

## ŠVEJK—THE *HOMO LUDENS*

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My point of departure is the concept of play as introduced by Johan Huizinga in his classic work *Homo Ludens, a Study of the Play Element in Culture*.<sup>1</sup> Huizinga defines play in the following way: "Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'."<sup>2</sup> This definition comprises all the activities covered by the Latin verb *ludere* or by the English verb 'to play' and the noun 'game' as it applies to animals, children's and grown-ups' games of strength and skill, games of invention, of guessing, games of chance, as well as language games, theatrical, musical and ritual performances.

Play is not solely a human activity—we know that animals play as well—yet man is *the* playing creature. Playing is an extremely important activity in human life, the playful aspect of man is a central trait of human character, he is a *homo ludens*. Man is not only allowed to play, he is even expected to indulge in different kinds of game in different stages of his development according to generally accepted social rules. Play and games have a definite and well defined place in man's life and as such they are generally respected. For this reason Huizinga was right in claiming that "play and culture are actually interwoven with one another, that genuine pure play is one of the main bases of civilization."<sup>3</sup>

In this paper we shall examine a fictional world whose structure is dominated by a particular *homo ludens*. The *homo ludens* imposes his own rules, the rules of his games on the hostile "real" world. In such a fictional world the ludic function of man is of much greater importance than all other human functions, so that the *homo ludens* proves to be the only true *homo sapiens*.

### *Aspects of Play*

Huizinga's concept of play is anthropological. According to Huizinga play is one of the three basic constituents—together with religion and

economics—which explain the universal phenomenon of culture. In such a frame of reference play is an extremely broad concept which covers many meanings and connotations and refers to every sphere of human activity. Such a universal concept is far too broad to explain the specific aesthetic functions of play in a literary work. Therefore I propose a narrower concept which will focus on those aspects of play that are useful for clarifying the structural, semantic and aesthetic qualities of one cultural phenomenon, one specific literary text—*The Good Soldier Švejk and His Fortunes*.

Every game is comprised of many different aspects. The basic distinction to be made is between the purposeful or functional game, on the one hand, and the purposeless or pure game, on the other. I call a game purposeful if it is played for some practical goal. The most common practical goal of games is material benefit (payoffs, winnings of stakes, etc.). The pure game as opposed to the functional game serves no practical goal. It is played for fun, for entertainment, for distraction; it is a very effective time killer. Note that often the same game can be played either as a functional game or as a pure game; thus football can be played for fun by a group of boys or in order to make money by professional football players. This differentiation between functional and pure games is relevant in the world of adults only. What is typical, in my view, for the world of children is the playing solely for fun, the purposeless game. Children play in order to amuse themselves and give pleasure to their partners, even if the partners are sometimes adults. For this reason pure games are sometimes associated with childlike behavior.

The second aspect by which games are characterized is the number of players involved; single-player games are to be distinguished from those which require two or more participants. If a girl plays alone with her doll she is engaged in a single-player (pure) game whereas games like baseball or tennis require several participants. Games requiring two or more players are *interactional* games reflecting in their structures and strategies all forms of interacting, from cooperation to conflict. One special feature of social games is their particular setting (environment): game rooms, pubs, casinos, etc. Within the category of social games card games are of special importance for our topic.

The third aspect of games relevant for our inquiry is the activity underlying them, which may be either a speech-act or a non-verbal activity. Verbal games use the medium of language and include puns, word plays, jokes, anecdotes and stories. Non-verbal games involve all kinds of physical movements, deeds and gestures. Quite a few action games require the use of an "instrument," such as a ball, a puppet, a pack of cards. A whole class of play-activity is based on social roles. In this respect we can speak about a *caricature* of a social role, or about *playful imitations*. Both forms of role playing involve playful transformations of non-verbal as well as verbal components typical for a social role.

