

THE AUTHENTICITY OF WAR THEMES IN LITERATURE AND FILM

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ABSTRACT: The study analyses the authenticity of literary and film works. The study takes as its starting point literary and film works produced during the second wave of war-themed artistic production. This wave dates back to the second half of the 1950s, with the first period characterised by works such as *Kronika* [Chronicle] by Peter Jilemnický. These works present a one-sided view of the war, i.e. on the one hand, the Germans are depicted as representatives of evil, on the other, there are only positive heroes (partisans, Red Army soldiers, insurgents). The second wave raises the question of whether even soldiers with positive qualities have faults; they sometimes fail as humans, but ultimately they stand on the side of good. Such works are most convincing when they are authentic and created by authors and artists who were themselves active participants in the fighting.

KEYWORDS: Authenticity. War. Literature. Film. Analysis.

This study examines the authenticity of literary and cinematic representations of war. It begins with a corpus of literary and film works produced during the second wave of war-themed production, which emerged in the latter half of the 1950s. The first phase of post-war representation, exemplified by works such as Peter Jilemnický's *Chronicle*, tended to present an ideologically unambiguous interpretation of the conflict. Within this framework, Germans were depicted exclusively as embodiments of evil, while the opposing side consisted entirely of morally exemplary protagonists, including partisans, Red Army soldiers, and participants in the Slovak National Uprising. The second wave of war literature and cinema introduced a more nuanced and psychologically complex perspective. It acknowledged that even protagonists aligned with the forces of justice possess human flaws and are susceptible to moral failure, while ultimately remaining committed to the ideals of resistance, progress, and the common good. The persuasive power of these works derives largely from their authenticity, particularly when they are created by writers and filmmakers who participated directly in wartime combat. There is a fundamental distinction between reading about war or listening to mediated accounts of it and encountering representations of individuals who were exposed to the dangers of war on the front lines, witnessed the deaths of their comrades, or were themselves compelled to kill, shoot, and destroy the enemy.

In prose fiction and film, narrative may be grounded either in authentic experience or in experiences mediated through reading and cinematic reception. The most artistically compelling works about war often stem from the authors' or directors' lived experience, as demonstrated by the novels, novellas, and films of Slovak artists who not only witnessed the war but also took an active part in its events, particularly as members of the Slovak National Uprising or the partisan resistance. These formative experiences became, whether directly or indirectly, the thematic basis or creative impulse behind their war-related works and, subsequently, their film adaptations. This authenticity can be examined through the analysis of selected artistic achievements: Ladislav Mňačko's novel *Smrť sa volá Engelchen* [Death Is Called Engelchen] (1959) and its film adaptation (1963); Peter Karvaš's drama *Polnočná omša* [Midnight Mass] (1960) and its film adaptation (1962); and Dominik Tatarka's novella *Kohútik v agónii* [The Rooster in Agony] (1959).

