

UDK 821.162.3"19"
Preliminary communication

Valentina Majdenić (Croatia)

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek
Faculty of Education

Andrea Vučetić (Croatia)

School of Economics, Požega

CZECH HUMOUR AS TIMELESS ANTI-IDEOLOGICAL PROPAGANDA

Abstract

World wars have left an indelible trace while they lasted as well as in times after them. In Czech culture and literature one of the common ways of adapting to political regime changes is using humour in literary works. The paper focuses on three novels by famous Czech novelists: *The Good Soldier Švejk* by Jaroslav Hašek, *I Served the King of England* by Bohumil Hrabal and *The Joke* by Milan Kundera. By using humour as dominant literary discourse, the authors created marginalised characters, (anti)heroes who, despite living at different times, disarm the war. Nuanced irony, black humour, sarcasm and grotesque reveal the true face of wars and restraints of (post)war ideologies – Austrian imperialism, Nazism and socialism by treating them as absurd. Timelessness of pacifism which these works promote makes these books appealing to readers even nowadays.

Keywords: Czech literature, ideology, humour, anti-hero, Hašek, Hrabal, Kundera

Introduction

The pages of the 20th century history are stained by bloody traces of world wars which tailored the political map of Europe many times. Historical-political changes within one state had a domino effect on other countries therefore it is not uncommon that the Czechs also suffered consequences of world wars. Despite censorship imposed on the Czech people, some writers had the courage to write about forbidden themes, regardless of the troubles they could get into.

The paper focuses on three novels by Czech authors: *The Good Soldier Švejk* by Jaroslav Hašek, *I Served the King of England* by Bohumil Hrabal and *The Joke* by Milan Kundera. Since these novels represent a reaction to adverse circumstances already seen in the world and being aware of Czech inclination to gentle humour, we propose the hypothesis that these authors fight against ideologies by using humour. The aim of this paper is to examine this hypothesis by thoroughly

analysing the novels and determine the extent to which the protagonists accept or fight against a certain ideology.

It is important to mention that so far there are no papers in Croatian scientific bibliography that analyse all three works in the same context or have an interdisciplinary approach in looking at them as anti-ideological propaganda. Still, there are some in the Czech bibliography. In Croatia there are a few doctoral theses which analyse single novels in some other contexts. These are *Poetic Interspace of Péter Esterházy between Late Modernism and Postmodernism* (2010) by Tina Varga Oswald, a thesis by Jasna Poljak Rehlicki *From Myth to Irony: the Character of Warrior in European Cultural Circle from Classical Antiquity till Today* (2013) and Filip Hameršak's *Croatian Autobiography and World War I* (2013). Some papers partially related to these novels were also written by the authors of the theses¹. There are some papers that occasionally deal with Hašek's famous Švejk and only mention Kundera's *The Joke*, but there are hardly any papers in Croatian bibliography that analyse Hrabal's novel. Still, Dragan Gligora discusses Hrabal's book in the paper *How the Unlikely became Reality: Pleasure and Knowledge in Hrabal's novel I Served the King of England*. Since such papers are scarce in Croatia, this paper is a novelty because it attempts to systematise and complete present knowledge.

Methodology

The basic concept of the paper demands an interdisciplinary approach and various methods. In order to examine the hypothesis that Czech authors fight ideologies by using humour, it is necessary to systematise knowledge not only regarding literary theory, but history as well. By combining inductive-deductive and descriptive method, the narrative worlds of the novels are to be described within historical-political context of the 20th century and then more precisely within the position of the Czech people as parts of different states and countries. In order to establish to which extent the protagonists accept or fight against different ideologies, it is necessary to apply contrastive analysis and put them in co-relation and by critically interpreting the quotes from the novels record their similarities and differences. This analysis is closely connected to problem-solving approach since it will raise a number of questions. Finally, a synthesis of all conclusions will be presented as well as recommendations for future research.

Results

In order to examine the hypothesis whether humour represents the key anti-ideological weapon of Czech writers, it was necessary to take the following steps: (1) put the novels into a specific historical and spatial context; (2) record the characters' (and indirectly authors') attitude to the regimes; (3) examine the characters' ability to adapt to new political circumstances and their internal motivation; (4) synthesise the influence of regimes on the characters' social status.

