

## MULTILINGUALISM AND THE CZECHOSLOVAK CONTEXT OF «MINOR LITERATURE»

### *El multilingüismo y el contexto checoslovaco de «Literatura menor»*

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RESUMEN: La teoría de la «literatura menor» de Gilles Deleuze y Félix Guattari ha tenido un impacto considerable no sólo en el estudio de Franz Kafka, sino también en el campo de la literatura comparada. Este artículo demanda si las suposiciones lingüísticas de esta teoría son adecuadas para el complejo panorama cultural de la Praga moderna, y examina las formas en que las especulaciones sobre las literaturas menores de Deleuze y Guattari pasan por alto o simplifican aspectos importantes del contexto literario checoslovaco. Para un contra-punto de vista, se basa en Milan Kundera, que ofrece las «naciones pequeñas» como un punto de vista diferente de la historia europea.

*Palabras clave:* Literatura Menor, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Franz Kafka, Milan Kundera.

ABSTRACT: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of «minor literature» has had considerable impact not only on the study of Franz Kafka, but on the field of comparative literature. This article questions whether this theory's linguistic assumptions are adequate for the complex cultural landscape of modern Prague, and examines the ways in which Deleuze and Guattari's speculations on minor literatures overlook or simplify important aspects of the Czechoslovak literary context. For a counter-perspective, it draws on Milan Kundera, who offers the «small nations» as a different vantage point on European history.

*Key words:* Minor Literature, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Franz Kafka, Milan Kundera.

In recent years, the definition of world literature, previously limited to a canon of European classics, has been globalized to include works from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Nonetheless, despite the increasing geographic diversity represented in the contemporary definition of world literature, there is still an emphasis on works produced in English, French, Spanish and other major languages. As critical attention has shifted from the West to postcolonial literatures, a blind spot has remained: the post-Communist world (previously known as the «Eastern Bloc»). A truly comparative approach to Central European literature, emphasizing the unique features of this region shared by diverse nations and languages, is still uncommon in literary criticism. One exception is the work of Claudio Guillén, with its sensitivity to multicultural settings from the Iberian peninsula to the Austro-Hungarian realms. In his discussion (1993, 261) of «*multilingualism*, so important throughout the literary history of the West» (Guillén 1993, 268), points out:

It is important to distinguish between writers whose multilingualism—effective or not— is a personal destiny... like Joseph Conrad, and those who became multilingual in response to the peculiarities of their social surroundings and the the particular historical moment handed them by fate. Great differences, both spatial and temporal, obtain between these innately polyglot circumstances, and the critic attempting to evaluate a bilingual writer should be acutely aware of these differences, since they provide both a starting point and background necessary for any analysis.

Guillén provides examples ranging from thirteenth-century Mallorca to nineteenth-century Budapest, but the best-known case he mentions is the Prague of Franz Kafka. For decades after his death, Kafka was seen mainly as a German writer whose obscure national origins in provincial Bohemia (which became part of Czechoslovakia in 1918) enhanced his stature as a prophet of modern alienation. Only gradually did the multilingual situation

of German/Czech/Jewish Prague toward the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire begin to enter critical interpretations of Kafka's work.

The most influential study of Kafka's «multilingualism», *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure (Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature)*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, bring Kafka's observations on national identity together with their own speculations on language. With Kafka's diary as their starting point, they assert (1986, 17-18) that Kafka was caught between the «four languages» of Jewish Prague (German, Czech, Yiddish, and Hebrew): cut off from the national territory of his native German, and unable to connect with the Czech territory surrounding him, much less with a Jewish homeland. Kafka's attempt to escape this «deterritorialization», by writing in the dialect of «Prague German», results in his creating a «minor literature», or «the literature which a minority constructs within a major language». This is characterized by «language» with «a high coefficient of deterritorialization», a «cramped space» which forces everything «to connect immediately to politics» and «a collective enunciation». A key part of minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari claim (1986, 24), is the difficulty of crossing linguistic borders: «What can be said in one language cannot be said in another, and the totality of what can and can't be said varies necessarily with each language and with the connections between these languages»<sup>1</sup>. This theory has had considerable impact not only on the study of Kafka's writing, but more broadly on the comparative study of world literature. Yet despite the political claims of Deleuze and Guattari's work, the concept of «minor literature» does not sufficiently address (to echo Guillén's warning) «the peculiarities of [Kafka's] social surroundings» in Prague nor of «the particular historical moment» of modern Czechoslovakia.

