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The Character of the Russian in Slovak War-Themed Literature[1]

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Introduction

The image of the Russian and Russia in Slovak literature has not been a subject of scholarly analysis to date, even though the issue of Slovak-Russian relations has been under scrutiny by several scholars, most recently in the monograph *Slovensko-ruské vzťahy a súvislosti* [Slovak-Russian relations in context].[2] The more specific topic of Russian literary influence on Slovak writing received intense attention in Slovak literary scholarship between the two world wars. The most significant expert in the field is Andrej Mráz (1904–1964), who continued his research into the 1950s. His inter-war and post-war studies were published in the monograph *Z ruskej literatúry a jej ohlasov u Slovákov* [On Russian literature and its reception by the Slovaks].[3] The work of Mráz was continued, among others, by Andrej Červeňák (1932–2012) in the 1960s. Červeňák's long-term research focused on the influence of Dostoevskii on Slovak writers as well as the Slovak reception of other great Russian writers, such as Tolstoi, Turgenev, Lermontov, Pushkin, Yesenin, and others. In terms of Slovak-Russian relations, his most important monographs are *Človek v literatúre* [Man in literature][4] and *Russkaia literatura v slovatskom vospriiatii* [Russian literature in Slovakian perception].[5] Besides numerous analyses of the presence of Russian literature in Slovak literature and culture, there are also many studies on translations of Russian literary works into Slovak, for example, the monograph by Soňa Lesňáková, *Slovenská a ruská próza: Kontakty a preklady* [Slovak and Russian fiction: Contacts and translations].[6] The most recent synthesis of translation research is the monograph *Ruská literatúra v slovenskej kultúre v rokoch 1836–1996* [Russian literature in Slovak culture in 1836–1996].[7]

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2 Andrej Červeňák, ed., *Slovensko-ruské vzťahy a súvislosti* (Nitra, 2002).

3 Andrej Mráz, *Z ruskej literatúry a jej ohlasov u Slovákov* (Bratislava, 1955). The book contains studies of Pushkin, Tolstoi, and Gor'kii in the Slovak context, among others.

4 Andrej Červeňák, *Človek v literatúre* (Bratislava, 1986).

5 Andrej Červeňák, *Russkaia literatura v slovatskom vospriiatii* (Bratislava, 2007).

6 Soňa Lesňáková, *Slovenská a ruská próza: Kontakty a preklady* (Bratislava, 1983).

7 Katarína Kenížová, ed., *Ruská literatúra v slovenskej kultúre v rokoch 1836–1996* (Bratislava, 1998).

Despite numerous analyses of Slovak-Russian literary relations, there has however been no study of the image of Russia or the Russian in Slovak literature. This study on the image of the Russian in Slovak war literature[8] is the first work on the imagology of the Russian in Slovak writing. It is based on the author's primary, heuristic research and the conclusion includes a synthesizing exposition of findings about the changes in representing the Russian and his specific characteristics in Slovak literature.[9] This study's focus on war writing emerges from the fact that the majority of Russian characters in Slovak writing appear in war literature, while we can presume that the tense war conditions provided the authors with a unique opportunity to model their heroes on the basis of observing such motives and consequences of human behavior that had been unknown or even unimaginable previously, that is, they reflect the human character more deeply.

Russophilia (the love of Russia and its culture)[10] and the idea of Slavic solidarity,[11] which meant reliance on the firmness and power of this biggest Slavic state and protector of the Slavic language family, are views deeply rooted in the Slovak past. Especially in the nineteenth century when the awareness of an autonomous Slovak nation and its language were formed in accord with all-European revolutionary movements, looking up to Russia as the hegemonic country of the whole Slavic world was passed onto the masses by the Slovak educated elite. The trusting and admiring relationship with Russia, that is, in principle non-problematic, also found its non-problematic expression in contemporary literature. One of the key figures promoting the idea of Slavic solidarity and the first significant Slovak writer who in his laudatory verses

8 The article represents the first part of the author's study, which focuses on First World War literature.

9 This study focuses on original Slovak war literature; therefore, other imagological approaches such as historical, sociological, psychological, culturological, etc., are utilized only as necessary, if they add to the literary analysis.

10 Russophilia (in contrast to Russophobia) means "love of Russian." The term therefore denotes a positive relationship with Russia, which of course signifies a predilection for everything Russian.

11 The main ideologues of the idea of Slavic solidarity in the 1820s and 1830s were the Slovaks Ján Kollár and Pavol Jozef Šafárik. The idea took impetus from the strong position of tzarist Russia after the Russian defeat of Napoleon in 1812 and from the theory of the German philosopher J. G. Herder, who believed in the future of the Slavs in Europe. As a result, there was a rising scholarly interest in the Slavs, the study of Slavic languages, literature, and history. In addition, Kollár and Šafárik were of the opinion that the Slavs are one nation, formed of the so-called tribes; within this erratic conception, they saw the Czechs, Moravians, and Slovaks as one tribe, who supposedly used the same language in two versions, Czech and Slovak. This view was rejected by Ľudovít Štúr, who fought for recognition of the Slovak language and the Slovak right to national self-determination.

extolled the greatness of Russia and its culture was Ján Kollár (1793–1852).[12] His poem *Slávy dcéra* [The daughter of Slavia] (1824) calls for cooperation of the Slavic peoples supervised by Russia. The author compares Russia to a mighty oak tree, which has always defied doom and must therefore be a shield for the smaller and downtrodden Slavic "tribes."

The efforts of the Slovak national revivalists culminated in the year 1843 with the codification of standard Slovak by a generation of young scholars, Romantics led by Ľudovít Štúr (1815–1856). Štúr and his companions also adopted the idea of Slavic unity and the role of Russia as the protector of the Slavic nations. In contrast to Kollár, who focused mainly on the cultural solidarity of the Slavic "races," Štúr was particularly concerned with the Slavs' political vocation and he published several articles on this subject. This was one of the reasons why he became an official enemy of the Hungarian Empire and was persecuted for his political beliefs. His treatise *Slavdom and the World of the Future* was not published until after his death, when it was issued in Moscow in 1867. In this work, the author encourages the unfree Slavic nations to be politically and culturally oriented towards a powerful Russia.[13]

The main agenda and goal of the Slavic political manifesto was to unify all the Slavic "tribes" or "branches" (later nations), which would help individual Slavic nations defend themselves against German discrimination as well as Magyarization (Hungarization).[14] In this situation where the identity of the nation was under threat, it was understandable that Slovak patriots failed to notice the insufficiencies of the Russian Monarchy and Russia's underdevelopment, poverty, and serfdom.[15] The attitude of the small Slovak nation towards the great Russia with its glorious past, grand arts, and magnificent literature

12 Before Ján Kollár, Russian motifs were used by Daniel Krman Jr. (1663–1740) in his travel diary *Itinerarium* (1969), where he describes his experiences and observations from his travels to the Russian Front during the war between the Swedish king Carl XII and the Russian tzar Peter the Great.

