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Finnish Literary Studies in the Czech Republic

Charles University, Prague and Masaryk University, Brno

I. Charles University, Prague

I. Introduction

At the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague, the Finnish literature has been taught within the department of Finnish philology, which has enjoyed a long tradition here. Vladimír Skalička (1909–1991), Professor of General Linguistics and a member of the influential Prague School of linguistics responsible for developing the system of morphological typology, was also involved in the study and research of Finno-Ugric languages. He began teaching Finnish courses as early as the 1930s, although the MA Programme in Finnish philology was only initiated in the late 1960s. Skalička was also an important translator: he translated many canonical Finnish authors including A. Kivi, M. Waltari, F. E. Sillanpää or M. Talvio (as well as some less known writers such as A. Järventaus, A. Konttinen and E. Manninen), and used literary texts as material for his language classes. His scholarly publications were, however, in the field of linguistics. Since Skalička joined general linguistics with Finnish (and Hungarian) studies, for many years the Department of Finnish Studies belonged to the Institute of Linguistics and Finno-Ugric Studies. In January 2015, it became a part of the Institute of Germanic Studies, which included, from the very outset, the Department of Scandinavian Studies.

During the last 45 years, thanks mainly to Hilikka Lindroos, a long-time Finnish lecturer at Charles University, a substantial number of graduates from the Finnish department have become translators, some of them editors and several of them literary scholars. During this period, and in particular since the 1990s, literature as a part of Finnish Studies Programme has been taught within a solid theoretico-methodological framework, not at the service of language teaching (which, for its part, has always been connected to a deeper study of linguistics), but on a par with it: teachers of Finnish language and literature tend to cooperate within various projects. Though the main focus has always been on literature written in Finnish, Finnish literature at Charles University has been understood within a multicultural, transnational and multilingual framework: the literature of Finland encompasses not only literary production written in Finnish but all literature produced in the territory of Finland.

2. Finnish Literature as an Integral Part of Finnish Philology

From the very beginning, the teaching of Finnish literature was an important part of the five-year Master's Programme. For a long time, Finnish philology was taught as a major subject, in combination with one other philological subject (Russian, later English or German). Together with Finnish literature, students had to take up an obligatory course called Introduction to Literary Studies, taught by literary scholars from various departments.

The first (part-time) teacher of Finnish literature was Jan Petr Velkoborský (1934–2012), so far the most prolific and the most versatile Czech translator of Finnish literature. Like Skalička, Velkoborský translated many Finnish canonical writers (mainly prose, but also poetry and drama), and he was awarded the State Award for Foreign Translators (the Finnish Government Prize for the Translation of Finnish Literature) in 1983. Velkoborský's view of Finnish literature was strongly influenced by Kai Laitinen's *History of Finland's Literature* (*Suomen kirjallisuuden historia*), which he translated into Czech, though the translation has never been published. Although he specialised in translating Finnish-language authors, Velkoborský introduced through his lectures Laitinen's concept of the bilingual literature of Finland, i.e. literature both in Finnish and in Swedish. Velkoborský worked as an editor at the Prague publishing house Albatros, specialising in children's literature, and within the Finnish-literature curriculum he held courses in Finnish children's literature and literature for young adults. Velkoborský also published many translator's forewords and postscripts, newspaper articles dealing with Finnish literature, and entries in the *Dictionary of Nordic Writers* (published under various titles in 1967, 1998 and 2004; see Hartlová 1998; 2004).

After the major political changes in 1989, the number of students of Finnish Philology at Charles University increased (Finnish philology was always popular, and has remained so), and this in turn created the need for more teachers, especially in the field of literature. In the first half of the 1990s, Pavla Kmočová and Viola Parente-Čapková held literary seminars as part-time teachers. In 1994, Parente-Čapková became the first full-time teacher of Finnish literature at Charles University. In 2001 she moved to the University of Turku, where she has held various positions ever since. She has cooperated closely with the department (holding courses, supervising theses, acting as a consultant and opponent for BA and MA theses). In 2008, she became the first Docent/Associate Professor of Finnish literature in the Czech Republic; her Habilitation Thesis (Parente-Čapková 2007) was based on her history of Finnish literature, the first of its kind originally written in Czech and published as part of *Modern Scandinavian Literatures 1870-2000* (Humpál, Kadečková, Parente-Čapková 2006; 2013/2015). Since Parente-Čapková left Prague, Finnish literature has been taught by Jan Dlask, a specialist of Finland-Swedish literature, who became the first doctoral student to complete his degree in Finnish literature at Charles University. After having taught Finnish literature as a part-time teacher for six years, Dlask became a full-time literature teacher at the department in 2008.

