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A WAR POET *IN ABSENTIA*: THE YEAR 1918
IN JAROSLAV HAŠEK'S LITERARY OUTPUT

The year 1918 is a something of a blind spot in Jaroslav Hašek's literary output. To begin with, uncertainty remains about the very events of his life. He left the Czechoslovakian Legion and joined, at the end of February, the Red Army. Hašek was caught in the long anabasis of the Legion moving towards Vladivostok, and we still do not know much about the details of his life during the few months he spent in Samara and in the city of Bugulma, despite thorough research and field studies by the Soviet writer Aleksandr Mikhaylovich Dunaevsky. The Czech title of the latter's work speaks by itself: *Jaroslav Hašek's disappearance*. "It is commonly known, he mused, that Hašek served in the Red Army. However, the report on this short period of his life is most fragmentary. A few documents, some terse, administrative notices".¹ Jaroslav Křížek's study makes the same observation that little is still known about Hašek's life in the revolutionary Russia, since the author himself, after he came back to Czechoslovakia, at the end of 1920, kept the realities of life in the Soviet Union shrouded in mystery.² In that respect, the polemical figure of the communist writer does not make things easier. The many biases when it comes to that subject, as well as the smear campaign that the Czechoslovakian press carried out against Hašek, do not allow us to take some of the contemporary evidence at face value. Similarly, even though secondary literature from the socialist period in Czechoslovakia provides us with valuable facts about the writer, its apologetic stance reveals an ideological reading of Hašek along the lines of Marxism-Leninism. Above all, Hašek himself, from his deserting the Austro-Hungarian army in 1916, and even more so from 1918 onwards, mostly worked as a propagandist, so that the literary quality of his written production during that period is correspondingly altered.

The author of *The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk During the World War* allegedly told his first wife Jarmila, however, about the continuity in

¹ Alexandr Dunajevskij, *Zmizení Jaroslava Haška* [*Jaroslav Hašek's Disappearance*], trans. Bohumil Neumann (Praha: Svět Sovětů, 1967), 8: "Všeobecně je známo, že Hašek sloužil v Rudé armádě. Zprávy o tomto krátkém období jeho života jsou však velmi kusé. Několik dokladů, suchá úřední oznámení". Unless stated otherwise, citations are translated by Jean Boutan and Gildas Tilliette.

² Jaroslav Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku* [*Jaroslav Hašek in Revolutionary Russia*], (Praha: Naše vojsko 1957), 9–13.

poetical inspiration that led him to compose his famous novel: “I am writing Švejk. It has pursued me for years. On the front, you know, in Russia, everywhere. It began to germinate in me as soon as the war broke out. I felt as if something was being born. This idea I got back then, you know. Fancy that? Please read the first chapter”.³ It may be that this is, in Jarmila Hašková’s posthumous account (1930), a retrospective reconstruction of the genesis of that now world-famous masterpiece. That being said, this testimony must be given a chance, because it suggests a slow maturation of the novel during the war period, rather than going along with the widespread idea that this monument of Czech literature would have appeared almost *ex nihilo* (such great is the disparity between it and the 1911 pre-war short stories about the Good Soldier). Such an idea pervades, for instance, the account made by Hašek’s second wife, Alexandra Lvová (known as Šůra), where the main impression (as indeed for the 1911 stories) is that of an alcohol-fuelled stroke of genius: “Once, it was in the end of February, they came home with Sauer in a good mood. They were laughing, embracing one another, and Jaroslav declared that he had got an idea. That he would write about Švejk. I didn’t know he had already written about Švejk before the war. It was only then he told me, but he immediately announced, this would be something totally different, this would be real literature”.⁴ The year 1918, though, is precisely the one that is missing in that self-identifying war-novel. When the novel was completed by Karel Vaněk, he did not even write about the ending of the war and affirmed that Švejk had disappeared before the October Revolution; we will meet the hero again only after his return to Czechoslovakia in 1920.

This article purports to give an outline of the major evolutions in Hašek’s literary output around the year 1918, a year that saw the end of the World War and, for the writer, the start of the Russian civil war. The Russian Revolution meant for Hašek, as he wrote in 1918, the transition from a “war between States” – or “war between Empires” – to a “war of the proletariat against capitalism”.⁵ The article will be examining the repercussions of the great events of 1918 on the east front – the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the founding myth of the Czechoslovakian Legion and the beginnings of the Soviet Union – in the literary works of a man who has been taxed for being a renegade to each of the three aforementioned causes. The particular issue of *Švejk*’s maturation during the war may help us put the year 1918 into perspective with the end (though only to some extent) of the conflicts and the beginning (however protracted) of the post-war period, which determines the novel’s particular stance, as we understand from the frame narrative in the introduction:

³ *Lidský profil Jaroslava Haška [The Human Profile of Jaroslav Hašek]*, ed. Radko Pytlík (Praha: Československý spisovatel, Edice vzpomínky a korespondence 1979), 266: “Píšu Švejka. Celá ta léta mne to drželo. Víš, na frontě, v Rusku, všude. Začalo to ve mně hned, jak vypukla válka. Cítil jsem, že se něco rodí. To, co mne napadlo tenkrát, víš. Chceš? Přeči si první kapitolu”.

⁴ *Toulavé house: Zpráva o Jaroslavu Haškovi [Errant Goose: Report on Jaroslav Hašek]*, ed. idem (Praha: Panorama, 1982), 285: “Jednou koncem února přišli se Sauerem domů v dobré náladě. Smáli se, objímali a Jaroslav prohlásil, že dostal nápad. Bude psát o vojáku Švejkovi. Já jsem nevěděla, že o Švejkovi psal už před válkou a během ní. Řekl mi to teprve teď, ale hned prohlásil, že tohle bude něco docela jiného, tohle že bude skutečná literatura”.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 248.

