

Prose Poem in Slovak Literary Modernism (Notes on Genre and Typology)

Dana Hučková

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ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6157-8821>

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The article examines the genre classification of prose poems in general and the place of prose poems in Slovak literature during the first third of the 20th century, when several modernist poets, including Ivan Krasko (1876–1958), Vladimír Roy (1885–1936), and Martin Rázus (1888–1937), devoted themselves to this genre. The article also explores subsequent Slovak literary reflections on the prose poem. The subversive loosening and re-evaluation of poetic and prose conventions in the genre led to the emergence of a new hybrid form, which appears as a revolution in the context of modernism, representing a new form of cultural performance. Contemplativeness is identified as the fundamental poetic quality in Slovak texts. The article also highlights differences in the genre classification of individual works; for example, I. Krasko's prose poems are perceived as poems, while the texts of V. Roy and M. Rázus are classified as belonging to the epic genre. The article outlines a framework for defining and classifying the genre, utilizing a polyphonic spectrum of approaches. The study concludes that the definition of the genre through the dynamics of opposites proves to be insufficient in current research. Literary genres are extremely flexible categories whose boundaries are defined almost exclusively to be crossed and overcome. From this perspective, the genre in question also requires a new reading and research.

Kľúčové slová: genológia, poetika žánru, báseň
v próze, slovenská literatúra, modernizmus

The emergence of modern prose poetry – a genre combining poetry, essays, and philosophical maxims – is traditionally associated with French literature of the second half of the 19th century and with such well-known names as Charles Baudelaire (posthumously published collection *Petits poèmes en prose*, 1869; original title *Le Spleen de Paris*) and Arthur Rimbaud (collection *Les Illuminations*, 1886). In Russian literature, Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev (*Poems in Prose*, 1882) was the pioneering author. Mixed forms of poetry, verse, and prose appeared in individual European literatures before, in works from the immediately preceding and also from earlier periods (Moore 2009; Bender – Felten – Marchal 2024). Prose poetry from the second half of the 19th century, with its implicit genre ambiguity, is perceived as the most significant genre innovation of literary modernism. The symbolist combination of the prosaization of poetry and the lyricization of prose (or, in other words, the paradox of prose penetrating poetry and poetry penetrating prose) is also captured by the oxymoronic name of the new genre, which emerged as a result of the crisis of the traditional genre system, and a manifestation of the decay of the previously valid canon of recognized genres.

While Stéphane Mallarmé called for freedom and individuality in verse language (*Crise de vers*, 1886), short prose with an emphasis on a fragment became more widespread in prose during the 19th century. The romantic understanding of the fragment, according to which the fragment is always defined negatively in relation to some totality, is giving way to a new perspective. Brevity is no longer just a quantitative factor, but it is becoming a qualitative feature (Althaus – Bunzel – Götsche 2007: XIII). The epistemological claim of prose to totality of depiction is replaced by a concentration on detail, a segment of reality, and a single moment (which was related to the radical change in the understanding of time and duration).

It was Baudelaire who succeeded in creating “a new poetic space that tolerates the coexistence of opposites” (Whidden 2022: 7). The tension between opposites formed the basis of Baudelaire’s understanding of the phenomenon of modernity – in his essay *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (written at the turn of 1859 and 1860, and published in 1863), he characterized modernity as transient, fleeting and contingent, stating that it was one half of art, the other being the eternity and immutability (Baudelaire 1968: 598). The new, the current, the changeable on one side, and the old, the persistent on the other side, are thus part of a single whole; however, the speed at which the modern loses its relevance is changing.

