

Interlitteraria – 18/2

Miscellanea

SCHRIFTsteller und DIKTATuren.

Writers and dictatorship



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Introductory Note

With this issue, *Interlitteraria* enters its new, biannual publication rhythm announced in this year's spring issue. Despite the changes the year 2013 has brought to the journal, many traditions continue to be followed. Issues open to miscellaneous topics, such as this one, will be published every other year, and will hopefully always bring together diverse ways of comparativist thinking and research, a variety of scholarly traditions and the different working languages of *Interlitteraria*. In the 2013 winter issue, the German language and German-speaking scholars have a considerable presence, which brings a most welcome balance in this aspect, since German has been somewhat absent from the journal in recent years.

By a happy coincidence, in this issue's miscellanea section a number of articles are based on close reading of texts dealing, in different ways and forms, and in different periods, with the perception, interpretation and narration of one's own life and that of others. The question of understanding individual human experience in the context of history connects the first part of the journal to the second: a thematic section called *SCHRIFTsteller und DIKTATuren. Writers and dictatorship*.

This thematic section was proposed and prepared by guest editors Liina Lukas and Silke Pasewalck from the University of Tartu and is based on seminars organized in 2011 and 2012 in Riga and Tartu with the support of Baltisch-Deutsches Hochschulkontor. The seminars focused on poetics of remembrance and on literature's role in totalitarian regimes. Remembrance therapy had been the first method of addressing the trauma of totalitarianism after the fall of the regimes, followed by the study of micro-histories and everyday-history of the period once the archives and closed sections of libraries were reopened to the public, and research into adaptation and survival strategies.

In this context, literary texts have also been considered as historical sources or even documents, fictional and poetic remembrance have become increasingly important in cultural studies.¹ Methods and objects of study from many other fields of humanities and social sciences have also been instrumental in the study of the totalitarianism.² This complex period in history can only be understood

¹ A recent publication on the relationship between politics and literature in German speaking literature combines both aspects: writing under totalitarian conditions and literary remembrance of dictatorship (Rüther, G. 2013. *Literatur und Politik. Ein deutsches Verhängnis?* Göttingen: Wallstein).

² Publications such as *Võim ja kultuur* (Tartu 2003, 2006) and *Kohandumise märgid* (Tallinn 2002) gather papers from specialists of literature, art, film, ethnology, folklore, music, linguistics.

through interdisciplinary approach and cooperation of scholars from different fields. Cooperation between scholars from different countries needs to be developed as well: research on totalitarianism in literary studies has rarely been done comparatively and even more rarely has included the small literatures from the Baltic region.³ The problems and research interests described above are, however, common to many Middle and Eastern European cultures and would benefit from discussions in various comparative and theoretical perspectives.

The thematic section in this issue of *Interlitteraria*, bringing together the Estonian, Latvian and GDR's experiences with the literary field in totalitarian circumstances, hopes to further comparative study and closer research cooperation on this topic in the future. The papers gathered here follow a new trend in literary and cultural studies, trying to overcome the dichotomy of "we" and "the others", "victims" and "perpetrators" that has dominated the discussion of socialism in Eastern Europe so far, broadening the spectrum of categories and concentrating more on the particular biographies and options for action, the moral abyss and the ambivalences beyond categories like adaptation, dissidence, conformity and opposition.⁴ The postcolonial perspective as one possible way towards a better understanding of the trauma of totalitarianism is illustrated by a debate from the conference *Baltic Studies 2013* transcribed in this issue of *Interlitteraria*.

In the future, *Interlitteraria* hopes to welcome many other such sections and chances for cooperation with guest editors. Quite a few small scale conferences and seminars are organized without means, money- or distribution-wise, for proceedings, and their results, while still valuable when published individually in separate books or periodicals, risk losing some of the intellectual synergy that comes from their dialogue with one another. Hopefully, *Interlitteraria* will be able to contribute to the preservation of the integrity of some of these discussions.

Liina Lukas, Silke Pasewalck, Katre Talviste

³ The following publications may already show this direction: Huntemann, W. et al., eds. 2003. *Engagierte Literatur in Wendezeiten*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann; Wölfel, U., ed. 2005. *Literarisches Feld DDR. Bedingungen und Formen literarischer Produktion in der DDR*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann; Gansel, C., ed. 2007. *Gedächtnis und Literatur in den „geschlossenen Gesellschaften“ des Real-Sozialismus zwischen 1945 und 1989*. Göttingen: V & V Unipress. In 2011, the Estonian journal *Methis* published a special issue for Soviet studies where the comparatist perspective was largely supplied by the postcolonial theory, starting with David Chion Moore's article *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Towards a Global Postcolonial Critique*.

⁴ A good example proving this shift of emphasis is Sarah Jones' book *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism. Negotiating Space in the GDR Literary Sphere* (New York: de Gruyter, 2011).