

of history - the Polish, the Habsburg and the Byzantine-Ottoman. But to lump together all the peoples between the Alps and the Urals, and to think in terms of an 'eastern' and a 'western' Europe separated by the border between today's power-blocs, is an error that is dangerously widespread.

THE RETREAT INTO THE UNIFORM AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF ORDER

ŠVEJK AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF CENTRAL-EUROPEAN LITERATURE¹ VÁCLAV BĚLOHRADSKÝ

I. Central-European Civilisation (an Attempt at a Definition)

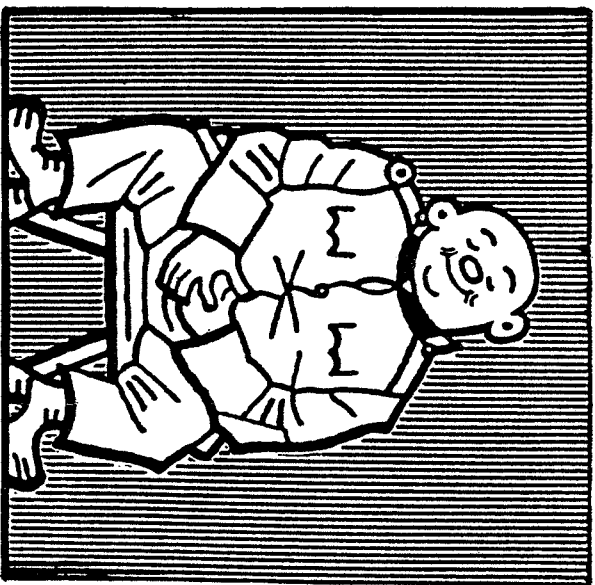
The great success of Jaroslav Hašek's *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za světové války* (*The Good Soldier Švejk [Schweik] and his Fortunes in the World War*) with the average reader has obscured the uniqueness of the book within the Czech literary tradition and its foreignness to all that Czech literature stood for before 1914. The domestication of Švejk produced notorious labels like 'a simple, ordinary man from the folk, in whose direct unpretentiousness the author finds a welcome contrast to the attitudes of the ruling classes' and 'a popular humorist, a representative of the indestructible folk Czechness'; in his genial smile the nation survives, waiting for better times, etc. etc. This interpretation was considerably enhanced and strengthened by the famous illustrations by Josef Lada, which totally exclude all interpretations of Švejk, other than those just quoted. Jindřich Toman² has shown in his stylistic analysis that Švejk is in fact much less 'folk-inspired' (*lidový*) than might appear to be the case.

Hašek's novel, with its sophisticated overall construction, is stylistically akin to the European Avant-garde. The actor and comedian Jiří Voskovec³ recalls that at his first encounter, Švejk had struck him as something stunningly modern, in a world still ruled by pompous and parochial officialdom. For him, it was a product of an inherently European attitude, mocking the anachronistic, ostentatious and smug world of

officials, nationalistic 'patriots' and all the other bombastic purveyors of empty talk.

And to bring the unforgettable festival of fun of the early 1920s in Czechoslovakia to its climax, Jaroslav Hašek created his *Good Soldier Švejk*. The first instalments of this work, which, apart from Čapek's word *robot*, has to date been the only Czech contribution to world literature, stunned both myself and my fellow-comedian Jan Werich. . . . After our revolutionary discovery of Chaplin and Co., alongside the impact of Dixieland Jazz, Jaroslav Hašek became yet another powerful source of our humour. Švejk, a modern St. George, the hero of the saga of a single brain's triumph over the Hydra of the Establishment, the Regime, the System - Reason, disguised as Stupidity, in a struggle against the Absurd pretending to be Wise and Dignified - the sense of Nonsense in its struggle against the nonsense of Sense - all this is the quintessence of comedy, the nuclear energy of fun. 4

The world that loomed behind Švejk - one which, in Voskovec's view, had just tripped over its own long beard - comprised not only Austrian military uniforms, officials, *Herrn Kollegen* with blackened bald patches under their thinning hair, but also Czech national costumes, patriotic dances and nationalistic rhetoric. These mutually hostile worlds struck Voskovec, for all their differences and feuding, as basically identical: the inanity of



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Soldier Švejk

the nationalistic songs was in a way the same in the Austrian and the Czech camps. Of course, it was still possible to distinguish the victims from their tormentors; yet they were intimately inter-related by their vocabulary, their modes of thought and their shared obsessions. Hašek broke the narrow confines of their quarrels and thus set his work in a totally new context.

Švejk is a part of that European literature whose modernity lies in its having shed light on the deep and intrinsic relationships between all those feuding languages, customs and viewpoints that co-existed within one epoch. I emphasise this point in order to bring out the modernity of Hašek's work *vš-ť-vš* the Czech literary tradition and, at the same time, its total unrelatedness to the Czech folk tradition. None of Švejk's anecdotes is folk-like: all of them are instances of a complicated, destructive attitude, which has nothing whatever in common with the folk tradition. The Czech folk tradition is baroque: Švejk's amorality is deeply alien to it. Erasm Kohák⁵ reiterates the moralist's misunderstanding of *Švejk* when he wonders how such a shocking type could have become a major Symbol. The moral sense of the Czech folk tradition is completely alien to Švejk's 'modern sense of fun', as Voskovec puts it.

