

Genealogies of Czech Literary History

Abstract

The article analyses the most important and most influential narratives of the history of Czech medieval literature that were produced from the beginnings of modern historiography and literary history in the 19th century onwards. The question is how the character of individual narratives and their socio-historical contexts influenced the questions, topics and areas of interest in research on the history of medieval literatures in Bohemia. For Czech literature, such analysis is especially important, because it shows that the problems the history of Czech literature has had to face from its modern beginnings are also the problems of any new approach that literary historiography may pursue in future, from whatever point of departure. The narratives on which the article focuses are built on an amalgamation of the history of society, language and literature, which a) makes it difficult to supersede them and b) makes any detailed research on transmitted texts look less important. Here lies one of the challenges for future research: the relation of language, text and social and political history has to be analyzed in detail, because it is only through a coordination of all these perspectives that a coherent narrative of the history of Czech literature has been maintained in the past.

Sometimes, for example during the International Medieval Congress in Leeds, when one strolls through the corridors where the publishing houses present their newest publications, one gets the impression that Czech medieval literature (that means literature written in Czech but also texts written in Latin and/or German from the Bohemian basin) does not exist. This can easily throw one into turmoil and existential uncertainty, especially if one is a person doing research in this area. As Walter Schamschula, the German specialist on medieval literature in Bohemia, expressed it more than twenty years ago: “Old Czech literature is one of the most undervalued areas of verbal art outside of its homeland” (Schamschula *An Anthology* 5). It is sometimes very difficult indeed to convince colleagues, especially those from Western countries who have not mastered any Slavonic languages, that quite the opposite is true and that the medieval Latin as well as the vernacular literature from Bohemia is rich, manifold

and worth of analysis and above all is an integral part of medieval occidental literatures. For these reasons we may again cite Walter Schamschula, whose judgement has not lost its relevance even after a quarter of a century:

The European areas in which medieval literatures have been investigated and edited most extensively and intensively are the Romance, Celtic and Germanic, essentially the cultural sphere of the Western Roman Church. Medievalists are concerned either with these areas or, within the Slavic world, with orthodox traditions. They tend to neglect the fact that there is also a Slavic tradition that belongs to the area of the Roman Church. In this area, an intellectual and artistic universe has developed which deserves high attention. This is especially true for Czech, Slovak, Polish and Croatian literatures, and foremost for Czech which, as the westernmost Slavic culture, was also the most advanced in the Middle Ages, showing the closest ties with Latin erudition. (Schamschula *An Anthology* 5: see also Picchio)

To illustrate this 'artistic and intellectual universe' it will be sufficient to touch on some of its significant features. At first, at the beginnings of literature in Bohemia, the ephemeral yet fascinating competitive coexistence of western-Latin and eastern-Slavonic written cultures is documented. Although the transmission history of all the relevant Slavonic as well as Latin manuscripts is extremely complicated, nevertheless the history of mutual influences of the Latin and Slavonic as well as Greek literatures and respective languages represent an exciting research topic waiting for differentiated debate. However, it always has been and, for the reasons Walter Schamschula formulated so well, still is a domain of individual disciplines remote from each other: Byzantine studies, Greek philology, Slavonic studies, medieval Latin philology and archeology.

After this period of imperial struggle for influence is over at the end of the tenth century, another competitive coexistence in the Bohemian basin starts to emerge, between Czechs and Germans. At this point, the chronicle of Cosmas, which contains the first and only and therefore the most successful *origo gentis* narration of the Czech-Bohemian nation and statehood, already bears anti-German tendencies. During the Middle Ages (at least till the fifteenth century) the Cosmas chronicle served as the basis for any subsequent historical narrative. As the most powerful *origo gentis* narrative, the chronicle

was a prominent source of interest for historians from the beginnings of modern Czech historiography. The modern narratives of the Bohemian-Czech history of the Middle Ages rely heavily on Cosmas's chronicle, very often adopting not only its factual information but also its interpretation of events and its overall judgements on the respective society and its elites. For the history of literature in Bohemia, Cosmas's chronicle is important because of its prominence in the modern historical narrative, but also as the prime literary text from a period that is considerably poor as to written sources.

The competitive coexistence of the Czech- and German-speaking population in Bohemia reaches its discursive peak at the turn of the fourteenth century as a consequence of so-called German colonization in Bohemian lands, which was heavily supported by Bohemian kings in the second half of the thirteenth century. From this period, meaning from around the middle of the thirteenth until the middle of the fourteenth century, literary culture in Bohemia is influenced and shaped by Latin literature alongside German literature. Czech literature emerges at the beginning of the fourteenth century in a close relationship with German. Several Czech adaptations of German epics and lyrics flourishing at the time at the courts of late Přemyslid kings (Přemysl Ottokar II, Venceslas II) have been transmitted to us. The fascinating Bohemian chronicle in verse written in Czech, known as the *Chronicle* of the so-called Dalimil, dating from the 1310s-20s, has an undeniable anti-German tone, now and then quite aggressive, which is explicable by the environment in which the chronicle had its origin. The presumed audience and very probably also the text's sponsors, who were recruited from within the ranks of Czech-speaking nobility of the realm, feared the loss of its privileges and its economic as well as political power in favour of the ever more powerful cities, which were often dominated by German-speaking patricians. The existence of two contemporaneous German translations of the chronicle and of a slightly later Latin one (preserved in a quite recently discovered fragment of a lavishly decorated codex made in Italy and commissioned probably by an unknown Czech/Bohemian customer) allows us to assume much more complicated relationships between the social groups and interests involved than the simple 'antagonism,' as the relationship between 'Czechs' and 'Germans' is ostensibly described in the Czech version of the chronicle.

The time of the reign of Charles IV and Wenceslas IV brought not only a flourishing of literatures in all three languages of the realm,

but their interconnections and ideological significances also deepened in a way of which contemporary research is only partially aware. The foundation of the University of Prague (1348) brought about a sort of textual production hike in the last third of the fourteenth century. A considerable number of texts from this period have always attracted the interest of historians and philologists, especially because of the prominent role of the university in the formation of the Hussite movement from the beginning of the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the concentration on the Hussite reformation has also conditioned the selection of material worth of analysis, which has only recently started to be more balanced. We may also assume that the period of the Hussite movement before and after the outbreak of Hussite wars has to be scrutinized and contextualized anew, not simply with a focus on Czech written production, which of course experiences a real boom in consequence of the self-definition of the movement as a Czech cause: the interpretation of Czechs as the elect nation whose task was the reform of the church was widespread among the leading figures of the movement from its beginnings. The Hussite reformation and its textual inheritance is such a prominent research topic, especially in Czech but also in international historiography and (mainly Czech) literary historiography, that we may speak of the individual discipline of Hussitology, but nevertheless much is left to be done beyond this area, and the results may surprise us all.

Why then, if literature in Bohemia represents such an interesting research area, especially for contemporary historiography and literary history with their interdisciplinary-oriented methods of cross-cultural comparison, is the research on the material extant rather modest, and the material itself almost *terra incognita* for international scholars?

