

Comparative Literature in Slovenia

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Volume 2 Issue 4 (December 2000) Article 11**Kristof Jacek Kozak,****"Comparative Literature in Slovenia"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss4/11>>

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Abstract: In his article, "Comparative Literature in Slovenia," Kristof Jacek Kozak provides a historical overview of the practice of theory in the discipline of comparative literature in Slovenia. Despite its small size and relative low profile, Slovenia is taken as an exemplar within comparative literature scholarship. Kozak observes that the development of comparative literature in Slovenia may be characterized by an attempt to both arbitrate and mediate between distinct poles. On the one hand, Slovenian scholarship has felt the need to secure or determine itself in accordance with its own interests and concerns. On the other hand, it has recognized the need to be in accord with various movements and determinations across national borders. This situation is primarily mediated via the accounts of Janko Kos, a prominent scholar of the field. Via Kos, Kozak traces the origins of comparative literature to various theoretical movements and counter movements, as practiced by principle theoreticians. Whilst a methodological pluralism has emerged, there is resistance to an "anything goes" approach in Kos's thought as well as by Slovene comparatists in general. This situation is highlighted by the occurrence of recurrent issues, questions, and problems, and the article converges around movements between distinct legacies and poles.

Kristof Jacek KOZAK

Comparative Literature in Slovenia

The first and foremost problem of any (scholarly) endeavor in Slovenia is the size of the country. It is inhabited by only two million people whose lives pass by almost unnoticed by other larger nations. This fact per force limits the scope and horizon of its professional endeavors when compared with other European countries. Consequently, any scholarly activity undertaken by such a small nation is left to oscillate or arbitrate between potentially mutually exclusive poles. On the one hand, between a comfortable and self satisfied inwardness and self reliance. On the other hand, between an uncomfortable, aggressive and, quite frankly, uncharacteristic openness to the "outside" world. Irrespective of the size of a country, however, any scholarly venture must constantly reassert its distinctiveness, uniqueness and the essential differences of its own particular field. A nation with a small population finds itself asking questions concerning the adequacy or relevance of its own research, especially how (if at all) it can or should relate to the rest of the world. Thus, any area of research in Slovenia has to establish and prove itself within these rather narrow national boundaries and simultaneously define itself as equal to that of any other nation. Consequently, comparative literature in Slovenia is no exception when it comes to answering these questions. It, too, strives to define its distinctive features, to catch up, and to be in accord with the latest scholarly currents in the world, but at the same time to develop the characteristics through which it appears distinctive and unique; it wants to partake in international debates while drawing upon its own distinguishing Slovene roots. Its drawback in comparison with other disciplines is that it first had to establish itself, that is, to become comfortable in "its own skin," which appears to be the problem of comparative literature in general and, second, it had to define itself as a very modern and non-problematic area of research in today's humanities. Yet, not everything appears to be so bleak.

Jankos Kos provides us with the most comprehensive account of the development of comparative literature in Slovenia thus far. This doyen of the field is a long-standing professor and occupies the Chair of the Department of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Ljubljana. He is the author of (amongst others) "Teorija in praksa slovenske primerjalne književnosti" (1978), "Primerjalna zgodovina slovenske literature" (1987), "Oddelek za primerjalno književnost in literarno teorijo" (1989), "Literarna veda kot znanost, ki se mora odpirati tudi filozofiji" (1991), "Theory and Practice of Comparative Literature" (1994), "Nikoli ne bi odsel na samotni otok" (1996), and *Duhovna zgodovina Slovencev* (1996) (for the corresponding translations of the Slovene titles in English, see the Works Cited). Within these texts, Kos simultaneously documents and maps out the journey of Slovene comparative literature via historical sources and contemporary liaisons. The primary movement and recurrent contention is that Slovene comparative literature (such a label does not mean a particular kind of comparative literary scholarship but rather comparative literature as it is practiced in Slovenia) developed predominantly on the basis of the French comparative literary school, although on more than one occasion it reached beyond this limited view and attempts to embrace a more inclusive perspective of the field.

