

Local Literatures, Global Perspectives

On Writing a Literary History for Secondary Schools

Svend Erik Larsen

Globalization

In Denmark, as elsewhere, everyday life is globalized, although not in the same way. If we only regard globalization as a matter of international politics and economics it is not yet grasped as a pervasive everyday reality. Yet, it is only from this quotidian perspective that it really matters. Only then, it becomes a concern for literature and literary or cultural history; otherwise it would merely be a special aspect the lives of certain people in particular locations around the globe. Today the everydayness of globalization has reached a level that often makes us often forget that its marks are left everywhere, and we hardly ever give it a thought that life could be different, at least not in our part of the world. Just open the fridge or the wardrobe and check where their contents come from. Turn on your TV set. With news broadcasted 24 hours a day the globalized world walks right into our sitting room. Within one generation more and more people have experienced other places of the world than those staying at home all their lives. This holds both for those who travel from their home country and for those who enter it from elsewhere.

In this part of the world borders are on the move, also on other continents with different manifestations of globalization. But there, too, globalization permeates everyday life and this is where literature is produced, translated and used as an integral part of the negotiations of these dynamic borders. The same should hold for

literary histories, but this is hardly the case, given their general national ramification. This paper is about why we shall and how we can create literature differently, particularly where it is most important in the generation of a new awareness of globalization and the role of literature: the secondary school system.

In spite of the fact that the term ‘globalization’ only occurs in English from the 1990s as a term for political and economical trends, like all major cultural phenomena it has a broader historical foundation. At the moment it extends its effects to permeate daily life, this foundation becomes broader, deeper and embraces a longer time span. Denmark is taken here as the case – for one thing I know it best when it comes to everyday life, but also because on this tiny part of the globe, globalization is an undeniable reality. Even though borders today have moved extremely rapidly and in so many areas of our life, Denmark and Danish people have continued to be part of the movements of a larger world. The official website of Denmark: www.denmark.dk, writes on the changing history of the Danish borders:

Throughout its early history, Denmark had many contacts with the outside world, but with the beginning of the Viking Age, c. 750 AD, the country really became part of European history. [...]The word ‘Denmark’ appears as early as the Viking age, carved on the great Jelling Stone from the 900s, but there’s a huge difference between what ‘Denmark’ comprised then and what it comprises today. In some eras, for instance the 13th and 17th centuries, Denmark was a superpower whose influence was as massive as that of the largest European countries. Very bluntly speaking, it can be claimed that the present configuration of Denmark is the result of 400 years of forced relinquishments of land, surrenders and lost battles [...] Denmark’s current shape and extent is the result of successive cedings of territory due to its exposed location by the access routes to the Baltic. Until recently, the Danes were an exceptionally homogenous people, which can be attributed to the gradual loss of marginal parts of the realm in the course of time¹.

¹ The quotations is composed of three references inside www.denmark.dk: 1) www.denmark.dk > Denmark at a glance > History > The Viking Age; 2) www.denmark.dk > Denmark at a glance >

In certain periods of time Danish borders seemed so stable that nobody would have believed that they would ever change. Nevertheless, at some point they moved. It last happened in 1944 (forgotten by most Danes today) when Iceland declared its independence after 700 years of Danish rule. In the regions of the world that once were part of Denmark or that had been Danish colonies, different peoples lived with their particular languages, traditions and norms. Denmark included more peoples, languages and cultures under its rule than today, even when immigration is taken into account. It was quite some time before Danish was not only declared the official language in everyday life, in arts and sciences and in politics, but also *de facto* functioned as the predominant language for everyone. This only happened in the 18th century and the natural language for the royal house was not Danish until rather late.

The 20th century has shown just as many changes for Denmark as earlier centuries, but by different means. Following an internationally monitored referendum in 1920, the German border moved southward to the present border from the river Kongeåen to the small city of Kruså. The Virgin Islands were sold to the United States in 1917, and a disagreement with Norway concerning the maritime borders around Greenland was settled 1933 after a court case under the auspices of the international court in The Hague. A similar event occurred in 1964 after a similar dispute concerning the oil fields in the North Sea, again involving the maritime borders of Holland and Germany. At that point such acts were not considered under the term globalization.

History; and 3) www.denmark.dk > Denmark at a glance > History > Factsheet on History (Aug 18, 2010).

However, globalization is the term that we use to refer to such events today for example in the case of the definition of the borders of the Arctic region in 2010, which is still an issue between Denmark, Canada, England, Iceland, Ireland, Russia and Norway. In her 2005 report 'The Fight about the Borders of the Nation' from the National Danish Geological Survey [Danmarks Geologiske Undersøgelser], Dr. Anne Torzen explains that the issue concerns the future ownership to the submarine continental base, which is effectively a regional version of the global fight for access to natural resources. Regardless of this dispute, Denmark has covered the same small part of the global surface since 1944. Nevertheless, the world inside and outside the country continues to transform itself beyond geography, continually and interdependently. The position of Greenland and the Faroe Islands inside the Danish kingdom has been changed and is still an open issue, as is the formal and informal influence exercised by UN, NATO, EU and other transnational bodies on the definition of Denmark's geographical, political, economical, legal and cultural borders. When international terrorism hit the World Trade Center in New York September 11, 2001, Denmark also felt the consequences through changing legislation for travels, passports, visa, asylum and immigration.

