

CZECH, SLOVAK, AND HUNGARIAN LITERATURE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL WORLD LITERATURE TEXTBOOKS: A MUTUAL COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT: The teaching of world literature in secondary schools in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia is influenced by a complex interplay of cultural-political and practical factors, including the prestige of particular national literatures or authors, decisions made by textbook authors, and, occasionally, language accessibility and functional relevance reflecting current geopolitical orientations. The selection of national and world literature authors in curricula serves as a tool of cultural representation, collective memory, and political symbolism. The three countries adopt different textbook models- while the Czech Republic and Slovakia allow the parallel use of multiple titles, Hungary employs a unified, state-mandated textbook. The analysis reveals significant asymmetries in the representation of neighbouring national literatures, with Slovakia acting as a cultural intermediary that partially integrates elements of both Czech and Hungarian verbal traditions. The Czech approach appears culturally ambitious but neglects the regional context, while the Hungarian model emphasises national heritage and presents world literature selectively and in limited scope. The comparison shows that cultural openness does not necessarily entail intercultural sensitivity, especially when neighbouring literatures fail to meet the criteria of global prestige, linguistic accessibility, or political relevance.

KEYWORDS: National literature. World literature. Czech Republic. Hungary. Slovakia. Textbooks. High school.

Literary education in primary and secondary schools plays a key role in fostering awareness of national and world literature, influencing not only students' aesthetic and cultural values but also their understanding of cultural heritage and, possibly, patterns of international cooperation. The study focuses on a comparative analysis of the mutual representation of the national literatures of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia in the presentation of world literature in secondary school textbooks. The deliberate selection of literary works, writers, as well as illustrations, photographs or allusions in literary textbooks provides insight into the methodology of real literature teaching in the countries concerned, which enables the analysis of the way in which the literary heritage of these nations is presented in the context of the wider European and world literature. It also shows a picture of national identities and reflects the historical, cultural and geopolitical contexts that shape the relationship between the nations. The analysis of textbooks is valuable for understanding didactic approaches to the teaching of literature and for assessing how individual nations shape their cultural identities and influence mutual cultural perceptions within the Central European region. A comprehensive series of textbooks was excerpted and compared; in the Czech Republic, textbooks from three publishers – *Hravá literatura* [Playful Literature] by Taktik, *Literatura v souvislostech* [Literature in Context] by Fraus, *Literatura* [Literature] by Didaktis, a single smart textbook on literature by the National Education Portal for grades 9 – 12 in Hungary, and *Literatúra I – IV* [Literature I – IV] by Orbis Pictus in Slovakia.

SECONDARY SCHOOL LITERATURE TEXTBOOKS – CZECH REPUBLIC, HUNGARY AND SLOVAKIA

Textbooks are the most basic and long-used teaching aid for teaching literature in schools; in practice, they are often supplemented by workbooks. Unlike other teaching aids, textbooks still retain their status as a fundamental and difficult-to-replace tool in teaching practice. Textbooks generally exist in printed (book) form or in a hybrid form combining print and electronic interfaces; electronic versions are also becoming established in the practice of contemporary schools. Although it is clear that the teaching of literature commonly involves other didactic materials and individual teacher input, it is textbooks that best reflect the actual pedagogical practice of primary and secondary schools. The workbooks are mainly of an applied nature and are used for pupils' independent work at school and at home. Their main aim is to check understanding of the material covered, so unlike textbooks, they do not usually contain explanatory passages (the only exception being brief summaries of the material). For these reasons, textbooks are the main object of analysis in this study, not, for example, workbooks.

The Czech Republic has an open textbook market, characterised by a wide range of textbooks, freedom of choice for schools, but also differences in quality. With the introduction of the Framework Educational Programmes¹, the textbook market has been expanded to include so-called non-/item textbooks, where the endorsement remains a recommendation, not an obligation for schools to use them. Textbooks with an endorsement are guaranteed to be in line with the curriculum framework; textbooks without an endorsement can be used, but their use must be justified in the school curriculum, i.e. the responsibility for their use lies with the school or the head teacher.² The analysis focused on secondary school literature textbooks published by Didaktis, spol. s.r.o. in the Czech Republic, the publishing house Fraus, s.r.o. and the publishing house TAKTIK International, s.r.o. In Hungary, uniform “smart” textbooks (Smart Textbooks) have been introduced since 2014 as part of a broader effort to centralise and modernise the education system. The development of the textbooks was coordinated by the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development, and the textbooks are thus the result of the work of editorial teams (teachers, university teachers, IT experts). The main reasons for introducing uniform textbooks in Hungary include centralising teaching content, making textbooks accessible to all pupils, and promoting the digitisation of teaching. Critics of the reform have pointed out, and continue to point out, the ideological influence of textbook content and the limitation of pedagogical autonomy. In Slovakia, a textbook policy reform is currently underway to modernise and digitise teaching materials. The Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth is preparing new textbooks in line with the updated national curriculum, but schools will continue to have a choice of alternative sets of textbooks. The Czech textbooks place the greatest emphasis on factual information, while the Hungarian textbooks are characterised by a reduction of the

¹ The Framework Educational Programmes (RVP [FEPS]) constitute a generally binding framework for the development of school educational programmes across all fields of education in pre-school, primary, primary art, language, and secondary education. They were introduced into education in the Czech Republic by Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on pre-school, primary, secondary, higher vocational and other education (Education Act).

