

The Idea of Slavic Solidarity in Literature and Fine Arts. Critical reading and interpretation of literary and fine arts' canon: Alfons Mucha versus Jiří David

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Abstract

The idea of Slavic solidarity in Slovakia and Bohemia in the 19th and early 20th century remains a dominant theme in literature and fine arts. Dealing with the works of two renowned artists, this paper explores the circumstances of the rise and transformation of the idea as a myth, utopia and reality, in the course of the birth of two autonomous nations in the process of constituting their common state.

The paper also aims at the reinterpretation of the Slavic myth as portrayed in Alfons Mucha's artwork *The Slav Epic* and its postmodern rewriting in Jiří David's monumental work *Apotheosis*. Alfons Mucha relied on the Slavic myths accentuated in the National Revival of the Czechs and Slovaks in the 19th century. He built on the late romantic idea of the multinational Slavic tribe and its importance in history. Jiří David intervened into Mucha's artwork. Through the apocrypha, he confronts the visions of romanticism with the contemporary social, political and cultural situation in Europe. The critical deconstructivist reading of the Slavic myth builds on the message of late Romanticism. The artwork *Apotheosis* by Jiří David is not only an original reception of the famous work of art by Alfons Mucha, but it also critically reviews the current social and political situation at the time of the new Migration.

Klíčové slová

Idea of Slavic solidarity, visual mythology, deconstruction of the myth, Alfons Mucha, Jiří David.

Introduction

Socio-political and cultural context of literature and art in the 19th century in Bohemia and Slovakia

The Czechs and Slovaks are the two closest Slavonic nations. The cultural development of the Czechs is comparable with the Slovaks although throughout most of their history the Czechs lived and developed under the protection of their own sovereigns (Czech princes and kings). Slovaks had to build their national independence and right to language and territory in the conditions of the Hungarian and/or Austro-Hungarian Empire. Miroslav Hroch, who compares the national movements, says that the Czechs had better conditions for the formation of national

awareness and the formation of a separate nation in the 19th century compared to Slovaks – this had to do with the historical reasons (the intermittent existence of the Czech statehood, i.e. the Czech Kingdom) and later the greater interest in education of the middle class – craftsmen and townspeople. The lower numbers of students at secondary and higher schools in Slovakia were also caused by the different composition of population compared to Bohemia. According to Hroch, Slovakia, and/or Upper Hungary, was largely agrarian and the numerous peasants living in this territory did not prefer education. The Slovak intellectuals formed groups in the Lutheran clergy.¹ This argument can be corrected and it can be noted for completeness that the education of Slovaks was limited by the fact that they could only be educated effectively in the Hungarian language, especially after the adoption of the Magyarization laws, which also distorts the real composition of the ethnic strata. To find an employment, many Slovaks adopted the Hungarian nationality or wrote their name in the Hungarian transcription. Peter Zajac describes the Slovaks and/or inhabitants of Upper Hungary with Slovak as their mother tongue as the so-called “nationally diffused community.”² This means that the ethnic Slovaks had a Hungarian nationality. The Czech population, although in the German "grip", had no such experience of assimilation and denationalization. After the Turkish invasions when the Hungarian nobility was pushed to the north of Hungary, the upper classes – the original Slovak nobility – were hungarized. In Upper Hungary, especially in the region of Turiec, education in the mother tongue and the national spirit was provided by the lower yeoman population. This population had a demonstrable impact on the advancement of thinking in the region. The support for education in general and literature (written language) and literary creations in particular, and their dissemination in the native language played a crucial role in the birth of the modern Slovak nation, which was a minority nation within the structure of the Hungarian, and later Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 19th century.³

¹ HROCH, M.: *Hledání souvislostí. Eseje z komparativních dějin Evropy*. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství SLON, 2018, s. 246-250.

² ZAJAC, P.: (ed.): *Štúr, štúrovci, romantici, obrodenci*. Bratislava: Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, VEDA, 2016, s. 39.

³ The Slovak intellectuals first used the biblical Kralice Czech as a language suitable for the Slovak ethnic group. However, the Slovak national revivalists ultimately abandoned the original idea of using the biblical Czech and Štúr codified the Slovak language in 1843 in the so-called Štúr separation, which was based on – according to the latest findings – the urban dialect of the Liptovský Mikuláš townspeople. The earlier theories stated that the codification of Štúr's Slovak was based on the folk and peasant dialect in Central Slovakia. The speech of the townspeople (nobility, aristocracy) had a more refined and consistent (regular) character than the speech of peasants. The codification and adoption of the language is a key cornerstone of the new modern nation (the Slovak language was codified in 1843). It turns out that the separation from Biblical Czech, which was used as a liturgical language in the Lutheran Church in Czechia and Slovakia since the 17th century, was a cultural act and Štúr's prudent decision with political implications. Slovak became the common language of Protestants and Catholics (unification of confessions on a linguistic basis, acceptance of a single common language by Catholics and Protestants). The use of a common language across the confessions ensured a wider support of the development of national culture (ZAJAC, P. (ed.): *Štúr, štúrovci, romantici, obrodenci*. Bratislava: Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, VEDA, 2016, s. 39, 66, 323; HROCH, M.: *Hledání souvislostí. Eseje z komparativních dějin Evropy*. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství SLON, 2018, s. 250.

At last, the national liberation movement in the second half of the 19th century was suppressed and the efforts to establish own culture were marred. A more free and significant development of national culture only occurred gradually after the establishment of the new common Czechoslovak state – the Czechoslovak Republic (1918).⁴

The strongest position in the national revival of the 19th century was held by literature – it was extremely rich, it reflected the development of language and literary speech and it offered a romantic/realistic, and later critical view of life and history of the Slovak society in Upper Hungary. Inter alia, Slovak literature was based on the Great Moravian/Magna Moravia tradition as the first common state of the Czechs and Slovaks (833-907), and on Slavic mythology. Visual arts in Slovakia dealt with the mythological topics only in a limited extent. The first books and journals written in the Slovak codified by Ľudovít Štúr were sans illustrations, e.g. Ján Francisci published his *Slovenskje povesti* (Slovak Legends) in 1845. Ľudovít Štúr, who codified the Slovak language, wrote a review of *Slovenskje povesti* in the journal *Slovenské pohľady* (Slovak Views).⁵ Given the importance of the acquisition of written language, Peter Zajac also emphasizes the following work: *Prostonárodné slovenské povesti* (National Slovak Legends) of 1858, which were compiled by Pavol Dobšinský and "formed the basis of the vibrant Slovak literature" written after the Hattala-Hodža's reform of Štúr's Slovak.⁶ The legends and fairy tales had a wide impact and they meant a lot for the acquisition of the Slovak language not only for the scholars but also for general population.

