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# Periodization of Art and Literature: A Historical Perspective

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## Abstract

The author of the paper deals with a basic question – what is the history of literature? As a rule, the history of literature belongs to the basic books of the field, they are the starting point for the study of the younger generations of literary scholars, and they are used by the general public to teach and get ideas about the history in the field of literature and folklore. How is the material periodized? How is history interpreted? Is it all about concepts and opinions? He asks questions and tries to find answers. He also notes the division of history into smaller sections, the so-called periodization of history. From this perspective, literary history is a period in which literature is divided based on social, cultural, and artistic changes. The periodization of literary history differs according to geographical location and historical period, but also according to the type of thinking (such as Chinese cyclical repetition of the Yin-Yang pattern of Taoist philosophy) or according to a specific genre (such as Japanese classification based on the development of the haiku genre).

## Key words

history of literature (literary history); world literature; comparative studies; genre studies; time and periodization of (literary) history

## Abstrakt

### Periodizace umění a literatury: Historická perspektiva

Autor příspěvku se zabývá základní otázkou, co jsou dějiny literatury. Dějiny literatury patří zpravidla k základním knihám oboru, jsou východiskem studia mladších generací literárních vědců, využívá jich široká veřejnost k poučení a získávání představ o dějích v oblasti literatury a folkloru. Jak je materiál periodizován? Jak je historie vykládána? Jde o pojetí a názory správné? Klade si spíše otázky a snaží se najít odpovědi. Všimá si rovněž členění dějin na menší úseky, tzv. periodizace dějin. Dějiny literatury z tohoto hlediska jsou potom období, do kterých se dělí literatura na základě společenských, kulturních a uměleckých změn. Periodizace dějin literatury se liší podle zeměpisného prostoru a historického období, ale i podle typu myšlení (čínské opakování cyklicky se opakujícího vzoru taoistické filozofie yin-yang) nebo podle určitého žánru (japonské členění podle vývoje žánru haiku).

## Klíčová slova

historie literatury; světová literatura; komparatistika; genologie; čas a periodizace literatury

It is difficult to talk about the history of literature without a discussion of history in general.

History is the most expansive empire of all. It's an empire that has no borders, and its territory is infinite, stretching as far back as the past and into what we might imagine to be the distant future. It may be said that history exists in two forms, as an object of study (the past) and how it gets represented by historians. History has been defined, interpreted, and re-interpreted numerous times by many historians who have different perspectives of the world around them. This subject can be a problem.

History is a chronicle of the past. The moment we speak of things that happened before, we are, in fact, speaking of the past. History is understood as flow, denoting a continuous and progressive movement from one stage to another; history is understood as duration, characterized by an inherent passage of time and a change in behavior patterns over time.<sup>1</sup> This change is not exclusive to human society, but rather is found across all aspects of nature: both within human societies and nature itself. However, beware of transferring natural systems to human ones, as was the case, for example, in the influential theory of evolution of Charles Darwin, who made a career in many areas of science, but wrongly.<sup>2</sup>

There are many forms of history. The first is the written word; history as it has been told and retold through time. The second is the version we learn in schools, books, and other venues by historians. By definition, historians are experts in the interpretation of facts and information about the past.

The history of a company is never lost. It is kept in archives, kept on paper, kept in books and kept in one's mind (specifically folklore – the history of literature and folklore was interpreted by slavist Frank Wollmann (1888–1969), in the Czech and Slovakian languages, there is a word for complex marking of literature and folklore, in texts written and spoken – “slovesnost”).<sup>3</sup> Depending on how it is recorded, the information can either go astray or it can be kept alive by revisions. To achieve a better understanding, history is divided into smaller parts.

## Introduction to periodization

In general – and this is true in most disciplines – periodization is a way of dividing time into periods. In literature and art history, it is a way of organizing artistic production into chronological periods for easier analysis. There are many different ways.

Periodization is the process of systematically dividing time and space according to certain aspects, which, as a rule, proceed from the current point of view, from the knowl-

1 Compared to TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, Pierre: *Chuť žít: (výbor studií a meditací)*. Ed. Jiří Němec. Praha: Vyšehrad, 1970. 243 s.; *týž: Jak věřím*. Překlad Věra Dvořáková a Jan Jones. Praha: Vyšehrad, 1997. 164 s.

2 Compared to DARWIN, Charles: *O vzniku druhů přírodním výběrem*. Ed. Hana Marsault. Vyd. 3., v nakl. Academia 2., rev. Praha: Academia, 2007. 579 s.

