The campus novel and university satire in recent Czech literature

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This article attempts to identify works of fiction in recent Czech literature that can be considered campus novels, more or less corresponding to the genre pattern that has taken shape in Anglophone literature since the middle of the last century. Aware that, in the Czech context, it is a genre that is relatively unproductive and marginal, the article introduces Czech fiction with university themes, considering the contribution of the comic and satirical modality as one of the defining features of the campus novel and pointing out possible inspirational influences, genetic and typological connections, or possible differences from the Anglophone tradition. It also attempts to highlight the thematic background of Czech campus novels and point out their possible thematic specificity.

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The campus novel genre has been developed in Anglo-American literature since the 1950s in works of fiction "whose action takes place mainly in a college or university, and which is mainly concerned with the lives of university professors and junior teachers [...] and to a lesser extent with their students, both undergraduate and postgraduate" (Lodge 2006, 1). While the campus novel has already been established as an autonomous and equally significant genre in the Anglophone milieu (see, for example, Quinn [2000] 2006, 63), in Czech cultural conditions, the campus novel is perceived rather as a marginal subgenre of humorous fiction (cf. Mocná 2004, 263–264) and a brief glance at more recent Czech literature suggests that fiction focused on academic life is not frequent. This is also why critical reflections on the Czech campus novel are sporadic and they mostly deal with separate chosen works of fiction only (cf., for example, Gwóźdź-Szewczenko 2019). Even more recent treatises researching campus novels within the broader context of Central European literature give little attention to the Czech literary field (Fuchs and Klepuszewski 2019, 47–109; Blashkiv 2024).[1]

The purpose of this study is therefore to present the Czech manifestations of the campus novel and, potentially, to identify their genetic, typological, and thematic specificity. We focus on Czech works of fiction thematizing the university or college as the main settings, more or less in comic or satirical mode, which is also considered typical for this genre (Lodge 2006 or Showalter 2005, 2–3).[2]

THE EMERGENCE OF A CAMPUS NOVEL IN THE CZECH CONTEXT

Some Anglo-American campus novels were introduced into the Czech cultural environment through translation soon after their publication – Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) was translated into Czech only five years after the original edition. At that time, the translation of this novel was not presented as a new and distinctive genre, but as a book which, with its satirical view of the provincial university and intellectual snobbery, originally developed the line of British humorous fiction, which had long enjoyed great popularity among Czech readers (Škvorecký 1959, 284–286). Similarly, the later translations of David Lodge's books *Changing Places* (1975; Czech trans. *Hostující profesoři*, 1980) and *Small World* (1984; Czech trans. *Svět je malý*, 1988) were not yet recognized as campus novels but as popular humorous fiction.[3]

The phrase "univerzitní román" (the Czech equivalent for the term "campus novel") as the designation of a new genre of Anglo-American origin was gradually incorporated into Czech terminology only towards the end of the 1980s. An important role was played by the new Czech literary-historical syntheses of English literature. The second volume of the book *Dějiny anglické literatury* (History of English literature) mentioned the works of David Lodge, noting that this author, together with Kingsley Amis and Malcolm Bradbury, "is considered the creator of the new genre of campus novel" (Stříbrný 1987, 748). The single-volume *Dějiny anglické literatury* (History of English literature) dealt with the issue of the campus novel much more extensively, including an outline of the social and cultural context of its emergence (Hilský 1988, 236–250). The author of the relevant passages was the professor of English literature and translator Martin Hilský, who later dedicated a separate chapter

to the campus novel in his monograph *Současný britský román* (The contemporary British novel, 1992). At the same time, however, he was obviously still aware that for the Czech recipient, it might be a phenomenon that is not yet established and conceptually anchored. Therefore, in the introduction to the chapter, he names it the "[s]o-called 'campus novel'" (1992, 104) and summarizes its defining features: the narration uses satirical or comic modality (cf. also Lodge 2006); the protagonist is a university teacher; the setting is usually a small provincial university; typical motifs include scandals, embarrassments, conflicts with superiors, and departmental meetings (Hilský 1992, 104). However, the phrase "univerzitní román" ceased to be a neologism in the Czech language very quickly: by 1992, the annotation on the back cover of *Jíst lidi je neslušné*, the Czech translation of Malcolm Bradbury's novel *Eating People is Wrong* (1959) used this term without quotation marks as a current genre characteristic.