Fine arts as a parallel reflection of the literary ideas and themes in the national formation process

Visual arts in Slovakia could be considered complementary to the literary events since the "visual ideology" of the national revival is less rich in comparison with literature. In Slovakia there were only a few artists that cooperated with the cultural elites, intellectuals, writers and spiritual leaders who identified themselves as Slovak and were part of the national revival. They

⁴ Miroslav Hroch claims that cultural and educational institutions are the key pillars for forming the nation and national autonomy. Independent national development was determined by education in the national language at all types of schools. The new free republic – Czechoslovakia – created favorable conditions for the massive support of education of the Slovak population. The Slovak minority literature (literature written in Slovak, with its various forms in the individual eras) thus acquired new "customers". Vavro Šrobár, in his capacity as Minister of Education, custodian for Slovakia and an avid czechoslovakist, put emphasis on the creation of textbooks and education. The national institutions to support education and culture were established in the same period – Comenius University in Bratislava (1919), Slovak National Museum (1919); and other important institutions such as the Slovak National Gallery, Academy of Fine Arts, Academy of Performing Arts were established after the World War II (1949). For more details, see: HROCH, M.: *Národy nejsou dílem náhody. Příčiny a předpoklady utváření moderních evropských národů*. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství SLON, 2009, s.119-123. and KOVÁČ, D.: Vavro Šrobár, politik prevratov, In MICHÁLEK, S.-KRAJČOVIČOVÁ, N.(ed.): *Do pamäti národa*. Bratislava: Veda, 2003, s. 575-578.

⁵ The review was published in *Orol tatranský*, 8. - 9. of September 26 (Mal. Rujna) and October 3 (Vel. Rujna) 1845. For more information, see: https://zlatyfond.sme.sk/dielo/1332/Stur_Posudky-a-recenzie-II/1#ixzz5c12gPljZ

⁶ ZAJAC, P.(ed.): *Štúr, štúrovci, romantici, obrodenci*. Bratislava: Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, VEDA, 2016, s. 58.

ordered the works of fine art, mainly portraits. The gallery of Slovak personalities by J. B. Klemens or Michal Peter Bohúň belongs to some of the best creations in visual arts at the end of the 19th century. The portraits indirectly encouraged the literary authors. Art was focused on the portraits of the representatives of national revival, literati and writers such as *Ludovít Štúr* (1872), painted for the Hall of Fame in Matica slovenská in Martin, *Andrej Sládkovič* (1872), *J.M. Hodža* (1846) painted by Jozef Božetech Klemens. Apart from the Slovak literati, J. B. Klemens portrayed the Czech nationalist *J. Kajetán Tyl* (pencil drawing, 1841) and he also painted a generic literati (*Portrait of a literati*, 1843). In addition to these, he also painted portraits of ecclesiastical personalities ordered by the Church (the evangelists Cyril and Methodius in the Dohňany and Mojtin church in the Považie Region). The works of Peter Michal Bohúň represent even higher quality and compelling expressiveness. In addition to the literati, he also painted the burghers and esquires in the interest of their emancipation against the Hungarian nobility. The way they were depicted in the portraits reflected their civil and social ambitions.

Portraits of the key national thinkers - a significant indirect support of literature

A portrait is a means of personal appraisal (elevation and advancement to the gallery of the eternal) of the portrayed person, which was very important for the support of the overall national awareness.

These unique works include the portrait of Ján Francisci who is shown in the landscape with a group of Slovak military volunteers during the 1848 revolution. He is depicted with confidence and in all seriousness, and as a dominant figure in the landscape (hierarchical composition is used), emphasizing the social importance of the main character (*Peter Michal Bohúň: Ján Francisci as a captain of the Slovak volunteers*, 1849-1850).

The portraits of key Slovak personalities and thinkers were not authored by the domestic artists only. For example, the graphic art portraits of *Ludovít Štúr* (1848) and *Jozef Miloslav Hurban* (1849) by the Serbian artist Anastasia Jovanović are less known. They were ordered by the thinkers themselves. These creations are indicative of the close contacts of the said personalities with the Vienna culture, and they are also an expression of cooperation with the Slavic artist who managed to overcome the difficult social conditions with his own tenacity, and became a court graphic of the Serbian nobleman Obremović, who temporarily lived in the Vienna exile. Jovanović was included into the Dictionary of Slavic Artists by literati Ján Kollár.⁷ The Jovanović's portrait of Štúr is a civilian one: his face is characterized by slightly softer and more rounded features when compared to other portraits of Štúr. It is a half-figure with a typical pose of an educated scholar. The portrait includes a handwritten note: *Ludovít Štúr*. Under Hurban's portrait is a three-line verse in Štúr's Slovak.⁸ Art was also focusing on ethnographic painting (emblematic images of the individual social strata – craftsmen, peasants and other strata as positive personalization of their social status).

We can also find a few examples of works that depicted the events of the day. Their testimony is authentic and today they belong to historical painting (*Peter Michal Bohúň: Assembly of the Slovak people in the spring of 1948* and *Peter Michal Bohúň: Orava esquires in prison*).

⁷HERUCOVÁ, M.: Oltárny obraz v Hlbokom, litograf Anastas Jovanović a maliar Johann Boss. In ZAJAC, P.(ed.): *Štúr, štúrovci, romantici, obrodenci*. Bratislava: Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, VEDA, s. 429-456.

⁸ HERUCOVÁ, M.: Ibid., s. 429-456.

