

**HABAJ, Michal – HUČKOVÁ, Dana, eds.:
MEDZIPRIESTORY MODERNIZMU [INTERMEDIATE
SPACES OF MODERNISM]. Bratislava: Veda, 2024.
320 pp.**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/slovlit.2025.72.4.10>

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Modernism and modernity represent complex, multilayered, and mutually interconnected phenomena, full of contradictions, that had a significant impact on the culture, art, and society of the 20th century. Although efforts to understand and describe them have been ongoing practically since their very emergence, research into these concepts still brings numerous topics worthy of further attention. Even their basic terminological framing and chronological definition remain subjects of ongoing debate, as noted by Antoine Compagnon in his 1990 essay *Les cinq paradoxes de la modernité* [Five Paradoxes of Modernity]. The French literary scholar introduces one of its chapters by observing that the words “modern,” “modernity,” and “modernism” do not have equivalent meanings in at least three dominant European languages – French, English, and German – and that each cultural environment has handled and continues to handle these terms differently. Beyond this observation, it is also worth noting that Compagnon, in his thirty-five-year-old text, did not include any languages or local cultural contexts from Central and Eastern Europe in his reflections on modernism. This fact is probably not surprising, and it is not mentioned here in order to provide an easy target for superficial criticism. Rather, the author’s omission can largely be understood as char-

acteristic of the contemporary debate on the subject. Even though since the early 1990s modernist studies have significantly shifted away from the idea of a Western-centric, universalistic modernism, which other regions merely imitated or copied, there still remains much unexplored – particularly in the study of modern artists living and working outside the main modernist centres.

For this reason, the publication of the new book *Medzipriestory modernizmu* [Intermediate spaces of Modernism] (2024), prepared by a team of authors under the editorship of Michal Habaj and Dana Hučková, deserves recognition. Their volume situates itself precisely within the context of research on regional or semi/peripheral modernisms and the field of new modernist studies to which it explicitly subscribes. It is the result of sustained interest in Slovak literature from the end of the 19th century to the 1950s and conceptualises Slovak modernism as a heterogeneous and plural phenomenon playing a crucial role in the processes of establishing, shaping, and affirming Slovak national identity. As a central metaphor for capturing the nuances of the chosen topic, the editors employ the category of *interspace*, representing moments of intersections and overlaps among poetics, types, genres, or the social functions of the text (p. 8). According to the editors and contributors, the *interspace* con-

stitutes a space where precisely those modernist paradoxes become visible, paradoxes that appear even more striking in local modernisms than in modernist centres.

In terms of its overall structure, the volume is divided into three thematic sections: *I. The Modernity*, *II. The Avant-gardes*, and *III. Boundaries*, encompassing a total of ten chapters, each functioning as an independent study, supplemented in the final third of the book by an extensive visual section. The collection opens with Tomáš Horváth's text *Modernist Literary Dreams, Hallucinations, Lunacy and Other Realities*, which, on the basis of a far-reaching argument supported by philosophical concepts addressing individual subjectivity, demonstrates that the fictional representation of an individual's psychic reality constitutes a fundamental element of modernist poetics. The chapter interconnects aesthetics, literary scholarship, and philosophy (particularly Arthur Schopenhauer, Ladislav Klíma, and phenomenology), creating a remarkable, though intellectually demanding, construction that seeks to map a specific epistemology of Slovak modernism through motifs of dreams, hallucinations, and psychological disorders as thematised in the works of individual authors. The proposed model of psychic reality thus allows for a comparison of literary works across generations, differing in genre, aesthetics, and poetics, bringing the writings of authors such as Ivan Krasko and Ján Hrušovský on the one hand, and Ivan Minárik, Ivan Gall, and Vladimír Wagner on the other, into new interpretive relationships. However, certain passages in the chapter come across as excessively elaborate, particularly when the argumentation moves away from concrete textual analysis toward abstract ontological frameworks. Nevertheless, the chapter stands as a significant introductory text of the volume, emphasising the subject and its psychic reality, and thus pointing to one of the central modernist principles that, in various variations and echoes, are addressed by the authors of the

remaining contributions throughout the publication.

This line of inquiry is continued by the study *Modernist Ars Poetica and Category of Ambiguity* by D. Hučková, which focuses on the poetics of the early work of two key representatives of Slovak modernism – the already mentioned I. Krasko and Vladimír Roy – in the context of the genre of manifestos and programmatic poems as specific forms of expression within modern and modernist poetry. The author interprets the programmatic poems of both writers as a space for the self-reflection of the modernist subject, placing considerable emphasis on semantic ambiguity and on the stylistic tension between subjectivity and universality. Each of these poets, for her, represents a distinct type of modernist poetic identity: while Krasko moves between formal restraint and self-reflective sensitivity, Roy tends toward a more expressive and symbolist poetics. The chapter underscores that grappling with modernity and modernism was for both authors not merely an aesthetic matter, but a question of personal and artistic authenticity and of negotiating their relationship to earlier literary traditions.

