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The seeds of my thesis “Repression, Literature, and the Growth and Metamorphosis of Czech National Identity in the 20th Century” were sown in March of 2007, when I spent ten days in Prague with my parents. While I was there, I bought Jaroslav Hasek’s *The Good Soldier Svejk*, Bohumil Hrabal’s *I Served the King of England*, and Jan Neruda’s *Prague Tales*. The trip and novels opened my eyes to the experience of the Czech people in the 20th Century, subjected to foreign occupation after foreign occupation throughout the World Wars and the rise of the USSR, while attempting to form national identity.

I became a double major in Comparative Literature and History precisely because of the way the aforementioned literature encapsulated and enlivened history in my eyes. My curiosity grew, and I enrolled in Dr. Jerzak’s course in Eastern and Central European Literature, where I encountered Hrabal’s *Closely Watched Trains*. The darkly comedic characters of Hrabal’s novels indicated a trend in Czech literature beginning with Hasek’s *The Good Soldier Svejk*, a comedy about the Czechs under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These were stories of “accidental heroes” of Czech nationalism who embraced their nationality not by intrinsic values or feeling, but by some external pressure, as if by accident. Yet, I knew little to nothing about the actual history of the former Czechoslovakia and its 20th Century experiences to support this.

I approached Dr. John Morrow Jr. in the History department about researching the development of a national identity in Czechoslovakia during the 20th Century. He agreed to sponsor my historical research and encouraged me to incorporate the works of literature I had encountered as relevant.

My first foray into research was with a list of books that Dr. Morrow had suggested. I was armed with this list when I began the summer language immersion program at Indiana University. I collected the call numbers of the titles I was looking for but found that every work lining the shelves was written in an incomprehensible language. I don't speak Czech. I decided the best method would be to explore any titles English I could find. I found two of my most valuable books this way, H. Louis Rees's *The Czechs During World War I: The Path to Independence* and Josef Koudelka's photographic collection of the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968.

My readings confirmed my hypothesis that the Czech move for independence happened almost accidentally. A combination of external events, including economic pressures discussed in Rees, created a defiant national group, eager for rights and the promise of self-rule. Photographs of swastikas painted on Russian tanks in Koudelka's work indicated that over 50 years later, Czech identity was defined in a German power context, though the enemy of Czech independence in 1968 was the Soviet Union.

Encouraged by these substantiating sources, I began to explore more specific venues. Even though I was 582 miles from Athens, the Galileo password allowed me to access the University of Georgia Library system. Unable to read Czech primary sources, I chose to search the ProQuest historical files of the *New York Times* for contemporary international perspective on events in Czechoslovakia. Features including a multiple article expose on the ethnic diversity splitting the Austrian Empire highlighted international awareness of the Czechoslovak unhappiness added to my understanding of the conditions in which the newly forming and formed country emerged.

The use of online journals was instrumental in expanding my knowledge of theoretical concepts of the progression of Czech history. I primarily used JSTOR and EbscoHost. The journals *History and Theory* and *Central Europe* were especially useful, revealing reviews on topics such as varied philosophies of Czech history. After meeting with librarian Diane Trap, I learned many other methods of utilizing historical journals. By searching in the subject category “History,” she showed me that Galileo highlights relevant journals such as *Historical Abstracts* and the *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies*. With the microfiche available in the library of the *Digital National Security Archive*, Ms. Trap also explained to me a valuable database of primary source of international radio broadcasts that had been translated into English.

When I returned to Georgia my transition to the University of Georgia Library was seamless. I found almost all of the books Dr. Morrow had recommended, and began reading a series of essays (*Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe 1918-1948*). The essays were too specific for broader focus of my research, and provided little significant information on the national move for independence. This experience, although not directly contributory to my paper itself, helped me determine the types of sources useful for my research.

Soon into my preliminary readings, I began searching through the books I was reading for sources these authors had used to expand my variety of sources beyond the recommended list to better substantiate and confirm my understanding of the Czech national movement. Some of the books were not available in the Georgia libraries. Ms. Trap informed me that Georgia has a inter-library loan system, where within days, I could easily request and receive books from a network of universities with GIL Express or Interlibrary Loan. While some of the books were

entirely academic in nature, others, like Peter Demetz's *Prague in Danger*, included a narrative component of personal experience.

Through these research methods, I was able to place literature into the scheme of Czech history. Writers and literary figures of 20th Century Czechoslovakia became beacons of cultural and national identity. Two recent articles in the *New York Times* framed the dichotomy of modern attitudes towards the Czech identity, frustration with the muted lack of overt resistance and absence of a strong Czech identity, and pride over perseverance a tradition of "comedies of defiance" in literature. Through the practice of independent library research I was able to trace the experience of a small nation forced to struggle for existence and the importance of literature to the Czech people, also incorporate the marriage of two codependent fields, Literature and History.

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ABSTRACT

ILANA MCQUINN

Repression, Literature, and the Growth and Metamorphosis of Czech National Identity in the 20th Century

(Under the Direction of DR. JOHN MORROW, JR.)

Czechoslovakia in the 20th Century followed a tumultuous path that led it to freedom from the three-hundred year yoke of the Habsburg Empire, an existence as a small democratic nation surrounded by dictatorship, Nazi occupation twenty short years later, and finally total and complete de-individualization under Soviet Communism. The Czechs were pushed to independence by frustration with a protracted existence as the “other,” or the marginalized minority nation not in power, in the German dominated Habsburg Empire. A large component of the formation of Czech identity depended on linguistic differences and the contrast with the German, and as such struggled to develop an identity independent of the crutch of the “other.” Some have argued that the muted method of resistance that the Czechs employed through the majority of the Nazi and Communist control of Czechoslovakia weakened the Czech claim to a unified identity as a people. The ironic comedies of Jaroslav Hašek and Bohumil Hrabal, however, exemplify how crucial intellectual and literary figures became for solidifying the Czech national identity. This paper examines the manner in which Czech culture and national identity developed in the 20th Century with special attention to *The Good Soldier Švejk*, *Closely Watched Trains*, and *Too Loud a Solitude* from the repressive periods of World War I, World War II, and Communist control.

INDEX WORDS: Czechoslovakia, Czech, Nationalism, World War I, Habsburg Empire World War II, Munich Conference, Normalization, Prague Spring, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, *Closely Watched Trains*, *Too Loud a Solitude*, Bohumil Hrabal, Josef Koudelka, Invasion of Czechoslovakia