BLOODY MASSACRES ON THE MORAVIAN PLATEAUS

Ladislav Mňačko's *Death Is Called Engelchen* (1959) is widely regarded as one of the most important Slovak war novels of the 1950s and 1960s. Four years after its publication, it was adapted for the screen by the acclaimed directing duo Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos. Set in Moravia, the narrative centres on the hamlet of Ploština, with Vizovice, Zlín, and Vsetín serving as key locations in the novel's depiction of partisan resistance and the closing months of the Second World War. The novel's protagonist and first-person narrator is Voloda, who functions as the author's alter ego. Like Ladislav Mňačko himself, Voloda is a partisan who fought near Ploština. Although the protagonist is Czech by origin (specifically Moravian), he is nicknamed "Voloda" by the Soviet soldiers who joined the partisan struggle against the German forces. In the film adaptation, however, the character is renamed Pavel, a change that reflects a substitution during adaptation. The novel's authenticity derives from the author's direct participation in the partisan resistance. Mňačko drew upon his firsthand experience of combat operations, including guerrilla actions against German forces, acts of sabotage, interrogations, and executions. What, then, constitutes the novel's distinctive significance? The protagonist, confined to a hospital bed, is tormented by guilt. His partisan unit had withdrawn from the village of Ploština, where the inhabitants had provided the fighters with food, shelter, and other support. Shortly after the partisans' departure, a German Jagdkommando (punitive unit) entered the village, burned eight of its ten houses, and confined the men in the burning buildings, where they perished. In total, twenty-four villagers were burned alive, three were executed, and one was tortured to death. These events are historically documented. The perpetrators subsequently carried out a similar massacre in the nearby village of Prlov, where twenty-one people were killed. Mňačko's novel, however, focuses exclusively on the destruction of Ploština. Today, a large memorial commemorates the victims at Ploština, and a plaque bearing the names of all the sacrifices is placed in front of the village church. As the novel is rooted in a documented historical event, it is worth noting that the Jagdkommando responsible for the massacre was trained in Slovakia, first in Sekule near Malacky and then in Trenčianske Teplice. From there, the unit was deployed to Vizovice, approximately 15 kilometres from the hamlet of Ploština in the Kopanica region. In the novel, the principal figure behind these punitive operations is Otto Skorzeny (1908 – 1975), one of the Third Reich's most prominent special operations commanders. Entrusted by Hitler with several high-profile missions—including the capture of Benito Mussolini from Gran Sasso, the abduction of Miklós Horthy Jr. in Budapest, and the suppression of resistance movements in Nazi-occupied territories—Skorzeny is depicted as directing the anti-partisan campaign in Moravia. One of the novel's chapters bears his name, underscoring his significance within the narrative. As Ploština lay within German-occupied Czech territory, two collaborators deserted the partisan group and reported its presence to the German authorities. A punitive unit subsequently set out from Vizovice under the command of Kurt Werner Tutter (1909 – 1983). Tutter, who was of German origin and came from Prague, was fluent in Czech but notorious for his exceptional brutality. In the novel, he is identified as the eponymous Engelchen. The title derives from the Nazi practice of using euphemisms to describe their planned massacres. Tutter thus becomes the ironic embodiment of the "little angel" of the title. After the war, he was brought to trial. However, he gradually came to the attention of the Czechoslovak State Security, which sought to recruit him as an informant; by the time Mňačko's novel was published in 1959, he was reportedly cooperating with the service. He lived to an advanced age and became a respected citizen of the Bavarian town of Kötzing, where, as an Evangelical, he served his church in perfect peace. The two collaborators, Oldřich Baťa and František Machů, also appear in the novel under their real names. After joining the partisan unit, they are interrogated. However, they later

manage to escape and provide the German authorities with detailed information about the partisans' activities and whereabouts. Following the war, both men were executed. Having outlined the historical foundations of the novel, we may now examine how the author constructs a fictional narrative upon this factual framework.

During the battle for the town, Volod̑a sustains a gunshot wound to the spine that leaves him paralysed. Because the spinal cord has not been irreparably damaged, there remains hope that, with Dr Brázda's care, he will eventually regain the ability to walk. The hospital setting consequently provides the novel's narrative frame: while undergoing treatment, Volod̑a gradually recounts to the nurse Eliška, through retrospective narration, the events that unfolded in Ploština. Alongside its depiction of partisan warfare and life within the resistance movement, the novel devotes considerable attention to the love relationship between the protagonist and Marta, a Jewish woman. Although the author was not of Jewish origin, he maintained a deep personal affinity for the Jewish community. After the Second World War, he married a Jewish woman, Hedviga, under circumstances that have never been fully clarified. Although she was well known within Mňačko's circle of friends, none of his contemporaries could later explain where or how the couple first met (Leikert 2008, 70 – 73). One account holds that the couple met in a concentration camp, where Mňačko spent a significant period before joining the partisan resistance. Their marriage ended in the late 1960s. He subsequently married Eva, the daughter of the Slovak poet Ivan Krasko, and with her, he lived in exile in Austria. Mňačko's enduring sympathy for the Jews is evident throughout his literary work. He also attended the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, and his reportage on this internationally significant event was later published in the book *Ja, Adolf Eichmann...* [I, Adolf Eichmann...] (1961). In the opening chapter, *Moja súkromná žaloba* [My Private Indictment], he lists by name several individuals he had known personally who became victims of the Holocaust (Mňačko 1961, 5 – 6). It is, therefore, unsurprising that he was able to create such a compelling and psychologically convincing Jewish character.

