

CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH ON SLAVIC LITERATURE IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract: In Slovakia Slavic literary studies can be found at the institutes of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS) and at university departments. The only SAS institute to truly focus on Slavic studies is the Ján Stanislav Institute of Slavistics. Other SAS institutes that deal with Slavic studies to a lesser extent are the Institute of Slovak Literature and the Institute of World Literature. There are also Slavic-oriented academic initiatives involving short-term projects. Considering this situation, there is a need to prepare a programme for Slavic literary studies in Slovakia so that a framework can be created outlining a new, systematic approach.

Key words: Slavic literary studies in Slovakia 1993–2012; Slavic studies research institutions; Slavic studies periodicals.

Slavic studies is a scientific discipline dealing with the languages, history and cultures of Slavic nations. It is a complex and interdisciplinary research field occupying a specific position within the humanities. Slavic studies in Slovakia analyses the relations between Slovak and Slavic phenomena on the one hand and Slovak and non-Slavic phenomena in the context of linguistics, literature, folklore studies, ethnography, archaeology and history on the other. Contemporary Slavic studies in Slovakia is perceived as a broad and comprehensive discipline (and not a narrow philological discipline). The concepts involved in historical and comparative research in literary studies are highly diverse. Slovak Slavic studies primarily deals with topics from the fields of linguistics, folklore studies, ethnography, history and archaeology. Although literary themes and literary studies are dealt with, they are so disparate that it is almost impossible to refer to an unequivocal or predominant concept in Slovak Slavic literary studies.

First of all, we will discuss the current institutional framework of Slavic studies in Slovakia, and list the researchers in the field and the relevant publications. Current work in Slavic literary studies tends to focus in two branches or two areas.

Primary research in Slavic literary studies

This approach is adopted by Slovak philologists specialising in various Slavic languages and literatures. These scholars are based at SAS institutes (such as the Ján Stanislav Institute

of Slavistics¹ and the Institute of World Literature)², and they are often translators or university lecturers, who also deal with literary relations and comparative literature studies as part of their research on Slavic literature. They may be institutionally affiliated with the Department of Slavic Philologies at the Philosophical Faculty of Comenius University, Bratislava; Eastern Slavic languages and cultures at the Department of Russian, Philosophical Faculty of Constantine the Philosopher University, Nitra; the Institute for Research on the Cultural Heritage of Constantine and Methodius at Philosophical Faculty, Constantine the Philosopher University, Nitra; the Department of Slavic Languages at the Faculty of Humanities, Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica (primary focus on Polish and Russian); the Institute of Russian, Ukrainian and Slavic Studies at the Philosophical Faculty of Prešov University (offering Central European Studies from 2013/14); and the Department of Slovak Studies, Slavic Philologies and Communication at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice.

Research findings are published in the following academic journals: *Slavica Slovaca* (published by the Ján Stanislav Slavic Institute, SAS), *Slovak Review* (published by the Institute of World Literature, SAS) and in *Nová filologická revue* [New Philological Revue: Contemporary Linguistics, Literary Studies, Translation Studies and Cultural Studies] (published by the Faculty of Humanities at Matej Bel University). Mention should also be made of books and volumes of proceedings and papers, especially those that deal with particular kinds of Slavic literature. For instance, the volumes *Slovensko-slovenské jazykové, literárne a kultúrne vzťahy* [Slovak-Slavic Linguistic, Literary and Cultural Relations], *Slovensko-bieloruské jazykové, literárne a kultúrne vzťahy* [Slovak-Belorussian Linguistic, Literary and Cultural Relations], *Z história slovensko-nemeckých vzťahov* [From the History of Slovak-German Relations] or *Staršia slovensko-talianska medziliterárnosť* [Older Slovak-Italian Interliterary Relations].

Research in Russian studies is still the most developed and strongest area of Slavic literary studies in terms of its earlier cultural and social development, and the traditions of the discipline in Slovakia. Most Slovak Slavic literary studies research in focuses on how Russian literature is received and issues in Russian literature.

Examples include Andrej Červeňák's research on Russian Modernism and Eva Maliti's contributions towards discussions on Russian Symbolism. In Slovakia, however, Russian studies almost seems to compete with Slavic studies: it often tends to be presented as a discipline outside Slavic studies or Slavic studies tends to be subsumed within Russian studies.

Secondary research in Slavic literary studies

This approach is taken by Slovak literary scholars with a background in Slovak studies who majored in Slovak language and literature, and who conduct research on literary theory

¹ Researchers with literary connections Peter Žeňuch, Katarína Žeňuchová, Svorad Zavarský, Andrej Škoviera and Svetlana Šašerina.

