

The “literary memory” model of research based on comparative analysis: A presentation on cultural archeology

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“Literary tradition” is an umbrella term for the developmental sequence of relatively fixed textual and extratextual units, whether of a spiritual nature (such as literary forms, devices, symbols, etc.) or a materialized one (monuments, museums, statues, etc.). These have formed a complex system of intertextual and cultural “traces” and “signs” existent in the awareness of individuals and various groups. The dynamic, semantically unlimited process of literary creation and reception continually restores the hierarchy of meanings in our memory, selectively recording our past values, in most cases through controlled learning and subjective experience. The classic approach of literary history pushed this area of reception – common in material culture – to the periphery of its interest, the sphere of literary sociology. In reference to the absolutization of the “extrinsic” approach, this diverted attention from the text on its own and from the philological substance of the broad conception of literary culture. In the general communicational concept, tradition and memory were in most cases reduced to registering strictly literary metacommunication, grounded in the principles of historical poetics; they were seen as creating the canonized values of the literary past and as constituting their norms as textual patterns: invariant prototypes of genres and themes. This selective attitude to past values took shape as a virtual unity of the paradigmatic aspect (tradition as a summary of the potential textual fruition of the post-textual continuation) and the syntagmatic aspect (tradition as a dynamic configuration of post-textual relations). In the semiotic-communicational concept of the Nitra School, for example, tradition embraces both axiological aspects (a survey of ideas, relations and contexts understood either affirmatively or controversially) and a materialized pattern related to the existence of literary texts (Miko and Popovič 1978). Similarly, ancillary researches in the field of literary history, such as biographism or prosopography, have generated diversified collectible materials yielded by the textual activities of selected groups and individuals (subsequently appraised through quantitative-statistical analysis) and provided literary historians or lexicographers with extensive database standards. Yet these have exclusively favored publication activities as the determinative criterion for personal categorization, fundamental in any literature. Thus the documentation and presentation of the literary past only proceeded towards the sphere of nonmaterial cultural heritage.

The new impulses which led to the development of memory studies as a discipline thematizing the subject and spiritual essence of cultural contents, as pointed out by the German literary theoretician Aleida Assmann, drew mainly on historical discourse, on discussions about the purpose of oral history assuming that “memory can exist even without writing, without written tradition and interpretational, canonizing processes” (Assmannová 2013a, 63). However, the concept of national memory in this sense (German scientific meta-reflection) brought a moral aspect into the research on this cultural reconstruction in the form of the political dimension of memory, which can select a historically disputable (though relevant) segment of national history. Assmann calls for constituting a common European memory within a supra-national, dialogically devised frame, which would respect the fact, such as in reference to the Holocaust, that “cultural memory is not only linked with the recognition of one’s own suffering but with one’s guilt as well” (Assmannová 2013a, 64). Following Curtius’s concept of *topoi* in European literature and the Latin Middle Ages, Assmann helped to formulate the theory of cultural memory within the German context, distinguishing between two modes of experience and its emotional availability through literary images. When evoking literary traditions and creating memory, we have two choices: 1. a spatial paradigm (*ars*), the mechanical storing of past phenomena with an emphasis on intuition and mimesis, and 2. a temporal paradigm (*vis*), typical of modern communities since the mid-18th century, sensitive to the historicity of the exterior reality. The reconstruction of memory proceeds through intergenerational transfer and is located in a time between recording and an individual new evocation, during which it is subject to structural alterations (Miko and Popovič 1978). Tradition thus reflects the simple fact that memory is subjected to the passage of time, and the process of remembering and forgetting, aside from the mechanical reproduction of the traces of the past, is supplemented by productive activity viewing the past from the future perspective. Basically, the past is both experienced and newly created through variant literary images. This is forestalled by Jurij M. Lotman’s definition of the semiotic function of memory as a specific mode of preserving information in cultural systems which, having been exposed to many contexts, assumes the character of symbols affected by contemporary emendations. The mechanism of semiotic memory thus applies the principle of creolization, not conserving particular texts but operating as a device to regenerate them (Lotman 1990, 369).

