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Comparative Literature in Slovakia

I.

Comparative Literature in Slovakia and its history is seldom mentioned in the books or articles devoted to the history of Comparative Literature. Scholars familiar with the histories of Central European Comparative Literature will know, however, that Slovak Comparative Literature dates back to the nineteenth century. Pavel Jozef Šafárik's (1795-1850) *Geschichte der slawischen Sprache und Literatur nach allen Mundarten*, published in 1826, marks the starting point of Slovak endeavours in Comparative Literature. Šafárik's monumental work represents the first concretization of the interliterary process within the framework of Slavonic languages and literatures — especially of Czech and Slovak — where dialectical tensions between intra-literary and inter-literary perspectives are stressed, although these terms are not used. Significantly, integrational as well as differential tendencies are taken into account in the work, even though much more space is devoted to the original and undifferentiated idea of Slav unity. "Slavonic language and literature" in the title of the work is misleading. On the contrary, in Šafárik's work diversity is a crucial concept, albeit at times sacrificed to the notion of an imagined homogeneity to comply with contemporary political and historical realities. In essence, Šafárik understood Slavonic literatures in an analogy to European literary "families," similar to the linguistic concept of Germanic languages.

Typologically similar to Šafárik's book was Ján Kollár's (1793-1852) *O literárnej vzájemnosti medzi kmeny a nářečnými slavskými (On Mutual Literary Relations Between Slav Tribes and Dialects)*, published in 1836. In my opinion, Kollár's concept of a unified Slav literature was a regression in comparison with that of Šafárik. At the same time, it is more than likely that Kollár was aware of Goethe's concept of world literature — first published in 1831 — and Kollár understood Slav literature as a hypostasis of world literature in the Goethean sense: "Nationalliteratur will jetzt nicht viel sagen; die Epoche der Weltliteratur ist an der Zeit, und jeder muß jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen" (Goethe in Biedermann Nr. 2472).

The third important representative of the prehistory of Slovak Comparative Literature was Ľudovít Štúr (1815-1856), who is credited as the codifier of the Slovak literary language. His work, *O národných písních a pověstech plemen slovanských (On Folk Songs and Legends of Slav Peoples)*, published in Prague

in 1853 — following Šafárik and Kollár — stresses the idea of solidarity and intellectual exchange between Slav nations and their literatures on the basis of his analysis of folk songs and legends. Although he was not knowledgeable about the contemporary methods of Comparative Literature, he was acquainted with the works of the Grimm Brothers and Hegel.

Jozef M. Hurban (1817-1888), a colleague of Štúr, published in the journal *Slovenské pohľady* (*Slovak Views*) between 1846-1851 another important work of Slovak Comparative Literature under the title "Slovensko a jeho život literárny" ("Slovakia and Its Literary Life"). The aim of Hurban's seminal work was not intra-literary study. At the time of intense romantic nationalism, Hurban was not adverse to the influence of foreign literatures on Slovak literature.

A new stage in the development of foreign literatures on Slovak literature necessary to mention Pavol Országh (1849-1921), later known under his pseudonym Hviezdoslav, who attempted to confront indigenous literary works with outstanding works of world (not only Slavonic) literature. Important were also the literary and critical essays of Svetozár Hurban Vajanský (1847-1916) and Jozef Škultéty (1853-1948): the former, more conservative, stressed the aspect of relative autonomy of Slovak literary development; the latter, more progressive, highlighted universal and foreign values in Slovak literature. Škultéty — together with Jaroslav Vlček (1860-1930), who is renowned for his scholarship in both Czech and Slovak literature — became the founder of Slovak literary scholarship. As the author of *Dejiny literatúry slovenskej* (*A History of Slovak Literature*, 1889-90), Vlček created a synthesis of Slovak national literature including a "presupposition" that can be understood as the basis of Slovak Comparative Literature.

II.

Nearly two decades would pass before the first representative of Comparative Literature as a discipline in its own right and comparable to other European models appeared. Pavel Bujnáč (1882-1933) studied philosophy, aesthetics, and philology in Leipzig and Hungarian literature and Finno-Ugric philology in Budapest. As a result of his wide and interdisciplinary perspective, he was well prepared for the study of inter-literary phenomena. From his first essay "Romantizmus v literatúre slovenskej" ("Romanticism in Slovak literature," 1907) to his seminal comparative work on Slovak-Hungarian literary relations, *Ján Arany v literatúre slovenskej* (*Ján Arany in Slovak Literature*, 1924), he aimed at the study of Slovak literary phenomena in the context of an international framework. His works are prime examples of contemporary influence studies.

