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The Global Campus: Academic Fiction in World Literature

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The global campus: Academic fiction in world literature

OKSANA BLASHKIV

In university history, the turn of the 21st century was marked by several books that proclaimed its changing role, rapid decay, and even ruin. The institution which had guaranteed the continuity of education since the 12th century, which was one of the pillars and powers of Western civilization for centuries, which guarded nation-states and national cultures in the 19th century, with the coming of globalization showed evidence of a deep crisis or a transition phase revealing the need of rethinking, redefinition, and reform. The condition of the university at different stages of its development was the focus of attention of philosophers, historians, sociologists, cultural theorists, writers, and literary scholars. After centuries of recording annals of the university in literary texts, 19th-century literature in English elaborated the genre of the campus novel, which despite all odds preserved its popularity through the 20th century into the present. In recent years, literary studies have moved beyond the Anglo-American tradition of the campus novel into examining non-Anglophone literatures around the world.

The topic of this issue of WORLD LITERATURE STUDIES provides a unique opportunity to present non-Anglophone campus fiction and, consequently, to view the literary representation of higher education in its plurality and diversity. In their choices, the authors focus on contemporary Ukrainian, Swedish, Spanish, Slovak, Romanian, Polish, German, Czech, Bulgarian, and American literature, providing comparative global/transatlantic and national/local perspectives on the university and the ways it is perceived in different cultural contexts. Simultaneously, the authors have attempted to delineate a series of idiosyncratic characteristics of the campus/academic novel within a specific national literary tradition, while drawing parallels with the best-known case, the Anglo-American subgenre. The issue places principal emphasis on the transatlantic perspective on campus fiction comparing literature written in English and contemporary European literature. In the context of world literature, the articles highlight the diversity of campus fiction, thus widening the discussion about the global campus and enriching it with the topics of national/local history and cultural memory, distinctive perspectives on multilingualism and hybrid identities, and above all, the past and present of the university that defines its future.

Globalism, then and now: The rise of international neoliberalism and the academic novel

MERRITT MOSELEY

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Globalism, then and now: The rise of international neoliberalism and the academic novel

Neoliberalism. Managerialism. Privatization. Academic novel. Faculty status.

This article uses a longitudinal comparison to trace the development in higher education from an era of the "global campus" to a more fraught and harsher academic climate and relates it to the rise, beginning in the 1970s, of neoliberalism as a governing philosophy in the West. Examples from mostly Anglophone novels illustrate this change into a worldwide neoliberalism that is the new globalism and its effects in academia; the presence of neoliberalism in societies beyond the US and UK leads to speculation on its likely appearance in future academic novels.

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In one of the best-known campus novels, David Lodge's *Small World* (1984), the professor Morris Zapp (based on the real-life literary theorist Stanley Fish) chortles: "The world is a global campus, Hilary, you'd better believe it. The American Express card has replaced the library pass" (64). As the subtitle of the novel, "An Academic Romance", suggests, a more useful term for this genre is the academic novel, since Zapp's point here is the abolition of the traditional campus, as he insists elsewhere: "the day of the individual campus has passed. It belongs to an obsolete technology – railways and the printing press" (43). Technology has allowed for academic globalization, for which Zapp is a notable spokesperson: "As long as you have access to a telephone, a Xerox machine, and a conference grant fund, you're OK, you're plugged into the only university that really matters – the global campus" (44).[1] However, this development is part of a long period of university expansion and support that lasted in the US and the UK from shortly after the World War II until around 1980, so Zapp is actually celebrating a world which, though he has not noticed it yet, is vanishing around him.

Earl Rovit's memoir-essay in the *Sewanee Review* shows how agreeable that world was for its participants:

> This [i.e. the 1960s] was truly a golden age for anyone who would "gladly teche and gladly lerne". Sputnik led to the National Defense Act which, as a by-product, channeled rivers of money and resources into higher education. Our salaries rose gradually; our options for publication and more prestigious jobs proliferated; and – for a short time – pursuit of excellence in the humanities seemed to be compatible with the larger American materialistic enterprise. (2009, 88)

These good times, Rovit states, were not just for domestic consumption:

> As academic resources burgeoned and discretionary funds grew, there was a proliferation of grants, conferences, short-term workshops, summer guest lectureships, and opportunities to teach abroad, practicing what I suppose would now be contemptuously called cultural imperialism, but which concomitantly allowed us to meet – and generally like – the colleagues whom we knew only from their publications. (89)

Global experience – traveling the world, with travel costs provided courtesy of the university, or the government – is an important perquisite of higher education teaching for Rovit as well as Zapp (and the many other professors criss-crossing the globe in *Small World*).

It is important to note two points about Zapp's enthusiasm for academic globalism. One is its belatedness, not just because of the quaint idea that a Xerox machine is the cutting edge technology to shrink the globe, but more importantly because the era of widespread enthusiasm for higher education, particularly in the humanities, and the healthy funding that accompanied it, had already, by 1984, started to curdle in the United States and the United Kingdom. The other is the unacknowledged inequality and privilege of the globalism he celebrates. Zapp is, or aspires to be, the highest-paid university professor in the world, and he is on faculty at a wealthy research university. He considers the possession of an apparently limitless travel fund something like having access to a telephone. But even in his heyday – and even in the prosperous West (no African or Latin American professors seem to intersect

on the global campus in *Small World*), there were haves and have-nots. A recent denunciation of academic conferences identified them as one of the "things winners like so much they insist everybody must like them. […] [W]inners are people with academic jobs that pay a living wage, people with tenure, people with power over academic decision-making, people who sit on hiring committees and on promotion & tenure committees, people with travel budgets" (Cheney 2017, n.p.). The privileged – academic figures like Siegfried von Turpitz and Fulvia Morgana, or Morris Zapp and Philip Swallow's real-life counterparts Stanley Fish and David Lodge – oversaw a global system that was enjoyed mostly by a small, privileged class. Another fictional example of this academic globalism is David Damrosch's oddly semi-fictional 2000 novel *Meetings of the Mind*, which consists largely of conference papers written by real people who are credited as co-authors. Four friendly colleagues who enjoy getting together and debating various points of literary and philosophical theory do so by arranging to travel the world, from Tokyo to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and appear on arranged panels at academic conferences where they carry on their conversation for the benefit, it seems, mostly of themselves but presumably at the expense of their home universities.

What led to the decline of this system? Governments changed, not only the persons and parties who led them, but the assumptions that drove them. Countries in the West moved away from the philosophies under which they had operated through most of the 20th century and adopted what Rosa Toliou names "a new management model of the capitalist economy" (2007, 51). She identifies its "main characteristics" as "less state control and domination of the market, while at an ideological level are expressed through the ideas of monetarism and neoliberalism. The most distinctive examples of the new model were introduced in the USA and the UK during the Reagan and Thatcher governance accordingly" (51). Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in the UK in 1979; Ronald Reagan was elected US president in the following year and inaugurated in 1981. Toliou's term "neoliberalism" is the key to the new global campus; such a dramatic change in social and economic policy must be reflected in the university sector and, as we shall see, in the academic novel.

Neoliberalism has been variously defined, but Beth Mintz offers a succinct summary: "It includes a belief in the following: the efficiency of the free market and the deregulation and privatization of the public sector that markets require; tax reduction; abandoning the welfare state; and replacing the notion of the public good with a personal responsibility for one's own welfare" (2021, n.p.). That applies to governments generally. It is obvious how tax reduction, for instance, will impact, i.e. financially starve, publicly funded institutions of higher education. But depriving colleges and universities of public support is a corollary, as well, of a new idea of the student: "Neoliberal thought considers higher education a financial investment for students, and it assumes that colleges and universities should compete for customers, just like any other sector" (2023, n.p.). The student as customer, shopping at the diploma supermarket and spending her or his own money, very often borrowed, is the key symbolic figure in this new dispensation. Other key features of the neoliberal regime in higher education, as summed up by Jeffrey Williams, are

> the push for research to bring in corporate funds or to lead directly to commercial patents, the morphing of administration to a CEO class detached rather than arising from faculty, the casualization of a majority of faculty in part-time, adjunct, or term positions, and the pressure on students, working long hours as well as taking loans to pay tuition. (2013, n.p.)

If one ponders the neoliberal emphases on commercially viable research and on higher education as workforce preparation, the marginalization, and sometimes elimination, of the humanities and liberal education generally are predictable.

The following article will take two approaches to exploring neoliberalism as the new globalism – a globalism that, unlike the older one, does not unite academics but divides them as fierce competitors for market goods. One is an attempt to treat its features in more detail, citing their presence in academic novels, mostly but not exclusively Anglo-American (which is probably inevitable, since as Rose Toliou suggests, these two cultures were the breeding grounds for global neoliberalism). The other is to show the spread of this ideology into other countries and other universities and, one might predict, the academic fiction of other national literatures.

NEOLIBERAL FEATURES

Marketization

As Stefan Collini, one of the most astute (and melancholy) observers of trends in higher education, writes: "'Marketisation' isn't just a swear-word used by critics of the changes: it is official doctrine that students are to be treated as consumers and universities as businesses competing for their custom" (2018).[2] Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades agree:

> Students are primarily seen as revenue producers, as tuition monies account for increasing shares of public college and university expenditures. […] Although academic managers (administrators above the level of department heads) refer to students as customers, the real customers are the corporations that employ the institutions' "products". (2000, 74)

As the Vice Chancellor declares in Christopher James Rhodes's *University Shambles*: "'We don't have students; we have customers!' Stirling George's fist smacked the table, and the oak murmured back affirmatively. […] 'Our role is teaching: customer supply, I prefer to call it!'" (2009, 4) Having defined students as customers renders the university a retail establishment. In Frank Parkin's *The Mind and Body Shop*, the vice chancellor, worried about the bottom line of the philosophy department – for all elements of the university are supposed to show a profit or at least break even – finally suggests that the department open a retail shop. Acknowledging that it is in the middle of the town's red-light district, he goes on:

> "Yes, it's a prime site. You need to be in the thick of things, obviously. It's no good being stuck out in the suburbs, is it?" […] That little shop was a first-class commercial proposition; or would have been if it weren't such a fire hazard. "This really is your last chance, Hambro," he called out as he clambered up a mound of building rubble and slithered down the other side on all fours. "You've had every opportunity. If you bungle this one it'll be curtains for Philosophy." (1987, 67)

That Philosophy ends up running a brothel – profitably, which is what counts in the new system – is a triumph for the new marketization. As Stefan Collini laments: "Marketisation hollows out institutions from the inside so that they become unable to conceptualize their own activities in terms other than those of the dominant economic dogma" (2018).

Privatization

A corollary or prime condition for marketization is privatization. Rose Toliou cites "the principles of neoliberalism, where everything is seen as a possible source for profit" (2007, 55). Malcolm Bradbury's *Cuts* expatiates on the new goal: the Vice-Chancellor

> was himself an enthusiastic privatiser or privateer, and that summer of 1986 "privatization" was, along with "buzz-word", the great buzz-word. For a year or more he had been thriving on all sorts of novel ideas of this kind, encouraging, for example, sponsored tutorials, so that lecturers now discussed the poems of Catullus or mathematical equations wearing teeshirts and little caps that said on them "Boots" or "Babycham". In all the corridors now, there were big notices saying, "The faculty in this university all wear Marks and Spencers underwear". (1987, 59–60)

Not surprisingly, the university in *The Mind and Body Shop* has made similar improvements: "Hambro's eyes closed in despondency. Something, somewhere, had gone badly wrong with his grip upon the world. It had never been part of his life's plan to sell philosophy from door to door, or to serve behind the counter of a basement shop, or to wear the brand name of a pet food across the back of his MA gown" (Parkin 1987, 85). In Lars Iyer's *Exodus*, two despairing philosophers worry about what will become of the university, arguing (fruitlessly) against "capitalism in the university, against the private partners of the university" (2012, 250). They agonize over what to them is the apocalyptic state of university education: "They're simply going to *marketise education*, W. says. They're simply going to turn the university over to the free market, just as they are turning all sectors of the public services over to the free market. They're going to submit philosophy to the *forces of capitalism*" (15). And what will this mean for the philosophers? "What will happen to us, in the *new university*? Will we become *learning facilitators*, taking our students through the Microsoft philosophy package? Will we become *virtual guides* in the *Philosophy-World*™ learning environment?" (61)

Another aspect of that marketization, in addition to homologizing the university and the retail store, is what Jeffrey Williams noted: "the push for research to bring in corporate funds". *University Shambles* demonstrates the effect of this demand:

> Staff were expected to apply for more grants, and for bigger grants, even though success in winning them was accordingly less likely; it was a gamble, but there was no other way. Sir Malcolm had to balance the books; that was the job he'd been hired for. He then unsheathed the sword of Damocles. All departments that scored below a grade 4 in the RAE[3] would be closed forthwith, especially those running expensive science subjects. (Rhodes 2009, 152)

Parkin supplies a satirical account of sponsored research:

> "I've just completed a project designed to test the limits of human psychological endurance."
> "Ah. Good, good. Who funded it, the Marine Commando?"
> "The Post Office. They wanted an economy job, so I had to use hens." (1987, 37)

Managerialism

Novelists have been quick to note the shift toward a "managerial" approach to academic administration. One dispirited faculty member in Rhodes's *University Shambles*, faced with the university's "new corporate structure" sums it up as "top-heavy management, run by managers, not academics. People who have no idea and no subject knowledge. Anyone could do their job and do it better, too; but none of them could do ours! And yet they treat us like shit!" (2009, 165) The supervisor of Philosophy in *Exodus* is a "manager". Jeffrey J. Williams identifies this important change: "In short, professors no longer constitute the core of the university, as the classic image typically has it: they are more commonly service providers for hire, with the central figures being the managers of the academic multiplex who assure the experience of the student consumer" (2013, n.p). Likewise Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades explain the new terminology, referring to "academic managers (administrators above the level of department heads)" (2000, 74). Beth Mintz links managerialism with the image of the university as a business – not a manufacturing company, much less a nonprofit enterprise, but a store selling degrees – competing with other businesses to attract student customers. The consequences of universities competing for students include expanded spending on student services and the growth in numbers of administrators.

> This contributes to the decline in instructional spending as a percentage of total expenses in both the public and private (non-profit) sectors which, in 2017–2018, accounted for 27% and 31% of four-year school budgets, respectively. Add to this nearly a half a billion dollars spent on advertising each year, and the role of competition and marketing in tuition escalation becomes clearer. (2021, n.p.)

Undoubtedly those advertising dollars are directed by managers, often in what is now proudly called the marketing department.

Audit culture

"The entirely legitimate demand that universities be accountable to society," writes Stefan Collini, "has, in conjunction with certain other features of the contemporary political climate, resulted in the growth of a particular kind of audit culture that is having very damaging unintended consequences" (2017, 36). One sort of audit is the UK's Research Assessment Exercise, fear of which drives most of the university's activities in *University Shambles*. Assigning a number to a university's research success permits a ranking system which, as Collini sadly declares, "has come to dominate academic life, from appointments, promotions, choice of research topics and so on to university strategies, marketing and publicity" (149). Chris Lorenz explains the use of another audit scheme, European Credit Transfer System points (strict-

ly speaking, simply a measure of contact hours required in a course): the difficulty in defining educational outputs and assessing their quality is met "by defining the product of education as qualification – expressed in terms of ECTS points and their accumulation into diplomas. The quality of the education is then defined as the quantitative efficiency with which these qualifications are produced" (2012, 621).

Unable to define quality, either of research or teaching, managers seek to count proxies, in order to reach some number. In the UK, Collini explains almost incredulously, numerical grades are assigned on teaching quality: "But the metrics by which teaching quality is measured are – I am not making this up – the employment record of graduates, scores on the widely derided National Student Survey, and 'retention rates' (i.e. how few students drop out)" (2018, n.p.). The obsession with metrics both deforms what education means and degrades faculty; as Christopher G. Robbins explains, "Seeing faculty as the problem functions as a staple of the politics of humiliation and symbolic shaming that occurs in neoliberal corporate education reform" (2021, 36). This shaming and misdirected passion for quantification appears, as we might expect, in the academic novels concerned with neoliberalism's effects. One example appears in Bradbury's *Cuts*: "You probably also saw they chose to give ratings to the various departments and universities in the country. Rather as if they were running some Michelin Guide to thought. They gave the best departments stars, and so on" (1987, 65). Rhodes explores some of the gimmicks to which universities resort, such as head-hunting active researchers to join the university and improve its numbers or submitting only selected department members for assessment, somehow hiding the deadwood.

Change in faculty status

One of the most striking features of the neoliberal regime is the way faculty members have been denigrated. Chris Lorenz writes that "in the risky neoliberal world, jobs and social security for faculty are definitely passé" (2012, 600), Luke Winslow comments generally on neoliberal approaches to higher education with a particular focus on the recommendations of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, an influential right-wing think tank: "By constructing an image of what I call the Undeserving Professor, the TPPF critic reconciles the educational funding paradox by advocating for a reinvented version of higher education where faculty initially become cheaper, flexible, and contingent, and then more easily surveilled, disciplined, and disposable" (2015, 203). The happy, perhaps complacent, reflections of professors enjoying life before the dominance of neoliberalism like Earl Rovit and Morris Zapp look almost unbelievable compared with the lives of their counterparts today; for instance, "Over two-thirds (68 percent) of faculty members in US colleges and universities held contingent appointments in fall 2021, compared with about 47 percent in fall 1987" and "[n]early half (48 percent) of faculty members in US colleges and universities were employed part time in fall 2021, compared with about 33 percent in 1987" (Colby 2023, n.p.). The trend toward forcing applicants for university careers into underpaid and precarious teaching positions reached its nadir in 2022, when the prestigious University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA)

advertised a position as "adjunct assistant professor" in Chemistry with no salary and no benefits (Hartocollis 2022, A11).

One of the most vivid treatments in academic fiction of this new world is Alex Kudera's 2010 novel *Fight for Your Long Day*, which covers a day in the life of Cyrus Duffleman, whose Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree in creative writing has made him eligible to teach for insultingly low pay and no benefits, not even respect, for three different colleges in Philadelphia, one of them a for-profit school. On his "long day" (actually his 40th birthday), he struggles to prepare for his teaching as he travels the city on public transit, and at the end of the day he changes into a uniform and works as a security guard at one of the colleges. The decline of a centuries-old learned profession has seldom been rendered more poignantly.

Destruction of the humanities

A final outcome of neoliberalism is a change in the status and role of the humanities, which are seen as underperforming in the new market scheme. "Part of moving to the market," Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades explain, "has meant at the margins turning away from the liberal arts toward professional and vocational curricula" (2000, 74). A variety of neoliberal features militate against the study of such fields as philosophy, English, or the traditional "hard" sciences. One is the use of post-graduation employment and compensation as a gauge of academic quality; another is the demand that faculty research must be justified by its usefulness to "society" (i.e. business). Many academic novels are written by faculty members in English or another of the traditional humanities fields, and it is not surprising to see their alarm. Julie Schumacher's *Dear Committee Members* (2014) focuses on a beleaguered chair of English whose department is continuously and cruelly downgraded, particularly to the benefit of the favored Economics department. The Vice Chancellor in *Cuts*, under "pressure from the government to bring in more relevant subjects, […] was trying to disestablish ancient departments like Classics and English altogether, and replace them with more modern ones, such as a Department of Snooker Studies" (Bradbury 1987, 60). Some novelists imagine outlandish combinations to which undesirable departments might be driven, including not only a combination of philosophy and prostitution in *The Mind and Body Shop*, but physics and leisurewear in *University Shambles*. In Iyer's *Exodus*, one philosopher teaches only sports sciences students; his erstwhile philosophy colleagues now teach in track suits, with whistles around their necks. He has been reprimanded for his teaching: his students in badminton ethics don't want to hear any more continental philosophy (2012, 180).

Much of this – that is, the consequences for higher education of the neoliberal theory and its adoption by governments – is well-known, certainly within the university community. The question is whether it is just an Anglo-American problem, as the articles and especially novels I have cited so far might suggest. Collini, somewhat surprisingly, notes the fear he has detected among Continental counterparts that "the changes that have been imposed on universities in Britain may soon be coming their way" (2017, 19), to other advanced industrialized countries. Elsewhere he writes that "European commentators also realize that extreme market-fundamen-

talist elements in their own political cultures are keeping a close eye on the British experiments, encouraged to imagine why they may be able to get away with when their turn in power comes" (2018, n.p.). But developments are much further advanced than Collini was afraid they might be in 2017 and 2018.

One case in point is Australia. Ben Kunkler relates that "Neoliberal budget cuts and deregulation dating back to the 1980s forced Australia's universities to reorganize along market lines. This process was often spearheaded by managers recruited directly from the finance sector. […] Today, the marketization of Australian universities is all but complete. Among university executives, neoliberalism is hegemonic" (2021, n.p.). Another Australian observer points to the scheme by which "scholarship, education, students, academic staff, and practices are subordinated to managerial imperatives", including a dramatic accountability system, part of what has already been called the audit culture (Morley 2024, 571).

Michael Wilding's novel *Academia Nuts* (2002) reveals a fictional university entirely in thrall to the neoliberal ethos. In managerialism, this is reflected in the proliferation of administrative titles: "the Vice-Chancellor. The Pro-Vice Chancellor. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The Chair of the Professorial Board. The Dean. The Sub-dean […] 'Senior Management we call them now,' said Dr. Bee" (17). In audit culture, this is shown through the endless lists required: "It was list time. It was always list time, these times. Activities report. Research report. Publications report. University report. Faculty review. Departmental review. […] Every other week there was another list to complete" (69). In faculty status, this is displayed through the lack of permanent positions: "the new churn, the short-term, non-tenurable, fixed contract level A appointment, here today, gone tomorrow, ave atque ale, never seen again" (19). In anti-humanities animus, this is exhibited through a focus on more profitable fields:

> The immediate agenda was to run the humanities down, the unspoken agenda that was euphemism for the even more unspeakable agenda of running them off campus altogether, along with the pure sciences. Replace them with the applied. Applied money-making and Advanced Money-lending; Language Training for Business; Business Administration; Commerce; Tourism. (53–54)

Australia, in Wilding's text, is not a country nervously considering whether it might be possible to get away with some of the neoliberal experiments already tried in the UK and the US: it is in full-blown crisis. As one of the older English professors insists, "This is the apocalypse. These are the last days. The days of rapture" (115). Both educational observers and academic novelists are dramatizing this ongoing crisis.

But what of other countries, outside the UK, the US, and the English-language Commonwealth? Chris Lorenz writes about "neoliberal policies in the public sector – known as New Public Management (NPM)" (2012, 600), and demonstrates that they are far more widespread, and have been operating far longer, than Stefan Collini seems to recognize:

> NPM was developed in the US in the 1980s and was soon adopted by the UK, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Sweden. In the meantime varieties of NPM have

> literally spread worldwide and continue to do so. Since 1999 NPM is being advertised in Europe as the Bologna Process and is also being exported by the EU outside Europe, especially to Latin America. Because in the EU educational policies are channeled through the national states Bologna-NPM exists in many national varieties. (Lorenz 2012, 603)

Lionel Pilkington writes about Ireland's plunge into neoliberalism, characterized by "the introduction of a wide range of calculative auditing and 'performance management' practices, and a market-based ideology of cost efficiency" – i.e. Lorenz's New Public Management – combined with a "public that is universally hostile to all non-utilitarian concepts of university education" (2013, 36). As many analysts and novelists note, the criterion of utilitarian or non-utilitarian often is used to disparage, or reduce support for, humanities disciplines like philosophy and literary studies.

NEOLIBERALISM AND HIGHER EDUCATION OUTSIDE THE ANGLOPHONE WORLD

Reports from diverse countries demonstrate that neoliberal approaches to higher education have been almost universally adopted in the northern hemisphere (and more spottily in the southern hemisphere). Rosa Toliou writes about Greece and its new framework that "puts the blame on education and tries to scorn the 'effectiveness' and 'quality' of public higher education until public opinion believes that privatisation (in the sense of tuition fees, private interests in research private universities, etc.) is the answer to it" (2007, 55). Toliou specifically traces these changes to the US and the UK, and their governments' policies of monetarism and neoliberalism. As shown in the title of an article by Yangson Kim, "The Institutionalization of Neoliberal Ideas in the Management and Evaluation of Higher Education in Korea and Japan", these concepts have reached East Asia as well (2021, 47).

One of the most thorough explorations of the invasiveness of neoliberalism is about Central Europe, focusing on Slovenia: "The tendencies of the current neoliberalization of higher education are visible in decreasing government funding and the competitiveness it fuels, the increase of short-term contracts for academic staff, and scientific production governed by funding structures" (Hofman and Samalavičius 2016, 1). Slovenia is also witnessing a "'new managerialism' with a gradual yet visible shift toward a corporate model of administrative structure" (1–2). As for shifts in disciplinary validation: "In recent decades, programs in humanities (or what we call liberal education) have become fewer because they are viewed either as relics of some sort of suspicious 'tradition' or as providing no useful and applied knowledge" (4). All of this should sound familiar from our survey of recent practice in the UK and the US. The authors, or interviewer and interviewee, touch on the quantification of research success – and the funding it ensures – by both "the amount of external funding each staff member brought to the institution", and "points amassed by publishing" (2). The latter practice is in widespread use in other countries, particularly Romania and Poland. In a clear illustration of neoliberalism's determination to replace judgments of quality with metrics of quantity, on the grounds that only that which can be counted is real, academics are expected to earn a stated num-

ber of "points" by their scholarly publishing in order to retain their positions. Those points vary according to someone's determination (perhaps at the Ministry of Education) of how much journals and book publishers are worth, and the values are changed often.

In 2020, a Polish academic who published a book with Duke University Press earned 100 points; the same book published with the University of Toronto Press would earn 80 points. As for an article, one published in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* would earn 100 points; in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 40 points (Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego 2020). A Romanian lecturer during the same period needed to know that publications indexed in International Databases earned 540 points, while an article in a volume of conference proceedings was not worth any points at all. In a strangely anti-Romanian approach, a monograph or book chapter published with a publisher on the list of "prestigious international publishers" earned 681.50 points; a monograph or book chapter published with a national (i.e. Romanian) publisher had no value at all (Selejan 2021).[4] If one is going to assign imaginary numerical values to substitute for judgments of quality in academic publication, it helps to make them extremely (if spuriously) precise, as in the 681.50 points above.

The fact, promise, or threat (depending on one's viewpoint) of neoliberalism in higher education has escaped its originating confines and spread widely in Europe and Asia. It *is* the new globalism. The question is, are academic novelists in Korea, Slovenia, or Greece alert to these developments, and are they writing novels dramatizing and satirizing them, as American, British, and indeed Australian novelists have been doing for some forty years? I do not have the answer. Perhaps there is a brilliant Slovenian academic novel lifting the lid on neoliberalism which has yet to be translated into English. But it seems likely that the subject will appear in campus novels wherever neoliberalism has begun to make itself known. The academic novel is the canary in the coal mine of higher education (Moseley 2019, 20); that canary is sick unto death in the neoliberal mineshafts of the US and the UK and it must be feeling dizzy and short of breath in Korea and New Zealand, Slovenia and Romania. I expect and predict a new wave of campus fictions from those cultures, academic novels that hold the mirror up to managers and arithmetical audits, privatization and student customers, marginalization of the humanities and business sponsorships, and everything else that constitutes the global neoliberal paradigm.

NOTES

[1] This now seems quaint, as Zapp was speaking shortly before the widespread availability of the Internet transformed higher education and reduced the necessity for travel for the international sharing of academic work.

[2] Collini makes the amusing point that in the UK universities are always being hectored to become more like business, when in fact UK businesses have a poor record and are hardly ideal models for emulation (2017, 154).

[3] RAE, which means "research assessment exercise", is one of the numerical schemes threatening universities in the UK in the name of "accountability".

[4] This obviously disadvantages researchers in fields like Romanian linguistics, which must be much more difficult to place in English or American journals.

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Central European perspectives of the global campus: Slavic academic fiction after 1989

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Central European perspectives of the global campus: Slavic academic fiction after 1989

Campus novel. Academic novel. Slavic literature. World literature.

The article discusses non-Anglophone campus fiction based on contemporary Slavic academic fiction. The author maintains that for the study of Slavic campus fiction in the context of world literature, the methodology of area studies and comparative literature is productive since it presents necessary tools for interdisciplinary research. This idea is illustrated by campus fiction written in the countries of Central Europe. The article discussed generic peculiarities of Slavic campus fiction, which primarily is constituted by the socio-cultural context of the area's university history and the themes, therefore, dealt with by the novels. As the themes common for Czech, Slovak, Polish, and Ukrainian campus fiction the author specifies the problem of identity, cultural memory, and the university's contemporary challenges. Among the specific features identified in these national literatures, campus metafiction by Slovak and Polish writers is mentioned. The author concludes that Slavic campus fiction offers a unique lens on multilingualism and hybrid identities, shaped by Europe's intricate history and opens up new possibilities for further research.

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Until recently, campus fiction was viewed as an exclusively Anglo-American phenomenon, and therefore uncommon outside that context. However, recent studies reveal that campus fiction is to be found in other national literatures, both "large" and "small". While the campus novel emerged as a subgenre in English and American literature, "it is a subgenre that has appealed to many major literary novelists, including such authors as Vladimir Nabokov, Javier Marias, Zadie Smith, Philip Roth, A. S. Byatt, Bernard Malamud, and Nobel laureates Saul Bellow and J. M. Coetzee" (Moseley and Kucała 2019, 5). Campus fiction emerged independently and almost simultaneously in English and American literature in the 1950s. Scholars can agree that by now this subgenre has established its canon, which includes Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954), Mary McCarthy's *Groves of Academe* (1952), Randall Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution* (1954), David Lodge's campus trilogy (*Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses*, 1975; *Small World: An Academic Romance*, 1984; and *Nice Work*, 1988), Malcolm Bradbury's *History Man* (1975), serving as foundational texts against which all other campus novels are inevitably compared. Most recently, Jenny Erpenbeck's *Kairos*, a love story between a student and a writer set in East Germany, won the International Booker Prize in 2024. Meanwhile, existing research shows that campus fiction appears to be both a genre that has existed within the given national literature roughly since the 19th century (though not being defined as a separate subgenre) and a genre brought to the fore or even appropriated from literature in English due to globalization. Regardless of its origins, campus fiction provides an inside look at higher education, opening up the possibility of interdisciplinary research that involves such fields as comparative literature and university studies (Barnett and Standish 2002; Williams 2019).

In the context of world literature, recent publications (Gruszewska-Blaim and Moseley 2016; Gruszewska-Blaim 2018; Fuchs and Klepuszewski 2019; Moseley and Kucała 2019; Selejan and Moseley 2022) suggest that the "geography" of campus fiction has substantially expanded. Along with Anglophone literature written in various countries, the genre of the campus novel has started to be discussed in relation to literature written in other languages. Campus fiction is not alien to Spanish, French, Italian (Soliński 2015), and Romanian literature (Selejan 2019a). In the 20th century it went through several stages of development in German (Trombik 2017; Selejan 2019b) and Austrian (Weiss 2019) literature. In Norway there is "a long tradition in literary depictions of academia, the students and the staff" (Christensen 2017) which apparently made a good basis for contemporary campus fiction; the same seems to be true for Finland (Juntti 2017).

In Slavic countries, the situation with campus fiction is a bit different. For quite some time campus fiction in Polish literary criticism has been discussed through the "category of exceptionality" (Trzeciak 2015, 57; cf. Sidowska 2015; Skubaczewska-Pniewska 2018, Klepuszewski 2019a, 2019b; Perkowska-Gawlik 2025). In Czech literary criticism, until recently campus fiction was not considered to constitute a separate distinctive genre (Pavera 1999; cf. Gwóźdź-Szewczenko 2019; Hrtánek 2025). In Slovak literary criticism, the campus novel is regarded as a marginal but persistent genre of contemporary Slovak fiction (Mitka 2018). In Croatian literature,

"the term 'academic novel' is fairly known" and that is due to only a few translations of academic literature on the topic and fiction itself and due to "different geopolitical and historical circumstances heavily connected with the development of science and the academic society" (Varga Oswald 2014, 125). In Ukrainian literature, campus fiction is also considered marginal and hybrid or functioning under the names of other genres (Blashkiv 2019). Meanwhile, it is difficult not to notice a certain uneven division regarding non-Anglophone campus fiction between "large" (Western) and "small" (Slavic) literatures, as well as literary criticism around it.

This status quo is the result of several issues, the first of which is language. Accessibility of texts translated into English is different for Western, Central, and Eastern European countries in general; when it comes to campus fiction, a marginal genre in Slavic literatures (if acknowledged at all), the choice for translation naturally lies with the "national canon" yet unknown to English literature, not the academic novel. The rare exceptions occur, like Josef Škvorecký's *Příběh inženýra lidských duší* (1977; Eng. trans. *The Engineer of Human Souls*, 1984), Dubravka Ugrešić's *Ministarstvo boli* (2004; Eng. trans. *Ministry of Pain*, 2005) or Oksana Zabuzhko's *Pol'ovi doslidzhennya ukrayins'koho seksu* (1996; Eng. trans. *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, 2011), but they are seldom viewed within the frame of campus fiction per se. Depicting visiting professors from Slavic countries in "hosting" universities abroad (a classical campus fiction motif), the novels are usually discussed in the context of expatriate (post-1968 in Czech and post-Yugoslav in the case of Škvorecký and Ugrešić respectively) and post-Soviet Ukrainian feminist writing in the case of Zabuzhko. The discussion is complicated even within literary criticism of different Slavic countries due to the marginal status of campus fiction in their national literatures, different Slavic languages of novels and academic discourse around them (campus fiction in Slavic languages often is not translated either to English or other Slavic languages or the neighbouring countries), but also due to attempts in the existing research regarding the genre of the campus/academic novel to level up with singular texts of English and American literature that make the canon of campus fiction, like Amis's *Lucky Jim* or Lodge's *Changing Places* and *Small World*. Another matter is related to the inextricable connection between literary and university history within the canvas of campus fiction. The connection is unquestioned, but university history in the Slavic lands is not widely known, which creates the next difficulty in discussing the Slavic phenomenon of campus fiction outside its geographical area. Therefore, paraphrasing the known witticism about national authors writing national literatures while translators writing world literature, Slavic campuses have not yet been marked on the literary world map and remain a local phenomenon.

This article attempts to outline the potential of Slavic campus fiction for the study of the genre in the context of world literature. Its focus is on the contemporary Slovak, Polish, Czech, and Ukrainian novel written after 1989. In addition to being Slavic, they constitute the geographical area of Central Europe, "the most complicated cultural complex, the region with colourful historical and religious developments, the cradle of revolutions and world wars" (Pospíšil 2015, 13), which, nonetheless, presupposes common values, history, cultural memory as well as a certain mindset.

Even though according to some scholars, Ukraine can be part of Central Europe only within the borders of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire (i.e. Western Ukraine), other scholars consider the European vector of its intellectual elite over the centuries to be enough to consider Ukraine within Central European cultural entity. The university as a factor in shaping Central European identity comes as a logical assumption though rarely paid enough attention. In his influential essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe" ([1984] 2023) Milan Kundera emphasized the university as an example of Central European identity saying:

> Central Europe is not a state: it is a culture or a fate. Its borders are imaginary and must be drawn and redrawn with each new historical situation. For example, by the middle of the fourteenth century, Charles University in Prague had already brought together intellectuals (professors and students) who were Czech, Austrian, Bavarian, Saxon, Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian, and Rumanian with the germ of the idea of a multinational community in which each nation would have the right of its own language: indeed, it was under the indirect influence of this university (at which the religious reformer Jan Huss was once rector) that the first Hungarian and Rumanian translations of the Bible were undertaken. (48)

In the context of globalization, this cultural area poses even more interest due to its multi-ethnic and multilingual background, meanwhile, the history of the university and academic culture in these lands sheds specific light on the global campus. Therefore, the campus fiction of Central Europe presents a unique opportunity to combine the Anglo-American template of campus fiction with the traditions of Slavic literatures.

STRUGGLING AGAINST ITS OWN TEMPLATE: IS THERE A SLAVIC CAMPUS NOVEL?

In English there are several terms used to define a piece of prose focused on the depiction of the university environment, among them the campus novel, the academic novel, the university novel, or the college novel. In particular, some scholars distinguish between "university novels" and "campus novels". David Lodge maintains that "'campus fiction' is a term used to designate a work of fiction whose action takes place mainly in a college or university, and […] is mainly concerned with the lives of university professors and junior teachers […] and to a lesser extent with their students, both undergraduate and postgraduate" (2006, 1). Malcolm Bradbury provides the following generic criteria of the campus novel: it emerged after World War II, "is written by university teachers […], set in 'new universities', real or fictitious", discusses "some of the pressing social and intellectual questions of the time", and is "nearly always comic in spirit" (1996, 274). Meanwhile the university novel, according to Bradbury, which "has very deep roots" going back to the mid-19th century, is written by "reminiscing ex-students", "stylized, largely fantastic, […] describe[s] an ancient city drenched in sunlight and nostalgia" (1996, 274), which obviously fixes the distinction between Oxbridge novels and those set in "new universities". The comprehensive study by Mortimer R. Proctor (1957) maintains that the origins of the university novel in English literature can be successfully traced from Chaucer's

Clerk of Oxford and up to the mid-1950s, while Bradbury maintains that it endures into the 1980s and possibly on. That, in turn, suggests the simultaneous co-existence of two parallel genres dealing with the university environment but different in tone. Similar in a way is the American tradition of distinguishing between campus fiction (student-oriented, developing in the 19th century often as *Bildungsroman*) and academic fiction (faculty-oriented, developed after World War II; Williams 2012, 567). At the same time, while John E. Kramer chooses the term "college novel" over "campus novel" or "university novel" by stressing the importance of the setting (2004, 1), Merritt Moseley chooses "academic novel" as most inclusively widening the scope of campus fiction (2007a, viii). Meanwhile, David Lodge (2006) uses these terms "more or less interchangeably" attributing to the academic novels more inclusion and to the campus novel "more expressiv[ity] of the unity of place which characterises the genre" (2). Lodge also stresses that "the rapid evolution of the genre" owes much to "the convergence of these three highly gifted authors [Mary McCarthy, Randall Jarrell, and Vladimir Nabokov] on the university or college as a subject and setting" (2006, 3) in addition to Kingsley Amis in England. These novels (all published in the 1950s) set the generic template of campus fiction, more specifically of "satire on professors themselves" (Moseley 2007b, 110).

For European literatures, defining the generic peculiarities of campus fiction is not entirely simple. Non-Anglophone literatures often borrow the word "campus" from English as well as the set of generic criteria, often taking David Lodge's campus trilogy as a canonical example or measure for campus fiction written in other languages and other cultural contexts. That, on the one hand, extremely narrows down the choice of texts and discards the variety of representations, and on the other, begs for a closer look at the Lodge trilogy which is generically "fluid" itself (Walsh 2007, 276). A common feature that all the scholars register is a non-satiric mode of non-Anglophone campus fictions, many also refer to the long-lasting tradition of literary portraits of "university life", which is rooted in the history of the institution.

The history of the university in contemporary Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Ukraine is closely tied with the history of kingdoms and empires of which their lands were a part. When the first universities started to be established in Central and Eastern Europe they were often called "academias" and even if they were sometimes short-lived, the later restored institutions often claim themselves to be their "spiritual heirs".[1] Historically, these academies were dedicated to preparing the religious elite and (despite being closed off) constituted integral parts of the towns and cities. The oldest university in the region, Charles University in Prague, was established by Charles IV in 1347.[2] Poland's Jagellonian University followed 20 years later, but after the first partition of Poland between three empires of Europe, the university history in its lands (including part of today's Ukraine) largely depended on the rule of Russia, Prussia, and Austro-Hungary.[3] The first university in Slovak lands was established in Bratislava in 1465 as Academia Istropolitana and functioned for over twenty years till 1488. The second one was founded in Trnava in 1635 gradually developing into an institution of four faculties; however, in 1777 it was relocated to Buda.[4] From then until the founding of Comenius University in 1919, there was

no "*complete* academic institution of higher education"[5] (Višňovský 2021, 139–140; emphasis added) on the territory of present-day Slovakia, which made young people seek education in universities of the neighbouring states.

After World War I, the university history in Central Europe was readjusted to the establishment of new nation-states, but in the late 1930s, the university development in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Soviet Ukraine was interrupted by World War II. As postwar satellites of the USSR, the Warsaw Pact countries received individual treatment on the part of Soviet authorities, which reformed their systems of education following the models particularly adjusted to the country and its culture (Connelly 2000). Meanwhile, the university in post-war Soviet Ukraine is marked by the same characteristics as that of the whole Soviet Union, performing primarily the function of the interpellator of ideology and that of the mouthpiece of the regime. Therefore, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union marked the moment when literary representation of the university could change and not be censored.

The political history of the peoples that lived in Central Europe seems to be more important for understanding contemporary campus fiction by Czech, Slovak, Polish, and Ukrainian authors than their literary history. Nonetheless, the (re-)emergence of campus fiction took place simultaneously with these national literatures finding their voice in post-communist times, with the incorporation of literary practices of postmodernism, and with the globalization of the world which was behind the iron curtain a short time ago. Under such socio-cultural circumstances, campus fiction in the countries of Central Europe combines the features of student- and professor-oriented novels, being set both in distant and recent past alongside the present, addresses the problems that concern both academic and national identity solving them differently depending on their nations' history and aspirations for the future, presented in the satirical tone or not. Therefore, the generic diversity and hybridity within which Slavic campus fiction operates is quite high (Sidowska 2015; Skubaczewska-Pniewska 2018; Blashkiv 2024). The themes that dominate in these fictions are the theme of identity, cultural memory, and contemporary challenges of the university against the background of the post-communist/post-colonial past. The three themes often intertwine within the same novel but are realized within the historical contexts meaningful to Slovaks, Czechs, Poles, and Ukrainians. It may be worth reminding that these novels were written after 1989 and mainly reflect the contemporary discontents and anxieties of the academic community (cf. Showalter 2005) but also may be extrapolated onto the nations they represent.