Today you can meet in the streets of Prague a shabbily dressed man who is not even himself aware of his significance in the history of the great new era. [...] And this quiet, unassuming, shabbily dressed man is indeed that heroic and valiant good old soldier Švejk. In Austrian times, his name was once on the lips of all the citizens of the Kingdom of Bohemia, and, in the Republic, his glory will not fade either.⁶

The story, left unfinished at the time of Hašek's death in 1923, recounts the hero's adventures up to 1915, and nothing is said on how he fared on the east front before coming back to Prague. Our subject here is, thus, the literary aspects of Jaroslav Hašek's disappearance, which is also Josef Švejk's disappearance. In other words, if Hašek's novel was about the Good Soldier's bursting into the World War I, we would like to observe in this article the author himself, walking out of that conflict.

“AUSTRIA BIDS THE MAP OF EUROPE FAREWELL, /
FOR IT HAS NO PLACE ON EARTH ANYMORE”⁷

The year 1918 sees the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was the trigger in the countries of the dual monarchy for a wealth of writings, from Robert Musil to Josef Roth and from Jožef Wittlin to Miklós Bánffy. If one can agree with Claudio Magris in saying that the use of satire did not prevent writers (this is true for Musil in particular) to paradoxically contribute to the emergence of the whole Habsburg Empire myth, it remains that Hašek's humorous approach to the “last days of mankind” theme stands out for its irreverent quality. Armed struggle against the Austro-Hungarian Empire seems to have been Hašek's priority from the time of his capture by the Russian army in September 1915. Until 1918, Austria in particular bears the brunt of his attacks, as the quondam anarchist indulges in a resolutely nationalistic rhetoric and goes as far as espousing the cause of the conservative *Družina* (*the Companions*, renamed after 1915 *Union of the Czechoslovakian Societies in Russia*) founded by Czech migrants in Russia.⁸ He was reusing in his pamphlets, however, literary devices and themes that have been already present in his pre-war works as well as in the Czech tradition of anti-Habsburg satire, but which he can henceforth liberally exploit. In *Švejk in captivity*, a first draft of the novel published in 1917, he brings in Karel Havlíček Borovský in order to come back to the commonplace of the “nation in chains”:

Everybody probably knows that Havlíček readily characterizes the court martials thus: “A court martial is a wild beast”. More than 20 000 victims who have been condemned by these courts in the Czech countries since the war began could wholeheartedly concur with Havlíček.

⁶ Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, trans. Cecil Parrott (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 1.

⁷ Idem, *Čechoslovan*, 1916, December 11th (cited by Jaroslav Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 78): “Rakousko s mapou Evropy se loučí, / proň není místa na zemi”.

⁸ Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 63–69.

If we count, on average, five years in custody *per capita*, it all adds up to 100 000 years in prison, a handsome figure, for the Czech nation.⁹

This continuity from pre-war anarchism to propagandist activities on the front is materialized in the return of Austrian spy Alexandr Mašek at the end of the short story *On the Tracks of the Prague State Police* [*Po stopách státní policie v Praze*], but this time in Russia. Following the programme of the pre-war satirical journal *Šibeničky* [*The Small Gallows*], the author pledges his character to the gallows: “Alexandr Mašek is still alive, he is currently living in Russia where he takes a deep interest in the Czech question. I have heard it say that he was in prison and would be hanged. Were this to happen, I place in his grave this story in his memory”.¹⁰

This condemnation of the Austrian police state is of course present in *Švejk in captivity*, though not without a pinch of anti-Judaism that reveals, so often as in that first draft, the nation-based antagonisms: “In the shops, you would always find a German Jew or Jewess or yet other loyal informers”.¹¹

By no means is that the only example. Hašek’s writing is constantly reusing and shifting older motifs. In *Švejk in captivity*, numerous memories of the 1911 short stories staging Švejk for the very first time indicate that this new narrative is in the continuity of Švejk’s adventures while in manoeuvres with the Austrian army. At the end of the war, this version is still violently anti-Prussian and anti-Habsburg:

Or, let’s examine the case of Emperor Wilhelm. Any child could tell you that Emperor Wilhelm is mentally backward. At court though, his hare-brained plans are considered strokes of genius. Now-defunct Franz-Joseph I only declared war as a consequence of psychological disorders. The autopsy that was performed on the stupid old man revealed the supuration of his brain (*atrophia cerebri senilis*). And this was, in the case of Franz-Joseph, nothing but the atavistic imbecility which affects the Habsburg family. When he was young, Charles I was subject to hydrocephalus and was treated at Dr Guggenbühl’s residential home in Abenberg, near Interlaken in Switzerland.¹²

⁹ Jaroslav Hašek, *Dobry vojak Švejk v zajeti* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 2013), 34: “Snad každý ví, že Havlíčkova charakteristika vojenských soudů začíná slovy: „Vojenský soud, to je samec“. Na 20 000 obětí tohoto soudu v českých zemích od počátku války mohlo by klidně podepsat Havlíčkův výrok. Počítáme-li průměrem pět let žaláře na jednotlivce, dělá to pěknou sumu, 100 000 roků vězení pro český národ”.

¹⁰ Idem, “Po stopách státní policie v Praze“ [*On the Tracks of the Prague State Police*], *Čechoslovan*, 1916, August 21st (in *Moje zpověď a jiné povídky* [*My Confession and Other Short Stories*]; Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, Česká knižnice, 2008, 255): “Alexandr Mašek zůstal však na živu a nalézá se nyní v Rusku, kde velice se zajímá o českou otázku. Slyšel jsem, že jest zavřen a že má býti pověšen. Bude-li pověšen, kladu mu tuto vzpomínku do hrobu”.

¹¹ Hašek, *Dobry vojak Švejk v zajeti*, 35: “v obchodech se vždy vyskytl nějaký německý Žid nebo Židovka, nebo jiný loyální denunciant”.

¹² Ibidem, 56–57: “Nebo si vezměme případ císaře Viléma. Každé malé dítě ví, že císař Vilém trpí úbytkem mozku. Ve dvorních kruzích jeho žvásty a plány považují za geniálnost. Nebožtík František Josef I. vypověděl válku jen následkem duševní poruch. Při pitvě tohoto stupidního starce bylo zjištěno hnisání mozku (atrophia cerebri senilis). A u Františka Josefa nebylo to opět nic jiného, než zděděný kretenismus, kterým trpí potomci Habsburků. Karel I. byl v útlém mládí stížen vodnatostí dutin mozkových a ošetřován byl ve vodoléčebném ústavě Dr. Guggenbühla na Abenbergu u Interlabenu ve Švýcařích”.

