

## Editorial

Alongside Jozef Felix, Anton Vantuch (1921-2001) was the founder of Slovak Romanistics. With scholarly precision and a wide range of disciplines (literary history, historiography, cultural history, and philosophy), he explored significant elements of French culture his whole life and linked them to Slovak culture, always remembering the systematic discovery of what was still not well known in Slovakia. As a cultural and literary historian, he wrote several monographs and lots of original studies, which were also very well received abroad. He was a renowned translator of fundamental philosophical works and of fiction, the author of dozens of afterwords to prominent works of French literature, and a university teacher who educated several generations of French literature students. To this day his students remember him kindly. However, so far only marginal attention has been paid to his impact on Slovak culture. It would not be far from the truth to say that Anton Vantuch has remained unjustly forgotten for decades and that his diverse activities have remained in the shadows.

The book *Anton Vantuch (1921-2001): a Romanist, Literary Scientist, Cultural Historian, and Translator* (Jana Truhlářová, ed., 2018), just published by Comenius University Press, strives to be a first comprehensive evaluation of his work.

Four authors (Katarína Bednárová, Eva Frimmová, Daniel Škoviera, and Jana Truhlářová) aim to systematically explore the individual areas of Vantuch's cultural activity:

Daniel Škoviera, a classical philologist, decided to concentrate on Vantuch's works concerning Greek and Latin antiquity, as well as the Latin Middle Ages, of which the monograph on the humanist Ján Sambucus (1975) and *Homer and the Homeric World* (1960) attracted the most attention. In these books, Škoviera focuses on those parts that deal with the complicated relationship with the doyen of classical philology, Miloslav Okál. Both of them worked together in the 1950s at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts of Comenius University, and although Anton Vantuch devoted himself mainly to the older French literature at that time, he was also a graduate in classical philology and

an expert in classical literature. By combining a professional point of view with the assessment of the contemporary ideological and political situation, Škoviera shows how the period requirements of the state and university political bodies interfered in seemingly “neutral” areas such as classical philology and influenced the development of the discipline itself.

The historian Eva Frimmová introduces Vantuch’s main historical works on research into the Renaissance and later periods, as well as the context of his long-term involvement in the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, where he worked for two decades (1961-1980) until retiring at a difficult time that did not favour the humanities, let alone Western culture or the history of earlier periods.

The literary historian and translator Katarína Bednárová analyses the entire translation output of Anton Vantuch with a special focus on the translation of a selection of Essays by Michel de Montaigne (1975) and two books by Henri Bergson, *Laughter* and *An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1970). She points out that through his translations Anton Vantuch filled the blank spaces on the map of both the literary classics (fiction, autobiographical and reflective literature) and fundamental philosophical works (Montaigne’s Essays, Descartes, Rousseau, D’Alembert, Sainte-Beuve, Bergson, and Sartre) focusing on the European literary canon. On the one hand, he also formed the Slovak context of literary translation and culture over four decades in the second half of the twentieth century.

Jana Truhlářová deals with Vantuch’s literary-historical work during four decades of his activity (1955-1995), focusing on his main monographs *The Poet Saxo and Old French Epic Singing* (1959), *C. L. Montesquieu: a Struggle for the Work* (1977), *Molière: Thirty Years on Stage* (1987), and one where he is a co-author, *The History of French Literature* (1995). She pays special attention to his research of Montesquieu, whose work became Vantuch’s lifelong interest and a field in which he gained international acclaim. Separate sections are dedicated to Vantuch’s reviews, articles, and afterwords as well. Truhlářová puts an emphasis on the transdisciplinary nature of his approach to literary-historical issues, which Vantuch, as a graduated philologist and philosopher and later also a cultural historian, applied throughout his whole professional life.

Finally, the book includes a complete bibliography of published books, journal articles, and translations by Anton Vantuch which were gathered and compiled by Veronika Čejková, a specialist who works at the Institute of World Literature. It is the first ever elaborated bibliography of Vantuch's work, and from it we can clearly see the huge and diverse work behind the titles and numerical data.

Although we have sought to process the individual areas of Anton Vantuch's work in separate chapters, it has not been possible to write them without interconnection. The characteristic feature of Vantuch's approach or method of transdisciplinarity was to transcend or even unite the disciplines. This is once again in the spotlight and is proving to be the most comprehensive method of accessing cultural phenomena. For Vantuch, his work with historical and philosophical material was an essential prerequisite and starting point for his literary work, and his philological and philosophical knowledge was an inevitable condition for the proper assessment of archival documents as well as the historical knowledge and context which he made good use of while translating and commenting philosophical and fictional works of French literature from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries.

Together with Jozef Felix, Anton Vantuch created the foundations of the modern study of French literature. He introduced dozens of classical and contemporary literary and philosophical works to Slovak readers, and through his research methods he outlined for all of us who investigate and study Romance literatures the only possible way to approach cultural values dutifully and for a good purpose. This is the legacy we are trying to continue.

**Jana Truhlářová**