The most significant *structural* feature of playing is the distinction between plays constituted and governed by a set of rules and those performed without any constitutive rules. The notion constitutive rules and the distinction between them and regulative rules goes back to J. Rawls<sup>4</sup> and has been later developed by J. R. Searle.<sup>5</sup> According to their distinction a rule is constitutive for a certain activity if the very definition of this activity requires that the rule be satisfied; e.g. all the rules of chess are constitutive to chess playing. Regulative rules are not logically needed for the very existence of the activity, but are required by customs, traditions, etiquette etc. Searle aims at analyzing speech-acts whereas my interest lies with games. Therefore my distinction differs slightly from his. For example, sincerity of intention is a constitutive rule for promise-making and Searle remarks that, by analogy, playing in order to win is constitutive to the act of playing. Yet there is a clear difference between the requirement of sincere playing and rules which define when a king is mated in chess. For my purpose it is more natural to take as constitutive rules those which define the game itself as a closed system and to take as regulative rules those which define the relations between the "world of game" and the "world of ordinary life." Thus playing in order to win will belong with other rules which determine how to conduct a game which is defined by its particular constitutive rules. This only goes to show how flexible the border between the two categories is and the possibility of considering a spectrum of rules—a topic which does not concern us here.

The regulative rules of playing are respected by those concerned as meticulously as the constitutive rules of the game; violating these rules is as severe a sin as violating the rules of the game itself. Serving juice to a *mariaš* player is regarded as worse than not knowing a game-constituting rule. In fact, in the latter case the knowledgeable players offer eagerly their advice, whereas drinking juice or soda water during a *mariaš* game will necessarily result in enstrangement or even in exclusion of the violator.

The final aspect of playing concerns the degree of emotional involvement of the players. A free player controls his involvement in the game and, by playing, enlarges the space of his voluntary acting. In contrast, a gambler is enslaved by playing, by his irresistible obsession.

Having described the essential aspects of games I want to turn now to the study of Švejk in his game playing.

### *Games Švejk Plays*

From the history of the novel's critical reception we can see clearly that throughout the years critics as well as the general reading public reduced Švejk to a "social type," thus overlooking the richness of the figure. He has been described as a "Genius-Idiot" (Olbracht),<sup>6</sup> pacifist

(Brod),<sup>7</sup> coward (René Wellek,<sup>8</sup> Novák<sup>9</sup>), a shirker without any moral principles or rather with one principle only—to get away from danger (Dyk,<sup>10</sup> Durych<sup>11</sup> and many others), or “a memorial of sham to those who humiliated the Czech nation” (Šalda).<sup>12</sup> When the text first appeared, Švejk was generally regarded as an idiot and Hašek saw in this misinterpretation his own failure as a writer.<sup>13</sup>

In order to show the complexity and richness of Švejk we have to look closely at the multiple functions which this central character fulfills within the overall structure of the novel.

Švejk is neither stupid, nor goodhearted. Nor is he the type whose main concern is to save his own skin. In some crucial situations Švejk as if intentionally courts danger instead of running away from it. The most striking example of it is his putting on the Russian uniform which leads to his imprisonment by his own army. Švejk's behavior throughout the novel reveals three dominant traits. One is his incessant story telling, with stories interlaced or piled up, or as Daneš<sup>14</sup> calls it, “glued to each other.” The second is his predilection for creating absurd situations much resembling those narrated in the stories. The third is his equanimity, composure, endurance and cold-bloodedness, characteristics which we rather expect from an English gentleman than from Švejk. He is never scared, never tired and never complains. As Lubomír Doležel has already pointed out, “Švejk survives every danger and every disaster because he is invulnerable like heroes of myths and fairy tales.”<sup>15</sup> It seems to me that precisely this invulnerability, this myth-heroic quality of Švejk is one of the main causes for “the unjust labelling of Švejk as coward, or opportunist who simulates idiocy in order to survive.”<sup>16</sup>

Milan Jankovič<sup>17</sup> who has carried out the most detailed structural analysis of the novel, gave much attention to the first element—Švejk's story-telling. He has claimed that in telling these stories Švejk realizes the only freedom available to him. He escapes from the reality imposed upon him to a free but unreal world. I think that this interpretation misses the most important link between the stories Švejk tells and the situations in which he gets involved. Both are of the same type—both are games, and as I hope to show, very similar games.