The French approach in early comparative literature, as defined and developed by Baldensperger, Brunetière, Hazard, van Tieghem, Carr, etc., concentrates on relations (*rappports*) studied in a rather strict historical-positivist manner. In this approach to comparative literature, the utmost significance is attributed to facts, factual evidences, and documents. The only relevant relations are therefore *rappports de fait*, for example, scholarly elements requiring empirical proof. Another essential element used by "orthodox" French comparatists is the actual act and hence, the method of "comparing." In its strictest sense this approach amounts to limiting comparative literary scholarship to the study of binary relations in their "factual" form. It comes as no surprise that the main subject of comparative literature thus becomes the "sources of literary works, reactions and mediators, the fate of the works and the success of the authors, their influence" (Kos 1978, 31; some North American universities have also chosen this model for teaching comparative literature. Hence the prospective student has to choose his/her first [major] and

second [minor] language and literature so that the comparative attitude is a priori secured). This kind of positivist scholarship, despite being less of a scholarship than of a literary history, which works its way towards a thorough description of one's own national literature and its influences, exerted a significant influence on comparative literature. Yet, when this approach came under critique, two kinds of criticism of French comparative literary scholarship developed. The first was more ideological claiming that it was too nationally oriented and consequently, did not treat "other" literatures equally, whereas the second was methodological stating that comparing per se was already the foundation of the discipline hence there was no need for stressing the comparison. The bottom line of this criticism of the French school was that because of its concentration on factual comparisons it turned into empirical, positivist literary history. Such criticism provoked a strong reaction from the French ranks compelling Marius François Guyard among others to refute those accusations and to proclaim that "comparative literature is not comparing" (1994, 5).

While Slovene comparative literature has certain traditional ties with the French school, the more modern approach appears to be all-inclusive, in theoretical and in methodological as well as in subject matters. In this vein, modern Slovene comparative literature reaches out towards the American school. Nevertheless, due to notable French influences, the Slovene comparative literary discipline remains very European with respect to its general view of the area of research. While North American scholarship today tends more towards issues in cultural studies, the European tradition -- very generally viewed in German-, French-, Italian-, Spanish-, Portuguese-language, etc., scholarship including Central and East Europe -- appears to hold a philosophical and essentialist point of view in and for the discipline (with regard to this observation, see Peter V. Zima's work). The division between the two can be said to run along these lines: It is clear that the first and foremost problem for Slovene comparative literature, as with other national comparative literary disciplines, is to establish its own independent position between the "general" (*littérature générale*, *Weltliteratur*) and the "national" literature. Here there are two different sides: If one is too inclusive, the other is too exclusive. Where, then, is the place for comparative literature per se?

As a general guideline, Slovene scholars, most notably Anton Ocvirk, Dusan Pirjevec, and Janko Kos suggested precisely the space between the two, a zone that in effect creates a platform where both "parties" can meet. According to Kos in the 1978 article "Teorija in praksa slovenske primerjalne književnosti," the Slovene interest in comparative literature has its roots within Romanticism (9). This common source is also cited as the origin of the development of comparative literature within Germany and France (9; citing the Schlegel brothers and Villemain, respectively). Kos attributes the determinate role of Romanticism within Russia's own development of comparative literature, and Drago Bajt in his 1989 article "Primerjalna književnost v vzhodnoevropskih socialističnih deželah" similarly cites (via Mickiewicz) Romanticism as origin of Poland's development of a comparative literature (45). Matija Cop (1797-1835), an enlightened scholar whose main interest lay in European literature and in transferring its models to his native soil is considered as one of the founders of modern Slovene comparative scholarship. According to Kos, Cop's publications strove to bridge the gap between European and domestic literary production and then, very much in the vein of today's cultural studies' approach, suggested discussing the relationship between literature and the social basis of language (Kos 1978, 9). Recognizing the connections among literary genres as well as the importance of the initial paradigm, he broadened this area of interest to include a European perspective. Cop's life may be perceived as an epitome of the existence of the Slovene nation in the Austrian monarchy. A librarian and teacher overlooked by many, he worked in Rijeka, Lvov, and Ljubljana as a philologist, historian, theoretician of literature, and literary critic. Very much in the spirit of the time, Cop's interest lay in taking a holistic look at the cultural and literary endeavors of his day. Whilst Kos observes that Cop did not differentiate between comparative and general literature, this does not diminish his value as an early proponent of a comparative concept. Through his analyses Cop became aware of the importance of contemporary forms of poetry, which resulted in the introduction of those to the greatest Slovene poet, Romantic bard, France Prešern. Cop's broad interest, building a bridge between European literatures and his own, thereby considering the wide

in order to understand the "narrow" element, set a paradigm pregnant with consequences for a comparativist stance in Slovenia.