In his influential essay «The Tragedy of Central Europe», Milan Kundera (1984, 108) describes a Central European «vision of the world, a vision based on a deep distrust of History... The people of Central Europe... represent the wrong side of this History: its victims and outsiders». The Jews of Central Europe, in particular, represent the region's «intellectual cement, a condensed version of its spirit, creators of its spiritual unity». He contrasts Kafka (1984, 107-108) to another Jewish writer of Prague:

The great Czech poet Julius Zeyer was born in Prague to a German-speaking family: it was his own choice to speak Czech. The mother tongue of Hermann Kafka, on the other hand, was Czech, while his son Franz took

1. This is an allusion to Michel Foucault, who (DELEUZE and GUATTARI 1968, 96f) «insists on the importance of the distribution between what can be said in a language at a certain moment and what cannot be said (even if it can be done)».

up German... What a tangle of national destinies among even the most representative figures of each country!

Certainly, Kundera's nostalgic evocation of a lost multicultural Central Europe is highly politicized, influenced by his own marginal position as a Cold War exile in the West and by European indifference to the countries of the «Eastern Bloc». As Stanley Corngold (1994, 91) has pointed out, «The ongoing Central and Eastern European use of Kafka aims chiefly to open a source of political and polemical impulses heightening the self-consciousness of peoples living on the margin of great powers». However, while both Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka* and Kundera's essays from the same period use multilingualism as a cornerstone of their arguments, they move in profoundly different directions: the French theorists suggest that Kafka attempted to liberate himself from a limited cultural territory, but the Czech novelist suggests that it is precisely the smallness of this «realm» that gives it a unique Central European «vision».

This study uses Deleuze and Guattari's «minor literature» as the starting point for an exploration of the role of multilingualism in Czechoslovakia, examining their claims in relationship to Kafka's original reflections on «small literatures», as well as the work of Czech and Slovak writers. Most studies of «minor literature» have focused on writings by ethnic or political minorities in «major» languages, usually taken to be English, French, or German. The troubling aspect of this is not the ignorance of Czech and Slavic literatures among postcolonial critics, but rather the way that the less commonly spoken languages have been marginalized within this supposedly «liberating» model. However, less widespread languages can take on a «major» function in multilingual settings, as is the case for Czech in the Czechoslovak context. It is important to note that Czech and Slovak are closely related but separate Slavic languages (one might compare their relationship to that of Castilian and Catalan in the Spanish context) and there was never actually a unified «Czechoslovak» literature. Despite attempts to preserve a unified literary language for the two nations, the standard version of literary Slovak was established in the mid-nineteenth century. The interwar republic officially considered «Czechoslovak» to be the national language, but Slovak writers (like Prague Germans) remained outside the mainstream of Czech literature. Although decades of Czechoslovak unity created a bilingual public, Slovak was persistently seen as a «minority» language by Czech-speakers. Yet popular culture such as film and particularly music crossed the linguistic divide more easily than literature, creating a shared «Czechoslovak» cultural space that continues to some extent even today.

