

**EDITORIAL**

The interest of Europe for the Orient has been long attributed to historical, political and economic factors, being often looked at through the lens of colonialism and associated approaches. While key contributors have noted the rise of new types of discourses and representations in genres considerably employing the Western literary imagination, the geographic space ranging from the Balkans to the Far East continued to be seen as dominated by exoticism. Responding to the growing interest of scholars for cross-disciplinary contributions devoted to *East and West* from a cultural perspective, this issue of *Synergy* seeks to present the papers of nine contributors from Australia, Germany, India, Japan, Romania and Russia.

The main questions pursued by the participants in the Panel *East and West within Interdisciplinary Frames* of the Conference *Synergies in Communication* (16-17 November 2017), concerned the literary relations between ‘major’ and ‘minor’ literature, as well as the issue of ‘centres’ versus ‘peripheries’. In addition, presenters debated on the images of otherness in non-Western representations and works, generating different models of world literature. Following the intense debate during the working sessions of the panel, this issue of *Synergy* is far from arguing that the Eastern and Western cultural voices and perspectives provide solutions to the topics addressed. Instead, it examines identity in a specific context, as well as cultural representations and literarily and politically-shaped discourses mixed with imagination and creativity.

The first section groups articles where authors study cultural connections under the perspective of **Interdisciplinary and Cultural Synergies**. Travelling back in Japanese history and religion and making use of an impressive bibliography, which includes primary sources written in classical Japanese or *kanbun*, the paper *The Tenjin Cult: A Brief History of the Syncretic Cult of A Heavenly Deity in Japan* reconstructs the faith in Tenjin (The Heavenly Deity) –the deification of a famous scholar, poet and politician of the Heian period (794-1185), Sugawara no Michizane (843-903). The author, **Vladlena Fedianina**, thoroughly investigates the formation of the cult and its chronological subdivisions (early 10th century);

the syncretic manifestation of Tenjin worship within the *honji suijaku* paradigm which combines and harmonises Buddhist and Shinto elements, particularly focusing on Tenjin as the manifestation of bodhisattva Kannon (11th-19th century); and finally, the institutionalisation of the cult which culminates with its official recognition by the government (19th century to the present day).

The readers are next invited to step into another cultural space of South Asia, represented by India. In her paper, *Fictionalising Facts or Factualising Fiction: Evaluating the Validity of Devdutt Pattanaik's Management Lessons Drawn from Mythology*, **Minouti Naik** follows the steps of Devdutt Pattanaik, who tried to reconcile facts with fiction by transferring different mythological episodes from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* to the business world. Her paper focuses mainly on Pattanaik's five management related books and articles which have appeared in newspapers over the past two decades, in an attempt to determine whether drawing management lessons from Hindu mythology has added value to the texts and the genre, or has rather resulted in their devaluation.

**Aurora Băgiag's** paper, *Uncle Anghel de Panait Istrati ou l'aventure antéchristique d'un Job moderne*, delves into Panait Istrati's exotic fictional universe, focusing on Adrian Zograffi's return at home as presented in *Uncle Anghel*. This is far from allowing the young man a peaceful reunion with members of his family and of his past; his maternal uncle, Anghel, oscillates between joyful moments and memories, and highly dramatic psychological encounters with family members. While exposing local superstitions and traditions embedded in the psyche of the locals, the uncle, abandoning himself to alcoholism instead of resisting the tragic deaths of his children, engages young Adrian into a deep reading of his life, similar to Job, in an authentic *mise en abîme* where the inebriate openly questions divine authority. The analysis looks at the aesthetic and atheistic values presented by the main protagonist, an alter ego of Istrati himself, opposed to the fatalism of his uncle – issues which reconnect the narrative to the writer's on-going concern with the Oriental versus the Occidental moral and economic stands.

Adopting a sociolinguistic perspective, as the title of her paper suggests, *The Notion of 'West' in Contemporary Japan: A Sociolinguistic Perspective*, **Naoko Hosokawa** analyses how the Eastern-Western division of the world is incorporated into the Japanese discourse through the use of certain

morphemes, such as *wa* (Japanese style) and *yō* (Western style), as well as through the contrast between *nihongo* (Japanese) and *gaikokugo* (a foreign language). Based on several newspaper entries (*Yomiuri* and *Asahi*), the contrasting images between Japan and ‘West’ are seen to be part of the negotiating process of Japanese national identity through the generalisation of ‘West’ and the particularisation of Japan, in other words, the idea of ‘West’ is employed as the general ‘Other’, in contrast with the specific ‘Self’ of Japan.