Švejk can by no means be described as passive, or one upon whom things are imposed. Given the global inexorable conditions: the regime, the war, the mobilization order, the universal madness, Švejk preserves his inner freedom and creates around him a local free space in which he *acts* freely; he plays. The games, actional or speech games, are very peculiar, sometimes subtle activities which he initiates in quite unexpected whimsical ways. This is expressed in hundreds of episodes throughout the book from little pranks to major adventures which may have serious consequences. These buffooneries, whims and practical jokes are different forms of Švejk's playing; Švejk transforms every activity into playing by

endowing it with some features of games. He creates a multitude of play situations ranging from pure, purposeless, aimless playing to games used in his struggle against powerful adversaries. Švejk is really the archetypal *homo ludens*—the playing man who can enjoy his games without worrying about anything. His invulnerability stems from the earlier mentioned mythic quality as well as from his supreme skills in playing.

To Švejk playing is always possible: he understands the nature of a game, and knows what a game demands both from the players and from the bystanders. He respects and follows almost pedantically both the constitutive and the regulative rules of the game and expects the same from his co-players. A particularly good example of this attitude is expressed by him with respect to *mariáš*-playing. *Mariáš* is to Švejk a matter of everyday life, everyday praxis. I cannot analyze here all the structural and semantic roles of *mariáš* in Hašek's novel; that would demand a separate paper. But I would like to illustrate Švejk's attitude to playing by quoting one of his anecdotes about *mariáš*:

"It's just like what happened once down at the restaurant, U Valšů. There was a prize oaf there who had a *durch* hand but didn't play it. Instead he always threw away all his lowest cards and made everyone play *betl*. And what hands he had! In every suit he always had the highest cards. And, just as I wouldn't have got anything out of it now, if you had played *durch*, so at that time I couldn't have got anything out of it, nor could anyone of us either. As the game went on we would have paid him all the time. At last I said to him: "Mr. Herold, please do play *durch* and don't be a bloody fool." But he flew at me and said he'd play what he liked and I should keep my trap shut since he had a university education. But he paid dearly for it. The landlord was our friend and the waitress could hardly have been on more familiar terms with us, so we were able to explain to the police patrol that everything was all right. We said first of all that it was a dirty trick of his to disturb the night peace by calling a patrol just because somewhere in front of the pub he had slipped on the ice, fallen on his nose and broken it. We hadn't done anything to him when he cheated at *mariáš*, but when he had been found out he had rushed out so quickly that he fell full length on the ground. The landlord and the waitress confirmed to us that we'd really been too gentlemanly to him. He had deserved all he got. He had sat from 7 p.m. to midnight and only ordered one beer and sodawater, and made out that he was a hell of a gentleman because he was a university professor. But he understood as much about *mariáš* as a goat about parsley."<sup>18</sup>

Mr. Herold violated several regulative rules of *mariaš* and was therefore justly punished. The first rule is the absolute obligation to play as well as possible. The second rule is that sitting in a pub and playing *mariaš* erases every social difference (in a similar way as imprisonment does). And finally, while playing *mariaš*, one is supposed to drink significant quantities of beer. Because Mr. Herold ignored these rules, Švejk and his friends—the representatives of the game laws used the police—the representatives of the civil laws in order to punish justly the spoil-game.

In some situations Švejk plays a pure purposeless game, in others he plays for the purpose of provoking his adversaries or getting out of trouble. He entertains himself and his listeners with numerous verbal games, but is equally good in action games. He caricatures his own social role, that of the brave soldier of the Austrian army, and imitates skillfully the social roles of other agents of his fictional world. He is a good player who never cheats and never falls into the trap of the gambling passion.

Now, let me demonstrate how, in particular instances, Švejk transforms acting into playing. In Švejk's actions all the basic features of playing can be discovered; Švejk, as I said earlier, attaches play features to each of his acts.

At the very beginning of the novel when Švejk enters the pub U Kalicha he orders his drink in the following way: "Švejk who came into the pub, ordered a dark black beer and remarked: 'Today they'll be in mourning in Vienna too.'"<sup>19</sup> In this skillful improvisation Švejk starts a game of trivialization. His manner of ordering his drink turns it into a play with the symbolic meaning of black color. In a similar way Švejk continues his game when speaking about the flags in terms of merchandise, thus diminishing their symbolic value to zero.<sup>20</sup> What is at first a pure aimless game, becomes in the presence of the secret police agent Bretschneider a challenge to power, a precarious maneuver with possible dangerous consequences.