When we leave the local world to travel, study, do business or work in other places than our home place, we enlarge our contact with the global. In the same move the larger world also comes to Denmark and new groups with new languages, religions and political opinions move in. While this has of course happened before in Danish history, it has never had the massive effects we know today. Whether or not we prefer still to consider the process as mainly concerned with economy and politics or geography and war, eventually globalization always results in a cultural and personal process. The questions 'who is a Dane?' and 'who is a foreigner?' have not received identical answers throughout our history, and for those living in Denmark in

earlier periods it did not mean the same thing as it does for today's inhabitants. Modern globalization may be a recent phenomenon, but it comes as no surprise that personal and cultural identity can only be shaped through the encounter with the world outside the local horizon. For language and literature in particular, this is nothing new. In such forms, identity is never a domestic affair. Like any other language, Danish has been formed and continues to be formed because it cannot avoid being used across national and cultural boundaries where it absorbs words and idioms from other languages. Literature in Denmark has always shaped the self-understanding and identity of people living in Denmark through the encounter with other people and places across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

Like in other globalized countries, in today's multicultural Denmark, this encounter also takes place inside the actual borders, when young immigrant bands call themselves *Outlandish* or *Middle East Peace Orchestra* and interpret traditional Danish songs in unfamiliar musical garments. Also, it can be seen to take place when the Danish-Australian writer Jeff Mathews in his novel *Halality* (2001) uses the Danish of immigrants, slang, the international media-lingo or the language of text messaging. Also when the Danish-Turkish-German writer Efi Beydin in the captivating short stories *Kantate for Emilia* (2009) takes issues with cultural boundaries seen from the other side in a beautiful and flexible Danish. Through these examples we can see that literature is a window to a world on the move, no matter where and when it is written and used. Or else it is not literature at all.

A Global Outlook from a Small Town

In literary history the connection between literature and globalization departs from the rapidly re-emerging interest in *world literature* in literary studies today. The

notion was first introduced by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1820s at the same time when the apparently conflicting concept of literature as primarily a national phenomenon in national languages gained ground (partly in contrast to the universal Latin). In tandem with this conception, modern literary historiography began to develop with national literary histories as its central paradigm celebrating the increasing national self-awareness which often developed into a more or less martialistic nationalist self-sufficiency. With his notion Goethe foresaw the necessity of an antidote to this development. But his global vision started all the same in a small town in the backyard of Central Europe.

World literature is often taken to be a small canon of works of perennial value high above the less valuable and more restricted local literatures. The canon of world literature is seen as giving form to universal human conditions and experience transcending any particular time and place, whereas local literatures shape national identity in historical contexts, an identity which was often explained in the collective national epic of the literary histories (and other historical narratives). Goethe himself was not without complicity in this simplification, but there is more to his idea of the trans-locality of literature.

Without Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Weimar would have remained an unknown place, even a non-place, somewhere in the Eastern outskirts of Central Europe. With Goethe, Weimar became for more than a generation a cultural center for both the German speaking part of Europe and for Europe as a whole. The city was the capital, *Hauptstadt*, of one the many small German principalities, Sachsen-Weimar. Actually, it was more *Haupt* than *Stadt*. The head was Goethe's, reflecting most of the world on its inside, while the city in Goethe's lifetime harboured just 8.000 inhabitants. But in face-to-face encounters and in his correspondences, Goethe gathered important thinkers, artists and diplomats from all over Europe, across the

national borders of his day. He was a diplomat, a civil servant and a *polyhistor* in the cosmopolitan spirit of the 18th century and engaged himself in modern sciences such as geology and biology as well as in philosophy, arts and letters. But first and foremost he was instrumental in the development of the conception of human life, which under the name of *Bildung* constituted the widespread and still active foundation of education and formation in general, particularly in Central and Northern Europe.

After Goethe's death in 1832, Weimar continued to be a symbol of German and European culture, for better or worse, with a global impact although its cultural profile narrowed down primarily to the arts. European composers like Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner walked the streets and visited *salons* and concert halls. And, shortly after 1900, Weimar became the home of an art and crafts school which had a potent influence on art, science and politics that was as prominent as the outcome of Goethe's work. Known as the *Bauhaus* school it became a driving force in 20th century architecture, urban planning, design and visual culture across the globe. This effect was obtained mainly because *Bauhaus*, with innovative creativity, combined the traditional craftsmanship with modern industrial production in design, materials and forms of production, opening also, social and political perspectives. The activities of *Bauhaus* had global consequences for our urban environment in the streets, the workplace and the homes. Arguably, modern design in any of its varieties would not have existed without Weimar and Bauhaus.