HISTORICAL THEMES IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN ACADEMIC FICTION

Anglo-American campus novels do not commonly discuss themes such as patriotism as an academic value, questions regarding national identity, preserving the collective and cultural memory. These are recurrent themes in Central European campus fiction, however, due to which (and probably because of the absence of satire), they are seldom defined as such and are more often referred to as historical novels.

Eva Maliti Fraňová's novel *Tajomstvá mladého Bajzu* (Secrets of young Bajza, 2023) is based on the life story of Josef Ignác Bajza (1755–1836), a Catholic priest and the author of the first novel written in literary Slovak, *René mládenca príhody a skúsenosti* (1784; Eng. trans. *René, or a Young Man's Adventures and Experiences*; Pucherová and Brtáňová, 2025). The importance of history for understanding the protagonist's motivation and actions is revealed in the novel through the history of Slovak education. In 1777, the protagonist Jožo, after having spent a year in the University of Trnava (which had just relocated to Buda), journeys to Vienna to enroll in the Pazmaneum seminary for Hungarian theological candidates, with the intention of becoming the author of a book in Slovak. However, when he wants to write a letter to his mother in his native village (Predmier, near Žilina in present-day Slovakia), he cannot choose which language to write it in:

> if he wrote a letter in Hungarian, she would not want to understand it, so alien it would sound for her. He would not be able to write the whole letter in German and his father would not be able to read it. It would be best to write in plain Slovak. His mother would like that. However, he realized that this would not be easy either. It would not be possible to do it properly. Jožo tried to do it this or that way and finally understood that to become a Slovak writer would not be easy. (30)

Even though the novel naturally may be read as a literary biography and a history novel, the character of Bajza the student, his campus life within the walls of the seminary, and a love storyline suggest that the novel may also be read as a variant of *Bildungsroman* and campus fiction. Bajza's story is also about the formation of Slovak national identity in the end of 18th – earlier 19th century, when Slovaks had neither their own state, their own written language, or any institution of higher education.

The prominence of the protagonist, the time, and the place of action in the novel *Tajomstvá mladého Bajzu* stresses the importance of history, cultural memory, and national identity as leading themes in campus fiction in Central Europe. An important detail for the development of education in Slovakia was religion: during the counter-Reformation, Protestant students of Slovak descent had no other choice but to go to study at the German universities of Halle or Wittenberg, returning home with a certain mindset ready to raise national awareness among their own people. Therefore, the typical enclosed and isolated structure of the university does not pose this self-sufficient microcosm known to the English campus novels that focus on exclusive rituals and experiences. Instead, the protagonist's campus life is not detached from the world outside university life of his local ethnic/national community, which would have an impact on his identity as a learned man and a representative of his people. This corresponds to the history of Slovak culture, which was predominantly produced by scholars of Slovak origin educated and operating in different parts of Central Europe (Višňovský 2021).

The same matter of national identity is illustrated in the academic historical mystery *Głowa: Opowieść nocy zimowej* (The Head: A winter night's tale, 2016) by Tadeusz Cegielski. The murder investigation takes place against the background of a big conspiracy organized by the Russian authorities governing part of the Polish lands

after the Third Partition of Poland. The student of medicine and self-appointed sleuth Mikołaj Obrycki turns out to be not only a prominent forensic investigator but also a politically conscious Polish patriot who sees through the provocations and manipulations of the authorities. However, in his investigations he is not alone: the university community of fictional and historical figures in the novel is depicted as united in their efforts and aware of the dangers entailed by the political subordination of Poland. Moreover, the university is an integral part of the city and its social life, the source of its cultural existence while its statehood was destroyed. This sense of community rooted in the Polish university would also be consistent with the historical role it played for over 200 years.

The "Kapranov brothers" Dmytro and Vitaliy Kapranov, the Ukrainian authors of the "historical anti-mystery" *Sprava Syvoho* (The case of the Greyhaired, 2019) focus on the story of a Soviet official and university dropout, who fabricates a case against a historical figure, the professor Dmytro Yavornytsky (1855–1940), makes it his life mission and a means of upward social mobility.[6] In the novel, the professor is consistently persecuted by both regimes, that of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and both times by Russified and ideologically corrupt Ukrainians. Professor Yavornytsky symbolizes Ukrainian identity and a gradually destroyed cultural memory, while the young investigator of the internal services and his "tutor" represent the ideology of the colonizer. Both novels present a "university mystery" that deviates from the academic mystery template known to Anglophone campus fiction.

Andrzej Braun's *Cyfrograf* (2006), Yuri Makarov's *Za chvert' desiata* (A quarter to ten, 2013), and Pavol Rankov's *Legenda o jazyku* (The legend of the tongue, 2019) illustrate the ways the national identities of Poles, Ukrainians, and Slovaks were transformed under the rule of the state socialism in these countries. While none of these fictions has received sufficient attention in the context of campus fiction, all of them bear great potential in illustrating the peculiarities of the university environment in the countries of Central Europe after World War II and under the close "supervision" of the Soviet Union. Moreover, in this case, campus fiction becomes the keeper of the collective memory passed down to the third-generation descendants by those who actually lived through this experience. In addition, they also testify to the coming-of-age in a certain period in history in Central Europe, which drastically differs from the Anglo-American perspective.

The importance of history and cultural memory is also crucial for understanding Slavic campus fictions dealing with contemporary problems of the academia. What seems to be the familiar problems of the contemporary globalized academic world, in these countries' campus fiction it is also linked to their post-communist and hence post-colonial past. This is obvious in the Slovak author Oliver Bakoš's *Katedra paupológie* (Department of paupology, 2001), when the need to restructure the department of Marxism-Leninism leads to the invention of a new field of research called "paupology" (science about the poor) and to an attempt to seize power and take the position of the department head. The same post-communist heritage underlies the events in Jozef Puškáš's latest novel *Vivat, akadémia, zbohom, Čechov* (Vivat, academy, goodbye, Chekhov, 2024). Similarly in Jiří Fanta's *Univerzita* (Uni-

versity, 2007), a detective story only partially set on campus, the political changes prompt the dean's elections at the Department of Economics, as a result of which the department remains in the hands of the former communist secret service informant, using the same methods to reach his goal. The same idea is developed by Michal Sýkora in the academic mystery *Modré stíny* (Blue shadows, 2013) revealing not only the university's underside but also the complexity of Czech society regarding the ramifications of its communist past. In the Ukrainian context, Daryna Berezina's *Facul'tet* (Faculty, 2017) and Petro Bilous's *Universytet suvoroho rezhymu* (The university of severe order, 2022) portray the university as a corrupt institution operating on Soviet principles of total submission to power and intolerance to professionalism and any kinds of otherness.

To discuss the trait of neoliberalism in these fictional universities without ramifications of their previous mode of existence under the communist ideology and state control would be missing not only a great deal of understanding but also irony regarding the contemporary state of the university outside the campus novel – in real life. Even though these examples probably do not cover all the novels united by the theme of the communist/Soviet heritage, the choices made by authors in terms of genre may give some clues as to the national differences in elaborating the given topic. While the Czech writers prefer academic mystery, Slovak and Ukrainian writers choose bitter satire.

While historical traumas, memories, and the search for identity unite many campus novels by Central European writers, there are some unique literary phenomena as well. Among these, one cannot omit Stanislav Rakús in Slovak literature and Arthur Przybysławski and Wit Szostak in Polish literature for their unique campus metafiction. A professor of Slovak literature and a literary critic, Rakús is the author of three novels: *Temporálne poznámky* (Temporal notes, 1993), *Nenapísaný román* (Unwritten novel, 2004) and *Excentrická univerzita* (Eccentric university, 2008), which make a trilogy that is often defined as "academic". Marek Mitka states that Rakús "absorbed" the best that "the campus novel elaborated over the half a century" (2018, 124), in particular drawing on the humor and intellectual depth of David Lodge, on the one hand, and "the so-called non-humorous kind of university fiction, saturating theoretical and pedagogic activities of the protagonist", as presented by John Williams, on the other (2018, 125). In one of his interviews, Rakús notes that in his literary texts he "creates decent people who live in relatively indecent times and their decency becomes a certain source of conflicts in their lives" (2010), the "indecent times" being the pre-1989 era. By that alone, the novels become literary reflections on the essence of creative writing in times of silence. In the context of Slovak culture, where the writer/poet traditionally serves as a symbol of "people's consciousness", Rakús's university men (both students and professors) who write novels but face the obstacle of not being able to publish them, receive a much wider context for interpretation. The novels' narrative structure gives rise to the question of how the contemporary novel should communicate recent experience and preserve cultural memory in a period that appears to have little to remember the past by, except "the unwritten novel". On the contrary, the Polish writers, both professors of philos-

ophy, address contemporary academe through dialogue with key texts in world literature. While Wit Szostak creates a Polish Don Quixote of the 21st century in *Sto dni bez słońca* (One hundred days without sun, 2014), Arthur Przybysławski in *Pan Profesor* (Mr. Professor, 2020) and *Pana Profesora dziennik sekretny* (Secret diary of Mr. Professor, 2022) unfolds in front of the reader a Rabelaisian literary feast (Skubaczewska-Pniewska, 2024). In the novels of both writers, rich literary communication with world literature takes place against the background of contemporary academia with all its absurdity, unrealistic estimations, and the loss of humanity. By the degree of intertextuality, these novels may be justly compared to canonical Anglo-American campus fiction. In addition, the writers' professional expertise in philosophy and parody as the main means of conveying ideas brings these novels to a whole new level. At the same time, as in the case of Rakús, they cannot be regarded without the context of national history and culture.

CONCLUSION

Central European campus fiction is a rich and multifaceted literary phenomenon, yet to be fully discovered by readers and scholars of both Slavic and world literature. Academic literature suggests that contemporary Slavic writers, while accepting the campus novel template, modify the genre adjusting it to the local material. One such modification is the high hybridity of Slavic campus fiction, embracing features from the *Bildungsroman,* biography, historical novel, satire, and mystery to anti-mystery, anti-biography, life writing, and utopia. Despite the dominant genre characteristics, Slavic academic fiction is deeply grounded in the local culture, university history, and literary traditions of the region's separate nations. The fact that these fictions are produced in national languages and are rarely translated testifies to their local scope rather than a broader Slavic or European one. However, judging by the common themes developed by such fictions, like post-colonial/communist trauma, cultural memory, and identity, Central European writers do share some characteristics that could probably be discussed in terms of "common mentality" or collective memory. Dealing with its traumas, nonetheless, takes an individual national turn. That is also the reason for the absence of satire as a dominant feature of campus fiction. With its focus on the intellectual and the university as his natural habitat, the Slavic academic novel, nonetheless, sheds light on a bigger picture of the highly nuanced history of Central Europe. Therefore, its "learned men" along with the fluidness of their identity remain acutely aware of the national question and their position regarding it. Due to the Slavic university history and political regimes that controlled it, the whole city (or country) becomes the primary setting for the novel, alongside or instead of the university campus or department. That, in turn, may explain why the professors are not burdened by the dilemma of whether to stay or leave the institution; instead, they survive in it against all odds. The one academic year of cyclic time traditional for the Anglo-American campus novel is seldom observed in Slavic fiction; instead, it may be compressed to several weeks or extended to a lifetime, to illustrate the cyclicity of social events rather than academic ones. The dominant themes are developed around the reconstruction of distant and recent historical events connect-

ed to university education or "the learned men" important for the history of the nation (cultural/collective memory); the problem of identity against the background of the recent colonial (communist/Soviet) past; and dealing with contemporaneous neoliberal challenges the university finds itself while it still deals with its decolonial (post-colonial issues). Simultaneously, Slavic campus fictions revise the university's changing role in contemporary globalized society, the ramifications of the humanities' decline or failure, and the national character, history, identity complexity, or cultural memory construction. Thus, the academic community appears torn by multiple, often opposing messages and challenges that keep academics on the brink of breakdown, often both personal and professional.

The case of Slavic campus fiction shows that non-Anglophone fiction offers a unique lens on multilingualism and hybrid identities, shaped by Europe's intricate history. This, in turn, highlights the plurality and diversity of literary representations of higher education, enriching the global discourse on university life, which may help find insights into the current condition of the university worldwide and possibly look for universal solutions, especially in the face of recolonization as a new global tendency.

NOTES

[1] These included the Academia Istropolitana in Bratislava (1465–1488), the Ostroh Academy (1576–1636) and the Mohyla Academy (1632) in Ukraine.

[2] The second oldest university in the crown Czech lands was Palacký University in Olomouc, established in 1573 and led by the Jesuit order.

[3] In Poland the university history is connected to the key moments in the country's history: the establishment of the Polish Kingdom (Jagiellonian University in Krakow [1367]), the loss of statehood due to three partitions (Imperial University of Warsaw [1816]), and regaining of statehood (the Piast [Poznań] University [1918]).

[4] Its successor institution is Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest.

[5] Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the present author.

[6] Yavornytsky was known for his research on the Zaporozhian Sich, destroyed by Catherine II in 1775.

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Aging professors: Reading transatlantic academic plays of the 1990s

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Aging professors: Reading transatlantic academic plays of the 1990s

Professor. Aging. National Identity. Ethnic Identity. The 1990s. University. Volodymyr Prat͡s'ovytyĭ. Donald Margulies.

A comparative reading of Volodymyr Prat͡s'ovytyĭ's *Ostannia͡ polemika profesora Dobrenka* (The final polemic of professor Dobrenko, 1991) and Donald Margulies's *Collected Stories* (1996) contributes to the understanding of the Ukrainian and US-American academic play of the 1990s. The chosen plays address the vulnerability of late adulthood, the close correlation of academia's decline with the physical and emotional deterioration of older professors, references to the past, the complexities of memory, and power dynamics. If Prat͡s'ovytyĭ's drama engages with the essential theme of national identity within Ukrainian academia in the transitional period, Margulies's text for the stage captures the intricate layers of personal memories and a problem of cultural appropriation. Both plays illuminate generational conflicts between younger and older scholars, emphasizing health struggles, emotional wounds, growing disillusionment, and the heavy responsibility the latter bear. The medical humanities framework is instrumental in reading aging professors' unsettled relationships and the medicalization of narrative.

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It is an open debate whether academic drama constitutes a genre. The scholar Rudolf Weiss doubts its existence by calling it a "missing genre", but he enumerates, surveys, and analyzes several plays by British dramatists (and one from the US) which tackle the world of academia and its power structures in the second half of the 20th century. His view is that the crisis in academia, with the university "in extremis or on the point of tumbling into the abyss" and "in ruins" (2016, 134–135), limits dramatic productions of the academic play. Addressing playwriting of the 1990s, I find the vision of the period to be complicated, because of memory as a "central illusion", ambivalent, as "defined by an overwhelming assumption that life, and particularly American life, was underwhelming", and internationally anxious, as "the world was starting to go crazy, but not so crazy that it was unmanageable or irreparable" (Klosterman 2022, 2–4).

In this context of international anxiety, the following aspects of aging discourse in playwriting deserve special attention. The article studies and contrasts older professors' generational conflicts and emotional vulnerabilities in two plays authored by Ukrainian and US-American dramatists based on the shared background of the power shifts of the aging experience. Both the male chair of the department in Volodymyr Praŝ'ovytyĭ's[1] drama *Ostannia͡ polemika profesora Dobrenka* (The final polemic of professor Dobrenko[2]), written in 1991, and the female professor in Donald Margulies's play *Collected Stories* (1996), confront zeitgeist changes and struggle with aging. Although Praŝ'ovytyĭ's drama primarily addresses the critical issue of national awareness within the turbulent Ukrainian academia, Margulies's play centers on the problem of cultural appropriation of personal memories. Both of these texts from the 1990s explore the dramatic conflict between the younger and older generations of academics, highlighting the significant vulnerabilities of the older generation – including physical ailments, emotional scars, feelings of betrayal, and the weight of responsibility. In addition, the stereotypical perception of the aging professors as a metaphor for the "aging" of the institution of higher education thoroughly analyzed by Eric Leuschner (2006, 352) applies to the dramas by Praŝ'ovytyĭ and Margulies.

Among the negative consequences of the lack of the experience "necessary for the production of great art" in campus fiction, Merritt Moseley singles out the focus on personal life of academic writers and conventionality of expression (2016, 30–31). Opposing Sanford Pinsker and Leslie Fiedler in the genre's formulaic (in terms of the plot twists) and stereotyping (in terms of the characters) nature, Moseley detects its advantages in integrating and interacting with highbrow and lowbrow literature genres (2016, 33). Praŝ'ovytyĭ incorporates a nation-developing agenda into its very texture of his play, which reveals the Ukrainian zeitgeist of the period. Thomas Docherty's premise of the development of modern aesthetics "in an explicitly nationalist arena […] with social questions pertaining to the formulation of the autonomous human subject […] regulated by the academy" and his statement that "questions of major national concern find their mediation in the teaching of the humanities disciplines in the university" (1999, 1) resonate with Praŝ'ovytyĭ and Margulies's dramas reflecting Ukrainian and Jewish-American identities respectively. Docherty elaborates on the role of modern universities in reconciling experience/sense with

knowledge/reason (1999, 232). His inferences prove that academic "commitment implies national allegiance" (244). Although the history of Western academia in Weiss's "missing genre" of academic drama has already been (at least selectively) examined, a brief comment on the development of a similar literary phenomenon in the Eastern European context is necessary.

The Ukrainian academic play has a fundamental background in Jesuit school drama (Ukr. шкільна драма – *shkilna drama*), which spread in Ukraine through the Polish influence in the 17–18th centuries. Shkilna drama was formed due to the curriculum favoring dramatic performances as an additional means of examining poetics, rhetoric, and philosophy (Sulyma 2010, 11). Authored by the teachers and performed by the students (in the Jesuit tradition), shkilna drama developed morality play and historical drama subgenres, apart from performances of Christmas (vertep) and Easter cycles, apocrypha, and panegyrics, which shaped the foundation of modern Ukrainian drama (16).

Didactic in its essence, shkilna drama tackled not only basic Christian staples but also national awareness of community (18, 21), epitomized by the anonymous[3] historical drama *Milost' Bozhiia Ukraïnu Svobodivshaia* (1728; the title is translated by Dmytro Doroshenko as *The Liberation of Ukraine by the Grace of God*, 1957, 105) describing the Khmelnytsky Uprising of 1648. As a result of his survey of numerous dramatic texts of the 17th and 18th centuries, Mykola Sulyma infers that "old Ukrainian school drama carried a great charge of spirituality, promoted Christian morality, fostered charity towards one's neighbor, self-sacrifice, and taught to think in high religious-philosophical categories" (50) having formed afterward the basis of the secular Ukrainian play. The foundation of this playwriting tradition is inherent in Praŝ'ovytyĭ's drama, too. The dramatist uses the polemic as a principal imagery of his plays and even foregrounds it in the title of *Ostanni͡a polemika profesora Dobrenka*. Built on a dialogical base, drama employs disputes and debates as its semantic tools, which in the selected plays of Praŝ'ovytyĭ and Margulies acquire additional connotations of competition between younger and older colleagues.

What is nationally marked in Praŝ'ovytyĭ's drama is the exposure to Ukrainian academia's double standards, which are rooted in the educational system of the ex-USSR. In her analyses of Ukrainian campus novels, which formed a genre in the late 20th century, Oksana Blashkiv detects "a rather tragic picture of the post-Soviet (academic) society, lost and disoriented. Marginalized, alienated, disoriented, and lonely – these would be the adjectives defining professor images in Ukrainian contemporary fiction" (2018, 158). This depiction applies to the older adult professor in Praŝ'ovytyĭ's play. In discussing US-American campus fiction, Eric Leuschner refers to the negative portrayal of college professors and "the negative public perception of the university" in popular culture and academic novels, highlighting how bodily defects serve as a metaphor for their separation from the public (2006, 349). Apart from the deep crisis in the Soviet and post-Soviet Ukrainian universities in the late 20th century, as shown in *Ostanni͡a polemika profesora Dobrenka*, and the restrictions on creative writing in terms of ethnic identity and private life, as shown in *Collected Stories*, a shared theme of the academic play of the period is the deterio-

rating health of older adults. Thus, the playwrights build parallels between politics, represented by academia, and personal struggles, represented by the characters.

Regarding the characters, the dramatic action around the aging Jewish professor in *Collected Stories* is enhanced by the New York City milieu, which serves as a setting for numerous plays about Jewish-Americans. Ethnic identity is highlighted in Margulies's play, in contrast to national identity as an essential issue in Prats͡ovytyĭ's play. As noted by the cultural and literary historian Sander L. Gilman, "being a New Yorker in the 1990s means sounding Jewish – being a Jew in spite of oneself" (1991, 30). In parallel with Gilman's metaphor of New York as the city of disease, "the locus of one's sense of alienation from the self" (31), Margulies's drama reflects the crisis of ethnic identity appropriation: aging professor Ruth Steiner, considers the use of "Jewish intellectual life" in the novel by her younger non-Jewish colleague Lisa Morrison as "mimicry; parody; bogus; inauthentic; irresponsible" (2002, 207). Compared to the turbulent, financially insecure years in the former USSR, "the 1990s represented the longest economic expansion in U.S. history" (Klosterman 2022, 2). The contemporary generalization of the decade as "the last period in American history when personal and political engagement was still viewed as optional" (2) seems to fit the transatlantic dichotomy produced by the two dramas: the focus on the political in the text of the European author and the preoccupation with the personal in the play of his US counterpart. This binary opposition is reflected in Leuschner's study of academia as a disease: in contrast to European intellectuals, "the American university professor [is] civically and politically *dis*engaged" (2006, 350). Comparing the struggles of a Ukrainian professor with national identity to the concerns of a Jewish-American professor about cultural appropriation enables a discussion of academia's late adulthood in a global context. The philosophy of medical humanities, represented by intergenerational conflicts involving power shifts and markers of aging, enables a close reading of vulnerabilities (including professional ones) in these dramatic texts.

MEDICAL HUMANITIES IN THE ACADEMIC DRAMA

Although the subjects of these plays are, strictly speaking, non-medical, and even if it is the case (as in Act I of *Ostannia͡ polemika profesora Dobrenka*), "the [medical] concerns are more patently social" (Beecher 2023, 31), the predicament of the elderly characters in both plays can be productively viewed through a medical humanities approach. The focus is not on medicalization but on interpersonal communication between different age generations: in late adulthood, illnesses produce mostly negative corporeal ambivalence, forming the ground for ageism.

What is conceptually at stake in medical humanities is the consideration of the liminality of human existence in therapeutic practices (17) that makes "questions about the meaning of life and death [...] essential to medicine" (Cole, Carlin, and Carson 2015, 1). One of the directions of this interdisciplinary field of healing science and culture is highlighted by Alain Touwaide, who claims that "science in recent times has become increasingly interested in connectedness, expressed in terms of communication, interrelation, and networks between the elements that it has persistently

searched to identify and isolate in previous periods" (2023, 369). Certain fictional texts have already become seminal for the discipline, including the Pulitzer-prize winning drama *Wit* (1995) by Margaret Edson, adapted into a cable TV film in 2001.[4] Literary scholarship considers that "diseases are essentially social or psychological in nature" (Beecher 2023, 27). Developing Beecher's observation of the medical practice in "complex social environments" (31), I argue that the nature of the dramatic conflicts in the selected plays of Ukrainian and US-American authors depends strongly on the interaction of health and/or diseases of the older adult characters and social and psychological setting. Thus, in his consideration of the intellectual hero in early post-Soviet Ukrainian prose, Mark Andryczyk foregrounds three prototypes of novel characters, among them the "Sick Soul":

> Many of the Ukrainian intellectual protagonists that appear in the prose of the Eighties Writers are shown to be suffering from some sort of illness; repeated references to the physical and / or mental sickness of these intellectuals show them to be maladjusted, mad, and dysfunctional. […] Their sickness is revealed throughout these prose works through direct and indirect references to illness and health institutions, by the omnipresence of alcohol and alcoholism in the characters' lives, and through the depiction of these characters' families as being broken or dysfunctional. (2012, 67)

Andryczyk's close reading of fiction by Oksana Zabuzĥko, Iurii Andrukhovych, Kostiantyn Moskalets, Iurii Gudz, and Iurii Izdryk detects a number of sick intellectual characters which he explains "as a return to the modernist depiction of the tortured intellectual, which was forbidden during the era of socialist realism" (81). This point of view resonates with Praťs'ovytyĭ's drama.

The 1990s represent the narratives of illness in US-American fiction, for example, in *Autobiography of a Face* (1994) by Lucy Glealy and *The Caregiver: A Life with Alzheimer's* (1999) by Aaron Alterra. Auto/biographical in nature, these texts contribute to "heighten our powers of perception, deepen our self-knowledge, and thicken our understanding of what it's like to suffer through an illness or cope with an injury" (Cole, Carlin, and Carson 2015, 136). Although medical issues are only references in *Collected Stories*, they add realistic touches to the aging discourse in the play.

INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICTS

An animating force in the aging discourse, intergenerational relations constitute the core of the modern drama. From the sociological perspective, "conflict is natural and inevitable to human life" (Lowenstein 2005, 407). In the framework of the family (the smaller model of society), conflicts between generations develop a "normal expectable aspect" (406), forming later through solidarity intergenerational ambivalence, that is, "the intersection of affection and conflict" (Giarusso et al. 2005, 414). Yet, the conflicts between aging professors and their younger counterparts in the selected dramas occur beyond family circles. The confrontation in both cases leads to the failure of the older adult characters, though this is somewhat ambiguous.

Ostannia polemika profesora Dobrenka consists of three acts, each developing in its own setting: hospital – professor's apartment – campus. Act I introduces the opposing forces embodied by the university associate professor Maksym

(the lead character) and the chair of his department, Professor Dobrenko (who is also arguably a lead character). The latter stays in the hospital after heart surgery, and Maksym takes care of him, alternating with the professor's much younger lover, Oksana, who is Maksym's age. As a result of the polemic with Maksym (whose stand on Ukrainian national identity is bold and unacceptable for the ideology of the 1980s, when the dramatic action unfolds), Professor Dobrenko gets worse and is transferred to the intensive care unit.

Act II displays Maksym and Oksana in Dobrenko's apartment, where Oksana reveals the inside story of her relationship with the professor. Her tawdry tale, devoid of romanticism and full of routine details, fits Moseley's remark that "the uses of campus adultery or other forms of sexual irregularity have altered in recent academic fiction; the routine acceptance of sexual relations between professors and students has been problematized – in fiction as in life" (2016, 35) which is relatable to Margulies's drama as well. After all, Oksana tries to seduce Maksym, but it is in vain.

The final act opens with the news of professor Dobrenko's death, which provokes an additional plotline with the university's rector at the head. This line represents the internal conflict of the play as it examines the Ukrainian academic system trying to take a new course after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and sheds unexpected light upon the image of the deceased professor.

The polemic of Maksym and the professor in Act I determines the type of conflict. There is a context of power: even though the professor is disabled, he is still his colleague's boss. At the very beginning, he asks to change his bed into a sitting position and Maksym to take a seat. Thus, the older adult tries to have an equal, if not dominant, stand on the nonverbal plane. In his open talk with the younger colleague, the professor argues that they used to be enemies because Maksym subverted his academic concept and, thus, his authority. The dramatist does not reveal the concept's details, which one can quickly grasp from Maksym's cues: the professor's methodology, built on a Soviet ideological background, is unviable. Dobrenko's violent denial of his opponent's invectives ("junk", "fiction") further deteriorates his physical condition. In turn, the elderly scholar accuses his junior colleague of an immature attitude toward the team and science: Maksym ignored the taboo subjects and academic conventions of the era. Despising corruption, the younger scholar embodies the ideal model of a disinterested scholar independent of the Soviet regime. One of Dobrenko's final questions, as he actually nears death, sheds some light upon his role in academia: "Do you really think that I alone can change anything in the system or alter human nature?" (Pra͡t͡sovytyĭ 2008, 23) This rhetorical sentence spurs further dynamics in the debate between the male characters, resulting in Maksym's accusation of the professor for writing negative reviews on the scholars who had been unafraid of the regime and, for that, were later deported to Siberia. The defamation (as we learn in the play's finale) kills Dobrenko, whose blood pressure rises, leading to the imminent end. This dramatic conflict is ambivalent yet unresolved because it is an incident or tragic force, in Gustav Freytag's construction of the drama (1900, 99). Having learned the background and biography of his deceased boss, who hap-

pened to have a tragic life and who appointed Maksym as his successor, the younger lead character declares his guilt in the professor's untimely death.

The ambivalence of intergenerational conflict is also indicated in Margulies's drama. In the system of his dramatis personae, two female characters shift the position of power throughout the play, similar to Praŝ'ovytyĭ's lead. The action unfolds in the apartment of Ruth Steiner, an aging professor and distinguished short-story writer who is on friendly terms with Susan Sontag, Norman Mailer, and E. L. Doctorow (Margulies 2002, 160). In this text for the stage, the relationships between Steiner and Lisa, her student and assistant, develop in two acts, each consisting of three scenes demonstrating the characters in different time spans and roles. First introduced as a devoted student to Steiner and then as her caring assistant, Lisa turns into a successful short story writer and later a novelist, yet she flaunts the private life of her teacher, mentor, and close friend in her novel. In her review, Elyse Sommer interprets the conflict of *Collected Stories* as an "undefined illness to dramatize how the student moth's emergence as a butterfly embodies an inevitable contrast to the waning powers of the successful mentor [...]. This also heightens the teacher's sense of betrayal" (1997, n.p.).

Initial communication between the two characters is rather cold on the part of the older adult, who does not give full credit to the student, implying that the appearance of the latter hardly corresponds to her serious writing: "You *do* write better than you talk" (Margulies 2002, 145). The distance that Steiner keeps is explained by her privileged role as a university professor who teaches creative writing: "I've prided myself for years for being able to match the student with the story [which students practice writing in Steiner's class]. It's a game I play with myself" (140). As an apprentice, Lisa uses every opportunity to get what she needs, including "sucking up to" the woman professor (144), comparing Steiner's mentorship with a religious experience (144). Similar to Professor Dobrenko from Praŝ'ovytyĭ's drama, Ruth Steiner is a complicated character: despite her irony, sarcasm, and detachment, the professor teaches her student responsibility, performance, and writing ownership, discussing and analyzing Lisa's writing in detail that creates an additional metafictional layer of the text. A tutor of creative writing, Steiner argues that "writing cannot be taught" and that "the university is taking your money under pretenses" (146). Her self-critical claim that writers who teach do not have the answers, though "the good ones ask the right *quest*ions, that's the key" (147) demonstrates the crisis of academia of the time. Nevertheless, Steiner enjoys teaching because interaction with younger generations forces her to be critical, keeps her vision honest, and keeps her brain active.

There is a strong match in the mutual antagonism of Lisa/Steiner and Maksym/Dobrenko: after months of working as the female professor's assistant, Lisa still cannot satisfy the demanding Steiner: "no matter what I do, it's wrong. I always seem to get your disapproval when it's the opposite I want so badly" (162). This leads to the discussion of the role of media among younger generations of US-Americans and the negotiation of their identities in this context. Thus, Lisa infers that her life is commonplace and "so *television*" (184). This inference is preceded by a debate

on the influence of media upon young women who, through their interrogative manner of expressing affirmative sentences, tend to be "begging to be heard, begging to be understood" (155). Noting that in the 1990s, "there were more television networks than ever before" (2022, 8), Klosterman infers "Younger generations despise older generations for creating a world they must inhabit unwillingly, an impossible accusation to rebuff. Older generations despise younger generations for multiple reasons, although most are assorted iterations of two: They perceive the updated versions of themselves as either softer or lazier (or both)" (8–9).

Probably the older generation's disdain in the form of Steiner's all-encompassing control over her young colleague (as a result of her success with the first published book, the professor regards her protégée as an equal now) prevents Lisa from sharing her concept of the novel in which she appropriates her mentor's youth without prior consent. Steiner feels deceived, to say the least. In their final confrontation, the aging professor's words are filled with hidden meaning that Lisa is unable to discern: talking about burglars, the professor does not mean literally cheating but rather metaphorically hinting at Lisa for stealing her memories and the vulnerable fragment of her youth, not meant for publicity (Margulies 2002, 194). Whereas Maksym, who defames professor Dobrenko, indirectly causes the latter's demise, Lisa's case of "creative appropriation" (Sommer 1997) brings professor Steiner disparagement. The older protagonist confesses to Lisa her envy of the young woman's "life ahead". A similar feeling of doom about Professor Dobrenko is read in Praf͡s'ovytyĭ's play in the rector's line in the final Act: "His life had finished him off… And he was hopeless then… His time was up" (2008, 65). The markers of aging reinforce this discourse of the decline of late adulthood.

MARKERS OF AGING

The critical feature of the verbal component of *Ostanni͡a polemika profesora Dobrenka* is its ageist use of language in the lines of the lead characters: Maksym calls the professor derogatory names behind his back: "old geezer" and "decrepit" (Praf͡s'ovytyĭ 2008, 7) as well as "old demagogue" (55). Labeling the intensive care unit where the older protagonist stays as "a ward of die-hards", Maksym demonstrates his masculine superiority over a vulnerable opponent in his invective language. In turn, Dobrenko is prone to self-stereotyping in the following lines: "a frail, weak person" (15) and "my goose is cooked" (21). Metaphorically, the lead character embodies the hypocritical system of the collapsed Soviet Union, and therefore, his demise may designate the beginning of a new era. After all, "[i]n the construction of narratives of illness, the writer strives to make existential sense of an experience by placing it in the context of a larger narrative of suffering and loss or healing, and then, in that light, giving a plausible account of what is happening now" (Cole, Carlin, and Carson 2015, 136). The emphasis of medical humanities on the "narrative of suffering and loss or healing" can be insightful in understanding agency of late adulthood.

Unlike *Ostanni͡a polemika profesora Dobrenka*, whose timeframe is limited to several days, *Collected Stories* covers six years, giving some advantage for studying age in fiction. Also in contrast to the Ukrainian drama, there are no invectives on the part

of the younger character, but rather cases of Steiner's self-deprecation who names and shames herself as "an old fart" (Margulies 2002, 157), "an old ham" (197), and a "pitiful old woman" (200) that makes salient not only cultural ageism but also gender discrimination. What is universal in both plays is that stereotypes which the aging professors apply to themselves, fit the category of illness and powerlessness according to Erdman Palmore's taxonomy (Palmore, Branch, and Harris 2005, 301), with the sole exception of Steiner's intelligence as "the feisty older woman who cracks wise" (Margulies 2002, 159). Both older adult characters resist patronizing: Dobrenko expresses it ironically in the line, "is it nice to take out pots after me, to serve me like a small child?" (Praťs͡ovytyĭ 2008, 16); and after betrayal, Steiner refuses to accept Lisa's assistance (Margulies 2002, 195).

Memory relates to the challenges that both fictional professors share. Common ground for markers of aging is found in the fragments of "life review" in both dramas. The concept of revision of one's life, designed by the gerontologist Robert Butler and further developed by Michael Mangan, foregrounds recollections as a form of self-awareness in late adulthood (Mangan 2013). On this basis, Mangan singles out several types of reminiscences in drama, some of which are employed in the selected plays. Thus, the rector's recollections of the deceased professor help Maksym radically reconsider his attitude toward his former boss and intellectual opponent (Dobrenko grew up as an orphan in dire straits, served in wartime in an assault unit, and his family had Cossack origin[5]). Even though these reminiscences are uttered by other characters (namely, the rector and Oksana) rather than the older adult himself, they perform a transmissive function, that is, "passing on of one's cultural heritage and personal legacy" (Mangan 2013, 126). In her lengthy, monologue-like revision of her love story in young adulthood, Steiner builds an escapist reminiscence because the memories of that period are both painful and glorious for her at the same time: "it *was* my shining moment" (Margulies 2002, 177).

Though experiencing various physical setbacks – Dobrenko endures two heart attacks, an aortic aneurysm (Praťs͡ovytyĭ 2008, 43), and high blood pressure (24) while Ruth Steiner suffers from memory problems (Margulies 2002, 139), arthritis (195), calcium deficiency and stinging eyes (199), both fictional professors age in compliance with gerontological data (Palmore, Branch, and Harris 2005, 164–165). In terms of medical humanities, the above-mentioned medicalized aspects form the discourse of decline and become pivotal in perceiving the aging experience of the professors.

In the rising action of both plays, there develops social withdrawal of older adult characters due to their interpersonal ties, which become the points of their vulnerability manifested by the May/December romance: Dobrenko has an extramarital affair with a much younger PhD student, Oksana, and Ruth Steiner had an infatuation in her youth with the much older (real-life) poet Delmore Schwartz. Because the field of medical humanities focuses not only on the medicalization of narrative but also on unsettled relationships, this subfield negotiates and criticizes their interaction to build a connection between physical and psychological. Considering chronic conditions and other age markers of the aging professors in these works, each drama brings a complicated resolution to intergenerational conflicts.

CONCLUSION

Although the plays under discussion here have more contrasts than parallels, they demonstrate how both professors defy memory issues, loss of influence, and generational confrontation, which can be a common denominator inspiring transatlantic reading. In both plays, professors in their sixties are anxious about knowledge transfer and power shifts, underscoring the universal concerns of aging in academia. The elderly professor gestalt, regardless of gender, though in a different way, reflects the challenges of aging in a global academic culture, which are generally marked with ageism and self-stereotyping on behalf of the older characters. At the beginning of the 1990s, Volodymyr Prat͡s'ovytyĭ nationalizes Ukrainian drama: the playwright imagines the formation of national (non-Soviet) academic character while analyzing the predicament of the Soviet times in the history of Ukrainian scholarship. Like his Ukrainian counterpart, Donald Margulies lays bare Jewish-American identity at the core of his plays in the familiar university milieu of the Eastern coast. The aging markers in both plays manifest the discourse of decline rather than progress. The "failure" in terms of dramatic conventions of aging professors signals the crisis of academia in the 1990s. Finally, polemic functions as a driving force in the plays, foregrounding vulnerabilities of masculinity and subordination and reaffirming the university's still important role, even in crisis, for the community.

NOTES

[1] The present article uses the norm of transliteration and romanization of the US-Congress Library: https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/romanization/ukrainia.pdf.

[2] *Остання полеміка професора Добренка* (in original). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Ukrainian are by the present author.

[3] Although historian Dmytro Doroshenko mentions Teofan Trofymovych as the author of the drama in his 1957 study, Yaroslav Gordynsky (1925 and 1927, cited in Sulyma 2010, 33–34) and Yevhen Onat͡s'ky (1961, 978) insist on the text's unknown authorship.

[4] See Gaidash 2018.

[5] For a Ukrainian reader, social exclusion signifies the inability to be employed and influence life in the state.

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The academic murder mystery as a popular subgenre from the Polish perspective

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The academic murder mystery as a popular subgenre from the Polish perspective

Polish fiction. Academic murder mystery. Campus novel. Professors in literature. Heterotopia.

In his chapter devoted to academic mystery fiction included in *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (2008), Joseph Rosenblum notices that the substantial collection of academic mystery novels gathered by John E. Kramer in his annotated bibliography *Academe in Mystery and Detective Fiction* (2000) illustrates the prophetic nature of John Donne's observation regarding universities as an ideal setting for crime stories. Murder mysteries set in academia constitute a thriving subgenre of academic novels, with many works written by authors connected in some way to British and American tertiary education institutions. While universities in other countries also offer compelling material for novelists, there appears to be a certain kind of reluctance among, for instance, Polish scholars to divulge academic matters to the general public, or to satirize their colleagues for fear of becoming subjects of ridicule themselves, or, even worse, to become depicted as either a victim or a perpetrator of a hideous crime committed within university walls. Nevertheless, there are authors who have chosen to explore the landscape of Polish universities, considering it a fertile ground for constructing captivating mystery plots, albeit, hopefully, without any real-life homicides to serve as inspiration.

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Academic mysteries, broadly understood as stories of mysterious crimes connected to academe, are usually classified either as crime fiction or academic fiction. For example, in *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (Rollyson 2008), academic mystery novels open the list of subgenres, which also includes cozy mysteries ("cozies"), forensic mysteries, police procedurals, and even true crimes. On the other hand, Elaine Showalter's study *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents* (2005) includes Amanda Cross's and Joanna Dobson's academic mystery series featuring female literature professors playing the role of amateur sleuth as important examples of academic fiction of the 1980s and 1990s respectively (69–99). Likewise, in his essay "Types of Academic Fiction" in *The Academic Novel: New and Classic Essays* (2007), the editor Merritt Moseley considers academic mysteries as one of the minor subspecialties of the academic novel focused on faculty (108). Interestingly, the primary reason for the double inclusion of academic mysteries in these two quite distinct taxonomies is the unique character of their setting.

This article will present two contemporary mysteries written by Polish authors and analyze the way in which the heterotopic character of academia triggers different kinds of criminal offences. It aims to answer the questions: to what extent do academic mystery novels set at Polish universities imitate and adhere to the Anglo-American paradigm? Do they constitute a fully developed form of the Polish academic mystery novel, or are they merely tentative explorations into the potential of this academic novel's subgenre?

