

MÁRIA BÁTOROVÁ*

Institute of World Literature Slovak Academy of Sciences (Bratislava, Slovakia)

ORCID: 0000-0002-0936-0577

Slovak culture and literature after the Velvet Revolution of 1989

In this study we will focus on the connection of culture and art with historical and political processes in the twentieth century, which to a great extent affected developments in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic after the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic (1993). The complexity of Slovakia's historical development provides sufficient discourses and ample artistic and literary works (of interest from a cultural point of view), which were the seismographs of this development, especially in the parallel culture, literature, and the visual (especially action) arts. We have tried, using specific works, to point out that free writers even under socialism were able to produce works that became a mirror of deviation and camouflage. The politics of the socialist system forced writers into internal emigration and onto the so-called "index" (blacklist), so that their works could not be published until after 1989. At the same time, we point out that some literary scholars – despite their own anchoring in solid academic institutions – respond to these publications and studies on the complex question of the existence of a parallel culture in a non-conceptual, ideological, and unscholar way.

Keywords: Slovak culture, literature, Velvet Revolution 1989, parallel culture, ideological systems

Introduction

We could ask: why reconstruct the past (even through literary works)? The answer is simple: so that we can live better in the present and our children in the future. Quality of life is the most important thing, and this does not mean here property, means of

* **Address:** Institute of World Literature, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Dúbravská cesta 9, 841 04 Bratislava, Slovakia. **E-mail:** maria.batorova.sav@gmail.com. VEGA project no. 2/0026/19.

consumption, etc., but freedom as well as the spiritual sphere. The field of ideas, i.e. the cultivation of the social sciences and the humanities, falls into this category. To live this quality requires a strong, refined personality, because one does not live easily.

In the turbulence of the past decades, we have been again defining our being in the European context, in which we have not always lived freely, and this is why the desire for a free existence has always been nurtured in our territory. Two theses apply here:

If crisis is a productive state, then we are on the right path.

The spiritual homogeneity of the global world lies in acknowledging the heterogeneity and uniqueness of cultures.¹

It is necessary to be aware of several aspects that influence our theses in regard to the historical context: A) that the 20th century² accumulated various historical inclinations of Slovakia from the past centuries. This thesis continues into the 21st century, too, and is clearly one of the basic theses of historical development in general; B) the residuals of previous time periods, which necessarily pass into the present, are the most tenacious barriers between the old conserved ways of thinking and existence and the new/old-new ideas of a better/freer existence; C) from among the countries of Central Europe and their cultures, Slovakia has a unique – postcolonial – history, because it experienced five separate hegemonies in the 20th century;³ D) the historical situation of the territory of contemporary Slovakia in the past and partly even today has induced symptoms⁴ of fear,⁵ schizophrenia – hypocrisy, the predominance of the life of a common citizen in scepticism and without ideals, little joy. Not common citizens (including these, but this is captured only in the “memory of family chronicles”), but artists in particular create their own reality – an alternative scene that is known to them.

Fear is a natural companion to rueful social and individual processes. The history of Slovakia has seen its share of various sad stories, responded to in poetry (the murder of the revolutionaries Šulek and Holuby captured in the play by V. Hurban

¹ The Declaration of Human Rights sets out this Enlightenment European idea. The question is whether this is not some form of European supremacy. Definitions differ in different countries of the world and are based on diverse experiences. They must therefore be respected. It is necessary, however, to pay regard to *universal* human rights, i.e. to perceive each person, regardless of territorial differences, as having a dignified existence with the same rights and obligations.

² T. Štrauss's book on the complexity of the 20th century, *Toto posrané 20. Storočie* [*This stinking 20th century*], is the most exacting reflection of the artistic and social processes of the 20th century we had in Slovakia at that time, comparable only with the book of the famous French philosopher Alain Badiou (the Swiss edition under the name *Das Jahrhundert* [*The century*] from 2006), which Strauss critically aligns with in literally the second edition of his book.

³ M. Bátorová, *Slovak literature and culture from the “postcolonial” perspective*, “Primerjalna književnost” 2014, 37, vol. 3, pp. 73–88.