We may argue that Marta is perhaps the most tragic female character in Slovak literature. She is, to some extent, modelled on Mata Hari, the First World War spy who was executed for passing intelligence to both the French and the Germans. During a partisan operation in Zlín, Volod̑a encounters Marta, who protects him, and the two soon embark on a passionate love affair that includes a sexual relationship. At this stage, however, Volod̑a is unaware that Marta also maintains intimate relationships with German officers to obtain valuable military information. She subsequently passes this information to the partisan command in Ploština, enabling the resistance fighters to carry out sabotage operations behind enemy lines. Although this narrative strand is fictional, Mňačko integrates it convincingly into the novel's historically grounded framework.

Marta later visits Volod̑a in the military hospital to bid him farewell, saying she is leaving for Canada, where her brother lives. Burdened by guilt, she believes she must leave her homeland behind. Her inner conflict is expressed in the following passage: “*Yes, and one day, when you no longer feel as miserable as I do now, you'll suddenly shout at me—where! Oh, don't tell me you won't; you know yourself that it could happen. And then what? Everything will come back again*” (Mňačko 1959, 39).

At the end of the novel, when Volod̑a can walk with crutches, an officer in an American uniform arrives and introduces himself as Marta's brother. He reveals that Marta never left for Canada; instead, she took her own life by overdosing on morphine (ibid., 249). On the one hand, Volod̑a's gradual physical recovery symbolises his return to life: having regained mobility, he will soon be able to walk unaided. On the other hand, Marta's death marks the irrevocable loss of his great love. The novel closes with Volod̑a's resolve to seek out Engelchen.

Death Is Called Engelchen was adapted for the screen by the directing partnership of Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos. Kadár was of Hungarian Jewish origin, while Klos was a native of Moravia. Their

collaboration proved exceptionally successful; two years later, they directed *Obchod na korze* [The Shop on Main Street] (1965), which became the first Czechoslovak film to receive the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Their adaptation of Mňačko's novel immediately preceded this internationally acclaimed achievement and may be regarded as one of the two finest accomplishments of their joint cinematic career. The film adaptation introduces several notable changes. Most significantly, it adopts a less overtly pro-Soviet perspective than the novel and does not glorify Soviet achievements. Nevertheless, the film opens with an assault on a manor house on the outskirts of Zlín, where Pavel and a Soviet soldier fight side by side to clear the building of German troops. As the Germans retreat, one of them fires a final shot that wounds Pavel. This injury leads to his hospitalisation. Marta appears in a hallway inside the house, but in the film, she does not leave for Canada.

Václav Macek, in his monograph on Ján Kadár, argues that the directors created a film that calls into question conventional notions of wartime heroism; moreover, these war veterans did not always have a clear understanding of the political climate during the trials of the 1950s (Macek 2008, 128 – 129). Unfortunately, this also applies to Mňačko himself. During the trial of Viliam Žingor and his co-defendants, Mňačko adopted a completely erroneous stance, a decision he regretted for the rest of his life. On 18 December 1950, Viliam Žingor, together with Samuel Bibza and Ladislav Nosák, was executed following a politically motivated trial.

Mňačko sought to come to terms with his moral failure in the 1950s primarily through his collection *Oneskorené reportáže* [Belated Reports] (1963) in which he exposes the insidious tactics used to stage these show trials. He likewise portrayed the inhuman face of socialist ideology in practice in his book *Kde končia prašné cesty* [Where the Dusty Roads End] (1962). The emergence of the Communist functionary and his increasingly obsessive determination to retain political power became the central theme of the novel *Ako chutí moc* [The Taste of Power] (1968). Published during the Prague Spring, the novel attracted considerable public attention because its content resonated strongly with the period's political and intellectual climate. Miloslav Vojtech aptly characterised it as the “novel-pamphlet” (Mikula et al. 2005, 391).