Keeping the focus on Japan, *Songs of Revolution in Takarazuka Revue: The Dialectics of Cultural Imperialism and the Nostalgia for Intellectual Activism in Late-Modern Japan* continues to revolve around this country’s culture. At the beginning of her paper, **Maria Grăjdian** gives a brief overview of the history of Takarazuka Revue, the all-female popular musical theatre founded by Kobayashi Ichizō in 1913 and then contextualizes the Japanese intellectual activism as represented in the performance *1789 – The Lovers of Bastille* from 2015, derived from a 1974 blockbuster, *The Rose of Versailles*. The author contrasts the two plays in terms of the fascination of freedom (*The Lovers of Bastille*) and the dialectics of love (*The Rose of Versailles*) with the ultimate goal to reveal this double-edged function of the Japanese cultural products released by the entertainment industry: national reframing and international impact, categorised as cultural imperialism.

Reflecting on cross-disciplinary links between art and fiction emerging in the Balkan area, **Dana Radler** provides a useful insight into the landscapes and protagonists of Brăila, as presented in Panait Istrati’s *Kyra Kyralina* and the works of five Romanian painters focusing on the harbour, local landscape, harvesting, both male and female characters, all featured along a notable ‘Oriental’ perspective (*Touches and Taches: Expression of Identity Connected to Panait Istrati’s Kyra Kyralina*). She engages in a comparative analysis between six visual representations versus those coming out from Istrati’s story, identifying connecting or contrasting discursive *taches* (concept coined by Øystein Sjøstad), often consisting of patches, digressions, bursts or gaps specific to each medium. While the place and the character are obviously elements presented in painting or writing, time is a more capricious factor, it is often hinted at by either soft visual elements or shades meant to suggest the devastating effect of illness, suffering and isolation.

The second section, **Literary and Translation Studies** includes three papers devoted to voices coming from the Middle East. Addressing novels authored by contemporary Saudi female writers in the first decade of the 2000s, **Roswitha Badry** exposes contrasting elements between reality and assumed values in the society (*Countering Prevailing Discourses with Literary Creativity – Contemporary Saudi Women Novelists’ Drive for Change*). Exploring the links between the narrative and the marketing tools to promote Raja Alsanea’s *Girls of Riyadh*, Badry thinks the controversy raised by this volume only allows the wide public to learn critically from ‘the other’. The works of three other selected authors (Badriyya Al-Bishr, Layla Al-Juhani and Raja Alem) are minutely analysed, the result being a rather heterogeneous picture of Saudi society when writers approach sensitive issues such as various forms of discrimination, stories of corruption or historical references. For the discussed authors, it appears that their writing sometimes becomes a mixture of facts and fantasy under various narrative techniques, which is less subject to ideology or religious spirit as compared to earlier decades.

Focusing on the identity of Muslim protagonists living in the West, **Jillian Curr** examines the sophisticated narrative of migration, loss and exile in estranging urban environments as depicted by Hanan al-Shaykh in her novel, *Only in London* (2001). In her paper, *The City: A Place for Reinvention*, the demarcation between reality and fantasy is highly fragile, and the patterns of movement and unsettling belonging are only partly dependent on geographical *topoi*. In between physical and imaginary constructs, the analysis follows both female and male characters in search of individual freedom, better appreciated than any return to the past, in a continuous process of resistance, disruption and negotiation.

Engaged in discussing ‘travelling concepts’, **Hala Kamal** explores the connections of ‘feminism’ and ‘gender’ as articulated in the Egyptian context (*‘Travelling Concepts’ in Translation: Feminism and Gender in the Egyptian Context*). The author investigates the historical elements related to feminism, emerging both from the area of cultural studies, as well as translation studies. She sees them as rooted in inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches where ideas move from humanities to social sciences; ‘feminism’ is thus emerging on its own in the Egyptian environment, contrasting the historical route of other cultural concepts. Starting from Edward Said’s paradigm of ‘travelling theories’, she then presents the complex historical and cultural meandering of ‘gender’, starting from its introduction, acceptance and resistance to its incorporation into

feminist and academic discourses. What is noteworthy for the future debate may actually reside less in a particularly translated concept as such, and more in the process related to its cultural translation.

This issue of *Synergy* closes with one book review by Dana Radler, which rounds up the tour of the proposed thematic area from the East to the West. The book review examines Zamfir Bălan's recently published book, entitled *Panait Istrati, povestitorul fotograf, fotograful povestitor* [Panait Istrati, the storytelling photographer, the photographic storyteller], 2017.

Looking at the papers collected in this journal, it appears that the geographies of identity have shifted from a linear, often chronologically-set vision of the cultural environment as it has repeatedly been discussed by major theorists. Identity and related cultural concepts about *the East and the West* are constantly questioned, becoming a delicate, if not difficult topic for protagonists either turning to a new place called home, or simply exploring their often troubled past while attempting to accommodate the future.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks to the colleagues supporting this thematic issue: especially to Professor Emerita Mariana Nicolae and Dr. Marina Militaru for their constant support. We would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to Dr. Raluca Nicolae, for her commitment in all academic and organisational tasks related to the selection of the papers assembled in the present issue.

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