² In order to obtain an endorsement from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT [MoEYS]) of the Czech Republic, a literature textbook (as well as other textbooks for secondary schools) must meet a number of formal, content and pedagogical criteria set by the Ministry, e.g. compliance with the Framework Educational Programmes, professional correctness and up-to-dateness, didactic appropriateness, linguistic and stylistic level, graphic design and clarity, internal logic and structure, accessibility and technical design.

curriculum, focusing on selected figures and their works, with an emphasis on the evaluation component and work with the text. In the Czech Republic, this role is fulfilled by workbooks. Within the named limits, the textbook is the basic, but not the only teaching aid; excerpts are selected, although in practice, the most used textbooks in the given countries are the textbooks in this study, which substitute the actual pedagogical practice in secondary schools in the countries under study. The validity of the data obtained is highest in Hungary, where a single national textbook was analysed. The data from the Czech Republic also show relatively high significance, with excerpts drawn from three different sets of textbooks widely used in practice. In Slovakia, however, the results should be interpreted as indicative, as the excerpts were only performed on one textbook set, in the context of the existence of a pluralistic market for alternative textbooks.

NATIONAL AND WORLD LITERATURE

National literature is most often defined as a body of literary works produced within a particular national community that shares a common language, cultural tradition and historical experience. This literature reflects the identity of a given nation, while also contributing to its formation, legitimisation and transmission across generations. National literature develops dynamically in dialogue with other (national or transnational) literatures and in response to social, political and aesthetic changes in society. The notion of world literature is traditionally derived from Goethe's 1836 remarks in which he warned of the weakening significance of the concept of "national literature" and the urgent need to introduce the notion of "Weltliteratur" (Birus 2008). Goethe, who saw literature as a means of disseminating universal cultural values, viewed it in a broader, transnational framework that transcended national boundaries. This view differs in part from the theoretical positions of Johann Gottfried Herder, who viewed intercultural interactions through the lens of seeking similarities with one's own, national culture (Herder 1774, 297). According to the American literary historian David Damrosch (2003), literary works enter the canon of world literature when they are read outside their original context and circulate in a broader cultural sphere. Damrosch describes this process in terms of three ways of reading world literature: "classics", "masterpieces" and "windows of the world". Classical works represent the fundamental literary values of their respective cultures, masterpieces mark literature of the highest aesthetic value, and "windows of the world" serve as a tool for learning about foreign cultures through literary texts (Damrosch 2003, 1 – 36). In the context of the development of world literature, Pascale Casanova (2004) points to the example of the rise of the French language in the sixteenth century, when Paris, thanks to the victory of the French language over Latin, played a key role in the formation of a "world republic of literature" that broke free from national and political ties. This process can be understood as a gradual transformation of literature from national frameworks to a broader, transnational context. Franco Moretti, the Italian literary historian, emphasises, on the contrary, that the meaning of a literary work is not universally constant, but is always conditioned by the cultural and historical context in which it is perceived. In this respect, Moretti points to the inequality in the global literary system, where "peripheral" cultures interact with "core" literary traditions, creating a dynamic in which literary works are transformed as they move between different cultural and historical contexts (Moretti 2000, 55 – 56). World literature projects are thus strongly linked to the process of globalisation. However, global integration in the past never occurred as a harmonious interconnection of world cultures; rather, it was reflected in expansive movements such as long-distance trade, the colonial expansion of European powers, or Christian missions that led to the spread of European civilisation into the rest of the world. Literature as a "unified global phenomenon" took shape primarily as European literature, within the framework of European political sovereignty and domination, and even its initial development

was influenced by Eastern cultures. Later, in the context of the political and cultural dominance of the United States, it became part of a broader American cultural phenomenon that provided a new worldview from an American perspective (Pan 2023, 83).

