

CULTURAL IMPACT AS TRADITION AND CHALLENGE FOR CZECH, UKRAINIAN AND POLISH COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Until the outbreak of World War I, the status of Czech, Ukrainian and Polish Comparative Studies was affected by the political dependence of the three nations. In the period between the world wars, only Czechs and Poles could freely carry out comparative research, and after 1945, due to the loss of political sovereignty, ideology once more had an impact on the development of science. The regimes closed down such distinguished institutes as the Department of Comparative Studies at Charles University in Prague. In 1893, the first professor of comparative literature at this University was Jaroslav Vrchlický, followed by František Xaver Šalda and Václav Tille, who opted for the European dimension of local literature. After the war, the traditions were to be continued by Václav Černý, a Czech professor of Romance languages, but his Department of Comparative Studies was opened twice and suspended as many as three times, both on account of Černý's anti-communist sympathies and of his research on the affinities of Czech culture and the French tradition.

Under the pressure of Marxism, studies on the linkages between Slav. literatures and Western culture were either curbed or curtailed, and where the communists had unlimited power, as in Soviet Ukraine, "bourgeoise" comparative studies were banned as early as the 1930s. Approved was the search of "Slavic reciprocities in Slav literatures".

Remembrance of the political control of comparative studies made Julian Kornhauser come up with a pessimistic evaluation of the future of the science. The author finishes the article "The End of Slav. Comparative Studies?" with a question mark, at the same time implying the disintegration of science through the long-term focus on "Slavic unity" (Kornhauser 154).

The legacy of Czech, Ukrainian and Polish Comparative Studies derived from the time of domination by the Soviet Union does not confirm this scathing assessment. Among many relevant texts of no value, one can still find a number of reliable sources, thanks to which Slav. Comparative Studies does not need to develop within an intellectual void. Let me mention only a few figures. One of the most eminent figures of Czech Comparative Studies after 1945 was Frank Wollman (1888–1969), a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle prior to the war, interested in comparative research since the 1920s. After 1948, whenever he could, he criticised the political agenda of Comparative Studies ("Zpolitizovaná komparatistika", *Slavia* no. 26/1957) and raised other debatable issues, such as "Slavic unity", Panslavism and Slavophilia. In 2001, a Slavistická společnost Franka Wollmana was established at Masaryk University in Brno to continue the scholar's traditions. Of great importance was the work of the younger generation, i.e. Wollman's son, Slavomír, Josef Hrabák and Slovak Dionýz Ďurišin. In Poland after World War II, despite the dominance of ideology-laden "impact studies" and "contact studies", worthwhile theoretical texts continued to be written (by Henryk Markiewicz, Stefania Skwarczyńska, Stefan Treugutt, and Hanna Dziechcińska). The pre-war research on the linkages between Polish culture and Antiquity was continued, with Mieczysław Brahmer and Maria Strzałkowa as authority figures. In Polish Slav. Comparative Studies, I will limit myself to one name only: Halina Janaszek-Ivaničkova, renowned also thanks to her anthologies of global Comparative Studies. In Ukrainian Comparative Studies, there were noteworthy texts by Oleksander Bilecky, Hryhoriy Werwes and Dmytro Nalyvayka. In the second half of the 20th century and in the early 21st, next to traditional research centres (Kiev, Lviv), smaller institutes of Comparative Studies have sprung up in Tarnopol and Chernovce, and in eastern Ukraine: Odesa and Kharkiv.

Let us resume the question of the impact of geography and politics on each of the three offshoots of Comparative Studies Czech,

Ukrainian and Polish societies reside in an area called Central and Eastern Europe. Leaving aside the question whether the uniqueness of this space is the phantasy of politicians and writers or a fact, no doubt the geopolitical status of this area, in the shadow of the Austrian and Russian empires, sensitised the nations to the issue of cultural dominance. While in Europe, still prior to World War I, the question of cultural impact was a major focus of Comparative Studies, in this particular region it was more than just a philological problem. Especially that the clashing of dominance and subjugation, i.e. of small nations and the empire, as well as within an empire – the subjection of weaker nations to those of a stronger cultural and economic position – made the question of cultural impact a very delicate matter. This helped put forth ideas that sound fresh and modern even today.