On a much larger scale and with much more dangerous consequences Švejk plays the action variant of the pure game when he puts on the Russian uniform. His action here has no other motive than his curiosity:

"His Russian uniform was lying underneath the willows and Švejk was curious to know how it would suit him, so he took off his own and put on the uniform worn by the unfortunate naked prisoner, who had escaped from a transport which had been billeted in a village behind the wood."<sup>21</sup>

The best example of Švejk's playing with his role of "good soldier" is the famous latrine scene. Švejk follows strictly and rigorously the military regulations regarding the obligation of paying honor to superiors. Here the context of his action makes it an absurd caricature of the "good

soldier." Dub perceives the absurdity of the game while the senile *latrinen General* to whom Švejk's playing is addressed is extremely satisfied and proposes Švejk for a bronze medal.

Second level role playing can be observed during Švejk's stay in the army hospital. Švejk plays the malingerer as opposed to many of his roommates who are genuine malingerers; they pretend to be ill in order to avoid or at least to postpone their departure to the front. Švejk plays with their playing. . . . While most of them are broken (or cured) by their "medical treatment" and agree to be sent to the front Švejk pursues his game to the extreme and insists upon getting the full treatment a malingerer should get, although this treatment closely resembles torture:

" 'Don't spare me,' he invoked the myrmidon who was giving him the enema. 'Remember your oath. Even if it was your father or your own brother who was lying here, give him an enema without batting an eyelid. Try hard to think that Austria rests on these enemias and victory is ours.' "22

By playing his game so consistently and demanding of his torturer to play the role according to the rules, Švejk caricatures not only the behavior expected of a good "brave" Austrian soldier, but even more the behavior expected of a malingerer.

The social role which Švejk encounters most often in his Fortunes is the role of the military superior. This role is the basis of the military hierarchy and the foundation of military discipline. Švejk does not miss any opportunity to play with this role although he himself is the lowest member of the hierarchy. In a small instance we can exemplify this game by the scene with Lukáš's cat who ate the lieutenant's canary. Švejk playfully transfers the order given by the half-asleep lieutenant from himself to the cat:

"He went into the bedroom of the lieutenant who was already fast asleep and woke him:

'Humbly report, sir, I've no orders about the cat.'

And the sleepy lieutenant, half-awake, turned over on the other side, and growled: 'Three days confined to barracks!' and went on sleeping. Švejk went softly out of the room, dragged the wretched cat from underneath the sofa and said to her: 'You've got three days confined to the barracks. Dismiss!' "23

One of the best examples of Švejk imitating the role of a military superior is his drilling of Baloun. In this case the novel provides directly the prototype of the imitated activity in the immediately following scene when Švejk himself is drilled by *šikovatel* Nasáklo. The comparison of the

two scenes reveals a fundamental contrast between Baloun and Švejk. When Baloun is drilled by Švejk, Baloun who is not a *homo ludens*, follows Švejk's orders mutely and passively. As a striking contrast to this passivity the *homo ludens* Švejk immediately recognizes the weakness of his adversary. Through his verbal game he undermines Nasáklo's resistance and finally deprives his social role of its authority.<sup>24</sup>

### *Interactional Games*

Švejk's interactions with other characters are determined by their positions in Švejk's game-strategy. It should be noted, first of all, that not all the agents of the novel become Švejk's co-players; certain figures are excluded from Švejk's playground although they belong to his fictional world. Thus, for example, *hejtman* Ságner remains an outsider, excluded from Švejk's games. Having identified his game partners, Švejk instantly and unmistakably recognizes the particular role which they are going to play in his interactional games. The set of agents of Švejk's fictional world appears as a network of game relations in which the particular agents are assigned the roles of opponents, co-players, allies, assistants, etc. In this paper an exhaustive description of this network cannot be given. We shall restrict our examination to the four most significant play relations that Švejk establishes, describing briefly his interactional games with lieutenant Dub, with *feldkurát* Katz, with the one-year volunteer Marek and, finally, with his most enduring and versatile play partner, lieutenant Lukáš.