When analysing the novels, we simultaneously observed which forms of humour were used. Since there are no works which precisely list all types of humour, we found helpful Milivoj Solar's *The Theory of Literature* and *The Dictionary of Foreign Terms*. In the chapter on types of

¹ F. Hameršak wrote the paper *From a novel to a performance – the contribution to studying Švejk's theatrical anabasis* (2008) and J. Poljak Rehlicki and T. Varga Oswald co-authored *The relationship of literature and myth in Hašek's The Good Soldier Švejk* (2013)

literary drama types, Solar (1981) lists the terms *humour*, *satire* and *grotesque*, but he emphasises that they do not refer to drama only. They are general aesthetic terms that can be used in any art form as well as in literature. *The Dictionary of Foreign Terms* (Anić, Goldstein, 2004) offers explanations for all three abovementioned terms and also for *irony* and *sarcasm*.

In order to analyse and complement cognitions by providing explanations from literature, this paper lists a few types of humour (even though there must be more – authors' remark). *Humour* is "the ability to notice the funny side of an event or a situation" (Anić, Goldstein, 2004: 572), i.e. the most common laugh. The next level would be *irony* which is similar to mockery (Anić, Goldstein, 2004) since one means the opposite of what is being said (Solar, 1981). *Sarcasm* is a type of irony, but it is poignant and a bit cruel (Anić, Goldstein, 2004), and *grotesque* functions between bitterly serious and funny since it attempts to depict the distorted, unnatural, monstrous and caricatured (Solar, 1981).

The first task was to put the narrative world of the novels into historical and spatial context. The novels were not interpreted with regard to the year of publication, but with regard to the chronological appearance of a certain regime in the novel, even though the regimes are not strictly defined by years. It is important to emphasise that *The Good Soldier Švejk* consists of four incomplete volumes which depict the period from June 28, 1914, when the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand occurred. Since the author of Švejk died in 1923 he did not manage to finish the fourth volume² so it is difficult to speculate when the narrative would finish. The plot revolves around preparations and battles during World War I³ therefore the setting is not rectilinearly limited, but it adapts to historical battlefields. At that time the Czech people were part of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy⁴ therefore Švejk is a contemporary of Austrian imperialism. On the contrary, in Hrabal's novel the protagonist Jan Dítě's point of view is formed shortly before⁵, during⁶ and after Nazism and in socialism⁷. The narrative is set in Czech region.

² Since the 4th volume was not finished, the translator of this edition from 1996 noted that the novel was completed by journalist Karel Vaněk, but more recent Czech critical editions were mainly published without that part (Hašek, 1996)

³ The Great War questioned spiritual and cultural values of all nations. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the world functioned on the basis of Newton's cognitions, but Einstein's theory of relativity undermined stability and unjustly cast doubt on all human values and absolute terms: good and evil and similar (Johnson, 2007)

⁴ Despite the fact that the Czechs had been only one part of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy since late Middle Ages, bibliography emphasises that the reign of Emperor Franz Joseph I was *the golden age* for the Czechs. The foundations for technology and economic growth were laid, and previously flourishing culture got added value. Even though the Czechs did not have their own state, their rights were protected to a certain extent due to Austro-Hungarian Compromise. Still, problems arose since the Czechs lived with other nations that believed their rights were affected by the Czechs. Those were primarily the Germans who had lived in Czech regions for years, but Hungarians as well who believed they should enjoy more rights than the Czechs. It is clear that the ruler's wish to indulge people and grant rights to subordinate nations and to protect Austrian interests at the same time inevitably brought about tense relationships. Their relations were even more strained shortly before World War I. (The History of the Czech Republic, 2014)

⁵ A great threat was Germany that was rapidly recovering after the loss in the Great War and this was especially apparent during Adolf Hitler's reign and the period of more aggressive German politics. After a number of actions undertaken against other European countries, Hitler turned against the Czechoslovakia since it presented an obstacle to his secret wishes to conquer regions in the east. In 1938 he publically stated that the issue of 10 million Sudeten Germans, permanently living in Czechoslovak region, could only be settled if this part was united with his Reich. Czechoslovak defence forces were becoming weaker which was also influenced by other countries' attitudes that

Kundera's protagonist Ludvík experiences the last regime and the time after the decline of socialism, also within borders of Czech regions.