But Weimar's post-Goethean afterlife also had other consequences. One of the first constitutions on the European continent was born there in 1816 as a cautious beginning before democratic constitutions gained ground later in the century. In 1919, during the aftermath of the First World War, Germany made efforts to become democratic. This attempt was made by the Weimar Republic, which ended when

Hitler and the Nazis rose to power in 1933 and the quickly ensuing Second World War. The Nazi regime was well aware that Weimar recalled both an old Germanic greatness and a more recent political breakdown, and they cultivated this positive symbolism of greatness with such a perverted zeal that it eventually produced negative effects. Already in 1937 the concentration camp *Buchenwald* was built, almost in Goethe's backyard. The Spanish prisoner and member of the French resistance Jorge Semprún described in *L'écriture ou la Vie* how he walked around there, wondering how world culture could precisely, in this place, be transformed into world torture.

The former Eastern German communist regime tried in 1968 to launch a new constitution in Weimar with more allusions to the myth of Goethe than with real contributions from his work. Finally, in 1998, the Goethe archives, the old part of Weimar, and the *Bauhaus* site were declared by UNESCO as part of the world's cultural heritage, while Weimar and its now 65.000 inhabitants became the European cultural capital of 1999. If a small city like Weimar can repeatedly emerge as a kind of global center under different historical conditions, arguably, there is no place which cannot take on that same role. The size and location of the place in itself does not determine the range of its cultural perspective, only the quality of its visions.

Word Literature in a Provincial Town

Goethe's vision developed through his primary activity of writing literature which was the source of all his other creative activities. Toward the end of his life he had a series of conversations with Johann Peter Eckermann, who collected the great man's words and published them after Goethe's death as *Gespräche mit Goethe* (1836). This account of their conversations offers an important insight in the making of the

conception of human culture during the long period when Europe collected its forces, before it jumped head on into modernization in the mid-19th century when industrialization, urbanization and the outline of modern democracies took shape. But for literature, the most important of the ideas that Goethe introduced, promoted the concept of a world literature. Although seemingly only a few scattered remarks over a couple of pages, minor reflections of his thought, they nonetheless had a lasting effect and have been further elaborated by others in different directions. And today this same idea is important for how we try to come to grips with literature in the context of modern globalization.

On January 31st, 1827 Goethe told Eckermann that he had just finished reading a Chinese novel and found it both understandable and profoundly interesting. The account contains elements about the description of characters, the relationship to nature and to the cultural environment, both of which are in harmony with the way European literature describes similar phenomena. The exact text referred to is unknown but Goethe read widely among various translations and re-elaborations of Oriental literature which inspired his poetry and essays². Goethe concludes that if the Germans do not direct their attention toward the larger world, they will remain enclosed in 'a pedantic dusk' (Eckermann 1981, 175). Moreover, he states that '[n]ational literature will not say very much these days. The age of world literature has arrived, and today all of us must help this age to come into existence' (Eckermann 1981, 174). But behind the programmatic words Goethe still finds that the old Greeks set the standard. They possess a power of expression beyond any historical, linguistic, cultural and national borders and differences. What Goethe

² It may perhaps be Peter Perring Thom's collection of texts *Chinese Courtship* (1824), or Abel Remusat's translation of the anonymous 17th century novel *Yu Jiao Li* [Thanks to Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg].

envisions is, therefore, a number of works which belong to a literary domain of their own, situated above national boundaries and rooted in universal human values. Great literature is seen to give the reader access to that domain no matter where and when it is written.

The attempts to articulate a universally valid conception of the human being was a pressing issue on the cultural agenda in Goethe's lifetime after the human rights had been written down, and after the French and the American revolutions had tried to realize them under violent and bloody circumstances: France in war with herself and the rest of Europe, America in war with England. But Goethe was more preoccupied with the gradual realization of the universal potential of humans in the individual human being than with the revolutionary movements and the national boundaries. The most basic universal human potential is the capacity of each individual to fully realize him/herself, mostly himself at the time, as an individual in a gradual process that is fostered by encounters with society and nature – the process of *Bildung*. That the nation constituted a natural frame for the collective organization of this process, was a widely accepted idea with a long afterlife. Our national language, which we acquire 'naturally', as it were, enables each individual to realize his or her full potential in relation to others and in relation to the ideal of human freedom. That is why *Bildung* was integrated as the guiding principle for the national education systems that were established all over Europe from the early 19th century and onwards. For the same reason, national literature played a decisive role, and the national literary history emerged as a coherent representation of how each nation gradually evolves through its connections with the universal ideals of mankind. This connection is realized when the particular national language is molded in the universal forms of literature.

The idea of universal poetry became pivotal to German Romanticism. Literature was seen as universal because it is able to express what is common to all humans across individual differences and cultural and national boundaries. Hence, a world literature is possible; a literature, which in particular national languages articulates universally valid human conditions and as such is accessible to all people independent of linguistic differences, translations and other cultural filters. Together with the national literary history, a general and comparative study of literature emerged with the goal to study the connections between the national literatures and to reveal the shared universal features of all literatures. This reduplication of a national study of literature with a general study of literature reiterates itself in other of the new domains of cultural studies which were born at the same time: linguistics, anthropology, history.

