

Central-European Masculinities in a Comparative Perspective

Abstracts

COURAPIED Romain – *Le discours de la crise de la masculinité dans la littérature décadente (The Discourse of Masculinity Crisis in Decadent Literature)*

FRANÇAIS – Après une courte mise au point théorique sur la question de la crise de la masculinité que l'on définira davantage comme une perception et une construction discursive que comme une réalité objective (Judith A. Allen, Francis Dupuis-Déri), l'enjeu de l'intervention sera d'évoquer la notion de décadence dans la littérature de la fin du XIX^e siècle européen (Jean de Palacio), et le discours spécifique sur les masculinités qu'elle induit.

La décadence est d'abord un concept historique par lequel on définit l'ascension et la chute des civilisations, mouvement qui induit logiquement une pensée circulaire du temps opposable au progressisme. Si la décadence de l'Empire romain est historiquement circonstanciée, la notion de décadence telle qu'elle est évoquée à la fin du XIX^e siècle européen, comme une menace imminente, s'avère quant à elle une peur fantasmée qu'aucun fait historique tangible ne vient appuyer. Une pensée de la finitude s'est pourtant cristallisée dans les discours fin-de-siècle à travers le mouvement décadent (ou décadentisme), questionnant particulièrement, le sexe, le genre et les sexualités. En effet, cette littérature multiplie à l'envi les personnages d'hommes amoindris, impuissants, sous la tutelle amoureuse de femmes fatales (Mireille Dottin-Orsini) apparemment omnipotentes. Pourtant ce pouvoir, comme celui, politique, des féministes dites de la première vague, n'est qu'apparent ou temporaire, l'effet de backlash (Susan Faludi) est fort. L'enjeu de l'intervention sera de mettre en évidence un paradoxe : le postulat d'une masculinité en crise induit *in fine* une puissante réaction misogyne. Zjed – dn

Cependant le mouvement décadent ne se résume pas à cela et nombre d'auteurs agissent au second degré, avec recul et avec humour, auteurs qui, conscients du soupçon pessimiste qui pèse sur eux au premier degré, entreprennent d'en feindre ironiquement l'état d'âme pour s'organiser des marges de manœuvres. L'intervention s'achèvera sur une réflexion concernant les identités dissidentes, voire *queer*, qui, sous couvert de décadence, s'affirment peu à peu dans les textes.

ENGLISH – After a brief theoretical overview of the question of the masculinity crisis, which we will define more as a perception and discursive construction rather than an objective reality (Judith A. Allen, Francis Dupuis-Déri), the focus of the talk will be to discuss the notion of decadence in late 19th-century European literature (Jean de Palacio), and the specific discourse on masculinities it generates.

Decadence is first and foremost a historical concept used to define the rise and fall of civilizations, a movement that logically induces a cyclical view of time opposed to progressivism. While the decadence of the Roman Empire is historically situated, the notion of decadence as evoked at the end of the 19th century in Europe, as an imminent threat, proves to be a fantasized fear unsupported by any tangible historical fact. Nonetheless, a notion of finitude crystallized in the fin-de-siècle discourses through the decadent movement (or decadentism), particularly questioning sex, gender, and sexualities. Indeed, this literature abundantly features characters of

diminished, impotent men, under the romantic control of seemingly omnipotent “femmes fatales” (Mireille Dottin-Orsini). However, this power, like that of the so-called first-wave feminists, is only apparent or temporary; the backlash effect (Susan Faludi) is strong. The aim of the talk will be to highlight a paradox: the premise of a masculinity in crisis ultimately induces a powerful misogynistic reaction.

However, the decadent movement is not limited to this, and many authors act on a second level, with detachment and humour, authors who, aware of the pessimistic suspicion that weighs on them at face value, ironically feign this state of mind to create manoeuvring space. The talk will conclude with a reflection on dissident, even *queer*, identities that gradually assert themselves in the texts under the guise of decadence.

