

# *Neohelicon's* Local Traditions and Present Strategies

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*The paper describes the history and present strategies of the journal Neohelicon, and comments on the local traditions of comparative literature in East-Central Europe it tries to continue. Those are the journals Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum edited by Hugo Meltzl in Kolozsvár 1877-1888, and Helicon, the journal of the Commission Internationale d'Histoire littéraire moderne, edited by Jean Hankiss in Debrecen 1938-43.*

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I believe that the best way to pay tribute to Anton Ocvirk from the viewpoint of Hungarian literary scholars is by referring to the most important and internationally best-known achievement of comparative literature studies in Hungary – namely, *Neohelicon*, an international journal based on and expressing the international activity of decades of Hungarian scholarship. Because this journal has always emphasised local and regional traditions, it offers an opportunity to discuss the regional history of comparative literature studies (to some degree shared by Slovenes and Hungarians) as well as the present state of and opportunities for this discipline.

*Neohelicon* was originally conceived as a journal strongly connected with the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA). Each copy contains a short declaration of its program: “*NEOHELICON* is a journal dedicated to studies in comparative and world literature. It particularly welcomes studies that further the synthetic presentation of literary epochs, periods, trends, and movements from a comparative point of view.” When the journal was founded in 1973, this creed still included an additional sentence, which was retained until 2000: “The Publishing House of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences has established this journal to promote the project ‘A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages’ launched under the auspices of the International Comparative Literature Association.” The last issue that contained this sentence was the first issue that I signed as managing editor. The disappearance of this

sentence, however, did not represent a break with the ICLA or any loss of interest in its valuable project. Since then we have published research by the ICLA's standing Committee for Theory four times, and from the Research Committee for Eastern and Southeast Europe twice. The repeated discussions on the opportunities for literary history in the present state of post-modern culture, organized by the ICLA's Coordinating Committee for the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, filled both issues in 2003. This makes it clear that we did not omit the sentence because the long-established ICLA project no longer needs promotion.

There are, however, some features in *Neobelicon's* history that may explain the omission of that restriction in the original creed. The journal was founded in 1973, and the first editor-in-chief, György Mihály Vajda, was not only the founder of the journal, but also an enthusiastic organizer of the "Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages". This project was launched in March 1967 by the ICLA's Executive Bureau. After sending around a circular and a questionnaire, it was Vajda that the bureau committed to creating a draft that the ICLA's General Assembly could discuss during the next congress in Belgrade. Although this first draft referred to the comparative history of European literature, Vajda emphasised that "European" was not intended to have any geographical delimitation; it was instead meant to signify a historically developed type of literature.<sup>1</sup> This ideal is, in my opinion, more successfully suggested by the final formulation.

The first volume of the series that discussed geographically non-European literature was edited by Albert Gerard: *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*. It was published in 1986, and it was about this time that *Neobelicon* took an interest in African literature. In 1989 the first such issue contained five papers on African authors, and in the following years three issues focused on African literature as their main topic.<sup>2</sup> Since that time *Neobelicon* has been, indeed, an important forum of scholarly discussion on African literature. In one of his editorials, Vajda emphasized the connection of this regional extension of interest both in the ICLA series and in *Neobelicon*.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of history of literature in European languages, however, is somewhat problematic from the viewpoint of certain recent phenomena. Even if literature is produced in European languages on every continent, globalization has proved the concept to be restrictive. The discipline's founding fathers regarded literature, as they understood the notion, as an originally European phenomenon, and therefore the comparison seemed adequate only among European-type literatures. It did not take long, however, for some scholars to try to understand the European type

of literature through comparisons with other types, especially with those of East Asia. Today, when the ICLA's most numerous and prosperous regional organization is the Asian one, comparative literature studies should not exclude these huge areas of literary scholarship. In 1983 a *Neohelicon* issue discussed the theoretical problems of the notion of world literature or universal literature (with the contribution of Alfred Owen Aldridge and Anna Balakian, for example), and it contained some papers on East Asian/European literary relations. For example, Katschuko Takeda wrote about "Biblical Influence upon Yasunari Kawabata", and Marián Gálik about "The Concept of Feeling in Chinese, English and German Literary Criticism" (*Neohelicon* 10/1, 1983, 95–103 and 123–130). Nevertheless it was only a few years ago that *Neohelicon* started regularly publishing papers on Chinese literature, and our 2007/2 issue primarily discusses East Asian literary issues.