The Slavic mythology is another important topic in the literature and artistic creations from the period of National Revival and national liberation. In Bohemia, the publication of the work *Old Czech Legends* by Alois Jirásek (1894) was an important event. Jirásek compiled thirty-five stories. The first edition of the book was accompanied by very nice illustrations by Mikuláš Aleš, rendered in the spirit of the romantic ideal. It is possible that Alfons Mucha had knowledge of this book and it helped him in the preparation of the extensive Slav Epic cycle. As mentioned earlier, the Slovak Legends penned by J. Francisci (1845) and P. Dobšínský (1858) were not illustrated. Later, the publishers of Slovak fairy tales relied on visual illustrations by Czech artists.⁹

Unlike Bohemia, this theme has not been rendered on large-format canvas in Slovakia as an autonomous work. We can only see it as illustrations in the magazines or calendars. Similarly, the topic of Great Moravia and the evangelists St Constantine the Philosopher (St Cyril) and St Methodius is mostly dealt with in historical and religious paintings. This topic became popular especially during the millennial celebrations in 1863 in the Moravian Velehrad and elsewhere. Various proposals for large-scale images with the theme of Great Moravia were proposed, but they were ultimately implemented only as altar paintings and liturgical objects (church flags, altar paintings of St Cyril and Methodius by J. B. Klemens). The proposals for wider epic-symbolic cycles with historical themes and images of the personalities from the Slavic history were presented e.g. by priest Ruprecht Rudolf Přecechtel or priest and Professor Jan Jazbera at the University of Warsaw who proposed to publish a Slavic-wide album with historical and mythological themes in 1861. Juraj Slotta mentioned the creations of the Czech priest Přecechtel in the magazine *Voice* in 1862, which was devoted to the theme of "Czechoslovak luminaries", i.e. the personalities of history and mythology.¹⁰ However, these themes had not been tackled until then as a free art cycle in a way that would surpass the generous depiction in the work *The Slav Epic* (1910/12-1926) authored by Alfons Mucha. Despite the fact that Slovak fine arts in the period of Romanticism and Realism show no examples of large-format cycles with mythological or historical themes, it is a quality production without the intention to exceed the standards of contemporary artistic style. The problems associated with the beginnings of original Slovak culture also include the fact that the artists mostly studied in Budapest or in Munich and Vienna, and if they wanted to get new jobs, they had to follow the requirements of their clients, which mostly included the Hungarian nobility. Many excellent Pan-European artists identified with several different cultures: Slovak, Hungarian and Austrian (e.g. Ladislav Medňanský and Alojz Štróbl).¹¹

⁹ PÁCALOVÁ, J.: *Rozprávky Janka Rimavského*. Bratislava: Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, VEDA, 2015, s. 24. Pácalová notes that J. Francisci prepared nine illustrations, which he ordered from the Prague workshop of the wood engraver František Bartel, only in the second edition of the fairy tales, which were published under the title *Poviedky pre slovenské dieťky, 1871* (Stories for Little Slovak Children). Only four of them were used, and all eight prints were later used with Francisci's consent by Pavol Dobšínský as title pages of the volumes of National Slovak Legends in the years 1880-1883.

¹⁰ BEŇOVÁ, K.: Cyril a Metod vo výtvarnom umení 19. storočia na Slovensku, In PEKAROVIČOVÁ, J.-VOJTECH, M.(ed.): *Studia Academica Slovaca. Prednášky XLIX. letnej školy slovenského jazyka a kultúry*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského Bratislava, 2013, s. 39-59.

¹¹ BEŇOVÁ, K.-GAŽÍKOVÁ, Z.-BIZUB, F.: *Alojz Štróbl*. Liptovský Mikuláš: Galéria Petra Michala Bohúňa and Slovenská národná galéria, 2007, s. 76. The Slovakia-born sculptor Alojz Štróbl lived

Slovak art, which preferred national themes, often included mythification and experienced a major boom with the arrival of modernism (Jozef Hanula, Martin Benka, Ľudovít Fulla since the 1930s), that is, in the conditions of the newly emerged Czechoslovak state when the emancipation efforts of both nations came to fruition (e.g. *Jozef Hanula: St. Cyril and St. Methodius among the people*, 1936 and *Martin Benka: St. Cyril and St. Methodius*, 1942).

The social and political situation and conditions for the development of art in the 19th century were more favourable in Bohemia (the Academy of Arts in Prague was established as early as in 1799). The large-format historical painting (Josef Mánes, Mikoláš Aleš, Vojtěch Hynais, Václav Brožík) was well represented.

Slavic unity – the future world. An epic as a Utopian construct.

The world-famous Alfons Mucha was active in the Czech Republic and France at the end of the 19th century. He first became famous as an author of Art Nouveau posters, illustrator, decorator and theatrical costume designer. In the years 1912-1926 Mucha created a twenty-part large-format cycle of monumental images called *Slovanská epopeja - The Slav Epic*. It was his personal project; he made it without an order, and he received support from an American sponsor Charles Crane. His creations were free and based on his thinking, knowledge and imagination. The cycle also included the late-romantic ideas on the role of Slavs in history. In the cycle of paintings *The Slav Epic*, Jiří Mucha relied on the Slavic myths accentuated in the National Revival of the Czechs and Slovaks in the 19th century. He built on the late-romantic idea of the multinational Slavic 'tribe' and its importance in history. His approach is more modern from the perspective of expression than the national revivalist ideas articulated in the literary and the often canvassing language of the 19th century. Despite the criticism of art historians that accompanied the cycle, Mucha's work was a step forward in the modernization of expression of mythological themes. The mythical and historical stories are articulated through figural compositions, dominated by the heroes – the main protagonists of the events – which is also the case in literary mythology. For example, Mucha's modern visual expression includes surreal passages, flatness and decorativeness of expression, and the strong and targeted colour symbolism. Special role in the cycle is played by the large format, which facilitates the effect of grandeur and pathos. In addition to the historical illustrations of mythological stories, the central theme of the cycle is the idea of pan-Slavic unity (Pan-Slavism). It is a mythical idea that can only be expressed in art. Milena Slavická, a contemporary Czech art theorist who commented on Mucha's work, asks the following question: "What can we say about the language of myth? In many respects myth is similar to a work of art; for example it is always illustrative. Its images, however, are "mythological" and not, for example, symbolic, allegorical or metaphorical as in the case of the work of art. The mythologeme has its own meaning, which cannot be translated even into the language of art. Even though the creation of myth is imaginative, like that of art- especially poetry, which comes closest to a certain form of mythical narration – nevertheless, it is

alternately in Liptov (Slovakia) and Budapest (Hungaria), and he almost paid the price for this lifestyle because he was labeled as an unreliable "Hungarist" and his property was almost confiscated during the establishment of Czechoslovakia. The creations by Ladislav Mednyánszky, a world-famous author, were appreciated without the nationalist compunctions only at the exhibition (and in the four-language publication) held jointly by three national artistic institutions – Slovakia, Hungary and Austria, in 2004.