3 Compared to WOLLMAN, Frank: *Slované : kulturní obraz slovanského světa. Díl 2. Slovesnost Slovanů*. Praha: Vesmír, 1928. 259 s.

edge of “up-to-date”. Of course, it will be more appropriate to break down according to historicity, i.e. in the art according to the poetics and aesthetics of a given artistic style, similarly in literature according to the prevailing literary norm, poetics, points of view of literary criticism, etc.

If we accept the view that “*periodization is a process of systematic division of time*,” then this is a useful tool for understanding literature and art history, since it allows us to study trends, styles and movements in these organs of work.

It is precisely the study of movement – of “events” in art and literature – that belongs to the neurasthenic points of the field that can be called “*philosophy of art*” or “*philosophy of literature*”. The centerpiece of such a view is not in the analysis of individual elements of the structure and construction of the (literary) text but sees history as a movement, something plastic, flowing.

Understandably, there are all sorts of views on history and historical events. Therefore, before speaking of periodization, it must be explained how history and historicity can be understood.

## (Literary) History

History is the story that people tell about the past. It’s a way of understanding how our world came into being, but also how our ancestors felt and thought about their lives and the world around them. The world in both: micro and macro forms. History is not just facts or data: it is also ideas and stories that have been passed down through generations of people. First, of course, from mouth to mouth, only later through a certain code and communication channel. Folklore and manifestations of feelings (expressed in body painting, clothing, body accessories, etc.) at some point arise but also disappear, at some point they also materialize. It is the case with the so-called solidification of hot lava – this is the moment folklore is written down and becomes a permanent part of writing.

## History is the story that people tell about the past

History is not science in the sense of data or series of data (what we know from mathematics or physics), but you can study it as if it was – and that’s what historians (of art or literature) do! History is not just about what happened in the past; it is also about how things change over time and why they have changed or stayed the same. In other words, history is about change itself.

History has many sub-areas and approaches: archaeology studies ancient human cultures by examining their material remains (such as tools); political history studies how governments have been organized over time; cultural history studies how ideas such as race or gender have changed over time; economic history studies how economies grow or shrink over time; diplomatic history focuses on international relations between states or peoples.

## Thus, literary history is not an exact science, but you can study it as if it were

History is not science in the sense of exact science. In fact, it is not even an exact science, although some areas of literary criticism are directed towards exactness (determining authorship – the so-called attribution of the text, versology, etc.). The history of literature is a social science, and it can be studied scientifically like other social sciences, but it is not quite like them because it does not have the same methods or rigor as the Natural Sciences.

The history of literature is a discipline of literary criticism and research that focuses on the written record, as opposed to oral transmission. In this sense, it is an “aesthetics” of literary documents belonging to a particular place at a given time, which can be as short as a few years to as long as many centuries. The idea that history is the result of an accumulation of events (the past) over time has been compared with Heraclitus’s saying: *“No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man”*. History understood as duration is what historians call *longue durée* or historiography in language other than English; historians across all historical periods have used a variety of methods when studying history and its sources in order to answer questions raised by their contemporary society and/or to address issues relevant to future generations.

### Literary Criticism and its Effects

Literary criticism has often been viewed as an expression of particular ideologies, sentiments, or values. It is seen as an instrument used to justify or condemn certain philosophical or historical positions. It is assumed that texts are produced within cultural contexts, which determine their meanings and maintain a kind of “distance” between the reader and the work that is at once cultural and emotional. This leads to a situation where criticism is reduced to mere ideological statements that reflect only the subjective views of the critic rather than some objective fact about a text; they are reduced to mere expressions of political bias and personal opinion. However, criticism can also function in a very different way, making it possible for readers not only to evaluate works but also to interact with them in an active manner.

In the sixteenth century, time began to be described not as a predetermined and unchangeable sequence of events but as a fluid phenomenon: ‘the river of time’. As such, it was subject to constant alteration by the passage of moments, memories and dreams. This conception of time allowed writers to merge history into their own lives by referring to shared experiences. The use of the concept of the river of time allowed Shakespeare to create a place where history and his own life spilled into each other.

The sixteenth century has been called many things, but one theme that is difficult to escape is that of change. With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Europe was in a position to take advantage of the advances made by Muslim thinkers and artists, including the introduction of coffee, pasta, oranges and tobacco into European society. All were

seen as exotic novelties at first until they took their place as common items used in everyday life. In addition, many nations were experiencing some kind of revolution or rebuilding following periods of war and turmoil. These changes opened up new opportunities for people living further away from urban centers who had previously been excluded from participating fully in society as merchants or traders due to their poverty.

What was brought from Constantinople to Italian city states were valuable manuscripts (Platon, Cicero etc.). They were again read, interpreted and used in a practical way.