Be this as it may, György Mihály Vajda, a scholar enthusiastically engaged in the project "Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages" and the first secretary of the project's coordinating committee, founded *Neohelicon* to help promote the volumes of the series and to create a forum for developing its theoretical basis. The first 8 volumes (1973–1988) of the series were published by Akadémiai Kiadó of Budapest, the same publishing house that started simultaneously publishing *Neohelicon* – however, the journal was always published in cooperation with certain leading academic publishers in Europe, a topic I shall discuss a bit later. The connection with the ICLA was rather strong in the first year; in the last pages of its first issues, *Neohelicon* published "ICLA News", as though it were a semi-official journal of the association. This activity became superfluous with the establishment of the ICLA Bulletin in 1982.

*Neohelicon*, however, was already originally designed as something more than a forum for background work in ICLA; Vajda explained his ideals in the manifesto of the first issue, with the Latin title "Lectori salutem". He rejected any hierarchy among national literatures, and sought to survey the literary process from the Renaissance to the present. He formalized three requirements a publication in *Neohelicon* should meet: 1) The research should transcend national borders, 2) It should involve more than one national literature and, if it discusses a smaller topic, it should do it in a very broad context, and 3) It should create a partial or universal synthesis. The final goal of the journal was (and is) to attain a synthesis of *Weltliteratur*. Vajda regarded the "Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages" as an intermediate level between comparative literature studies and *Weltliteratur*. In his mind, the terms "literatures compared" and "world literature", "comparison" and "universal literature" were not in

opposition but complementary; their difference is one of degree.<sup>4</sup> This is the solemn creed of *Neohelicon*: comparative literature that serves the synthesis of universal literature. We support the comparative history of literatures in European languages because we regard this as a way towards understanding *Weltliteratur*. This program can be even supported in the present state of crisis of comparative literature studies.

As the other face of this “global” prospect, Vajda emphasized certain local traditions of comparative and universal literature studies through the name or names of the journal. Let me start with the Latin subtitle, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, which refers to an older local tradition. This was the title<sup>5</sup> of the first journal on comparative literature studies, published in Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca, Romania) from 1877 to 1888. It should be emphasized that this was the world’s first journal in this field. Its editors, Sámuel Brassai and Hugó Meltzl, were the first literary scholars that tried to harmonize the comparative method with universal interest. The older professor, Sámuel Brassai, supported the journal with the prestige of his name (Berczik 1959: 225) as well as financially,<sup>6</sup> while it was actually run and edited by Hugó Meltzl. The concept of a polyglot journal on comparative literature was a consequence of the editors’ polyglot Central European culture and their European literary horizon (Vajda 1973: 12). *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* was a truly polyglot journal or, as its by-line stated: “Unbeschränkt polyglotte, kritisch-aesthetische Fachschrift für Folklore, Weltliteratur, Übersetzungskunst, vergleichende Volkliedkunde und ähnliche vergleichende anthropologisch-ethnographischen Disziplinen.” The journal appeared every two weeks, and it contained rather brief articles or short sections of serially published articles. The title was printed in eleven languages on the cover, and as an example the first volume in 1879 contained items in the following languages: Latin, Hungarian, German, French, English, Italian, Provençal, Romanian, and Chinese. The Chinese contribution was a strophe from a poem by Tchou Wang in French transcription and with a French translation.<sup>7</sup> I find more interesting another “Chinese” publication in another issue; it appeared in the column “Petőfiana,” which usually published items related to the international reception of Hungary’s national poet Sándor Petőfi. Wilhelm Schott, a German scholar from Berlin, submitted a poem in Tchen-Ki-Tong’s translation called “Tung pi zeu tschy” in German transcription.<sup>8</sup>