Let us look for the cultural background of Švejk's universality and for the sociological sources of his modernity: it is high time that the domesticating tendency, which aims to confine Švejk to the cliché of a 'Czech folk story teller', was refuted.

Švejk is universal, because it is anchored in the culture and civilisation of Central Europe. The unity of that civilisation has been obscured by the political division of that part of the world. But this division cannot alter the fact that *Švejk* belongs, not to 'Slavonic literatures', but to the same city as Franz Kafka, to the same area as Robert Musil. It is surely significant that the Czech writer Milan Kundera, living in Paris, emphasises that he is a Central-European, as against the East-European identity that is being forced upon him. However, what is even more important is that whatever universal validity Czech literature possesses, it does so because it is fundamentally Central-European.

How is the expression 'Central-European civilisation' to be understood? We can use the standard definition of *civilisation* as a set of cultural models of social behaviour which make up an environment shared by two or

more societies. Such an environment includes a common language or the commonly accepted use of several languages, the use of the same basic technology, the same laws and rules of decision-making, the same type of public opinion, the same everydayness, and a certain degree of religious and ideological unity. As against that, the word *civilization* is used to denote the models of behaviour limited to a single social structure. A civilization originates from certain elements of a particular culture spreading beyond the confines of their original social structure. In this sense, we can speak of a Christian civilization, a Catholic, democratic or, conceivably, a rationalist civilization. Our contemporary civilization is technological, because technology is that element of western culture which is transmitted to all other cultures and social structures. Discovering a civilization entails identifying the element of a culture most capable of becoming 'universalised', i.e. of becoming an element that unifies a number of societies, thereby creating a commonly shared environment.

Central-European civilization can be defined as 'supra-legalistic', in the sense that officials, a legal code, an *apparatus*, a central system of weights and measures, uniforms, rubber-straps, offices, state salaries and careers are the only universal factors around which, and through which, Central-European unity and its ethos originated. This multi-national territory was never unified by language, history, a common culture or by religion: only the impersonality of laws and the precision of weights and measures imprinted a unity upon the Austrian State. According to H.G. Gadamer,⁶ understanding a culture as a tradition requires identifying the question which that culture is constantly trying to answer and which it feels to be 'its intrinsic part'. Central-European civilization is trying to answer the question: can a Legal Code, in its general sense of an impersonal precision, be the source of a universality? Is there not something nihilistic in this universal retreat to the Law and into the Uniform? To what extent is it permissible to dissociate oneself from what 'differs from the Law' and from what is not precisely measurable?

More theoretically, we could speak of a permanent absence of legitimacy that pervades the whole Central-European area. There have been attempts to overcome this absence of legitimacy by constructing a perfectly impersonal, neutral legal code. This Legal Code is presumed to be the source of legitimacy, indeed, to stand in for it. Thus there emerges a classic ideology,

whose aim is to rationalise society by means of the State: to overcome the absence of legitimacy by constructing a system of perfect organisational *apparatus*, whose neutrality and impartial precision could be shared by all, regardless of their individual differences.

However, when the impersonal legal code assumes such a legitimising function, it becomes grotesque. A State that regulates and runs Society becomes overburdened, and the limits of the state rationality soon become obvious. Over and over again, natural energy keeps emerging from beneath the impersonal legal code which, while impossible to classify rationally, is nevertheless both appealing and seductive. Beyond the overburdened Law, we can clearly see those things that 'differ from the Law', things that seemingly *can* be put into a uniform, *can* be neutralised and contained: yet a pyjama will always show even from under the tightest uniform; even in the most thoroughly mapped-out environment something will always be there to defy all attempts at rationalising it.

The First World War stunned people precisely because it showed the fragility of Reason, of the centralised system of weights and measures and the impersonal Law. Voskovec saw the laughter of his generation as being provoked by the contrast between the pomposity of

the statuesque splendour of the Tsars, Kaisers, Archdukes, bowler-hatted statesmen on the one hand, and the convulsed, ashen-pale, emaciated faces of rank-and-file soldiers in faded uniforms⁷

on the other. The world's 'historical landscape', that pompous pretentiousness which turned the starvation of the soldiers and the mud of the battlefield into 'rational and noble historic victories' - all this suddenly collapsed. Voskovec's contrast highlights the disintegration of the whole legalistic and rational interpretation of order and history, based as it is on the need to increase rational impersonality, whose classic incarnation is the State. The First World War brought about the fall of the dignity of impersonal Reason, which had aimed to achieve a level of perfection that would make it fully independent of everything personal and 'different from the Legal Code'.

Central-European culture also became aware of the potential barbarity and inhumanity of this impersonal, State-orientated rationality and its depersonalising 'historical props', which obscure the real meaning of one's actions and one's personal responsibility for them, stylising violence,

cruelty and murder into an 'Historical Necessity'. The mass crimes that have shaken the values of this century were the product more of an 'infection-by-geometry' in the devastated landscape of the State than of an explosion of some primitive instincts within civilised Man: these crimes were, first and foremost, the product of a *civilisation*. Musil regards the idea of order as inherently related to death: a perfect order is a cold death, a devastated moonscape, an infection-by-geometry.

