European Review, Vol. 21, No. 2, 241–251 © 2013 Academia Europæa
doi:10.1017/S1062798712000397

From the National to a Transnational Paradigm. Writing Literary Histories Today

SVEND ERIK LARSEN

Department of Aesthetics and Communication, Section of Comparative Literature, Aarhus University, Langelandsgade 139, DK 8000, Aarhus C, Denmark.
E-mail: litsel@hum.au.dk

Modern literary history was born, together with the European nation states, in the early 19th century, encapsulating the emerging idea of literature as an articulation of the national mentality. In tandem with other national histories of art, politics, language, religion, culture and nature, literary history took part in the creation of a national identity, as did the literary texts it interpreted and canonized along a historical trajectory with the nation state as its teleological culmination. Literature and literary histories have always been a form of cultural intervention, not just texts. This is still the case, but in a modern transnational and globalized cultural environment, inherited historical paradigms are obsolete as scientific and didactic models. Nevertheless, they still play a dominant role in our educational institutions on all levels. This article discusses the resilience of the national paradigm, points to the institutional and conceptual obstacles for imposing alternative frameworks, but also exemplifies how new historiographical routes may be found.

The Situation

The seemingly provocative title of David Perkins' volume *Is Literary History Possible?* (1992)[1] is contradicted by the very existence, use and ongoing publication of literary histories. But when we ask if a *relevant* literary history is possible, literary studies is confronted with the challenge, first, to conceptualize such a history beyond the constraints of the established national paradigm and, subsequently, to turn this conceptualization into a practice that renews the writing of literary histories. In this essay I will suggest a relevant take on literary history in the present historical situation of cultural globalization by reinterpreting the rise of literary history as a genre. My deliberations will end with a short description of a concrete case I have been involved with: a new local literary history for the high school curriculum in Danish literature, but firmly based on a transnational approach.[2]

Since the Middle Ages, literature had been conceived as more European than national or local, based on models dating back to Antiquity. In contrast, modern literary history came to be conceived as an integral part of the cultural formation of the nation state and

its theoretical and ideological foundations, and the way it was written reflected its relevance at that particular juncture in European history.[3]

Although the new national genre emerges as a pan-European development around 1800, its point of gravity is German idealism. Here, the new approach to literature went through an integrated theoretical reflection on literature and history along with the elaboration of new historiographical practices. This combined effort made the national paradigm a very strong construction, which has continued to dominate literary historiography beyond its foundational cultural context. That a relevant literary history must challenge this paradigm is, however, not a provocative question anymore. But to understand how this change has to be fashioned and, more importantly, to understand why the paradigm prevails as a still extremely successful construct, that is the crux of the matter when we want to go beyond it.

The Historical and National Paradigm

Literature was the object of analysis in literary theory long before literary history became a significant project in its own right. In Europe, what we today call literature stood out as something distinctive when the epics and other works began being written down in Athens, supposedly in the 6th century BC, and prompted theoretical reflection. But literary history does not appear as an independent enterprise. Its occurrence is not possible until two conditions are met. First, a concept of literature needs to be developed that makes historicity a genuine part of the identity of literature. Literature was not considered in this way by Plato and Aristotle, even in their broad understanding of poetry. They saw it either as a didactic endeavour to be realized or as a set of formal constructs to the imitated. Second, a concept of history must be developed that embraces culture as a historical process in which literature assumes an important position as a prime example of human creativity, a concept also foreign to Plato or Aristotle.

The concept of culture as a historical phenomenon and literature as an essential part of it in Europe only developed during the 18th century. Before, literature was mainly seen as a stock of canonical forms and examples to be imitated and modified. On this new basis it is, of course, not only literature that was recognized as a historical phenomenon, but all cultural phenomena. Hence, when literary history is introduced as an important academic and cultural enterprise, other cultural areas also obtain their histories: legal history, church history, language history, art history, etc. Specific cultural histories emerge in clusters.