The principle of polyglottism had its drawbacks; sometimes none of the subscribers were able to read the entire issue (Gaal 1975: 26). It was, however, a very important means of expressing the journal’s ideology. The majority of the publications were written in German or Hungarian;

from 1879 to 1882 half of the 156 articles were in German, one-fifth in Hungarian, and the rest primarily in English, French, and Italian (Damrosch 2006: 108). The opportunity to publish articles in less common languages was important nevertheless because it was in accordance with Meltzl's creed that every nation has equal rights in world literature: "Our secret motto is: nationality as the individuality of the people should be regarded as sacred and inviolable. Therefore any people, be it ever so insignificant politically, is and will remain, from the standpoint of comparative literature, as important as the largest nation." (Meltzl 1973: 60). Polyglottism, however, has importance from the viewpoint of the discipline as well. In his manifesto describing comparative literature as a future discipline *in statu nascendi*, Meltzl (1877: c. 179) differentiated between direct and indirect means of comparison. Indirect comparison can make use of the principle of translation; translations make the international trade in literary products easier, but exclusive research on such indirect contacts could hardly avoid the danger of superficiality. The principle of translation must be complemented with the principle of polyglottism, which makes direct comparison possible (Meltzl 1877: c. 307-315).

Regarding his activity as beginning or establishing a discipline, Hugo Meltzl believed that what is important in the given situation of comparative literature is collecting literary and folklore materials from the widest possible areas rather than comparing what is directly and easily available (Meltzl 1877: c. 179; cf. Kerekes 1937: 77). *Acta comparationis litterarum universarum* was therefore highly interested in issues of translation, reception, and international contacts, but because its general approach to literature was based on the Herderian perspective that regarded national culture originally designed by the people (i.e., the rural masses), it wished to collect folklore items and then to compare them with both folklore items of other nations and developed cultural goods. As a result, important and interesting folklore material can be found in the volumes of the journal. What may be more appealing, this attitude represented a challenge to the nationalism of the times – on the one hand, to Hungarian nationalism, which wanted to see Hungarian literature as totally organic, and therefore Meltzl had to face attacks in Hungarian journals and newspapers charging *Acta* with advertising a cosmopolitanism that degraded the national culture (Gaal 1975: 25; cf. Vajda 1962: 330–331); on the other hand, to the literary nationalism of the European great powers, because the readily available material to be compared belonged to them. Meltzl sought to challenge this literary nationalism both by expanding the European arena to include literatures in less common languages and by widening the field to include masterpieces of non-European cultures (Damrosch 2006: 102).

Establishing an international discipline, however, would have presupposed the cooperation of the great powers, and French and German scholars of those days “had little of Meltzl’s interest in the literatures of smaller nations – and less interest in working with scholars in these nations.” (Damrosch 2006: 109). After 12 years of heroic effort, Meltzl had to cease publishing the journal. Not even in the best year could he sell more than a hundred copies (Berczik 1987). That best year was 1879; the journal was originally planned for only two years (Gaal 1975: 16) but on the basis of the general interest in the work the editors decided to start a *series nova* in January 1879. In that year *Acta* published papers on a great variety of topics by many contributors. In 1884–85 there was a second and last flourishing (Kerekes 1937: 84) after Meltzl’s journey to Italy, where he forged some new connections, but after those years the decline could not be halted – especially when a new rival appeared in the scene, Max Koch’s *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturgeschichte*, a journal apparently designed to compete with *Acta* and to enforce the great power perspective in comparative literature (Damrosch 2007: 139–140). Anton Ocvirk (1936: 17–18) appreciated Hugo von Meltzl’s achievement, and from today’s perspective it is extremely important.

The legacy of this journal is visible in *Neohelicon*’s design not only in its subtitle, but also in its use of Latin. Every issue has a name in Latin, printed on the cover, and the names of the regular columns appear in Latin as well. For example, “Ergasterium” (“workshop”) is similar to a small exclusive club in which certain distinguished scholars show how to do things, and “Historia Litterarum Europaeorum” is a forum in which issues in the comparative history of literatures in European languages can be discussed. Latin is intended to suggest how deeply our journal is rooted in tradition.

The name *Neohelicon* is an allusion to a journal named *Helicon*, which published five volumes between 1938 and 1943.<sup>9</sup> The story started with the 1928 Oslo congress of the International Association of Historical Sciences, which some literary historians attended on the basis of their being *historians* as well. As part of the association the *Commission Internationale d’Histoire littéraire moderne* was established in Oslo. This first international association for literary studies held three congresses in the interwar period, the first in Budapest in 1931. János Hankiss (or, as he wrote his name in international publications, Jean Hankiss) was one of the youngest and most active members of the commission (Gorilovics 1994: 132), which was composed of 36 scholars from 19 countries (Van Tieghem 1932: 138). The congress was the result of his organizational skills and his ability to win the Hungarian culture ministry over the cause.<sup>10</sup> Although no more than three of the eighteen presentations discussed explicitly comparative

topics,<sup>11</sup> the congress was an important event in the history of comparative literature due to its methodological and theoretical focus.

