

## **Voices of Europe. Literary writers as public intellectuals**

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## **Voices of Europe, Literary Writers as Public Intellectuals**

Rede,

in verkorte vorm uitgesproken bij de openbare aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar in de  
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door

Odile Heynders

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The search for truth – be it the subjective truth of belief, the objective truth of reality, or the social truth of money or power – always confers, on the searcher who merits a prize, the ultimate knowledge of its non-existence. The grand prize of life goes only to those who bought tickets by chance.

The value of art is that it takes us away from here.

Fernando Pessoa: *The Book of Disquiet*.

*In memory of my dear father, brother and sister.*

### The Nobel Laureate

*Stockholm. December 7, 2006.* Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk delivers his Nobel Prize acceptance speech before the distinguished audience of the Swedish Academy. As in any ceremonial speech, elements of *ethos* and *pathos* are combined; the lecture describes the 30 year-long career of the author and includes a narration of a suitcase in which Pamuk's father kept his own, amateur writings. Eventually the son has outgrown the father, thanks to his determination to forego the pleasures of society and to live the life of a hermit. In the definition of Pamuk this is what a literary writer does:

“A writer is someone who (...) shuts himself up in a room, sits down at a table, and alone, turns inward; amid the shadows, he builds a new world with words. (...) The stones we writers use are words. As we hold them in our hands, sensing the ways in which each of them is connected to the others, looking at them sometimes from afar, sometimes almost caressing them with our fingers and the tips of our pens, weighing them, moving them around, year in and year out, patiently and hopefully, we create new worlds.”<sup>1</sup>

After thirty years of stubborn work, Pamuk is awarded what you might call the *Gold Medal* of literature, and tells the illustrious listeners in Stockholm the moving story of a father whose ambition did not lead to the devotion a strong writer needs. And in a way the son Pamuk *wished* the situation to be like this, the son wanted his father to be a father only. A father is the loved one close by; a writer has to distance himself, needs *askesis*, a state of solitude.<sup>2</sup>

But this idea of the writer having to stay alone in a room, creating a *new world*, is only part of the message of the speech. Pamuk also addresses the issue of being a Turkish writer, living in and writing from the perspective of Istanbul. This city is the centre of his world, he has narrated ‘its streets, bridges, people, dogs, houses, mosques, fountains, strange heroes, shops, famous characters, dark spots, nights and days’. He has made them part of himself. What Istanbul is to Pamuk, reminds us of what Dublin is to James Joyce, or Lisbon to Fernando Pessoa or Berlin to Alfred Döblin. The city permeates the writer's life on every level. Beyond the city is the outside world. For Pamuk this initially ‘other’ attractive and challenging world was the modern west, Europe. And that is most certainly something the Nobel Prize committee has rewarded as we can read in the caption on their website: Pamuk is

a writer “who in the quest for the melancholic soul of his native city has discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures”.<sup>3</sup>

Again, this is only part of the message. Pamuk is receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature 2006, after having been charged in Turkey in 2005 with insulting Turkish national character by making statements on the killing of Kurds and the genocide of Armenians. In an interview with Swiss newspaper *Der Tages-Anzeiger*, Pamuk had said of Turkey: “Thirty thousand Kurds and a million Armenians were killed in these lands and nobody but me dares to talk about it.”<sup>4</sup> After the Swiss publication the Turkish nationalist press set off a relentless campaign against the writer. The international press, however, as well as members of the European Parliament and the International PEN protested to the Turkish government, as a result of which the charge was dropped in January 2006. Tellingly this happened in the week when the EU planned to start reviewing the Turkish justice system. The decision of the Nobel Prize Committee may have been politically motivated, in that they were not only honouring Pamuk’s novels but also his taking a stand as a public intellectual against the government line and official Turkish historiography.

Pamuk’s speech contains a message on authorship, a message on Turkey on the edge of Europe, and one on the responsibilities of an independent writer. The authority of his voice, delivering the Nobel Prize Lecture on an important stage, has an effect on a broad European and probably even worldwide intellectual audience even though it’s influence cannot be measured in any quantitative sense. Pamuk’s speech brings me to the issues I would like to reflect on in this inaugural lecture: the positions of a writer in society, the place of literature in Europe, the qualities a literary text needs to create a new world, and the performance of the literary text by the readers. These issues form the core of the research I would like to work on in the coming years.

### **Public Intellectual<sup>5</sup> and Literary author**

In his captivating research on public intellectuals in the US, entitled *Public Intellectuals, A Study of Decline* (2001), Richard A. Posner, judge and senior lecturer at Chicago University, describes public intellectuals as: “intellectuals who opine to an educated public on questions of or inflected by a political or ideological concern.” (2004;2) A public intellectual expresses himself in a way that is accessible to the public, and the focus of his expression is on matters of general public concern.<sup>6</sup> His opinions are sometimes condescending and often prickly or

controversial. Posner concentrates on the structure, patterns and conventions of public-intellectual work and finds that it is becoming less distinctive than it used to be. The social significance of the public intellectual is deteriorating in the US and the principal reason for this is the growth and the character of the modern university. Universities are not preparing students anymore for the kind of general view, natural curiosity and creativity that a public intellectual needs.

In the first part of his study Posner offers a socio-systematic (statistical) approach, in the second part he focuses on literary criticism, law and intellectual history.<sup>7</sup> He distinguishes between different *types* of public intellectuals, such as the commentator of current events and the critic of social trends, and different *formats* of public intellectual work, for example, the magazine article versus the full-page paid advertisement. He also identifies various *genres* of public-intellectual work, from translating one's scholarly work to political satire, and analyses the conventions that define those genres.<sup>8</sup> Posner is quite critical about the role literature and current literary critics play in social debates. Discussing the critical work of famous American public intellectuals Martha C. Nussbaum and Wayne C. Booth, Posner expresses his disapproval of their *moralist* interpretations of literature. Both these scholars either forget the aesthetic input of literature or trivialize the complexity of characters. Nussbaum exaggerates the *edifying* content of literature. By seeking to use literature for political purposes, the literary critic as a public intellectual not only *devalues* literature but actually also *misuses* it.<sup>9</sup> Posner asserts: "The fact that great literature is almost by definition separable from the social context of its creation does not eradicate that context, but neither does it suggest that injecting great literature into modern political debates is a fruitful way to treat literature." (246) This remark testifies to the typical opinion that literature as an *aesthetic genre* should be kept separate from mundane reality and politics. Put in more specific terms, we see Posner here as a defender of the (New Critical) *autonomy* concept of literature. This involves the emphasis on the independence of the literary text (the content as form and style) from the world outside. The result of this approach is that much attention is paid to typical features of literariness and the formal complexity of texts.<sup>10</sup>

Although the public intellectual is a typical European invention, the decline in Europe is probably even more notorious than in the US. To learn more about Europe, and about the traditions of intellectual writing here, we can turn to Tony Judt, historian and professor at New York University. In *Reappraisals* (2008)<sup>11</sup>, his latest collection of essays, Judt studies

forgotten 20<sup>th</sup> century European thinkers and writers such as Arthur Koestler and Manès Sperber. He observes that “Of all the transformations of the past three decades, the disappearance of ‘intellectuals’ is perhaps the most symptomatic”. (2008;12) The term *intellectual* first appeared round about the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It described men and women in the world of learning, literature and the arts who applied themselves to debating and influencing public opinion and policy. The intellectual was politically engaged, committed to an ideal, a dogma or a project. The first intellectuals were the writers who defended French Jewish artillery officer Alfred Dreyfus, who was falsely accused of treason. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals shaped public discourse. In repressed societies, they took on the role of spokespersons for the public interest and for the people, against authority and the state. In open societies, they benefitted from the right of free expression.