⁴ We consciously use the medical term here, because it is a symptom – a mental disorder that society has suffered and that in some cases still persists.

⁵ Fear is one of the basic attributes of expressionism. See W. Rothe, *Der Expressionismus*, Frankfurt am Main 1977.

Vladimirov, the shooting in Šurany and the subsequent poem by Laco Novomeský dedicated to Mária Kokošová and others, the shooting in Košúty...), but such sophisticated judicial murders, as those staged after the Second World War⁶ and in the 1950s, left clear traces on the psyche of Slovak intellectuals in the new Czechoslovak Republic.⁷ However, the work of conformist writers in the 1950s also needs to be approached differently, and the slave-like use of the method of socialist realism and its circumvention must be distinguished.⁸

The first definitions of manipulating the society after 1945

Dominik Tatarka: *The demon of conformity*⁹

The two types of totalitarianism – fascist and communist – that Hannah Arendt identifies¹⁰ – are typical for the 20th century, and Dominik Tatarka experienced both of them. Both of these totalitarian systems mean freedom *reductio ad absurdum* [reduced to absurdity] to the anarchy of power, to which no laws apply. There are no private goals, only public ones achieved at all costs. Fascist “Gleichschaltung” – the introduction of uniformity into life – is connected with the awareness of the obligation to serve regardless of family ties, as Tatarka described precisely and ironically in *The demon of conformity* to characterize the Stalinist cult of personality and socialism:

...**My nearest and dearest** couldn't abide living with a **traitor** who held onto his **betrayals as principles**. They sought out and they found other company, the company of **people afflicted** in one way or another. Whether yes or no, I don't know, but **they, too, wound up in a public trial with traitors. They were condemned**. And in the name of my own **blessed conviction** and scrupulousness I requested

⁶ R. Letz, *Slovenské dejiny V 1938–1945*, Bratislava 2012, pp. 263, 264. In particular, this is a letter from E. Beneš, in which he asks Moscow for help in punishing Slovaks, and doing it so that they do not know about it! The Soviets were also present in the 1950s during the “monster trials”, the condemning of the so-called bourgeois nationalists and in judicial killings. Our intellectuals, in a new connection with the Czechs into a single state, could not be rehabilitated even by the general national rise against fascism – the Slovak National Uprising!

⁷ The difference between the Slovak “quiet” and the Czech “public – loud” dissent is caused by fear, specifically by historical experience. See: M. Bátorová, “Vnútoraná emigrácia” ako gest oslobody (Dominik Tatarka a Ludvík Vaculík po roku 1968), in: M. Bátorová, *Dominik Tatarka slovenský Don Quijote. (Sloboda a sny)*, Bratislava 2012, pp. 24–50. The author of this study distinguishes between two phases of Slovak dissent (the term refers to “different-minded”): the first begins after 1945, the second after 1968.

⁸ See: M. Bátorová, *Socialistický realizmus a jeho podoby v slovenskej literatúre. (Tvorba Dominika Tatarku a Františka Hečka v päťdesiatych rokoch 20. storočia)*, in: “Philologia” 2017, 27, no. 1, pp. 11–30.

⁹ This essay, which was published in *Kulturný život* in 1956 (written in 1954), means for Slovakia the development of the first characteristic of totalitarian practices and is part of the essay *The enslaved century* by Czesław Miłosz (London 1953) or the poems of the Czech author Pavel Kohout and his theatrical play *September nights* (1954).

¹⁰ H. Arendt, *Puvod totalitarizmu I–III*, Prague 1996, p. 679. Hannah Arendt considers both types of totalitarianism to be equal.

the strictest punishment for them. **I requested the death penalty for my wife and my son. After this act of mine, all that remains of me is the principle; I was left with only a terrible principle: to be dependent on and to agree.**