The Renaissance was a period of cultural rebirth in Europe that began in Italy and spread to the rest of Western Europe, as well as much of Eastern Europe and parts of Central, North and South America. This was marked by a re-exploration of classical antiquity, which had been largely lost to Europe during the Middle Ages. Scholars discovered a wide range of scientific, philosophical, political and artistic ideas in the texts that had been preserved by Arab scholars from across the Mediterranean region. These ideas included ancient Greek philosophy, Roman law and literature, history and statistics, along with lessons on mechanics and geometry. The Renaissance was a revival of interest in classical antiquity. It involved a renewed study of the works of classical authors, such as those of Plato and Aristotle, who had been neglected for many centuries by Western European scholars. As stated earlier, Renaissance scholars also studied the writings of important ancient writers such as Cicero and Tacitus (who wrote in Latin) and Homer (who wrote in Greek).

The Renaissance was a period of cultural rebirth which began in Italy during the fourteenth century and continued until about 1600. During this time, Europe entered a new age and started to think, write and paint differently from what had come before. Renaissance writers include Petrarch (1304–1374), Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) and Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540). Renaissance artists include Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475); however, there were many more besides these two giants of art history. Medieval literature in all European countries was strongly influenced by Latin and Greek texts, both classical and post-classical. Thus, medieval works were derivative and written in the tradition of antiquity. Medieval authors borrowed from classical Latin and Greek authors, often reinterpreting them as though they were writing in their native language. The Renaissance in Central Europe did not take off until around 1450 when German scholars started to study ancient texts more seriously than before. It was derivative because, at this time, they did not have a formed or entirely independent national identity. Central Europe was late compared to the Italian city-states, so medieval writers there lacked some key elements (such as individualism) that characterized Florentine and Venetian humanists.

The Renaissance in Central Europe was well developed by the time Italy reached its full extent of cultural and political development. The further development of Germany, Switzerland, France and Poland bore the fruits of the Renaissance culture in literature. The German language contributed to the rise of modern languages, especially English, which was heavily influenced by German speakers who entered into English politics as

well as introduced their language in England and thus enriched it with German vocabulary.

The literary Renaissance in the Czech lands was an extended and complicated process whose influences can be traced to classical antiquity but which culminated only in the seventeenth century. From the fourteenth century onwards, the Czech language became increasingly influenced by German. During the fifteenth century, sophisticated prose texts appeared for the first time in Czech; these attracted foreign scholars as well as local ones like Jan Hus (around 1370–1415) and his followers, who wrote religious texts in their native language. The Hussites introduced a new interest in outside texts, particularly those from Germany, such as Luther's Bible translation. The specifics of the Czech Renaissance were two directions of humanistic studies: one was a direction related to antiquity like elsewhere, the other was connected with national goals and the domestic social situation. The interest in ancient ages reappeared in Baroque – antiquity was used as a part of fiction at that time.<sup>4</sup>

During the Renaissance, European intellectuals first wrote and thought about history from a secular perspective. This new approach to understanding the past led historians to write about a broad range of subjects (e.g., wars, revolutions) from various perspectives rather than only from their own national or religious loyalties. The classical theories concerning writing history, such as those of Thucydides, Cicero, and Machiavelli, were rediscovered during the Renaissance and provided models for scholarly writing about the Middle Ages and early modern period. Historians began to understand how humans were shaped by their environment, including their family backgrounds, economic situations, social relationships with others living around them and other factors that influenced their lives and actions.

From the Renaissance onward, Western historians have focused increasingly on the meaning of history and the question of how to write it. The first major historian of the Renaissance, Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897), emphasized the importance of individualism in his work and was influential in making European history into a scholarly endeavor rather than just a political treatise or romanticized record. Herbert Butterfield (1900–1979) applied the idea of “Whig History” to modern historical writing. He argued that historians tend to view their work as progress toward enlightenment and rationality – an idealistic process which is actually never reached.

The Renaissance and the development of thinking about history and the periodization of history are central concerns in Protestant or Anglican countries. Our discussions will address broader cultural themes such as the impact of Protestantism on literature, new trends in biography and autobiography, changing forms of writing about religion, natural philosophy and science, the rise of empiricism and empiricist ideas about hu-

4 Compared to KOPECKÝ, Milan: *Český humanismus*. Praha: Melantrich, 1988. 282 s.; týž: *Daniel Adam z Veleslavína: studie s ukázkami z díla Veleslavínova*. Praha: Svobodné slovo, 1962. 178 s.; PAVERA, Libor: *Kazatel Daniel Nitsch : kapitola z barokní homiletiky*. Brno: Istenis, 2003. 231 s.; PETRŮ, Eduard: *Vzdálené hlasy: studie o starší české literatuře*. Olomouc: Votobia, 1996. 443 s.; HLOBIL, Ivo – PETRŮ, Eduard: *Humanismus a raná renesance na Moravě*. Praha: Academia, 1992. 274 s.

man nature, dramatic satire as a type of social criticism, the historical novel and other narrative genres.