An understanding for things 'different from the Law' is typically Central-European. It is a unifying factor in Central-European philosophy, science and literature. It is a feeling for the absurdity of attempts to restrict life to a single, unified and impersonal state rationality, which would have life flow along pre-determined lines, freed from all dirty linen and personal prejudice. This is where the Central-European grotesque has its source: Kafka, Hašek, Kundera. The human body, the feminine principle, childhood, the Slavonic languages of the Empire, its mysterious provinces, its multi-nationality - all these are things controlled by the irreducible ambiguity of life, which destroys state rationality; yet these things at the same time release in all of us something fundamentally positive, attractive, maternal, immeasurable and comforting. To shield ourselves from this comforting ambiguity, we don a uniform and retreat to the Law. But our private, individual lives keep re-surfacing as something dangerously attractive, as an obsession, a nocturnal aspect of the life of the proper civil servant.

All Central-European culture describes this basic fundamental movement: a regression from the Uniform back to life. Central Europe, as a forefront of the Western World, experienced earlier than the rest of that world the grotesqueness of the legal code that aims to assume overall legitimacy and become the centre of every human, personal existence.

The detachment from the elemental positiveness of life and its natural world (*Lebenswelt*) is the paramount feature of the rationalist establishment of today, and turns this establishment into a grotesque construct. Central-European culture has anticipated the universal devastation, which is in danger of taking place through the Retreat into the Uniform, to the ultimate, perfect, unambiguous Language and to Science. It anticipated a crisis of western aspirations which aim to achieve a universally legitimised existence: a *modus vivendi*, which is seen as the fulfilment of

Western Man's historic task. Rationality that has recourse to impersonality as its normative base necessarily leads to a neutralisation of all values and of personal consciousness: it transforms each human community into a depersonalised mass, transforms culture into ideology and hastens the advent of the Totalitarian State. Nobody, perhaps only an animal, can be that impersonal, says Musil. 8

II. *The Uniform, Science, Incompleteness: The Three Themes of Central-European Literature*

The basic pattern of modern Central-European philosophy - and of the Central-European Tale [a 'tale', that is to say, narrative fiction based on personal and essentially non-communicable experience of the traumatic events of the twentieth century; J.Č.] - evolves around the following three key themes: (a) an illusory Retreat into the Uniform, i.e. to its ability to control and mask the irrational aspects of life (Hermann Broch, 9 Joseph Roth, 10 Hašek); (b) the alienation of Science from life, the insurmountable presence of the 'mystical' in man's language and actions, a critique of objectivism (Edmund Husserl, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Broch, Musil); (c) the essential incompleteness of Central-European philosophy and of the typical Central-European Tale, their 'non-finiteness', i.e. the impossibility of finding a culmination for them in a 'finale' of some kind (Husserl, Wittgenstein, Kafka, Hašek, Musil, Italo Svevo 11).

(a) In Central-European literature the Uniform symbolises the inevitable logical conclusion of West-European metaphysics, which has taken Man out of the mutable world of the senses and has based any meaningful human existence on the perception of 'Truth' or of an 'Idea'. Whatever is real, wears a uniform: a uniform is the true God of metaphysics. Only in a uniform does human life achieve the dignity of an Idea. By means of a uniform it is possible to escape from the fragility and fuzziness of life to a world of permanent meanings and facts. The Uniform guards us from being attracted by the things that 'differ from the Law', things that are merely inconsistent reflections of the 'Idea'. The Uniform embodies what European objectivism strives for. One of the central metaphors of Husserl's language is constructed on this basis:

An ideological cloak of 'mathematics' and 'mathematical natural sciences', or a cloak of symbols, of symbolic mathematical theories, governs all those things that, for the scientists and the educated, replace the 'objectively true and genuine' natural world.

The ideological cloak causes us to regard as *true existence* what is merely a *method*; the ideological disguise is the cause of our failure to grasp the *real meaning of the Method*. 12

The Uniform lies on the borderline of 'Reality', of the precise world of Reason which separates us from Chaos.

Anselm Eibenschütz, our inspector, was . . . a former soldier forced him to. And he was very sorry having to leave his uniform behind . . . He did not like civilian clothes, and he felt like a snail forced to leave the shell it had been building from its own saliva, its own flesh and blood, for a quarter of a snail's natural life . . . He took off his uniform, his beloved uniform, and left the barracks, his beloved barracks. He ought to have remained in the barracks. Among the soldiers, his whole life was governed by rules. There, there were no informers or anonymous letters. The responsibility for what each soldier was doing lay way above them, in a territory unknown to them. How easy and free was the life in the barracks! He felt deserted now, without a fatherland, a stranger in those unfamiliar civilian clothes after his twelve years in a rifleman's uniform. 13