After the demise of Romantic period that had brought about this type of research, it was of no great surprise that this "open" comparative characteristic waned. Realism took the place of Romanticism and consequently introduced a different awareness of the previously mentioned questions. The attention of literary scholars turned inward again into the national realm itself and there was little interest in following events elsewhere. The interest in literary scholarship was revived in 1850 for a short time when Ivan Macun published a treatise on literary theory, the first one written in Slovene. After this, the first analyses of European influences on Slovene literature were written by, among others, Fran Levstik and Fran Levec towards the end of the nineteenth century. A very important shift happened around 1900 with a younger generation of literary scholars such as Matija Murko (1861-1952), Ivan Prijatelj (1875-1937), France Kidric (1880-1950) and Ivan Grafenauer (1880-1964). Coming without exception from the positivist scholarship and working predominantly on Presern, they volens nolens became more interested again in the larger, in fact, European picture. Because of their position this meant that it was not enough to explain literary works only through the close reading, but rather they had to be situated within a broader perspective. Suddenly, connections with European literatures appeared in the forefront of scholarly investigations and, with them, one could see the influence of foreign authors on Slovene ones. In response to this foreign influence a riposte was initiated in the formation of artistic and literary periods, directions, and currents. Yet, it is hard to say that conscious efforts of Slovene scholars were connected to this strategy, even though their scholarship pointed out many comparative questions and problems. There was an approach within the scope of the general (world) literary scholarship more in the vein of literary history. This is particularly true for Ivan Prijatelj and France Kidric who were particularly interested in Slavonic literatures, specifically their interrelations and mutual horizons.

According to Kos, the efforts of these two men could have been in the literary field regarded as the beginning of a particular branch of comparative literature, namely "Slavonic comparative literature" (1994, 11), but this labeling tends to limit the field of scholarly investigation only to Slavonic literatures and their mutual influences. Arguably, it would delineate a correct approach only in the case where there were other specific fields of comparative literature, such as "Germanic" or "Romance." Insofar as comparative literature as a discipline would be limited to particular fields, this would also in all likelihood be its form. However, the essence of comparative literature is precisely to put up no borders, no limitations, hence to allow no confinements. Its proposed or avowed frame of reference is literature as whole with its very disparate contacts and connections. For some, even this might appear to be too bold a statement. At the 14th congress of the ICLA: International Comparative Literature Association in Edmonton, Wang Ning (Peking U) had to admit in the discussion ensuing from his presentation that e.g., Chinese postmodern literature does not have too many similarities with European, North- and Latin-American (see Virk, 1994 71). Since this conclusion may be also valid for other literary examples, one has to exert great caution with effusive generalization and broad inclusiveness.

Therefore, it is clear that the above mentioned fields are all constituent parts of one comparative literary discipline which consequently cannot be split into smaller "groups of interest." Suffice to state that these scholars came only very close to starting the study of comparative literature. The position of comparative literature in Slovenia is branded by this particular predicament. Although there were scholars who wrote and published in this field it was hard to confirm its existence without any academic or scholarly supporting evidence. Its systematic development can be traced back to the development of the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Ljubljana. Prijatelj and Kidric instituted the teaching and research of more modern Slovene literature in the Institute for Slavonic Philology at the newly opened Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana. Kos records that in 1926 Kidric initiated lectures on the "European frame" (1989, 223) of Slovene literature, and was thus able to lecture in a distinctive Seminar for Comparative Literature (Comparative Literary History, as it was called then) which has existed as a separate entity from the Institute of Slavonic Philology since 1930. Prijatelj lectured

there until 1935 and in 1937 he was replaced by Ocvirk. (Note: The University of Ljubljana in its present form was inaugurated on 31 August 1919 by the king of the then Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes who appointed the first eighteen professors to their positions. On 12 November 1919, the first president of the university, mathematician Josip Plemelj, and the deans were elected. The first lecture took place on 3 December 1919; see Melik).

