

## SOME NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF CZECH SLAVONIC LITERARY STUDIES

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As nearly everything in this new *fin de siècle*, literary scholarship and criticism find itself at the crossroads methodologically, thematically and existentially. Everybody feels that under the influence of rapid changes in technology and in the way of life of modern man in general our traditional philological disciplines have to be changed – **the major question is, however, not if but when and how.**

Nowadays humanities in general and traditional philology in particular have to overcome many new and unexpected obstacles, have to deal with new things and phenomena closely associated with the development of technological society at the end of the second millenary. The crucial troubles also consist in the crisis of academic education.

The idyllic picture of the evolution of literary criticism seems to be false: the real state of things could be characterized as the **disintegration and dispersion**. Literary criticism has been divided into many discourse and territorial groupings which do not communicate with each other. The tendency towards the conception of literary criticism as a norm-making discipline was substituted by the freely conceived cluster of impressionistic ideas and interpretations. The present Central European model of literary criticism should undergo substantial changes. One of the most topical is the problem of literary streams and currents which divided the totality of literary process and often suppressed individual features of artifacts. The confrontation with the close historical study of the artifacts' poetics might lead to a more real picture of the development of literature and change the artificial paradigms which do not often correspond to the intrinsic structures of works of art. The theory of literary kinds (genres) named „literary genology” faces the same problems. Aristotle's genre systematics completed from time to time with new literary kinds, terms and definitions draws nearer to its collapse; the search for a new semantic key became the necessary condition for further development of this sphere of literary criticism. The author of the present contemplation offers the entity of Slavonic literatures and that of Slavonic studies as a convenient level of communication; the history of literary criticism shows how often Slavonic literatures and Slavonic studies have given birth to new general conceptions (R. Jakobson, R. Wellek, F. Wollman). Another problem concerns the relations of literary criticism to the concept of social studies (sociology, political science, social psychology etc.); the author's concept is based on the open model of mutual commu-

nication between philology and social sciences, but, on the other hand, he insists on the necessity to preserve the methodological integrity and consistency of literary criticism as an independent discipline.

The first problem is associated with the search for a new methodology which is sometimes linked with the impact of social sciences with new, more aggressive cluster of methods which more directly reflect the economic or even financial conditions the society lives in. It is also connected with the end of cold war and iron curtain policy changing the area or areal principles giving more room for traditional philology which earlier functioned as a mere service for those who dealt more or less with political science. This impact could be seen at the Twelfth International Congress of Slavists in Cracow (August-September 1998) where some voices even called for the cancellation of all the traditional concepts of Slavonic studies which were said to be connected with various ideologies. Though these voices were rejected by the majority of participants, the impact of social sciences appeared, for example, in the foundation of a new Slavonic discipline called „emigrantology” which aroused the interest of the present slavists, but also a high degree of scepticism. Nevertheless, the existence of the International Committee of Central and East European Studies, influential especially in English speaking countries, its congresses – the last held in Tampere, Finland (2000), its methods of work open new fields for mutual cooperation, but, on the other hand, lead to the necessity of strictly formulated methodology and the area of research of traditional Slavonic philology.

The discussions associated with the university crisis, with the inevitable changes in humanities in general and philology in particular have been reflected in the famous American discussion of 1996–1997 on the pages of *Daedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (Fall 1997), a *Profession* published by the Modern Language Association (1996). Some of the reflections of these problems can also be found in the collection of contributions published in English in Nitra, Slovakia (*Tracing Literary Postmodernism*. University of Constantine the Philosopher, Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Literary Communication, editor: Tibor Zilka, Nitra 1998). The study by Michel Holquist (*Profession*, 1996) expresses the trends leading to the permeation of comparative studies, the area studies and the study of foreign languages. The author demonstrates the split of traditional philology and social sciences as a result of cold war in which the politically oriented area studies prevailed. In the Nitra contributions to postmodernism Donald Cary Freeman, professor of English studies and law at the University of South California, declares the fall of traditional philological unity mentioning the famous article written by Alan Sokal and published by the journal *Social Text*. This nonsense article was published because it suited the ideological

bias of the editor. Freeman calls for the reconstitution of the unity of language and literature studies as a „New Philology”, otherwise the tendency in the USA and western Europe might lead to the deprofessionalization of philology as such.