Such scurrilous attacks, endorsed by the narrator himself (as these considerations on the imperial family during Švejč's visit to the asylum), are nowhere to be found in the post-war novel. All quotes from the 1911 short stories have disappeared as well. It is all too evident that times have changed. The short story *The Czech Pickwicks Club* [*Klub českých Pickwicků*] (after Dickens), published in 1917 in the Kiev newspaper *Revoluce*, the voice of the Czech conservatives (who were then being outflanked by the Petrograd opposition group), reveals this circulation of motifs in Hašek's works: this time with character satire being wielded in different political contexts. The portrait of the War Prisoners Club's President collaborating with the Union of Czechoslovakian Societies [*zajatecký Klub spolupracovníků Svazu*] Chalupa reminds us of ministers Žáček and Bráf in the eponymous humoresque from 1909/1910:

During last season, he has squandered the club's subscriptions in trips to Petrograd, which The Czechoslovakian always discloses thus: "Yesterday, the President of the association of the Union collaborators has returned to Kiev from Petrograd". "Yesterday, the President of the association of the Union collaborators has left Kiev for Petrograd". Apparently, the Czech revolution is mostly about knowing on which line of the Russian railway rides Mr Chalupa, hunter by trade. Indeed, the evolutions of his ideological tendencies, his political leanings and the touching outpourings of his revolutionary soul could be summed up by the following:

from Kiev to Petrograd 1246 versts,
 from Petrograd to Kiev 1246 versts,
 from Kiev to Petrograd 1246 versts,
 from Petrograd to Kiev 1246 versts.¹³

The incipit of *The Ministers Dr Žáček and Dr Bráf* [*Ministři Dr. Žáček a Dr. Bráf*] serves as an abstract for the whole story:

Whoever follows with some degree of interest the administrative bulletin of the city of Prague will not, without doubt, fail to observe the following information: "His Excellency Minister Bráf has left Prague and is now back in Vienna". "His Excellency Minister Žáček is now back in Vienna, having left in Prague". "His Excellency Minister Bráf has now returned to Prague from Vienna". Thus, Dr Žáček and Dr Bráf keep relieving each other. One arrives in Prague while the other leaves, and vice-versa. That is indeed a fact: there is constantly one of our Czech ministers riding the Prague–Vienna line.¹⁴

¹³ Jaroslav Hašek, "Klub českých Pickwicků" [*The Czech Pickwicks Club*], *Revoluce* [*Revolution*], 1917, April 23rd (Jaroslav Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 93–94): "Za poslední čtvrt roku projel klubovní příspěvky do Petrohradu, což bývá vždy veřejně kvitováno slovy v Čechoslováku: 'Včera vrátil se z Petrohradu do Kijeva předseda spolku spolupracovníků Svazu'. 'Včera přibyl z Kijeva do Petrohradu předseda spolku spolupracovníků Svazu'. To je patrně strašně důležité v české revoluci, po jaké trati jezdí bývalý střelec pan Chalupa v Rusku. A tak celý vývoj jeho ideových směrů, politického proudu a celý úchvatný tok jeho revolucionářského ducha dá se vtěsnat do této bilance: z Kijeva do Petrohradu 1246 verst, z Petrohradu do Kijeva 1246 verst, z Kijeva do Petrohradu 1246 verst, z Petrohradu do Kijeva 1246 verst".

¹⁴ Idem, "Ministři Dr. Žáček a Dr. Bráf", *Karikatury* [*Caricatures*], 1909, November 2nd (cited in *Praha ve dne i v noci* [*Prague by day, by night*]; Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1973, 58): "Kdo sleduje se zájmem úřední Pražské noviny, ten jistě následující zprávy nepřehlédne: 'Jeho Excellence pan ministr dr. Bráf odjel opět z Prahy do Vídně.' 'Jeho Excellence pan ministr dr. Žáček odjel z Prahy do Vídně.' 'Jeho Excellence pan ministr dr. Bráf přijel z Vídně do Prahy.' A tak se střídá dr. Žáček a dr. Bráf. Bud' přijede do Prahy jeden a odjede druhý, nebo naopak. Faktum je, že na trati Praha–Vídeň jezdí neustále jeden z našich českých ministrů".

These variations on one theme reveal the permanence of satirical and parodic forms and motifs despite the varied causes which characterized Hašek's political engagement during the key years 1917–1918. The commitment to a conservative agenda should not come as a surprise, even for an ex-anarchist and future communist: Hašek's grievance against the Petrograd opposition was first and foremost their compromising of the unity of the Czech movement in Russia and their harming the efficiency of the struggle against Austro-Hungary.¹⁵ This imperative is what, in spite of his expulsion following the publication of *Club of the Czech Pickwicks*, also directs, starting in the second half of 1917, his activity with the Czechoslovakian Legion, the Czechoslovakian National Council Branch in Russia led by Masaryk (the Kiev group of the Union of Czechoslovakian Societies had, by then, been relegated to a minority). As 1918 is starting, and before, Hašek leaves the Legion, the fall of the empire is still the main theme in his satirical writings, for example in the *Small Feuilleton* [*Malý feuilleton*], published in the third issue of *Čechoslovan* on 17 February:

Postdam, Schönbrunn fade away,
Baleful illusions,
While we burn the black and yellow flag.
The Empire's role is done with.¹⁶

When the Czechoslovakian Legion was ordered to go to France, the leaders of the Branch thus refusing to defend Ukraine anymore against the German and Austrian troops, Hašek ironically remarked, in the last issue of *Čechoslovan* on 24 February, pointed out the lack of political courage in front of the enemy with much irony:

In anticipation of the attack the Austrians are preparing in Ukraine, I hereby withdraw all the insults that I wrote against the Austrian Emperor Charles, and fearing his wrath I will flee to Australia.¹⁷

“YOU ARE BOURGEOIS AND OUR ROADS CROSS,
WE GO TO THE LEFT WHILE YOU TO THE RIGHT”¹⁸

The fight against the dual monarchy is also what makes decide Hašek to leave the Legion. Convinced of the necessity of pursuing the struggle on the east

¹⁵ Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 84–85.