The first move in this direction is a new take on history: from being the store house of the past it centres on the processes of change involving human agency. This shift occurred with the early natural sciences. In his *Novum Organum* (1620) Francis Bacon developed a visionary idea of how nature itself, regarded as raw material, could only take shape and fully realize its immanent natural form through human intervention. We can shape nature into things which 'before they were invented, it would hardly have occurred to anyone to have the least idea about them; they would have derided them as impossible'.[4] As something entirely new, Bacon assumed that the world

being written about is essentially historical and changeable through human activity. For this reason, he made a list of more than 130 partial histories ranging from the unchanging movement of the planets to scientific experiments entirely planned and carried out by humans and thus changeable by human will, envisioning a history of music, a history of wine, and a history of sexuality among others, but still no history of literature.

The next step on the path towards a modern conception of history was taken by Giambattista Vico in his convoluted *Scienza Nuova* (1725/1744). Contrary to Bacon, he made a sharp distinction between the dimension of reality that is only governed by humans and that which consists of the things and shapes that God has created, i.e. nature, and which only God can comprehend. The first dimension of reality is shaped by humans and can, as a consequence, only be fully understood by humans according to its own particular methods and principles. Vico called the knowledge of such principles 'poetic knowledge'. For him, just as for the Greeks, 'poiesis' refers to creative human activity in a broad sense: the creation of meaning, institutions, common norms, and the like: 'therefore, if only it happens that he who makes the things is the same as he who tells about them, then history cannot be more true'.[5]

When reality is seen as historical and changeable rather than as the result of one instance of divine creation, then its coherence needs to be articulated in human terms. Immanuel Kant proposes a kind of union of the tendencies implied by Bacon and Vico in his *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784). Kant underlines that mankind has to recognize 'that everything that happens to him could rightly be ascribed to himself so that he is fully accountable for all the troubles that come from misuses of his reason'.[6] The writing of histories, that of literature included, becomes an ethical endeavour, that is to say a cultural intervention.

Moreover, in his *Muttmasslicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte* (1786) Kant uses the literary genre of the novel as an image of this kind of history writing. If the purpose is to create unity and not simply to sum up dispersed facts, it is also necessary to make room for assumptions for the sake of narrative coherence. Therefore, history writing is for Kant not merely a kind of narrative, but actually a kind of novel – a constructed narrative totality. Furthermore, he holds that this is particularly true for the most ancient history, which has few or no facts for support. But assumptions must not replace facts, only be used to fill cavities based on general but undeniable facts about mankind, e.g. that it has language and family and forms institutions. With these facts as fixed points, one can construe the most ancient history as part of a whole that points forward toward the gradual development of human freedom. Here, literary history not only is made possible, but is also given the same goal as other types of history: to prompt the development of humanity in the contemporary and future human culture.

The Paradigm of Literary History

Several decades later, between Johan Gottfried Herder's early *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774) and G.W.F. Hegel's late grandiose historical visions in *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (1837), Wilhelm

von Humboldt presented similar ideas in *Betrachtungen über die bewegenden Ursachen in der Weltgeschichte* (1818), *Betrachtungen über die Weltgeschichte* (c. 1820) and *Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtsschreibers* (1821). Like Kant, he tries both to accentuate the natural basis of history and in particular to emphasize the significance of literary forms for the course of history. In line with Romantic thinking, he views nature as a metaphor for the organic form and development of historical reality. The natural base of this totality is the nation with language as the core of its formative power, which thus shapes and develops both the individual and the nation.[7]

Here, literature, more than other art forms, acquires a double role. On the one hand, literature is a parallel to the writing of history and serves at the same time also as a model for it. On the other hand, literature is a real driving force in history and therefore itself by nature subject to change. If the nation is central to the historical process of reality, literature is a form of expression that actually shapes the national unity, which is also the goal of the representation of history, and, like language, it is itself an active medium for the reflection on the values and goals of history.