The true founding of comparative literature as a discipline in Slovenia is attributed to Anton Ocvirk (1907-1980). Today the publication of his book *Theory of Comparative Literary History* in 1936 is considered to mark the birth of comparative literature in Slovenia. In the early 1930s Ocvirk began consolidating the inherited views within the Slovene literary scholarship with those which he deemed the most influential in the field. In his lectures and publications from as early as 1938, Ocvirk reached beyond previously established European limits and started discussions on the latest issues in literary theory and methodology together with selected chapters from literary history. From the outset Ocvirk did not reject the possibility of such a synthesis; his was the perspective of a maximalist, a synthesist who is satisfied only when the horizon in question appears to be and is also seen as unlimited. In his case this limitlessness meant both, expanding his interests first to Europe then to the entire world as the frame of reference on the other. As far as the methodology was concerned, the most emphasis was placed on "comparing" as such, on (f)actual influences, those which could be empirically proven and positively asserted (see also van Tieghem's *La Littérature comparée*, 1931). Consequently, the foundations of a viable Slovene comparative literature which he laid, were based on conclusions of the French school. Stemming namely from Hazard's circle -- Hazard happened to be Ocvirk's teacher and mentor; he completed his Ph.D. under the supervision of Hazard in 1933 -- Ocvirk used Hazard's scholarly approach as his own starting point which he eventually left behind in search for a more encompassing standpoint because he felt that such a perspective could not be fully satisfactory.

Nonetheless, Ocvirk also added other components to the essential elements considered by the French school in order to equilibrate the emphasis of the nascent discipline in Slovenia. He broadened the questions of influences, responses, and intermediaries with more "classical" themes usually considered in German scholarship where Goethe's *Weltliteratur* collected plaudits. Ocvirk recognized the need for a less literal approach while dealing with literary styles and genres on one hand as well as literary periods and movements on the other. It was obvious to him that broader issues should go hand in hand with strictly literary concepts. The historical positivism and empiricism represented by Ocvirk's point of departure became a determinate factor within the scholarly and speculative procedures of comparative literature. Its importance may be attributed to the question of redress or emphasis. Specifically, Ocvirk was the first scholar in Slovenia to seriously consider the issues of literary theory as the beacon of literary studies. His significance lies in the fact that he successfully combined the theoretical literary issues with literary history and through his work he manifested the interconnection of both thereby laying firm foundations for the geistesgeschichtlich approach later assumed by Kos, and today still practiced at the Department. By bringing these very diverse elements together and by putting "timeless" theory and historical interpretation on the same level, he opened a path, a bivium, from where the future development of comparative literature in Slovenia could not escape. In fact, this path proved to be the rewarding and fertile middle ground between the two extremes. On one hand the traditionalists, such as Ocvirk himself, rejected the theory as too philosophical for independent consideration since their main issues usually revolved around the essence of a work of art, cf. the phenomenological approach. On the other hand, "les modernes" wanted to reach out towards the known substance with new tools which included particular elements borrowed from the philosophical methodology.

Through this Ocvirk remained both on the meta -- or theoretical -- level as well as on the basic, factual, historical one. It should be pointed out that Ocvirk never discarded the framework or outlook of the French School, even though he thus attempted to broaden the horizon of contemporary literary studies. While remaining in fundamental accord with the latter, he saw himself only as a scholar who expanded the scope of investigation. As another of Ocvirk's invaluable contributions to Slovene comparative literature Kos also lists the investigation of

"literary-aesthetic, formal-stylistic or psychological-personal facts" (1994, 12). In this light it is evident that he was pitted against any excessive application of theoretical construction or, for that matter, against any philosophically based scientific method. Thus, the crossing of this barrier and the introduction of philosophical methods into Slovene comparative literature were left for generations to come. Only with the appearance of younger scholars tempted by the ontological as well as the epistemological, cognitive, and ethical issues of literature did the field predominantly develop in the new direction. But it was not until 1945, after the end of World War II, that the Department of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory was finally established at the University of Ljubljana. As already stated, it was not only instrumental but also essential in constituting the base for comparative literary studies in Slovenia, and still is the most vibrant and intense forum where up-to-date issues in comparative literature are discussed.

Another important step towards establishing comparative literature in Slovenia was taken in 1948. Under the auspices of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Institute for Slovene Literature and Literary Science was founded to boost the work on literary theory as well as in comparative literature. In a reorganized form the Institute has survived to the present day. It was also in 1948 when Kidric retired from lecturing at the University. This prompted Ocvirk to switch entirely to the Department of Comparative Literature which in 1950 changed its name to the Department of World Literature and Literary Theory. For more than a decade Ocvirk was the sole professor in the department until 1963 when another important figure of Slovene comparative literature appeared at the University. However, the man who, at least for a period of time, fundamentally changed the theoretical paradigm by opening new horizons was Dusan Pirjevec (1921-1977), one of the three professors who began teaching in the Department after World War II. Pirjevec, a very spirited lecturer, at first followed Ocvirk's positivistic scholarly paradigm but in the early 1960s opted for a shift in both the methodology and the substance of comparative literature. His major sources can be traced down to the following philosophical platforms. Having been initially influenced by the French, he converted to existentialist philosophy, particularly the strand of Jean-Paul Sartre. Another paramount authority for Pirjevec manifested the philosophical tradition of phenomenology: The theoretical stances of Edmund Husserl and Roman Ingarden, yet, his most viable theoretical source was Martin Heidegger. Pirjevec was mostly interested in pursuing the questions of the ontology and phenomenology of literary work into which he successfully introduced Heidegger's notion of the "ontological difference," which grew to be his starting point in basing and directing his research. Pirjevec was also the first scholar to introduce the concept of hermeneutics and its methodology into literary studies in Slovenia.