If modernists perceived poetry as a medium of reflection, prose poetry represented a new type of objective modernist poetics, and the confrontation of subjectivity with the world was an important feature of it. The basic feature of this borderline form, which develops a new modernist model of the subjectivity of a speaking subject, is “the dramatization of the clash between consciousness and the world” (Kluba 2022: 30–31), as Jonathan Culler stated in his interpretation of Baudelaire. According to Culler, the author refers to subjectivity that was born, but also “modified in relation to the romantic model – subjectivity consisting in the ‘drama of the consciousness of a depersonalized subject’” (Culler 1988: 296). Cheryl Krueger pointed out that “what lies beneath the genre’s obvious evocation of formal and literary tensions (between verse and prose, between

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302 the lyric and the narrative) are larger questions of immortality and death” (quoted in Whidden 2022: 5–6).

As a result of modernist transgressions of fixed genre patterns, not only hybrid forms of familiar genres, but also entirely new types of texts that use the dichotomies of the literary system emerge. The idea of poetry in prose (Kreienbrock 2020) not only raises questions of form (verse, prose), language (metric patterns and bound speech, natural flow and colloquial speech), and syntax (poetic syntax, prose syntax), but also, and above all, questions of semantics, the position of the subject, and self-referentiality.

The dual principle of prose poems

There are numerous theoretical and literary-historical works, as well as anthologies on the subject of prose poetry in general, as well as within selected national literatures and comparative analyses (selectively Craver 1999; Bunzel 2005, 2007, 2009, 2024; Krueger 2007; Caws – Delville 2021; Kluba 2022; Whidden 2022; Bender – Felten – Marchal 2024). The basic definition is relatively clear: a prose poem combines the expressive means of poetry and prose, utilizing the duality of the lyrical and the epic, thereby reflecting the modernist effort to unite opposites in a syncretic manner.¹ Nevertheless, it is a genre that does not have a stable form, and its elusiveness remains its main definition, as some of the latest conceptual explanations mention.

The entry in the dictionary of systematic terminology of the new theory of lyric poetry (lyricology), written by Rüdiger Zymner, describes prose poetry as a short text, concentrated in its form and information, typographically resembling prose, not metrically organized, which claims to be received as poetry, due to its contextual embedding in poetry, or due to its form and contents (Zymner 2019: 42).

According to Wolfgang Bunzel, the genesis of prose poetry was not related to an effort to poeticize prose, but to prosaize poetry. He also mentions that prose poetry at the end of the 19th century underwent so many interpretations that the space for genre-typological discussion was essentially exhausted – prose poetry was assigned to prose, understood as poetry, and proposed as an intermediary text type. It would therefore be wrong to define prose poetry based on unambiguous content or formal criteria since it can only be grasped through its diverse and incompatible functional varieties (Bunzel 2024: 204).

Verse and prose

Verse and prose are found at a descriptive level that precedes the common genre triad of epic, drama, and poetry. However, the difference between verse and prose is not included in genre typologies. The most commonly used criterion for differentiating poetry and prose is the distinction between bound and unbound

1 Prose poetry is characterized by a whole range of dualities, such as poetry – prose, lyrical – epic, bound speech – unbound speech, or figurative – literal. Modernist poetry based on the presence of three key factors – suggestion, evocation, and symbol – featured so-called “double-layered” images, created through contrast (for example, by connecting two spaces, comparing exotic foreign countries and home, and then developing contrasting associations associated with them). A similar thematic and motivic duality is also present in prose poems.

speech. While the lyric is characterized primarily by a bound (rhythmic) form of speech (with a fixed meter or rhyme scheme, in the graphic form of separate verses), the epic is defined by unbound speech (the text is arranged into sentences and paragraphs). The different ways of organizing language (Kožmín 1967: 18) create two different styles: the style of poetry (with a predominance of the aesthetic function of “autotelic” poetic language) and the style of prose (with a dominant role of the narrative method; Kožmín 1967: 21).