Against this historical background, literary history emerged as a new academic genre based on two principles:

(1) a *dynamic reciprocity* between culture and literature sparks an ongoing change of both;
(2) *contemporary culture* serves as the point of departure, also for the apprehension of earlier periods.

The last principle is anticipated by the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns in French classicism at the end of the 17th century: *la querelle des anciens et des modernes*. The focus of this controversy was the emerging genre of the novel and the new higher position of prose fiction as a potential canonical literary form. The fierce debate revolved around a historical problem: was literature in the modern languages able to develop not merely new works but also new forms and discursive types that would surpass the classics? 'Ancients' such as Nicolas Boileau said no; 'moderns' such as Bernard de Fontenelle said yes. A special position was occupied by Pierre-Daniel Huet with his reflections on the genre of the novel. In 1670 he tried in *Traité de l'origine des romans* to give the novel literary status as a genre on a par with tragedy and other canonical genres.

It is important to note that the term 'modern' did not anticipate later terms such as modernism, modernity, modernization and the like. The French debate used the word 'modern' in its Latin sense of 'modo': 'on time', 'right now'. The modern therefore refers to what has recently occurred, what is contemporary. Thus, the idea that took shape in the French debate was that the contemporary period existing at any time has in itself a normative value, also comprising literature and the evaluation of literatures of the past without giving priority to the standards of the earlier periods. It is in the nature of norms to change, foundational norms included.[8]

Germaine de Staël's erratic but innovative *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) is both inspired by the new views from the end of 18th century and the older French debate. The first part, 'De la littérature chez les

Anciens et chez les Modernes', refers directly to the old debate but also amalgamates it with the German ideas on nation and literature:

> In all literatures we have to distinguish between that which is national, and that which belongs to imitation […]. Imitation as artistic principle, as I have shown, does not allow for infinite improvement, and in this perspective the moderns incessantly create and recreate the old anew. […] Even the greatest genius transcends only to a minor degree the intellectual level of his time.[9]

Individual literatures are locally anchored and typical of their period, and dependent on social institutions and a regional, climatic, and, consequently, naturally determined mentality. (Mme de Staël advocated the climate theory of the 18th century). On this basis, literatures, old and new, are assumed to contribute to a society's and a culture's historical transformation toward increased humanity. Literature does not just *have* a history, but *creates* history.

The conception of human reality as essentially historical implies that historicity is a universal phenomenon, which is reflected in the writing of history. The special role of literature in this process pulls in the opposite direction. Literature is supposed to develop and represent history in a local and national perspective. From the beginning, then, the very tension between a national and a global perspective has been the driving force in the development of a modern literary history, which includes both literature as a historical phenomenon and the writing of literary history as a scholarly project.

Opposing the National Paradigm

To oppose the national paradigm today is not an easy task: modern literary studies and literary historiography are born out of it and derive their institutional position and cultural importance from it. We are part of it, both as culturally anchored individuals and as professionals. Hence, we are not facing a paradigm outside ourselves from which we can just distance ourselves in today's global culture, nor can we just imitate it without betraying the historical nature of literature and literary history. Moreover, we still subscribe to its two basic principles, that of cultural reciprocity and that of the importance of the contemporary perspective on history. But if we are not able to re-cast such assumptions as guidelines for the actual writing of literary histories in the context of today's globalized cultures, we will re-inscribe ourselves into the national paradigm.