Roth's inspector is conscientious, but on the frontier of the Empire, office-holders must face deep loneliness: here the 'representatives of the weights and measures, the Law and the State were regarded as enemies'. It is easy to be on the side of the weights and measures when you're in your uniform, shielded from people's judgements, from their eyes. In civilian clothes, life comes too close for comfort. The hero starts realising that it is probably absurd to check weights and measures. His whole life and career slowly disintegrate and he is finally murdered in a smugglers' inn on the Russian frontier. Here he had found the only passion of his life, a GYPSY woman, from whom he learnt 'what he was about, and this recognition stunned him'. As he lies dying, he dreams that he is no longer an Inspector of Weights and Measures, but a tradesman and all his weights and measures are false. And lo and behold, the Supreme Inspector enters, examines them and then says, surprised: 'All your weights and measures are false, and yet they are correct.' Without that uniform, Order is at the mercy of GYPSIES, dreams, and unmeasurable, meaningful, though

unscientific, language. Broch describes the metaphysical anxiety which seizes the young officer von Pasenow as he catches glimpses of the nocturnal origin of life.

... a proper uniform makes it possible to separate our person from the outside world; it is like a hard casing with which the world and the person may constantly collide, yet they remain strictly separated. The real function of the uniform is to display disciplined order and to introduce it into the world, to eliminate the uncertain and clouded current of life, and to cover up all the soft and imprecise things on the human body, its underwear, its skin . . . The man who in the morning buttons up his uniform has, in fact, acquired a second skin, a stronger skin, and he begins to forget his underwear, the uncertainty of life; indeed, life itself recedes into the distance . . . 14

Von Pasenow is frequently seized with the horror that he might 'slip out of the uniform' into the clammy, mutable matter of life. He feels revulsion at any contamination of the uniform by the body, wrapped in underwear, and he despises married officers.

The whole of Švejk is an account of someone becoming a [narrow-minded] idiot (*Abblunzt*), a process generated by the uniform, giving its wearers the impression that they are 'the vital persons', whereas all the others are 'merely chance persons'. And the chain of war can remain unbroken only because every man is dispensable to the uniform: he enters it, dies in it, and another man replaces him in it.

"They bury the soldiers naked," said another soldier, "they put another person in that uniform and we start all over again."

"Until we win the war," remarked Švejk. 15

Švejk's facetious donning of a Russian uniform which a Russian prisoner-of-war had left on the bank of a pond, also belongs to that category. The uniform charges us to 'show the utmost spiritual indifference', to fill one's stomach and 'not to worry about things'.

Kundera analyses 'verbal uniforms', that is, defensive constructs designed to shield us from inconstant reality. An ideology is a set of such verbal uniforms, it is the need to wear a mask, which is a feature of growing up. Lyricism is for Kundera an example of such an artificial world, from which any element of resistance or difference has been excluded: hence the relation between poetry and the police. Lyricism is

a uniform in the sense that it safeguards us from the inconstant matter of the world.

Man, expelled from the safe enclosure of childhood, desires to enter the world, but because he is at the same time afraid of it, he creates an artificial, *substituted* world out of his own verses. He lets his poems circle around him as though they were planets circling around the sun; he becomes the centre of a small universe, in which there is nothing alien, in which he feels at home like a baby inside its mother, because everything in this universe was created from a single piece of raw material - his soul. Here he can accomplish all those things so difficult to accomplish in the external world; he can, like the student Wolker (16), march into the Revolution along with crowds of proletarians and, like the virgin Rimbaud, whip little girls; but those crowds and, indeed, those little girls - his 'girlfriends' - are made not from the inimical material of an alien world, but from the raw material of his own dreams; they are therefore him himself and do not disturb the unity of the universe he has constructed. 17

Political, patriotic and legal speeches belong among the stylistically and thematically totally different 18 fragments which function in Švejk as a source of nonsense. Thus, for instance, the speech of the young army doctor who prompts the malingers to

fertilise the vast fields of fame of the Empire with your blood, thus victoriously accomplishing the task given to you by History, to dash forward in your heroic courage, with no regard for your lives,

upon which the senior army doctor comments: 'Whether you talk to them in angelic or devilish tongues, it's all to the same effect. They are just a rabble.' The unforgettable sermon by Curate Ibl, the example of bravery, shown by the driver Bong, the speech of the drunken lieutenant Dub - all these are instances of 'verbal uniforms', whose essential absurdity is brought out by Švejk's attempts to take them totally seriously.

Hašek's political speeches as a candidate of his [facetious] Party of Moderate Progress within the Confines of the Law (Strana mírného pokroku v mezích zákona) are among the finest specimens of this kind of language.

'Voters! Now that I am about to deliver my first speech as a candidate, my sight unwittingly roams to the past, when Christopher Columbus . . . was preparing to set sail from Spain across the sea, to discover America. At that point, standing on board his three ships, he said, just before the anchor was raised: 'America will not be discovered by empty clichés and speeches.' 19

Lieutenant Lukáš, Švejk's superior, understood such an analysis of the verbal uniform only too well as, after listening to the Good Soldier for a while, he thought: 'My God, I myself often talk the same rubbish - the difference is only the form in which I present it.'

To sum up: the uniform in Central-European culture represents a symbol of the search for one's own inevitability amongst merely coincidental things and beings, a symbol of the construction of an order, impregnable by mutable experience and by the flow of life. The uniform is the symbolic logical conclusion of the European concept of truth seen as impersonality, an abstraction divorced from real life.

