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Comparative Literature and a “Small Nation”: the Latvian Experience

MAIJA BURIMA

Abstract. Comparative literary studies is an essential component of self-identification for Latvian culture as that of a small nation that was formed under a powerful impact of other cultures that determined the historical and geographical situation of Latvia. Studying the phenomena of foreign literature is a good way of typological mapping of Latvian writing in the context of other culture types and literary trends, locating foreign influences and recognizing the synthesis between Western and Eastern critical and theoretical thought.

Interest in comparative studies or their elements is related to the tendencies of Latvian cultural policy. The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was the time of intense, though not systematic, studies of foreign literature. After Latvia gained its independence, with gradual intensification of the significance of Latvian national literature, the number of comparative studies was reduced. However, they became more detailed in content, manifesting the subjective attitude of the scholars and even specific expression. In the soviet occupation period, comparative studies were subjected to the impact of soviet ideology in their subject matter. Despite the numerous ideological clichés, research works were published in the USSR and Latvia at that time that defined functional paraphernalia of comparative literary studies, introduced precise and thematically wide notions. In the first decade of the restored independence in Latvia, no monographic studies dedicated to comparative literature were published as scholars needed time and learning the trends of western literature to crystallize a new mode of speaking about comparative literature. The 21st century is marked by a range of studies on literary contacts between the Latvian and other cultures. The researchers focus on both the resonance of individual foreign writers in Latvia and restoring the history of literary contacts with various areas in the world culture, as well as studies on the resonance of Latvian literature in the world.

Keywords: comparative literature studies, translation studies, literary influences and borrowings, reception, national literatures, small literatures, literature of big nations, world literature, localizations, adaptations, “iconic” writer, history of Latvian literature.

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Comparative literary studies comprise a complex phenomenon. It is methodology that investigates various communicative aspects of literature. Several objects of comparative literary studies may be singled out:

- 1) Direct contacts between literatures with respective investigation of the role of influences (or producer) and borrowings (or recipient). This interaction is more and more often denoted as reception, paying greater attention to studying the position of recipient – how the trend of the development of writer's creative work and the peculiarities of the epoch determine the particular borrowing, by what devices it is taken over in the recipient's text. Typology that is revealed in the comparison of definite themes, myths, images, genres, literary trends, by presenting typological models determined by dedication to similar philosophical aesthetic ideas, equal socio-economic conditions or ideological clichés.
- 2) Genetic affinities that envisage the existence of parallels based on mythological or linguistic preconditions.
- 3) Specific features of national literatures that must be perceived as a constant entity. Of equal importance to pointing out influences and borrowings or typology is, after comparison with other phenomena, setting aside the layer of influences and borrowings, to draw the characteristics of the uniqueness of national literature.
- 4) The interaction of comparative studies and translation studies in studying literary communication is a complex issue.

In this perspective translation is positioned as a macro-linguistic (Komissarov 2009: 9) and culture phenomenon. Its analysis comprises reasons that determine the need of perceiving literature for foreign impulses and readiness to perceive them, connections between authors and texts selected for translation and the socio-cultural situation of the importer of the translation. Another point is the translator's personality and interest in the formation of trans-national cultural bridges and linguistic strategies of translation – looking for equivalents, filling in lacunae or using extra-linguistic factors, translating images without an adequate match. Viktor Zhirmunskiy pointed out the role of translations in the international interaction of literature, emphasizing that, under certain conditions, literary interaction is marked by the primacy of translation (Zhirmunskiy 1979: 139). Pavel Topor emphasizes the complex character of translation: "Perception of translation as a final product in the new language environment is backed up by the processes of its creation and the figure of the translator, its creator, as well as its impact on the new reader and the very object of impact. Besides, the object of impact is to be understood not only as an individual reader but the whole literature wherein the translation was made on the whole." (Topor 2000: 199–200)

The communicative chain of literary reception, if it crosses language borders and includes translation, stretches from one national culture to another in which it searches for its reflection or by the phenomenon of which it wishes to identify itself. According to Leonid Barkhudarov, the text of a translation is never a complete and absolute equivalent of the source text (Barkhudarov 1975: 11)

This means that a comparison of the original and its translation must address the issues of image transmission and compatibility.