Judt’s main concern is that today we have not only forgotten who Europe’s most important intellectuals were, but we have also reduced the intellectual to the stereotype of the left-wing Western progressives who dominated the stage from the 1950s to the 1980s (examples he mentions here are Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and Günther Grass). Our modern image of the intellectual blurs the fact that historically many intellectuals were *right-wing* thinkers and pessimistic liberals (most of them Jewish). They formed a ‘Republic of Letters’, a community of conversation and argument. In an essay on Albert Camus, Judt remarks that moral authority is in fact lacking in present-day France, the country in which the intellectual used to take the pleasure of intellectual activity for granted. We are now in an era of “self-promoting media intellectuals, vacantly preening before the admiring mirror of their electronic audience.” (2008;104)

Both Posner and Judt observe that today’s intellectuals are not the creative, morally committed, curious, independent and controversial thinkers of the past century who would write for a general public. But if we zoom in more carefully on the literary texts that are written today, let’s say since 1990/91 (‘die Wende’, internet/digitilization, Gulf War), we might notice an intense interest in moral, social and political issues. Judt does not seem to realize that something is happening in current European literature. Take for instance, an internationally publishing author like Spanish Juan Goytisolo, who has written *State of Siege* (1995) in which he fictionalizes the war in Sarajevo. There is the novel *Atomised* (1998) by French author Michel Houellebecq who criticises the unbridled growth and spread of consumerism and sexual freedom since the sixties. The protagonist in the novel *Saturday*

(2004) by British author Ian McEwan discusses the US and British policy in Iraq. In recent Dutch literature we see the same phenomenon of increasing political engagement in the works of, among others, Arnon Grunberg, *Onze Oom* (2008) and Robert Anker, *Hajar en Daan* (2004). And particularly in novels written by Dutch female authors we notice an interest in collective social and ethical themes.<sup>12</sup>

Not only in the fictional novel, but also in genres such as epic poems, columns, pamphlets, blogs and journal articles, literary writers engage in discussions on social issues. We are witnessing a great deal of specific intellectual activity in literary authors taking a stand on issues in the public sphere. By using the notion of ‘public sphere’ I am referring to German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who describes it as a sphere *between* civil society and the state, which emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed. State authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people. In the twentieth century, however, the public sphere has changed from a *liberal* public sphere to the *social-welfare-state* democracy in which public opinion is taken into account, but no longer in the form of an unrestricted public discussion. The media serve less as platforms of debate than as “technologies for managing consensus and promoting consumer culture”.<sup>13</sup> Thus the crucial question is, how can the solitary writer play the role of a public intellectual if there is no longer a real public sphere of debate?

It is impossible to do justice to the richness of Habermas’s theory here, but some notions have specific relevance for my line of argumentation. First there is the distinction between ‘intimate sphere’ as opposed to the ‘public sphere’; intimate referring to what is embedded in a person’s immediate environment. An example would be Pamuk sitting solitarily in his room, writing about his father’s suitcase. Secondly, there is the notion of the ‘public sphere in the world of letters’, which refers to writers (in the so called French *salons* or German *Sprachgesellschaften*) playing a special role in forums for discussing social and political issues. An example would be Pamuk on a platform in Frankfurt addressing the Armenian genocide. The literary writer today, working alone in his room writing fiction, or standing in front of an audience performing a specific political statement, can play a vital role in ethical discourse. The author as public intellectual is at once politically engaged and detached.



We are confronted here with the issue of the boundaries between the aesthetic text and the real rapidly changing world, an issue that was already brought up in Posner's study and one that is also causing controversy in Dutch academic discussions today. It is at heart the issue of the 'crisis' of the autonomy of literature. The observation by *UvA* professor Thomas Vaessens, in his inspiring *De revanche van de roman* (2009)<sup>14</sup>, that after the humanist ideals of modernism, and after the relativism of postmodernism, a new era has begun in which literary authors are looking for new forms of commitment in order to revitalize the novel, is obviously linked to the institutional study by William Marx, *L'Adieu à la Littérature* (2005)<sup>15</sup>, announcing the declining prestige of the novel.

*UU* researchers Wilbert Smulders and Frans Ruiter, on the other hand, recently initiated a research project funded by NWO<sup>16</sup>, in which the autonomous authorship of Dutch author W.F. Hermans takes a central position. In their opinion, autonomous authorship is found in the typical position of a literary author as an independent subject. Fiction implies the freedom of imagination and therefore represents a detached, independent relation with regard to reality.

The plea for commitment by Vaessens, and the plea for maintenance of the demarcated position of the author of fiction by Smulders and Ruiter are both plausible, but in my opinion also too narrow reactions on the development that is going on. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century neo-liberalist context that has emerged after the drying up of postmodernism, literary writers do indeed take more explicit ethical positions in their texts as Vaessens observes, but the impact their statements have and *can* have depends heavily on the types and genres of these texts as well as on where and by what media these texts are published. An essay is different from a novel, a blog or a newspaper article. On the other hand, whereas a novel can indeed be seen as an autonomous/detached work of creative imagination as Smulders and Ruiter state, this does not imply that it can have no practical implications, including ethical demands and political decisions. Neither the idea of there being an *immediate* relation between the fictional novel and social reality, nor the idea of an autonomous (outsider) position of the author can be claimed as being representative for the situation of literature today.

In my opinion, the autonomy of the literary work is opened up by authors who depict and rethink political issues and in doing this, demarcate specific places in the public sphere. As Milan Kundera has proposed in *The Art of the novel* (1986)<sup>17</sup> authors can take *various* positions; some authors take position as *writers*, others as *novelists*:

“ The writer has original ideas and a unique voice. He can employ any form (including that of the novel) and because everything he writes bears the mark of his thoughts, carried by his voice, it is part of his work. Rousseau, Goethe, Chateaubriand, Gide, Camus, Malraux.

The novelist does not attach so much importance to his ideas. He is an explorer, busy feeling his way to unveil an unknown aspect of existence. He is not fascinated by his voice, but by a form he is after, seeking to make it his own, and it is only the forms that can meet the demands of his dreams that become part of his works. Fielding, Sterne, Flaubert, Proust, Faulkner, Céline.”<sup>18</sup>

The writer belongs to the realm of the history of ideas, the novelist to the European history of the novel. According to Kundera, the novelist’s only responsibility is to the first author of fiction: the Spanish Miguel de Cervantes. In my opinion, the writer as well as the novelist, do have responsibilities, although they operate in different parts of the public domain and motivate different actions by the audience. The novelist can stay in his room pretending not to be aware of this audience; the writer has to go out into the world every now and then. But all written texts do not really exist if they aren’t read, discussed and evaluated, and thus *performed* by the public.