This observation is in accord with defining human memory as a complex semantically-episodic system (Bahna 2011, 113–114). Whereas semantically-oriented memory points to a mental representation reflecting a general knowledge of the world, i.e. the acquisition and transfer of factual information, episodically-oriented memory reflects remembrance of past personal experience in the subjective time. The process of forming collective memory, in the sense of cultural tradition as an “ideal” cognitive summary of objective information and subjective experiences that consist of a virtual set of individual “autobiographic” segments of the human “I”, can be formally concretized through “non-textual materialization” (material “vestiges” of the past). In artistic communication, however, recollections of the past can be verbalized, namely by being organized in the form of stories, by constructing

the narrating “we” that symbolizes the thematic core of the “ideal” cultural tradition as a dynamic process of semiotic creation, as well as by reconstructing recollections and conceptually schematized knowledge. Such a concept of notions, most frequently manifested through narratives, discourses, images and interpretational patterns, does not reflect the material or immaterial past; it is essentially a spiritual, social and cultural construct revealed “both in a materialized form and functioning as norms and ideas” (Půtová 2019, 107).

One methodologically inspiring attempt to recognize the relevant core of cultural tradition is the project headed by Marijan Dovič of the Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies (ZRC SAZU) *Nacionalni pesniki in kulturni svetniki Evrope: komemorativni kulti, kanonizacija in kulturni spomin* (*National Poets and Cultural Saints of Europe: Commemorative Cults, Canonization, and Cultural Memory*), completed in 2014–2017. Its aim is to grasp the transformational mechanisms of canonization and worship of writers and artists in the process of social mobility in modern linguistically ethnic communities between 1840 and 1940. The project provides the methodological impetus of “digital literary studies” to comparative thought in literature and to empiric literary research (Schmidt 2008), where similar approaches have not previously been pursued, and is included in SPIN (Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalism). It was prepared in collaboration with Joep Leerssen, the chair of the international program *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, launched in 2010, which provides access to the key data (beyond the statistical or factographic) for the critical study of European literary cultures from the 18th to the 20th century.

Leerssen, the Dutch comparatist and cultural historian from the University of Amsterdam who has worked extensively on the origin, impetus and impact of cultural nationalisms in the latter half of the 19th century as related to the development of modern, linguistically and ethnically defined literary cultures, espouses the method of “ingressive literary history”. Formulated by John Neubauer and Marcel Cornis-Pope in their four-volume *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010), this method enabled researchers to divide the “story” of Central Europe into “hubs” – pivotal cultural and political milestones which entered historic memory as collective archetypes. These “hubs” represented a specific “spatial metaphor” converging to “the intermixture of fibers, in a network, a point where diverse developmental lines encounter a certain midpoint, without which the dynamics of the whole system could not be explained” (Koron 2009, 103). The picture of literary history comprising a variety of viewpoints and fragmentary utterances thus turns into a partial and pluralistic discourse of “microhistory”, factually, a literary scan of the last two centuries. Nonetheless, there is some dissimilarity referring to the impulses of postmodern cultural anthropology: a stronger emphasis is placed on the “posthumous life” or existence of materialized or textual forms of culture and its supporters in the process of their intense acquisition and appeal. The programmatic orientation towards the principles of classification and conceptualization, which enable a member of a particular community to perceive and inter-

pret the external reality, implies an ethno-semantic analysis based on the belief that we can create a specific terminological-semantic system, i.e. a collection of rules reflecting the “cultural grammar” of any society. The project assembles new knowledge, some of which has already been published in journals or books, such as the team monograph *Kulturni svetniki in kanonizacija* (Dović 2016), *National Poets, Cultural Saints: Canonization and Commemorative Cults of Writers in Europe* (Dović and Helgason 2016), *Prešeren po Prešernu* (Dović 2017), and *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Leersen and Rigney 2014). We might also refer to the monothematic issues of renowned comparatist journals: the Slovenian *Primerjalne književnosti* (34, No. 1, 2011) or the German *Arcadia* (52, No. 1, 2017).