The relationship between poetry and prose has been a topic of theoretical discussion since ancient times. Greek philosophers understood poetry as a work of inspiration bestowed upon the poet by divine power, and considered it to be akin to divination. Thanks to divine intervention, poetry provides knowledge of the highest order: it guides souls, educates people, makes them better, or at least has the potential to do so (Tatarkiewicz 1985: 44). According to Yuri Lotman, history proves that verse was initially the only possible form of verbal art (Lotman 1990: 115). While the development of poetry was burdened by a long history of formal conventions, prose forms belonged to a lower level in the genre hierarchy.² From the end of the 18th century, during the establishment of aesthetics as an independent discipline, a more or less clearly structured system of genres developed, determined by the basic dichotomy of poetry and prose, and by their understanding as a contrasting pair or definitional opposites (Vers und Prosa... 2023 [online]).³ In Romanticism, lyric poetry was elevated to a poetic norm, even to the essence of literature, but instead of its mimetic nature, the emphasis shifted to expressiveness: lyric poetry was understood as an intense expression of the poet’s feelings and a representation of subjective experience. The position of prose also changed, moving towards its autonomization and confirmation of its aesthetic legitimacy.

The dynamic development of prose genres in the 19th century gradually led to more differentiated theoretical analyses of prose and, conversely, to a certain weakening of the theory of lyric. Several recent research initiatives revise this theoretical imbalance in the positioning of poetry in literary discourse, supplementing a comprehensive definition of poetry (Culler 2020 [2015]), introducing differentiated modern tools for its analysis (Müller-Zettelmann – Rubik 2005), or reflecting an intention to systematically examine poetry as a separately definable genre that is not bound by the frames of individual national literatures (within a new discipline called lyricology; Hillebrandt – Klimek – Müller – Zymner 2019).

As Culler stated: “The new lyric studies should not only explore different historical manifestations of lyric but also propose new normative models

2 In his monograph *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (1970), in the chapter Poetry and Prose, Lotman argues against the view that ordinary human speech and prosaic speech are identical, and therefore prose is a primary, preceding phenomenon in relation to poetry. According to him, “in the hierarchy of movement from simplicity to complexity, the distribution of genres is different: colloquial language – song (text + motif) – ‘classical poetry’ – artistic prose” (Lotman 1990: 115). All translations from Slovak and Czech in the text are those of the author.

3 Papers from the international symposium Vers und Prosa. Differenz – Interaktion – Interferenz that took place 2 – 7 September 2024 in Villa Vigoni, will be published in KASPER, Judith – ZUMBUSCH, Cornelia, eds. *Vers und Prosa*. Berlin: J. B. Metzler, 2025.

304 of lyric, emphasizing features that can become the basis of new typologies [...]. A proliferation of models and typologies should help bring poetry back into literary studies” (Culler 2008: 205).

The aesthetic potential of verse and prose can only be critically grasped by examining them together, especially at the intersection of different literatures and systems. Comparing verse and prose through their formal aspects is an important way to explore their relationships of mixing, blending, and contrasting, as well as the repeated negotiation of the boundary between them. At the same time, however, neither verse nor prose can be reduced to a question of form alone, since they both have profound semantic, aesthetic, philosophical, and other implications (Vers und Prosa... 2023 [online]).

One of the essential areas of research into the differences between prose and verse can be considered rhythmic configurations and theories of rhythm. In more recent research, rhythm is not perceived narrowly as a formal element, but as a specific intermedial, cultural, and epistemic form of organization of language, music, and dance, as well as work and nature. Attention is focused not only on the acoustic dimension of poetry and prose, but also on their relationship to music (through the categories of lyricism and musicality), dance, painting, and physicality (movement, breath, and gestures). Paul Valéry, in his lectures (*Poésie et pensée abstraite*, 1939), developed the metaphor of prose as walking and poetry as dancing (a similar dichotomy could be speaking and singing). This physical basis of rhythmic experience (the kinesthetic-physical dimension of meter and rhythm) also appears in current reflections on rhythm (Marcus 2023).