² Researchers Mária Bátorová, Katarína Bednárová, Adam Bžoch, Eva Maliti, Ladislav Franek, Róbert Gáfrik, Judit Görözdi, Ján Jankovič, Olga Kovačičová, Magda Kučerková, Mária Kusá, Gabriela Magová, Roman Mikuláš, Soňa Paštéková, Dobrota Pucherová, Bogumila Suwara, Jana Tesařová, Jana Truhlářová, Libuša Vajdová, Ján Zambor and Milan Žitný.

and history of Slovak literature. They are based at research institutes (for example, the Institute of Slovak Literature, SAS)³ and universities (the Department of Slovak Literature and Literary Studies at the Philosophical Faculty of Comenius University, Bratislava, and other Slovak language and literature departments—the Pedagogic Faculty of Comenius University, Bratislava;⁴ St Cyril and Methodius University, Trnava, the Pedagogic Faculty, Trnava University; the Faculty of Humanities at Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica;⁵ the Catholic University in Ružomberok,⁶ János Selye University, Komárno; the Philosophical Faculty of Prešov University, Prešov;⁷ the Philosophical Faculty at Constantine the Philosopher University, Nitra;⁸ and the Department of Slovak Studies, Slavic Philologies and Communication at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice.⁹

Research into the history of national literature also deals with issues in Slavic literature (such as, for example, Slavic reciprocity). There are also themes emanating from a wider geographical area (Central Europe, Eastern Europe) and theoretical themes from other areas (such as literary periods, genres, and poetics). Whether a researcher is predisposed towards Slavic studies is dependent on the scholar's individual research interests, his/her openness towards other literary systems and also his/her language competence. For many researchers in Slovak studies, Slavic studies is an immanent part of their work even though it may remain implicit (for example, when studying Czecho-Slovak literary relations).

The main academic journal in this field is *Slovenská literatúra [Slovak Literature]* published by the Institute of Slovak Literature, SAS (since 1954). It is the only academic periodical in Slovakia dedicated to research on national literature. Most of the articles are on literary history and literary theory, but the journal accepts other types of research, both from Slovakia and abroad. It occasionally publishes Slovak translations of foreign articles, especially those on literary theory which may lead to further Slovak literary studies.

Some academics such as Peter Káša from Prešov University combine Slavic studies and Slovak studies. Káša deals with the 19th century Slovak literature (the work of P. J. Šafárik and J. Kollár). Since he previously taught Slovak language and culture in Poland and in Hungary, his insights into Slovak literature are always complemented by knowledge of Czech, Polish and Hungarian literary contexts. Ľubomír Kováčik from the Faculty of Humanities at Matej Bel University Banská Bystrica specializes in Slovak literary Romanticism. His work is comparative in nature, dealing with Slovak and Polish Romantic literature. Miloslav Vojtech from the Philosophical Faculty at Comenius University, Bratislava, conducts research into Slovak-Czech connections in literary history in the first half of the 19th century). Dag-

³ Another research organization (not part of the Slovak Academy of Sciences) is the Matica slovenská Slovak Literary Institute. It specializes in literary studies and the history of Slovak literature.

⁴ For example, Zuzana Kákošová, Miloslav Vojtech, Anna Kruláková, Dagmar Kročanová, Ladislav Čúzy, Andrea Bokníková, Peter Darovec, Valér Mikula and Ján Zambor.

⁵ For example, Martin Golema, Ľubomír Kováčik and Martina Kubeláková.

⁶ For example, Edita Príhodová.

⁷ For example, Stanislav Rakús, Marta Součková, Peter Káša, Ján Gavura and Soňa Pariláková.

⁸ For example, Marta Keruľová, Silvia Lauková, Igor Hochel and František Koli.

⁹ For example, Ján Gbúr, Marián Andričík, Markéta Andričíková, Ivica Hajdučeková and Marek Kendra.

mar Kročanová, also based at Comenius, situates Slovak literature within broader European contexts. Pavol Koprda from the Philosophical Faculty of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra researches Slovak-Italian literary relations in the period of Renaissance. This area, Slovak-Italian literary relations, yet in earlier periods, is also researched by Ivan Šuša from the Faculty of Humanities of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica.

The Institute of Slovak Literature at the Slovak Academy of Sciences is an example of an institution that also falls into this group. It is a scientific institute specialising in the history of Slovak literature and literary theory. Its focus on Slovak studies means that, from the perspective of research criteria, it may not be directly linked to the international context. Nevertheless, it is obvious that some of the research is rooted in Slavic studies.