One of the presentations signalled a shift in the history of Hungarian and Central European comparative studies. Sándor Eckhardt refuted Jakob Bleyer's "Vienna theory", which suggested that all the cultural influences in the East-Central European region came through, or rather from, Vienna. This theory gave German studies a leading position in Hungarian comparative literature. Eckhardt (1932) proved Hungarian influences in Slovak and Romanian culture, and hinted at other connections as well. Through his criticism of the Vienna theory, he paved way for comparative analyses of multilateral connections in the region's cultures. Because he was much more interested in the history of ideas than in mere positivistic cataloguing of connections and influences, he also suggested that what should be analysed is the ways a target culture assimilates imported ideas (Vajda 1962: 347). The imprint of German romanticism in the various cultures resulted in their general similarity, and one of its features was their hostility towards each other; this insight of Eckhardt's (1932: 89) suggested a general comparison that underrates political-ideological conflicts as temporary cultural phenomena.

The theoretical focus of the congress was something new, and the commission wanted to continue it. The 1935 congress in Amsterdam discussed literary epochs, and the 1939 congress in Lyon the problem of literary genres. When the commission launched a journal, it was edited in line with this new trend in comparative literature (Vajda 1962: 359); *Helicon* was called a "Revue internationale des problèmes généraux de la littérature." The journal appeared under the aegis of the Pantheon publishing house in Amsterdam, but it was actually edited and printed in Debrecen, where its director, János Hankiss, was living. It published articles in German, English, Spanish, French, and Italian. Due to its strong theoretical interest, it always had a separate column for literary genres<sup>12</sup> and research methods. This is a local tradition that *Neohelicon* wanted to join: an international journal focusing on general problems, which was launched under the auspices of the biggest international organisation for literary studies, and which was edited in Hungary. As a political act, it promoted the peaceful principles of world literature during the gloomy years of World War II (Vajda 1973: 12–13), until the war itself made it impossible to receive submissions.<sup>13</sup>

*Neohelicon* proudly referred to local, regional traditions, but it never was a Hungarian enterprise. In his manifesto in the first issue, Vajda declared that a strong emphasis should be laid on the literatures of East-Central Europe, and even now we are faithful to this ideal; in 2004 we published an issue on Balkan literatures (31/2, *Balkanica*), and the 2005 issue on na-



tional stereotypes also primarily discussed East-Central European material (32/1, *Stereotipi nationum*). One of the last issues contained a collection of articles on the literatures of Slavic nations after the revolutions of 1989. Notwithstanding this interest in the region, *Neohelicon* is not an especially Hungarian journal. The percentage of Hungarian contributors was not overly high, even if an issue published the proceedings of a conference held in Hungary. However, this is only one aspect of its non-Hungarian character.

When *Neohelicon* was established, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the institution that supervised all scientific and academic life in the (at that time) communist country, was running and financing many journals to promote Hungarian science and scholarship on the international stage. *Neohelicon* was none of these; from the very beginning it was a business-like enterprise of the academy's publishing house of the cooperation with Mouton (The Hague/Paris) until 1976 and then with John Benjamins (Amsterdam). As a consequence, from the very beginning it was designed to meet international requirements and to share in the sales of the increasingly industrial production of scholarly articles. When the Hungarian Academy of Sciences sold its publishing house to Kluwer Academic Publishers (Dordrecht/Boston/London) after the revolutions of 1989, this did not cause any drastic change in the journal's life. *Neohelicon* became one of the eight shared journals of Akadémiai Kiadó and Kluwer, and the only one in the humanities. Nevertheless, the arrival of the new owner, a multinational company, was reflected in the journal; it lost its pocket-book appearance and received a new, more dignified format. When Springer bought Kluwers' share in Akadémiai Kiadó, the new owner wanted to unify the look of every journal, and therefore *Neohelicon* received a new cover, full of information. The new, larger format was introduced in 1999 for the twenty-sixth volume simultaneous with the debut of the new editors-in-chief, József Pál and József Szili. After 25 years of editing the journal, Miklós Szabolcsi and György Mihály Vajda resigned, although Vajda continued attending the meetings of the editorial committee and helped its activity with much useful advice. When he passed away in 2001, on the day after he wrote the last line of his last book on the image of Joan of Arc in European literature, a memorial issue started being planned. The first issue of 2002, dedicated *In memoriam György Mihály Vajda*, was probably the most prestigious one in the journal's history; it was a true parade of leading figures in comparative literature studies worldwide, paying tribute to their late master and colleague.