The distinction between writers and novelists as described by Kundera, fits into the ideas of philosopher Richard Rorty, and it is through his work that we can get a better understanding of the issue of responsibility. In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*<sup>19</sup> Rorty distinguishes between writers on autonomy, and writers on justice. The former, the ironist writers, are primarily interested in the *private goals* of self-creation and redescription within the context of an acute awareness of the contingency of their belief system. The latter, the liberal writers, are primarily interested in the public goals of freedom, justice and solidarity. A self-declared liberal ironist, Rorty, finds those authors the most interesting, who display in their work both an appreciation of the contingency of knowledge and, simultaneously, a sensitivity to the pain of others. This argument is anti-liberalist in the sense that he denies that there are universal principles of good and evil. And he is also anti-postmodernist in the sense that he does not accept the anything-goes fluidity. Rorty points out that it is the power of literature to make us understand solidarity, to make us notice suffering when it occurs.<sup>20</sup>

Both Kundera and Rorty demarcate two positions which actually are not sharply distinguished from each other. What is important here, is the observation that authors can play

different roles, perform various actions, express individual opinions – and in doing this have an impact on the public domain. In what follows, I will discuss some public-intellectual activities carried out by authors (most of them both writers and novelists) in order to draft a more fine-meshed pattern of different forms of literary performances of responsibility. But first I will sketch the current European context in which the literature I am interested in can be placed.

### **The cultural and institutional space of Europe**

The consolidation of the *European Union* in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 reflected new economic, political and cultural realities and possibilities.<sup>21</sup> The dissolution of national borders and the reduction of transit restrictions have contributed to a rethinking of such basic concepts as national sovereignty and EU membership, territory and space, cultural identity and transnational imagining. The challenge present-day European intellectuals see themselves confronted with is summed up succinctly in the words of social theorist Arjun Appadurai: “We need to think ourselves beyond the nation”.<sup>22</sup> However, Europe today, though economically and legally powerful, is ambiguous as a democratic *political* space where 27 member states have to be kept together. Europe as a *cultural* space lacks decisiveness and is dealing with increasing populism emerging out of a realm of fear and irritation.<sup>23</sup> The European Parliament and the European Council have been creating a trans-European cultural infrastructure, but its effectiveness is not strong enough.<sup>24</sup>

I am interested in European issues on two levels: 1. Europe as an institutional and historical construct and 2. Europe’s Cultural Repertoires. On both levels we need to define what European citizenship is about, what the basic ideals and the main problems are. How come so many inhabitants of the union are not ‘Europe-minded’? What are the possibilities and perspectives in culture of increasing the awareness of Europe’s roots, symbols and identities? Can we (re)construct a novelistic outlook on Europe and on the solidarity a democratic Europe requires?

“Europe”, according to Kees Fens, who certainly was one of the most important public intellectuals in Holland in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “is in danger of becoming the most pedestrian word in our culture. It (...) only has an economic and political meaning.”<sup>25</sup>

European culture is at its best a mosaic of residues and other uncomprehended parts. The word Europe “does not bear boasting about it, least of all in a culture that makes any form of continuity impossible”. (2004;11) And yet, every week in his famous ‘Monday columns’ in the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, the skeptic critic would show just how deeply he felt about that very same European culture. His essays on the Petrarca brothers, on Augustine, on St. John of the Cross, on Oscar Wilde and Kurt Schwitters, all testify to his erudition, his curiosity and a clear style of writing based on the humanistic ideal of *Bildung*. This ideal of education implied that thinking and writing had to do with finding a place of one’s own, finding an authoritative voice through which the elites could speak up for others. The irony of Fens is deeply rooted in his intellectually being-a-European. His warning is addressed to the commercial and bureaucratic exploiters of Europe.

Not many people will object to the idea of Europe taken as a cultural construct rooted in classical Greek and Roman culture, in Christian, Jewish and Islamic religion, in Renaissance art and the scientific thinkers of the Enlightenment, in Romanticism and in the developments of Modernity. Nevertheless, this idea of European culture as ‘unity’ and aim is not only pushed aside by economic and technical high lights, it is also criticised by writers and philosophers, some of the more challenging ones being Jacques Derrida in *The Other Heading, Reflections on Today’s Europe* (1991)<sup>26</sup> and Etienne Balibar in his *We, The People of Europe?, Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (2001)<sup>27</sup>. Derrida criticises a Eurocentric thinking as in the idea<sup>28</sup> that Europe’s ideals (freedom of speech; democracy; culture; respect for the individual) can function as a format for solutions on a global scale; he also observes that Europe has confused its image (...) with a heading for world civilization or human culture in general. Derrida points out that migrations to and within Europe show the shortcoming of the humanistic ideals, which do not automatically result in humane practices. The effect of this is that “hope, fear, and trembling are commensurate with the signs that are coming to us from everywhere in Europe, where, precisely in the name of identity, be it cultural or not, the worst violences, those that we recognize all too well without yet having thought them through, the crimes of xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, religious or nationalist fanaticism, are being unleashed, mixed up”. (6) The dissemination or diaspora is a better metaphor for thinking Europe than the idea of wholeness and connectedness.<sup>29</sup> There is no one Europe, there are different Europes, a western one and an eastern one; a well-to-do one and a poor one; a Europe of the fish- and milk-quotas and one of Erasmus programmes stimulating student exchange.

Etienne Balibar points out that a European Constitution sharpens the classical debate on the foundations for a democratic state. Europe has to be thought of as a new type of political entity in which European citizenship needs to be reconsidered. Balibar introduces the hard-hitting notion of *European Apartheid* to signal the contradiction “between opposite movements of inclusion and exclusion, reduplication of external borders in the form of “internal” borders, stigmatization and repression of populations whose presence within European societies is nonetheless increasingly massive and legitimate”. (2004;x) Starting from the complicated Balkan War and the NATO intervention in Milošević’s Serbia, Balibar discusses the ambiguity of the notions of interior and exterior. Yugoslavia was considered an *exterior* space, in which in the name of a principled intervention, Europe felt compelled to put a stop to and prevent further crimes against humanity. While looked upon as an exterior space, the Balkans were at the same time considered to be *within* the borders of Europe, a geographical space within which principles of Western civilization had to be defended. The complexity of these real political situations show that Europe is multiple and “always home to tensions between numerous religious, cultural, linguistic, and political affiliations, numerous readings of history, numerous modes of relations with the rest of the world.” (2004;5) European unification implies dealing with obstacles and calls for a reinvention of what it means to be a citizen.

This reinvention of citizenship cannot do without a reinvention of European history. Michael Zeeman<sup>30</sup>, again an authority in European issues, warned against the ‘post-historical awareness’ of current European citizens and the European institutions: “it is typical that the European Economic Community of yesteryear was changed into a European Union without a word being spoken about a European culture and its history, about perception and appreciation. In that light, the current passionlessness of the European project is understandable. And highly dangerous.”<sup>31</sup> Literature can represent parts of national histories, can tell the narratives of national cultures, and is therefore an important medium to bring about European responsiveness and continuity. In Margot Dijkgraaf’s fascinating book of interviews with European writers<sup>32</sup>, it is especially this continuity that current writers consider important. Most of them look upon the novel as a European invention, and realize that they are working in the tracks left by preceding European writers. In these times of historical change it appears thus that European writers themselves experience the responsibility both to relate to their literary roots and to today’s social and political issues.

Last but not least, Europe is a geographical space, a continent or territory with natural borders in the North, East, West and South. But borders and boundaries may mutate. From a colonial and orientalist point of view North Africa and the Middle East for many decades were considered not as beyond but as belonging to Europe. We still experience the effects of this tragic history: authors like Amos Oz in Israel or the Moroccan/French Tahar Ben Jelloun could be considered as European authors.

