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## The Slavonic Literary Studies at the Crossroads: Redefining, or Preserving?

**ABSTRACT:** Pospíšil Ivo, *The Slavonic Literary Studies at the Crossroads: Redefining, or Preserving?*, "Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne" 23, Poznań 2022. Wydawnictwo "Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne," Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, pp. 193–211. ISSN 2084-3011.

The author of the present study tries to answer the question from the title about the contemporary state and the future of Slavonic literary studies in connection with other disciplines, e.g., comparative and genre studies, their crises and shifts of methodological emphases. According to the author, the future perspectives of Slavonic studies are associated with the relatively constant entity of the subject, the Slavonic phenomenon or the Slavonic world as marking or delimiting the boundaries of Slavonic studies as an independent or autonomous discipline, and with their open or semi-open character in the philological framework, dynamic borders and transcending towards the cultural-area concept without losing their philological kernel.

**KEYWORDS:** Slavonic studies; comparative studies; genre studies; power in literature and literary studies

At the very beginning I would like to stress the importance of Slavonic studies even these days and to mention the languages which served as a communicative tool for mutual understanding for all Slavists. Besides French, it was mainly German, which Pavel Josef Šafařík/Šafárik, a Slovak by birth writing his works prevalently in Czech, used in his famous *Geschichte der slawischen Sprache und Literatur nach allen Mundarten* (A History of the Slavonic Language and Literature in All Dialects) from 1823, the book that might function as a model for his successors, e.g., Adam Mickiewicz in his Paris lectures some 20 years later. Apart from the Prague Linguistic Circle in which French was the language applied in the title of its works *Travaux du cercle linguistique de Prague* (*Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*), French was also used during the memorable event of Polish literary or, in a wider sense, general cultural history—Adam Mickiewicz's already mentioned Paris lectures delivered at the Collège de France, with the famous Romantic poet self-critically complaining of his seemingly imperfect knowledge of this language, though when reading his lectures, I am convinced he was too modest in this sense.

I do not mean we could come up with something brand new or absolutely original; this is not the main feature of our rather speculative scholarly disciplines in which it is possible to reach just shifts of emphasis, but if we succeeded in this, our world of Slavonic studies would fulfil its role and mission.

The absence of wider discussions very often ignoring one another, as we foresightedly called it at the turn of the century and millennium, becomes, I am afraid, one of the leading symptoms of contemporary science in general, but it cannot prevent us from prolific returns to the roots created by our predecessors who anchored their discipline investigating its borders, sense and, above all, its threats and perspectives. The frequently used word “threat” does not mean that Slavonic studies represent a threat, but, on the contrary, they themselves are an object of such threats. The well-known openness of Slavonic studies in a wider sense, i.e. both philological and areal, is often defined by its connection with comparative studies which were from the very beginning a leitmotif of modern Slavonic studies supported and applied by all the relevant scholars from Dobrovský, Baltic German Vostokov (Osteneck), Kopitar, Karadžić, Jagić, Murko, Máchal, Horák, Wollman and others. The

Slavonic material as such, especially the Russian one with its developmental anomalies (Pospíšil, 2008a, 2018a), provided the methodological progress with the strongest inventive impulses demonstrated, for example, by Roman Jakobson, Mikhail Bakhtin, Dmitry Likhachev or Yuri Lotman.

Towards the end of the 20th century and a little later, I described in a series of articles the various threats from philology in general up to Slavonic studies in particular. Language and literature, linguistics and literary criticism dealt with originally formed philological unity often served as a litmus paper of social processes: on the one hand they are their tool and means and their distinct reflection. On the other hand, where the social processes seem to be unsealed, exposed, uncovered, open, and bare, much more than an investigation of a successful journalist, as language and its textual products—besides behaviour, manners and extraverbal activities—represent a dominant tool of practical politics and social attitudes. In this context language and literature as fiction, *belles lettres* are also a means for grasping a cultural area, the spatial processes of integration and globalisation. It becomes evident—and the language and its products themselves reveal this most illustratively—that the process of uniting is going on unidirectionally, that action causes reaction and that the clustering and permeation also demonstrate other, very often contradictory paradigms which might be named as disintegration, non-communication, alienation, dispersion and ignorance. The plurality, historical ruggedness, multilayered structure of Europe to a certain extent predetermine the methods of integration. In other words, technocratic knacks of political scientists who try, rather in arithmetical and geometrical ways, to investigate political systems and, moreover, apply some experience from other areas and fields to European realities, e.g., the problem of national minorities can be successful only in theory and at the very beginning, probably in institutions and power-managed practice, but on a long-term basis they usually create new problems and conflicts.