UNIVERSITY AS A SETTING CONDUCIVE TO CRIME

Universities along with their campuses constitute separate administrative areas, often referred to as university towns. They comprise not only university buildings encompassing libraries, auditorium rooms, classrooms, and departmental offices but also dormitories, canteens, sports centers, and in some cases even a nursery school, a clinic, and a pharmacy, forming an almost autonomous unit within the municipal space. University authorities enjoy a certain degree of autonomy or even freedom from an external authority, i.e. the mayor and the city council. For example, universities in Poland possess a special status of autonomy guaranteed in the Polish Constitution, which, for instance, allows the police to enter university premises either when called by Rector (BrE – Vice-Chancellor, AmE – University President), or in cases of immediate threat to life or natural disasters. "The unique 'extraterritoriality' of universities is one of the aspects of their traditional autonomy (Article 70, paragraph 5 of the Constitution). […] This aspect of autonomy is further developed in Article 50, paragraphs 3, 4, and 6 of the Law of Higher Education and Science – explains Professor Hubert Izdebski" (Sewastianowicz 2020, n.p.).

Different university departments or institutes, depending on the administrative arrangement, usually occupy separate buildings or, at least, different floors within a building, which often results in forming almost familial bonds among members of faculty, university officials and staff. The apparent utopian character of these tightly-knit societies, whose various academic pursuits and other activities frequently en-

gage the student body, is attributed to the common goals of the academic community. These goals revolve around the university mission, which invariably focuses on education, research and personal development.

Even the above succinct characteristic foregrounds the fact that "the academic murder mystery relies on the apparent antithesis between the values of higher education […] and the homicide" (Moseley 2007, 109). After all, the academic community is expected to be involved in the pursuit of knowledge rather than that of the perpetrator, which makes a murder as well as its subsequent investigation unheard-of occurrences. Therefore, the surprise element, responsible for the initial shock, incites the readers' interest in getting engaged in the criminal investigation, which regardless of numerous university affairs, reveals universal human vices, because whether we want it or not, "[l]ike in ordinary world of ordinary people, who either respect or breach the criminal code, murder among academics – fictional or real – is not unthinkable" (Gruszewska-Blaim 2016, 92).

In "The Guilty Vicarage", an essay discussing the addictive nature of detective fiction, W. H. Auden emphasizes the importance of a closed society, characterized by the same occupation, interests, acquaintances, friendships and liaisons, in creating a compelling murder mystery. The academic community confined within university walls fulfills the criteria of such a secluded group, which, accordingly, excludes "the possibility of an outside murderer" (1948, 407). Consequently, the readers' attention is drawn to university affairs in search of scholarly or unscholarly connections between the prematurely deceased members of the university community and their murderers within the academic realm. Although Auden notes that "[it] is a sound instinct that has made so many detective-story writers choose a college as a setting" (408), their choice is attributable to the specificity of university space rather than mere gut feelings.

UNIVERSITY AS HETEROTOPIA

Michel Foucault's seminal essay "Of Other Spaces" describes heterotopias as "effectively enacted utopia[s] in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and converted" (1986, 24). Elucidating the characteristics of heterotopic sites, Foucault divides them into two separate categories – of crisis and of deviation, followed by different principles of heterotopia and their representative examples. While "Of Other Spaces" is widely used in different fields of study, ranging from architecture to literary criticism, and has proven insightful in delineating the specific character of numerous places, many scholars point out that the essay provides neither a clear-cut definition of heterotopia, nor consistent exemplification of the idea (Genocchio 1995; Soja 1996; Harvey 2000; Topinka 2010). In "The Geographies of Heterotopia" (2013), Peter Johnson explicitly states that Foucault's accounts of heterotopia are "sketchy, open-ended, and ambiguous", accompanied by a list of "mischievous" (790) examples. Nevertheless, he admits that the very concept proves to be extremely popular, inspiring scholars to designate "a dazzling variety of spaces" (796) as heterotopic sites. Johnson enlists 36 studies discussing heterotopias, ranging from the 19th century ship narrative

to the public nude beach (797). The wide variety of studies dedicated to entirely different "locations" demonstrates that the power of Foucault's essay lies not so much in the clarity of the concept, but rather in its potential to show how certain features may result in the identification of spaces of otherness (Wesselman 2013,17).

Although Foucault does not classify universities as heterotopias, the various aspects of tertiary education institutions – educational, social, political, financial and constitutional – suggest that they can be seen as notable examples of counter-sites. Universities simultaneously reflect and contest societal norms, mores, pursuits, achievements, opportunities and limitations, both historically and in contemporary times. Moreover, the university is envisaged, or even anticipated, as the "ultimate space of critical resistance" (Derrida 2001, 24), where discussion about truth would extend far beyond academic freedom:

> But whether these discussions are critical or deconstructive, everything that concerns the question and the history of truth, in its relation to the question of man, of what is proper to man, of human rights, of crimes against humanity, and so forth, all of this must in principle find its space of discussion without condition and without presupposition, its legitimate space of research and reelaboration, in the University and, within the University, above all in the Humanities. (25)

Building on Foucault's argument that in contemporary societies heterotopias of crisis have been supplanted by those of deviation, it appears that scholars' rejection of "instrumental, pragmatic and affective modes of thinking that pepper mainstream life" (Dalgliesh 2023, 97) can be perceived as a certain kind of deviation, with the university serving as a notable example of such heterotopias. However, in contrast to the heterotopias of deviation mentioned by Foucault – rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, or prisons – the connection between university and society appears to have a completely different character. This is primarily because the members of a university community are neither involuntarily placed nor restricted in their placement. Moreover, if we argue that heterotopias of deviation not only protect society against those who fail to conform to the established norms but also constitute their shelter, then "the ivory tower [may be seen as] a refuge for the socially awkward academic, whose inability to fit is a deviation of sorts" (Dalgliesh 2023, 97). The renowned poet A. E. Housman, who taught Latin for many years at the University of Cambridge, once said, "I find Cambridge an asylum, in every sense of the word" (Richards 1947, 100). His witty remark undoubtedly underscores both the deviant and protective qualities of academia.

Examining the principles of heterotopias through the lens of university and university campuses, one may find a compelling illustration of Foucault's ideas concerning identification of other spaces. For instance, Foucault's claim regarding the power of society to adjust heterotopias to its changing fashions and mores (1986, 23) may be exemplified by the recent popularity of online courses, which Bregham Dalgliesh calls "a pandemic fuelled migration to online education" (2023, 97). Moreover, the university's capability to collate disparate spaces and violate the linearity of traditional experience of time finds manifestation in contemporary university libraries and archives. Equipped with the latest achievements of informational tech-

nology, these repositories provide their users with the immersive experience of special temporal aspects of otherness, simultaneously accumulating, abolishing, and rediscovering time in novel ways. The university's unique "system of opening and closing" (Foucault 1986, 23), representing yet another feature of Foucault's heterotopic sites, creates an illusion of an approachability of an otherwise restricted space. Contrary to what might be expected, affiliation with a certain university does not amount to getting to university, either as a student or an academic. While it is true that both studying and working in academia require "hav[ing] a certain permission and mak[ing] certain gestures" (26), such as passing an entrance exam or undergoing the tenure procedure, a mere fulfillment of these procedures, let alone physically entering the university space, does not necessarily entail the "inclusion into the community, quite the opposite, it may only evoke or enhance the feeling of otherness" (Perkowska-Gawlik 2021, 114). Academia, as a highly hierarchical institution, heavily stratifies its members, not only according to their academic achievements and titles, but also according to the perceived profitability, practicality, or popularity of their fields of expertise.

The abovementioned policy of academia, which introduces artificially created divisions among and within different academic disciplines, reflects Foucault's argument that heterotopias exist "in relation to all the space that remains", either creating "a space of illusion that exposes every real place", or a space of compensation that would be perfectly ordered, unlike the "messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (1986, 27) reality one knows and detests or even loathes. Nevertheless, university, grounded in a rational justification for its existence, even if this justification is a mere illusion, "offers society the chance to constantly challenge itself and face its illusions by unabashedly looking at itself in the academic mirror" (Dalgliesh 2023, 99).

DISCRETE REALMS: STUDENT AND PROFESSOR LIFE IN FICTION

Novels set in academia, where characters and their endeavors are in one way or another inscribed into the policy and functioning of tertiary education, are called academic novels, university novels, college novels, or campus novels. Some critics use all these names interchangeably, others opt for an introduction of the clear division between "student-centered" and "staff-centered" fiction (Williams 2012, 584). Since the student body constitutes the majority of dwellers on university campuses, the term "campus novel" appears to be more appropriate for novels that focus on student university or college life. Likewise, the term "academic novel" explicitly refers to academia, making it more appropriate for novels centered on academics, or simply staff-centered ones. Additionally, these novels are often authored by academics who aim not only to direct the reader's attention to the world of teaching and research but also to underscore their ability to design different textual games through "self-referentiality, […] flaunting of theoretical knowledge, […] allusiveness and postmodern playfulness" (Moseley 2007, viii–ix).

The aforementioned lack of scholars' agreement on the name of novels whose action is set at institutions of tertiary education concerns also detective novels whose criminal intrigue is strictly connected to the university milieu. The author of *Ac-*

ademe in Mystery and Detective Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography (2000), John E. Kramer emphasizes the diversity of mysteries set in academia, which range from serious to playful detective novels to police procedurals (ix). He opts for the name "college mystery" for detective fiction "with settings and characters drawn from the world of higher education" (xi), stating that the adjective academic in the name "academic mystery" would be too inclusive and easily applicable to "mysteries set in high schools and prep schools" (xi). A different approach is taken by Ludmiła Gruszewska-Blaim, who differentiates between the mysteries focused more on bringing the culprit to justice than those dwelling on the problems haunting the university world. Consequently, she introduces two names referring to these two dominant tendencies respectively, i.e. the college mystery novel and the mystery academic novel (2016, 93). The current author's previous study entitled *The Contemporary Academic Mystery Novel* (Perkowska-Gawlik 2021) chooses to rely on the term "academic mystery novels", as all the novels in her analysis focus on academics. My choice to choose this term is congruent with Jeffrey J. Williams's (2012) argument concerning the division of academic fiction into student-centered and staff centered novels:

> [T]he term "academic mystery novel" or "academic mystery" [refers to] all the novels [...] focus[ed] on academic staff and employ[ing] professors as amateur sleuths. Moreover, they are [often] written by academics who frequently use the vehicle of the classical detective formula to present their field of study while untangling a criminal conundrum. (Perkowska-Gawlik 2021, 16)

POLISH ACADEMIC FICTION

No matter whether we are talking about the academic novel, campus novel, academic mystery, or college mystery, they all are typically associated with the Anglo-American world. To demonstrate that the academic genre has also generated a "regional response outside the Anglo-American territory", Dieter Fuchs and Wojciech Klepuszewski edited and published the collection of essays entitled *The Campus Novel: Regional or Global?* (2019). The collection comprises essays analyzing academic fiction written by authors from such countries as India, Japan, South Africa, Spain, Austria, Germany, Romania, Norway, Czechia, Slovakia, Croatia, Ukraine, and Poland.

In his two essays on Polish university novels included in the abovementioned volume, Klepuszewski states that Polish novels exploring and strictly devoted to academic issues are rare. He attributes this limited interest to their perceived uncertain or questionable critical value, which results in a small print run, typically publication by local publishing houses, and therefore limited significance in the book market (64). He underscores that "most novels that could be considered in the context of academic fiction establish a remote link with the theme, most often manifested in the fact that one of the characters happens to be an academic, which allows for occasional academy-related references in the novel" (64–65). Among the examples of such novels cited by Klepuszewski are Jerzy Broszkiewicz's *Doktor Twardowski* (1977), Anatol Ulman's *Szef i takie różne sprawy* (The boss and some miscellaneous matters,1982), Jerzy Plich's *Spis cudzołożnic* (Census of adulteress, 1993), as well as

Ku słońcu (Towards the sun, 2010) and *Na krótko* (Let's make it short, 2012) by Inga Iwasiów.

In her article "Czy istnieje polska powieść uniwersytecka?" (Does the Polish academic novel exist?), included in the volume entitled *Literaturoznawca literatem, czyli rzecz o akademii i kreatywnym pisaniu* (Literary scholar as literary figure, or academe and creative writing, 2018), edited by Ludmiła Gruszewska-Blaim, Anna Skubaczewska-Pniewska addresses the often cited Ewa Kraskowska's article (2008) bemoaning the unsatisfactory production of Polish novels which could be categorised as university fiction. As Skubaczewska-Pniewska notes the very title of Kraskowska's otherwise informative article, i.e. "Dlaczego lubimy czytać powieści uniwersyteckie, ale nie lubimy ich pisać?" (Why do we like reading university novels but we dislike writing them?) not only implies the gap in Polish fiction that still awaits filling but also discourages many scholars from taking up studies concerning the Polish equivalents of David Lodge's university trilogy. However, Skubaczewska-Pniewska's delineation of numerous Polish novels[1] presenting and/or satirizing Polish universities and their employees gives the positive answer to the question whether the Polish academic novel exists. In her opinion, it not only exists but also undergoes unceasing development interweaving with other literary genres and conventions.

Klepuszewski reiterates the question posed by Kraskowska, asking why there is a preference for reading academic novels over writing them. He ponders the absence of writers in Poland, who, despite multiple translations and publications of academic fiction by renowned authors like Kingsley Amis, David Lodge, and Malcolm Bradbury, would be willing to pursue a similar path (2019, 66). One of the factors hindering Polish authors from delving into "the Polish groves of academe" (66) is the specificity of the themes, which could only be authentically portrayed by academics. Moreover, Polish scholars who also happen to be authors of fiction tend to refrain from mocking or criticizing their colleagues, let alone revealing university secrets.

Klepuszewski favorable describes Jerzy Kaczorowski's novel *Zamek* (The castle, 1978) as a prime example of academic fiction within Polish literature (67). *Zamek* shares similarities with Lodge's *Small World* in that the academics can be compared to knights, but Kaczorowski's "knights", unlike those from *Small World*, cannot indulge in global conference hopping. For economic and, more importantly, political reasons, the communist authorities in Poland were not interested in supporting contacts between Polish academics and those from the Western world. *Zamek* focuses on a more regionally focused event, mainly due to "the hermetic and economically backward Polish reality of the 1970s" (67). Instead of numerous conference meetings, the autodiegetic narrator of *Zamek* participates in a single conference held in a remote location. The titular castle chosen as the conference venue harmonizes with the atmosphere of verbal banter, evoking the essence of courtly tournaments (70).

POLISH ACADEMIC MYSTERY NOVELS

Interestingly, recently literary critics have highlighted the "refreshing" influence of popular literature, such as detective novels and mysteries, on the fictional portrayals of Polish academia. For example, in the pseudonymous author Tobiasz W. Lipny's

detective novels, a young art historian smoothly moves between the "musty academic world" and the clandestine world of art and antiquities trafficking, not forgetting about indulging in numerous purely sexual affairs (Kraskowska 2008, 73). Although Lipny's trilogy – *Barocco* (2006), *Kurlandzki trop* (The courland trail, 2007), and *Brukselska misja* (Brussels mission, 2008) – is an interesting example of the merger between the detective novel and the academic novel, it lacks a university ambience per se, unless we consider sensual and sexual pleasures of academics as an indispensable part of their lives. On the other hand, the reader interested in the politics of Polish academia may find some excerpts, presenting the narrator's unfavorable, not to say acerbic, comments concerning "[t]he existing system [which] promotes not so much scholarly activity, but rather the ability to publish a certain minimum with appropriate distribution over time, and the laborious creation of a 'Great Work', which is […] indigestible and unread by anyone"[2] (Lipny 2007, 172).

In "Academic Nostalgia in Mystery Novels Celebrating Old Polish Universities" (2022), Oksana Blashkiv presents two academic mystery novels by Tadeusz Cegielski and Joanna Jodełka, which were written to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the founding of the University of Warsaw and the centenary of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. As Blashkiv puts it, both novels are deeply nostalgic about the spirit of patriotism and fraternity that defined the university during the turbulent times of the Partitions. "Despite different narrative strategies, both novels promote the idea of 'the Polish University' as the source of clear values, a moral compass, and even a condition of the political re-establishment of the Polish state" (92).

Despite a sense of nostalgia for the past glory of Polish tertiary educations, Polish authors – particularly academics who also try their hands at writing fiction – are not deterred from writing crime novels addressing the present condition of Polish universities and the problems haunting the Polish academic world. *Śmierć dziekana* (The death of the dean, 2014), by Zofia Tarajło-Lipowska is an intriguing example of a detective novel set in the academic milieu, reflecting actual events experienced by the author during her academic career. While it is not surprising that writers draw inspiration from real events, *Śmierć dziekana* is a rare example of the academic mystery with no disclaimer on the copyright page, on the contrary, its author openly admits that the novel presents a fictionalized version of her experiences as Professor of Czech Studies in the University of Wrocław, where she does not work any longer.[3] *Śmierć dziekana* intertwines the conventions of academic fiction with the scaffolding of the police procedural. In the course of the investigation, the reader gets acquainted with numerous conflicts and power struggles between academics camouflaged, obviously, by an aura of their studied smoothness of manners.

Interestingly, in both cases, i.e. the academic mystery and the police procedural, the reader's perception of the narrative story world is determined by the protagonists' perspective, that of the members of the academic community and police officers respectively. Thus, the fight for tenure, rivalry, and plagiarism are among the major problems of the highly hierarchical world of academia. The motifs prevailing in the police novels comprise overwhelming bureaucracy, "the overworked

force, the hostile public, the burned-out cop, the alienation from normal life" (Panek 2003,157), and the repercussions which the commitment to the never ending "struggle of good versus evil" (170) have on the private and professional lives of the protagonists. The "text" written by the criminal in *Śmierć dziekana* does not go beyond the convention of the academic mystery, whereas its deciphering, i.e. the "text" of the investigation produced by the police officers, interlaces with different aspects concerning their lives. These two "texts" do not appear in a linear and separate form but are intertwined throughout the novel, with spatial elements of the academic mystery constantly surfacing in the police procedural.

The ongoing alternation of the two aforementioned genres corresponds with Peter Hühn's approach to the formula of detective fiction "viewed in the context of narrative and reading theory" (1987, 453). Hühn defines the basic structure of the detective novel in the following way: "The plot of the classical detective novel comprises two basically separate stories – the story of the *crime* (which consists of action) and the story of the *investigation* (which is concerned with knowledge). In their narrative presentation, however, the two stories are intertwined" (452). As regards the two major parameters of Hühn's theory – reading and writing – the reader is faced with two "texts": on the one hand, the already written "text" of the criminal, and on the other hand, the "text" of the investigation which is being written by the detective (457). Hühn's approach to the structure of detective fiction, emphasising the presence of the two stories, follows that of Tzvetan Todorov, yet Hühn takes a more semiotic perspective focusing on reading and interpretation.[4] Hühn perceives the detective story as a metaphor for the process of reading, with the detective serving as a model reader.

However, to label *Śmierć dziekana* a police procedural, other characteristics than the three policemen are needed because, as Leroy L. Panek states, "nobody claims that the presence of a police officer makes police fiction" (2003, 155). John G. Cawelti considers the police procedural as a subgenre of the classical detective tale, stating that the main difference between the two "is a matter of emphasis in the narrative" (1976, 126). The reader's attention is more focused on the process of the investigation than on the mystery itself (127). In his essay "Post-war American Police Fiction", Panek notes that all police novels, no matter whether they adopt the form of the typical whodunit, thriller or love story, foreground the "unique impact" (156) of the police work on the way official investigators organize their lives and professional careers. In the amalgam of the police procedural and the academic novel, the police officers' "line-of-duty heroism" (Lehman 1989, 133) does not merely preserve the image of the university as a unique place of murder but also contributes to the realistic presentation of this institution as a potential crime scene.

In the second chapter of *Śmierć dziekana*, Professor Mirosław Korbieluch, dean of the Faculty of Humanities falls from the fourth floor down the stairwell in one of the university buildings. Of course, nobody witnesses the fall; only two students hear a heavy thump and then see their dean lying in a pool of blood. The academics interrogated by Cichosz are unanimous in demonstrating their grief as well as admiration for the deceased colleague's virtues, and they cannot conceive who might have

wished for his demise. Nevertheless, after the initial shock, many of them remember that there is indeed a person who has not been in good rapport with the late dean.

The ostracized academic turns out to be Professor Melania Melpomańska, who used to be the chair of the Middle East studies unit, until the dean replaced her with a Czech professor, Dalimil Muminek, who comes only once a week. As it turns out during the criminal investigation, he was of great assistance in awarding Korbieluch an honorary doctorate in Ostrava. Muminek's secure position and Korbieluch's advancement in academia have no legitimate foundation, since Korbieluch lacks merit for the honorary degrees, and Muminek's expertise is not as remarkable as purported. Professor Melpomańska is well aware that the loss of her administrative position was meant to be a punishment for her direct and vehement objection to the dean's plotting, which resulted in the Institute committee's decision to "torpedo" the project of Persian studies prepared by her unit (2014, 26). He convinced the members of the Institute that Melpomańska's project would not be profitable for "our people", i.e., the Latin department to which he belonged. Therefore, they voted against the project, regardless of the money granted to this enterprise by the internationally recognized "Orient-Express" fund (26).

The inspector is convinced that despite being a graduate from the same university where the homicide took place, he still needs insider knowledge. For most of the narrative, the role of the academic amateur sleuth is realized in the form of anonymous emails sent by a person who apparently wants justice to triumph in the "wasp's nest" (40). The detective's anonymous helper turns out to be a newly appointed female professor. However, unlike the female amateur sleuths, such as Amanda Cross's Kate Fansler or Joanne Dobson's Karen Pelletier, she prefers not to be directly involved in the investigation for fear of ruining her own academic career, as eventually happened to Professor Melpomańska.

Another relatively recent Polish academic mystery, also written in the form of the police procedural, is Anna Bińkowska's *Tu się nie zabija* (We do not kill here) published in 2017. Unlike the majority of academic mysteries, which adhere to the rules of the classical detective novel, Bińkowska's mystery leans towards the hard-boiled formula of crime fiction, characterized by graphic violence, sleazy urban setting and slang spiced with swear words. The homodiegetic narrator of the Prologue, who is also the murderer, does not spare the reader brutal details of the homicide scene. The stabbing of Professor Tadeusz Zawistowski, the fictional director of the Institute of Archeology at the University of Warsaw, is preceded by a vicious altercation between Zawistowski and his killer. The fierce confrontation implies both academics' involvement in some illegal financial matters.

Interestingly, criminal offences and violent behaviors appear to lie within the domain of academics working for Profesor Zawistowski. They constitute perfect suspects, as they are all "guilty of something" (Auden 1948, 409). One has a child with a girl under sixteen years of age, which is a criminal offence. Another academic, when drunk, destroyed a valuable archeological site, which was later covered up in documents. Another, a woman professor who appears as a paragon of academic virtue, is guilty of plagiarizing her MA thesis, casting doubt on her subsequent academic

achievements. Yet another has enormous financial problems, while rumors suggest that she was apprehended and suspected of art trafficking some time ago (Bińkowska 2017, 278–279).

The murderer was not only Zawistowski's subordinate but also a person emotionally dependent on him, a fact that the late director exploited relentlessly. As revealed in the course of the criminal investigation, Zawistowski achieved his powerful position in academia by blackmailing others. The investigation is carried out by Chief Inspector Jacek Budryś and Sergeant Iga Mirska, who alternate the roles of focalizers. Their initial mutual animosity gradually transforms into genuine friendship characterized by deep emotional involvement. Moreover, thanks to her family connections, Sergeant Mirska proves to be helpful in navigating the literal and metaphorical labyrinth of the campus. Her father, a professor of musicology at the university where the crime occurred, provides her with some useful observations. Therefore, albeit an outsider herself, Mirska's upbringing enhances her perceptiveness to the intricate dynamics of the academic "small world".

In *Tu się nie zabija* Bińkowska describes the financial problems of the Institute of Archeology which suffers more than other institutes in the Faculty of Humanities since it lacks funds for buying the expensive laboratory equipment and other materials for research. The absurdity of the regulations requires that even when the Institute is awarded a research grant, the anticipated costs are usually cut by two thirds, which makes the winning project unworkable. Paradoxically, regardless of the useless sum of money allotted to the Institute, academics from other institutes believe that their archeologist colleagues should be pleased since the positive evaluation of their proposal is in itself a tremendous success.

The working conditions of the scholars are hardly bearable not only because of the poor financing but due to the manipulative character of their late director, described as a sadist, recognizing no limits to his power. His subordinates are either totally submissive, or plan to quit the job once they find an opening in a different institution, which, however, borders on the miraculous. For example, Professor Irena Parys, who in addition to her scholarly duties has to do a lot of paperwork for the director Zawistowski, curses the day she decided to become "Indiana Jones in a skirt" (18). Professor Parys can be identified as the juggler, as her "academic work and family responsibilities […] occur in tandem" (Diezmann and Grieshaber 2019, 183). This balancing act leaves her feeling extremely stressed, unable to be a full time mother and a full time scholar simultaneously. Professor Zawistowski makes her life so challenging that there are moments when she wishes she had chosen to be a full-time housewife. Currently, she juggles between being partly a housewife, providing unpaid assistance to her three family members and the cat, and partly an academic, struggling with students and loads of administrative matters (Bińkowska 2017, 18). Consequently, she experiences a double sense of guilt: when at home, she cannot stop thinking about her work, and when at work, she frets over all her duties at home.

Bińkowska's vivid portrayal of the university, where she compares the institution to a large corporation, revealing how outsiders are barred from uncovering the intricate web of financial interdependence, laced with accusations of plagiarism, appears

to classify her academic mystery as yet another example of a globally relatable *roman à clef*. After all, the Internet is replete with news about financial frauds or plagiarized dissertations exposed at different universities all over the world.

CONCLUSION

The academic mystery novel, regardless of the nationality of its author, addresses the current situation of tertiary education, not only because the criminal offense occurs within the university walls but also because the institution itself appears to be quite efficient in creating, or even fostering, conditions conductive to violating the law. The criminal investigation aimed at finding the murderer reveals "academic secrets" that otherwise rarely hit the headlines. On the one hand, murders amongst academics are rather rare. This rarity casts doubt on the revelations discovered during the subsequent investigation, serving as a protective shield for the authors, more often than not academics themselves, who might be accused of tarnishing the good name of educational institutions. On the other hand, one may hope for certain reasonable changes when problems magnified by fictional academic characters, though often treated with disbelief by outsiders to academia, finally gain attention, even if only among academics who constitute the majority of the readership of university fiction. In that vein, the academic mystery novel should be more frequently included in the syllabi of literature courses, since only an awareness of the problems haunting academia, even in their fictionalized form, could lead to necessary improvements.

Like their Anglo-American counterparts, contemporary Polish academic mysteries feature crimes in university settings but differ in their approach to investigating these crimes. Polish authors appear to favor the police procedural format with external investigators playing the roles of protagonists. Although police procedurals set in academia are also popular across English-speaking countries, their treatment of academic life and mores rarely goes deeper than that of any other professional setting as a crime scene. In the Anglo-American tradition, the genres focused on exploring university issues in depth almost by default tend to feature protagonists from within academia, primarily professors and students. These protagonists serve as amateur sleuths and sidekicks to official investigators. As a result, in academic mysteries which typically adhere to the requirements of the classical detective formula the entire cast – the amateur detective, the sidekick, the murderer, the victim, and the suspects – is drawn from the university community.

Polish authors addressing various crimes in the academic milieu show preference for the police procedural, which suggests a certain degree of detachment – either real or apparent – achieved through the employment of the outside focalizers, namely police officers. The preference for police protagonists, rather than representatives of the university community, creates an emotional distance from academic life, which is a stark contrast to the intimate and emotionally engaged insider perspective characteristic of Anglo-American academic mysteries. As a result, in Polish academic mysteries it is an outsider, the police officer, who realizes the mimetic component of character, essential to evoke the reader's willing suspension of disbelief.

Consequently, the reader becomes more familiar with the lives, thoughts, and reasoning of the police officers than those of the academic characters directly involved in the fictional murders.

The examples of Polish mystery novels presented above show that even though the criminal investigation takes place within the university walls, the readers, especially those not professionally involved in academia, are encouraged to adopt the police investigator's perspective while getting engaged in solving the criminal conundrum. After all, it is the policemen whose ups and downs as well as personal problems constitute the remaining part of the narrative, while academics and their lives are reduced to answering questions or tampering with evidence, should they feel compelled to erase any traces for some reason.

The emergence of Polish academic mysteries, while still in an early phase, indicates the popularity of this particular subgenre of the academic novel. Polish authors have a great potential to develop the subgenre further. Following the institutional insight of the Anglo-American tradition, they may show the specificity of Polish tertiary education to a wider audience, for instance highlighting and satirizing the parallels between numerous bureaucratic procedures pervading apparently different institutions like the police and the university.

NOTES

[1] The novels which Skubaczewska-Pniewska classifies as the representatives of Polish academic fiction are, for example, *Pomysł* (The concept, 1974) by Kazimierz Brandys, *Zamek* (The castle, 1978) by Jerzy Kaczorowski, *Stręczyciel idei* (Procurer of ideas, 1980) by Julian Kornhauser, *Złoty pelikan* (The golden pelican, 2004) by Stefan Chwin, *Cyrograf* (The pact, 2006) by Andrzej Braun, *Ostatni raport* (The last report, 2009) by Zbigniew Kruszyński, *Na krótko* (Let's make it short, 2012) by Inga Iwasiów, *Wiosenne przesilenie* (Spring fatigue, 2013) by Jerzy Lesław Ordan.

[2] None of the Polish novels discussed or referred to in the present study have been translated into English; thus, all the translated quotes are mine.

[3] The "non-fiction" synopsis of the novel, which is the account of her 20-year career at the University of Wrocław, can be found on her website entitled "Ujawniamy nieprawidłowości w nauce – Tarajło-Lipowska" (We detect irregularities in science – Tarajło-Lipowska). In addition to *Śmierć dziekana*, Zofia Tarajło-Lipowska is the author of another academic mystery entitled *Recykling* (Recycling, 2017), also inspired by her career at the University of Wrocław.

[4] In chapter three of the *Poetics of Prose* entitled "The Typology of Detective Fiction", Tzvetan Todorov highlights the duality of detective fiction: "the first – the story of the crime – tells 'what really happened,' whereas the second – the story of the investigation – explains 'how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it'" (1977, 45).

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The campus novel and university satire in recent Czech literature

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Campus novel. Czech fiction. College themes. Satirical mode.

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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Magical realism and the othering of the academic in three Romanian postcommunist novels

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Magical realism and the othering of the academic in three Romanian postcommunist novels

Academic novels. Magical realism. The *other*. Postcommunism. Romanian literature.

This article discusses three academic novels by the Romanian authors Anton Marin, Alexandru Mușina, and Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru. Their novels pertain to the third and most recent "magical realist" stage in the development of the Romanian postcommunist academic novel, coming after what I have elsewhere identified as the "realist" and "metafictional" phases. In this phase, the Romanian academic novel evinces extreme instances of othering, as academics variously morph into grotesque creatures, ranging from Kafkaesque cockroaches to mythical vampires, from stand-alone eyes to gorillas. The article explores these practices of othering with an eye to the ways they were shaped by postcommunist experience. In the process, it considers the links between postcommunism, postcolonialism, and magical realism.

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The novels to be discussed in this article, Anton Marin's *Eu, gândacul* (I, the bug, 2009), Alexandru Mușina's *Nepotul lui Dracula* (Dracula's grandson, 2012), and *Scriptor sau Cartea transformărilor admirabile* (Scriptor or the book of admirable transformations, 2017) by Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru, pertain to a recently emerged genre within Romanian literature: the academic novel. In the Anglo-American literary continuum, this genre is generally regarded as having emerged in the early 1950s on both sides of the Atlantic. One of the theorists of the genre, Jeffrey J. Williams, distinguishes between academic novels as faculty-centered and campus novels as student-centered (2012, 561–562), a distinction that has been widely adopted by other scholars. Elaine Showalter retains the criterion for the distinction, but occasionally reverts to German terminology: "*Professorromane*" and "*Bildungsromane*" (2005, 2). In Romania, the student-centered novel goes back at least to the 1930s, when several campus novels were published (Mudure 2020, 79–80).

The faculty-centered novel, however, was slower to emerge. Mihaela Mudure does not mention any pre-1990 academic novels, and only two have been previously identified (Selejan 2021, 148), both published during the communist period. One of these, Alexandru Piru's *Cearta* (The quarrel, 1969), revolves around a university professor's love affair, and the other, Andrei Brezianu's *Castelul romanului* (The novel's castle, 1981), is so densely allegorical and cryptic that a coherent interpretation of its academic elements is extremely difficult. Nonetheless, the Romanian academic novel flourished after the fall of the Iron Curtain. In his novel *The Last Hundred Days*, Patrick McGuiness briefly sums up the situation of Romanian academics under communism: "[e]x-professors haunted the university buildings, minimum-wage ghosts who dusted their old lecture rooms or polished floorboards on all fours as their ex-colleagues stepped over them. […] [I]t was in the janitorial strata of Romania's universities that you found the real intellectuals" (2013, 31). Thus, only two categories of academics existed in communist Romania: the collaborationists, whose defection came to be called "the betrayal of the intellectuals" in the postcommunist public sphere, and the uncompromising intellectuals, who either ended their lives in poverty or died in prisons across Romania after fabricated trials conducted by the *Securitate*. After the first and most oppressive decades of communism, overcoded fictions made their way into print by dodging censorship, as Cristina Șandru states: "The oasis of fiction was tolerated by the communist authorities – it was censored, but ultimately, if intricate and symbolic enough, allowed a relatively free terrain of manifestation. The dexterity in maneuvering allusion was the ticket to publication" (2012, 94). Brezianu's novel clearly falls into this category. The first overtly and recognizably academic novels were published after 1989. They were either drably realist or blatantly slapstick satires that sometimes dispensed with any attempts to use fictional names for their characters. This realist phase in the early 1990s – mid-2000s was followed by a brief period of academic metafiction from the mid-2000s to the early 2010s, which was then superseded (or rather continued) by a neighboring literary mode, i.e. magical realism, from the early 2010s to the present (Selejan 2019, 2021).

According to Christopher Warnes (2006, 488), the oxymoronic term "magical realist" dates back to circa 1798, when it was first used by the German Romantic poet Novalis in his notebooks. Novalis never got to elaborate on magical realism, as he focused on the related term "magical idealism" (488), but his insistence on *Wunderwahrheit* (magical truth) rather than *Naturwahrheit* (truth of nature; 489) prefigures the tension between "natural and supernatural, realist and fantastic" (490) in 20th-century magical realism. In the 1920s, the term resurfaced in Germany and Italy, and starting in the 1940s, it was widely used in connection to Latin American fiction. Currently, it relates to a global literary phenomenon (Warnes 2009, 6), as the term was brought to bear on postcolonial literatures by Homi K. Bhabha: "'Magical realism' after the Latin American Boom, becomes the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world" (2000, 7). Thus, magical realism is a highly malleable literary mode exhibiting a "cyclically recurring spirit as opposed to a 'historical style' frozen in time", as Kim Anderson Sasser states (2014, 2–3). According to Șandru, the East-Central European strand of magical realism – as opposed to its Latin American counterpart – favors "the playful and the intellectual over the sentimental, the magical and the archetypal" (2012, 152). The novels discussed here illustrate this argument, as they are all playfully metafictional, albeit to different extents and in different ways. They also display several elements identified by central European scholars in their analyses of the kinship between South American and central European magical realism in a 2016 issue of *World Literature Studies* journal, which unites contributions on Slovak, Serbian, Czech, Hungarian and Romanian literature: the use of genealogies and family trees, the presence of repetition, excess and the rapid pace of the storytelling (N. Tóth and Petres Csizmadia 2016, 99–100), the integration of myths and dreams and a Baroque richness of narrative details (Gvozden 2016, 68), and the regional and areal contexts of the multicultural spaces constituted by peripheral territories formerly belonging to the Habsburg monarchy (Passia 2016, 32).

Since 2012, the year that saw the publication of Bogdan Ştefănescu's *Postcommunism/Postcolonialism: Siblings of Subalternity* and Cristina Şandru's *Worlds Apart? A Postcolonial Reading of Post-1945 East-Central European Culture*, the interest in approaching Romanian postcommunist literature through the postcolonial framework has intensified. For some East-Central (and Western) European scholars, such as David Chioni Moore, Alexander Kiossev, and Monica Bottez, the postcolonial approach is appealing due to its explanatory potential with regard to postcommunism. Others resist making any link between the two or regard such a link warily, not least because postcolonialism is often perceived as "a dominant research paradigm where western high theory is applied to local material" (Tlostanova 2012, 134) or in other words, postcommunism is perceived as being "the poor relative, the *other* of postcolonialism" (Bottez et al. 2011, 235). Dobrota Pucherová and Róbert Gáfrik, on the other hand, apply the postcolonial label to Central and Eastern Europe: "*all* of Europe is postcolonial, *but* in different ways" (2015, 14, italics in the original) but use it in a qualifying and nuanced manner by identifying new theoretical vocabulary such as postcommunist Gothic, mutant coloniality, and self-colonization (13). For

the novels discussed here, Romania's postcolonial relations to the Kingdom of Hungary, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, and the USSR bear limited significance, as there are sparse allusions to Romania's late medieval and early modern history of subordination (in particular in Alexandru Mușina's novel). With regard to the postcommunist period, Romania's neo-colonial (Pucherová and Gáfrik 2015, 22) link to Western Europe on the one hand and its proto-colonial (Kovačević 2008, 2) relation to the European Union (EU) on the other are highly relevant. Like other East-Central European countries, Romania is plagued by the ruthless exploitation of its "human and natural resources" by West-European investors and the phenomenon of brain-drain, while its internal colonization of ethnic minorities like the Roma (to be discussed in connection with Mușina's novel) continues (Pucherová and Gáfrik 2015, 22). Its proto-colonial relation to the EU manifests itself as a "uni-directional flow of directives and their acceptance as necessary for emancipation from economic or cultural 'inferiority'" (Kovačević 2008, 2). It is evident by now that East-Central Europe emerges as Western Europe's post-/neo-/proto-colonial *other*.

Each of the three Romanian postcommunist academic novels considered in the present article showcases a different kind of magical realism and different practices of othering. In all three novels, the Romanian academic world is presented as a microcosm,[1] a small-scale copy of Romanian postcommunist society, ridden as it is with corruption, inequality and the ideological clashes inherent in a society transitioning from communism to capitalism, as Romanians' attitudes range from nostalgia for the financial and social stability of the communist period (Todorova 2010, 5–6) to a ready and opportunistic embrace of capitalism and even comprador-like behaviors. While the fictional worlds of these novels suggest a continuity between Romanian academia and Romanian postcommunist society, they simultaneously present the academic as *other*, thereby distancing the academic world from society at large. Thus, the academic is portrayed as a Kafkaesque cockroach, a modern-day vampire, a stand-alone eye or a gorilla. In effecting this extreme form of othering, the Romanian academic novel departs from the Anglo-American bedrock of academic fiction, which comprises novels like James Hynes's *The Lecturer's Tale* (2001), in which the protagonist is temporarily endowed with an infallible power of persuasion, yet preserves all his human attributes.

The three novels discussed here are by authors coming from the three historical Principalities – Moldavia, Wallachia, and Transylvania – that became united (in 1859 and 1918, respectively) to form contemporary Romania, a relatively recent creation as countries go. Each Principality boasts a rich history of subordination to imperial powers (Transylvania to the Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Empire, Wallachia to the Ottoman Empire, Moldavia to both empires just mentioned and to the Russian Empire, with occasional attacks from Poland). Thus, Anton Marin is from Wallachia, Alexandru Mușina is from Transylvania, and Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru is from Moldavia. This history of imperialism further nuances the practices of othering at work in the novels, a fact that is particularly visible in Mușina's novel, which problematizes the fact that Dracula is a product of Western European culture.

KAFKAESQUE COCKROACHES AND ANTI-ESTABLISHMENTARIANISM

Marin's novel *Eu, gândacul* is a first-person reworking of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915), a masterpiece of magical realism *avant la lettre*. The former's protagonist, Dan C. Mihăilescu,[2] is a chemistry lecturer at the University of Bucharest who contemplates writing a novel about a man turned cockroach and who also muses over being turned into a cockroach himself. Eventually, he is granted both wishes: he turns into a cockroach after drinking holy water and Marin's novel reads like a metafictional, work-in-progress account of the protagonist's adventures in the insectile world. Mihăilescu almost instantly becomes the "*Șefu*'" or "boss" (2009, 59) of almost 20 million cockroaches, inmates of the University of Bucharest. The fact that the protagonist takes to calling himself "The Great Civilizing Hero – GCH for short"[3] (2009, 65) might allude both to Romania's colonial relationship to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and to its current "neo-colonial" subordination to its Western European investors and its "proto-colonial" status within the EU. The number of cockroaches roughly equals the population of Romania, suggesting that the cockroach community is a micro-representation of Romanian society. Elsewhere, the lecturer turned cockroach calls himself "el lidero maximo" (84), pointing towards the authoritarianism of a communist leader like Fidel Castro. He also compares himself to Hanibal, Caesar and Napoleon (93). In short, while leading the cockroaches, the protagonist experiments with every power structure known to humankind. Heroically, he manages to avert a catastrophe by preventing pest control from killing the entire cockroach population, but he also – rather conveniently – uses them for his own, human, ends, i.e. for purging the university of its most corrupt members by exposing their dealings. Mihăilescu manages this by communicating with his academic peers through the bodies of the cockroaches that literally write accusations on the wall for the academics to read. This is another deliberate allusion to communism, as the formations of cockroaches moving in unison evoke the massive parades that used to be organized for communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu (198). However, the protagonist seems to be impervious to communist-style megalomania, as he declares in a self-congratulatory aside, by retaining a sense of the ridiculous and a sense of proportion in spite of his notoriety and authority allegedly reaching positively stratospheric levels (186).

