

# Personal Ethos in the Literature of Slovak and Czech Dissidents: The Essay as a Form of Expressing an Active Personality

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*This article discusses texts by selected authors from the period of »consolidation« in Czechoslovakia. The first part briefly outlines the sociohistorical context of dissident writing.*

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## Introduction

Twentieth-century art cannot do without reflection on significant social problems, without artists' focus on man and his diverse, varied existence. However, it is important to distinguish whether this is done only through the prism of a subjective view of artists with an emphasis on descriptions of their own maladies and experience, without any concentration on any abstract meaning and scope, without great conceptions and transpersonal goals. Such "talking about oneself" has reduced art to a trivial level of common everyday conversations.

Few writers have been able to grasp the trivial authenticity that modernism allowed in art at the beginning of the twentieth century, in a way that made it art with propositions of the fundamental problems of life. For the outstanding personalities living under the totalitarian conditions of the Warsaw Pact countries after the Second World War, it was the essay that became their genre of narration, through which they were most capable of reflecting reality.

Faced with the diversity and ambiguity of the current of modern movements, as well as their postmodern continuations, entropy became entrenched in thinking about literature and art. However, in the second

half of the twentieth century in the Eastern Bloc countries it is possible to distinguish two basic streams in art: the official and the alternative one.

Outstanding personalities of twentieth-century alternative culture, whose primary medium was the word, still relied on the word and still had confidence in it. They placed all their hope for the resolution of social (and more often also political) conditions in it. Literature of inner emigration<sup>1</sup> and dissent<sup>2</sup> are symptomatic of alternative culture. In various communist countries, their mode of existence and the extent of their activities differed.<sup>3</sup>

In international projects, Czechoslovakia emerges as one state, largely compact and without any resolution. As a rule, Slovak participation is missing. From my own experience, I know that *-slovakia* was still a mere suffix of *Czecho-* (i.e., Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia) for the West in 1996. From the outside this may seem acceptable. However, upon closer inspection one discovers dissimilarities. The difference between the Czech lands and Slovakia has deep historical roots and also continues into the twentieth century. However, it was only together that the Slovaks and Czechs were able to break loose from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s the Slovak politician Alexander Dubček conceived of “socialism with a human face.” Dubček came from a communist family and by the end of the 1960s he was working as a reform communist. His politics were inspired by movements in intellectual and artistic circles, as well as among the “workers” created by the 1950s – that is, political processes, gulags, the creation of cooperatives, the dissolution of monastic orders, and so on. Already by the preparatory phase of the 1960s it is necessary to trace parallels and differences in development in the Czech lands and Slovakia.<sup>4</sup>

In the period of “consolidation” following the Prague Spring, sanctions emerged in the Czech lands under the leadership of Gustáv Husák, against which it was necessary to take a stand in one way or another. Sanctions against intellectuals were much more striking than in the past. Thus, the situation crystallized – many intellectuals from the period of revival in the 1960s left and lived abroad – actually, they were “allowed” to do so under dismal conditions as in the case of Jiří Gruša, Pavel Kohout, Arnošt Lustig, and others, or they were monitored at home like Ludvík Vaculík, Václav Havel, and others, and from their “emigration into their own world” (“life in truth”) they organized important resistance with a risk of interrogation, imprisonment, and other forms of persecution, including inferior social standing without work or without an adequate job.

In Slovakia in this situation, the sanctions were not set as an “either-or” alternative.<sup>5</sup> After the purges in 1970,<sup>6</sup> political differentiation of the unreliable became a tool for breaking up the potential solidarity of dissidents

in Slovakia. Unlike Dominik Tatarka, Jozef Jablonický, Miroslav Kusý, Hana Ponická, Marian Városov, Thomas Strauss, and others, some politically engaged intellectuals quietly obtained new inconspicuous positions. Culture was saved by writers engaged in the organs of the Communist Party. Through this differentiation, the last remnants of hope for a common front of further resistance were smashed.