Surveying about fifty European literary cultures from Armenia to Iceland and from Portugal to Russia (including Turkey, Georgia, and Israel), the encyclopedic project was authored by more than a hundred scholars (the present author replied to a questionnaire about Czech literary culture). Although liable to unavoidable simplification and a compiling approach, it also takes account of minorities with an autochthonous literary language but incomplete statehood or disrupted political-historical continuity (such as the Galician, Catalan, Provençal, and Faroe literary cultures). The project’s foremost goal was to discover the poets, writers, and artists who were remembered, revered, and canonized in the process of building the nation between 1840–1940, although previous periods featuring great figures like Shakespeare, Dante, and Cervantes were also represented. However, the focus of its research was never on specific textual interpretations, or authorial “biographies”, but rather on the cultural “vestiges”, “relics”, or “signs” (“lieux de mémoire”) of these individuals, or to be more precise, of the process of their canonization. Thus the author’s glorification as a national bard and “cultural saint” was in a particular culture related to the question whether this notion (the terminological difference from the poet-bard or poet-prophet) is relevant to the community under consideration, if there were more subjects aspiring to that position, and, in addition, to what extent the canonization of artists in different literary cultures resembles religious canonization. At the same time, we need to be aware of the fact that the position of a subject aspiring to “cultural sainthood”, despite relatively swift and mass-scale adoration, can sink into total oblivion, even in the macro-historic memory of the national community (the process of semantic marginalization). Neubauer uses the term “national icons” for those figures who have become the metaphoric embodiment or figurative symbol of a particular culture without regard to political shifts, whose position has shifted in other words from “national bard” to “cultural saint” (2010). Logically, those aspiring to be cultural saints are already mentioned in encyclopedias or historical surveys which do not require further bibliographic reference.

Marijan Dović outlines an analytical model of canonizing cultural saints, which to some degree recalls the formality of the Christian beatification and canonization process, with the “afterlife” of this “candidate” being motivated by the previous facts formalized during his physical existence (2012). It is evident that canonization, though figurative, represents a complex, semantically multilayered process embracing a wide variety of ritualization practices, such as intertextual continuity, transla-

tions, quotations, the names of urban spaces, and other elements of material culture (including monuments, statues, museums, parental homes, memorial plaques, coin and banknote emblems, etc.), as well as classical, formal ratification procedures (inclusion in the educational system, in textbooks and readers, etc.), a process emerging from the primary textual corpus of the author.

The canonization model of “cultural sainthood” is comprised of three structural components whose content and chronology are interwoven: 1. *vita* (the life of the candidate and his/her canonization potential), 2. *cultus* (the canonization proper and its constituents, basically the process of production or reproduction of the canon status), and 3. *effectus* (the societal consequences resulting from the canonization process). If we briefly examine these three items and describe them systematically, we can determine that the aim of the *vita* (whose title alludes to the hagiographic genre) is to select biographical moments connected with the candidate’s distinct and unique qualities, as they are generally recognized. Within the scope of the *vita*, it is possible to differentiate four categories: *persona*, *enigma*, *opera*, and *acta*. *Persona* implies the potentialities linked with the writer’s personality, especially his or her physical appearance (such as charisma). The mysterious nature of Romantic aesthetics can be interpreted, as in the case of the Czech poet Karel Hynek Mácha, as a token of genius, which is connected with the irrationality of the poet’s premature death. *Enigma* suggests transgressions or deflections from the anticipated discourse (manifest bohemianism, a tendency to eroticism, martyrdom, the existence of apocrypha, intimate diaries and potential muckraking, etc.). *Opera*, obviously the most significant since it is the obligatory condition of the subsequent canonization, includes the potential determinants ensuing from the aesthetic values of the candidate’s works. In this case, the complete works or canonized opus exemplify the radical change of values and aesthetics, e.g. at the transition of a stylistic epoch. *Acta* actually determines the writer’s activities in a broader cultural field, his or her generally appreciated merits in national culture, and his or her share in the genesis and promotion of national ideology. Contrary to such an appraisal, Mácha, as mentioned above, could hardly be labelled a Czech nationalist; the author need not be identified, positively or negatively, with a particular ideology or so-called “national character”. What matters here is whether the materialized or textual traces in cultural memory function effectively in the specific literary culture and are perceived as such.

