

**RÓBERT KISS SZEMÁN: *SLOVANSKÝ GOETHE V PEŠTI. JÁN KOLLÁR A NÁRODNÍ EMBLEMATISMUS STŘEDOEVROPSKÝCH SLOVANŮ* (A Slavonic Goethe in Hungary. Ján Kollár and National Emblematism of Central European Slavs).** Praha: Akropoli., 2014. 210 s.

The monograph “*A Slavonic Goethe in Hungary. Ján Kollár and National Emblematism of Central European Slavs*” by Hungarian literary scholar and university professor Róbert Kiss Szemán, is devoted to the literary heritage and the impact of Ján Kollár on the cultural and literary life of the Slavs in Central Europe. It is divided into five main chapters.

In the first chapter, “The anamnesis of Kollár as spiritual shepherd (pastor), scientist, artist” Szemán describes the background of Ján Kollár’s life in Hungarian Pest as an evangelical pastor and depicts a complicated network of mutual contacts among Slavic, Hungarian and German people who lived side-by-side in Pest during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Szemán focuses not only on the negative aspects of the coexistence of Slovak and German believers within the evangelical congregation in Pest – their mutual misunderstandings and efforts to gain the upper hand and impact in the field of language – but also writes about the mutual cooperation between the Slovak part of the evangelical community and the Hungarian community in the 1820s. These aspects were later neglected and even glossed over due to changes in the political, cultural and religious situation during other stages of the Hungarian and Slovak National Revival. Szemán characterizes in detail the stimuli that Kollár received from the Hungarian

environment, not only from the authors of Hungarian periodicals such as “Tudományos Gyűjtemény” (which, as Szemán mentions, has been deeply explored previously by the Slovak scholar Peter Macho) but mainly focuses on the impact of the Hungarian scholar István Horvát who, according to Szemán, influenced Kollár as much as Herder or Šafárik, at least to the same extent. His influence, however, has never been thoroughly explored. Szemán analyzes the mutual relationships between the Hungarian researcher and Kollár, and even refers to Kollár as a “Slovak István Horvát”. In a detailed analysis of Kollár’s oeuvre, he highlights the impulses, thinking and cultural heritage that the Slovak pastor inherited from István Horvát. Szemán’s research points out the numerous parallels between the lives of Kollár and Horvát and which can be identified in other contexts that unknown or overlooked were in by previous scholars. In this chapter Szemán also draws out and characterizes parallels with the literary work of Goethe and outlines the main features of their spiritual kinship.

In the next chapter, entitled “Daughter of Slavia”, Szemán provides a definition of national emblematism and applies it to the most famous and most significant literary work of Ján Kollár. According to the Hungarian scholar, national emblematism is a general term embracing the scholarly fields of history, linguistics, geography and others. The particular pieces of knowledge from these areas are considered in terms of the nation. Against the background of the development and growth of Kollár’s most famous composition “Daughter of Slavia”, Szemán shows how the particular components of national emblematism can be established, and he

analyzes and reinterprets in detail Kollár's literary masterpiece. He finds new meanings which have hitherto gone unnoticed in interpretations – particularly components in which Kollár enriched the Slavic national emblematicism with a new perspective of Slavic Heaven and Hell, thereby creating a new dimension of spiritual poems.

In the fourth chapter of the monograph, entitled “Slavic / Slovak Hell”, Szemán continues his analysis of Kollár's poems from the perspective of national emblematicism in the context of guilt, sin, punishment and hell, adducing several examples from Kollár's writing.

In the subsequent fifth chapter, “The Pilgrimage stop of Slavic national exodus” the scholar returns again to the figure of Ján Kollár himself and his life, which is here examined through one of the central themes of Kollár's literary heritage in general – trips, travel, exodus, wandering, departure and return.

The monograph concludes with chapter six, the “Vienna epilogue – Postlude and the erosion of Kollár's work”, devoted to the final stage of his life when his philosophical and literary legacy began to erode. Erosion, however, does not mean extinction, decline and disappearance. On the contrary – the symbols, images and philosophical content of Kollár's oeuvre are not dead and useless, for they still attract younger generations and, in slightly modified form, fit into the cultural heritage as indestructible elements.