Goethe's statement on world literature occurs on the backdrop of these ideas. He is clearly more interested in the relation between the individual and the globally manifested possibilities for human development and for new forms of cultural evolution than in the national aspects. In his conversation with Eckermann he remarks that the high quality of the Chinese novel he has just read derives from the fact that it resembles his own idyllic narrative in verse *Hermann und Dorothea* (1797). However, Goethe is not only slightly narcissistic. What he shows indirectly is that there is always a local and personal starting point when we reach out to understand a global context that we cannot experience directly by ourselves. Goethe tries, himself, to write poetry in a foreign style. First of all the collection *West-östlicher Diwan* (1819, enlarged 1827), 'diwan' meaning in Persian a collection of poetry. In the title he mentions his own home ground first, *West*, but this is not meant to be a projection of himself, but a challenge to himself. Every local culture is, with its own language and culture, a valid point of departure for a global perspective. That

is the function of the 'West' in the title and the book. Any locality can be challenged productively from the outside, irrespective of size and location. No population, German or other, in any location can legitimize an attempt to hide in 'a pedantic dusk.' This is the critical essence of Goethe's self-reflection.

Local Literature as the Prism of World Literature

This is the point where Georg Brandes interacts with Goethe when he further develops the idea of world literature in the short article 'Verdenslitteratur' [World Literature] (1899). Goethe walks on a tightrope between a classical universalism and a modern global perspective looking to both sides. In the universal perspective, the human being addresses the ideal or divine dimension of life: 'God' or nature speaks to us through poetry. For Brandes, however, the heart of the matter is that in literature, and across languages and cultures, humans share with each other common issues and concerns, while being fully aware of the actual multitude of their differences and varieties. This is the modern global perspective.

Brandes reminds us of the progress of science as a global intellectual process and of the travelogues from scientific expeditions during the 19th century. He adds that transport, communication, modern press and also translations accelerate the global process, and he might also have listed the newly established international time zones, the telegraph lines and the world's fairs. There is no universal idealism at work here, but concrete globalized cultural contacts and interactions. Therefore, he moves his focus away from the universal content of world literature above the national literatures which Goethe placed at center stage. A literature of this kind which is immediately understandable everywhere, may for that very reason be deprived of all 'vitality and power' (Brandes 1902, 28), simply because it is not rooted anywhere.

And if something is written in order to be marketed as world literature, it is therefore highly probable that it is completely irrelevant. It is more likely that world literature primarily has to be seen as a local literature, which just happens to be written in a language which for the time being, and more or less accidentally, enjoys a global extension. Smaller languages may therefore hide literature known only by a few, but with a world literature quality. The point Brandes makes is that a world literary perspective is played out inside and not beyond national and local literatures:

World literature of the future will appear the more appealing, the stronger it represents the national particularity, and the more diversified it is, but only when it as art and science also has a general human dimension (Brandes 1902, 28).

World literature is not a certain group of texts, but rather certain effects that literature exercises when we read it in different and concrete contexts where we use it together with other texts and cultural phenomena. It creates a unified perspective through different texts. This happens when literature becomes a cognitive model for global thinking and opens windows, doors and barriers for the wind that blows from the greater world into the specific locality of everyone.

This point of view is shared by newer presentations of world literature, by David Damrosch's *What is World Literature?* (2003) among others:

World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures. World literature is writing that gains in translation. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time. [...] This refraction is double in nature: works become world literature by being received *into* the space of a foreign culture [...] Even a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two different cultures. [...] World literature is thus always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture; hence it is a double refraction (Damrosch 2003, 280, 283).

Although Damrosch was not familiar with Brandes' Danish essay when he wrote his book, he exemplifies Brandes' view point: Brandes' and Damrosch' texts are different texts but with a unified perspective. Instead of talking about the double refraction Brandes saw the dual nature of the study literature in the image of a telescope: we have in turn to look through it from both ends to obtain both the diminishing effect that distances us from the local perspective alone and the magnifying effect that brings the foreign closer to us.

Damrosch enhances Brandes' point in underlining that the label world literature depends on more than the text itself. It is a qualification that follows from the way we read and use literature, but of course based on the concrete possibilities offered by the textual structures. Literature consists of texts without borders if our reading actually opens the borders. To read all texts in that perspective does not entail that all texts are equally relevant or valuable, that they all have enough 'vitality and power' to be outstanding world literature. Literature becomes world literature with a cultural impact when it enables us to open the world around us, irrespective of its language and place. But not of the way we use it. Brandes joined Goethe when the both in various ways warn us against what Amitav Ghosh in his *The Glass Palace* (2000) calls the 'monumental inwardness.'

Literature Around the World

Brandes also touches another important point: the worldwide dissemination of literature and knowledge. He mentions the importance of transport, communication and the modern press. Today we could expand his list: import and export of

educational systems, electronic media, exchange of students, backpackers, media conglomerates and other elements of modern globalization. When Brandes emphasizes the primary importance of the local anchoring, his general claim for world literature is doubled and can be formulated in the following way: first, local anchoring is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for literature to be world literature, and second, its wide spread circulation through the channels available in any given age is only a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for the status of texts as world literature.