unconvertible”.¹² Mucha painted the pictures on the Zbiroh Castle. His aim was to depict the Slav mythology and history of the Czech nation. His intention was to make a cycle for the world exhibition in Paris, but he ultimately dedicated his artwork to the formation of the new state – Czechoslovakia – and the city of Prague.¹³ Mucha formulated one condition: the large-format paintings had to be showcased in a separate exhibition stand.¹⁴

Karel Šrp, who explains the artworks of Alfons Mucha, emphasizes: “The Slav Epic series stands at their intersection between allegorical, historical and mythological imagination. Mucha decided to convert in to pictorial representation moments from the history of the Slavs which he personally regarded as crucial, subjecting them to his own view, often without regard for the actual course of historical events, and adapting them to his own concept. He worked primarily in the area of allegory and examined both mythology and history from that angle. He converted abstract notions into an artistic language.”¹⁵ Author continues: “Attraction of *The Slav Epic* is that it is the work of a single artist in which he fulfilled his own long - standing concept, a desire that he had already had ten years before he began painting it. Even its connection with pan Slavic programme was considerably loose one; it was not meant to be its unequivocal artistic representation.”¹⁶

The paintings of Slav mythology and Czech history are selectively and thus subjectively aimed at certain specific key topics and events, and their content is focused on mythology, religion and history, which is presented in an allegoric form. The paintings are dedicated to the mythology and history of the Czech Slavs, which also include the Serbs, Russians, Bulgarians, Croats, Macedonians, Baltic Slavs and Moravians. Slovaks are not mentioned as a separate nation/tribe. One painting is dedicated to the topic of Great Moravia and the arrival of the evangelists Constantine and Methodius to the Moravian Velehrad (*Alfons Mucha: The Introduction of the Slavonic Liturgie*, 1912). Next to the evangelists there are iconic characters of secular nobility – the Moravian princes Rastislav and Svätopluk. In Mucha’s view, the Moravians are considered to be a nation/tribe, which probably also includes the ‘Slovak Slavs’. This is in line with the idea of a single Czechoslovak nation and/or Moravian-Slovak nation, which was contemplated at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.¹⁷ The spectacle

¹²SLAVICKÁ, M.: *Myth and pseudomyth*. In PŘIBÁŇ, J.-RUSNÁKOVÁ, K.(ed.): *Apotheosis, Apocalypse, Apocryphon: Deified Nations, Deified Art*. Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, s. 75-87.

¹³BYDŽOVSKÁ, L.-SRP, K.: *Alfons Mucha. Slovanstvo bratrské*. Prague: National Gallery, 2005, s. 242. The ceremonial handover was held on September 1, 1928 during the 10th anniversary of establishment of Czechoslovakia, with the presence of the Mayor of Prague Karel Baxa and the patron Charles R. Crane in the large hall of the Fair Palace, the most modern building in Prague at that time intended for fairs and exhibitions. This hall housed the exhibition of the entire cycle.

¹⁴ The Prague Municipality only decided about the installation location in 2017 (the Těšnov Station). Up until now, the paintings were installed at the Moravský Krumlov Castle, and since 2012 they have been in the Prague National Gallery. In 2017, the paintings were taken on a tour to Japan and they were also scheduled to be exhibited in China.

¹⁵ SRP, K.: In a common dream. In Pribáň, J.-Rusnáková, K.(ed.): *Apotheosis, Apocalypse, Apocryphon: Deified Nations, Deified Art*, Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2015, s.33-51.

¹⁶ SRP, K.: *Ibid.*, s. 44.

¹⁷ The idea of a single nation is older – it was introduced in the 17th century when the Slovak Lutherans began using the biblical Czech as a liturgical language. The idea of a common language of the Czechs and

of the Great Moravian history in Mucha's painting is situated in Velehrad – the seat of the Great Moravian princes. Other Great Moravian seats, however, included Devin and Nitra (Slovak towns' equivalent in size and importance to the Moravian town Velehrad). These places did not receive attention in Mucha's cycle.¹⁸

The unity of the Slavs – a Pan-Slavic notion – is the central idea of Mucha's cycle. The cycle not only reflects it in the context of the common roots and mythology, but it openly calls for it. The work is an extended arm of the national liberation efforts commenced in early Romanticism. Mucha's cycle can also be viewed as a romantic dream – daydreaming, and it was opposed by the historians. The mythological paintings use artistic imagination – the historical constructs and images have a mythical nature. Karel Šrp recalls: “In Apotheosis of the Slavs Mucha arrived through the interconnection of several temporal layers at the coveted time „ after“ history, belonging now to the Slavs in the wake of the disasters of war with the occurrence of apocatastasis bringing humanity to eternity and bliss. The Slav Epic had an unequivocal intellectual objective, not an ideological programme associated with particular political party or movement. Mucha conceived its execution as a personal, patriotic task he set for himself; it was not demanded or commissioned by anyone else. In his twenty canvases he elevated to the level of other nations the significance of the underrated Slavs is dominated by disputes between the Slavs and their struggles for very existence. The Slav Epic is dominated by disputes between the Slavs and other nations concerning territories, faith alphabet, culture and learning. They bring to it ahistorical dialectic pacified in the final Apotheosis of the Slav.”¹⁹