The private, family sphere thus loses its meaning, as the closest relationships are disrupted. The greater and more dangerous the pressure from power and the more one is subject to it, the more the question of freedom concerns one's conscience. Tatarka also experienced the process of gnawing at his conscience when he was forced in 1952 to write a pamphlet against show-trial the defendants and in favour of their conviction.¹¹ Shortly afterwards, in the essay, *The demon of conformity*, he at least partially satisfied his conscience (others did not), because he was the first who dared to publish a statement about the regime's manipulative practices. The names in the essay are symbolic. The dualism of pain and suffering, and at the same time healing, is encoded in the name of the main protagonist Boleráz. In the characters of the hegemonic political holders of the "truth" – the powerful – "engineers of human souls" – it is possible to recognize the real figures of fellow writers and journalists who at the time obediently promoted the policies of the Communist Party: Juraj Špitzer and Vladimír Mináč. I am convinced that *The demon of conformity* would not have come about if Tatarka's conscience had not gnawed at him for his participation in a political campaign against alleged bourgeois nationalists.

Tatarka also presents a testimony on the aggressive manipulation of his person in the work *Navrávačky* [*Outpourings*].¹² This work, however, was created – recorded on a tape recorder – much later, at a time when Tatarka had already decided on internal emigration.

For a certain time after 1948, Ján Smrek, too, so disappeared for signing the *Manifest proti Povstaniou* [*Manifesto against rebellion*].¹³ For their whole life, *pars pro toto* (due to different directions and political groupings as well as different religious confession), the following people all thus became lost: doctor and convert, essayist and aphorism writer Pavol Strauss;¹⁴ poet of the Catholic modern and priest, Janko Silan;¹⁵ inter-war Communist, writer, teacher and publicist Jozef Hnitka, labelled

¹¹ D. Tatarka, *Prud šie nenávidieť nepriateľa – vrúcnej šie milovať stranu*, "Pravda", 26.11.1952. In addition to Tatarka, L. Mňačko, and A. Bagar published pamphlets in the same issue. The whole text is published for the first time in full in the Appendix of the monograph *Dominik Tatarka slovenský Don Quijote*, Bratislava 2012.

¹² One of Tatarka's comments on this matter can be found in: Štolbová, E., *Navrávačky s Dominikom Tatarkom*, ed. N. Gašaj, Bratislava 2000, pp. 201–202: "...And all at once Ďuri Špitzer appeared and recited one bloody, bloody speech against bourgeois nationalism. (...) Well, I have to tell you, my books *V úzkosti hľadania, Farská republika* (...) Because someone labelled me as a class enemy. (...) And everyone, everyone condemned me."

¹³ V. Petrík, *Neznáma kapitola Smrekovej poézie*, in: *Proti noci. Básne vnútorného exilu*, Liptovský Mikuláš 1993. Petrík here speaks about a "blacklist" that Smrek was on from 1948 until the mid-1960s.

¹⁴ M. Bátorová, *Paradoxy Pavla Straussa*, Bratislava 2006.

¹⁵ Texts of M. Bátorová, J. Pašteka, M. Hamada, see, for example, *Katolícka moderna*, in: J. Hvišč, V. Marčok, M. Bátorová, V. Petrík, *Biele miesta v slovenskej literatúre*, Bratislava 1991, pp. 43–61;

by Juraj Špitzer as a leftist extremist and by Milan Lajčiak in the magazine *Kultúrny život* as someone who came to the defence of Novomeský and Clementis, who were accused of bourgeois – non-nationalist deviations in Budmerice (1950). Hnitka was put on the lists, now located at the National Memory Institute, which opened after 1989, as an “enemy of the state” with a ban on publishing until the end of his life (1992).¹⁶ These authors could only publish after 1989.

She strains her ears in vain; she won't learn any more. Those two are no longer sitting. They are leaving for the building site. She would like to know **who dares to build on her land**; indeed it's why she came here. And now she should just pointlessly head back down the road? **Not sleep all night?**

Who's building this here? – she shouted from behind the bushes.

Godžišek, – one of the boys threw over his shoulder.

Who? – she demanded.

(...)