¹⁶ Jaroslav Hašek, “Malý feuilleton“ [*Small Column*], *Čechoslovan*, 1918, February 17th (Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 138): “Postupim, Schönbrunn ztracují se v dáli / jak nepřijemná fáta morgana, / a černožlutý prapor doma pálí. / Úloha říše nyní dohrána”.

¹⁷ Idem, *Čechoslovan*, 1918, February 24th (ibid., 141): “Vzhledem k chystanému vpádu Rakušanů na Ukrajinu odvolávám tímto všechny urážky, které jsem napsal proti rakouskému císaři Karlovi a utíkám před jeho hněvem do Austrálie”.

¹⁸ Idem, “Malý feuilleton“, *Průkopník*, 1918, April 4th (cited in Radko Pytlík, *Jaroslav Hašek: Data – Fakta – Dokumenty* [*Jaroslav Hašek: Data – Facts – Documents*]; Praha: Emporius, 2013, 141): “Jste měšťáci a cesty se nám kříží, / my nalevo, vy jdete napravo”.

front, he does not hide his disagreement with the policies of the National Council Branch.¹⁹ When the German and Austrian armies attack Ukraine, Hašek, recently engaged in the Red Army, uses the same argument in tracts written for the legionaries, for example in his call *Soldiers – Revolutionaries!* in April 1918:

Today, the bayonets of Karl Habsburg and Wilhelm Hohenzollern are pointed at the back of Russia, where we have all found protection, and which allowed us to carry out the Czech Revolution.²⁰

Once more, one observes the turnaround of a motif which Hašek frequently drew on in his anti-Austria satire, namely the bayonet backstab – or, bayonet lower back stab, as in his pamphlet against emperor Charles *The Sovereign who Sits on the Czech Bayonets*²¹ [*Panovník, který se posadí na české bajonety*]. This insistence on the same themes and motifs speaks in favour of some constancy in Hašek's positions, even though his changing sides during the year 1917, and even more in February 1918, led the opposition press to label him a traitor, and the Kiev social-democrats, whom he had derided, rejected him as well. He seems however to have stayed true to his engagements every time until his political positions became untenable, which a sarcastic remark from the official organ of the Branch, *Československý denník*, summarized fairly appropriately: "Poor Hašek! There he already felt out! Where shall he go now?"²² In April 1918, Hašek is still hesitating: however inflexible his position on the issue of the Legion's transfer to France, he remains ultimately unconvinced by communism.²³

Hašek of course denied being a traitor to Czechoslovakia, and he would lay the charge on his very accusers in a letter to Jaroslav Salát dated on September 17, 1920:

I travelled from Simbirsk to Irkutsk with the army. The yoke of various important and party-affiliated tasks which I then bore constitute the best material for a polemic with the bourgeoisie in Bohemia, which claim that I have, as you say, "stained my reputation" by joining the Bolsheviks, for base reasons. They themselves can't do without that ideology of "staining one's reputation". They themselves sought just such "stains", first with Austria, then with the Tsar, and then they fairly wallowed in it with French and British capital and "Comrade Tuzar". As far as the last-named person is concerned, it's quite difficult to judge who "stained" himself the worse by association. Long live political speculators!²⁴

¹⁹ Cecil Parrott, *The Bad Bohemian: A Life of Jaroslav Hašek, Creator of the Good Soldier Švejk* (London: Abacus, 1983), 185.

²⁰ Jaroslav Hašek, *The Secret History of my Sojourn in Russia*, trans. Charles S. Kraszewski (London: Glagoslav Publications, 2017), 192.

²¹ Idem, *Čechoslovan*, 1916, November 27th (Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 80).

²² Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 186: "Chudák Hašek! Tak už vypadl! Kam se teď obrátí?"

²³ Ibidem, 197.

²⁴ Jaroslav Hašek, the letter to Jaroslav Salát, *The Secret History*, 249–250. In the Czech original, "přimazat se k bolševikům" would mean "to compromise oneself with the Bolsheviks" rather than "to stain one's reputation". Cf. *Tajemství mého pobytu v Rusku* (Praha: Naše vojsko 1985), 175: "Od Simbirska po Irkutsk s armádou, kdy na mně ležela tíha různých vážných úkolů partijských i administrativních, jest nejlepším materiálem k polemice s buržoazií v Čechách, která tvrdí, že jsem se 'přimazal', jak ty píšeš, k bolševikům. Oni nemohou sami se obejít bez ideologie slova 'přimazat se'. Oni se hleděli přimazati k Rakousku, pak k caru, potom se přimazali ku francouzskému

This new “changing sides” of the writer is validated by an arrest warrant of July 25, 1918: Hašek was “charged with committing the crime of treason against the Czechoslovakian nation”.²⁵ That was the second document of this kind in one year, after a similar notice produced by the Austrian justice in October 1917. That it must have moved Hašek is visible in the wanted notice against the Good Soldier Švejk which serves as a foreword to *Švejk in Captivity*:

The imperial and royal court of the territorial tribunal in charge of criminal affairs in Prague, section IV, has settled the confiscation of all properties of Josef Švejk, cobbler, lately housed at Královské Vinohrady, guilty of deserting and surrendering himself to the enemy, of high treason and of crimes against the State’s martial authority, according to paragraphs 183–194, number 1334, paragraph c, and also to paragraph 327 of the military penal code.²⁶

As the author himself had commented: “How did you end up mixing with these cranks, you who wanted to serve the emperor your master even to the bitter end?”²⁷ In the introduction of his biography of Jaroslav Hašek, Gustav Janouch – perhaps better known for his *Conversations with Kafka* – adopts, probably unwittingly, the same device, opening his narrative with a portrait of the writer about to be lynched by Czechoslovakians, quoting the wanted notice:

Jaroslav Hašek, the father of the good soldier Švejk, fascinated me from the moment that I caught sight of him for the very first time in a dark raging crowd, more than forty years ago.

The Czech nationalistic legionaries, standing under the command of a certain Oberstleutnant Čerovský, were about to hang Hašek on the Wenceslas square, since the court-martial of the Czech Legions, being faithful to the Entente, had issued a wanted notice against Hašek on July 25th in Omsk, charging him with “several crimes of high treason against the Czechoslovakian Nation”. [...]

