



The Concept of War: Jaroslav Hašek's the Good Soldier Švejk and James Jones's the Thin Red Line a Comparative Study

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Abstract: *The issue of war concept is common in the existing literature, yet it is controversial in this field. Many studies approach this topic extensively. However, approaching this topic in the novels of The Good Soldier Švejk and The Thin Red Line is not done yet. This paper includes the First World War in Czech Bohemia through The Good Soldier Švejk and World War II on Guadalcanal Island through The Thin Red Line. The study is significant due to applying the war concept for the first time to the selected texts. The two novels were compared through irony, sacrifice, and madness. The comparison includes the protagonist Švejk through the novel, The good soldier Švejk. While for the novel The Thin Red Line, there is more than one character, such as Witt and Welch. The study concludes that each work by each author has a historical storyline that depicts the misery caused by war and the destruction it causes to humanity.*

Keywords: *The Good Soldier Švejk, The Thin Red Line, War, Sacrifice, Madness.*

Introduction

War is a conflict between certain parties, which can be between states or within the state by force of arms, whether by land, air, or sea (Johan, 1981). Human struggle and conflict use war metaphorically to achieve political, economic, religious, and geographical ambitions. Since politics has ambitions for power and the administration of public affairs, politics is considered the main source of wars. The convergence of politics and wars can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Economic, religious, and geographic ambitions come after politics, as they have implications for wars in general (Sun, 2010, p.8).

The origins of war novels go back to the Middle Ages and classic periods such as the ancient English literature sagas Arthur. Epics preserve the history and myths of the various conflicts between societies. The anti-war narratives are influenced by Dante's portrayal of Hell in Inferno and John Milton's novel, which depicts heaven in Paradise Lost. War is an important topic in early and contemporary Western literature. Many wars inspired the Romans and the Greeks in epic poetry, historical accounts, and drama. Heracles is an example who played a large role in the Trojan War in Western literature, to the First and Second World Wars, as it greatly influenced the course of Western literature. Western literature is often dominated by moral, psychological, and social functions, sometimes simultaneously (Brosman, 2015, pp. 85-86).

Introduction to Czech Literature, a Historical Survey

World War I hastened the introduction of a new philosophy in Czech literature in Bohemia. A process against moral decay and passivity in philosophy reached a climax due to the influence of the

War on faith in the Czech nation. The subjectivity and individuality that gave birth to excessive selfishness to express themselves in an arrogance like Barbey d'Aurevilly or the bitter irony of Oscar Wilde. The First World War led to the revival of the Czech literary impulses forward after they were behind foreign currents. The spirit of the national unity of the Czech Republic has awakened, and the moral concept is with it as well. At the same time, they suffer from several fronts under the trenches, frustrated and filled with despair. It was also referred to and explained by Jaroslav in the novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*. The Czechs had to pretend to defend the Austro-Hungarian Empire with the double-headed eagle symbol. The War forced Czech writers down to the patriotic roots of self-realization and self-determination.

Literary works are characterized by a spiritual approach, which raises the instinct and vitality above the culture of the heart and mind. The human being has lost his inner integrity and is divided into several personalities who fight and confront themselves, each with mysterious powers. A spontaneous denial of war, brutality, and absurdity marks major Czech literary works. Likewise, the animal nature of the human being and desperate nihilism are among the topics of Czech literature. The First World War is a fundamental turning point in the Czech spiritual life. A point to which Czech writers have always referred, under the influence of the war, they focused on certain layers of Czech society that contributed to the diversity of form and literary subject. Czech writers eagerly hope for cultural and political liberation to reconnect with the world, especially Western Christian culture. The impact of the war on Czech literature was immense, as it eased social barriers as the commoner became part of the higher units. The war awakened a new class called the proletariat, a soldier who saw much terror, vitality, and instinct in war. The First World War brought about a new wave in the traditional expressionist form where the world appears to the expressionists as boundless, and chaos does not stop growing. The world turned into terror on one side and the desire for survival on the other. (George, 1960, pp.153-155)

Introduction to American Literature, a Historical Survey

On the other hand, American novels in the Second World War dealt with the issue of courage and confronting fear in wars, such as Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* in 1961. Many other accounts describe the heroics of young soldiers on the battlefields. Literary works deal with personal and social problems, especially in the context of identities, such as a Latino soldier and another Jew, as in Norman Mailer's 1948 novel *The Naked and the Dead*. The battle becomes a mental battle for the soldiers rather than with the enemy. The consumption of war novels decreased after the American-Vietnamese war because of the American global policies dealing with wars and crises. Long after the American-Vietnamese War, he began to take up war fiction again, as it coincided with World War II. The focus is on the soldiers' courage in the fighting, their sacrifices, and their horror in the war.

The Second World War has many novels and memoirs like Jesse Gray and James Jones that describe their harrowing experience and the stories of soldiers with them in the war. The diversity of purposes dealt with in war literature, for example, some of which are mainly author-specific, others social, with the aim of persuasion. Also, some authors deal with society, both the writer and society, in one novel. War Writing is an expression of the individual writer as it concerns a psychological component. It is also a means of communicating with individuals that express collective values with ethical and social elements. The authors of war novels write for their companions on the battlefields, whether alive or dead, for those who come after them to take the lessons, wisdom, and experience that the soldiers were exposed to during their journey in the war. Authors document to an unknown audience whose writing contains important values and lessons (Brosman,2015: 86-87).