During the last decade of the 20th century, the first efforts were also made to compare the genre of the campus novel with Czech literary production. An opportunity was created, for example, by the seminar "Obraz školy a učitele v české literatuře 20. století" (The image of the school and the teacher in 20th century Czech literature), which resulted in the publication of a collection of articles.[4] The possible existence of the Czech campus novel was addressed by Czech translator Jiří Rambousek in his paper "Obraz školy a učitele v díle českých spisovatelů" (The image of the school and the teacher in the works of Czech writers, 1999). Although Rambousek's survey shows that the attention of Czech writers has mainly focused on primary schools and high schools, three books are explicitly mentioned in the conclusion as representatives of the Czech campus novel (1999, 19): Jan Truneček's *Blažená alma mater uprostřed týdne* (Blissful alma mater in the middle of the week, 1984), Radoslav Nenadál's *Gaudeamus* (1994) and finally Miroslav Skála's *Moji dvojníci* (My doubles, 1994). The question of whether the campus novel even exists in contemporary Czech literature was raised by the literary historian Libor Pavera in his short essay "Český univerzitní román: absentující?" (The Czech campus novel: absent?, 1999). Pavera identifies a few Czech "works of fiction with university themes" (30–31) but does not directly classify them with the genre of the campus novel. He sees a difference primarily in the role of the university setting in the plot: in Czech fiction, this specific social sphere plays a marginal role, the university is often just a background, Pavera argues, to develop themes not strictly tied to academic ground (62–63). He sees the second difference in the target and intensity of the critical tone, noting that harsher assessments of the academic world are rather uncommon in Czech fiction (64). In any case, he concludes his brief reflection by stating that the current transformations of Czech university education offer enough themes that call for a new fictional rendering; thus, he indirectly suggests that the genre of the campus novel could soon be applied in its "pure" form in Czech literature as well (65). In a sense, our study is a response to Pavera's brief survey of Czech fiction with university themes and to his implicit expectations of the Czech campus novel. In the following sections, we will try to identify works of fiction that lean towards this genre; we will be particularly interested in the extent to which writers have effectively used this thematic potential

in the interval of approximately 30 years, i.e., whether "full-fledged" campus novels can be found in more recent Czech fiction.

PREDECESSORS OF THE CZECH CAMPUS NOVEL

As in Anglo-American literature, there were some works of fiction depicting the lives of university students in older Czech literature as well. These books presented students' experiences (often as the perennial contradiction between youthful ideals and the harsh reality of adulthood) on the basis of a generational, educational, or disillusionment novel, while the university environment itself is often a static and indistinct background, captured sporadically and more or less marginally.[5] Thus, such narratives lack the basic distinctive features of campus novels – in these cases, on the contrary, the university setting fundamentally and permanently influences the actions and thinking of the protagonists, who are primarily members of the academic staff (Lodge 2006 or Showalter 2005, 1–2). This thematic focus can be found – perhaps for the first time in Czech fiction – in the novel *Alma mater* (1933) by Anna Maria Tilschová, but the story of two surgeons who are also university teachers is not a satire of a medical faculty, but a psychological portrait of two diametrically opposed and distinctive personalities. The behaviors, feelings, and professional experiences of university teachers were later presented in Josef Galík's novel *Zkouška před termínem* (Examination before the term, 1975), whose storyline is set at the Faculty of Arts. The fact that a dispute between an ageing associate professor and students is mirrored in the thoughts of the characters (both teachers and students), and the narrative continuously delves into their inner selves seems to have led Pavera to the opinion that Galík's book is "[m]ore of a psychological novel or a story from contemporary life than a campus novel" (1999, 64). Furthermore, Galík's novel is different from the campus novel due to the lack of humor or satire. Although Anglophone campus novels do not spare parody, anecdote, caricature, irony, and self-irony, i.e., typical means of expression of the satirical mode (Fowler [1982] 1985, 110), the narrative of *Zkouška před termínem* is tinted (despite a few light-hearted moments from student life, whose authenticity is colored by slang expressions) with darker shades; especially when it turns out that behind the conflict between teacher and students there are old injustices, intensified at the beginning of the so-called "normalization" – after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact forces in 1968 – by the dismissal of those university teachers who were not loyal to the ruling regime.[6]

