

Frantisek Galan (1946-1991) : In Memoriam

MICHAEL HOLQUIST

Make hue among the dark comedians,
Halloo them in the topmost distances
For answer from their icy Elysee. Wallace Stevens

On Monday, October 21, 1991, Frantisek Galan, Professor of Comparative and Slavic Literature at Vanderbilt University, died after a six month encounter with Leukemia.

Professor Galan was born in Slovakia in the dark years following the German occupation. Except for brief meetings, his father (a distinguished lawyer) and mother were separated by the war, and then by events leading up to, and following the Communist accession to power. Professor Galan was raised largely by an uncle, a Supreme court judge, in Bratislava. His father was arrested and imprisoned during the Slansky trials, and although later released, died a broken man. Professor Galan nevertheless remembered his youth with fondness, and he never forgot the friends he made in those years, many of them now occupying high posts in the new Czechoslovakia. A great lover of all the arts, Professor Galan early fell in love with classical American Jazz, and served as the impresario for several local groups of musicians. It was only natural, then, on entering the Comenius University of Bratislava in 1966, that he should devote himself to a Major in English and American Studies, with a minor in Slavic Philology.

After the Soviet invasion of 1968, Professor Galan left Czechoslovakia for Canada, where he received his B.A. (with a Major in Slavic Studies, and a Minor in English) from the university of Toronto in 1970. He began graduate work in Comparative Literature at Princeton the same year, receiving his M.A. in 1974. He returned to Canada for his doctoral work at the University of Montreal. He completed his dissertation, "Toward a Structural and Semiotic theory of Literary History : the Prague School Project, 1928-1944," and received his doctorate from Toronto in 1980.

In 1977 Professor Galan began what was to be a distinguished (if all too short) teaching career as an Assistant Professor at the University of Pittsburgh; from 1978 to 1985 he taught in the Slavic and Comparative Literature departments at the University of Texas, Austin (with a stint as Adjunct Assistant Professor of Semiotics at Brown University's Center for Semiotic Studies).

Having done pioneering work in establishing the importance of Russian Formalist film theory for a generation of Western experts, Professor Galan was appointed Associate Professor of English and Film at Georgia Institute of Technology, where he served from 1985 to 1988 (when he spent a one semester appointment in the English Department of Emory University). In 1988 he took up his final appointment as Professor of Comparative and Slavic Literatures at Vanderbilt University.

During his short life Professor Galan won several distinguished Fellowships including those from the National Humanities Center in Triangle Park,, N. C. , the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center in Washington, D.C. His 1981 monograph, *Prague School Pragmatics* and, above all, his magisterial *Historic Structures : The Prague School Project, 1928-1946* (Austin : University of Texas Press, 1984), established Professor Galan as one of the leading authorities in the area of East European literary theory. *Historic Structures* was immediately recognized as a work whose rigor was matched only by its lucidity; it has now appeared in new editions, as well as in Spanish and Japanese translation. At his death he had completed editing a special issue of the *Indian Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* devoted to the work of the Prague School, and had all but finished *Poetics of Cinema*, an anthology of Formalist writings on film theory (which will be completed by his friends). Professor Galan's central project of his last years, a large volume on "Prague Between the Wars: an attempt at a Semiotic Study of Culture," will now not see the light of day.

The world of learning will not soon forget Frantisek Galan as an erudite and innovative scholar. But there is always a portion of even the greatest scholar's life that "is not writ in any book." Of this portion of Frantisek Galan's existence it may truly be said that his intelligence did not flag in the teeth of certain death. Those who enjoyed the gift of his friendship will cherish all their lives the memory of his precise wit, the elegance of his personal style, and his consummate love of all things beautiful and well made.