However, the existence of world literature cannot be justified solely by the growing economic, political and cultural processes that transcend national and continental boundaries. Indeed, world literature is closely linked to the creation of the so-called “global tradition”. As Pan puts it, “when thinking about world literature, it is the history of the tradition, not the individual texts, that is relevant” (Pan 2017, 40 – 45). The translation of a literary text into another language does not preserve the (historical) tradition of the original text as it was created in the national literature but creates a new tradition of the translated text in a new cultural context. What constitutes world literature is thus not only determined by the texts themselves, but also by the retrospective views of them from the past. At the same time, the criteria for including literary works from different national literatures in world literature are shaped in the present. A translated text from another national literature enters into a complex relationship with the national literature of the home country, where it fulfils diverse cultural, aesthetic and ideological functions and takes into account historical perspectives. The variability of the criteria for selecting texts constantly disturbs a unified conception of world literature. As a consequence, a multiplicity of world literatures emerges, in which each cultural space creates its own worldview (Pan 2023, 81). The spread of a literary work into world literature can thus be explained not only by its universal appeal but also by the issues it addresses, which remain relevant across historical periods and geographical contexts (ibid., 86). The unitary character of world literature is therefore difficult to sustain. As Pan notes, “the separate worlds of literature defined in different public spheres can provide the basis for a kind of complementarity at the cultural level, in which each tradition’s mode of meaning can provide resources and refuge for others” (ibid., 87). The fragmentation of world literature, where each national literature represents the world in itself, and world literature is “downloaded” to the whole of each cultural space, corresponds with our conception of world literature in each national curriculum, where world literature fulfils its didactic and utilitarian function.

The study is no longer focused on contemporary discussions of world literature (César Domínguez, Theo D’haen, Marko Juvan, etc.), while the notion or concept of world literature is viewed in this paper in accordance with the threefold concept as presented by the Slovak literary theorist and comparatist Dionýz Ďurišin. Ďurišin’s classification includes: 1) the additive/mechanical conception, 2) the axiological/choice conception, and 3) the literary-historical conception as a result of a concrete investigation of the interliterary process (Ďurišin 1992, XX). Considering the goals of comparing the secondary school curriculum, the concept of the so-called world literature (great books) is adopted, i.e., the body of works of all national literatures that every student at the appropriate level of schooling should know. This notion represents a kind of compromise between “world literature as a certain convention resulting from a new interpretation of literature” and a mechanical set of the so-called best works, i.e. works included in the reading lists, i.e. compulsory reading (Pospíšil – Zelenka 1995, 104). The paper works with the notion that each nation, or each national literature, creates its own world literature, which can be abstracted from the preferences and obligatory and optional offerings contained in the curricular documentation of the countries represented.³

³ In addition to the notion of world literature, there is also the notion of “world literature”, which has its analogue in the concept of “world languages” (Pospíšil 1999). In this case, worldliness refers to a situation in which a given language, such as English, Spanish or German, is used not only by native speakers but also by non-native speakers, both in schools and in the cultural representation of a “great” nation and its history. Great (world) literatures have passed through different periods in history, where their influence

The paper is a follow-up to the study *World Literature in the Pedagogical Practice of the V4 Countries* (Schacherl 2024, 101 – 113), which compared the content, performance standards, outcomes and requirements for graduates in the countries. Although the causes may be influenced to varying degrees by different traditions in education policy, the emphasis on original or translated texts, or the varying linguistic isolation of the countries studied, the comparisons indicate that the Czech Republic's compulsory requirements for high school graduates are generally more oriented toward the study of foreign national literatures, i.e., world literature, than those of other neighboring Central European countries, which are more focused on their own national literatures and are more nationalistic in this sense. In the Czech Republic, the school-leaving examination (the so-called “maturita”) in mother tongue and literature differs in the common part by the greater range of (authors of) world literature that a secondary school graduate must know, the orientation towards testing knowledge of literary history, the absence of measurement of the pupil's skill in coherent expression (in spoken and written form) and reading of artistic and non-artistic texts. The current form of the school-leaving examination in the Czech language and literature in its common part reflects the traditionalist conception and principles of education in the Czech Republic, characterised by a holistic view and the predominance of theory over practice. In Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, the school-leaving examination in relation to world literature focuses on a minimal number of authors and works, the pupil's own reading and the skills of its application. Differences are also evident between the preferences of specific national literatures representing world literature. Although a different emphasis is placed on specific historical periods in individual countries (e.g., Romanticism in Slovakia, in Hungary the Enlightenment), in the Czech Republic, French and English national literatures are most significantly represented in the canon of world literature, in Hungary, Russian and French, and in Slovakia Russian/Soviet national literature. Given the common history of Central European nations in the 20th century and similar historical experience, the different orientation of the world literature obligatory literature reading lists in the countries under study, namely the Czech and Polish lists towards the West, and in Hungary and Slovakia towards the East, is surprising; however, it reflects fairly faithfully the geo/political orientation of each individual country. A common feature is the absence of representatives of minor national literatures and languages in the canon of world literature. The specific range and list of names representing world literature are only rarely the same across the Visegrad Four countries, even in terms of specific names and their works (*Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière*). Apart from the global tradition, created by the aesthetic quality of the work and the time-tested value of the author, the temporal and local relevance of the topic, the political order also significantly determines what kind of world literature the students taking the school-leaving exam in a particular country will know, i.e. what representation of specific authors and works from other national literatures in world literature will be in the obligatory (i.e. compulsory for all pupils) pedagogical documentation of secondary school studies with the final secondary school examination.