The social life of the “parallel culture” in the Czech lands was organized through public manifestos such as “The Two Thousand Words” (which automatically belong to parallel culture for their courage to criticize the party and its practices), petitions to the samizdat series *Edice Petlice* (Padlock Edition), and other activities. Many participated in this and, despite monitoring by the police, it was tirelessly promoted by Vaculík and Havel.

### **1968, normalization, and consolidation**

In 1968 the awareness of democracy, which made it possible to cooperate, was indelibly set in the consciousness of the citizens of Czechoslovakia. The reform thesis of “socialism with a human face” had become a slogan and Alexander Dubček became a national symbol. Lubomír Lipták considers the changeover from 1967 to 1968 to be the beginning of a “new stage of our history.” The “national front” (a notion used by Lipták) that was formed did not target the Czech nation, but was against conservatism; it did not reject Prague, but centralism in general.

Suppression of the reform efforts by armed forces from Warsaw Pact countries (i.e., occupation) was a twofold disappointment for the people of Czechoslovakia: 1) the rest of the countries did not join in, but they served a hegemonic power, and 2) the people themselves, under the influence of this power, stepped back from their positions on the path to freedom. The years of “normalization” and “consolidation” meant only resignation and large-scale “inner emigration.” On the other hand, this situation was also a challenge to maintain one’s own “human face” despite “consolidation.” Two burning human torches became the conscience of the time and a uniting factor, two students from Prague: Jan Palach (who burned himself to death on 16 January 1969 in protest against the ongoing “normalization”) and Jan Zajíc (who burned himself to death a few days later). Over the following years, environmentalists were rather well organized as well as the Slovak Catholic dissident movement connected with foreign countries, which resulted in the Candle Demonstration in 1988, which was also the beginning of open protest and revival and the fight for democracy in Slovakia one year before the Velvet Revolution. (Korec, *Bratislavský*)

An important role in the preparations for 1968 was played by *Kultúrny život* (Cultural Life) with Pavol Števček as its editor in chief, and within this especially *Oneskorené reportáže* (Belated Reports) by Ladislav Mňačko. The initiatives around Echo appear unique and exceptionally progressive for the 1960s. Milan Zemko's ideas fundamentally revise communist society and in all their proposed coordinates are reminiscent of the changes that took place after 1989 (Zemko 22–25).

The “consolidation” period was marked with deepened schizophrenia, an atmosphere of fear of ubiquitous power, total “inner emigration,” or actual emigration abroad. In Slovakia, “inner emigration” and the dissident movement were concentrated in fine arts circles and in the Catholic underground (see Strauss, *Tri otázky*).<sup>7</sup> Other activities in other professions were either sporadic and individual, or persistent but isolated. Resistance against the authorities was not organized and institutionalized in Slovakia<sup>8</sup> as it was in the Czech lands.

### **The Slovak issue as part of the resistance**

As so often in the past, the issue of the autonomy of Slovakia, connected not only with the ideological hegemony of the USSR but also the state hegemony of the Czechs in Czechoslovakia (Lipták 5), came to the fore in Slovakia again in the 1960s. The Czech lands, as a historically independent formation, did not need to struggle with such issues. This is the “external” difference between the Czech and Slovak dissident movements. At the same time, it is also a very complicated element that clouded the situation for Slovak dissidents, and it divided rather than united Slovak society on the edge of what was already symptomatic nationalism. Part of the opposition, who unreservedly and gladly functioned later under the sun of autonomy in a functioning society, were reluctant to support independence. (The same situation was repeated once again after 1989.) On the other hand, the activation of national awareness also stirred up the old Slovak nationalists (from the first Slovak Republic from 1939 to 1945), who in the old spirit hatefully and in the name of democracy attacked not only the contemporary communists but also the resistance fighters that fought against Germany in the Second World War. The formation of the “national front” and its operation is analyzed in detail by Lipták with the following conclusion: “The Slovak participants in the fight for democracy in the republic brought into it zeal and stubbornness, but above all the temperament and enthusiasm of a real national and nation-liberating fight” (353). When the Soviet troops withdrew from the streets of the

cities into their garrisons, the question of ratifying the constitutional law on the Czechoslovak federation was again placed on the agenda. After a lengthy process of the application of Constitutional Law no. 143/1968 Coll., which theoretically changed and amended the constitution from 1960, basically creating a new constitution, the first Slovak government was appointed by the chairmanship of the Slovak National Council at the beginning of January 1969. On 30 January 1969 the Federal Assembly gathered for its first session (Rychlík 271 ff.).