Szemán's monograph provides an overview of the research on Kollár's literary work, but it is also something more than a typical well-done scholarly work. The Hungarian scholar points out that it is still necessary to return again and again to seemingly resolved

issues, because, as the case of Kollár's philosophical and artistic legacy shows, important, significant moments in the history of Central European nations need to be constantly reanalyzed, due to changing political, cultural and social conditions. Thanks to Szemán's book we can find answers to many questions regarding the current situation and the complex relations between the Central European nations. Thus, in a broader perspective, this book is a proof of how the humanities can contribute to the understanding of complicated political and economic relations today.

Among the undeniable benefits of Szemán's work is that it maps the Hungarian context of Kollár's activities in Pest, analyzes the impact of the surrounding Hungarian environment on the form and content of Kollár's work, and demonstrates that Kollár's national attitudes, shaped by Hungarian impulses, differed from the national attitudes of those artists who lived and worked only in a Slavic environment. Of course, there are many professional works, studies and articles on Kollár's literary legacy by Czech and Slovak scholars; however, Szemán offers a new and fresh look at things that seem obvious and familiar. This is due to the fact that the Hungarian scholar perfectly controls the complicated Hungarian-German-Slavic cultural relations of Kollár's times, and, like writers and scholars in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, seamlessly finds the right path in the labyrinth of cultures, nationalities and ideas. As scholars from the Czech Republic and Slovakia well know, in works of this type mutual relations between nations are full of subtle images and symbols hidden beneath the surface of words, and they cannot be discovered without a deep knowledge of Hungarian, German and Latin.

Szemán's book demonstrates that the cultures of particular Central European nations do not exist in a cultural vacuum and cannot be examined separately. They behave like communicating vessels, and the perspective of other nations – Slovak, Czech, German, and in this case Hungarian – allows you to see their new, veiled face. Furthermore Szemán, as we can see from the bibliography, works with archival materials and sources in Latin. He also mentions the work of other Slavic scholars in Czech, Slovak and Polish. Thus, thanks to the knowledge of languages and cultural contexts – Slavic, Hungarian and German – Szemán is well equipped with the necessary tools to research such complicated figures as Ján Kollár, who belong to the entirety of Central European literature and cultural heritage.

Finally, it is worth pointing out Szemán's scientific objectivity, which may not be so obvious when we consider sensitive issues of nationality, national sentiment and the complex history of Central European nations. Nowadays, during times of political and cultural struggles, this work represents a rare example of impartiality and openness, diligence in examining the sources, and honesty and fairness to all these things that previous generations have left us. Although the literary legacy of Ján Kollár has frequently become a political weapon in national struggles, Szemán rises above political controversy and appropriately highlights the great artistic potential of Kollár's literary heritage.

Szemán has achieved something rare and unique. He has demonstrated how religion, politics, national consciousness and interpersonal relationships can be significantly shaped and formed through literature and that literature itself still holds a powerful influence on

our thinking about the world and humanity itself.

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**ALENKA JENSTERLE DOLEŽAL:**  
**AVTOR, TEKST, KONTEKST,**  
**KOMUNIKACIJA. POGLAVJA IZ**  
**SLOVENSKE MODERNE.** Maribor:  
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fakultete, 2014. (Mednarodna knjižna  
zbirka Zora, 103). 417 str.

Zadawano sobie ongiś pytanie, czy w przypadku słowiańskich literatur narodowych można mówić o „słowiańskich modernizmach”, czy też o „słowiańskim modernizmie” jako uogólnieniu modernistycznych zjawisk tematycznych i stylowych w dziełach powstałych w językach słowiańskich. W chwili obecnej twierdzenie o jedności czy o jakiejś specjalnej bliskości literatur powstałych w różnych językach słowiańskich – tylko z tego tytułu, że języki należą do jednej grupy – nie ma realnych podstaw. W poszczególnych etnikach o słowiańskim rodowodzie respektuje się istnienie literatur narodowych, które uformowały się oddzielnie, choć kształtowały się w podobieństwach czy powiązaniach z innymi literaturami narodowymi, przy czym kryterium wyróżnienia tych podobieństw czy powiązań nie tkwi w podobieństwie językowym, lecz wynika z historii, z położenia geograficznego, z szeroko rozumianej kultury tych etników.

Z podobnego założenia wyszła Alenka Jensterle Doležal, która w książce