In studying intercultural contacts it is often emphasized that the work of world-famous writers is often related not only to his or her nation but emerges as a bright sign of the epoch or literary "icon". The notion of the "**iconic**" **writer** may be attributed to those authors who, owing to the general, universal, and artistically refined content of their literary works, can be perceived in other cultures as indicators of significant search and changes and sources of essential aesthetic impulses. These are supra-national, generally human literary phenomena with a very wide range of perception beyond the country or nation they have been produced in.

"Icon" is a universal denotation of a phenomenon of foreign literature, e.g. writer (Goethe, Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche), work (*Don Quixote*, *Faust*, *Divina Commedia*), literary group or edition, etc. that has acquired a "supra-national" character and embodies generalized and universal ideas. The notion of icon brings together various possible levels of influence of foreign writers in relation to comparatively younger or marginal cultures. To consider the impact of an "icon" on foreign culture and characterize the iconography of foreign literature in "one's own" literary space and against this background emphasize the original structures created by recipients, three major aspects of the manifestation of "icon" must be regarded:

- 1) "icon" as an impulse for direct borrowings: formation of related images, motifs, plots;
- 2) "icon" as an impulse for the search for new self-expression when the impact of the "icon" is but indirect, its presence is just implied by individual structures or the overall expression of texts;
- 3) "icon" as an impulse for creating a completely juxtaposed expression and poetic world.

Projection of comparative methodology to quantitatively big and small nations differs. Big nations produce their own wide and diverse range of literary products, they have comparatively few "blank spots" – phenomena that are not represented by any actually accessible literary works. For this reason the interest of big nations in the literatures of small nations may be caused only by particular literary phenomena, for instance, historical topics that throw light

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on previously unknown and silenced historical situations (such as deportations in the soviet period) or texts that focus on generally human concepts (such as religious, philosophical issues that create a situation of identification for a reader).

Small nations find it important to frame themselves in the context of global literary processes. The literary examples of big nations fill in the lacunae of literary publications of small nations in respect of subject matter, genres and other innovative concepts. They are a significant source of reception, therefore writers belonging to small nations more often use intertextuality, allusions, and reminiscences, to get attached to the literary processes of big nations. The peripheral situation of small nations in the world literature space is determined by several reasons:

- quantitatively (at some stages also qualitatively) small local book markets, little competition among writers;
- language and translator issues;
- insufficient international resonance of small nation cultures, their low visibility and recognition.

The strategy of small nations borrowing the literary examples of big nations is related to the phenomenon of localization. “The definition of “localization” reflects this by talking about products rather than texts, and describing the process in terms of the “preparation,” “tailoring,” or “adaptation” of the product for a new situation. The word “local” has several meanings. The first of these is the small word “locale”, which denotes a set of linguistic and cultural parameters defining the context end-use. It is a nice short term to replace expressions like “target language and/or culture” found in many translation theories. It also implicitly recognizes that translators have rarely worked for entire languages or cultures; our audiences have always been local market, locales, for which the term was missing. The important point is that the paradigm of localization involves far more than the mere term “localization”. (Pym 2010: 121–122)

Jeanne E. Glesener (Luxemburg) notes about the place of small literatures in the world literature space that

[...] the complex location of small literatures in world literature, meaning the literature from small nations or communities that, as Milan Kundera puts it in his essay on world literature, are destined to wait in the antechamber of history. Given the academic and intellectual interest in recent years in the workings of world literature, the revision of its canon, the emergence of new comparative approaches and methods for its study, it is worthwhile to inquire after the fate

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of small literatures in the innovative structures that aim to account for the expanded global scope of world literature today. One may indeed ask whether the chances of small literatures of being represented in world literature have improved. What, on the other hand, are the impediments a small literature has to contend with and that are likely to hinder its visibility? (Glesener 2012: 76)

Jordan Lyutskanov (Bulgaria) uses the notion “minor literature” to denote small literatures opposing them to ‘major’ literature. He refers to Kafka’s reflection:

A minor literature is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language but the literature a minority makes in a major language’. Hence we are able to suggest a tri-chotomic typology of literatures, designating the corresponding types as minor, small and hegemonic. In addition, we dare to contest the position of Deleuze and Guattari’s when they invest revolutionary potential in minor literatures (attaching, besides, the concept of minor literature to one of two opposing chains of concepts: deterritorialisation, non-representation, metamorphosis, intensity vs. (re)-territorialisation, representation, metaphor, extensity). We guess that self-constituting as an agent of minor literature inevitably happens in a place, time and in relation to other agents; evading interpretations does not destruct a situation characterised by hegemony but contributes to a new constellation of power and provokes renewal within the agency of hegemony: it is, or at least it could be, an affirmative act. (Lyutskanov 2013)

Latvian literature is a peripheral phenomenon on the mental map of European culture. To characterize its specificity comparative methodology has been used already since the moment of the formation of Latvian secular literature. Proximity to “iconic” world literary phenomena consolidates the sense of identity of “small literatures”.

The origin of Latvian comparative literary studies dates back to the late 19th century when in Latvian newspapers, along with translations of fiction from other languages, there appeared reviews about writers, regarding the innovativeness or peculiarities of their texts that at that time were not originally produced but had been reprinted from Russian or German periodicals.

In the period of independence of Latvia (1918–1940), Latvian writer and literary scholar Zenta Mauriņa (1897–1978) turned to studying foreign literature and comparing it to Latvian writers’ works, their philosophical and aesthetic ideas and Latvian mental concepts. Having acquired specialization in Baltic philology at the University of Latvia (1923–1927), Mauriņa proceeded with studies of philosophy and comparative literature in 1929 at Heidelberg

University in Germany. Till the autumn of 1944 she had published 19 books in Latvia: monographs investigating text structure in Latvian and foreign writers' works, e.g. "Daži pamata motīvi Raiņa mākslā" ("Some basic motifs in Rainis' art", 1929), studies of literary trends as represented in writers' work, e.g. *Jānis Poruks un romantisms* (*Jānis Poruks and Romanticism*, 1929), interpretations of the projection of philosophical views in the text, e.g. "Friča Bārdas pasaules uzskats" ("Fricis Bārda's world view", 1938). She has applied the comparative approach, analyzing numerous parallels of images, motifs, plots and other structures in the works by foreign authors translated to Latvian with texts by Latvian authors, e.g. *Dante tagadnes cilvēka skatījumā* (*Dante in the Contemporary Perspective*, 1937), *Dostojevskis* (*Dostoyevsky*, 1931, 1935)¹; she has published a book in German, *Dostojewskij. Menschengestalter und Gottsucher* (1952). Mauriņa is the founder of a specific genre – literary philosophical essay. She has studied national identity features in literature in seven essay collections on the aesthetics and poetics of Latvian and foreign writers' works: *Pārdomas un ieceres* (*Reflections and Conceptions*, 1934); *Ziemeļu tēmas un variācijas* (*Northern Themes and Variations*, 1939); *Kultūras saknes* (*Culture Roots*, 1944) and others. In 1944 she emigrated to Germany. In 1946 she settled in Sweden. In 1949–1963 she taught at Uppsala University. Mauriņa's essays are focused on a writer's personality as a centre for searching a way to the peculiarities of the writer's work. She has selected great personalities – romantically and existentially minded authors. Mauriņa's essays are marked by emotional subjectivity, she looks for spiritual freedom, humaneness, highly ethical ideals, comprehensive knowledge of the world culture and manifests a skill to compare, confront, systematize literary processes and phenomena in a wide context.