13 This work, Štúr's last, represented a philosophical-political vision with some reactionary elements (the creation of one Slavic superpower) and must be seen in the light of the failure of the Slovaks in their struggle for the right to national self-determination in the 1848–49 revolution. In 1867, when Štúr's work was published in Moscow, Moscow hosted the Slavic Congress. The Congress was an indicator of the state of Slavic solidarity and Russophilia at the time. Eighty-one delegates from all Slavic nations gathered in Moscow. Only the Poles were missing, since they had disagreements with the Russian government and called the Congress a betrayal of the Slavs. Nevertheless, the Slavic Congress was a "fervent manifestation of Slavic solidarity and brotherhood," according to Andrej Mráz in his study "Účasť Slovákov na Slovanskom zjazde v Moskve roku 1867 [The participation of the Slovaks at the Slavic congress in Moscow in 1867]," in *Z ruskej literatúry a jej ohlasov u Slovákov* (Bratislava, 1955), p. 75.

14 Ľ. Štúr distinguished between the nationalist chauvinism of the Hungarian government and the Hungarian people.

15 It needs to be noted, however, that already in *Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti* [Slavdom and the world of the future] had Ľudovít Štúr criticized Russian serfdom, the secret police, and the privileges of the nobility.

was not radically challenged until World War I and the Great October Revolution.[16] As some Slovak writers and translators from the Russian language (for example, Janko Jesenský, Jozef Gregor Tajovský, Jaroslav Augusta, and Mikuláš Gacek) also took part in the Great War on the Eastern Fronts, they contradicted the Slovaks' traditional views of Russia with their harsh war and revolution experiences. The idealized images of Russia took more realistic form in the real-life stories of the Slovak writers—soldiers. The writers kept diaries, took notes, made observations, and even wrote entire collections of poems or documentary essays (Jesenský's collection *Zo zajatia* [From captivity], the diary records *Cestou k slobode* [On the way to freedom],[17] and Tajovský's *Rozprávky z Ruska: Rozprávky o československých légiách v Rusku* [Tales from Russia: Tales of the Czechoslovak legions in Russia]).[18]

World War I and the Memoirs of Tajovský and Jesenský

In the times of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, before World War I, the writer and journalist Jozef Gregor Tajovský (1874–1940)[19] was concerned about the fate of the Slovak language and culture and fought against the Magyarization of the Slovak nation. As a result of his nationalist-oriented work, Tajovský was considered politically unreliable by the Hungarian government and in 1915, after the outbreak of World War I, was sent to the Russian Front. However, he was determined not to fight against the Russian troops. Soon after his arrival at the front, he made several attempts to desert to the Russian side. On December 29, 1915, near Dobropol' he succeeded and was taken into captivity. There, he sought opportunities to contribute to the Czechoslovak liberation movement and as early as May 1, 1916, he joined the Czechoslovak Army in Kiev.[20] At the same time, he became an editor of the press media distributed by the Czechoslovak legions in Russia, namely the magazine *Čechoslovan*[21]

16 In the second half of the nineteenth century, a significant Slovak informer about the developments in Russian literature and admirer of Russian realism was Svetozár Hurban Vajanský (1847–1916), a personality of Slovak cultural and political life. His view of Russia was clearly idealistic; he called Chekhov's story *Mužíci* [The muzhiks] (1897), which gives a critical view of the Russian peasant, a "piece of gossip" and "self-defiling."

17 Janko Jesenský, *Zo zajatia* (Turčiansky Svätý Martin, 1922); Janko Jesenský, *Cestou k slobode* (Martin, 1933).

18 Jozef Gregor Tajovský, *Rozprávky z Ruska: Rozprávky o československých légiách v Rusku* (Bratislava, 1920).

19 See the monograph by Marcela Mikulová, *Tajovského obrodenecká moderna* [Tajovský's revivalist modernism] (Bratislava, 2005).

20 The Czechoslovak legions in Russia started to form in 1914 to support the armies of the Allied Powers. They fought against Austria-Hungary and Germany in the interest of forming a common state for the Czechs and the Slovaks. In October 1917, they formed the Czechoslovak Elite Army.

21 The magazine *Čechoslovan* was the instrument of the Union of Czecho-Slovak Societies in Russia. Tajovský and Jesenský at first translated chosen Czech articles into Slovak and later

and later editor-in-chief of its supplement *Slovak Voices*. In September 1916, he was joined by the writer and politician Janko Jesenský (1874–1945), who had come from Voronezh to help him with his work as editor, writer, and artist for the newspapers.[22] Both authors published articles, poems, and short stories in which they encouraged the Slovak captives as well as those in the armed forces, and they also informed their readers about life in Russia and the Russian people.

Tajovský artistically reflected his first impressions of Russia and his desertion into Russian captivity in his sketch *Janko Vrábeľ*. The eighteen-year-old Janko does not want to fight against his "Serbian and Russian brethren." He sabotages the commands of his Austro-Hungarian superiors. Therefore, he is often disciplined but does not mind because he "suffers for his Slovak beliefs, love for the Russian brethren, without whom the Hungarians would have eaten us alive long ago. But they are afraid of the bear, even behind the fence, for he one day will raise his paw to protect us, too..."[23] This is Janko's apparent so-called Pan-Slavic view of the "big Russian bear." It can be said that in the hero's opinions, we can see the author's own. According to his experiences, the Slovak captives were treated as equals and trusted by the Russians. Tajovský often praises the "good Russian hearts." In a humorous way, he depicts the Russian muzhiks—the soldiers who used to carry on them everything they had found while marching along the way, from bacon and honey, boots and clothing to wall clocks and pots. The muzhiks—"*market vendors*" loaded with all possible things—could not keep up with the advancing army and were hindering the transport of machinery and carts. Therefore, once someone shouted out a warning that a German cavalry unit was coming, the muzhiks immediately dropped all their loads and dispersed quickly. Later, when the situation had settled down, they mourned for their lost cargos, which were supposed to make their hard military lives easier. Tajovský confesses:

> I had never been so close to people as I was to that little outcast peasant, sparkly as a child, defiant as a child, good-hearted and bad-tempered as a child. What kind of person will he be when the child grows up, nobody can guess today, but I think that Russia will yield a new man, man-brother to all people.[24]

This is how Tajovský depicted the ordinary Russian soldier with hopeful empathy.