Another noteworthy scholar, Štefan Krčméry (1892-1955), was perhaps no comparatist in *sensu stricto*. However, many of his studies are of comparative character owing to the situation and character of contemporary Slovak literary life. This can be seen clearly in many of his articles, such as "Jubileum Danteho"

("Dante's Jubilee"), "Lord Byron, "Literárne súvislosti" ("Literary Context"), "A.S. Puškin," and in his book *Stopäťdesiat rokov slovenskej literatúry* (*One Hundred and Fifty Years of Slovak Literature*, 1943). On the basis of many of his observations in the field of literary translation, Krčméry may be regarded as a forerunner of the theory of translation developed by the Nitra School in the 1960s and 1970s (see Mozejko).

After the First World War, Slovak Comparative Literature was greatly aided by Czech scholarship. Many Czech scholars of aesthetics and Comparative Literature worked at or collaborated with their Slovak colleagues at the newly founded Comenius University in Bratislava (1919). To name a few, Albert Pražák (1880-1956), Frank Wollman (1888-1969), Jan Mukařovský (1891-1975), Jiri Horák (1884-1975), and Jiri Polívka (1898-1933). Especially F. Wollman's theory of Comparative Literature and his framework applied to Slavonic texts had a great impact on both Czech and Slovak comparative literary studies. Wollman's seminal *K metodologii srovnávací slovesnosti slovenské* (*On the Methodology of Slav Comparative Literature*, 1928), developed a synthesis of Russian Formalism, Czech Structuralism, and Western European comparative perspectives (e.g., Paul van Tieghem). Slovak Comparative Literature showed a high level of innovation in the period between the two World Wars. For example, Rudolf Uhlár (1904-1934), Rudo Brtáň (1907-), Milan Pišut (1908-1984), Mikuláš Bakoš (1914-1972), and Karol Rosenbaum (1920-) developed independent and novel frameworks and methods of Comparative Literature for the study of Slovak literature. Uhlár's work, *Vzťahy medzi slovenskou literatúrou a literatúrami susednými* (*Relations between Slovak and Neighbouring Literatures*, 1933-1934), develops the results of Bujnáč's above mentioned work with his own work as a theoretician. In addition, his knowledge of literary material is broader and his work transcends the pitfalls of Bujnáč's influence-study approach. Brtáň's essays, although brief in length, are brilliant compendia of his vast factual knowledge (e.g., his *Barokový slavizmus* [*Barock Slavism*]). Pišut, later Professor of Slovak and Czech literature at Comenius University, contributed mainly in the field of Czech and Slovak literary relations, while his colleague Bakoš contributed by introducing foreign literary theories (e.g. Russian Formalism), by his studies of Slovak versification, and by his work on the periodization of Slovak literature against the background of international literary developments. Rosenbaum devoted his attention mostly to Slovak-German relations, particularly in his work *Vzťah slovenského literárneho romantizmu k nemeckému literárnemu klasicizmu* (*Relation of Slovak Literary Romanticism to German Literary Classicism*) where he critically implemented as well as developed Wollman's and Zhirmunsky's ideas. He was probably the first who stressed the importance of reception studies in the literary process.

III.

Factographical interest was the most typical phenomenon for inter-literary studies of Slovak scholars in the 1950s. In the first half of the Stalinist-Zhdanovian period when comparative studies were anathema, labelled as "bourgeois cosmopo-

litanism" and "kowtowing to the West," comparative literary study suffered in all satellite countries of the Soviet empire. Factographical approaches concentrated on mostly Slavonic literatures, for which there were enough experts in Slovakia. While Soviet and Communist oppression limited the development of Comparative Literature, the focus on factual studies resulted in some valuable work: later, the accumulated material proved useful for broad synthetic works and for theoretical reflections.