Prose poem: a genre without a fixed set of genre characteristics

Literary theory tells us that certain recurring features, a certain prototypical set of textual rules, are important for a coherent definition of genre. As Tibor Žilka states in his definition of genology,

every literary genre is the result of thematic, compositional, and stylistic generalizations and has the character of an invariant (established) model for the creation of specific texts. A specific literary text is always the realization of a genre invariant, this means, it is created on the principle of a certain established pattern. However, a specific text of high quality also enriches the abstract model of the genre invariant, this means, it becomes a model for the creation of texts in a given genre (Žilka 2016: 31–32).

The subversive loosening and re-evaluation of the genre conventions of poetry and prose in the new form of prose poetry has been characterized from the outset by a certain conceptual and categorical vagueness and freedom, which places prose poetry in the position of an unstable or weakly defined genre. In this context, Oskár Čepan raised several questions, for example: “Is a prose poem ‘communicated’ poetry or ‘modulated’ prose? Is it even a legitimate genre? Isn’t it fishing in extraterritorial waters?” (Čepan 1965: 51). Another researcher, Charles Bourg, asked “naive” questions, such as where poetry began, where prose ended, and whether there really was such a chimera as a prose poem (Bourg 1995: 628).

Although texts labelled as prose poems are characterized by great formal variability, identical terms often appear in their description: fragmentary nature, textual brevity, partial abandonment of fixed narrative patterns, intensity of utterance, autonomy, and exclusivity. On closer inspection, however, all these terms appear to be only symbolic criteria, conventional signs, or merely formal characteristics that do not contribute to the creation of a coherent corpus of the genre.⁴

Agnieszka Kluba, the author of a monograph on Polish prose poems (Kluba 2014, 2022), lists other fundamental elements that shape the profile of the genre: a specific construction of subjectivity, an intergeneric nature while maintaining the framework of a superior lyrical modality, rhythm based on a semantic rather than a prosodic pattern, brevity of form, irrelevance of poetic language, unity, unpredictability, and timelessness of form, whose type of coherence is always singular, the dominance of spatiality over temporality, lyrical intellectualism and a tendency towards cyclicity, which is particularly often accompanied by “the ability to absorb different voices and modalities” (Kluba 2022: 121).

Another way to approach prose poetry is to attempt to differentiate it from other literary genres in the field of prose with which it is usually confused, for example, from narrative stories, such as short stories, anecdotes, or fairy tales, as Pedro Baños Gallego did in 2019 and 2020.

Motivation behind the author's choice of genre

Genre categories influence not only reading but also writing, since they are part of various modelling processes (e.g., composition strategies, narrative strategies, or writing strategies). The decision to write a prose poem signals both a conscious act, and the fact that the poet is aware of the ontological difference between “poetic language” and “everyday language”. (For a verse poem to become a prose poem, it is usually necessary to remove the obligatory metrical organization, caesura, rhyme, and verse structure).⁵ By renouncing these restrictions, the poet opens up unlimited space for the figurative expression of ideas.⁶

František Miko wrote about the nature of genre choice:

We do not consider the circumstance of whether the poetic subject chooses verse or prose to be a matter of usual expressive choice. This is more than just a conventional poetic form. The prosaic form of the text is strongly associated with the succession and continuity of expression as characteristic attributes of epic and technical texts. It definitely implies an objective line of development of the theme. Prose is always a sign of objectivity – and epic. The prosaic form of a poem must then be explained in such a way that the lyrical subject does not want to completely abandon the objective level, and persists at least in its last characteristic feature, the prosodic coherence of the units of the text (Miko 1973: 169).

4 For example, the question of what brevity means and how it is defined raises a number of uncertainties. “Brevity” tends to be defined as ranging from half a page to three pages.