The Mucha's project also shows the signs of a Utopian vision of the positive contribution of this multinational tribe to history, which could also play a role in the development of civilization. The work also includes a Utopian idea on the possible future unity of the Slavs, which is characterized by pure spirituality and non-violence. Mucha's project grew up on the ideas of elatedness associated with the new state – the post-war Czechoslovakia. The cycle articulated, fed and developed the myth of an equivalent, or even leading role of the Slavs in the context of European nations. As we know, subsequent developments have not confirmed the romantic ideals – neither those from the end of the 19th century, nor those from the modern times. The idea of a Pan-Slav world has never been fully brought to reality and thus it could not have been

Slovaks intensified in the late 19th century when the national revivalist Jan Kollár promoted the enforcement of a modified Czechoslovakian language for the Slovak ethnicity. Among other things, the concern was that: “*a tiny audience cannot have literature of its own*” if a specific and unique language such as Slovak is used. Jan Kollár writes about the issue in a letter to Alois Vojtěch Šembera, August 19, 1845 (Zajac, P.(ed.): *Štúr, štúrovci, romantici, obrodenci*. Bratislava: Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, VEDA, 2016, s.153). The common language was called *lingua slavo-bohemicae* and/or *bohemo-slavica*.

¹⁸ In the artistic license of the author, Mucha's cycle as if “neglected” the Slovak dimension – the mythological or historical segment of the nation living in the Slovak territory. However, according to some historians and theorists, the interconnection of Slovakia and Czechia in the new republic was a politically necessary and prudent measure, which diplomatically addressed the ethnic composition of the new state where the German population accounted for up to 20 percent (3.3 million people) of its inhabitants. Slovakia was a new corridor against the “German grip”. For more information, see: Česká televize, “Národ československý?!”

” Studio čt24, November 2, 2011, Available at: <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/archiv/1285691-narod-ceskoslovensky>

¹⁹ SRP, K.: Ibid, s. 45-46.

verified. In terms of the national-formative function, which should be played by the works of Alfons Mucha – the Slav Epic – but also by the other above mentioned works by Slovak artists (Benka, Hanula etc.) yearning for Slavic unity in a kind pseudo-mythological form, they can be considered as an expressive and ideological anachronism and a kind of ‘ideological figure’ because they only appeared after the national and state sovereignty of both nations. The artistic and aesthetic value of the said works, if perceived separately from politics and ideology, was not eliminated by this anachronism – the works gained popularity, admiration and respect of the audience gradually and all around the world. The completion of the self-determination process of these nations (Czechs and Slovaks) by establishing an independent joint state – Czechoslovakia – did not result in eliminating the continuous need for strengthening the national awareness through such "figures" of memory and myth. On the contrary, the unsteady national conditions resulting from the multinational nature of the Czechoslovak state generated and fostered such challenges. This was not only the works themselves and their content or ideological message, but also the solemn nature of their disclosure and presentation (a celebration in public spaces, such as a vernissage or formal opening). A ceremony as a transient rite, its form and pomp, is not only a cultural but also political or ideological gesture. It is an expression (or a symbol) of confidence of a national community in an area with mixed ethnicities. This confirms the research conducted by Hroch, who claims that celebrations are some of the accompanying signs and conditions of the national formation process²⁰. These, as confirmed by history, do not cease even after the political endorsements and self-determination of the nation is complete, and even in the case of a state nation such as the first Czechoslovak Republic. The idea of Slavic unity in the case of Czechs and Slovaks did not vanish, but on the contrary, it came to fruition in the new, politically and culturally defined borders.

Critical reception of the idea of Slavic unity in modern times. Deconstruction of Mucha’s work – reinterpretation of the Romantic ideal. Jiří David: Apotheosis (2015)

Almost one hundred years later, the idea of a single Slav world is yet again responded to by Jiří David, a contemporary Czech artist and one of the leading personalities of Czech Postmodernism. Jiří David was inspired by the current conflict of two Slavic and formerly very close nations – Russia and Ukraine – which today function as two separate states. David's work can be viewed as a special case of *critical reception* of Alfons Mucha’s works and his mythical Utopian visions – visual ideology of Pan-Slavic unity. This idea was very close to the thinking of the scholars, writers and artists in the National Revival. The artistic project presented by Jiří David at the international exhibition of fine art in Venice in 2015 (Biennial of Contemporary Art Venetia) was based on an appropriated and reinterpreted painting²¹.

²⁰ HROCH, M.: *Národy nejsou dílem náhody. Příčiny a předpoklady utváření moderních evropských národů*. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství SLON, 2009, s. 248-258.

²¹ The Biennial project was a result of cooperation of the two republics – Czech Republic and Slovakia – the artistic part was represented by the painter Jiří David and the theoretical part by the Slovak curator Katarína Rusnáková. David's project was awarded the fifteenth best work at the 2015 Biennial by The Guardian. After 1989 and/or 1993 (formation of the independent Slovak Republic), i.e. in the modern history of presentation of national art in the Czechoslovak Pavilion, it was the first installation exposing the reflections on political matters.

Jiří David selected the *Apotheosis of Slavs* (1925) for reinterpretation – it is the last painting in the Mucha's cycle. In Mucha's *Apotheosis of the Slavs*, a large, young, strong man – an allegory of a Slav – dominates the painting as the main character. In the background, he is shadowed by an equally sized figure of Christ. The painting also shows figures representing the various Slavic communities; each group is arranged in a sophisticated composition, which expresses the symbolism, mythology and historical references. In this last painting within the cycle, Mucha follows the contemporary social and political situation of the nation standing at a crossroads. The painting is a celebration of the Slavic spirit, full of symbols and live action.

Jiří David made a replica of the painting in a monochrome greyish-black-and-white colour shading. It was not a literal appropriation, but the author intervened into the semantics of Mucha's works by modifying some of the key themes, or replacing them by those that represent the current social, cultural and artistic events. David replaced some themes by inserting 21 apocrypha into the painting. This way he both activated the perception of the viewer and, in the spirit of postmodern irony, contested, disputed and excluded the romantic Utopian idea of a large and fair Slav existence and history. The individual apocrypha are linked to specific characters – heroes, which David transformed into modern *current heroes*, or *antiheroes*. David also modified some figural symbolic themes. The idea of the Slav existence and history thus received a worrying fracture and an unpleasant, de-aesthetizing taste.