The Slavonic studies in the Czech Republic – though intrinsically differentiated – are based on traditional philology with the background of other disciplines including history, ethnology, folklore studies, less philosophy and political science. The school of comparative studies in Brno has a tradition going back to the 1920s and 30s. It is connected with the work of Frank Wollman and his students – the tradition of genre research within the framework of various Slavonic Institutions in the Arts Faculty of Masaryk University in Brno has gone on since the 1970s. However, the present methodology would bring together Slavonic, English, Romance, German and Classical Studies and would simultaneously connect with philosophical, historical and sociological texts. In this sense, the newly established disciplines could also be linked to the disciplines which will start to develop in the newly created Faculty of Social Sciences of Masaryk University. It is impossible simply to adhere to the Czech tradition – it is essential to study those trends being pursued, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, which are known as metahistory. Trends similar to metahistory are also appearing in other social sciences as well as in philosophy. The substance of this approach is the conception of a scholarly text as a distinctively structured narrative. It would be necessary to draw parallels between Anglo-American metahistory and the similar movement in Scandinavian countries and also with the new Franco-Polish study of manuscripts (manuscriptology), and to compare the Russian work being carried out by the cultural historians associated with the journal *Odissej* (Ulysses).

The impact of social studies is nevertheless felt, but it is much weaker in the sphere of linguistics than in literary scholarship which is quite understandable. To avoid the danger of mechanical connection of the two mentioned scientific spheres, for example, as a study of language and literature as the means for social and political studies, a small group of researchers from the Institute of Slavonic Studies at the Faculty of Arts and the Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Brno started the supported research in the sphere of textual typology, trying to link the disciplines dealing with both belles lettres and special texts connected with journalism and the study of mass media. The key to this research, which is the result of the new impact of social sciences upon traditional philology caused by the contemporary situation of areal studies, consists in the conception of fiction and non-fiction as a certain type of the narration which may be analysed as a particular genre entity. The seminar held in Brno in summer 1998 came to the specific spheres of interest which have an interdisciplinary character: the linguistic characterization of the text, the problem of transitory genres on the boundary of fiction and non-fiction, the place of mass literature (Triviallitera-

tur), the visualisation of the text and the electronic media, the text and the rhetoric and the new terminology. The specific subject called „Integrated Comparative Genre Studies” seems to have the following structure: the general history and theory of literary genres, the comparative history of literature, the genre structure of non-fiction, literature as a source of information for social sciences, literary character of social studies, the problem of the language in fiction and non-fiction. The main aim of the study group is to overcome the methodological split between the two big groups of sciences and to avoid the situation in which traditional philology served for the purposes of social sciences as auxiliary means. Now the representatives of areal studies which are the transitory zone between social sciences and philology show that they need not only practical language, but the whole linguistic and cultural background. Without the practical knowledge of the language of a particular area in all its dimensions including historical, and with clusters of allusions presented in literature which became the common property of all educated people it is very hard to construct the principles the political system should be based on.

Let us have a look at the contemporary sphere of Czech Slavonic studies as an example. The structure of contemporary Czech Slavonic studies is loose and the Czech Committee of Slavists is only the representational body organizing mutual cooperation of Czech slavists in the period between two congresses – the last of which was held in Cracow and the next will be held in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

The second crucial problem of Czech Slavonic studies – besides that of the impact of social sciences and the necessity of transforming its methodology which is – I guess – very similar to that of other countries, at least in Europe – is the problem of the exchange of generations. In connection with the deterioration of contemporary economic situation, the financial position of both the Czech universities and the institutes of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic is critical. This prevents the Slavonic institutes and departments from the generational reconstitution of their staffs or, at least, the change is very slow and in some places nearly caused the collapse of normal activity.

The Institute of Slavonic Studies at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University, Brno, covers both Russian studies and other Slavonic languages and literatures – it has nine Slavonic disciplines including Ukrainian, all south Slavonic languages and literatures, and Slovak studies. Linguistics is based on the methodology of contrastive study of Slavonic and non-Slavonic languages, literary studies go back to the tradition of comparative studies founded in Brno by professor Frank Wollman and his disciples. The Brno Institute of Slavonic Studies publishes the quarterly *Opera Slavica*, the second Slavonic journal published in the Czech Republic after *Slavia*, the annual *Slavica Litteraria* and the periodical *Litteraria Hu-*

manitas. The international conferences regularly organized by the Brno Institute of Slavonic Studies focused on the work of Frank Wollman, Roman Jakobson, in the pre-war period professor in Brno, and Alexander Veselovsky. The important project was also the bibliography of balkanology. The combination of comparative and genre studies together with the methodological principles of philological hermeneutics and with the interest in social sciences and wide international contacts characterize this specific centre of Slavonic studies.