CHRISTMAS EVE ENDS IN AN EXECUTION

Another example is Peter Karvaš's play *Polnočná omša* [Midnight Mass] (1960). Following the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising, Karvaš worked for the Free Slovak Radio, undoubtedly influenced by the Nazi persecution of his parents, who are believed to have perished in the massacre in Nemecká. These traumatic experiences became, either directly or indirectly, the thematic basis and creative impulse for his works dealing with the Second World War. Although Karvaš never obtained definitive information about the circumstances of his parents' deaths, he maintained that his father, a physician, voluntarily joined his mother, thereby consciously accepting their shared tragic fate. Karvaš describes these events as follows: “In 1941, he was forbidden to treat patients; within a short time, half a dozen delegations arrived at the county and district offices with signed petitions from the nearest villages. In 1944, after the Uprising, he and my mother were imprisoned in the county jail. On the night of the third or fourth of December, he was offered the opportunity to escape, but he refused because my mother was no longer able to walk. On an unknown day, they were taken to an unknown place—most likely to Nemecká on 5 December, where they were probably executed at the lime kiln, their bodies probably burned, and their ashes probably scattered into a stream” (Karvaš 1981, 45).

Although Karvaš did not take part directly in the fighting during the Uprising, he endured many of the war's hardships as a Jew. He lost both of his parents: his father, a physician devoted

to serving the local community, and his mother, the daughter of the painter Dominik Skutecký and herself an accomplished artist. They were deported by the occupying authorities, and Karvaš never learned the precise circumstances of their deaths. Another personal tragedy struck him several years after the successful stage premiere and film adaptation of *Midnight Mass*. His son took his own life. *Midnight Mass* was written during the second wave of Slovak literary works with war themes. Like many works of this period, it foregrounds the Slovak National Uprising. However, unlike large-scale narratives centred on military operations, Karvaš sets the drama in a small provincial town and a single family household.

Characters:

Parents: Valentín Kubiš and Vilma Kubišová – Jozef Kroner and Hana Meličková.

Their children: Marián (guardsman) – Ďurko (partisan) – Karol Machata and Ivan Mistrik, Angela (aryanizer) – Margit Bara – her husband Paľo (a Russophile) – Ladislav Chudík.

Wehrmacht Lieutenant Brecker – Hannjo Hasse.

Nurse – Katka – Emília Vášáryová.

The drama is set in the household of the Kubiš family in a small provincial town during the Uprising. One son, Marián, serves in the Hlinka Guard, while the other, Ďurko, has joined the partisan resistance. This central conflict is handled differently in the stage play and its film adaptation. In the drama, Ďurko has already returned home and is concealed in the family's woodshed, whereas in the film, he is first shown running for his life before being hidden in the attic. Throughout his concealment, he is cared for by the nurse Katka, who is also his romantic partner. The action unfolds on Christmas Eve. The family gathers for dinner, joined by Wehrmacht Lieutenant Brecker, Angela's lover. Each principal character represents a distinct type. Although Brecker initially appears to be a friend of the family, the conclusion reveals his belief in the doctrine of the *Übermensch*: "*You are Asians, like the Russians and all the rest! One day there will be no trace of you left. Do you hear me? Not a trace!*" (Karvaš 1960, 155). In the second act, Ďurko is executed after German soldiers discover him in the family's woodshed. The conclusion of the third act, however, points towards liberation: the arrival of the partisan forces, led by Katka.

In the film adaptation, the overall composition is substantially reworked, and several episodes are rendered with greater dramatic intensity. The Christmas Eve dinner serves as a preparatory sequence in which the entire family is gathered, except for Ďurko, who is hidden in the attic, suffering from fever as a result of his wounds. One particularly significant narrative element, present in the play but developed far more dramatically in the film, concerns Vilma, the mother of the three adult children. She confesses to the parish priest that the family is sheltering her son Ďurko in the attic. The priest subsequently violates the seal of confession by revealing this information to Lieutenant Brecker, who immediately takes action. As the Kubiš family attends midnight mass, the film reaches its dramatic climax. Having just confronted Brecker in a tense exchange, Angela enters the church and tells her parents that the Germans have arrested Ďurko and that his execution is imminent. After the service, the family leaves the church, and in the silence and darkness of Christmas night, gunfire suddenly sounds. This is a metonymic representation of the execution of Ďurko, both son and brother.

One important aspect of the film is the disclosure of the seal of confession. According to Catholic doctrine, this is a mortal sin and an exceptional occurrence. Within the film, this motif acquires broader ideological significance. Karvaš, himself of Jewish origin, depicts a priest who betrays a fundamental principle of the Catholic faith during the wartime Slovak State, whose official ideology under President Jozef Tiso was explicitly grounded in Christian, and specifically Catholic, values. The film thus presents a striking contradiction between proclaimed religious principles and actual conduct, offering a sharp critique of the moral and institutional failures of Catholic representatives of the wartime Slovak regime. Directed by Jiří Krejčík, the film also

features a screenplay by Karvaš and Albert Marenčin. The adaptation evidently adopts a markedly critical stance towards both the wartime Slovak State and the Catholic Church.