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started to write their first editorials and contributions. The magazine focused on the issue of the political form of the state (or states) to be created for the Czechs and Slovaks after the war. To give the Slovaks more space for their opinions, the supplement *Slovenské hlasy* [Slovak voices] was created.

22 More details can be found in Jesenský, *Cestou k slobode*, pp. 114–129.

23 Jozef Gregor Tajovský, *Dielo* [Collected works], vol. V (Bratislava, 1956), p. 24.

24 From the short story *Vo vlaku* [On the train], ibid., p. 116.

However, there were now also the first bad experiences and warnings, for instance, the Russian superiors' disrespectful behavior towards their subordinates. Humiliated, illiterate, and narrow-minded, the Russian muzhiks were thus apt to trust various agitators. In his sketch *Samostrelci* [Self-Shooters], Tajovský writes about crowds of deserters who were persuaded to stop fighting on the fronts and go home after the Revolution of 1917. On the way home, they hurt themselves, although it was obvious these were not war wounds, which is why the Cossacks and the police arrested them. The deserters' actions right after the October Revolution in November 1917 were assessed by the author as a betrayal of young Russian freedom.

However, Tajovský soon changed his positive opinion about the Bolshevik Revolution. On May 15–16, 1918, during the Russian Civil War, there occurred an incident at the Cheliabinsk railway station that caused the Czechoslovak legions to stand up to Soviet power[25] and they started long-term fights along the Trans-Siberian Railway lasting one and a half years. The military act was caused by the Bolsheviks' efforts to disarm the legions. Tajovský in his *Stories of the Czechoslovak Legions in Russia* (1920) records the Bolsheviks' vicious attacks and views their doings as sabotage of the whole of Russia:

> The further West, the more witnesses to the Red Army's methods of warfare. They are destroying everything, they wouldn't mind knocking mountains down to obstruct our soldiers' way in order to avoid fighting. The rails pulled out, the bridges knocked down, and smashed wagons on the bigger ones, a derailed locomotive; up on a twenty-thirty-meter-high bridge, two collided trains whose locomotives met right on the bridge; some carriages burned down, some battered are standing on the rails and others left abandoned under a steep hillside. I hadn't seen such pictures since the start of the World War. No political party can be allowed to cause such havoc during their rule. This is done by hired people and criminals in service of Lenin and Trotskii, and they are ruining the whole of Russia so that it could not stand up to Germany again or this would be the end of the German pride.[26]

Nevertheless, Tajovský always distinguished between the Bolsheviks and the rest of the Russian nation.[27] In his sketch stories, he asks many a time: "What does a muzhik think... does he understand or just watches as a child, like almost the whole Russian nation watches our fight?"[28] In Tajovský's represen-

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25 While the Czechoslovak legionnaires fought against Soviet power, about 20,000 former Czech and Slovak prisoners fought on the side of the Bolsheviks.

26 Tajovský, *Rozprávky z Ruska*, pp. 222–223.

27 Tajovský and the other Slovak writers discussed here understood the Russian nation as consisting of ethnic Russians (although their roots may have been marked by unions with other ethnicities). The notion of Russianness thus did not include other nations and ethnic groups in the Russian Empire. This study focuses only on Russians in the works of authors mentioned; if the image of Russianness includes references to other ethnic groups of the Russian Empire, this is explicitly noted.

28 Tajovský, *Rozprávky z Ruska*, p. 202.

tation of the Russians, the author's Slavic sympathy and the sympathetic tone is also found in the description of Russian women as good-hearted peasants. Tajovský also captured the townswoman particularly well, whom he characterized as a woman that is spontaneous, caring, well-educated, and faithful to her husband on the front.

Experiences and opinions similar to those of Tajovský were also obtained in Russia during World War I by Janko Jesenský,[29] a poet, writer, and journalist. Similarly to Tajovský, he joined the Austro-Hungarian Army after the outbreak of World War I as an "unreliable Pan-Slavist."[30] He deserted into Russian captivity on July 3, 1915, near the village of Turobin. In his memoir from the years 1914–1918 entitled *Cestou k slobode* (1933), Jesenský says that since he spoke German, Russian, and English, he became a translator in captivity and due to this was treated well by the Russians. As a translator and astute observer, he soon became familiar with the conditions in the Russian environment and army. The Russian people as well as the officers of lower rank shared the opinion that the generals were traitors in collaboration with the Germans. In the newspaper *Russian Word*, Jesenský discovered that in Russia, "everything is in the German hands, business, banks, industry, diplomacy, general officers."[31] This is also why there was an atmosphere of distrust and chaos within the army. Nobody kept promises, there was no discipline or control, and theft was common. Interpersonal relationships were based on mutual sympathy and antipathy rather than nationality. What Jesenský mainly captured was the individual characters of the people whom he met. As opposed to Tajovský, he generalized less, rarely referred to typical characters, and did not omit negative observations and experiences in his memories of Russia.

As for the Russian community that Jesenský lived close to, he became particularly interested in their talkativeness, constant philosophizing, and general tendency to conduct religious ceremonies, but also their lack of inhibition if there was an opportunity to earn something at someone else's expense. No one knew in advance whether he would get his money's worth in services or goods. On the other hand, there were also people who really helped those in need.

Just like Tajovský, Jesenský took the first chance to join the Czechoslovak resistance movement in Russia. It did not take him long to be promoted to the leadership ranks. He traveled much and moved often. He used to take private lodgings and so he got to know Russian manners and behavior. Often, the accommodation was not worth the price he had paid, but for example in Vorone-

29 See the monographs by Michal Gáfrik, *Básnik Janko Jesenský* [The poet Janko Jesenský] (Bratislava, 2006) and Oskár Čepan, *Stimuly realizmu* [The impulses of realism] (Bratislava, 1984), pp. 368–428.

30 Janko Jesenský's father, Ján Jesenský Gašparé, participated in the Slavic Congress in Moscow in 1867. He brought up his son in a Russophile spirit.

31 Jesenský, *Cestou k slobode*, p. 55.

zh, he came across lodgings where he was well looked after. He gained access to the library and was able to study Russian literature. Later, however, he had to leave Voronezh for Kiev.

