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The Works The Demon of Consent and Delayed Reports as Critical Reflections of Their Time

Abstract
The present study deals with two prominent personalities of literary, cultural, and social life, respectively their (in their time) important works. One of them is Dominik Tatarka and his cardinal work Démon súhlasu [The Demon of Consent, in magazine form in 1956, in book form in 1963] and Ladislav Mňačko and his Oneskorené reportáže [Delayed Reports, 1963]. In the turbulent years after the Second World War, when Czechoslovakia struggled to define its state character, both representatives radically sided with the regime and supported it in all their activities. For example, both Tatarka and Mňačko were involved (to some extent) in the conviction of wrongly accused individuals. However, they were among the first to understand the system's destruction and criticise it publicly. The works, Démon súhlasu [The Demon of Consent] and Oneskorené reportáže [Delayed Reports], became significant in this regard. At the time of their publication, both texts boldly named the pernicious practices of communist totalitarianism and foreshadowed and contributed to the change in the social climate that led to the Prague Spring. Based on an interpretative probe, the present study aims to approach the semantic dimensions of these works and, through literary instrumentation, make accessible a mode of critical reflection on the communist regime.

Key words
Communist Regime. Critical Reflection. Czechoslovak Writers. Interpretive Probe. Literary Work.

Introduction

Dominik Tatarka (1913 – 1989) and Ladislav Mňačko (1919 – 1994) represent outstanding personalities of the last century's literary, cultural, and social life. At the same time, several facts are uniting them. The quality of their writings (apart from those that favour socialist realism) gives them an essential place in the history of Slovak literature. Both worked as journalists (see, e.g., Antošová, 2023; Leikert, 2008), and in the turbulent years after the Second World War, they yielded radically to the communist regime. They joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) and, as party members and significant individuals in *Cultural Life* (writers, journalists, members of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers[1]), directly participated in the building of the communist regime and its propaganda (see, e.g., Antošová, 2012; 2023; Leikert, 2008). From these "dark" times[2], we can mention, among other things, that both – each in their way – took part in the fabricated judicial trials of the 1950s.[3] At the same time, after understanding the destruction of totalitarian practices and admitting the fact that (in Tatarka's words) "it is impossible to go on like this, that the tide no longer carries the wave"[4] (Tatarka, 1968, pp. 287-288), they were some of the first public figures who dared to criticise the regime. In connection with the above, we can mention the Second Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers in 1956, representing a symbolic breakthrough. The programme of the meeting, agreed in advance and planned by communist officials, turned into a lively critical discussion about the destruction of the regime. The bulk of the criticism of communist practices was led by Czech writers (František Hrubín, Jaroslav Seifert), and among Slovak writers, it was Tatarka and Mňačko who participated. They spoke publicly at the congress and made critical contributions (see, Mňačko, 2011; Tatarka, 2011). The natural consequence of the shattered faith towards the regime was also the literary work of both representatives. In 1956, Tatarka published *The Demon of Consent*, a courageous work for its time, in which he openly named the destructions of communist totalitarianism. Mňačko does so a little later, in 1963, in his *Delayed Reports*. Even though *Delayed Reports* was published "only" in the 1960s, when anti-communist voices were already quite evident in society, both works had an undeniable social and moral value in their time. They began to undermine the consensual pro-Communist concept, rejected the thesis of the Communist regime's infallibility, and resolved to highlight its errors. With this in mind, *The Demon of Consent* and *Delayed Reports* also stand at the centre of the present study. Based on the method of interpretation (for more detail, see, Popovič et al., 1981; Plesník et al., 2011; Eco, 1995), we aim to approach the semantic level of the communiqués and thus to make a critical reflection on the communist regime accessible through literary instrumentation[5].

1 The Demon of Consent – An Interpretative Probe

The satirical text *The Demon of Consent*, better defined by the

1 Authors' note: It was a literary/cultural institution exclusively serving the communist regime and its propaganda (see, Bombíková, 2000).

2 Authors' note: The "dark" times were marked not only by the fabricated political processes in Czechoslovakia, but they also had a significant impact on the everyday life of the broadest strata of the population. Among the persecuted, apart from political opponents (including former members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), were village "rich" – "kulaks" who refused to accept the collectivisation of agriculture, tradesmen, representatives of the intelligentsia, churches and national minorities (see, Kontriková Šusteková, 2012).

