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Literary and Philosophical Text in the Interconnection of Opinions (G. Vámoř: Atoms of God and The Principle of Cruelty)

Abstract

This paper focuses on the writer Gejza Vámoř (1951-1956), namely his two publications of different natures, i.e. the novel *Atoms of God* and his Dissertation thesis in philosophy, *The Principle of Cruelty*.

These are texts that were more or less created in the same time period, and in which the writer communicated his philosophical worldview in almost identical ways. The aim of this paper is to show the semantic proximity of philosophical and literary communication, and at the same time to make accessible how the various philosophical theses were “imprinted” into the novel through a literary setting.

Key words

Atoms. Bacteria. Biological Philosophy. Dissertation Thesis. God. Infection. Medicine. Novel. Philosophy. Principle of Cohesion/ Cruelty. Principle of Love.

Introduction

Gejza Vámoš (1901–1956) represents an original personality in Slovak literature of the first half of the 20th century, in whom literary competences were subtly intertwined with both medical and philosophical dimensions. The writer graduated in medicine (1919–1925) and worked as a doctor. At the same time, he enrolled in the external study of philosophy (1925) and he defended his Dissertation thesis – *Principle of Cruelty* – at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University in Bratislava in 1932¹. The aforementioned intentions were also given space in his artistic activities, where the philosophizing doctor or doctor philosopher entered the free literary space in order to let his medical-philosophical inclination shine on an artistically free creative basis.

From this optic, the novel *Atoms of God* (1928) is a notable work. Together with his Dissertation thesis, *The Principle of Cruelty*, it stands at the centre of attention of this paper. In a comparative focus and by means of an interpretative analysis its aim is to show the semantic overlaps between texts of different character, i.e. a work of fiction and a professional Dissertation thesis. At the same time, this paper will make accessible

¹ The work was not published in book form until 1996 under the editorship of the managing editor Roman Michelko. For more information, please see: VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996.

how the various philosophical theses have been translated into literary situations.

The novel *Atoms of God* was published during Vámoš's medical practice² and his study of philosophy. The work has the ambition to fulfil Vámoš's idea of art as a phenomenon, the aim of which is to educate and ennoble the percipient in an accessible way, in symbiosis with the exactness of medicine and philosophy. After all, the writer himself explicitly declares this in *The Principle of Cruelty*: “If it is said that art ennobles, the medicine teaches us to see and think. Of course, it must be the medicine embedded in the ruts of philosophical thought”³. “The writer of these lines attempted to do this in the medical novel *Atoms of God*”⁴. The author begins his “education” of the reader to “see and think” (i.e. to the complex philosophical questions of life as such) on the basis of medicine and philosophy at the very beginning of the novel, which is a kind of prologue/“foreword” to the literary action. Its name is *The Brotherhood of the Living*, and it consists of the following parts: *The Fall*, *The Struggle*, *The Betrayal* and *Eros of Broken Wings* and it is

² First, in 1928 Vámoš worked in Prague as “a physician and assistant to the professor of balneology and psychiatry at the Charles University, MUDr. E. Cmunt” (VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 176). In the same year he moved to the town Piešťany, where he established his own outpatient department (VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 177).

³ VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 91.

⁴ VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 91.

a kind of philosophizing account of the origins of the organic world. It is a text that does not have a classical literary character; it is communicated on a generalizing level (the personification comes only at the end of the whole foreword) and the specific character of the mentioned “micro-unit” is also foreshadowed by its graphic differentiation (already pointed out by V. Barborík⁵). It is declared in a different typeface compared to the rest of the text. With regard to the semantic level, the above-mentioned “micro-unit” represents a generalizing condensation of Vámoš's philosophical worldview, also anchored in *The Principle of Cruelty*, while the declared philosophical theses (communicated in the prologue/foreword and in the Dissertation thesis) are subsequently shown in the next part of the novel, i.e. in specific literary events.

1 On Semantic Identity of Texts with Respect to Their Specifics (General Level)

In both texts (the Dissertation thesis and the novel/novel prologue), the initial thesis sounds explicit, defining organic life as an infection⁶ or contagion⁷, an unwanted entry into the peaceful inorganic world. In

⁵ BARBORÍK, V.: *Prozaik Gejza Vámoš*. Bratislava : Slovak Academic Press, 2006, p. 60.