(b) The second key theme of Central-European literature and philosophy is the grotesqueness of attempts to restrict the subjective meaning of life within an unambiguously defined scientific language. Viennese neo-positivism (and especially its later American, optimistic, version) is an example of absurd attempts to reduce the problems of individual human existence to a question of the right *method*: once we have renounced the inexpressible that keeps cropping up in language and have isolated it as a 'mistake' or as a linguistic illusion, an age of world unity and peace will begin, an era of happiness for mankind. Such a philosophical programme parallels attempts of the State to reduce *essence* to *function* (a person's identity is determined by his social role) and legitimacy (legitimate is what a specialised apparatus authoritatively defines as the law). The absurdity of this illusion has been described by Husserl, Wittgenstein, Sigmund Freud, Karl Kraus, 20 Kafka, Elias Canetti, 21 Broch. This theme is the common denominator of the entire Central-European culture. Kafka's 'Logic may be undeniable, but it will succumb to Man who wants to live' 22 points to the nature of this absurdity. Reason is an instrument of life, and any attempts to invert this relationship result in a paradox. The attempt to reduce legitimacy to pure legality results in all impure, i.e. specifically human, elements - love, hatred, ethical values, beliefs, subjective opinions, etc. - being excluded from human activity. Thus, however, Reason is transformed into a police interpretation of the world. Wittgenstein, the inspirer - despite himself - of the Vienna Circle, never shared the illusion that the immeasurable can be measured and the incalculable calculated by projecting scientific norms into philosophy and into culture as a whole. He never saw Science as a source of Sense. Wittgenstein defined

the rules which a meaningful language must obey (experience-content or tautology), but at the same time he realised the fundamental uselessness of this discipline as the solution of 'life problems'. There are totally meaningless sentences which we nevertheless understand one way or another and which are more meaningful for us than any scientific theory can ever be.

We feel that even if *all conceivable* scientific questions were to be answered, our life problems would still not even be touched by that. Certainly, there would be no more questions, and precisely in this lies the answer. The solution of the problem of life is in its disappearance. (Is this not why people to whom the meaning of life has become clear, after much doubt, have been unable to say what the meaning of life was?)

The inexpressible really does exist. This shows itself, it is 'the mystical'.²³

Kraus said shortly before Wittgenstein that 'Science does not span the chasms of thinking, it simply stands before them like a warning sign, and those who ignore it, do so at their own risk'.²⁴ In Kafka's diary we find a very Wittgensteinian thought: 'only those questions can be answered to which we already know the answers as we ask the question'.²⁵ Similarly, Freud says that 'logical argument fails *vis-à-vis* emotional interests' and draws all his conclusions from this.

Understanding Science as a source of meaning in human life is to believe in the omnipotence of the Method. The Method brings ever larger regions of the world within our grasp: things can be measured and manufactured, geometrical figures can be reproduced precisely, truth can be re-instated. In this sense, an ever greater part of our lives fully depends on our arbitrary will: everything that surrounds us may be methodologically manipulated and our emotions or viewpoints may be methodologically proved or disproved. However, the question arises whether all this power over ourselves and the world is in a fundamental relationship, not to what we are because of our arbitrary will, but to what we are historically, because of our finiteness; a fundamental relationship to what we could call 'the natural order of our existence', which ante-dates any method.

Neo-positivist optimism alleges that it is possible methodologically to map out the areas of meaningfulness in language and to eliminate all statements which do not fall within the scientific norm of meaningfulness. However, such a view is absurd, because genuine language is not 'pre-deter-

mined', it has its roots in the natural world, whose natural meaningfulness exists prior to any methodological construct. Language is genuine only as long as it exposes us to the strength of what transcends us. Methodology is 'lyrical', in Kundera's sense. Methodologically organised persuasion is not a genuine language simply because its meaning has been pre-determined. What matters is to try to capture the extra-methodological experience of truth: it is only from this that 'meaning' enters our lives.

Modern violence is connected with this application of the Method. The intellectuals want to become the enlightened avant-garde of mankind and methodologically to create a 'new man', to achieve the 'final solution to social problems'. Broch sees the source of *Kitsch* in the methodological application of art: *Kitsch* originates from the efforts to achieve maximum effect, i.e. from one's methodological approach to art. A poem is *Kitsch* if it merely aims to make the reader cry or laugh and methodically organises language to achieve this aim. Modern cruelty is a lyrical cruelty, which stems from the desire to set up a world where all meaning originates from our arbitrary will.

Art, philosophy and genuine thought enquire into the relationship between what an effective method has made fully dependent on our arbitrary will and what constitutes the natural world, the order of our finite existence, what 'happens', experiences that we cannot arbitrarily 're-wind' and 're-play' like some mechanical recording. There is a natural flow of life, from which all our language and actions acquire their meaning: but our experience of this meaning is extra-methodological.

Husserl and Jan Patočka²⁶ turned this question into a fundamental theme of contemporary philosophy: this theme of meaning (which ante-dates any method and is therefore generally binding) also recurs in the question of natural human rights.