In 1964, the Institute of World Literatures and Languages of the Slovak Academy of Sciences was founded; in it Slavonic literatures together with Hungarian, German, Spanish, Anglo-American, and Latin-American literatures were studied. At first the works of most collaborators, led by Bakoš, prolonged the scholarly orientation of the second half of the 1950s, and only later, in the second half of the 1960s, began a new comparative perspective to emerge. This period of activity produced studies concerned with Czech-Slovak literary relations and works dealing with the theory of translation. In the latter area, especially Anton Popovič (1933-1984) at the above mentioned Nitra School excelled with his works such as *Preklad a výraz (Translation and Expression, 1968)*, *Teória umeleckého prekladu: Aspekty textu a literárnej komunikácie (Theory of Artistic Translation: Aspects of Text and of Literary Metacommunication, 1975)* (for Popovič's selected works see the Works Cited; for a recent application of his work see Tötösy de Zepetnek, 1995). Popovič's work attracted some interest among comparatists owing to his election as the first Chair of the Committee on Translation of the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée.

Genealogical studies represent another focus in Slovak Comparative Literature. Here one may see, again, the impact of Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism from the 1920s and 1930s. Dionýz Ďurišin (1929-), the most prominent Slovak Comparatist of our time, began his influential series of works with his *Slovenská realistická poviedka a N.V. Gogol (N.V. Gogol and the Slovak Realistic Short Story, 1966)*. Perhaps the best work of among his books, containing several seminal articles, is a collective volume entitled *Komparatistika a genológia (Genealogy and Comparative Literature, 1973)*, with two important studies by Pavol Petrus (1927-), "Komparatistický a genologický aspekt literárnej komparistiky" ("Comparative and Genealogical Aspects of Comparative Literature") and Ďurišin's own "Druhový aspekt literárnej komparistiky" ("The Genealogical Aspect of Comparative Literature").

Comparative studies of verse was another field of Comparative Literature practised in Slovakia in the 1960s and in the 1970s. For example, Viktor Kochoľ's (1919-1984) *Slovo a básnický tvar (Word and Poetic Form, 1966)* and *Rým v slovenskej poézii (Rhyme in Slovak Poetry, 1975)* are of note. Comparative stylistics were most influential through the books of František Miko (1920-) *Estetika výrazu (Aesthetics of Expression, 1969)* and *Text a štýl (Text and Style,*

1970). As well, together with Nora Krausová (1920-), Viktor Kochoľ was the most important adherent of comparative semiotics.

During the 1960s and 1970s Slovak Orientalists began to collaborate with scholars of Euro-American literatures and published a number of note worthy volumes: Marián Gálik (1933-) (Sinology), Ján Mučka (1942-1994) (Vietnamistics), and Xénia Celnarová (1944-) (Turcology). From the beginning, their work showed a certain level of departure from the general thrust of Slovak Comparative Literature at the time. While for Slovak Comparatists their national literature was always *terminus a quo*, for Slovak Orientalists this was not the case. Instead, they attempted to link more distant literatures in the context of international Comparative Literature.

IV.

In the first half of 1960s a new scholarly (and political) situation permitted to confront indigenous Slovak developments with that of international tendencies and discussions. Especially, stimuli from Soviet Comparative Literature studies were encouraged because of their in-depth knowledge of world literatures and lack of ideological, "bourgeois," prejudices. Some of these works, such as by Nikolai Iosifovich Konrad (1891-1978) were studied among Slovak scholars with interest and sympathy. Interestingly, Slovak Comparatists did not appear to realise that Konrad propagated a specific Marxist version of Comparative Literature but drew on French comparative methods, particularly on those of Paul Van Tieghem (Gálik 1975, 286-87).

When considering the Slovak efforts to develop Slovak notions of Comparative Literature, the most important and decisively the most pioneering effort is represented by Ďurišin's book, *Problémy literárnej komparistiky (Problems of Comparative Literature, 1967)*. Ulrich Weisstein, probably the most industrious "chronicler" of the history of comparative literary theories, in his study "Assessing the Assessors — An Anatomy of Comparative Handbooks," observes two prominent factors in their development: the first is Van Tieghem's *La Littérature Comparée*, and the second is Ďurišin's book that appeared in the same year as his meritorious *Einführung in die Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* (Riesz 98).¹ Importantly, Ďurišin's definition of Comparative Literature is