5 Nevertheless, rhyme and internal sentence rhythm remain.

6 Parallelism, playful repetitios, alliteration and syntactic symmetry are most frequently used tropes and figures.

306 Poetry in prose in Slovak literature

In the Slovak literary milieu, the cultural tradition of prose poem is linked primarily to the French context (Ch. Baudelaire, Lautréamont, J. A. Rimbaud, S. Mallarmé), Russian literature (I. S. Turgenev), and Czech influences (Jaroslav Vrchlický, Antonín Sova, Otokar Březina, Karel Hlaváček, Jiří Wolker).⁷ Reviews from the 1920s and 1930s also contained references to other authors, such as Rabindranath Tagore,⁸ Carmen Sylva,⁹ and Olive Schreiner.¹⁰ Prose poems also overlapped with the genre of philosophical aphorisms (for example, Friedrich Nietzsche).

The first prose poems in Slovak literature appeared at the beginning of the 20th century in the symbolist poetry of the Modern School (Ivan Krasko, Vladimír Roy) and in modernist lyrical prose (Ivan Gall: *Na Dušičky* [On All Souls' Day], 1906; Samo Cambel Kosorkin: *Zlomená duša* [Broken Soul], 1910). However, separate books of predominantly reflective and meditative texts, which would declare their affiliation to the genre by their title *Básne v próze* (or variations of this title, such as *Prose poems*), were not published until the 1920s (by Martin Rázus, Bohuslav Klimo Hájomil, and Augustín Način Borin), and the 1930s (by Theo Herkeľ Florin). In the interwar period, the innovative possibilities of this new hybrid form were of interest not only to lyric poets (such as Štefan Krčméry), prose writers with a lyrical orientation (Milo Urban), and lyrical prose writers (Ľudo Ondrejov), but also to authors inclined towards experimentation (for example, within the poetics of surrealism, in works by Rudolf Fabry, Ján Rak, Štefan Žáry, and Vladimír Reisel).¹¹

The basic poetic quality of Slovak prose poems from the first third of the 20th century is contemplativeness. Reflexivity and meditateness directly

7 In addition to direct intertextuality, the relationship of a specific text to a particular cultural code or consciousness must also be taken into account. Jiří Pelán's statement on the question of specific influences, using the example of Ch. Baudelaire, is instructive: "It is not [...] ruled out that poetic influence may also be merely the product of an analogous cultural-historical situation or similar psychological nature. This must also be taken into account when researching this type of intertextuality" (Pelán 2021: 51).

8 Rabindranath Tagore/Rabindranáth Thákur (1861–1941), Bengali writer and philosopher, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Štefan Krčméry, in his love correspondence from 1919–1922, refers to the Czech edition of his collection *The Gardener (Zahradník)*. Kladno: Šnajdr, 1917), which in English translation, the author dedicated to the Irish poet and playwright William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): "Oh, Rabindranath, great singer of India, come and break our silence" (Krčméry 1972: 50).

9 Carmen Sylva was the pseudonym of Elisabeth of Neuwied (1843–1916), the first Queen of Romania and the wife of Charles I. Hollenzolern-Sigmaringen. Her book of allegorical prose, *Leidens Erdengang. Ein Märchenkreis* (1882) was published in Czech translation in 1901 under the title *Utrpení na pozemské pouti* [Suffering on Earthly Pilgrimage] in the Světová knihovna (World Library) series by J. Otto Publishing House in Prague (translated by Anna Řeháková). As Pavla Maternová wrote in her review of the book in the magazine *Ženský svět* [Women's World], "it is a beautiful book of rare poetry despite the fact that it is written in lines that are not bound by rhythm" (Maternová 1901).

10 Olive Schreiner (1855–1922), a South African writer and one of the first South African women's rights activists, explored the relationships between feminism, race, sexuality, and work. Her collection of eleven short lyrical prose and prose poems, *Dreams*, published in 1891, was translated into Czech by Marie Jesenská in 1905 under the title *Sny* [Dreams], and published by J. Otto in Prague. In terms of genre, these are allegorical fables, but due to their radical political content, the texts are also referred to as feminist allegories. Schreiner's book was extremely popular in its day and was also very inspiring for British suffragettes.