DEBIŃSKA Aleksandra – *Phantoms of war - about war invalids of the Second Polish Republic (reconstruction attempt)*

The aim of the project is to reconstruct the figure of a war invalid present in the Polish literature of the interwar period. In addition to the romantic discourse of soldier heroic masculinity existing in Poland, at least since the end of World War I, another image of masculinity has been emerging more and more clearly – pushed to the margins, tabooed or displaced from official war narratives. Polish literature from the period 1918–1939 shows soldiers not only as men-heroes. There are texts in which men's merits for the homeland are shown through a wound, scar, or permanent mutilation. Novels, poetry, and memoir texts allow us to conclude that war invalids were presented as heroes, but in practice – bodily – they were deprived of this masculinity. They became unproductive and had the greatest problems with regaining agency, professional, social, and family positions. Fragments of the narrative devoted to war invalids can be found e.g. in the prose works of Jan Żyznowski, Michał Choromański or Andrzej Strug, as well as in the poetry of Władysław Sebyła or Józef Aleksander Gałuszka. War invalids are perceived by the general public as weak, helpless, passive, or dependent on others. These are attributes that long before the interwar period belonged more to women and children. The myth of the soldier-hero is extremely important, but in the project, I draw attention to the fact that the figure of the war invalid is equally important.

FILIPOWICZ Marcin Lukasz – *Participation and resistance. Patterns of masculinity in 19th century Czech culture*

My presentation will describe how I examined Czech masculinity patterns in the 19th century using the theoretical framework of masculinity studies, which posits that nationality and gender are intertwined. In many instances, nationalism reinforces the militaristic-hegemonic masculinity model, characterized by a disciplined group of male warriors. However, the Czech case may provide a contrasting example. Analysing Czech masculinity within the national movement of the 19th century is crucial, especially given the marginalized status of educated Czech men. The Enlightenment ideas led to the emergence of hegemonic masculinity, which shaped bourgeois society and spread throughout the continent. According to masculinity studies, such hegemonic masculinity emerged and was maintained by opposing the category of the 'other' – the woman, the madman, the Jew, or the colonial native, who was usually subordinated and

had a different cultural origin. A similar, yet opposite approach can be applied to smaller European nations and it may be possible to identify an ethnic and cultural hegemon as the dominant "other". To illustrate my approach, I will draw on Raewyn Connell's model of protest masculinity and Sally Robinson's critique of binary opposition focusing on cooperation and resistance within hegemonic norms. Through the application of this approach, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of Czech masculinity patterns during the Habsburg era.

HALLAMA Peter – *Les masculinités socialistes en Europe centrale et orientale – vers une histoire sociale et culturelle ? (Socialist Masculinities in Central and Eastern Europe – Towards a Social and Cultural History?)*

FRANÇAIS – Alors que les études critiques sur les masculinités se développent de façon dynamique, une histoire sociale et culturelle des masculinités, s'intéressant aux pratiques sociales au quotidien et à l'espace privé voire intime, peine à exister. Cela est d'autant plus vrai pour l'historiographie des pays socialistes en Europe centrale et orientale. Certes, des travaux sur les représentations des masculinités socialistes, notamment dans la littérature et le cinéma, existent, tout comme des recherches sur le répertoire visuel et l'« hypervirilité » communiste. Or, ces travaux confondent souvent représentations officielles, propagande communiste et « masculinité hégémonique ». Ils prennent les productions étatiques pour des appropriations sociétales. Ainsi, une grande partie des travaux a tendance à reproduire une image des sociétés socialistes comme étant homogènes et obéissantes, voire « totalitaires ».