Literary criticism, like other humanities often called “soft” sciences (in contrast to “hard” ones, i.e. exact, natural, technological and also social sciences) develops in gradual shifts of emphasis, rather than in revolutionary jumps. At the beginning of the 21st century modifications

appeared which had been formed in the course of the preceding century, but mainly during the previous 30–40 years. The mentioned shifts of emphasis are represented by several movements signalling, unlike in the 20th century, radical turning points. While the so-called hard sciences also contain the application phase of exact sciences (logic and mathematics) and predominantly natural ones, but ideologically manipulated social sciences as well, (especially various types of sociology, applied or social psychology and political science) directly connected with the interests of global social structures thinking of the principle transformation of society, the world as such and the human itself with all the threats and ethical responsibility/irresponsibility, the “soft” sciences, humanities, including philologies, have a rather slow, gradual, imperceptible, silent, rather than noisy development (with the exception of those researchers who try to make the soft sciences hard as a service for social and other sciences, not as their equal partners; the attempts at compromise are represented, for example, by the Brno concept of philological-area studies).

Scholars have for decades conspicuously spoken about the end of the national and Enlightenment conception of literature. This conception has been based on the traditional function of literature since the 18th century. It is typical all over the world, but it is especially striking in the Slavonic cultural area. For Russians living under a more or less weakened autocracy, literature was often the only serious expression of a free spirit that represented liberal thought and substituted both philosophy and theology as well as social sciences. While Russians had their independent state of a national type which to a certain extent tolerated, assimilated or integrated other nations and ethnical groups, though it also manipulated them, e.g. the relation to Russian Jews (Solženicyn, 2001, 2002), the other Slavs had to fight for their national autonomy and later state independence, and some of them found themselves in a conflict with the Russian Empire (Ukrainians, Poles, Belarusians), in other cases it was rather complementary (Czechs, Slovaks) or conflicting and complementary at the same time (southern Slavs). If we take into account the economic function of literature, we come to the conclusion that in the 19th century literature was a profitable business even for those who did not represent an absolute aesthetic top—this is the

origin of the typical Russian word *intelligencija* (intelligentsia; Latin *intellego*) in the sense of a community of people making a living from mental/intellectual work and also another Russian word *literator* (writer, man of letters), a noble name for a journalist, essayist, but also for a person trying to create *belles lettres*, a cultural activist. The general respect for writing and literature, especially in Slavonic countries, also concerned commentators and interpreters of given authors, which was common all over Europe or in all the European-American zone. Let us mention the novel by Jack London, to a certain extent autobiographical, *Martin Eden* (1909) where the protagonist is dreaming about becoming a writer in the same way today's boys and girls dream about a career in pop music or modelling, which reminds us of the autodidactic characters of the novels by Maxim Gorky, London's inspirer (by the way, London wrote a review of Gorky's first novel *Foma Gordeyev* in 1899). *Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*. This was the basis of the illusions about a literary scholar as a teacher of morals, mentor, visionary, the living consciousness of a nation or of the whole humankind, arbiter of truth and justice which was the reflection of the object of his/her research. Some of these substantially non-realistic, false or falsified qualities were prolonged also with the revolutionary period of the end of the 20th century, as I suggested in 2009 summarizing my reflections back in the mid-1990s (Pospíšil, 2009a).