Therefore, the tension between the local and the global aspects is articulated by the textual structure itself and thus a topic for various interpretive theories and methodologies centered on the texts. Furthermore, changing conditions of circulation and the problems they entail inevitably address theoretical and methodological problems, but do not offer the means to solve them. Finally, there are texts out there with a slim circulation which have the potential to be world literature, only waiting to be known outside their local confinement determined by language, culture and media.

Some texts will make it outside the enclosure, others not; some will make it with a huge delay, like aboriginal dream-time narratives made known through the global success of aboriginal painting and Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (1987). Others with a smaller delay, like Imre Kertész's *Fateless* (1976) which jumped from anonymity to world fame via the Nobel Prize in 2001. But in both cases the tension between the local conditions and the global perspective is an integral part of the text, although the road to their dissemination often seems accidental. Such texts often require new reading strategies and theoretical approaches that may have implications for a general reorientation of existing literary traditions. This happens when new genres occur, like witness literature, migrant literatures or hyper fiction, or when new focus points like place, translation or performativity attract the scholarly attention.

The 'world literature' perspective is not only valid for particularly selected texts, but is connected with the way we can and ought to use *all* literature. It is an approach to literature that sees it as a prism defracting the light from a larger and heterogeneous world so that we see its diversity in the place where we are located. Therefore, world literature is not primarily a matter of global distribution or stable canonizable standards, although this also belongs to the discussion. First and foremost, world literature is a global perspective on literature where it is actually written and used, which always happens locally. The span of the perspective depends on the potential offered by the literary texts for turning the local perspective into a larger trans-local perspective and of our capacity to use the texts to that end. If this does not happen, we and not the texts are to blame. Sooner rather than later the issue of world literature will therefore bring us to a didactic and pedagogical discussion.

This is my perspective in what follows. Here I will present an outline of the ideas behind and the structure of a history of literature in Denmark written for the secondary school system: local literature in a global perspective. Consequently the title runs in a kind of globish – *litteraturDK*.

Students and Teachers

The efficacy of literary didactics rests on at least two important presuppositions on the part of the students: i) they have a hermeneutic desire related to their age and culture, and ii) they know a language with which to express it. All students fulfill these presuppositions before they begin in a high school and are introduced to literature in this context. Even if they express themselves badly in the language of teaching (Danish in this case), they have a language to express their hermeneutic interest although not always in a very exact or polite way. 'I don't understand that

fucking crap! – Why the hell am I supposed to learn this?’ are clear linguistic articulations of interpretational needs, but definitely not very precise, sometimes in the case of youths from immigrant families who often have a rather liberal attitude to grammar and pronunciation. Teaching is about giving those needs a form that enables students of all inclinations to benefit from the reading of literature. Therefore the task that we face is didactic and as the example above shows, this is often a difficult one to tackle.

To carry out that task, it is my claim that we must offer a re-conceptualization of Danish literary history (and other national literary histories). The point of departure for this endeavor is that the hermeneutical needs belong to globalized reality as it is experienced in Denmark, and that literature belongs to a larger media landscape defined also by other languages than Danish and other media than verbal language. This reality promotes an encounter between several cultures and it therefore inevitably contains a strong historical dimension, which more often than not is excluded from the close-reading strategies pursued in the teaching of literature or reduced to factual comments of varying relevance. Hence, a re-conceptualization is just as much a research task on the university level as an open issue on the level of the everyday life in secondary schools.³

Apart from answering a series of explicit questions, all text books, in literature and physics alike, suggest an answer to a didactic question which is normally *not* explicitly posed. This question is the *teacher's question*: ‘what am I supposed to teach the students?’ In a sense, the text book as a whole is the answer. In contrast, the questions explicitly posed are most likely to be lists of specific goals for the teaching

³ Denmark had a high school reform in 2005 which opens the possibility for new text books based on more recent research. The present literary history forms an attempt to take advantage of this possibility.

of the discipline in question on that particular level, maybe related to a national curriculum. When it comes to literary histories, the answer to the implicit question is most often this one: are the students supposed to know a less than comprehensive research-based national literary history from the university or just the text book used by more senior students? The consequences of this didactic approach is a dual problem for literary teaching today: first, literary history on all levels of teaching is always defined as an abbreviated easy reader version in relation to an allegedly 'real' literary history pertaining to teaching at least one level up; second, the perspective becomes, or remains, only a national one.

To take the first problem first: all text books that I know of see themselves as a discount product, not the real thing. This attitude constitutes an unfortunate didactic basis in any discipline. It implies that a literary history used in a given class does not have a formative concept or, rather, that it doesn't have concept of its own, targeting this particular didactic context, simply because the concept of the 'real' history is copied from above without further reflection. In most cases this history is still the history of how the Danish national state emerged and developed and how its indigenous Danish-ness grew out of a long history with the 19th century as the turning point. That is also to say that the same century that promoted general education (with the need for textbooks) and also saw literary studies emerge as an academic discipline and, together with it, literary history as a didactic genre shaped as a tool both for education of the public in a larger sense and for the educational system in a more narrow sense.