### **European Writers and Novelists Acting in the Public Sphere**

Having discussed the changing impact of public intellectuals, having reflected on the ideal and realities of Europe, I now have to answer the question ‘what is the input of literary authors in debates on societal issues representative of present-day Europe?’ Let me discuss a few examples of the various forms of literary commitment that can be found across the continent. Every example shows the literary author as a public intellectual. However, the genres, text types, public appearances and positions of writers and novelists are different.

#### The registering capacity of literary writers

One of the most inspiring authors in Europe today is German essayist, poet, journalist, translator and dramatist, Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1929). He really is an European public intellectual, with his talent for evoking scenes and persons, for retelling anecdotes and for comprehending conflicts between various people, parties and nations. In 1989 he published *Europe, Europe, Forays into a Continent*<sup>33</sup>, in which he takes us on a tour of Europe in the recent past. Focusing on Sweden, Italy, Hungary, Portugal and Spain, he describes how Europe has been moving towards a new identity. In telling the stories of others, in striking up conversations with everyone from bankers to revolutionaries, astrologers to *apparatchniks*, Enzensberger suggests that Europe’s strength lies in embracing diversity and improvisation, not in bigness and regimentation. Certain details of Enzensberger’s story, however, are shocking – are *meant* to be shocking, I suppose - to a Western European who is living in prosperity. The following is a passage from the chapter on the gypsies in Hungary (not even the poorest of the Eastern European nations).

“Leaning on two crutches, a seventy-eight-year-old woman with the face of an American Indian opens the door for us. The house consists of two rooms. No furniture,

only dirty straw sacks in the corners. There is not a trace of the Hungarian miracle here. We have arrived in Bhopal, in Luanda, in La Paz.

Gradually the daughters and then the grandchildren crowd in through the door. Not even the grandmother knows how many there are. The first child comes when the girls are fourteen. Contraceptives are unknown. Many children are born deaf and dumb. The old woman was elected chieftain after her husband's death, but she can't cope anymore. She points to the antiquated wheelchair in the yard, in which she is pushed to the doctor's, almost an hour away. She has rheumatism of the joints. She speaks forcefully and confidently. She's not complaining, she's stating facts".<sup>34</sup>

Enzensberger depicts the gypsies in their miserable conditions, without making explicit statements on what is wrong and who is to blame for it. However, in the description of the details, in his meticulous observations he lets us notice 'the suffering when it occurs'. This is literature on real circumstances, even tragic ones.

Enzensberger's book on Europe can be compared to the book *Danube* (1986), by Italian author and scholar of comparative literature Claudio Magris (1939). He describes a journey from the source of the river Danube to the Black Sea. Along the way, from the Bavarian hills through Austro-Hungary, to the Balkans, he guides the reader through stories, encyclopedic facts and the history of Middle Europe. Magris uses the notion of *microcosms*, to describe how each story, from the most desolate regions, evokes a world on its own.

A third example I could mention here is the *History of the Present, Essays, Sketches, and Dispatches from Europe in the 1990s* (1998) a work by British historian, Timothy Garton Ash (1955). Again this is a book in which everyday stories from people in the East of Europe are collected and comprehended in a historical perspective. Again it is a fascinating report on how people live, think and are keeping their hopes up for the future. These three authors are public intellectuals writing on Europe. They all write literature, but there are differences in the way they write. Magris employs an almost lyrical, dense style; Enzensberger is very clear but effective in his deceptive simplicity; and Ash is the historian and journalist. The scale ranges from lyrical style to *discursive* history or new journalism. And from broad social issues to the micro perspective on human existence.

Immediate and deliberative commentary on 'the real'

The next example of a literary writer as a public intellectual, this time operating in the spotlights, is that of a writer who opened the debate on a media issue by sending in a letter to the editor of a newspaper using his authoritative voice as an author. The event that sparked off the debate was the publication on June 22, 2009 of a huge photograph in colour on the front-page of the Dutch quality newspaper *NRC*. It was a photo of a young woman dying in a street of Tehran. This woman, Neda Salehi Agha Soltan, was shot and died within a few minutes. One of the passers-by had taken the picture with a mobile phone and put it on *YouTube*.

Three days later, on Thursday June 25, Dutch literary writer, columnist and essayist Herman Franke (1948), sent an open letter to the newspaper entitled: ‘Why should I have to watch Neda die?’ Franke complains about the sensationalist character of placing this photo on the front page. What at first sight looked like a painting by Rothko, turned out to be a huge photo of a beautiful young lady with one eye breaking while the other is closed. We see her at the moment of her death. Her face is covered in blood. Franke is irritated by the *carelessness* of the editorial board, not knowing exactly who this woman is -- the information about her name and age were wrong --, and not knowing who shot her. The caption: ‘Neda becomes face of Iranian Protest’ is news analysis based on *manipulation*. Franke is even more annoyed by the fact that (series of) photographs of victims are used more and more in current newspaper articles: “My point is that making the suffering of victims understandable, influences the building of opinion in political conflicts, arouses public sentiment and condones reprisals.”<sup>35</sup> Politicians and spin doctors are using suffering victims to get attention. Both *CNN* and *Al Jazeera* exploit victims to promote their opinions. Mass-media enhance the pain of some and ignore the pain and grief of others. Hence, quality newspapers should behave very prudently in their ‘use’ of victims. Franke ends his article by explaining what the similarity is between a story and politics:

“As a writer I am used to imagining being a character, including unsympathetic ones, whenever this is necessary for the story I want to tell. Every political conflict is also a kind of story. The victims in these stories should be able to count on journalists making the effort of placing themselves in their miserable position – and this goes for unwelcome victims as well.”<sup>36</sup>

This case shows a literary writer who is concerned about the ongoing manipulation of the news in one of the major Dutch newspapers. This author does not have a reputation as a



political activist, but his article is published immediately, and simply signed: “Herman Franke is a writer”. Being a writer apparently implies having an authoritative voice. It implies accepting his *critique* as important.

Another example of a writer publicly discussing an even more structural political issue, comes from the Belgian literary author and archeologist David Van Reybrouck (1971). He wrote a pamphlet *Plea for Populism* (2008)<sup>37</sup> in a series of pamphlets published by the prestigious Dutch publishing House Querido. Van Reybrouck takes a stand in the ongoing debate in The Netherlands and Belgium on the fear of populism. Rightwing populist politicians like Geert Wilders in Holland and Philippe de Winter in Flanders founded so called one-issue parties, focused on putting a stop to Muslim immigration and on expelling criminal Muslims out of Europe. Van Reybrouck turns the regular argument *against* populism on its head by concentrating on the problem of the ‘diploma democracies’ in Western Europe. Most of the representatives in parliament are highly educated. People without any schooling, the underclass, do not feel represented. The diploma democracy is a symptom of the increasing distance between highly and low educated people in society. The only way to clear the negative atmosphere of fear and rudeness defended using the ‘freedom of speech’ argument, is to invent a new form of populism. I quote Van Reybrouck: “Enlightened populism might be a populism reaching further than the politics of loud and simple evocations (..), a populism that takes the ideal of a world citizenship as not being contradictory to the wish for a *sense of belonging*, a populism that rejects a shaky cosmopolitanism just as much as a simple-minded nationalism.” (66).