Let us have a look at some crucial episodes of the development of Brno and Moravian Slavonic studies.

The foundation of Masaryk University in Brno (in the former Czechoslovakia, now in the Czech Republic) also meant the beginnings of Slavonic studies: the first professor of Slavonic studies **Frank Wollman** (1888–1969) came to Brno from Bratislava Komenský University. He was an excellent comparatist, later the author of *Slovesnost Slovanů* (1928), expert in South Slavonic literatures, the theorist dealing with literary methodology (*K metodologii srovnávací slovesnosti slovanské*, 1936), the founder of the famous Czech School of Comparative Studies (Prague – Brno, see: Slavomír Wollman: *Česká škola literární komparistiky*, Praha 1989). In 1923 the professors of Czech literature at Masaryk University Stanislav Souček (1870–1935) and Václav Vondrák (1859–1925) invited Sergij Vilinskij, a Ukrainian by origin professor and vice-president of Novorossiisk University in Odessa, being in Bulgarian exile after the Russian October Revolution to come to Brno – he then became the founder of the study of modern Russian literature though in Russia he dealt in fact with medieval religious texts which are common for Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian literatures (a marginal remark: Vilinskij was a teacher of another famous Russian medievalist N. K. Gudzij and in the winter semester 1913 he also taught Mikhail Bakhtin, who then left Odessa for St. Petersburg); in Brno he wrote a book on M. J. Saltykov-Ščedrin and on the Bulgarian writer Petko Todorov, and with the financial support of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education he spent much time in Bulgaria studying religious texts in Bulgarian monasteries. In Brno S. Vilinskij also made friends with the Moravian author of the first Czech History of Russian literature, a Catholic monk, priest and an excellent translator from Russian and other Slavonic languages Alois Augustin Vrzal (pseudonym A. G. Stín, 1864–1930).

Although Ukrainian language and literature was regarded as a natural part of Brno Slavonic studies from their very beginnings, Ukrainian did not represent a specific subject and there were no professors specialising either Ukrainian language or in literature, and after 1945 and later, Ukrainian was taught (it is said that after the wish of Soviet authorities) only at Charles University in Prague. In spite of this sad fact the practical courses in Ukrainian were realised and later a good specialist in Ukrainian literature appeared.

**Dr. Mečislav Krhoun** (born 1907 in Poland, died 1982 in Brno) studied Czech., history and geography at Brno Faculty of Arts (Filozofická fakulta) in 1928–1933, later he studied Polish and Russian (1946–1947), became doctor of philosophy in 1935, was a disciple of the famous Czech historian and critic of literature Arne Novák (1880–1939). Then he taught at various grammar schools in Moravia and in Slovakia (Nový Bohumín, Spišská Nová Ves, Lučenec, Brno), after 1945 he was a lecturer at Cracow University, Poland, later he worked in the Slavonic Institute in Prague; his several study stays in Poland, Russia and Ukraine were oriented on the study of literature. Though he delivered lectures in Old Russian literature, in Russian folklore and in methodology of teaching languages and literatures, his scholarly interests were connected with the study of Ukrainian, Polish and Belorussian literatures and literary scholarships. Mečislav Krhoun knew Russian, Polish, Ukrainian and Belorussian, not speaking about the obligatory knowledge of German; this enabled him to analyse the whole cultural panorama in which the Germanic, Slavonic and Jewish, partly also Armenian elements permeated in Ukraine, especially in the Bukovina, a former part of Austro-Hungarian Empire with its centre Černovcy. Krhoun's creative activity at the Faculty of Arts (Filozofická fakulta) of Masaryk University in Brno concerned the period of the 1960's and the 1970's – later Ukrainian disappeared from the study programme in Brno again and was restored only in the 1990's with the help of the Ukrainian lecturer Halyna Myronova who came to support Brno Ukrainian studies from the Kiev Shevchenko State University and settled with the whole family in Brno. Galina Bínová, a Russian by birth, deals with Ukrainian literature and Tat'jana Juříčková covers the transitory zone between linguistics and literary scholarship (poetics and stylistics).