Czech had been a developed literary language before 1400 (the Bohemian theologian Jan Hus was known across Europe). However, after

Bohemia was defeated by the Habsburgs in 1620, most of the nobility and urban elite in the Czech lands spoke only German. The nineteenth century was dominated by the rebirth of Czech language and culture, known as the Czech National Revival. Like the rebirth of other «folk» languages in the early modern period, the Revival was inspired by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder and his image of the Slavs as a peace-loving, hard-working folk<sup>2</sup>. One of the ironies of the period, as Hroch (2004, 104) has shown, is that the group of scholars who promoted the concept of a nation based on the Czech language, rather than a multiethnic Bohemia, originally published their major works in German. Nineteenth-century Czech writers such as Karel Havlíček-Borovský were increasingly vocal in their demands for cultural equality with the Germans, as Agnew (2003, 70) points out, but at the same time, they were suspicious of Bohemian Jews, whom they considered more closely aligned with German-speakers.

Along with the pressure of Austrian-German culture «from above», Czechs were also encountering resistance «from within», the movement known as the Slovak National Awakening (the counterpart to the Czech National Revival). Unlike the Czechs, the Slovaks of «Upper Hungary» had never had an independent kingdom, nor a developed literary language, and for centuries they had used an adapted form of «Biblical Czech» (based on the first complete Czech translation of the Bible, the *Kralice* Bible of 1613), as well as Latin, German, and Hungarian. As late as the 1820s, the Slovak poet Ján Kollár composed his epic *Slávy dcera* (*Slava's Daughter*) in Czech. For Claudio Guillén (1993, 11), Kollár was an «exile» writer who «forged not only modern Slavic poetry but also a militant conception of pan-Slavism... [while] surrounded by other ethnic communities, primarily those speaking Hungarian and German». Kollár believed in cultural «reciprocity» between the Czechs and Slovaks and urged for a shared literary language, considering «Czechoslovak» as one of the four main Slavic languages. However, a strong sense of distinctly «Slovak» identity had emerged, faced with increasing political pressure from Hungary against minority languages. Under these circumstances, the tiny Slovak intelligentsia felt a greater urgency to preserve the uniqueness of their language rather than merging willingly with the Czechs. In 1843, a group led by Ľudovít Štúr created a version based on the language spoken in the central part of Slovakia, which is still in use today. As Štúr (Pynsent 1994, 185) declared, «Every nation is most ardently

2. In particular, HERDER'S *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (*Ideas toward a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, 1784) predicted a glorious future for the humble Slavic nations.

coupled with its language... language is, then, the surest sign of the essence and individuality of every nation». Štúr was attacked for this separatism by Havlíček-Borovský (1986, 59), who called it the «bitterest irony» that a Slovak had been able «to tear Slovakia away from us, [the Czechs], who had been so strongly joined with it in literature and nationality!». However, the creation of the Slovak literary language placed Czech in the role of a «major language» for Slovak writers.

Czech literature became more cosmopolitan in the late nineteenth century, epitomized by the «Lumír» group whose main figures were Julius Zeyer and the poet and translator Jaroslav Vrchlický. As the critic F. X. Šalda (Lehár 330-331) later observed, «Vrchlický has been the greatest revolution until now in the Czech cultural world. For a gloomy and meditative nation, [...] Vrchlický's poetry breaks in with joyful fanfares». Rainer Maria Rilke (the best-known Prague-German poet) wrote two of his early poems as tributes to Zeyer and Vrchlický; both poems, George C. Schoolfield (2009, 72) notes, «overflow with flattery». However, as Stanislav Šmatlák (2001, 193) has pointed out, the Slovak poet Svetozár Hurban Vajanský criticized Vrchlický for his «concept of art that does not “offend” either morality, or the “Slavic nature” of mankind. Both elements –morality and Slavness– were an integral part of the current “national” conception of Slovak literature». Nonetheless, Vajanský's critique demonstrates that Slovak writers continued to look to Czech literature for a connection to the wider world, even after the divergence of the two literary languages. Zeyer's case showed the growing horizons of Czech literature even more dramatically: while his background (as Kundera has pointed out) was German-Jewish, he chose to write in Czech; one of his stories, «Samko the Bird» (1896) featured a Slovak protagonist.