3 Authors' note: Tatarka directly participated in the sentencing of Vladimír Clementis to death (see, Mikloško, 2001). Mňačko is the author of the booklet "Proces proti velezradným fabrikantom, veľkostatkárom a zapredancom" ["The Trial of the Treasonous Fabrikants, Big Landowners and Sellouts"] (1950), depicting the trial of Žingor and other defendants. The court gave death sentences to three defendants, including Žingor (see, Mňačko, 1991).

4 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1968).

5 Authors' note: Since each interpretation is in the competence of a different author (Antošová, M.: *The Demon of Consent*; Vrábel, K.: *Delayed Reports*), the authors retain the freedom of their own interpretative procedures, as a result of which each interpretative probe follows its own system. What both interpretations have in common is the ambition, defined in the aim, to approach the semantic dimensions of the texts and the mode of critical reflection on the regime through literary instrumentation.

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author as "a fantastic treatise from the end of an epoch", was first published in the magazine *Kultúrny život* in 1956 (it received a book edition in 1963). As the available materials show, it was published sometime before the (already mentioned) Second Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers. As an aside, we may note that Tatarka's discussion paper at the congress and *The Demon of Consent* are related. In his convention speech, the writer "borrowed" the image of "the unscented flower" from the novel, and in their basic ideas (succumbing to the "demon of consent", the absence of rationale, manipulation by power), the two communiques of a different nature correspond to each other. However, by its literary nature, the demon of consent naturally has many more significant possibilities. Tatarka, through literary language and satirical-imagery "playfulness", has made such an analytical insight into the building of a totalitarian society that the text becomes a clear-eyed (in some places truly systemic) "textbook" on the manipulation of power, the manufacture of the "demon of consent", the cultivation of the masses, the voluntary loss of freedom, of one's judgement, and the manipulative affective-pursuit "passion" that "overrides" the phenomenon of conscience, rationing, free choice. Jančovič appropriately called the work "an exact diagnosis of the mechanism of power"[6] (Jančovič, 1996, p. 48). At the same time, the pamphlet is intensely autobiographical and outlines the situation in which Tatarka existed in the 1940s and 1950s.

The writer Bartolomej Boleráz-Tatarka's alter ego is at the story's centre. He is – like Tatarka – part of an organisation (the pendant, in reality, is the Union of Czechoslovak Writers) whose only task is to agree: "I had to approve and agree because I was a member of an approving, consenting body, a consensual organisation, a machine that must run smoothly"[7] (Tatarka, 1963, pp. 12-13).

Bartolomej (although already dead)[8], like Tatarka, recognises and admits that what he exists in and agrees with is destruction on a personal and societal level. He no longer lives authentically, by his thinking, feelings, and beliefs, but uncritically and slavishly accepts the regulations dictated from the outside: "when I thought how many times I had foolishly agreed"[9] (Tatarka, 1963, p. 13).

Tatarka (1963) describes the building of the "demon of consent" through the "demon of power", specifically through the image of the Figura, who "manufactures" his consenting figures by giving away lucrative functions. He covers power structures with them, reinforcing his own power: "In order to be a bigger figure, to advance in rank [...], Figura needed to have many figurines under him. He made them in succession, first in the village, then in the district, and finally in the county"[10] (pp. 21-22).

The author draws attention to the phenomenon of power from a psychological point of view and compares it to the biblical image of Eve biting into the forbidden apple (Tatarka, 1963). As Tatarka (1963) points out, tasting the "apple of power" brings a sense of omnipotence, majesty, comfort and material convenience, although, in reality, this omnipotence has clear and sharp bounds of "Figura" (in the broader sense of the system) who has subjugated the "figurine". This subjugation, servility to the system at the expense of one's own free decisions and ethical principles, is admitted by Bartolomej:
"The chauffeur brought me in front of the Palace of Culture, a colossal tower on the banks of the Danube. [...] Everything is concentrated in it. For the creator, all the best. [...] Underground bars, showers, cafés, swimming pools, playgrounds. [...] The creator, once here, has to make a superhuman effort to drag his heels out of his comfort."[11] (p. 15)
"I'm intoxicated by the feeling of power! I feel a glimmer of power on me, and it lifts me up. [...] A flight of spirit? And for what?"[12] (p. 17)

