

**Ruch komparatystyczny
w Europie Środkowej**

**CZECH-SLOVAK COMPARATIVE STUDIES
“REBORN”. A NEW ASSOCIATION ON THE WAY**

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(Nitra)

Słowa kluczowe: czeska i słowacka komparatystyka – Czesko-Słowacka Asocjacja Literatury Porównawczej – kongresy ICLA/AILC – Slavomír Wollman – Dionýz Ďurišin – tradycja strukturalizmu – teoria międzyliterackości

Key words: Czech and Slovak comparative studies – the Czech-Slovak Association of Comparative Research – the ICLA/AICL congresses – Slavomír Wollman – Dionýz Ďurišin – structuralist tradition – the theory of interliterariness

Abstrakt: Miloš Zelenka, „ODRODZENIE“ CZESKO-SŁOWACKICH STUDIÓW PORÓWNAWCZYCH. NOWA ASOCJACJA W DRODZE. *PORÓWNIANIA* 18, 2016. T. XVIII. S. 339-348. ISSN 1733-165X. Artykuł informuje o obecnym stanie czeskiej i słowackiej myśli dotyczącej literatury porównawczej z pozycji metod, obszarów tematycznych i bazy instytucjonalnej. Czeska i słowacka komparatystyka tworzyły dopełniającą się całość: z jednej strony była to slawistyczna tradycja wychodząca z estetyki strukturalnej (S. Wollman), a z drugiej zmiierzająca do rozwoju teorii międzyliterackości i interdyscyplinarnych studiów nad literaturą światową (D. Ďurišin). Naruszenie tej „symbiozy” na przełomie lat 80.-90. ubiegłego stulecia oznaczało utratę kontaktu z komparatystyką w świecie. Celem nowopowstałej Czesko-Słowackiej Asocjacji Literatury Porównawczej z oficjalną siedzibą w Instytucie Światowej Literatury Słowackiej Akademii Nauk w Bratysławie jest wspieranie badań czeskich i słowackich w tym zakresie. Badacze, którzy są członkami Asocjacji w roku 2013 uczestniczyli w XX Światowym Kongresie Literatury Porównawczej w Paryżu (AILC/ICLA), gdzie prezentowali anglojęzyczny numer czasopisma „World Literature Studies” zatytułowany *Comparative Literary Studies as Cultural Criticism*. W lutym 2015 roku w Bratysławie odbyła się pierwsza wspólna konferencja czeskich i słowac-

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kich komparatystów („Slavica Litteraria“ 18, 2015, z. 1). Na XXI kongres AILC w Paryżu 2016 czescy i słowaccy komparatyści we współpracy z kolegami z zagranicy przygotowali panel *Old and New Concepts of Comparative Literature in the Globalized World*. Współczesna czeska i słowacka komparatystyka, która wychodzi z założenia, że teoretyczny i metodologiczny dyskurs dokonuje się w różnych językach i stosunkach władzy, odwołuje się do związków z nośnymi tradycjami modernizmu, w których znajduje inspirację do badań poetyki historycznej i teorii międzyliterackości, zamierzając w stronę studiów nad tożsamością kultur, postkolonializmu i studiów regionalnych.

Abstract: Miloš Zelenka, CZECH-SLOVAK COMPARATIVE STUDIES “REBORN”. A NEW ASSOCIATION ON THE WAY. *COMPARISONS* 18, 2016. Vol. XVIII. P. 339-348. ISSN 1733-165X. The paper conveys information on the current state of Czech and Slovak comparatist thought as regards its methods, thematical orientation and institutional base. Czech and Slovak comparative research has always been a complementary whole embracing, on the one hand, the tradition of Slavonic studies grounded in structural aesthetics (S. Wollman) and, on the other, the endeavour to develop the theory of interliterariness and interdisciplinary study of the world literature (D. Ďurišin). Much to our regret, the disruption of this “symbiosis” at the turn of 1990s resulted in losing contacts with the rest of the world. Therefore the prime objective of the newly established Czech-Slovak Association of Comparative Literature, based in the Institute for World Literature SAV, Bratislava, is to encourage Czech and Slovak literary research. The constitutive members of this association already in 2013 participated in the 20th World Congress of Comparative Literature in Paris (AILC/ICLA) so as to present the English version of their World Literature Studies journal under the title *Comparative Literary Studies as Cultural Criticism*. The first joint conference of Czech and Slovak comparatists (*Slavica Litteraria* 18, 2015, No. 1) was held in Bratislava in February 2015. For our next event, the 21st AILC Congress in Paris 2016, Czech and Slovak scholars, together with their foreign colleagues, have prepared a joint panel presentation *Old and New Concepts of Comparative Literature in the Globalized World*. Convinced that theoretical and methodological discourse is carried on in various languages and power stands, present-day Czech and Slovak comparative research, while following the pillar traditions of the past, espouses modern inspirations that obviously relinquish historical poetics and the theory of interliterariness, bound for exploring new cultural identities, post-colonial and area studies.