Proceeding from this socio-historical context, which developed author's personalities as dissidents, I categorize dissidents (i.e., those thinking differently) based on certain differentiating features, some of which overlap:

A: Common features:

a) Coming out against or a radical attitude towards power and violence (all that were demonstrably prosecuted and persecuted by the government); and

b) The natural world and maintaining it under unfavorable conditions.

B: Differentiating features:

a) The scale of importance (public appreciation or also function) before becoming part of the dissident movement;

b) After becoming part of the dissident movement: organized dissent (in the Czech lands), scattered dissent (in Slovakia);

c) Differing level of education;

d) Affiliation with the Communist Party: political persuasion, revision of the ideology of socialism, Christian universalism, a liberal attitude; and

e) The relation to the nation.

Here it is important to realize what strength there had to be in the common features listed above if they were able to maintain the idea of unity despite such significant differences. The dissident author type may have the following identity:

a) Supranational or panhuman (Havel,<sup>9</sup> Vaculík,<sup>10</sup> Strauss,<sup>11</sup> Hnitka<sup>12</sup>)

b) Both panhuman and national (Tatarka)<sup>13</sup>

c) Panhuman, national, and also Christian (Korec).

Within the differentiation listed above, every dissident author has his own special identity that shows in his works in a very pregnant way through the subject, which manifests itself as unique and original, without any reference to the relations (or boundaries) of genres and other theory-given criteria in the selection of the theme, motifs, and later in their way of reflecting and their poetics of processing. Because the works of the authors mentioned above reduce the plot and fiction is a distinct subject reflecting sociopolitical events, these authors' predominant genre is the essay,<sup>14</sup> and

distinct essay-like elements are also present in their other writing. Under the sociopolitical conditions of the twentieth century, the genre of the essay and its characteristics overstepped its boundaries and shifted into drama (Havel), into prose works in an authentic, diary, documentary form (Tatarka, Pavol Strauss, and Jozef Hnitka), or into journalism (Vaculík).

If action is the essence of existence of these authors, despite the fact that they were silenced by force, the living “subject matter” of this production, these essays, has more than documentary value. Based on possibility and due to its “vivacity,” it has also actively entered into the civic consciousness, and thus it became active in the process of awareness. In cases when the author was not allowed to publish at all, he lived in an area in a “happening” way and he alone “performatively” influenced a relatively broad audience with the risk of police or physical persecution.

Such alternative literature (the essay) accompanies official politics and official thinking like a shadow, like a correction, like a reservoir of different thinking, a possible potential of transformations.

The individual authors were more or less aware of the power of their influence. Havel describes the inner mechanism of the functioning of the word against power in the following way:

The operational range of this special power cannot be recorded based on the number of followers, voters, or soldiers because it extends in the “fifth column” of the social consciousness, the hidden intentions of life, the suppressed desire of man for his own dignity and fulfillment of elementary rights, his real social and political interests. Thus, in question here is power that does not dwell in the force of a social or political group limited in this way or that, but above all in the power of the potential hidden in the *whole society*, including all its power structures. This power does not rely on its own soldiers but, so to speak, on the “soldiers of its enemy”; that is, everybody that lives in falsehood and can be at any time – at least theoretically – struck by the power of truth. Is it a sort of a bacteriological weapon, by means of which – once the conditions have ripened for it – a single civilian can disarm an entire division. (Havel 20)

An addition to Havel’s reflections above is made in one of the texts by Tatarka; a discreetly hidden reflection on power and the possibilities of overcoming it:

No defeat is absolute. Based on the assumption of the fundamental that you have a desire to undergo a struggle, that you have courage and or self-confidence to fight an adversary, you are watchful and wait. A suitable moment and the position you take will add regiments and divisions to you that make you, presently, positionally, historically weaker than your adversary. And this is surely the Biblical story of pitting one’s strength against another’s, the story and case of David and Goliath. (Tatarka 47)