Historical writing is a timeline of events written by people who have lived in the past, using documents and artifacts. The studying of history dates back to antiquity which referred to as “inquiry” into the past by the first historian, Herodotus. History can be described as the study of the human past, and it can be divided into three major parts – prehistory, history and post-history. Similar are the attitudes to history in three different currents. Three or more ways of looking at history were created over time.

## **There are many different ways to think about history – “procesual”, “postprocesual”, and “critical”**

The procedural approach to history assumes that there is a causal chain that can be traced back in time. That is, all events are somehow interconnected, and all follow a specific pattern. The post-process school of thought rejects this idea because it assumes that everything has already happened, so we can no longer change anything-it’s too late! Instead, postproccessionalists believe that everything happens at once: every possible outcome exists simultaneously in an infinite number of parallel universes (or even just one). They argue against linearity because it ignores these other possibilities of what could be happening at a given moment.

A critical approach focuses on how power structures affect our understanding of what constitutes truth versus fiction; who gets access to knowledge production processes, such as writing books or conducting research projects; whose voices are heard over others in society as a whole?

## **The process approach treats history as a science that can be used to predict the future**

According to this view, history is a series of events that can be understood as a causal chain. Procedural historians look for patterns and patterns in history; they believe that if you understand how things work now, you will be able to predict their behavior in the future. They use scientific methods such as experiments (controlled tests) and statistical analysis to test their ideas about how societies evolve over time.

Here, in this area, which uses exact data to project the future of mankind, one can undoubtedly include a prospectus, cultivated in the future, for example, by the Spanish author J. L. Abellán (1933).<sup>5</sup> His ideas are very much appreciated by the author of this article – they teach the so-called Spanish prospectus, which aims to create megatrends and explain certain directions in which humanity should develop in order to preserve itself, in order to preserve the overall sustainability of man and the world that surrounds him.

5 Compared to ABELLÁN, José Luis: *Myšlienky pre XXI. storočie*. Bratislava: Archa, 1997. 112 s.



## The post-process approach focuses on understanding why things happened the way they did

It deals with the processes that led to events and their significance, as well as the social and cultural context of these events. In addition, it considers how different people perceive the event differently, depending on their perspective or worldview.

Postprocessionalists do not believe in objective truth; instead, they claim that there are multiple truths regarding a single event based on different perspectives (e.g. Postprocessionalist archaeology thus emphasizes significance over material remains – less interested in what the objects were made of than what they meant to those who used or created them).

## Critical histories are skeptical and often deconstructive in nature

They question the validity of the evidence, the motives of the people who wrote it, and their intentions.

Critical historians approach sources with a critical eye and look for gaps or inconsistencies in the accounts that may have been deliberately omitted by those who write them. Critical historians also look at how these sources were used by later historians to draw conclusions about the past.

## Final summary

History is – in conclusion – something that people have written down and told stories about over time. So, the most important is the “keyword” story. It should be based on facts that can be verified and proven to be valid again and again (as in the exact sciences), it should have Dynamics corresponding to a certain period, it should have places “full”, not places “vague” and “thin”, and it should not encroach too much fiction, fiction simply must not prevail over facts, on the whole, it should be a well-constructed story with certain periodization points, beginning, course and conclusion. Where to get those points is, of course, the right question.

The basis is knowledge of materials, critically evaluated material, links within national literature, as well as between literary units and each other, good research methods, especially comparative studies.<sup>6</sup>

6 Compared to ĎURIŠIN, Dionýz: *Čo je svetová literatúra?* Bratislava: Obzor, 1992. 209 s.; KALISTA, Zdeněk: *Cesty historikova myslení.* Ed. Zdeněk Beneš. Praha: Garamond, 2002. 285 s.; POSPÍŠIL, Ivo et al.: *Světové literatury 20. století v kostce: americká, britská, francouzská, italská, Latinské Ameriky, německá, ruská, španělská.* Praha: Libri, 1999. 239 s.; POSPÍŠIL, Ivo – ZELENKA, Miloš: *Pojem a koncepce světové literatury.* Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity. D, Rada literárněvědná. 1996, roč. 44, č. D42, s. [103]–112; POSPÍŠIL, Ivo: *Ke koncepcím dějin literatury: obecné a zvláštní.* Slavica litteraria 13, 2010, č. 1–2, s. [33]–46. Compare the excellent anthology to comparative literature – JANASZEK-IVANIČKOVÁ, Halina: *O współczesnej komparatystyce literackiej.* Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1980. 253 s. or *Antologia zagranicznej komparatystyki literackiej.* Redakcja Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková. Wydawca: IK, 1997.

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