Owing to his primarily philosophical orientation, Pirjevec naturally saw literary problems from a different perspective from that of Ocvirk. For him literary works of art functioned as "external" phenomena, epitomes of what could be described as "essence." They were intentional objects, embodiments of exoterically inaccessible ontological components, and in this respect he stood in fundamental accord with Ingarden whose phenomenological theory he supported wholeheartedly. For Pirjevec literary works of art have an independent existence beyond factual reality. Stemming from this line of thought, it seemed most natural that Heidegger's "ontological difference" between the "being" [*Sein*] and "entity" [*Seiende*] would also prove to be of the utmost usefulness searched for truth which was necessarily hidden and unattainable, particularly attributing such truth to poetry, although even the novel was not a total stranger to it either. Here another influential thinker must be mentioned. In the case of the novel it is György Lukács who established great authority with his *Theory of the Novel* (1916) and this genre became one of the Pirjevec's preferred genres and he published some incisive studies on the subject of the European novel.

In transferring the philosophical and aesthetic discourse into literary scholarship Pirjevec automatically transposed some of its problems. While today's literary science exercises the highest caution when seeking the "truth" of a work of art, Pirjevec's contemporaries were less reluctant to look for absolute and universal terms and concepts. For him there was the ultimate truth of an artwork that we know about but cannot reach and is linked to the "being" [*Sein*] of the work and in turn asserts its existence. Pirjevec was the only comparatist who concentrated predominantly on the philosophical aspects of literary problems. By resolutely transferring the weight of research

towards philosophy and the aesthetic, Pirjevec stirred the moderate comparative literary scholarship. According to Kos, Pirjevec's ideas were too one-sided and therefore too remote from the realm of proper scholarship. Kos went so far as to insist that Pirjevec "disturbed its unity" (1994:14). Pirjevec had taught with Ocvirk for almost a decade when a third colleague Janko Kos joined them in 1970. Soon afterwards, in 1971, the Department changed its name again and became the Department of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory which it still retains today. In the mid-1970s the Department reached its apogee in relation to the quota of its teaching staff: Three professors and two assistants, and remained at this level for many years -- in fact, until 1999.

We have observed that Ocvirk started on the premises of French comparative literary scholarship and departed from orthodoxy by adopting a more reconciling stance. Pirjevec, on the other hand, moved in a different direction by emphasizing and underlining the philosophical aspects of literary works of art. Kos -- born in 1931 -- sought to mediate the differences between distinct emphasises and approaches by moving towards a synthesis within Slovene comparative literary scholarship. Literature, usually the main object of research, came under the influence of philosophical, aesthetic, cognitive issues which, in the hermeneutic process, relegated it to the periphery. It is safe to say that, in Kos's opinion, opening comparative literature so much to philosophical questions and to methods of examination would remove the balance necessary for a thorough and non-biased scrutiny. Nevertheless, this toned down stance was not formed from the outset. Kos records in 1991 that in the early 1970s he favored the opinion that literary scholarship had to become as scientific as possible, which actually meant that the scholarship had to get rid of the multitude of "foreign influences" and, conversely, to focus strictly on literary methods. This changed around 1980 when, under his guidance, Slovene comparative literature was set on a course of reconciliation. Kos wanted to remain faithful to Ocvirk's heritage yet he did not want to keep philosophical elements too far at bay. After he became the senior comparatist in Slovenia, Kos realized that pure literary scholarship enabled scholars to achieve only partial results, thus "on the one hand literary scholarship was focused on pure science and on the other had to open itself towards philosophy" (1994, 14). Kos's rather cautious scholarly demeanor nonetheless showed his determination to bridge the previous gap with a moderate and consolidating stance and subsequently to bring a certain degree of unity and synthesis to former extremes as well as to enrich purely scientific literary scholarship. The best examples are provided by his publications where Kos exerts extreme caution in approaching an endless array of issues. Moreover, he scrupulously and in a truly original "poly histor's" way avoids radical and one-sided and thus also less purely "scientific" conclusions. In his opinion, this development went in the direction of appeasement, where both extremes were brought closer to a mutual understanding and where togetherness of traditional and modern approach to Slovene comparative literature could be achieved. As a true comparatist, Kos took pains to bring Slovene comparative literature onto the same level as it occupied in the world. His efforts can be particularly well seen in his seminal book *A Comparative History of Slovene Literature* (1987). Despite being similar in title to Philippe van Tieghem's *Les Influences étrangères sur la littérature française 1550-1880* (1961), Koren urges in a 1988 article that Kos actually follows an entirely different path (52). Contrary to the Frenchman's "external" (foreign *sensu stricto*) influences, Kos embraced a perspective unraveling the said influences on Slovene works of art. Via this distinct vantage point, Kos gives Slovene literature a more commendable epistemological advantage.