“The Two Thousand Words” by Vaculík was the first serious attack against the power and positions of the governing party. Because it was issued publicly and it was possible to affiliate with it, it also had great political power. Here, Vaculík analyzes mechanisms of power that cannot possibly be identified with:

The Communist Party, which enjoyed a great deal of confidence from people after the war, had gradually exchanged it for offices, until it got them all and had nothing else. We must say it like this, and it is also known to the communists that are among us and whose disappointment from the results is as great as the disappointment of others. A wrong line of leadership has changed the party from a political party and an ideological alliance to a power organization that has acquired a great amount of attraction for power-hungry self-seekers, accusing cowards, and people with a guilty conscience. (Vaculík, “Dvatisíce” 1, 3)

In the Czech lands, the social life of the “parallel culture” was organized: from the public manifestos of “The Two Thousand Words,” which due to their courage to criticize the political party and its practices automatically belong to parallel culture, via the foundation of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted (*Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíbaných*, VONS), via petitions to the Padlock Edition and other activities, in which many participated but which, despite monitoring by the police, were tirelessly supported by Vaculík and Havel. Vaculík expressed the contempt for the regime and the absurdity of the “functioning” of the system in one sentence: “So why do the brutes ask if they expect only one answer?” (Vaculík, *Český* 57). For them, the situation was not easy. Vaculík describes the sadness over the relations in the following way:

Again, I have experienced that trembling, incomprehensibly and inadequately coming from some ill part of my body perhaps. Nor could I speak; on my way back, Saša took me home. After a common friendly farewell, at home (fortunately I was there alone, out of shame), I worked my way through anger: are those boys of his possibly more valuable and precious than mine?” (Vaculík, *Český* 38–39)

In *Hovory o kultúre a obcovaní* (Conversations on Culture and Discourse), Tatarka begins with a description of the feeling his comfortable shoes give him in the streets of Paris. He is led by two experiences to reflect on possibilities generally, on the “tradition of broad possibilities”: during a visit to a certain Parisian student and his lodging he can see the familiar wide bed he himself used to have once in his student room:

I couldn't resist, I got out and looked. Almost exactly the same room as mine some time ago. On the walls there was old faded wallpaper, a wide, enormous

bed that took up almost three-quarters of the space. Half of it would suffice not only for sleeping but also for God knows what kind of performances, and you wouldn't fall. God knows who introduced a bed of such oversize dimensions and when, but it is maintained as a tradition of broad possibilities. (Tatarka 45)

In a friend's cottage, where he relaxes, he is again reminded of the variants of possibilities by tools brought from the loft: "Surely I can create what I want, this all is at my disposal, so why wouldn't I attempt something that could be called a work of architecture. This all was caused by the tools .... the tools opened my eyes to age, shapes, quality" (Tatarka 50).

He puts individual conclusions next to one another in an associative way, and so it is up to the reader to figure out connections. He describes life situations in a mosaic-like way and reflections arising from them about sociopolitical, historical, and aesthetic issues. Topically, the present alternates with the past here – the terse advice of a Polish historian about the suffering of the Polish nation through art – a gibbet, as a monument that has become a memento for the living, the death of a little son on insurgent territory, an extreme existential situation in which, as a prisoner of the Germans, he was close to death, as well as other horrors of the war, experiences rooted in his subconscious.

My first boy, still in his swaddling clothes, used to walk in the mountains as a partisan; he paid a high price for the uprising. I'm no longer surprised by death. But nonsense still keeps surprising me. Before I rose, everything was decided concerning us. . . . And what is the consolation for a nation that doesn't weigh in terms of power? A nation whose fate has become to always be liberated by someone and from something? . . . Liberators will become redeemers, and if we do not defend ourselves against them, they will keep paying a high price for us with a gradually more liquid dollars until they buy us out at a giveaway price forever. (Tatarka 46)

The identity of dissident authors manifests itself in not forgetting about what makes the essence of the meaning of life. The authentic narrative is almost stenographically recorded. The artistic processing is visible in the authorial selection of facts, the usage of paradox, verbatim and factual but also transferred naming of actual experience, reflection of reality, and also very emotionally engaged or discursive language.