Characteristic of academic fiction, then, the community of cockroaches living within the University of Bucharest is seen as a microcosm of Romanian society at large. It is arguable whether this society is a utopian-communist or a "neo-colonized" capitalist one. If anything, it seems to be a hybrid, mongrelized form. The protagonist's "others" are both his fellow academics, whom he despises for their moral atrophy, and the community of cockroaches, upon whom he looks down for their lack of human intelligence. The former attitude is redolent of communism, while the latter suggests capitalist colonialism. Nonetheless, the protagonist is part of both communities, a possible allusion to the transitional, in-between, hybrid state of post-communist societies.

Given the lecturer's lack of power and authority in his initial and in his final form, i.e. as a human, his time spent as a cockroach-cum-superhero smacks of escapism, but

it also illustrates the antibureaucratic position of magical realist texts, which means, according to Wendy B. Faris, that they "use their magic against the established social order" (1995, 179). His academic integrity renders him a misfit within the academic community and, arguably, within Romanian society at large, a fact he has clearly internalized, since he is musing on becoming a cockroach in order to enjoy a quieter, simpler life. It is only from his vantage point as an insect that the protagonist can be turned into a spy, a secret observer not just of his fellow academics, but also of other characters. In this, the story differs greatly from Kafka's. The adventures of Mihăilescu the cockroach place the novel's reader in a sort of panopticon from which heavily and deliberately stereotyped people from all walks of life are seen in action: poorly qualified journalists, ruthless real estate speculators, cleaning ladies who steal, porters who drink, university professors who are bribed by students as well as politicians, nurses who traffic internal organs, etc. The author's deftness in seemingly effortlessly switching between linguistic registers is remarkable. Obscene and offensive language is alternated with elevated idioms and academic jargon (especially in the metafictional asides to the reader), with incorrect grammar as a marker of a working-class status and with untranslatable regionalisms. A special idiom is dedicated to cockroach language, which is the most ungrammatical of all. Thus, language becomes a potent othering technique in Marin's novel, which, to a higher degree than Mușina's, abounds in stereotypes.

MODERN-DAY VAMPIRES AND ANTI-EU ATTITUDES

In the same denunciatory vein, Mușina's novel *Nepotul lui Dracula* – whose title translates as "Dracula's grandson" or "Dracula's descendant" – holds up an inconvenient light to Romanian postcommunist corruption, both within and outside academia. Other processes of othering are at work in this novel, which self-reflexively recycles the transnational Dracula myth, as if "to reclaim a space of otherness by appealing to myths of difference", as Christopher Warnes argues (2009, 5). One of the academics in Mușina's novel asserts that the Dracula myth says more about its creators than it does about its object: "Dracula is their [i.e. the West's] cultural product, not ours… Anthropologically, it's a common occurrence: you project the evil in yourself onto the Other, the foreigner" (2012, 149). This statement mirrors Șandru's assertion that the Balkans have been

> the repository of the West's forbidden desires and anxieties – in Freudian terms, the unrepressed part of the continent's psychic life. Hence its association with violence, primitivism and excess (whether political-revolutionary or sexual), all traits that an "enlightened" Europe sought to drive out of its psychic constitution and project outwards, on an Other that would thus be both part of the self, and at the same time different from the self, that which the self rejects or suppresses. (2012, 36)

The protagonist of Mușina's novel is a young academic, an assistant lecturer in French literature who discovers that he is actually a vampire and a descendant of Wallachian voivode Vlad Țepeș, i.e. Vlad the Impaler, also known as Vlad Dracul, i.e. Vlad the Devil. Bram Stoker (among other British Gothic writers) superimposed his own fictional creation, Dracula the vampire, on the historical figure

of Vlad the Impaler,[4] a fact that most Romanians resent and deplore, while enjoying the fruits of the region's intensified tourism; after all, Dracula has become a national brand. Mușina playfully merges the myth with history in his protagonist, Florin Angelescu Dragolea, whose oxymoronic name resembles that of "magical realism", as it alludes to both angel and devil. The students call him FAD, using an acronym that also means "dull" in Romanian, alluding to his tedious lectures and to the drab outfit he wears every day. In academically dishonest fashion, his lectures heavily rely on his hopelessly recondite doctoral thesis on Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which he teaches in each of the three years of study, under different course titles. However, starting with the moment he discovers steak tartare (and the blood contained therein), he and indeed his lectures become much more animated and he is re-branded as "Fifi", a name meant to underscore his newly-found "coolness". The novel hyperbolically and humorously traces Fifi's way to a highly unlikely life of glamour (as he becomes King Fifi Dracula I) and thereby effects, in Șandru's words, "a visionary transformation of the drabness of the real through the defamiliarizing, transfigurative powers of art" (2012, 149), which is specific to the original European version of magical realism. Throughout Mușina's novel, vampirism is relentlessly defamiliarized and unveiled as existing everywhere: in the university, where students drain their professors of energy and knowledge (2012, 126); within the EU, an institution very deft at depleting the natural resources of certain member states (409), etc.

Seen as an opportunity for Romanian scholars to get grants and funding by accommodating vampires in a politically correct manner, vampirism is comically described as a "new minority to be acknowledged, to be protected, positive discrimination, special parking lots, [admission quotas] in universities, dimmed lights in the lecture or seminar room so their eyes won't hurt… the whole thing" (143). The leading philology professors consider establishing an institute for the literary research of vampires that could boast a certified vampire among its researchers and would therefore surely be unique worldwide. The flamboyant humor employed by this kind of tongue-in-cheek discourse is subverted by serious undercurrents, however. Thus, the academics note that Bram Stoker's version of the Dracula myth was developed in full decadence, i.e. in late 19th-century London. They comment on Dracula's being a modern Robin Hood, one who sucked the blood of upper middle-class girls in a sort of retaliation to this social class for sucking the blood of the British colonies (139). Significantly, Dracula is placed at the very margins of the civilized world, i.e. in Transylvania. In the Transylvanian academics' interpretation (Mușina's novel takes place in Brașov, Transylvania), Stoker's novel does not so much revolve around vampirism as it is meant to unmask the *other* who has to be eliminated for being different and therefore dangerous by default. The current state of the transnational Dracula myth is also analyzed and parallels between postcolonialism and postcommunism are constantly suggested. Thus, recent portrayals of Dracula in Western European and American culture attempt to humanize Dracula, similar to the way Western Leftist intellectuals of the 1950s–1970s attempted to humanize communism (140). Significantly, these debates between the scholars from Brașov extend over 50 pages, taking up more than ten per cent of the novel's length. The members of this overtly elitist club which calls

itself COI, an acronym standing for the "Club of Intelligent People" in Romanian, are all men, which correlates to the literal meaning of the acronym, i.e. testicle. Nonetheless, the unofficial head of the School of Letters who exceeds the dean in power is neither an academic, nor a man, but the chief secretary, Enikö Trăistaru, a former Securitate member, a woman, an ethnic Hungarian, and a Protestant in a predominantly Orthodox country – in short, the epitome of a minority, but at the same time a reminder of Transylvania's colonization by the Kingdom of Hungary and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As is evident from the discussion on pro-vampiric affirmative action above, political correctness is mocked ad infinitum in the novel, in an attempt to shake off contemporary Western cultural colonization.

The same holds true for postmodernism. This may seem paradoxical, given that magical realism is generally regarded as an important strand of postmodernism. However, this is yet another point of resistance in which Romanian literature and criticism depart from the Anglo-American center. In Romanian writing, the relevance or applicability of postmodernism to Romanian culture is a controversial subject and Mușina's own view illustrates this point, as he coined an autochthonous term (the new anthropocentrism) as a counterpart to Western postmodernism. Consequently, *Nepotul lui Dracula* repeatedly sports terms like postmodern, postmodernity and postmodernism, to seemingly indiscriminately describe any current cultural developments and fashions: "A huge broken toy, with a PhD in Proust's semiosis, and a bacchant, the girlfriend of a sheik from the Gulf, dancing to *Rock Around the Clock* at 10 p.m., on the 3rd floor of a block of flats on Victory Boulevard – that is the quintessence of postmodernity" (89). Similarly, Fifi is a civilized, postmodern vampire who does not kill his victims for their blood, but asks his students to kindly donate it and awards them good grades in return. Bubu and Lulu, the alluring female undergraduates he teaches are postmodern fairies (27) of trendy, postmodern femininity (11), whereas the young scholar and ladies' man Remus Durac is euphemistically refashioned into an eternal lover, the likes of Tristan, Dante and Petrarch: "A sincere and devoted one, but also a postmodern one, i.e. a multiple one: he loved women, all women. He was rhizomatically looking for Woman in, through and amongst women. Seven to eight at a time […]" (2012, 199). The Faculty of Letters is a postmodern tribe with unpaid research quotas (145), led by a postmodern and eternally busy dean. Mușina – who was a poet, a critic and a creative writing professor – voiced his qualms vis-à-vis postmodernism, which he considered to be essentially a mannerism. This explains the many repetitions that parodically dapple the novel, such as the description of Fifi's fangs: "a row of cavity-free teeth, only slightly tobacco-stained, with the two upper canines somewhat longer than normal, in his deeply red, chili-colored gums" (5) and of the way he speaks French: "A distinguished, 19th-century French with a slight unrolling of the 'r', the way it used to be spoken in aristocratic circles in interwar [Romania]" (5). All these parodic features (the ironic overuse of "postmodern", repeated ad nauseam) are meant to underscore the novel's subversiveness, which is essential to both magical realism and metafiction.

Naming the Other is a pervasive othering strategy in the novels discussed here. Florin Angelescu Dragolea is rarely called by his name, as the novel's text is replete

with "Professor FAD" and "Fifi", the former denigrating his teaching abilities, while the latter is meant as a term of endearment. His succinct description by the novel's narrator is very telling: "Professor FAD was [...] a freak, a misfit within postcommunist society" (2012, 72). Another instance that illustrates the power of naming in Mușina's novel relates to ethnic minorities in Romania and the political correctness that the EU promotes with regard to them. On a trip to a conference at Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu, the protagonist meets Elvis Boboieru, a rich Romani chief who is struck by Fifi's resemblance to boyar Atănasă Drăculea, Boboieru's grandfather's master before the advent of communism. Boboieru's ostentatious residence is endowed with postmodern charm, as its architectural style with 28 turrets is a combination of the Taj Mahal, the US Capitol, and a Russian cathedral (379). Boboieru – whose name is derived from "the boyar's ox", since his grandfather regularly gave blood to the boyar – refuses to call himself a Romani instead of gypsy. He traces the politically correct name's origins to what he perceives as the perfidious, capitalist West: "Roma is a word invented by slick Americans and Germans so they can better exploit us, cut us off from our roots, so we forget our traditions and they can do whatever they like with us. Make us their servants. Only the stupid ones are Roma, the clever lads are all gypsies" (181). The gypsy servants who had provided generations of vampiric Drăculea boyars with blood metaphorically and ironically illustrate what Ștefănescu calls the "internal colonization" of the Romani population, a colonization achieved by means of "infantilization and denigration" (2012, 54).

Like Marin, Mușina sees the "fog" of postcommunism as a mere continuation of the "darkness" of communism: "After the Red Plague of communism came the Yellow Plague of generalized theft, reckless consumption, of impudence and bare-faced lies" (2012, 408). The novel triumphantly ends with Fifi crowned king of Romania and expected by his subjects to be an "honest" vampire literally sucking the blood of his certified donors (students and Romani people) instead of the figurative blood of an entire country. Here, the text alludes to the complicity between corrupt Romanian postcommunist politicians and the EU, especially in the often scandal-provoking privatization of massive state-owned companies:

> For 'tis a greater sin to take the blood and skin of an entire people, to cut down its forests, to sell for peanuts to foreigners its corn, petroleum, salt and marble, its gold, silver, uranium and methane gas, the honey of its meadows and the fruits of its orchards, its water and air, and to hide the dirty money in off-shore bank accounts in the Bahamas, the Seychelles or Switzerland, than 'tis to drink, like the next man, the wine, the plum, pear or grape brandy made in one's own household. Or, as a borderline case, the blood donated by those who hold you in high regard and love you. Each to their own metabolism, their peculiarity and their habits of consumption. (409)

The grotesque humor of this passage is typical of the novel's dream-like sections. As if the mythical and magical elements of modern-day vampirism were not outrageous enough, each of the novel's chapters is divided into several sections, the last of which consists of the protagonist's dreams, though this is rarely stated as such. The quotation above is taken from what the reader takes to be Fifi's last and most extravagant dream. In this, Mușina's novel illustrates magical realism's propensity

to make the reader hesitate between what Faris terms "understanding an event as a character's hallucination or as a miracle" (1995, 171).

GORILLAS, STAND-ALONE EYES AND ANTI-ACADEMIC FEELING

As degenerate and decadent as Mușina's novel sounds, given the brevity of this description, the colonialism-as-vampirism of *Nepotul lui Dracula* is not macabre, but buoyant and hilarious. By contrast, Cuțitaru's novel *Scriptor sau Cartea transformărilor admirabile* (Scriptor or the book of admirable transformations) seems to enact the shift from the European version of magical realism to its subsequent versions by pointing to what Șandru calls "the unrepresentable at the heart of the real – the horrific, the grotesque, the macabre" (2012, 149). The narrative voices are now dark, restrained and very similar to each other, as opposed to the irreverent and playful voices of the other two novels. *Scriptor*'s leitmotif is "*pleasure in pain*" (Cuțitaru 2017, 21), a phrase similar in its oxymoronic quality to magical realism. This expression is repeated throughout the novel and it is often commented upon in terms of its paradoxical and oxymoronic character.

The novel's introductory section, its epilogue and two brief interludes are printed in a different type font than the bulk of the book, which consists of five sections entitled "Confusio" (62), "Vigilia" (116), "Solitudo" (213), "Conversio" (218), and "Substitutio" (229), each having a different character as its declared author, who does not always coincide with the section's narrator. The Latin titles conspicuously allude to the Latinity prized by all Romanians and underscore Romania's borderline identity. As Bogdan Ștefănescu claims, Romania is a "prime candidate for ambiguity neurosis", as its "elites have traditionally defined their nation as a mongrelized cross between Greek Orthodoxy and linguistic Latinity" (2012, 110). One of the two main characters, Boris Mercuti, has an Italian Catholic father and a Romanian Orthodox mother. When his father dies, he is torn between the two religions, and although he lived in Romania all his life and was submerged in Romanian culture, his Italian roots are foregrounded: "He felt he was tied through deep, intricate and subtle channels, to that ancient culture, to which he had always belonged, despite the irony of fate" (2017, 46). Incidentally, one of Mușina's characters, Professor Teodor Cossiga, is also Italian. Both novels point towards what is traditionally seen as the genesis of the Romanian people, i.e. the Roman conquest of Dacia in 101–106 AD, while also foregrounding contemporary hybrid identities.

Mercuti is repeatedly described as a man who was crushed by the 1989 revolution. He had been a promising academic when he decided to go into politics, a decade before the fall of communism. Unlike his comrades, who cynically re-enter politics as recycled socialists after 1989 (52), he returns to academia, but he feels alienated from both faculty and students. Eventually, he gives up social life altogether and is finally shown to have mysteriously disappeared – into a transcendent world – through a mirror,[5] from where he is still able to observe the "real" world he left. The story of Mercuti's metamorphosis is appropriately told in "Conversio", which is ostensibly penned by Petronel Normanu, but contains a first-person narrative from Mercuti's point of view.

Before his disappearance, Mercuti morphs into a gorilla and is variously described as a massive, furry monster, "Yeti", "Bigfoot" (226), and, significantly, a vampire: "I thought I saw a vampire ready to hiss, idiotically, through his teeth" (225).[6] The *Doppelgänger* motif is prevalent, suggested by repeated references to Edgar Allan Poe's short story *William Wilson*, first published in 1839, but also by Mercuti's final disappearance through a mirror. At the onset of his transformation, Mercuti wonders whether its cause is the radical change brought about by the fall of communism in December 1989. He realizes that he had misread himself when he had gone into politics under communism: "I had not been ready for the political experiment, I know that now, but what was happening to me (as a punishment?) was decidedly too much! […] I was, undeniably, a pedantic, sophisticated bookworm. Therefore, I clearly didn't belong in politics. I was wrong. *I misinterpreted myself*" (222, italics in the original). The trauma caused by his "oxymoronic" life – the word "oxymoronic" is frequently used in the novel – is never resolved and the novel's last section, "Substitutio", set a century later, in the year 2098, features a stuffed gorilla. In this section, Petronel Normanu mirrors Mercuti's transformation into a gorilla and becomes himself one. Like Mercuti, Normanu had been unable to adapt to postcommunist reality: "Oh well, I have always been out of sync with the accelerated progress of *my* world!" (239, italics in the original) A century earlier, he had feigned senility while being a university professor because he could no longer make sense of the world. Like Mercuti, Normanu suspects that his transformation into a gorilla might be a punishment for his earlier act of falsehood: "He *knew* he had exaggerated in miming early senility within the community, but what he went through now (a punishment for his previous social 'histrionics'?) was too much by any coercive or punitive standard" (237, italics in the original). Both Mercuti and Normanu are writers and academics who at some point give up on academia, in different ways. Their transformations into primates can be interpreted as a punishment for that defection or, as "Solitudo" and "Conversio" suggest, a gradual death of the writer as a human and a birth of the Scriptor. In "Solitudo", the act of living is seen as a search for the Transcendent and the act of writing as a translation of the Transcendent for the others. The Scriptor would then be the fusion of the two: "an entity capable 'to connect' *directly* to the Transcendent. An impersonal (trans-personal and, simultaneously, trans-corporeal) entity" (217, italics in the original). In "Conversio", the writer is seen as a donor of intellectual and spiritual chlorophyll, in the sense that the writer needs to die in order for the literary work to be able to survive.

Victor Olescu, Mercuti's best friend and simultaneously the dean who enabled Mercuti to return to academia after the fall of communism, is reduced to a standalone eye by successive amputations he has to undergo because he suffers from peripheral artery disease. Hyperbole and paranoia permeate this section of the novel, appropriately entitled "Vigilia", and the watchful eye that used to be Victor Olescu recalls the kind of paranoia induced by Ceaușescu's secret police (Securitate) during communism. In the end, Victor's wife succumbs to madness and the eye is swallowed by Victor's dog, Beșleagă, who, like Victor's son, has become increasingly inimical to him. Paranoia also permeates the novel's first section, "Confusio", which

tells the story of an academic scandal occasioned by a student's lurid campus story in which many university professors recognize themselves and their own questionable affairs. As a result, the student is expelled, only to be re-enrolled later and to eventually become the promising Petronel Normanu.

This novel is the most disturbing of the three, due to the backward-looking morbidity that pervades its plots, as well as its ominously restrained style, which varies but little across the different sections with ostensibly different authors. As both the title and references to Roland Barthes's 1967 essay "Death of the Author" suggest, the novel's author is turned into a quasi-Barthesian *scriptor* who obliquely collects the work of others. Cuțitaru's *scriptor* is, however, Barthesian with a twist: while Barthes conceives of the *scriptor* as an entity whose "hand, detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin" (1986, 52) and the text is "a fabric of quotations […] a tissue of signs, endless imitation" (53), Cuțitaru's *scriptor* is the reader's link to the Transcendent and is characterized as being "gigantic, dazzling and seductive" (2017, 217). This description of the prophetic *scriptor* (albeit ironic) would probably elicit a frown from Barthes, who took such pains to dismantle the notion of the Author as some kind of genius.

CONCLUSION

The three novels discussed above illustrate various strands of magical realism, with different structures of othering. While Marin's cockroach and Cuțitaru's various creatures are deeply disruptive to their social and academic surroundings, Mușina's vampire is less a disruption and more a diversion. The attentiveness to alterity displayed by these novels could be read as a postcommunist backlash, as "totalitarianism is radically impervious to otherness – that is, it denies the existence of a *thou* that is comparable to an *I*…" because "it treats 'difference' as 'opposition'" (Todorov 2003, 34). Marin's and Mușina's novels create a distinct sense of relief and of freedom, while Cuțitaru's novel is more restrained. Nonetheless, all three novels use language extravagantly, in a carnivalesque spirit that is perhaps most visible in Mușina's novel.

The academic is othered "from within", as the three authors are academics themselves, yet there is a lingering sense that, at least in part, this self-image is an internalized one, an image hailing "from without". All the novels discussed here portray, to different degrees and in different ways, a self-image of the Romanian (indeed Balkan) postcommunist academic that seems to result from internalizing a Western European image of Eastern Europeans as corrupt and chaotic, or as perpetrators of despotism and nepotism, named by Șandru as "the savage within" (2012, 36). Nonetheless, the novels' subversiveness rebels against both East and West, against the Soviet/Communist legacy and its trauma, as well as Western cultural and economic neo-colonizers.

NOTES

[1] The "microcosm" argument has become a commonplace in academic fiction criticism, as David Lodge (2006, 5) and Terry Eagleton (1988, 94) illustrate.

[2] Dan C. Mihăilescu is also the name of a contemporary Romanian literary historian, critic and essayist. The three novels can also be read as *romans à clef*, particularly because Marin and Mușina set their novels in two real Romanian universities. However, a reading of the novels as *romans à clef* goes beyond the scope of the present article. An example of a thinly-disguised academic is Andrei Terian of Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, who is mentioned in Mușina's novel as Professor "Ternian" of the same university (2012, 199).

[3] Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Romanian are by the present author.

[4] Ironically, Vlad the Impaler (1431–1476) was a ruler of Wallachia who has gone down in the collective Romanian imaginary as a voivode who kept the Ottoman Empire at bay and did not tolerate any form of dishonesty or theft in Wallachia.

[5] The mirrors encountered in Cuțitaru's novel quite literally embody a feature of magical realist fiction, in which according to Faris, "repetition as a narrative principle, in conjunction with mirrors or their analogues used symbolically or structurally, creates a magic of shifting references" (1995, 177).

[6] Metamorphoses are also common in magical realism (Faris 1995, 178).

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The American university in the aftermath of 9/11 in Susan Choi's novel *A Person of Interest*

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The American university in the aftermath of 9/11 in Susan Choi's novel *A Person of Interest*

Susan Choi. Campus novel. Post-9/11 fiction. Moral panic. Profiling. Folk devil.

This article analyzes Susan Choi's *A Person of Interest* (2008) as a work of post-9/11 campus fiction. Personal grudges, hidden motives, and past secrets take on a new dimension in the atmosphere of suspicion, where even a respectable citizen becomes a suspect. The novel serves as a microcosm of the post-9/11 world, portraying a space where the ordinary transforms into a landscape of fear and distrust. By examining it through moral panic theory, the following analysis demonstrates how surveillance invades personal privacy, stripping individuals of their humanity and reducing them to suspects. The protagonist Lee's once private, unremarkable life becomes a spectacle for public scrutiny, with his movements, relationships, and past subjected to relentless investigation.

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Campus novels are a broad, flexible category that integrates many subgenres and themes and reflects diverse cultural and educational landscapes. In contrast, 9/11 and post-9/11 fiction is primarily an American literary development deeply rooted in the nation's recent political history and its collective response to trauma (O'Donnell 2010; Wagner-Martin 2013). Susan Choi's novel *A Person of Interest* (2008) stands out as a unique integration of these genres, blending the universality of campus narratives with the localized, historically grounded themes of post-9/11 fiction. *A Person of Interest* also distinguishes itself thematically from other works within the genre and its American literary contemporaries, such as *Blue Angel* (2000) by Francine Prose, *The Human Stain* (2000) by Philip Roth, or *Real Life* (2020) and *The Late Americans* (2023) by Brandon Taylor. These novels have distinct identitarian and ideological slants, typical for American fiction of the last 50 years. Though Choi's novel is not an exception in this respect, the writer reaches beyond rewarding and politically appropriate motifs. *A Person of Interest* is a post-9/11 campus novel and a psychological drama that blends personal and political narratives and reflects the anxieties of an increasingly surveillance-driven and fear-stricken society. The writer uses the backdrop of a university campus to explore issues of identity, suspicion, and guilt in the wake of a local traumatic event that mirrors the psychological and sociopolitical landscape of post-9/11 America. Through Professor Lee's experience, the novel discusses themes of paranoia, racial prejudice, and the loss of trust, reflecting the heightened fear and suspicion that characterized the period following the attacks of September 11, 2001. The characters' occupation makes their life choices and challenges ethically challenging and emotionally poignant.

A Person of Interest is not Choi's only novel exploring various aspects of American university life. Academia is one of her favorite subjects, and she revisits it in her novels *My Education* (2014) and *Trust Exercise* (2019). Even though we cannot label them as campus fiction, a university/school setting and characters connected with academia are crucial for their plots. In *A Person of Interest*, a university, which is a setting typically associated with intellectual freedom, diversity, and the pursuit of truth, becomes a scene of violence – an explosion in Professor Hendley's office kills a young and famous mathematician. The bomb arrived with mail addressed to this utterly unpolitical person admired by students and colleagues, except for Lee, whose life is profoundly altered by the bombing. The unexpected attack and Hendley's death make Lee, a 65-year-old Asian-American professor of mathematics, look back at his personal dramas, unhappy relations, betrayals, jealousy, and professional unfulfillment.

In Choi's novel, echoes of the "Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski's story are evident. However, the socio-historical context of *A Person of Interest* is distinctly different, shaping how this narrative is approached. Choi was familiar with Kaczynski's case because her father, Chang Choi, a mathematics professor at Indiana University South Bend, followed it closely, especially when investigators revealed the bomber's identity. Choi's father was shocked to discover that Kaczynski was the "antisocial genius from his Michigan doctoral program with whom he had exchanged notes and shared desk space" (Valby 2008). Theodore "Ted" Kaczynski was a once-brilliant mathematician

who studied at Harvard and Michigan, taught at Berkeley, then became a recluse in Montana. He first came to the FBI's attention in 1978 when a rudimentary homemade bomb detonated at a university in Chicago. Over the next 17 years, he sent or delivered a series of increasingly sophisticated bombs, ultimately killing three people and injuring nearly two dozen others. Kaczynski's actions instilled widespread fear and panic, including threats to target airplanes in flight. It took a special FBI-led task force almost 17 years to identify and apprehend the Unabomber (UNABOM being the case code name, standing for "University and Airline Bombing") (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2024).

The character of Donald Whitehead, a bomber, is inspired by Kaczynski. He, too, is a brilliant mathematician who works at Berkeley after earning his degree and later retreats to a hermit's life. However, Choi does not create a direct prototype of the terrorist of the 1980s–1990s. Whitehead is a flat character whose role serves "little more than a pretext, a device that allows Choi to stage Lee's inner chaos against the spectacular backdrop of an FBI manhunt and the inevitable media circus that the case attracts" (Gibbons n.d., n.p.). In short, Whitehead's role in the novel is to launch a retrospective "Redemption Machine" for Lee. This is part of James Gibbons's criticism of Choi's use of the Unabomber's case. The critic's point is valid, though Choi did not intend to focus on Whitehead's history, or explore his moral and psychological disintegration. As she mentioned in one of her interviews, people like Kaczynski are "stultifying", while those "being dragged along in their wake, the people whose lives they've destroyed – they can be riveting" (Newberger 2008, n.p.). Her sympathy lies with Lee and the disintegration of his personality amid the post-9/11 atmosphere of moral panic and suspicion, which profoundly affects his life, the academy, and interpersonal relationships.

Choi deliberately does not give her protagonist a first name – he is just Lee. Nor does she specify his ethnicity. He speaks Japanese and spent his childhood near an unidentified ocean, so we may assume he is Japanese or Chinese, but the writer does not identify the country of his origin. Giving him probably one of the most common Asian last names, Choi underscores the typicality of his situation: "I'd decided I didn't want to be specific about Lee's ethnicity, and so I needed something generic for his name that didn't paint me into a corner. Lee did the trick for a last name, but then I couldn't hit on an equally generic first name. And after a while I liked the sound of his just being 'Lee'" (Newberger 2008, n.p.).

The explosion of the bomb next door and the unexpected elimination of Lee's rival expose his deeply hidden grudges and jealousy:

> The bomb and Lee's terrible gladness: that something was damaging Hendley because Hendley made Lee feel even more obsolete and unloved. It had been the gross shock of realizing that he felt glad that had brought him to sitting, from being curled on the floor, and that had nailed his gaze emptily to the opposite wall. He was deep in disgusted reflection on his own pettiness when the bomb squad found him. (Choi 2008, 9)

Lee finds himself under suspicion, partly because of his awkward attitude (he does not visit Hendley in the hospital, never asks anyone about his condition, and skips the memorial service) but also due to his status as an outsider and of Asian origin.

His alienation, which primarily has psychological and cultural roots, is tied to his ethnic background and a deep social inferiority complex, which Lee has experienced ever since he found himself in the USA:

> Jealousy had stained much of Lee's life [...]. As a young man, before emigrating, he'd never experienced any of the circumstances that might have aroused that emotion. His had been, initially, an exceptionally privileged family. Then they had fallen. [...] [T]he anguish of being a fallen aristocrat, or as much of a fallen aristocrat as your nation can muster, is a very different anguish from that of envying those better off. His family had only their past selves to envy, and envy was not what they felt; they mourned their past selves as if they'd been cut down by death. Lee felt fierce love for the naïve and arrogant young man he'd been, and, sometimes, in his immigrant life, this love almost seemed to reanimate that former self, so that to outsiders he seemed both arrogant and remarkably blind to his own circumstances. (15)

With time, Lee's uncertainly, bitterness, and sense of loss transform into psychological insecurity and a feeling of inadequacy, which he tries to conceal: "Lee modeled himself on the Byronic octet, not without some success; his ink-dark, almost mirrorlike hair grew to fall in a cowlick that hid his forehead; he found a battered calf briefcase, like a WASPy, neglected heirloom, in a secondhand store" (17–18). Lee's academic career, while consistent, remains relatively unremarkable, and little is known about it. It is all connected with the same school where he became a member of the academic community that got used to him, even when, as the reader may conclude, he did not feel entirely at home because of the old grudges of the past.

The unnamed university where the novel's action takes place is located in a Midwestern town in the Rust Belt, and is the town's single distinguishing element. Otherwise, it is "grey and enfeebled", and young people are leaving it or succumbing to drug use. A division of the town into the "gown" and "nongown" parts means a clear social gap. For Lee, a house in the "gown" part lost its appeal long ago. He is as bitter about it as about everything else in his personal and academic life:

> Lee no more felt a kinship to these town geriatrics than he would have to horses or cows. Academic life demanded that reflexive belief in exemption from sorry surroundings, as if being a tenured professor at a second-rate school were like being an American diplomat in the Third World. [...] But what if twenty-five years in the same place had filled with time's silt the dividing abyss, so that now Lee was less a grand Gownsman than another old Townsman who should give up his license? (85)

The provincial university is a micro-replica of the post-9/11 world, where the ordinary suddenly transforms into something suspicious. The bombing, while not directly related to international terrorism, evokes a sense of terror and reflects the national atmosphere following 9/11:

> Outdoors, spring had been sweetly indifferent to the disasters of man, but from this vantage the budding branches Lee saw appeared frozen in postures of horror. It must be the youth of this building, Lee thought; not enough had transpired here for the palimpsest theory to work. From its cold lobby tile to its dirty skylights, the place was all about Hendley. (39)

The campus is no longer a safe space – the FBI scrutinizes the incoming mail and faculty IDs are checked. Mistrust and heightened security permeate the academic environment, and everyone seems a potential suspect. This atmosphere on campus and in the town becomes a favorable environment for the spread of moral panic.

This concept, introduced by the sociologist Stanley Cohen in 1972, refers to widespread fear that something poses a profound threat to the values and interests of society. The scholar notes in the *Introduction* to the third edition of his *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* that almost half a century later, the term did not lose its significance: "Calling something a 'moral panic' does not imply that this something does not exist or happened at all and that reaction is based on fantasy, hysteria, delusion and illusion or being duped by the powerful. […] This labeling derives from a wilful refusal by liberals, radicals and leftists to take public anxieties seriously" (2011, vii). While Cohen relies on a conservative perspective rooted in traditional values, moral panic is not an ideological concept. It is politically neutral and can be used in cases that support diverse political perspectives (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009; Jenkins 1992; Whitlock 1979). Cohen and his followers use the concept to explain manipulation with a sense of collective social safety, which frequently supports political profiling and discrimination.

Moral panic rises when "folk devils" or deviants create a new and refurbished evil, "wreaking havoc on the decent, honest members of the society at large" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009, 33). Goode and Ben-Yehuda note that folk devils "provide authoritative concepts capable of rendering situations meaningful by constructing suasive images by which meaning can be sensibly grasped and which can arouse emotions and direct mass actions toward objectives which promise to resolve existing strain" (27). After 9/11, terrorists became a standard and very convenient version of folk devils as a personification of evil and agents "responsible for the threatening or damaging behavior or condition" (27). Indeed, the emergence of a new folk devil did not eliminate others, like drug dealers, child molesters, juvenile delinquents, etc. However, the locus of moral panic is of crucial importance (43), and "while some of the actions taken as a result of a moral panic are society-wide in their impact or implications – federal laws, for instance – they are always the product of what specific individuals or members of specific groups do" (43). Therefore, post-9/11 folk devils are a specific American cultural and social product, which makes Choi's novel a thematically unique text that integrates terrorism-induced moral panic into campus fiction.

Moral panic is directed against an assumed threat and makes the social actors combat it, "often transmitting rumor and occasionally falling victim to mass delusion about it" (33). Media and political rhetoric often amplify moral panics, which identify certain groups or behaviors as dangerous or deviant and, as a result, pressure governments and institutions to take action, often through policies involving political profiling and surveillance. Although Lee does not establish a new category of folk devil, his behavior and relationships align well with the prevailing atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty and the emergence of moral panic on campus and in the town.

In the post-9/11 context, the moral panic surrounding terrorism led to an increase in state-sanctioned profiling of Muslim and Middle Eastern communities: "In the United States, two common though false narratives about terrorists who attack America abound. We see them on television, in the movies, on the news, and, currently, in the Trump administration. The first is that 'terrorists are always (brown) Muslims'. The second is that 'white people are never terrorists'" (Corbin 2017, 455). This panic-inducing approach is fueled by sensationalist media coverage and political rhetoric that portrays these communities as inherently linked to terrorism, reinforcing public fear and justifying the expansion of political profiling programs.

Experts at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University prepared a report analyzing troubling political programs introduced during the Obama and Trump administrations. These programs perpetuated the perception of individuals of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Arab descent, as well as Muslims more broadly, as "presumed national security threats" (Crawford, Graves, and Katzenstein 2023, n.p.). They targeted these communities with mass surveillance, eroded privacy and individual liberties, and reinforced Islamophobic and xenophobic public narratives. The authors of the report point out that these programs heightened the visibility of Muslims and individuals of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Arab descent, not only through government initiatives but also in interactions with neighbors, the media, and workplaces. As a result, these communities have frequently been subjected to violence, intimidation, vandalism, and hate crimes, particularly in the years following 9/11. While the overall number of reported hate crimes declined by over 18% between 2000 and 2009, incidents targeting Muslims surged by more than 500 percent. Anti-Muslim activities – including hate crimes targeting mosques and Islamic centers, media coverage of anti-Muslim violence, and discriminatory actions or statements by public officials – significantly escalated starting in late 2015. Assaults against Muslims in the U.S. reached a peak of 127 cases in 2016 (Crawford, Graves, and Katzenstein 2023, n.p.). While President Joe Biden revoked Trump's discriminatory orders targeting citizens from predominantly Muslim countries, the criminalization and mass surveillance of racialized groups, including Muslims, Arabs, and Latinx immigrant communities, have persisted without significant reduction. This situation led to the frequent and ongoing emergence of moral panics nationwide, and American academia was not immune to them.

Moral panic is a hybrid product that integrates justified experience-based anxieties, fear of the unknown, and hysteria prompted by the media's desire to create a sensation. After 9/11, Americans attempted to cope with their fear and uncertainty by assigning blame and identifying a clear enemy. This process was facilitated by moral panic, which not only heightened collective anxieties and created, or rather, deepened a division within society, separating individuals into categories of "them" and "us," deviants and law-abiding citizens (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009, 33). The fear of "otherness" is not a novel concept. In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said explores how the West constructs the "Other" as inherently different, threatening, and inferior. While Said's work predates 9/11, its framework applies to post-9/11 discourse, particularly examining how fear of "otherness" became amplified and institutional-

ized. The problem is that Lee is not only an American citizen. He perceives himself as American and his self-identity does not require confirmation. Nothing in his behavior or attitude has ever indicated a lack of loyalty towards the American state. His unnamed home country exists only in his sentimental memories, which belong to his past and early immigrant years. However, in post-9/11 America, Lee's strangeness and isolation suddenly become connected with his ethnic background and become a source of hostility, which is one of the essential elements of moral panic (Cohen 2011, xxvi). Lee's racial and ethnic background, combined with his nonsocial behavior, are appropriate for channeling the community's fear. *A Person of Interest* highlights how the fear of "otherness" became pervasive after 9/11 and how individuals who fit the mold of foreignness, even tangentially, could be implicated in acts of terror simply by association. The effects of such suspicion and moral panic were damaging to the targeted individuals like Lee and the larger social fabric as they ruined the valuable atmosphere of trust and collaboration, which is so important in academia.

Moral panic and the power of profiling also affect the insulated academic community, which, although politically and culturally sensitive, is expected to exhibit a higher degree of common sense than the rest of society. Although Lee is neither Muslim nor Middle Eastern, he suddenly becomes "other", i.e., an alien, due to his Asian heritage, and this difference becomes a point of suspicion. Despite being a longstanding member of the university community, he turns into an outsider, and his foreignness and emotional coldness influence the assumption of his guilt. Lee's race and immigrant background change into proxies for danger in the eyes of those around him. His colleagues, many of whom have known him for years, quickly distance themselves from him once he is labeled a suspect. Choi's novel offers a fictional illustration of Judith Butler's concern, which she articulates very clearly in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004). She criticizes how fear and grief in the aftermath of 9/11 were mobilized to justify suspicion, profiling, and exclusion of those perceived as foreign or non-American, i.e., "the other". Lee becomes someone who, by mere association with "otherness", was implicated in violence and subjected to isolation and subsequent dehumanization.

Lee and we, as readers, observe how the college is filled with rumors and gossip, and the atmosphere is becoming too tense to endure and impossible to ignore: the dead silence in class, colleagues' constant elusiveness, even cars in the parking lot seem to avoid closeness to his. Rumors implicating Lee in the terrorist bombing and moral panic they intensify become a pretext to justify removing Lee from campus. Dean Littell appears to be aware that acting on gossip is not a good option. Still, he admits that hysteria connected with Lee and rumors associated with him discredit the Department: "It looks like I don't have any choice but to act on the rumors' effects, and it's gotten to where I've had the TV news people all over the campus this morning. Which brings it all back to student welfare" (Choi 2008, 194). He suggests (actually orders) that Lee take a semester off and move away from the town. The dean's proposal expresses consensus as a "widespread agreement (not necessarily total) that the threat exists, is serious, and that 'something should be done'" (Cohen 2011, xxvii).

The dean's proposal is not simply an attempt to push Lee into quasi-retirement but the result of irrelevant and disproportionate suspicion that daily acquires a frightening form. Cohen refers to disproportionality as an "exaggeration of the number or strength of the cases, in terms of the damage caused, moral offensiveness, potential risk if ignored" (xxvii). Rumors of harm, whether fabricated or genuinely believed, contribute to its enhancement. In a small and relatively isolated community like a provincial university, the role of rumors, even when they lack substantiation, cannot be underestimated: "If many [...] such rumors or tales or legends circulate about a particular issue in specific social circles, that may indicate that something significant, something very much like a moral panic, is about to launch" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009, 45). Following Hendley's death, anxiety and tension at the university and in the town escalate, and Lee's behavior becomes "rumorgenic" (Choi 2008, 131). Academia in Choi's novel is not only prone to moral panic, which taps into underlying racial and cultural anxieties. We may assume it tends to be more susceptible to rumors and suspicion than other institutions because it operates under the belief that it is uniquely special. Choi knows it from her life experience: her father was a math professor, so as a child, she could closely observe university life and personal relations. As the writer points out in one of the comments, "[t]he pedagogical relationship is inherently interesting because there's so much unresolved tension. In certain creative contexts there's an active erasure of that power differential – we're artistic people, special people, unconventional. All of those rules and structures don't apply to us. It can end up wonderful or it can end up dangerous" (Jordan 2020, n.p.). While Lee is struggling with uncertainty, a sense of being lost, guilt, and ghosts of the past, the university community, overwhelmed by anxiety, treats rumors as verified facts. For convenience, it appears willing to accept subjective impressions and opinions as sufficient grounds to determine Lee's fate.