Dans notre intervention, nous présenterons ces difficultés auxquelles des spécialistes des pays d'Europe centrale et orientale sont confronté.e.s. Nous montrerons ensuite des pistes pour écrire une histoire sociale et culturelle des masculinités sous le socialisme dans cette région. Pour ce faire, nous nous appuyons sur des travaux récents sur l'histoire sociale et l'histoire du quotidien sous le socialisme, sur l'historiographie des masculinités en Europe de l'Ouest et aux États-Unis ainsi que sur nos propres recherches dans les archives est-allemandes, tchèques et slovaques. Parmi les études de cas, nous aborderons la paternité homosexuelle, la question de la présence des pères à l'accouchement ou encore la violence intrafamiliale.

ENGLISH – Although critical studies on masculinities are rapidly evolving, a comprehensive social and cultural history of masculinities, particularly one that delves into everyday social practices and private or intimate spaces, remains underdeveloped. This gap is especially evident in the historiography of socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. While there are existing studies on the representations of socialist masculinities in literature and cinema, as well as research on the visual repertoire and communist “hypervirility,” these works often blur the lines between official representations, communist propaganda, and “hegemonic masculinity.” They frequently misinterpret state productions as reflections of societal norms. Consequently, much of the scholarship tends to portray socialist societies as monolithic and obedient, even “totalitarian.”

In this presentation, we will examine these challenges faced by scholars specializing in Central and Eastern Europe. We will then outline potential pathways for developing a social and cultural history of masculinities under socialism in this region. Our approach will integrate recent research on social history and the history of everyday life under socialism, the historiography of

masculinities in Western Europe and the United States, as well as our own archival research in East German, Czech, and Slovak sources. Among the case studies, we will explore topics such as homosexual fatherhood, the presence of fathers during childbirth, and domestic violence.

HECZKOVÁ Libuše & SVATOŇOVÁ Kateřina – *A story without a plot, paradox of a private/public man. Lessons on masculinity from Jan Patočka in 1963 and Wim Wenders in 2024*

Based on Jan Patočka's review of the Vyskočil/Havel play focusing on masculinity and power, powerlessness and Emanuel Levinas' enigmatic concept of "la caresse," the presentation will focus on the problems of the private and the public, power and powerlessness in two different works of art from different periods (Autostop by Ivan Vyskočil and Václav Havel from 1963 and the film Perfect Days by Wim Wenders from 2024).

IDIER Antoine – *Histoire de l'homosexualité, identités, masculinités (History of Homosexuality, Identities, Masculinities)*

FRANÇAIS – Ne travaillant pas sur l'Europe centrale, mais sur l'histoire et les cultures LGBTQI+ en France et aux États-Unis (principalement), je reviendrai sur quelques problématiques et tensions qui traversent l'histoire de l'homosexualité et les études sur le genre et la sexualité au sujet de la constitution des identités et des subjectivités homosexuelles. Il s'agira plutôt d'identifier des outils analytiques à travers plusieurs problématiques. En particulier, je reviendrai sur plusieurs éléments :

- la « co-existence non-rationalisée de différents modèles », selon l'expression de la théoricienne queer Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Epistemology of the Closet), de catégories de la sexualité ;
- les permanences et transformations rapides de certaines catégories ;
- l'analyse relationnelle des rapports entre différentes identités et le rôle des effets de *distinction* ;
- les tensions entre déterminismes, appropriations et réappropriations, caractère fixe ou éphémère du jeu des identités.

ENGLISH – Although my focus is not on Central Europe, but rather on the history and cultures of LGBTQI+ communities in France and the United States, I will explore various issues and tensions within the history of homosexuality and the studies of gender and sexuality, specifically regarding the formation of homosexual identities and subjectivities. The objective is to identify analytical tools across several topics. In particular, I will address:

- The "non-rationalized coexistence of different models" of sexual categories, as described by queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in Epistemology of the Closet;
- The persistence and rapid transformation of certain categories;
- The relational analysis of interactions between different identities and the role of distinction effects;

- The tensions between determinism, appropriation and reappropriation, and the fixed or ephemeral nature of identity dynamics.