Thus it is clear that the meaningfulness of scientific language is limited by the fact that Science disregards exclusively personal things, our own 'Private Tales', our finiteness. On the other hand, the language of art and philosophy is an attempt to provide a language for things that have never happened before and will not happen again - finite, personal, unique things, which are intelligible to other people, although they are not intelligible in a replicated (i.e. methodological) way.

Central-European culture sees the prevalence of methodology and *Kitsch*

of hierarchically arranged values which were laid down once and for all. In such a setting, the non-recognition of, for instance, any higher values, is a *tragic* conclusion. Only in such a setting is it possible to devise a finale for a Tale. It may be tragic or comic, but it will always take place against the backdrop of the hierarchy, of a permanent validity. However, how should one conclude a story which takes place outside the hierarchy of values? or, rather, how does one conclude a story, whose central theme is the disintegration of this hierarchy of values?

It should be recalled that Musil wrote a dissertation on Ernst Mach²⁷ and that even the name of his novel, *A Man without Qualities*, is connected with the critique of metaphysics. This critique leads to a radical rejection of the idea of the Finale, of the completed form in Central-European literature. A word can never definitively prove its meaning (Broch): we can find the same theme in Wittgenstein's definition of philosophy as a discipline which cannot say anything about the world, but clarifies those things in language which enable us to say something about that world. Philosophical knowledge is pushed away at the end like a ladder that we used for climbing up, but can now be of no more use. Musil's *A Man without Qualities* cannot have an ending, because it keeps disintegrating into ever new stories, and the knowledge it presents is always only as valid as the story from which further stories keep emerging. *The Good Soldier Švejk* cannot have an ending, Švejk cannot win the war, his stories and the knowledge he presents are without a finale. A finale in Kafka's novels would be just as unthinkable. In Kundera, the only viable finale is a 'joke', in which the validity of the story that has just taken place is shown as completely fortuitous, non-permanent. Endowing the story with some sort of permanence would amount to placing it in a kind of hierarchy and returning it to the realm of metaphysics. The ultimate conclusion of Wittgenstein's philosophy is silence: one has to keep silent about things that nothing can be said about. In the second part of his work Wittgenstein shows that the meaning of words is always transitory and is based on linguistic play, and that there is no essence of things to which definitive meanings of words would point. In the actions of people that have 'slipped out of their historical settings', have lost their permanent validity, their 'scientific aura', Kundera sees the territory of the grotesque at its most typical. ('O Bohemia, where the glory of the gunshots turns so frequently into the

within a social structure as leading to the ascendancy of the masses in Society. Impersonality and methodology transform a human being into a part of an amorphous mass, because an individual is always rooted in his own life-tale, which can be understood by others only as long as they, too, have their own life-tales. The masses do not understand anything, because they are 'outside' genuine history, without their own individual tales. It is only individual, unique life-tales that can be communicated from person to person and be shared by them.

Science as a source of Nonsense is a profoundly Central-European theme. What is at stake is the preservation in Man of his sensitivity to the extra-methodological experience of truth, to the truth present only in tales. Modern history is a state-controlled discipline in which killing is explained away methodologically. Marxism is a Science in this sense, the Science of 'Historical Necessity'. The Science of History functions here as a theatrical setting, against which our lives acquire a methodological meaning. Central-European culture rebels against this scientific and theatrical setting. *Švejk* is permeated with this spirit of rebellion. Švejk's experience of truth defies methodological pigeon-holing. He is a non-historic character. His stories run counter to 'Historical Necessity'.

Švejk in the hands of the forensic experts and subjected to psychiatric investigations, the endless zoological and historiographical variations by Hašek, the frequent conjuring up of the linguistic and stylistic atmosphere of a scientific, specialised language - this is part and parcel of the fundamental critique of methodology. The military methodology of Cadet Biegler (*Was schadet dem Magen im Kriege*), the deciphering of secret messages, the victory plans as set out in the chronicle kept by the volunteer Marek, the classical languages in Hašek's short stories - all these illustrate that disrespect for Science as a source of meaning so characteristic of Central-European literature.

(c) The third unifying feature of Central-European culture is its rejection of the idea of the Finale, the Conclusion. The incompleteness of all important works of Central-European literature and philosophy is the product of their structure and not of the coincidental circumstances of their authors. This incompleteness is directly related to the critique of European metaphysics, i.e. the critique of any definitive hierarchy of values and facts. The idea of an ending is predicated on the existence of a set

fun of kicks on the backside!')²⁸ The true reality of our actions lies in our 'being abandoned by History'. Only out of this historic 'loneliness' may a Tale be born.