Suspicion affects all areas of Lee's everyday life. His home seems to be searched in his absence while his once-friendly neighbors become self-appointed prosecutors. They remember that Lee was "unusual" and once even slammed the door in a neighbor's face. Routine incidents and attitudes are exaggerated and charged with hidden meaning. The neighbors accompany the journalists, and when they crowd at Lee's door and start banging at it, he is virtually paralyzed with fear. We observe a transformation of an intelligent, skeptical, though misanthropic individual of a relatively high social status into a frightened and dumb creature unable to communicate his needs.

Lee's experience reflects the broad racial profiling that many Muslim and South Asian Americans faced in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The authorities, University colleagues, and neighbors quickly latch onto Lee as a suspect, reflecting the ease with which individuals who appear different – not only racially or culturally but also behaviorally – can become targets of suspicion. However, Choi does not allow for such a simplified novel reading. Lee's background makes him an easy target, but even the most common things, like students' grades or arguments between colleagues, acquire an exaggerated significance in the atmosphere of general suspicion. Sondra, the Department's secretary, finally dares to mention to Lee how others see and interpret his attitudes:

> [A]ll I want to say is – is it true you weren't at the memorial? […] You know, all of us in the department, we all sat together. And no one could find you. […] It didn't look right. And after you were on TV, speaking so well. And then not at the service at all. And these FBI people are asking about the department, and sometimes they just ask about you. And everybody remembers those fights you and Hendley would have – […] Lee, last week when I asked you to go to the grief counselor, […] you said something I thought was very strange. You said, "I am the last person you ought to be nice to," or something like that. Why did you say that, Lee? What did you mean? (2008, 172)

It is not only the words and past arguments that acquire a different meaning. Lee notices someone moved things in his university office and home study. He senses "the malevolent interference". The atmosphere for him seems to become thick, inexplicable, and filled with a hunch: "Lee sat gripping the arms of his chair and bending a furious gaze on the objects he cherished, as if they'd betrayed him" (173). Even a scientist whose profession is grounded in pragmatism and logic can be deeply affected by alleged surveillance. Lee begins to perceive things that are not there, growing suspicious of the people around him, their words, and their actions. His behavior starts to shift, appearing increasingly paranoid and even hysterical. The more Lee loses emotional and psychological balance, the more suspicious he becomes – if not for the FBI people, then for his colleagues and neighbors. His mathematical mind is helpless in the face of panic-induced suspicion.

One of the most compelling aspects of *A Person of Interest* is its exploration of guilt and innocence, both on a personal and societal level. Lee is innocent of the crime he is suspected of, but he is not entirely without guilt in other areas of his life. He harbors profound feelings of regret and failure, both as a father and a colleague, and his troubled relationships with Aileen, his daughter Esther, and Hendley amplify his sense of isolation and internal guilt. Choi creates a complex emotional landscape where questions of complicity and moral responsibility often merge. Lee's status as a "person of interest", which for most means a suspect, forces him to confront how others see him and his self-perception. His long-standing alienation, a sense of inferiority, and his fraught relationships with his women and colleagues surface with new strength after the bombing and subsequent investigation. The latter turns him, a rational and well-organized person, into a trapped creature who has no choice left:

> "You both should believe me!" Lee was only remotely aware that his temples were streaming with sweat – his mind was cornered and panicked. […] He no longer knew how he'd gotten here or what sense it made, only that his survival relied on persuading this obdurate man. "I am telling you the truth –"
> "If that's the case, then would you like to take a polygraph?" Morrison said.
> "A lie-detector test implies the person being tested is suspect," Lee said after a moment. […] He felt offended to the core. At the same time, he still was a prisoner of panic. The panic interfered with his indignation: it would soon deplete it. (179–180)

Although Lee does not face any direct charges, his communication with the FBI agents shows how, in the post-9/11 climate, the integrity of individuals and communities is questioned or reshaped in light of new fears and biases.

The FBI's investigation into the bombing brings intense scrutiny upon Lee's personal life, and he finds himself living under the constant watch of law enforcement

and the media. The sense of being surveilled, of having one's privacy invaded, is symbolic of the broader experience after 9/11 when government surveillance programs like the Patriot Act of 2001 expanded, and citizens became more accustomed to the idea of living under watchful eyes.

The loss of privacy and the expansion of state power in the name of national security enhanced public panic and individual vulnerability. Once private and unremarkable, Lee's life becomes a spectacle for general consumption, and his movements, relationships, and past are subject to investigation. The dehumanizing effects of this kind of scrutiny show how surveillance not only invades personal privacy but also strips individuals of their humanity, reducing them to mere suspects. Even though there is no evidence linking Lee to the crime, his background, social isolation, and personal dislike of Hendley become enough for the FBI to pursue him as a suspect.

Lee's situation reflects the broader American trend of law enforcement targeting individuals from specific racial and ethnic backgrounds, especially in the context of terrorism investigations. A sense of risk is integrated into a broader culture of insecurity, victimization, and fear (Cohen 2011, xxx–xxxi). In Lee's case, his status as a naturalized foreigner in a predominantly white academic environment makes him an easy scapegoat, even though the real threat lies elsewhere.

The novel explores the impact of institutionalized political profiling and shows how prejudice operates in the private sphere, affecting relationships and community dynamics. Once the FBI begins investigating Lee, the academic community around him changes; colleagues who once saw him as harmless, if eccentric, now avoid him, and neighbors treat him with suspicion, if not hostility. Prejudice can spread quickly, even in a community that, by definition, should be critical and resistant to outside pressure. The shift in how those around Lee perceive him illustrates the connections between public accusations and private biases.

Lee's feelings of alienation are not solely the result of external prejudice. His internalized sense of inadequacy and failure as a father, husband, and colleague compound them. The novel examines how prejudice, once internalized, can lead to self-sabotage and isolation as Lee comes to embody the very outsider status that others project onto him. This internalization of prejudice is a subtle yet powerful theme in the novel. Choi suggests that living under constant pressure – whether due to race, ethnicity, or political climate – can profoundly impact an individual's sense of self. Lee is not a likable character, but his situation evokes sympathy. He becomes a symbol for the many who, like him, must live in a society that views them through a lens of cultural superiority. Even though Lee is, of course, innocent of the bombing, his behavior and attitudes sometimes appear evasive or guilty. Choi uses this ambiguity to highlight how political profiling erodes the presumption of innocence. For Lee, the process of clearing his name becomes all-consuming, and the stress and humiliation of being investigated leave him psychologically scarred. Even though the bombing mystery is eventually solved, the experience permanently alters Lee's life.

A Person of Interest crafts a nuanced portrait of life in the shadow of fear and suspicion, using the campus novel framework to explore broader themes related to post-9/11 America. The novel's depiction of paranoia, racial prejudice, surveillance, and

the fragility of trust reflects the psychological and social aftershocks of the 9/11 attacks. Through Lee's character, Choi examines how these forces shape individual lives, often with devastating consequences, and erode community bonds and intellectual freedom ideals. *A Person of Interest* stands as a powerful reminder of the human cost of living in a society governed by fear where even the most insulated spaces – like university campuses – can be transformed by the traumas of the wider world.

Comparatively, the campus novels mentioned at the beginning of the article – Francine Prose's *Blue Angel*, Brandon Taylor's *Real Life*, and Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* – also discuss identity and societal conflict within academic settings. However, Choi's work extends beyond the individual struggles of its protagonist to explore the collective moral panic that defined the early 21st century. While *The Human Stain* examines race and personal reinvention and *Blue Angel* critiques academic power dynamics, Choi focuses on the post-9/11 surveillance culture, linking personal biases and weaknesses to broader societal anxieties.

In *A Person of Interest*, Choi captures the toxic impact of moral panic where a character like Lee, already struggling with alienation and self-doubt, becomes an accessible target for the community succumbing to hysteria and fear. The novel asks readers to confront the fragile boundaries between personal integrity and public judgment, making Lee's history a poignant exploration of post-9/11 American consciousness.

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"The inhospitable city": A Spanish view of Oxford in Javier Marías's *All Souls*

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"The inhospitable city": A Spanish view of Oxford in Javier Marías's *All Souls*

Javier Marías. *All Souls*. Spanish campus novel. Oxford in fiction. Literary translation.

Loosely inspired by the author's stay at Oxford, Javier Marías's *All Souls* (1989) seems a typical campus novel. Yet, narrated retrospectively by a Spanish visiting professor after the death of two other characters, *All Souls* defies the conventions of the comic and satirical campus novel while anticipating the later inclusion of more serious themes in the subgenre. This article also interprets *All Souls* in the frame of Marías's later text *Dark Back of Time* (1998), a response to the widespread misreading of *All Souls* as a *roman à clef*, especially around the publication of its English translation.

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In the editors' introduction to the recent thematic issue of the *Polish Journal of English Studies* dedicated to the campus novel, Merritt Moseley and Bożena Kucała observe that the subgenre

> has appealed to many major literary novelists, including such authors as Vladimir Nabokov, Javier Marías, Zadie Smith, Philip Roth, A. S. Byatt, Bernard Malamud, and Nobel laureates Saul Bellow and J. M. Coetzee. A majority of the best-known academic novels have been from the Anglo-American world but this is changing as new examples spring up outside the Anglosphere. (2019, 5)

On closer inspection, one recognizes that the given list features two British writers (Smith and Byatt), four American ones (Nabokov, Roth, Malamud, and Bellow), and one South African one (Coetzee), the only non-Anglophone writer being the Spaniard Marías (1951–2022). This is not a coincidence, as the campus novel has become a rather notable subgenre in Spain in the last decades, with Marías being its major representative.[1]

In more general terms, Marías's work may also be seen as a bridge between Anglophone and Spanish literature, as he translated major British and American authors, including Laurence Sterne, William Faulkner, Vladimir Nabokov, and R. L. Stevenson (Herzberger 2011, 10). Moreover, the titles of Marías's later novels are often taken from Shakespeare's plays – *Corazón tan blanco* (1992; Eng. trans. *A Heart So White*, 1995) from *Macbeth*, *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* (1994; Eng. trans. *Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me,* 1996) from *Richard III*., and *Así empieza lo malo* (2014; Eng. trans. *Thus Bad Begins*, 2016) from *Hamlet*. Marías himself said: "For too long Spanish novelists have been obsessed with Spain. I'm much more concerned with returning the Spanish novel to literature itself" (Woodall 1992). Being well-read in Anglophone literatures, the author thus aims to contribute to "world literature" rather than limiting himself to a national (or Hispanophone) literary tradition.

SATIRICAL DEPICTION OF OXFORD

Michael Kerrigan's review of *Todas las almas* (1989; Eng. trans. *All Souls*, 1992), Marías's contribution to the campus novel subgenre named after All Souls College at Oxford, characterizes it as "a dazzling example of the Oxford novel with all the ingenuity and the humour and the nostalgia we could hope for" (1989, 19).[2] Indeed, *All Souls* seems a typical campus novel, loosely inspired by the author's two-year stay at Oxford (1983–1985) and introduced by a note about resemblances being "purely coincidental" (Marías [1992] 2012, xv).[3] As Alexis Grohmann (2002, 147) points out, this note was only added to the English translation to prevent additional misinterpretations of the novel as a *roman à clef*. Marías was surprised by this misreading among academics to such a degree that he decided to address the issue extensively in *Negra espalda del tiempo* (1998; Eng. trans. *Dark Back of Time*, 2001),[4] a reflection on the sources of and reactions to *All Souls*. In this text, he writes: "I imagined that having dedicated a good part of their lives to teaching literature […] they would be able, without doubts or difficulties, to distinguish between a work of fiction and a memoir or an essay" ([2001] 2013, 37). Moreover, Marías notes that the labelling of the novel as a *roman à clef* slowed down the publication of the English transla-

tion; as the Harvill Press was afraid of risking some future lawsuit, the corporation's lawyers studied the text carefully to ensure it does not contain any "intentional or involuntary crime" (242).

To a certain degree, *All Souls* conforms to the conventions of the contemporaneous predominantly Anglo-American campus novel, which is considered a comic and satirical subgenre (see Showalter 2005, 2–3; Anténe 2015, 141–148). Some scenes of socializing at Oxford, described from the point of view of the narrator, an unnamed visiting professor of Spanish, memorably use humour with a satirical effect. For instance, at a weekly formal dinner organized by the college for its faculty and students, there is a high table where twenty selected dons and the Warden, the director or administrator of the college, are seated. As the Warden is, in the narrator's words, "often a bored member of the nobility" (Marías 2012, 37), the tradition dates to a time when there was a correlation between higher education and the upper class. Those by the high table, which is literally raised above all other tables, have to follow some elaborate rules, which seem rather strange to the Spanish narrator: "It is stipulated that each (elevated) college member should speak for seven minutes with the person to his right or left (this depends on the distribution of the couples at the head of the table), and then for five minutes to the person on his other side and so on alternately for the two hours that the first stage of high table lasts" (38). Besides, the wearing of gowns is obligatory, any direct contact with the other guests is forbidden until dessert is served, and one can only smoke after the Warden decides to toast the Queen. In turn, due to the high tables being so formally structured, at his first one, the narrator is so preoccupied with observing the rules that he can hardly enjoy the meals.

However, despite all the detailed organization, the narrator's first high table eventually turns into chaos, as the Warden, Lord Rymer, himself breaks the rules and tries to talk to people further away from him, as he is too irritated by both his immediate neighbours, "the warden of a women's college, a real harpy, [and] a supercilious, pontificating luminary of the social sciences called Atwater" (44). Moreover, the irritated Warden starts to strike the gavel, which is normally used to announce a new meal, leading to further confusion, as waiters immediately arrive to collect the guests' plates. While the scene is incredibly funny, it also implicitly raises the question to what degree the observance of all the traditional rituals is meaningful and necessary.

Overall, the Spanish narrator's view of Oxford rejects any idealization of the university, which at times appears to cling excessively to bygone traditions. The notion of Oxford being out of time is embodied in the character of the ancient porter of the Institutio Tayloriana, Will, who at the age of almost ninety "literally did not know what day it was and spent each morning in a different year, travelling backwards and forwards in time according to his desires or, more likely, quite independently of any conscious desire on his part" (4). Will's confusion may seem bizarre, but it may also reflect the lack of change at Oxford over the years. To the narrator, Will represents "the stasis and stability of the place"; at the same time, Will's raised hand when greeting the lecturers makes the Spaniard feel that "in the inhospitable city

of Oxford there was at least one person who was really pleased to see you, even if that person did not actually know who you were" (4). In the narrator's view, anyone other than an Oxbridge graduate must inevitably feel ostracized at Oxford. He finds the city and university inhospitable due to the Oxford dons' pomposity; their self-importance along with their being private and gossipy at the same time makes the narrator conclude that "anyone who's not a scandalmonger or, at the very least, malicious is doomed to live as marginal and discredited an existence as someone unfortunate enough to have graduated from a university other than Cambridge or Oxford itself" (26). The narrator's feeling of displacement at Oxford is perhaps less surprising in the context of an entire chapter on the negative portrayal of foreigners in the British campus novel in Ian Carter's monograph (1990, 177–196). In particular, Carter states that "an uninterrogated notion of Englishness makes foreigners at best comic, at worst dangerous" (177).

Despite the narrator's sojourn at Oxford being a teaching stay at a prestigious educational institution, he reports that his "duties in the city of Oxford were practically nil", concluding that "Oxford is, without a doubt, one of the cities in the world where the least work gets done" (4). While the narrator may have a light teaching load due to being a visiting professor and even admits to having "no administrative duties, not even the invigilation of exams" (92), his observations reveal a lack of work ethic behind the facade of the prestigious university. However, regardless of how hardworking the professors are, they enjoy unlimited respect from the students. The narrator, who is in his early thirties during his stay, describes his communication with Oxford students in this way:

> In age I was closer to them than I was to most of the members of the congregation (as the assembly of dons and teachers of the university is called, in keeping with the strongly clerical tradition of the place) but the mere fact that I spent our few hours of eye contact perched nervously above them on a dais was enough for the gap between the students and myself to verge on that between king and subjects. (9)

As there is a considerable distance between the instructors and students, the narrator only mentions the students briefly as a group, never referring to any of them as individuals throughout the text.

The distance only seems less striking in the translation courses the narrator teaches in tandem with several of his English colleagues who select the texts to be translated. Their choice of texts makes the Spaniard question the beneficial effect of the course, as the texts are full of vocabulary he finds extremely dated. It is the archaisms that make the narrator invent theories on the words' etymology in response to the students' questions. The episode thus provides one of the illustrations of academic study being disconnected from practical everyday life. To a degree, the narrator's view is confirmed by his colleague Cromer-Blake from the Spanish department, who once tells him about the students:

> After enduring our teaching methods and our continual hounding of them, […] they're fitted for any task, even if all they can do is scan sonnets and stammer out a few incoherent remarks about Calderón or Montaigne in an oral exam. Only the most ill-equipped for life in the world, like myself, come creeping back wearing these silly gowns. (65)

Being cynical and self-deprecating as well as critical of Oxford's teaching practices, Cromer-Blake significantly differs from the most of his pompous and self-important colleagues.

Another example of academia's impracticality is illustrated by a young Oxford economist's research topic of a "unique cider tax that existed in England between 1760 and 1767" (40). While the extremely narrow focus of research may bring to mind Jim Dixon's article on "The Economic Influence of the Developments in Shipbuilding Techniques, 1450 to 1485" in Kingsley Amis's seminal British campus novel *Lucky Jim* ([1954] 1992, 15), the difference lies in Marías's economist being honestly convinced about the significance of his academic study.

OXFORD AND THE "ENGLISH NATIONAL CHARACTER"

Besides commenting on the university life at Oxford, the narrator also makes some observations on the "English national character," so as a result his specific descriptions of Oxford blend in with his general view of the English. For instance, several comments concern the indirectness he finds typical of the English people: "The English never look openly at anything, or they look in such a veiled, indifferent way that one can never be sure that someone is actually looking at what they appear to be looking at" (Marías 2012, 41). In this respect, only the female character of Clare Bayes, an Oxford academic who later becomes the narrator's lover, is not typical; as David K. Herzberger notes, when the narrator looks at her directly at the high table, she "returns his gaze and thus converts him from observer to observed" (2011, 113). Accordingly, the narrator does not consider Clare a "typical Englishwoman", the more so because she spent her childhood in Delhi and Cairo, where her father was stationed as a diplomat.

Besides describing the English people as being reserved in general, the Spanish narrator also touches on their antipathy towards the Irish in particular, noting that Professor Kavanagh, despite being the head of the Spanish department, was "considered suspect by both colleagues and subordinates alike precisely because he was easy-going, Irish and wrote novels" (Marías 2012, 47). This observation also reveals that Oxford professors may consider writing novels too frivolous and therefore incompatible with an academic career; it should be noted that Kavanagh publishes his fiction under a pen name. Furthermore, the narrator once meets Kavanagh at a local disco, mostly frequented by working-class people from around Oxford, where Kavanagh excitedly introduces him to some young women as Antonio, whispering to him in Spanish shortly thereafter: "It's best they don't know our real names. [...] It's perfectly safe, they only come to Oxford at night" (118). It follows that Oxford professors strive to retain their respectable image at all costs, keeping a distance not only from their students, but also from the world outside the university.

Spanish academia is portrayed as more relaxed and less traditional than its English counterpart, as Kavanagh is at the disco with a distinguished Spanish professor who has come to Oxford to deliver an invited lecture. The narrator describes his well-known colleague in this way:

> The celebrated Professor del Diestro, in his own opinion the greatest and youngest world expert on Cervantes, and known in Madrid (according to how much one disliked him) either as Dexterous Diestro or Dastardly Diestro. […] A distinguished, opinionated man in his forties, wearing his designer shirt and his bald pate with equal panache. (118–119)

By portraying the Spanish professor with a modern designer shirt and self-confidence rather than the traditional British gown and indirectness, Marías reflects the stereotypical cultural differences between Spain and England. However, as del Diestro's stay only lasts a short time, there is no other description of any interaction between the distinguished Spanish professor and his younger colleague.

In *Dark Back of Time*, Marías writes that "none of the characters [in *All Souls*] had a counterpart in anyone who exists or once existed" (2013, 24). However, he explains that the Spanish visiting professor was loosely based on real-life scholar Francisco Rico, to the latter's knowledge and displeasure "by the character's behaviour and degree of resemblance to him and the amount of space he was allotted" (24). This incident adds another level of complexity to the issue of approaching the novel as a *roman à clef*. Given the relatively small world of academia, the British publishers of *All Souls* were afraid that some of the readers may have recognized themselves in the characters and filed a lawsuit, and Professor Rico was hoping to raise his international reputation by being a model for a character in the novel.

It should be noted that in *Dark Back of Time*, Marías also makes fun of Spanish academia, particularly by a critique of the system of graduate degrees. The narrator highlights the paradox that he was later assigned to teach Ph.D. students at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid without having a doctorate himself: "My courses were at the level of the doctorate that I didn't and still don't have. More than once I considered enrolling in my own courses and becoming my own student just to get the credits (I would have played it safe and given myself only B's)" (2013, 28).

Unlike Marías, the narrator of *All Souls* does not teach at any Spanish university after leaving Oxford. Rather, after his return to Madrid, the narrator gets a new job in finance; he also gets married and starts his own family. The novel thus illustrates Janice Rossen's point that "many of the best university novels are about someone leaving academe at the end of the book" (1993, 188). In *Dark Back of Time*, Marías further highlights the differences between the narrator of *All Souls* and himself as the author: "The nameless narrator […] appears in the novel married to a woman named Luisa and father of her newborn child, which was demonstrably not my situation, my case or anything that has ever happened to me" (2013, 23). The ending of *All Souls* thus challenges the autobiographical interpretation of the novel.

BEYOND SATIRE

The narrator's numerous witty remarks throughout the text may almost make the reader forget the novel's opening sentence: "Of the three, two have died since I left Oxford" (Marías 2012, 3), the two characters who have died being Cromer-Blake and another literary scholar, Toby Rylands, and the third being Clare Bayes. The narrator retrospectively reveals that he had learned first about Cromer-Blake's

death from an express letter sent by Rylands and then about Rylands's death from a phone call by Kavanagh. As Robert C. Spires proposes, the two deaths and the birth of the narrator's son have inspired his writing project:

> [The narrator] hopes that the act of narrating will help him reconcile the incongruity between the mortal essence of the individual and the immortal perseverance of the species – the contradiction experienced by all humans between their ego and communal instinct, between their need to feel unique from and yet identical to all souls, past, present, and future. (1997, 139)

In some passages of the novel, the word *souls* thus takes on an additional meaning, referring not only to All Souls College, but also to the souls of the characters.

Besides his memories, another source of the narrator's account of his stay at Oxford is Cromer-Blake's diary, which the narrator acquired after Rylands's death, more than two years after his return to Madrid. As the narrator's companionship with Cromer-Blake and Rylands as well as his love affair with Clare transcend his view of Oxford as an inhospitable place, this section of the article will survey the narrator's descriptions of these three characters. As Patricia Moore-Martinez observes, the novel

> has a snapshot or episodic video quality of moments and incidences punctuated by tangential musings and reflections on the narrator's own feelings. […] These visuals and musings are subtly perceptive, comic portraits of individualistic, unique literary personages, yet these portraits could also be classified as affectionate caricatures. (2009, 76)

The narrator thus describes Cromer-Blake, Rylands, and Clare in an affectionate way, while also occasionally revealing their faults.

The narrator refers to Cromer-Blake as "his guide and mentor" and even "the only real friend he made at Oxford" (Marías 2012, 36, 127); accordingly, Cromer-Blake repeatedly refers to him in the diary as "our dear Spaniard" (34, 205). While Cromer-Blake teaches Spanish literature, he is not particularly passionate about his field; in particular, he is "cruel to hagiographers of García Lorca, a writer he classified as a nincumpoop [sic]" (66). Cromer-Blake's own sense of isolation as a gay man is alluded to by the fact that his partner, Bruce, never directly appears in the novel, as he is a mechanic from Vauxhall and not a member of academia; in the narrator's words, Bruce is Cromer-Blake's "other world" (130). Cromer-Blake is seriously ill for most of the narrator's stay at Oxford, despite trying to deny it; eventually, some colleagues have to take over some of his classes. As John Banville describes Cromer-Blake as "lethargically dying" (2012, ix), his premature death at the age of thirty-eight may have been expected.

Toby Rylands is first described by the narrator as someone of whom he "was very fond" (Marías 2012, 42). Rylands becomes Professor Emeritus after the first year of the narrator's stay and explains to him why he has lost contact with his former student Cromer-Blake: "I'm the mirror in which he's afraid he'll see himself reflected. His end is near and so is mine" (135). While Rylands mentions writing a book on Laurence Sterne, no draft of this manuscript is found after his death, suggesting that his plan was more of an unfulfilled dream.

Clare Bayes and the narrator start a love affair after having been introduced to each other by Cromer-Blake at one of the high tables, despite Clare being married to another Oxford professor and having a young son with him. The narrator and Clare try hard to keep the affair secret, meeting in hotels in London or Reading, as the narrator believes that the people at Oxford are always spying on each other: "In Oxford, the only thing anyone is truly interested in is money, followed some way behind by information, which can always be useful as a means of acquiring money. […] Giving information about something is, moreover, the only way of not having to give out information about oneself" (26). To the narrator's knowledge, no other character found out about the affair; only some passages in Cromer-Blake's diary reveal he had been aware of it.

During his time at Oxford, the narrator clings to Clare; as Robert C. Spires notes, only the love affair "alleviates [the narrator's] anguish" (1997, 139). Clare is the only female faculty member described in detail in the text; at the high table, "she was one of only five women at the supper, and one of only two aged under fifty" (Marías 2012, 41). The narrator suffers from Clare refusing to meet him for a month during her son's illness, and even begs her to leave Oxford with him at the end of his stay. Clare, however, makes clear she refuses to leave her husband.

Overall, the narrator's friendship with Cromer-Blake and Rylands as well as his love affair with Clare provide instances of the text moving beyond the comic and satirical elements of the campus novel. Despite his criticism of Oxford, the narrator thus found genuine connection with some colleagues. In particular, the touching portrayal of Cromer-Blake's and Rylands's demise transcends the typical features of the contemporaneous Anglo-American campus novel. It is not until considerably later that major Anglophone campus novels introduce the theme of death, more extensively in the US than in the UK. Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000) deals with the resignation and death of its protagonist Coleman Silk, a classics professor at a small American college, as described by Silk's friend Nathan Zuckerman. In contrast, Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* (2005), a British novel set mostly in the US, features the death of Carlene, a professor's wife who is a rather minor character.

INTERTEXTUAL ELEMENTS

As has been already shown, some intertextual elements of *All Souls* do not go beyond brief allusions to Anglophone or Spanish authors, referring to the professors' teaching or research interests. Additional examples besides those already mentioned include Rook, a famous member of the Russian department, who claims to have been engaged on a new translation of *Anna Karenina* for the past twelve years and who had met Nabokov during an academic year spent in America. Rook's working on the translation for such a long time may relate to the narrator's early observation about how little work is being done at Oxford. Also, the narrator once recalls Nabokov's pondering on the device of eavesdropping in the 19th-century novel, more specifically in *A Hero of our Time*, concluding that: "In Oxford (and in Cambridge too, I imagine), eavesdropping becomes exactly what Nabokov describes in the Ler-

montov novel mentioned above: 'the barely noticeable routine of fate'" (Marías 2012, 172). The passage illustrates the narrator's tendency to compare literature and life as well as his concern with lack of privacy at Oxford.

Other intertextual elements relate to one of the narrator's ways of passing his time at Oxford and even develop the story, such as his pastime of searching for rare books. Once, the narrator happens to see the Spanish and Portuguese specialist Alec Dewar at a second-hand bookshop, secretly reading Pushkin in the original. Eventually Dewar is revealed to be a Russian linguist for the Secret Service, interrogating Russian émigrés, such as dancers and athletes, but, even this discovery does not significantly change the narrator's view of Dewar. He is amused to imagine the professor tormenting the émigrés with his questions, just to have something interesting to talk about at high tables in Oxford. But while initially mocking Dewar, the narrator eventually begins to sympathize with him: "[Dewar] knew no other life than the university. He was just one more bachelor in the city of Oxford, another upholder of the old clerical tradition of that immutable, inhospitable place […] (Another troubled spirit, like myself.) Dewar was a dead soul" (154).

As the narrator sees the profusion of second-hand bookshops in Oxford, he decides to limit his book search to only five authors, including "the Welshman Arthur Machen, that fine stylist and strange narrator of subtle horrors" (74). The narrator even accepts the invitation to join the Arthur Machen Society from another browser in the bookshop, who is pleased to recruit the first member from the Spanish-speaking world. While this detail may be seen as reflecting an earlier time with fewer global connections, for the narrator, there is something typically English in joining various organizations:

> I, who had never been a member of anything in Madrid, had in a few months become a member of the Oxonian congregation by virtue of my job, a member of St Antony's College, to which, as a foreigner, I'd been assigned from the Taylorian Institute, a member of Wadham College, to which I'd been assigned according to the caprice of my head of department, Aidan Kavanagh, and now I was a member of the Machen Company. (87)

The narrator's amazement at having become a member of so many organizations in such a short time highlights his feeling of foreignness toward the English mores.

Through reading Machen, the narrator eventually discovers another author, Machen's acquaintance John Gawsworth, a pseudonym for the poet and short story writer Terence Ian Fytton Armstrong (1912–1970), for whom Machen had written a foreword. The narrator explains that his interest in Gawsworth "grew not so much because of his rather indifferent literary output but because of the strange man behind it" (103), as Gawsworth had his texts published in exotic locations such as Cairo and India. In 1947, on the death of his mentor, the writer M. P. Shiel, Gawsworth was named heir to the kingdom of Redonda, a small island in the Antilles. In *Dark Back of Time*, Marías writes that the true-life story of John Gawsworth was ironically "the aspect of the novel that struck many readers as the most novelistic and fictitious, pure Kiplingesque invention, pure make-believe on my part" (2013, 18). Marías thus highlights the complex interplay between facts and fiction in *All Souls* as well as its misinterpretation by the readers.

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator's stay at Oxford strangely interconnects with Gawsworth's life. When Clare explains to him she does not want to continue the affair, she confides in him that her mother did not manage to cover up an affair with "a lover who stayed too long" (Marías 2012, 186), a man she met in Delhi named Terry Armstrong, whom the narrator identifies as the writer John Gawsworth. While the entire plot of the novel is situated in Oxford, it thus portrays the characters as linked to each other by unexpected coincidences and distant places, which is another innovative aspect of Marías's text. No major Anglophone campus novel until that point provided such parallel stories between the protagonists and the biographies of authors they study, the first similar case being A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance*, published in 1990, a year after *All Souls* came out in the Spanish original. In *Possession*, however, the pair of researchers study the fictional Victorian poets Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte rather than real historical figures.

CONCLUSIONS

All Souls presents a brilliant example of the campus novel as a comic and satirical genre, highlighting various follies of Oxford academics, such as pomposity and adherence to rituals, from the point of view of an outsider and foreigner. The text also touches on the widely-held national images of England and Spain by comparing social conventions in general as well as in the academic setting; because of the distance Oxford dons keep from both their students and people outside their social circle, the Spanish narrator finds the city rather unhospitable. Another important element that develops the international theme of the text is the love affair between the narrator and his English colleague. At the same time, by means of its serious themes of illness and death of two of the narrator's friends, the text transcends the generic boundaries of the contemporaneous campus novel. *All Souls* is also innovative by means of its use of intertextuality, as it implies the narrator's experience may be similar to the biography of an author he studies. Both the treatment of serious themes and elaborate employment of intertextuality become more common in later Anglophone campus novels.

The widespread tendency among academics to interpret *All Souls* as a *roman à clef*, as discussed in detail in Marías's *Dark Back of Time*, suggests the inability or perhaps rather unwillingness to distinguish fiction from facts. While some readers may be worried about being identified with a not particularly positive character, others may hope to become more reputable if a character in a novel is based on them. As autofiction as a form of fictionalized autobiography continues to be a popular novelistic subgenre, both interpretative approaches mentioned above reveal the academia as an insular social world whose members expect to be remembered by their colleagues.

Published more than three decades ago in both the Spanish original and the English translation, at a time when the only means of communication were letters and phone calls, *All Souls* provides contemporary readers with much food for thought. Academic institutions nowadays are hopefully more appreciative of international cooperation and hardly isolated from the rest of society to such an extent as Marías's

fictionalized Oxford, in part due to the recent technological developments. Still, the novel may serve as a reminder of the necessity for the university not to close its gates.

NOTES

[1] A dissertation on the Spanish campus novel (Moore-Martinez 2009) lists nine novels by six authors. Those available in English are Rafael Chirbes' *Mimoun* (1988; Eng. trans. 1992), Javier Marías's *Todas las almas* (1989; Eng. trans. *All Souls*, 1992) and *Negra espalda del tiempo* (1998; Eng. trans. *Dark Back of Time*, 2001), and Javier Cercas' *El inquilino* (1989; Eng. trans. *The Tenant and the Motive*, 2005) and *La velocidad de la luz* (2005; Eng. trans. *The Speed of Light*, 2006). In contrast, none of the three English-language monographs on Marías's work (Grohmann 2002; Herzberger 2011; Pérez-Carbonell 2016) consider Marías as an author of the campus novel.

[2] According to Ian Carter, Oxford and Cambridge figure in over 70 percent of British academic fiction published between 1945 and 1988 (1990, 5).

[3] Grohmann also provides a detailed comparison of the narrator and other characters with Marías and faculty members employed at Oxford during Marías's stay, finding only minor similarities (2002, 127–134).

[4] As Herzberger explains, the title of the novel comes from Prospero's speech in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "What seest though in the dark backward and abysm of time?" (2011, 121). In *Dark Back of Time*, Marías explains the title in this way: "The kind of time that has not existed, the time that awaits us and also the time that does not await us and therefore does not happen, or happens only in a sphere that isn't precisely temporal, a sphere in which writing, or perhaps only fiction, may – who knows – be found" (2013, 301).

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The Perlmann crisis of the academic world

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The Perlmann crisis of the academic world

Pascal Mercier. *Perlmann's Silence*. Academic novel. Genre and subgenre. Burnout syndrome. Crisis of the academic world.

The article discusses the crisis of academia depicted in the novel *Perlmanns Schweigen* by Pascal Mercier (1995; Eng. trans. *Perlmann's Silence*, 2012). It also examines the question of the novel's genre classification. Perlmann's burnout is represented by a web of motifs – such as losing one's sense of purpose in regard to teaching and research work, competitive struggles such as popularity contests and number of publications, the inaccessible nature of the humanities, the commercialization of research, the contradiction between the philosophy of science and the practice of research work. We consider these to be distinctive because in the 1990s the repeating motifs unmasked the *internal* decay of the academic tradition along with the identity of the academic teacher or professor. It showed how the academic environment reacts to new trends in university education by distorting academic values and scientific research. In effect, this problem emerged because quality was exchanged for quantity, scientific respectability for social prestige and popularity. Thus the motifs are specifically concerned with the decline caused by the capitalization of academia, research work, and the subsequent thinking of teachers within the profession.

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This article is focused on the image of the academic world as constructed by the character of Philipp Perlmann in Pascal Mercier's prose debut, *Perlmann's Silence* (*Perlmanns Schweigen,* 1995; Eng. trans. *Perlmann's Silence*, 2012).[1] We are interested in the picture of the crisis within academia as well as with the academic as an individual, which Mercier had depicted by means of a university model even before the Bologna declaration was adopted. Furthermore, our interest lies in answering the question of the novel's genre classification, since Mercier's prosaic debut is a part of the tradition of the German university novel and, at the same time, a part of the discourse on the crisis of the humanities and, above all, on the crisis of academia and with academic teachers. The crisis of the humanities was not a new topic at the time of the novel's publication; it was debated both socially and academically and its roots go deep into the past. Although the emphasis of the crisis has shifted, the common denominator has remained the conceptual metaphor of usefulness and pertinence, especially in the context of social change. The authors consider the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries and the emergence of a modern type of university – the so-called Humboldtian model – to be one of the turning points in the crisis of the humanities, which also led to its renaissance.[2] The Humboldtian model of the university has also created a different historical background and a different university discourse in Germany than in the Anglo-American context. One of the fundamental differences is that in the Anglo-Saxon systems, the university is far more connected to everyday life. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, pressure for a more utilitarian view of education and research began to increase with an emphasis on their pragmatic application; we also discuss education in the era of neoliberalism. From the period up to 1995, many academics have decisively entered this debate, for example, C. P. Snow in his essay *Two Cultures* (1959, printed 1961). Criticism of the modern educational system (closing the mind) as opposed to classical education (opening the mind) was also raised by Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). Pierre Bourdieu in *Homo Academicus* (1988), for example, criticizes elitism and reflects on academic autonomy in relation to the commercialization of education. John Law writes about how modern societies organize and structure the social order (1994). In the German-speaking territories, the importance of the humanities in relation to social critique is considered, for example, by Jürgen Habermas in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981; Eng. trans. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 1984).[3]

Elaine Showalter in her book *Faculty Towers* claims that "academic novels are rarely in sync with their decade of publication; most reflect the preceding decade's issues, crises, and changes" (2005, 12–13). Pascal Mercier's *Perlmann's Silence* has proven the exact opposite, as the relevance of its themes has only grown over time. The type of academic represented by Philipp Perlmann and the ways in which he sees academia and its future remain relevant across Europe, including Slovakia.[4]

PETER BIERI'S CRITICISM OF THE POST-BOLOGNA ACADEMIC WORLD

Pascal Mercier was the pseudonym of Peter Bieri, who worked as a professor of philosophy at the German universities of Marburg, Bielefeld, and Berlin. As a writer, he became famous for his five extensive novels. *Perlmann's Silence*, which he published while still an academic, was his debut novel. It was only with his next novel, *Der Klavierstimmer* (The piano tuner, 1998), when he revealed his real identity behind the pseudonym Pascal Mercier. His breakthrough work was the novel *Der Nachtzug nach Lissabon* (2004; Eng. trans. *Night Train to Lisbon*, 2008), which was translated into almost 20 languages and made into a film.

After the release of *Perlmann's Silence*, Peter Bieri managed to last another twelve years in the academic world. Disgusted, he gave up his professorship at the Freie Universität Berlin in 2007 and retired from academia altogether. Seven years later the journalist Jürgen Kaube stated that Bieri "left the department in protest against the university's policy, to which science is alien" (2014, n.p.). According to the German philosopher Holm Tetens (2023), Bieri began distancing himself from the academic world of the university and from academic philosophy even before the publication of his literary debut *Perlmann's Silence* in 1995. Thus this novel may be viewed as the outcome of a long contemplation on academic work and dissatisfaction with the way the system functioned:

> The most important motif of Bieri's departure from the academic philosophy is already present in his first novel: a reproach that conceptual and argumentative clarity can become autotelic and, as a result, it mainly goes past the existential dimension of philosophical formulation of questions. Although people speak, they say nothing – that is an important motif of Bieri. (Tetens 2023, n.p.)[5]

The departure from the academic world and academic philosophy, according to Tetens, did not happen quietly and without conflicts. Even in an obituary made public by the Freie Universität Berlin, Tetens points out that Bieri "often felt misunderstood and not respected enough by his colleagues. But he did not make it easy for his colleagues either" (2023, n.p.).

In one of his few interviews on this topic, Bieri explains his decision in this way: "The situation at the university makes me upset. It's not only about money and company identity. I am devastated by the mentality of the university" (Anonymous 2007, n.p.). Bieri's reaction to the state of the university has much to do with the Bologna reform of higher education, which was unpopular in academic circles even then, and often blamed for the decline of the Humboldtian ideal of education. He was extremely disappointed by the changes that followed the reform and by the pressure the academic environment exerted on researchers: "A professor is nothing but a prison guard of modules now. I spend hours solving bureaucratic problems of the students…" (n.p.). The Bologna Process was not criticized only by Bieri but also by several other notable academics. In his critique of the functioning of the university, Bieri highlights another serious fact – the expectation that professors should acquire money for research, which he considers an outright disgrace in the humanities. The criticism mostly dealt with the commercialization and the economization of education, its standardization,

uniformity, schematism, enormous rates of bureaucracy, heightened pressure created by competition and third-party financing, and restriction of academic freedom.

PERLMANN'S SILENCE AND VIVAT ACADEMIA

German literary criticism in that period devoted little attention to Mercier's debut, and not even the mystery surrounding the authorship of the pseudonymous novel could pull the critics in. The readers were left with only the brief information that Pascal Mercier is a Swiss author and an associate professor in linguistics living in Genoa, Italy. This information, combined with the theories about the novel's main character, prompted the creation of even more theories.[6]

When it comes to Mercier's debut, the work is characterized by the discussion of its genre classification. It can be viewed as a philosophical novel because the main character is enquiring into ethics and morality, the issue of experience, free will and oppression, and the nature and motivation of human behavior. Time and the experience of the present[7] also play a crucial role, as well as the question of identity,[8] memories, or the meaning of the process of remembering in relation to language.[9] The novel also bears the attributes of a psychological novel; after all, the novel is dominated by the auctorial-personal narrator of Philipp Perlmann and his personal perspective. Friedman Apel assesses the novel as "a self-reflective, philosophical-analytical, criminal, and adventure novel in line with the highest artistic tradition" (1995, n.p.). In connection to *Perlmann's Silence*, the term "university novel" is also mentioned.

It is important to note that relatively few studies on the term "university novel" have been written in the German-speaking environment. The borders, the definitions, and even the term itself are thus not precisely defined. Among the most known and extensive publications devoted to the problem are the works of Victoria Stachowicz (2002) and Alexander Košenina (2003). Until 2009, the genre "university novel" had not even been incorporated into the *Handbuch der literarischen Gattungen* (Handbook of literary genres, Lamping 2009) as a single entry. Nowadays it is only briefly described as a variant of satire.[10] The change was brought about via Vojtěch Trombik's doctoral thesis (2017), which became the most cited secondary literature on the subject for the whole of the German-speaking territories. The author successfully provides a more nuanced perspective and contributes to the university novel being perceived as a valid genre.