Apocrypha – the medium of critical deconstruction

The twenty-five apocrypha in David's painting comment on and de-pathetize the current happenings around us: Let us mention a few examples: The *bones* theme stands for the memory of the nation; The *truth* theme is an allegory of a girl wearing a medical mask (perhaps in a symbolic sense – to not get infected by lies); The *Slav* is not a hero like in the Mucha's painting, but is physically weak, with a scar after an appendix surgery, and *shackles* on the neck (an allusion to the meaning of the word “Slav” – a slave); The theme of the grandiose wreath in Mucha's painting is changed into a wreath made of *psychotropic mushrooms* – *Psilocybe*; The *lonely wolf* theme is an allusion to terrorism; The *burning house* is a symbol of victims. The *heiling Slavs* – the dark side of positive patriotism.

The heiling Slavs – the dark side of positive patriotism.

The master (model) for the theme in the *Heiling Slavs* apocrypha was a photograph Jiří David must have chosen in an Internet picture gallery. The photograph was made by the reporter Jozef Teslík in 1943, when Slovakia was ruled by a clerofascist regime, and as a separate state was in the hands of Hitler's Germany (*Jozef Teslík: Celebrations of the 2nd nation-wide march of Hlinka's Youth in Bratislava in 1943*). Teslík's photograph very aptly shows the fascist greeting at a public meeting. The gesture and its pertinence to the nation is highlighted by the clothing of the heiling who are dressed in Slovak folk costumes. As an emblematic image, the photograph has been used in modern culture a number of times (for example on the envelope of the book about the theatre play Holocaust in the theatre Arena in Bratislava in 2012 and others).²² David

²² The photograph by Jozef Teslík also appeared on the cover of the book by Bohunka Koklesová *V tieni tretej ríše* (In the shadow of the Third Reich) in 2010, and as an artifact – a manipulated and enlarged photo – at the art exhibition *Sen a skutočnosť* (Dream and Fact) in 2017 in Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava.

appropriated this photograph and used it freely with an expressionist handwriting as an apocrypha at a place, which did not show any persons in the original Mucha's painting, with national flags overhead. Jiří David generalized this theme and applied it on all Slavs – perhaps in an effort to point out that it wasn't only the Slovaks (some of them) who were fascists at that time. Nevertheless, this is an interesting fact and one could argue ironically that after one hundred years the Slovaks have ("finally") earned their place in the family of Slavic peoples in Mucha's painting (interpreted by David). Unfortunately, the reputation of the Slovaks (and the Slavs in general) is not very flattering.²³ Unfortunately, the reputation of Slovaks (and Slavs in general) is not very flattering. A minor detail should be accentuated: the heiling Slavs also brandished Moravian costumes, suggesting that the meeting in Bratislava was also attended by a group from Moravia. In the study of the materials for this project, Jiří David also discovered this connection. In respect of Mucha's work and David's criticism, Bratislava was portrayed as a topos of the event linked to the manifestations of fascism. But David is more interested in the generalization (which is nevertheless attributed to the group concerned): "The phenomenon of folkiness, folklore (as the declared authenticity, purity, strong traditions, etc.). I was interested in it in conjunction with servitude, hypocrisy etc. I was also interested in the phenomenon of subordination of small (Slavic, but not only those) nations for their survival ... The things we are willing to sacrifice, the things we rather prefer to forget in our history, those that may not even be ours ... The things we are able to believe under pressure."²⁴

The author appropriated the basic thematic and compositional layers of Mucha's painting and modified/rewrote others (colour) with the aim to deconstruct the idealized Utopian image of Slav unity. The disassembly of the original took place in the name of new critical design. In the rewriting, the painter used a classic stucco technique to accentuate the birth of the painting and conduct a creative notional and deconstructive dialog with Mucha's painting in the process.²⁵

Colour as a means of critical reception

Apart from the positive figural symbolism, the original image Apotheosis by Alfons Mucha also exhibited significant colour symbolism and expression. David also deaesthetized this aspect of the original painting and painted it in a monochrome black, white and grey colour grading.

²³ Many characters in David's painting come from the world of art and legends and they open up a new repertoire of associated meanings: the portrait of German conceptual artist *Joseph Beuys*, Serbian performer *Marina Abramović* on horseback; the theme of the American flag by the pop-art artist *Jasper Johns*; the *priestess* giving birth to a Slav; the *devil* juxtaposed to Christ and David's *self-portrait* inserted into a goblin.

²⁴ GERŽOVÁ, J.: Jiří David v rozhovore s Janou Geržovou. In *Profil. Contemporary Art Magazine* 27, no.2 (May 2015), s. 46-58.

²⁵ The viewers could compare the original and the reconstructed painting thanks to the reproduction of Mucha's original painting in the poster and publication, which was part of the project. The publication was a series of articles on globalization, existence of Slavs and current events, and it was penned by significant scientists in the field of sociology, philosophy and arthistory (Jiří Přibáň, Katarína Rusnáková, Jacques Rancière, Karel Srp, Zygmunt Bauman, Peter Sloterdijk, Miroslav Petříček, Milena Slavická, Timothy Snyder, Susan Buck-Morss, Suzana Milevska, Václav Bělohradský). The publication also included a writeup by the curator Katarína Rusnáková. For details, see: Přibáň, J.-Rusnáková, K.(ed.): *Apotheosis, Apocalypse, Apocryphon: Deified Nations, Deified Art*. Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2015, s. 6-7.