Although remaining on the firm ground of the European tradition in methodology, Kos -- as the Chair of the Department of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Ljubljana -- strove to broaden the horizons of scholarship. He opened the door for new currents such as "reception aesthetics, poststructuralism, deconstruction, theoretical psychoanalysis, new historicism, feminism, etc." (1994, 15). Although these currents in comparative literature were not unknown in Slovenia, their acceptance and usage was somewhat more reluctant than, for example, in North America. This reveals the unease of the comparative literature in Slovenia today which is, in Kos's own words, "still being determined primarily by the bases created ... in the first decades after World War I" (1994, 15). Ocvirk's model of historical empiricism was subjected to

modern philosophical, psychoanalytical, hermeneutic, and other theoretic approaches. In more than one instance, the limits between two extremes (historical-empirical and philosophical-theoretical) become blurred and shifted. Despite this blurring and shifting, Ocvirk remains a highly regarded and frequently cited theorist. Kos, in his professorial role, paid great attention not to favor any of the above-mentioned approaches; according to him, the balance and moderation in views ultimately reflected the true scientist. This attitude helped in specifying the method which intrigued Kos for a good number of years; moreover, it seems to have become his primary one. Instead of Pirjevec's Heideggerian *seinsgeschichtliche* problems he favored much more classical, *geistesgeschichtliche* questions. In Kos's words it was: "exactly this which enables scientific methodology in Slovene comparative literature not to be placed in exclusive opposition to non-empirical or even explicitly philosophical approaches" (1994, 16). Equal emphasis is put on every aspect of scholarship, be it theory or empirical research, be it "pure" theorizing or factual analysis, be it in discussions about literary genres or in particular study cases. Kos's personal scholarly attitude had a tendency towards synthesis, towards inclusion of both previously separated issues under discussion. For him Ocvirk's position was not yet good enough and Pirjevec's attitude, because of its purely philosophical bend, was unacceptable and no longer viable. By virtue of his dissatisfaction with those rather metaphysical problems Kos supported "more rational and also differentiated *geistesgeschichtliche* studies" (1994, 16). In Kos's opinion, any particular theoretical position due to its unilateral approach, either in dealing with history or with theory, cannot be completely useful. The most appropriate illustration of these statements is Kos's recently published book, *Duhovna zgodovina Slovencev (An Intellectual History of Slovenes)* (1996), a tour-de-force of his intellect that crowns his endeavors. Over the years, Kos's students have applied his approach as can be seen, for example, in Tomo Virk's *Duhovna zgodovina (Intellectual History and Literary Scholarship)* (1989).

Under his auspices two main research topics have emerged in Slovene comparative literary studies. The first is the methodology of comparative literature which, having shaken off Pirjevec's predominantly Heideggerian direction, became open to the multiplicity of different approaches and towards "methodological pluralism" (16). The second topic is represented by the increased presence of Slovene literary themes in comparative literary studies. Slovene literature, in addition to the less cosmopolitan approach necessarily embraced by the Department of Slavics at the University of Ljubljana, is being considered within a bigger picture encompassing Europe and the world. In light of recent trends in comparative literary scholarship, new movements and directions within the discipline are developed. In the above-mentioned interview Kos described Slovene comparative literature today by claiming it stands on a world level. Having developed methodological pluralism, he did not at the same time allow it to deviate into empty eclecticism or pure methodological voluntarism, although it approached other fields that would not fit into pure science, like literary criticism or essay writing. By retreating from pure science and by offering its hand to philosophical and semi-literary methods, comparative literature became "very versatile, open and flexible" (Kos 1991). Still, not all the formal bodies needed for the normal functioning of a discipline were in place by this time. The piece that was missing was a formal organization, which would open up the secluded academic and scholarly circles to an interested public. It was not until 1973, however, that the Slovene Association for Comparative Literature was founded. This association, gathering both scholars and nonprofessionals around comparative literature, started with quite an ambitious program. Its main task was to spread the notion of comparative literature in addition to providing the scholarly community with a platform for discussions outside the institutional framework. At the same time the Association became an enlivened place for extra-curricular lectures and talks by scholars and authors as well as the successful organizer of symposia. In 1993 the Slovene Comparative Literature Association took the first steps towards institutional internationalization by becoming a paying member of the International Comparative Literature Association.