⁶ VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, pp. 16–17.

⁷ VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. VII.

the Dissertation thesis, Vámoř takes Haeckel's theory of panspermia as his own "according to which the germs of life are scattered throughout the universe, searching for suitable planets"⁸. However, the origin of organic life as such, its first cause, is vaguely reflected in the work. Vámoř admits that "we know nothing about it"⁹ and in this respect, he relies on B. Russell¹⁰ according to whom "the idea that things must have a beginning is really to be attributed to the wretchedness of our imagination, so I guess I don't need to waste time in arguing about the first cause"¹¹.

Compared to the thesis, no anchoring and not resolving this issue has clearly declared parameters' in the novel as, where the infection is the first mover behind all the doom (God/Rozmar). The God "having no better job, spat himself into the universe. His sputum dissipated into dust and every atom of that dust was a living cell. This dust falls, it flies, the contagion of life spreads like a plague on the stars. (...) And that is how the God came to the earth"¹².

However, this differentiation does

not significantly divide the texts and does not change the essence of Vámoř's philosophical worldview. Glancing away from the "living cell", more or less justified, both works continue in unison towards the principle of coherence, or the principle of violence and cruelty. The living cell passes into a state in which it not only splits into individual self-existing cells, but the principle "which first gave the impulse to the single-celled being to remain in unity after division, and which we may call (...) the principle of violence, or, if we like, of cruelty", comes into play¹³. The God (noted by M. A.) "He set the atoms against each other, so that they would kill each other. What is even more, he let them form organized, cohesive associations"¹⁴.

The cause of the initiation of the principle of coherence, and hence of cruelty, is vaguely obscure in the

philosophical text¹⁵ (in symbiosis with the above-mentioned) ("Here the principle asserted itself, which for the first time gave the impulse to the single-celled being to remain in unity after division..."¹⁶); in the novel (as the above quotation shows) Vámoř continues the concept of the God who is responsible for everything: "The Whim wanted something else. (...) So he commanded the cells to form clusters, so that they would remain together in strange formations. And so the smaller and higher animals were created"¹⁷.

Starting from the "constant" principle of cruelty, i.e. the instruction to coherence, both the Dissertation thesis and the novel continue in the same line (with respect to their specificity, i.e.

8 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 117.

9 For more information, please see: VÁMOŘ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 25.

10 For more information, please see: VÁMOŘ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 27.

11 For more information, please see: VÁMOŘ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 121.

12 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. VII.

13 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 32.

14 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, pp. XI-XII.

15 Compared to the novel, this "obfuscation" of the First Cause/First Mover/God accompanies the entire philosophical text in the Dissertation thesis, and it apparently arises from Vámoř's ambition to declare his philosophy within biological frameworks, and although Vámoř also seeks to follow the theses of biological philosophy in the novel, as Barborík has already stated, he "contaminates biologizing theory with his notion of the First Mover - God" (BARBORÍK, V.: *Prozaik Gejza Vámoř*. Bratislava : Slovak Academic Press, 2006, p. 60.). On top of Vámoř's biological philosophy in his Dissertation thesis (since the author can write anything in a fiction text - as pointed out for example by M. Zigo (more on this: ZIGO, M.: *Svár krutosti a lásky*. Vámořova filozofická dizertácia. In *OSTIUM - internetový časopis pre humanitné vedy*, 2011, Vol. 7, No. 1. [online]. [2022-12-02]. Available at: <<https://ostium.sk/language/sk/svar-krutosti-a-lasky-vamosova-filozoficka-dizertacia/>>.) it can be noted that the views contained in it have their debatable and problematic points, but the task of this paper is not to evaluate the legitimacy of Vámoř's philosophical concept in the Dissertation thesis, only to point out its semantic penetration with the novel.

16 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 32.

17 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. VII.

the unresolved first cause of life versus God, in no way disturbing the essence of Vámoš's approach). Under this approach, the living atoms/cells in clusters form cohesive specific "formations", giving rise to various forms of organic life, whose determining determinant is the instinct for self-preservation and thus the constant egocentric struggle to maintain existence¹⁸. The emergence of different species of animals thus builds up a system of subordination, and in the name of the instinct of self-preservation the stronger survives at the expense of the weaker: "We understand the life of living creatures as an effort to sustain by its offspring. The means of this effort is a struggle, because we are bequeathed to feed on organic body of our living, actually mortified brethren of the animal kingdom"¹⁹. "And so a condition of life of one became the death of the other. (...) Grass was eaten, worms were dug up, fish were caught, birds were persecuted, and animals were murdered. And this struggle became more and more sophisticated"²⁰.