Interestingly, while his diaries contain few specific references to Czech literature, Kafka (1948, 140) criticizes Vrchlický's melodrama *Hippodamie*, which he attended in December 1911 at the Czech National Theater, as «a rambling about in Greek mythology without rhyme or reason... All this must be sad for a Czech who knows even a little of the world». In contrast, Kafka's reaction to the Yiddish-language theater of the Polish-Jewish actor Yitzhak Löwy was more positive, and in October 1911 he (1948, 65) wrote his detailed observations on a performance he saw in Prague, comparing their movements to the *šlapák*, a Czech folk dance. He concludes (1948, 70) that

Yiddish literature [...] is obviously characterized by an uninterrupted tradition of national struggle that determines every work. A tradition, therefore, that pervades no other literature, not even that of the most oppressed people. It may be that other peoples in times of war make a success out of a pugnacious national literature, and that other works, standing at a greater

remove, acquire from the enthusiasm of the audience a national character too, as is the case with *The Bartered Bride*, but here there appear to be only works of the first type, and indeed always.

In his entry for December 25, 1911, inspired by «what I understand about contemporary Jewish literature in Warsaw through Lowy and of contemporary Czech literature partly through my own insight», Kafka (1948, 148-149) considers the benefits and limitations of literature in a «small nation». He creates a «character sketch of the literature of small peoples» and outlines three attributes of these literatures: «liveliness», «less constraint» (including the use of «minor themes»), and «popularity» (which includes a «connection with politics»). The literature of such nations is enriched by the lack of a major talent overshadowing other writers: «The independence of the individual writer, naturally only within the national boundaries, is better preserved». He concludes that «many of the benefits of literature... can be produced even by a literature whose development is not in actual fact unusually broad in scope, but seems to be, because it lacks outstanding talents». Kafka (1948, 151-152) describes these «benefits» in detail, including «the pride which a nation gains from a literature of its own and the support it is afforded in the face of the hostile surrounding world». Yet these nations could also turn a «hostile» face back to their own minority groups, and Kafka's reference to national «pride» in Prague has more than a hint of irony. Vrchlický's work, is a force of innovation within the Czech context, seems to reflect the limitations of a small literature without the benefit of «liveliness». Nonetheless, Czech culture (which he describes from his «own insight») is more familiar to Kafka than Yiddish (which was hardly spoken in Prague), and in his analysis of the «national struggle» of Yiddish writers, his point of reference is Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta (The Bartered Bride)*, 1870), which consciously drew on Czech folk sources in order to create a «national opera».

In formulating their theory of minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 16) draw on these reflections on «small literatures» but partly misinterpret Kafka's cultural references, such as conflating Yiddish and (non-Jewish) Czech literature into a single «Jewish literature» for their own argument: «The problem of expression is staked out by Kafka [...] in relation to those literatures that are considered minor, for example, the Jewish literature [sic] of Warsaw and Prague». They also refer to Kafka's (1977, 289) 1921 letter to Max Brod, in which he alludes to the «three impossibilities» facing Jewish writers in German: «the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing differently... thus it was a literature impossible from all sides». Deleuze and Guattari take this «impossibility» as a definitive statement on the situation in Prague, overlooking the role that Jewish writers

like Brod played as cultural mediators between other national groups, to say nothing of the increasing number of Jewish writers who were writing in Czech. Thus they conclude the German-Jewish writer is separated by language from the surrounding territory: «The impossibility of writing other than in German is for the Prague Jews the feeling of an irreducible distance from their primitive Czech territoriality». Developing their concept of «minor» as «the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature», Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 18) add that every author «who has the misfortune of being born in the country of a great literature must write in its language, just as a Czech Jew writes in German, or an [Uzbek] writes in Russian». This is one of their most puzzling observations, setting the obscure Uzbek reference aside (while the only Central Asian writer to make any mark on world literature, the Kyrgyz Chingiz Aitmatov, wrote in Russian, the Soviets simultaneously supported writing in Uzbek and other «minority» languages). Within two pages, Kafka (referred to elsewhere as a «Czechoslovakian Jew») has been turned from a «Prague Jew» into a «Czech Jew», which is something quite different, but more importantly, it is precisely his «misfortune» of *not* being born in Germany, but in polyglot Prague, that allows Kafka to become, in Deleuze and Guattari's (1986, 19) terms, «a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to [his] own language». He is not, as they (1986, 25) claim, «one of the few Jewish writers in Prague to understand and speak Czech», although he apparently spoke Czech better than many other Prague-German authors (both Jewish, like Max Brod, and non-Jewish, like Rainer Maria Rilke).