The first step to avoid this potential short-circuit is to recognize that when the national paradigm around 1800 was constituted it was not an established model like the classical genres, but an open project in search of its practice, trying to explore experimentally how to actually represent the mutual relationship between nation states and literatures without yet knowing how to do it. Today, we face a task similar to that of the founders of the national paradigm, searching for common historical denominators for literatures past and present in order to understand how they can help us come to grips with our own contemporary cultural conditions. But now this happens in opposition to the solutions that first were experimental attempts but later became institutionalised during the 19th and 20th centuries, yet based on the two foundational principles. Therefore, our major goal today is again to open up to new experiments which, precisely as experiments, allow

for a non-dogmatic re-cycling of relevant components also from the national paradigm and turn them into a viable historiographical practice. This task confronts us with three challenges:

(1) *The translocal*. One obvious problem is the fact that the translocal or transnational context was already part of the national paradigm, but cast in national and strictly hierarchical terms. The translocal was seen:
   (a) as other nations, inside or outside Europe;
   (b) as proto-national colonies depending on the genuine European nations (Asian countries, Latin America or the USA);
   (c) as no nations at all and therefore with no legitimate claim to a history of their own, and also not a literary history (Africa, Australia or the Arctic regions). If colonies or aboriginal communities left their subordinate status, they were lifted up in the category of a nation and then dealt with accordingly, that is to say in the manner of the standard paradigm of the literary histories of the old nation states.

We know from post-colonial studies that this ideological bias produced a skewed reception of non-national literary productions, both when considered in their own right and in their interaction with colonial neighbours and colonial powers. But more importantly, the foundational dogmatism barred the way to re-think the still useful pragmatic categories of the national literary historiography on new grounds in an interaction with general historical changes, both in the mainly European nation states themselves and in the non-European regions. Even today we often witness an attempt to copy the national model of literary history as part of new countries' ambitions to obtain international recognition, as for instance in the Balkans. *Consequence*: a new conception of the relation between the local and the translocal on globalized conditions is required.

(2) *New disciplines*. The second difficulty in distancing ourselves from the national paradigm is the division of labour in the study of literary history, which came about together with the national paradigm. First, there is the study of national literatures; second, there is the comparison between them in terms of influence, similarities, etc, as foreseen by Mme de Staël. This bifurcation was later institutionalized in teaching and research as two disciplines: comparative literature posing the different national philologies as the first link of the food chain. Thus, comparative literature is born within and shaped by the national paradigm. *Consequence*: a new conception of the relation between disciplines is required.

(3) *Autonomy*. Finally, we are also facing the shortcoming of a contemporary conception of literature which, however, is already embedded in the national paradigm, but inducing an ahistorical component into its basic historical thinking. It is the ahistorical doctrine of the autonomy of works of art, and also works of literature. Although this doctrine, in its modern version launched by New Criticism, first and foremost concerns the individual work of literature or art, it is reduplicated on the level of national

> literatures taken to be autonomous entities expressing the Englishness, Dutchness, Swedishness, etc, of their nationalities. Each nation is supposed to have its own literature and literary history, only engaged with each other in external relations of influence and reception, and anything different from other national literatures or cultures does not count as a relevant context. Cultures or nations not considered to be fully developed, such as the colonies, formed only fragments of relevant contexts and could not have a self-sustained national literature. Thus, the historical study of literature as an interaction between literature and a cultural context is born within a conception of literature and culture that actually prevents us from developing an adequate conception of the historicity of literary texts. As we know from the many studies of Otherness, this attitude shapes and sharpens the image of the foreigner and the foreign on national conditions, as mainly a problem to come to terms with and not as a possibility for new cultural vistas. The result is that literary histories, at the level of the national corpora, turn their cultural contexts into external and ambiguous instances of a non-national foreignness. *Consequence*: a new conception of the specificity of the literary text is required.

Suggestions for Another Way

The literary history I have co-authored with three colleagues, *litteraturDK* (2009)[10] exploits recent international research on the relation between local literature and global perspectives in order to promote another take on literary history.[11] A quote from the English version of the official website of Denmark (www.denmark.dk)[12] on the changing history of Denmark as a constant replacement of borders is a condensed expression of the global and transnational perspective as relevant throughout Danish history:

> 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 900 s, 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 time.