Lieutenant Dub is Švejk's most consistent adversary. Although it might seem shocking to readers of Švejk, we have to recognize that he is an ideal counterpart to Švejk because his acting, not unlike Švejk's, is transformed into a game, a game of playing with a social role. Dub, a high school professor of Czech, plays the role of the reserve officer so ardently that he becomes a caricature of the Austrian officer; similarly Švejk, as we have seen earlier, plays the caricature of the "good soldier." Furthermore Dub shares with Švejk a fondness for storytelling; not unlike Švejk, he refers constantly to his prewar experiences, using them as the source of his *exempla*. These similarities between Švejk's and Dub's modes of acting do not deny their essential differences, perceived by every reader of the novel. In our frame of reference, these differences appear as diverse possibilities of role playing. First of all, Švejk knows that he is playing; his playing is conscious, whereas Dub has no idea that he is playing a role. In this respect Švejk appears as an extremely intelligent player, while Dub is the idiot of the game. Švejk knows the effects of particular game strategies and in his games against Dub he improvises the right kind of game. Thus, for example, in one of the "do-you-know-me" performances of Dub we can



watch Švejk causing him to lose control completely and then finally 'beat' him by claiming that his brother is a schoolmaster:

"Very well, then, do you know me or don't you know me?"

"I know you, sir."

"I tell you for the last time that you don't know me, you mule, you. Have you any brother?"

"Humbly report, sir, I have one."

Infuriated at the sight of Švejk's calm unruffled expression, and unable to control himself any longer, Lieutenant Dub shouted out:

"And your brother must certainly be as big a bloody mule as you are. What was he?"

"A schoolmaster, sir. He was in the army too and passed the officers' exam."

Lieutenant Dub looked at Švejk as though he wanted to run him through with his sabre. Švejk bore his furious look with dignified composure, so that for the moment their whole conversation ended with the word: "Dismiss!"<sup>24</sup>

This conversation shows clearly Švejk's art of playing not only with the social role his adversary performs, but also with his social aspirations. In addition, it is Švejk who really knows Dub in spite of what Dub keeps claiming, and thus a secondary verbal game develops both on the explicit level and on the implicit level through Švejk's game.

As opposed to Švejk's highly inventive games, Dub's game is repetitive and stereotyped, restricted to the obsessive hunting game with Švejk. With great perseverance but little inventiveness Dub pursues Švejk, attempting again and again to catch him and have him punished. But Dub is always the loser, beginning with the cognac episode and ending in the scene with Colonel Gerbich; in the latter case, Dub's hunting game fails most miserably giving to Švejk the final triumph in his unfinished duel with Dub.

Švejk's very best play partner is, of course, *feldkurát* Katz. Unlike Dub, Katz is aware that he is playing a social role and does not hide his purely material motivation. Švejk starts his contact with Katz in the prison-chapel during Katz's sermon. He attracts Katz's attention by bursting into tears and thus initiates the first dialogue and his Fortune. Katz turns to him directly: "Don't cry, I tell you, don't cry!"<sup>25</sup> After the sermon he has Švejk summoned to him and there he starts shouting at him and demanding that he admit having cried only for fun. The narrator describes Švejk's answer in an ambiguous manner. Švejk

answers "deliberately"<sup>26</sup> (*rozvážně*), but stakes everything on one card which is a hazard move. Švejk admits that in fact he did cry just for the fun of it and in order to complete the *feldkurát's* show. What Švejk actually does is deliberately lose that 'trick'; he lets the *feldkurát* find out the truth about him, and thus he wins the whole game: Katz takes him out of prison and becomes his very best play partner. Here Švejk has played a perfect *betl*.