In her literary reviews in the late 1920s she asked questions, "Is literary studies a science?" (Maurina 1940: 279) and "What is a civilization writer?" (Maurina 1940: 288). Mauriņa regards methods of literary criticism (Maurina 1940: 293) and demands a correct attitude towards the translated text in her article "Some words about our translators" (Maurina 1940: 301). Her main contribution is promoting foreign literature in Latvia (and after emigration in 1944 also in Germany and Sweden) informing the readership of Latvia and other countries, arousing interest in literary contacts, searching for typology and stimulating writers of that time to engage in indirect dialogues among one another. She has an article dedicated to the relations of English and German literatures (Maurina 1940: 273). However, on the whole in the 1930s interest in comparative literary studies diminished, making room for studying Latvian

¹ Reedited: Mauriņa Zenta, *Dostojevskis*, Riga: Kabata, 1993.

literature that was caused by the intensification of nationalist ideology in the country, notwithstanding the fact that voluminous editions of foreign literature translations were issued (Sigrid Undset and Fyodor Dostoyevsky in 16 volumes, 1937–1938; Knut Hamsun in 15 volumes, 1935 and other authors).

Many features of pseudo comparative studies occurred in the period of soviet occupation when literary research artificially emphasized the decisive role of soviet literature in the development of the Latvian literary tradition, propagated vulgar sociological treatment of Russian classics and completely disregarded Western influences. "In the years of Stalinist regime at some point this branch was labelled bourgeois and anti-popular. In the course of time the notion of literary relations appeared that seems slightly ambiguous from the Latvian point of view." (Jundze 2002a: 86)

Laimonis Stepiņš (1927–1989) was one of the major comparative literature scholars in Latvia in the period of the soviet occupation. He mostly was focussed on ideologically more or less neutral Scandinavian literature reception in Latvia and analysed this phenomenon from the bibliographical perspective. Arno Jundze, the researcher of Latvian and Finnish literary contacts, writes about him and his work conditions: "L. Stepiņš acted in comparative literature in the only way that was possible at that time. Besides, Stepiņš' approach was to order a segment in the wide and virgin or in the best case disorderly classified field of translated literature that still remains the great unknown in the history of Latvian culture" (Jundze 2002a: 86).²

Under the post-soviet conditions, after the regaining of Latvia's independence in 1991, there was no great enthusiasm at first either for comparative studies or the creation of original Latvian literature, because what happened first was the recovery of the works that had been forbidden under the soviet regime. No methodology had crystallized for comparative studies because it was necessary to reconsider the soviet comparative field. This situation in the post-soviet literary science is marked in Viktors Ivbulis' book *Uz kurieni, literatūras teorija? (Where to, literary theory?, 1995)*. In the chapter "Comparative literature" Ivbulis summarizes and briefly regards different comparative traditions, arriving at the conclusion made by René Wellek in the late 1970s that comparative studies focused on historical criticism, ignoring artistic expression, forms, and genres. Empirical knowledge is not sufficient to find common denominators among literatures of various nations – it is necessary to search for regularities. There have been cases when comparative scholars have tried at all costs to emphasize the influence of the author of their nation upon other parts of the world. Paul van Tieghem in his book *La littérature comparée*

² Translations of quotes originally not in English by Sandra Meskova.

published in 1931 states that along with gathering facts, one must look into major political, social, philosophical, religious, scientific, artistic, and literary attitudes in a particular epoch and within a particular nation. Who were the most efficient mediators of influences, the busiest and most demanded translators? What did authors, critics, and readers in every country know about other nation's language, literary ideas of the present and past? (Ivbulis 1995: 42–43)

While up to now theoretical research in Latvian comparative studies has not appeared, applied comparative studies have been developing for more than a decade. The first post-awakening precedent was the first wide and representative comparative literature paper collection that is based on presentations at the international conference *Comparative Literature in Eastern Europe and the World: Theories and Interpretations*. The conference took place in September 1999 in Riga. The collection does not contain any articles dedicated to comparative methodology. Its papers sketch separate aspects of modern comparative criticism: the interdisciplinary aspect, the impact of technologies on text creation and interpretation, yet scholars mostly analyze particular phenomena of Latvian and other literary contacts, e.g. the typology of ancient mythology, the influence of the Russian, French, English, Norwegian, Polish, American, etc. literature on Latvian literature.

Comparing in comparative studies must not become intentional collecting of similarities, coincidences, transfers. Comparative literature tries to bring out the general regularities of relationships between literatures.