Vámoš's perception of a man as the most violent, the cruellest warrior with the greatest intellectual

possibilities in his/her potentiality is declared in both texts in the same intentions (arising from Vámoš's perception of phenomenon of life). As a consequence of the (unessential) differentiation mentioned above, however, both texts logically go on to declare different starting points for that combativeness and intellectual invention, even though the result is still the same. In the case of the Dissertation thesis, Vámoš continues to shy away from talking about God, and the originator of the most aggressive, most militant dimension of a man with the greatest intellectual potential is a natural biological evolution ["... all our technical progress has long been hidden in natural revelations. (...) the entire technical progress is only ingenious combination of human invention"²¹. "And moreover, the notion of cruelty grows proportionately in a line ascending to man"²²], or more precisely, the unanchored principle of cruelty ("As if the principle of cruelty was not enough with amoebae primitive eating. As if he wanted to see the mutual devouring of organized units, a more sophisticated struggle, and wanted to create the most violent and the most militant creature among the mutually devouring living creatures"²³.) In the novel,

the writer continues the set line, while the originator of the most aggressive dimension of man is God or the principle of cruelty, but God is explicitly responsible for it: The Creator has "limited the mode of struggle to other animal species and they were only miserable automatons, while the God provided a man with wide possibilities. From his infinite cleverness, the God has given man a single fibre"²⁴ and "such centres in the brain as no animal had"²⁵. "In relation to other living creatures, the God has allowed the man everything, to undermine the lives of these (other, noted by M.A.) creatures by the most extreme cruelty. All that the God has admitted man to do, everything the God has put into man's hands, has always served only to subdue the world, to subtle and perfected ways of obtaining food and protect man's own poor, soft, irresistible body. And man has enslaved all living creatures"²⁶.

Whoever is the originator of these possibilities, the fact remains that in both the Dissertation thesis and the novel, man represents the most militant creature, whose egocentrism transcends the elementary struggle for survival and takes on the most aggressive, cunning dimensions.

18 The problem of the self-preservation instinct in "borderline situations" is also pointed out, for example, by Z. VARGOVÁ. For more information, please see:

VARGOVÁ, Z.: The Peculiarity of R. Galazar's Testimony in the Context of Literary Works on the Subject of the Holocaust. In *Ad Alta: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2022, Vol. 2, No. 12, pp. 257-261.

19 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 64.

20 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, p. 8.

21 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 65.

22 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 80.

23 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 78.

24 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. XII.

25 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. XVIII.

26 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. XII.

It may be noted that while this combativeness, cunning, and egoism are only sternly stated in the Dissertation thesis and not elaborated upon in detail, in the novel (as will be shown in the next section of the paper) they are vividly and minutely portrayed through the novel's situations.

The greatest aggressiveness and belligerence, however, has a counterbalance in Vámoš's philosophical concept, i.e. the ethical potential and the principle of love. Thus, man has something by which the condemnation to the greatest aggression can be corrected in his/her self-consciousness. Although in one position the writer declares love as mere instinct in both the Dissertation thesis and the novel²⁷ and in these basic features he does not go beyond the plan of the "Schopenhauerian" will to life; on the other hand, other communicated facts contained in both works seem to take the phenomenon of love out of the instinctive framework. In his Dissertation thesis, Vámoš states that although a man is condemned to an egocentric, aggressive struggle for himself/herself, transcending the elementary struggle for survival, his/her potential (as the potential of the only living being) also contains the ability to become aware of this evil and to transcend it in the

name of love and ethics: "...in case of a man, we cannot resign and resignedly endure the stereotyped control of fate, but realization of evil that presses upon us obliges us to countermeasures"²⁸. "By destroying the conceited and deceitful individuality, it is necessary to arrive at the principle of love, this only one, as if not successful, but at least striving and destiny-mitigating rival and paralyzer of our principle of cruelty, which has its greatest support in the individual delusion of a mankind"²⁹. In the novel, the dimension of non-instinctive love is more evidently felt outside the framework of a generalizing "prologue", namely in the concrete plot of the novel (to be discussed in more detail in the next section of the paper), where the main character's need for love is explicitly manifested, and here it is not only a matter of instinctive, sexual needs tied to the male-female platform or the preservation of gender, but also of the essential need for kindness, attention, understanding, empathy, and human cohesion as such³⁰. It is a love that can take different forms³¹. The question remains, however,

