

TONE SMOLEJ (ed.): Janko Kos in slovenska primerjalna književnost [Janko Kos in Slovenian comparative literature]

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In the current postmodern period of the disciplinary specialization of literary studies, it is difficult to identify figures who universally and knowledgeably encompass the thematic horizon of their internally structured field. In the Central European context, we can recall the Czech Josef Hrabák (1912–1987), the Polish Henryk Markiewicz (1922–2013) or the Slovak Stanislav Šmatlák (1925–2008). Each of them has covered the history of their national literature from the Middle Ages to the present as an act of individual creation, and in addition to theoretical studies, they have also written textbooks and occasional texts, devoted themselves to literary criticism and contemporary literature, and have also worked on comparative studies and world literature. These personalities, who are perceived with reluctance by some as legendary “icons” and by others as antiquarian forgotten relics, were characterized by a certain methodological “conservatism” as well as by a centrist position that allowed them to cope with different, often fashionable “isms”. In the Slovenian environment, Janko Kos (b. 1931) represents the synthesizing type, impressive in the breadth and depth of his scope. The leading Slovenian comparatist Tone Smolej has compiled a volume dedicated to him, *Janko Kos in slovenska primerjalna književnost*, which was published as the tenth volume in the *Historia facultatis* edition of the University of Ljubljana’s Faculty of Philosophy, on the 100th anniversary of its founding. The volume, which includes 15 studies, also has a valuable personal bibliography from

1948–2023 (compiled by Martin Grum) and a list of lectures at the University of Ljubljana (compiled by Irena Ipavec Dobrota). At the same time, it presents the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Ljubljana and the scholars who have intellectually shaped its history as a continuous and traditional university discipline. Originally intended as a classic *Festschrift* for Janko Kos’s 90th birthday, the book has grown into a collection of thematically layered texts by his former students and admirers.

In his brief introduction (5–6), Smolej, who has also contributed an insider’s profile of Kos’s career (29–42), explains the origin of the publication, which spans the over 75 years in which the researcher has been continuously publishing. Smolej reconstructs Kos’s student years and his training under Anton Ocvirk, the founder of Slovenian literary comparative studies, influenced by the French positivist-oriented comparative school. According to Smolej, the co-author with Majda Stanovnik of the monograph *Anton Ocvirk: ob stoletnici rojstva* (2007), the difference between the two scholars stems from their methodological orientation: unlike the positivist Ocvirk, Kos was able to draw inspiration from modern literary scholarship.

The following chapters address topics ranging from the scholar’s work and his main literary interests (Vladimir Bartol, Ivan Cankar, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Žiga Zois, etc.) to theoretical excursions (the theory of the novel, lyricism, the art of film, or occa-

sional essays, memoirs, and encyclopedic entries). They are accompanied by a still-relevant text by Evald Koren from 1988 assessing Kos's comparative history of Slovenian literature (*Primerjalna zgodovina slovenske literature*, 1987), which followed Anton Ocvirk and Paul van Tieghem in placing the interpretation of national literature in a European context. Marko Snoj's archival documentation of the family roots and origins of the surname Kos is followed by contributions by Martina Ožbot, who recapitulates Kos's relationship to Italian literature, especially to Dante and Boccaccio, and by Luka Vidmar, who highlights the scholar's interpretation of the Renaissance poet Zois. Irena Samide discusses Kos's assessment of Goethe's influence on Slovenian literature in relation to the integration of pre-Romanticism into the periodization of so-called small cultures, and she also recalls the critical acclaim attained by his monograph *Predromantika* (1987). Similarly, Vanesa Matajč examines Kos's reinterpretation of the Slovenian modernist Ivan Cankar. Alen Albin Širca's contribution from the field of philosophical-religious comparative studies reflects on the researcher's view of the Bible as the organic basis of ancient Jewish writing, as well as his treatment of Biblical motifs in the Slovenian cultural tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries. The volume concludes with Alenka Žbogar's article on Kos's didactic dimension (which included the regular production of high school textbooks), Matevž Rudolf's chapter on his learned interventions in film theory, and Seta Knop's overview of his editorial activities.

The individual studies convincingly document that Kos has intervened in many areas of literary scholarship, as evidenced by his extensive bibliography (*Znanost in ideologija*, 1970; *Prešeren in njegova doba: študije*, 1991; *Literarna teorija*, 2001; *Slovinci in Europa*, 2007; *Sociologija slovenske literature*, 2016). Probably the most valuable study alongside Smolej's texts is Tomo Virk's methodological contribution "Litteris comparativis semper deditus" (7–16), which

places the scholar as the "youngest" and most prolific in terms of publications in the "golden age" of the previous phase of Slovenian comparative studies, alongside Anton Ocvirk and Dušan Pirjevec. According to Virk (who contributed another text to the collection on Kos's perception of Vladimir Bartol), his literary thought – which represents a synthesis of rational phenomenology and philosophically-oriented currents – can be described as "classical" because of its complementarity of historical approach and typology. Indeed, Kos's methodological pluralism is based on the view that the subject of literary sciences is characterized by heterogeneity, hence there is no single binding method.

In this way, Kos comes close to the world-famous Czech-American literary theorist, René Wellek, who, despite his text-centrism and structuralist starting point, managed to balance "internal" and "external" approaches to the study of literary works. Therefore, he consciously distanced himself from the "extreme" positions of literary science, such as subjective psychologism or deconstructionist "excesses." According to Virk, equally important are Kos's terminological contributions, such as supplementing Stanzel's narratological concept with a new type of virtual narrator, defining the so-called internal form of an artistic text applied from German phenomenology, or specifying literary "artistry." In the theory of the novel, the researcher has complemented György Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin, and with the help of Jürgen Habermas's opposition between public and private spheres, he has extended it to a new genre form existing in postmodernity and based on a specific ratio of non-fictional and fictional narrative lines that reflect not only the "empirical world" but also the "world of the text." Thematically related to Virk's study is Darja Pavlič's essay emphasizing Kos's contribution to lyric theory (the elaboration of the possible positions of the lyrical subject in the deep structure of the text) in his monograph *Lirika* (1993).

This collection is proof that Slovenian comparative studies thoroughly maps its his-

tory, which it properly appreciates while also reconstructing its methodological lines in detail. It has at its disposal scholars of various generations (Marijan Dović, Marko Juvan, Tone Smolej, Tomo Virk, etc.) who despite their different interpretative approaches, create an audible “consonance” or polyphony of “partial” voices without any ideological barrier. We can only welcome the fact that Janko Kos, now over 90 years old and still profes-

sionally active, has not yet said his last word in this dialogue.

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