A shot ricocheted, Jaromil clutched at his chest and Lermontov fell onto the frozen concrete of the balcony. He is in the gala uniform of a tsarist officer and he is now raising himself from the floor. He is disastrously alone. There is no literary historiography here with its soothing balm which would give a noble meaning to his fall. There is no pistol to put an end to his boyish degradation. There is only laughter coming through the closed window to disgrace him eternally. He goes to the railings and looks down. But alas, the balcony is not high enough for him to be sure that he would be killed if he jumped He is caught in a trap. He is caught in the trap of a farce. Lermontov is not afraid of death, but he is afraid of being ridiculous - an unsuccessful suicide is funny. (But how come, how is this possible? . . . After all, whether or not a suicide is successful, it is still the same deed, with the same motivation and the same courage! What then is it that distinguishes the tragic from the ridiculous? Just the fortuity of success? What is it that distinguishes smallness from greatness? Tell us, Lermontov! Is it just the props? The gun or the kick on your backside? Only the theatrical scenery which History has foisted upon a human story?)²⁹

Ludvík's revenge in Kundera's *The Joke*, or the suicide of Zemánek's ex-wife, which is degraded into a bout of diarrhoea, are equally abandoned by History. There is the same mechanism of a lapse from the Historical Scenario in the *Farewell Party* and in the book of short stories *Laughable Loves* (e.g. *Nobody Will Laugh*).

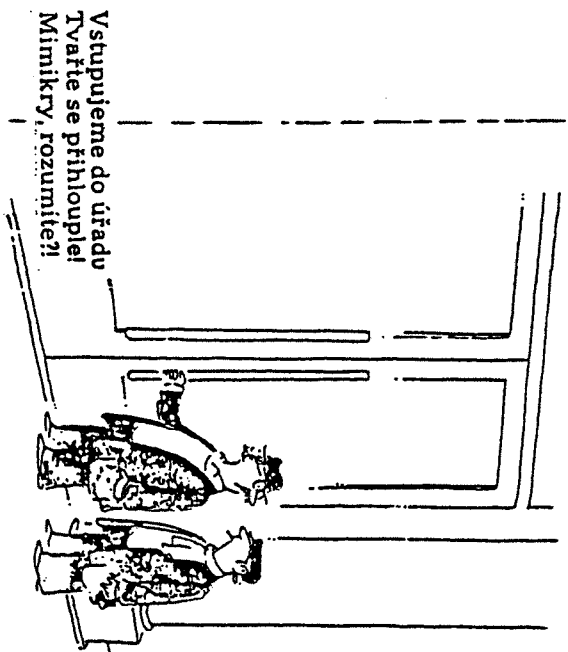
This abandonment of human actions by History, the collapse of the theatrical props, by means of which a crowd of 'howling men, with their trousers full, in the heat of enemy fire' might be turned into Warriors and Historic Heroes, is the dominant theme of Švejk. Historic and scientific props survive in Švejk merely in the heroism, manufactured to meet official demand, in sermons, officers' speeches, and in the battle-plans which end up as toilet paper, like the one so used by Officer-Cader Biegler. Once our personal stories have been abandoned by History and Science, they cannot reach a finale: any permanent validity presupposes theatrical props.

The western concept of History is metaphysics projected into time: it is a search for a definitive order of events, things, statements, a search for a definitive, final solution. It is an expression of the desire for a

'grand finale'. But a finale in a story is metaphysics-turned-narrative. A tale with a conclusion inevitably takes place against the backdrop of an ordered Cosmos, where a kick on the backside does differ from a gunshot and where at the end of the narrative a virtue can cover itself in glory. God, the Devil, the Tsar, truth, good, love, matrimony, progress, the people, Stalin, the Revolution, the brethren and the comrades, socialism - these are all elements of metaphysics projected into time: it is from these theatrical props that tales take on their definitiveness. For the Central-European intellectual all finales are equally viable: a finale belongs not to life, but to merely external props and to a metaphysical strait-jacket.

It should be recalled that Nikolai Gogol added a 'finale' to *The Government Inspector*, in which a real (i.e. the Tsar's) inspector appears on the stage and sorts everything out, with the result that Tsar Nikolai I could come to the premiere and not feel offended: he, the Living Finale.

All important works of Central-European literature are thus inherently unfinished - Kafka, Hašek, Broch, Musil, Wittgenstein, Husserl, Kraus: all these authors fail to bring their stories and ideas to a final, permanent form, because by so doing they would put them back into Uniforms, into



- Get your mask on,
we're going into a
government office.
Look like an idiot,
get it?

From: V. Renčín
Rančín 99
Prague 1982

Science and the décor of permanent validity, whose collapse they portray so graphically.

This, then, is the real cultural context of *Svejk*. What it derives its universality from is its Central-Europeanness. Kundera has remarked that the small nations of Central Europe do not make history, they are its victims: hence their intimate familiarity with the idea of annihilation. The collapse of the historical props, this loss of control over history is, of course, the archetypal situation in modern times everywhere. Or are there still nations 'big' enough to be able to remain in control over history? It is in its comprehension of the disintegration of order, History, of the props of 'higher' Reason, of all permanent validities, that Central-European culture is in advance of the cultures of the so-called 'big nations'. In this lie the roots of its universality.