Jaroslav Hašek

Hašek is a Czech writer and journalist best known for his satirical and humorous writings, and he was born in 1883 in Bohemia. Hašek's novel, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, is one of his most famous and successful novels. The novel has been translated into over 60 languages and is the most translated in Czech literary history. Hašek's family is a farmer with roots in Medlovary, Bohemia; his father died early from alcohol poisoning. Because of poverty, he and his family were forced to move

a lot until the number of times they moved was fifteen. His brother, Bohoslav, is jealous of him, but their relationship has turned out well over time. Hašek has a heart defect called thyroid arrest. At the age of eleven, he got to know a sailor with a notorious personality which influenced his hashik personality, especially with women. In 1897, he participated in the riots in Prague against the German Nazis, where he was arrested. He seemed to make money in journalism and literature, where he met the Czech Ancarius. Later he became editor of the anarchist magazine Komuna in 1907, to be imprisoned for a short period because of his work. He was captured by the Russians to be recruited into the Czechoslovak Legion against the Austrians. In 1920, he was subjected to a failed assassination attempt due to his membership in the Soviet city (Bubenlk,1985, pp.1-3).

The Good Soldier Švejk

The novel begins with the news of the assassination of the Austrian heir, where a woman tells Švejk about the assassination, she says “And so they have killed our Ferdinand” (Hašek, 1974, p.3). That would precipitate the First World War in 1914. Švejk appears in public more than once to show his enthusiasm for the service of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor in a way that has several interpretations. One of these explanations is that he pretends to be an idiot or is an idiot and does not understand what he is saying. He is imprisoned several times for speaking about the emperor, which seems to others a mockery. A member of the State Police, Bretschneider watches Švejk always and almost every time he is arrested. Švejk is sent to prison to be examined by several doctors; they decide that Švejk is mentally ill, and he is transferred to the military hospital for mental illness.

He is released and deported to Prague to join the Austro-Hungarian army. Meanwhile, Švejk became famous for his comic words about the emperor and the army. He meets the Reverend Otto Katz, who is losing Švejk’s efforts because of his betting on cards, to First Oberleutnant Lukáš to become Švejk Batman for Oberleutnant Lukáš. Švejk is trying to go to Bodunice on foot after he misses the train heading from Bohemia to Bodunice. He is arrested on the way as a spy to go to his military regiment. Later, the regiment is transferred from the regiment to the town of Bruck a der Leith, located between Austria and Hungary, where relations are tense between them. Švejk is arrested again on the eastern side in the direction of Galisa, but this time a suspected Russian escapee. The novel ends, and the protagonist Švejk does not fight in a battle or a trench. The novel is not considered complete due to the death of the author Jaroslav Hašek. Švejk was expected to participate in the battles due to the author Hašek’s background in the struggle against the Austro-Hungarian Empire for the Czech country.

James Jones

Jones is an American novelist born in 1921 in Robinson, Illinois. At seventeen, he joined the US Army in the 25th Infantry Division. He served before and after World War II in Huawei and the Battle of the Guadalcanal campaign. Jones witnessed several battles, such as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. He received the National Book Award for his novel From Here to Eternity in 1952. The 1962 novel The Thin Red Line reflects Jones’ experience in combat. Jones is the father of two children, his daughter Kylie Jones, author of the book A Soldier’s Daughter Never Cries, which narrates the life of Jones in Paris in the year 1960. Jones has considered one of the prominent figures in his family, as well as his family, is one of the prominent families because they discovered oil on their farm.

Depression is common in the Jones family, as his grandfather lost his fortune due to his equity investment. This affected his parents, his father was suffering from heavy drinking of alcohol, and his mother had diabetes, as she suffered from excessive weight gain. In his writings on his personal war experiences, Jones found the space he needed. Jones lived an active childhood and did little joining in team sports. His excellence in the English language in school gave him the motivation to write. While growing up, Jones’ father underestimated him because he was in the US Army in World War One. Jones was influenced by his father’s cruel treatment of that anger within him in his writings on the military. After joining the army, he wrote, translating all his emotions that had to be

carried out. Jones's writings immortalize one of the best war novelists of his time in an unorthodox style of writing (Marie, 2002, pp.11-12).

The Thin Red Line

It is a novel by James Jones about World War II of soldiers in the C-for-Charlie Company, documenting the battle between the Americans and the Japanese on the island of Guadalcanal. Jones tells the events of his experience through several soldiers. Witt is daring and disagrees with bosses with his thoughts and opinions. He hates war and fighting and loves life and always advises Charlie about changing himself. Edward Welch is a Senior Sergeant classified as fighting and rushing insane during battle. He was considered a loyal friend who enlisted in C-for-Charlie for economic reasons during the Depression. Sergeant Storm runs C-for-Charlie's inability to remain rational in company and battle.

