

---

---

## Preface and Notes for users

The term Eastern Europe is not simply geographical. This Companion covers East European literature, and that is a political designation, for writers of the 'imperial' languages, e.g. Brod, Canetti, Kafka, Werfel, let alone Dostoevski, Pushkin or Tolstoy, are not included. Nor are writers who chose English (Conrad) or French (Moréas, Apollinaire) as their language of literary expression. Eastern Europe indicates those linguistic areas or nation-states which were or considered themselves oppressed by (or, in a 19th-century cliché, under the yoke of) one of the four great European continental empires (Austrian, Prussian, Ottoman and Russian) for anything from fifty to a thousand years. Essentially these cultures were Christian: here Albania is an anomaly, like Bosnia; Yiddish literature is an exception of a different kind: the authors were Jewish, but what they wrote was composed on 'Christian' territory. The 'intellectuals' (producers of literature) of these linguistic areas once felt politically or socially oppressed, usually by Germans, Turks or Russians, but it is more complicated than that. For example, Slovaks felt oppressed by Hungarians and Hungarians by Vienna; or Roumanians felt they were oppressed by Greeks and Greeks by Turks. Whatever one may as an historian think about degrees of oppression, the literature represented in this volume was produced by intellectuals who, at best, felt like the Welsh under the English, at worst, like the Jews under the Nazis or the Armenians under the Turks. The reader will not normally find here E European writers of non-fiction, literary theorists, political writers, historiographers. This volume concentrates on composers of verbal art.

No entry was normally permitted to have more than three works in its registration of translations. This will seem unfair to lovers of particular writers. The advice on further reading was also limited by the editors to three items on a given author or work (in English, French, German or Italian). Some contributors have chosen longer articles on fewer writers, some briefer articles on more writers. The number of entries does not indicate any scale of literary importance. On the other hand, contributors assigned the literature on a linguistic group which has a continuous original literature since the Middle Ages were given more space than those whose linguistic group produced a literature only in the 19th or 20th century. No doubt some apparent unfairness has crept in, but that was not the editors' intention.

The editors have attempted to give some stylistic unity to the volume, without altering individual contributors' expressions of enthusiasm or approaches to

literary criticism and history. Contributors were encouraged to express original views as far as it was possible in such limited space. The choice of authors to be included was left entirely up to the contributors, with two provisos. First, any author who, whatever his literary value to a late 20th-century critic, significantly contributed to the development of a given literature should be included. Secondly, any author who has or had an international reputation, however meagre his contribution actually was or is, should be included.

The editors have tried to make the Companion as easy to use as possible. Except in the case of the titles of some periodicals and anthologies (see Abbreviations), all abbreviations used are such as any 'general reader' will recognise. References to literary movements will be explained by consulting Index C. Cross-references are indicated by the fact that a writer's name appearing in an article on another writer or in the brief historical essays is printed in SMALL CAPITALS.

To find all mentions of authors in SMALL CAPITALS, or authors who have no entry of their own, and of authors outside East European literature, all references to movements, groups, trends, periodicals, the user should turn to Index C.

Likewise, any user desiring some comparative view of, say, Romanticism in Eastern Europe should turn first to Index C. By consulting Index A a user may establish which authors were writing in the same or a comparable period.

Index B concerns anonymous and collective works, and adaptations which were important for the development of an individual literature. Two things have to be borne in mind. First, if, say, the Apollonius of Tyre romance does not appear, that indicates only that none of the contributors considered the version of that romance sufficiently important in the assigned literature to merit an entry. Secondly, if for only one literature, say, the Troy Book is entered, that does not mean that other literary traditions do not have a version of the Troy Book. The oral tradition and popular literature have entries for only very few literatures, which does not signify that other literatures had no such traditions. The one unifying aspect to Index B lies in the fact that all contributors were asked to provide a brief account of the history of Bible translation in the linguistic area about which they were writing.

The editors have done everything they could to make the Companion enjoyable as well as informative reading. Reading just the lives, particularly of Yiddish and Balkan writers, provides themes for novels. On the other hand, the reader will find accounts of writers, particularly in the West of E Europe, who appeared to have had stolidly peaceful noble or bourgeois lives. The editors hope that this volume will give some insight into the culture of those Europeans who at some time over the last few hundred years felt themselves cut off from the luckier (??) W Europeans.

Many E Europeans hate being called E Europeans. Two things, however, do unite all the literatures contained in this volume. Whether Finnish or Greek, Armenian or Hungarian, writers thought of 'Europe' as something outside

them, at least for some period, in some cases only during the years since Communist take-over – hence the post-1989 'back to Europe' slogan. Secondly, in most of the cultures studied in this volume some sense of a period of suffering or some 'national trauma' lies at the centre of Xness. Some of the 'national cultures' described in this volume did not seriously come into being much before Herder and the Romantics' invention of the notion of nation. One only has to think of what those writers from E Europe who adopted a W language have contributed, especially in the 20th century, to W European literature to see how little it matters in what language one writes: Conrad, Moréas, Tzara, Ionesco . . . let alone Canetti or Kafka.

The editors hope that users will learn as much about 'less-known' literature as they have from putting together this volume. The idea of the Companion came from Mr Malcolm Gerratt at Dent's some time before the collapse of socialism. Most of the tiresome typing and sorting work has been done by Nicola Mooney, Radojka Miljević and Sarah Safraz. Without all of these, even with modern computer technology, the editors would not have been able to compile this volume.