Van Reybrouck shows his concern with what is happening in society. He takes up his pen to write against simplifying statements. He tries to rethink a new form of populism, based on the formats of ‘traditional’ socialism. He takes on what he feels is part of a writer’s task in society. Tellingly his new and in my opinion, brilliant project is the coordination of the rewriting of the European constitution in poetry by 52 poets “who have something to say on this continent, on this history, on the faith that binds us together”.<sup>38</sup>

### The power of imagination

The third example of how a literary author discusses social and political issues, is British novelist Martin Amis (1949). In the aftermath of 9/11 many public intellectuals have reflected on the event in order to understand it. In April 2006, an aesthetic effort to comprehend

terrorism was also made by Amis. His short story *The last days of Muhammad Atta*<sup>39</sup> fictionalizes the last 24 hours of Egyptian Islamic terrorist Atta, who intentionally flew American Airlines Flight 11 into the World Trade Center. Amis tries to re-live Atta's last days and to understand what drove him. Combining facts and fiction, reality and imagination, the author creates a unique account and shapes Atta into an *understandable* character. Some critics have criticized him for blurring the distinction between understanding and sympathizing. However, he does give the reader an *idea* of how the character's mind might have worked. I will read out the last scene of the story:

“The joy of killing was proportional to the value of what was destroyed. But that value was something a killer could never see and never gauge. And where was the joy he thought he had felt – where was that joy, that itch, that paltry tingle?

Yes, how gravely he had underestimated it. How very gravely he had underestimated life. His own he had hated, and had wished away; but see how long it was taking to absent itself – and with what helpless grief he was watching it go, imperturbable in its beauty and its power. Even as his flesh fried and his blood boiled, there was life, kissing its fingertips. Then it echoed out, and ended.”<sup>40</sup>

It is the power of the novelist that he can imagine a moment like this. It is the power of literature that after the description of the moment of death there is even more. The story ends just like it began: “On September 11, 2001, he opened his eyes at 4 a.m., in Portland, Maine; and Muhammad Atta's last day began.” By repeating the words from the beginning, Amis's story is opening up. There can be no final conclusion, meaning or commentary. The suffering will go on.

### The writer as a Media figure

Educated as a philosopher, Dutch writer Desanne van Brederode (1970), writes many of her texts from a self-reflective perspective. She likes to contemplate (im)morality and (ir)rationality; she is interested in the world around her, in different ideas and opinions. Since her debut *Ave Verum Corpus* (1994), Van Brederode has published four novels in which we can discern a growing interest in issues related to contemporary Dutch society. They connect the ‘closed’ world of literature to the here-and-now of modern life. This makes Van Brederode's novels disturbing. She confronts her readers with opinions and ideas and invites

them to think them over, to react to them, to act – in the words of Susan Sontag – as *militant readers*. Van Brederode not only positions herself as a literary writer and philosopher, she also takes on an explicit public role as ‘television-columnist’. Since 2006, she has had a regular column in a political talk show broadcast every Sunday morning. Here we can watch her as a *media intellectual*, commenting in about 3.5 minutes on what is happening in Dutch society. Topics are political decisions and their consequences for ‘normal’ everyday life.

Let me zoom in on the column ‘Ayaan Hirsi Ali’, broadcast on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009.<sup>41</sup> Hirsi Ali, a former refugee from Somalia, became a Dutch MP, was threatened by Muslim fundamentalists because of her anti-Islam opinions and because – together with filmer Theo van Gogh who was murdered in 2004 – she had made the film *Submission*. She later moved to the US and after a few years the Dutch State stopped paying for her protection. Van Brederode notes that Ayaan has disappeared completely from the Dutch media:

“How come so little of her influence is still noticeable today? Did she in fact have any influence at all? While all the media were taking stock of the past, first Ayaan-less year, nobody even bothered to ask these questions.

Pim Fortuyn is still mentioned regularly. So is Theo van Gogh. And understandably so. Their opinions got them killed. Herman Brood [pop musician] was never killed for his opinion, but he too entered the conversation regularly these past few weeks, as a symbol of debauched Holland before palling set in under prim and proper restorative forces. (...) but what about Ayaan?

Is everybody consciously keeping quiet about Ayaan? Are the media and all those intimate friends of Ayaan’s being inhumanly cold and disloyal? No, none of that. Maybe they have simply been mistaken. Mistaken about a person’s talents. That is as human as anything. But if that is what it is then they should at least have the courage to admit it. That too is part of the freedom of speech. The courage to remove the protective hand and admit that it’s come up empty.”<sup>42</sup>

Van Brederode here at once questions Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s popularity *and* the public intellectuals who first considered her a forerunner in the debate on immigration and now let her live quietly and far away in the US (‘not on our finances’). And she airs her own opinion, which will not come as a surprise to her readers, which is that she herself was not a fan of

Hirsi Ali's Muslim-repressive ideas. This is a honest position and one immediately linked to the opinions of the protagonist in her novel *The Awakening [Het opstaan]* (2004).<sup>43</sup>

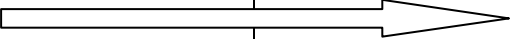
### The novelist as a disturbing moralist

The last example is a historical one. In 1951, famous Belgian writer Marguerite Yourcenar (1903)<sup>44</sup> publishes *Mémoires D'Hadrien*<sup>45</sup>, a novel in letters presented as written by the sixty-year-old Roman emperor Hadrian, who lived in the second century AD. In his letters he describes his physical condition and justifies political decisions taken during the years of his reign. The text is composed as a letter, written by the emperor who addresses the story of his life to Marcus Aurelius, his successor.<sup>46</sup> Yourcenar was the first female writer honoured as a member of the *Academie Française*. This surely makes her a public intellectual. However, what makes *Memoires of Hadrian* representative in our discussion today, is that in this text, written a few years after World War II, Yourcenar imagines a political leader and reflects on the issues of leadership. Shortly after the downfall of Adolf Hitler, with his megalomaniac fantasies about the Third Reich, this literary author represents a historical leader in order to contemplate issues of morality in leadership. Hadrian's leadership is not without Machiavelistic practices, he is not a humble man. But Yourcenar also portrays him as the leader who stabilized the empire.

The novel was written shortly after the Second World War, in a confused, disordered European context. The weakening Roman Empire reflected the chaotic situation in post-war Europe. Nevertheless, the novel expressed a certain postwar optimism regarding the future of mankind. Yourcenar reflects on the magnetism of historical leaders. She is interested in psychology and intellectualism and in the *transition* of time periods. She is aware of what might be called the 'synchronism of times'. This might be an explanation for the renewed interest in her work today.

The literary examples discussed can be incorporated in a 'heuristic model' in which I bring together text-forms and positions defended in writing. I will use this model in the coming years to draw up an inventory of writers, texts and political issues in different national literatures in the European context. It seems that most of the authors I have mentioned can be categorized in different segments. The broader the writer's interest in the world, the more categories he or she will appear in. Enzensberger is the most significant example: he wrote his

Europe travelbook; essays on politics and ethics<sup>47</sup>, he wrote epic poems on Europe and novels. In Dutch literature D. van Brederode counts as significant case.