The official satire of the Czech postwar period avoided university-related topics because its focus was limited by the required engagement of the literature with the new, that is, socialist society.[7] Even in the more relaxed atmosphere of the 1960s, when direct and so-called "new satire" began to be preferred, Czech universities did not become a model for depictions in a satirical mode. This was probably because higher education, as a socially exposed and ideologically crucial sphere, had long operated under the direct control of the communist authorities, so that a critical ridicule of university operations would in fact be an attack not only on the academic nomenclature but also indirectly on the political system, both of which would have had fatal consequences for the potential author. It is also worth noting that in demo-

cratic Western countries the humanities provided a vivid background for the genesis of the campus novel, but in the Czech context the humanities were under the strictest governmental supervision (Holý 2009, 12–14).[8] Logically, the scheme of the campus novel could thus be applied more significantly and coherently in the production of Czech exile literature, particularly in one storyline of Josef Škvorecký's multilayered novel *Příběh inženýra lidských duší* (1977; Eng. trans. *The Engineer of Human Souls*, 1984). From the 1950s on, as an editor and translator of Anglophone literature, Škvorecký kept up to date with the thematic and genre trends in Anglo-American fiction (among other things, he wrote the afterword to the first Czech edition of the novel *Lucky Jim*). Later, Škvorecký projected his own experiences as a professor of literature at the University of Toronto into the story in which something of the conventions and themes of campus novels is incorporated: the peripeties of an unequal relationship with an attractive student or the difficulties with an annoying student are interspersed with metaliterary reflections, reproductions of student papers or inserted letters imitating various sociolects. The figure of a Central European exile, who carries with him an immediate (but in Canada unshareable) negative experience with the communist regime, could vaguely resemble the professor from Nabokov's novel *Pnin* (1955). However, the character traits and position of the protagonist Danny Smiřický in Škvorecký's novel are entirely different: he is an ironic witness and observer of the growing leftist revolutionary sentiment and sympathy for Marxism among western intellectuals in the mid-1970s, and the contempt of his insights into students and colleagues are derived from this paradoxical situation.[9]

In official Czech literature, the hypothetical predecessor of the campus novel can be found in the later years of the normalization period, when, in connection with the gradual changes in the social climate and the arrival of young generations of writers, novels thematizing the issues of various professions became more popular (see Janoušek et al. 2008, 500–505). Some of them also reflected – still, of course, within the tolerated boundaries of the censorship supervision at the time – the rigidity of the school system, its crippling uniformity, and the strained relations between teachers and pupils (504). Their authors mostly focused on lower education, but there were also a few books that presented a broader and more insightful focus on the university environment. It was foreshadowed in Petr Kudela's novel *Něžné sestřičky* (Tender sisters, 1982), which explores the relationship between a female student and an older associate professor. This love story also demonstrates a certain, albeit still cautious, inclination towards a satirical depiction of the university: the narrative includes, among other things, a parodically apocryphal lecture or a portrayal of the academic council, whose panoptical staff nepotistically selects a suitable candidate for a foreign internship.

DOMESTIC FILIATIONS OF COLLEGE SATIRE OF THE 1980S

One of the characters in Kudela's novel paraphrases a student anecdote, making a nominal reference to the work of the Czech humorist Jaroslav Žák (1906–1960), the author of highly popular books, especially *Študáci a kantoři* (Scholars and

schoolmasters, 1937) and *Cesta do hlubin študákovy duše* (Journey into the depths of the student's soul, 1938). These books are parodically stylized as learned treatises, presenting high school teaching in a mosaic of explanations, descriptions, characteristics, and example comic situations drawn from the eternal "duel" between teachers and students. Although Žák's literary activities were forcibly suppressed for a time in the postwar period, the poetics of his works persisted in the Czech cultural context, primarily due to two film comedies based on Žák's artworks.[10] Thus in the 1980s, attempts to adapt Žák's "high school humor" to a university setting can be observed in the official Czech literature.