to what extent that spiritualised, conscious and elementary instinct transcending the level of love is (or is not) implemented in the work (as we will point out below). However, the aforementioned does not change the fact that the higher plane of love, or the vision of a higher position of love transcending egocentric, individual interests, is present in the novel as well as in the Dissertation thesis.

In addition to the perception of man as the greatest in his/her capacities, endowments and intellect, as the most aggressive, cunning, and astute creature (on the other hand, capable of ethics and love that transcends/breaks the boundaries of individualism and undetectable egocentrism), at the same time, both texts emphasize his/her status as the most fragile being as far as physiognomy is concerned. In Vámoš's philosophy, man is a complexly differentiated "animal", made up of many cells, and thus easily vulnerable and not very resilient in his complexity: "The principle of cruelty, however, commands to the unicellular human embryo what it once commanded to the free cellular beings in the primeval ocean: to cohere and convert the immortal human embryo into the realm of differentiation, which signifies a gradual diminution of vitality, vulnerability, sickness, and death"³². "In so doing, the man

28 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 84.

29 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 87.

30 An example is the fictional situation about forensic medicine and an uncompromised doctor called "The Old Hangman" (VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, p. 51.). We will mention and declare the principle of love in later sections of this paper.

31 NOVÁČIKOVÁ, D.: Typologicko-interpretatívna analýza podôb lásky v prózach Timravy. In OBERT, V. (ed.): *Literárnovedné štúdie II*. Nitra : Filozofická fakulta UKF v Nitre, 2002, p. 81.

27 For more information, please see: VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 55; VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, p. 15.

32 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 73.

is the most sophisticated warrior among the living, but also the most miserable and the most assailed. For being appointed ruler of the living, the man must pay back cruelly. His commanding spirit is enclosed in a poor ridiculously helpless mass”³³.

At the same time, in both texts, the most resilient form of life, i.e. uncomplicated single-celled organisms (bacilli, microbes) that represent the “insidious” (invisible) enemy of man, attacking him and making him sick, is contrasted with man as the physically weakest³⁴. On this level, Vámoš (again identically in both publications) opened a space into the world of medicine, highlighting medical science, the doctor and discovery of the microscope, which allow man to fight the world of germs/ diseases, which, naturally, is related to the potential given to man, to that “fibre” or intellectual invention, which gives man such possibilities that no other form of life has: “the greatest weapon of all ages is to be considered a microscope, and the greatest warrior the one who looks into the microscope, a physician”³⁵; “the supreme leader of the living beings is the man looking into the microscope – the physician”³⁶.

33 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. XIV.

34 For more information, please see: VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, pp. 62-65; VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, pp. 9-10.

35 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Princíp krutosti*. Bratislava : Chronos, 1996, p. 65.

36 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. XVII.

2 Application of a Philosophical Worldview to the Plot of the Novel

The philosophical worldview, identically communicated in the Dissertation thesis and condensed in the novel’s prologue (as we have presented it above), subsequently receives a varied literary development in the next part of the novel, i.e. in its specific plot.

The author uncovers the story of Karol Zurian. He creates a literary plot that mirrors the ego-driven principle of cruelty in its dominant features, where the principle of kindness fails to be implemented; it declares man as the most militant, most aggressive “animal species”, far beyond the instinct of elementary self-preservation.