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 20) explain that «the situation of the German language in Czechoslovakia, as a fluid language intermixed with Czech and Yiddish, will allow Kafka the possibility of invention»<sup>3</sup>. Their main source on the linguistic situation in Prague is not Kafka's own work, but the German critic Franz Wagenbach (Anderson, 1989, 45), who claims that Kafka «fought against stylistic pathos as well as the impoverished Prague German by imposing an extreme rigor on the verbal material offered to him by his environment»<sup>4</sup>. Kafka's contemporary Johannes Urzidil (1968,

3. It is noteworthy that the Czech translator of Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka* made a slight adaptation here for Czech readers, referring to «the case of German in its *special* Czechoslovak situation» («případě němčiny v její zvláštní československé situaci») [emphasis added]. See Deleuze and GUATTARI, 2001, 109.

4. Unfortunately, the work originally cited by Deleuze and Guattari is the French translation (1967) of Wagenbach's *Franz Kafka* (1958), which does not exist in a full English translation. On the inaccuracies in the French translation of Wagenbach used by Deleuze and Guattari, see BOQUE, 2003.

11-12) suggests that the «four ethnic sources» of Prague (that is, German, Czech, Jewish and Austrian, rather than Yiddish) «removed» the German writers of Prague «from a locally circumscribed atmosphere to a larger and more fundamental one». In terms resembling but almost the reverse of Deleuze and Guattari's «cramped space», Urzidil insists that Prague German was actually purer than most German dialects, precisely because of its territorial isolation. As David Damrosch (2003, 201) has pointed out, «Though [Kafka] wrote a locally inflected German, so lightly punctuated as to create frequent run-on sentences, he meticulously regularized his spelling and punctuation when he prepared manuscripts for publication». By taking Kafka's ironic and individual perspective as a standard for all Prague-Jewish writers, and relying on other German observers such as Wagenbach, Deleuze and Guattari present a limited view of the linguistic options available in early twentieth-century Prague, particularly the role of Czech.

Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 24) do provide an alternative to the restrictive opposition of major/minor within their own essay, with the clarification: «One language can fill a certain function for one material and another function for another material. Each function of a language divides up in turn and carries with it multiple centers of power». In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they (1987, 102-103) state more clearly that the categories of «major» and «minor» should be interpreted in terms of language *roles*, arguing that «the more a language has or acquires the characteristics of a major language, the more it is affected by continuous variations that transpose it into a «minor» language». They describe «the linguistic situation in the old Austrian empire: German was a major language in relation to the minorities, but as such it could not avoid being treated by those minorities in a way that made it a minor language in relation to the German of the Germans. There is no language that does not have intralinguistic, endogenous, internal minorities». In this section, it is only «Prague German» that seems to qualify as a «minor» language, but Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 104) add Czech in the following remark: «Doubtless, in the Austrian empire Czech was a minor language in relation to German; but the German of Prague already functioned as a potentially minor language in relation to the German of Vienna or Berlin; and Kafka, a Czechoslovakian Jew writing in German, submits German to creative treatment as a minor language». One of the less frequently analyzed aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's «minor literature» theory is the «tetralinguistic» model of language, which allows for a more nuanced context of multilingualism. Drawing on the work of Henri Gobard, they propose (1986, 23) four functions of language (vernacular, vehicular, mythic, and referential) defined by location: «vernacular is here; vehicular language is everywhere; referential language is over there; mythic language