The late 20th century witnessed the waning of one developmental stage of Czech and Slovak comparative literature, which, irrespective of the country’s constitutional union or even the 1992 partition, always made up a complementary whole. Resting on a confrontation of two methodologically contrasting approaches, this “symbiosis” acted as a strong stimulus to literary historical research. On the one hand, there was Slavomír Wollman (1925-2012) the Czech Slavonic scholar who may have represented the classical comparative school but ventured to reanimate its “ageing” terms through new applicability; his direct opposite was Dionýz Ďurišin (1929-1997) an experiment-oriented scholar whose separation from tradi-

tional ways was crowned with the search for new terminology, enabling him to formulate the theory of interliterariness and to undertake interdisciplinary researches into the world literature. It was in Wollman that the Slavonic line of Czech comparative studies, developing the morphological stimuli of formalism and structural aesthetics, came to a head. Existentially anchored in the Brno comparative school (represented by Frank Wollman, Slavomír's father and very likely the most distinctive figure of Czech comparative literature as structuralist and member of the Prague Linguistic Circle), this concept, was directed from genetically contactological comparative approach to implementing philosophical and cultural impulses, at all events combining comparative method with genological research. Comparative studies were perceived as an integral branch and a substantial constituent of literary history operating within supranational context with historical poetics at its core. By general consent, modern comparative literature was deemed an autonomous discipline with established extent of issues, a sphere of knowledge which, regardless of possible specificity of its methodology, penetrated into literary theory and literary history, through exploring international literary relations or by comparing works of different national literatures.

In the 1980s, the influence of Brno tradition shaped the activities of the Department of Slavonic Studies at the Institute for Czech Literature, the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (ČSAV), Prague, headed by Slavomír Wollman. After 1989, the tradition continued in the brief span of activities of the Literary Department of the Institute for Slavonic Studies, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague (AV ČR), which remained in existence until 2003. The morphological line of Czech comparative research in the 20th century, aimed at exploring the Slavonic literary materials, was creatively prolonged by the Slavonic Institute at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno, which, under the leadership of Ivo Pospíšil, a specialist in Russian studies, subsequently, at the turn of 21st century, framed the concept of integrated genre typology as a multidimensional, genologically comparative domain that would, through the typological study of publicistic, artistic and scientific texts, facilitate the interconnection of philological and social fields by searching for common grounds between their discourses or transitional zones. The notion of a text as a specific instance of the interlacement of both spheres converted this discipline into a general genology in its own right which carried on comparative typology of diverse genres as a dominant form and existence of literature.

The other, methodologically contrasting orientation of Czech comparative studies was inspired by non-Slavonic, mainly Romance philology and its hermeneutic frames of reference remained associated with empiric authorial activities. Notwithstanding the time span of their activities, from J. Vrchlický, F. X. Šalda and V. Černý to the now nonexistent Centre of Comparative Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, they established common ground on the en-

deavour to interpret an individual artefact and its binary polarity by pursuing the most frequent emphatic or intuitive approach which rejected fixed categories and the institutionalised conception of the field. This was the line followed in the main by Václav Černý (1905-1987), a specialist in Romance philology whose lack of theoretical reflection did not prevent him from developing a comparative method enhanced by the study of literary relations of Europe to extracontinental cultures. Comparative research was thus deprived of its metatheoretical status, rather becoming an interpretational activity, a new mode of reinterpretation or synthesising intellectual reflection, which attempted to cope with the awareness of multicultural world through a subjective dialogue. In the works of the Centre's leading representatives (A. Housková, O. Král, M. C. Putna, V. Svatoň, etc.) the hermeneutical tradition was reflected in thematological analyses where multicultural and interregional awareness were externalised in sharing and clashes, as a transfer of values and ideas. The significance of these two lines, "morphological" and "intuitive", can hardly be diminished by the fact that both concepts rather ran parallel than provoked productive clashes or invited polemics to make mutual adjustments.