It is worthwhile to recall this tradition, although in a short article we are limited to a few questions only: some of the ideas were formulated still in the 19th century, while others between the world wars, even if they resounded shortly after the end of the conflict with Nazi Germany.

This is what happened in the case of the lecture delivered in 1946 in Paris by the eminent Czech Structuralist, Jan Mukařovský. Although he stressed the need for analysing a literary work of art within its cultural context, Mukařovský was for a long time sceptical, as Miloš Zelenka observes, about the use of the comparative method in the research on national literature (Zelenka 64). In his literary analyses, Mukařovský drew on national literature, seeing it as a closed, self-sustaining system, accidentally permeated by insignificant elements from other systems. Mukařovský changed his position only in the 1960s, as confirmed, e.g. by his article “K dnešnímu stavu a výkladům srovnávací vědy literární”, published in *Impuls* no. 10/1967.

Despite a waning interest in Comparative Studies in the 1940s, in his aforementioned lecture delivered at the Institut des Études Slaves, published as “O strukturalizmu”, the scholar addressed the “impact” angle taken by French comparatists. Apart from the eponymous question, he polemicized with the French position which saw French culture as a model tasked with the role of “civilising” provincial literatures. Mukařovský rebuked these views and stressed the dynamism of national literature, which he saw as a changeable structure (Mukařovský 110). According to him, the process of cultural impact is similarly dynamic, as literary influence is never one-sided (an approach adop-

ted by the French scholars). The cultural relation does not generate a passive and an active role, since the party accepting specific patterns is engaged, too. Influence does not involve a mechanical "reproduction" of the original, as within the process some things are selected and others rejected, whereas the adopted elements are ordered hierarchically, their relations established in a way that does not need to respect the principles of the first literary work (111).

Mukařovský pointed out one more aspect of cultural impact. Referring to the literatures of Central and Eastern Europe, he highlighted the fact that they were in different impact zones, influenced by competitive, if not exclusive stimuli. Influence was subject to deviation arising from the clash with domestic traditions that interfered with the new factors and from the competitive impact from divergent cultural zones. The Structuralist would point to Czech literature, which in the 19th and 20th centuries was influenced by Russian as well as Polish and Western writers. The ideas and models derived from there were neither complementary, nor homogeneous. Contrary to his French colleagues, convinced that the impact of their literature may be exclusively positive, Mukařovský maintained that while the Slavic influences contributed to the unique character of Czech letters, the Western patterns were not conducive to it.

Mukařovský protested against a one-sided, selective and static perception of literary relations. Regrettably, he saw some Czech scholars as blindly subscribing to this view, erroneously haunted by the complex of the "small Czech nation".

Mukařovský's views preceded the Comparative Studies of his time. The dynamic and active theory of cultural impact anticipated the 1960s vision of the humanities as a system of viewpoints rather than established hierarchies. Mukařovský would oppose the rigid understanding of the dominant culture as follows:

Under the traditional approach, influence is seen as one-sided. Pitted against each other in permanent opposition are the influencing and the influenced entities. This approach disregards the fact that influence, if it is to be accepted, must be prepared under domestic conditions, decisive for the degree and direction of this influence. Under no circumstances does influence obliterate what the development of local art has brought about, or what the earlier and contemporary knowledge of a given society has generated. Therefore, when examining influence, one must assume that individual national arts meet as equable (never subordinating the influenced party to the influencing one [...]) Influence is not, let it

be stressed once again, a token of superiority or subordination of individual national cultures. What brings them together is their reciprocity, born out of the equity of national and equal status of their cultures (115).