11 Ján Zambor follows the development of this genre in Slovak literature of the second half of the 20th century (Zambor 1983: 194).

result from the key thematic and motivic dominants: crisis of the subject, loneliness, rebirth of the self, absence of the other (or absence of a loved one), rejection of the other, life and death, mystery of faith, experience of revelation or vision (epiphany), nature, and the perception of the landscape.

The primacy of lyricism

Slovak literary studies dealt with the genre of prose poems only occasionally and selectively, especially in reviews of book production (for example, Lukáč 1926; Mráz 1926, 1936a, 1936b), in school textbooks on poetics (Bujnák – Menšík 1930; Harpáň 1986), in literary-historical works (Brezina 1961; Gáfrík 1965, 1993, 1998; Šmatlák 1979), in methodological and interpretative studies (Čepan 1965; Miko 1973; Zambor 2016), or in anthologies (for example, *Volný verš v slovenskej poézii* [Free Verse in Slovak Poetry]; Zambor 1983).

Similar to the European tradition of research into this genre, which considers lyricism to be the primary quality of prose poetry, Slovak literary-theoretical discourse also tends to associate it primarily with the genre of lyric. Oskár Čepan was the first to emphasize lyric when he wrote: “Within the inventory of traditional types and genres, prose poem is an exceptional phenomenon. Its lyrical ‘modulation’ within the range of prose depends too much on the intensity of the carrier communicative wave of a paradoxical type: it is not a communicative ability based on the language of prose, but on the language of lyrical poetry” (Čepan 1965: 52).

In his stylistic analysis, Miko described prose poetry as “an extreme case of contamination of lyrical and epic elements. On a thematic level, it is characterized by a prevailing tendency toward simultaneity, while phonetically it retains prose succession. Subjectivity is motivated by an implicit, reduced subject of a general nature. It is essentially a lyric” (Miko 1973: 106).

Similarly, Michal Harpáň also underlines the lyrical character, defining prose poem as a work written in a prose form but not belonging to the epic: it is “a lyrical genre form in which the absence of verse is balanced by the established lyricism of expressive categories” (Harpáň 1986: 215). However, M. Harpáň considers it problematic to define the nature of the genre overlap between the lyrical and the epic, as he immediately adds that prose poems cannot be “safely defined as a transitional lyrical-epic genre, because the relationship between lyrical and epic in it does not establish any system” (Harpáň 1986: 216).

Ján Zambor also emphasizes the lyrical constant as key to prose poetry: “The so-called prose poem, otherwise a borderline form between free verse and prose, was constituted as a lyrical form” (Zambor 1983: 194). He continues:

Modern poetry, including Slovak poetry, has relativized the boundaries between free verse poem, prose poem, and artistic prose to such an extent that in certain cases the most appropriate term for a certain hybrid literary form is indeed “text”. [...] If we find the term prosaic poem (one modification of which is a poem in prose/prose poem) acceptable, we could perhaps also talk about poetic prose [...]. If we occasionally encounter good artistic prose in poetry, which the author classified as poems and usually given verse form, similarly, in belletristic prose, we discover passages that have the validity of poems (Zambor 1983: 194).

308 Interpretative tradition of prose poems in Slovak literature

Prose poems appeared in Slovak literature at the beginning of the 20th century in the works of three poets: Ivan Krasko (1876–1958), Vladimír Roy (1885–1936), and Martin Rázus (1888–1937).¹² While Krasko's prose poems are perceived as poems, Roy's and Rázus's are classified as prose. Their interpretation has been addressed mainly by literary historians with a research focus on literary modernism or specializing in the study of poetry, such as Oskár Čepan (1925–1992), Stanislav Šmatlák (1925–2008), Michal Gáfrik (1931–2015), and Ján Zambor (1947). Many of their findings overlap, while in some cases their interpretations diverge and occasionally even contradict each other. They paid the most attention to the texts of Krasko.