To come up with a new concept is not just a question of changing a didactic genre, but more profoundly to form a new understanding of the point of departure for the writing of any literary history today. As documented in my reference to Goethe and Brandes, the possibility for such a re-orientation was part of the agenda already

in the same period as the national literary history dominated the agenda in research and teaching to the effect that other possibilities became almost invisible. With few exceptions, in Denmark at least, this situation still defines the agenda (Hans Hertel's *Verdenslitteraturhistorie* 1-7, published in the 1980ies being one of the valuable exceptions).

Internationally, however, the rethinking of literary historiography is beginning to spread, also in presentations for a large audience (see Denis Hollier's *A New History of French Literature* (1989) and David Wellbery's *A New History of German Literature* (2004)). In 2002, Mario Valdès and Linda Hutcheon pushed this process forward with *Rethinking Literary History* in the context of the International Comparative Literature Association's monumental series *A History of Literatures in the European Languages*, which has been published since the 1960's. Since 2002, various new approaches have been translated into concrete literary histories about Latin America, East and Central Europe (with the fall of the Berlin Wall as the turning point), and also in the ongoing projects on the literature of the Iberian peninsula and on Nordic literatures. All of these projects adapt a global world literature perspective on local literatures.

The intention of *litteraturDK* is to harvest some of the fruits of these research trends for didactic purposes tailored to the secondary school system. Denmark, in particular, has good possibilities for the realization of this project. In classes of Danish language and literature, now also including other media as part of the national curriculum, the teaching of literature has been to the present day, the center for the promotion of *Bildung* and Enlightenment, both terms to be taken in their traditional sense. This focus was established for a number of partly accidental reasons, and in other European countries the picture looks different. For example, in Sweden and also in Germany, the teaching of history came to exercise a similar function, while in

France philosophy has been the central overarching discipline. As the German/Scandinavian notion of *Bildung* has not played a significant role outside of this region, the role of philosophy in France is slightly different. In the UK and the United States too, the situation varies, inasmuch as the notion of competence is stronger than the notion of *Bildung* within the school system. So, the teaching of literature has a stronger position in the Danish school system than in many other places, even among the Nordic countries. It is a challenge to keep that position, and the only way to do so is to make literature relevant for students also on new cultural conditions and transform them to didactic practice.

Literary History as a Lifesaver

The second problem mentioned above together with the lack of a re-conceptualization of literary history is its national focus. The international and wider historical context is placed like a lifesaver around Danish literature, keeping it up and saving it from the troubled waters of the larger world. Besides that function, the references to international contexts have nothing to do with literature itself. They mostly consist of factual additions and a set of influences of varying nature and relevance. To make things worse recent years have seen a number of official lists of national canonical works without any contextual references. What they leave out, for example, is the role of translations and their contribution to literature in Denmark; the same goes for literature from or about the Danish colonies or literature in other languages than Danish, vital for the life of literature in Denmark since the Middle Ages and up to today's multicultural society. Travel literature in all of its various manifestations does not play a prominent role either. As in other countries, translations of Homer and Shakespeare have been more important for literature in Denmark than many of the

smaller national poets from the same periods as the translations and retranslations.

The almost exclusively nationally oriented model has been intimately connected with the practice of literary historiography, but has nothing to do with the reality of literature itself. From time immemorial, before writing, before book printing and before it mingled with the digital media, literature has moved freely in images, motifs, genres, translations and adaptations, imitations, borrowing, theft, influences, shameless copying etc. across and beyond all the boundaries one can think of: geographical, cultural, linguistic, generational, media-specific boundaries and a good deal more. The particular national condensation only means a temporary slowing down of the inborn transgressive dynamics of literature, in exactly the same way as we today can see Denmark as the result of the movement of borders on many levels. No lifesaver can, or should, save literature from the great ocean of world literature. And even if one tried, it would plunge again into the water, all by itself.

Luckily, the teaching of Danish exploits lots of texts and other materials that explore the world outside the national confinement. In such cases the linearity of national history is broken up, various verbal and non-verbal media interact with each other and the local and the global cross each other. But mostly this operation happens as something which is relevant to contemporary culture and without much support, if any, from the literary histories. Therefore, this positive trend makes the problem even more felt: literary history is deprived of relevant didactic perspectives. The historical dimension is not integrated in the concept of literary didactics and it cannot be integrated as long as the two problems listed above remain unsolved: a re-conceptualization in a didactic perspective targeting the given level of teaching, and a conversion of the national paradigm.

Two Questions for an Alternative Literary History

The literary history I have co-authored with four colleagues, *litteraturDK* (2009), exploits the international research developing new perspectives on the relation between local literature and global perspectives in order to promote another take on literary history. First of all the book functions as an answer to two other implicit questions than the implicit teacher's question I mentioned above.