The subsequent study by Barbora Zlejšia, *Intersection as a Creative Principle (Proses of Štefan Krčméry)*, addresses the lesser-known and until now largely overlooked prose work of Štefan Krčméry, whose poetry and essays have typically attracted more critical attention. Zlejšia, by contrast, highlights the importance of his prose texts, viewing them as a unique contribution to the development of Slovak lyrical prose in the spirit of vitalist and introspective modernism. Here, the central metaphor of the *interspace* serves not only to connect the lyrical and the epic but also to emphasise the inner division of the author's work between a subjectively intuitive and a rationally intellectual approach to both his own creative process and his perception of the world. The study also sensitively analyses the role of nature, which in Krčméry's texts

becomes a space of spiritual and existential reflection, and in a cultivated and persuasive manner links his individual style with the modernist tendencies of the period, while repeatedly highlighting the originality and uniqueness of his writing.

The first thematic block is concluded by the text *Thresholds of the Modern in Urban Prose of Jozef Cíger Hronský* by Matej Masaryk. His chapter focuses primarily on the urban space as a key category where modernist modes of narration collide with traditional narrative structures. In modernism, the city becomes a symbolic space where the existing social order is called into question and individual existential certainties are undermined. Masaryk compellingly demonstrates this, among other examples, through the lesser-known novel *Proroctvo doktora Stankovského* [Doctor Stankovský's Prophecy] (1930) by J. C. Hronský, in which elements of modernist poetics – such as experiments with chronology, the breakdown of causality, or the motif of a disrupted identity – come into conflict with components of traditional narration. The resulting prose is semantically and aesthetically ambivalent, which, however, the author does not perceive as a weakness but rather as evidence of the contradictory assimilation of modernist impulses in interwar Slovak literature. The author's ability to connect narratological analysis with cultural-historical context, especially in terms of reflecting on bourgeois identity, rationality, and the role of various social groups, represents an inspiring contribution to the understanding of the poetics of urban space.

The studies gathered in the second section, dedicated to the avant-gardes, primarily address the work of authors associated with the avant-garde group DAV and its eponymous journal. The programmatic positions of the DAV members and their relationship to poetism and the Czech artistic group Devětisil in the mid-1920s are the focus of Habaj's richly source-based text *DAV and Poetism between Rejection and Acceptance: Poetism as Dis-*

cussed and Written by the Davists (1924–1925). The aim of his study is to draw attention to the often-repeated simplifying scheme that automatically places the DAV members in opposition to their Czech colleagues. Habaj carefully distinguishes between the programmatic rejection of poetism expressed in DAV's theoretical texts and its actual presence in the literary production of the group's members. The author thus shows that despite their sharp ideological rhetoric, the DAV members adopted certain formal and aesthetic elements of poetism (the principle of montage, playfulness, stylisation of the subject, or the poetization of everyday life) and applied them in a specific, often hybrid, genre context. Poetism, in their conception, was not an avant-garde fashion but a creative tool in the hands of a leftist-oriented cultural group. This stimulating chapter not only revises long-standing stereotypes about DAV and contributes to a more nuanced differentiation of the Slovak avant-garde, but also moves beyond a purely national framework toward a broader context, highlighting DAV's position between ideology and aesthetics, avant-garde vision and Marxist politics.

Martina Péterová also focuses on the DAV members' connection between revolutionary Marxism and avant-garde poetics in her study *On the Waves of the Masses. On Collectivism of the Davists in the Mid-1920s*. Her text concentrates on the early writings of the group's members (particularly Ján Poničan, Eduard Urx, Daniel Okáli, and Andrej Sirácky) and highlights the dominantly present militant collectivism. Péterová analyses above all the stylisation of the topoi of the masses, the collective, and the modernist concept of "new man," not only in manifestos but also in poems, essays, and journalism. She observes how the language of "collective energy" transforms across different forms and genres, and how this generic diversity serves to build the aesthetic image of revolution. The author further emphasises the tension between the programmatic collecti-

414 visation of the subject and an unconsciously present individuality, which often reappears in the texts through exalted gestures, pathos, or heroic stylisations. Her clearly structured and accessible study shows that collectivism within DAV went beyond a rhetorical strategy tied to a particular ideological position but rather represented a distinctive poetic form, a creative principle, and a distinct aesthetic category.

The final study within the avant-garde block is Zuzana Kubusová's chapter *Transformation of Characters and Spatial Contrasts as Indicators of Ideological and Aesthetic Intersections in Peter Jilemnický's novel Víťazný pád* [*The Triumphant Fall*]. In it, the author focuses on Jilemnický's debut novel from 1929 and, through a narratological analysis of the protagonists and the category of space, examines how ideological elements (revolutionariness, collectivism) and artistic aspects (influence of expressionism, elements of poetism) come into conflict within the text. She interprets these elements both in relation to DAV's poetics and to the author's later works. She concludes that selected novel cannot be unambiguously classified as proletarian literature but rather as a novel that ideologically and formally occupies a position on the boundary between realism and the avant-garde, between experiment and conformity.