Jaroslav Kohout's short story cycle *Kantorův notes* (Schoolmaster's notebook, 1986) relates to Žák's books directly by dedication to "schoolmasters and scholars". The stories draw on the cycle of university activities: entrance exams, lectures, meetings, disciplinary proceedings, graduations, etc. and acquire an anecdotal tone (sometimes with moral lessons) due to the mistakes, ignorance, clumsiness, or eccentricities of the typical "inhabitants" of the academic microcosm. Among the range of humorous works in the spirit of Žák's stories about the interactions between students and teachers, one can also include Miroslav Jandovský's short story collection *Amulety* (Amulets, 1981), in which the university world is connected to the similarly peculiar world of art (the domain of the comically oddball heroes is musicology). Jandovský's book also features an intertextual reference that indicates an inherent fusion of the domestic tradition of "high school humor" and a foreign source of inspiration: the hero of the opening short story has the novel *Lucky Jim* in his library.

Jan Truneček's *Blažená alma mater uprostřed týdne* (1984) similarly references the humorous tradition of Jaroslav Žák – the annotation on the bookmark explicitly addresses the book to "scholars and schoolmasters". As noted above, Truneček's work of fiction has been cited as one of the examples of the Czech campus novel (see Rambousek 1999, 19). Pavera, however, describes the same book as science fiction with the college serving merely as a backdrop (1999, 63). The first assessment, however, is more fitting: the apparently parodic story of an associate professor who accidentally "brings to life" a perfect woman through mathematical theoretical constructions serves as a fictional framework for subtly ironic scenes set at the university. The storyline features anecdotal accounts of lectures, seminars, thesis defenses, or departmental meetings, which is, after all, the very topos of the campus novel (Hilský 1992, 104). The "excursions" depicting the grotesque lives and professional misadventures of some of the actors carry a satirical tone.

THE CAMPUS NOVEL AS A RECKONING WITH THE COMMUNIST PAST

After the collapse of the state socialist regime in 1989, works of fiction reflecting on the pre-November era began to emerge relatively quickly in Czech literature in order to bear witness to life under non-freedom with minimal distance and without censorship restrictions. Radoslav Nenadál's book *Gaudeamus* (1994) casts a particularly sharp critical light on the politicized situation in Czech universities (the author, as an English scholar and translator, was undoubtedly familiar with Anglophone

campus novels). Nenadál's novel portrays an obscure and unscrupulous associate professor of aesthetics who gradually gains power within the faculty during the post-war decades. She employs intrigue, slander, and denunciations to achieve this, while hypocritically justifying the destruction of innocent lives by fighting in the name of communism. Although the book can be viewed as both a pamphlet and a satire (Rambousek 1999, 19), it is possible that many of the scenes, appearing bizarre or absurd from the current perspective, are not driven by satirical hyperbole, but by a chillingly authentic portrayal of the protagonist's character, warped by complexes, vindictiveness, resentment, and an intoxication of power.

On the other hand, Miroslav Skála's book *Moji dvojníci* (1994) occupies a lighter, downright humorous position of university satire. Although it appeared in book form in the same year as Nenadál's novel, it is probably the first work of fiction to reflect on pre-November events in universities, as Skála's text was already published in 1991 as a serial in a newspaper. The story of an unambitious young man who, through his own recklessness and coincidence, finds himself in various precarious situations during his studies, culminates in a presentation where he deliberately expresses nonconformist views. The key image of the university behind the scenes (according to several indications, modelled after the Faculty of Arts in Brno) features several grotesque situations, e.g. when it is revealed that the psychology department keeps an old monkey as a research assistant.

Skála's book represents works of fiction that provide a satirical retrospective through the eyes of students – let us remind that many critics do not classify narratives with student protagonists as campus novels. However, in Czech fiction, the point of view of the young generation (unburdened by the past as much) is quite often the basis for satirical or comic portrayals of education during the state socialist era,[11] with more or less strong emphasis on the political background. For example, the story of the novel *Studovali práva* (They studied law, 2010) by the authors Petr Ritter and Zdeněk Šťastný is a grotesque variation on the theme of student experiences, encompassing dormitory parties, emotional and erotic adventures, visiting lectures and pubs, complicated preparation for exams, or humorous interactions with teachers of various character types. At the same time, however, the background of the humorous scenes is a harsh recollection of the emerging "normalization" with unfolding prohibitions and repressions significantly affecting the functioning of the faculty (enforced personnel changes and alterations to the forms and content of teaching, subject to the growing ideological pressure). On the contrary, the action of Petr Luňák and Marek Pečenka's novel *Hrdinové* (The heroes, 2014) is set at the end of the late socialist era, a few months before the revolution in 1989. The title, intertextually replicating the title of Josef Škvorecký's well-known novel *Zbabělci* (The cowards, 1958), is, of course, meant ironically. Although the protagonist, a history student, participates in risky anti-communist activities, he does so mainly to impress girls, much like the hero of Škvorecký's novel. In any case, passivity and opportunism dominate among most teachers and students, so that the faculty is inertly stuck in ideological grooves. The protagonist's home department, in particular, is an almost impregnable communist stronghold. The bitter comedy, coupled with