The essence of creation in the authors' essays is their sensibility to socio-political events and also the mutual reflection of works published in samizdat. In the introduction to *The Demon of Conformism*, titled "Outcry of Epiphany," Havel writes: "As a medium of human self-awareness, literature can simply never entirely break free from the clime of its place and time. This is why in places where politics penetrates everything so markedly, literature is also more penetrated by it" (Havel, "Výkřik" 5)



Limited space prevents me from mentioning and analyzing all the authors listed above that became emblematic in various types of dissent in Czechoslovakia.

In conclusion, it is possible to point to a broader context. The interpretation of the situation for the entire Eastern Bloc also legitimizes a personality from nearby Poland as the analyst of the nature of the twentieth century: Czesław Miłosz. By the beginning of the 1950s, when he published his essays as *The Captive Mind* (1953) in his London emigration, Miłosz showed a double existence – a public mask and a private face – and revealed the pretence and hypocrisy of eastern totalitarian society. Miłosz was not a political writer. He only needed to identify, for himself, what was going on in the country he left, so that he could exist freely; that is, without a double face. In emigration he also published his novel *The Seizure of Power*, which elaborates on the theses of his previous essays in a fictionalized form. As Ladislav Volko points out in the introduction to the Polish edition of Miłosz's novel (2002), Stanisław Barańczak speaks about the possibilities of the protagonists of this novel as about a defeat. He has the following in mind: collaboration, isolation, and death. However, in the panorama of history we can really see the isolation of the “inner emigration” as a hidden corrective for contemporaries and as a motivation for reflections about a possible future direction of humankind.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The notion of “inner emigration” emerged in the period of the Third Reich (see Lowy). I use it metaphorically for a different historical period, and so it is not identical with the meaning it had in the 1930s. It is different mainly due to the gesture of the voluntary decision that the personalities of the “inner emigration” had to exist outside the official current and in a substandard position of a citizen and artist. It also differs in a certain courage to express one's own opinion. In 1930s Germany something like this would have been impossible due to the extreme threat to existence and very probable incarceration in concentration camps. Despite this difference, I use this notion to stress the affinity between the types of free existence in two totalitarian systems of the twentieth century: fascism and communism (see Courtois et al. 24–25).

<sup>2</sup> The notion of “dissent” is an inexact notion. According to Zdeněk Mlynář, it was Western journalists and people active in the opposition that participated in introducing it and did not know how to more precisely term themselves “differently thinking.” Being a dissident referred to expressing one's own opinions in public, “not to live in lie” (Solzhenitsyn), to live the “life in truth” (Havel), and “to defend one's own reality” (Šimečka). In Czechoslovakia a question of the natural world is related to dissent. That world had been formed against the conformism of “real socialism” (Kusý). The natural world and its interpretation constitute the explicit part of Dominik Tatarka's reflections; for example, in his work *Návraťky* (Recordings). (see Bělohradský 83; Mlynář 660; Kusý, 95; Patočka, 9; Kmet')

<sup>3</sup> After the death of Stalin, the politics of the Soviet Union attempted de-Stalinization