In conclusion, like Mňačko's *Death Is Called Engelchen*, Karvaš's *Midnight Mass* also centres on armed resistance during the Second World War, specifically the Slovak National Uprising. Written in 1960, the play was adapted for the screen remarkably quickly, with the film premiering on 24 December 1962. The adaptation ranks among the most accomplished Czechoslovak films of the period and continues to engage contemporary audiences. The film's enduring artistic value is further enhanced by the direction of Jiří Krejčík, a leading figure in post-war Czech cinema. A. Marenčin's participation in this project deserves special mention. A remarkably versatile artist, Marenčin devoted much of his work in the late 1950s to films about the Second World War, making a significant contribution to the development of the genre. His engagement with wartime themes was grounded in personal experience: he participated in the Slovak National Uprising as a member of the Čapajev partisan unit. This firsthand experience enabled him to depict combat with exceptional credibility, as in *Prerušená pieseň* [Interrupted Song] (1959), directed by the Georgian filmmaker Nikoloz Sanishvili. Produced as a Slovak–Georgian co-production, the film explores the aftermath of combat operations on Georgian territory during the Second World War. The protagonist, a Slovak soldier who defects to the Soviet side, is so severely wounded that his leg must be amputated. During his recovery, he is cared for by a Georgian physician, who eventually marries him. After the war, the couple settled in Slovakia, where they raised three children, one of whom became the distinguished Slovak international footballer and national team member, Igor Novák. The film derives much of its persuasiveness from the authenticity of its creators' wartime experience.

A. Marenčin brought this authenticity to the film *Midnight Mass* as one of its three screenwriters. His firsthand experience of combat enabled him to construct dramatically convincing wartime situations.

MATERNAL LOVE AS THE CAUSE OF A SON'S DEATH

Dominik Tatarka (1913 – 1989) also had combat experience. The oldest of the three authors discussed in this study, Tatarka participated in the Slovak National Uprising. Although his novella *The Rooster in Agony* is set in the post-war period, it is profoundly shaped by the legacy of the conflict. At its centre is the tragic fate of a mother whose sixteen-year-old son was executed by the German occupying forces.

Characters:

Katarína – mother of the executed son

Paľko – her brother, a participant in the Uprising

Milko – the 16-year-old executed son

Grandmother – she slaughters a rooster

Little Rooster – a symbolic parallel to the executed son; its selection appears accidental.

The novella unfolds as Paľko visits his sister Katarína, hoping to offer comfort after the execution of her young son. Yet Katarína remains consumed by grief as though she were responsible for her son's death. The narrative develops almost entirely through the dialogue between brother and sister, whose conversation gradually reconstructs the traumatic events that led to the tragedy. As Katarína recalls: “*They rounded us up in the schoolyard, and the sentence was pronounced immediately: ‘We will shoot twenty of yours for our two. Mines have exploded on your land’*” (Tatarka 1959, 72).

They gradually rounded up the twenty hostages, searching the village house by house with the tracking dogs. Among those captured was Milko. The reprisals had been triggered by a landmine explosion in the early morning, after which German forces occupied the village. In the ensuing confusion, Milko attempted to flee with his father to seek refuge in the nearby forest. His mother, however, intervened, believing that staying at home would be safer: *“Milko, come back. You’ll stay here. Not another step. You are not leaving my side. And my boy obeyed me—as he always did”* (ibid., 66).

The mother will not let go of her son, believing she is protecting him. Paradoxically, however, her maternal love becomes the immediate cause of the premature death of the sixteen-year-old Milko. The father fled and came to no harm. The son stayed behind and was executed. Tatarka, who was well acquainted with existentialist philosophy, builds this episode around one of its principles. Human beings are ultimately responsible for their own decisions, yet at a young age, a parent can also influence a serious decision. The mother’s decision, although motivated entirely by love and the desire to save her son, proves tragically mistaken. This realisation gives rise to her overwhelming sense of guilt. At the same time, it is clear that the true source of the tragedy is the war itself. The war forces Katarína into a fundamental decision. Her maternal instinct to protect her son is transformed by the violence of war into the very cause of her son’s death under the fire of the German execution squad. The novella echoes a central tenet of French existentialism: although not every human decision determines the course of one’s life, certain choices become irreversible turning points. For the mother, the decision to keep Milko at home becomes such a defining moment, condemning her to a lifetime of remorse and self-reproach.