Her whole body trembled **from anger** and from an evil presentiment. She didn't think or wonder at all about the fact that **he hadn't told her anything** about wanting to build on her property. **It's Godžišek and he can do anything.**

(Jozef Hnitka: *Jabloň* [*The apple tree*]¹⁷)

The novella *Jabloň* is an extensive record of the vicissitudes of Slovak history of the 20th century. It is about chameleon-like lack of character, when for the sake of profit fascists turn into communists, and the only thing they care about is their own benefit and a hatred for principles. On the example of the character Godžišek, who has two types of wealth in reserve: a hotel and a tinkerer's hamper, the author reveals the functioning of socialist offices, where in the position of chairman of the ZPB (association of anti-fascist fighters) is a man who during the Second World War, in the services of the regime, tortured opponents of fascism, and thus also Blen's son Janko, a partisan, whose mother then found him in a mass grave in Žilina. The particularity of the author's poetics is also the curt language of this novel, the short sentences and dialogues that move the story along, as well as symbols, such as the name of the main protagonist Blenová (from “blen” – nightshade), later “jabloň” (apple tree) and then “kohút” (rooster). The autobiographical character, Potočár, who wandered through

M. Bátorová, *Roky úzkosti a vzopätia*, Bratislava 1992, pp. 85–93; M. Hamada, *Janko Silan: Dom opustenosti*, Bratislava 1997; J. Pašteka, *Tvár a tvorba slovenskej katolíckej modern*, Bratislava 2002.

¹⁶ M. Bátorová, *Kalendárium ku knihe Jozef Hnitka: Transfúzia*, Bratislava 2003, pp. 348–362. After the 1989 revolution, Hnitka was rehabilitated by the School Administration and the Association of Slovak Writers. He is listed in the Dictionary of Slovak Writers of the 20th Century. A. Maťovčík et al., *Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov*, Martin 2001, pp. 148–149.

¹⁷ This is an extended short story (35 pages), which was a part of the manuscript of three short stories *Jabloň, Dovidenia Erika, Medailón* [*The apple tree, Goodbye, Erik, Medaillon*] and was to be published in the Enlightenment edition Martin in 1968/1969, but was blocked just before the press by a super-lecturer's judgement. It was published posthumously as part of the book *Transfúzia* [*Transfusion*], Bratislava 2003. The other two short stories, *Goodbye, Erik* and *Medaillon*, as well as an unpublished extensive story *Toreadori* [*Toreadors*] were published in a book of the same name in the edition of the Association of Slovak Writers in Bratislava in 1919.

the hill country in order to help people without “authorization,” allows the author to articulate his own life credo: “Who authorised me? No one. There are no credentials required for a person to do useful work.” This “anarchist” authorial credo could not conform to the socialist system of power.

Pavol Strauss, a doctor of pathology in Nitra, grew up in Liptovský Mikuláš, where he lived with his mother at the house of his grandfather, Doctor Kux. Strauss studied in Prague and Vienna. In Prague he published two collections of poems in German (1937/1938), returned to Slovakia and converted to the Catholicism, which he maintained until the end of his life (1994). He was forced to hide during the war. After the war, he became a promising surgeon (internships in Switzerland), but from the 1950s to 1989 he was not permitted to publish. His collected works were not published until after the Velvet Revolution. In addition to poetry, he also kept diaries and wrote reflections and aphorisms, a genre characteristic of modernity.¹⁸ He was banned from publishing, so he wrote freely, without self-censorship, and many of his aphorisms are a sharp critique of the socialist establishment: “Absolute neutrality is rubbish.” “People procreate in a natural sexual way, but idiots do so through the mass media.”

All of these authors were sooner (Smrek) or later (J. Silan, P. Strauss, J. Hnitka) rehabilitated after 1989 as both citizens and writers, but the act itself was only a moral satisfaction. Writers’ associations and their publishers did not impose any obligation to publish these silenced authors. The publication of their works following more or less from a private initiatives (apart from the works mentioned in the notes of this study) was not predominately an incentive for literary scholars to study them and include them in the development process of Slovak literature. They remain displaced and condemned to “internal emigration” – beyond recognition – both in life under socialism and in times of democracy.¹⁹ The beginning of such an ideologically shifted perception, which strongly recalls the ideological shifts from the times of socialism, when writers were on the blacklist and there was only one truth – power – we see in an article that with a few “select” writers ignores the developmental aspect of including authors ostracized under socialism. This is recapitulated by Dana Kršáková in “The situation of contemporary Slovak literature” on 28 April

¹⁸ In the edition of Michal Vašek in Prešov, under the direction of J. Pašteka and directed (also financially) by F. Mikloško, the whole of Strauss’s work was gradually published. In 2007, F. Mikloško asked the author of the first scholarly monograph on Pavol Strauss for a manuscript of his two German collections and for their subsequent editing for the publication of a collective work. He received the manuscripts, but entrusted editing to another author.