twice; once during the twentieth convention of the Communist Party in 1956, and then during the twenty-second convention in 1961. After that, imprisonments set in again. In art, a pilot role in the process of democratization was played by Boris Pasternak and Vladimir Vysotsky and the conception of the “rebellion of personality.” The establishment of *samizdat* in the 1960s represented an uncensored platform. Recall the “Chronicle of Current Events” from 1968 and the foundation of the “Initiative” groups from 1969; these were the first programmatic activities for human rights in the Eastern Bloc. In Poland in 1956 there were attempts at reform that ceased very quickly. However, the government had to respect the Catholic Church, where the intellectuals found their refuge. In 1970 there were workers’ strikes in Gdańsk and Gdynia, and in 1980 the establishment of the Solidarity (*Solidarność*) social and workers’ movement. The nation also organized itself into a community thanks to the election of Karol Wojtyła as pope. In their difficult history, Poles had been trained in perseverance, and in the Second World War they organized an underground state structure. In 1981 they moved away from communist rule and took their own way. In Hungary, oppositional thinking is based on the experience from 1956. János Kádár tried hard to depoliticize the state and reform it economically. The intellectuals, followers of Georg Lukács, opened theoretical debates on contemporary socialism. At the same time, Hungarian dissidents were in operation and utilized their economic advantages; in the 1980s they achieved dialogue with the reform wing of the authorities. In 1961, the Berlin Wall was built in East Germany. In church and cultural circles, protest groups had been formed since the mid-1970s. These were peace and ecological initiatives demanding disarmament and nature conservation. The expulsion of Wolf Biermann from East Germany took place in 1976. Galleries, books, and newspapers appeared outside the official scene. Human rights took a place in the movement’s agenda only before the revolution.

<sup>4</sup> There are a relatively large number of resources on this issue in historical studies, and individual aspects of dissent have been dealt with elsewhere (e.g., Catholic dissidents and alternative fine arts; see Bátorová; Courtois et al.; Dobiáš; Kaplan; Kmet’ & Marušiak; Lesňák; Lipták; Mikloško; Pešek; Pešek & Letz; Petřivý; Rychlík; Strauss.

<sup>5</sup> An exception was the imprisonment of Milan Šimečka, and later Ján Kalina. Unlike similar cases in the Czech lands, nobody protested when they were taken into custody.

<sup>6</sup> For more detailed statistics as well as differences in the results of the purges in the Czech lands and Slovakia, see Jan Rychlík’s chapter “Rozdíl při průběhu čistek v ČR a SR” (280–282).

<sup>7</sup> In a very exemplary way, using various individual yet symptomatic examples, Strauss captures the inner developmental rhythm connected to foreign countries. (See also Strauss, *Utajená*; Strýko; Lesňák; Korec, *Od barbarskej I*, II, III)

<sup>8</sup> See Jablonický, *Samizdat*, *Samizdat 2*, *Samizdat o disente*; Kopsová et al.; Kusý; Kusý and Šimečka; Šimečka; Váross.

<sup>9</sup> Václav Havel was born in 1936 in Prague to a “bourgeois family,” which is why he was not allowed to study under the communist regime. In 1967 he graduated from a distance-learning program in dramaturgy from the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU) in Prague. In 1963 his first play, *Zabradní slavnost* (The Garden Party) was staged at the Na Zábřadlí theatre, in 1965 *Výrozmění* (The Memorandum), and in 1968 *Ztížená možnost soustředění* (The Increased Difficulty of Concentration). In 1969 his plays were banned in Czechoslovakia. He refused to leave Czechoslovakia and published in *samizdat*. He was a co-founder and one of the first three spokespersons of Charter 77 (*Charta 77*). He was imprisoned four times and constantly spied on. In 1989 he took part in the foundation of Civic Forum (*Občanské fórum*) and helped determine the direction of its activity. He holds many Czech and foreign awards. In 1989 he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. An unusual biography of Havel, from his dissident years, is the book *Dálkový výslech* (Long-Distance Interrogation; an

interview with Karel Hviždala, 1986). In 1989 he was elected president of Czechoslovakia. There is much secondary literature on Havel, but no monograph has been published yet.