The first one is the *students' question*: 'why don't we watch a DVD instead of reading a book?' *litteraturDK* reacts to this question by showing how literature is a part of a modern media landscape, but also by underlining that literature is able to perform in ways that other media cannot. Literature actually channels the hermeneutical needs of 16-19 years old by shaping answers that correspond to what it means to be human beings in a globalized world. Throughout its recorded history, literature has developed a stock of interpretational models we can use also today to map a changing trans-local reality based on the following six questions that are also present in the mind of young people, explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously and in more or less clear terms: *how can I find my place in society? how does my local universe relate to the world at large? how are my dreams about the world as it should be? who am I? how do I relate to my body? how can I grasp what is larger than my senses and my understanding can embrace?*

These questions are not random. They indicate existential and social coordinates for human life – the social, the cross-cultural, imagination, individual identity, the body and everything that transcends the limits of humans. With these coordinates human beings have always tried to interpret and come to grips with their lives, now as well as back in time. On that basis, different cultures and epochs have offered different interpretations and mapped out human life.

The set of questions just mentioned is the backbone of all literary and other art forms. In all periods, in genres, in imaginary language, in themes and motifs literature confronts these questions over and over again and in new ways in order to make us see new interpretational openings. That is why every question allows us to tell the history of literature in Denmark during the thousand years that it has been known, and to shape it as a history of how new models of interpretations have occurred in a permanent exchange between what happens inside the changing boundaries of Denmark and a larger outside world. Each of the six questions is translatable into a theme which runs as the red thread through one of several possible histories of literature in Denmark in its relation to a larger world from the Nordic Middle Ages up till today.

Therefore, *litteraturDK* contains six parallel historical literary trajectories which we have subdivided by the same limits between historical periods. They evolve from six different thematic centers generated by the six questions: Upstairs & Downstairs; Home & Abroad; Fantasy & Reality; I, Me & the Others; Body & Environment⁴; Us & the Other. Each period opens with a nodal point in Danish history which has had a literary impact and at the same time marks a change in the relation between Denmark and a larger world with an increasing global outreach. Thus, the period 800-1536 is opened by the Viking Age; 1536-1801 by the Reformation; 1801-1849 by the English attack on Denmark and the beginning of the rapid dissolution of Denmark as a European empire; 1849-1914 by the democratic constitution; 1914-1969 by WW1; 1969 to the present by the globally broadcasted moon landing. Because of the national curriculum which frames the six semesters'

⁴ The Danish word is 'Omverden' which like the German 'Umwelt' has a broader, phenomenological meaning than 'Environment.'

teaching of literature in high school and which emphasizes literature after 1800, the most recent periods are more elaborated than the earlier ones.

Every chapter offers a different viewpoint on how literature during 1000 years has suggested answers to questions about what it means to face the conditions of human existence living in Denmark as a country within moving boundaries and with a changing but always crucial interaction with the larger world. In the beginning, this world was first of all the Nordic world, but also more remote places on the margins (Caucasus) or outside Europe (Newfoundland); then with Christianity it became more and more the European world as a whole, and during the 20th century it also comprised the global reality. Each of the six chapters contains a section dealing more in detail with one of the six sub-periods subdividing the *long durée* of the 1000 years. A few extensive readings of selected texts show how a literary history opens for an analytical practice and offers more than being a contextual lifesaver. The use of identical epochal subdivisions in all chapters implies that the teacher will have the choice of telling the student to read across the chapters inside the same temporal limits, reading for example the six sections on Romanticism (1801-1849) of which one of them will offer a comprehensive presentation of the period in question. But the teacher can also read the thematic trajectories one at a time. The bottom line is that such alternative possibilities makes it clear that the choice of historical perspective always has to be discussed, is never just something to be taken for granted.

With the six fundamental existential questions as the cornerstones the book is also written with other readers in mind than those high school students who already may take an interest in literature and perhaps want to study literature in various later educational contexts, which is a maximum of 20%. It has also been written for the students we would like to convince that literature and reading is a worthwhile activity in the lives of people in a modern world, and to whom we hope this conviction will

have an effect after they have left school. Therefore, the text only comprises 200 pages in a narrative form – narratives are efficient communicative tools both to provide knowledge and to motivate readers. They can read everything by themselves during 3 years of high school. With this, there are a lot of beautifully reproduced enticing illustrations, presentations of translations, small author portraits, time lines, index and a dictionary. A literary history must not be a condensed version of historical chronology in a certain cultural area; like literature itself, it is a cultural intervention which in this case takes place in high school as part of the responsibility of the educational system both to contribute to the development of the students' personality and to prepare them for higher education.

Now I come to the second implicit question to which *litteraturDK* as a whole constitutes an answer. It concerns students and teachers alike: 'why do we have to read Danish literature in a globalized world?' The book suggests that it is both a good idea and a necessary activity, not only because it is required by the curriculum, but because all of us live in a local world on globalized conditions. For the readers this local world happens for the time being to be Denmark. Therefore the book must, on a practical level, by its composition and communicative strategies and by its view points and selection of texts, demonstrate how we can read local literature in a global perspective, and how this perspective also imposes an alternative concept for the construction of a historical trajectory, different from most of the available literary histories.

Therefore, the book is not a literary history of *Danish* literature for high school, but a history of *literature in Denmark*, that is about the texts which have been read, used, imitated, remediated, arrived along labyrinthine routes, transformed completely once they arrived and thereby constituted examples of the permanent presence of the greater world inside the local confinement. The book emphasizes

other aspects, now and then picks others texts or authors and opens other perspectives than is usually seen.