This situation has many explanations, and in this essay only some of them can be addressed. They are of an institutional, scholarly, theoretical and methodological nature in addition to the simple language barrier: *slavica sunt, non leguntur*. Let us start with Czech scholarly discourse. This is important because, as the editors of this issue have emphasised (see “What is European Medieval Literature?” above), “although we are always operating with multiple possible developments seen from a certain time and place, we can only write and understand retrospectively.” Introspection – a sort of meditation on the history of literary historiography itself – should be an integral part of this reflection. For Czech literature, such introspection is especially impor-

tant, because it shows very quickly that several problems the history of Czech literature has had to face from its modern beginnings are also problems for any new approach we may pursue in future from whichever point of departure. In the following analysis I will concentrate on the main literary historical as well as historiographic narratives in Bohemian-Czech literature, which were produced from the beginnings of modern historiography and literary history. I will set aside the individual genres, groups of texts or special research areas and the development that they underwent in the given time frame. I will also quote only the most important secondary literature concerning the dominant narratives and their role in society. Special studies, text editions and lexica I will also leave aside.

Josef Dobrovský and His Research on Czech Literature: Uniting Literature and Language

Modern research on Slavonic and Czech literature, culture and history starts more or less with the pioneering work of Josef Dobrovský in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, on which the disciplines of Slavonic and Czech philology were founded. Dobrovský and his generation of scholars began to focus on the earliest history of the Slavs for various reasons: an important one was the influence of Rousseau's teaching and the judgements of the German scholars influenced by Rousseau, especially the work of Johann Gottfried Herder. German scholarly discourse was decisive for the development of the two young disciplines: Dobrovský applied the methods of modern German philology – for example the methods of comparative linguistics – to Slavonic material. Analytical work on language was the central point of his Slavonic studies and had a direct impact on the following generations of Czech philologists. The ideological underpinning Dobrovský gave to his Slavonic studies was also very important for subsequent generations of philologists and literary intelligentsia.

Dobrovský wrote the first modern history of Czech literature, *Geschichte der tschechischen Sprache und Literatur* (1791–92, second edition 1818). In this work he connected the analysis of language and literature; he regarded literature only as a representation of a particular language. The structure of his book indicates this: the first four chapters are devoted to the development of the common Slavonic language, the fifth and sixth chapters to Slavonic orthography and

character font. The remaining chapters (seven through twelve) describe the history of literature in the Slavonic and Czech languages. Individual literary works are treated by the author as monuments of the six different stages in the development of the Slavonic-Czech language. Dobrovský suggested a periodization of the Czech language and its literature into six ages: the first from the immigration of the ‘Czechs’ into the Bohemian basin until their Christianization in the ninth-tenth century AD; the second from the Christianization until the rule of Johann of Luxembourg (1310, the disappearance of the indigenous ruling family of Premyslids); the third until the outbreak of the Hussite revolt in 1419 (Dobrovský writes “until Jan Hus or the death of the king Venceslas IV of Luxembourg”); the fourth from the 1420s until “the spread of book print or the beginning of the rule of Ferdinand I” (1526); the fifth from this time until 1620 (the battle on the White Mountain in Prague, in which rebellious protestant and Utraquist Czech estates were defeated by the Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand II); and the last and sixth from “the expulsion of non-Catholics until our times” (Dobrovský 14).

Dobrovský’s periodization concentrated exclusively on Czech written texts; German and Latin production is mentioned only as a context for Czech production. Dobrovský understood German literature as a more developed one, which served as an authoritative model for Czech literature. According to him, this relationship between German and Czech literature was constituted by the dominance of German culture in general, at the court of the late Premyslids as well as in the fast-developing Bohemian cities. German immigration into the Bohemian basin in the second half of the thirteenth century was in his conception the key factor for the development of Czech literary culture:

Die deutsche Sprache beliebte der Hof und der Adel, und sie war das Mittel, wodurch die Nachahmung der deutschen, die in Künsten und Wissenschaften die nächsten Muster waren, erleichtert worden ist. Man lernte nun die Werke der schwäbischen Dichter kennen und fand Geschmack daran. Das Beispiel deutscher Dichter reizte die Böhmen nun auch zur Nachahmung, zu ähnlichen Versuchen in ihrer Muttersprache. (Dobrovský 329–30)

This narrative could be easily read as a description of the situation of Czech-speaking literary culture in Dobrovský’s own times: at the end of the eighteenth century, German scholarship and literary culture

were leading the way for the first Czech national thinkers and men of letters. Many of them, like Dobrovský himself, published their ideas and analyses solely in German.

Dobrovský's approach may seem ancient history today, but it is a key factor for understanding the subsequent development of the scholarly discourse on the question of what Czech literature is and what it is not. Dobrovský's understanding of literature as a demonstration of the abilities of a language to fulfil the highest cultural aspirations lies behind the works of all his followers, Czech philologists and literary historians alike, reaching far into the twentieth century. The language itself was never critically discussed from the methodological point of view in its relationship to literature on the one side and society on the other, and it was never discussed as a social and cultural phenomenon together with other languages coexisting at a given time in the respective area.

The role of literature as a sort of legitimization for its respective language and society representing together the idea of a nation further shaped the way in which literary works were perceived in society, in lower and higher educational systems as well as in scholarly discourse. The concentration of Czech philology and literary scholarship on 'their' literature and its almost compulsive urge to compare the 'quality' and the 'development' of this literature with other European literatures, especially German literature, is very comprehensible in the times of 'cultural struggle' (*Kulturkampf*) of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, as the Czech national intelligentsia and political elites called the ideological background of their activities concentrated on the Czech nation, its historical past and political future. The other part of this ideological background provided the movement of Pan-Slavism, which was nevertheless more ephemeral in Bohemia than it may seem at first sight. Although in Czech literary history the 'initiating' role of medieval Slavonic written culture in the ninth and tenth centuries was always regarded as prominent (see below), research on it was only partially influenced by decisively politically connoted ideas about Pan-Slavism, and not without ambivalence. Soon after the 1848 Pan-Slav Congress in Prague, leading figures of the political Pan-Slavic movement in Bohemia, Karel Havlíček Borovský, Ludovít Štúr and František Palacký, explicitly refused to agree to its logical consequence, namely the leading and protectionist role of the Russian empire, and pursued a new concept of Austro-Slavism. In addition to the always-ambivalent role of Pan-Slavism in contemporary research at this point,

Pan-Slavic ideas were at best expressed in the forged Czech medieval poems from the second decade of the nineteenth century. After their exposure as forgeries in the 1880s, Pan-Slavic ideas were dead not only as political but also as scholarly concepts.

Czech Manuscript Forgeries and Josef Jungmann: National Literature without Texts

Nevertheless, aside from Pan-Slavism, which represented a problematic political concept anyway for the Czechs (who initiated it), the Ossian-like forgeries of Czech medieval heroic epics and lyric poetry that were produced by ardently nationalistic poets and linguists (bred almost without exception by Josef Dobrovský, who also was the first scholar who strongly doubted the authenticity of the allegedly newly-found medieval manuscripts with the said poems) played an enormously important role in the formation of the new Czech political nation (Rychterová “The Manuscripts”). For the second generation of intellectuals and politicians of the so-called national awakening (the first one formed by enlightenment scholars, Dobrovský and his circle), the forged manuscripts were seen as evidence of a very high level of advancement of Czech literature between the eighth and tenth centuries that could in this way compete with German. For these people, the fact that the poems were forged was not important (several of them were among the presumed authors) because of the philosophical background that legitimated their existence. According to this, the forged poems were expressions of the soul of Czech nationhood, which had continued unaltered from the beginnings of the Czech nation to the present times. It was only necessary to dive deep enough into this soul to hear and to record the echo of its songs (Dávidházi). The forgeries became an integral and for several reasons the most important part of the history of Czech literature, as is already seen in the 1820s in the *Historie literatury české* [*History of Czech literature*], which was written by one of the presumed authors of the forged poems, Josef Jungmann. In his narrative, Jungmann mingled the history of the Czech language, Czech literature and Czech society (the nation) in a way that far surpassed Dobrovský’s approach. Jungmann defined ‘literature’ at first very widely – his *Historie* gathered practically all documents in which Czech words or sentences appear – from glosses in medieval Latin manuscripts to tracts on horse diseases from the sixteenth century

to decrees of city councils from the seventeenth century. For his own time (the nineteenth century), he concentrated on poetry and prose. He also proposed a new, or, rather, a slightly modified periodization from the one proposed by Josef Dobrovský. He marked the beginning of the first period with the year 451 and the end with the extinction of the Přemyslid dynasty in 1306: the period nevertheless ends in 1310 with the beginning of the rule of John of Luxembourg as it was described by Dobrovský.