The Czech scholars who return today to the pre-war tradition observe that Czech Structuralism was free from the faults of French Structuralism pointed out in 1968. They moreover stress the significance of this tradition for the construction of the Czech and Slovak School of Comparative Studies. In fact, it is evident that the careers of the major Czech comparative scholars, who matured intellectually in the period between the world wars, were influenced greatly by the Prague Linguistic Circle. The Structuralist "angle" facilitated the development of a comparatist perspective. The meetings of the Circle were attended by the young René Wellek. While he cannot be considered a Czech on account of his origin and biography, no doubt the Czech (or perhaps Central European) component was a major ingredient in the identity of one of the most eminent Comparative Studies scholars of the 20th century. Until the outbreak of World War II, Wellek's intercultural activities involved the promotion of literature written in English in the Czech press and the promotion of Czech culture in the English-speaking world. The only major comparative text from that time is a comparative study of the output of F.H. Mácha and Byron (1937). That year, Wellek published a short article about, or actually an obituary of, Václav Tille (Wellek 7). Seminars by Tille (1867–1937), a Slav. and German Studies scholar, a professor of comparative history at Charles University in Prague had their impact on young Wellek. While he did not share many of his professor's views, he was inspired by his idea of variables and relative cultural values, which undermined the vision of fixed hierarchies in culture.

Sensitivity to the question of cultural impact, evident in Mukařovský and other scholars from the region, stemmed from the need to overcome cultural provincialism and to "catch up with Europe", and at the same time from the fear of imitation. Therefore many intellectuals were intrigued by the preservation of equilibrium between modernisation of the language of art through the use of European elements and the search for an independent path. One of such intellectuals was Karel Čapek who, while not in the inner circle of comparative studies, addressed the question of cultural impact. This is the pivotal issue of his *Essay for Jonathan*, written for 6 years (1932–1938). The writer's considerations were made more dramatic by the immi-

ment war and a return to reflections on the legitimacy of Czechoslovak culture and the Czechoslovak state. Čapek rejected the arguments of sceptics, who criticised the secondary nature of Czech legacy. Instead, he defended the right of the legacy of other nations to be seen as an accessible treasure trove, probed in order to enrich one's own culture, without the complex of being an imitator, though, since inspiration, transferred to another context, is never a repetition.

It seemed that the question of the usefulness Czech culture departing from the stronger and more developed German culture was conclusively resolved during the national revival. Čapek's essay indicated that under unfavourable circumstances the problem re-emerged. No wonder that in the 19th century and long afterwards, during a heated debate about how to understand the national character of culture, the suspicion of succumbing to unwelcome cultural impact may have had tragic consequences for the lives and careers of even the most outstanding artists. Otakar Hostinský (1847–1910), renowned for the development of national aesthetics, was one of the few who defended the music of Bedřich Smetana against the hostile conservative Czech public. Hostinský, creating a philosophy of the history of art from the point of view of the artistic progress of a "small nation", identified four stages of this process. The first one is characterised by an increase in the number of works, while the second one by the appearance of their new forms. The third one sees new combinations of previously existing forms, whereas the fourth stage is marked by the emergence of innovative means of artistic expression (Kučera 393). As the Czech aesthetician observed, especially during the second and third stages, national art must open up to European patterns, its aesthetics corresponding to the artistic currents of the day. Entering the debate about the Czech national opera, the critic located it in the context of the most outstanding works of European music rather than of Czechs' favourite folk songs. He defended Smetana when the composer was accused of transferring to the Czech stage of Wagner's "Germanic" impact and of subordinating the national to foreign influence, German at that.

Hostinský's concept stressed dynamic influence: he did not regard the Czech composer as a passive imitator of a German musician who "civilises" the province by imitating the accomplishments of a higher culture. He saw him as capable of applying foreign patterns so that they can grow into the domestic culture and create new artistic quali-

ties. The struggle of the Czech public with Smetana and the struggle for Smetana of elite group of writers, philosophers, musicians aware of the need for a new art intensified in the late 1860s and actually continued till the composer's death; passing away in a psychiatric institution, Smetana was convinced that he had not created a national opera, which had been his great expectation all along.