In connection with the above, we can mention the very opening chapter – *The Three Dogs* (following the aforementioned philosophical preface/prologue). In this chapter, Zurian unreasonably lashes out at a lower animal species (to put it in the spirit of the novel’s poetics), namely dogs that annoy him by repeated barking, albeit without any substantial harm. In accordance with Vámoš’s philosophy, the dog is determined by its natural limits, i.e. by the instinctive struggle for life, and unlike man, has nothing extra: neither that clever “fibre” of God, nor the possibility of transcending its instinctive combativeness by the conscious principle of love, and at the same time it is trained by man to guard a delimited territory. At the same time, the circumstances are not significantly dangerous. On the contrary, the situation regarding the

dogs is transparent, predictable, and in a way trivial; it is regularly recurring, and the protagonist (by virtue of his intellectual and ethical capacities, the possibility of conscious benevolent action, which surpasses other animal species) does not look for any ways to resolve this situation in a non-aggressive way. Instead, he premeditatedly prepares revenge on his vile dog “enemies”, as he feels offended by their annoying behaviour: “By the time he was so nervous, humiliated and irritated that he felt he couldn’t stand their behaviour any more. (...) It was a question of power, superiority and moral victory to deal with these monsters”³⁷.

The main character reflects on the whole situation in an exaggerated, even anxious way. He demands of the lower species (the dog) to be something the dog cannot be [“... he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword. You will die, Pufi (the dog, noted by M. A.), and your death will be insidious and low, as you have been to the world”³⁸.] and the triviality of the circumstances and the inequality of the struggle only declare human complacency, resentfulness, aggressiveness, the need to win and prove superiority. Zurian even resents the dog’s inability to understand that it was he who carried out the act of revenge:

37 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. 32.

38 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. 33.

"... no, that's not what I wanted. (...) I should have put an end to that monster differently, so that it would understand that it was me, his enemy, who took this revenge on it, who drag it into the hell, fully aware of its cruel defeat and my victory"³⁹.

The chapter *Three Dogs* is immediately related in meaning to the following chapter *Three Doctors*, and it can be said that they are analogous in their basic features. The focus, however, is no longer on the "lower species" versus the "cruellest, most violent, and most sophisticated type of warrior curs"⁴⁰, i.e., man, but on man versus man. While due to a need for profit in the broadest sense of the word (empowerment, control, dehumanization, etc.), mankind makes life unpleasant in a deliberately insidious and purposeful way.

The chapter *Three Doctors* and those following (*The Diploma Labourers*, *The Outcast*, etc.) create a wide space for various semantic positions in which the "struggle for life" is given space, in humanly "richer" possibilities and more far-reaching consequences than just the elementary, instinctive struggle for survival. The characters fight for themselves, their place in society, their own prestige, and their actions are accompanied by lies, intrigue,

bribery, envy, pretence, and greed. The medical environment in which the novel's setting is embedded is characterized by its ugliness and limitedness: "They (doctors, noted by M. A.) executed every single man, or in fact everyone, whom they spoke about... no other word was spoken than just who, when and how he/she was blustering, with whom he/she quarrelled, how dirty he/she was, and when he/she would be kicked out from there. They we only gossiping about absent people, telling shameful intimacies about women, colleague women known by everyone present..."⁴¹.

By depiction of interpersonal relationships, situations, intrigues and atmosphere in the novel in general (the circumstances of the case of Dr. Vokurková, the broken X-ray tube, unwillingness to help, jealousy, mutual rivalry, etc.), the author declares the mutual struggle of the "human species" at the most primitive level. And if Vámoř, in his philosophical concept, defined man as a facticity in which the principle of cruelty (the aggressive struggle for oneself) is "countered" by the principle of love, he fails to implement this oppositional level more fundamentally in the inhospitable atmosphere of the novel.

The human potential for kindness, empathy, or the possibility of transcending one's own individuality

(egocentric space) towards at least some kind of harmonisation of society, as well as a possibility of shifting one's own self from destructively egocentric struggle to higher (kinder, nobler) positions, happens (or rather, does not happen) very marginally in the novel, and such situations do not even receive a more substantial epic elaboration. Although Zurian initially expresses a need for and belief in the principle of love, in warmth and kindness of the collective ("Ah, colleagues, Zurian thought, comrades-in-arms. I won't be alone, I'll have the support of collegiate, warm-hearted and experienced comrades behind me who will explain everything to me until I become their equal warrior"⁴²), in fact, he remains more or less confronted only with human aggressive belligerence.

Paradoxically, the individualism and aggressive egocentric combativeness in the work are undermined by the characters of women of questionable reputation whom Zurian treats - the prostitute Lojzka and the cashier Filoména, infected with gonorrhoea. In this way, Vámoř juxtaposes the lofty, intellectual world of medicine, full of baseness and destructive interpersonal relationships, and on the other hand the world of frivolous women who are despised by society and Zurian himself.