Jungmann emphasised the key role of the ‘ethnically Czech’ dynasty as he understood it. The second period was determined by him using the years 1310 and 1409, the year of the issue of the decree of Kuttenberg, which adjusted the relation of the four ‘nations’ at Prague University in favour of the Czech nation: in Jungmann’s time this was understood as the first victory of the ethnic Czechs over the Germans (the difference between a ‘nation’ at a medieval university and ‘nation’ in an ethnic and cultural sense was here suspended). The earlier date of the end of the second period also allowed Jungmann to put the vernacular Czech writings of Jan Hus at the beginning of the third period, which starts with the year 1410 and ends in the year 1526 with the end of the rule of the last Slavonic dynasty in Bohemia (the year that Louis the Jagiellonian dies in the battle of Mohács). He marked the end of the fourth period with the battle at the White Mountain (1620), the fifth with the Josephine reforms in the 1770s and 1780s, in his own words with the introduction of the German language as the language of state administration and education in the Habsburg monarchy, and the sixth he left open up to his own time. Jungmann reworked his book again in 1846 (Jungmann 1849), 20 years later, but the periodization stayed the same.

A close look at the few differences between Dobrovský’s and Jungmann’s periodization reveals that Jungmann kept Dobrovský’s basic structure and only connected the respective dates with different events, which means that he gave them a new historical and ideological background with a focus on the *Kulturkampf* between German and Czech national elements throughout history. His major change concerns the first period, which he began with the year 451. The date is not further explained in the book, and it is very interesting to look at it more closely because it illustrates in detail what concept of literature (never explicitly discussed by him) stood behind Jungmann’s work.

Jungmann connects the year 451 with the arrival of the ‘Czechs’ in the Bohemian basin. He borrows the story from the medieval

chronicle of Cosmas (written at the end of the eleventh and in the first two decades of the twelfth century), which contains in its first chapter a sort of ethnogenesis of the ‘Czechs,’ as Cosmas knew them in his own time. The story is well known. It talks about the so-called forefather Czech, who came with his people to the Bohemian basin from the south, recognized the land as suitable for settlement and settled there. There are no temporal designations in the narrative, and Cosmas himself characterizes the story as the “narration of old men we may or may not believe.” The first written medieval Czech chronicle of the so-called Dalimil, composed during the first two decades of the fourteenth century, added several details to the story. In it, Croatia was determined to be the land of departure of the forefather Czech and his people, and the forefather himself was described as a man who was banished because of murder. Later chroniclers of the fourteenth century more or less continued this narration, which was altered, or, rather, enlarged by Václav Hájek of Libočany in the third decade of the sixteenth century. He described two brothers, Czech and Lech, Croatian princes who moved (without explicitly mentioning a reason) north with their *Volk* and founded the land of the Czechs (Bohemia) and the land of the Poles (Poland). This event is dated to 644. Hájek’s chronicle is the only source Jungmann could use for his dating. Although it was already known in his time as an extremely unreliable source (a detailed critical analysis of the text of the chronicle was delivered by Gelasius Dobner in 1761–82), Czech as well as other European poets and men of letters (among others Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Johann Gottfried Herder, who were both leading the way for their Czech followers and emulators) liked the chronicle because of its lively and colourful stories and narratives.

Nevertheless, Hájek’s dating does not have anything in common with the dating of Jungmann’s *Historie*. If we look further, the only possible explanation that remains is that he took the date from the battle on the Catalaunian fields, in which the Huns under the leadership of Attila were beaten by the Roman general Aetius and which meant the end of Hunnish rule in Europe. Only the collapse of Hunnish rule could (hypothetically) open the way for migrants from the Balkan Peninsula towards northern parts of Europe. The year 451 as the date of origin of Czech literature is (of course) attested by no document. This fact nevertheless does not call it into question in the eyes of Josef Jungmann. In his perception (which is never explicitly discussed in the book), the simple existence of a nation (and he regards the mythical Croatian immigrants as such) sufficiently documents

the existence of its national literature, and, what is even more important, its national literature in its purest, most original, uncontaminated form. Without a single text in his hands, Jungmann regards this period of Czech literature (no matter how absurd this sounds today) as its golden age. This golden age ends with the disappearance of the ethnically Czech ruling dynasty, the direct heir of the forefather Czech and his descendants in Jungmann's understanding. The forged poems from the manuscript from Königshof, which contained the heroic narratives from the time before the Christianization of Eastern Central Europe and were regarded by their authors as a representation of the soul of the nation, were placed in the last years of Přemyslid rule. Declaring the first period of Czech literature as a golden age, to which the forged epics allegedly belonged, therefore allowed Jungmann to connect his own time (meaning the sixth period) with the origins of Czech literature, nation and language and to present it simultaneously as its representation, reincarnation and resumption.

Dobrovský already regarded the history of the language and its literature as inextricable. For Jungmann, this conjunction, in which the history of the society (nation) was also incorporated, possessed an even higher, almost metaphysical meaning. The works of Dobrovský and Jungmann remained the only attempts at describing the development of Czech literature from its beginnings to modern times until the end of the nineteenth century. The reasons why they did not have followers who would develop and/or discuss their concepts further are manifold. One of them is surely the problem of the literary forgeries, the manuscripts of Königshof and Gründberg. Their authenticity was attacked repeatedly from different positions and fiercely defended until the 1880s, when the most distinguished Czech philologist and linguist Josef Gebauer switched sides and, leaning on his lifelong research into the medieval Czech language, exposed the texts from both manuscripts as works from the early nineteenth century. The following controversy filled the next decade and absorbed the energy of all its participants. Only after its partial remission, from 1892 onwards, did the Czech literary historian Jaroslav Vlček publish the first volumes of his history of Czech literature, which replaced Dobrovský's and Jungmann's works.

Jaroslav Vlček and His History of Literature as History of Ideas

Vlček returned in his periodization to Dobrovský, but he modified it significantly. At first he included Old Slavonic literary monuments connected to the mission of Constantine and Methodius in the ninth century in the narrative as a part of Czech literature (first period: “The beginnings of Czech literature under the rule of Latin”). This was a highly ambivalent decision from a contemporary point of view (there are no documents with Old Slavonic literary texts extant from the given time that originate in the Bohemian basin) that determined the perception of Old Slavonic literary culture in Czech literary scholarship for decades to come. Vlček interpreted the mission of Constantine and Methodius as well as the reaction of the Frankish church, which are both relatively well documented, as the first stage of the *Kulturkampf* between Latino-German and Greco-Slavonic Christian concepts of culture and state formation in Bohemia. This was ultimately won by the Latino-German party, which according to him had grave consequences for Czech society and culture: “The Czechs permanently adhered to the European West and were from now onwards at the mercy of its prolific as well as its lethal influence” (Vlček 22). In Vlček’s *History*, the conflation of the history of literature with the history of society, which Jungmann had introduced in his work, was pursued further. For example, in Vlček’s work the Latin chronicle of Cosmas, which during the Middle Ages was already regarded as the best narrative on the beginnings of the Czech nation and state, is listed among Czech literary works, whereas other contemporary Latin literary production is strictly omitted.