You could hear the loud rolling voices of anonymous prosecutors and defenders. People were pushing and jostling one another back and forth. Only Hašek seemed to stand motionless in the crush. What is going on here, actually? What do those people want from me?²⁸

The parallelism between the Austrian and Czechoslovakian proceedings against Hašek finds an echo, as it seems, in his writings. There is an explicit comparison,

i anglickému kapitálu i k ‘soudr. Tuzaroví’. Co se týká posledního, zde velice těžko soudit, kdo se ke komu ‘přimazal’. Ať žijí političtí keřasové!”

²⁵ Charles S. Kraszewski, introduction to Hašek, *The Secret History*, 28.

²⁶ Hašek, *Dobrý voják Švejk v zajetí*, 8: “C. a k. zemský, jakožto trestní soud v Praze, oddělení IV., nařídil zabavití jmění Josefa Švejka, obuvníka, posledně bytem na Král. Vinohradech, pro zločin sběhnutí k nepříteli, velezrada a zločin proti válečné moci státu podle § 183–194, č. 1334, lit. c) a § 327 vojenského trestního zákona”.

²⁷ Ibidem: “Jak ses dostal do styku s těmi číslicemi, ty, jenž jsi přece císaři pánu chtěl sloužit ‘do roztrhání těla’?”

²⁸ Gustav Janouch, *Jaroslav Hašek: der Vater des braven Soldaten Schwejk* (Bern: Francke, 1966), 7: “Jaroslav Hašek, der Vater des braven Soldaten Schwejk, faszinierte mich vom ersten Augenblick an, als ich ihn vor mehr als vierzig Jahren in einer dunkel wogenden Menschenmenge zum erstenmal zu Gesicht bekam. Die tschechischen, nationalistisch gesinnten Legionäre, die ein gewisser Oberstleutnant Čerovský führte, wollten Hašek auf dem Prager Wenzelsplatz aufhängen, da das Feldgericht der tschechischen ententetreuen Legionäre am 25. Juli in Omsk gegen Hašek einen Steckbrief erlassen hatte, in welchem von ‘wiederholtem Hochverrat an der tschechoslowakischen Nation’ gesprochen wurde. [...] Man hörte laut rollende Stimmen anonymer Ankläger und Verteidiger. Die Menschen stießen und schoben einander hin und her. Nur Hašek schien in dem Gedränge bewegungslos zu stehen. Was tut sich hier eigentlich? Was wollen die Leute von mir?”

in particular in the aforementioned article *Why are you off to France*: “For this reason also in the organ of the Branch, the *Czechoslovakian Diary*, they wrote that training, not politicking, was a soldier's job. According to the fine sentiment of Austro-German militarism: *Maul halten und weiter dienen!*”²⁹

In the *Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk during the World War*, where this precept of Austrian militarism is, indeed, also quoted, quips are made against the recently (1918) born Czechoslovakian Republic as well. Though Bretschneider, the new avatar of Alexandr Mašek, is devoured as soon as 1914 by the dogs Švejk sold him, the author's afterword leaves no doubt as to the fact that the change in regime only meant one police state replacing another:

Lots of people of the type of the late Bretschneider, who under old Austria was a member of the secret police, are still knocking about today in the Republic. They are extremely interested in what people are talking about.³⁰

In the current state of the text dealing with Švejk's Austro-Hungarian adventures, satire is still directed mostly at the old world; but, it is directed as well, every so often, at post-1918 Czechoslovakia, illustrating what Hašek called the ideology of the verb “*přimazat se*” [*to compromise oneself with somebody*], for example about the book *Stories from the Life of our Monarch*, “which had been written by the present meritorious chief editor of our official Czechoslovakian Republic who doted on old Franz”.³¹ In *Švejk in Captivity*, Švejk was the one who had visions of the emperor. In fact, as rewritten by Hašek in 1921 the novel is less systematically anti-Habsburg than during the war. In the already cited humoresque *On the Tracks of the Prague State Police*, there is a short story about Franz-Joseph's portrait which may bring to mind the famous incident of the flyblown Emperor's picture at the beginning of the *Adventures*, but is more similar, in diegesis and narrative structure, to the story told by Švejk about the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk, as becomes clear when one compares the two passages:

[...] a few years ago, at the “Black Inn”, he had won at the tombola a plaster cast of Emperor Franz-Joseph I, he would make it drink, talk with it for days on end, and eventually broke its head, then to throw it down the men's toilets. He was able to prove that he had been as drunk as can legally be required, but he still got disciplined for it.³²

It was hot and he was quite tight, and on the way he saw a pillar and on the pillar was a box and in it under the glass a small statue of St John of Nepomuk. He prayed in front of St John and said to him: “It must be hot for you here; you ought to drink a little. You're in the sun here. You must certainly sweating all the time”. And so he shook the field-flask, took a sip out of it and said: “I've left you a nip too, St John of Nepomuk”. [...] After that John of Nepomuk slept with him in

²⁹ Jaroslav Hašek, “Why are you off to France” in *The Secret History*, 187. *Maul halten und weiter dienen*: “Shut up and keep serving!”.

³⁰ Idem, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, 216.

³¹ Ibidem, 71.

³² Idem, “Po stopách státní policie v Praze“, *Čechoslovan*, 1916, August 21st (*Moje zpověď a jiné povídky*, 250): “[...] jednou před léty v ‘Černém pivovaře’ vyhrál v nějaké tombole sádrový odlitek císaře Františka Josefa I., dával mu připíjet, vedl s ním dlouhé řeči a na konec mu urazil hlavu, kterou pohodil na oddělení ‘pro pány’. Dokázal sice, že byl opilý tak, jak to zákon vyžaduje, ale byl přece veden k evidenci”.

the straw [...] and he always had tremendous luck at cards. Wherever we were in camp he always won, until we came to the district of Prácheň and lay in Drahenice, and there he lost everything, lock, stock and barrel. When we moved off in the morning St John of Nepomuk was strung up on a pear-tree by the road.³³

The development of this motif trades the *ad hominem* anti-Habsburg satire for some anticlerical lampoon. Hašek's target is here conservatism, and he does not spare the young country's establishment when he concludes the first volume of his novel by mocking the bourgeoisie's taste for good form:

We cannot expect the inn-keeper Palivec to speak with the same refinement as Mrs Laudová, Doctor Guth, Mrs Olga Fastrová and a whole series of others who would like to turn the whole Czechoslovakian Republic into a big salon with parquet flooring, where people go about in tail-coats, white ties and gloves, speak in choice phrases and cultivate the refined behaviour of the drawing room. But beneath this camouflage these drawing-room lions indulge in the worst vices and excesses.³⁴

Needless to say, this satire of bourgeoisie conservatism was born in 1918 from the animosity between the author and the Czechoslovakian political leaders. It comes to life in a humoresque called *The Lost Echelon*, under the guise of a curious "political fiction" which introduces the American scientist William Darling's discovery, in 1968, of "some moss-covered railway wagons [...] amidst the abandoned, distant, and unending tracts of the Siberian tundra".³⁵ This happens to be the trains of the leaders of the Branch, whose conservatism Hašek sketches with this telling metaphor. He ridicules the Czechoslovakian epic by imputing the idea of coming back to France via Vladivostok to the reading of Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 days*, and of travel stories in general, from the novels of Karl May to the Baedeker travel guides. The divorce with the Legion is complete and Hašek's political evolution is apparent in the continuous progression of his works in these same years. The sense of having been let down by the Czechoslovakians – not to have let *them* down – always predominates in his judgment. The words he uses to bid farewell to his former party, at the end of this same short story, can thus be read as a genuine political statement: "And so we too piously repeat those beautiful words, calling, 'Go with God; goodbye forever, glorious old Branch! For all the good you've done here, the really isn't anything to be done for you!'"³⁶

"INSURGENTS ARE WE, THE ARMY OF THE BARRICADES"³⁷

If indeed Hašek regarded himself as left on the side lines of the twists and turns of Czechoslovakian politics, the idea of an alethic process in his adherence

³³ Idem, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, 442–443.

³⁴ Ibidem, 215.

³⁵ Hašek, *The Secret History*, 88 (originally published in *Průkopník*, 1918, May 24th).

³⁶ Ibidem, 92.

³⁷ Idem, "Malý feuilleton", *Průkopník*, 1918, April 4th (cited in Pytlík, *Jaroslav Hašek*, 175): "My vzbouřenci jsmé, vojsko barikád".

to Soviet communism (according to Jaroslav Křížek), or, of a conversion brought about by a Lenin speech (Radko Pytlík)³⁸, sound, to say the least, rather naive. In the collection of short stories entitled *In Command at Bugulma* and published in 1921 in the newspaper *Tribuna*, Hašek also derides Soviet Russia, and only with a somewhat crooked argument can one make a plea (as Janouch does) for the poet's doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy:

The laughter of his post-war humoresques, born of the war experience in Russia, did not address the political situation, but the people who were still stuck in the intellectual cage of the past.³⁹

His disengagement from political life upon his return to Prague, even though the Czechoslovakian communist party was just being founded, seems to contradict such an interpretation, despite Hašek's occasional collaborations with the newspapers *Rudé právo* [*The Red Law*] and his pro-Soviet Union declarations, as reported by his friends. According to Pytlík, Hašek had, in fact, signed contracts for the publication of serials – *Švejk among the Bolsheviks* and *Švejk in Holy Russia*, but he abandoned these projects in favour of a more ambitious one, *The Fatefull Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk*.⁴⁰

Hašek, it would seem, took up the story of his own adventures from the start of the war, and the rewriting of *Švejk in Captivity* in the four volumes of the *Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk during the World War* suggests that indeed the novel could well have carried on with “Švejk in Holy Russia” and “among the Bolsheviks”, of which *In command at Bugulma* was a first draft. This is all a conjecture, but one cannot help noting that whereas the pre-war short stories were completely fictitious, the *Adventures of the Good Soldier*, as well as *In command at Bugulma*, combined fiction with autobiographical elements. It would seem likely that Hašek purposed to set in a roman-fleuve – “of course, it shall be a novel long as [Jan] Otto's *Instructive Dictionary*”,⁴¹ he used to tell his friends – the sum of his experience, from the World War up until Švejk's return to Czechoslovakia. One can assume, first, that what he envisaged was a fictional synthesis of all his works and projects from the war and just after it, thus highlighting the continuity of his literary output; secondly, that the novel would be written in the same tone, and that the satire would extend, not only to Austria-Hungary and to the Czechoslovakian movement, but to Soviet Russia as well.

Yet, the importance of Hašek's communist engagement in his journey must not be played down. He definitely showed the same zeal in his engagement for the Soviet cause as in his work as a propagandist for the Union of Czechoslovakian Societies or in his venture with the Legion. Hašek himself protested of his earnestness in the already quoted letter to Salát:

³⁸ Cf. Radko Pytlík, *Náš přítel Hašek [Our Friend Hašek]*, (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1979), 162.

³⁹ Janouch, *Jaroslav Hašek*, 190: “Das Lachen seiner aus den russischen Kriegserfahrungen geborenen ersten Nachkriegshumoresquen war nicht gegen die politischen Verhältnisse, sondern nur gegen die Menschen gerichtet, welche ständig noch in dem geistigen Käfig der Vergangenheit steckten”.

⁴⁰ Cf. Pytlík, *Toulavé house*, 285.

⁴¹ Idem, *Náš přítel Hašek*, 187: “vždyť to bude román jako Ottův slovník naučný”.

I sloughed my instability over the course of thirty months of incessant work in the Communist Party and at the Front – save for a petty adventure after our brothers stormed Samara in 1918, and it fell to me to play the sad role of the son of a German settler from Turkestan, idiot from birth, who was separated from his home in his youth and wandered about the world. This I did for two whole months in the Samara gubernia until I was able to make it to Simbirsk. However, it fooled the sly patrols of the Czech armies who were passing through the country at the same time.⁴²

Dunaevsky duly emphasizes the romantic and highly Hašekian quality of this episode, dated precisely from June 1918, of which he gives a more thorough and detailed report.⁴³ This role, which seems to be coming straight from *Švejk*, ultimately asserts, in Hašek's letter, his loyalty to the socialist Revolution. It displays, indeed, the author in a situation where the only way out was to join the troops of the Red Army; they after all knew very well how to employ the author.