Mečislav Krhoun delivered lectures in old Russian literature; it was very organic and logical because this cradle of all the East Slavonic cultures contains the beginnings of all the East Slavonic national literatures. Besides, Krhoun dealt with Polish, wrote articles on Belorussian cultural and scholarly affairs, but his beloved subject was Ukrainian literature, especially the poetic work of **Jurij Adalbertovyč Fed'kovyč** (born 1834 in Storonec-Putyliv, died 1888 in Černovcy). Krhoun's work called *Básnické dílo Jurije Fed'kovyče* (Brno 1973, 359 pages – The Poetic Work of Jurij Fed'kovyč) is – as far as I know – the most immense and the most profound complex work ever written about this Bukovina Ukrainian poet. Unfortunately, the chosen language – Czech – prevented the monograph from being better known and more widely read in world literary scholarship in general, and in Slavonic studies in particular (the Russian summary in the book is too short – just one page). In the 1990's, when the interest in Fed'kovyč strengthened, Krhoun's book was completely forgotten and Fed'kovyč's German writings and his poetics were

discovered as if for the first time (the conference in Černovcy did not utter a single word about the book, and even the only Czech dictionary of Soviet writers published in 1977 – 4 years after the publication of the book – does not know it).

The monograph is subdivided into sixteen sections including bibliography, notes, the Russian summary and the index. The kernel of the volume contains twelve chapters dealing with the biographical and artistic development of the poet and prose writer, not omitting his role as a biliteral author. Mečislav Krhoun was not a literary theorist, rather a very industrious historian of literature; therefore there is rich material, long quotations and comparisons, less speculations and contemplations. The first chapter is fully devoted to the analysis of the special literature on Jurij Fed'kovyč (I. Franko, O. Makovej, M. Pivovarov and M. Nečiteljuk). However, M. Krhoun expressed his own views: he was the real representative of Czech Ukrainian studies with the profound knowledge of the cultural background and European poetic traditions. M. Krhoun is very sensitive to the quality of Fed'kovyč's poetry: he seeks its folklore roots but, at the same time, does not underrate the influence of German poetic traditions which formed not only Fed'kovyč's poetic beginnings, but all his creative activity. Though the researcher did not mention the terms used by more modern and postmodern theorists (e. g. Dionýz Ďurišin) he practically analysed the problem of Polish–Russian–Ukrainian–German polyliterariness. At least, he compared (with the positivist approach) the similarity of Ukrainian–German motifs in Fed'kovyč's poetry and the prolific and creative permeation of artificial German poetic tradition associated with both the classical and romantic creative patterns with that of Hucul–Ukrainian folklore poetics. Krhoun did not forget Fed'kovyč's link with the South Slavonic inspiration, and accentuated the specific features of Ukrainian poetic traditions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the different cultural basis and both the hidden and the open conflict between the Ukrainian East and West. Moreover, in the mentioned introductory chapter the author gave a rich political, economic and cultural background of Ukrainian literary activity in the situation when the Ukrainian studies in the countries under the Soviet influence were suppressed or at least reduced, not speaking about the obligatory ideological bias. The modest researcher Mečislav Krhoun with the support of the (at that time) subdean of the Brno Faculty of Arts, a slavist Jaroslav Burian published the book which showed new ways and deeper insight in Fed'kovyč's poetic career.

In the following chapters of his monograph the author paid attention not only to the poet's collection of poems called *Поэзия*, but also to his beginnings as a German poet; the influence of German poetic tradition in Krhoun's conception is neither overrated nor underestimated as it was usual in the official Soviet view. On the other hand, speaking about Fed'kovyč's collection of German poems *Am Tscheremus*, the author stressed the similarity of motifs and the poet's method of

transplantation and variation based on the domestic Hucul-Ukrainian mythological and legendary traditions. Also the type of Fed'kovyč's poetic creation differs a lot from that of artificial German romantic poetry. Though Fed'kovyč's significance is generally recognised, Krhoun regards the poet an outsider both in the national and in the poetic sense of the word.