Jesenský was in Kiev when the February Revolution broke out in 1917. This caused uncontrollable anarchy in the city. "Wherever he walked, Lenin as an invisible cholera bug left behind the corpse of the former establishment, and the disintegration of the elementary notions of thinking."[32] The soldiers and servants began to play the role of master. They were shooting their officers, trading with the Germans in the trenches, and tens of thousands of them were leaving the fronts for their homes to get hold of their masters' properties. "The whole of Russia was in flames. Wherever you looked, there was fire, robbery, rebellion, murder, blood. The Revolution had got perverted. Properties were drowning in the color red, burning."[33]

However, in November, an even greater disaster struck: the Bolshevik Revolution. "So far invisible, the cholera showed up in the form of Lenin's Mongolian skull. The skull of death with the hammer and scythe, not the star. During week-long shootings the mightiest Slavic country collapsed."[34]

During the first days of the October Revolution, Jesenský found himself in St. Petersburg, where he was an eyewitness to the revolutionary events. He was horrified by the revolutionaries' appalling atrocities. There were murders and lootings everywhere, in the streets, in the homes. The revolutionaries held trials and carried out executions on their own. Once they caught a captain. His son did not want to tear himself way from him so they cut off the father's arm with a saber, making the boy fall over on his back with the severed arm. Jesenský captured the cruelty of the revolution in for example his anti-Bolshevik poem "Equality, Liberty, Fraternity," included in the collection *Zo zajatia* (1919). He wrote this poem on February 3, 1918, in Kiev. The author compared the Soviet Revolution to a fierce storm that thrusts a human into blood and mud, and beats and batters with a stick the well-known principles of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.[35] In his other poems, Jesenský writes that it was slaves who took control after the revolutionary coup and that they spat in the face of Russia[36] and converted it into a house of the dead without culture or tradition.[37]

After such experiences, it is no wonder that Jesenský refused the Kiev Soviet warrant to form the Czechoslovak Red Guard. Just like Tajovský, he considered the Czechoslovak Bolsheviks to be traitors to the vocation of the

32 Jesenský, *Cestou k slobode*, p. 149.
33 Jesenský, *Cestou k slobode*, p. 151.
34 Jesenský, *Cestou k slobode*, p. 169.
35 Jesenský, *Zo zajatia*, p. 89.
36 Poem "Brest-Litovsk," Jesenský, *Zo zajatia*, p. 90.
37 Poem "Mŕtvy dom [The house of the dead]," Jesenský, *Za zajantia*, p. 91. Jesenský wrote this poem, dedicated to Dostoevskii, in Omsk on May 2, 1918.

Czechoslovak legions in Russia. The legions were meant to liberate the Slovaks and the Czechs from the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, not to become involved in the political turmoil in Russia.

At the time, many people were thinking about the end of the war and the revolutionary chaos and were turning to Tolstoi's philosophy of pacifism. In Omsk after a meeting with Dušan Makovický Jr., a keen Tolstoyan,[38] Jesenský read Tolstoi's work *Obdumaites'*, where Tolstoi rejects war. Jesenský was not pleased with the fact that Tolstoi "was ready to sell the whole of the Slavic world for one fervent Our Father. —That philosopher isn't suitable for us, not now, —I say to Makovický. —It's true it's beautiful, but only on the paper. The experience since the creation of the world has been different and will be different until its end."[39]

Jesenský's opinion proved to be right when Stalin issued a decree to disarm the Czechoslovak legions in Penza before their journey to Vladivostok and then home. After the incidents in Cheliabinsk in mid-May 1918, the decree was even toughened by Trotskii.[40] An open fight between the Czechoslovak legions and the Bolshevik Soviet government began.

Apart from the Bolshevik government, there was also the Siberian government based in Omsk, the Samaran government based in Samara, the Ural government based in Ekaterinburg, the Cossack government near Chita, and the Vladivostok government in Vladivostok. As Jesenský writes, when forming a united Russian government, all these small governments consulted the Russian branch of the Czechoslovak National Council. The negotiations, endless meetings, and arguments were also attended by Jesenský as deputy chairman of the Czechoslovak National Council in Russia. Jesenský's idea was that Russia should be liberated from the Bolsheviks as "obedient servants to the

38 An admirer of Tolstoi from the literary point of view was also Tajovský, who in 1909 wrote: "I would not trade Tolstoi's folk stories for the whole of Slovak literature: they are my constant model" (*Tajovský v kritike a spomienkach* [Tajovský in criticism and memoirs] (Bratislava, 1956), p. 171). As a realist with a tendency to straightforward moral messages, Tajovský liked similarly oriented works by Tolstoi. It needs to be added, however, that the reception of Tolstoi in Slovakia was divided. Andrej Červeňák in his study "Lev Tolstoi v slovatskoi kritike" argues that Tolstoi's utopic philosophy was partly put into practice (the so-called program of small work) only by the members of the liberal group united around the journal *Hlas* [The voice]. The best-known Tolstoyans were Dušan Makovický and Albert Škarvan, besides Tajovský. The other ideological streams of the Slovak intelligentsia refused Tolstoi's social views and accepted him as a representative of Slavdom (Svetozár Hurban Vajanský and the Slovak conservatives), but especially as a great artist whose work influenced the formation of Slovak literary realism (especially the work of Tajovský). See Červeňák, *Russkaia literatura v slovatskom vospriatii*, pp. 69–75.

39 Jesenský, *Cestou k slobode*, p. 185.

40 On May 25, 1918, Trotskii ordered each armed "Czechoslovak" on the Trans-Siberian Railway to be shot and groups of Czechoslovak soldiers to be disarmed and imprisoned. Compare Mikuláš Gacek, *Sibírske zápisky* (Martin 1936), pp. 162–164.

Germans" and, being free and united, it should join the other free Slavic nations in forming a union of states. Despite all of his negative experiences in Russia, Jesenský, similarly to Tajovský, maintained the concept of anti-German and anti-Hungarian Slavdom, an idealized vision of Slavic togetherness. At the same time, both Slovak writers insisted on equal rights and positions for the individual Slavic nations; they did not want Russia to be the ruler of the Slavic world.

Besides these meetings, the officials of the Czechoslovak National Council also participated in parties. Jesenský used to meet Russian women there.