It is evident that these regimes and the protagonists could not coexist without establishing some kind of relation. The question is what that relation was like and whether one can indirectly interpret it from Hašek's, Hrabal's and Kundera's narratives? In order to answer this question we have to consider protagonists' characterization since the events in the novels are not only influenced by political factors that the protagonists could not control, but also by the ways in which some people can(not) adapt to their times. This means that when attempting to describe the relations between the characters and regime, at the same time the question will be answered whether the characters succeeded in adapting to the situation and its effects.

Comparing Švejk, Dítě and Ludvík, we can conclude that Švejk definitely is the most cunning of them all regardless of the fact that in his surroundings he is deemed to be a person with a lower IQ. Hašek's characterization of his protagonist's appearance results in good-natured humour and readers' sympathy. A seemingly clumsy and dim-witted man got a recognisable facial expression in the illustrated as well as in the movie interpretation. This naïve, good-natured dog trader selling allegedly purebred dogs finds himself in the maelstrom of World War I. His optimism, loyalty and desire to die for the Emperor and his homeland are completely opposite to the cold bureaucracy of the Monarchy which was long ago deprived of any humanity. It is exactly this contrast that becomes the leitmotif of this parody of the raging war. For example, after being summoned to medical examination for the draft, Švejk, despite his rheumatism, forbids Mrs. Müller to call the doctor: *You'll not run anywhere, Mrs Müller. Except for my legs I'm completely sound cannon-fodder, and at a time when things are going badly for Austria every cripple must be at his post.* (Hašek, 1996: 78)

This novel shows Hašek as a master of grotesque. One of the most striking examples is when Švejk asks Mrs. Müller to borrow a wheelchair from an acquaintance and get him an army cap and to personally take him to medical examination. His innocent face wins him sympathy of crowds and he becomes a sensation in the article in *Prague Official News* with the headline: A CRIPPLE'S PATRIOTISM (1) (translated by C. Parrot).

(1)

Yesterday afternoon the passers-by in the main streets of Prague were witnesses of a scene which was an eloquent testimony to the fact that in these great and solemn hours the sons of our nation can furnish the finest examples of loyalty and devotion to the throne of the aged monarch. We might well have been back in the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans, when Mucius Scaevola had himself led off to the battle, regardless of his burnt arm. The most sacred feelings and sympathies were nobly demonstrated yesterday by a cripple on crutches who was pushed in an invalid chair by his aged mother. This son of the Czech people, spontaneously and regardless

were giving in to Germany's increasing demands. Finally, Czechoslovakia was forced to give up its border regions. (The History of the Czech Republic, 2014)

⁶ The period from 1939-1945 marked some of the most dramatic times in recent history of the world. "The world is affected by a war hurricane of so far unseen proportions and in a short period of time a political map and the relations between superpowers were changed a few times". (The History of the Czech Republic, 2014)

⁷ In post-war period the extreme left-wing party ruled the country so it was forbidden to establish any kind of right-wing parties. The aim of the newly formed political regime was to unite the nation and improve personal relationships, but during their government people again experienced what it meant to be politically unfit and persecuted. Consequently, the Germans were the ones who suffered most and had to bear the blame for their defeated countrymen in World War II. (The History of the Czech Republic, 2014)

of his infirmity, had himself driven off to war to sacrifice his life and possessions for his emperor. And if his call: 'To Belgrade!' found such a lively echo on the streets of Prague, it only goes to prove what model examples of love for the fatherland and the Imperial House are proffered by the people of Prague. (Hašek, 1996: 81-82)

In order to better understand the contrast between Švejk's good nature and maliciousness of Austrian bureaucracy, it is essential to record phrases which Hašek used to illustrate the Austrian empire: *police* state where trust does not exist so spies follow people (2); *cold* bureaucracy whose aim is to meet the requirements without critically questioning causes and consequences (3); *military* discipline that attempts to turn common subordinates into mighty killing machines (4); *exaggerated war* propaganda that, among other things, lures people into war by offering candies (5); *unconditional* loyalty to the state regardless of the imposed obligation to fight for other people's country (6).