Although the kernel of Krhoun's interpretation lies in comparative analysis of the 1860's poems and the kolomyika poems as well as the German poems of the 1860's, he did not ignore the lyric and epic poetry of the 1870' and the above-mentioned German collection of poems *Am Tscheremus* and the poetic cycle *Дики думи*, not speaking about the religious *Колядник*. Krhoun's scholarly discovery are Fed'kovyč's last poems being of a rather satiric and polemic character: the impact of sarcastic and sardonic realism openly burst. On the other hand, Fed'kovyč tried to synthesise the romantic and realist poetics into one whole. Analysing all the different layers of Fed'kovyč's poetry Krhoun did not omit his antisemitism, the source of which could be found in the economic and national situation of the Hucul-Ukrainians of that time. Krhoun's sincere and open approach towards both the strong and weak qualities of Fed'kovyč's poetry, his complex attitude to his art and political and social background, is worth appreciating.

As for the method of Krhoun's work, it is more or less thematology (Stoffgeschichte) mixed with the analysis of Fed'kovyč's verse; the problem consists in the fact that Krhoun was only rarely successful in the permeation of phonetic, versological and thematic aspects of the poet's creations. Therefore, the analysis is split into two isolated research entities. With regard to the specific generational and methodological approach Krhoun's work should not be underestimated: nobody who would like to write about this Hucul-Ukrainian poet should avoid this work – though written in a „minority Slavonic language”. The intention to translate some key-passages of this complex work into Ukrainian, German or English seems to be very topical especially nowadays, at the time of the triumphant comeback and immense rise of Ukrainian studies.

Another interesting, but half-forgotten personality was a Moravian Slavist, a Catholic literary historian, essayist and translator **Alois Augustin Vrzal** (1864–1930), a monk of the Benedictine monastery in Rajhrad (in the Brno neighbourhood), then a parish priest in three South-Moravian villages.

He was born in the family of a farmer in Popovice (near Kroměříž in the central part of Moravia). His father's name was Jan Vrzal. A. Vrzal was the ninth child of the family. Although the family was not very rich, the three sons received university education. A. A. Vrzal attended primary school in 1870–1876 in Rataje, then the Czech grammar school in Přerov which he finished in 1884. His grammar school teacher advised him to enter the Rajhrad Benedictine monastery, at that



time the centre of Catholic cultural activity. In 1884 Alois Vrzal adopted a monastic name Augustin. He studied theology, later gave lectures in Church history and Church law; in 1893 he was appointed a Church co-operator in Domašov, then a parish priest in Syrovice and in Ostrovačice (1916–1927). His diary – now kept in the regional archives in Brno – contains the information concerning his translations from Russian. Most interesting are the two episodes from Vrzal's (the pseudonym A. G. Stín is a cryptogram of Augustin) life: the attempt to make a trip to Russia in the fatal year 1914 and the police examination in his house during the First World War because of his Slavophile orientation. The uncertain political situation may also have caused the disappearance of several letters including those of M. Gorky.

The most important area in Vrzal's archives, correspondence and library contains the first publication of several letters, one of them belonging to the Russian political writer and translator from French, English and Polish, propagator of Franco-Russian alliance, the author of the positivist conception of N. S. Leskov – R. I. Sementkovsky. When working on his *History of the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Russian Literature*, Vrzal asked several Russian authors to send him brief autobiographies. Before his death Vrzal donated 36 letters, written by twenty-two 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian prose writers, to the Slavonic Seminar of the Brno Masaryk University. They were partly published (including a letter by A. P. Chekhov and 3 letters by V. G. Korolenko) by Sergii Vilinsky and Jaroslav Mandát. Vrzal's correspondents were – besides Chekhov and Korolenko – A. I. Ertel, G. A. Machtet, S. I. Gusev-Orenburgsky, I. A. Salov, A. M. Skabichevsky, B. Zaitsev, I. N. Potapenko, M. V. Krestovskaya, R. I. Sementkovsky, and others. Vrzal's library (now kept in the Brno University Library) contains Czech, Russian, Slovak, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Polish, Lusatian, Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian books written by the most prominent prose writers and poets.

The kernel of Vrzal's creative activity is his strategy as a translator from Russian into Czech and, last but not least, his literary criticism including *The History of the 19th-Century Russian Literature* (in Czech 1893), the booklet devoted to Pushkin's centenary, his probably most important work *Religious and Moral Questions in Russian Fiction* (1912) and his *Outline of the History of New Russian Literature* (1926) in which he dealt with modernism and post-revolutionary writings. Vrzal's heritage as a literary historian, critic and translator is immense. Although in his time he was not regarded as a significant slavist because of his ethical and catholic vision of literature and of his positivist and intuitivist methodology, his importance can be better seen nowadays, at the time of the growing interest to ethical principles, values, and to practical moral behaviour.