<sup>10</sup> Ludvík Vaculík is a Czech prose writer, columnist, and publicist, the author of the manifesto “The Two Thousand Words,” a founder of the samizdat Padlock Edition (*Edice Petlice*, founded in 1971), and a signatory of Charter 77. He was born on 23 July 1926 in Broumov, near Valašské Klobouky, as the son of a carpenter. From 1941 to 1943 he took a two-year course offered by the Baťa company in Zlín, where he worked until 1946. In 1946 he passed his school-leaving examination at the Business Academy and left for Prague, where he graduated from the College of Politics and Social Studies (*Vysoká škola politická a sociální*) in 1950. His literary career begun in 1953, when he was working as an editor in the political literature division at Rudé Právo publishers, where he worked until 1957, later for the weekly *Beseda venkovské rodiny* (Village Family Meeting), and after 1959 in youth broadcasting for Czechoslovak Radio. Throughout the 1960s he attracted attention through his socio-critical journalism. In 1965 he joined the editorial board of *Literární listy* (Literary Papers), later renamed *Listy* (Papers). This was the most significant periodical of the reform-minded intelligentsia and he stayed with it until the periodical was banned in 1969. By then, he had started his career as a prose writer as well; for example, his novella *Na farmě mládeže* (On the Youth Farm) was published, as well as his novel *Rušný dům* (Busy Home). However, today only his non-conformist novel *Sekeřka* (The Axe) is considered his real entrance to literature, which draws its motif from the destiny of his father.

<sup>11</sup> Pavol Strauss was born in 1912 in Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš (central Slovakia) and died in Nitra in 1994. He spent his childhood and youth in the family of his maternal grandfather, the Mikuláš-based physician, Bartolomej Kuks. The family was trilingual (in Slovak, German, and French). He graduated from the prominent secondary school in Mikuláš, studied medicine in Vienna, and, after his transfer to Prague, graduated from Charles University. He published two collections of poetry in German, *Schwarze Verse* (Black Verse) and *Kanone auf dem Ei* (The Gun on the Egg), both of them from 1936 to 1937. Two collections remain in manuscript (*Worte aus der Nacht* ‘Words from the Night’ and *Und der Bruder Abel lebt ja noch* ‘And Brother Abel Lives On’; both from 1940). He returned to Slovakia and experienced two conversions: to Marxism (in Prague) and to Catholicism (in Slovakia in 1942, lasting until his death). In 1944 he was imprisoned by the Gestapo, and then freed. Until 1948 he continued publishing and working as a surgeon, then as a head physician in Skalica. He received a fellowship in Zurich in 1946, and was then transferred to Nitra to a position in which he was not allowed to practice surgery. He mainly wrote for himself: essays, journals, and aphorisms (a rare genre). All of his works were published after 1989. An unusual biography of Strauss is presented in the book *Človek pre nikoho* (A Man for Nobody, 2000). The first scholarly monograph on Strauss, *Paradoxy Pavla Straussa* (Pavol Strauss’ Paradoxes, 2006) was written by the author of this article.

<sup>12</sup> Jozef Hnitka was born in 1913 in Turzovka (northern Slovakia) and died in Nitra in 1992. He studied at the Pedagogical Institute in Levice and received his degree at Comenius University in Bratislava. His fields of study were history, geography, and Slovak language and literature. He taught in several places in prewar Czechoslovakia and he joined the Communist Party. During the wartime Slovak Republic, he was a political prisoner in Ilava and he participated in preparing the Slovak National Uprising. He was one of the leaders of the uprising in northern Slovakia and took part in fighting in Strečno. He was arrested several times; he was constantly on the run with a fake ID. After the war he published the novel *Križové štácie* (Stations of the Cross). In the 1950s he was expelled from the Communist Party and from the Writers’ Union; he lost his job and did not have the right to work or publish. For his entire life, with the exception of the 1968 and 1969, he was listed in the ŠtB (secret police) files as an “enemy of the state.” After 1989 he was rehabilitated

by the Union of Slovak Writers and the School Administration in Bratislava. In 1991/92 he published *Útek z rakvy* (Flight from the Coffin) in samizdat. In 2003 a collection of his works was published, *Transfúzia* (Transfusion, Petrus publishers) with a detailed calendar in the concluding part and an epilogue by Anton Hykisch (and edited by the author of this article).