The point of reference of any comparative research is the question about the content of comparison. The smallest indivisible unit is searched for in exact sciences, e.g. atom in chemistry is the basic entity of substance, the limit of division, to express the composition of structure. In comparative studies, to compare texts with the aim of locating similar or kin structures, using units or structures of narrative, stylistic devices as a limit of division: motif, sense-group, image, episode, plot line, trope. Many comparative studies scholars think that, due to their universal character, themes, unlike motifs that are situational, cannot be used as a cornerstone of comparison. The book by Vera Vāvere and Ludmila Sproģe *Latviešu modernisma aizsākumi un krievu literatūras „sudraba laikmets”* (*Origin of Latvian Modernism and the “Silver Age” of Russian Literature*), on the one hand, continues studying Latvian-Russian literary contacts that were started already in the soviet epoch, but addressing themes that had been silenced then. The novelty of the research concerns shifting interpretation emphases, setting the reconstruction of the historic-cultural background not as an end-in-itself but a point of reference for characterizing the interaction of literary structures. The authors address the sensitive problem of citation that

requires precise excerption of structures to compare. In the chapter "Citation Ranges in Latvian Modernists' works" they emphasize that "in the poetic texts by Latvian modernists we often encounter layers of citations that endow the original with particular suggestiveness. "Citationalism" in this case must be perceived as a specific reference to the "alien word"; it is characterized by the degree of actualizing the artistic fact of the other culture." (Sproģe, Vāvere 2002: 132). Focusing on the intertextuality characteristic of the mytho-poetic consciousness of modernists, both authors investigate the possible parallels of the creative work of Latvian modernists and Russian symbolists and their relatedness not only to the Russian *Silver Age* but also a direct or indirect influence of Western European culture.

Comparative studies of the first decade of the 21st century in Latvia manifest an interest in characterizing the influence of remarkable foreign authors who have become global cultural icons. This principle has been demonstrated by the Russian comparative scholar Victor Zhirmunsky in his book *Goethe in Russian Culture*. His approach is typologically represented in regarding the reception of the German writer significant for Latvian culture as well. This is revealed in the collection of stories *Gēte un Baltija (Goethe and the Baltics, 2002)*.

A balanced characteristic of influences and borrowings is provided by comparative studies of Henrik Ibsen whose presence in Latvian literature has been intensely present since as early as 1886. Benedikts Kalnačs in his book *Ibsena zīmē (In the Sign of Ibsen, 2001)* emphasizes the significance of producer and points to the reasons for influences. Maija Burima, in turn, in her study *Ibsens Latvijā (Ibsen in Latvia, 2007)* takes up the characteristics of Ibsen's reception in the Latvian cultural space – Latvian *ibseniana* – and focusing on significant aspects of the writer's reception in Latvian culture:

The most extensive and important segment of the research is the review of influences and borrowings of plays by Ibsen in the historic-cultural context. The initial appearance of the playwright in the cultural space of Latvia gave rise to a tendency that afterwards became a landmark of Ibsen's reception, i.e. it is possible to follow a certain periodicity in Ibsen's perception, in which particular culminating points (a great number of stagings, play publications, critical articles) were followed by a decline in interest. (Burima 2007: 642)

In Latvian literary science of the first post-awakening decade there was intense emphasis laid on restoring literary contacts disregarded in the soviet epoch and creating the empirical base for systematization of the research material. Such a voluminous work can be done only by research groups. At the beginning of the 21st century the historic-cultural approach to comparative studies crystallized

