

## PREFACE

by

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"ICLA" has embarked on a large-scale enterprise for the production of a complete history of literatures written in the European languages. The Institute for Comparative Studies at the Sorbonne and the Literary Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences have joined forces to produce a history of European literature in the period leading from the Enlightenment towards Romanticism. The emerging outlines of the work now in preparation in the Paris and Budapest workshops suggest that the volume which is to discuss the period between 1770 and 1820 will bring into synthesis the most characteristic features and processes of the European development. That period, the time of the American War of Independence, the French Revolution and the English Industrial Revolution, was indeed a revolutionary epoch which brought about radical changes in the entire European literary scene. New critical and aesthetic ideas emerged, the old literary genres were transformed and, particularly in poetry, the personal note and lyricism became predominant, making the break with the poetic rules of classicism more complete. Nor was the transformation less effective in the field of the novel and the drama; after several tentative attempts the novel was ready to pave the way for the romantic and realistic art of the 19th century.

However, the literary processes and phenomena of this period in Europe were far from uniform, since the countries of Europe represented different stages of economic, political and cultural development. These basic differences allow us to distinguish several cultural zones in the Europe of the late eighteenth century. The differences between certain developed countries of Western Europe and the countries of Eastern, Central, Northern and Southern Europe which developed in different conditions were quite distinct. The radical transformation of European literature began in the mid-18th century in England and France, then from 1770 onwards, it was the literature of Germany which became the torch-bearer of the process. However, both Central and Eastern Europe reacted fast to this transformation. While in the countries of the West great literatures emerged which promoted bourgeois development, in Central and Eastern Europe the aim of bourgeois transformation was combined with the aim of creating autonomous national literatures. Thus the literary trends and movements of the period assumed different functions in Western and in Central and Eastern Europe.

We cannot successfully survey these processes, or comprehend their laws and peculiarities, unless we investigate the European history of this period from the angle of the evolution of a bourgeois and national culture. Similarly, an understanding of the literary phenomena requires a clear view of the emergence of philosophical, social and scientific trends in the various

cultural zones of Europe. However, to understand the literary phenomena and processes within the period and to appraise the significance of aesthetical and theoretical literary endeavours, it is important to see certain formations emerging among the themes of literature (they could just as well be called myths) and finally to distinguish the characteristics in the field of poetry, the novel and the drama in the respective zones.

The most important part of the comprehensive work under way in Paris and Budapest must be the analysis of the phenomena and processes of poetry, novel and drama in Europe at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Hence the projected work should include an ideological and aesthetico-historical survey as well as a thorough analysis in the domain of poetry, drama and the novel.

However, this type of research must be anticipated by a number of preliminary studies. The present volume contains but a few of these studies. We believe that more such studies, or even more volumes, would be needed to discuss the problems of poetry, or the drama and novel in various European literatures or in the specific European cultural zones, respectively.

Our present volume — which eventually can be followed up by several other preparatory volumes before a final synthesis — is but a small contribution to the great work carried on in Paris and Budapest.