on other national literatures was (and is) more significant in some periods than in others. Examples include Italian literature in the Renaissance, French literature in the Classical period, or Russian literature in the Realist era. The changing conception of world literature is the result of a complex interplay of various factors that contribute to its shape at a particular time and place. These factors include not only the proven aesthetic value of a literary work and the relevance of its themes, but also local and global traditions, geopolitical influences, and the sphere of influence of a given national culture. Moreover, the influence and significance of literary titles entering or emerging from world literature is strongly influenced by geopolitical conditions and circumstances. These conditions may be local, for example, in the context of relations between two neighbouring nations. However, they may also be global, as illustrated, for example, by the role of Soviet literature in the former Eastern Bloc countries.

COMPARISON OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS – CZECH REPUBLIC, HUNGARY AND SLOVAKIA

Our paper focuses on three specific national literatures (Czech, Hungarian and Slovak) and their presentation of world literature in the educational materials for secondary schools represented by the selected textbooks, specifically noting how these literatures are represented in relation to each other within the world literature offered in each country. National identity and its classification is problematic among the nations studied due to their shared history. The study simplifies matters by adopting the classification and distinctions used in specific textbooks, which is significant to the study's objectives. The hypothesis of symptomatic mutual representation is supported by several important factors: (A) shared historical experience,⁴ (B) cultural affinity between countries long understood as part of Central Europe, and (C) current geopolitical orientations, such as cooperation within the Visegrad Group. In particular, national contexts where literature becomes a tool for shaping national identity and cultural policy, the decision to include or exclude a particular literary work can often be the result of historical experience, political pressures or cultural heritage. Therefore, examining the representation of literature in school textbooks can be a valuable tool for understanding broader cultural and social trends in these countries. A deeper analysis focused on specific examples can reveal how these textbooks reflect patterns of cultural dialogue between these nations, which share a common history (bearing in mind the differences between historical periods, e.g., between the Habsburg, Turkish, or post-war contexts), but also significant differences in their literary traditions and national narratives. The reciprocal representation of literature may also point to a mutual cultural respect, concretised by the range of literary works that each country considers important for secondary education and that students should be familiar with. The Czech Republic has a common point with Hungary in that both national literatures have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature once (in 1984 it was awarded to the Czech poet Jaroslav Seifert, in 2002 to the Jewish-Hungarian writer Imre Kertész). Although the Nobel Prize in Literature is not always a reflection of the artistic (transnational) value of the laureate and his work, it is awarded for outstanding literary work and is associated with a significant financial reward and international recognition – Czech and Hungarian textbooks do not provide information about laureates from other national literatures (Seifert is mentioned briefly in Slovak textbooks in the chapter on Poetism). Secondary school students in the Czech Republic and Slovakia learn together about their common history, they learn about verbal monuments from the Old Slavonic period, Velká Morava [Great Moravia], they learn about the verse translation of the *Proglas* Gospel from literary monuments, they learn about *Moravian-Pannonian legends* (*Život Konstantinův a Život Metodějův* [The Life of Constantine and The Life of Methodius]). The common curriculum also includes 12th century Vagante (student) poetry, as well as Jan Kollár and his *Slávy dcera* [Daughter of Sláva], Ján Botto and *Smrt Jánošíka* [The Death of Jánošík]. Slovak students learn about the following Czech authors from Czech literature (medallion, sample and analysis of works): Jan Amos Komenský (1592 – 1670), Karel Hynek Mácha (1810 – 1836), Vítězslav Nezval (1890 – 1958), Jaroslav Hašek (1883 – 1923), Karel Čapek (1890 – 1938) and Karel Kryl (1944 – 1994). They also learn about the only artistic movement that emerged in the territory of the former Czechoslovakia, which is poetism. They learn about its basic characteristics, including Jiří Wolker, Jaroslav Seifert and Vítězslav Nezval. In the Slovak textbooks we can also find a number of references to the Czech context in the form of illustrations.

⁴ From the 11th century to 1918 Slovakia was part of Hungary, from 1918 to 1993 the Czech Republic and Slovakia were part of Czechoslovakia; on the intersections of Czech-Hungarian history, e.g. K. Endre, J. Novotný (1959), R. Pražák (1994), R. Pražák, R. Kiss Szemán, A. Mészáros (2014).