ILIN Darko – *Not only is he a pederast, but he is socially unacceptable: Queer Masculinities Under State-Socialism in Pavle Zidar's Literary Works*

The article will examine how queer masculinities are represented in the literary works of Pavle Zidar and the role of state and societal control in shaping these representations. It explores how societal control and state power are exercised over the subjects who challenge and subvert heteronormative and dominant ideological patterns. Pavle Zidar's 1976 novel *Dolenjski Hamlet* (Hamlet of Dolenjska) and its 1979 sequel *Roman o Hanibalu* (Novel about Hanibal) recount the narrative of a teacher's adjustment to a new environment after being involuntarily transferred to a small-town high school on account of his homosexuality. One of the novels' central topics is the collective conspiracy of the town's dignitaries to gather and fabricate evidence to expose Hanibal's homosexual desire. I will try to analyze the intersections between "deviant" sexualities and "deviant" ideologies because Zidar's Hanibal is being persecuted for his different ideological stance, a part of which sexuality is perceived. The literary representation of a small-town bureaucracy has often been used as a metaphor for the repressive and regulated nature of socialist states, therefore it is possible to treat it as an analogy of the state regime as a whole. Since the analysis will be informed by the insights from scholars researching the status of male homosexuality within Central European state-socialist systems, the main research question I aim to explore is what are the political implications underlying the representation of queer masculinities in Pavle Zidar's novels within the socialist political context, particularly concerning societal pressure and state power, and how do these factors shape the portrayal of masculinity and sexuality in his works?

MAZURKIEWICZ Filip & ŚMIEJA Wojciech – *Forms of Masculinity in Polish Literature and Culture: Presentation of Research Results pt. I & II*

The starting point of our presentation is the research results on the forms and manifestations of masculinity in Polish literature and culture from the beginning of the 19th century to the present day. The research team worked for several years, and their findings were published in a multi-volume series that includes multi-author books, monographs, and a volume of translations of representative works in this field of study. We will outline the main issues and objectives of the project, discuss the terminology we encountered in global masculinity studies, and present a summary of the conclusions that emerged during our work. We will also consider the possibilities for continuing this type of research and the potential application of our project's findings to the study of Central European masculinities.

MATONOHA Jan – *“Monstrous” masculinity: dissent / exile heroes and injurious attachments. Critical reading of the 1970s and 1980s Czech independent fiction*

Although by no means everything was bad in the pre-1989 context and one could easily point to things that were better pre-1989 society (such as for instance, urban planning or an extensive network of childcare facilities, both urgently missing, to my mind, in contemporary aggressive free market radically liberal economies), there were undoubtedly more troublesome issues than good in the pre-1989 era: one of the things one could point out is the issue of toxic masculinity in the works of dissent literary writers. At first glance, one could blame the dissidents themselves for adopting these heroic faces of macho men, yet it is abundantly clear that such a standpoint was a result of the need to embrace the conventional heroic identity vis a vis persecution by the then official power. Founding their approach in critical masculinity studies (Kimmel, Seidler, Whitehead, Beynon, Gardiner, Blazina, Mansfield, Kimmel, cf. also Watson, Maříková, Oates Indruchová, Filipowicz – Królak – Zachová), and to capture this (somewhat) insidious logic, this paper makes use of the concept of injurious attachments based upon the notions of injuring identities (Judith Butler) and wounded attachments (Wendy Brown). Based upon twofold logic they propose, the following could be stated: on the surface, clearly visible values occur – such as the brave man facing the official power prosecuting him; underneath, unnoticed and invisible lie the suppressed and unseen unwillingness to expose a more fragile self. Thus, the paper argues that the visible, clearly recognisable layer of identity is the solid, harsh face of a dissident capable of facing the oppression, while the neglected, suppressed, silenced or downright invisible was the one which could foster his more delicate and sophisticated sensibilities. The critical reading will involve major literary texts by Czech dissidents or exile writers, now celebrated stars of official post-1989 Czech literary canon, namely Václav Havel, Ludvík Vaculík, Josef Škvorecký, Jan Novák and Jan Pelc. Most of all though, the paper focuses on the novel *Gravelarks* by Jan Křesadlo published originally in the exile publishing house 68 Publishers by Josef Škvorecký in 1984, who (having been, by paradox, one of the persons contributing to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Czechoslovakia roughly two decades earlier) introduced – seen from a queer perspective – a profoundly troublesome counter-hero of a gay (or in fact bisexual) man (symptomatically, portrayed as rather “effeminate”) who is passionate in performing anilingus (i.e. being on the “giving” end of such a relation), a pleasure he forces his participants or “victims” to get involved with as bearers of his “sick” inclinations. Not only is the character most likely a secret agent or at least an active collaborator with the State Secret Police, but also the fact that he forces and blackmails his victims to bear his passion in anilingus “obviously” labels him as a “monster”, the word often used to refer to the given literary character. The paper thus aims to dissect the insidious and profoundly injurious logic behind the treatment of male identities in the context of dissident persecution and the literary texts that the authors in question produced.