At the same time, Figura's and his figurines' metaphorical images are tellingly complemented by Tatarka's other figurative "toy-mongering", reflecting the production of the "demon of consent". It is a straightforward (already mentioned in connection with the Second Congress) parable of the "unscented flower". The flower does not have a scent, while everyone unanimously claims that it does because it was declared so by the leading authority/Figure (Tatarka, 1963). This information is accepted as fact by the uncritical (Figura-obliged) "figurines", and even if it is subsequently objectively confirmed that the "bouquet" is odourless, in the interests of preserving power, prestige and infallibility, it is further proclaimed to be fragrant (Tatarka, 1963). Even the main "Figura" elevates it to a tenet so that no one doubts it anymore, even on principle:
"A bouquet is a matter of personal prestige. No one wants to be embarrassed. That is why the flower is elevated to a holy thing; the flower becomes a principle, a symbol. In the name of principle, the members of the body claim that a flower that does not actually have a scent is fragrant. Even if it did not, it is scented because, for principled reasons, it must have a smell."[13] (Tatarka, 1963, p. 45)

The unscented flower (celery, violet) can figuratively represent, in the narrower sense of the word, low-quality works in the text, which the "consenting" literary organisation should have unanimously declared to be of high quality; they were, in fact, compliant with the regime and written in the sense of the required method of socialist realism (Tatarka, 1963). In a broader range of meanings, the unscented flower/herb evokes the communist regime in its entirety. Nevertheless, Tatarka's (1963) straightforwardly accurate (as Jančovič talks about it) description of how a position of power, manipulation and servility turns an unscented flower into a scented one, or how a dysfunctional system is passed off as a functioning one and the only correct one, is wide-ranging and takes on general, timeless proportions: "The head of our ideological organisation asks the members of the elected body the question in principle: It smells, does it not? [...] In the name of fundamentality, the members of the body insist that a flower which is odourless in reality smells, nevertheless only smells, even if it does not because, for fundamental reasons, it must smell. [...] The agent Mataj takes the floor and declares the poor little flower holy and undoubtedly fragrant with all his determination, all the weight of power, and his position. Under the weight of Mataj's personality, eight million copies of newspapers claim, radio stations announce, armies of educational, librarian, propaganda, scientific and popularisation workers elaborate, explain, apply, and proclaim: the flower is fragrant. [...] Professors, academics [...] encourage: 'Little children, [...] smell these flowers'. The simple, incredibly ambitious youth smells and gets drunk on the scent of a flower that does not smell. They learn hypocrisy from their dear teachers and parents..."[14] (pp. 45-46)

The image in its semantic diasporas, both real (as the present and history prove) and literary, is still active and constantly valid – reminiscent in its layers of meaning either of the tired lamplighter in *The Little Prince* (Antoine de Saint-

6 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Jančovič, 1996).

7 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1963).

8 Authors' note: This "fantasy toying" is made possible by the fantastic plane of the text, since (as the subtitle of the work suggests) it is a "fantastic treatise", and in this sense the writer uses the posthumous return of Bartolomej to make him testify about the practices of the totalitarian regime.

9 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1963).

10 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1963).

11 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1963).

12 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1963).

13 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1963).

14 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1963).

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Exupéry) mechanically obeying a nonsensical command, or, even more compatibly, of the general approving nod from *The Emperor's New Clothes* (Hans Christian Andersen).

Moreover, Bartolomej decides to be the child, figuratively speaking, of the Emperor's new clothes, shouting that "the king is naked" and, therefore, that "this celery does not smell"[15] (Tatarka, 1963, p. 49). Tatarka aptly depicts how one behaves in a totalitarian society: driven by fear, intimidated, and not least bought by material comfort. While in private, Bartolomej's fact "about the unscented flower" is confirmed not only by all the "figurines" of the organ but also by the "Figura" himself, in the public forum, he is denounced for this truth and becomes "a recidivist, an exposed, proven, smeared relapse of hostile thinking"[16] for them (Tatarka, 1963, p. 45).

However, before Bartolomej can be somehow cardinally prosecuted for this truth, Tatarka (1963) brilliantly graduates the semantic "thread" of the text with an epochal break. The work refers directly to the confession of the Stalinist cult of personality and its downfall. It is precisely this intersection that the narrative captures, thus (albeit on specific events) outlining once again with a general/timeless overlay, the pitfalls of exchanging one epoch for another. What was good before is, naturally, evil in the new mood. Bartolomej, formerly a recidivist and enemy of the system, now states: "They are taking me away. Straight to the Palace of Culture. [...] They applaud [...]. That I am a character"[17] (p. 63). And even though the fall of the "cult of personality" finally brings the factual statement that "a deaf violet does not smell"[18] (p. 67), Tatarka again leaves the danger of consent "hanging" in the semantic diasporas of the text: "With relief, we unanimously called off all our resolutions, which we had agreed on only yesterday"[19] (p. 64).