The most frequent are important buildings, paintings, portraits of composers, 16 photographs in total (Český Krumlov, Hluboká nad Vltavou, Strahov Library, Mariánské Lázně, Municipal House in Prague, Villa Tugendhat, Dancing House, paintings by Mikoláš Aleš, Alfons Mucha, Josef Lada, etc.). There are also references to contemporary films from the common history (*Tři vejce do skla* [Three Eggs in Glass] 1937, *Škola základ života* [School as the Basis of Life] 1938, *Cesta do hlubin študákovy duše* [Journey into the Depths of the Student's Soul] 1939, *Kristián* [Christian] 1939), but also to Czech films after the separation of Czechoslovakia (*Pelíšky* [Cosy Dens] 1999, *Pupendo* 2003). The Slovak textbooks also contain teaching of Hungarian national literature, which is poorer in scope than the common teaching of the Czech and Slovak literature in textbooks. Secondary school students in Slovakia have Ján Fanchali-Jób, Slovak and Hungarian Renaissance in their textbooks (excerpt from the codex *Pane Bože milý, tobeť se žalujú* [Dear God, let them lament]), and the historian Matej Bel (1684 – 1749) is also represented. Slovak textbooks contain four pictures in the textbook that depict the Hungarian context (Hungarian parliament, Hungarian painters). In the period before the 19th century, it is difficult to distinguish between the national identities of the two nations within Hungary; the study adopts the distinctions and classifications used in the textbooks under review.

The textbook of literature for secondary schools in the Czech Republic by Taktik publishing house does not offer secondary school students any explanation about Hungarian literature, nor do we find any references to other cultural contexts associated with Hungary. Slovak literature is represented by a common curriculum (Old Slavic literature), and in the second year, in the section Romanticism in World Literature, Czech secondary school students are introduced to Slovak writers Ludovít Štúr (1815 – 1856), Janko Kráľ (1822 – 1876) and Samo Chalupka (1812 – 1883). All three are introduced with a photograph, a short biography, selected works, Štúr (*Náuka reči slovenskej*) and Chalupka with an excerpt from his work (*Spevy*). Romanticism in world literature is represented in this textbook for Czech high school students by seven specific countries (England, Germany, Poland, Russia, France, USA and Slovakia). In the textbook from Fraus publishing house in the second year, in the section *World Literature in the First Half of the 19th Century*, German, English, American, French and Russian Romanticism represent world Romanticism. An additional chapter entitled *Romanticism in Other Literatures* has been added, where selected representatives from Polish, Italian, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Slovak literature are briefly presented. From Hungarian literature, it is Sándor Petőfi (1823 – 1849), presented with a photograph and an excerpt from his work (*Mé básně* [My Poems]); from Slovak literature, it is Ludovít Štúr (1815 – 1856) with information that he laid the foundation of the written Slovak language, Jan Botto (1829 – 1881), Samo Chalupa (1812 – 1883), Andrej Sládkovič (1820 – 1872), Janko Kráľ (1822 – 1876), and Jozef Miloslav Hurban (1817 – 1889). All of these authors are mentioned along with a photograph, e.g. Janko Kráľ and an excerpt from *Orol vták* [The Eagle Bird]. Janko Kráľ is brought closer to Czech high school students by comparison with Karel Hynek Mácha, specifically by the similarity of figurative language. In the same textbook for the second year of secondary schools, in the section *World Literature in the Second Half of the 19th Century*, world realism is introduced through French, English, American and Russian literature. In the section *Realism in Other Literatures*, German, Polish, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and Slovak realism is represented (in contrast to Romanticism, German realism is thus represented in the section of other literatures, not among the main representatives of world literature as it was in Romanticism). Slovak realism is represented by its proximity to the Ruthenians, specifically the author Svetozár Vajanský (1847 – 1916) and his poetry collection *Tatry a more* [The Tatras and the Sea] (1880), from which there is also an excerpt, the novels *Pustokvet* [The Barren Blossom] (1893) *Koreň a výhonky* [The Root and the Shoots] (1895 – 1896) and the novella *Suchá ratolesť* [The Dry Branch] (1884). Other Slovak authors include Pavol Országh-Hviezdoslav (1849 – 1921)