After the implementation of the Bologna process, the structure of university studies changed. What remained unchanged was the vivid interest in Finnish studies, difficult to explain by any single factor. The number of students interested in enrolling has always been far higher than the number of those who could be accepted *vis à vis* the technical possibilities of the department. What also remained unchanged was the system within which students take up two major subjects (e.g. Finnish and English, Finnish and Ethnology, etc.), which are of equal importance and both curricula are of equal volume; only in the case of BA and MA theses must students decide in which of the two subjects to concentrate (that subject is then referred to as the 'diploma subject'). The previous five-year curriculum was nevertheless transformed into a three-year Bachelor's Degree Programme (Finnish Studies) followed by a two-year Master's Degree Programme (Finnish Philology). This, of course, led to changes in the structure of the Finnish literature curricula. Though the main part of the curriculum is dedicated to Finnish-language literature, students are also offered a course in Finland-Swedish literature, thanks to Jan Dlask's specialisation. Sámi literature has been taught within courses held by visiting teachers; in spring 2016 there was a course in Sámi studies (including literature), taught by experts from the University of Tromsø. The course took place at the Department of Scandinavian Studies and was meant for all students of Nordic languages and literatures. Such cooperation is natural since the Department of Finnish Studies is, together with the Department of Scandinavian Studies, a part of the Institute of Germanic Studies. Being in the same department with other Nordic languages has promoted collaboration in teaching the literature of Finland and that of the other Nordic countries: Jan Dlask regularly gives lectures on Finland-Swedish literature for students of Scandinavian Studies. Thus Finland-Swedish literature has been presented to students both as literature in Swedish, taught by teacher(s) from the Department of Scandinavian Studies, and as a part of the literature of Finland, taught by an expert in Finland's literature.

Most students of Finnish Studies at Charles University are native speakers of Czech (some of Slovak), and they usually only start to learn Finnish during their university studies. Therefore, it is not possible for them to read Finnish literature in the original from the very beginning of their studies. During their first two years, students read literary texts mostly in Czech (or Slovak) translations; texts in Finnish are limited to poems or short stories. As students acquire a better command of Finnish, the volume of literary courses and texts read in the original grows.

3. Structure of the Literature Curriculum

At present, the teaching of Finnish literature within the Department of Finnish Studies at Charles University can be divided into several levels. In the first year of their studies, BA students attend an Introductory Course in Literature, in which they become acquainted with the basics of literary studies, especially literary theory; they are also encouraged to test and

apply their skills in analysing and interpreting literature on four Finnish prose texts which they read in Czech translation during the course. On the second level (which consists of five successive courses taught in four terms during the second and the third year of the BA Programme), the history of Finnish literature is taught within its socio-cultural context. The first of these courses is dedicated to the Finnish oral tradition, mainly the epic folk poetry, and the origins of Finnish letters until the beginning of the 19th century. The second course deals with 19th-century Finnish literature. During the third year of the BA Programme, literary courses focus on the 20th century. One of the courses is taught in a seminar form. In order to obtain a BA degree, students have to undergo a final exam during which they have to demonstrate their knowledge of the history of Finland's literature, and, in case they have chosen to do so, to write a BA Thesis of at least forty pages on a subject relating to Finnish language or literature.

Finnish literature is also an important part of the two-year Master's Degree Programme in Finnish Philology. The curriculum aims at deepening students' general knowledge of literary history and theory. The Finnish literature MA courses deal with selected periods in literary history, schools of literary theory, and the sociology of literature. In addition, one course is dedicated to *The Kalevala* (in cooperation with Prof. Jan Čermák, an expert in Medieval English and epic literature and a Finnish graduate) and one to contemporary Finnish literature. During the Literary Translation Seminar, students work on translations of Finnish literary texts into Czech. Students complete their Master's Degree Programme in Finnish Philology by taking a final exam, and, again, if they choose to do so, by writing an MA Thesis in a subject relating to Finnish language or literature.