(2)

In every military unit Austria had her snoopers who spied on their comrades, sleeping on the same bunks with them and sharing their bread on the march. (Hašek, 1996: 106)

(3)

Here all logic mostly disappeared and the legal codes triumphed. The legal code strangled, went mad, fumed, laughed, threatened, murdered and gave no quarter. The magistrates were jugglers with the law, high priests of its letter, devourers of the accused, tigers of the Austrian jungle, who measured their spring on the accused by the number of clauses. (Hašek, 1996: 42)

(4)

Our Lieutenant Makovec always used to say: "There's got to be discipline, you bloody fools, otherwise you'd be climbing about on the trees like monkeys, but the army's going to make human beings of you, you god-forsaken idiots." (Hašek, 1996: 25)

(5)

Baroness von Botzenheim visited Švejk in military hospital in garrison prison in order to give him a treat for his loyalty to the monarchy. *A dozen roast chickens wrapped up in pink silk paper and tied with a yellow and black⁸ silk ribbon, two bottles of a war liqueur with the label: 'Gott strafe England' (God punish England). On the back of the label was a picture of Franz Joseph and Wilhelm clasping hands as though they were going to play the nursery game: 'Bunny sat alone in his hole. Poor little bunny, what's wrong with you that you can't hop!' Then she took out of the hamper three bottles of wine for the convalescent and two boxes of cigarettes. She set out everything elegantly on the empty bed next to Švejk's, where she also put a beautifully bound book, "Stories from the Life of our Monarch", which had been written by the present meritorious chief editor of our official "Czechoslovak Republic" who doted on old Franz. Packets of chocolate with the same inscription, 'Gott strafe England', and again with pictures of Austrian and German emperors, found their way to the bed. On the chocolate they were no longer clasping hands; each was acting on his own and turning his back to the other, there was a beautiful toothbrush with two rows of bristles and the inscription "Viribus unitis" (Joint forces), so that anyone who cleaned his teeth should remember Austria. An elegant and extremely useful little gift for the front and the trenches was a manicure set. On the case*

⁸ "Emperor garrisons and king troops and a yellow flag with a black eagle in Czech rural parts, Galicia, Hungary and Croatia were a dramatic sign of emperor's presence even to the most indifferent nations." (Johnston, 1993)

was a picture showing shrapnel bursting and a man in a steel helmet rushing forward with fixed bayonet, and underneath it was written: *Für Gott, Kaiser und Vaterland* (For God, Emperor and homeland). (Hašek, 1996: 96 – 97)

(6)

Švejk remembers Doctor Joseph Vojna's heroism and loyalty. *That one was in Galicia with the 7th garrison of Polish hunters, and when they reached for bayonets, he got a bullet in his head and while they were carrying him to the Dressing station he yelled at the ones carrying him that he wouldn't let them treat him for such a trifle. And immediately he wanted to go to the battle with a new troop, but a grenade cut off his ankle. Again they wanted to take him away, but he limped to the battle with a cane and used the cane to fend off enemies, but then another grenade came and cut off his arm. He put the cane in the other hand and yelled that he wouldn't forgive them this and God knows what would be of him if a shrapnel didn't finally kill him. If they hadn't beaten the life out of him, maybe he would be decorated with a silver medal for bravery. And when a grenade cut off his head, and when the head was still rolling on the ground, it was still yelling: "Let the duty to the homeland be unsurpassed even if you die a terrible death."* (Hašek, 1996: 25 – 26)

Despite clearly described cruelty and ruthlessness of Austrian imperialism, from the beginning to the end of the novel Švejk emphasises his loyalty to the Monarchy in a humorous, sarcastic and grotesque way. Clerks in state institutions (courtrooms, prisons, military garrisons, asylum, etc.) present him with a number of challenges to question his national enthusiasm and childish happiness because he can die for the emperor. One of the examples is the absurd situation when a board of medical experts had already decided that he was insane, but they still ask him *pro forma* questions:

(7)