Smetana died in 1884. It seems symbolic that the foundations for Ukrainian Comparative Studies were laid by Ivan Franko in the preceding year. In this case, too, reflection on cultural impact was a major element. At the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the following one, comparative research of Ukrainian culture was used to prove its ideological indebtedness to Polish or Russian culture (Budnyj and Ilnyčkyj 34). This is what Poles, Russians and sometimes Ukrainians did. Seeking relations between Ukrainian legacy and Russian or Polish culture treated Ukrainian culture as a second-hand, or even as a "tainted" version of the influencing culture. As Budnyj and Ilnyčkyj observe, Franko revalued the influencing–influenced relation (34–35). While he addressed the question of folklore studies, his remarks are both universal and innovative. Franko developed with a three-layer concept of influence: the first one is the layer of material (a pan-European legacy), the second one is composition, arising from the adaptation of foreign elements, to be combined, mixed and reformulated. The third stratum is the authors' individual approach to what is "adopted and mixed"¹. Comparing this concept with observations by Hostinský and Mukařovský as well as with the comparative approach developed after Wellek's rebellion in 1959, we notice how similar the ideas and considerations are. American Comparative Studies, a rival of the French school, pointed out that similarities exist next to differences and that it is the latter that should be the prime

¹ Franko's concept was described in a text *Starynna romano-germanska nowela w ustach ruškoho narodu*. Moreover, he included many interesting observations in the article "Adam Mickiewicz w ukrajinskij literaturi" (1885). Identifying Frank's approach to Mickiewicz only with the pamphlet *Poet of Betrayal* (1897) is a simplification; an earlier text shows Mickiewicz's poetry as a major model for Ukrainian literature and an object of transformations and cultural games rather than slavish imitation. This is what Franko wrote about the first translation of Mickiewicz into Ukrainian (Hułak-Artemowski 1837): "[...] the author wanted to add to Polish ballades, when possible, a Ukrainian tinge, enliven them with Ukrainian humour, which he fully managed" (Budnyj and Ilnyčkyj 385–386).

focus of research. It is the difference, or what arises from “mediated influence”, that Franko had highlighted in 1883, i.e. 76 years earlier.

Franko’s views were influenced by Mychailo Drahomanov (1841–1895), a Ukrainian political thinker, a European who freely drew on the intellectual legacy of nearly the entire continent. A polyglot, in his early youth he was able to read in five European languages on top of his knowledge of Slavic languages and Latin. His political views were, according to Ivan Lysiak Rudnytsky (Rudnyćkyj), syncretic (Rudnytsky 205), but he also stressed that key for the development of Ukrainian culture is to overcome the anxiety of influence. Drahomanov warned against the exclusive enclosure within one’s own, allegedly “national” formation. He wrote that 2–3 in 100 Ukrainian intellectuals read European books, mainly technical texts at that (Drahomanov 1915, 64). This did not bode well for the development of Ukrainian legacy. Still more controversial seemed his opinions on the attitude to Russian culture, which earned him the tag of a Russophile. However, Drahomanov’s warning against an overt severance of connections with Russian literature by Ukrainian writers stemmed from a pragmatic rather than an ideological position. He did not write about the historical union of both nations but stressed the need to modernise one’s own legacy in contact with a superior culture. As Drahomanov observed, if he saw strenuous efforts of Ukrainian writers to receive “spiritual food” directly from Western cultures, then he would not raise the issue. However, Ukrainian elites lacked sufficient European education for that (Drahomanov 1915, 65). According to him, without external support Ukrainian culture was bound to become provincial.

Drahomanov stressed that the difference between Ukraine and Russia was due to Ukraine having strong cultural ties with Western Europe until the 18th century and to Ukraine’s participation in Western social and cultural processes. The Ukrainian thinker attached great importance to this tradition. However, although relations with the West were mediated by the Polish Republic, this did not mean an uncritical praise of Polish culture. His approach was ambivalent and often scathing. This is one proof that the East-West alternative, in the context of which Comparative Studies of Slav countries has often been placed, is oversimplified. Comparative texts by Ukrainian researchers, recognised as Occidentalists (M. Daszkevych, I. Franko, V. Shchurat, O. Kolessa) were critical of Polish culture, the closest

“window on the West”. It was a framework of references and comparisons as well as negation of many Polish cultural values, imagery, rhetorical figures, and last but not least, the perception of history.

A similar ambivalence towards the West, in the attitudes of followers of this direction of cultural references, can be identified in Polish and Czech texts on cultural impact. That is why the Slavic connections with Western Europe cannot be precisely described via the rigid division into the Occidentalists and the traditionalists mistrustful towards Europe². Occidentalism may have determined the choice of the cultural horizon, which was not, however, tantamount to the recognition of the “influencing” culture as an undisputable model.