This evokes the fading memory, but also eliminates the colour symbolism. For example, the Slavs in Mucha's painting were painted in white as a symbol of innocence. The Slavs were also conceptually connected with the white colour by Ján Kollár in his interpretation of the symbolism of *Slavy dcéra* – a cult literary masterpiece of the National Revival.²⁶

Installation as a critical development of ideas of unity in the new conditions caused by the nations' migration

David moved the painter's reflection up a notch. As a faithful black and white replica with embedded apocrypha, the large-format painting was only one part – a segment of – the installation, which David installed in the Czechoslovak Pavilion in Venice.²⁷ The author placed the painting at the back of the pavilion – when arriving into the pavilion, the viewers only see a huge white area (rear side of the mirror). Jiří David's painting was placed in a relatively short distance (1.5 m) from the mirror. When the viewers want to see the painting, they have to walk through the passageway between the painting and the mirror. They perceive various distortions and shortcuts in the perspective. The small and narrow positioning creates the impression of cramped spaces. The narrow space is a practical hindrance to fully enjoy David's painting. What is more, the viewers can see themselves in the mirror in the background of the painting, and participate in the apocrypha messages of the deconstructed painting. They can participate in the dynamic re-interpretation of Mucha's theme, which raises the question of our personal involvement in the making of history. Thanks to the interactive participation of the visitors, the project assumed a wider and more current validity: The passageway/narrow space between the paintings reminds us of the corridors for migrants – pilgrims moving to a better world (to the new home country) at the times of climate changes and threats of war. At the international art exhibition, David's project became part of the international dialogue on the state of the art and society.

A little detour at the end: The situation in the Pavilion and real reception as a physical and mental act.

Our impressions from the visit to the Pavilion were augmented by the specific natural and climatic conditions. During the hot summer of 2015, it was difficult to spend even a few minutes in the Czechoslovak Pavilion with a glass roof and no air conditioning with unbearable temperatures rising to 50 degrees Celsius. The viewing of David's painting and ourselves in the mirror in the narrow corridor with troves of people also associated, for example, the unbearable and cruel conditions of the migrants traveling to Europe. In this very period, in the hot summer of 2015, thousands of migrants from Africa and Asia disembarked on the Italian shore every day. Hundreds, or even thousands of migrants made it to the Italian shore on a daily basis.²⁸

²⁶ SRP, K.: *Ibid.*, s. 39.

²⁷ Even after the split of Czechoslovakia, the Czechoslovak Pavilion represents both countries – the Czech and Slovak Republic, which alternate at the exhibition every two years. After the split of the original ones (e.g. the USSR or Yugoslavia), most new states had to find new display premises in Venice. For example, the Russian Pavilion is only used by Russia, and the Ukraine and other countries of the former Soviet Union had to find their own exhibition premises.

²⁸ An inappropriate April Fools prank (or provocation) was published in a seemingly serious article on the Internet, introducing the presentation of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) at the Biennial. According to the

Conclusion

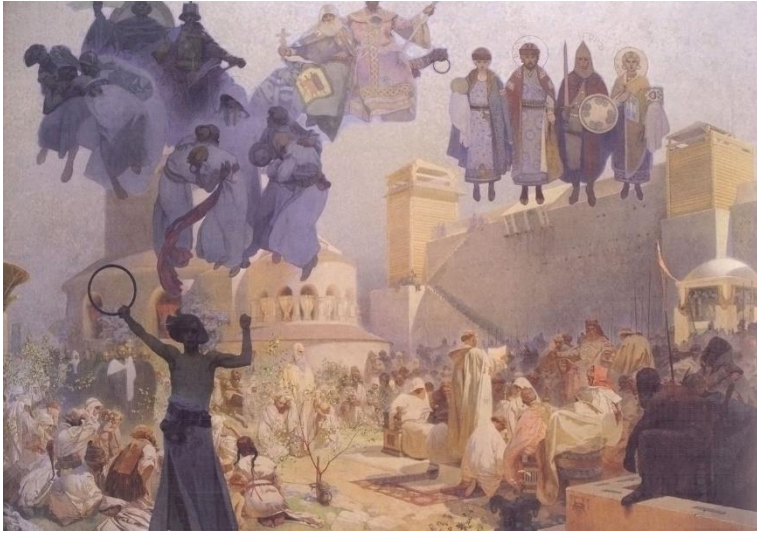
The idea of Slavic solidarity acquires new contours in terms of unification of Europe (European Union). The works of art that accompanied the process of forming a nation/nations at the turn of the 19-20th century – as can be seen in the example of the monumental artwork of Alfons Mucha – can be a stimulus for critical reflection on the current form of the world (for example, Apotheosis by Jiří David).

The reading/reception of Alfons Mucha's works is conducted in the critical spirit of Utopian deconstructions, its transformation into a dystopian world of anxiety, with calls for perceiving our own self-image and our place in the current world in the specific situations of turbulent social exchanges.

The national ideas and the canon of art in postmodernity are subject to critical reading in accordance with the current social and political conditions and events. The deconstruction of the original, however, can be a two-sided settlement – it can generate postmodern scepticism, or give rise to the vision of the future. The vibrant and interactive reception of the complex multi-layer artwork of Jiří David provided the experience of the 'new anxiety', and above all a call to reflection on the premises of the international Venice Biennial exhibition as a celebration of the global community.²⁹

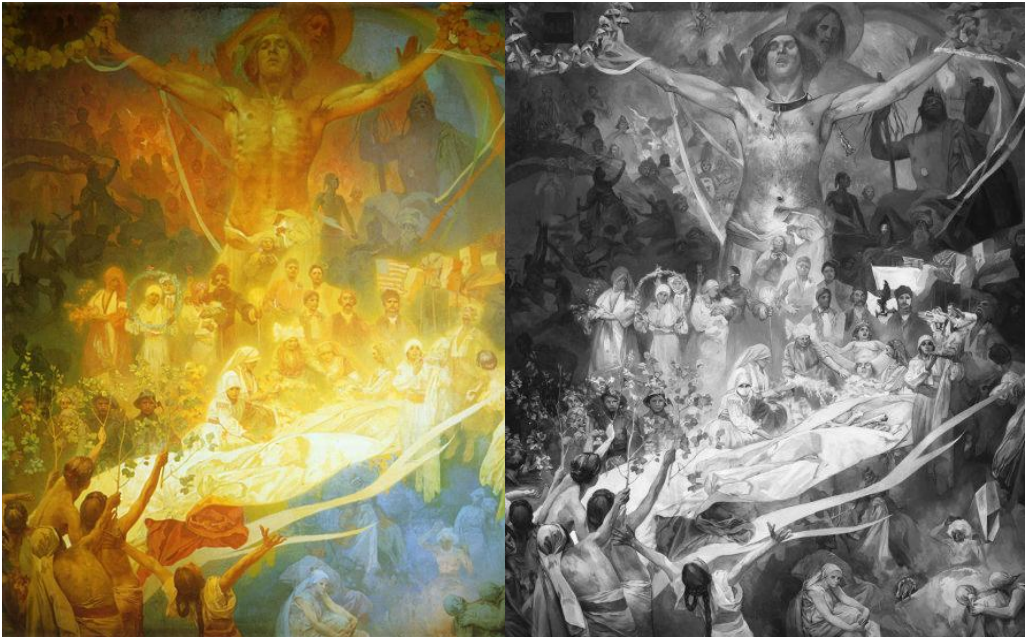
article, an ISIS barge is going to drop its anchor in Venice as a floating pavilion. For more details, see: ISIS to Exhibit Floating Pavilion of Art Destruction at Venice Biennale by The Editors on April 1, 2015. Available at: <http://hyperallergic.com/195279/isis-to-exhibit-floating-pavilion-of-art-destruction-at-venice-biennale/> [2015-12-09]