Vlček linked the beginning of the second period to the introduction of courtly lyrics and epics at the court of the late Přemyslids in the second half of the thirteenth century. Incidentally, he also linked it to the spread of German literary culture in Bohemia in the course of the so-called German colonization of the Bohemian lands. With these origins, courtly poetry (meaning mostly Czech adaptations of German models in his narrative) does not find any sympathy in Vlček’s work: he calls the respective texts “sluggish” and “boring” and, with reference to their low aesthetic and literary qualities, avoids an otherwise necessary compliment to German literature as an integral part of Czech literature. The second period, lasting some 50 years, is in his understanding a time of dominance of German courtly culture (poorly imitated by Czech authors) in Bohemia in its last,

decadent phase. It is very probable that Vlček's judgement and his negative view of the courtly epics were heavily influenced by the struggle for and against the forged manuscripts. The 'loss' of the forged epics for the narrative of Czech medieval history and literature was also a frustrating disappointment for the adversaries of their authenticity, among whom Vlček belonged. Besides, the controversy about their authenticity was by no means settled when he published his *History*. He did not include the manuscripts in his narrative on medieval Czech literature, because he would have been immediately forced explicitly to state his position on them by commenting on all the contradictory opinions that had been published in great numbers just in the time he had been working on his book. He avoided this by his critique of the entire genre of courtly lyrics and epics and by depriving it of any importance for the subsequent development of Czech literature.

The third period from c. 1310 till c. 1390 was, in his narrative, some sort of resurgence of Czech literary culture, which is described as a self-preservative movement of the 'Czech element' against the 'Germanization' of Czech noble courts and cities. In this conception the Czech chronicle in verse of the so-called Dalimil plays a main role, as with its emergence the period itself starts (1310–15). It allowed for the merging of literary and social history better than the chronicle of Cosmas because firstly it was a piece of literature in Czech and secondly it contained an indisputable anti-German tendency, which seemed to mirror the social situation of the time. Vlček does not incorporate any Latin and German literary works of the time in the third period; his focus is solely on texts written in Czech. This causes several omissions and logical gaps in his narrative that are difficult to understand from a contemporary point of view. For example, he includes in his narrative with regard to the next 'Hussite' period the reform theologians Matthew of Cracow and Matthias of Janov from Prague University as well as the reform preachers Konrad Waldhauser and John Milicius of Kremsier (the so-called 'predecessors' of Hus). Waldhauser and Milicius of Kremsier are even described as of utmost importance. All these authors expressed themselves in Latin and/or in German. They are present in the narrative only as 'personal' background for Czech written works of religious education from the last third of the fourteenth century, without establishing any connections between their writings and any extant Czech written text. Their writings are not analysed or described in detail in the book.

The amalgamation of the history of language, literature and society allowed Vlček as well as other authors after him to use the extant textual material according to his (their) momentary ideological needs. This amalgamation was successfully used to bypass the gaps in the narrative caused by missing comparative analysis of primary sources. This is probably one of the reasons why analyses of individual texts are so scarce in Czech literary scholarship from its beginning. It was never really necessary to deal with literary monuments as such because they were stratified according to external parameters and treated either as historical documents, or as documents of the history of ideas, or as documents of language development, with the task being to serve the resulting general narrative in which the history of society supported the history of language and the history of literature, and vice versa.

The fourth period in Vlček's *History* is very interesting in this respect. Jan Hus and his followers are regarded almost exclusively from the point of view of medieval history, church history and (especially in this case) the history of ideas. Literature (however defined) completely fades into the background, which is very well illustrated by the appraisal of Jan Hus and of his importance for Czech literature. Hus is the creator of a unified written Czech standard language in Vlček's narrative: only in this 'new language' lies his relevance for the history of literature. The third pillar of the narrative of the history of Czech literature, the language, dominates here to a surprising extent. Hus left behind an impressive bulk of texts written in Czech which may very well document a completely new stage of the development of literature written in Czech, concerning the language, literary style, genre, a new ideology of literature as well as a new strata of recipients etc. (Rychterová "The Vernacular"). Hus's care for the 'new' Czech language itself, meaning the development of a new diacritic orthography that indeed started to be popular in the time of his literary activity, is not well documented, and his participation in its introduction remains speculative. But nothing of this is discussed in Vlček's *History*. His effort aims at depicting Hus's struggle for a reform of the church, *ergo* his 'historical' value.

But why did Vlček choose to present diacritic orthography (the new 'normative' language as he calls it) as the major (and only) literary achievement of Hus? Firstly, he heavily depended on the work (unpublished university lectures) of the philologist and author of the (first and only) vocabulary of the medieval Czech language, Jan Gebauer, who appreciated Hus only for his role in the formation of lan-

guage and nothing else. Secondly, Vlček regarded Hus's written Czech work as not original enough, because it was dependent in its ideas on Wyclif and his theological and philosophical concepts. There was a controversy about the 'originality of ideas' of the Czech reform thinker Hus at the time (from today's point of view the question of 'originality' is obsolete). Vlček's judgement about Hus was driven by contemporary discussions of nationalistic historiography about Hus's and his movement's place in the history of the European reformation, and not by specific literary historical questions and evaluations. The socio-political history of the Czech-Hussite reform movement also determines Vlček's depiction of the literary activities of Hus's followers, the leaders of the Hussite (Utraquist) church during the fifteenth century. Interestingly, the military leader John Žižka is depicted here as a great Czech writer, very probably more for his military achievements than for his ideas or literary activities, which remain speculative: only one work, the Hussite 'military order' written in Czech from the 1420s, is transmitted under his name (Vlček 127–29).

From the history of the Czech reformation, which Vlček ends with the year 1485 (when religious peace was agreed by the representatives of catholic and Utraquist churches in Bohemia), he returns into the fourteenth century and starts a new chapter concerning the rise of humanism and the renaissance in Bohemia. He therefore offers two separate narratives of the same period, leaning on different concepts of historical development of European societies. What is more, these separate narratives concern the period he and many of his contemporary philologists and literary scholars regarded as the most important one in the development of medieval Czech literature. With humanism and the renaissance, Vlček returned to the history of literature in his second narrative of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. His way of dealing with the problem of the incorporation of the Hussite revolt into any history of European literatures became one of the most important features of Czech literary historiography until today: he ensured that literary works classified as 'humanistic' were always dissociated from the 'Hussite' narrative. In contrast to 'Hussite' texts, they were connected to the overall narrative of the European renaissance. However, in the narrative of Czech literature as expression of genuine 'Czechness,' of which the peak was Hussite production, they remained 'hanging in the air' between medieval and early modern times and also between medieval and early modern literatures. The narrative of the Bohemian literary renaissance

sance and humanism absorbed all those facts and findings about the late medieval history of Bohemia which did not fit very well into the dominant narrative of the Czech reformation of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The consequence was the production of concepts that tried to harmonise the two narratives, which were not only separate but also competing, by the means of terms and definitions, as for example with the concept of 'early Humanism in Bohemia' that is echoed in the scholarly discourse up to today. The two competing narratives are also present in the background of any medievalist reasoning about this period at least until the end of the twentieth century (and even later). After 1989 they were increasingly placed in opposition in medieval studies, which resulted in new appraisals of the high cultural achievements during the reign of Charles IV in contrast to the cultural collapse caused by the 'Hussites.' This narrative is also relevant to the public debate in the contemporary Czech media about 'Czech identity' and its roots. For historiography as well as the history of literature, such politically defined black and white representations of medieval history in Bohemia make efforts to overcome simplifying national and nationalistic historical narratives more difficult.

