

## The Travelling of Slavs and Through the Slavic Worlds

The formula of “travels in the Slavic region” refers to Larry Wolff’s book *Inventing Eastern Europe*, in which the researcher traces how travels in the Slavic region in the eighteenth century gave rise to a new research field and Slavic studies in general. Indeed, it quickly became apparent that the communities in question had to intervene in such a Foucauldian power-knowledge structure and advance a new understanding of what it meant to travel in the Slavic region, and thus develop alternative Slavic studies.

Today, Slavic studies develops under pressure from studies conducted in English. Its institutional fate depends on many variable factors, and at the same time there are new development opportunities for Slavic studies and new reasons for its popularity around the world. The discipline possesses a highly developed methodological framework, its own theoretical traditions, and engages in fascinating dialogues with historical and contemporary trends in the humanities. In recent times it has been clearly shifting towards cultural studies, blurring the border between philological and cultural reflection, and opening up widely to a comparative and supranational perspective. Indeed, Slavic studies is always in transit, in motion, always growing, and always responding to the changes in the contemporary world, academic institutions, and methodological schools. It is also looking to find its place within new international institutions gathering researchers of various approaches.

This volume has been conceived to create a unique platform and meeting place for Slavic scholars from many areas: thus, the title “travelling” is to be understood both in a direct and a metaphorical way.

The main part of the articles focuses on key issues related to travels in the Slavic region within two separate thematic approaches. The first one refers to the artistic representations of actual travels in the Slavic region, as well as the journeys of Slavs around the world, including but not limited to, travel studies, geopoetics, area studies and ecocriticism. Tomasz Ewertowski, a Slavist working in China, uses his dual cultural perspective to present the narratives about cruises between Europe and Asia in the first two decades after the opening of the Suez Canal (1869–1890). The author reads the accounts of Polish, Serbian and Russian authors (including Julian Fałat, Vlado Ivelić, Bronisław Piłsudski or Ivan Zarubin), extracting from the multitude of threads and shots common thematic lines, which include: a specific, evolving image of Asia, a new experience of time while overcoming the space, as well as reflections on mobility as a new cultural paradigm. Peng Yuchao’s article on the prose of Milan Jovanović also applies to the perception of Asia, and more precisely: of China. The author of the article shows how the confrontation with the Other influences the perception of one’s own identity and examines the characteristic tension between the heterogeneous European perspective and the utopian communal Asian perspective present in the Serbian writer’s narrative. Lana Molvarec studies a similar confrontation and its consequences in her text on the image of India in Croatian prose in the 20th and 21st centuries. A less distant journey is taken by the main heroes of the article by Krystyna Pieniążek-Marković who deals with the 19th-century account of the Croatian author, Adolf Veber Tkalčević, of a trip to the local “Lake District,” Plitvice. In the text, which also encodes traveling the road in its formal layer, the researcher shows the “world-formative” role of the discussed prose, introducing the Plitvice Lakes into the local culture. Mutual Slavic contacts—in this case Ukrainian–Serbian ones—and their literary reflections are shown in Natalija Bilik’s analysis. Sergey Kovalev scrutinizes the image of three cities: Polotsk, Vilnius and Moscow in the output of the contemporary Belarusian poet Oleg Minkin, using in his research the tools of geopoetics, biographical, topological and cultural turn, reflecting on the

therapeutic and nostalgic dimension of space. The opposite perspective—the perception of the Slavic region by recipients from different cultural circles—is presented in an article by Sanja Lazarević Radak which deals with the topic of the British and American, specifically mythologized perception of Serbia.

The second thematic circle focuses on literary transactions, like transfers of motifs or words, between Slavic cultures and their non-/Slavic neighbors, including linguistic, literary and cultural affinities and points of contact. Such issues are dealt with in a joint study by Alice Jedličková and Matěj Kos, presenting the results of comparative analyses of Czech and Polish transmediation of older texts of culture (fairy tales, legends) and their canonical literary renditions, most often introduced into the field of popular culture (cinema, comics, computer game), which is related to specific conditions. Maciej Junkiert, describing the Enlightenment (de Ségur) and romantic (Mickiewicz) representations of the Slavic region, sees semantic scaffolding, characteristic of each of these epochs and influencing the perception of the region. In such an approach, Wolff's "inventing" of this part of Europe is clearly dependent on perceptual convictions and fore-judgments related to the specificity of time and cultural formation. In this group of articles, the reader gets an insight into new projects and research concepts in the field of Slavic studies, as well as in the interactions between Slavic studies and contemporary theoretical schools, in which there are often surprising repetitions: in recent times, for example, a structural-semiotic approach has been gaining importance. The article by Ivo Pospíšil in this section is an attempt to answer the question of whether the direction of Slavic studies is rather conservative, or it is an innovative redefinition of existing approaches. Tvrtko Vuković's text, introducing a Croatian perspective, is devoted to a similar issue and concerns the methodological self-reflection of the discipline, its transformation and inspirations from other fields. The starting points for considerations are the 1980s debates revolving around Paul de Man's *Return to Philology*. The comments about the opening up of the discipline, its blurred boundaries and hybridity, and the social tasks undertaken by the Slavic studies bear the mark of Vatroslav Jagić, a Croatian Slavic scientist of world renown, with whom Vuković enters into a dialogue.

The most hands-on and up-to-date in the context of the Russian attack on Ukraine and the exodus of many Ukrainian women with their children to neighboring countries, is the text by Wojciech Hofmański and Karolina Pospiszil-Hofmańska on glottodidactic issues. The authors discuss the singular situation of teaching Polish to a Slavic student when the phenomenon of intercomprehension and interference occurs. In this article, theoretical considerations are intertwined with practical guidance that can be used by both glottodidactics and linguistic researchers.

The most unconventional journey—a journey in time—is undertaken by Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa in her wide review of the novel by Georgi Gospodinow *Времеубежище* (*Time Shelter*) from 2020. The researcher describes, in the context of the Bulgarian writer's book, a series of current problems like the sense of crisis, the social response to the pandemic, retrotopic tendencies, the specter of a collapse of civilization. It is a journey not only in time and not only across the Slavic region, but also along the most important challenges of the present day.

This volume also includes articles and essays not directly related to the main theme, for example, linguistic reviews by Agnieszka Kołodziej and Natalia Długosz, a comparative study by Agata Firlej, which are various versions of contemporary Slavic research.

Central, Eastern and Southern Europe is a place where historical and identity discourse plays a very important role. Any discussion about the culture of this area requires responsibility and insight, and is a challenge in which an immediate, real and practical reflection upon social life is inscribed—quite a rare thing in the field of the humanities. Regardless of whether literally, metaphorically, artistically or scientifically—one does not travel through the Slavic region with impunity ...

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