That the book suggests six historical and thematically informed routes is not only a reflection of the six semesters' duration of high school education. First of all, it is a consequence of the fact that in a globalized perspective no historical account can legitimately claim that any type of history of any local culture is subsumed under just one dominating historical line of development in the manner of the national concept of literary history and other domain specific histories. In this way *litteraturDK* abandons the idea that there is *one* history only of literature in Denmark. The chronological uni-linearity is one with the national literary history which turns simple chronology into a teleological ideology which neither maps the reality of literature, nor that of the globalized multicultural society where students live their everyday lives. All six histories offer interpretational historical models that can be reinvested in a modern world.

Of course, the teacher's question still exists: 'what am I supposed to teach the students?' Like all textbooks, this book, too, is a pragmatic construction. It must respect laws, regulations, curriculum, exam requirements, etc. Otherwise nobody would be able to use it to bridge between new trends in research and in didactic practice, but only exemplify the arrogance of universities vis-à-vis high schools: 'do as we tell you to do!' But the teacher's question does not dictate the structure and the thinking of *litteraturDK*. The book just answers the question, so nothing is missing that may impede its usability, but on the grounds of the basic conceptualization.

Didactics as a Cultural Challenge

Many high school students are not particularly motivated to read literature and close read texts. There are so many other texts and media out there that satisfy their need for fiction. It is *us* who try to place *our* literature in *their* media landscape which in the outset is characterized by intermediality.

Since antiquity, the images, themes, characters and stories of literature have travelled across linguistic, cultural and media specific boundaries. Literature has always opened an access to a shared cultural universe larger than any of the local languages and places where we encounter its stories and poems. Throughout history they have constituted the largest cultural reserve of recyclable experiences concerned with local lives and the simultaneous view of that life from outside. Literature has been global before globalization in the modern sense emerged. That is why new media never cease to re-use stories, images and characters from literature for still new audiences, from paintings to cartoons and film and TV-series and games, although these media also develop their own ways of expression.

The global perspective frames the present and future everyday life of the students with a both promising and scaring self-evidence that my generation had tried painstakingly to incorporate. In other words, *we* are writing a literary history about *their* world. That is why a concept is needed; it does not come all by itself just by repeating the term globalization a sufficient number of times and add some foreign translations.

litteraturDK takes Denmark as its point of departure and does so in relation to Nordic literature and European literature which in translation or in its original languages is part of literature in Denmark. Only during the 20th century translated non-European literature begins to play an important role in the literary landscape in Denmark, although some important translations are known from the 18th century. But

also in a globalized world, Denmark interacts with this world on a European cultural foundation with Denmark as the basic platform. We are still Danes in Europe, but today we have a global outlook. Literature consists of texts without boundaries if we are able to open the gates.

Bibliography

- Andreasen, B., M. Jørgensen, S.E. Larsen and D. Ringgard. 2009. *litteraturDK*. Copenhagen: Lindhardt & Ringhof.
- Brandes, G. 1902/1899. 'Verdenslitteratur.' *Samlede Skrifter* 12. København: Gyldendal. pp. 23-28. Engl. trans. <<http://global.wisc.edu/worldlit/readings/brandes-world-literature.pdf>> Accessed 18 August 2010.
- Casanova, P. 1999. *La république mondiale des lettres*. Paris: Seuil.
- Damrosch, D. 2003. *What is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Damrosch, D. 2008. *How to Read World Literature*. New York: WileyBlackwell.
- Damrosch, D. Ed. 2009. *Teaching World Literature*. New York: Modern Language Association.
- Eckermann, J. P. 1981. *Gespräche mit Goethe*. Munich: Insel Verlag.
- Ette, O. 2005. *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben. Literaturen ohne festen Wohnsitz*. Berlin: Kadmos.
- Frank, S. 2008. *Migration and Literature*. London: Palgrave.
- Le Bris, M. 2007. *Pour une littérature- monde*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Lindberg-Wada, G. Ed. 2006. *Studying Transcultural Literary History*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Noyes, John K. 2006. 'Goethe on Cosmopolitanism and Colonialism: *Bildung* and the Dialectic of Critical Mobility.' *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39/4. pp. 443-462.
- Quay, S. og G. Watling 2008. *Cultural History of Reading*. Vol. 1: *World Literature*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Prendergast, C. Ed. 2004. *Debating World Literature*. London: Verso.
- Rosendahl Thomsen. M. 2009. *Mapping World Literature. International Canonization and Transnational Literatures*. London: Continuum.
- Saussy, H. Ed. 2006. *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.
- Schöning, U. Ed. 2000. *Internationalität nationaler Literaturen*. Tübingen: Wallstein Verlag.

- Simonsen, K.-M. og J. Stougaard-Nielsen Ed. 2008. *World Literature, World Culture*.
Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.
- Torzen, A. 2005. 'Kampen om rigets grænser.' I: *MiljøDanmark*, 2005/1. pp. 18-23.