with his compositions *Hájníková žena* [The Gamekeeper's Wife] (1884 – 1886) and the novels *Ežo Vlkolinský* (1890) and *Gábor Vlkolinský* (1897 – 1899). In Czech literature, he is compared to Jaroslav Vrchlický. Next, Martin Kukučín (1860 – 1928) is quoted in his prose novels *Rysavá jalovica* [The Speckled Heifer] (1885), *Regrúti* [The Recruits] (1891), *Dies irae* (1893) and *Dom v stráni* [The House on the Hillside] (1903 – 1904), followed by the names of Jozef Gregor Tajovský (1874 – 1940), Ladislav Nádaši-Jégé (1866 – 1940) and Božena Slančíková (1867 – 1951). There is a photograph of Pavol Országh-Hviezdoslav, and there is also a photograph of the highest mountain in Slovakia, Gerlach, and a photograph of the Slovak textbook *Dějiny slovenskej literatury*. The textbooks *Nová Literatura 1 to 4*, published by Didaktis, do not include Hungarian or Slovak romantic or realistic literature of the 19th century. In the third (previously in the fourth) volume of this set of textbooks, the Hungarian novelist and playwright István Örkény (1913 – 1979) appears in the section *European Literature 1945 – 1989*. He is introduced by a short medallion that focuses on his life and work, and his tragicomedy *Kočí hra* [The Cat's Game] (1963) is more fully introduced. Representatives of minor national literatures, such as Austrian and Greek literature, are also given space in this textbook. Hungarian high school students are taught about only one writer from Czech literature, Bohumil Hrabal (1914 – 1997), in the literature textbooks. Slovak literature is not represented in the Hungarian high school literature text.

The excerpts of the mutual representation of Czech, Hungarian and Slovak literature in high school textbooks showed asymmetries in the mutual reception, evaluated according to the degree of quantitative presence of the national literature of the neighbouring country. Slovak textbooks show the highest degree of openness towards the literature of neighbouring nations. Slovak secondary school students are most often introduced to Czech literature, and more rarely to Hungarian literature and culture. This openness has evident historical roots – Slovakia and the Czech Republic were one state for most of the 20th century, and the shared past is still present both in cultural memory and in the institutional framework of education. The Slovak curriculum maintains continuity with the Czech-Slovak cultural space, including specific curricular content, even after the federation's split. However, the opposite relationship is not reciprocally balanced in the excerpted textbooks. The Czech educational discourse is not uniform; the content of the curriculum is defined very generally by the Framework Educational Programmes⁵ i.e. the specific content of the literary curriculum is to a certain extent determined by the decision of the author's collective of a given textbook, i.e. it varies according to specific textbooks. The textbooks of *Nová Literatura* by Didaktis do not include Slovak literature in the framework of world literature; Hungarian literature is represented by one author from the second half of the 20th century. The textbook by Taktik maintains the tradition of previous textbooks in teaching 19th-century Slovak Romanticism but does not include any new material and places a strong emphasis on the national literary canon. This stance can be read not only as an expression of cultural identity but also as a form of symbolic emancipation from the common framework of the federation. The most open to Slovak and Hungarian literature are the textbooks from the Fraus publishing house, which lists representatives from Slovak Romanticism and Realism, and Hungarian Romanticism is also represented. The Czech system thus reflects a greater departure from the federal past and focuses more on the literature of the great nations. Compared to the Czech system, the Slovak system represents a much more inclusive curricular model – open primarily to Czech literature and, to a lesser extent, to Hungarian literature. This inclusiveness may result not only from historical and

⁵ “The development of literature in the context of contemporary thought, art and culture – the function of periodisation of literature, the development of the context of Czech and world literature; the thematic and expressive contribution of great authors; literary trends and movements; the development of literary types and genres with an emphasis on modern literature” (RVP G 2007, 16).

linguistic proximity, but also from the cultural strategy of a smaller nation that perceives the need to legitimise its identity in the context of culturally dominant neighbours. Although Czech and Slovak literature come from the same geographical and cultural space, and are both literatures of small nations, the relationship between them has never been balanced: Slovak textbooks show a greater openness to the culture of the neighbouring (major) partner, while the Czech approach remains primarily self-referential, although it differs in the particular textbook on offer.

The relationship between Slovak and Hungarian literature in secondary school textbooks is similarly unbalanced as the relationship between Slovak and Czech literature. While Slovakia is relatively open towards Czech literature, it is much more reserved towards Hungarian literature. Hungarian literature is only sporadically represented in Slovak textbooks – through a literary history shared by several authors or mentions of artists or architectural monuments. The Hungarian curriculum completely neglects Slovak literature. Czech literature is represented in Hungarian textbooks only rarely; the only figure is Bohumil Hrabal, perceived as a representative of modern Czech prose. The relationship between Czech and Hungarian literature is entirely absent in one textbook, while in the second and third textbooks it is created exclusively through a single personality. Both analysed relations – Czechoslovak and Slovak-Hungarian – show a structurally similar imbalance. Although the Slovak system is open towards Czech literature, it remains reticent towards Hungarian culture. The Hungarian approach is selective, focused on its own cultural ethos, with minimal concern for neighbouring nations. Czech students either do not encounter Hungarian and Slovak literature at all, or only exceptionally single authors. In the Czech Republic, there is no uniform definition of the basic literary curriculum; the inclusion of world and national literature is entirely within the competence of textbook authors. The resulting plurality of content in the Czech Republic contrasts with Hungary's centralised approach. The diversity of Czech textbooks in the presentation of world literature and the selection of national literatures from neighbouring Central European countries demonstrates the minimal state interference and the low level of curriculum management in this area. The opposite pole is represented by Hungary, where the content of uniform textbooks reflects strong political and curricular intentions of the state.

