



INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century saw an unprecedented upsurge of literary theorizing. It was one of the results of the change of paradigm in the perception of literature and its place in academic (or public) space – from the nineteenth century’s considering literature as just one part of a more general philological context to its establishment as an independent academic discipline. The ways of reading, studying and teaching literature shifted as well. Suddenly, it was realised that the ethical, biographical or generally cultural reading and teaching was not enough. There emerged a need to study and teach literature “scientifically”. The entire twentieth century could thus be seen as an exploration of various ways of making the literary process (i.e. the interaction between the writer, text, reader – their conceptualisation itself being a result of the mentioned paradigmatic shift) formalised and objectivised, and thus “subjected” to scientific methodologies.

Alongside the rise of literary theories, the teaching of literature has not been given the amount of attention it deserves, although it has always been an important and indispensable part of new approaches to the literary process. One of the approaches in which the teaching was at least mentioned was, for example, American New Criticism and their famous prefatory “Letter to the Teacher” (“...if poetry is worth teaching at all it is worth teaching as poetry”). Another interesting remark about teaching and its consequences for literature is Paul de Man’s “[T]he only teaching worthy of its name is scholarly, not personal.” One would find other opinions concerning the teaching of literature in the light of modern critical approaches, either based on elaborate theories or just didactic instructions. However, in general, one can say that the issue has not been satisfactorily explored. And it should be. Especially higher education experience with teaching in literary courses tells us that there is something wrong with discussing and understanding literature. There have been articles pointing to the decreasing interest of students in mechanically ideological interpretations, in the unbelievable “theoretical” tricky



plays with language of literary works, as well as, in general, and consequently, in reading as such.

Drawing on the above-mentioned trends, the aim of this publication is to reflect on the state of literary education in the twenty-first century, which seems to differ from the preceding years by one important aspect – the ever-growing influence of new technologies. Literature could not be, and was not, left out of this. One of the consequences is the “penetration” of various other media into what was the realm of the pure word in the past. We thus increasingly speak about multimedia, intermediality, multimodality, digitalisation, hypertextuality, etc. Such are some of the new modes of approach to current literary texts. Along with that, there is a new, different search for meaning, which is now not only one, or objective, but multidimensional, a result of decoding, rather than of an analysis. Text is no longer a product of individual authors, but a function of inhuman/posthuman compositional forces.

However, the application of new technologies in literature education could also mean a “danger” for literature, especially for the traditional understanding of what literature is. If, traditionally, literature was understood as a verbal art, using words as its medium of, Aristotelian, “imitation”, in recent times one can notice a growing intensity of “talk” about the “post-word” era in literary studies. This raises a natural question: Would the “post-word” literature be literature at all? The abandonment of words and the shift to the visual is indeed a general sign of the times, and it may help attract more interest from young people brought up upon the images of popular culture, but will it substitute for more traditional purposes of literary education, the ones which are, I dare say, still needed to be cultivated, despite the label of traditionalism, and, perhaps, obsolescence, attached to them nowadays?

As there is then a great over exaggeration in saying that the traditional book-based culture is gone, and we should embrace a hyperlinked reality of hashtags and meanings created through the play of Derridean “non-teleological” signifiers, there is also danger in saying that literature is “in danger”. Words are not bound only to the paper, however nice it smells to the “antiquarians”, but can emerge in e-readers as well. And they do not have to be substituted by images or sounds, which may never be able to penetrate to such depths of reflective levels that words can. Thus, it may not be the question of either tradition or innovation, but rather



of their coexistence. If we lose touch with the traditional word, we will lose the sense of value, if, on the contrary, we abandon the word's potential for innovative and playful imagination, we strip it of its multidimensionality.

The articles collected in this book reflect, in a way, the contradictions of the times. In Silvia Pokrivčáková's treatment of literary education one can see the attempt to move from the traditional concentration on the reading and discussing literary works in class, which is not interesting to contemporary students bred on digital media and the variability of their use, to a more individualised work with literary texts via online tools, media devices. Such approach, the author claims, not only attracts the students' interest in literature, but enhances their cognitive skills as well. In the first of her articles written in Slovak, Eva Vitézová deals exactly with the problem of the present – loss of interest in reading, the inability to understand the read texts. Although in the analysis of one of her books she mentions the great role of illustrations for children readers as well as the role of new reality, such as facebook, she stays firmly on the ground of a more traditional work with literary texts. The same can be said about her second article, which is the analysis of the genre of the legend, including its inter-generic variations, and its application in the education towards national and human values. Gabriela Magálová's article is a discussion of what she calls "meditative tale" in comparison with more traditional tales. She highlights the tale's ability to foreground universal ethical values for children. Last but not least, the article of Jana Javorčíková addresses the didactic aspects of literary education, moving from the exploration (through a questionnaire) of psychological concept of motivation and its related phenomena such as engagement and achievement, and considering their role in the low quality of the present literary culture, towards offering some methods how to strengthen contemporary students' interest in reading, including the improvement of their reading skills.

All in all, the book is an interesting attempt at tackling the problem literature is facing nowadays. Although the approaches may seem different, traditional or innovative, they share one thing, the awareness of decreasing standards in literature education and an effort to find its applicability for the society of the future.

Authors