We may ask ourselves why indeed did Švejk cry in the chapel. And the very simple answer is, for the fun of it, in order to participate in the *feldkurát's* show; activity in which he then indulges during his whole service. Already before seeing the chaplain Švejk knows what to expect; the religious services are introduced into the novel by one of the prisoners telling Švejk:

" 'Tomorrow we're going to have a show. They'll take us to the chapel to hear a sermon. We shall all of us be standing in our pants right under the pulpit. There'll be some fun.' "<sup>27</sup>

To Švejk like to all the other prisoners and like to *feldkurát* Katz the whole sermon is a show. Švejk, in order to enhance the fun, turns from a passive spectator into a co-actor. The show needs a repenting sinner, so he assumes the role.

*Feldkurát* Katz is a passionate player and immediately recognizes in Švejk the playing man. He demands him as his *putzflak*, because Švejk does what he does just for the fun of it:

"Today when I was preaching I found a bastard who started blubbing just for fun. That's the kind of cove I need."<sup>28</sup>

Švejk becomes his play partner and participates actively in Katz's religious 'theater performances.' When he assists Katz in the drumhead mass, the performance is perceived by everybody present as an excellent entertainment:

It looked like a Red Indian dance round a sacrificial stone, but it made a good impression, for it banished the boredom of the dusty melancholy drill-ground with its avenue of plum trees behind and its latrines, the odour of which replaced the mystical scent of incense in Gothic churches.<sup>29</sup>

If the reader is not yet persuaded that the mass is a perfect "as if" game which gives them both as well as their audience enormous fun the last dialogue in this chapter between Katz and Švejk says it almost explicitly:

"Humbly report, sir, must a server be of the same confession as the man he's assisting?"

"Of course," answered the chaplain, "otherwise the mass wouldn't be valid."

"Then, sir, a great mistake has been made," said Švejk. "I'm a man without confession. It's always me that has bad luck."

The chaplain looked at Švejk, was silent for a moment, then patted him on the shoulder and said: "You can drink up what's left in the bottle of sacramental wine and imagine that you've been taken back into the bosom of the Church."<sup>30</sup>

They are also excellent partners when it comes to playing with people. Their almost mute understanding of each other, their reciprocal playing into each other's hands (*nahrávání*) can be observed both during their debate with religious chaplain in ch. 12 as well as in the manner they play with the poor man to whom Katz owed money in ch. 13. But there is also a profound difference between these two players. To Švejk the joy of playing (*blbnutí*) is the first and foremost end; *feldkurát* Katz plays for profit. He explains his motives quite honestly to his pious colleague:

"My dear colleague," answered Katz, patting him familiarly on the back," until the state recognizes that soldiers who are going to their death at the front don't need the blessing of God for it, the chaplaincy remains a decently paid profession, where a chap isn't overworked."<sup>31</sup>

Before becoming a priest Katz assumed for the same reason, namely, to earn his living, the Christian face (rather than faith). Katz's religious playing is directly related to his gambling passion; significantly, during their search for the field altar Katz tells Švejk that the other day he won a lot of money in "God's blessing" (a gambling game) and that if everything goes well he will be able to buy the piano back from the pawnbroker.<sup>32</sup> He hopes to make money in gambling in the same way as he succeeds in playing the chaplain. But as opposed to his role-playing he is incapable of controlling either the hazard game itself or his gambling passion; he is no master of the situation and therefore, being incapable of controlling his gambling passion, he loses Švejk.

The one-year volunteer Marek is a character who almost naturally becomes Švejk's play partner. Although they come from different social groups, they start their play partnership as equals, expecting in prison a regimental report. The partnership between Švejk and Marek is based on their immediate recognition of a very special similarity: they are both "underdogs" within the military machine. It is the same kind of closeness which develops between *mariáš* partners, who form a closed group even in

the most crowded pub. Furthermore, Marek and Švejk are compulsive talkers and creators of fictions. (Marek's fabulating reaches its peak in his "history" of the batallion.)

Thanks to these common properties, Marek and Švejk develop a play cooperation from the very first meeting, as if they have played together for a long time. Their game against the warder is very successful; they beat him easily although he is the one who holds the trumps. In this encounter the game which Marek and Švejk play is explicitly linked to the card game of *mariáš*. In the train which is taking them to Kiralíhyda, Švejk and Marek keep reminding the warder of all his infractions of the army regulations. The warder is in a state of despair and resignation:

The men from the escort were playing cards with Švejk. Out of despair the corporal kibitzed from time to time and even permitted himself the remark that Švejk had led the ace of spades and that it was a mistake. He ought not to have trumped, but kept the seven for the last trick.