The connection with the area character of Slavonic and comparative studies, which I have founded and supported since the mid-1990s in Brno despite the resistance of many Slavists in the Czech Republic as well as abroad, is obvious. I discussed the issue in Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, in Prague and in Ljubljana, which gave birth to at least short-term cooperation that seemed hopeful, but also posed the aforementioned threats which were faced relatively often in western and northern Europe where pure philological Slavonic studies were transformed into various research centres in which philology became just a linguistic service for social sciences. Many departments of Slavonic studies disappeared from traditional European universities, mainly in Germany, Britain and Scandinavia in connection with the expansion of the EU and NATO, globalization, the end of the Cold War, the necessity to have functioning centres for many-sided, i.e. also philological

research, of the inimical countries outwardly disappeared. This reflection demonstrates how Slavonic studies were understood: primarily not as a separate, independent scholarly discipline, but rather as an auxiliary activity. As a founder and supporter of the area aspect of philology in general and of Slavonic studies in particular, I realised the danger of the hyperbolised area character of philology when the philological core is being ignored. In this sense, I have continually warned against the danger of the uncontrolled expansion of area studies and the complete transformation of Slavonic studies into history, political science, sociology, and social psychology (Pospíšil, 2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2008a, 2008d, 2009a, 2009d, 2009c, 2009e, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2012).

As demonstrated above, Slavonic studies in general and their philological part in particular are associated with comparative studies, more or less naturally, as a permanent balance between autochthonous and allochthonous roots of Slavonic literatures represents their dominant evolutionary feature.

I have written several books and a lot of articles, treatises and reviews about comparative literary studies both as a general and applied discipline, and recently I have included these provoking reflections in one of the commentaries in the Slovene comparative journal *Primerjalna književnost* (Pospíšil, 2005a, 2008a, 2009a, 2010e, 2012) and in separate publications (Pospíšil, 2000, 2008b, 2010f).

Comparative literary studies (*littérature comparée* in French literally—“compared literature”; in Czech *srovnávací literatura* —“comparing literature”; in German—apart from *die Komparatistik, vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*; in Polish *literaturoznawstwo porównawcze*) have been in their scholarly stage developing since the mid-19th century; it is most difficult to answer the simplest, basic questions concerning comparative studies, though, as they are surrounded by the plasma of history, theory and many other contexts and disciplines.

The sense of any comparison consists in a better, deeper cognition of an object or a cluster of objects or categories against the background of some other phenomena. This, however, presupposes being able to read in several national languages and to grasp the substance of cultures and literatures which formed common area entities or, on the contrary,

distant entities with weak or no common points, generic or contact relations. Thus, the first condition is the knowledge of several languages and literatures, however not shallow, but deep; whoever wants to become a comparatist cannot avoid this *sine qua non* condition. Famous comparatists expressed this view several times and often considered the situation unsatisfactory, e.g., René Wellek in the 1950s and even later, towards the end of the 1980s (Pospíšil, Zelenka, 1996). The first condition is closely related to general conceptions of the study of comparative literature. Though comparative literary studies are not typical only of literary criticism (other disciplines include, e.g., biology, law, political science), especially in investigating the literature/*belles lettres* comparison, they developed into an independent, autonomous discipline with a specific methodology and terminology. My conception is based upon the conviction that the structure of literary criticism/scholarship in its German version accepted a triad of main disciplines (axiological criticism/*Literaturkritik*, history, theory) completed by comparative and genre studies (“genology”) forming a pentad of disciplines. The hitherto history of comparative literary studies shows that they expand, widen, in a metaphorical sense, blow up, enrich themselves both vertically and horizontally. On the one hand, they complete their methodological equipment, methods and corresponding terminology, on the other they widen their thematic layers up to general comparative studies dealing with more kinds of art (see the international association *Ars comparationis*).

The formation of general comparative studies, though rather fragmentary, is a lesser problem than trying to create a general genre studies/theory (“genology,”) for example. But in both cases there are many obstacles, i.e. the heterogeneity of material and corresponding methodology, and, last but not least, resistance to subordinate a specific type of art to more general criteria.

The comparative studies as such went through several crises, declared by comparatists themselves, and through several evolutionary stages from the positivist, thematological (*Stoffgeschichte*) period to immanent methods accentuating morphological, eidological and structural approaches; simultaneously there exist both genetic, contactological and typological aspects. If this stage is called classical, later new, mixed, mutually permeated stages appear, e.g. comparative

cultural studies, practical or applied comparative studies absorbing new phenomena, such as postcolonial literatures, gender studies, cognitivism, epistemology, imagology and other fashionable streams the evaluation of which is premature now and which often, as in other booms, contain old procedures with certain shifts of emphasis.