The topics of BA and MA theses are particularly varied and not necessarily strictly confined to the sphere of literary studies; indeed, they can be interdisciplinary, e.g. by combining Finnish Studies/Finnish Philology with Translation Studies. Some theses deal with sociology of culture or concentrate on the cultural exchange between Finland and the Czech Lands (Finnish literature translated and published in Czech, Czech literature published in Finnish, Finnish drama in the Czech Lands). A considerable number of theses deal with the works of one chosen Finnish author (e.g. J. Aho, O. Paavolainen, A. Kivi), with a certain aspect of an author's work (e.g. religion and sexuality in the work of T. K. Mukka; social issues in the works of C. Kihlman; E. Lönnrot's role in the creation of *The Kalevala*; the image of Finland in the work of T. Jansson; M. Waltari's literary development from *Tulenkantajat* to *Sinuhe the Egyptian*) or analyse a certain topic in the work of two or more authors from a comparative perspective (e.g. the concept of ecstasy in the work of E. Södergran and K. Vala; the depiction of war in the work of P. Haanpää and V. Linna). Comparative works often focus on gender aspects (e.g. the figure of Don Juan in Finnish literature). Various topics dealing with Finnish folk poetry (poems associated with the cult of the bear, spells) have always been popular among students, as has the Sámi tradition

and the images of Lapland in Finland's literature. Literature for children and young adults has also been tackled (in a thesis on Finnish fairy-tales or another on Finnish literature for girls). One can also find broader topics and mapping of literary genres (Sámi poetry, modern Finnish drama, the genres of diary and letter in Finnish literature), often dealing with modern or contemporary literature and/or with popular culture (Finnish underground, Finnish Weird) and analyses of literary motifs (the swan motif in Finnish literature). Some works have an 'interliterary' comparative character, such as one dealing with the figure of Kullervo as a source of inspiration for J. R. R. Tolkien.

Until 2006 it was possible to study Finnish literature at PhD level too. The re-introducing of this possibility is currently under discussion.

As indicated above, at the Department of Finnish Studies at Charles University literary texts have always played an important role in the teaching both of Finnish literature and language. Since 2000 BA students have begun their acquaintance with the Finnish language through a textbook written by Hilkkka Lindroos (2002) called *Finnish (Not Only) for the Self-Learners*. The textbook comprises many poems, short stories and even some essays. In this way, from the very beginning, students also become familiar with literary texts in Finnish from the linguistic point of view. This teaching strategy was tested for a couple of decades before the publishing of the textbook and proved to be very successful.

In the 1990s the Department established a wide network of relations with literary scholars from Finland, who have given lectures and taught courses facilitated through the Erasmus or CIMO programmes. Sometimes, they would combine lecturing in Prague with teaching in Brno and/or Bratislava. Thanks to the high level of the students' language proficiency, literature courses by visiting teachers from Finland can be held in Finnish, using material in the original language.

4. Academic Research

The teachers at the department participate in larger scholarly projects and produce research within their own specialisations. Together with the department of Scandinavian Studies, they have worked on several larger projects such as *Dictionary of Nordic Writers* (Hartlová et al., 1998; 2004) and the aforementioned *Modern Scandinavian Literatures 1870-2000*. One of the topics on which they cooperate, and on which they have published several studies and articles, is the reception of Finnish literature published in Czech. As editors, they have cooperated on publishing the annotated version of *The Kalevala*, prepared and edited by the aforementioned Jan Čermák (*Elias Lönnrot and Josef Holeček's Kalevala in Modern Critical Perspective*; Čermák 2014). This edition also inspired two conferences on *The Kalevala* and the Finnish oral tradition held at Charles University in 2013 and 2015.

As a specialist in Finland-Swedish literature, Jan Dlask's PhD thesis dealt with the Tikkanen–Kihlman debate in the mid-1970s (*The Tikkanen–Kihlman Debate. Prelude. Works - Reception - Polemics*; cf. Dlask 2012). He

is currently working on a project examining the sociologically oriented history of Finland-Swedish literature (cf. Dlask 2012), which is supported by a grant from the Czech Science Foundation. The aim of the project is to write a history of Finland-Swedish literature in Czech, beginning in 1900, using the perspective of Bourdieusian methodology (e.g. the notion of the literary field, etc.).

Apart from literary history and the theory of literary history (the Habilitation Thesis at Charles University mentioned above), Viola Parente-Čapková's research interests have focused mainly on *fin-de-siècle* Finnish literature in a comparative perspective, L. Onerva and other decadent women authors (cf. esp. her PhD Theses at the University of Turku, Parente-Čapková 2014), gender studies, relationships between oral and written tradition, studies of (trans)nationalism and otherness. In 2013–2016, she worked in a HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) funded transnational literary history project *Travelling Texts 1790-1914. Transnational Reception of Women's Writing at the Fringes of Europe (Finland, The Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain)*, which belonged also to the field of digital humanities.