39 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. 37.

40 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936, p. 12.

41 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, p. 30.

42 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, p. 29.

However, it is these women (defined as immoral by social optics) who show compassion, kindness and attention to Zurian in the borderline situation of illness and the vision of death. In comparison, the doctor Sanscuolotte, Zurian's supposed friend, betrays him, slanders him in a tense borderline situation, and ridicules and dishonours him with lies. His inability to support Zurian in critical situations drives the protagonist to suicide.

The principle of love (as we have already pointed out) appears in the work only in the form of tiny fragments (Filoména, Zurian's friend Eugen, etc.) - in spite of being presented as a fact possessed by the human individual, the principle of cruelty motivated by egocentric interests fully absorbs the individual by its expansiveness in the modelled plot sequences: *"How only a man can hate a man. How mercilessly the stronger beats the weaker. Lot of humbug about eternal truth, about the triumph of love, infinite mercy, and yet there is only an ugly, cruel struggle where the stronger devours the weaker"*⁴³.

The urgency of reality that *"the work of creating organic life is dominated by the principle of cruelty and the Creator's desire for the struggle of the living"*⁴⁴ is emphasized (as already implied above) by a plan of the main character. Zurian

oscillates confusingly between the principle of cruelty (the egocentric concentration on himself) and the principle of love, with the principle of cruelty gaining the dominant position (similarly as in the plot of the work itself).

The protagonist insistently longs for a kind, tolerant, friendly world, but just as he fails to live in such a world, he also fails to create it. Nostalgically, in a kind of reminiscent optimism, he turns to the past, where *"he lived constantly in the company of artists and writers. He was used to extreme intellectual emotions, to the self-sacrificing, selfless friendship of exquisite boys, rich souls"*⁴⁵, but in the novel's setting, these dimensions of Zurian's personality are unfeeling, and the possibility of such experiencing/creating human relationships is hardly believable (except for isolated moments, such as the aforementioned friendship with Eugen). It is evidenced by the aforementioned aggressive situation with the dogs, and even in contact with humans, Zurian doesn't present himself as an outspoken character capable of creating/building healthy, kind interpersonal relationships. The relationships in the workplace fail completely and, reflecting on himself, he admits that it is perhaps his closed, unreadable, individualistic and ambitious behaviour that may have

sent a signal for the thoughtless and egotistical behaviour of his colleagues⁴⁶.

In this regard, the situation with the cashier Filoména can be mentioned, which the kind and understanding doctor (Zurian) allows himself to be in by extremely hateful emotions at the moment he is being insistently misled by the heroine. While the circumstances (similarly as in the case of the dogs) lack any fundamental seriousness, touching solely on Zurian's vanity, and despite the benignity and triviality of these situations, the character always responds/reacts in an exaggerated, affected, hateful and aggressive manner.

In addition to the aforementioned plot sequences, the inability to form and maintain full-fledged interpersonal relationships in the text is significantly underlined by the protagonist's destructive relationship with Medusa (the beloved woman), which is full of mutual tension, attacks, fights and inadequate reactions (e.g.: Zurian forces Medusa to abort the child (it is his child that he and Medusa are expecting) because she is jealous of the child, etc.).

However, some literary scholars⁴⁷ consider implementation of the

43 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, p. 218.

44 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, p. 13.

45 VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, p. 29.

46 For more information, please see: VÁMOŠ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, pp. 66-67.

47 For example, Daniel Okáli presents this opinion in his work: OKÁLI, D.: *Prozaik Gejza Vámoš*. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, 1971, pp. 27-59.

principle of love in the situation where Zurian deliberately (laboratory) infects himself with gonorrhoea in order to experience its effects more intensely so that he can bring a more adequate treatment for the contagion to the world. But given the complex view of the character and his development (suffered “fiascos” in the collective, tarnished reputation, sensitivity to his person, militant desire to win), one is left to wonder to what extent the egocentric desire for victory and a repaired reputation, rather than the desire to just help humanity without any concessions and benefits (fame or recognition), was responsible for the aforementioned gesture by Zurian. In addition to positions of aggression and belligerence, the novel also touches on man as the most fragile of animal species. Respectively, the work portrays the most militant creature/man in confrontation with the most resilient form of life, i.e. a microbe, a germ/nucleus, and hence disease. Whereby, as it was presented in the Dissertation thesis and in the philosophical prologue, the most sophisticated and most competent warrior against the world of germs is medical science, or the doctor looking into the microscope.