> What makes the Russian women so attractive? The fact that they present themselves without rituals, without poses, they are always warm-hearted and emotional, I'd say, their souls are like open vessels with fabulous drinks inside, they lean of their own accord and pour their liquids without worry. Our ladies are also full of sweet juice, but they are closed bottles, you have to pull the top with a corkscrew. And be careful so they don't break and you don't get hurt![41]

Jesenský kept longing for the Russian woman during his several-month-long sea voyage to Europe, which he had started in January 1919. The travelers on the ship were mostly Western Europeans. He recalls:

> We all felt a bit colder in our souls among those cultivated, Western, starched people, the Italians, the French. There were no real Russians, let alone the "nastoiashchaia russkaia devushka," cheerful, straight, modest and beautiful, just like those we used to meet in Russia. She would cheer us up and there would be a piece of Russia as well as a piece of Slavdom on the ship.[42]

On the way from Vladivostok to Europe, Jesenský stopped over in Japan and then went by ship to Shanghai and Europe. Tajovský spent about twenty days in Japan, after which he traveled to the United States and then home.

Tajovský's and Jesenský's writings about World War I in Russia were were testimonials rather than literary works. However, high literary quality can be found in the war-themed writings by other Slovak writers that are situated in a Slovak (or Austro-Hungarian) environment. These are the novels *Živý bič* [A living whip] (1927) by Milo Urban, *Pisár Gráč* [Gráč the scribe] (1940) by Jozef Cíger Hronský, *Odlomená haluz* [The severed branch] (1934) by Gejza Vámoš, *Muž s protézou* [The man with a prosthesis] (1925) by Ján Hrušovský, and the novella *Hrdinovia* [The heroes] (1918) by Božena Slančíková Timrava. Russian motifs can be found in the poem sequence *Krvavé sonety* [Bloody sonnets] (1919) by Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav, the poem *Dievča z Rossie* [The girl from Russia] (1925) by Ján Smrek, and the poem "Ex Oriente Lux" from the collection *Cestou* [On the way] (1935) by Martin Rázus.

41 Jesenský, *Cestou k slobode*, p. 222.

42 Jesenský, *Cestou k slobode*, p. 246.

The Two World Wars in the Works of Mikuláš Gacek and František Švantner

The Czechoslovak legions in Russia mainly fought for the new organization of Europe and the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak Republic. The goal was fulfilled. By the time Tajovský and Jesenský set out on their journeys from Russia to their home, the Czechoslovak Republic had already been established in October 1918. The establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic meant an end to the long-lasting efforts to Magyarize the Slovaks; the intense Magyar (Hungarian) oppression of the Slovak nation ended. Slovak society and culture could now develop under better conditions. A young generation, not burdened by the weight of history, was beginning to emerge. Young artists refused the older conservative branch of the Russophile Slovak culture and systematically gained inspiration from modern Western culture, avant-garde manifestos, and new, non-traditional works and experiments.

On the other hand, translations from Russian literature, especially the classic authors and émigrés after 1917, continued to appear. A significant Slovak translator from Russian, Mikuláš Gacek (1895–1971), besides translating Russian literature (Chekhov, Bunin, Kuprin, Gor'kii, Aksakov, Ostrovskii, Gogol', Turgenev, and others) also undertook to write his memoirs of World War I, which he published in 1936 under the title *Sibírske zápisky* [Notes from Siberia]. As a soldier of the Austro-Hungarian Army, he was captured in 1915 and worked at several prison camps and farms until becoming a member of the Czechoslovak Legions in 1917.[43] Like Tajovský and Jesenský, Gacek participated in the entire Siberian project and his memoirs are testimony to similar experiences.[44] Gacek returned to Russia at the beginning of World War II, when he worked in Moscow as a cultural adviser for the Slovak government in 1940–41.[45] The period 1937–1944 is recorded in his book *Surová býva vše pravda života* [The truth of life can be hard] (1996), published twenty-five years after his death. The book, however, does not include his Moscow experiences; these

43 On the issue of the formation of the Czechoslovak Legions in Russia, Mikuláš Gacek cites Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (from 1918, the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic), who on August 6, 1917, in Bristopol' addressed the legionnaires: "We must be grateful to Russia for letting us build our army, and we must be grateful to the Russian Revolution for the victory of democracy. Let's try to understand how anarchy took over where democracy should have been, and let's take a lesson from this for our own sake" (Gacek, *Sibírske zápisky*, p. 105).

44 Like Tajovský and Jesenský, Gacek also emphasizes the Slavdom idea; for example, he documents that Ľ. Štúr's work *Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti* was also read in Russian by the Slovak legionnaires (*Sibírske zápisky*, p. 121).

45 Besides Gacek, the writers who more or less collaborated with the Slovak pro-German government during World War II were Tido Jozef Gašpar, Milo Urban, Valentín Beniak, Jozef Cíger Hronský, Andrej Žarnov, Emil Boleslav Lukáč, and Ján Smrek. Only Hronský later contributed to the image of the Russian in Slovak literature.

remain in manuscript form, archived in the Slovak National Library in Martin. From these writings, we can learn that Gacek was unimpressed by Soviet Moscow in 1940. In comparison to his memoirs from 1915–1920, he perceived a negative change in the Russian character. He saw the Muscovites as hard and full of fear. He blamed the Soviet government: "The people are afraid. An invisible rule of an invisible hand interferes with human lives... Souls are poisoned. This is the Kremlin. Kremlin—hardness. Just like the human heart."[46] Gacek quickly registered the cult of Stalin, who was celebrated as a genius, leader, teacher of nations, and the sun of the world. Despite declared social equality, there were huge social divides between the rich privileged caste, which included the military dignitaries, and the poor masses. Moscow impressed Gacek as being uncultured and barbaric: "Yes, the regime has brought civilization to some Asian tribes, but the European, Russian development has been slowed down."[47]

Gacek's diaries are a significant record (despite being ideologically marked) of the impression of Soviet society and Russian personality on a representative of the Slovak government at the beginning of World War II.

Gacek's writings reflect the Slovak inter-war interest in Bolshevism and the building of a new social system in the Soviet Union.[48] Two positions were characteristic of the time. A left-leaning group included mainly cultural workers and writers publishing in the Communist magazine *DAV*.[49] Russian motifs appear in the work of Peter Jilemnický (1901–1949), a significant Slovak writer of the first half of the twentieth century.[50] The other position is represented by a study by Ladislav Hanus "F. M. Dostojevskij a svet boľševizmu [F. M. Dostoevskii and the world of Bolshevism]."[51] The author sees Bolshevism as reflecting the negative characteristics of the "Russian soul," such as the tendency to

46 Slovak National Library, Archive of Literature and Art, Martin. Fond: M. Gacek. Sig. 115 T 3.

47 Slovak National Library, Archive of Literature and Art, Martin. Fond: M. Gacek. Sig. 115 O 12, *Moskovské zápisky* [Notes from Moscow], p. 7.

48 Another view is given in the monograph by Josef Jirásek, *Rusko a my* [Russia and we] (Prague, 1929), a collection of studies on Czecho-Slovak-Russian relations between 1800–1867.