1 This book later appeared (always augmented or elaborated to a greater or lesser extent) in different editions and languages. From the different versions of the book, probably the German *Vergleichende Literaturforschung* (1972, 1976) was the most influential, although in reality the English version *Theory of Literary Comparatistics* (1984) was the best. Unfortunately, the latter was published in a hurry, without indices and bibliography. This book, with some changes, appeared in two Slovak editions (1975, 1985), then in Hungarian (1977), in Russian (1979), and in Macedonian (1987). A Chinese translation has been prepared by Liao Hongjun from the Russian version (personal communication) at the end of

different from those of his colleagues, precisely owing to his view of the development of Slovak literary scholarship and Comparative Literature in general. According to him, "comparative literature is in fact an extension of the traditionally apprehended field of the history of national literature, its organic part, tending to a knowledge of the process of higher literary entities" (1967, 28-29). In his framework, Ďurišin objected to influence studies as part of Comparative Literature. He maintained that Comparative Literature, viewed historically, may be divided into two different "basic kinds" of study: genetic-contact relations (influence studies in the West) and structural-typological affinities (parallel studies). Thus, he clearly established the notion of development in Comparative Literature. Ďurišin's *Sources and Systematics of Comparative Literature* (1974) also raised the interest of Western Comparatists, owing to his elaborations of the structural bases of Comparative Literature and his development of specific methodological questions.

Even some years before Ďurišin finished his theory of "literary comparatistics," he appeared to doubt its intrinsic value and its usefulness for the study of this realm of intellectual and spiritual consciousness. I mentioned Weisstein's observation about two stages in the development of the theory of Comparative Literature. It is very likely that, following his argument for an "inter-literary process," a third stage of Comparative Literature, will be achieved. I recall a conversation between Henry H.H. Remak and Ďurišin on the occasion of the IXth Triennial Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (Innsbruck 1979), where the question was raised about Ďurišin's further theoretical plans. At the time I was surprised by the self-criticism Ďurišin subjected himself to, elaborating on his theory of Comparative Literature. In time it became clear that Ďurišin was serious. In the Preface to his *Theory of Interliterary Process* (1989) he remarked that sometimes a scholar

becomes aware of a degree of conflict between what he has formulated and what he has hitherto taken for granted in his preceding research. Such a situation may at first appear paradoxical but it is actually a position quite conformable with Nature and its laws, being a result of an effort to achieve step-by-step ever higher levels of knowledge. Negation is in principle a guarantee of progress in human thought. From the point of view of epistemology ... it is not a matter of destruction, on the contrary, it involves the development of a new system which by means of the valid integration of earlier pieces of knowledge receives a new non-traditional evaluation. (7)

In my opinion Ďurišin's *Theory of Interliterary Process* did not achieve the qualities of his *Einführung in die Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* or his *Theory of Literary Comparatistics*. It was not well enough developed with

regards to its structure of argument, especially *vis-à-vis* his theory of "interliterary communities" (similar to "literary commonwealths" in Western theories of Comparative Literature) and the basic difference between "standard" and "specific" interliterary communities was not even mentioned. Ďurišin was aware of this and after he (with a number of collaborators including myself) published *Aspects ontologiques du processus interlittéraire* (1985), he produced six volumes of *Osobitné medziliterárne spoločenské (Communautés interlittéraires spécifiques)*, published between 1987 and 1993. The series included a Slovak version and comprehensive *resumés* in French and shorter versions in English. Volume six was written by Ďurišin without his international team of collaborators and it appeared with the subtitle *Pojmy a princípy (Notions et principes)*, 1993. In this book, 91 different concepts and terms are elucidated within the framework of the "interliterary process" and defined

par les catégories qui ne sont pas encore suffisamment expliquées, comme communautés interlittéraires spécifiques, communautés interlittéraires de type standard, centrismes interlittéraires et la catégorie finale — littérature mondiale. Elles se lient du point de vue du système aux composants autonomes du processus littéraire national. Entre les pôles extrêmes mentionnés, il existe l'unité dialectique contradictoire qui se traduit en pratique historico-littéraire par une tension entre l'histoire de la littérature nationale et de la littérature mondiale. (1993, 6)