¹⁹ We are thinking here of the reception of these authors in compendia such as “Internet scripts for future teachers” by V. Barborík: The development of Slovak prose after 1989 (university scripts on the subject History of Slovak literature: Slovak literature after 1989. Expert reviewers: prof. Adam Bžoch, CSc., mgr. Peter Darovec, PhD, 2014). The mentioned authors do not appear here and if, like Tatarka, no new basic studies are mentioned, but only entries in the dictionary (in Tatarka by F. Matejov), i.e. the research is again only ideologically selected. Dissent is perceived here, without providing reasons, until 1968, and so we could name more and more conceptual errors.

2005 on the iLiteratura.cz portal.²⁰ This approach of silencing the study of a parallel culture, given the plethora of literary scholars who have taken the issue seriously, is absurd, demagogic, and for education in this field very vague, impoverished and even dangerous. In Karol Csiba's review "Vyrovnanosť v skratke: Slovenská literatúra po roku" ["Equilibrium in brief: Slovak literature after 1989"]²¹ authors (Hochel, Čúzy, Kákošová) are asked for a polemical assessment and to be "uncompromising" in shaping "new literary-historical concepts".

In this context, the creators do not express themselves as uncompromising formers of new literary-historical concepts and probably do not even want to enter into broad polemical debates. However, they certainly have not forgotten that the peculiarity of the current work requires a polemical assessment. (Doesn't this remind us of something?)

It is necessary to note that these are literary-historical compendia (in almost all the mentioned cases) that students study at universities; they should therefore be informative and as comprehensive as possible.

The first differentiated reflections of the Velvet Revolution of 1989

A short story by the author of this study, *Zvony v Kameni* [*Bells in stone*],²² is one of the first, if not the first, literary reflections of the Velvet Revolution in Slovak literature. In it, the author captures the fall of the communist system in the Velvet Revolution of 1989, which no one had dared hope for, but which many had wished for, through the figures of three Bratislava intellectuals.

Nothing depends on me and people like me. Not from you and others like you, you chucklehead...
– I'll grumble to myself.

²⁰ Kršáková "retells," as she herself puts it, as "the only synthetic view of the issue", the study of Petr Zajac, *Slovenská literatúra deväťdesiatych rokov v obrysoch*, in: "Host" 2001, no. 5, p. 82. She introduces as relevant the opinions published in the newspaper "Pravda" by writers and then-literary celebrities D. Kapitáňová and D. Pastirčák. She uses the argument according to Zajac from Eduard Beaucomp, correspondent of the cultural section of FAZ, etc. Two other publications are devoted to literature after 1989: I. Hochel, L. Čúzy, Z. Kákošová, *Slovenská literatúra po roku 1989* [*Slovak literature after 1989*], Literárne informačné centrum, 2007 and M. Grupač et al., *Súčasná slovenská literatúra po roku 1989. Heslár vybraných slovenských literárnych tvorcov debutujúcich po roku 1989* [*Contemporary Slovak literature after 1989. An index of Slovak literary creators debuting after 1989*], Matica slovenská, 2015. In the preface of the latter publication, all dictionaries of Slovak writers published after 1989 are precisely named on 8 pages, while the "mother" (*pars pro toto* by G. Maťovčík are almost complete, while the others are ideologically bound, counting only a certain group of writers and literary scholars). The power structure has thus regrouped and the practices of maintaining its influence have, unfortunately, shifted to before 1989 to years that may and should be free; however, they have to adhere to objective and democratically correct rules, especially in state institutions such as universities and SAS.