Drahomanov raised one more aspect of cultural impact: the denationalisation of Ukrainian elites, who adopted the Polish or Russian cultural model, and ultimately also the respective identity. At Drahomanov’s time, this problem mainly involved the intelligentsia. The Ukrainian thinker defined this phenomenon as the “nomadism of the educated” (after: Rudnytsky 237) and sounded an alarm that only 5% of the intellectuals identify with the nation and assume the role of spiritual leaders (Rudnytsky 236). He asked rhetorically what would happen to the legacy of the French if their elites chose a different cultural and national identity: what would happen within a short time to French literature, political reflection and other achievements? (Rudnytsky 236).

The question of cultural impact was also interesting for Polish comparative scholars, even if Slavophilia was associated with ideology in the Second Republic. The Polish tradition of Slavophilia, including the foundations laid by Mickiewicz’s lectures, gave way to fears of Panslavism. There were few Polish followers of the creation of a “comparative Slavic literature”, a project which fascinated the Czechs and Southern Slavs. Even in the 19th c., when Poles tried to write a history of world literature, they did not single out a separate history of Slavic literatures. Polish literature was put in the context of Western European letters and of Antiquity. The prime focus of re-

² For example: Czech literary scholars found the context for their own literature in Paris, Rome, Vienna, Berlin, and Moscow, which did not preclude their critique of or polemical attitude to the above contexts. Historians were interested in a narrower context: German, Austrian, and in time also the Polish one. However, as Jiří Pešek observes, Czech historiography was predominantly focused on Czech history. Thinking in supra-national or even supra-regional terms was rare in Academia (after: Pešek 145, 147).

search was the French, German, English, and Italian influences, and if relations with Slavic cultures (e.g. Czech or Slovak) were examined, it was done so only from the point of view their impact on Polish culture.

Still more difficult, as strictly political, were cultural relations and the question of the influence of Russian or Ukrainian literature.

Edward Możejko, outlining the status of Polish Comparative Studies before World War II, mentioned “[...] Zygmunt Łempicki, (although he was decisively against the notion of comparative Slavic literatures)”. According to Możejko, the continuators of Comparative Studies after the war included Mieczysław Brahmer and Maria Strzałkowa (Możejko 20). It seems important that the author focuses solely on scholars who sought contexts for Polish culture in West European cultures. What about the East, one might ask? Should not have Możejko mentioned Marian Zdziechowski next to Łempicki, a German and Classical Studies scholar? Zdziechowski was as much a comparatist as Łempicki, but examined mainly Polish-Russian cultural relations. The short-shrift given to Zdziechowski shows that today, too, we may find it hard to cope with a thinker who titled his texts: *Wpływy rosyjskie na duszę polską* [Russian influences on the Polish soul] (1920), or *Europa, Rosja, Azja a idea słowiańska w Polsce* [Europe, Russia, Asia and the Slavic idea in Poland] (1923). It is not easy to look into these questions in a country where most know the poem – “Kto powiedział, że Moskale/ Przyjaciółmi są Lechitów/ Temu pierwszy w łeb wypalę/ Przed kościołem Karmelitów” [Who maintains that Muscovites are Poles’ friends will be killed by me in front of the Carmelite Church]³.

Relations with Ukrainian culture posed an even greater challenge. Those who did not wish to reiterate slogans about the charm of Polish culture, which led to the voluntary Polonisation of the Russian and then Ukrainian elites, had to address questions difficult from the cultural and political perspective. Polish impact on Ukrainian culture, no doubt profound, was neither decidedly positive, nor destructive. It was, however, subject to ideological interpretation on either side. To date, it has not been fully studied in its complexity and ambivalence. This might be work for whole generations, especially that it calls for the rejection of many representations ingrained in the Polish

³ Words from the poem *Kościuszko's Polonaise* by Rajnold Suchodolski.

consciousness. However, the benefits of today's modernised Comparative Studies help us see our own and other cultures in their dynamic rather than static contexts. The category of cultural impact, as a question of utmost significance in Central and Eastern Europe, is a perfect tool for the creation of a renewed vision of this region.

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The essays collected in this book were originally published in the following volumes of *Porównania. A Journal on Comparative Literature*:

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