<b>WRITERS</b>			
<b>Immediate Commentary on Reality</b> (essays; pamphlets; blogs, TV)	D. Van Reybrouck H. Franke H.M. Enzensberger	Media appearances: D. van Brederode,	<b>Explicit political statements</b>
<b>Registering Reality</b> (chronicle; anecdote, travel writing; autobiography)	H.M. Enzensberger C. Magris	Historians employing literary styles: T. Garton Ash	
<b>NOVELISTS</b>			
<b>Imagination: experiments with being-in-the-world</b>	M. Yourcenar M. Houellebecq M. Kundera	M. Amis J. Goytisolo I. McEwan D. van Brederode	
<b>Supreme Fiction, Irony</b>	M. de Cervantes L. Sterne	O. Pamuk, W.F. Hermans,	<b>Implicit statements</b>
<b>Intimate sphere</b>			<b>Public Sphere</b>

In the coming years, a scheme like this will be worked out covering different national literatures, bringing out comparisons and diversities and zooming in on European social issues that are considered to be important by literary authors. The literary texts make European history, politics and culture visible and reflective. Authors can play various roles in the debates, depending on the texts they write and the position they take in the public domain. It is by the specific ‘sound’ of their voice, it is in their idiosyncratic work, that they can deliver criticism on social issues.

## Literature Performed

March 2004, Johannesburg. American critic Susan Sontag delivers *The Nadine Gordimer Lecture*. In this speech, she emphasizes the *responsibility* of the writer. According to Sontag, Nadine Gordimer, South-African writer of Jewish-German extraction, is a typical example of the writer as a moral agent, who is not cynical but serious and portrays her part of the world with exacting, responsible attention. However, Sontag also articulates a warning: “Let the dedicated activist never overshadow the dedicated servant of literature – the matchless storyteller.”<sup>48</sup> The balance between moral commitment, psychological intrigue and aesthetic creation, between acting, thinking and writing is not always easy to keep. Paraphrasing Sontag’s words, I would say that the *singularity* of literature<sup>49</sup>, the structural and formal aspects of literature, is meaningful, dynamic and culturally operative. It is in *being* singular that literature can have an *effect* on political discussions. Literature is an indirect phenomenon. We may analyse and reflect on texts, we may recognize the tradition to which the text belongs, but what we are really concerned with is something else, having to do with *our* existence in time and space.

The most relevant European issues that we learn to comprehend by reading literature are issues of in- and exclusion. From Franz Kafka’s fictional novel *The Trial*, with its protagonist K., excluded from society by the trial he has to go through, to the autobiography of Czeslaw Milosz, entitled *Native Realm, A search for self-definition*, describing his youth in a region in which the borders (and national identities of the people) became fluid, to the recently published novel *Nowhere Man*, by Alexander Hemon, born in Sarajevo and now living in the US, to the examples of literature I have discussed here, all these texts show us examples of change, estrangement, and the loss and creation of identity. It is the singularity and inventiveness of literature that raises questions in the reader, questions about individual and social aspects. Both the aforementioned philosopher Richard Rorty and British scholar Derek Attridge have emphasized this quality of literature. As Attridge has formulated it in his book on J.M. Coetzee: “the impulses and acts that shape our lives as ethical beings – impulses and acts of respect, of love, of trust, of generosity – cannot be adequately represented in the discourses of philosophy, politics, or theology, but are in their natural element in literature”.<sup>50</sup>

How can we implement these ideas on a more practical level? Since authors take their role as intellectuals seriously, how can we make their voices heard? And how can we call in the aid

of literature to understand more of our European context? We have to keep people aware of the power of literature as a reflective medium. How can we do this? The first step I would propose is to bring in European issues in the current literature curricula in secondary schools. The separate reading lists for the Dutch, German, French and English departments in schools, focusing only on literature written in Holland, Germany etc, are not representative of Europe and may not be very challenging for pupils today, meeting each other on international social media sites. From the perspective of learning a language it is not necessary to read only French writers in the French classes or English writers in English classes. There is nothing against reading works in translation, provided the translations are excellent and do justice to the original. Works written in other languages than the ones taught in our secondary schools are just as much a part of our European literary heritage, which would not be complete without them. What I would like to propose is to open up the literature lists for authors in other European languages: so that, just to mention a few, Italo Calvino's, *Invisible cities* can be read in the English classes, Danish novelist Jens Christian Grondahl can be read in the German classes, Milan Kundera in the French classes, and Russian novelist Fedor Dostojevski in the Dutch literature classes (just imagine how relevant it could be to discuss *Crime and Punishment* (1866) in the context of Gerrit Krol's *Maurits en de feiten* (1986)). We should confront pupils in secondary schools at all levels with European literature, not only with works from the historical canon but also with recently published texts (involving novels and essays and blogs and other text types). A European list can be drawn up by teachers and scholars to be integrated in the existing departments and read by pupils in the languages they prefer. This, however can only succeed if the EU is willing to fund good translations and if the teachers are prepared to take up the challenge and engage their pupils in discussions on Europe. It is important to let our pupils and students hear the voices of European literature.

### **Word of thanks**

Ladies and gentleman, it has been an honour to speak to you here today about the issues that are so important for me from an official and a personal point of view. I am grateful to the Faculty of Humanities that the chair given to me is called Comparative Literature.<sup>51</sup> The disciplinary basis of this chair lies in Literary theories, the objects of teaching and research stretch beyond literature and involve culture, politics, ethics, in short 'the world' at large. I hope I have been able to give you an impression of how I think literature is connected to the



world, and how literary texts can provide reflection on the difficult social issues we are confronted with. Connecting history and the present, connecting creativity and rationality, connecting different national literatures will be the challenges I want to deal with in the years to come. What I have tried to show you in this lecture is that theories and ideas on literature need to be based on the close reading and comparison of literary texts. This conviction has been the one constant in my work, since I started writing my Master's thesis on modern poetry to finish my studies at Leiden University, more than twenty years ago. I still consider it a wonderful coincidence that after finishing that thesis, professor Jaap Goedegebuure invited me to come to Tilburg. I thank him here as my thesis supervisor and close colleague for many years. As time went by, he left Tilburg university in 2005 to go back to Leiden University. I consider this chair as a continuation of his and Hugo Verdaasdonk's work.

Let me now address the students I am teaching today. I am proud to be lecturing both to the Master's students of Culture Studies (*Algemene cultuurwetenschap*) and to the Bachelor's students of *Liberal Arts*. It really is a pleasure to work in a faculty that has invested in such a challenging project as our international *Liberal Arts and Sciences* curriculum. Standing in front of a class consisting of 17 different nationalities, mostly from Europe, and teaching issues of European culture is a fascinating experience every time again. I am optimistic about our chances to grow and to become even more fundamentally interdisciplinary than we already are today. I am convinced that we are offering you, our students, a really general education that prepares you for reflection on what is happening in a globalised world. I hope that some of you will be the public intellectuals of the future.

Speaking of Liberal Arts, I come to the team I have been working in since 2005, first as a group of amateurs building a new curriculum, now as an official board, with official duties and official assignments. I am very grateful that so far we have been able to preserve a basis of intellectual content in all the management tasks that we are confronted with. It seems to me that all of you, especially Willem Witteveen and Alkeline van Lenning, but also Aswin van Oijen, Petra Heck and Geno Spoormans share a curiosity in things going on, and that the main drive of our working together is that we do not already know but like to try and find out. Thanks to the help of Sandra, Paulien, Suzanne and Gaby we really are a winning team today.