²¹ "Slovenská literatúra" 2009, 56, no. 4, pp. 326–329.

²² The short story was written during and just after the 1989 revolution, published in: "Literárny týždenník" 1992, 5, no. 42, p. 6; Kanadská Cena Hronský'92. In book form: the mentioned story from the collection of stories *Zvony v kameni*, Bratislava 1993.

He turns away from the window, his eyes no longer shining, but now burning dangerously. He stands under the lamp and leans with both hands on the table.

– That is totally you. Nothing depends on you, **so you don't have to be responsible**. **A third of the Slovak intelligentsia digs in the garden in order to eat, a third sits in the library in order stay in one place, a third, the most capable, ignores the other two and their ilk and puts all of their hard-earned money and their parents' money and relatives into a risky business, which fails in advance because there is no ordinary professional or guild mechanism that would support one another...**, – the arms broke at his elbows as he dropped into a chair. (pp. 12–13)

The three protagonists, all intellectuals, live in one of Bratislava's town houses in the city centre, which one of them – a doctor with a penchant for history – bought as soon as possible after the revolution, even with people living in it – a Roma family and an old sick woman. In one of the flats on the first floor, the owner Egon accommodated his friends, a literary historian – a middle-aged sceptic – and a young architect – an idealist. The novella, including its symbolic title, responds to questions that were current during the transition period.

Later various fictional “records” gradually drew thematically on the period of the beginnings of democracy after the Velvet Revolution and from the period of the independent Slovak Republic (1993). The author of *Zvony v Kameni* published in 2010 the novel *Stred [The centre]*²³ (Bratislava: Ikar; Mitte, Vienna: 2018).

This **fear**, – the man said in the middle of the **debate** in a subdued manner, and yet clearly as if he could no longer hold back some **internal pressure**, – **spreads like a plague, inconspicuous, bearing an odour over the head that is triggered, it uncontrollably creeps into people, gnawing at their certainty and free choice...**, - his speech with a foreign accent turned into a whisper, still distinct... **The society stiffened...** (p. 7)

The novel has a framework structure made up of two meetings, the “gardens”, as the participants call the debating circles of a heterogeneous group of people who think they can influence society, and that democracy permits everything to be said here to avoid certain things in the current future. Openness is possible, and in the scope of it foreigners from the West are also invited into this society, and of course there are also descendants of active communists who benefited from the former regime. The opposition to this is made up of those returning from exile – dissidents whose personal histories are explained during the course of the novel. The structure of the debate, the types represented in it and freedom of expression, are here guaranteed by a predominantly dialogical form of the text and a poetics of polyphony,

²³ The novel received an extraordinary response; A. Halvoník (then the director of the LIC) recommended it at the LIC to M. Vallová, an LIC employee, who was in charge of promoting books, films, etc. But Vallová did not act on these intentions. With the support of Slovia (LIC), it was not published until 8 years later in German, by an Austrian publisher (Pilum Literaturverlag 2018). See also the analysis that the author prepared as a literary analysis at the request of the editor. M. Bátorová, *Středná Európa v románovej reflexii súčasnej slovenskej literatúry*, in: *Střední Evropa včera a dnes: proměny koncepcí*, ed. Ivo Pospíšil, Brno 2015, pp. 303–310.

so that it is not possible to guess what the centre of opinion is, if we do not take into account freedom, which could be it. The differentiation of the types of figures, which are flexibly depicted through life situations, is refracted on this concept and on the concept of faith – internal balance and positively to a life of motivated acts.

In the same year, the absurd tragic humour of Ján Drgonec and Andrej Ferek's *Jánošíkova banka* [*Jánošík's bank*] was published (Bratislava: Perfekt 2010):

“Sensation!” – **professionally bright star of the news, Sue Hen, last year's Miss Universe. “Czechoslovakia at the world level!** Reports Sue Hen, **Headline News**, with non-stop repeating of the news. **Heist** of the century! It's true! All the money from all accounts kept by financial institutions in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic has disappeared! I repeat. The report has been confirmed by all our agency's channels. **Cybercrime** has recorded the greatest **success** in its history. **Science triumphs over humanity!** All accounts in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic connected to the computer network **succeeded in being predisposed. No one knows where. ...**” (p. 12)

The text is based on the characteristics of the transition period, on the absurd contradictions of high quality and poor quality, the shift in the concepts of criminality (“successful”) from the classic meaning to the current one, robbery as normal... The meanings of words lose their capability to communicate; this is predominately about irony and clear recognition of abnormal social phenomena as being the norm, which creates a tragic-extinction effect.