49 See Stanislav Šmatlák, *Program a tvorba* [Program and art] (Bratislava, 1977) and Daniel Okáli, *Výboje a súboje* [Offensives and fights] (Bratislava, 1973).

50 Russian motifs can be found in Jilemnický's works *Víťazný pád* [A victorious fall] (1929), *Dva roky v krajine sovietov* [Two years in the country of the Soviets] (1929), *Zuniaci krok* [A sprightly step] (1930), *Kompas v nás* [A compass in ourselves] (1937), and *Kronika* (1947). General studies on Jilemnický are Juraj Špitzer, *Peter Jilemnický* (Bratislava, 1955); Břetislav Truhlář, *Peter Jilemnický. Spisovateľ—bojovník* [Peter Jilemnický. Writer—fighter] vol. I., II. (Bratislava, 1958).

51 Ladislav Hanus, "F. M. Dostojevskij a svet boľševizmu," *Slovenské pohľady* 3 (1942), pp. 153–164. By 1922, the treatise by Dmitri S. Merezhkovskii "Lev Tolstoj a boľševici [Lev Tolstoi and the Bolsheviks]" had already appeared in Slovak translation in *Slovenské pohľady* 4 (1922), pp. 222–226. The conclusions about Bolshevism by the Russian emigré Merezhkovsky and the Slovak philosopher Hanus are very similar.

anarchy, dogmatism, totalitarianism, maximalism, nihilism, etc. He supports his claims with references to Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* and concludes his article by commenting that although Bolshevism wanted to liberate the individual and society, it at the same time denied the human soul and its transcendental dimension. Thus "even the greatest Russian thinker and lover of the Russian people made his verdict upon his people with the title *The Possessed*."[52]

In June 1941, the Russian people again demonstrated their unknown potentiality when they stood up against German expansion together with other nations and ethnic groups of the Soviet Union. Naturally, this found expression in the image of the Russian in Slovak literature. The powerful and selfless Russian brother again became part of the range of literary characters. The Russians (Soviets) were schematically depicted, without conflicts and doubts, especially by communist writers. Authors from other political and ideological parties and groups might seek in the Russian liberator a human per se, a human with both positive and negative traits, who formed concrete relationships with the local people. In this way, some interesting personal profiles of the Russian man, whose actions and behavior were set in the context of the whole of Russian culture, were created by František Švantner (1912–1950).[53] Švantner went all the way from depicting the Russian soldier as a double of the World War I Slovak soldier (the novella *Božia hra* [God's game]) to forming a specific character of the Russian liberator, who was culturally justified by the course of Russian history and conditioned by the traditional Slovak Russophile attitude to their powerful Slavic brother (the novella *List* [The letter]).

During World War II, Švantner first turned his focus back to the subject of World War I. In his novella *God's Game* (1943), even Tajovský's and Jesenský's opinions and experiences can be traced.

First, here is a synopsis of the novella: A soldier of the Austro-Hungarian Army, Matej Dintar, and his friend are forced by hunger to cross the frontline in order to obtain food from a nearby manor, which has been seized by the Russians. On the way there, Dintar comes across a Russian having a bath and kills him. He hastily takes off his uniform covered in blood and puts on the Russian one. Later, another fight leaves him wounded. When the fallen are being identified in the hospital, the "naked body" of Dintar, feeling guilty for the murder of the Russian, falls off him. It sets out to save the soldiers who have been left lying on the battlefields.

Dintar recovers and carries on fighting on the war fronts for four more years. In the end, he is lucky to come back home to his wife, take over a pub,

52 Hanus, "F. M. Dostojevskij," p. 164.

53 František Švantner, *Nevesta hôľ a iné prózy* [The bride of the mountain slopes and other stories] (Bratislava, 2007). About Švantner's work, see the monographs by Ján Števček, *Baladická próza Františka Švantnera* [The balladic prose of František Švantner] (Bratislava, 1962) and Jana Kuzmíková, *František Švantner. V zákulisí naturizmu* [František Švantner: In the back stage of naturism] (Bratislava, 2000).

and have a daughter. Then one night, Dintar's pub is visited by his double, created by the war murderer's conscience, and demands Matej's property as well as his family. The guest tells his story—he was stabbed with a knife by a wandering Russian when he and his friend were having a bath in a canal, and was forced to wear a Russian uniform since he could not find his own after coming round. (This situation is a mirror image of the original event, when Dintar murdered the Russian.) Then, Dintar's double finds himself among Russians, who identify him as a certain "Ivan Vasil'evich" thanks to the Russian uniform. He learns the Russian language and after some time is picked up by the unknown Ivan Vasil'evich's wife. Dintar-the-double begins to live with her and they have a son. But he finds himself in a schizophrenic state all the time: he exists without the dead Ivan Vasil'evich's "soul." This goes on until he decides to find out what has happened to his own wife in Slovakia. When he finds the original Dintar by her side, he goes back to join his Marpha and Grisha in Russia. Having been visited by the double from Russia clears the Slovak Dintar's soul because he finds that his remorseful conscience has revived the victim of his violence.

In the Dintar character doubling and his struggle for survival, Švantner describes the universal everyman. Therefore, he notes in his novella that military uniforms are the same for all men in the world. This symbolic vision has a surprisingly real basis in, for example, Tajovský's memories. In his military luggage, there was one thing "from Turiec, another from Bratislava, another from Moscow, another from Warsaw, another from Kiev, another from Petersburg... and in addition to that one more being part of an Austrian military uniform, the other of a Russian one. I have one or the other, as if I had robbed both an Austrian and a Russian soldier and citizen."[54]

In Švantner's novella, Matej Dintar's alter ego becomes Ivan Vasil'evich when it puts on the Russian uniform. Revived and wounded, Ivan Vasil'evich spends the remaining years of the war in Russian hospitals and is having treatment in Lugansk, Ukraine, when the Bolshevik Revolution breaks out. During the Russian Revolution in 1917, the author Švantner was only five years old, so when depicting the revolutionary events, he probably sought help from the experiences and opinions of the Czechoslovak legionnaires. The Russian hero in *God's Game* Ivan Vasil'evich, the double of the Slovak Dintar, sees the revolution as chaos; in the Russian Army hospital he notices people's fear and their mistrust of each other. When meeting Ivan Vasil'evich's wife for the first time, the double finds out about the vandalism of the Bolsheviks who want to knock down Vasil'evich's house, but when the wife threatens them with her husband's revenge, they disperse.[55] Despite the Bolsheviks' actions, Dintar

54 Tajovský, *Dielo*, vol. V, p. 85.

55 A testimony about similar events in Russia was given by Jaroslav Augusta (1878–1970), a recognized painter of Czech origin who lived and worked in Slovakia. In his autobiographical book *Spomienky* [Memories] (1962), he describes the period he spent in Russia during World War I. As a prisoner of the Russian army, he worked mainly on farms; his artistic

alias Ivan Vasil'evič has a good impression of the Russians: Marpha has a lot of goodness and kindness in her face, and the servant Mitroshko has the broad face of a good man; by and large, Dintar does well in Russia and Ukraine. Švantner in *God's Game* from World War I, published during World War II in 1943,[56] still follows the traditional Russophile orientation: although there were objections to the Russian Bolshevik Revolution in Slovakia, the Russian nation was in general glorified.