OVSEC Julija – *Lavender marriages as a performance of masculinity*

Lavender marriages, historically termed for the camouflage of queer identities through heterosexual unions, offer a compelling study case on the performativity of masculinity within societal constructs. These unions, often borne out of societal pressure or necessity, reflect the

complex interplay between personal identity and societal expectations, particularly regarding gender roles. In navigating lavender marriages, individuals are confronted with a dichotomy: the inner tendency of their sexual orientation and the external performance of heterosexual norms.

Within the confines of these relationships, masculinity becomes a stage upon which individuals enact prescribed roles, conforming to societal expectations while concealing their internal selves. Judith Butler pointed out that "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts." (Butler, 2002: 179)

To understand why lavender marriages are an act to perform masculinity, we have to ask ourselves what kind of acts make a man. C. J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges, in an introduction to the book *Exploring Masculinities*, write:

" "Man" refers to a state of being; "masculinity" refers to much more: identity, performance, power, privilege, relations, styles, and structure." (Pascoe, Bridges, 2016: 3)

The performance of masculinity in lavender marriages is multifaceted, encompassing traditional ideals of strength, dominance, and heteronormative behavior. Men, in particular, may feel compelled to adhere to these norms, suppressing any inclinations or desires that deviate from the accepted narrative of masculinity of patriarchal culture, where they are restricted to live in their unique identity. Men's value is always determined by what they do. (hooks, 2004)

However, beneath the veneer of conformity lies a complex negotiation of identity. By examining lavender marriages through the lens of masculinity, we gain insight into how gender is constructed and performed within society. These unions serve as a microcosm of more significant societal norms and expectations, shedding light on the pervasive influence of heteronormativity.

In Slovenian 20th-century literature, we find an example of a lavender marriage in a novel called *April* by Mira Mihelič. Although the protagonist of the story is a woman, we still get an insight into the structure of such a marriage and, above all, into the demands of proving masculinity in a patriarchal society just before the start of the Second World War. In my analysis, I will apply Judith Butler's Performativity theory, through which I will examine how characters perform gender roles within the context of lavender marriages. I will reflect on the historical period of the literary work and how it shapes the portrayal of masculinity and lavender marriages and examine how cultural norms and societal expectations regarding gender and sexuality impact characters. I will pay special attention to how interactions between characters reveal underlying tensions and performative aspects of masculinity. By applying the concept of lavender marriages to literary analysis, you can uncover nuanced portrayals of masculinity, exploring how societal pressures and personal identities shape characters' experiences and performances. This approach provides a rich, layered understanding of gender and sexuality in literature

PITONAK Michal – *Contours of Resistance: LGBT+ Activism, Masculinities, and Morality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*

This presentation explores the transformative journey of LGBT+ activism within the challenging socio-political terrains of Central and Eastern Europe, with a spotlight on Czechia. It traces the roots of the movement, from its nascent stages under restrictive regimes, through its flourishing in the early post-socialist era, to the contemporary struggles against the rising conservative tide, populism, 'anti-gender' rhetoric, and so-called morality politics. A critical

dimension of this exploration is the examination of how 'traditional' and hegemonic masculinities are both contested and reinforced within these dynamics.