Another novel from the period of transition of socialism to democracy, *Pendleri* [*Commuters*] (Bratislava: Ikar 2018), was published by Tamara Heribanová:

“All children can attend this school and **it's not necessary to know German...** they've been following school lessons without any trouble for four or five months. It's a wonderful thing. My son has **two native languages**, Slovak and German,” she said, and the vice-president of the association, Bea's father, joined her with enthusiasm.

“**We feel like the old citizens of Pressburg again.** Our children will use the term that comes to mind first. Not that they won't know Slovak, but in the flow of speech, when German comes to mind first, they'll use it. But **Hungarian is still lacking**, otherwise we would already be such a **typical Pressburg family.**”

The report ended with a **moderator dressed in an Austrian dirndl**, climbing aboard a school bus full of children again **with a Slovak passport in hand.** (p. 83)

The novel from the turn of socialism to democracy is a text with autobiographical elements, in which, however, the passage of years is visible, as is a retroactive critical approach to various forms of opening an ideologically closed world to an “open” and yet closed world, in which questions of one's own identity are experienced and clear, while questions of another identity are totally indifferent. Behind all of this, the tragic fates of the opening of a domestic world, which, as happens in history, is not ready for it, unfolds. This novel is snapshot of the period of transition in its full range, encroaching into the educational sphere and into privacy rather vehemently.

Conclusion

It seems that in periods of crisis, Slovak culture, like other areas, has difficulties with funding and subsidies for culture, or rather with the redistribution of these funds. However, we want to further believe that its long-term existence as a subculture under the various intensities of hegemonic governments has taught this culture to exist in spite of everything.

In this study, we have purposefully selected only authors and texts that do not present studies by literary scholars – the “codifiers” of the contemporary “history” of literature. The formal criterion is the year 1989. In the analysis and demonstration of the essence of the developmental vicissitudes of the recorded and suppressed parallel culture, as well as its study after the revolution, we selectively presented two emblematic authors in whose texts we demonstrated that a much more serious criterion of this study is the fact that these works as well as debutante texts after 1989, are an accurate statement; they capture the essential characteristics of development; they communicate something that some literary scholars or individuals (as we present and quote in the notes of this study) do not want to present, for whom the methodological quality of developmental analysis is not important. They also subjugate their analytical procedures, which lack a systematic theoretical and methodological anchoring, to this, which leads to a random selection of authors and to their random classification in any subsequent syntheses. I likewise think that by presenting biased criteria²⁴ and instructions without analysis, this resembles congress materials from the communist era. They consolidate their power in order to act, so that they can influence decision-making processes.

We emphasize that we selected works that are critical and that argue with totalitarianism over decades; they are generally valid because they are based on the essential things of life. We are convinced that only art that deals with reality in this way brings something essential for life and is thus fully fledged art and not pointless art. Long-term research confirms for us that the fates of literary artistic works are related to the critical and expressive aspect, especially in totalitarian political systems.

In Slovak culture, we are seeing an ongoing period of transition and permanent crisis in the debate with the political and institutional power-capturing elements, which here, too, we cite only in the notes due to a lack of space. We assess this, however, as a process of crystallization, not as a failure of liberal democracy. Some foreign political scientists²⁵ define and draw attention to this process for politics.

²⁴ *Pars pro toto*, we will mention only one shift in meaning: the Slovak Writers' Association, led by J. Rezník and A. Hykisch, is considered to be the successor of the Association of Slovak Writers, which the same shift as in the opposite guard is thus indiscriminately formulated; the declaration of Ján Štrasser (shortly before then a functionary and member of the Communist Party), and an example of a democrat (cited in the works as relevant), in the position of Chairman in the newly established Community of Slovak Writers.