As I have already stressed in the cited article, comparative literary studies are drawing nearer to the position which could be called the stage of total reconstruction. It is caused by the intrinsic tension: on the one hand, the widening of the thematic range, on the other, the layering of various methodologies and predominantly the permeation of different spheres and methods dispersing and disseminating the original comparative concepts leading to the disintegration of this discipline. I could see it at the World Congress of comparatists held in Vienna (2016) where I delivered three different papers which were later published (Pospíšil, 2016a, 2017, 2021), and from the report of my colleagues who participated in the next congress in Macau (Pokrivčák, Zelenka, 2019) and later in Georgian Tbilisi (Zelenka, 2022), the tendency towards globalization and inclusiveness even strengthened, and the comparative basis widened, which may not be methodologically and teleologically healthy as it might lead to descriptiveness, a mere narration without clear and distinct results. This is, however, the disease of all international meetings in the last forty or thirty years: it is impossible to point out the defined currents and tendencies in contrast to interwar and partly post-war periods, it is amorphous mass of juxtapositional problems without contacts, conflicts and struggles or polemics and disputes everybody rather tries to avoid (Pospíšil, 2007).

Similarly, Slavonic literary studies are associated with genre studies; in Central Europe, especially in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, it is called genology, first proposed by Paul van Tieghem (Pospíšil, 2010f, 2014a) in his article of seven pages *La question des genres littéraires* (A Question of Literary Genres) (1939). I dealt with this in a special study in which I was the author of two monographs on the chronicle and other reflections (Pospíšil, 1983, 1986, 1998, 2005b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015b). In the 1970s and the 1980s I published several articles in the journals *Slavia* and *Československá rusistika* and used them in more general monographs and separate studies on the Russian novel during

my studies abroad (e.g., Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Great Britain, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary). This time span comprises approximately thirty-five years, which probably gives me the competence to formulate some generalizations. It is worth mentioning that the Brno genological school is connected—even if we leave the genre studies going back to the interwar period aside—with the end of the 1950s when my university teachers published their first contributions in the hitherto only European journal devoted to genre studies *Zagadnienia rodzajów literackich*. My cooperation with its editors-in-chief Jan Trzynadlowski (1912–1995) from Wrocław (Vratislav, Breslau) University, later with Grzegorz Gazda (1943–2020) from Łódź and Jarosław Phuciennik goes back to the 1980s–1990s.

As late as the beginning of the 21st-century genre studies/genology became fashionable: new genological centres arose in Poland, new genre volumes were published in Slovakia (Pospíšil, 2018b), to which I contributed (2003–2006), but it is inevitable to strictly differentiate between genuine genology as a progressive discipline and an amorphous boom research dealing with literary genres as a natural part of poetics. Recently, unfortunately a lot of dilettantism appeared in genre studies.

It becomes obvious that Slavonic studies are going through a chain of intrinsic crises connected with the problems of related disciplines—comparative and genre studies (genology). In other words: the redefining of the object of Slavonic studies is being realised simultaneously with the inner modifications of related disciplines. What should be proposed is the non-schematic, enriched return to general philology as a scholarly discipline dealing with language and its textual products, to the permeation on a different level of formerly united disciplines which in the course of 150 years have separated from each other. The views on this new unification or integration, on the “new philology,” are often controversial. In the international block of studies I organized in the Bratislava journal *Philologia*, the discussion oscillated between consent, acceptance and scepticism or rejection (Pospíšil, 2016b). In the introductory article I characterized the situation and summarized it briefly in the following way: it is impossible to restore the philological unity in its initial form, but at least we can tend to the convergence of linguistics and literary criticism; philology has always been a little utopian discipline,

i.e. transcending, but unsuccessful in reaching its aims, but at the same time philologists have often tried to draw closer to the permeation of its two poles. Therefore I was not so sceptical about the term “new philology” describing not a brand new discipline, but a new developmental stage of philological thought.