The second part of the analytical model of cultural canonization can be divided into the production and reproduction of the canonized status, the former being the canonization of the author’s primary corpus and the latter being the canonization of the secondary textual corpus emerging in response to the author’s works and personality. By production, we mean material vestiges in cultural memory, such as authorial relics or posthumous remains. These include the “secondary relics” displayed in museums (manuscripts, books, furniture, etc.) Sometimes the “signs” or “vestiges” may slide into a vulgar materiality if the exhibits feature the author’s everyday items closely related to their physical existence. A special segment of the canonized status production is represented by monuments or monumentalized architectural tombs, birthplaces, etc. The next category *scriptura* objectifies

the endeavor to consummate the primary corpus (referred to in German by the terms *Textpflege* or *Sinnpflege*) on the grounds of manifest identification, the recognition of its purpose. This refers, for example, to the textual supplementation of a complete work, the production of facsimiles or copies, providing textual reduction in search of an authentic “true” version, and the institutionalization and protection of the completed work by depositing it in archives or a museum. The last category is *confirmation*, culminated by formal ratification and ceremonial matriculation confirming the author’s status: the cultural saint leaves the cultural field for the sphere of politics. His or her “adoption” or “monopolization” by certain powerful groups serves as an indicator of political influence.

In terms of time, the reproduction cycle of the canonical status means the phase that follows the canonization, mostly its consolidation or extension. First, it is necessary to mention the category of *rituals* in the sense of commemorations (celebrations, monument “unveilings”, gala receptions, exhibitions, *tableaux vivants*, wreath-laying ceremonies, etc.). This is the actual intercultural transfer of the candidate’s personality and works from the enclosed microspace of intellectual elites into the societal macrospace shared by most of the social layers and groups constituting the national entity. Defying its symbolization, this is a semiotically metonymic transfer. The reproduction of canonical status is jointly used by the category of *appropriation*, viewed as an intertextual corpus of exegetic commentaries. These are scholarly and popularizing interpretations which cement the status of the cultural saint by removing, re-touching or mitigating some exegeses while placing it within the national and global context. The generically textual and materialized legacy of cultural saints stimulates both positive and negative hagiographical operations (ideological manipulations, mystification, uncritical adoration, etc.). The category of *procreativity* aligns itself with the basic factors of extending the secondary corpus, which denotes the sum of texts originated in response to the secondary corpus irrespective of the genre, language, expressional poetics and intersemiotic overlapping (a play, screenplay, picture, video, or instrumental music, including parody or imitation). The category of *indoc-trination* denotes the condition where the secondary corpus of texts and materialized vestiges is systematically incorporated into the educational system, with the aid of media, school regulations, etc. In a specific application, this results in integrating the curricula and university traditions (recitation, internationalization of scientific knowledge, etc.).

In Dović’s analytical model, the societal impact of the cult and canonization of cultural saints is described in the section “Effects”, which tries to render its formative influence in the development of modern societies. The societal effects are in most cases related to the formation of a new (national) community, i.e. to the construction or consolidation of a new identity through collective rituals or through creating new ideas shared with the cultural saint’s cult. It is the culmination of the semiotic nationalization of the public space which takes collective possession of topography and geography, and at times also of the administration which strengthens the canonization status through its symbolization. It mainly concerns the study of social frameworks and cultural conditions under which the cultural saint’s position

is institutionalized in the public and media space. There is an obvious analogy with the simple concretization of a literary work which, according to Ingarden, cannot be understood as an independent item. Concretization “is only affected by the changes of the corresponding acts of mind where it is objectified” (1989, 349). The subjective literary memory is in essence mantled by tradition, i.e. remembrance prevails over oblivion – the paradigm of tradition “keeps striving for the preservation of cultural contents” (Assmannová 2013a, 65). Writers in their capacity as cultural saints have often joined the national liberation struggle, entering the political context, engaging in revolutions, participating in the founding of new states, and generally becoming a legitimized symbol of the national movement and power transformations. In this regard, it is possible to mention the “appropriation” of the composer Richard Wagner by Nazi ideology on account of his anti-Semitic attitudes.