The irony in these phases of the text seems to re-develop the main timeless message of the work, namely the necessity and courage to use one's reason and to accept responsibility for one's decisions in full consciousness. Again, accepting theses dictated from the outside (even if they were currently valid) without a clear-eyed reconsideration of them only carries a "formula" of inauthentic reality experience, the absence of rationale, critical reflection, conscience, and responsibility for one's actions. This approach implies not only the danger that untruths will be adopted so quickly (by dictation from outside) but also the fact that a previously true thesis will eventually lose its validity and become dysfunctional or counterproductive, yet in an atmosphere of manipulation, absence of reason and critical thinking, there will be no one who will reconsider it anew. And it will be proclaimed true even when it is no longer valid – out of principle and fundamentality, just as Tatarka's work portrays it in the epoch before the fall of the "cult of personality".

The novel's precious legacy (more implicitly than explicitly present) can also be abstracted from the plot sequence, which touches on the change mentioned above of epochs. Tatarka portrays how change continues – the guilty are sought and condemned, passionate demonstrations are led against the "old", while the stands are already teeming with cunning "demons" proclaiming new truths. In doing so, the writer's appeal to the use of one's brain, present throughout the work, implicitly reminds us that the ability to defeat the "demons" of the age lies not in their aggressive and affective condemnation by the new "demons" but in an attentive, perceptive understanding of what has actually happened/is happening. Reactions from the servitude of inferiority multiply the inferiority (as Tatarka's text colourfully points out and, after all, history proves), while the wise understanding and comprehension of what happened leads to not repeating the same mistakes.

Tatarka's accomplice Juraj Špitzer, who was allegedly the prototype of the character Valizlost Mataj (see, Jurovská, 1997) and represented for Tatarka precisely the same "friend-enemy" as the book's Valizlost Mataj did for Bartolomej Boleráz, was very eloquent in this regard. Because of this close relationship and the experience of the same atmosphere, we take the liberty of quoting him here. And also because Špitzer, as an actual "Figura", experienced the ecstatic power in one epoch, only to experience aggression and condemnation in the next/new epoch for a change. And apparently, no one can name things better than someone who vouches for them with authentic empirical experience.
"Nonetheless, Gothic did not lose its value when the Renaissance replaced it, and no one would condemn the Baroque when the Enlightenment came with the cult of reason. The Old Testament retained its significance with the appearance of the New Testament (at least, it was the basis for the appearance of the New; note by M.A.). However, there are always reformers and exegetes who proclaim that after the appearance of the New Testament, it is justified to treat the adherents of the Old Testament as pagans. This ideological archetype has its origins in the binary formula of "us and them" and carries the germ of the defence complex or aggression, the theory of the legitimate and the illegitimate, ours and others, legalising a practice where a part of society or an entire nation is expelled from the centre to the periphery, and where the biological extinction of the "illegitimate" is only a matter of time."[20] (Špitzer, 1994, pp. 10-11)

The Demon of Consent is thus a work that, as Šútovec (1964) notes, was written late but still not too late because, as Schulz (1965) adds, "The hissing devils, the bitter demons, the creeping ghosts of rocky apathy, and even the demons of consent have not yet completely disappeared"[21] (p. 4).

2 Delayed Reports – An Interpretative Probe

The initial publication of *Delayed Reports* was also – like the text of *The Demon of Consent* – linked to the periodical *Kultúrny život* (*Cultural Life*). Fragments of the work were originally published in this magazine around mid-1963, with a book edition following a few months later. The motives behind the writing of this "collection of short prose" can be traced through the author's prefaces to the various editions of the book (1963; 1990). In hindsight, in the democratic atmosphere of the 1990s, Mňačko (1990a) suggested that he saw the book as a test for the contemporary establishment: "If they come out, it may be a sign that something is moving for the better in society; if they do not, it will [...] prove that the ruling system is unteachable..."[22] (p. 5).[23] In the introduction to the first edition, he admits that the book was written at the instigation of "cries, confessions, letters of the strangers", for whom he was the last straw as a writer, columnist and reporter when the people in charge failed to act (Mňačko, 1990a). It is the "competent" functionaries, the representatives of the Communist Party, who are the primary antagonists of the work, but rather than an attempt to harm the communists, Mňačko intended the book as raising a warning finger, providing a critical perspective on the period of the 1950s, the period of Stalinism. "This is not about recrimination and certainly not about revenge. It is about a deep understanding of what has happened so that it will not happen again"[24] (Mňačko, 1990a, p. 11).