Slovak comparative literature, by contrast, was a more monolithic, though internally heterogeneous and methodically more differentiated platform, which drew on morphological as well as communicational-semiotical concepts. Even though in the interwar period the roots of Slovak comparative studies were planted in Czech scholarship (with Czech literary theoreticians, Frank Wollman and Jan Mukařovský not excluding, delivering lectures at Comenius University, Bratislava, after 1918), in the latter half of 20th century Slovak comparative research reached its first climax in the works of Mikuláš Bakoš (1914-1972), a devoted admirer of the Prague Linguistic Circle who was inspired by Literary Phenomenology (R. Ingarden), by technological schools (Russian Formalism), and later, by Viennese Neopositivism. It was then that Slovak comparatists, who never abandoned their sense for structurally morphological implications, established a specific relationship to communicational and hermeneutical models creatively applied and developed in many fields and thematic areas (F. Miko in comparative stylistics; V. Turčány in comparative versology; J. Hvišč in comparative genology). This orientation conduced to the Nitra School methodology, where comparative approach moved along the axis of genology, theory of communication and translatology (the theory of translation and comparative textual typology were pursued especially by Frank Wollman's research assistant Anton Popovič). Brief reference deserves also the aesthetical-anthropological concept of art and literature perception developed by Andrej Červeňák, the Russian studies specialist of Nitra, who constituted a semiotic model of human structure as a triadic synthesis of motivic activities of a creative individual with respect to natural sciences (genotype), to societal sphere (phenotype), and spiritual sphere (nootype).

Divergent from it was the innovative endeavour of Dionýz Ďurišin, the world renowned scholar who in his monographs *Čo je svetová literatúra?* [What is world literature?] (1992) and *Teória medziliterárneho procesu I* [The Theory of interliterary process] (1995) divided interliterary entities into interliterary communities (wholes based on linguistic-ethnic criteria) and interliterary centrisms (units supported by geographical-administrative criteria) which comprise an internally differentiated system of world literature as both initial and final categories of interliterariness. According to Ďurišin, world literature can only exist as developmental (historical) structure expectable in every event of literary process and constituted by the receptional subject. His semiotic transformation of historical structure into a communicational code represented original advancement of the Czechoslovak structuralism in the 1960s (*Problémy literárnej komparatistiky*, 1967) [The Issues of Comparative Literature], against the background of generally negative criticism of the structure, i.e. Jakobson's concept of binarism and his proposition about the dual linguistic articulation. Hence Ďurišin's initiative can be genetically interconnected with F. Vodička's pioneering work *Struktúra vývoje*, (1969) [The Structure of development] and the more recent studies by F. Wollman; and within the international context, with the achievements of M. Lotman; U. Eco; A. J. Greimas; C. Bremond; J. Derrida etc. Ďurišin's involvement in setting up a new branch of literary scholarship originating within the interdisciplinary boundaries marked by literary theory; culturology; ethnology; economy; political geography; and the area theory reflected his belief that traditional comparative studies focused on contactology and typological relationships had fallen into terminal decline.

While Zoran Konstantović, the celebrated Serbian comparatist living in Austria, in his monograph *Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* (Konstantinović 1988: 9), considered the tradition of Czech-Slovak comparative literature (Ďurišin's contribution in particular) a corner-stone of the 20th-century world theory of interliterariness beside the French, American and Russian Schools, Wollman's monograph *Česká škola literární komparatistiky* [The Czech School of Comparative Literature] already in 1989 warned about the neglectful attitude to the traditional Slavonic studies displayed by the younger generation of researchers uncritically admiring the precipitously discovered Western comparative approach. For under the powerful spell of this fashionable, somewhat general "theory of literature", it was possible to produce the "proper" and "atemporal" history of national literatures. Paradoxically, the political changes commenced in the late 1980s may have apparently smoothed the way for new impulses in comparative thought in literature, yet the institutional transformations of academic and university establishments (rather renaming them, in fact), along with the ill-advised restructuring of philological programmes fell short of common expectations. In the Czech lands, the promising start of the Literary Department at the Institute for Slavonic Studies, the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, still involving S. Wollman, was forcefully discontin-

ued by his untimely resignation as editor-in-chief of *Slavia*, the prestigious journal for comparative research in Slavonic philology. Similarly the activities of the Centre of Comparative Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, and its subsequent incorporation into the Institute for Czech Literature and Comparative Studies (at the same institution) was rather open to doubt than a “turning point” or “breakthrough” ushering in new vigour. Apart from injudicious personal interventions and private aversions, Prague’s milieu had donned a thick “armour” of Czech studies, which deemed comparative studies unfruitful theorising.