is beyond». In Prague, the «vernacular» Czech is the everyday language of most of the population, the «vehicular» German serves an official function in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the «mythic» Hebrew is limited to religious use<sup>5</sup>. Perhaps the most ambiguous of these categories is referential language, which has a function of «sense and culture» and allows for «cultural reterritorialization». The «tetralingual» model is more accommodating to the shifting roles that languages in multilingual societies, although they do not seem aware that Czech, for example, moved from «vernacular» minor language in the Austro-Hungarian Empire to «vehicular» language of the new Czechoslovak Republic<sup>6</sup>.

The most detailed theoretical application of Deleuze and Guattari's «minor literature» to the Prague context is Scott Spector's *Prague Territories*, which examines the different «figures of territory, identity, and ideology» in German-Jewish Prague. Spector (1999, 29) points out that although «the historical circumstances in which Kafka found himself allowed for a uniquely nuanced and complex web of territorial relations to be articulated... Deleuze and Guattari dismiss the production of the rest of the Prague writers who benefited from the same rare contextual and linguistic condition». *Prague Territories* is «an attempt to reveal the complexity of the aesthetic and political projects of Kafka's fellow Prague writers, and the kinship of their projects to his». All of these texts, whether prose, poetry, or translations, «project figures of territory, identity, and ideology in different ways from him and from each other». Spector points out that the claim of a «minority» identity is complex, since they «were caught between identities “outside” and “inside” the power structure»: Jews were actually a majority among Prague Germans, just as German-speakers dominated the Empire. He sees the key to Prague-German identity in the importance that many of its participants placed on translation, through which they redefined their cultural and linguistic boundaries, even though Prague-German writers could not be fully «absorbed» by the Czech literary tradition.

Within the final decade of Kafka's life, the political and cultural functions of the Czech and German languages shifted dramatically. With the fall of

5. For a thoroughly researched analysis of the interaction between Kafka's «four languages» in his work, with particular emphasis on his knowledge of Czech, see NEKULA 2003, especially Chapter 8, «Kafkova česká četba v kontextu», 301-359.

6. Deleuze (GOBARD 1977, 11) wrote the introduction to Gobard's *L'aliénation linguistique*, commenting that Czech Jews were «afraid of Yiddish as a vehicular language, [and] had forgotten Czech as another vehicular language of the rural milieux from which they had come». However, Yiddish is never explicitly referred to as either «referential» or «vehicular» in *Kafka* itself.

the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, the Czech lands, Slovakia, and Ruthenia were joined to form the newly-established Czechoslovakia led by President Tomáš G. Masaryk, in which Czech speakers became the largest group and Germans found themselves a minority. Jews (more often educated in German but speaking both languages, as did Kafka) were once again caught in the middle. Although interwar Czechoslovakia experienced great cultural development, the same political issues that dominated the nineteenth century in Bohemia (the relationships between the majority Czechs and the German and Jewish minorities) remained key issues, even though the power balance had shifted. The situation became even more complex with the addition of Slovakia, whose southern regions were dominated by ethnic Hungarians, and even some Slovaks (although linguistically and ethnically close to the Czechs) were unhappy to be under Czech rule. While Czechoslovakia was one of the freest states for Jews in interwar Central Europe, the acceptance of Jews into Czechoslovak society, as Hillel Kieval (1988, 200) has explained, was largely dependent on their assimilation into Czech culture.