In 1991, the Literary Institute at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (established in 1973 following a reorganization of the academic institutes) was divided into two institutions—the Institute of Slovak Literature and the Institute of World Literature. The division was a response to an unnatural administrative merger (partly for political reasons) in the early 1970s, and the consequence of the natural evolution of the two research teams. The institutes also have different aims: while the Institute of Slovak Literature¹⁰ focuses on researching national literature, the Institute of World Literature¹¹ specializes in other national literatures and interliterary relations.

The Slavic dimension is visible in many scientific outcomes of the Institute of Slovak Literature. Its researchers do not only deal with national literature but explore areas where the national literature transcends broader contexts, both Slavic and non-Slavic.

The principal research areas are Slovak literature pre-dating standard language, thematic research into older Slovak literature as well as research on genres (such as treatises, sermons, literary genres, spiritual songs—researchers Gizela Gáfriková, Erika Brtáňová, Timotea Vráblová, Lenka Rišková and Olga Vaneková). Several researchers (for example, Vladimír Barborík, Karol Csiba, Jana Kuzmíková, Michal Habaj, Tomáš Horváth, R. Passia) analyse and interpret literary works by various writers, investigate literary directions and styles in the 19th and 20th centuries, and within other Slavic contexts: Classicism in Slovak, Czech, German, Hungarian and Polish contexts; Pre-Romanticism—Biedermeier—Romanticism in Slovak, Czech, Polish, Serbian and Croatian contexts (for example, research by Peter Zajac, Jana Pácalová, and Lubica Somolayová); Realism in Slovak, Czech, and Hungarian contexts (Marcela Mikulová and Ivana Taranenková); Modernism in Slovak, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Austrian and Romanian context (Marcela Mikulová and Dana Hučková); Socialist Realism in Slovak, Czech, Polish, Hungarian and German contexts (Fedor Matejov, René Bílik, Pavel Matejovič, Jelena Paštéková, Zora Prušková and Peter Zajac).

The Institute of Slovak Literature is also a place of contact for foreign literary academics engaged in Slavic and Slovak studies. It collaborates with Slavic institutes at universities abroad (for example, it arranged lectures for Slavic studies students in Vienna and Budapest; it organized a collaborative project with the Philosophical Faculty in Novi Sad, Serbia, on re-

¹⁰ Directors: Rudolf Chmel (1989–1991), Peter Zajac (1991–1998), Jelena Paštéková (1999–2006), Dana Kršáková-Hučková (since 2007).

¹¹ Directors: Dionýz Ďurišin (1991), Dušan Slobodník (1991–1992), Ján Koška (1992–2006), Adam Bžoch (since 2006).

searching Slovak literature in the Voivodina in the 18th to 20th centuries and on connections between literature from this area and Slovak and Serbian literature. It also organized lectures for students in Ljubljana and Cracow). Furthermore, it collaborates with literary institutes at academies of sciences abroad (in Prague, Cracow, Warsaw, Budapest and Moscow).

Considering chronological aspect in the research of literary history and of inter-literary relations, a relatively small number of scholars deal with topics in Slavic literatures of earlier periods (between the 11th and 18th centuries). These researchers are affiliated with the Slavic Institute of Ján Stanislav of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (for example, Peter Žeňuch, Svorad Zavarský, Katarína Žeňuchová, Andrej Škoviera and Svetlana Šašerina), with universities (Marta Keručová, Silvia Lauková and Pavol Koprda work at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra; whereas Zuzana Kákošová works at the Philosophical Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava), or with the Institute of Slovak Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Gizela Gáfríková, Erika Brtáňová, Timotea Vráblová, Lenka Rišková and Olga Vaneková). The research in Slavic literatures of the following periods (from the 19th until the 21st centuries) is covered by a significantly larger number of scholars.

Although it would be a simplification to distinguish between primary and secondary Slavic studies, there are two separate strands in Slavic literary studies in Slovakia. There is only one scientific institution in Slovakia that offers Slavic literary studies—the Ján Stanislav Institute of Slavistics. Staffing levels mean that the institute's scientific capacities are limited. Further opportunities for research in Slavic studies are presented by short-term projects designed by flexible research teams.

The emergence of two strands dates back to the early 1990s, when the periodical *Slavica Slovaca* was transformed. It was originally published twice a year, with each volume having two issues on linguistics and two issues on literary studies. The year 1992 was a milestone: the periodical was divided into two. The literary part of *Slavica Slovaca* became the *Slovak Review* (published by the then newly established Institute of World Literature at SAS). The subtitle on the cover page read: “formerly *Slavica Slovaca* and *Slowakei*”. The first editorial, entitled “Hľadanie konsenzu” (Seeking Consensus), explained:

The *Slovak Review* (...) was created through by merging (...) two existing periodicals—*Slowakei* (published by the Matúš Černák Slovak Institute in Munich) and *Slavica Slovaca*—a literary journal (...). This decision resulted from attempts to bring together research conducted in the similar fields of Slavic and Slovak studies and to create a common basis so that Slovak Slavic studies researchers can carry out their work more effectively in Slovakia and abroad (*Slovak Review 1*, 1992, 3).