The brutal treatment of the Japanese soldiers burdens his conscience. John Bell is a former officer brought back into the army with the rank of a soldier who is obsessed with his wife and always fantasizes about her. His wife requests a divorce during the war, which destroys him internally. James Stein loses the battle because of his fear and knowledge that soldiers will be killed if they attack because of the superiority of the Japanese. Captain Brass replaces him, considered the most violent and aggressive in the fighting, but without success. The narration describes the brutal, bloody, and terrifying soldiers experienced on the battlefield (Morrison, 1999, p.35).

Irony

The irony, evident in the novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*, repeats the phrases of Victory for the Austrian Emperor. The first meeting brought together Švejk and Katz in the church. Katz was drunk while he was at the priest's house. The irony is that the priest was drunk in the church. Švejk's strong quotes are ridiculous and have underlying messages. It sarcastically expresses the Austro-Hungarian empire and its dictatorship. Hašek's manner of dealing with the despotic ruler with sarcasm reveals the injustice the Czechs were subjected to in the First World War at the hands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Švejk has been arrested several times and is being returned because the war is inevitable. Ahmed always sarcastically said the longevity and victory of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor, which makes the people around him laugh, as in this quote, "God save our Franz Joseph! We shall win this war!" (Hasek, 1973, p.43).

Jones's novel, *The Thin Red Line*, mocks the decisions of the commanders and the army itself. The leaders claim patriotism, but at the same time, they throw young soldiers into the battlefields for their inevitable death. They are not interested in the soldiers or their families. All they care about is victory and honorary medals. Discipline and his claim only affect soldiers, not commanders who enjoy all kinds of comfort. Whoever sacrifices is the soldier, and the credit goes to the commanders. Soldiers do not have their fate but rather are tools in the hands of politicians and leaders. There is a clear mockery in the narration of decisions that led to many soldiers' deaths.

Suffering

The suffering of the soldiers in the novel *The Thin Red Line* is countless. The lack of water during the battle exhausted the soldiers and was the reason for losing soldiers. Some soldiers contracted malaria, including Welch, who refused to evacuate. Psychological suffering is the most common factor among soldiers. Many of them contemplate the death they could face at any moment. The aspect that contributed most of the soldiers' moments is dread and anxiety. The author suffered from the horrors of terror in the battle, emotionally and psychologically, translating that into the novel. The suffering of the soldiers was not limited to the enemy only but to the leaders who only cared about themselves. Many soldiers suffer from loneliness and insecurity. The human spirit that no longer discerns their loss of humanity due to killing and corpses is enough to bring suffering and pain to most of them.

In the novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*, suffering is personal and societal. Švejk suffered greatly from the dictatorial Austro-Hungarian regime. Many times he is caught and treated like a redneck that is

treated cruelly. Švejk suffers from rheumatism, and no one pays any attention to him. Several times he was accused of treason or desertion from the army, but he was neither a fugitive nor a traitor. Despite his constant suffering from the brutal treatment of him by the authorities, he was always smiling. Societally, the Czechs suffered greatly because of the war and the Austro-Hungarian emperor, as they suffered from the absence of their identity and right to self-determination. Bringing them into a war in which they have neither power nor strength. There is a lack of respect for the Czech identity or individual worker who suffers marginalization.

Madness

The thin Red Line novel deals with madness through soldiers. Murder and seeing dead bodies have negative aspects on the minds of soldiers. Most of them experienced hallucinations and were shocked. A normal human being cannot withstand the tremendous stress on the battlefield, where many fighters suffer from the after-effects of the fight, where hallucinations lead to a loss of control of the mind. Some soldiers commit suicide, become homeless, or even lose their memory. When a person loses his humanity, the consequences are dire, as in the case of Welch, who lost his mind. Welch could not bear the loss of his friend Witt, who had always urged him to review himself and that he still believed in him. In his novel, Jones tells us that a fine line between reason and madness embodies the novel as a whole “There’s only a thin red line between the sane and the mad” (Cull, 1999, p. 150).

As for the novel, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, madness was the share of the protagonist. When he has obvious mental problems or mental retardation, often the other characters describe them as crazy, but they smile invariably. The author gives space to the reader's imagination and decides whether he is crazy. He took many doses of medication in the military hospital for mental illness. Perhaps the author coined the madness of Švejk to speak freely of the Austro-Hungarian emperors and authorities. Švejk’s rational health remains a secret that no one knows except the author.

Conclusion

The two novels, *The Good Soldier Švejk* and *The Thin Red Line* have a common characteristic, which is to show the evils of war. At first, by irony, Švejk used irony to criticize the emperor and the army. Many characters in the thin red line used irony to criticize the commanders and the army, one of them Witt. Most of the characters in the two novels have suffered greatly from war to different degrees. As for madness, it was the share of Švejk, the protagonist of *The Good Soldier Švejk*. The other side of *The Thin Red Line* novel, Madness, struck several soldiers, including Welch. Finally, both authors documented a historical plot for each novel that illustrates the suffering of wars and their devastation on humanity.

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