a slightly oppressive absurdity characteristic of this university farce (see the oxymoron in the subtitle "A humoristic novel without a joke"[12]), is based on two parallel storylines: the protagonist is reluctantly drawn into the power schemes of the department head, while simultaneously being persecuted and blackmailed by an student functionary.

"THE 1990S" THROUGH THE LENS OF A CAMPUS NOVEL

The sequel to the novel *Hrdinové*, ironically titled *Učenci* (The savants, 2019) was written by Petr Luňák alone and published five years later. The story is once again set in a university institute, but this time takes place after 1989, when Czech higher education was undergoing fundamental changes. Alongside the restoration of academic freedoms and integration into international academic networks, universities also faced new challenges: personnel restructuring, redefining their social role, the rise of information technology, and, above all, the economic transformation, which meant unstable financing for the public sector. In these turbulent times, the director of the institute where Luňák's protagonist works as a researcher and teacher seeks to preserve his academic position at all costs, thus favoring spineless subordinates and various crooks with "profitable" projects. Therefore, Luňák's protagonist chooses to take advantage of a scholarship opportunity in the United States, motivated even more strongly by the chance to find an old student love there. The hero's confrontation with the bizarre reality of American universities echoes Lodge's famous novel *Changing Places*, and this intertextual connection is further resonant by the way Luňák's protagonist recounts his overseas experiences – the story, which also includes a mockery of the intellectual "elites" of the Czech exile community or a love story with an ironic happy ending, is partly presented as a collage of letters, newspaper articles, or other "documents".

Luňák's novel supports Pavera's implicit assumption that the transformation of our higher education in the last decade of the last century could serve as a strong impetus for the genesis of the Czech campus novel in British style. After all, the Czech university reality of the 1990s is in some ways remotely reminiscent of the postwar changes in the Anglo-American university system, from which the genre of the campus novel emerged (cf. Lodge 2006 or Showalter 2005, 1–2). In particular, the decentralization and democratization of the academic sphere and its accessibility to a broader range of applicants reveal certain analogies. Before November 1989, university studies and academic work were accessible only to a select, politically reliable few; now universities have opened up to virtually all those who are at least somewhat competent, regardless of background. New universities and colleges (public and private), as well as new faculties began to emerge, the content and structure of the fields offered changed, and the range of courses expanded. This led not only to a rapid increase in the number of university students, but also to special situations in individual departments: some of the retired teachers still remained in their former positions, while experts who had been dismissed for political reasons during state socialism returned to the departments, and a new generation of educators with a different mentality, energy, and attitude joined the faculties as well.

Perhaps the first novel reflecting the political and social changes that affect universities was Jiří Fanta's book *Univerzita* (2007). The narrative unfolds through parallel storylines, combining the student's and teacher's point of view, but, in consequence, it is a soberly toned critical fiction about illegal machinations behind the scenes, similar to Michal Sýkora's detective novel *Modré stíny* (Blue shadows, 2013), rather than a campus novel in the traditional sense (Gwóźdź-Szewczenko 2019, 175–176). A much stronger intensity and a higher proportion of satirical tone is found in Stanislav Komárek's novel *Mandaríni* (Mandarins, 2007), which examines the post-November transformations of Czech universities through the perspective of an ageing scholar. This protagonist watches with regret and nostalgia as all the joys of academic life in the early 1990s quickly and irreversibly fade away. The story describes the protagonist's ten-year progress through the academic hierarchy at the fictional Ferdinand University, which he joins shortly after the Velvet Revolution. In the euphoric atmosphere of the time, the events at the newly established faculty resemble a joyful celebration: "Schools had only a bare minimum of money at that time, but complete freedom in what they did and lectured" (Komárek 2007, 151). However, over time, the university gradually transforms into a bureaucratic and technocratic machine that, by prioritizing performance and profit, once again subtly suppresses academic freedom. Komárek's protagonist gradually realizes that his existence is threatened under the new conditions, as he belongs to the last of the "academic mandarins", that is, a community of oddballs who resist the fetishization of money and prefer to engage in largely impractical pursuits within the seclusion of their offices (at other times the sarcastic narrator likens them to deep-sea fish). The hyperbole then continuously determines not only the protagonist's academic journey (in critical moments, he repeatedly secures his success with the aid of a magical potion made from a Chinese mushroom), but also, fittingly, the fate of his faculty: on the threshold of the new millennium, it is relocated from Prague to a modern campus designed as a communist labor camp at the investor's request. However, the totalitarian spirit of this perverse architecture soon begins to influence the management and internal workings of the faculty.