The absurd questions are: *Is radium heavier than lead? Do you believe in the end of the world? Would you know how to calculate the diameter of the globe?* His answer to the last one is also a question. *No, I'm afraid I wouldn't,* answered Švejk, *'but I'd like to ask you a riddle myself, gentlemen. Take a three-storied house, with eight windows on each floor. On the roof there are two dormer windows and two chimneys. On every floor there are two tenants. And now, tell me, gentlemen, in which year the house-porter's grandmother died? (...)* After Švejk had left, the doctors agreed that *Švejk was a patent imbecile and idiot according to all the natural laws invented by luminaries of psychiatry.* (Hašek, 1996: 48)

This quote is a clear proof of Švejk's ingenuity and triumph over the absurdity of the system in which he lives. We may say that parts of Hašek's novel irresistibly remind us of the absurdity of Kafka's *Process*, but unlike Josef K. who did not manage to fight the trap in which he finds himself, Švejk uses humour to break the absurd by adapting to it and feigning loyalty, warmth and belief in people who were made into numbers by the system and became cannon-fodder in the battle for other people's ideals. Besides, Švejk manages to protect his interests in all situations.

Hrabal is perhaps most detailed when characterising his protagonist's physical appearance since his humour is primarily based on the main character's looks. Jan Dítě is unhappy because he is short, pale and emaciated and his life is dominated by his inferiority

complex. He is introduced at the beginning of the novel as an unpromising waiter who, by having inner monologues (which the whole novel is based on), shows signs of intellectual disability⁹. Still, already in the first chapter one can conclude that this apprentice waiter, like Švejk, is very resourceful in all situations. He proves this when he sells hot dogs to passengers in the railway station (8) (translated by P. Wilson):

(8)

And soon it was all I wanted to do too, walk up and down the platform several times a day selling hot frankfurters for one crown eighty a piece. Sometimes the passenger would only have a twenty-crown note, sometimes a fifty, and I'd never have the change, so I'd pocket his note and go on selling until finally the customer got on the train, worked his way to a window, and reached out his hand. Then I'd put down the caddy of hot frankfurters and fumble about in my pocket for the change, and the fellow would yell at me to forget the coins and just give him the notes. Very slowly I'd start patting my pockets, and the dispatcher would blow his whistle, and very slowly I'd ease the notes out of my pocket, and the train would start moving, and I'd trot alongside it, and when the train had picked up speed I'd reach out so that the notes would just barely brush the tips of the fellow's fingers, and sometimes he'd be leaning out so far that someone inside would have to hang on to his legs, and one of my customers even beamed himself on a signal post. But then the fingers would be out of reach and I'd stand there panting, the money still in my outstretched hand, and it was all mine. They almost never came back for their change, and that's how I started having money of my own, a couple of hundred a month, and once I even got handed a thousand-crown note. (Hrabal, 2002: 5 – 6)

He cures his inferiority complex by cunningly saving money since his priority is to become a millionaire and buy a hotel, and in this way earn the respect of others who find him *invisible*. Since everything in his life allegedly happened by accident, he also faces Nazism in the same way. He starts learning German by chance and going to movies to watch German films shortly before the beginning of World War II and when he saves a German teacher he becomes *one of them* for a short time. He creates his identity by comparing himself to blond haired Aryans and German state official since this is the first time when he thinks that people respect him.

(9)

It felt wonderful to be a part of this occasion, to be among captains and colonels and young people with eyes as blue and hair as blond as mine, and though my German wasn't up to much, I felt German... (Hrabal, 2002: 97)

Even though he apparently feels good among Nazis, wondering why his Czech countrymen avoid him, Hrabal's irony towards totalitarian regime is noticeable in a grotesque scene when doctors check whether Jan's sperm is Aryan enough so that he can "fertilise" his wife and conceive "a new man". Hrabal's caricature is also apparent in the measures undertaken by Lise so that their child would have Aryan mentality from birth (10).