Vlček's 'medieval Czech literature' ends in the second decade of the sixteenth century by being crowned with the subsequent period of the 'golden age' of Czech literature, in which the introduction of print, religious peace, national self-consciousness and pride, humanism and renaissance are brought together: after the epoch of dissociation an epoch of harmony and tranquillity begins. It is fascinating how easily the fissured scholarly narrative can become the fissured history itself. Vlček returns in the fifth period to the periodization and narrative of Josef Dobrovský, to his concept of literature as a chaperon of the language: already for Dobrovský the 'humanistic literature' was proof of the highest peak ever achieved in the history of Czech language. Vlček avoids starting the debate between the differing concepts of Dobrovský and Jungmann, who contrary to Dobrovský placed the 'golden age' in the oral culture of the old Slavs and then again in his own times. Vlček's history of Czech literature ends in the second half of the seventeenth century, with the work of John Amos Comenius, the last bishop of the Bohemian Brethren, and with Czech baroque poetry.

Vlček's work was highly influential in Czech literary scholarship of the twentieth century and is still very influential today. This is for the simple reason that after him no convincing narrative has been

produced that could successfully serve the needs and beliefs of Czech society. It must not be forgotten that before World War II, before the genocide of the Jewish population and the forced displacement of the German population, Czech society was practically bilingual. Only later did it become vaguely homogenous (if the Roma minority is put aside) through language, culture and also through something we could perhaps call a 'shared historical experience.'

Narratives of Bohemian-Czech Literature until World War II: a Failed Breakthrough

The next overall narrative of the history of medieval Czech literature was put forward some twenty years after Vlček by positivist literary historian Jan Jakubec. In Czech literary scholarship of the twentieth century, Jakubec's history was always considered to be less valuable than Vlček's work because of its 'lack of ideological quality.' Jakubec's book indeed lacks the perpetual oscillation between the history of society, the history of ideas and the history of literature and/or language. However, the author informs the reader much more about literary texts. In his analysis he works quite successfully with the criterion of genre, which replaces Vlček's criteria that rely on the history of ideas. This allows him to eliminate some of the periodization problems Vlček struggled with.

He starts with the Byzantine mission of Constantine and Methodius and leans on the work of Josef Pekař, published ten years after Vlček's *History*, which concerned the dating of one legend of St Venceslas and Ludmila that was named after its hypothetical author, the so-called Christian. Dobrovský dated it to the fourteenth century, whereas Pekař moved the date of its origin four hundred years earlier. He did this with the explicitly formulated purpose of replacing the 'lost' forged manuscripts with another literary work:

It was a sad duty of critical Czech historiography until now to remove old and new forgeries. Let us hope that it will now gain some merits. Because now historiography can show that it is able not only to destroy, empty and depopulate history, but to discover new values, conquer new and almost forgotten kingdoms. (Pekař 1–2: translated PR)

The word choice is very interesting. Pekař talks about his dating of the legend as a metaphoric conquest of new and forgotten kingdoms:

there is an idea of a struggle for Czech history behind it, of a battle for its early medieval origins. It poses the question as to why Czech historiography (and literary scholarship) was generally so keen (and is still today) to place the origins of Czech nation and statehood in the tenth century. A simple answer would be ‘the sooner the better,’ but there is something else to be considered. Only if Czech statehood and written culture had already started to emerge in the tenth century was it possible to depict it as an heir of the ‘Great Moravian Empire’ in its more mythical than historical dimension: the Great Moravian ‘empire’ is more or less hypothetical in its extent and importance, and has been disintegrated in the course of Hungarian raids. The legend of so-called Christian fitted these efforts more than anything else: it contains the *translatio imperii* narrative, which starts with a passage defining the Czech duchy as the heir of Great Moravia. To put the text, extant in manuscripts from the middle of the fourteenth century, as close as possible to the presumed event of this *translatio* is a strategy of nationalistic historiography that is only too easily understandable.

In his analysis of the legend, Pekař was convincing, and a considerable part of the Czech historiographic discourse accepted his dating (it has nevertheless stayed hypothetical until today). From this moment on, it became easy to re-define the beginnings of Czech literature by using ‘authentic’ and, what is more, eulogizing literary texts, not written in Czech but in any case (presumably) produced by a ‘Czech’ author, and to connect the texts originating probably in Bohemia in the time of the Byzantine mission of Constantine and Methodius (there are no texts extant from the respective time and area) directly to the beginnings of Bohemian-Czech statehood under the rule of the first Přemyslids. Pekař himself called the legend of so-called Christian “the first chronicle of Bohemia.” He entitled his treatise on the problem of the dating with this phrase. It replaced the *Chronicle* of Cosmas as the first medieval narrative of Czech history in his interpretation.

Jakubec emphasized the importance of the legend exactly for these reasons. Together with Pekař, he presumed the author of the legend of so-called Christian to be a member of the Přemyslid family and a relative of the holy bishop Adalbert of Prague, which means a person of the highest political importance (there is no proof for this). He dated the legend to the year 993 and emphasized the quality of its language (compared to contemporaneous European production) and its allegedly more ‘historical’ than ‘hagiographic’ pur-

pose. He wrote that from this legend we gain information on the considerable influence of Slavonic liturgy in the Czech duchy. Only with the help of the (Latin) legend of so-called Christian could all the church Slavonic sources be fully incorporated into the history of Czech literature, since they are extant only in much younger manuscripts and were produced far away from the Bohemian basin.

The subsequent development of Czech written medieval literature was arranged differently by Jakubec than by Vlček. Jakubec used the social and political history of the area only as a necessary background, instead of making it a driving force of the narrative as Vlček did. The history of ideas, which was Vlček's foremost concern, he completely left aside. Jakubec rather chose genre as a criterion and, to a certain extent, replaced the criterion of language development with it. He nevertheless kept the basic periodization of Dobrovský, and in accord with him (in contrast to Vlček) he integrated German courtly poetry of the second half of the thirteenth century into the narrative as an essentially positive, although 'decadent,' element. Nevertheless, he completely left aside German literary production of the fourteenth century. He thereby ignored the fact that key political figures were involved in it as authors and recipients, as for example John of Středa, the chancellor of Emperor Charles IV. During the Czechoslovak First Republic (1918–38), German studies at the University of Prague started to turn their attention gradually to the German literary monuments from Bohemia (Sichálek). The leading figures here were Arnošt Kraus (Kraus 1917–24, Kraus 1933) and Franz Spina (Höhne-Udolph), but the war (Arnošt Kraus was killed in 1943 in the concentration camp Theresienstadt) and subsequent *coup d'état* of the communist party controlled by the Stalinist Soviet Union terminated all these efforts for a long period to come.