However, Liberal Arts and Sciences is not my only habitat. The *Algemene Cultuurwetenschap* (*Culture Studies*) curriculum is carried out by colleagues with whom I have been working for many years now. From our background as a small group in the Faculty of Letters to our present situation as part of the Department of Language and Culture in a

huge Faculty of Humanities, the internal collaboration with Helma van Lierop, Léon Hanssen, Sander Bax, Jan Jaap de Ruiter and Hans van Driel has been stimulating. The context in which we are working now, in my opinion, offers new challenges and possibilities, in particular from the perspective of research. I am looking forward to collaborating in research with Ad Backus and Jan Blommaert, Kutlay Yagmur and Sjaak Kroon, who really are interested in broad cultural issues. I hope that our investments in a new research programme will prove fruitful in the coming years. I do think that there will also be interesting possibilities in working together with researchers from the department of Religious Studies in the field of comparison between different national literatures and cultures in Europe, but also to investigate the borders of Europe and what is on the other side. I hope we will succeed in preparing a really interesting ‘contested fields’ Master’s and Research programme in which the public domain will be the central focus.

I am happy that the new faculty constellation I am working in is managed by professor Sjaak Kroon. His friendly and at the same time realistic and objective approach to management issues is impressive. I am glad that at the same moment of my appointment another female professor was appointed at our faculty: Annelies van Heyst. I am looking forward to working together with you too. Last but not least I would like to express my thanks to the dean of our Faculty, Professor Arie de Ruyter, for his quick, clear and very often smart decisions, managing a faculty in which many solitary and proud researchers with their own idiosyncratic opinions have to be persuaded.

And then of course, thanks are due to my friends and family in Leiden. I am very, very lucky to have had such a warm network surrounding me, on which I could fall back for help in busy times. Without friends and caring parents it would not have been possible to keep working in Tilburg after my children were born. A very special thank you here is for Ingrid, the friend I met in the first week of our studies at Leiden University, it was literature that has bound us together for thirty years now. And finally I want to thank my nearest and dearest ones, and for that I will switch to my own language. Ik ben dankbaar dat op de eerste rij mijn moeder en zus zitten. Ik ben ongelooflijk trots op de waardigheid waarmee zij het verdriet dat ons in de zomer van 2007 overkwam hebben gedragen. En ik dank natuurlijk, mijn eigen gezin, Ronald, Lena en Gerrit. Zonder jullie zou ik hier niet staan.

Dames en heren, thank you all for coming here today, and for your attention.  
Let's drink a glass to Europe, to its history and literature in a fascinating world.

Ik heb gezegd.<sup>52</sup>

**Epilogue** – Literature and politics. The end of the freedom of obligations.

“A lifeboat is packed with survivors from a shipwreck. In the stormy sea around it there are other people in danger of going under. How should the occupants of the boat behave? Should they push away or hack off the hands of the next person who grabs the side of the boat? That would be murder. Pull him on? Then the boat would sink taking all the survivors with it. The dilemma is part of the standard repertoire of casuistry. The moral philosophers and all the rest who discuss it usually pay no attention to the fact that they themselves are safely on dry land. Yet all abstract reflections founder on just this ‘as if’, no matter what their conclusion. The best intention is frustrated by the cosiness of the seminar room, because no one can credibly declare how he would behave in an emergency.”

Hans Magnus Enzensberger: *The Great Migration, thirty-three signposts, XII.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Orhan Pamuk, *My Father's suitcase*. In: *Other Colours, Essays and a Story*, Translated from the Turkish by Maureen Freely, London 2007; 406.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence, A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edition, New York and Oxford 1997; 14-15. He describes six 'revisionary ratios' of writers and their precursors, one of which is the 'Askesis': the separation from others.

<sup>3</sup> See [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature).

<sup>4</sup> Pamuk *ibidem*, 356

<sup>5</sup> The term is coined by Russell Jacoby in *The last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, 1987, p. 5. See: Richard A. Posner, *Public Intellectuals, A Study of Decline, With a new Preface and Epilogue*, Cambridge Mass. 2003; 26.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Posner *ibidem*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Some interesting figures: Posner distinguishes 546 public intellectuals; 87 % male; 64% academics; almost 5 % black; 25 % right-leaning and 66 % left leaning; 43 % Jewish. (See p. 207)

<sup>8</sup> These are the seven categories he has developed:

- a. Translating one's scholarly work into a form that the generally educated public can understand (self-popularizing activities of modern scholars),
- b. Making specific policy proposals based on one's academic specialty,
- c. Politically inflected literary criticism,
- d. Political satire, *jeremiads* and other prophetic commentaries on public issues,
- e. General and specific social criticism, proposing social reform outside one's field,
- f. 'Real time' commentary; which includes also the rapidly emerging phenomenon of 'blogging',
- g. Experts testimony in court.

Translating the first of these categories to the Dutch and even Tilburg situation: Tilburg University has some prominent scholars in Economy and Law Studies (category 1) who explain difficult issues to the public (for instance: Prof. dr. S. Eijffinger, Prof. dr L. Bovenberg, Prof. mr. C. Prins and Prof. mr. T. de Roos). The university even yearly publishes a 'Mediatop'. However, not many professors in the Humanities appear on this list.

<sup>9</sup> Posner doesn't argue that there is *no* role for political critique in literature. He mentions Wystan Hugh Auden's poem 'Spain 1937'. But he disapproves of too much *moral* commentary on the basis of a literary work which is taken out of its cultural and historical context.

<sup>10</sup> See Russian Formalists 1915-1930 (Eichenbaum, Slovski and Jakobson) and the Cercle Linguistique de Prague (Mukarovsky) and the New Critics (I.A. Richards and W. Empson) and in the Netherlands: Merlyn (J.J. Oversteegen, Kees Fens, J.U Jesserun D'Oliveira)

<sup>11</sup> Tony Judt, *Reappraisals, Reflections on the forgotten Twentieth Century*, London 2008. A collection of articles published mostly in *The New York Review of Books*.

<sup>12</sup> Authors like Marjolijn Februari, Nelleke Noordervliet, Louise Fresco and Charlotte Mutsaers write a form of *literature engagée*, in which a multiplicity of voices is represented. Cf. Odile Heynders,

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Politieke romans van vrouwelijke auteurs. In: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 124, 2008;159-172.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas McCarthy, Introduction. In: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Translated by Thomas Burger, Cambridge, 1989 [Original: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 1962]

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Thomas Vaessens, *De revanche van de roman, Literatuur, autoriteit en engagement*, Nijmegen 2009.

<sup>15</sup> William Marx, *L'adieu à la littérature, Histoire d'une dévalorisation XVIIIe-XX siècle*, Paris 2005.

<sup>16</sup> See: <http://www.let.uu.nl/Wilbert.Smulders/personal/onderzoek>

<sup>17</sup> Milan Kundera, *De kunst van de roman, Essay*, 2 nd Edition Amsterdam 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Kundera ibidem, 146/147.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony , and Solidarity*, Cambridge 1989. In the introduction of this stimulating study Rorty explains his position: “This book tries to show how things look if we drop the demand for a theory which unifies the public and the private, and are content to treat the demands of self-creation and of human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable.” (XV) Most interesting are his analyses in part 3 of the works of Nabokov and Orwell.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Andrew Foley, *The Imagination of Freedom, Critical texts and Times in Contemporary Liberalism*, Johannesburg, 2009; 219-237.

<sup>21</sup> Most important institutional data concerning European unification: **1951** 6 countries working together on Coal and Steel market; **1957** Treaty of Rome; **1973** 9 member states developing a common policy; **1979** First elections for the European Parliament; **1992/3** Maastricht Treaty: European Union; **2002** Euro; **2004** 10 new members of the EU.

<sup>22</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large, Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis / London, 8<sup>th</sup> printing, 2008 [1996];158.