(10)

⁹ In this way one can get insight into the mental state of the character and directly experience what the character really thinks, regardless of the chaotic way in which this is realised. (Peleš, 1999)

When we came back from our honeymoon to that small town above Děčín where I was a waiter, Lise wanted us to have children. But like any true Slav, I was a creature of moods. I could do anything in the emotion of the moment, but when Lise told me to get ready because that night she was set to conceive the New Man, the founder of the New Europe, I felt exactly the way I had when the Reichsdoktor, acting on the Nuremberg Laws, asked me to bring him a bit of my sperm on a piece of white paper. For a week she'd been playing Wagner on the record player, Lohengrin and Siegfried, and she'd already decided that if it was a boy she'd call it Siegfried Ditie, and all week long she'd walked around gazing at those scenes in relief along the covered walkways and colonnades. She would stand there in the late afternoons with German kings and emperors and Teutonic heroes and demigods rising against the blue sky... (Hrabal, 2002: 111 – 112)

As the narrative progresses, we follow waiter's inner development. His alleged carefree spirit falters under the influence of warfare, but his craving for money is still present. He uses bloody money that belonged to Jewish people to finally build an exotic hotel, which arouses envy in all other hotel owners. When he realises that he can no longer benefit from Nazis, he distances himself from them and attempts to become close with communists who rule the country. Yet, in the process of nationalisations he loses his property worth millions. In the moments when he lost everything and when he feeds pigeons, he experiences catharsis (11).

(11)

I was a god of life. And I looked back on my life and saw myself now, surrounded by these divine messengers, these pigeons, as though I were a saint, and meanwhile I could hear the laughter and the shouts and snide remarks of the millionaires, and suddenly the message of the pigeons hit me, and the unbelievable came true again, because even if I'd had ten million crowns and three hotels it wouldn't have mattered, no, this kissing of tiny beaks was sent by heaven itself, just as I'd seen on the altar panels and the stations of the cross that we walked past to get to our cells. And even though I had seen nothing and heard nothing, wanting to be what I had never been able to be, a millionaire, despite my two million, I became a millionaire, a multimillionaire, only now, when I saw for the first time that these pigeons were my friends, that they were the parable of a mission I had yet to accomplish, and that what was happening to me now was what happened to Saul when he fell off his horse and God appeared to him... (Hrabal, 2002: 149)

This is also a biographical element because Hrabal liked pigeons and some speculate that he died when he fell through the window while feeding pigeons.

While these two novels are characterised by humour, irony, sarcasm and grotesque in creating characters, their relationships and points of view, Kundera's novel is realized on the basis of black humour and the protagonist's innocent joke. At the beginning, we are introduced to Ludvík, a promising student and a young Party member respected in his community. In order to make his friend laugh, a girl he knows from college, he writes a joke about optimism on a postcard: *Optimism is the opium of the people! A healthy atmosphere stinks of stupidity! Long live Trotsky!* (Kundera, 2000: 41)

Yet, unlike jokes in the first two novels this one results in more serious consequences. The author's style also reveals his attitude to socialist regime (12) (translated by M. H. Heim).

(12)

I had all kinds of answers ready for the commissions that called me in and asked me what had made me become a Communist, but what had attracted me to the movement more than anything, dazzled me, you might say, was the feeling (real or apparent) of standing near the “wheel of history”. (...) The elation we experienced is commonly known as the intoxication of power, but (taking a more benevolent stance) I would suggest something milder: we let history bewitch us; we were drunk with the thought of jumping on its back and feeling it beneath us, and if, more often than not, the result was an ugly lust for power, still (given that all human affairs are ambiguous) an idealistic illusion remained (especially, perhaps, in us, the young), the illusion that we were the ones to inaugurate the era in which man (all men) would no longer stand “outside” history, no longer cringe “under its heel”, but direct and create it. (Kundera, 2000: 87)

Since the novel is set in post-war period when they tried to create a positive attitude and widespread enthusiasm for Stalin’s regime, Ludvík was denounced as a traitor of the Party, expelled from college and drafted to work brigades to work in mines. Resentful because of such reactions of his former best friends, he turns to his inner monotony, hatred and craves revenge that later on determines all his actions. His friend Kostka also notices that (13).