The editorial also suggested that over the previous two decades, “Slavic studies, as traditionally understood, has weakened; on the other hand, some areas of Slavic studies have become stronger.” This shifted “the research focus towards the specifics of Slovak-foreign relations and connections. (...) We want to use this platform to turn *Slovak Review* into a modern mouthpiece for international Slovak and Slavic studies” (*ibid.*, 3-4). The article stated that “all journals mirror the particular real-life situations from which they emerge and seek to change and develop. *Slovak Review* has sprung up out of the current situation in Slovak and Slavic studies in Slovakia, and before it lie a clear approach and goal, notwithstanding the numerous difficulties involved” (*ibid.*, 4).

In 1993, *Slovak Review* published papers from the 11th Slavic Congress in Bratislava, and thus, it would appear, ended its Slavic orientation. In 1994, a year after the congress, the journal cover declared that it was a “Periodical on World Literature Research”, and in 2007, it changed its name to *Slovak Review of World Literature Research*. The 1994 editorial explained the change in concept:

The *Slovak Review* will define itself as a Slovak overview of a particular scientific discipline. It will be a forum for academics interested in research on world literature. Its ambition is to provide a selection of current research on several core problem areas: theory of the system of world literature, its subsystems and relations; the history and theory of literary translation in Slovakia; and developments in world literature during the Enlightenment and from Modernity to Postmodernity. The journal endorses the very best traditions in literary studies found in *Slavica Slovaca*, and seeks to follow in its footsteps. It would like to be an essential link in establishing contacts between Slovak literature and world literature, and in articulating issues in literature against the wider backdrop (...) The editorial board would also like to publish work on Slovak literature that is conceived of from the perspective of broader comparative or theoretical problems (*Slovak Review* 3, 1994, 1).

In 2009, the concept and name of the journal was changed for the last time (thus far, at least) to become *World Literature Studies: Journal for World Literature Research*. The journal publishes contributions on world literature; namely, literary studies and history, as well as theories on literature, culture and the humanities.

The shift in the journal from Slavic research to world literature research directly reflects a natural change in the research orientation of the publisher (the Institute of World Literature, established in 1991 following the division of the Literary Institute at the Slovak Academy of Sciences). The focus of the Institute of World Literature is now on researching phenomena and processes in world literature, with an emphasis on developmental trends in Modern literary movements, theoretical and methodological problems relating to the general literary process, the history of literary translation in Slovakia as well as theoretical and methodological issues in translation and on interdisciplinary research on great cultural eras. This focus is also reflected in the organizational structure of the Institute. It consists of three research departments: the Department for Theory of Literary Studies, the Department for Comparative Literary Studies and the Department of Translation Studies. Slavic projects feature as part of the current “portfolio” of the Institute—for example, Translation as a Part of the History of Cultural Space (principal investigator: Mária Kusá), Slovak-Croatian Literary Relations after 1948 (principal investigator: Ján Jankovič), and Hungarian and Slovak literature in the Central European Cultural Sphere (principal investigator: Judit Görözdi). Nevertheless, researchers only deal with Slavic literary studies in connection with their own individual research interests.¹² Moreover, many researchers in Slavic studies have passed away or retired.¹³

¹² Mária Kusá, Ján Zambor, Olga Kovačičová, and Eva Maliti conduct research into Russian literature; Ján Jankovič researches Croatian literature; Jana Tesařová studies Latvian literature, Bogumila Suwara analyses Polish literature, Judit Görözdi researches Slovak-Hungarian relations, Milan Žitný researches Slovak-Scandinavian relations, Libuša Vajdová researches Slovak-Romanian relations, whereas Adam Bžoch and Mária Bátorová research Slovak-German relations.

¹³ For example, there has been little interest in research on Ukrainian literature since Michal Molnár passed away (1930–2006); (see Molnár 2011). Research into Bulgarian literature ceased with the deaths

Given the current state of Slavic literary studies in Slovakia, reflecting on the field itself seems to be very important. Another pressing issue is the need to re-evaluate the concepts for volumes of proceedings on Slavic literary studies.

Looking at the current state of Slavic literary studies in Slovakia, it is useful to consider the programme itself so that frameworks can be created for a new, systematic approach. This would deal with any “gaps”, where topics for Slovak literary research have yet to be addressed.

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