Throughout its recorded history, literature has developed a stock of interpretational models, still relevant today, to map a changing translocal reality based on the following six questions that are also present in the minds of young people, explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously and in more or less clear terms:

(1) How can I find my place in society?
(2) How does my local universe relate to the world at large?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798712000397 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(3) How are my visions of the world?
(4) Who am I?
(5) How can I relate to my body?
(6) How can I grasp what is beyond the reach of my senses and my understanding?

These questions indicate the basic existential and social coordinates for human life – the social, the cross-cultural, the imagination, individual identity, the body, and everything that transcends the limits of human experience. They also constitute the backbone of 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. Literature actually channels the hermeneutical needs of 16–19 year olds by shaping answers that correspond to what it means to be human in a globalized world.

That is why every question allows us to tell the history of literature in Denmark during the 1000 years 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 that runs as the unifying principle through one of several possible histories of literature in Denmark in its relation to a larger world from the Nordic Middle Ages to the present.

Therefore, *litteraturDK* contains six parallel historical literary trajectories that we have subdivided into historical periods with the same timeframe. The six histories evolve from six different thematic centres generated by the six questions: Upstairs & Downstairs; Home & Abroad; Fantasy & Reality; I, Me & the Others; Body & Environment [in Danish: *omverden* = German *Umwelt*]; Us & the Other. Each period opens with a nodal point in Danish history that has had a literary impact and at the same time marks a change in the relationship between Denmark and an increasingly global world. 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 the First World War; 1969 to the present by the globally broadcast moon landing. Because of the national curriculum that frames the six semesters of literature taught in high school, and which emphasizes literature after 1800, the most recent periods are more elaborately considered than the earlier ones.

Every chapter offers a different viewpoint on how, for 1000 years, literature has suggested answers to questions about what it means to face the conditions of human existence living in Denmark – a country with 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 with more remote places on the margins of (Caucasus) or outside Europe (Newfoundland); then with Christianity it increasingly became 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 addressing in detail one of the six sub-periods subdividing the *longue durée* of the 1000 years. The works we chose, the

main lines we present, and the conclusions we come to highlight how literature itself, also in Denmark, has been created in a permanent border crossing of motifs, languages, themes, and genres, and on how literature has taken issue with identity issues in relation to this local-translocal exchange.

In *litteraturDK*, for the first time, Danish colonial history and its literary reflections form a genuine part of the presentation and the literatures from now independent places (Norway, Iceland, and others). And it introduces non-European authors in translation as well as the responsiveness of literature to the changing media landscape it has been part of – printing, visual culture, the printed mass media, digital media, etc. This context also cuts across the traditional inside–outside dichotomy of text and context, and opens up to a new interdisciplinarity.

A few detailed readings of selected texts demonstrate how a literary history also opens up to analytical practice and offers more than a contextual lifesaver. The use of identical epochal subdivisions in all chapters implies that the teacher will have the choice of making students read across the chapters inside the same temporal limits – for example, the six sections on Romanticism (1801–1849), one of which will offer a comprehensive presentation of the period in question. But the teacher can also have the students follow the thematic trajectories from 1000 to the present one at a time. The bottom line is that such alternative possibilities make it clear that the choice of historical perspective can never be taken for granted and always has to be discussed.

With the six fundamental existential questions as cornerstones, the book was also written with other readers in mind than those high school students who may already take an interest in literature and perhaps want to study literature in various later educational contexts, which is at most 20% of students. It is also aimed at those students we would like to convince of the fundamental value of literature and reading for people in a modern world. Given its didactic context, the book has to give an answer to the students' implicit question: 'Why read a book when you can watch a DVD?' *litteraturDK* responds to this question by demonstrating that literature is an integral part of a modern media landscape, but also by underlining that literature is able to perform in ways other media cannot.

Therefore, the text only comprises 200 pages in a narrative form, narratives being effective communicative tools both to provide knowledge and to motivate readers. Students will be able to read everything by themselves during the three years of high school. In addition there are many beautifully reproduced, enticing illustrations, presentations of translations, short author portraits, time lines, an index, and a glossary. A literary history must not be a condensed version of the historical chronology of a certain cultural area; like literature itself, it is a cultural intervention that 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' personalities and to prepare them for higher education.