Slovakia, too, witnessed the departure of distinctive personalities like: Karol Rosenbaum; Miloš Tomčík; Pavol Petrus; Ján Koška; Andrej Červeňák; etc. It was namely Ďurišin’s death in January 1997 that brought about the disruption of the Slovak developmental process and the disjunction of the Czech-Slovak “symbiosis”, let alone the loss of methodological contacts with the world events, as disclosed by the Slovak literary scholar Robert Gáfrik. On the whole, both Czech and Slovak literary scholarship fell short of translated works produced by world comparative research; most importantly, they were missing texts which would critically appraise modern inspirations, like e.g. imagology; historical-geographical topography; post-colonial theory; feminism; intercultural and social studies; West-Ost studies; media studies; the area theory; etc. The third edition of Ďurišin’s *Teória literárnej komparatistiky* (1985) [The Theory of comparative literature] was rejected by the author himself, and furthermore, his abstractions, though appreciated by international community (e.g. H. H. Remak; C. Guillén; D. Fokkema; etc.), were not compatible with the interpretational needs of practical literary history, conforming to Josef Hrabák’s *Literární komparatistika* (1976) as the only available Czech system of comparative thought. Admittedly, for university students this was a useful elementary handbook, but lacked any theoretical ambition. As of the 1990s, Czech and Slovak comparatists ceased to attend the AILC/ICLA world congresses, a cherished child of René Wellek, the American scholar of Czech origin who initiated the first congress held in Venice in 1955. In all respects, the AILC/ICLA congresses are currently counted as the most representative manifestation of the state and methods of literary theoretical thought and one’s participation in it (if the application is accepted) is deemed highly prestigious. The deplorable condition of the local comparative scholarship was reflected in the fact that in the last thirty years neither Czech nor Slovak Republic have had their deputies in the AILC top bodies, which logically resulted from the non-existence of national branches. (Incidentally, the last representation in 1970s was executed by Karel Krejčí and Anton Popovič, a Czech specialist in Polish studies and a Slovak literary theoretician, respectively.)

The necessity to restore the one-time contacts of Czech and Slovak comparative studies led to deliberations about the necessity to establish, at best, a joint Czech-Slovak association which would provide institutional support for the develop-

ment of comparative thought in this cultural-geographic area, and, at the same time, to apply for the entry into the AILC. Therefore in September 2012, the author of this text contacted Adam Bžoch, director of the Institute for World Literature, Bratislava, with a proposition to prepare a common Czech and Slovak copy of the World Literature Studies journal and present it at the 20th World Congress of Comparatists held in Paris in 2013, convened, after a long time, in Europe at a venue both financially sustainable and geographically available. Late in 2012, Adam Bžoch arranged a meeting where he appointed Robert Gáfrik editor of the special comparative copy of World Literature Studies. A decision was taken to address colleagues at home and abroad, to complete the editing and conceptual jobs, and to facilitate participation in the Paris congress for the presenters with the aim to restore broken contacts after the long "absence." Beside the author of this paper who reported on Central Europe within the discourse of literary research and on the modes of interliterary communication in this cultural area, there were only two Slovak comparatists, Róbert Gáfrik and Libuša Vajdová, who gave a presentation (the third, Anton Pokrivčák, was not a presenter). This fact notwithstanding, the joint Czech and Slovak copy of the literary journal, which also offered contributions by M. Schmitz-Emans; Ch. Sabatos; Adam F. Kola; A. Terian; etc, met with a positive reception as a token of reconstituted methodological pluralism and Czech-Slovak dialogue within the European context. The monographic copy of World Literature Studies, published under the English title *Comparative Literary Studies as Cultural Criticism*, then tackled, in an innovative endeavour, the very heart of comparative research, i.e. its methods and subject - namely specifying the purpose of comparative studies within Czech and Slovak context.