<sup>23</sup> Populism is fed by fear partly caused by the presumed consequences of the rapid unification process.

<sup>24</sup> Mabel Berezin and Martin Schain (eds.), *Europe without Borders, Remapping Territory, Citizenship, and Identity in a Transnational Age*, Baltimore 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Kees Fens, *Dat oude Europa, Nieuwe keuze uit de maandagstukken*, Amsterdam 2004;10.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading, Reflections on Today's Europe*, Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas, Bloomington & Indianapolis 1992 [1991].

<sup>27</sup> Etienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, Translated by James Swenson, Princeton and Oxford 2004 [2001].

<sup>28</sup> As expressed in the “traditional discourse of modernity” (28), meaning that we bear the responsibility for the European heritage. I quote Derrida: “it is necessary to make ourselves the

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guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, *but* of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading or the heading of the other.” (29).

<sup>29</sup> See also the UvA inaugural lecture of Ginette Verstrate, *Verstrooide burgers: Europese cultuur in een tijdperk van globalisering*, Amsterdam 2001.

<sup>30</sup> M. Zeeman can be considered as the public intellectual as literary critic. He spoke inspiringly in our Liberal Arts course on European Issues, February 2009, five months before his sudden and sad death.

<sup>31</sup> *Dromen van Europa, Hafid Bouazza, Bas Heijne en Michael Zeeman over het nieuwe Europa*, Onder redactie van Henk Propper, Amsterdam 2004; 53.

<sup>32</sup> Margot Dijkgraaf, *De pen van Europa, Gesprekken met Europese schrijvers*, Amsterdam/Rotterdam 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Europe, Europe, Forays into a Continent*, Translated from the German by Martin Chalmers, Princeton 1989. [Original: *Ach Europa*, 1987]

<sup>34</sup> Enzensberger *ibidem*, 120/121

<sup>35</sup> Translated: “Het gaat mij er om dat het invoelbaar maken van het leed van slachtoffers in politieke conflicten de meningsvorming sterk beïnvloedt, dat er stemming mee gemaakt wordt en dat er eventuele vergeldingsacties mee worden goedgekeurd of zelfs aangemoedigd.”

<sup>36</sup> Translated: “Als schrijver ben ik gewend me in te leven in personages, ook in onsympathieke personages, wanneer het verhaal dat ik wil vertellen dat nodig heeft. Elk politiek conflict is ook een verhaal. De slachtoffers daarvan moeten erop kunnen rekenen dat journalisten zich inleven in hun ellende – ook de onwelgevallige slachtoffers.”

<sup>37</sup> Winner of the Jan Hanlo Essay prijs, September 2009.

<sup>38</sup> See David Van Reybrouck en Peter Vermeersch, *de europese grondwet in verzen*, Een project van het Brussels Dichterscollectief / Passa Porta – Internationaal Literatuurhuis Brussel, Brussel [2009].

<sup>39</sup> The story is part of the volume: Martin Amis, *The Second Plane, September 11: 2001-2007*, London 2008. The story was published for the first time in *The New Yorker*, April 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Amis *ibidem*, 124.

<sup>41</sup> See: <http://www.vpro.nl/programma/buitenhof/dossiers/41193783>.

<sup>42</sup> Translated: “Waarom is er nog zo weinig van haar invloed merkbaar? Had ze eigenlijk wel invloed? Terwijl in alle media de balans van het voorbije, eerste Ayaanloze jaar werd opgemaakt, was er zelfs niemand die deze vragen stelde. Pim Fortuyn wordt nog regelmatig aangehaald. Theo van Gogh ook. Begrijpelijk. Zij zijn om hun mening vermoord. Herman Brood is nooit om zijn mening vermoord, maar ook hij kwam de afgelopen weken geregeld langs, als symbool voor het bandeloze Nederland van voor de vertrutting. Zelfs aan Mies Bouwman werd een heel programma gewijd, waarin ze tot mijn grote verbijstering opeens werd bewierookt als revolutionaire, vrijgevochten televisie-pioneer... maar Ayaan? Wordt Ayaan bewust verzwegen? Zijn de media en al die intieme Ayaanvrienden

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onmenselijk kil en ontrouw? Nee. Ze hebben zich misschien gewoon vergist. Vergist in iemands talenten. En dat is uiterst menselijk. Maar geef dat dan ook toe. Ook dat hoort bij de vrijheid van meningsuiting. Dat je soms je hand uit andermans boezem weghaalt, en hem in eigen boezem steekt.”

<sup>43</sup> Quotation from the novel: “Ik heb de artikelen overgeslagen omdat ik het te makkelijk vind om over zo’n kwestie waar iedereen alweer een mening over heeft, uit pure armoede ook een mening te formuleren. Na 11 september gebeurde dat. Na de moord op Fortuyn. ‘Waar blijven de intellectuelen?’ En hatsee, de intellectuelen staan te trappelen. Columpje hier, forumpje daar. Je ziet achter hun papperige immer fronsende koppen een spookgestalte staan: de Idee Intellectueel.” Desanne van Brederode, *Het opstaan*, Amsterdam 2004; 341.

<sup>44</sup> Pseudonym of Marguerite Cleenewerck de Crayencour, Brussels 1903- Maine USA 1987.

<sup>45</sup> Marguerite Yourcenar, *Memoirs of Hadrian and Reflections on the Composition of Memoirs of Hadrian*, Translated from the French by Grace Frick in collaboration with the author, With an Introduction by Paul Bailey, London 1986 [1951].

<sup>46</sup> The novel is built on six chapters based on key ideas generated by Hadrian. The first chapter offers a self-analysis. Then the book flashes back to important events: youth, education, relation to former emperors, years of travel throughout the empire, years of retreat. Climax of the novel is the chapter *Saeculum Aureum* (Age of Gold) in which Hadrian tells about his meeting with the boy Antinous in 127 AD. The love and later the suicide in Egypt of his lover lead Hadrian into occult preoccupations. In the end the emperor welcomes death because it will bring him back to his beloved boy.

<sup>47</sup> See: Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Schreckens Männer, Versuch über den radikalen Verlierer*, Frankfurt am Main 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Susan Sontag, *At the same Time, Essays and Speeches*, Edited by Paolo Dilonardo and Anne Jump, Foreword by David Rieff, London 2007; 212.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, London 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading, Literature in the Event*, Chicago and London 2004; XI.

<sup>51</sup> Comparative Literature in the sense as proposed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, New York 2003: as a “new comparative literature” that respects linguistic diversity, the aesthetic power of literature, and the political consequences of reading and writing about the works of other cultures, with the aim of “inscribing collective responsibility as right”. See also my article in the Special 125 year *TNTL* issue on ‘In- en export’: Odile Heynders, Neerlandistiek en de wereld: ‘Life in spite of everything’, in *TNTL* 125 (2009) 140-144.

<sup>52</sup> Parts of this lecture were written in July 2009 in a small, winterly cold office at North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. I thank Prof. Dr. Hein Viljoen and Prof. Dr. Heilna du Plooy for inviting me in their conferences and giving me all the facilities of ‘a room of one’s own’. The concept of the lecture also was discussed, October 2009, with master students of the Onderzoeksmodule Hermeneutische Analyse van Tekst en Beeld. A few of my near colleagues gave me feedback: Aukje van Rooden, Sander Bax, Geno Spoormans, Ad Backus and Hans Verhulst who has also done a great job in correcting my English.