It also cannot be denied that the quondam anarchist has felt sympathies from the start towards a Revolution which, to him, threatened German and Austrian imperialisms:

And we will all go hand in hand,
as we sang in the years of Omladina,
like the vanguard of the great revolution,
fighting for all to live in a better world.⁴⁴

In this poem though, as Křížek remarks, Hašek above all retains, from the October Revolution and its aftermath in the geopolitics of the world war, the international impact. Hašek attributes the same role to the October Revolution as to the struggle against Austria-Hungary on the Russian front, in *Švejk in Captivity*: “outside, far off and far away, north of Vienna, some sparkles glowing in the ashes of overlong centuries, which all kinds of articles of law hadn't been able to smother yet, were catching fire”.⁴⁵ This metaphor of blazes in the east and the glimmer of dawn is spun out by Hašek right through his political journey in Russia, including the article *Why are you off to France*:

Off to France, so as not to participate here in the renovation of the Russian Army; so as not to actively participate in the Russian Revolution; so as not to aid the Russian nation to shore up the republic of the Soviets, from which emanate rays of liberation to the entire world, including our own nation.⁴⁶

This metaphor, thus, prepares the setting up of the conventional image of light rising in the east, which is found as well in the proletarian poems of the young Jaroslav Seifert, for example *The Good News*, dedicated to another proletarian poet and critic who had written about *Švejk*, Ivan Olbracht:

⁴² Hašek, *The Secret History*, 249.

⁴³ Dunajevskij, *Zmizení Jaroslava Haška*, 18–24.

⁴⁴ Jaroslav Hašek, “Malý feuilleton“, *Čechoslovan*, 1918, February 17th (Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 138): “A všichni půjdem ruku v ruce, / jak píseň zní k nám z Omladiny let, / jak přední strážé velké revoluce, / všem vybojovat lepší svět”.

⁴⁵ Idem, *Dobryj voják Švejk v zajetí*, 50: “venku, daleko odtud, daleko na sever od Vídně se víc a více rozhořivaly jiskry, doutnající v popelu dlouhých staletí a ne zcela udušené všemožnými paragrafy”.

⁴⁶ Idem, *The Secret History*, 191.

over in the East our eyes discern salvation,
 over in the East, in the cornflower blue far away,
 a crown made of rye is emerging,
 with the hammer and the sickle.⁴⁷

Hašek himself gladly uses Christian – if not sometimes mystical – imagery when he is talking about the Russian Revolution: “We will be the apostles of the new resurrection of the Russian Republic”,⁴⁸ he claims in *Soldiers – Revolutionaries!*, with an exaltation that reminds one of Alexander Blok's *The Twelve* (in an article also dated from April 1918, it was from Ernest Denis, however, that Hašek borrowed, for the Hussites, the image of the “apostles of freedom”).⁴⁹ English translator Charles S. Kraszewski notices with right: “The ‘atheist’ Hašek has found a faith, it seems, and – if words like these are to be taken at face value – the conversion was of Pauline significance”.⁵⁰

In that respect, Hašek's support of the Soviet Revolution appears to be founded less ideologically than poetically. Hašek's writings reveal him as not so much a theorist than a man of action: the engagement in the political action is constant, but in defence of a cause which changes in accordance with the historical situation. Hašek keeps claiming just this: “We are the avant-garde of the rebellion, and the avant-garde must remain here!”.⁵¹ The line “Insurgents are we, the Army of barricades”⁵² is used in two different “serials” (*feuilleton*), on 24 February 1918 in the last issue of *Čechoslovan* and on 2 April 1918 in the second issue of the Soviet review *Průkopník* [*The Pioneer*]. The Revolution provides Hašek with a consistent frame in which to express the moral imperative he acknowledged even before his engagement in the ranks of socialism. But, this is not the only figure one may identify him with. In 1918, Hašek constantly refers to Hussitism, in which he finds the same hypostasis of action. In the last issue of *Čechoslovan*, he had already ended the *Small Column* with a comparison between the struggle against the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Taborite rebellion:

We'll reduce to ashes the imperial armies
 We'll trample the wiles of these proud lines,
 After a hundred years still you'll hear the cry “Forward, Tábor!”
 And the clamour of our weapons amidst the raging fires.⁵³

This comparison becomes clearer as one follows Hašek's political evolution in the spring of 1918, in the article *To the Czech Army. Why are you off to France?*

⁴⁷ Jaroslav Seifert, *Město v slzách* [*City in Tears*], *Dílo Jaroslava Seiferta I* (Praha: Akropolis, 2001), 37: “tam na východě vidí oči spásu, / tam na východě, v dálce barvy chrp, / vychází věnec žitných klasů, / kladivo a srp”.

⁴⁸ Hašek, “Soldiers – Revolutionaries!”, *The Secret History*, 194.

⁴⁹ Idem, “Čeští komunisté století patnáctého“ [*Czech Communists back in the Fifteenth Century*], *Průkopník*, 1918, April 4th (Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 180): “apoštoly svobody”.

⁵⁰ Idem, *The Secret History*, 50.

⁵¹ Ibidem, 191.

⁵² Idem, “Malý feuilleton“, *Čechoslovan*, 1918, February 24th and 1918, April 4th (Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 139, 179).

⁵³ Ibidem, “V prach rozdrtime vojska císařova / a pyšných rodů zašlapeme lest. / ‘Hr! Tábor!’ zazní po stech letech znova, / v požárů dýmu zbrani našich třesk”.

where he arguments against the Nation Council Branch by associating Hussitism and socialism: “We must remain here! Each one of us who knows that we are the direct descendant of the Taborites, the very first socialist communists in Europe, must remain here! And every single Czech knows this!”⁵⁴

Hussitism is however at this point a reference which Hašek shares with Masaryk, of whom he still speaks sympathetically.⁵⁵ His position gets more radical as early as the second issue of *Průkopník*, where he comes back twice to the historical model, first in a new verse *Feuilleton*, then in the article *Czech Communists back to the Fifteenth Century* [*Čeští komunisté století patnáctého*], published under the pseudonym of Dr Vladimír Stanko.