The concluding section of the volume, *III. Boundaries*, brings together three chapters devoted to literary expressions oscillating between modernism and existing tradition. In this context, Karol Csiba, in his study *Three Generational Publication with(out) a Programme - between Modernity and Tradition*, examines three anthologies of young Slovak authors from 1924, 1930, and 1941. He focuses on the extent to which these publications embodied generational identity, aesthetics, and cultural-political positions, pointing out that these collections were neither overly radical nor entirely conformist, but rather situated somewhere in between. Special attention is given to the anthology *Sborník mladej*

slovenskej literatúry [Almanac of the Young Slovak Literature] (1924), which is often considered a key document of the first post-war generation. Csiba, however, questions its "program" by demonstrating that it was a compositionally and ideologically heterogeneous work in which manifestations of modernist self-reflection coexisted with traditional themes. In a similar way, *Almanach tretej literárnej generácie* [Almanac of the Third Literary Generation] (1930) and *Sborník najmladších slovenských autorov 1940* [Almanac of the Youngest Slovak Authors] (1940, 1941) are analysed, as the author traces changes both in the language of the generation and in its ideological orientation. The study thus challenges entrenched interpretations linking generational manifestos exclusively with modernism and convincingly demonstrates that these publications represented a more complex symbolic space in which various tendencies clashed, often without a clear dominance of any one of them.

Dagmar Garay Kročanová's chapter *On Poetics of Lyrical Plays* addresses the phenomenon of lyrical drama between 1936 and 1948. Garay Kročanová interprets these hybrid texts as a borderline form that loosens the classical boundaries of the dramatic genre and transitions among poetry, epic narrative, and stage-based expressive means. She pays particular attention to rhythm, montage techniques, and the weakening of linear plot in favour of cyclicity and subjective expression. Especially significant is her emphasis on how these plays work with language – dominated by verse-based lines, monologues, and lyrical insertions that suppress traditional dramatic action. Equally important is the idea that poetic language within dramatic structure carries not only aesthetic value but also models an alternative perception of reality. The author demonstrates that lyrical drama of the 1930s and 1940s was more than just a transitional form but also a creative experiment within Slovak modernist dramaturgy.

The last study of both the final block and the entire volume is represented by Martin Navrátil's chapter *Works of the Youngest Authors of the Catholic Poetry in Modernist Context (1945-1948)*, which focuses on four young authors of late Catholic poetry – Ján Motulko, Vojtech Mihálik, Miroslav Válek, and Viliam Turčány. Navrátil maps how the works of these poets responded to modernist poetics and to the cultural-political shifts of the time. He pays particular attention to their attitudes toward modernity, which is reflected as a threat of the loss of order and a spiritual crisis. The Catholic poetry of this generation oscillates between faith and anxiety, between metaphysical certainty and the crisis of the modern subject. The study clearly structures the individual poetics of these authors and offers their mutual comparison in relation to classic modernist motifs such as alienation or the collapse of values. In doing so, the text convincingly demonstrates that this relatively peripheral production, in which the Catholic perspective clashed with modernist experience, was part of a broader modernist dynamic.

The collective monograph *Intermediate spaces of Modernism* is undoubtedly a valuable insight into the dynamic developments and transformations of Slovak literature in the first half of the 20th century. The central metaphor of the *interspace* represents a functional concept that makes it possible to grasp the relationships among aesthetics, ideology, and genre forms not as binary oppositions but as a fluid spectrum, allowing the inclusion within the context of modernism

of peripheral or borderline phenomena that transcend the traditionally established modernist corpus, whether it be lyrical drama or the prose work of Krčméry. All of the chapters are united by very careful work with the primary texts and their sensitive and insightful interpretation, although in the case of certain studies, a greater step beyond a purely text-centred reading toward capturing the broader social and historical framework in which these works functioned at the time would have been welcome. Likewise, the book would have benefited from a stronger comparison with other literary contexts, particularly within the Central European region (besides Czech literature, which is to some extent present, a confrontation especially with Hungarian literature could have been stimulating for readers), or from a more systematic evaluation of the influence of translations – if such translations were indeed accessible and influential in the Slovak context – on the work of Slovak modernists. Finally, the book might also have profited from a more extensive, methodologically synthesising concluding chapter, which would have explicitly summarised the theoretical outcomes and methodological implications of the entire publication and thus offered further possible tools for a more general understanding of local variants of modernisms.

Overall, it may be stated that *Intermediate spaces of Modernism* is an example of a well-founded and elegantly written collective work that is able to present literary history as a dynamic and open-ended interpretive process.

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