This tendency could be demonstrated in the field of Slavonic comparative studies which I expressed in the past—thanks to Dionýz Ďurišín—in the journal *Slovenská literatúra*. It seems to become obvious that the International Association of Comparatists manifests its serious interest in the modification of its discipline. The programme of its next congress which was held in Tbilisi, Georgia, contains among all the proposed panels also debates “on the edge,” real discussions on principle subjects, not their mere imitations. In this context I once more return to my initial concept of “interpoeticity” in the proposed congress study called *Interpoeticity as a Crucial Node in the Construction of the Complexes of the National Literature and World Literature*.

This trend ought to be linked with the problem of scholarly terminology which has always been closely connected with the modifications of methodology. In this sense I organized, similarly to a block devoted to philology, a block of studies on the terminology of literary scholarship (Pospíšil, 2018c) and tried to explicate and generalize some of the questions about my own attempts at the formation of new terms (Pospíšil, 2016c) based on the general results of terminology science that I dealt with in several studies and separate chapters of my books. In a special questionnaire I found out how terminology is grasped by doctoral students of philologies. The rise and application of new terms can be classified into several groups which I tried to describe as new or relatively new terms based on metaphorization of their original meaning, stressing and reassessing old and already accepted terms, shifts in the meaning of old terms, redefining of well-known terms and new contextualization. I presented the rise and fate of the newly coined terms on the example of some of my attempts (“poetics of the concrete,” “deviation of the chronicle character,” “dispersion/dissemination of the idyll and elegy,” “dominant, formative and catenary lines of the plot,” “dispersion and passing,” “pre-post effect/paradox,” “defocusing/dissipation/blur-ness of genre boundaries” etc.)

When in the mid-1990s I tried to constitute a newly founded Institute of Slavonic Studies at Masaryk University, Brno, I could naturally continue the rich tradition of Slavonic studies in Brno under the label Slavonic Seminar, headed by Professor Jiří Horák, much later the ambassador to Czechoslovakia in Moscow, a Russian immigrant of Polish and Ukrainian origin who came to Brno from Bulgaria invited by two Czech professors of Czech literature, Sergii Vilinsky, Roman Jakobson, Frank Wollman, Bohuslav Havránek (the majority of them became sooner or later members of the Prague Linguistic Circle), accompanied by other historians of literature from the spheres of Romance, Germanic and English studies, e.g., Otakar Levý, František Chudoba, Karel Štěpáník, Václav Černý who taught at one of the grammar schools in Brno before coming to Charles University to deliver brilliant lectures in comparative studies.

If we return to the interwar period in former Czechoslovakia, we have to admit that there were two main streams in literary scholarship: apart from the later famous Prague Linguistic Circle, there was the Society of Literary History represented by the supporters of traditional methods, such as positivism, *Geisteswissenschaft*, literary psychology, school of cultural history etc. The members of the Prague Linguistic Circle who committed sins against Jakobson's methodology of synchronous functional approaches, e.g., a literary historian Jan Vojtěch Sedlák (1889–1941) or Miloš Weingart (1890–1939), who was one of the founding members of the Circle, lost their membership either partly voluntarily, or partly due to expulsion. The strict attitude towards the so-called loyalty to methodology was also typical of the Slovak literary comparatist Dionýz Ďurišín. I repeated the cases of possible methodological clashes not accidentally, because these conflicts represent a famous dilemma between a liberal and dogmatic way of the formation of literary criticism as such. Without a strict approach such as the expulsion of a sinner from scholarly societies there is no progress, as literary methods sometimes need extreme approaches, otherwise they are not capable to bring new, innovative results. On the other hand, a certain drop of tolerance and conciliation is a necessary condition of mutual cooperation of the scholars of various ideas and temperaments. Literary criticism or, more academically, scholarship, has been going through several crises, and

this fact concerned also Slavonic Studies as such. One such crisis was the crisis of the so-called unity of Slavonic literatures, because Slavonic languages represent an indisputable unity, which can be very easily proved, while literatures do not represent such a strong and tightly bound entity. The crisis of comparative literary studies has been going on since the 1950s starting with René Wellek's famous Chapel Hill lecture up to the contemporary orientation of comparative studies on cultural studies (not "literatures," but "literary cultures"). In this sense, I have always argued with the whole concept of the generally accepted and admired John Neubauer and Marcel Cornis-Pope's project *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe—Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries* (2004–2010) with their word groups "literary cultures" as well as "East-Central Europe," a literal translation from German *Ostmitteleuropa* which, since the times of Friedrich Naumann's book *Das Mitteleuropa* (1915), has been bearing an indisputable ideological burden dividing the organic unity of Central Europe into two axiologically unequal halves.