Our return from Paris was followed by intense "diplomatic" negotiations which resulted in the preparation of the Czech-Slovak Association of Comparative Literature, officially based in the Institute for World Literature, SAS, Bratislava. In the statutes, drafted largely by Robert Gáfrik, the Association is defined as an interest civic society for organisation and support of Czech and Slovak research in comparative literature aimed at publishing professional literature and organising conferences (particularly, at supporting the participation of local researchers in world congresses) as well as at demanding greater recognition of comparative approach in university lectures and seminars. Next step was taken in November 2013 at the 4th Congress of Czech Slavonic Scholars in Telč, where the informal executive committee consisting of R. Gáfrik, A. Pokrivčák and M. Zelenka held a meeting to discuss the statutes, to decide on the first conference and also to apply to the Slovak Ministry of the Interior for the Association's legal subjectivity. The application was discussed in the summer of 2014 by the same committee and other signatory members who, under the leadership of R. Gáfrik, subsequently prepared the first conference of Czech and Slovak comparatists which was held in Bratislava in February 2015 and attended by the "magnificent" seventeen in total. From

among them, they chose five members of the executive board with Robert Gáfrik as uncontested chair.

The publicational presentation of the first congress, as it appeared in the monothematic copy of *Slavica Litteraria* (2015, No. 1), represents a compromise forged in open discussions about manifold interdisciplinary representations of comparative literature, which is not confined to one subject, neither to one method nor a standard method, because the theoretical and methodological discourse is performed in different languages and in diverse power relations. Contrary to this “multiplicity”, the papers revealed one symptomatic feature of “post-Wollman” and “post-Đurišin” era typified by moving from historical poetics and the theory of interliterariness towards the study of cultural identities, to post-colonial and area studies. The change of paradigm has led to greater thematical and methodological openness in Czech and Slovak comparative literature that – metaphorically – it is getting its “second breath”. There have appeared even translations of European comparative works (authored by e.g. C. Guillén; A. Courbine-Hoffmann; etc.), new anthologies of vernacular and comparative literature have been published, such as *Komparatistika a národní literatura* (2009) [Comparative studies and national literature], or M. Zelenka’s *Vybrané kapitoly z dějin česko-slovenské literární komparatistiky* (2015) [Selected chapters from the history of Czech-Slovak comparative literature]. Pride of place in the joint project of Czech and Slovak literary scholars headed by Pavol Koprda can be given to the two volumes of the extensive *Teória medziliterárnosti I-II* (2009-2010) [The Theory of interliterariness], presenting 63 texts of world’s major comparative scholars and arranged according to thematic sections. The importance of this monumental anthology consists in upholding the proposition that the theories of interliterariness were prevailingly based on Slavonic material, even though, with regard to the subject and search for new methods, their development was parallel with comparative literature in the West. In addition to these early-twenty-first-century handbooks, Czech and Slovak comparative research can pride itself with original theoretical works, among which special attention deserves R. Gáfrik’s thought-provoking monograph *Od významu k emóciám* (2012) [From the meaning to emotions], a piece of writing that within intercultural context deals with Sanskrit literary theory as related to the western Aristotelian tradition, which, following D. Đurišin, face up to the spatial aspect in comparative literature. In the same way, M. Zelenka’s monographs *Komparatistika v kulturních souvislostech* (2012) [Comparative studies in the cultural context] and *Comparative Literature and Area Studies* (2012) forecast the modern shape of comparative studies, connected by transcultural, interdisciplinary and hybridisational aspects and therefore placed on the horizon of various cultural lines.

Currently, the central task of Czech and Slovak comparatists who have joined the Association is to represent domestic comparative studies also abroad, at the 21st World Congress of Comparative Literature (AILC) in Vienna in July 2016.

They will deliver the already accepted joint panel presentation *Staré a nové koncepty literární komparatistiky v globalizovaném světě* [Old and New Concepts of Comparative Literature in the Globalized World]. This presentation, prepared in collaboration with foreign comparatists (such as M. Juvan; D. Kołodziejczyk; G. Tihanov; A. Terian; Adam F. Kola; M. Emans-Schmitz; etc.), should inspire inquiry into the destinations of comparative studies in Czechia and Slovakia: whether there are perspectives of joint research; whether there are themes that can be presented to the world comparatist community; what comparatist stimuli can be implied to maintain the vernacular scholarly traditions?

In conclusion, it is important to say that the "enlivened" story of Czech and Slovak comparative literature continues, not refuting the pillar traditions of the past but open to any methodological stimuli and thought impulses, because the very nature of comparative study is the theoretical justification of its existence and "venturing beyond" the established thematical and field limits. Primarily, there is a legally constituted institutional base of Czech-Slovak Association of Comparative literature, which should, without any aversions and ideological ambitions, become a coordinational platform and methodological initiator of pluralist thought about comparative literature.

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