In eleven reports, Mňačko stages

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17 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1963).

18 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1963).

19 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Tatarka, 1963).

20 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (Špitzer, 1994).

21 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Schulz, 1965).

22 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Mňačko, 1990a).

23 Authors' note: Mňačko has not yet denounced the party by writing *Delayed Reports*. He was a member of it until his expulsion following his emigration to Israel in 1967 (see, Leikert, 2008).

24 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Mňačko, 1990a).

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the difficult life situations of a man during persecution. He visits courtrooms, factories, construction sites, or ordinary tenements, which become the setting for stories inspired by real events and real people. These are stories of unfavourable cadre profiles, judicial or politically motivated wrongdoings, and failures. As one of the characters, Mňačko's role as a direct actor in the plot is variable within the respective stories. Sometimes, he is just a listener, and at other times, he influences the course of the plot. Despite the "reportage" label, *Delayed Reports* are more literary than journalistic output. The critical factor that makes the scholarly public more inclined to label *Delayed Reports* a literary work is precisely the specific degree of distortion, the unclear definition of the boundary between fact and fiction, which was pointed out by Pavol Števček shortly after its publication when he called the book "imperfect, compromising, not entirely true, distorting the facts..."[25] (Števček, 1963, as cited in Stanková, 2019, p. 223).

The realistic antecedents of the main characters are disputable; the fusion of several human fates from the 1950s into the protagonists' persons is also probable. Symbolically, Mňačko represents all the central characters of the work with an image of a grave in the opening reportage Na cintoríne / In the Cemetery. The tombstone, whose "greyness", "impersonality", or "simplicity" is at the centre of the narrator's attention when describing it, symbolises the thousands of affected and marked lives and untold stories from the time of Stalinism. "The name on it reminded me of no one, of nothing; I had no idea who the woman who died in 1953 was, what she looked like, just the grey simplicity of the stone, [...] quite like it might lie on the grave of another woman I knew..."[26] (Mňačko, 1990a, p. 14). In the Cemetery is the story of an unnamed former partisan lady whose husband was imprisoned as a result of a miscarriage of justice and who tragically ends her life by suicide, believing that her husband has rejected her. Despite the tragic and distressing features of the separate chapters, the unifying and pervasive theme of the book is the perseverance and resilience of the regime's victims, as declared by Mňačko (1990a) in the introduction: "I did not want to write obituaries; I wanted to show and prove how the communists, the people living among us, were able to endure the most difficult of trials – to be rejected and abandoned by their own..."[27] (p. 8) This is also true for the reports whose conflict is less severe than the others and whose tragic dimension is absent, thus ending favourably for the main characters. The protagonists' persistence in chapters such as Kádrová legenda [The Cadre Legend] or Klára [Clara] stems from their attempt to fulfil their desires despite the adversity of their cadre profiles.