Our father Žižka didn't give orders to Maxa⁵⁶,
He was a communist who beat the lords hollow,
And if today he'd led the revolution,
He would have burned to the ground the whole of the Branch.⁵⁷

In his erudite article, Dr Stanko minimizes the theological and religious significance of the Hussite reform to emphasize, drawing on Ernest Denis, the act of rebellion inherent to the movement: “The importance of Hus lies in his revolt against the authority of dreadful Rome, before which all Europe was trembling [...]. Denis writes that Hus' road to the stake was the most beautiful gesture of his rebellion. His fire went out, but the flames lit along the Rhine have set ablaze, far up to the North, the small land of Bohemia”.⁵⁸ The author also notes the sociopolitical aspects of this revolt, and the comparison with the Russian Revolution is indeed explicit.

Even in the satire *In Command at Bugulma* is Žižka a figure of identification, when the narrator, taking up a position in Bugulma, is welcomed by the town officials:

In his address, [the mayor] said that he trusted that I would have mercy on the town. I must have seen like Žižka at the gates of Prague, especially when I caught sight of the schoolchildren in the crowd.⁵⁹

The same year (1921), Hašek demonstrates, in the humoresque *A Small Misunderstanding*, the same fascination with the theme of armies in campaign and the upheaval that follows in local geopolitical relationships. The narrator is

⁵⁴ Idem, *The Secret History*, 191.

⁵⁵ Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 177.

⁵⁶ Prokop Maxa was the delegate of the Czechoslovakian National Council in Petrograd.

⁵⁷ Jaroslav Hašek, „Malý feuilleton“, *Průkopník*, 1918, April 4th (Křížek, *Jaroslav Hašek v revolučním Rusku*, 180): “Náš tatík Žižka Maxy nebyl vůdce, / byl komunistou, všechny pány bil, / a kdyby dnes byl vůdcem revoluce, / tu ‘Odbočku’ by celou upálil”.

⁵⁸ Idem, “Čeští komunisté století patnáctého”: “Nejde tu o to, proč byl Hus upálen, zdali pro čtrnáctou či devatenáctou thesi. Význam Husův jest v jeho vzpouře proti autoritě onoho hrozného Říma, před kterým se třásla celá Evropa. [...] Denis praví, že Husova cesta na hranici byla nejkrásnějším gestem vzpoury. Hranice jeho uhasla, ale plameny od Rýna zapálily daleko na severu malou českou zem. Trocnovský sedlák-voják Žižka udeřil pěstí na stůl své chalupě a řekl: ‘Hrr na pány!’ A po něm z českého jihu to opakovaly sedlácké pěstě přes Tábor na Prahu, do údolí Ohře, na východ k Orlici”.

⁵⁹ Idem, “In Command at Bugulma”, *The Secret History*, 116.

sent to Omsk by the Siberian revolutionary committee, and has to bring back to Irkutsk general Sun-Fu, a delegate of the Republic of China, so that the representative of the Popular Commission for Foreign Affairs may negotiate with him a deal on the frontiers of Soviet Russia with Mongolia and China. On his way to Urga, he is joined by local populations, Buryats, Mongols etc. so that he eventually arrives in Urga accompanied by thirty thousand men.

The personal experience of Hašek's engagement in the Red Army in Siberia is combined here, humoristically, with a historical picture of epic dimensions. The ambition to paint a heroic epic is something very new about the post-war *Švejk*: "Great times call for great men",⁶⁰ as the novel's introduction now announces. The afterword again considers this project, and concludes about the novel: "It is a historical picture of a certain period of time".⁶¹ The heroicomic indeed is always about setting the individual's smallness against the greatness of the times. But, history has replaced the personal point of view which directed the citing of the wanted notice as an introduction to *Švejk in Captivity*. Similarly, the attribution to the characters of the novel of autobiographical traits now goes without any of the interventions of the homodiegetic narrator, who set himself as an eyewitness to mention that he was at the war with *Švejk*: "I saw with my own eyes Biegler, the cadet, start to cry during one such conversation, and Major Wenzel pat him on the shoulder".⁶²

The abandonment of a subjective viewpoint on the action may be, after all, an influence of historical materialism on a work of fiction which, contrary to Hašek's propaganda writings, has little recourse to the terminology of Marxism-Leninism. That Hašek would now forfeit the nationalist rhetoric of the early years of his engagement against Austria was also in keeping with revolutionary internationalism; such an evolution may have been prompted by his opposition to the representatives of the Czechoslovakian Republic in the Legion. However, what came first and foremost was revolutionary action, which condemned the armistice, officially ending the first worldwide conflict, to be nothing more than a parody of peace, as long as social injustice endured: "Mír je na papíře". Peace is only on paper.⁶³

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⁶⁰ Idem, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, 1.

⁶¹ Ibidem, 214.

⁶² Idem, *Dobry voják Švejk v zajetí*, 87–88: "Sám jsem viděl na vlastní oči, jak kadet Biegler se dal při takové rozmluvě s ním do pláče a jak mu major Wenzl poklepal na rameno".

⁶³ Idem, *The Secret History*, 194.

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A WAR POET IN ABSENTIA:
THE YEAR 1918 IN JAROSLAV HAŠEK'S LITERARY OUTPUT

Summary

This article purports to give an outline of the major evolutions in Hašek's literary output around the year 1918, a year that saw not only the end of the world war, but also, for the writer himself, the start of the Russian civil war. The Russian Revolution meant for Hašek, as he wrote in 1918, the transition from a "war between States" – or "war between Empires" – to a "war of the proletariat against capitalism". The lack of safe information about Hašek's biography during this short, yet crucial, period of his life does not still prevent us from retracing the repercussions of the great events of 1918 on the east front – the fall of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the founding myth of the Czechoslovakian Legion and the beginnings of the Soviet Union – in the literary works of an author who has been taxed for being a renegade to each of the three aforementioned causes. The particular issue of *Švejk's* maturation during the war may help us to put the year 1918 into a perspective with the end (though, only to some extent) of the conflicts and the beginning (however protracted) of the post-war period. Whereas the novel was about the Good Soldier's bursting into the conflict, this article observes Hašek himself, walking out of the world war.

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