The choice of the university/academy as the main setting of the novel is, without a doubt, a common denominator of the various attempts at defining the given genre. However, such a narrow view excludes novels that do not take place in such an environment, even though they depict its effects on the lives of the characters. Defining the genre in this way – that a university novel is a novel that takes place at a university – is, for example, defended by John E. Kramer (2000);[11] however, we consider this definition too limiting. On the contrary, Wolfgang Weiss and Vojtěch Trombik state that the borders of the definition should be broadened – the term "university novel" should thus denote a whole university microcosm that is quite inaccessible to the rest of the world but with all the attributes of academic life quite intimately depicted. This characterization also includes the literary debut of Pascal

Mercier. In this case, the space of the university cannot be a defining generic characteristic. The texts do not always have to be situated at a university; they can depict individual aspects of the life of a researcher/professor/academic that transfers the university experience to other parts of life. The texts can also address a coming to terms with the academic environment/institution of the university, wherever they take place (see Moseley 2007). Thus, it means that the influence of the academic environment on the plot of the novel is more important than the environment itself.[12]

In general, one might say that the university novel tells a story that is situated in an academic environment and depicts the university in some way. Its characters are professors, associate professors, academics, and students. Sabrina Deigert, too, considers all novels that are predominantly about everyday academic life to be university novels (2019, 64). It seems that defining the genre is quite difficult, as noted by literary scholar Wieland Schwanebeck: "In the course of a historical survey, it should become clear that an all-encompassing definition […] under which all textual examples could be summarised must remain a utopian goal, not least because even the most inventive representatives have hardly set thematic boundaries" (2012, 53).

Since, according to Wolfgang Weiss, the university novel always refers explicitly to the university in social reality, "its most important constitutive trait is that the essential features of the institution are incorporated into the overall fictional outline of the world in the novel, whether in a realistic mimesis that may move towards an exact description of the real university or in a stylized, model representation, including caricature exaggeration or satirical distortion" (1994, 20). He also claims that "university as a subject of a novel has never taken root in German literature" (1995, 447) and is aware of the issue of defining the genre. He sees a possible solution, nevertheless, in defining the protagonists of these novels: "this category of novels does not have a typical hero like the *picaro* but alternately focuses on students, associate professors in precarious positions, grey professors, or guests of the faculty" (1994, 20; emphasis in the original). Barbara Himmelsbach, too, points out that in a university novel, not only "students, teachers (professors or associate professors, temporary or full-time staff), visiting professors, lecturers, *writers-in-residence*, or even non-scholarly employees of the university may be at the center of the action, so that the themes dealt with in the novel may differ very strongly due to the different perspectives" (1992, 5; emphasis in the original).

The definition of the genre is made more difficult by the various thematic foci of the novels and the overlap with several other literary genres. The themes and plotlines that the authors implement have many varieties, and they almost always surpass the borders of the genre.[13] They also fulfil many functions. The most popular themes include intrigues and relationships, criticism of institutions, refusal of the system and its methods, depiction of research, social structures of the university, disappointment caused by the academic world, or sexual harassment.[14] Philosophical topics, the issues of identity and integrity, or the isolation from the outside world are also among the most frequent themes.

Vojtěch Trombik comments on the genre classification of *Perlmann's Silence* when regarding Mercier's debut along with *How are you, Mister Angst*? (2008) by Joachim Zelter as one of the best new *psychological* (emphasis added) university novels. Additionally, Trombik considers both works as "works on the border with the *experimental* university novel" (2017, 17; emphasis in the original). The definition is further developed by Markus Fischer, who describes Mercier's novel as a "research novel" (2020, 53). At the same time, he also emphasizes that among university novels, research itself is only rarely portrayed as the main theme. He legitimizes his description by explaining that the theme of academic research is at the foreground in this particular novel. For us, Mercier does not hierarchize the motifs of academia but rather creates a web out of them, each motif playing an important role because it contributes to a change in the characters – their thoughts, experiences, opinions, and actions – that are unique both to male and female academics. The complementary research part of the university professor's work is portrayed in the novel as burnout. Research, presumably as meant by Fischer, turns into a fascination with the language, the content of a thought, particularly in regard to the translation of Leskov's text. In this case, however, it is not the essence of the research work that is at stake, but the discovery of a new, interesting, and as yet unexplored activity by Perlmann, in which the translation replaces academic research. In terms of this way of thinking, the label "research novel" is debatable.

Several reviewers of the novel emphasize Mercier's mastery of believable depictions of the academic world. For example, Gerhard Beckmann argues that it is "the most important university novel in contemporary German-language literature" (1998, n.p.), and he views it as an "example of the present deterioration of academic communication". Even Olaf Kramer (2008) draws attention to the portrayal of the position of science in the academic world. In her review, Petra Frerichs (2021) emphasizes the excellent handling of character psychologization and the construction of the novel's ensemble.

Because Mercier's novel depicts the academic world and its inaccessibility, the protagonist and most of the characters in the novel are academics or researchers, and they allude to the inaccessible academic world. The work, however, can be further characterized as an academic novel with psychological, philosophical, and criminal novel components.[15] The motif of the intended murder stems directly from the academic environment and its functioning; it consists of immense remorse, feelings of shame, fear of being exposed as a plagiarist, and of the loss of reputation within the tight linguistic circles depicted. All of these elements almost lead the main character to the murder of his colleague Leskov and his own subsequent suicide. The psychologization of professional burnout and of sheer exhaustion, therefore, takes on an absolute existential dimension. It is from this perspective that Graham Reid reflects on the novel, describing *Perlmann's Silence* as a psychological thriller (2012). He even identifies a near-Hitchcockian tension within it. Peter Bieri himself has stated that he "was both shocked and amused to discover the extent of criminal energy present in Philipp Perlmann" (2011a, n.p.).

THE PERLMANN CRISIS

The novel starts with a description of the moment of psychological crisis of the narrator, linguistics professor Philipp Perlmann: he has nothing to say, there is an unbearable silence, there is a sudden blindness to signs and meanings, the appearance of anxiety and the feeling of being unconvincing and boring, the inability to concentrate, the feeling of irreversibility, the loss of faith in the meaning of academic activity, the loss of a sense of excellence, the disinterest in methodical investigation, forgetfulness, the feeling of exclusion, wasted time, even dead time. Against all of this stands a generous budget, a meeting of the top experts in a pleasant location without concern for the expense, public interest, a product or even a committed professor. The causes of Perlmann's crises are three-fold, of which the latter two are professionally related: 1. the death of a partner, 2. the feeling of academic stagnation, as if "he had nothing to say" (Mercier 2011, 3), and 3. the increasing contempt for academia and the loss of faith in the importance of academic work. In this state of mind, Perlmann recklessly accepts an offer from the Olivetti company to organize and lead a multi-week linguistic symposium at a luxurious hotel in Liguria, where he is expected to give a lecture on his current research. The sponsoring company is "especially charmed by the possibility of being able to promote a project that had something to do with the company's products, while it also went far beyond it, by taking in questions of general interest, of significance to the whole of society, so to speak" (Mercier 2011, 5). By moving the setting from the university to a luxury resort, Mercier again thematizes the affect of commercialization on the humanities.

The text is interspersed with reflections on translation and its nature. It is Perlmann's translation of a text by his Russian colleague Leskov, entitled "On the Role of Language in the Formation of Memories", that becomes central to the novel, through which we are confronted with several philosophical problems (the philosophy of time, the philosophy of remembering) as well as with the philosophy of language itself. Paralyzed by the expectations of the academic world, Perlmann hides in a hotel room and seeks refuge in the translation of the Russian text, as a result of which he becomes more and more entangled in a vortex of lies. The lack of time to write the brilliant introductory lecture expected by everyone and doubts about his own abilities lead him to plagiarism when he decides to appropriate the text of the Russian colleague, translate it into German, and present it in front of his colleagues. Plagiarism is considered one of the greatest sins in the academic and scientific world and often means academic suicide, since it utterly undermines the identity and reputation of the researcher/professor. Therefore, Perlmann also addresses a current and frequently cited practice that concerns researcher/professors and increasingly students, which has apparently been around for a long time but to an unknown extent.

However, it is not Perlmann's intention to proceed in this way; he never intended to present a plagiarized text to his colleagues; the problem lies in his doubts about his own abilities. He feels that everyone expects him to give a brilliant and ground-breaking preliminary lecture in which he will report on his current research. Clearly, Perlmann's motivation for translating Leskov's text is not to commit

an academic crime; the translation is merely an escape and a flight from his inability to write his own paper. If he later decides to use the translation and pass the text off as his own, this act must be understood as a way out of immense pressure and a product of desperation (which, of course, in no way excuses the possible violation of academic ethics).

Autobiographical details, rooted mainly in the experience of the philosopher Peter Bieri, are a characteristic feature of Mercier's writing. He built his academic career on specific philosophical (epistemological) and psychological questions. Later, he decided to prematurely terminate this career. Mercier's dive into the academic world is interesting because it casts doubts on the mechanisms of its functioning. It was these very mechanisms that brought the sensitive main character, Philipp Perlmann, to a point where anxiety and panic took over, not allowing him to evaluate situations accurately. The suffering Perlmann experiences stem mainly from his hyperbolical constructions of expected social situations, in which he fears not only other people but also his own failure and incompetency. He thinks:

> They would look at him expectantly as he sat at the front, and then, after a prolonged, unbearable silence and a breathless halting of time, they would know: he had nothing to say. Ideally, he would have left again immediately, without giving a destination, without an explanation, without an apology. For a moment the impulse to flee was as violent as a physical pain. […] He couldn't come up with a convincing excuse. To give the true reason would be impossible. Even if he could summon the courage, it would sound like a bad joke. (3)

Perlmann, who knows from the very beginning that he has nothing to say, realizes that his whole reputation depends on how well he corresponds with the image of the prominent and respected scholar he is believed to be. When the emphasis on the quality and originality of academic works shifts to quantity, he also feels pressure to constantly produce new works. As his years holding an academic position pass, Perlmann becomes more and more the image of what other people want him to be. In effect, he loses himself, growing further and further away from his research work. He does not feel "present" within it, and he doubts that he ever did:

> If only he could feel that in his academic work as well. It seemed strange to him, but he no longer knew if it had ever been so. If it had, it was a long time ago, in a time when he had not yet known the paralysis that had tormented him for so long. By now he had the feeling that he didn't really know what it was like: doing academic work. […] [H]e had lost his faith in the importance of academic work – that belief that impelled him in the past, which had made daily discipline possible… (10)

In contrast to the natural sciences, the humanities do not have a corrective that would determine which theory is correct and which is not. It is often just a matter of which theory gets accepted. In this way Perlmann points out a certain inaccessibility of the humanities and of the academic world itself. While reading the novel, one becomes aware of the academic world as something of a self-contained circular movement, a world that rarely has impulses from the outside. Perlmann is exhausted and more:

> Making an academic discovery: he simply had no need for it now. Methodical investigation, analysis and the development of theories, hitherto a constant, a given, self-evident

> element in his life and in a sense its center of gravity – he had utterly lost interest in it, and so completely that he was no longer sure he understood how it could once have been otherwise. If someone spoke of a new idea, the beginnings of a notion, he could sometimes still listen; but only for a short time, and its elaboration interested him not at all. It felt like wasted time. (11)

In contrast to such an "inaccessible science", Mercier puts forward the character of Giorgio Silvestri, who works directly in a psychiatric clinic, where he studies speech disorders as expressions of mental disorders in schizophrenics. Through Silvestri, Mercier also brings into the text the real-life figure of the Italian psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and psychotherapist Geatan Beneditti, who is considered a pioneer in the psychoanalytic treatment of psychoses.

The mental state mentioned at the beginning can be described as a burnout syndrome. Along with frustration, the burnout syndrome is common in the real lives of both academics and the non-academics. Perlmann himself realizes that the joy and energy he felt at the beginning of his academic career have completely vanished. The reference to the stagnation of research in the humanities among some of his colleagues is also alluded to in the novel. There is a mention of colleagues who do not publish anything anymore or of those who keep revitalizing older research. Philipp Perlmann is aware that a number of professors who have not written or contributed anything new for a long time are nevertheless able to continue to exist in universities, and with due flair too. In this case, Mercier lends a critical voice to the Spanish linguist Evelyn Mistral.

The competitive struggle in academia is also strongly thematized. It is manifested in Perlmann's efforts to win awards or invitations to guest lectures at renowned universities. However, the competitive struggle also takes place elsewhere – at the level of popularity with students. Thus, for example, Perlmann's colleague Berghoff envies Perlmann not only because he spends most of the semester in an expensive hotel in Liguria, but also because Perlmann's lecture halls are full of students, which is proof of his popularity. In his lectures, Perlmann, however, is aware of his failure and the difference compared to when he started his academic career; he is conscious of his sense of distance from his chosen field; he performs rhetorical exercises instead of a deeper immersion in the subject matter. It is not only in the field of research that Perlmann realizes that he has nothing to say; he feels that even the students – the driving force behind his work – have ceased to interest him.

Mortimer Robinson Proctor's comments on the British university novel also applies to Mercier's novel:

> Thus the university novels have always had to a large extent the quality of the documentary about them. […] They have recorded, with surprising accuracy, the issues of reform, the temper of the reformers, and the astonishing changes they wrought; perhaps as accurately and certainly more vividly than could any memoir of official account of the most important era of university reform that England know. (1977, 187)

In hindsight, the crisis of the academic world as viewed by Perlmann was affirmed by André Bosse, a critic and journalist whose article "Uni ohne Sex-Appeal" (2012) begins with the clear statement that the Bologna declaration killed the university

novel; the credit system, employability, and directives of effectiveness destroyed academia and changed it into a "boring stress" (in langweiligen Stress).

The way in which the crisis of the professor and academia is thematized in the novel is related to structure. Both the causes and the manifestations of the crisis are revealed right at the beginning, so we do not follow either their gradual unveiling or their escalation. When Perlmann returns to the causes, it leads him to repeat his thoughts, and when he delves into the manifestations of the crisis – that is, into himself – we observe a sort of "feeling schematicism" that slows the plot down, even stalls it. The crisis of academia and the individual, as Mercier calls and describes it, may form the basic blueprint of the novel, but it is the repetitiveness that undermines the persuasiveness of its depiction and makes Perlmann an unsympathetic, self-absorbed egocentric, who compares himself to others and criticizes them. However, we believe that the novel's aesthetic focus lies in another motif – the intellectual rescue of Philipp Perlmann from the catastrophe to which Perlmann's situation could lead. It is the aforementioned passion for translation, which turns into fascination and thus allows the author not only to fictionalize his philosophical views and thinking, but also to develop a variety of motifs related to the philosophy of language or identity, as well as the pitfalls, challenges, and specifics of translation work. The latter is submitted to a reflexive and critical inspection. Throughout the process of translation, the poorly functioning academic system is also revealed. Had Mercier not chosen the motif of translation, he would not have been able to show the difference between the academic (no longer creative) activity and the joy the translation brings.

The "space" of translation – the text within the text – makes discourse about academia and the self-destructive aspect of such working structures possible. This aesthetic-discursive strategy serves to represent the hero's thought-world. In dialogue, such a detailed depiction would be impossible or at least extremely problematic. Mercier has succeeded in a specific visualization through words – a paradox, given that the title mentions silence while the narrative itself represents a constant process of working with words – and thanks to it he has created a specific dimension of suggestive reality.

CONCLUSION

In addition to the web of motifs associated with Perlmann's burnout, which form the essence of genre classification, another web of motifs in Mercier's novel is both parallel and prospective. These motifs are related to a newfound fascination with translation, a "difficult" task (as it often appears in the novel's text) that, however, fails to motivate Perlmann to work intellectually after such a long time.[16] Although we could find many faults with the novel, such as the unconvincing escalation of the causes of the professional crisis, the repetition of the protagonist's thoughts and emotional states, the emotional schematicism, Perlmann's alter ego in the form of Leskov's handwriting as a means of expressing a variety of philosophical reflections (Mercier uses the same compositional element in both *Night Train to Lisbon* and *Gewicht der Wörte* – The weight of words, 2020), it, nevertheless, fascinates us

with the realism of its fictional world. Certainly, the planning of the murder and subsequent suicide may appear to be merely a fictional gradation, but Perlmann's feelings and experience of professional crisis are authentic.

Peter Bieri was not a visionary; he was just sensitive to the changes in German higher education, which anticipated the intense discussions on higher education reforms in Germany in the 1990s.[17] If Perlmann might have appeared to the Slovak readership in the 1990s as a solitary eccentric[18] – after all, even Graham Reid (2012) wrote of him as "an unsympathetic figure who talks too much about an increasingly fragile ego" –, 30 years later we would find in our academic space not only many Perlmanns but a whole panopticon of Mercier's characters.

Ulrike Dubber's (1991) description of the university novel as a "fictionalized sociology" particularly stands out in relation to *Perlmann's Silence*. The novel was written at a time of heated debates about the future of higher education in Europe (even though the campus novel is above all an Anglo-American affair). There were also debates about the social significance of the humanities. The university novel is heavily conditioned by how universities function (and the authors know how they function from their own experience) and thus reflects the real crisis of the people working in this sphere. Perlmann's crisis of academia might be specific in that in the 1990s it unmasks the very internal disintegration of the academic tradition and the identity of the professor. The academia has responded to new trends in university education by distortion of academic values and deformation of academic research because it has exchanged quality for quantity and academic respectability for social prestige and popularity.

According to Bieri, education shapes the cultural identity of the individual and the cultural identity of the community through the acquisition of the mother tongue and foreign languages (2011b). The distortion of the traditional Humboldtian university in favor of corporate education necessarily leads not only to a crisis of academic tradition but also to a crisis of cultural identity of both the individual and the community, a fact that Pascal Mercier warned us about three decades ago.

NOTES

[1] Even though *Perlmann's Silence* was published 30 years ago, it appeared only two years ago in a Slovak translation by one of the co-authors of the present article, Paulína Šedíková Čuhová (*Perlmannovo mlčanie*, 2023).

[2] In Germany, for example, it is the work of Schelsky (1957), in which the author contemplates the significance of the humanities in the education of postwar Germany.

[3] After the novel's release, the other works are Readings 1999; Nussbaum 2010; Collini 2012; Newfield 2016, and others; in Germany, we would particularly like to mention Münch 2007 or Liessmann 2014, 2017.

[4] The penetration of neoliberal politics into the Slovak education system has begun to be described only recently. Ondrej Kaščák and Branislav Pupala's *Škola zlatých golierov* (School of the golden collars, 2012) is a compelling critique of the one-sided neoliberal redirection of European education. See also Kaščák and Pupala 2011; Višňovský 2014; Kaščák 2016; Golema 2017; Passia 2018, and Jančovič 2019.

[5] Unless otherwise stated, all translations from German are by the present authors.

[6] Pascal Mercier, in one of the interviews that took place after his identity as Peter Bieri was revealed, expressed that he is not Perlmann although both have an academic background (more detail in Saltzwedel 1998).

[7] Bieri published his dissertation on the philosophy of time in 1972.

[8] As a philosopher, he also addressed the question of identity – personal, mental, intellectual, cultural, affective, linguistic, spiritual, etc. – in *Wie wollen wir leben?* (2011a), for example.

[9] Both Peter Bieri and Pascal Mercier are fascinated by language. Yet again in *Wie wollen wir leben?* (2011) he argues that language is the key to the emergence of personal identity; he reflects on language blindness and language vigilance, on the role of the mother tongue and the acquisition of foreign languages.

[10] By comparison, the campus novel appeared as a term in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* in 1985.

[11] Definitions in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1991, 30) and *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (2013, n.p.) correspond to the tradition of the campus novel in the Anglo-American setting but are not applicable in the European context; its application would disqualify many works as campus novels.

[12] Oksana Blashkiv writes: "The end of the twentieth century produced images of academics who were anxiously unable to adapt to the new requirements the welfare university imposed on their lives and identities. Talking about the 'university man' today presupposes awareness of not only the historical and literary background, but also social and cultural diversity of the globalized world, which has a direct bearing on his/her academic identity" (2018, 152).

[13] Very often it is a cross-genre shift towards the crime university novel, for example novels by Nora Dorn.

[14] For example, *Die Brandung* (1985) by Martin Walser, *Auditorium panopticum* (1991) by Kerstin Hensel, *Der Campus* (1995) by Dietrich Schwanitze, *Magistra* (1997) by Monika Bohn, *Die Intrige* (2001) by Dorothee Nolte, *Die Schatten der Ideen* (2008) by Klaus Modick.

[15] A similar case in Slovak literature is that of the literary scholar and writer Stanislav Rakús (Součková, 2022).

[16] For importance of the text in terms of the motif of translation see Čuhová and Kubealaková 2023.

[17] On the evaluation processes that started around 1994 in Germany, see Rehburg 2006.

[18] Considering the history of the Anglo-American university novel, Weiss depicts the manifestations of frustration and inferiority among humanities scholars, even leading to suicide (1994, 119–127).

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The university as heterotopia in Tabea Mußgnug's *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders...*

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The university as heterotopia in Tabea Mußgnug's *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders...*

Tabea Mußgnug. Academic novel. Campus fiction. Student memoir. Heterotopia. Authenticity.

Nächstes Semester wird alles anders… (Next semester all will be different…, 2015) by Tabea Mußgnug is a student memoir that constructs the university as a Foucauldian heterotopia. The nameless first-person narrator, who functions as a *persona* for the author herself, tells us about her preoccupations, idiosyncrasies and anxieties, relating anecdotes from the student life of a millennial who does not seem to take her studies in the humanities or herself all too seriously. Her student memoir provides a fresh look at the university by shifting the focus of narration to a partly factual, partly ironical description of daily study routines, after-work life, and leisure time. Her confessional tone, irreverent attitude, and frequent use of clichés and stereotypes serve her narrative construction of authenticity. With *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* Mußgnug joins the ranks of those authors of campus fiction who have come to turn away from academia, emphasizing that there are more important and satisfactory things to do in life than studying or teaching at a university.

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A number of new and previously unknown German-speaking authors have tried their hands at academic fiction in the course of the last two decades.[1] One possible explanation for this trend seems to be the popularity of Dietrich Schwanitz's *Der Campus*, which appeared in 1995 and was subsequently turned into a film directed by Sönke Wortmann (1997). Another reason is that this genre strongly reacts to changes in the university landscape (cf. Moseley 2019). In Germany, the last decade of the 20th century and the first of the new millennium have brought university reforms attempting to curb the excrescences of the liberal changes conceded by the authorities in the wake of the student rebellions of 1968.[2]

Among these authors from the millennial generation is Tabea Mußgnug (born in 1987), whose student memoir *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* (Next semester all will be different…) appeared in 2015. Like her nameless protagonist and first-person narrator, Mußgnug studied art history, religious studies and Byzantine archaeology, and did her PhD in art history at the University of Heidelberg. This information (provided inside the book) suggests that the character should be taken as a *persona* of the author herself, which leaves the readers to ponder what sort of text they are dealing with.

The book's paratexts give an important clue: it is published by Fischer Publishers, but although the book has a slightly larger format, the graphics of the yellow cover is reminiscent of the inexpensive *Reclam Universalbibliothek* series, mostly featuring classical German writers. The "smudged" yellow cover creates the impression of being a used copy, as also suggested by the red ink with which somebody (the previous reader?) seems to have filled in the letters "e", "d", and "a" on the front and the verso. Finally, the subtitles "Zwischen Uni und Leben!" (Between the university and life!) and "Für alle, die denken, sie bräuchten einen Plan" (For all those who think that they need a plan) appear to be handwritten with green and red felt pen, as if the book's owner had scribbled on the cover herself, perhaps doodling on it to kill time during a boring lecture. These graphic details point towards one of the central assumptions in this article: the fiction of authenticity and the realization that authenticity is – like truth – an artificial construction. This also applies to constructing the university as a heterotopia in the Foucauldian sense.

Moreover, on the back cover we read that Mußgnug's narrative is meant to be a "Guide for all who know what it feels like to be continually asked: 'And what can you do you with it afterwards?'"[3] Mußgnug seems to have in mind a clearly-defined group of readers who are capable of sharing and appreciating her experiences, that is, prospective students or university graduates who are asking the naïve question, "And what can you do with it afterwards?" This may also include less academically-minded readers who nevertheless are curious to find out what it feels like to study at university today. Mußgnug's text is difficult to classify, depending on whether one reads it as a documentation of real-life experiences, or considers it to be fiction. The simple suggestion to read it as a student memoir based on the experiences of its author makes the work quite unique, with hardly any parallels in the German-speaking realm. As a genre, the memoir, like the autobiography, allows for the employment of episodic structures and the insertion of personal anecdotes as well as claims to be true to life.

It also allows the use of fiction, as we know, at least since Hayden White, that fiction is needed to (re)construct the past (1973).

This article will describe the protagonist's intentionally irreverent and satirical views of university life as well as discussing the serious issues and problems that lie beneath the surface of her comic and ironic self-stylization. We should note that the style of the whole work is informal and close to oral speech, suggesting local student jargon along with the lingo of the millennial generation. This relaxed and informal way of writing is crucial to the work as a whole and to the effects it wants to achieve. The insider view and the intimate and confessional tone is part of Mußgnug's narrative construction of authenticity, with which she seems to be targeting both the group of prospective "firsties", or "Erstis" in German (41), that is, first-semester students who are facing entry into university life, as well as those who nostalgically recall their own college days. It goes without saying that the memoir also seems to be confirming the prejudices of those who have always claimed that studying at university is a waste of time, and that young people should be applying themselves to something more useful or profitable. The world of the university in Mußgnug's view resembles a pleasant heterotopia with a special space and time structure. It is a protected space where today's young people are provided for and looked after, do not need to work very hard, and have much time on their hands to try new things and indulge in their hobbies – including partying, social media, and many other types of entertainment. This picture of student life suggested in Mußgnug's memoir claims to be authentic, but it is doubtful whether it is a truthful reflection of reality. The authenticity that Mußgnug's book constructs (and to which it owes its success) is more an expression of the nostalgic longing for the genuine and the true, which in the age of fake news and artificial intelligence threatens to become a rare commodity (Schilling 2020; Dinger 2021), than a truthful account of the student experience. Mußgnug describes her laborious way into the university world, what it feels like to live inside this "bell jar", and her desperate attempts to get back into "real life".

UNIVERSITY (LIFE) AS HETEROTOPIA

In contrast to utopias or dystopias that portray imaginary worlds, heterotopias exist as parts of our reality, but according to Michel Foucault they are also different from it, demarcated by real or imaginary boundaries that mark heterotopia as a special place. Foucault lists gardens, prisons, churchyards, psychiatric asylums, museums, or libraries as examples (2005, 16). These heterotopias are related to heterochrony, that is, special concepts of time, for example, the churchyard, where time stands still, or the museum or library which "collect" time and are therefore related to eternity (16). What is also important to note is that access to these heterotopias is granted through initiation or purification rituals (18). In the academic context, we can think of the ritual of selecting the "right" university and the *Immatrikulation* (official enrollment), the host of accompanying forms and formalities, and the discouraging experiences of the narrator as she tries to settle down into university life.

Mußgnug's unnamed narrator/protagonist is aware that she is moving in a special place as well as in a special time, since quite early in her work she reflects on this process:

> The "now" is a great, boring waiting hall. But I am also afraid of the "after", because the "after" means to face the real world. Of course, the university is not the real world. The university is a cheese dome with semester ticket and student insurances, shared flats, asparagus in the canteen for two Euros, and for all and everything there is a help desk. We have a lot of time, without anyone telling us that we are just hanging around, for we are studying, we are doing something important and respectable, working with our heads. If you want to go abroad, you can live for a semester in Barcelona, just like that, university will see to it. If you don't like a seminar, well, leave it. If it doesn't work out with your credit, you can do it next semester. (2015, 12)

Here, place and time are closely related in Foucault's definition of heterotopia. The "now" ("Jetzt") refers to the time when she is still at university but has successfully concluded her studies and is writing her job applications. It resembles a "waiting hall" ("Wartehalle") in which she is preparing for the time "after" ("Danach") that is, her (re-)entry into "the real world".

Repeatedly mentioned throughout Mußgnug's memoir is the fact that students may seem to have a lot of time on their hands. This impression at least applies to the students in the humanities, for Mußgnug is aware that the situation may be different for students studying other subjects. As proof she cites the so-called "semester holidays" ("Semesterferien"), which in Germany take up ten weeks twice a year. The narrator emphasizes how the university lecturers insist on calling this "lecture-free time" ("vorlesungsfreie Zeit"), the implication being that this time is not meant for holidays but for writing seminar papers, reading, and preparing yourself for the upcoming semester (Mußgnug 2015, 137ff.).

Initiation troubles

At the beginning of Mußgnug's student memoir she faces the questions of what to study and where to study it. These matters are crucial, and are not so easily answered by the prospective *Erstie*, since the act of choosing your subject presupposes that you know about your strengths, weaknesses, and predilections, which is not always the case.

Early in her memoir, the protagonist realizes that her choice of "exotic" subjects might turn out to be problematic in the long run. The question: "And what can you do with it afterwards?" (196), which others continually confront her with, fuels the feeling of latent panic that takes possession of her when she is reflecting on her chances of getting a decent job in the future. It also forces her to ponder another problem, namely, "where noble idealism stops and naive stupidity begins" (194). Throughout her text, Mußgnug contrasts the so-called "orchid subjects" ("Orchideenfächer"; 40), such as Byzantine archaeology or religious studies (both of which she later chooses), to disciplines such as medicine, law, economics, or teacher training courses, which she has ruled out for herself from the start. According to Mußgnug, disorientation, pragmatism, and utilitarian thinking are la-

bels that describe the prospective student's state of mind and motivation much more adequately and authentically than the idea of a thirst for knowledge in specific disciplines. The writer/narrator's sympathy seems to be with the *Ersties,* and her intention is to encourage them by describing how many other beginners are in the same situation.

Mußgnug is right when she considers the possible outcomes of a decision that ignores the question of what you can do with a degree after graduation. She chooses subjects that make the transition from school to university easy for her, following stereotypical ideas of what might be easy or difficult. What makes starting student life even more difficult is the sheer number of universities that you can apply for, since German students can study almost anywhere in Germany, if we ignore the question of *numerus clausus* for the time being. There are hardly any study fees to be considered, as most of the universities are non-profit institutions financed by the various federal German governments. Quite in contrast to England, where the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge indisputably stand for "excellence", in Germany it is not so clear which universities can count as "excellent" institutions. The reason is that a globally recognized ranking system comparable to that existing in England or in the United States has not been established – for various reasons.

In *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…*, the protagonist is aware that in 2007, all universities are "obsessed" (34) with the idea of receiving the title of "elite university" (34). In Germany, this goal was endorsed in 2005 by the so-called "Excellence Initiatives" (34) launched by the German Science and Humanities Council and the German Research Foundation and implemented in two phases from 2007 to 2017. It is more than understandable that the label "excellence" was taken advantage of by the endowed universities to advertise themselves as "elite universities" according to the model of Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, and Yale, although in England and the US other criteria have to be fulfilled to be awarded this predicate. Mußgnug insists that, seen from a student's perspective, the choice of your university is not so much a matter of the institution's excellence, but is rather dependent on other considerations. Her decision to change from Heidelberg to Karlsruhe after her first semester and study the subject of German philology in Karlsruhe is a remarkable indicator in this direction. Karlsruhe is well known for its sciences and technology, but less so for its humanities.

Mußgnug's protagonist feels insecure, and when she begins to study art history and German philology in Heidelberg, she is intimidated by the change of her environment and by the challenging reports of her student colleagues about the difficulties they had to master by pulling many "all-nighters" of work. She loses heart and believes herself to be "the dumbest chicken at the university" (37). The subtitle of her student memoir, "For all who think they need a plan…" – implying that you do not need a plan, that it is "normal" if you do not have one – is meant to be reassuring for all those who are in a similar situation. According to Mußgnug, there are enough examples of this (35–36).

A student's perspective on relaxation and routines

Mußgnug's images of student life at Heidelberg University should be taken with a pinch of salt, for basically they are low-angle shots drawn with a lot of irreverent humor, self-irony, and partly with satirical intention:

> When some time ago, on a Monday evening, my flat mate Sarah and I were visiting Sarah's boyfriend Lukas, I started to realize how much I was – in terms of time – living in a parallel world. Actually, we just wanted to watch a film together, but we found a bottle of Absolute Raspberry Vodka, ice-cold, and because it was hot and we hadn't eaten anything substantial, only a piece of watermelon, the effect was impressive. At half past eight I was standing at the open flat window above, bawling loudly and throwing freshly washed underpants from the laundry rack on to the street. Below, Sarah tried to catch them and was laughing her head off. People passed by on their way home and in expectation of a whole week of work that lay still before them, while I threw a cucumber out of the window because I had run out of pants. At half past nine, me and Sarah took turns hugging the toilet bowl. (12–13)

Mußgnug has deliberately chosen to write from the perspective of a student of the humanities who describes herself as a "scared rabbit" (59) as well as a late developer and closet procrastinator who is to function as a representative of the average student population. The narrator thus portrays herself and her ambitions in an ironic light. She realizes and freely admits that there are better students than she is, which is an understatement that creates space for self-irony, self-critique and satire. Mußgnug's first-person narrator poses as a *picara*, who desperately tries to survive in an environment where too many students are squeezed into small lecture halls or seminar rooms, and people have to sit on the floor, where you have to enter your name on a long list with many other names to sign up for a presentation topic in the prescribed seminars, and where you are just a faceless nobody for the professor or lecturer. Descriptions and critical reflections on the course contents that her protagonist has studied for seven years are blatantly absent. The narrator does not want to come across as an intellectual, but simply poses as a young woman of our time, one who speaks the language of the millennials and who shares her generation's preoccupations, aspirations and anxieties.

Mußgnug is very much concerned with the organization of her studies and the routines a student must go through. She finds fault with the way things are administered; for example, the university administration still works with hard copies. There are other things that become more important for a student than enthusing over newly won scholarly insights into her study subjects, such as registering in time for a presentation topic (58 ff.), or not being able to sign an attendance list in an overcrowded lecture hall because it gets "stuck" in its circulation and does not arrive in time to be signed before the end of the lecture.

Writing seminar papers becomes a boring routine, dominated by paraphrasing secondary sources, copying and pasting, without using any creativity. At student level, the likelihood to be found out as a plagiarist at this time is still limited, at least as Mußgnug's first-person narrator believes, since the professors do not read the numerous student papers themselves, but delegate this task to their student assistants ("Hi-

wis" – German abbreviation for Hilfswissenschaftler; 123–124), whom the teachers treat as their "slaves" (124).

Internships and holiday jobs

If university is a heterotopia and studying amounts to life under a bell jar, the many internships that bachelor's and master's students must complete during the course of their studies seem merely ritualized attempts at making contact with real life – something which Mußgnug's narrator instinctively dislikes. Internships and holiday jobs logically build bridges to the outside world, with all the consequences this might entail for the protagonist. Time begins to move faster, life becomes more laborious, and often Mußgnug's protagonist prays that these periods go by quickly. She realizes that as a student trainee, she is really everybody's "doormat" (Mußgnug literally: "Mops"; 130) and wishes she were back in the "shelter" of the lecture hall.

The narrator makes it clear that she harbors antagonistic feelings towards the educational or teaching sector of work life. Her phobia is expressed in a comic way, for example, when she notices "forty-five crowing primary school kids equipped with Mandarin-scented India rubbers and wholemeal cheese sandwiches in Lillifee Tupperware" (121). She also observes that the children born after the year 2000 sometimes seem to bear strange names. Mußgnug's skill in creating comic dialogue is illustrated in passages such as "'Lucifer hit me on my head today with his pencil case' – 'Ach, Snow White, this is only his way of showing you that he likes you'" ("'Luzifer hat mir heute mit dem Mäppchen auf den Kopf gehauen' – 'Ach, Schneewittchen, damit zeigt er doch nur, dass er dich mag'"; 131). Other encounters with reality in the form of various internships and holiday jobs create more or less similar results: for the time being, she prefers to stay under the bell jar.

The difficult transition back into reality

The final episode of this life in heterotopia is the attempt to regain access to reality. This demands again a ritualized form of activity: writing application letters and receiving scores of polite rejections. The conflict between a practically oriented choice of study subjects (economics, law, medicine) and following the inclination of one's mind is pertinent throughout Mußgnug's text, however, and this tension reaches a climax towards the end of her memoir. Her disappointment becomes greatest when at a barbecue she meets a former student friend who took up the study of business administration and engineering when there was a demand for it on the market, and who is now successful in his job, earning a lot of money:

> He mentioned that he had always wanted to study history. Sure of victory, I asked him whether he did not regret his choice in the meantime (Subtext: "Regret having sold yourself for filthy lucre to cold economy, you bending bugger!"), and waited for regretful words. He laughed and said that he simply read many history books, which he could afford to buy for himself due to his job and doesn't need to borrow from the library, in his spare time. For the rest of the evening I felt crestfallen. (194)

Mußgnug seems to have written *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* during a time of unemployment after completing her PhD in 2014. In Germany the per-

centage of unemployed academics is lower than the average unemployment rate (cf. Bundesagentur 2024). Although the situation for academics on the job market is not so bad overall, there may be individual differences, such as Mußgnug's combination of three "orchid subjects", that make it more difficult to find a suitable job.

FICTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY

University life may be experienced differently by other students, especially those studying other subjects, and Mußgnug's text creates the feeling that her protagonist has formed a somewhat biased view of student life. The idea that students have so much time at their disposal is only true up to a certain point. Being enrolled in a BA course usually means studying within a set curriculum of prescribed classes and lectures, within which the student's choices are limited. When Mußgnug insists on the fact that students can skip a seminar or postpone it until next semester, she is only telling us half of the truth. Also, going abroad for a semester is not so easy, as the lectures, seminars and examinations one takes abroad may differ from those of the home curriculum and may not be recognized by the home university. Thus, despite the good intentions of the system's initiators, the intended theoretical flexibility of the Bologna agreements continues to have practical limitations.

Mußgnug's University of Heidelberg seems to be a paradise for students of art history, Byzantine archaeology, and religious studies, although Mußgnug's narrative deliberately distorts and simplifies reality in her creation of "authentic" student life. As Erik Schilling (2020) points out, authenticity should not be understood as an essentialist term that gives us access to the "truth", but as "*the congruency between an observation with an expectation of the observer*. The one who says 'authentic' in this sense says nothing about the observed person or entity, but only about her/his expectation and observation" (11).

With Schilling's definition of authenticity as our starting point, our analysis will have to concentrate on the narrative strategies that Mußgnug uses to construct authenticity, and not on the question of truth. Claiming that students lead their lives under a bell jar is certainly part of it. Other strategies were already mentioned before: the faked Reclam environment of the paratext, the choice of the narrative subgenre of student memoir, for example, and the insertion of a biographical note that the author studied the same subjects as her narrator-persona. The informal writing style, which amounts to a fiction of orality, and the irreverent tone with which she describes her teachers and the subjects she is studying, contribute to the creation of an authentic student perspective. Finally, the host of intertextual and intermedial allusions and cultural references embed her narrative firmly into the cultural context of her time. Although it seems counter-intuitive at first glance, the employment of stereotypes and clichés, together with her irony and satire also serve the purpose of creating an authentic view of reality.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE HUMANITIES

As previously mentioned, the narrator's choice of fields of study is portrayed in an ironic light, and the cavalier way she makes this choice feeds the prejudice

of the general public that many subjects in the humanities should be dropped from the university syllabus, and that studying them is a useless undertaking and a waste of precious resources. At least theoretically, the study of an *Orchideenfach* implies much more than what is suggested by the English stereotype of "left-handed underwater basket weaving". Mußgnug's memoir should be read in the context of the global discussion about the role of the humanities within the spectrum of academic disciplines, the questioning of their social relevance, and efforts to curtail them by various universities. The depreciation of the humanities is not merely a local but a global phenomenon, as J. M. Coetzee emphasizes in his foreword to John Higgins's book *On Academic Freedom in a Democratic South Africa* (2014):

> South African universities are by no means in a unique position. All over the world, as governments retreat from their traditional duty to foster the common good and reconceive of themselves as mere managers of national economies, universities have been coming under pressure to turn themselves into training schools equipping young people with the skills required by a modern economy. (xi)

Coetzee, who became professor of general literature at Cape Town University in 1983 and was distinguished professor of literature between 1999 and 2001, is arguing from an insider's perspective. Mußgnug's text makes a contribution to this discussion, not so much by explicitly voicing an opinion, but by pointing out the practical implications and consequences of this issue, as well as, perhaps most importantly for our analysis, showing what it looks like from a student's perspective.

STEREOTYPES AND CLICHÉS

The employment of stereotypes and clichés should be understood as part of the narrative strategies used by Mußgnug to construct authenticity. Cognitive psychology assumes that we use perception schemata in our everyday lives as a means of recognizing, understanding, and remembering reality by reducing complexity and structuring information (Anderson [1996] 2014; Medin and Ross 1992). The reality that we encounter daily is so full of details that we need this reduction to allow orientation. Perception schemata are stored in our memory and are activated in the process of cognition. What we recognize, therefore, is not so much reality as such but the congruency of the schemata we have learned and internalized in the process of socialization with the structures of reality we encounter. Cognition, therefore, paradoxically implies a "less", and not a "more" of information, while new and more complex knowledge comes about by adding information and restructuring these schemata, or as conceptual blending theory has shown, by the combination or blending of more than one schema of recognition (Fauconnier and Turner 2003).