The author further expands on the issue of Russophilia in his novella *List*[57] from 1948. The novella is set at the end of World War II when Russian soldiers were liberating the Slovak territory. In her good-bye letter to Ivan, Júlia reveals the troubles of their several-year-long marriage. For Ivan, marriage to Júlia, who until then has only trusted her reason, is supposed to be a way of reaching a perfect humanity. He has longed for a love that would embrace the whole of humankind, the whole world, and the universe, which is supposed to lead to God. Ivan leads his wife Júlia to an all-embracing love, too. During the war, their ideal is represented by the Russian soldier—the liberator—who does not hesitate to sacrifice himself for humankind. However, when the Russian Army on their way to victory over Nazi Germany arrive in their town, Ivan loses his enthusiasm. The moment he finds out that his savior's ideal is a free man with his particular demands as well as flaws, he loses his unworldly confidence in him. Immediately, he wants to open Júlia's eyes too, so he brings home a drunk and rough Russian captain. The Russian soldier begins to demand the wife and she surrenders, trying to save her cowardly husband. Ivan and his family as well as their acquaintances utterly condemn her. The wife bears the undeserved punishment with slavish humility until she finds out she is going to be a mother. This reminds her of her "sin": When she had woken up next to the ruthlessly wolfish captain on that memorable night, she could have revenged herself by killing him. However, she discovers in the rapist her long-nourished literary ideal of the Scythian, evoked by Blok's poem *The Scythians*.[58] In Blok's

skills prevented him to a great degree from starving. Augusta did not become part of the Czechoslovak legions, but his experiences and impressions of Russia are very similar to those of Tajovský, Jesenský, and Gacek, although Augusta's narrative does not provide direct political commentaries on the events he witnessed (which might be explained by the political regime at the time the book was published).

56 In the editions published during so-called Socialism, the novella was censored; the censorship cut out Švantner's critical opinions of the Bolsheviks. The novella was published in full in the edition František Švantner, *Nevesta hôľ a iné prózy* (Bratislava, 2007).

57 In Švantner, *Nevesta hôľ a iné prózy*.

58 The poetry of Alexander Blok was well known in Slovakia and even subject to polemics (for example, the poem sequence *Dvanásti* [The twelve], published in translation by Janko Jesenský in 1934). See Mária Kusá, "HĺbkA a šírka záberu [The depth and width of the frame]," in Kenížová, ed., *Ruská literatúra v slovenskej kultúre v rokoch 1836–1996*, pp. 52, 62. Švantner probably knew Blok's poem *Skýti* [The scythians] from Jesenský's translation of the book *Z novšej ruskej poézie* [From recent Russian petry] (Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš, 1947), pp. 45–48.

poem, the Scythian is the symbol of Russia, the bearer of the new light from the East for the whole of Europe. Blok's Scythian presents the Asian element of a perhaps cruel love, which calls for the brotherhood of Russia and European nations in a hard, uncompromising, even violent way. Júlia, literally seduced by Blok's poem, cannot revenge herself upon her Russian rapist—a "revived" Scythian. On the contrary, she regards her dishonor as a gift by which she has contributed to fulfilling his great vocation.

Júlia's Scythian is god-like, a synonym for all-embracing love, manifestations of which she sees in the works of Russian modern writers such as Gor'kii, Maiakovskii, Blok, and Pasternak. Russian artists impress her by depicting a man in his total nakedness, which makes one feel regret as well as hatred. Experiencing the Russian man esthetically draws a magic force into Júlia's world view and becomes her only criterion for assessing Russians, although this is an irrational-mythological form of relationship with an object. It is true that Júlia discovers her husband's inability to accept the Russian ideal in its profane form, but at the same time loses her awareness of the clear literary-esthetical genesis of the Russian liberator. The literary influence of the wild Scythian character on the originally rational (before marriage) Júlia's thinking is, in some respects, mystical.

Júlia finds in the literary Scythian a bearer of a possible humane world, which she has dreamed of. But there is a contradiction; although it is true that the Russian liberator in her story is a wild bearer of life, it is questionable whether he is also a bearer of humanity. He is presented as a fearless, impulsive, authoritarian liberator. Thus, he calls to mind the Bolshevik as described by Jesenský: Lenin with his Mongolian skull.

In general, though, the Russian captain in the novella *The Letter* is different, Júlia also perceives the common Russian soldiers. She notices that affability does wonders for them: wild liberators turn to childishly trusting and sensitive people who help her with her work and are obliging and respectful. They like to put their guns down and plunge into lively manifestations of life, singing, and dancing.

The characters of Júlia and Ivan and their conflict show that Slovak Russophilia was built on a mainly literary and emotional basis. The Slovaks did not sufficiently know the real Russian Empire. Thus, the encounter with a real Russian deeply affects the marriage of the protagonists.[59]

The Letter is artistically one of the best works of Slovak literature about World War II, which are numerous. As to the character of the Russian, it still is a matter requiring special analysis.

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59 Švantner also thought about the character of the Russian and the post-war role of Russia (the Soviet Union) in his after-war diary records. He suggests that after World War II, the Slovak man had many objections to communism as well as the Soviet Union, but above all that it was necessary to recognize the Russian people's bravery, for example, when defending Stalingrad (František Švantner, *Integrálny denník* [Integral diary] (Pezinok, 2001), p. 105).