Krasko is the author of two prose poems, *Noc* [Night] and *Ja* [I], both written in 1909, and published in magazines in 1910. They are connected not only through the two text segments “It is necessary to think, inevitably necessary!” and “you cannot escape, you cannot!”, but also by “the borderline form of despair of reason” (Šmatlák 1979: 254) and by the same problem – “realizing the necessity of thinking and the call to think” (Zambor 2016: 165). Gáfrik pointed out the influence of Indian religious philosophy (Gáfrik 1965: 163–164) and the aspect of the deep dichotomy of the lyrical subject in relation to life, namely “not feeling” and “not thinking” as the salvation of the individual from the tragedy of being (Gáfrik 1965: 182). From a formal point of view, despite their narrative nature, they retain a verse form, and in terms of poetics, they share a common theme, imagery, as well as sound and rhythmic structure. In his textological commentary in the edition of *Súborné dielo Ivana Krasku I.* [Ivan Krasko: Collected Works I.], Gáfrik states that “perhaps even *Noc* [Night] was originally in verse”, and adds that “it can be seen from the individual editions that Krasko did not care about the length of the line, that he subordinated it to technical printing conditions” (Gáfrik 1966: 369). Based on an analysis of four variants of the prose poem *Ja* [I], Čepan concluded that

the gradual reduction and condensation of the poetic “material” was accompanied by a clear effort to reject all formal, external, and secondary signs of poetic and prosaic approaches, such as verse structure, regular meter, but also the simple and natural logical-grammatical structure of prose and the principle of sujet composition. The metrical basis, already not very distinctive, is coordinated with the norms of prose syntax. The resulting text is characterized by “muted” formal means, which are as common to poetry as they are to prose. Metaphor is metonymized, and metonymy is metaphorized. Everything is connected by the phenomenon of lyricism, which evokes associations on both sides, towards verse and prose. Its basis lies in the expressiveness of simple affirmative and exclamatory statements and appeals, stripped of obvious hypotactic condition (Čepan 1965: 52).

12 I. Gall (1885–1955) and S. Cambel Kosorkin (1883–1935) focused primarily on prose; moreover, their poetic prose was published only in magazines at the beginning of the 20th century, and the collected works of both authors were published posthumously – Ivan Gall: *Odkaz* [Message] (1956); Samo Cambel: *Zlomená duša* [Broken Soul] (1972).

Zambor, whose reading is characterized by extraordinary interpretative sensitivity, draws attention to several important moments – in the prose poem *Noc* [Night], for example, to its “dimension close to non-fiction prose” (Zambor 2016: 167)¹³ and in the prose poem *Ja* [I] to its “visual character” related to the symbolism of light (Zambor 2016: 179).

Roy included two prose poems, *Brezy* [Birches] and *Zvony* [Bells], originally published in a magazine in 1910, in his poetry collection *Keď zmiznú hmly* [When the Mists Disappear] (1921). Several researchers (Brezina 1961; Gáfrik 1965) have linked their creation to Roy’s direct inspiration from Krasko’s prose poems, which had been published shortly before. As a poet, Roy chooses prose, blurring the boundaries between lyric and epic, and chooses a suggestive and weakened subject for his lyrical self-expression. His work with rhythm is striking: the rhythmic division of sentences, the repetition of words and sentence structures as an analogy to the rhythmic structure of verse are combined with syntactic means of prose (with sentence structure and semantic structure). Literary historian Ján Brezina, the author of the only monograph on Roy to date, characterized these prose poems as “small, closed epic stories, imbued with deep lyricism (which, by his own admission, he learned from Turgenev)” (Brezina 1961: 176). According to Šmatlák, Roy chose “a form that he continued to cultivate in the post-1918 period and which, also thanks to him, became a popular literary genre for many authors of the young post-war generation. Compared to Krasko, Roy is more descriptive in this poetic genre, and his introspection does not have the penetrating edge of philosophical intellectualism, but leans toward emotionality and even sentimentality” (Šmatlák 1979: 276–277).