²⁹ This paper was made possible thanks to the project VEGA 1/0461/16 titled "Reinterpretation of images of the cultural mind in contemporary aesthetic and artistic reflection". The project was implemented at the Institute of Literary and Artistic Communication, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra in the years 2016/2018.



**Figure 1. Alfons Mucha : The Slav Epic -
The Introduction of the Slavonic Liturgy, 1910-1928**

Source: <http://www.muchafoundation.org/gallery/themes/theme/slav-epic/object/213>



**Figure 2 and 3 Deconstruction of Mucha's work – reinterpretation of the Romantic ideal -
Alfons Mucha : Apotheosis of the Slavs (1925) vs Jiří David: Apotheosis (2015)**

Sources: <http://www.kalab.nl/en/p/mucha/20.html> and <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/exposition-detail/jiri-david-apoteoza-1/>



Figure 4 and 5 The healing Slavs - Slovaks?

Jozef Teslík : Oslavy 2. Celoštátneho nástupu Hlinkovej mládeže v Bratislave, r. 1943
 (Jozef Teslík : Celebrations of the 2nd nation-wide march of Hlinka's Youth in Bratislava in 1943)

David vs Teslík. Apropiation of the photography.

Source: <https://www.webumenia.sk/dielo/SVK:TMP.154>

and <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/exposition-detail/jiri-david-apoteoza-1/> detail/



Figure 6 Jiří David: Apotheosis (2015). Installation in the Czechoslovak Pavilion in Venice
 (La Biennale di Venezia, 2015). Source : Jiří David's Photo archive

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Idea slovanskej vzájomnosti v literatúre a vo výtvarnom umení. Literárny vs výtvarný kánon a jeho kritické čítanie. Alfons Mucha a Jiří David

Idea slovanskej vzájomnosti je v 19. storočí na Slovensku a v Čechách jedna z dominantných tém v literatúre i výtvarnom umení. Článok si všima podmienky vzniku a transformácie tejto idey ako mýtu, utópie a reality počas zrodu dvoch svojbytných národov v procese konštituovania ich spoločného štátu na príklade diel dvoch vo svete renomovaných umelcov – Alfonsa Muchu a súčasného výtvarníka Jiřího Davida.

Článok sa sústreďuje na reinterpretáciu slovanského mýtu v diele Alfonsa Muchu *Slovanská epepeja* (1910-1926) a jeho súčasný prepis v monumentálnom diele *Apotheosis* (2015) Jiřího Davida. Alfons Mucha sa opieral o slovanské mýty artikulované národnobuditeľskými potrebami Čechov a Slovákov v 19. storočí. Vychádzal z neskororomantickej predstavy o významnej úlohe viacnárodného „kmeňa“ Slovanov v dejinách.

Bol to jeho osobný projekt, realizoval ho nezávisle, bez objednávky, tvoril celkom slobodne, na základe svojej úvahy, poznania a imaginácie. Do cyklu vtesnal neskororomanticke predstavy o úlohe a možnostiach Slovanov v dejinách. V Muchovom cykle v zhode s ideou jednotného československého kmeňa absentuje výraznejšia pozornosť venovaná Slovanom z územia dnešného Slovenska. V jeho diele nie je výtvarne osobitne artikulovaný a špecifikovaný slovanský kmeň žijúci na Slovensku vo formácii Veľkej Moravy (Nitra, Devín a i.). O sto rokov neskôr tento handikep, okrem iného, koriguje v komplexnej inštalácii *Apotheosis* (2015) Jiří David. Jiří David vytvoril dielo rovnako ako Mucha slobodne a na základe úspechu v súťaži o možnosť realizácie originálneho a z hľadiska vývinových tendencií relevantného diela v československom pavilóne na svetovej výstave Bienále súčasného výtvarného umenia v Benátkach (r. 2015). David intervenoval do Muchovho diela a prostredníctvom výtvarných apokryfov konfrontoval vízie romantizmu so súdobým spoločensko politickým a kultúrnym dňaním v Európe. Intervencia v podobe originálne zasadených segmentov do premalby Muchovej Apotheosy využila okrem iného mediálne šírené obrazy, napr. z internetovej databázy obrazov a fotografií. Článok akcentuje moment, keď do segmentu kritickej prezentácie kmeňa „slovenských“ Slovanov bola apropriovaná reportážna fotografia z obdobia Slovenského štátu fotografa J. Teslíka. Konkrétnym impulzom pre autora boli aktuálne politicko vojenské pnutia v slovanskom svete (Rusko vs Ukrajina).

Davidovo dekonštruktívne kritické čítanie slovanského mýtu tak aktualizovalo poslanstvo neskorého romantizmu. Stalo sa nielen príkladom originálnej recepcie slávneho diela Alfonsa Muchu, ale tiež kritickým pohľadom na prebiehajúcu sociálno politickú situáciu dnes, v čase nového sťahovania národov.

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