Research into cultural heritage and literary memory employing the analytical concept of cultural saints can augment classic literary history with an interdisciplinary dimension. Rather than the traditional sociological enquiry on literary tradition as a correlate and specific models of communicational discourse about the author’s life and works, it consists of the identification and reconstruction of the criteria through which members of a specific community introduce the singularity of a literary work into the collective memory. It is this singularity, intensely reflected as a result of positive appraisal, that is a response to the fact that the author’s text or posthumous life comply with the changing needs of the national community. Although Dović’s model of cultural saints has been created with an empirical collection of biographical-statistical data, predominantly through verifiable information, the individual categories originated from the historical study of 18th to 20th century European literary cultures, whose cultural nationalism contributed to the genesis of modern ethnolinguistic communities. Moreover, the data were collected in communication with literary scholars “within” the given culture, who gained subjective intimate experience and a synthesizing approach to their own traditions, cultural inheritance, institutions, social systems, historical tradition, etc. The authorial team drew on works on cultural nationalism (Gellner 2003; Stevens 1997, 248–258), Neubauer and Cornis-Pope’s “ingressivist” theory (2010), Franco Moretti’s theory of interliterary networks (54–68), and Leerssen’s imagological research into material “otherness” (2006, 559–578). To some extent, reference can be made to Foucault’s literary archeology, i.e. the analysis of the authorial institution diachronically exploring the preservation and reconstruction of works of art (2002). The emphasis on the study of the material dimension of semiotic traces fluctuating between institutions and texts also suggests Stephen Greenblatt’s “new historicism” while concretizing the much-exploited model of the literary canon erroneously related only to textual canonization (2004). The concept of cultural saints views canonization as a changeable and dynamic network of discursive modes of textual and extratextual practices, which are subject not only to given rules but also to the chaos of randomness. Dović has conceived his analytical model as a methodological introduction to the study of commemorative cults of the 18th to 20th centuries. It relates the pan-European epidemics of events celebrating “great” personalities to a multitude of subjective and

objective factors, whereby the canonization of the author's life and works is decided not only by aesthetic values and perhaps by the media's reductive paraphrasing of his or her main "idea", but also the process of institutionalization and the extrinsic historical situation of the national community. Further research will determine the semantic and structural hierarchy of individual categories by answering the following question: what decides whether a national poet is established as a cultural saint or whether, in an intergenerational transfer, he or she is allowed to fall into a "semantic vacuum" where he or she may be prepared for "reincarnation" as a cultural value, or suffer (in Foucauldian terms) irrevocable exclusion.

Translated from Czech by Jiřina Johanišová

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The “literary memory” model of research based on comparative analysis: A presentation on cultural archeology

Literary memory. Cultural archeology. National poet. “Cultural saints.” Marijan Dović.
Joep Leerssen.

Drawing upon research on literary culture and memory, this article explores the transformational mechanisms of the canonization and worship of authors in the process of social mobility from 1840 to 1940. As a result of the joint endeavor of the comparatists Marijan Dović and Joep Leerssen, the analytical concept of “cultural saints” conceives of canonization as a movable network of textual and extra-textual discursive practices. The importance of the concept lies in its more precise differentiation between objective and subjective factors, which are instrumental in the preservation and reconstruction of the practice of artistic creations. Implementing an ethno-semantic analysis, Dović and Leerssen’s model supports the abstraction that the constitution of national identity through collective rituals and the formation of new ideas establishes a canonized set of rules, the “cultural grammar” of any society.

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