(13)

They expelled you from the Party, from the university, put you in among the politicals for your military service, then kept you down in the mines for another two or three years. And you? You gnashed your teeth in resentment, convinced of the great injustice done to you. That sense of injustice still determines every step you take. (...) A man devoted to his faith is humble and must humbly bear the most unjust of punishments. The humiliated shall be raised up. The repentant shall be purified. They who are wronged are thereby given the chance to test their fidelity. If the only reason you turned bitter towards your fellow men was that they placed too great a burden on your shoulders, then your faith was weak and you failed the test. (Kundera, 2002: 285)

Even after a few years when he manages to graduate and find a job, Ludvík still wants to revenge and punish Zemánek because he finds him responsible for all the troubles he went through. In order to hurt him, he has intercourse with his wife, but then he finds out that they are about to get divorced. The most absurd part of his revenge is noticeable at the end when he meets Zemánek after all these years. Once a zealous communist, Zemánek has abandoned his youth beliefs and adapted to a post-modern society by showing us that every time requires a different approach. In this tragic and grotesque way, Ludvík realises the futility of hatred and revenge that marked his life and turned it into the funniest joke.

These quotes are just a part of an extensive corpus that could be used to illustrate the level of forms of humour in works of Czech novelists. They are also great indicators of presence of all types of humour (even black humour) that writers use to fight different ideologies, which supports the affirmative hypothesis. The next part contains the discussion on the observations recorded during the analysis of all three novels.

Discussion

The introductory part of the paper states that Czech novels have rarely been the subject of research in Croatian scientific bibliography and that they were only partially mentioned in three doctoral theses as well as in few papers. Since these novels have not been mentioned in the context of humour as a means of fighting against ideologies, this is the first paper that analyses them in this way using interdisciplinary approach.

The proposed hypothesis has been confirmed by a number of representative quotes which indicate the presence of humour, irony, sarcasm and grotesque making fun of the absurdities of war. When creating the characters, all three authors chose common, average and imperfect people since this is how readers can identify with their destinies more easily. It is a fact that the authors actually talk about political regimes, personally and indirectly through their characters. No matter whether they talk about Austrian imperialism, Nazism or socialism, a man is only a number in the war, someone who can easily be exchanged and someone who is not regarded as an individual, but part of the mass. Censorship is one of the ways to control the masses therefore it is not unusual that the novels were published some time later. Still, they discuss issues of their times.

Even though a person is shown as a mere puppet in a political morass, ironically the novels prove that there are always the ones who will manage to satisfy their needs, even in such circumstances (Švejk and Jan to a certain extent). On the other hand, there are individuals whose remaining life will be filled with bitterness and hatred because of a simple joke (Ludvík). All three novels are a cry of ordinary people, not only the characters, but the authors' protest against ideologies as well. A recognised and powerful anti-ideological message is only a small contribution to research on rebellion of ordinary people against (post)war situations and it can inspire future research.

Conclusion

World wars are permanently engraved in the collective consciousness of people as a traumatic experience. In order to face the chains of history, and their present as well, three Czech writers (Hašek, Hrabal and Kundera) wrote novels in which they use humour to fight against ideologies.

Whether using simple or black humour, irony, sarcasm or grotesque, their marginalised (anti)heroes prove that all ideologies are the same regardless of the fundamental convictions. Although Švejk shows inventiveness and ingenuity in inhumane war conditions by skilfully avoiding dangerous situations, imperialism proved to be insensitive to an ordinary man unless he was *one of them*. Jan Dítě is probably called Dítě on purpose (Czech for a child) because he childishly and naively goes through the horrors of war. The same as Švejk, with his grotesque actions, he successfully avoids the tragic destiny of the majority of his countrymen. However, Kundera's Ludvík suffers consequences of his joke that later on consumes him with hatred.

When comparing these three characters, it can be noticed that Švejk and Jan Dítě were not ideologically characterised like Ludvík. Maybe it was this dissociation that helped them in their effective resistance and adaptation to situations that were disastrous for others. But Ludvík believed in the regime on whose foundations he had been brought up and which ostracised him later only because of an innocent joke. Unlike the first two novels in which the characters

approach life ironically, in the last novel life treats Ludvík ironically. Kundera laughs at the absurd of *being part of ideology* that rejects and punishes *its* people because of a trifle.

These works with their powerful anti-ideological message and humour are equally relevant even after (more than) a half of century and the distance from bloody totalitarian times provides them with a more impartial presentation of futility of suffering.

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