Two of the reports ("Záhrada utrpenia" ["The Garden of Suffering"] and "Svedok" ["The Witness"]) take place in a courtroom. This setting represents a crucial slice of Mňačko's reporting since he was assigned to cover several infamous trials during the founding period of communism. "The Garden of Suffering" (the figurative name for the courtroom) is about one of them – namely, Galan's trial. Thanks to the circumstances of Galan's case, Mňačko's idea of socialist justice suffered its severe first shock. In the report in question, the reader follows the evolution of the narrator's attitudes toward the defendant, from initial antipathy to later goodwill leading up to action. The narrator/reporter initially denounces this "dangerous specimen of a saboteur" with a bourgeois background on the pages of periodicals and approves of the death sentence imposed, but later is mainly instrumental in securing his early release. Through the inner monologues of the main character, Mňačko depicts the gradual disintegration of the illusions of a dedicated communist journalist. Doubts about the trial led him to discover that the party needed to find someone to blame for its failure, so it filed several false charges against Galan and forced his colleagues to perjure themselves. In the reportage, Mňačko also refers to his contemporary alibis, stemming from his zeal for the ideas of socialism and his ingrained opposition to class enemies. "They would not play with us, I thought. It is a struggle, a revolutionary struggle, a battle of two classes; mercy is a weakness that does not pay off..."[28] (Mňačko, 1990a, p. 33). The heroes of the publication are not only the unruly victims of socialist justice, although, as the author later stated, for Western readers, this aspect overshadowed all other layers of the work (Mňačko, 1990b). Mňačko also sheds light on individuals unjustly neglected by the regime from its own ranks. The central figures of the chapters with this motif are the construction managers, the engineers who, after having contributed significantly to the socialist development, become unnecessary. The motif, with minor variations, is present in "Výletná loď" ["The Cruise Ship"] and "Slávnosť" ["The Celebration"] reports. The latter reportage further develops a characteristic feature of the regime that Mňačko had already worked with in "The Garden of Suffering" – avoiding responsibility for one's failures. The protagonist, the director of the construction of a hydro-centre, falls into disfavour with the "competent" after groundwater unexpectedly interrupts the work. The impending doom, which they, too, share (they started the work without probing), motivates them to attack. "They are already thinking how they will frame him, expose him, accuse him, the more responsible one is for what has happened, the more fervently he will shout about his guilt... class enemy... saboteur..."[29] (Mňačko, 1990a, p. 119) "In vain, no one listened to him, everyone was absorbed in themselves, everyone was looking for their share of the blame and their defence, the defence in such a case is offence..."[30] (Mňačko, 1990a, p. 120) In "The Cruise Ship", the reader is introduced to the fate of a talented engineer assigned to build a famous hydroelectric powerplant. However, after saving the structure from a flood, he is recalled shortly before the work is completed, and his name is not mentioned during the opening ceremony. Alongside the bourgeoisie, Mňačko thus portrays another enemy of communism: the educated man pushed out of the limelight at the expense of emphasising the power of the working class. "To prove that we can do without the intelligentsia"[31] (Mňačko, 1990a, pp. 83-84).

Although the book is accused of having been written and published "literally belatedly"[32], its value lies above all in its depiction of "the arc of the unprecedented deformations of the years of bureaucratic terror"[33] (Mňačko, 1990b, p. 182). Through eleven reports, Mňačko pays tribute to the "grey tombstones", a largely unknown set of people whose lives were directly (more or less tragically) marked by the machinery of the then regime and the actions of its representatives, portrayed in the text as vengeful, cruel and alibistic individuals. The work is (apart from the apparent criticism of the regime) conceived as a chronicle of intransigence and perseverance and also as a chronicle of the gradual loss of illusions of the once naive author. In it, Mňačko thoroughly discusses, based on his own or mediated experiences, the harmful aspects of the period, which he later called "the scab of brains"[34] (Mňačko, 1991, p. 12).

25 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Stanková, 2019).

26 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Mňačko, 1990a).

27 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Mňačko, 1990a).

28 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Mňačko, 1990a).

29 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Mňačko, 1990a).

30 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Mňačko, 1990a).

31 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Mňačko, 1990a).

32 Authors' note: According to Matejovič (2019), Mňačko came with "a cross after the funeral".

33 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Mňačko, 1990b).

34 Authors' note: The text is loosely translated from the original source (see, Mňačko, 1991).

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Conclusion

As the interpretations show, the writers – each in their unique way, i.e. through the authenticity of their own experience and knowledge, the manner of their narration, and the originality of their style – brought closer (through the phenomenon of literary art[35]) the functioning of the totalitarian regime in the 1950s and, through their heroes, pointed out its pitfalls and destructions. The novels are a comprehensive account of a particular historical era and have their due value in all temporal perspectives. At the time of their creation, they "awakened" society to a critical reflection on lived reality and (through the lens of artistry) made accessible the mechanisms of the functioning of the totalitarian regime and pointed to its aggressive violation of human rights and freedoms. The works are an artistic eyewitness testimony of a totalitarian system from the present and future perspectives. In their efforts to capture how such a society, and the individual within it, functions and behaves (as the present interpretation reveals), both texts are instructional "textbooks" on how to remain alert and attentive to potential "demons of power" and "demons of consent" and how to detect the totalitarian ambitions of the "Figuras". Moreover, both works remain timeless in this dimension and a memento for all future times and spaces.

35 Authors' note: The depiction of totalitarianism within the artistic/literary space is addressed, for example, by Vargová (2023).

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