The depiction of a campus in the conclusion of Komárek's book is an exception in the Czech literature. The reason is simple. Although campuses as spatially unified university designs are occasionally developed in the Czech Republic (often driven by the aim of repurposing brownfields), most contemporary Czech universities and colleges remain institutions integrated into urban anatomy, with individual teaching spaces, administrative buildings, and accommodation capacities typically scattered across various city locations, sometimes at considerable distances from one another (Blashkiv 2024, 464–465). Some critics suggest that the absence of a campus tradition may explain the limited production of campus novels in a given national literature: "It is mainly because universities are not usually designed in this particular way in the rest of the world that campus novels have rarely occurred in other countries" (Anténe 2015, 6). Nevertheless, even in Czech campus novels, there is a conception of the setting as a closed, isolated microcosm with a distinct climate, with its own rituals and rules. This is exactly what the narrator of Komárek's novel describes:

"The university is like a small town in a big city" (2007, 120). In essence, the traditional chronotope of Anglo-American campus novels is substituted by localizations with analogous characteristics: faculties, institutes, or departments typically serve as the central settings of "campus narratives" in Czech works of fiction (the classical topos of the provincial university is sometimes ironically transformed into a stereotypical disdain for schools outside of Prague: the protagonist of Skála's book has no chance of being admitted to Charles University, so he starts studying in Brno, that is, at a "smaller rural university"; 2010, 23).

The result of the often ill-considered and nonconceptual transformations of the university system in the post-Soviet era is also satirically depicted by Jan Truneček in his book *Blažená alma mater na prahu třetího tisíciletí aneb aplikovaná akademiologie* (The blessed alma mater on the threshold of the third millennium or Applied academiology, 2010). The setting is a fictitious department that is no longer subject to political influence, but is under immense economic and administrative pressure from the university establishment. The academic workplace thus becomes a battleground where the particular power and financial interests of individuals and various opinion groups clash in meetings, consultations, conferences, advocacy, project activities, etc. Grotesque snapshots of the department's goings-on are accompanied by explanatory passages that ironically bring the university operation closer to the uninitiated reader and shedding light on the timeless, universal mechanisms of the struggle for power. A panoptic parade of typical characters (an autocratic superior, an arrogant colleague, an incompetent teacher, a joker-academic, an eccentric scientist, an attractive PhD student, etc.), framed in Truneček's book by a parodic play on science (*applied academiology*), again evokes the similarly constructed "systematics" of characters in Jaroslav Žák's books, where an important building block of the comic element was, among other things, the use of nicknames that emphasized the caricatured nature of the school ensemble. The same applies to Truneček's, Komárek's, or Luňák's works – many of the characters have comical surnames or are given ridiculous "telling" nicknames. With the same satirical intent, academic discourse is frequently parodied in these books, infiltrated with the expressive and stylistic mannerisms of bureaucratic newspeak (for example, Komárek's or Truneček's comical overuse of abbreviations).