NOTES

1. This is an edited translation of the Czech original, 'Útěk k uniformě a pád pořádku: Svejk jako součást středoevropské literatury', published in *Přeměny*, No. 2/1981, pp.33-46. It was abridged and translated by Jan Čulík and Peter Henry.
2. Jindřich Toman, 'Futurismus, dadaismus nebo poetismus? Poznámky o Svejkovi', *Ibid.*, pp.26-32.
3. Jiří Voskovec (1905-1981), a member of the Czechoslovak inter-war Avant-garde, playwright, actor, theatrical director, translator and poet and one-half of the famous Czech comic duo of Voskovec and Werich (VWM). In the 1920s and 1930s, together with Jan Werich (1905-1980), he wrote and staged a number of successful avant-garde comedy shows in Prague, the later of which were openly anti-fascist. VWM spent the Second World War in the United States; Voskovec returned to the USA in 1951, working as an actor until his death in 1981.
4. Jiří Voskovec, *Klobouk ve křoví*, Prague, 1965, p.29.
5. Erasm Kohák (b. 1933), Czech philosopher living in the United States, Professor of philosophy at Boston University, specialising in phenomenology (Husserl, Patocka) and Masaryk's social philosophy. Among his works are *Idea and Experience* (Chicago-London, 1978); has also published English translations of T.G. Masaryk and Paul Ricoeur.

6. H.G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen, 1960.
7. Voskovec, *op.cit.*, p.12.
8. Robert Musil, *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, Hamburg, 1970, p.201.
9. Austrian novelist (1886-1951).
10. Austrian novelist (1894-1939).
11. Italian novelist of Austrian extraction (1861-1928).
12. Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendental Phänomenologie*, The Hague, 1962, pp.51-52.
13. Joseph Roth, *Das falsche Gewicht: die Geschichte eines Eichmeisters*, Frankfurt am Main, 1965, pp.8, 9, 20.
14. Hermann Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, Zürich, 1932, pp.19-20.
15. This and the following quotations are taken from: Jaroslav Hašek, *Osudy dobrého vojáka Svejka za světové války*, Prague, 1962, p.272.
16. Jiří Wolker (1900-1924), Czech avant-garde poet, the most important representative of the early twentieth-century Czech school of 'proletarian poetry'.
17. Milan Kundera, *Život je žinde*, Toronto, 1979, p.257.
18. Toman, *op.cit.*, p.27.
19. Hašek, *Dějiny strany mírného pokroku v mezích zákona*, Prague, 1963, p.272.
20. Austrian novelist (1874-1936).
21. Austrian novelist of Spanish-Jewish extraction (b. 1905), winner of the 1981 Nobel Prize for Literature.
22. Franz Kafka, *Der Prozess*, Frankfurt am Main, 1964, p.165.
23. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, London, 1922, 6.52, 6.521.
24. Karl Kraus, *Beim Wort genommen*, Munich, 1955, p.83.
25. A reference to an entry in Kafka's diary for 28.9.1915 (Franz Kafka, *Tagebücher (1910-23)*, Frankfurt am Main, 1967).
26. Jan Patocka (1907-1977), Czech philosopher, disciple of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, whose ideas he developed; historian of philosophy. He edited, translated from Latin and annotated a major part of the work of the Czech educationalist and thinker Jan Ámós

- Komenský (Comenius, 1592-1670), published Husserl's *Erfahrung und Urteil* (Prague, 1938). The edition was destroyed by the Nazis; after the war it was reprinted (from a single surviving copy); he has also compiled Husserl's bibliography (1939). He wrote extensively on pre-Socratic philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Comenius, Herder, Hegel, Husserl and others. Among his own philosophical writings are *Prizozrený svět jako filozofický problém* (1936, also transl. into French), *Každěské eseje o filozofii dějin* (circulated in typescript 1975, published in Munich in 1980; also transl. into French and Italian) and numerous other works. In 1977 he signed the Human Rights Manifesto *Charter 77*; died of a stroke during a protracted police interrogation.
27. Ernst Mach (1838-1916), Austrian phenomenalist philosopher.
28. Kundera, *op.cit.*, p.351.
29. *Ibid.*, p.352.

EVGENIJ KUMIČIĆ AND THE CROATIAN NOVEL

MARY P. COOTE

1883 was truly a watershed in Croatian political and cultural life. That year, the nation entered a new phase of its political life: the Hungarian authorities, who had been given the administration of Croatia by the formation of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy in 1867, were increasing efforts to repress Croatian national aspirations, especially through restricting the use of the national language. In August 1883, coats of arms inscribed in both Hungarian and Croatian appeared on the government office buildings in Zagreb, provoking rioting that spread from the capital to the countryside. Eventually the hated dual-language plaques were replaced with less offending ones; but the political unrest was brought under control only after the appointment in December 1883 of the Hungarian Count Khuen-Héderváry as Governor of Croatia, whose oppressive regime lasted for twenty years.

The Croatian literary world, thus occupied with the struggle to maintain the national language, culture and national identity, had been shaken no less by the news of Turgenev's death in France in August 1883. Thanks to his reputation as a European - and rather less as a purely Russian - writer, Turgenev was widely known and acclaimed among the Croatian reading public¹ - as, indeed, he was throughout Slavdom. His last story, *After Death* or *Klara Milich*, had been translated into Croatian almost immediately after its publication earlier in the year. The translator - as quoted by a reviewer in *Hrvatska Vela* (*The Croatian Muse*) in July 1883 - was baffled by Turgenev's excursion into spiritualism at the end of his career, but had no doubt that the author's stature and impact on European literature would recommend anything he wrote.² 'Who in Croatia has not read Turgenev?' he asked rhetorically in his Introduction to the translation.³