Since an association without its own "voice" was not fully operational, a scholarly journal devoted only to comparative literature was established in 1978. It remains in publication to this day. From the outset, though, there was a sense -- if not an outright question -- concerning the

need for such a journal in a nation so small. And yet it was this sensibility -- and the corresponding questions -- which continue to give the bi-annual *Primerjalna knjizevnost* (*Comparative Literature*) its contemporary resonances. Indeed, it contributed to solidifying the position of comparative literature, its field of study, its methodologies, and its meaning in the Slovene literary space and society in general. Comparativists are not the only scholars encouraged to contribute to the general discourse -- scholars from other fields are more than welcome to publish there, with only one restriction: The topic has to be discussed from a comparative point of view. Currently, the journal effortlessly secures its position among plethora of other scholarly journals in Slovenia and boasts remarkably high ratings throughout its issuance.

Among the important achievements of Slovene comparative literature one should mention at least two. The first is a series of monographs entitled *Literarni leksikon* (*Encyclopedia of Literature*) and published by the Institute for Slovene Literature and Literary Science at the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts at Ljubljana. The series began in 1978 and its first volume Ocvirk's *Literary Theory*. With this book he set the tone for the entire series in that its focus is on literary theory. According to Ocvirk's introductory words the edition does not favor any particular aspect but is fully open to any and all methodological approaches and theoretical and philosophical views. Its aim is to construct a totality (which, nota bene, can never be achieved) out of which the comparative literary discipline will appear as a whole. In this vein the scholarly format was set for all ensuing publications. Every author has to cover the concept under discussion *ab ovo*, elaborate on its basic meaning, and link it to its presence in Slovene literary realm. Among published books there are volumes on diverse topics such as positivism in the study of literature (D. Dolinar), romanticism (J. Kos), cybernetics, communication and information studies (D. Pirjevec), the sociology of literature (D. Rupel), popular literature (M. Hladnik), drama and theatre (A. Inkret; L. Kralj), the essay (D. Poniz), gothicism (K. Bogataj-Gradisnik), and postmodernism (J. Kos). From these topics it is obvious that the emphasis by and large lies in concepts accepted and discussed by the international scholarly community. Slovene authors and scholars have taken this into account, have successfully elaborated on them, and have linked them to the Slovene cultural, social, and literary realm. It is worth noting that the on-going work on the series of the *Literarni leksikon* entails throughout the elucidation of the relationship between international and global and "local" (Slovene) literature and literary theory. The edition has grown considerably and now numbers forty-five volumes, the most recent of which features M. Juvan's monograph on intertextuality.

A great editorial effort of a different kind was to publish the one hundred most important novels figuring in the world's heritage. Each one is accompanied by a lengthy and very studious introduction written by one of the comparativists. Through this editorial achievement Slovene comparative scholarship established itself as the mediator between the achievements of world literature together with its theory and the readers' (professional or amateur) community. Not only does the development and success of Slovene scholarship speak for itself, but of related importance are those people who have been associated with the Department. If one browses through the list of those who graduated or at least studied there, it reads almost as a "Who's Who" in Slovenia. An amazingly large number of people who remained active in public life had an "affair" with comparative literature. Among them and this is only a very arbitrary list writers (A. Blatnik, J. Javorsek, M. Pevec, J. Virk), poets (A. Debeljak, M. Dekleva, N. Grafenauer, M. Jesih, J. Menart, B. A. Novak, J. Snoj), playwrights (E. Flisar, I. Svetina), politicians (J. Pucnik, D. Rupel), literary scholars (M. Dolgan, D. Dolinar, H. Glusic, M. Hladnik, M. Juvan, J. Koruza, D. Moravec, M. Stanovnik, J. Skulj), publicists, editors, translators (A. Berger, M. Bogataj, K. Bogataj-Gradisnik, M. Crnkovic, T. Stoka). This colorful roster of names shows only a very limited number of the professions followed by former students of comparative literature. The department always had a reputation of being the one among those in Arts which provided its students with broad and firm foundations. It has kept this good, not to say elite, standing since.