Czech literature's brief new golden age was personified in Karel Čapek, who became famous abroad for his plays, especially the international hit *R.U.R.* (1920), which popularized the word «robot». Čapek, who was closely associated with President Masaryk, was a strong proponent of the official ideology of a unified Czechoslovak nation. In response to a Slovak interviewer in 1931, Čapek (1984, 40-41) stated, «The Czechs are a different nation than the Slovaks, but not in language. The Slovak question is not a language question at all. It concerns two nations divided not by language, but by character!». He repeats the common perceptions of the Slovaks as a more «sociable» nation than the Czechs, but adds that the Czechs can bring a «higher culture of civilization» to Slovakia. He also compares the situation of the Czechs and Slovaks (as he does elsewhere in more detail) to the English and Scottish in Great Britain. Čapek also comments on Slovak literature, admitting that «a Czech understands spoken Slovak more quickly than written Slovak». He then urges Slovak literature to change its course from the «one-sidedness» that characterized it before the establishment of the Republic: «Slovak literature needs to stop being a [simple] protest, and to become a celebration of Slovak life». Here Čapek suggests that Slovak literature can play the role of challenging and expanding Czechoslovak culture, creating a «minor literature» much as Deleuze and Guattari suggest the influence of Czech had done for Kafka's German.

Milan Kundera (2007, 29) returns to the topic of Kafka in his collection *Le Rideau (The Curtain)*, and scorns the widespread notion among the French («who are not used to distinguishing nation from state») that Kafka

was a Czech writer: «Of course that is nonsense. Although from 1918 on he was, indeed, a citizen of the newly constituted Czechoslovakia, Kafka wrote solely in German, and he considered himself a German writer»<sup>7</sup>. If Kafka had written in Czech, Kundera adds, no Czech editor or publisher would have had the «necessary authority» to introduce his works to world readers, the way that Max Brod did «with the help of the greatest German writers». He concludes, «Even if a Prague editor had managed to publish the books of a hypothetical Czech Kafka, none of his compatriots (that is to say, no Czech) would have had the authority needed to familiarize the world with those extravagant texts... No, believe me, nobody would know Kafka today –nobody– if he had been Czech». Kundera (2007, 30-31) cites from Kafka's *Diary* on the literature of small nations, specifically Kafka's «surprising observation» that what in a large nation «provokes a brief flurry of interest, here brings down nothing less than a life-or-death decree». This reminds him of the nineteenth-century Czech context, but like Kafka, rather than referring to a literary work, he alludes to Bedřich Smetana and his 1864 «chorus [...] with the lines "Rejoice, rejoice, voracious raven, you have a treat in store: soon you will feast upon a traitor to our country"». A «traitor» at that time, he explains, «was any Czech who decided to leave Prague for Vienna and participate peacefully in German life there». Kundera is alluding to his own sense of being perceived as a «traitor» for leaving Czechoslovakia for Paris, and particularly for abandoning the Czech language in the late 1980s and composing his later literary works in French. The only way to fully understand literary works, Kundera (2007, 45) suggests, is to see them not only in terms of their «small» national context, and the «large» world context, but most importantly, in the «median» regional context (in this case, Central Europe). While he does not allude to the concept of «minor literature» that was inspired by exactly the same source, his insistence on the need for a «median context» provides a «means of escape» from Kafka's division of large and small literatures, which has led to Deleuze and Guattari's dead-end opposition of «major» and «minor».

In the nineteenth century, as Kafka had suggested, language and territory became indelibly linked to identity, and even after the fall of Communism in 1989, little has changed, at least for the small nations of Central Europe. The vulnerability of these nations, Kundera suggests, have allowed different perspectives on power to emerge. The challenge of finding a

7. The fact that Kundera insists on this point shows how much things have changed from previous decades, when Kafka was almost always considered «German» and his Czech birthplace was largely irrelevant.

permanent identity in this region where borders have so frequently changed, shows the artificiality of all national identities, even those who greater stability leads us to take them for granted. To fully explore the historical development of smaller literatures across Europe and beyond, literary criticism requires a nuanced exploration of the shifting roles of language in multilingual settings. Thus, as theoretically fruitful as Deleuze and Guattari's «minor literature» has been for cultural studies, Kafka's work is not the final point of «deterritorialization» in the former Czechoslovakia; it is only the beginning.

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