History of Literature during Communist Rule: the Choice of the People

The next coherent interpretation of the history of Czech literature was written after the communist seizure of power in 1948 (Hrabák). How the interpretations of the history of Czech literature would have developed in a democratic Czechoslovakia remains an intriguing question. The works of the prematurely deceased Czech literary historian Jan Vilikovský (1904–46) indicated new methodological approaches, which unfortunately could not be elaborated into a com-

prehensive narrative. For him, Czech literature was the sum of the literatures in all languages used in the given geographic area (Vilikovský *Písemnictví, Próza*). Vilikovský's pupils and followers Antonín Škarka and Josef Hrabák left this approach, revolutionary in the context of Czech literary historiography, and defined German literature as not belonging to the subjects of research on Czech literature. Their argument sounds slightly peculiar from a contemporary point of view, but it fits perfectly with the approaches that Czech literary historiography formulated from its very beginnings (the history of literature as an amalgamation of the history of language, society and literature): literary expressions in the German language do not have any relevance for the development of Czech literature, because German was never the literary language of Czech Slavs, which means that the German language does not belong to Czech "verbal and literary culture" (Hrabák 9). On the contrary, Czech literature had to fight against German literature at the end of the thirteenth century and only with supreme effort was it able to maintain its place in the sun (Havránek-Hrabák 11-12).

Hrabák became the foremost representative of Marxist literary historiography under the new regime, and as such he coordinated and in great part himself wrote the next comprehensive narrative on the history of Czech literature, this time under the central idea of '*lidovosti*' or '*zlidovění*'. Unfortunately there is no satisfying translation of these terms into English. Apparent equivalents such as 'popularization' and 'popularity' have a different meaning in the context of English-speaking literary scholarship. '*Völkisch*' or '*völkischness*,' 'becoming *völkisch*' is closer, but it is still not exact enough. '*Lidovost*' and '*zlidovění*' are not only terms imported by the Soviet form of Marxist literary historiography, but they are also terms deeply rooted in the cultural self-understanding of the modern Czech nation formed during the nineteenth century. The whole culture of the so-called 'Czech national awakening' turned, in the best Herderian manner, to the hypothetical 'poetic soul of the *Volk*,' in which the first generations of literary scholars searched for the purest form of national literature in their own language (Czech social elites were German- and French-speaking and reading at that time). As mentioned above, Jungmann based the main elements of his narrative on this search: his understanding of what literature is and what not, and where and when it started and ended, depended on the (hypothetical) participation of the *Volk* in it. Marxist literary historians therefore did not need to cope with the difficult introduction of extrinsic

concepts into their 'own' literary discourse. They only had to slightly adapt particular elements of their own discourse and to reinforce the tendency already available in it as one of their main interpretative approaches.

The anti-German tendency of Czech literary historiography of previous periods fitted perfectly into post-war Marxist concepts too. Hrabák again only needed to reinforce this and to interface it with the half-nationalistic, half-Marxist concepts of '*völkischness*.' In short, the resulting narrative had the following tenor: Czech literature began in the East with the Byzantine mission of Constantine and Methodius, which did not bring language and literature but Christian liturgy, which was able to compete with the Latin liturgy and script. Czech language was always there as well as a genuine '*völkisch*' literary taste, and the script simply made its proper expression possible. The script was abandoned hereafter, but this did not change the basic attitudes. Then, Latin and also German influences from the West arrived, which were adopted by the social elites and therefore became dominant for considerable periods. But they continually clashed with the Slavonic needs and aspirations of the 'common people.' The *Volk* defied the alien influences and promoted its own literary production and understanding of literature. Latin (or German) literature was not able to initiate '*völkisch*' vernacular literary production, in contrast to Church Slavonic. At the end of the Middle Ages, these *völkisch* needs and aspirations triumphed with the Hussite 'literary' revolution.

In the so-called 'academic history of Czech literature,' for which Hrabák designed the outline, we sometimes meet almost comical arguments in favor of this overall concept. For example, the fact that between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries only Latin literary monuments are extant from the Bohemian basin (the German ones are excluded) is ascribed to the lethal political influence of German (Roman) emperors, who interfered with the inner issues of the Czech duchy. This was very weak during the given period, and unable to defy this German influence more effectively (Hrabák 61). From a contemporary point of view, the use of the bad-influence argument makes it even less understandable why German literary works are not mentioned in Hrabák's work. On the other side, the smaller the amount of information the smaller the possibility that the hypothesis would be criticized. Hrabák could use Dobrovský's periodization almost without any changes because of the ideological affinities of his concept to the concepts of the literary historio-

graphy of the 'national awakening.' He only had to interpret the fourteenth century, from the Chronicle of the so-called Dalimil until Jan Hus, as an 'intermediary phase' in a story of otherwise linear progress of the self-assertion of the *Volk*. He managed this with the help of the terms 'laicization' and 'democratization' of literature (used as terms describing subsequent periods, meaning that development went from laicization to democratization), which both then found their peak in the subsequent period of Hussite literary production in which the literature became entirely '*völkisch*.' Very important in Hrabák's concept was the direct connection of the Byzantine mission of Constantine and Methodius with the beginnings of literacy in the Bohemian duchy of the tenth century that had been created by the previous generations of historians and literary historians: without this the whole narrative of the '*völkisch*-Slavonic-Czech' literature, the narrative arc of its triumphant struggle against alien influences, would completely lack its basis. However – and we have to admit this – the resulting narrative appears surprisingly coherent up to today. It does not have any gaps and inconsistencies, unlike the narrative of Vlček (who did not have the legend of so-called Christian, of course), and it does not need the additional criterion of genre to cope with the divergent material, as Jakubec required. It is self-contained and as such also very convincing. No wonder that it is so difficult to abandon. The so-called 'academic history' of Czech literature (Hrabák) is the last overall narrative of Czech medieval literature written: there have been no new attempts after 1989, neither by the institutions nor by the individuals active in the discourse of Czech literary scholarship.

There are, however, two histories of Czech literature written by German literary scholarship, Winfried Baumann and Walter Schamshula, from the second half of the twentieth century. Both of them rely heavily on the material collections and narratives produced in Czech literary scholarly discourse: they simply redirect the focus in the direction of a positive appraisal of German literature and its more important and more differentiated role in the overall narrative. The explicit approach of Winfried Baumann (Baumann) was to describe and analyze the relations between Latin, Czech and German literary production between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. He left the Byzantino-Slavonic episode aside and also abandoned the chronological principle of narration. He has chosen instead the genre as the principle of primary organization of the given textual material. The chronological point of view nevertheless creeps in by the back door,

as it were, in the last two chapters concerning the literary boom in the second half of the fourteenth century until the end of the Hussite revolt at the end of the fifteenth century. Here, the criterion of the genre failed to sort out the material in a reasonable manner (frankly speaking, the criterion of genre was only useful for the period in which German literature dominated). Walter Schamschula (Schamschula, *Geschichte*) followed a decade later. He also paid more attention to German literature in Bohemia, and beside a basic chronological organization of the material, in his book genre is also the main criterion. Baumann as well as Schamschula did not pay any attention to Hebrew literature originating in the Bohemian basin. Czech narratives ignore it too, but they ignore everything written that is non-Czech as far as they can (Latin production is discussed only because of the lack of 'own' production written in Czech).