"In pubs," said Švejk, "there used to be very good notices against kibitzers. I remember one of them: 'Kibitz, go and hold your jaw, or I'll knock you on the floor.'"

The army train went into the station, where the vans were to be inspected. The train stopped.

"Well, of course," said the volunteer mercilessly, giving a knowing glance at the corporal, "we've got the inspection already."<sup>33</sup>

Marek's and Švejk's closeness is revealed not only in their defensive game, but also in all the instances of verbal games where they use the same style of language. One of the best examples of their stylistic proximity is their conversation with father Lacina; both Švejk and Marek adopt by imitation of Lacina's religious phraseology:

"On what grounds have you been punished?"

"The Lord visited me with punishment," answered Švejk piously, "on regimental report, sir, as a result of my being late in reaching my regiment through no fault of mine."

"God is boundlessly merciful and just," said the senior chaplain solemnly. "He knows whom he should punish and shows in this his wisdom and omnipotence. And why are you in gaol, volunteer?"

"Because," answered the volunteer, "merciful God was gracious enough to visit me with rheumatism and I waxed too proud."<sup>34</sup>

However, the stylistic closeness between Marek and Švejk seems to be rather rare. Typically, Marek's verbal style is rhetorical and has a tendency to abstractness, while Švejk's style is always concrete and purely

entertaining. While reacting to the same impulses the two players proceed on opposite stylistic levels:

"All along the line," said the volunteer, pulling the blanket over him, "everything in the army stinks of rotteness. Up till now the wide-eyed masses haven't woken up to it. With goggling eyes they let themselves be made into mincemeat and then when they're struck by a bullet they just whisper, 'Mummy.' Heroes do not exist, only cattle for the slaughter and the butchers in the general staffs."<sup>35</sup>

In his follow-up, Švejk switches from Marek's level of abstract slogans to the level of an entertaining story narrating the misadventures of the courageous carpenter Mlíčko and his artificial wooden leg. Mlíčko was at the end sentenced by a special veteran court: they impounded both the medal for courage and his wooden leg.<sup>36</sup>

In this and similar instances Švejk's verbal game is not a complement of Marek's; rather, it seems to me, Švejk parodies Marek's verbal play.

The most complex play relationship of the novel develops between Švejk and Lieutenant Lukáš. This complexity is created by the ambivalence of mutual attitudes, an ambivalence which characterizes both the relationship of Lukáš to Švejk and that of Švejk to Lukáš. While Dub is Švejk's permanent adversary and Katz Švejk's equally permanent partner, Lukáš is sometimes Švejk's partner, sometimes his adversary, but most of the time both at once.

The fundamental division of their social roles is given by the army hierarchy: Lukáš is the superior, the officer (also the winner of Švejk), Švejk is the servant (the lowest *putzflak* lost in cards). This clearcut social opposition is undermined by Lukáš himself in the 'introductory scene,' establishing thus his ambivalent attitude towards Švejk:

While he was speaking Lieutenant Lukáš sat for a long time on his chair, looking at Švejk's boots and thinking: "My God! I often talk drivel like this too and the only difference is in the form I serve it up in."<sup>37</sup>

Lukáš recognizes in Švejk's words his own way of speaking, thus acknowledging the similarity between them while identifying their difference as a difference in form only. This similarity/difference as well as the constant quantitative shifts between them pervade the whole relationship between the officer and his batman. Later on when Lieutenant Lukáš is appointed "Kompanienkommandant" and Švejk designated his "Kompanienordonanz" the ambivalent relationship is clearly signaled by the verbal terms of the roles; Lukáš is aware of the relevance of this sign,

repeating to himself on the way home: "Kompanienkommandant, Kompanienordonanz." Lukáš's verbal play with the two terms bearing a common linguistic component reveals both the unity and the hierarchical distinction of the two players.