²⁵ I. Krastev, S. Holmes, *Světlo, které pohaslo: vyúčtování*, Prague 2019.

Infiltrations of different types of totalitarian practices penetrate from a former totalitarian system; they still make it impossible to fully guarantee freedom of thought and art, or the possibilities of its presentation.

We also claim a great measure of exhaustion from various solutions in the country's own development that no strength remains to respond to the development in other countries; thus a paradox occurs: "free" countries do not respond through art, when it is now possible to do so today; they are not interested in themselves, and they really know nothing or little about themselves.

Translated by: David McLean

References

- Arendtová, H., *Puvod totalitarismu I–III*, Oikoymenh, Praha 1996.
- Bakula, B., *Eine Parallele Welt. Beiträge zur unabhängigen Kultur in Polen 1976–1989*, Societas Pars Mundi Publishing / Bielefeld 2018.
- Bátorová, M., *Zvony v kameni*, USPO Peter Smolík, Bratislava 1993. (first publication in: "Literárny týždenník" 1992, 5, no. 42, p. 6).
- Bátorová, M., *Paradoxy Pavla Straussa*, Petrus, Bratislava 2006.
- Bátorová, M., *Stred*, Ikar, Bratislava 2010. (German edition: *Mitte*, Pilum Literaturverlag, Wien 2018).
- Bátorová, M., *Dominik Tatarka slovenský Don Quijote*, Veda Vyd. SAV, Bratislava 2012. (English: Peter Lang Verlag, 2015).
- Bátorová, M., *Slovak literature and culture from the "postcolonial" perspective*, "Primerjalna književnost" 2014, 37, no. 3, pp. 73–88.
- Bátorová, M., *Stredná Európa v románovej reflexii súčasnej slovenskej literatúry*, [in:] *Střední Evropa včera a dnes: proměny koncepcí*, ed. Ivo Pospíšil, Jan Sojnek – nakladatelství Galium, Brno 2015.
- Bátorová, M., *Socialistický realizmus a jeho podoby v slovenskej literatúre. (Tvorba Dominika Tatarku a Františka Hečka v päťdesiatych rokoch 20. Storočia)*, "Philologia" 27, no. 1, pp. 11–30.
- Drgonec, J., Ferko, A., *Jánošíkova banka*, Perfekt, Bratislava 2010.
- Heribanová, T., *Pendleri*, Ikar, Bratislava 2018.
- Hnitka, J., *Jabloň*, [in:] Idem, *Transfúzia*, Petrus, Bratislava 2003.
- Kohout, P., *Záříjové noci*, Published by Orbis Praha 1956.
- Letz, R., *Slovenské dejiny V 1938–1945*, LIC, Bratislava 2012.
- Miłosz, Cz., *The captive mind*, Harvill Secker, London 1953.
- Pašteka, J., *Tvár a tvorba slovenskej katolíckej moderny*, Lúč, Bratislava 2002.
- Petrík, V., *Neznáma kapitola Smrekovejpoézie*, [in:] *Proti noci. Básne vnútorného exilu*, Tranoscius, Liptovský Mikuláš 1993.
- Schlögel, K., *Terror und Traum: Moskau 1937*, Carl Hanser Verlag, München 2008.
- Strauss, T., *Toto posrané 20. Storočie*, Kalligram, Bratislava 2008.
- Štolbová, E., *Navrávačky s Dominikom Tatarkom*, ed. N. Gašaj, Literárne a informačné centrum, Bratislava 2000.
- Tatarka, D., *Zúrivejšie nenávidieť nepriateľa – vrúcejšie milovať stranu*, "Pravda", 26.11.1952.
- Tatarka, D., *Démon síhlasu. Viera, Desanka a Oleg Tatarkovci* (text from 1956, publ. in "Kultúrniživot"), ed. M. Hamada, pref. V. Havel (text from 1985), Archa, Bratislava 1991.
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, https://www.ustavnysud.sk/documents/10182/992240/DE_01_48.pdf/0d4bbd21-2476-4881-a7b3-145f72f2564b.