Now What? Medieval Literature in Bohemia between Concepts, Theories and Methods

If we return to the last narrative produced by Czech literary scholars, the 'academic history of Czech literature' (Hrabák), the question of how the 'new,' non-Marxist narrative of Czech medieval literature should look like after 1989 has no simple answer, although it may seem so at first. No 'anti-*völkisch*' turn would help, because this narrative is not simply a Marxist import but is deeply rooted in the self-identification of the Czech-speaking inhabitants of the Bohemian basin, beginning with the concept of their nation from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The periodization of Czech literature that the first generations of Czech linguists and literary scholars designed was a result of the amalgamation of the history of society, language and literature. Its focus on the metaphysically assumed role of the nation in history made it in a way a self-fulfilling prophecy that appeared to join, explain and represent everything (every text) from the most distant past to the very present. Therefore any analysis of extant texts was regarded as almost obsolete: they did not have the power to change the narrative anyway. It also successfully prevented attempts to regard literature from other than a national perspective. Although it may seem that the conceptual outlines Dobrovský, Jungmann and their followers designed were historicized a long time ago, quite the opposite is true. There is still no detailed analysis of the backgrounds of their outline of the history of Czech literature. And

there are still texts and authors almost unknown to research because they did not fit into the dominant narrative: such is the fate, for example, of the already mentioned chancellor of Charles IV, Jan of Středa, whom we should regard as a very important figure in the late medieval history of Bohemia. Only recently was basic research on the transmission and reception of his German writings started.

Connected to this basic problem are several aspects we have to take into account. A first and definitive factor in the hunt for any scholarly discourse that is comparable to the one of contemporary 'western' literary scholarship is the institutional situation of Czech literary scholars. For decades (at least from 1945 until 1989), the education and training of young scholars was organized around the concept of Czech literature as a 'national' literature, and was undertaken in their own national language. The necessary qualification for a scholarly career therefore did not involve any/enough linguistic proficiency in Latin and Middle German (or modern German at least). This meant that for a long time after 1989 there was a complete lack of specialists who had been educated and trained in a way that would enable them to regard and analyze Czech literature from a comparative point of view. Only in recent years has this handicap been overcome with several gifted scholars of younger generations who have been educated in different systems of foreign or reformed domestic universities (see the thematic issue of *Slovo a smysl – Word and Sense* 2014).

The second aspect is the dynamics of the development of European-American literary scholarship from the second half of the twentieth century onward, which brought along a whole series of conceptual, terminological and methodological innovations. These are subject to constant and fluid dialogue between disciplines involved in research on literary texts. It is quite unclear how the history of Czech literature may be integrated in its entirety into this dialogue. In other words, is there any chance of the development of an overall narrative of Czech medieval literature (or medieval literature from the Bohemian basin) that would 'catch up' with the dynamic discourse of the literary scholarship of the last fifty years, if not more? How can the 'squaring of the circle' be achieved: to catch up on the contemporary situation of the debate and at the same time critically to discuss its development from the point of view of the specific material to which it has to be applied?

The third aspect concerns the specifics of the territory and language. How should we describe the literatures of individual lands of

the Bohemian crown? (that means in the Middle Ages Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Lusatia, etc.) How should one treat Czech literature as a part of literatures from Central and Eastern Central Europe? How can one describe their common features (if there are any)? How are the literatures from Bohemia to be integrated into superordinated units? How should one cope in this respect with the at least partly 'Slavonic' character of the literature from Bohemian basin? How should one solve the problem of the affinities of languages and the gaps between religions and cultures at the same time? Do Russian and Balkan literatures belong to the superordinated units that Bohemian literature has to be integrated into, or not? In this respect the question of cultural transfer and its directions also has to be reconsidered. The depiction of the transfer of ideas, narratives, literary forms and texts from the west to the east, meaning from the centers of Latin written culture in France, Italy and Germany to Bohemia as well as its counterpart, the search for the reciprocal movement back, depends heavily on the overall concepts of 'west' and 'east.' Both are provided with evaluative criteria, 'west' as more 'developed,' 'advanced' etc., 'east' as more 'genuine,' to mention only a few of them. More adequate for the extant material would be to abandon the east-west dichotomy and start from the premise of smaller units that stand in mutual contacts of varying intensity.

The fourth aspect is the complex relation of explanation and representation. How should one discern between explanations and representations of this literature, if the explanation and representation have, from the beginnings of Czech literary scholarship, been regarded and designed as one and the same thing, so much in fact that we can talk about self-explanatory representations (narratives)? The question of explanation and representation is crucial with regard to the audience the hypothetical 'new history' of Czech literature has to reach. On the one side there is an international scholarly community, on the other the Czech-speaking public. The history of 'native' literature is an integral part of lower and higher education in the Czech Republic (the population of which has been, as mentioned above, almost homogenous concerning ethnicity and language since 1945). How should a narrative (representation) look that would be able to satisfy both communities, the international scholarly one as well as the local one? Is such an overall integrated narrative even possible?

And last but not least: How should one cope with the role of the history of literature in contemporary European but also global society, considering the media revolution of the last twenty years?

The way suggesting itself is first to disintegrate any more or less coherent narrative and to start from smaller chronological and territorially delineated units. This was the approach of Eduard Petřů (Petřů), who saw the necessity of dealing with the question of the interrelations, interconnections and autonomy of Church Slavonic, Latin, German and Czech literatures as the first step on the way to a 'new' history of Czech literature (Hebrew literature is again missing in his outline). This would allow us to parcel out the history of Czech literature into individual histories that could be analyzed, explained and narrated separately at first and then, in a second step, put together again on a higher theoretical and methodological level as an integral part of medieval European literatures in the broadest sense. The problem here is again the amalgamation of the historical and literary historical narratives. The disintegration of the literary-historical narrative presumes previous disintegration of the historical narrative, a task which can become very quickly too complicated. Nevertheless, in my eyes this represents the only possible way to deal with the problem successfully, although it is costly in terms of time.

Taking this into account, the first step has to be scholarly concentration on individual works and/or groups of works, and new critical overviews of their transmission, conditions of origin and modes of reception from the point of view of their potential multilingual background and character. The historical conditions of individual processes of vernacularization have to be scrutinized again and again to avoid any self-explanatory narratives, which are almost irresistible, especially in the case of the Hussite movement and its indeed revolutionary new understanding of the role of vernacular languages in the political struggle for the church and social reform.

The first results regarding this first step on the way to the 'new' history of the Czech literature (or literatures) have already achieved been in the last decades. New topics were formulated, new methods introduced, works and authors were appreciated anew that had been long neglected because of their problematic status in the overall narrative of Czech literature (some of them, especially the German and Hebrew ones, were regarded as not belonging to it, some of them as not fitting in it, some of them as not interesting enough for it). Nevertheless – and this is the reason why the permanent critical preoccupation with the basic themes of the history of the literary histori-

cal narrative of the past and critical analysis of the historiographic discourse is of crucial importance – the main themes and problems of the periodization and overall narratives of the Czech medieval literature persist. They persist not only as implicit preconditions of perception (and this holds true for Czech as well as foreign specialists who in the past made attempts to narrate the history of the Czech literature), but also as problems of non-ideological (we may say post-nationalistic and/or post-Marxist) interpretation.

The overview of dominant narratives of the history of Czech literature I sketched above shows relatively clearly which these themes and problems are. Firstly, the necessity of contextualizing the Slavonic mission is relevant, together with several attempts to cultivate the ‘Slavonic heritage’ during the Middle Ages. Here the existence of the Slavonic liturgy in the Benedictine abbey of Sazava in the eleventh century and the literary activity of the Benedictine abbey of Emaus founded by the emperor Charles IV in 1347 has to be emphasized. The question is how the approaches of modern and contemporary Slavonic studies may be integrated into ‘new’ reasoning about the history of medieval Czech literature. The struggle of Slavonic studies to integrate (or to ignore) Czech literature because of its distinct ‘western’ character (Picchio) speaks for itself.