Michal Švec, who graduated with honours with a MA Thesis on the motif of the swan in Finnish poetry (cf. Švec 2012), has taught a literary course at BA level. He is currently enrolled in the PhD Programme in Comparative Literature, which is, at present, one of the options offered to post-graduate students interested in doctoral studies in Finnish literature.

The research output of the literature teachers has been published on various forums and in various languages – in academic journals in the Czech Republic, Finland and the Nordic countries and elsewhere – in Czech, English, Finnish, Swedish and other languages, such as German or Italian. Authors often face the familiar dilemma of which language to publish their research in. Clearly, the pressure to publish in English, 'the main language of international scholarly communication', is growing all the time, but the task of researchers is also to communicate with both the academic and broader public in the country of her or his *alma mater* and to strengthen scholarly publishing in the local language (in this case, Czech). However, since the broadest academic audience for the study of Finnish literature is, clearly, in Finland, publications in Finnish and Swedish are of major importance.

The research networks of Jan Dlask and Viola Parente-Čapková comprise, naturally, networks within the Nordic countries as well as various other European countries including the Czech Republic, and countries outside Europe. Cooperation within Charles University has also been continuous and intense. In addition to colleagues from the Department of Scandinavian Studies and the Department of Anglophone Languages and Literatures, both researchers have collaborated, in terms of lecture series, publications and research projects, with colleagues from the Institute of Czech and Comparative Literature, the Institute of Translation Studies and many others.

Apart from their scholarly work, teachers of Finnish literature and language (Finnish language and linguistics is the specialist field of Lenka Fárová) disseminate knowledge of Finnish literature in various ways: they write reviews of works of Finland's literature translated into Czech, interview Finnish authors visiting the Czech Republic, prepare radio programmes on Finnish literature, take part in the organisation of various cultural events, such as literary evenings, festivals and round tables at book fairs. During the last decade, many of these events have taken place in collaboration with the Scandinavian House, a voluntary-based non-profit organisation established in 2005 which aims at presenting the culture and traditions of the Nordic countries in the Czech Republic. Michal Švec is the current Chairperson of the Scandinavian House.

5. Translating as an important output

Translation is not only a part of the curriculum in the form of language courses or translation seminars; it connects the department with the larger literary field in the Czech Republic. All teachers and scholars of the department also have experience with translating Finnish literary and scholarly texts (from Johanna Sinisalo's *Not Before Sundown* to *History of Finland* by Eino Jutikkala and Kauko Pirinen) and anthologies of poetry (*My Face in Language. Anthology of Contemporary Finnish Poetry*; Parente-Čapková 1998). Their example opens the door for students; nowadays, almost all translators of literary works from Finnish into Czech are graduates from the department.

The Literary Translation Seminar connects the teaching of Finnish language and literature: the seminar is conceived as a workshop in which Finnish literary texts are analysed and interpreted both from a linguistic and literary point of view, taking into consideration the cultural context of the texts. Thorough analysis is the first step when working with literary texts. The next phase is creating the Czech version, discussing it in the group and polishing the translation.

The same strategy has been implemented in the case of one of the major literary activities of the department, i.e. three projects of anthologies of short stories, translated by MA students. Anthologies of literary texts from the Nordic literatures (*Yearbook of Nordic Literatures*, *Almanach severských literatur*, see Čapková et al. 1997; Fárová et al. 2000) were joint projects with the Department of Scandinavian Studies. They contained short texts translated by students and edited by their teachers, both linguists and literary scholars, and with the help of the foreign lecturers, who assisted the students mainly during the first phase of the project. The first *Yearbook* was a pilot project, consisting of short stories, poems and aphorisms translated from Danish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish and Sámi, while the second volume had a sharper focus: it presented Nordic women's writing in the form of short stories. The last translation project – an anthology of seven Finnish fantastic short stories (with the title *Forest Foxes and Other Disturbing Stories*, *Lesní lišky a další*

znepokojivé příběhy, see Fárová et al. 2016) – was published in spring 2016 by the publishing house Pistorius & Olšanská in their Scholares Series. The format remained the same: short stories by L. Krohn, J. Sinisalo, M. Verronen, J. Vainonen, T. Raevaara, P. I. Jääskeläinen and A. Leinonen were translated by MA students of Finnish Philology within the Translation Seminar. Again, linguistic assistance was initially provided by the Finnish lecturer Timo Laine, while the translation proper took place under the guidance of three teachers (Jan Dlask, Lenka Fárová, Viola Parente-Čapková) who also edited the publication and wrote an Afterword on Finnish fantasy and sci-fi literature. In May 2016, the book was presented at the Prague book fair (Book World Prague), where Nordic countries were the guest of honour.