<sup>13</sup> Dominik Tatarka was born in Drienove in 1913 and died in Bratislava in 1989. He studied at Charles University in Prague and at the Sorbonne in Paris. He entered into literature through his collection of novellas *V úzkosti bládnia* (In the Anxiety of Searching, 1942) and *Panna zázračnica* (The Miraculous Virgin, 1945). He participated in the Slovak National Uprising, and in the 1950s he made his works conform to socialist realism. At the same time, he secretly wrote his *Demon súblasu* (The Demon of Conformism, 1956, published as a book in 1963). He insisted on protesting against the entrance of Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia, returned his state award, spoke on SNP Square in Bratislava, and students carried him on their shoulders. However, he remained ostracized in Slovakia, then made contact with Czech dissidents, was one of the first signatories of Charter 77, published in samizdat, and wrote *Písачky* (Scribbles) and *Navrávačky* (Recordings).

<sup>14</sup> Regarding the essay, “this term was used for the first time and canonized by Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592). From the viewpoint of formal logic a subject-object synthesis is dominant, which is an inherent part neither of poetry, nor of epics – not only methodologically, but also from the viewpoint of the character attributes (metonymical or metaphorical depiction of the model of the theme). Often it also has the form of brief, esthetically impressive and distinct journalistic performances that are a valuable resource for thinkers. However, even then a sensually and aesthetically dynamic modeling of the theme is characteristic for the essay, which is usually realized as a pendant of a novel plot by means of a polynome, polyvalent trope in a characteristic imaginative, often even poetically composed developmental movement” (Valček 155).

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## Osebni etos v literaturi slovaških in čeških disidentov: esej kot oblika izražanja aktivne osebnosti

Ključne besede: literatura in etika / češka književnost / slovaška književnost / disidentstvo / disidentski pisatelji / družbena vloga / esej

Prispevek obravnava zapleten problem, zato je njegova struktura razvejana.

1. V sklopu, ki obravnava družbenozgodovinski kontekst, so disidenti opredeljeni po določenih lastnostih, ki se med seboj povezujejo:

– skupne lastnosti: a) močno nasprotovanje politični oblasti in nasilju (vsi, ki jih je dokazljivo preganjala politična oblast in jim je grozil zapor, izguba službe itd.); b) ohranjanje naravnega stanja tudi v neugodnih razmerah;

– posebne lastnosti: a) stopnja pomembnosti (prepoznavnost, položaj) preden so postali disidenti; b) potem, ko so postali disidenti: organizirano nasprotovanje (na Češkem), razpršeno nasprotovanje (na Slovaškem); c) različne stopnje izobrazbe; d) prepričanje, revizija socialistične ideologije.

Kako vplivne so morale biti skupne lastnosti, da so uspele ohraniti ideje o enotnosti kljub velikim razlikam?

Vsak disidentski avtor ima svojo značilno identiteto, ki se pokaže v »ne pozabljanju« bistva oziroma smisla življenja. Avtorjeva globoka izkušnja izvira iz njegove zavesti in se kaže v »avtentični« naraciji. Iz avtorjevega načina izbiranja dejstev je jasno, da gre za umetniško obliko komunikacije.

2. Osrednji del tega prispevka je analiza tekstov izbranih avtorjev in del iz časa konsolidacije Českoslovaške socialistične republike. Izbrana besedila so eseji, ne romani, novele ali kratke zgodbe. Meje esejja so se v 20. stoletju premaknile, in sicer proti dramskemu in proznemu žanru – v avtentični, dokumentarni obliki ali obliki dnevnika (Tatarka, Vaculík, Gruša, Strauss, Hnitka).

Ta vrsta umetniškega ustvarjanja nima le dokumentarne vrednosti, ampak se je, zahvaljujoč svoji vitalnosti, ustalila v javni zavesti (kjer je bilo to mogoče) in učinkovito širila spoznanja. Če avtor svojega dela ni smel objaviti, je lahko na javnost (predvsem pa na ljudi iz svoje okolice) vplival na »hopeningih« in »predstavah«. Taka dejavnost je bistvo obstoja. Spretno je izražena skozi tematiko, motive in način refleksije in poetike ter izvirno in avtentično presega meje žanra ali drugih teoretičnih meril.

Etos te alternativne kulture se izraža v univerzalnem kodeksu najstarejših etičnih norm. Lahko bi rekli, da so to prastari eseji, ki želijo na pozitiven način vplivati na sedanost in vzpostaviti tehtno prihodnost.

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