I have always appreciated Ďurišin's revision and even radical transformation up to the disappearance of traditional comparative literary studies through interliterary communities and interliterariness, and interliterary centrism. How to solve such a dilemma? I tried to widen the traditional concept of Slavonic studies in the sphere both of linguistics and literary criticism by the concept of area studies, or, strictly speaking, philological-area studies based on the kernel of traditional philology transcending towards the research of a certain cultural and geopolitical area, e.g. the Balkans, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, the Mediterranean etc. with the help of history, ethnology and folklore studies, sociology, social psychology etc. I met with the clear disagreement up to the end of the 20th century when my former opponents declared the concept their own invention. At the point I became a strong opponent (as mentioned above) of the mechanically conceived area studies in which the philological kernel completely disappeared. It had its consequences also in the educational practice: it is very easy to repeat the political and politological phrases rather than to learn new words, to read hundreds of books and mainly to think. "Thinking aches," said our first President on the eve of the birth of the Czechoslovak Republic and a specialist in aesthetics,

literary criticism, sociology and history of philosophy, Thomas G. Masaryk. This is valid also in the contemporary situation of Slavonic studies.

When it comes to humanities, each science or scholarship starts with the definition of the object of its research. In the case of Slavonic studies, it is the complex notion sometimes called the Slavonic world (Pospíšil, 2016d). In connection with the contemporary relevance of area studies this term best corresponds to the complex investigation of the Slavonic phenomenon as such. So, the first dilemma concerns the real existence of the unity of the object of Slavonic studies—the Slavonic world. Does it really exist? Do the Slavonic languages and Slavonic literatures really exist as a special entity differentiating from the other language-literature entities? Is it real and truthful to speak about the Romance or Germanic entities? In this context the entity of Slavonic languages and literatures as well as the complex of the so-called Slavonic world is the crucial starting point.

The strict definition of the object of any scholarly discipline is closely linked with the definition of its borders. The contemporary state of things manifests more or less rather the dispersion and vagueness, indistinctness, blurriness, unclearness, nebulosity—the experience of a decades-old postmodernist concept of thought consisting in ambiguity, ambivalence, uncertainty, defocusing, the disappearance of the borders of (in the past) clearly defined scholarly disciplines. If the concept of any science or scholarship is unclear, also the results of the investigation can be unclear, close to zero. The pretext for an incredibly wide concept of scholarly disciplines without borders or boundaries (*sans rivages*—without bounds) was associated with the complicated object of research, but I think the main reason for that was the repeated rejection of a more exact attitude towards humanities. The history of humanities in general and philology in particular manifested the eternal clash between more exact approaches and those preferring the impressionistic, approximate vague concept of the scientific object corresponding to essayism, artistic ambitions etc. This clash was taking place throughout the whole 20th century expressed by the conflict between immanent, autonomous methods like formism, formalism, structuralism etc., on the one hand, and various kinds of *Geisteswissenschaft*, psychological approaches,

receptionist and hermeneutical concepts, area and cultural studies etc., on the other. Strictly speaking, it could be explicated by Roman Jakobson, interwar professor at Masaryk University in Brno, by the term “literariness” as an expression of the specificity of *belles lettres*, in contrast to the boundless, limitless conception of literature fully integrated in too broad subjects like culture or cultural studies, geopolitical areas etc. The conception of area-philological studies transcending the barriers of pure philology towards a wider concept cannot, however, mean the total dispersion or dissolution of the discipline based on the firm, lasting philological foundations.

