

## **Queer Spaces Behind the Iron Curtain. The Case of Wilhelm Mach**

### **What are we going to do?**

A small international research team will work with the legacy of Wilhelm Mach, a Polish poet and prose writer, to make his letters available for online publication to be utilised by non-heteronormative writers and intellectuals from Poland and Bulgaria. The letters will be posted on an open-access webpage. They will be accompanied by a dictionary consisting of writers' biographies, as well as visualisations demonstrating the temporal dynamics, specificity and geography of the letter-writing queer community. This online publication will be accompanied by a monograph on Mach's literary *oeuvre* which will include his letters into the interpretive field focusing so far on his creative writing: novels and reportages.

### **How will we proceed?**

Found and collected from various Polish and Bulgarian archives, Mach's letters will be prepared for digital publication. Their digitalised copies will be supplemented with explanatory footnotes and processed graphically. In addition, a database will be developed on the basis of the formal and thematic information present in the correspondence. This will serve as the basis for visualisations of the documentary sources. The use of ICT applications (the Palladio tool developed by Stanford University) to provide the map and the insight into the informal transnational queer community will facilitate the transfer of knowledge about the processes of formation and functioning of this group of writers and intellectuals, as well as allow for an understanding of the flow of ideas and information within it. The digital reconfiguration of manuscripts has a meaning-creating potential that will be used to interpret Mach's literary texts, and the other way round: reading his fiction will also affect the shape of the visual presentation of the correspondence corpus.

### **Why is this study worth doing?**

It is worth exploring the letter-writing community co-created by Mach as well as the contact zone between his fictional and epistolary texts because, first of all, we know very little about the biography of this now-forgotten writer, whose archive remains inaccessible to scholars and readers. Secondly, due to the lack of data, we continue to use an inaccurate and misleading picture of the overall situation of homosexual artists in communist countries. What is studied most frequently is the influence of Western gender minorities on the shape of the Eastern European non-heteronormative relations. It is forgotten, however, that the Eastern Bloc consists of states that had completely different attitudes to homosexuality and homosexual writers, while the existence of transnational queer communities within socialist states has been a very rare subject of research attention.

### **What will the effects of the project be?**

The webpage will be an open archive of Wilhelm Mach's correspondence, which will surely attract the attention of researchers from Poland and abroad. The biographical dictionary of Mach's addressees, as well as visual maps of the letters and the accompanying structured data, will constitute a fundamental source of information for the further description of the Polish-Bulgarian queer community. Materials prepared in such a way will show in a new light the Polish-Bulgarian cultural relations in the 1950s and 1960s while taking into account gender and identity issues that have not been studied so far. In addition, a new interpretation of Mach's fiction and non-fiction will be constructed that for the first time will include the biographical discourse emerging through his letters.