Another implicit question is also answered by the book: '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 within a globalized context. For the readers of the book this local world happens to be Denmark for the time being. Therefore, the book must, through

its composition and communicative strategies and through its viewpoints and selection of texts, demonstrate on a practical level both how to read local literature in a global perspective and how this perspective also imposes an alternative concept for the construction of a historical trajectory.[13]

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

That the book suggests six historical and thematically informed routes is not only a reflection of the six-semester 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 of there being only *one* history of literature in Denmark. The chronological monolinearity is one with the national literary history, which turns simple chronology into a teleological ideology mapping neither 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.

The Cultural Challenge

Literary histories are products of the same history as the culture we are part of and the literature we write about. Therefore, our paradigms and practices are historically sensitive, even volatile. Today we share the paradigmatic problems across the globe in our parallel attempts to rewrite local literary histories, be it in Denmark or elsewhere. That is why it is a cultural challenge, and a permanent one at that: the best quality of a literary history today is not that it finally sets things right, but that it has a life span of no more than 15 years and inspires new people to write new literary histories and reactivate the role of literature in contemporary culture in order to avoid what Amitav Ghosh calls the 'monumental inwardness'[14] of cultures.

References

1. D. Perkins (1992) *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).
2. S.E. Larsen, B. Andreasen, M. Jørgensen and D. Ringgaard (2009) *litteraturDK* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt & Ringhof).
3. S.E. Larsen (2011) What is literary historiography? In: K. Kulavkova, N. Avramovska (Eds) *New Literary Theory and Hermeneutics* (*Interpretations* vols. 4–5) (Skopje: Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts), pp. 67–92.
4. F. Bacon (1994) *Novum Organum* (Chicago: Open Court), p. 113.
5. G. Vico (1966) *La Scienza Nuova e Opere scelte* (Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese), p. 299.
6. I. Kant (1964) *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), p. 101.

7. W. von Humboldt (1960) *Werke* 1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), p. 580.
8. J. Le Goff (1992) *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press).
9. G. de Staël (1959) *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* 1 (Genève: Droz), pp. 92, 149, 147.
10. S.E. Larsen, B. Andreasen, M. Jørgensen and D. Ringgaard (2009) *litteraturDK* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt & Ringhof).
11. The framework is the emerging World Literature paradigm in Literary Studies, see, U. Schöning (Ed.) (2000) *Internationalität nationaler Literaturen* (Göttingen: Wallstein); D. Damrosch (2003) *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press); D. Pizer (2006) *The Idea of World Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press); M.R. Thomsen (2008) *Mapping World Literature* (London: Continuum); K.-M- Simonsen and J. Stougaard-Nielsen (Eds) (2008) *World Literature, World Culture* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press); T. D'haen (2012) *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (London: Routledge), and T. D'haen, D. Damrosch and D. Kadir (Eds) (2012) *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (London: Routledge).
12. The website was visited on 20 November 2009.
13. A similar but antipodean perspective can be found in W. Veit (2008) Globalization and literary history: rethinking comparative literary history – globally. *New Literary History. Special Issue: Globalization*, **39**, pp. 415–435.
14. A. Ghosh (2000) *The Glass Palace* (New York: HarperCollins), p. 349.

About the Author

Svend Erik Larsen is Professor of Comparative Literature at Aarhus University**.** He was a Member of the Bureau of the International Comparative Literature Association 1992–2004 and from 2007 he has been a Member and Secretary for the ICLA project Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages. He is chair of the section for Literary and Theatrical Studies in Academia Europaea. He has written extensively on literary theory, literary and cultural history (see http://au.dk/en/litsel@hum). At present he is working on a book on Forgiveness as a Cultural Challenge.