Probably the best treatment of his framework of "specific interliterary communities" has been written in the English *Summaries to the Russian edition*, entitled *Problemy osobykh mezhliteraturnykh obshchestv (The Problems of Specific Interliterary Communities)* (1977). This Summary, importantly, draws attention to the necessity of studying Oriental literatures in the larger framework of Comparative Literature. Ďurišin actively pursued his vision of Comparative Literature. It would make a long list to enumerate all of his projects but here are some, indicating his wide and innovative approach to the discipline: "specific interliterary communities" of different Slavonic literatures, of Western European literatures, of Asian and African countries both in the Medieval and the Modern periods. Ďurišin was clearly influenced by the work of Slovak Orientalists at least since the time of preparing his publication of *Theory of Literary Comparatistics*, and later he collaborated with Russian and Uzbek experts on Asian and African literatures. In addition, during these years Ďurišin extended his scholarly endeavours to the concept of "interliterary centrism" which, according to him, "représentent l'avant-dernier degré de l'étude du processus interlittéraire qui permet de centrer l'attention à la catégorie finale de l'interlittérarité — la littérature mondiale" (1993, 25).

CONCLUSION

Owing to obvious language barriers — *Slavica et Slovaca non leguntur* — Slovak works of Comparative Literature remain(ed) unread in the broad reading public of Western countries. Here, I would like to list some of the most important works published by Slovak Comparatists, in addition to those I mentioned above:

- 1) Russian and Soviet literature: Soňa Lesňáková (1932-), *Maxim Gorkij v slovenskej kultúre* (*Maxim Gorky in Slovak Culture*, 1961) and *Cesty k realizmu: J.G. Tajovský a ruská literatúra* (*Roads to Realism: J.G. Tajovský and Russian Culture*, 1971); Ema Panovová (1925-), *Puškin v slovenskej poézii do r. 1918* (*Pushkin in Slovak Poetry up to 1918*, 1966) and *Vzťahy a konfrontácie: Ruská poézia v slovenskom literárnom a spoločenskom kontexte* (*Relations and Confrontations: Russian Poetry in Slovak Literary and Social Context*, 1977); Andrej Červeňák (1932-), *Vajanský a Turgenev* (*Vajanský and Turgenev*, 1968).
- 2) Polish literature: Jozef Hvišč (1935-), *Epické literárne druhy v slovenskom a v poľskom literárnom romantizme* (*Epic Literary Genres in Slovak and Polish Literary Romanticisms*, 1971), *Problémy literárnej genológie* (*Problems of Literary Genealogy*, 1979); Pavol Winczer (1934-), *Poetika básnických smerov* (*Poetics of Poetic Trends*, 1974).
- 3) Other literatures studied by Slovak Comparatists: Zlatko Klátik (1922-1990) was the expert for different literatures of the former Yugoslavia. He produced two comparative monographs: *Štúrovi a Juhoslovania* (*Štúr's Generation and Yugoslavs*, 1965) and *Slovenský a slovenský romantizmus* (*Slovak and Slav Romanticism*, 1977); Rudolf Chmel (1939-) published two monographs on Slovak-Hungarian literary relations: *Literatúry v kontaktach* (*Literatures in Contacts*, 1972) and *Literárne vzťahy slovensko-maďarské* (*Slovak-Hungarian Literary Relations*, 1977); and Ján Koška (1936-) is the author of *Slovenské pohľady na bulharský juh* (*Slovak Views on the Bulgarian South*, 1978).
- 4) My own work concerns a departure from the above "traditional" areas of Comparative Literature as I responded to the "third" possible stage of Comparative Literature and focused on Chinese literature: *The Genesis of Modern Chinese Literary Criticism, 1917-1930* (1980), *Milestones in Sino-Western Literary Confrontations, 1898-1979* (1986) (the Chinese version of the last appeared in 1990), *Interliterary and Intraliterary Aspects of the May Fourth Movement 1919 in China* (1990) and *Chinese Literature and European Context* (1994) (see also the Works Cited below).

In closing, I would like to say that it is difficult to predict the future development of Slovak Comparative Literature. Obviously, after the "Velvet Revolution" of 1989 there is much more freedom. At the same time, owing to the lack of financial means — previously provided by the Czechoslovak government — the economics of scholarship and publishing are seriously compromised.

The Slovak Academy of Sciences

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