Conclusion

Relations between the Slovaks and the Russians have been for centuries determined by serious historical circumstances and experiences. This context necessarily influenced the image of the Russian in Slovak literature. It can be summed up that the image of the Russian in Slovak literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was mostly positive but also one-sided. Behind this lay ideology. First there was the Russophile ideology, developing the ideal of the great Russian protector of the Slovak nation, in which nationalist aims dominated, although a considerable part was also played by culture and science. After World War II, the communist ideology in Slovakia also supported the cult of the powerful Russian brother as the liberator of Czechoslovakia and the post-war leader of a "fairer world." However, the official relationship with the USSR did not reflect the actual feelings of Czechoslovak citizens towards the Russian/Soviet regime. With time, as the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army became a historical fact and the gratitude of the population vanished with the repressive measures of Soviet foreign policy, this Russophilia was gradually replaced by Russophobia (fear, hatred, disillusionment). This change in the perception of the Russians, however, was a taboo topic in literature, not permitted by censorship. In this context, an apt observation by Švantner from the late 1940s rings true: "We expect more from the Russians than they are able to do. We have created myths and legends about them, we cannot see them as people with flaws anymore."[60]

It needs to be emphasized, though, that Švantner's comment does not reflect any peculiarities or prejudices of the Slovak national "character." The bipolar or ambivalent perception of Russia and the Russians in Slovak literature had always been the result of imperfect knowledge (leading to idealization) of Russian reality, but also influenced by Russia's power and geographic largeness. Later, the key factors influencing the image of Russia were mainly its role in defeating Nazi Germany, its communist ideology, and expansive politics.

The aspect of Russian culture that had always been perceived positively in Slovakia was Russian classic literature. The great Russian realist authors with their philosophical and moral views strongly influenced Slovak realist literature, as is also evident in the memoirs of Tajovský and Jesenský. Tajovský's and Jesenský's works about Russia and the Russians were not written with high creative ambitions and their value is mostly documentary. They are stylized documents about great historical events, World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution. The chaos of historical events in Russia did not permit the writers to give detailed attention to the psychology of the Russian person; moreover, Tajovský's and Jesenský's Russophilia prevented them from expressing stronger criticism of common Russians or the nation as such. However, their expe-

60 Švantner, *Integrálny denník*, p. 73.

riences with the Bolsheviks and their leadership, turned against the foreign legionnaires, made them see the Bolsheviks apart from the rest of the Russian nation, as primitive and beastly. This view was shared by all Slovak writers who participated in the fighting on the Eastern Front.

The Slovak enthusiasm for Russian classical and modern literature on the one hand and the cruelty and barbarism of the October Revolution on the other are also reflected in the work of Švantner. His work no longer focused on the great historical events, but on their consequences in human psychology. Švantner's novella *List* is an expert exploration of the soul of a woman who has been so powerfully influenced by her reading of Russian literature that she tends to see her rape by a Russian soldier as a gift due to his liberator role in World War II. In the backdrop to this conflict are episodically presented other Russian soldiers, who are described as joyful, simple, and helpful. For Švantner, the "common" Russian man is a positive character with a good heart.

After the war, instead of continuing in the line of Švantner's psychological representation of Russians and Slovak stereotypical expectations, writers returned to heroic portraits of the Russians as playing key roles in breakthrough historical events. For example, the communist writer Peter Jilemnický (1901–1949) turned to ideological aims, adoring Russian partisans with great pathos in his novel *Kronika* [Chronicle] (1947). The result of these authorial choices was ideologically deformed and schematic Russian characters as always-positive heroes. Submission to the requirement of a positive representation of Russians continued even after the schematic representation of the Germans as evil occupiers changed towards more psychological portraits of the Germans. The Russian soldier continued to symbolize a new, "better era."

A definitive shift towards a more complex representation of the Russians happened after the fall of the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia in 1989, when the communist ideology ceased dictating literary themes and modes of creative representation. However, similar to the situation in 1918, when the Slovaks achieved freedom from Hungarian oppression, the liberation in 1989 brought about interest in the West rather than in Russia. Russian reality and history have not been an attractive literary subject for most writers, a fact definitely related to the negative experiences of the Slovaks with the communist regime, imported from the USSR. As a result, Russian themes have been rare in Slovak literature since 1989.[61] The situation has changed slightly in the last three years, when fictional works by Rankov, Hunčík, Krajňák, Bindzár, and Vilikovský[62] and travelogues by Boris Filan and Robert Bielik have been pub-

61 A few poems with Russian motifs can be found in the works by Ján Zambor and Pavol Janík. One short story with the theme of Russian émigrés in Germany appears in the eponymous short prose collection *Tell* (1999) by Mária Bátorová. Russian motifs are also used in the novel *Námestie kozmonautov* [The Cosmonauts' square] (2007) by Viliam Klimáček.

62 See the novels *Hraničný prípad* [Borderline case] (2011) by Péter Hunčík, *Bez dúhy* [Without rainbow] (2011) by Juraj Bindzár, and *Matky* [Mothers] (2011) by Pavol Rankov and the novellas *Carpathia* (2011) by Maroš Krajňák and *Štvrtá reč* [The fourth speech] (2013) by Pavel Vilikovský.

lished.[63] The texts of Pavol Rankov and Pavel Vilikovský bring kaleidoscopic views of the Russians, utilizing postmodern narrative strategies such as the altering of authentic testimonies and stylized documentaries with fantastic absurdity and alienating experiments, resulting in a bizarre merging of reality and imagination. It is, however, subject to discussion whether contemporary Slovak works on World War II significantly transform the Slovak stereotypical image of the Russian as brother and/or oppressor.

Contemporary Slovak writers place focus on more balanced images of Russian characters and realities. Perhaps it is a result of the traditional Slovak perception of the "big Russian soul" and its unbound, both positive and negative, emotional potential. It is, however, hard to accept today the naive claim by Tajovský: "What a coincidence in the soft, gullible nature of both the Russians and the Slovaks!"[64] It seems that the Slovak perception of Russia has changed to an empathetic attitude, as suggested by the subtitle of the recent travelogue by Boris Filan: "You Will Not Understand Russia Rationally."[65]

63 Robert Bielik (b. 1963) describes his visit to Russia in the mid-1980s in one chapter of his travelogue *Zanzibar* (2011). The author, a university student at the time, smuggled religious literature into the USSR. In Moscow, he met the Orthodox priest Alexander Menyo, who was shortly after the fall of communism brutally murdered with an axe. Bielik briefly discusses the roots of the evils of Bolshevism, as well as humankind.

64 From the sketch story *V ústrety* [Ahead] of July 4, 1918. In Tajovský, *Rozprávky z Ruska*, p. 214.

65 Boris Filan, *Vodka, duša, kaviár. Rusko rozumom nepochopíš* [Vodka, soul, caviar. You will not understand Russia rationally] (Bratislava, 2013). The subtitle is a citation from a poem by Fyodor Ivanovich Tiutchev.