in Latvia and fundamental collective research is being undertaken. The reception in Latvia of the most significant Nordic writers of the early twentieth century is regarded in the collective monograph *Ziemeļu zvaigznājs (Northern Constellation, 2002)*. Arno Jundze has dedicated his monograph *Somijas literatūra Latvijā 1885–2001 (Finnish Literature in Latvia 1885–2001, 2002)* to the reception of Finnish literature. The University of Latvia Literature, Folklore and Art Institute in cooperation with the Henrik Ibsen research centre in Oslo and the Polish Academy of Science Art Institute has prepared and published at the Oslo University academic publishing house a collection on the reception of Henrik Ibsen's writing in the Baltic States and Poland (2006). Nordic literature has had as great an impact on the development of Latvian literature as the historically determined influence of German and Russian literature. The contribution of contemporary research is characteristics of the reversed process – Latvian literature reception. This is demonstrated by Ilona Ļaha's monograph *Latviešu literatūra Zviedrijā (Latvian Literature in Sweden, 2010)* that deals with Latvian and Swedish culture contacts, provides the characteristics and evaluation of the spread of Latvian literature in Sweden that is greatly marked by cultural and political contacts and stereotypes.

The book *Vācu literatūra un Latvija. 1890–1945 (German Literature and Latvia. 1890–1945)* provides a summary of the influence of German literature of the given period on Latvian culture. Such editions as this do not assess the quality of translations but the wide bibliographical index is of great significance. The critics have praised the chapter by Māra Grudule on Baltic German Literature (1890–1939) where

the author gives a precise formulation of what exactly is Baltic German literature: these are the texts produced by the authors who are “Germans born in Latvia (in the contemporary sense), basically in Courland and Livland, who have written *literary works in German*”. Hence – texts that are absolutely real and have existed here for many decades but have had no relation to the processes in Latvian literature. Literature that was born, developed and then – with Baltic Germans leaving Latvia – effectively died leaving so thick a layer of texts that it is now possible to break them into periods, classify according to genres, analyze their values orientation, search for masters, etc. A slightly surreal phenomenon – a history of literature that truthfully describes the complete history of a literature from its origin until its death. (Berelis 2005)

In the comparative research of Baltic literatures, a research conference tradition was initiated in 1995 by Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian scholars with a common research interest – Baltic memory – concerning what is common

and what is different in the perception and understanding of history and contemporary processes. The materials of the first conference were published in the journal *Latvian Academy of Science Newsletter (Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis)*; later a tradition was developed to publish conference paper collections that regard the concept of Baltic memory from a theoretical perspective³ and produce the analysis of the twentieth-century literary processes. In parallel, a comparative studies of two literatures has been produced, e.g. the collection prepared by Latvian and Estonian scholars on the literature of the 19th and 20th, as well as the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. The book *300 Baltic Writers* published in 2009 has an encyclopaedic scope; in preparing it the University of Latvia Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art cooperated with Lithuanian Literature and Folklore Institute in Vilnius and Estonian Academy of Science Under and Tuglas Centre.

In 2008 the University of Latvia Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art started a series of research paper collections *Comparative Literature: Baltic Literature*. The study *Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians: Literary and Culture Contacts (Latvieši, igauņi un lietuvieši: literārie un kultūras kontakti, 2008)* provides a wide survey of the literary contacts of the three Baltic States.

Attention is drawn to both the formation process of mutual notions and translations and reviews as well as parallels and interaction of literature development. The book is addressed to readers in Latvia, therefore the focus is on relations between Latvians – Estonians and Latvians – Lithuanians. Further attention should be paid to Estonian and Lithuanian literature parallels. Authors of the research provide a detailed review of the presence of Estonian and Lithuanian literature and culture in Latvia. The edition is supplied with bibliographical indexes. (Kalnačs 2008: 14)

The second edition of the series *Back to Baltic Memory: Lost and Found in Literature 1940–1968* treats the typology of soviet influences upon Baltic literatures. The third edition is the monograph by Maija Burima *Modernisma koncepti 20. gadsimta sākuma latviešu literatūrā (Concepts of Modernism in Early Twentieth-Century Latvian Literature, 2011)* that takes up investigation of the peculiarities of Latvian and Baltic early modernism and its comparison to other culture processes.

³ Mihkelev A. (ed.) *Turns in the Centuries, Turns in Literature*. Tallinn: The Under and Tuglas Literature Centre of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, 2009.