"LEAKING" OF CAMPUS NOVEL IN CONTEMPORARY CZECH FICTION

The books by Petr Luňák, Jan Truneček, or Stanislav Komárek can be considered genuine campus novels. However, such a genre profile cannot and should not be defined categorically or comprehensively, especially since the campus novel in particular is downright supportive of postmodern creative practices (David Lodge's books serve as an excellent example). In addition to irony, self-reflexivity, layers of meaning, etc., campus novels are often, and intentionally, based on other works (cf. Showalter 2005, 7) and serve as structural "vehicles" of genre-hybrid texts. The structure of the campus novel easily absorbs the narrative frameworks and motifs of the romance, comic, social, psychological, adventure, or philosophi-

cal novel; expository, interpretive, or essayistic passages are seamlessly embedded within the university setting. This is also significant for Czech campus novels. For example, Luňák's book *Učenci* can be read as a love story, as a sarcastic "sociological" exploration of Czech post-revolutionary reality, or in its subtext as a reflection on fateful coincidences in the lives of individuals and society. Komárek's *Mandaríni* is a comparable amalgam (as indicated in its subtitle *Nepravidelný román* – Irregular novel). On the contrary, the thematic and narrative elements of the campus novel can seamlessly integrate into the structure of another genre, as evidenced by Colin Dexter's "campus detective novels", which according to the literary scholar Michal Sýkora "often approach the British tradition of campus novels" (2012, 125) with their satirical view of the academic world. Sýkora employs such subgenre crossovers in his own work, frequently offering critical commentary on contemporary university events. Most recently in 2022, as co-writer of the script for the television crime series *Pozadí událostí* (Behind the curtain, dir. by Jan Hřebejk), in which the crime and its investigation are set within an unspecified faculty of arts. This setting allowed the authors to incorporate into the classic detective plot a theme that has long been addressed in some foreign campus novels, namely the potential danger of insensitive assertion of political correctness and its misuse (cf. Anténe 2015, 119–140). In *Pozadí událostí*, this negative tendency is personified – in authors' hyperbolic perspective – by the caricature of a dictatorial dean who, hypocritically cloaking herself in a radical programme to enforce strict rules for a "safe faculty", manipulates, coerces, and controls through intrigue.[13]

The syncretic nature of the campus novel and its constant lean toward popular fiction contribute to the marginalization of this genre in a Czech literary context. Even two Czech cross-sectional and canonical perspectives on Czech post-Soviet literature fail to acknowledge the genre of the campus novel, and the works of fiction discussed in this article are overlooked (see Hruška et al. 2008; Fialová 2014).[14] The persistent "invisibility" of Czech campus novels is also indirectly evidenced by the title of a brief announcement about the publication of Anna Cima's novel *Probudím se na Šibuji* (I wake up at Shibuya, 2018). The title of the announcement – *Univerzitní román prosakuje do české literatury* (The campus novel leaks into Czech literature; Zavřelová 2018) – gives the false impression that this genre has only recently emerged in Czech fiction.[15] However, as this article has also shown, its "leakage" can be referred to in connection with Škvorecký's 1977 novel *Příběh inženýra lidských duší*. Even if we focus only on officially published Czech literature, then it is clear that already in the first half of the 1980s several works of fiction have been forming that are typologically close to this genre.

CONCLUSION

The intention of this article was to make the Czech campus novel more visible, perhaps even to some extent, to emancipate it in a literary-historical context. Even a brief and incomplete inventory of Czech fiction with university themes reveals that the campus novel has gradually taken hold in Czech literature, although it has not gained (and probably never will gain) such a stable and productive position as

it has in Anglo-American literatures. David Lodge explains the lower productivity of the European campus novel in part by stating that "European academics are more concerned about preserving their professional dignity than their equivalents in Britain and America" (2006). It is not certain whether this still applies to younger generations of contemporary Czech university teachers. In any case, their professional environment remains – despite all sociocultural changes – relatively closed and exclusive, so any potential satirical depiction of it can only be fully "appreciated" by a small group of "insider" recipients with the same experience (i.e., again predominantly academics). Thus, the satirical depiction of the Czech academic world often becomes only one component of comic stories about the lives of university students. However, several works in Czech fiction after 1989 can be identified that are fully comparable to the campus novel of Anglo-American provenance: they focus on the academic staff, the intensity of the satirical modality in them is increasing, and the range of pilloried phenomena is widening. The poetics of the Czech manifestations of campus novel are genetically influenced not only by Anglo-American campus novels, but simultaneously by older domestic sources of "high school humor". The anecdotalism is primarily linked to the characters of strange, distracted, impractical teachers/scholars; the edge of the satire is not very sharp and aims rather at the partial ills of contemporary academic activity (abuse of nepotism, stereotypes of activities, interpersonal relations, etc.).