II. Masaryk University, Brno

MICHAL KOVÁŘ

I. History and background

The history of Finnish literature at Masaryk University in Brno goes back to the 1960s, when Richard Pražák (1931–2010), the late professor of Hungarology, studied in Finland (1963–64). Even though his area of interest was mainly the history of cultural contacts in Central Europe and Hungarian literature, he occasionally held courses on Finnish, containing a brief introduction to the history of Finnish literature. As is the case with other Czech scholars, including the historian Miroslav Hroch and the literary scholar Vladimír Macura, we can assume that his interest in the period of the Enlightenment and the era of the National Awakening in Central and Northern Europe was partly motivated by the political role of national epics, namely of the Czech so-called *Manuscripts*, the Finnish *Kalevala* and the Estonian *Kalevipoeg*. Pražák wrote some articles about the history of Finnish–Czech relations, and he oversaw his student Pavel Mrkvánek's work on the Czech reception of *The Kalevala*, which led to Mrkvánek's thesis *The Czech Reception of Finnish Literature with Special Attention to The Kalevala: A Contribution to Czech-Finnish Cultural Contacts till 1914* (Mrkvánek 1969) with its central contrastive part focused on Czech and German translations of *The Kalevala*.

In 2002, a new field of study was founded at Masaryk University: Baltic Studies, with two branches, Lithuanian and Finnish. Given that the new field of study is based in Indo-European comparative linguistics, enriched with lingual areal convergences examined primarily from their social and cultural circumstances, the extent of Finnish literature teaching has been relatively small compared to that of e.g. the political history of Finland. Besides, students are expected to acquaint themselves with the history of Swedish, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian literatures too. A one-semester course in the history of Finland's literature was

introduced in 2004 (in 2003, the first Finnish courses were opened as a new field of study), and since then it has been running every second year. The course, initially held by Markéta Hejkalová, daughter of Richard Pražák and one of the major Czech translators and publishers of Finnish literature, aims to explain the history of Finnish literature in terms of literary representations of the political and social changes in Finland. This course has been accompanied by a course comprising the individual reading of Finnish fiction in translation.

2. Current situation

Since 2010, both courses have been held by Michal Kovář, an alumnus of Prague Finnish Philology. His main areas of interest are Sámi literature and Finnish literature outside Finland. He is also a translator, having translated works by Bengt Pohjanen and Nils-Aslak Valkeapää as well as Sámi oral literature (tales and proverbs) to name but a few. Kovář enriched the basic orientation of the course with trans-border and transethnic views, using a broader referential frame of Scandinavian literature, Sámi literature (not limited to Finland's Sámi authors), and Finnish or "Finnish" literature abroad (e.g. that written in Kven, Meänkieli, Carelian). Finland-Swedish literature has occasionally been presented by Jan Dlask from Charles University, Prague. The relevant perspective of language standardisation with the help of fiction, along with a list of normative translations (translations of works belonging to the world literary canon) and mentions of literary life and basic institutions has also been used in the case of Finnish in Kovář's course Fenno-Ugric languages in historical and cultural context.

A one-semester course in contemporary Finnish and Estonian literature has been created for the Master's Degree students of the Baltic Studies programme. The objective of the course is the examination of two kindred traditions planted in different political and cultural situations and searching for analogies (e.g. North Finnish and South Estonian literary peripheries). Two lecturers from Estonia (Linda Püssa and Anni Tammemägi) have taken part in the course too.

The final opportunity for MA students to become acquainted with Finnish literary life in Brno has been a course in textual interpretation and a translation course focusing on Finnish fiction (held by Markéta Hejkalová). In the first case, the content of the course has been determined by the main interests of Michal Kovář (ancient literature, oral literature) and by the topics of students' theses, which have mostly dealt with literary imagology. However, there have been many sophisticated MA theses on subjects including the development of particular motives or particular subgenres in Finnish literatures. The translation course has served not only as an intense contact with foreign textuality, but has also led to tangible results as collective publications. Some of the alumni have continued translating. Notable among them is Alžběta Štollová, who is nowadays a renowned specialist in Finnish dramatic art and its translator into Czech.

III. Conclusion

Though the departments in Prague and Brno have different profiles, the literature teachers and researchers from both departments share an intense interest in literary history, the theory of literary history as well as approaching literary history from the point of view of transnationalism, comparative and interliterary perspectives, postcolonial studies and various conceptualisations of otherness. At present, they are planning a history of Finland's literature written as a joint project and focusing on these themes.

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