In 1926, Rázus published a book entitled *Z drobnej prózy* [From Small Prose], which contained seventy texts that the author himself described as poetic prose or prose poems. As in the case of Roy, this was a belated publication, as most of Rázus’s prose poems were written before 1920, and three of the included works had even been published in the magazine *Prúdy* [Currents] as early as 1910 (*Hudba vládcu miliónov* [The Music of the Ruler of Millions], originally untitled, under the collective title *Odrobinky* [Crumbs]) and in 1911 (*V knihovni* [In the Library], *Idyla* [Idyll], under the collective title *Drobnôstky* [Trifles]). The collection as a whole is characterized by contemplativeness, allegory, intellectual pessimism, emotional melancholy, and defiance. Rázus’s subjective bias and determination to transform the world in the spirit of a return to original values can be felt in the texts. Gáfrik emphasizes the typological similarity of Rázus’s prose poems to Baudelaire’s model (as opposed to Turgenev, which, according to this literary historian, was received in the Slovak environment more widely). He describes Rázus’s “small prose” as “the most symbolist prose of Slovak modernism” (Gáfrik 1998: 163), or “the most symbolist prose” (Gáfrik 1998: 166). On this basis, he places Rázus’s form of the genre in direct opposition to the neo-romantic line, which, according to him, is represented by the texts of Krasko, Roy, Cambel Kosorkin, and Gall, with their “extremely tense moodiness and expan-

13 “In the context of Krasko’s poetry, the poem *Noc* [Night] represents a new penetration of non-fiction, reflective discourse into poetry, with its terminological vocabulary of an intellectual and even technical nature, which deviates from standard poetic language” (Zambor 2016: 167).

roč. 72, 2025, č. 4 310 sion of the subject's emotionality" (Gáfrik 1998: 154). He sees the difference between the two lines – the “collective” neo-romantic line and Rázus's individual symbolist line – in the subject's orientation towards itself versus towards the world. He also points out that while other artists focused on the “drama of the subject immersed in self”, for Rázus, the “drama of the subject in the world and the drama of the world” were essential (Gáfrik 1998: 154).

A brief summary of the key interpretative findings shows that researchers have given the highest praise to Krasko's prose poems. Roy has not yet been fortunate enough to find a perceptive interpreter (for example, Gáfrik rejected his work as epigonic). The position of Rázus, defined through the author's conflict with the world, was more oriented towards ideology than aesthetics. Čepan's findings on lyricism and Zambor's in-depth reading of poetic texts are therefore particularly relevant for future research.

New questions

Crossing stylistic and genre boundaries became a common phenomenon in 20th-century literature, which significantly challenged the idea of traditional poetics that literary genres are relatively easy to distinguish. The prose poem is a good example of this. It would be too simplistic to understand this genre as a total art form synthesizing poetry and prose – the coexistence of both elements in a shared textual space is neither symmetrical nor balanced, nor is their contrast a universal (and thus legitimizing) category for the hybrid genre.

Although formalistic approaches to the genre of the prose poem were limited to the dynamics of binary opposites, current research shows that literary genres are extremely flexible categories whose boundaries are set almost exclusively to be crossed and overcome. It is precisely this openness to the blurred boundaries of classical definitions in poetics, or even liberation from the genre perspective, that could be the path to a more precise theoretical conceptualization in the future. It would enable one to see the prose poem as a part of a constant process of change, and to understand its discontinuity as part of continuity.

Translation Dagmar Garay Kročanová

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Mgr. Dana Hučková, CSc.

Institute of Slovak Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

Dúbravská cesta 9

841 04 Bratislava

Slovak Republic

E-mail: Dana.Huckova@savba.sk