Further, the necessity of contextualizing the German courtly literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Bohemia is relevant. The first literary activity in the Czech language in the Bohemian basin has also to be related to this literature without prejudice or martial rhetoric (Hon). The Czech written works of the genres of courtly literature from this period are transmitted mainly in fragments. It is necessary to scrutinize them anew from the point of view of their (mostly hypothetical) reception and sociopolitical impact. The explanation of the striking fact of the fragmentary transmission of these works that Jan Jakubec formulated in his *History of Czech literature*, namely that the destruction of the manuscripts from this historical period was more damaging in Bohemia than elsewhere, cannot hold. We need to ask whether the terminology and literary scholarly concepts developed by modern and contemporary German studies (for example ‘*Prosaauflösung*’) are fruitful or not for this German and Czech literature. Are they able to describe the specific character of Bohemian German literature and its Czech adaptations or not? Put another way, how inclusive and how exclusive has the concept of the ‘new’ history of medieval literature to be? How may the terminologies and methodologies of ‘national’ literary scholar-

ship be integrated and selected to serve the purpose of any new, maybe postnational, maybe postcolonial history of literature?

The necessity of understanding fully the new appreciation of the Czech language pursued by the leaders of the Czech reform movement, Jan Hus and Jakobell of Mies, pertains. It has to be discussed in detail as well as the consequent politicization of vernacular languages, especially Czech and German but also Latin, which is related to the 'national' (or proto-national) character of the Hussite revolt in the first half of the fifteenth century. For the Hussite period, the terms 'laicization' and 'democratization' as well as '*völkischness*' also have to be debated without prejudices: they are relevant for the discourse because of their effort to describe the emergence of significant lay participation in the church political agenda of the realm from the point of view of the history of literature. For a balanced appreciation of Hussite Czech literature in particular, the history of the Hussite movement, across its whole spectrum from conservative Utraquists to Taborite radicals, is of utmost importance. Research on the Hussite period is one of the few topics of Czech medieval history that is also methodologically and theoretically an integral part of contemporary European-American medieval studies. However, in the area of Czech written literary sources, this international Hussitology still relies too much on the prevailing, older narratives of history of Czech literature, because the analysis of this material requires special skills the majority of medievalists involved do not have.

This problem also concerns the role of modern critical editions of extant texts: what should these editions look like? Here the role of Latin, German and Czech as well as Hebrew philology is crucial. The respective philologies have to formulate questions that text editions should answer. In fact, the decisions concerning what an edition has to look like usually depend on the questions formulated by the history of literature and also by medieval studies in general. Only an overall debate on the literary-historical questions from the philological point of view and vice versa may help further, which is a debate still waiting to be started.

Above all, the relation of language, text and social and political history has to be analyzed in detail, because only their conflation has been able to maintain a coherent narrative of the history of Czech literature in the past. As I showed above, these three columns on which the available narratives so far rest have secured their balance. The question is, if it is possible after all to do without them. And if yes, then how, and – what is more important – to what purpose. The an-

swer suggesting itself, namely that only this step would make it possible to incorporate the Czech medieval literatures into the overall narrative of the European medieval literatures, could be too simple. There are too many specific features that define the literature from the Bohemian basin and the literature written in Czech: three of them I listed above. First is the recurring flirtation of basically Latin literary culture in Bohemia with Church Slavonic. Second is German courtly culture and the Czech literary response to it, which was probably short-lived and mainly politically motivated. In this case, terms like 'transfer' or 'acculturation,' if we decide to use them, have to be discussed with regard to this specific situation in the framework stated above. The third is the linguistic nationalism of the Hussite movement. Besides this, the material basis of Czech medieval literature is relatively narrow in comparison with Italian, French and German literatures in the period of interest - even if we take into account all the languages present in the Bohemian basin.

To abandon the history of the (Czech) language as a principle of narration and qualitative criterion seems relatively easy: in that case we only have to sacrifice the focus solely on the texts written in Czech and the narrative of linear qualitatively-defined development of Czech written literature. Focusing solely on the Czech literature means a slightly uncomfortable approach anyway, because it suggests more questions than it answers. It is for example not quite clear how to stratify the esthetical quality of literary language extant in few texts dispersed through three centuries. However, abandoning the socio-political history of the realm as a strong interpretative tool (and not only as some sort of 'context') seems almost impossible.

Firstly, a considerable number of extant texts (especially the texts regarded usually as most important for the literary historical narratives, those belonging to the canon) originated in very specific contexts: they were tightly joined to inner political circumstances. This is surely the case for the chronicle of the so-called Dalimil (in Czech as well as in German and Latin versions), for the majority of Hussite literary texts in all three languages, but very probably also for the Czech written courtly epics and lyrics, for the extant medieval Czech biblical translations, for literary works produced in the 'Slavonic' abbey of Emaus, and also very probably for some of the works of religious meditative literature written before the Hussite revolution.

Secondly, we have to take into account that, compared to the situation of transmission in German, French, Italian, Dutch and also English literatures, the possibilities of reconstructing the reception

of individual texts or text groups, especially in the case of Czech written literature, are very rare, and the possibilities of reconstructing respective communities of interpretation are even rarer, especially for the time before the Hussite revolution. This applies not only for hypothetical communities of lay readers, but also for monastic communities and their libraries which were disrupted in great numbers in the time of the Hussite wars. Here the different situation in the individual lands belonging to the Crown of Bohemia also has to be considered. But the outbreak of this revolution and the veritable flood of Hussite (and anti-Hussite) texts, especially in Czech, warn against the hasty conclusion that there was only very moderate demand and equally very moderate supply. However, it is still very possible that the necessary result from this observation will be a thesis on the 'retarded cultural development' of Czech-speaking society in Bohemian lands and its acceleration based on the reinforced 'Europeanization' of Bohemia during the reign of the Luxembourg dynasty on the Bohemian throne, especially in the last third of the fourteenth century.

It is obvious that the 'new' history of literature(s) in Bohemia has to discuss the perspectives of literary studies together with the perspectives of medieval studies, which are of course also dependent on the historical narrative changing permanently in the course of shifting historiographical approaches. Both have to be regarded as equal, because both of them illuminate different parts of the whole. We can remember 'genre' as an example. It never had great success in the overall narrative of the history of Czech medieval literature (although there are of course many seminal studies from past decades on individual genres (for example Lehár *Nejstarší, Česká*). The material basis is too narrow and the Hussite period has turned it on its head anyway (as Winfried Baumann for example had to recognize). But Hussite literature alone could be actually an argument for the creative use of the 'genre' category, as one of the striking features of Hussite propaganda was without doubt the fusion of genres and the fusion of discourses: the fact that Jan Hus was burned in Constantia just because he did this shows that it was important. Then the European perspective has to be pursued (only a rigorous European approach can help to overcome ideologically teleological narratives of the past), which is already happening in many collaborative studies concerning individual texts and their reception in various languages and societies (only a few of them are quoted in this text). But we do not know yet what the resulting narrative (teleological or not) of lit-

erature and/or literatures in Bohemia as a part of the history of European medieval literature will look like. There is a lot of work to be done before then.

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