From one viewpoint, however, this issue was exceptional: it had no unifying topic. As far as I can see, the dominant strategy of humanities



journals today is to publish more or less unified issues, in which a reader interested in a particular article can find much additional reading on the topic. An issue of a journal is becoming similar to a book, or a collection of papers. Publication or written communication is, of course, only one of the forums for scholarly discussion. Discussion itself seems more important than it used to be; the time when a scholar could publish a paper declaring final results – that is, the truth about a topic – is over. This is especially true in comparative literature studies, where the context of analysis has literally become global. We have entered the age of collective approaches; a set of articles may display various aspects, but naturally not all the aspects of a problem. This presupposes a complementary relation between the contributions. The other important forum for such activity is, of course, academic conferences. A connection between journals and conferences is useful and important. A journal may publish the scholarly discussion for a wider public in an enduring form, even if different media have different requirements. Journals usually require the contributors to adapt their conference presentations to the rules of academic writing, and sometimes they publish only a selection of the papers that meet these standards.<sup>14</sup> To publish conference proceedings is the simplest way of creating a thematically unified issue or volume and it suits the life of academic society – but it is not, of course, the only way.

This trend, however, is not something new for *Neohelicon*, which has published unified issues on special topics since it was founded. The Latin title on the cover indicates both devotion to tradition and faith in discussion and the collective approach. Even the Latin of our titles suggests an ever-changing, transforming tradition, because it is not classical Latin at all. It is rather a Dog Latin of modern scholars, with such vocabulary as *Modernismus*, *Postmodernismus*, *Symbolismus*, or even *Francophonia*. Moreover, only five issues of the sixty-eight already published or edited bear titles such as *Miscellanea*, *Varia*, or *Diversa*. I do not think that their percentage will rise in the future; *Neohelicon* plans unified issues partly in cooperation with ICLA committees, which is the conference-like way, partly with guest-editors that collect contributions on topics such as “Francophony in the Eastern Mediterranean region” or “Migration and Literature” as Efstratia Octapoda-Lu and Armando Gnisci, a distinguished member of our advisory board did; or the theory of paratexts, or the possibility of connecting post-colonial and francophone studies, or youth literature – to mention only some of our more or less unsettled ideas.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Le qualificatif ‘européenne’ ne signifie pas une delimitation géographique, mais se propose de désigner un type littéraire fruit d’une évolution historique.” Vajda 1969: 779.

<sup>2</sup> 16(2), 1989: *Africa*; 17(2), 1990, *Africa et alia*; 21(2), 1994, *Imprimis Africa*.

<sup>3</sup> “L’horizon géographique de plus en plus large de cette entreprise permet à *Neohelicon* également de servir à la fois les idées présidant aux recherches en matière de Littérature Générale et Comparée et celles relatives à la Littérature Universelle.” Vajda 1990 : 7.

<sup>4</sup> “L’histoire des littératures des langues européennes . . . constitue aussi comme un maillon intermédiaire entre la littérature comparée et la *Weltliteratur*, qui sont loin d’être pour nous des termes opposés, mais des idées complémentaires, séparées uniquement par une différence de degré.” (Vajda 1973: 13). Similar ideas were expressed some years later on the topic of “frontier”: “Die Grenzen stellen ein altes Problem der Komparatistik dar. Sie ist an der Grenzen von Völker und Nationen entstanden, an Grenzen, deren Aufgabe nicht nur Trennen, sondern auch in Verbiden besteht. Sie ist nicht, wie es früher gemeint wurde, an den Grenzen der Nationalliteraturen geblieben; sie ist bestrebt die allgemeinen Grundlagen der Literaturwissenschaft zu fördern und die weltliterarische Forschungen zu dienen.” (Vajda 1980: 7).

<sup>5</sup> The Latin title was highlighted by letters larger than those in other languages after 1879; in the previous period the Hungarian title *Összebazonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok* was highlighted.

<sup>6</sup> In 1883 he withdrew from the journal, and one of the causes of his decision may have been its significant arrears (Gaal 1975: 17).