Mußgnug seems aware that her narrative representation of reality is brimming with stereotypes and clichés, and the way her narrator argues about this proves her self-reflexivity and intentionality in the use of these schemata. This is the case, for example, when she tries to draw conclusions from the outer appearance of the students to what kind of subjects they study (2015, 71–73): "Clichés always somehow or other arise from the truth" (71). This statement reveals that Mußgnug conceives truth here

in an essentialist way, that is, "truth" is something that exists before the act of cognition takes place, and is already there when we try to recognize it, but in reality, this is not the case. Clichés are perception schemata that have been ingrained by repetition and have become petrified, while new knowledge only comes about by the combination or "blending" of different mental input spaces that share a common generic space with others (cf. Fauconnier and Turner 2003).

Within Mußgnug's student memoir, clichés and stereotypes serve a double function: not only are they applied to construct what the narrator conceives of as "authenticity", but they also serve the narrative purpose of satire, as the reduction of complexity, simplification and exaggeration are also well-known strategies of satirical style, which is illustrated in the following passage:

> as far as law students are concerned, the cartoon pictures of them are more or less completely in congruence with reality: deck shoes, beige Chinos, Ralph-Lauren shirts, pearl necklaces and Longchamp bags give themselves the honor. Not so long ago, I saw three female law students queuing up for lunch. They were all wearing medium blue jeans, beige trench coats, Burberry scarves and ponytails, and were probably all called "Theresa". I don't know how it happens that none of them has a look at the others and asks herself where they took a wrong turn. (2015, 71)

Stereotypes and clichés can be found frequently all through Mußgnug's narrative of student life at Heidelberg University. Early reviewers (Menz 2016; Wüstehube 2015) have criticized the author for these seemingly superficial and clichéd views of reality. These critical voices are justified up to a certain point, because Mußgnug seems to rest content with the first step of the recognition process, that of confirming "identity", while the more complex thought processes according to Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner would require "integration" and "imagination", that is, cognitive "blending" (2003, 6). Nevertheless, Mußgnug's intention behind this is clear: by confirming the prejudices and preconceptions of her readers, she tries to draw them to her side, turning them into "accomplices" in her observations of student life, encouraging them to laugh with her about the cartoon-like representation of her student world. This tendency towards simplification, caricature, and stereotypical observation is also characteristic of Mußgnug's images from the world of the millennials, a generation that came to maturity in the first decade of the 21st century.

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

Mußgnug goes to great lengths in recreating the *Zeitgeist,* the cultural context, and the mentality of this time. The world of the millenials is created by countless references to cultural trends and tendencies, to typical role behavior, and to popular conventions and institutions, although the narrator herself admits that in doing so, she again has to resort to clichés and stereotypes: "It sounds terribly trite to call any generation a generation" (2015, 134). Although Mußgnug calls our attention to this, she does not hesitate to fill in the picture further.

Her intertextual and intermedial references are all intended to confirm the authenticity of the world being narrated. Whatever "turn" one would suggest at this

point, the age of information, of artificial intelligence, or the post-factual age (cf. Kowalik 2023; Gess 2021), for example, suffice it to say that the author is writing in a time characterized by the longing for authenticity (besides Schilling 2020, cf. Dinger 2021, 17), a category that oscillates between essential genuineness and artificial construction. Nostalgic memories that her readers may want to share help to form a common ground of understanding, and on this basis the author constructs the authenticity of her narrative.

Once again, the starting point for Mußgnug's observations on the lifestyle of her student generation between "lightness and depression" (2015, 136) is the assumption that students have too much time on their hands. This time has to be "killed", by binge-watching popular German or American TV series, for example. In remembering the recent past, Mußgnug's protagonist quotes lines from her favorite pop songs, and she discusses lifestyle journals for the younger generation (*Neon* and *Vice*; 84). She mentions famous rock festivals such as "Wacken" and "Rock am Ring" (93–94), reflects on the drinking habits "pre-drinking" and "level drinking" (108) of her generation, and recites the names of fashionable alcoholic beverages of this time and hip cocktails such as Hugo, Aperol Spritz, Caipirinha, and Wodka O (105–108). In this way, the narrator spins a dense web of cultural references, into which she can embed her observations about the student life of this time.

Reading through her text, one cannot help getting the impression that "leisure time" and "after work life" seem to be more important than studying at university. Mußgnug's partial defiance of political correctness and her transgressions of cultural taboos must also be discussed in this context, as disregarding cultural proprieties creates the impression of a spontaneous, honest narrator, one who is aware of her own shortcomings and faults. In the context of what Mußgnug is doing, this becomes a technique of constructing authenticity by subverting authority, while self-reflection and self-affirmation serve as buffers to fend off critique.

She emphasizes that her mission is to speak about the "unspeakable", and by doing so she underlines that she is telling nothing but the truth.

In her attempts to identify and describe characteristic features of the millennial generation, Mußgnug's narrator does not neglect to mention the internet and the smartphone, which have undoubtedly shaped the life of the whole generation (Dimok 2019). In *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* she gives us an insider's view of how the internet and the smartphone influences the behavior of her cohort. Again, she observes that there are so many options of distraction, together with her generation's tendency for procrastination as well as the general fear that one is missing out on something (FOMO). Social media here play a crucial role, since they provide access to so many different types of information: "Ahh, the internet and the smartphone, mothers of so many wasted hours" ("Ach, das Internet und das Smartphone, so vieler *vertüdelter* Stunden Mütter"; 2015, 141, emphasis added). The Northern German verb "vertüdeln" not only implies "to waste time", but also "to be entangled", thus nicely expressing the compulsive and obsessive nature of social media communication.

In the chat application Bibflirt (144), these technologies have even conquered the library, formerly a place of strict learning and research and a typical heterotop-

ic space, which in the new millennium seems to have been conquered by modern communication technology. The internet and the smartphone are also at the root of many anxieties of the millennial generation (Docu 2018, 8–9), such as the youth cult spread by influencers, social media, and the cosmetics industry. In Mußgnug's student memoir, there is a lurking fear of having to leave the safe academic environment and face life beyond it: "If you feel yourself growing old at university, you realize the only things that life has in store for you now are home loan savings and children's seats" (2015, 198). Becoming a full-fledged adult member of society is inevitably related to being expelled from this paradise/hell, and having to face reality in the form of taking on a job.

CONCLUSION

Tabea Mußgnug's *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* is unique among German texts about the university in its form of a student memoir that attempts to capture the spirit of the millennial generation. At times, the work is hilariously comical and reveals that Mußgnug is a writer with potential. It is not a study guide ("Leitfaden") for those looking for orientation, as it proffers clichés and stereotypes, half-truths, and questionable claims about studying subjects in the humanities.

Comparable to other campus fiction written in the last three decades (Mengel 2019), it also examines "the university in relation to society at large" (Staphorst 2023, n.p.), following David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988), J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (2000), Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004), and Jonathan Coe's *Middle England* (2015) in this respect (Mengel 2022). All of these texts are only partly campus novels, for they all reach beyond the campus and are embedded in the social and political contexts of their time. What Mußgnug shares with these authors is their lack of enthusiasm for academia, and their critique of its shortcomings. Mußgnug's question on the back cover: "And what can you do with it afterwards?" draws our attention to the fact that we are not only dealing with the anxieties of the millennial generation but also with what turns out to be an existential crisis or identity crisis ("Sinnkrise") in the humanities and, in a wider sense, of the university as such.

More examples of this kind can be found in recent literature set at universities. Tiphaine Rivière's graphic novel *Carnets de thèse* (Notes on a thesis, 2015), translated into German as *Studierst Du noch oder lebst du schon?* (Are you still studying, or have you begun to live?, 2016) reads like a companion piece to Mußgnug's *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* The work is also based on the autobiographical experience of its author, who in contrast to her protagonist Jeanne Dargan – and to Tabea Mußgnug – ended her doctoral studies at the Sorbonne about Franz Kafka after three frustrating years of struggle. It is interesting to note that the question "Und was macht man dann damit?" also appears on the inner cover of the German translation of Rivière's graphic novel.

As Mußgnug states about herself in the paratext of her book: "She works in an archive and is waiting for the great brilliant job offer." In the meantime, she has written two more books in the field of art history, and under the pseudonym of Katharina Innig she published her first traditional work of fiction, a historical novel with the ti-

tle *Die Forscherin. Prinzessin Therese und der Ruf des Amazonas* (The researcher: Princess Therese and the call of the Amazon, 2022). It seems that Mußgnug has tried to answer her own question in this way – as has Tiphaine Rivière by becoming a successful author of graphic novels.

NOTES

[1] See the list of authors and titles in the Appendix below.

[2] This period has also seen the implementation of the 1999 Bologna declaration and the introduction of a new study architecture in form of BA and MA courses at almost all German universities (cf. Mengel 2001).

[3] Since there is no English translation of Mußgnug's novel, the translations are by the present author.

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A tale of two professions in the Swedish campus novel *Vård, skola och omsorg*

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A tale of two professions in the Swedish campus novel *Vård, skola och omsorg*

Linn Spross. Campus novel. Quit lit. Swedish literature. Academic fiction. Work environment.

This article examines the depiction of two different professions in the Swedish novel *Vård, skola och omsorg* (Healthcare, schools, and social services, 2021) by Linn Spross. The narrator-protagonist quits her job as postdoctoral researcher at a prestigious university and begins working as a home care aide. The novel's chapters alternate between these two work environments, implicitly inviting the reader to compare and contrast them. The article analyzes the novel in relation to the genres of campus fiction and quit lit, showing how conventions from both contribute to the novel's critique of academic working conditions.

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A recent Swedish novel puts a new twist on the genre of campus fiction. Entitled *Vård, skola och omsorg* (Healthcare, schools, and social services, 2021), it depicts not only the academic profession, but also life after leaving it. The narrator-protagonist Julia Malmberg has held positions as a PhD student and later postdoctoral researcher at a prestigious university. One day, however, after enduring cruel criticism at a departmental research seminar, she throws her laptop out the window and vows never to return. Instead, she takes a job in home care services (called "Hemtjänst" in Swedish), providing assistance to elderly clients in their homes. The novel's chapters alternate between Julia's memories of academic life and descriptions of her new work as a home care aide, thus juxtaposing the two professions and implicitly inviting the reader to compare the two. As this article will show, the academic profession does not come out well in this comparison.

Author Linn Spross (born 1989) grew up in the Swedish university town of Uppsala. She debuted as a novelist in 2013 with *Grundläggande studier i hoppfullhet och hopplöshet* (Basic lessons in hopefulness and hopelessness).[1] In 2016, she completed a doctorate in economic history and subsequently held a research position at Uppsala University. After the birth of her child in 2019, however, Spross decided to switch careers for the sake of job security. "Academia is very competitive", she notes in an interview, "There are many people with PhDs and few positions" (Annell 2021, n.p.).[2] Like the protagonist of *Vård, skola och omsorg*, she enrolled in a nursing program and took a job in home care services. Although the plot of the novel bears some resemblance to the author's own life, she explains that "[t]he book is not an autobiography, although its basic story is like my own. The appeal of writing fiction is that you can dramatize, make up things, and exaggerate as much as you like. It would have been a very boring book if I had written an accurate and nuanced account of my time in academia" (Annell 2021, n.p.).

The result exhibits several features of the academic novel: partly set on a university campus, it depicts hallmarks of academic life such as research seminars and a dissertation defense, with comical and satirical elements. At the same time, Spross's novel launches a critique of working conditions in academia today and proposes an alternative work ethic. I will examine how Spross develops this critique by drawing on two different genres: campus fiction and the more recent genre of "quit lit" essays, in which authors explain why they have left academia.

CAMPUS FICTION AS A WINDOW ON ACADEMIC LIFE

The campus novel arose as a distinct genre in Great Britain and the United States after World War II, when universities in these countries were expanding rapidly (Showalter 2005, 1). Novels in this genre are typically set on a university or college campus, with faculty members as the main characters.[3] Their plots reflect the particular rhythms of the academic year with semesters, exam periods, and summer breaks. Frequent motifs include competition, power struggles, departmental politics, gatekeeping, and exclusion (Rossen 1993, 3–5). In some works of campus fiction, faculty rivalry even serves as a motive for murder, as Elżbieta Perkowska-Gawlik (2021) has shown in her study of the subgenre of academic mysteries.

Campus fiction is often written by academics who have first-hand experience of the worlds they depict (Parini 2000). They bring to it a high level of self-awareness, often with meta-fictional and meta-critical commentary (Fuchs and Klepuszewski 2019, 7). Janice Rossen reasons that it "makes sense for those who wish to comment on academe to choose the novel form; the activities of writing and reading are so closely bound together that it seems natural to write and read about ourselves as academics – even to write and read about others who write *about* our profession" (1993, 9). Merritt Moseley argues that the "academic novel can be considered the canary in the coal mine, a sensitive monitor warning of poisonous gases of which the ordinary miner is as yet unaware" (2019, 27).

In the monograph *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents* (2005), Elaine Showalter traces the development of the Anglo-American campus genre, arguing that campus novels can be read as windows on academic life. She holds that they offer readers "a full social history of the university, as well as a spiritual, political, and psychological guide to the profession" (145). Showalter's chronological survey of the campus genre begins with works such as C. P. Snow's idyllic depiction of Cambridge in *The Masters* (1951) and ends with early 21st-century novels such as Francine Prose's *Blue Angel* (2000), at which point, according to Showalter, "the last vestiges of idealism" had disappeared from the genre (107). She identifies a shift during the first few years of the 21st century (which is where the monograph's survey of Anglo-American campus fiction ends) to "cosmic, mythic, and vengeful" plots (123).

Showalter concludes that literary responses to changes in higher education tend to appear about ten years later. "Academic novels are rarely in synch with their decade of publication", she observes, hence "most reflect the preceding decade's issues, crises, and changes" (15). Given the significant reforms to higher education in Europe and North America since the 1990s, it is interesting to consider how campus fiction has evolved in the 21st century. As literary sociologist Jan Váňa argues, "Fictional writing embraces aesthetic devices […], which can refer beyond concrete experience and are thus able to mediate a deeper understanding of the social landscape where this experience occurs" (2020, 182). It is also interesting to see how academic fiction has developed beyond Anglo-American contexts; as demonstrated by the volume *The Campus Novel: Regional or Global?* (Fuchs and Klepuszewski 2019), examples from different countries reflect differences between higher education systems. This article will contribute a perspective from the Swedish context by analyzing Spross's depiction of the academic work environment.

Swedish higher education has undergone significant reforms in recent decades, including the introduction of neoliberal management practices. This follows the general trend at European universities "from a loosely coupled, decentralized expert organization to a strategically acting, managed organization", in which "academic missions are carried out by means of increased reliance on the organization itself, and not solely by the academic community and its members" (Krücken 2020, 165). Organizational scholar Lars Engwall argues that Swedish universities and colleges have come to resemble commercial businesses (2024, 11), and he notes a resulting focus on cost-efficiency to the detriment of academic freedom, collegial governance,

and working conditions (2024). Beginning with Bill Readings's critique of the contemporary university in *The University in Ruins* (1997), a number of academic participant-observers have painted a picture of a general decline in working conditions since the turn of the millennium (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2020; Collini 2017; Fleming 2021; Ginsberg 2011; Hil 2012; Rolfe 2012; Zawadzki and Jensen 2020). A recent essay in the Swedish daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* by Ola Sigurdson, professor of systematic theology, sums up the situation in the following way:

> The experience of working for over twenty years at a Swedish university has entailed not only international dialogue and mutual intellectual exchange, but also less stimulating things: a workday comprised of increased centralization and less collegial decision-making, ever more administrative systems and a heavier teaching load, more short-sighted publication strategies and policy documents full of empty phrases, more online teaching and less contact between teachers and students. (2024, n.p.)

With this background in mind, let us now consider Spross's fictional representation of academic working conditions in the 21st century.

VÅRD, SKOLA OCH OMSORG

The novel opens in medias res with a scene out of Julia's workday as a home care aide:

> It has a special taste, another person's urine. A taste containing lots of information, different tones ranging from sour to sweet. With a little bitterness at its base. But I don't have time to think so much about this, because I suspect he'll be angry if too much pee splatters on the floor. It requires a hell of a lot of concentration, even though it should be a fairly easy task. "Empty CAD", it said in my schedule, and by googling I learned that it stands for *catheter à demeure*, which is a plastic tube inserted in the bladder, and which collects the urine a human produces in a bag fastened to the leg with the help of a kind of woven stocking. (Spross 2021, 5)

After testing the reader's tolerance for graphic bodily description, the narrator proceeds to explain how a urinary catheter works. In this opening passage, Julia has difficulty emptying one and urine sprays in her face. "It might sound disgusting", she remarks, "but that is not what worries me most. I'm afraid it will become embarrassingly obvious just how bad I am at my job" (5). As we will see, this fear of failure on the job is a recurring motif in the novel – especially in connection with Julia's previous life as an academic.

The novel consists of 35 short chapters which alternate between two periods in the narrator-protagonist's life. In the chapters narrated in the present tense, Julia is a home care aide and mother of a toddler. The chapters narrated in the past tense tell of Julia's life as an academic, when she was a graduate student and later a postdoctoral researcher in the fictional Department of Cultural History at Uppsala University. By switching between present and past tense, as well as between settings, the novel's form creates a contrast between the two different kinds of work. The alternating chapters depict Julia's workdays with a focus on past interactions with her mentor and colleagues at the university on the one hand, and with current co-workers and clients in home care services on the other hand. I will refer to these

two narrative strands as the campus narrative and the post-campus narrative, respectively.

While the narrator-protagonist describes work as a home care aide as stressful and challenging at times, it is the academic work environment that comes across as most difficult. Julia's worklife as a postdoc researcher is characterized by job insecurity, unwritten rules, destructive criticism, and dependency on colleagues higher up in the academic hierarchy:

> After the PhD you are expected to be able to stand on your own two feet and develop your own career. That is what they say anyway. In reality nearly everyone is dependent on having a professor, perhaps your dissertation supervisor, draw in money for them by getting big research grants. Thus, you are required to build a good relationship with one of the silverbacks. (23)

The "silverbacks", i.e. influential colleagues higher up in the academic hierarchy, are epitomized by the character of Christer Widemar, a professor at Julia's department who is her mentor yet plays the role as gatekeeper (89).

ACADEMIC WORKING CONDITIONS AND THE ETHOS OF SUFFERING

Spross's published research focuses on working conditions. Her doctoral dissertation examines the question of worktime reduction in the 20th-century Swedish welfare state.[4] In an article on labor issues, she links this same issue to quality of life, arguing that "the question of worktime concerns […] what kind of life is worth living" (2013, 104). This research specialization can be seen to carry over to the novel *Vård, skola och omsorg*, which uses irony to question academics' attitudes toward their profession.

Julia relates that she entered academia with high ideals, dreaming of "[a] place where you could be enthusiastic, excited. […] Where you could help one another, take hold of various ideas and together bring them to fruition. An intellectual collective founded on knowledge that strives to be free and shared. But in reality, it was something else altogether" (Spross 2021, 39). She refers to the university town of Uppsala as a place "where fiction, fantasy, and expectations coincide" (42). Her mentor Christer also espouses a romantic view of academia and implies at the same time that Julia may not be suited for it. When she states, in reply to a question about her career plans after the PhD, that "I enjoy writing, perhaps I will write a collection of essays, perhaps something for a general audience on political history. Perhaps a novel sometime", Christer suggests that she quit: "If you don't see research as a calling, a life mission, you can just as well give up your place to someone more motivated" (24–25). Ironic passages such as the following serve to question this view:

> The problem with me wasn't that I didn't work hard enough, or that I failed at writing a dissertation. It was that I suffered too little. This became increasingly obvious during the years I spent within the walls of Academe. […] I wrote my dissertation too quickly, and I finished within my four years of allotted funding. This led the abovementioned professor to declare, without having read my manuscript, that I was virtually guaranteed to fail. Don't come here and think you can just write – that's not the way research works.

> It has to cost you more. The effort must be more visible, you should be marked by it, be able to show scars and blood in order for it to have any worth. (25)

Irony is also evident in the following passage, in which the narrator addresses the reader directly with the following tongue-in-cheek advice:

> There's one thing you need to know about Academia: you should feel like shit. If you don't, pretend for god's sake that you do. Mention sleepless nights, injuries from typing on the computer, stress-related illnesses, and nutritional deficiencies. Complain about the times, about the students, about all those idiots who don't understand the important production of knowing that goes on in the ivory tower. (26)

The idea of academic work as a calling that requires sacrifice is critiqued in a non-fiction book by journalist Sarah Jaffe, entitled *Work Won't Love You Back: How Devotion to Our Jobs Keeps Us Exploited, Exhausted, and Alone* and published the same year as Spross's novel. One chapter focuses on the academic profession, which Jaffe criticizes for "a labor-of-love rhetoric that claims certain work is not work at all" (2021, 173). Jaffe traces a downward trend with regard to academics' working conditions:

> all over the world, academics face the increase of part-time positions and the loss of autonomy and power. […] While European universities still offer more security than many US institutions, the situation of part-time faculty in the Americas […] is a bellwether for the rest of the world. By 1999, an estimated one-fifth to one-half of European countries' academic staff were "nonpermanent". (171)

In such a precarious labor market, argues Jaffe, the long-standing romantic view of academia and its culture of self-sacrifice renders non-tenured academics vulnerable to exploitation, encouraging them to do unremunerated labor in the hope that it will eventually lead to a tenured position.

As if echoing Jaffe's argument, the narrator of Spross's novel invokes Max Weber in her critique of the ethos of suffering:

> It is a narrative that can easily be incorporated into the general protestant work ethic that tells us that suffering in this life leads to higher rewards later. The sociologist Max Weber held that it was precisely this ethic that made it possible to establish capitalism so quickly in Northern Europe. […] Today we have removed heavenly salvation from the equation, but we still say that he who sacrifices something will succeed. (148)

By contrast, Julia views her work as a home care aide as an opportunity to relieve the suffering of others, "instead of suffering myself" (27). Towards the end of the novel, she confirms this alternative work ethic when she once again addresses the reader directly:

> Perhaps we will meet out there. If you should need me sometime, I'll be there. Maybe we'll meet in an emergency room if you've broken your leg. In a hospital ward if you're seriously ill. When your mother develops dementia, or when your sister for some reason no longer wants to live. It doesn't matter who you are. You could be my worst enemy. You could be a stranger. You could be someone I once loved. We'll meet when you for one reason or another have difficulty, and I promise I'll do my best to help you. (186)

Thus while the campus narrative in *Vård, skola och omsorg* portrays the academic work ethic as destructive, the post-campus narrative proposes a positive alternative, as we will see further in the following section.

A STORY OF QUITTING

If campus novels offer a window on universities, academic quit lit can be said to show academia in the rearview mirror. Lukas Moe offers the following explanation for the recent rise of this essayistic genre in blogs, social media, and publications such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: "As conditions deteriorate, and the call of vocation grows harder to hear, academics have written more about work. The confessional strains of this literature belong to the subgenre of 'quit lit', which ranges from bitter anguish to wrenching grief" (2022, n.p.).

Quit lit contains more than personal complaints, however, as many authors use individual experiences and disappointed ideals of academia as a starting point for a more systematic critique of the academic workplace. As Lara McKenzie points out, "much of what is called quit lit is written in hindsight – months after academics' departures", and should thus "be understood as exposing patterns in people's departures, pointing us to why and how they leave" (2021, n.p.).[5] Francesca Coin argues that quit lit "transform[s] the act of quitting into a political process whereby the subject abdicates its competitive rationality to embrace a fundamental loyalty to different values and principles" (2017, 707).

Although fictional, Spross's text recalls the quit lit genre in that its post-campus narrative strand depicts not only how the protagonist leaves academia, but also why. The end of Chapter 5 reveals that nearly six months have passed since Julia left academia, thus giving the novel a retrospective dimension similar to that found in quit lit. And like the authors of quit lit, Spross's narrator Julia reflects in hindsight on her negative experiences of academia and offers a critique of its problems. For example, she comments on a high rate of mental illness among academics, attributing it to the work environment: "It's not actually scholarly work as such that destroys people, it's Academia. Academia is to blame for the fact that PhD students are strongly overrepresented among patients at the psychiatric emergency room" (63). She offers the following commentary on the hostile environment at departmental higher research seminars:

> There is a principle in hermeneutics called *the principle of mercy*. It means that you should always choose the most benevolent and generous interpretation of a text, in order to attain as correct an understanding of it as possible. We might say that an opposite principle reigned at the higher seminar – the principle of cruelty and ruthlessness. The criticism was always merciless because it was impossible to defend oneself against it. There were always objections to the project itself, its basic idea. (138)

Chapter 28, in particular, recalls the quit lit genre. It has the form of a farewell letter to a psychologist. Here Julia reflects on her post-academic life, concluding that she is less afraid than before: "It no longer feels as if I have to swim as fast and hard as I can just to stay afloat" (163). That Julia has moved on emotionally from her negative experiences of academia is confirmed in the novel's penultimate chapter, when

she is sent, in her new professional role, to the home of Christer, now incapacitated by a stroke:

> We find ourselves in the same room, just he and I. It occurs to me that I could kill him. It would be rather easy now that he's at a disadvantage. […] He's wearing a bathrobe that looks a little soiled, and I think he should be given clean clothes and wonder where I'll find some. I decide to let him live. More than that, I'm going to do what I can to improve his quality of life. (190)

The earlier hierarchy between professor and postdoc researcher is thereby reversed, and Julia now has both the power and opportunity to seek revenge, yet she chooses instead to help her former nemesis, in accordance with her own ethos of care.

AN ALTERNATIVE WORK ETHIC

Spross's depiction of home care services is not uncritical; caring for the elderly is described as challenging, and time pressure is part of Julia's workday as she bicycles from one client to another on a tight schedule (10–12). Nevertheless, her job as a home care aide entails better working conditions than what she experienced as a university employee. Julia relates that she was invited to a job interview immediately, rather than having to wait for months for a reply, as when applying for academic positions. And she accepts the job offer in the spirit advocated by Jaffe, namely as work for pay: "I was so happy about the simple logic of selling my labor to a buyer willing to pay the agreed-upon price. It was a simple economic transaction, a far cry from messy social relations with predetermined roles and power hierarchies. […] It wasn't my soul and dreams that were for sale" (27).

Julia also gains a better work environment, with clear boundaries between work and free time that allow for better work-life balance. Shift work stands in contrast to the grey zones and never-ending work of academia, where the power dynamics in the workplace spill over into social situations as well. Furthermore, caring for the elderly is depicted as a challenging but rewarding and meaningful job. Julia finds more solidarity among her new colleagues, who unlike her former academic colleagues (whom she describes as apolitical) are receptive to her political engagement for better working conditions (78–79).

A HAPPY ENDING

Academics are frequently portrayed negatively in campus novels. As Sally Dalton-Brown notes, "*Homo academicus* is rarely a leader or inspirational teacher, as one might expect, but is very often depicted as a fool, fraud, or philanderer imprisoned within a politically claustrophobic institution, an environment that almost appears to encourage foolishness, fakery, and philandering" (2008, 591). By contrast, Julia Malmberg is a positive hero, depicted in a way that is likely to evoke readers' sympathy. She possesses wit, empathy, and integrity, and by making an active choice to leave academia, she demonstrates agency.

While it is not uncommon for campus novels to depict the protagonist leaving academia, this situation is rarely depicted as a happy ending.[6] Furthermore, the plot typically ends there, giving at most merely a brief glimpse of post-campus life. In this

way, Spross puts a new twist on the traditional campus novel genre. With regard to the genre of quit lit, Moe argues that such narratives can be difficult to sustain: "only so many pages can be turned with vicarious sympathy for someone quitting or deciding to quit" (2022, n.p.). Spross avoids this pitfall, however, by highlighting in the post-campus narrative what Julia has gained by leaving. In the novel's final paragraph, she reflects on the importance of her new profession while observing ambulance personnel at work: "For them this is just another day on the job. Yet another day of dealing with life and death, medicine and care. Yet another day when they are needed, when they serve people who really need them. […] Soon I will be one of you" (196).

In terms of income and social status, Julia's career switch represents downward mobility, yet it is presented in a positive light in the post-campus narrative. In interviews, Spross has described *Vård, skola och omsorg* as a reversal of the traditional success story of upward mobility through education and hard work.[7] Here, the protagonist gives up the social status achieved through education in exchange for job security, meaningful work, and work-life balance. Spross's novel thus has a happy ending – at the individual level at least. Poetic justice comes with the reversal of roles between Christer and Julia, while the fictional university in Spross's novel remains a closed world that academics must leave to find happiness.

NOTES

[1] To date, neither of Spross's novels has been translated into English.

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Swedish are by the author of this article.

[3] A distinction can be drawn between the *Bildungsroman*, which focuses on students, and the campus novel, which focuses on faculty (Dalton-Brown 2008, 599, fn 1).

[4] The title of Spross's doctoral dissertation, from 2016, is *Ett välfärdsstatligt dilemma: Statens formuleringar av en arbetstidsfråga 1919–2002* (A dilemma for the welfare state: Making time manageable 1919–2022).

[5] Sustained critiques of the academic work environment are also found in recent autoethnographic publications, e.g., *Complaint!* (2021) by Sara Ahmed.

[6] Examples include Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* (1957) and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999).

[7] Interview with Spross on the Swedish television channel 4, August 25, 2021. https://www.tv4play.se/klipp/8b09d20c0f10b71a5023/video-linn-foresprakar-att-ge-upp-maste-sluta-glorifiera-lidande.

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The phenomenon of the "Professorenroman" in Bulgarian literature

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The phenomenon of the "Professorenroman" in Bulgarian literature

Bulgarian literature. *Professorenroman*. Postmodernism. Academic fiction. Campus novel.

This article, based on the author's previous research in Bulgarian, presents a phenomenon that until now has not been the subject of systematic study: the Bulgarian *Professorenroman* (literally "professor's novel"). Tracing the development of Bulgarian academic fiction over the last three decades, it brings out the presence of a relatively homogeneous group of works that share common literary characteristics and ways of communicating with readers. The present analysis defines several common features shared by approximately a dozen novels by contemporary Bulgarian writers, all of them university professors. The phenomenon of the Professorenroman is examined briefly in the historical context of its emergence in the 19th century, and in more detail as an effect and consequence of the development of postmodernism in Bulgaria since the late 20th century. It is complemented by a more detailed reading of four recent novels.

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The *Professorenroman* (literally "professor's novel") emerged as a new phenomenon in Bulgarian literature in the late 20th century and continues to develop. Bulgarian critics use the term Professorenroman as a self-explanatory concept, but there is no official definition of it in Bulgarian literary studies, and the phrase has no translation in major languages such as English and French. The following brief historical excursion will help us view the phenomenon in its Bulgarian and contemporary context.

The term Professorenroman appeared in Germany in connection with a new type of the historical novel that gained great popularity in the second half of the 19th century. These works were written by professional historians (university professors) in ancient world history, especially the history of Egypt and Old Germany (they were also called *archaeological novels*). These novels had a literary, usually adventurous, plot with fictional characters, but the action was situated in settings described with utmost historical accuracy and in meticulous detail (the Indiana Jones film series can be considered their distant descendant in popular culture). This approach obviously appealed to an audience that was already predisposed by the rapid development of the scientific knowledge of history, the welfare state and nationalism in that era. The combination of fiction and "reliable" knowledge would become the Professorenroman's most persistent characteristics, something of a trademark that would survive all vicissitudes.

In English literary studies of the late 19th century, this new subgenre took on pejorative overtones.[1] The pallid characters and contrived circumstances, the supremacy of knowledge over imagination, and the lack of individuality in the novelistic style seemed too "German". Yet it was British literature that revived and updated this already dusty genre in the mid-20th century. Its renaissance began with the Oxford professor Iris Murdoch and such works as *Under the Net* (1954) and *The Black Prince* (1973). The genre's Enlightenment past seemed to be completely forgotten when the remarkable novels of J. R. R. Tolkien (a leading British linguist and folklorist), William Golding (an English language professor), and John Fowles (a professor of philosophy) appeared one after another. Fowles entered the field of postmodernism (using numerous allusions to Gothic and Victorian novels, playful irony, etc.) with works such as *The Collector* (1963) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) in the late 1960s.

Against this background, we should distinguish three directions of "professorial" presence in Bulgarian literature. The first is an unprecedented and unimagined growth of writing ambitions among Bulgarian academics. It is impossible to make a list of all the novels published by academics over the last twenty years, so here is an indicative (and possibly incomplete) sample of those who have published novels in 2022 alone: Ivan Stankov, Lyubomir Halachev, Ivan Dobchev, Todor P. Todorov, Emilia Dvoryanova, Daniel Valchev, Albena Stambolova, Kristin Dimitrova, and Justine Toms, not to mention Ivan Mladenov's novel from late 2021. Not all of these authors write novels that can be called Professorenroman. But there are plenty of others who have mastered this approach without professional training, just patience and motivation.

The second includes books with professors or academics as protagonists (so-called *campus novels*). True campus novels are still lacking in Bulgarian literature, perhaps because American-type campuses are also lacking, yet there are literary characters marked by an academic presence. In reference to the abovementioned examples from 2022, the novel production of that year is exceptional for Bulgarian literature. The number of new novels published by Bulgarian authors is rather impressive; I have read about 40 of them, but the total seems to be at least 60, and perhaps 70.[2] On the one hand, this shows the trajectory that 21st-century literature has already undertaken; on the other hand, it is indicative of the emergence of new trends that will probably continue to develop in the time ahead.

The third group is made up of the true Professorenromane produced in Bulgarian literature since the 1990s. It includes often well-written works such as Svetlozar Igov's *Elenite* (The stags, 1998), Ancho Kaloyanov's *Deveti* (The ninth, 2003), Nikolai Gotchev's *Pisma do Egina* (Letters to Aegina, 2006), Valeri Stefanov's *Izgubenite magareta* (The lost asses, 2006), *Slepiyat gradinar* (The blind gardener, 2011), *Zhenite sa spomen ot mraka* (Women are a memory of darkness, 2014), and *Lyubovni istorii ot Vavilonskata biblioteka* (Love stories from the Babylonian library, 2016), Simeon Yanev's *Biografii na otrepki* (Biographies of geeks, 2013), Boris Minkov's *Prezapis ili drugiyat kufar v Berlin* (Remake, or the other suitcase in Berlin, 2013), and Ivan Mladenov's *Raz/sdvoenie* (Re/paired, 2021). Four recent novels – Albena Stambolova's *Dnevnik na artista* (An artist's diary, 2022), Daniel Valchev's *Nedelniyat prodavach na knigi* (The Sunday bookseller, 2022), Krassi Zourkova's *Wild-alone* (2015, Bulgarian trans. *Samodiva*, 2016), and Vladimir Karadzhov's *Etiopska prikazka* (An Ethiopian tale, 2017), will be presented to illustrate the specific features of the genre.

ORIGINS OF THE PROFESSORENROMAN IN BULGARIAN LITERATURE

The aftermath of World War I gave birth to Bulgarian fiction that expressed the state of the psyche in extreme situations of human existence: between reality and hallucination, life and death. A kind of psychological reflection appeared in Bulgarian literature, which rejected the traditions of romantic individualism and the early modernist infatuation with the Nietzschean superman. Novellas such as Dobri Nemirov's *Koshmar* (Nightmare, 1919) and Georgi Raichev's *Mŭnichŭk sviat* (A tiny world, 1919), or Vladimir Musakov's unfinished novel *Kŭrvavi petna* (Bloodstains, 1916, published posthumously in 1921), depict human experiences in the dark world of instincts where the primal forces of human nature rule. The path to this depiction passes through morbidity, hallucinations, madness and death. Kirill Hristov's novel with strong autobiographical projections, *Bezdna. Izpoved na edin umopobŭrkan* (Abyss. Confession of a lunatic, written 1926, published 1995), recounts the dark chaos of sexual insatiability. Since Hristov did not dare to publish it in his lifetime, it would not be discovered and published until the late 20th century.

The origins of the Professorenroman can be traced back to the Secession prose created by Nikolai Raynov, a professor of art history, who was famous between

the two world wars for his predilection for the then-fashionable ideas of theosophy, and his work demonstrates extensive knowledge of history, philosophy, literature and the arts. However, no one has applied the term Professorenroman to either of Raynov's novels, even though it existed at the time of their publication, and it is doubtful whether the mysticism and theosophy in which this knowledge was immersed be conceived of as "scholarly".

The second half of the 20th century also lacks many examples. The historical fiction of Vera Mutafchieva, a professor of Ottoman history, seems closest to the characteristics of a Professorenroman, notably her most famous work, *Sluchayat Dzhem* (1966; Eng. trans. *The Case of Cem*, 2024). Haim Oliver's *Roman za edin piyanitsa* (A novel of a drunkard, 2017), which exudes a strong didactic message, was also written in the state socialist period but was rejected by two publishers and only appeared nearly four decades after it was written. Its protagonist is a talented film director and screenwriter making a film called Zhazhda (Thirst), for whom alcoholic intoxication became an illusory salvation, as much from an inability to fight external circumstances as from a failure to transcend his own inhibitions.

The specific character and frequency of the Bulgarian Professorenroman in the 21st century can only be understood by paying attention to the role of postmodernism as a source of philosophical ideas, literary examples and social influence. The postmodern genesis of the Professorenroman can be discussed from several angles, of which two of the most visible are the construction and the poetics of the text. Almost all writers seek to transcend the conventions of the genre, but humanities professors in particular relish the opportunity to bend its boundaries to the point where their word alone decides what a novel is. Poetics, as one might expect, involves the full arsenal of familiar postmodern devices. Academic knowledge is unleashed in games of mystification, parody and transtextual reference; the novels abound in overt and covert quotations, juggling with the facts of sciences that we know to be accurate.

Postmodernism's breakthrough for Bulgarian readers came with Umberto Eco, whose international bestseller *Il nome della rosa* (1980; Eng. trans. *The Name of the Rose*, 1983), appeared in Bulgarian in 1985. By that time, it had already become famous among Bulgarian researchers due to a 1983 article by Nikola Georgiev, who analyzed it as an epitome of the postmodern novel. In general, it was the professors who initiated the cult of Eco in Bulgaria. Following the novel's translation in Bulgarian, another professor, Ivaylo Znepolski, unravelled the semiotic fabric of the text, and then a professor of philosophy, Tsocho Boyadzhiev, discussed it in a seminar. It is no coincidence that during the presentation of the novel *Elenite* by Svetlozar Igov, someone called him "Umberto Igo".

After 1989, translations of Jorge Luis Borges were released with great fanfare, along with a highly celebrated translation of Milorad Pavić's *Hazarski rečnik* (1984; Eng. trans. *Dictionary of the Khazars*,1988). Being both Professorenromane and epitomes of postmodernism, the novels of Eco, Borges, and Pavić showed the way and inspired the courage to break through the hitherto rigid boundaries of notions of scholarship. "It is fiction that gives such a freedom that the arid world of fact and

judgment lacks",[3] says Ivan Mladenov in *Raz/sdvoenie*. True, there are not so many "facts and arid judgments" in philosophy and literary studies, yet novel writing professors are predominantly humanities scholars, with the strong desire to express their views.

THE PROFESSORENROMAN IN BULGARIAN LITERARY RESEARCH

In the last twenty years, the use of the term Professorenroman has become quite frequent among Bulgarian scholars. Among the earliest uses of this term in Bulgarian criticism are references to novels by scholars of Bulgarian literature such as Svetlozar Igov, Ancho Kaloyanov, and Valeri Stefanov. In his review of Igov's *Elenite*, which displeased the author, Boris Minkov notes that "*Elenite* could be called a *Professorenroman* upon which an examination could be conducted, for it is loaded with quotations that are relatively easy to read" (2003, 73).[4] Antonia Velkova-Gaidardzhieva unequivocally defined Kaloyanov's *Deveti*[5] as a Professorenroman because it is "a text web of styles, reminiscences, patterns, biographical reconstructions, silent dialogues, cultural quotations" (2004, 16). In reference to Stefanov's *Izgubenite magareta*, Georgi Kapriev has spoken of "professor's prose", whose "obligatory and inevitably distinguishing specificity is the well-mastered erudition" (2006, 3).

However, the tag of Professor can no longer be literally binding. Firstly, because the word professor simply means teacher in some countries; secondly, because the system of academic positions is very dynamic (today's assistant professor is tomorrow's professor), and literary history cannot keep a record of these changes. Practice shows that even within the narrow confines of the time I write about, there are authors with different degrees and positions, as well as those who have moved "up". This is why the term Professorenroman should be understood more broadly, as a fluid affiliation to an academic milieu.

Given the professional affiliation of the authors, one might expect their works to be "serious" and aimed at what we used to call "high literature". Such novels undoubtedly exist, and they have even increased in recent times. For example, Ivan Mladenov's *Raz/sdvoenie* is difficult to the point of impenetrability. The author not only drowns his reader into a chaos of philosophical notions but further provokes his patience with an artificially constructed syntax, which he himself likens to "a kind of a lying policeman – to warn that this is not light reading [...] not a book to read on the subway".[6] The majority of authors, however, try to promote their knowledge within the matrix (or matrices) of some story genre. This trend is not new but rather follows the "archaeological" novels of the 19th century. Following Fowles's *Collector*, however, the aspect of entertainment became of an increasingly postmodern kind; the traditional adventure narrative mixed with other "frivolous" models of popular reading: crime, fantasy, mystery, horror, etc., even parapsychology came to the fore.