The old and eternal dispute between the defenders or advocates of the Slavonic unity and its opponents does not mean an irreconcilable conflict, but rather the expression of relativeness of these phenomena. The Brno and Prague comparatist Frank Wollman (1888–1969), who very often argued with the German and Polish Slavists on the subject of the existence of the term “Slavonic literatures” and came to the conclusions in several of his books—including *Slovesnost Slovanů* (Literature of the Slavs) (published in 1928, reedited in Czech in 2012, translated into German and published by Peter Lang Verlag in 2003) and *Slavismy a antislavismy za jara národů* (Slavisms and Antislavisms in the Spring of Nations) from 1968—that the notion of Slavonic literatures is relative: there are the waves of unity and the waves of disintegration; the strongest argument of the consistency of Slavonic literatures (while the affinity of Slavonic languages is indisputable) is the morphological nearness, closeness besides ideology or politics. The terms and their consistency are, of course, also of subjective quality. For example, the so-called unity of Slavonic literatures is not only a natural phenomenon based on the nearness of language material, including the geographical closeness, but also on the subjective concept, very often of ideological and political background, e.g., in the framework of the national revival in the 19th century Frank Wollman deals with in his aforementioned book *Slavismy a antislavismy za jara národů* analyzing, more or less, the period of 1848. The whole problem is also linked with attempts at reviving the new form of philological unity as such (Wollman, 1928, 2012, 1936, 1948, Pospíšil, 2006, 2016e). As a Czech philosopher and specialist in the Russian avantgarde, Zdeněk Mathauser once put it, if slavisms are common

Slavonic qualities, *topoi* or *loci communes*, there is no need to reject them, as they could contribute to a better and a more profound understanding and grasping of the object of the research; if they are not, it is in vain to artificially construct the general slavisms. The opposite of slavisms, antislavisms are constant accompanying phenomena in the Slavonic world demonstrating the intrinsic discrepancy or contradictory character of the Slavonic world as such. The natural part of Slavonic studies must be not only the famous Slavonic mutuality (the term *vzájemnost* borrowed by Jan Kollár from Polish) and having a constant place in all Slavonic concepts, but also just the opposite, immutuality, plays a significant role in the Slavonic world and inter-Slavonic relations, as I have shown in several case studies and books, incidentally on the example of the very complicated Czech-Slovak bonds.

### **Conclusions and summary**

The future perspective of Slavonic studies might be connected with two, only seemingly contrasting aspects:

- 1) The relatively constant entity of the subject, i.e. the Slavonic phenomenon or the Slavonic world as marking or delimiting the boundaries of Slavonic studies as an independent or autonomous discipline.
- 2) The Slavonic studies as an open or semi-open discipline in the philological framework and dynamic borders and transcending towards the cultural-area concept, but not losing its philological kernel and starting point.

All this presupposes the permanent process of transcending and, at the same time, delimiting the scholarly discipline called Slavonic studies in the process of the cognition of its subject and taking into account the intrinsic heterogeneity of its structure, e.g., language, literature, culture, history, society, ethnicity and mentality. It is also inevitable to speak about the often taboo problem of power in science. Everywhere and also in the academic environment there is a clash of meanings, opinions supported by various ideologies which should be rooted in scientific, rational arguments, mutual decency and tolerance. Especially in humanities

in general there cannot be, as mentioned above, brand new inventions or revolutionary revelations, radical changes, upheavals, overturns, but only slow, gradual, gentle shifts of emphasis. Even the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers cannot be excluded, rather on the contrary, which cannot be said in the case of exact or natural sciences. The extremely harmful, damaging factor is the permanent struggle for power in science associated with the suppression of different views and opinions and with the ostracism of their supporters. This tendency has been culminating since the beginning of the 21st century and has reached unfortunately its peak nowadays. It is usual not to mention this fact, but I would say this problem of permanent conflict and contradiction in the academic sphere is even sharper than in the rest of society. Speaking on the basis of my own experience: I do know no harder and more irreconcilable situation than that of the academic sphere. Therefore it is very topical to stress the current significance of tolerance and mutual understanding and respect when speaking about the future perspective of philology in general and Slavonic studies in particular. Thus, to return to the substantial question placed in the title of this modest contribution: “redefining, or preserving?”, I can only answer the following: the gradual shifts, i.e. also redefining, but very careful and conservative, with the gradual transition towards a wider concept, but always accompanied by redefining the boundaries of Slavonic studies, so that the changes and the natural movement and reform might not bring more damage than benefit for the integrity of a science or a scholarship which cannot cease to function as an effective tool of human cognition.

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