Thus, the process of school canonisation of world literature is not primarily based on the principle of cultural or geographical proximity, but rather on the degree of cultural prestige of a given national literature, a particular author and his work, as determined by the tradition of a given nation, which is decided by authorial (Czech Republic and Slovakia) or consensual (national educational institute) decision. The selection of foreign authors thus reflects the prestigious status of world literatures and their traditions, takes into account the presence or absence of a universally recognised personality in a given national literature, and only to a limited extent considers real intercultural relations or linguistic intelligibility. Linguistic permeability might influence the decision to include a neighbouring national literature or culture in the curriculum, but probably most so for the contemporary one. Slovak students understand Czech without much difficulty, which allows for a relatively broad reception of Czech literature – not only in textbooks but also in the form of cultural recommendations (e.g. films or other works of art). The opposite direction is more limited – Czech students come into contact with Slovak students sporadically. The language barrier between Czech and Hungarian is even more pronounced, as they are entirely different language systems without natural intelligibility. This asymmetry of language permeability is probably also reflected in the willingness to include neighbouring cultural elements and stimuli in the teaching. The Czech education system shows a clear preference for literature written in world languages (especially English, French or German), which can be interpreted as an aspiration to cultural belonging to the Western space. In consequence, the literatures of smaller neighbouring nations, whose linguistic differences create a communication barrier, remain marginalised. They are presented only by selected textbooks in an itemised way within the framework of the fact

sheet. Hungarian, as a Finno-Ugric language, forms a natural border to the Slavic language space, which is reflected in its limited permeability in Slovak and Czech school discourse. Only local specificities are exceptions: for example, southern Slovakia, where Hungarian is commonly spoken, may show a higher degree of linguistic and cultural openness towards Hungarian literature. The representation of the Czech writer Bohumil Hrabal in Hungarian textbooks can be understood as an individual recognition of his transnational importance and exceptional aesthetic value, but not as a systematic expression of interest in Czech literature. Slovak textbooks do not include Hrabal at all, which confirms that his presence in the Hungarian curriculum is not a manifestation of a more general reception of Czech literature, but rather an expression of cultural exception.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of selected secondary school literature textbooks in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia – while being aware of the limited representativeness of the analysed sample – revealed a basic and consistent finding: the teaching of world literature in these countries pays only minimal, in extreme cases, zero attention to the literatures of neighbouring nations. This finding is in line with the conclusions of a previous analysis of compulsory requirements for high school graduates in the Visegrad Group countries, which identified a common feature – the absence of minor national literatures and languages in the presentation of world literature. World literature is mainly represented in the school canons or literature lists of these countries by authors from the so-called major literatures and languages, with the selection of specific representatives varying slightly between countries. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia have different approaches to the conception, function and use of secondary school textbooks. In the Czech environment, there is a diverse range of textbooks, the content of which is limited mainly by the requirements of professional accuracy, scientific verifiability and up-to-datedness concerning the state of knowledge in the field. The Slovak system is similar in this respect, but the state declares its intention to introduce some regulation to guide the selection and content of textbooks while maintaining the plurality of the system. In Hungary, by contrast, uniform textbooks have been introduced, whose content clearly reflects the aims and interests of national education policy.

The comparison of the mutual representation of national literatures within the representation of the so-called world literature in selected secondary school textbooks of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia by considering the limits of the source corpus data shows a significant asymmetry in the reception of national literatures of the three neighbouring Central European countries. This is not only a matter of differences in the scope and selection of each other's curricula, but also of uneven levels of cultural interest, reflecting the historical, linguistic, and political contexts of these countries. Slovakia is closest to the position of a cultural mediator within the Central European area in the teaching of literature, Czech authors are systematically and prominently included, Hungarian literature is also present, but somewhat marginally. The openness to Czech culture has historical and practical roots in Slovakia (linguistic intelligibility, shared past). In the case of Hungary, the transfer is more difficult, both linguistically and institutionally. The Czech Republic includes Slovak literature only rarely, Hungarian literature either does not appear or only sporadically. This suggests a greater closedness of the Czech educational framework towards the literatures of neighbouring countries, probably also a consequence of greater cultural dominance in the former federation (in the case of Slovakia) and low linguistic competence towards smaller languages, especially Slovak. The curricular openness of the Czech Republic to Western literature reflects the aspiration of cultural belonging to the West and, at the same time, a cultural hierarchy in which the literatures of smaller neighbours are not considered as world modernities or civilisational affiliations. In this discourse, regional literatures do not have a strong place. The