At first, Karol Zurian works in the Clinic of Pulmonary Diseases, where tuberculosis is treated, and later in the Dermatological Clinic, where venereal diseases are

treated⁴⁸. The thesis of the physical infirmity and fragility of the most differentiated and complicated animal species (man) is declared in the novel through medical optics/terminology and detailed minutiae with naturalistic stylization: “*On the third day the disease presented itself in the form of profuse purulent discharge from the urethra*”⁴⁹. “*God gave man a huge, long, tangled intestinal tract (...) and let ruthless bacillus of typhoid, cholera, and shigellosis to enter and make this tract inflamed, swollen, riddled with sores, perforated, and bleeding to death*”⁵⁰.

The human shell is here placed on the level of low-quality “material”, which is supported by the idea of the meaninglessness, wretchedness and fragility of human (organic) life in the work, which is – as already stated – an unwanted contagion. At the same time, Vámoř minutely describes the doctors’ struggle with diseases. In doing so, he focuses his attention on Zurian, who, in his tenacity, desires constant improvement, and his passion for medicine, intensely searches for ways to defeat the “microbe” (contagion). The paradox remains, however, that in the end it is not the microbe that defeats man, but his

most militant, most aggressive, most egoistic position, which, however, turns against himself. Having been laboratory-infected with gonorrhoea and after the worsening of its course, Zurian is left paralysed by an aggressive, egocentric environment (slander, ridicule, judgment) on which he cannot lean. At the same time, in his sensitivity to himself, he is unable to face failure, his ruined reputation, and due to the strength of his ego, he is equally unwilling to ask colleagues for help. And even though it would potentially be possible to reverse the situation, he chooses suicide instead.

Conclusion

As is evident from the above-mentioned, the Dissertation thesis and the novel contain common theses of Vámoř’s philosophical worldview, while the theses declared in the philosophical work are first communicated in the literary work in a generalizing dimension, by means of a foreword/prologue, which is outside the classical literary text, and only afterwards are they translated into concrete literary situations and elaborated in more detail in those situations. In both texts (the Dissertation thesis and the novel) Vámoř works with the perception of organic life as infection/contagion. He declares a different approach only in the question of the first cause of the origin of life (in the Dissertation thesis, he resigns himself to this problem; in the novel he explicitly declares God as the originator of organic life), which

48 For more information about the motif of illness in Slovak literature, please see: BRUNCLÍK, J.: Cholera v próze Martina Kukučína Dies irae. In *Slavica Wratislaviensia*, 2023, Vol. 177, No. 4135, pp. 157-168.

49 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, p. 75.

50 VÁMOŘ, G.: *Atómy Boha*. Bratislava : Dilema, 2003, pp. 9-10.

does not fundamentally divide Vámoš's philosophical concept as such. Then he works identically with the principle of cruelty, of man as the most physiognomically fragile, weakest, but at the same time the most egoistic or warlike animal species with superior intellectual possibilities. The writer posits the principle of love to counterbalance the principle of cruelty and violence, which is the most extensive in man compared to other forms of organic life (going beyond the elementary struggle for survival/self-preservation). It is again identically stated in both texts, while it is elaborated in more details in literary situations in the novel, apart from the fact that the characters fail to realise it. In his concept, Vámoš places the most resistant life form, namely the unicellular/microbes, the bacilli to man, who is the most combative in terms of capabilities, but physically the most fragile/weak "animal species". In this background, the author belauds medical science/doctors as the most important "warriors" in this regard in both the Dissertation thesis and the novel.

In conclusion, both the novel and the Dissertation thesis, each in its own space and through its own "instrumentarium", reflect Vámoš's philosophical worldview more or less identically, and despite the fact that the novel as such, in its otherness, aroused controversial reactions from the

literary professional public⁵¹, it is an interesting literary communication reflecting the author's philosophical concept in Slovak literature.

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⁵¹ For more information, please see: BARBORÍK, V.: *Prozaik Gejza Vámoš*. Bratislava : Slovak Academic Press, 2006, pp. 56-59.