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The beginning of the 20th century was characterized by a singular shift in the cultural orientation of Latvian artists. This shift was elicited by the prevailing conditions affecting the cultural climate. To begin with, the Latvian literary horizon had expanded to include foreign cultural influences. The young authors of the day were strongly affected by the cultural expressions of the big European nations, by various American cultural phenomena, by the iconic representatives of world literature, and by the bright intellectual stars of some of the smaller nations, e.g. Norway, Finland and others. For Latvian writers, these aspects reinforced the notion that even a small nation could fully express itself through art and could legitimately participate in current cultural processes. ... The processes taking place in Latvian literature at the start of the 20th century can be characterized as the interaction of a number of cultural types and literary styles that existed side by side. (Burima 2011: 322)

The fourth edition of the series *Comparative Literature*, Benedikts Kalnačs' study *Baltijas postkoloniālā drāma* (*Baltic Postcolonial Drama*, 2011) is an attempt to discover the social and psychological processes of colonization in the analysis of Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian dramaturgy, using

an assessment of differences and similarities in the historical situation in which other bodies of literature had been generated. Such comparisons are possible at the global level. Our investigation concentrates on the Baltic context, keeping in mind that many of the tendencies identifiable in Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian literature originate in parallel with the cultural construction of other nationalities. (Kalnačs 2011: 255)

The book is developed with the wish to make out how the process of the development and consolidation of the Baltic national cultures took place until the formation of independent countries in the second decade of the 20th century and later loss of independence in the middle of the century and what has been the way to political and intellectual independence at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries (Kalnačs 2011: 7).

Contemporary Latvian comparative studies scholars synthesize comparative studies with other methodologies and schools of criticism, trying simultaneously to produce the comparison of the historic-cultural context and poetics of the texts studied. The "small literatures" of the post-soviet area have a specific situation using different approaches of cultural criticism. In a sense it is conditioned by the culture's geographical and socio-political conditions. This situation has been pointed out by Andrei Terian (Romania):

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I believe that a considerable share of the responsibility for the current lack of interest in the Second-World national literatures resides in the existing concept of "world literature". To the extent that it is set to seek by all means "worlds beyond our own place and time", it faces the risk of favouring eccentricity in the form of exoticism and the picturesque and thus slide toward what I would label as *an essentialism of radical otherness*. Or, it is obvious that Second-World national literatures could never fulfil this aspiration, because their identity is first and foremost based on mixture, on fragmentation, on hybridization – which, I believe, are traits illustrated here sometimes to an extent larger even than the already classical "post-colonial" literatures. It is precisely for this reason that I consider the study of their *puzzle*-like structure to be a challenge both to the post-colonial studies and to "world literature" in general. It is unlikely that we could find here a new Dante, but it is obvious that, if this cultural space were absent, "world literature" would be incomplete. (Terian 2012: 25)

Institutionally in Latvia, unlike Lithuania and Estonia, no association of comparative studies has been founded, but the field of comparative research is covered by the Daugavpils University Institute of Comparative Studies that was founded in 2003. The mission of the institute is to focus on comparative and contrastive research as well as studies of regionalism in the global context; the multicultural situation of our region, polylingualism, different religions and ethnicities as the empirical background for the typological research of attitudes between the periphery and the centre in the local and global context

Doctoral theses and individual publications by Latvian comparative studies researchers are dedicated to many other aspects of reception: analyzing Latvian – English, American, French, Polish, Jewish literary contacts from synchronic and diachronic perspectives. They study the typology of genre (autobiography, detective fiction, fantasy genre, travelogues) and culture concepts – memory, landscape, etc.

The institute publishes two editions – *Journal of Comparative Studies* (until 2013 it was titled *Acta Comparativistica*), and the thematic article collection *Comparative Studies*.

It must be concluded that the methodology of modern comparative literary studies as a theoretical and historical discourse of the analysis of literary relations may be realized both in the framework of a single literature and from the aspect of two or more national literary relations, providing immanent characteristics of intertextual regularities and integrating in text analysis perspectives of narratology, culture anthropology, etc.

Maija Burima

maija.burima@du.lv
 Daugavpils Universitāte
 Vienības iela 13
 Daugavpils, LV-5401
 LATVIJA

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