<sup>7</sup> Tchou Ouang, “Ode inedite chinoise”, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 3(1), 1879, c. 130.

<sup>8</sup> Tchen-Ki-Tong, “Tung pi zeu tschy”, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* 12(3), 1888, c. 110–111.

<sup>9</sup> This represents one volume per year, but in 1939–40 only one volume was published because of the congress of the *Commission Internationale d’Histoire littéraire moderne* in Lyon; in 1939 the first issue of volume 2 contained some materials about the congress in advance (e.g., some abstracts), and the joint issues 2–3 of volume 2 in 1940 contained the congress proceedings.

<sup>10</sup> For the connections of Hankiss’ plans with Hungarian politics see Gorilovics 1995: 92–93.

<sup>11</sup> Vajda 1962: 352–353. The three papers described by Vajda as explicitly comparative were presented by Paul van Tieghem, Tivadar Thienemann, and Sándor Eckhardt. All the papers can be read in the 1932 issue of the *Bulletin of the International Committee of Historical Sciences*.

<sup>12</sup> For the theory of genres in *Helicon*, see Martonyi 1995.

<sup>13</sup> For the history of *Helicon* see Gorilovics 1994.

<sup>14</sup> For example, issue 32(2) contained five papers of the eleven presented at the workshop “Facing the Other, Othering the Face” of the 2004 Hong Kong Congress of the ICLA.

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## *Neohelicon*ove lokalne tradicije in sedanje strategije

Ključne besede: primerjalna književnost / literarne revije / *Neohelicon* / zgodovinski pregledi / Meltzl, Hugo / Hankiss, Jean / Vajda, György Mihály

Najbolj znan dosežek primerjalne literarne vede na Madžarskem je revija *Neohelicon*. Njen prvotni namen je bilo podpiranje projekta »Primerjalna zgodovina književnosti v evropskih jezikih«, zbirke, ki je začela izhajati pod

pokroviteljstvom Mednarodne zveze za primerjalno književnost (ICLA). Revijo in projekt ICLA je povezoval eden od njenih ustanovnih urednikov, György Mihály Vajda, zanesenjaški organizator revije pa tudi primerjalne literarne zgodovine. Naslov in podnaslov revije poudarjata lokalne in regionalne tradicije primerjalne književnosti – namreč reviji *Helicon*, ki so jo v tridesetih letih 20. stoletja izdajali in tiskali v Debrecenu na Madžarskem, in *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, pravi poliglotski časopis, ki je med letoma 1877 in 1888 izhajal v Kolosváru na Madžarskem (danes Cluj v Romuniji). *Acta* so predstavljala izziv literarnemu nacionalizmu velikih evropskih sil, medtem ko je *Helicon* med mračnimi leti druge svetovne vojne razglašal miroljubna načela svetovne književnosti.

Hugo Meltzl je ustanovil prvi časopis za primerjalno književnost kot izrazito poliglotski forum. Na disciplino je gledal kot na nekaj, kar šele nastaja, in menil, da je v dani situaciji bolj pomembno zbiranje literarnega in folklornega gradiva s kar najširših območij kot pa primerjava tistega, kar je bilo z lahkoto in neposredno dostopno.

*Commission Internationale d'Histoire littéraire moderne* je bila prva mednarodna zveza za literarne študije in Jean Hankiss je organiziral njen prvi kongres; ta je bil pomemben dogodek v zgodovini primerjalne književnosti kot discipline, zato ker se je osredotočal na metodološka in teoretska vprašanja. Nato se je Hankiss lotil izdajanja prvega mednarodnega časopisa, ki naj bi se ukvarjal s splošnimi problemi, kot so literarna obdobja in zvrsti, vendar je nekaj let pozneje vojna prekinila njegova prizadevanja.

*Neohelicon* se navezuje na to tradicijo in se poskuša spoprijemati z izzivi, ki jih prinaša sedanja kriza primerjalne književnosti. Uredništvo od samega začetka izdaja tematsko enovite številke in raje podpira diskusije, kot da bi razglašalo končne izsledke, saj je postal v primerjalni književnosti kontekst analize dobesedno globalen – prišli smo v obdobje kolektivnih pristopov.

Poudarek je na literaturah srednje-vzhodne Evrope, v zadnjih letih pa v časopisu dobivajo vedno večji pomen vzhodno-zahodne primerjave in literature vzhodne Azije.

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