Another example of this ambivalence is Lukáš's attitude to Švejk's services during the trip to Bruck. While Švejk should have been sent to him already at 11 o'clock, he asks the commander of the train to keep him in the prisoners' wagon for the rest of the trip. But when he encounters Švejk at the station with the food (in fact intended for *oberfeldkvardt* Lacina) he is very happy to take him back. He is very inconsistent in the performance of his role of the military superior. Although he always threatens to punish him, he never really punishes Švejk. He might swear at him as the worst of officers does and at the same time approaches him as an old friend. Not surprisingly, Lukáš is reprimanded by General-major von Schwarzburg for treating Švejk as his equal.

Švejk's attitude to Lukáš is equally ambivalent. On the one hand he treats Lukáš as his superior following meticulously the rules of the military code. On the other hand Švejk is aware of the commonness of their fate and of the permanent ties which bind them together. In the most sentimental scene of their interactional game, that is during the Vienna reunion after a long separation, Švejk speaks about this commonness quite explicitly:

"It only dawned on me how sad it was that we are both the most unfortunate people of all in this war and under the sun and we can neither of us help it."<sup>38</sup>

Most frequently Švejk's ambivalent attitude to Lukáš is revealed, of course, in his play-acting. Švejk brings upon Lukáš all kinds of troubles, but then, with utmost devotion and loyalty, he does his best to protect him from the worst consequences. Thus in the Kiralihyda episode Švejk delivers Lukáš's letter in the most indiscrete way, stages together with Vodicka an unprovoked fight with the Hungarian soldiers, but later on when questioned about the letter, he swallows it, thus keeping Lukáš out of the game.

Very significant component of the Švejk-Lukáš relationship is the fact that Lukáš is the addressee of most of Švejk's narratives; in other words Lukáš is the main partner of the highest form of Švejk's verbal playing. Again, Švejk's verbal playing with Lukáš is varied and quite often contradictory. In many instances Švejk uses verbal game to make Lukáš forget the trouble which he has brought on him. In other cases Švejk narrates to entertain Lukáš; sometimes when Lukáš is extremely bored he asks Švejk to distract him by a story. These seem to be the only cases in which Švejk narrates on request. No less exceptional is Lukáš's ability to

interfere with Švejk's talking. The only unfinished story of Švejk is that one when Lukáš cuts him off.

The ambivalence of the Švejk—Lukáš relationship ensures the variety and complexity of their interactional game. For this reason the game is allowed to last without becoming repetitive and boring.

Our investigation of Švejk's interactional games gives us a deeper insight into the fundamental structural principle of Hašek's novel: the structure of the novel is modeled on the structure of a game with several players. By the presence of a *homo ludens* in the fictional world the set of its agents is transformed into a set of his play-partners. This perception is certainly a major reward for our interpreting Švejk as *homo ludens*. Most significantly, perhaps, it gives us an answer to the question why this controversial novel has retained its comic effect and aesthetic appeal. As an inventing and improvising *homo ludens* Švejk overcomes the stereotype of his role and generally undermines the schematism of the traditional adventure novel. The attractiveness of the universal *homo ludens* explains the attractiveness of Švejk to readers from very different cultures even to those for whom his particular historical situation is irrelevant or completely unknown.

However, the attractiveness, even fascination of Švejk's playing is given primarily by the fact that it is a risky, dangerous game. Švejk's playing is not only a defense against a mortal threat, but equally a daring challenge to this threat. To be sure, Švejk survives by playing; however at the time his playing lands him in prisons, gaols, mental hospitals, indeed brings him very close to the gallows. In this respect Švejk reminds the reader of an acrobat or stuntman who courts danger by daredevil acts performed for his own and the spectators' pleasure. On the other hand, however, Švejk is an unprofessional, amateurish and childish naive *homo ludens*. His act is the act of a clown who imitates clumsily (or rather pretends to imitate clumsily) a daring performance of a skillful acrobat. We gaze with amazement at the acrobat's act; we laugh at the clumsy imitation of the clown. Nevertheless, deep in our hearts we feel that the amateurish clown playfully imitating a professional hero is no less skillful and courageous while at the same time being much more human and loveable.

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#### NOTES

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