post-communist curriculum in the Czech Republic is an expression of cultural transformation and a desire to subscribe to the Western civilisational space, which leads to the suppression of the Central European neighbourhood in favour of the global West. The Czech canon strongly reflects linguistic and cultural prestige (English, German, French), whereas the literatures of small neighbouring nations are perceived as less prestigious and regional, which is probably decisive for curriculum selection.

Slovak and Hungarian textbooks have a more pronounced national dimension compared to the Czech one, not only because of the size of the nation, which is relatively similar in all countries, but also because of the historical experience of threat. National interests or concerns probably enter into them more. National literature is the basis of cultural identity; world literature enters into it in a limited and cautious way. Smaller nations use the literary canon as a means of cultural self-defense, leading to a protectionist curriculum focused on their own culture. Countries with a strong need for self-affirmation choose an exclusive approach to author selection. The Czech education system is the most oriented of the three countries towards the world literature, especially the literatures of major cultural and linguistic entities. Yet, it is also the least open to the literatures of its closest neighbours, Slovak and Hungarian literature, which are in principle completely excluded from the curriculum. Slovakia and Hungary, on the other hand, show a more defensive approach – their literary curricula place more emphasis on national literature as a key element of cultural identity. In the case of Slovakia, the partial openness towards Czech literature can be explained by the historical coexistence of the two nations in a common state, as well as linguistic intelligibility. In the case of Hungary, the inclusion of foreign (especially non-Slavic) literature is exceptional and is mostly linked to canonised figures of European literary modernism. Hungary includes Czech literature, mentioning only a single writer (Bohumil Hrabal). Slovak literature is absent from the Hungarian curriculum, despite a significant Slovak minority living in Hungary.

The differences and divergences are not random; the motives may range from language barriers, cultural hierarchies and stereotypes to political priorities and the degree of institutionalised interest in the neighbouring state(s). It is symptomatic that it is Slovakia – the country with the smallest population – that shows the greatest cultural openness within the Central European region, while the larger states take a more selective or exclusive approach. From a pedagogical point of view, this is an important implication: the current approach to teaching literature may (consciously or unconsciously) reinforce cultural closedness and fix national literature as an isolated value. In the context of Central European plurality and historical ties, however, it would be desirable to broaden this perspective – not only in the spirit of “cultural exchange”, but as a means to a deeper understanding of the region, its history and present. School teaching of (national and world) literature is not only a tool of education, but also a mechanism of cultural selection. A comparison of the Czech, Hungarian and Slovak approaches to teaching world literature through the lens of the national literatures of neighbouring nations in secondary schools shows that cultural openness does not necessarily mean intercultural sensitivity. On the contrary, it can lead to overlooking the closest neighbours if their literature does not meet the requirement of global prestige, or if it is not commonly available in the language or it does not meet current political goals. However, world literature, including the literatures of different nations and cultures, has not only aesthetic and cultural value, but also an important political and educational dimension. Within national education systems, it is often simplified and reshaped according to particular ideological, historical and cultural needs. The representation of world literature in literature textbooks is therefore not only a matter of aesthetic taste or literary trends, but also a reflection of broader national interests and cultural policies. In this context, Slovakia appears as a cultural bridge in the Central European region precisely because it combines linguistic proximity with historical experience and a willingness to accept the literature of its neighbours as part of its own cultural space, whether

this is a conscious decision or is forced to do so by the combination of a number of different circumstances or limits. This model could also serve as an inspiration for a broader conception of cultural education in the post-communist countries of Central Europe.

SUMMARY

The analysis of selected secondary school literature textbooks in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia shows that the teaching of world literature pays minimal or, in some cases, no attention to the literatures of neighbouring nations. This confirms earlier findings from the Visegrad Group, which highlighted the absence of minor national literatures and languages in school presentations of world literature. Instead, curricula focus mainly on authors from major literatures, with only minor differences among countries. The selection of literary works is influenced by cultural, political, and practical factors, including national prestige, textbook authors' decisions, and educational policy. In the Czech Republic, a wide range of textbooks is used, with content mainly guided by professional accuracy, scientific reliability, and up-to-date knowledge. The Slovak system is similar, although the state plans to introduce some regulation to influence textbook selection and content while preserving plurality. In contrast, Hungary has introduced uniform textbooks whose content clearly reflects the goals of national education policy.

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