Through vivid examples, I investigate the strategic responses of activists to counter populist narratives and actions that seek to marginalize sexual and gender minorities. The rise of the anti-gender movement can be seen as a response to the 'crisis of masculinity', where some men perceive themselves as 'losers' of equality policies and feminist gains. This crisis manifests through various channels, from claims that boys are disadvantaged in schools to the perceived threats to heterosexual men from the normalization and legal protection of LGBTQ+ people.

Furthermore, I delve into the concepts of ontological insecurity and uncertainty, illustrating how these sentiments can be exploited by morality entrepreneurs who foster societal divisions by manipulating emotions and affects, often through appeals to traditional gender roles and norms. By focusing on the intersection of masculinities and activism, I underscore the complex dynamics at play in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights and recognition. This includes examining how masculinities are constructed, challenged, and redefined within the movement, and how these processes influence broader social and political outcomes.

Finally, I will showcase the resilience and adaptability of the LGBTQ+ movement, shedding light on the broader implications for social justice, policy formulation, and the ongoing quest for equality and acceptance in the region. This narrative not only offers insights into the resilience of the LGBTQ+ movement but also reflects on the broader implications of these struggles for democracy and social cohesion in the face of rising authoritarianism.

SLOBODA Zdeněk – *Masculine Sport and the Challenge of/for Gay, Trans* and Intersex* Athletes*

Sport is an important social and cultural phenomenon. Contemporary sport has been institutionalising in the context of the development of modern society, which, in addition to, for example, the transformation of the labour market and the development of leisure time, also entails the transformation of gender roles and identities. Initially, we could observe a strong social gender bipolarisation (and the related reinforcement of heteronormativity) leading to the cultural anchoring of sports as a male sphere. As such, it became important or even crucial for the formation of male identities, especially in team sports, through the relation of sport to the military or violence. However, the last few years have been characterised not only by the development and promotion of women's (performance) sport and the closing of the gender gap in sports, but also by the reduction of homophobia (or heteronormativity) in sport or with the coping of sports with the inclusion of trans* and intersex* athletes; Both with ambivalent (and still developing) outcomes.

In my paper, in addition to providing basic perspectives on why sport is masculine and what implications this entails, I will look through Czech data collected from focus groups on the topic of coming out and homophobia in team sports, and through a look into media discussions on the topic of categorizing male and female in relation to trans* and intersex* people.

TARANENKOVA Ivana – *Of Fathers and Sons. Masculinity in Slovak Literature*

Despite sporadic initiatives, Slovak literary scholarship has not developed masculinity studies. Nevertheless, in various literary-historical situations, it deals with themes and motifs that

fall within this field. Slovak literary studies identify them but do not place them in the context of gender studies. Such issues include, for example, the question of the 'hero of our time'. What is really at stake is a confrontation with the hegemonic ideal of masculinity in different historical eras, which intertwines the gendered with the social.

In this context, we can mention the theme of the outsider frequented in the Slovak literature of the 1990s, which analysed the crisis of masculinity in the era of social transition in post-communist countries.

A recurrent theme in Slovak literary and cultural history is the relationship between sons and fathers, which shapes the individual and social identity.

In my presentation, I will analyse several literary texts of 20th and 21st-century Slovak literature (by authors such as Dominik Tatarka, Martin Šimečka, Balla, Peter Macsovszky), where I will point out how the gender aspect connects to the social aspect, as well as the gendered conditionality of topos and situations previously interpreted as universal.