When considering the situation of Slovene comparative literature at home and abroad, one comes to the conclusion that there are few things working to the detriment of the scholarship. The most notable of which is the size of Slovenia, modest in both its population and its size. Here the

everyday sophism about the relation between quantity and quality cannot even come into effect because "the happy few" partaking in Slovene comparative literature are simply too few to permit themselves not to be dedicated scholars. Nevertheless, comparative literature in Slovenia boasts a paramount significance for the nation's cultural realm. It is one of the few disciplines connecting characteristically Slovene enterprise, that is literature and literary events, with mundane happenings. In this respect its role is a commendable one: the only question is its reach. Succinctly put, Slovene comparative literature lacks the "critical mass" to break out and establish itself internationally. This is not for a lack of thorough and weighty scholarship, but simply because of its collective presentation that always remains precarious. Even if scholars are now and then personally successful, it is still Slovene comparative literary scholarship in general that lacks holistic validation and acknowledgement by the international community. In this respect the Slovene comparative literature resembles a "Sleeping Beauty"....

Be that as it may, a great portion of the responsibility for such a condition lies with the Slovene scholars themselves. They have so far neglected the ultimate importance, even the essential necessity, of international contacts and their own presence abroad. For Kos, Slovene comparative literature has both a special nature and a particular position, incomparable to that of the Slavics department which has its counterparts in most other countries. Slovene comparative literature, again in Kos's opinion, is not just a "simple imitation of international events", on the contrary, in many instances it is "original" (1996, 70) because of its foundation in Slovene *Geistesgeschichte* (intellectual history). Kos prefers to shift the focus to the reluctance of the international community to open up its interests in the direction of less populated nations. Nonetheless, not all Slovene scholars supported such a standpoint and attitude of "hibernation." It is possible to say that Kos modeled his stance after Ocvirk who was rather reluctant to partake in different scholarly activities abroad. Such a self-sufficient attitude can be understood only from the point that for Ocvirk the development of Slovene comparative literary scholarship was represented by examples taken only from Slovene literary heritage. Soon afterwards this task ceased to be so pressing since comparativists successfully established comparative literature as an independent and meaningful discipline within Slovenia. Pirjevec was, in Kos's words, more interested in contacts with philosophers than comparativists, whereas Kos himself "does not believe overly in international scholarly contacts on personal level, or that of exchanges or symposia etc. A true contact ... is always spiritual -- and from a distance," (1996, 70). In his opinion, the establishment and maintenance of those kinds of contacts invite the danger of "watering down" the discipline itself. Another danger to intellectual scholarship contributes "international scholarly tourism" (1996, 70). Since Kos, as Chair of the Department, was the most prolific and consequently, the most influential comparativist, his influence was such that, with few noteworthy exceptions, many scholars followed his example thus giving the tone and shape to the general attitude of the entire field. Nonetheless, even though all those years with the prevailing inhibited attitude towards the international scholarly community are gone, nothing was irretrievably lost. The period of the last twenty or so years was precisely the time when many efforts should have gone to promoting Slovene comparative literature, to opening it to the world, and to positioning it on the international map. Today, after the many political and ideological changes in Central, East, and Southern Europe, the institutional internationalization of Slovene comparative literature is increasingly taking place. One example of this is a recently undertaken move has been the reestablishment of affiliation with the neighboring Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, in the summer of 2000. For Slovenia trying to establish itself as a Central European country these contacts now seem to be of particular importance. Comparative literature as a discipline and its parameters with regard to the relative potential in crossing linguistic as well as political borders should in this case only help in establishing its position. By emphasizing the development and maintenance of links between different spaces and locations -- culturally and geographically -- comparative literary scholarship represents a relevant force in society. In 1999, the Department of Comparative Literature at Ljubljana boasts the largest number of teaching staff and students since its inception after World War II. There are now five professors (Lado Kralj, Chair, Janez Vrecko, Boris A. Novak, Tomo Virk, and Vid Snoj), two assistants (Matevz Kos and Vanesa Matajca), and a

full-time librarian (Vera Troha), all of whom contribute to the strengthening of the discipline not only in Slovenia but in Europe and the world.

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