Professional erudition in some field or fields of scientific knowledge continues to be the leading edge. It is noteworthy, however, that knowledge in humanities, and to some extent in social studies, is overpowering; the boundary between those, who "know", and those, who "write" in these fields is increasingly thinning. This explains,

to some extent, the passion for essayistic reflections, which overgrow the skeleton of the plot and which in practice are boring for the greater number of readers.

EXAMPLES OF THE PROFESSORENROMAN IN RECENT BULGARIAN FICTION

In Albena Stambolova's *Dnevnik na artista* (An artist's diary, 2022), access to the text is deliberately hampered in a conscious attempt to reproduce the clinical picture of the psychotic patient's thinking. Following doctoral work in semiotics and psychoanalysis, the author taught at the Sorbonne and is now a special consultant at the private New Bulgarian University. The reader is thus also obliged to be "academic" in a way, if he or she is to engage fully with the novel. With the added traces of decadent novels like Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À rebours* (1884) and Oskar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890), it becomes clear that *Dnevnik na artista* is aimed at a small, boutique audience and was written with a hope for lasting literary recognition.

Stambolova's protagonist Manol is a young, gifted sculptor who loses his parents, an event that would be traumatic for anyone, and crosses the threshold that leads to madness. After their death, the young man is faced with the impossible task to overcome melancholy and outlive his mourning by coming to terms with the ugliness in the behavior of people he has loved and hated up to that moment. The mental disorder leads him to a long process of therapy in which he is required to keep a diary. The monological narrative unfolds the abyss of human psyche, in which a never-ending war is waged between the destructive power of the instincts and the creative ambitions of the mind.[7] Professionally trained in psychoanalysis, the author peers into the darkness, interrogating the chaos with the help of classically approached symbols, archetypal formulas and cultural references.

Daniel Valchev, the author of *Nedelniyat prodavach na knigi* (The Sunday bookseller, 2022), is known not as much as a professor in legal studies, but rather as a former minister of education. His novel is an exemplary representative of the modern Professorenroman and even has extra features that would suit other books of this genre. For instance, the stylish and luxurious edition with unusually clear and large print, as if the author foresaw that his readers would be people whose eyesight is already weakened by reading too many books. The protagonist is a professor teaching philosophy of law, not at a Bulgarian university, but at the Sorbonne. He arrives from Paris, albeit without much enthusiasm, to Varna to look for his vanished brother. The imposed journey will gradually turn into a voyage "in search of lost time", ending with an initiation into that kind of knowledge which is not taught anywhere in the world. The criminal thread in the plot is woven with romantic adventure, philosophical treatise, and essayistic reflections on some literary works.

But the most "professorial" aspect of the novel lays in the fact that it is not the professor who is its protagonist, but the books he once had read in his childhood and youth, such as Lermontov's *A Hero of our Time*, Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*, and Irwin Shaw's *Evening in Byzantium*. Academic knowledge is also woven into the plot: from law and philosophy to advanced mathematics. A flash of mystery enables

the author to introduce another dimension in which our world dwells; questions are raised about the meaning of human existence, the freedom of personal choice, and the relationship between individual choice and moral responsibility towards other people. The ambition to unfold a verbal fan of knowledge drifts into the middle, then begins to drag. The novel, however, does not rely on a general readership but on an audience of friends, admirers, and (perhaps) colleagues, as is the case with almost all novels of this subgenre.

Nedelniyat prodavach na knigi differs from other Professorenromanen in that it is the only one to contain a scene set in a university environment. In fact, this scene (although not set in Bulgaria) is the closest thing to a campus novel to be found in the Professorenroman written in Bulgarian. The narrative begins with the protagonist walking through the corridors of the Sorbonne and reflecting on the psychology of the art of teaching. The lecture itself is briefly described, without any attention to the setting, but with some observations on the behavior of students in general. At the end of the lecture, a student asks a question, which the professor answers in such a way that he does not appear to be in a hurry to leave the room. Even as an exception to the general rule, *Nedelniyat prodavach na knigi* demonstrates the reluctance of Bulgarian author-professors to focus on the settings and specifics of the place where they work. For the same reason, these authors avoid creating relatively independent characters capable of actively participating in the plot. It is clear, then, that the genre of the campus novel is alien to their preferences, not least because it does not offer them the opportunity to develop the thoughts and experiences of the narrating protagonist.

There is a genuine campus novel in Bulgarian literature of the last decade, Krassi Zourkova's *Wildalone* (2015, Bulgarian trans. *Samodiva*, 2016), whose author is not a professor but a practicing lawyer, and who does not live in Bulgaria, but in the United States. Zourkova left Bulgaria in the early 1990s to study art history at Princeton, then attended Harvard Law School, and began to practice finance law in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. At the age of 40, she wrote her first novel in English, *Wildalone*, which was released by the prestigious HarperCollins publishing house. In genre terms, the novel is a blend of contemporary fantasy, witch romance and modern gothic. The plot involves young Thea Slavin, a talented Bulgarian pianist and a freshman at Princeton who struggles to adapt to the challenges of American college life and finds herself entangled in a love triangle with two enigmatic and handsome brothers belonging to the netherworld. She is also about to uncover a terrible secret about her own family in Bulgaria. What seems to have most impressed American readers is the exotic mix of Greek mythology and Bulgarian folk legends. The reviews printed on the book describe it as a "fluid, pulsing, gothic narrative" (*Library Journal*, on the front cover) and "a striking debut" (*Publishers Weekly*, on the back cover).

The title *Wildalone* is itself a neologism, with Zourkova substituting the Bulgarian word *Samodiva* as the title of the 2016 Bulgarian translation (in Bulgarian folklore, samodivas are mystical woodland creatures, young and beautiful maidens who sing and dance in the moonlight, seducing lonely shepherds whom they take away, often

to the netherworld). As can be seen, this Bulgarian campus novel relies on the opportunity to bring an "authentic" Bulgarian mystique to a foreign country. The Bulgarian translation failed to impress critics or the general public. On the other hand, the novel was appreciated in the American environment, which has traditions of both campus culture and campus novel writing.

There is, however, one particular case that stands apart from the novels listed so far: Vladimir Karadzhov's *Etiopska prikazka* (An Ethiopian tale, 2017). A senior lecturer in economic and social geography at the Southwest University "Neofit Rilski" in Blagoevgrad, Karadzhov researched the history of coffee globally and wrote his "Ethiopian tale" (of 120 pages) that works only with scientifically proven facts, but tells the story in a fairytale style of narrative and in popular language. After the book gained popularity among the general public, the author acted in a way which explains how the traditional academic desire for knowledge may mix with the present-day ambition for greater exposure. He hired the best possible Bulgarian translators in French, German, English and Spanish, then he employed expensively-paid (by Bulgarian standards) foreign specialists to edit their work, so that "it would not feel like a translated novel".[8] All this work consumed a great deal of his energy and financial resources; for each of the translations he spent (in his own words), "as much money as buying a used car". Four books appeared in digital format, in four different languages, successfully sold on Amazon, and St. Cyril and Methodius National Library declared *Etiopska prikazka* a record holder in translations among Bulgarian titles within one calendar year (2018). This seems to be more than was achieved by Georgi Gospodinov, the only Bulgarian winner of the international Booker Prize.

Encouraged by the success of the first book, Karadzhov published a second, similar book, *Okeanska prikazka* (An ocean tale, 2021), this time on the journey of vanilla (one of the three most expensive spices in the world) from a small Mexican tribe through the initial failure to domesticate it in Europe up to the unexpected solution of the problem 200 years later. This book (over twice as long as his first, at 300 pages) is a genuine geographical novel with fully reliable historical and biological information, further supported by over a hundred encyclopaedical footnotes and guaranteed by the three-months work of its scientific consultant, an associate professor of botany[9]. This may be a revelation for readers, but the transformation of the Professorenroman into the *Professorenmärchen* (professor tale) is also a neoliberal gesture. Life in translation of both books may be exemplary for the conception of global literature which favors the circulation of translation at the expense of classical literary qualities and is most clearly visible in David Damrosch's theory of world literature.

CONCLUSION

The final question to consider is that of the reception of these novels. Some of these authors clearly do not want to be read by the general audience of "mainstream" readers and defend the self-indulgent elitism of the academic intellect. The majority, however, seek a reasonable compromise, offering knowledge for anyone who would reach for it. No one can say for sure how large the audience of the Bulgarian Professorenro-

man is, and to the best of my knowledge, none of them have been published abroad, although a translation alone, of course, does not mean international success.

As for the individuality of an author's signature, it is rather encoded in the combination each author makes for himself. As Svetlozar Igov put it, "I have read so much and experienced so many influences that in the end I came to resemble myself" (2014, n.p.). The question that cannot be answered is: how long will this game of selves be relevant, and what will the future hold for the Professorenroman in the later decades of the 21st century? As a Bulgarian proverb says, "Everything comes in its own time", but also, one might add, in its own setting.

NOTES

[1] It seems easy for English researchers to have overlooked the fact that the first "scholarly" novels were actually invented by Lord Edward Bulwer Lytton in the 1830s; the most famous among them, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), had the greatest influence on German professors. In English-language and later French-language literature, subgenre forms developed which at first sight might have something in common with the Professorenroman, for example the *university novel* and the closely related *campus novel*. Russian literary studies, however, use the German term in its honest translation, *professorskij roman* (professor's novel), which is probably where the Bulgarian term comes from.

[2] One example of a professorial character in a non-professor novel is Pavel Ananiev, the history professor in Vladimir Zarev's novel *Obŭrkani v svobodata* (Confused in freedom). His academic presence, however, is reduced to his signature phrase, "All women age except first-year students" (Zarev 2022, 192).

[3] Unless otherwise stated, all translation from Bulgarian are by the present author.

[4] Svetlozar Igov seems to have taken offence at this definition, which probably did not suit his ambitions. However (and in a true "professor's" manner) he added that a large number of quotations have been encoded in his text ("my book is swarming with quotations"), most of which are not at all "easy to find" (Igov 2014, n.p.).

[5] The title makes a historical reference to September 9, 1944 when the socialist regime was proclaimed in Bulgaria. Ancho Kaloyanov is also professor in Bulgarian literature.

[6] Ivan Mladenov made this statement in an interview for the Bulgarian National Radio in October 2021.

[7] Most novels of insanity are written in the first person, a technique that is meant to make the narrative "authentic", at least in the imagination of its author and those readers who have no real experience of this kind. The storytelling is mostly fragmented and messy in the attempt to imitate the thinking of a mentally ill person.

[8] These details come from the author himself, on the Horizon Program of the Bulgarian National Radio on 13 December 2018.

[9] In just four days, sales put it at number five on Helicon's (the largest bookstore chain in Bulgaria) weekly list. In electronic format, it became one of the top ten best-selling books of the month (according to the official Southwest University website).

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SHUNQING CAO – PEINA ZHUANG: A New Introduction to Comparative Literature: From a Sinitic Perspective
Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2024. xxviii + 186 pp. ISBN 978-7-119-12950-1

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There are many introductions, handbooks and companions to comparative literature available in English, and each publication presents a unique take on the field, but they are almost always conceived from a European or North-American perspective. *A New Introduction to Comparative Literature* by Shunqing Cao and Peina Zhuang is therefore particularly interesting, because it brings a survey of the theories of comparative literature in the so-called Global North, and also offers a glimpse on the discipline as developed by Chinese scholars. This English translation of the Chinese original published in 2021 is a valuable contribution to the state and prospects of the discipline globally.

Cao and Zhuang's book consists of an introduction and four chapters. The introduction defines comparative literature and outlines its history in Europe, North America and China. The first chapter concentrates on international literary relations and influence studies. The focus of the second chapter is on parallel studies. In the third chapter, the authors present the variation theory of comparative literature, while the fourth chapter offers an outlook on the future of general literature studies.

One of the principal starting points for the authors is the distinction between the French and American schools of comparative literature, which has always been controversial, although it was used quite widely till the 1990s. The French school is characterized by a focus on international relations and the concept of influence, while the American school aims to expand the focus of comparative literature through interdisciplinarity and cross-national research. It is worth mentioning that M.-F. Guyard and René Étiemble distanced themselves from this *idée reçue* already in the 1970s.

Shunqing Cao and Peina Zhuang are aware of the problematic character of a sharp distinction between the two schools and admit that by the 1970s the differences between them were basically eliminated. Interestingly, they see a historical progression from the French school to the American and to the Chinese school. The period of the French school was approximately from the 1870s to the 1950s. The postwar period until the 1970s was dominated by the American school, followed by the period of the Chinese school that focuses on cross-cultural study. Again, the relativity of the distinctions becomes obvious if one admits that many of the driving ideas of the Chinese school were anticipated by René Étiemble, who was himself a scholar of Chinese literature, and have been picked up by other scholars in the Global North.

However, the period from the 1970s onwards clearly represents a new phase in the development of Chinese comparative literary studies, in which it has achieved intellectual independence. For Shunqing Cao and Peina Zhuang, the Chinese school has not replaced the French and American schools, but rather integrates them and builds on them, while adding elements of the Chinese tradition. With the increasing presence of Chinese literary scholars in the interconnected academic world, it is necessary to be aware of the ac-

complishments of Chinese literary comparatists and enter into a dialogue about the general questions of comparative literature with them. The present book is therefore a much-needed publication introducing the key concepts of Chinese comparative studies and the understanding of the development of the discipline by Chinese scholars. Unfortunately, despite giving attention to the French and American schools, the authors of the book do not directly react to other major developments in literary studies, such as postcolonial studies and world literature studies.

Nowadays the necessity of overcoming Eurocentrism is widely acknowledged by scholars in the Global North, but despite this fact, the international discourse in literary studies remains mostly Eurocentric. It is not possible to overcome Eurocentrism without the knowledge of non-European literatures and literary theories, and a dialogue in which both sides lack a good knowledge of the other's positions is prone to misunderstandings. Thus, in the book, concepts familiar to European and North American scholars are reinterpreted from a Chinese perspective, such as the way that the authors promote interdisciplinarity: "*Wen* [literature] and *yi* [art] constitute two major systems. Only after we figure out their positions and relations in China's framework of knowledge, and their links with Chinese cultural traditions and spirit, can we hold a reliable interdisciplinary dialogue" (87).

Cao and Zhuang make several generalizations that may raise the eyebrows of Western scholars, if they are not understood in the proper context, such as their claim that "poetry (especially lyrics) have not received due attention in the Western literary tradition" (76). Since the authors build on the groundbreaking work of Earl Miner, his argument that Western literary theory is based on drama, whereas the Chinese, Indian and Arabic poetry is based on lyrics, is especially significant.

One of the most remarkable Chinese achievements in the theory of comparative literature is Shunqing Cao's variation theory. It is also duly expounded in the present book. The variation theory helps the authors integrate the main areas of comparative literary studies such as translation studies, reception studies, imagology, cultural studies, and civilizational studies. In my opinion, two concepts related to the variation theory, cultural filtration and literature misreading, deserve special attention. The authors see cultural filtration as a fundamental process of cultural exchange. They even acknowledge that "effects of cultural filtration and misreading are most prevalent in dialogues between civilizations" (145). However, they still encourage dialogue and are generous enough to account for misunderstanding, an approach which makes the exchange more relaxed and inviting. Their volume thus offers several conceptual tools for a cross-civilizational study of literature. In opening important questions and offering a vision for a truly general literature studies, it definitely makes worthwhile reading for anyone interested in the theory of comparative literature.

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ANTON VYDRA: Hermés bez krídel. Kultúrne obrazy kontinentálnej hermeneutiky [Hermes without wings. Cultural images of continental hermeneutics] Praha: Togga, 2023. 276 s. ISBN 978-80-7476-308-3

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Dejiny západoeurópskeho hermeneutického myslenia boli spracované viackrát, pripomeňme v našom prostredí známejšie diela *Einführung in die literarische Hermeneutik* (1975; čes. *Úvod do literární hermeneutiky*, 2003) Petra Szondiho, *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960; čes. *Pravda a metoda I*, 2019) Hansa-Georga Gadamera či antológiu *Seminar: Philosophische Hermeneutik* (Seminár: Filozofická hermeneutika, 1976) Hansa-Georga Gadamera a Gottfrieda Boehma. Dosiaľ sa ich však nikto nepokúsil predstaviť prostredníctvom radu dominantných obrazových predstáv a ideových sugescií, ktoré v tej-ktorej dobe predchádzajú racionalizáciám a konceptuálnym výsledkom výkladovej práce. Na takúto úlohu sa podujal slovenský filozof Anton Vydra, ktorého kniha *Hermés bez krídel* prináša trinásť komplexných obrazov, prevažujúcich v koncepciách kontinentálnej (čítaj: západoeurópskej) hermeneutiky od gréckej antiky po 20., respektíve po 21. storočie. Dôvod či potreba uchopenia mnohorako sa v čase meniacich metód výkladu kanonických textov, sveta, prírody a človeka prostredníctvom imaginatívnych setov (pojem je inšpirovaný Gastonom Bachelardom) tkvie práve v proteovskom charaktere hermeneutiky ako vedy alebo dokonca v jej nezničiteľnosti, pretože po ústupe niektorých interpretačných modelov si dokázala nájsť k objektom svojho záujmu zakaždým iný prístup alebo sa v prípade potreby vedela presmerovať na iné objekty interpretácie a pritom výdatne čerpala z bohatého rezervoáru európskej imaginácie.

Autor knihy sa vzhľadom na zložitosť vývoja hermeneutického myslenia od antického Grécka po súčasnosť zdráha písať nové „dejiny hermeneutiky", a radšej píše skromnejšie „o dejinách hermeneutiky". Ním načrtnutý oblúk, v ktorom sa zakaždým presúvajú ťažiská z jedného dominantného obrazu na ďalší, je ale celkom určite oblúkom historickým, aj keď ide o vývin neraz diskontinuitný, vyznačujúci sa nekauzálnymi postupnosťami a mnohými iteráciami. Piliere tohto oblúka siahajúceho ponad stáročia sú nasledovné: Na začiatku autor identifikuje u Platóna (*Ión*) predstavu *reťaze* ako interpretačnej schémy, v ranokresťanskej antike sa podľa všetkého presadí najprv obraz *pokladu* ako ukrytého zmyslu (Órigenés), neskôr prevláda predstava *kľúča* (Atanázius, Hieronymus, Augustinus), *tela* (Augustinus, Thierry zo Chartres a ďalší), *výživy* (Alain z Lille, Peter Abélard a ďalší) a *sladkosti* (Hugo zo sv. Viktora, Bonaventura z Bagnoregia, Mikuláš Kuzánsky), v renesancii to bude obraz *šošovky* (rôzne výklady Herma Trismegista), ďalej *knihy* (ako knihy Prírody u Galilea, Francisa Bacona a iných), geometrických *základov* (Baruch Spinoza), *hľadiska* (Johann M. Chladenius, inšpirovaný Gottfriedom W. Leibnizom), až sa napokon vynorí obraz *kruhu* (pôvodne Immanuel Kant, ale najmä Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger a Hans-Georg Gadamer), predstava *života* (Wilhelm Dilthey a iní) a *rozhovoru* (opäť Heidegger, Gadamer, Paul Ricœr a dodnes mnohí ďalší). Ako autor poznamenáva, ide tu o *kultúrne* obrazy, to znamená, že väčšinou sú produktmi svojej doby

– nielen dobovej rétoriky, ale aj politického, spoločenského a technického vývoja –, no samy nerezultujú z imanentného vývinu hermeneutického myslenia. Z neho však často vyplýva iteratívnosť týchto obrazov, ktoré sa z európskej kultúrnej pamäti nestrácajú. Napokon, ako autor spomína v závere, aj obraz Herma bez krídel z názvu knihy vyplýva z dejinných premien imaginácie, v ktorých sa atribúty posla bohov mohli voľne meniť (mimochodom, ako raz napísal Jacob Burckhardt, už samotní starí Gréci zaobchádzali s kultúrnym dedičstvom, ktoré predstavovali ich bohovia, veľmi nedogmaticky). Jednotlivé po sebe nasledujúce kultúrne obrazy sa pritom väčšinou navzájom nerušia, akosi voľne vedľa seba koexistujú. Je to azda dôsledok toho, že hermeneutické školy medzi sebou nikdy nezvádzali také neľútostné metodologické a ideologické boje, aké sa viedli napríklad na poli prírodných vied?

Kniha Antona Vydru sa okrem koncepčnej originálnosti vyznačuje nespochybniteľnou ideovohistorickou a filozofickou erudíciou, s akou nás suverénne prevádza najmä hermeneutickým myslením kresťanskej patristiky i stredovekej i ranonovovekej filozofie. Okrem toho je na nej rovnako sympatická nenásilná sugestívnosť a intelektuálna otvorenosť, ktoré môžu inšpirovať k viacerým otázkam. Na tomto mieste si dovolím spomenúť aspoň dve, z môjho hľadiska zásadné. Tá prvá znie, či sa môžeme v prípade vývinu európskeho hermeneutického myslenia uspokojiť s imaginatívnym setom *trinástich* kultúrnych obrazov. (Autor síce na začiatku knihy popiera symbolický význam tohto čísla, ale ten smieme napriek jeho ubezpečovaniu považovať za objektívny.) Pokojne by nám mohli zísť na um aj ďalšie v určitých epochách vysoko frekventované obrazy tvoriace východisko interpretačného prístupu k textu, k svetu a človeku, ako napríklad lúč (svetlo, lampa), most či zrkadlo. Tieto kultúrne obrazy sú napokon dodnes vo výkladovej práci živé. – Druhá otázka je však azda ešte naliehavejšia: Nakoľko smieme považovať všetkých spomínaných trinásť entít, ktoré sú nepochybne kultúrne determinované, za *obrazy*? Nie všetky sa podľa všetkého vyznačujú vizuálnosťou, a ak aj často evokujú zmyslovosť, robia to rôznymi spôsobmi, niekedy veľmi odlišnými ako obrazy. Príliš sa zapletieme, ak ich alternatívne vyhlásime za idey alebo za predstavy? Túto otázku však radi necháme otvorenú, a to v dobrej viere. Keďže pre hermeneutické myslenie bola vždy charakteristická vysoká miera kritickej sebareflexívnosti, ktorá ho udržiavala pri živote a pomáhala rozvíjať, bude len celkom prirodzené, ak kniha Antona Vydru povedie aj k ďalšiemu prehlbovaniu diskusií o východiskách hermeneutickej práce v humanitných vedách.

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MILOŠ ZELENKA: Central Europe in Symbolic and Literary Geography
Berlin: Peter Lang, 2024. 176 pp. ISBN 978-3-631-90699-6; DOI 10.3726/b21812

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One of the main research fields of Miloš Zelenka, professor of Slavic literatures at the Institute of Languages and Cultures of Central Europe at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia, is comparative literary studies within the context of Central Europe and interliterary communities. His latest monograph, *Central Europe in Symbolic and Literary Geography*, aims to present Central Europe in light of the transformations taking place in contemporary culture. Zelenka draws attention to the changing understanding of key categories such as identity or national stereotypes, seeking to demythologize the region and present it without unnecessary idealization – a tendency often found in analyses, for instance, of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, frequently depicted as the center of the region. The publication provides a critical examination of Central European culture, aiming to demonstrate that the region, due to its unique geographical position, remains an important element not only of European but also world culture.

Zelenka's monograph consists of eight chapters, complemented by an introduction and conclusion. The author's main objective is to present the phenomenon of Central Europe in all its complexity and multilayered nature, analyzing specific literary works, intellectual debates, the processes of idea formation, and the mechanisms of the adoption of concepts from different cultural centers. Zelenka employs a clearly defined methodology, drawing from the achievements of literary comparatistics, theories of interliterariness, and global impulses from fields such as literary studies, literary history, sociology, political science, etc.

The first chapter, titled "Central Europe as an Issue in Comparative Literary Studies", provides a deep insight into the complex structure of the region in terms of culture, history, and language. As Zelenka states: "Central Europe in symbolic and literary geography (as stated in the title of this book) represents a mobile and heterogeneous space full of traditions and symbols, nourished by names and concrete stories that link this 'intangible' landscape into one sensitive and artistic ensemble. It is not just the spatial properties of literary texts but a complex, semantic 'network' of intertextual and intercultural relationships and contingencies between the author and his production; a network that is tied to such an autonomous space, regardless of whether we view it from a real, physical, mental, or spiritual perspective" (13). Zelenka also focuses on the region's distinctive characteristics that shape its unique nature. His perspective is broad and includes reflections on the social, religious, political, and cultural situation: "a relevant characteristic of Central Europe is the diversity and interpenetration of peoples, cultures, religions, languages, institutions, and traditions of thought. From the perspective of 'ordinary' people, immersed in their ethnic 'code', these elements create instability and identity problems" (16). By tracing the fates of specific writers, poets, and intellectuals (e.g., Czesław Miłosz, Milan Kundera), Zelenka aims to identify how the region of origin influences the formation of attitudes, decisions, or the choice of language for literary communication.

The second chapter, titled "Central Europe from the Point of View of 'Ingressive' Literary History and the Conception of the So-Called Cultural Saints", introduces the so-called ingressive method of literary history, based on historical-geographical modelling. Zelenka raises crucial questions about the position of the writer/poet in Central European culture and shows the mechanisms of canonization. The focus is not on the individual fates of specific writers, but on the broader processes that lead to them becoming symbols and being elevated to a pedestal.

In the third chapter, "Central Europe from an Imagological Perspective", Zelenka proposes an imagological approach to analyze the representation of the "other" or "stranger" in Central European thought. The category of the "other" offers numerous interpretive possibilities, which the author uses holistically, showing, for instance, the creative tension between different nations and the ambiguous relations between them. He states: "the Central European interliterary area forms a poly-literary historical system deriving from a number of plurilingual, multi-ethnic formations" (48).

The fourth chapter, "Minimalist and Maximalist Conceptions of Central Europe (Principles of Interliterary Communication)", is devoted to two contrasting conceptions of Central Europe. By juxtaposing these differing approaches, Zelenka sheds new light on the extraordinary wealth of possibilities for capturing the diverse and rich culture and history of Central Europe. He meticulously examines the conceptions of Central Europe in each country, explaining why they took the form they did, citing political and historical factors.

In the fifth chapter, "Central Europe as a Cultural Notion (For Intellectual Discussion)", the author presents an overview of the debate surrounding Central Europe, which was initiated in the 1980s by Milan Kundera's famous essay *The Tragedy of Central Europe* (1984). Zelenka summarizes Kundera's main themes: "Central Europe, with its imaginary boundaries and movable frontiers, falls short of the true centre, for the division into the West and the East results in a subjective loss of togetherness and common 'Central European' awareness. In Central Europe – 'the small-scale model of Europe' – it is the whole of Europe and its cultural heritage that have always been defended" (69). He provides a lucid account of the course of the debate, which involved some of the greatest intellectuals of the time, highlighting the pivotal moments in the discussion, and shows that the concept of Central Europe evolved dynamically.

The sixth chapter, "Archetypes in Interliterary Communication", focuses on stereotypes operating in Central European culture and their selected realizations. Zelenka uses the concept of interliterary communication to trace the journey of individual archetypes and stereotypes. He focuses on the myth of the Danube River and the nostalgic myth of the Habsburg monarchy, and reflects on how these myths were formed and why they remain relevant to different nations of Central Europe. In the following chapter, "The Phenomenon of Central European Centrism", Zelenka examines the changes within the center/periphery system, which embodies a dynamic model of a polycentric and multicultural space, always in motion and susceptible to change both from within and without.

The final chapter, "Central Europeanship as a Way to Worldwide 'Reputation'", reflects on the distinctive features of Central European writing. Using specific writers and their works as examples, Zelenka attempts to model the exceptional artist whose works have a real chance of entering the global literary canon. The analysis is accompanied by an exploration of the unique features of Central European writing, characterized by a preference for the grotesque, irony, and subtle satire.

Due to its dynamic and open character, Zelenka's *Central Europe in Symbolic and Literary Geography* establishes new directions in the study of Central Europe, and contains many thought-provoking, though sometimes

debatable, reflections. It demonstrates that Central Europe functions as a litmus test, reacting to the smallest changes in European culture. Zelenka's monograph is an essential academic work not only for scholars engaged in Central European studies, but for anyone interested in the paradigm shifts in the culture of the region. This publication by Miloš Zelenka offers fresh insights into contemporary literary comparatistics and literary studies, advancing research directions in these fields. It presents innovative ideas and intellectual stimuli, making it a valuable resource for scholars and readers interested in the historical and ongoing developments of Central European literatures. It also serves as a significant catalyst for examining the evolving perception of Central Europe, particularly in the context of contemporary challenges and complexities.

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IVANA KUPKOVÁ: Cesty k „novej" ruskej literatúre v slovenských prekladoch po roku 1989 [Paths to "new" Russian literature in Slovak translations after 1989]
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The publication *Cesty k „novej" ruskej literatúre v slovenských prekladoch po roku 1989* by the translator, university lecturer, and translation studies scholar Ivana Kupková examines what is known as "new" Russian literature within the Slovak context since 1989. Kupková refers to the term "new Russian prose" coined by Varlam Shalamov, the essence of which is "the struggle against canonical writing in literary form, the fight for novelty, which is the only criterion of true art" (8; all translations from Slovak by A. R.). Applying Shalamov's concept of new prose to poetry and drama, Kupková speaks of "new literature, new in content and structure, in this very context, and in three forms: 1) translations of new works by authors who have already appeared in Slovak; 2) translations of mostly postmodern works that were either not allowed to be translated (parallel, postmodern literature) or were written in the late 1990s and beyond; 3) translations in which the translators used new methods and approaches that were not common until then, both in the positive and negative sense" (9). As Kupková states, the aim of the book is to analyze the translators' work as well as the translation methods and practices they used.

Russian postmodern literature presents a significant challenge for translators. Literary scholar Mark Lipovetsky often describes it as "a dialogue with chaos" (*Russian Postmodern Fiction*, 1999). According to Kupková, this is why it requires "a well-oriented and experienced translator, as well as a courageous and equally well-oriented and experienced editor" (14). In the first chapter, "Cesty objaviteľov" (Paths of explorers), Kupková introduces three authors: Viktor Yerofeiev, Nikolai Koliada and Andrei Bely, and analyzes the translations of their works. The first of the translations discussed is also the first Slovak translation from Russian postmodern literature. Kupková criticizes Vladimir Čerevka's translation of Yerofeiev's novel *Russkaia krasavica* ([Erofeyev] *Russian Beauty*, 1980–1982, Slovak trans. *Ruská krásavica*) mainly for its inconsistency at various levels of translation, which, despite some successful translation passages, undermines the overall impression of the translation. This inconsistency is evident, for instance, in the translation of tabooed vocabulary and vulgarisms such as the word "srať" (shit), which in one case is censored, but in another remains uncensored. Another issue with Čerevka's translation includes overly literal translations, calques of expressions that have established equivalents in Slovak, as well as formal problems such as unmarked direct speech, etc. Kupková considers the other two translations, both of Koliada's plays, more successful. The first play, *Murlin Murlo* (Murlin Murlo, 1989), was translated by Vladislava Fekete, while the second, *Kurica* (Chicken, 1989; Slovak trans. *Sliepka*), by Jana Juráňová. In general, Kupková considers these translations to be adequate. She points out a few shifts, mainly related to changes in meaning associated with the language of the characters, which is difficult to translate due to the use of "prostorechʹe", a colloquial form

of Russian. In highlighting the translators' functionality and creativity in challenging passages, Kupková's analysis leads her to an important observation regarding the role of theater producers; she points out that in certain cases critics blame inconsistencies (such as unnatural sentence constructions) on translators, although it is often the theatrical producers who should be held responsible. The last translation discussed in this chapter is Eva Maliti-Fraňová's version of Bely's novel *Serebriannyi golub* (*The Silver Dove*, 1909, Slovak trans. *Strieborný holub*, 2018), which Kupková considers mostly exoticizing. Kupková appreciates the fact that a text as thematically and linguistically complex as *The Silver Dove*, is followed by an afterword by the translator explaining her intentions and concept. On the other hand, Kupková finds mistakes that could and should have been avoided given the translator's experience, including the excessive use of the transitive (a common mistake in translations from Russian), as well as the non-functional transfer of elements that lose their function in the translated text (such as diminutives, which have a colloquial meaning in Russian but not in Slovak).

In the second chapter, "Necesty a slepé uličky" (Paths and dead ends), Kupková discusses Slovak translations of works by Alexander Blok, Vladimir Nabokov, and Victor Pelevin. Kupková first presents older Slovak translations of Blok's poems by Janko Jesenský, Ľubomír Feldek or Rudolf Skukálek, comparing them with newer ones by Alojz Nociar and Peter Chorvát. Retranslations often emerge for various reasons, such as their accessibility to a new generation. However, Kupková argues that this was not successfully achieved in this case: "The new Blok in the translations of Alojz Nociar and Peter Chorvát is indeed new, but not because it introduce previously untranslated poems, nor because they offer new, inspiring methods of translating Blok's innovative verse or new, inspiring imagery. What is new is the unprofessional, even careless approach adopted by the translators and the publishers (Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov and Torden), which allows for translational arbitrariness and personal ambitions, something unprecedented in the Slovak translation tradition since at least the 1960s and entirely unacceptable within it" (93). In Kupková's analysis of Adriena Matejovová-Richterová's translation of Nabokov's novel *Pnin* (1957; Slovak trans. 1991), she noticed that, despite the claim that the novel was translated from the Russian version of the English original, it is evident that the translator used the original English version as the source text, and she present evidence to support her claims (a literal translation from English or the translation of cultural references that align with the English version of the text). In the subchapter "Nelyrická odbočka" (A non-lyric digression), she focuses on a documentary about Nabokov from the series "Great Writers of the 20th Century", dedicated to his life and work, that aired on Slovak public television. The documentary was translated by an unknown author. As she demonstrates with ample material, the documentary serves as an example of a translator's irresponsible approach to their work. One particularly striking example is the translator's arbitrary and incorrect rendering of the titles of Nabokov's works, despite the fact that these had already been translated into Slovak. Moreover, in some cases, the translator inconsistently translates the same novel under different titles in various parts of the documentary. If the translator was unable to find the existing translated titles, it raises questions about the reliability of the translations of the quoted passages from these novels. Kupková presents these translations and supplements them with her own versions for comparison, highlighting where significant shifts in meaning occur.

The third chapter, "Cesty nádeje" (Paths of hope), is devoted to the student as a translator, which Kupková also evaluates from her own experience as a university lecturer of literary translation and editor of the student translation project *Môj pes má rád džez* (My dog likes jazz, 2008). In this

chapter, the author expresses her hope for a strong new generation of translators from Russian, analyzing the *Antologie ruských povídek* (Anthology of Russian short stories, 2007) translated by students from Masaryk University in Brno and published by Větrné mlýny, *Othər Storiəs* (2013) translated by students from Comenius University in Bratislava and published by Porta Danubiana, and finally *Nostalgia* (2021), an anthology of contemporary Russian writers, first published online by the student project "Samyzdat" then by the publisher Literárna bašta. Kupková considers these students' efforts as a promising path that translations of fiction could take (162).

The last chapter, "Cesta ciest" (Paths of journeys), returns to the writer Victor Yerofeiev, but this time it focuses on his translation by another translator, Ján Štrasser. This chapter also serves as a kind of optimistic ending to the publication and to Slovak translations of Russian literature, embodied in the figure of Štrasser, whom Kupková considers as the ideal prototype of a translator whose work is both readable and marked by great talent.

Each of the chapters in this monograph is constructed in a similar manner, maintaining a logical sequence. Kupková introduces the authors and the context in which their works were created, then she discusses the text itself, and finally, she focuses on the analysis of specific translations, demonstrating how translators think, or should think during the translation process. Particularly interesting is her view on the translation challenges posed by "new" Russian literature, which often draws on the discontinued tradition of Russian modernism and the avant-garde (e.g. translation of colloquial speech, the so-called "prostorech'e", allusions, connection with Russia, etc.), and the various methods chosen by translators. Kupková evaluates individual translations in detail and assesses their adequacy, functionality, and contribution to the Slovak culture.

One of the main issues Kupková points out is the absence of a systematic approach to translation, which leads to distortions of the original text, at times resulting in complete nonsensical translations. This problem shows the inadequate intercultural competence of the translators which results in their inability "to receive and interpret signals from the source culture and transfer them into the signal system of the target culture" (Jana Rakšányiová: *Transkultúrne prvky v preklade* [Transcultural elements in translation], 2005, 122). The book presents specific examples of incorrect or inadequate translations of writers' works, while pointing out the risks that this entails for the reader, and discusses complicated translation strategies that require a deeper understanding of the text and the author's intentions. While praising some strategies (functionality, creativity), she criticizes others (inconsistency, negative shifts), stressing that quality translations are most usually the result of collaboration between translators, editors, proofreaders, and theatrical producers.

Ivana Kupková's monograph *Cesty k „novej" ruskej literatúre v slovenských prekladoch po roku 1989* offers a critical perspective on the importance of translation in shaping the knowledge of foreign literatures in Slovakia. Kupková presents well-structured arguments supported by a rich theoretical foundation that allows the reader to grasp the complexities involved in translating fiction, particularly "new" Russian literature. The book serves as both an overview of specific translations of this literature and a practical guide for translators, providing insights into translation criticism and the translation process itself. Additionally, it can serve as a guide for readers seeking quality Slovak translations from Russian, helping them avoid low-quality translations that could discourage them from engaging with contemporary Russian writing.

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KATARÍNA BEDNÁROVÁ – MÁRIA KUSÁ – SILVIA RYBÁROVÁ: Slovník prekladateliek a prekladateľov: vedy o človeku a kultúre. Bratislava: VEDA, vydavateľstvo SAV – Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV, v. v. i., 2024. 464 s. ISBN 978-80-224-2070-9 (print), ISBN 978-80-224-2077-8 (online). DOI 10.31577/2024/9788022420778

Kolektívna publikácia prináša prostredníctvom portrétov takmer stovky prekladateľských osobností a ich výberových bibliografií súhrnný obraz podstatnej časti knižnej produkcie najdôležitejších diel filozofickej, sociologickej, historickej, literárnovednej či umenovednej orientácie, ktorá bola preložená a vydaná na Slovensku v rozpätí od medzivojnového obdobia 20. storočia po 20. roky 21. storočia. Poskytuje profily osobností slovenského socio-humanitnovedného prekladu, charakterizuje ich dominantné zameranie a vo svojej podobe tvorí aj svojské dejiny recepcie tohto typu literatúry na Slovensku. Spolu s úvodnými kontextovými statami, bibliografiou prekladov, výberovou sekundárnou literatúrou k jednotlivým heslám, registrom mien a ďalšími materiálmi umožňuje zároveň ich rekonštrukciu, a to aj vďaka prepojeniu jednotlivých hesiel a osobností prostredníctvom prekladaných autorov. Práve komplexnosť spracovania rozsiahleho materiálu, dosiaľ vedecky reflektovaného iba čiastkovo, zaručuje, že sa publikácia môže stať dôležitým študijným a bádateľským prameňom.

The dictionary of Slovak translators in the humanities and social sciences presents – through the portraits of almost one hundred translators and their selected bibliographies – a comprehensive overview of a substantial part of the book production of the most important works of philosophical, sociological, historical, literary, and artistic orientation, published and translated in Slovakia from the interwar period of the 20th century to the present day. It provides profiles of the personalities of Slovak socio-humanistic translation, defines their dominant focus, and also creates a unique history of the reception of this literature in Slovakia. Together with the introductory contextual articles, bibliography of translations, selection of secondary literature on individual entries, index of names, and other materials, it also allows for their reconstruction, thanks to the linking of individual entries and translators through the translated authors as well. Although the dictionary was published in Slovak, it also contains three introductory texts in English translation: "Foreword" (K. Bednárová – M. Kusá), "Contexts of translation in the humanities and social sciences I: Mapping the field" (K. Bednárová), "Contexts of translation in the humanities and social sciences II: The publishing environment in the coordinates of the socio-cultural and political system" (1918–1989) (M. Kusá).

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Čo dnes znamená globálny kampus? Aké sú jeho reprezentácie v literatúre? A čo hovoria o aktuálnej úlohe univerzít? Autorky a autori štúdií v čísle o akademickom románe hľadajú s rešpektom k jeho pluralite a rozmanitosti odpovede v súčasnej anglofónnej, ale najmä v neanglofónnej literárnej tvorbe. Závažnosť zvolenej témy vyplýva z výrazných zmien, ktorými akademický svet a jeho literárne stvárnenie v súčasnosti prechádzajú. Štúdie, ktoré obracajú pozornosť na univerzitnú fikciu v ukrajinskej, španielskej, švédskej, slovenskej, rumunskej, poľskej, nemeckej, českej, bulharskej a americkej literatúre, prispievajú k výskumu zobrazovania globálneho kampusu a jeho národných špecifík.

What is the global campus today? What are its representations in fiction? What do they say about the university's role in contemporary society? This issue devoted to the campus novel searches for answers in contemporary Anglophone and particularly non-Anglophone campus fiction in its plurality and diversity. The relevance of the topic is explained by the significant changes that the world of academia and its literary narratives undergo in the present. By bringing attention to campus fiction in Ukrainian, Swedish, Spanish, Slovak, Romanian, Polish, German, Czech, Bulgarian, and American literature, the authors shed light on the global campus and national peculiarities of its portrayal.