In conclusion, it can be stated that two thematic focal points emerge as a certain specificity of the Czech campus novel. The first is the functioning of universities under the state socialist regime, when teaching and research activities were subject (to varying degrees) to permissible schemes; the second focus is the transformation of the university system in the 1990s, when the remnants of the political straitjacket were gradually replaced by an overgrown bureaucratic apparatus and the aspect of financial profit. In the end, the promotion of correctness at the expense of academic freedoms appears to be a new theme with literary potential. The common thematic denominator is a grotesque anamnesis of the fulfilment of power ambitions, while the specific circumstances of the struggle for power in academia change over time, but its general motives, principles, and mechanisms remain the same.

NOTES

[1] Recently, of course, more comprehensive studies on the campus novel have also been produced in the Czech Republic, but these works (often of a qualifying purpose) still focus mainly on foreign production. For example, Petr Anténe's *Campus Novel Variations* (2015) chronologically compares the thematic modifications of English and American campus novels.

[2] The resources of the research infrastructure Czech Literary Bibliography – https://clb.ucl.cas.cz/ (ORJ code: 90243), and the resources of the Czech-Slovak Film Database – https://www.csfd.cz – were used in this study.

[3] Both of Lodge's books mentioned above were included in an edition called "Čtení na dovolenou" (Reading on holiday) by the publishing house Odeon. Even in more recent Czech historiography,

David Lodge is still classified as an author of "aesthetically less demanding works" (Janoušek et al. 2008, 128).

[4] The seminar was organized by the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University in Brno on 24 October 1996.

[5] Examples include Vilém Mrštík's novel of disillusionment *Santa Lucia* (1893) or A. C. Nor's later novel *Jedno pokolení* (One generation, 1931), whose titular collective protagonist is a "lost" generation of students growing up during World War I.

[6] "Normalization" originally referred to the process of restoring a "normal" state of society, that is, the reassertion of communist power after the violent suppression of reform efforts in 1968. Later, the term became a figurative name for a given historical period (1969–1989) when everyday life was determined by controlling, restrictive, and repressive mechanisms.

[7] After 1948, the concept of "socialist satire" emerged in the Czech fiction, directed against the enemies of socialism. Later, the so-called "communal satire" emerged, moderately beating out the wrongs in everyday life.

[8] Despite this, or rather because of it, antiregime resistance was growing among students, which was publicly manifested first in the late 1960s, during the failed attempt to democratize society, and again 20 years later, when the violent suppression of student demonstrations sparked the fall of the communist regime.

[9] Irony, or rather self-irony, can be seen in the title of the novel, which refers with disdain to the dictator J. V. Stalin's public demand that writers become "engineers of human souls".

[10] Film comedies *Škola základ života* (School is the foundation of life, 1938) and *Cesta do hlubin študákovy duše* (Journey into the depth of the student's soul, 1939) are still timeless cult movies today.

[11] This was already applied in the very popular film *Jak básníci přicházejí o iluze* (How poets lose their illusions, 1984; the screenplay was adapted by the humorist Ladislav Pecháček into the eponymous novella in 1991). Its protagonist, a young amateur poet, enters his first year of faculty of medicine in Prague, and he is soon swept up in a picaresque series of romantic entanglements, social faux pas, student hardships, and clashes with tricky lecturers.

[12] Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Czech are by the present author.

[13] The screenwriters Michal Sýkora and Petr Jarchovský, as well as the director Jan Hřebejk, are also university teachers, so it can be assumed that – like the authors of campus novels – they have projected their personal professional experience, albeit certainly modified by genre conventions, into this miniseries. Czech film critics had mixed reactions to this miniseries, as reflected in contradictory (mostly negative) reviews (see, for example, Fischer 2022).

[14] The marginalization of the campus novel can be seen even in contemporary Czech genre studies: Pavel Šidák's book *Úvod do studia genologie* (Introduction to the study of genre [genology], 2013) does not even use the phrase "campus novel" at all, although the author otherwise links his concept of genre landscape with several novel variants.

[15] However, the story of a student who searches for the fate of a mysterious Japanese writer has little in common with a campus novel (except perhaps that the storyline is marginally set in a Prague Faculty of Arts and the text contains several literary-theoretical reflections).

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