Existentialist philosophers maintain that, in moments of crisis, individuals must ultimately make their own decisions. Jean-Paul Sartre illustrates this principle with an example from his own life. In 1940, one of his former students sought his advice on a profound moral dilemma. The student’s father had abandoned the family and collaborated with the German occupiers, while his brother had been killed fighting against the Wehrmacht. His mother was now left alone. At the same time, he had the opportunity to travel to England and join the Free French Forces under Charles de Gaulle, thereby contributing to the struggle against Nazi Germany and avenging his brother’s death. Unsure whether to remain with his mother or join the resistance, he asked Sartre what to do. Sartre refused to provide an answer, insisting that no one could make such a decision on another person’s behalf. According to existentialist philosophy, every individual must confront difficult moral choices independently (Sartre 1991, 47 – 52). In the end, the young man decided to remain with his mother.

Milko also decided to remain with his mother. Yet, as a child, he yielded to his mother’s love, which ultimately cost him his life. From the novella’s perspective, however, the mother’s decision is more significant. Faced with an extreme situation, Katarína responded instinctively and emotionally, setting aside rational calculation. Had Milko remained with his father, both would most likely have escaped into the forest and survived. Indeed, the father avoided execution precisely because he fled, whereas Milko, who had initially been escaping alongside him, returned at his mother’s call.

Tatarka’s novella provides compelling evidence that his work is consistent with the principles of existentialist thought, even though he sought to deny this aspect of his work (Bátorová 2012, 152). This affinity may be explained, at least in part, by his academic training in French language and literature and by the year he spent in Paris in the late 1930s, where he could engage directly with French intellectual and cultural life. Sartre argued that human existence is marked by situations in which individuals must choose from options, and such choices may decisively shape the course of their lives. In extreme cases, an unfortunate decision may even result in premature death, as illustrated by the fate of Milko. Although it was his mother who made the wrong decision in

that situation, the consequence is a lifelong burden of guilt from which Katarína can never free herself. Her suffering persists beyond the events narrated in the novella, and the text leaves the reader with the clear impression that it will continue indefinitely. The ultimate cause of the tragedy is the war itself. Had there been no war, Milko would never have been executed.

CONCLUSION

In all three works, the narrative culminates in an execution or a series of executions. In Mňačko's *Death Is Called Engelchen*, the protagonist is haunted by guilt over the destruction of the village of Ploština and the deaths of its inhabitants. In Tatarka's *The Rooster in Agony*, the emotional focus shifts to a mother tormented by remorse for her son's execution. In Karvaš's *Midnight Mass*, particularly in its film adaptation, the parents and siblings are powerless to save Ďurko from execution. However, the family's subsequent guilt is not explored as fully as in the other two works. All three works share a common thematic foundation: war itself is presented as the ultimate cause of the protagonists' deaths. In this sense, death—in its various forms—emerges as the most enduring consequence of war.

SUMMARY

The study begins by considering whether artistic prose and film adaptations originate in authentic experience or in mediated experience. According to him, the plot in prose or film can be based either on an authentic experience or on one derived from reading or from film reception. High-quality works of art about war are created primarily from the authentic experiences of authors or directors; this is evidenced by short stories and novels, as well as films by Slovak creators who experienced the war and were direct actors or subjects of events, as participants in the Slovak National Uprising or partisan resistance.

The analysis focuses on three prominent Slovak writers whose wartime experiences profoundly shaped their artistic output. Ladislav Mňačko fought as a partisan against the German army in the vicinity of the village of Ploština near Vizovice in Moravia; Peter Karvaš worked for the Free Slovak Radio during the Slovak National Uprising and was deeply affected by the wartime deaths of his parents, who are believed to have been executed by the Nazis at Nemecká near Banská Bystrica. Dominik Tatarka took part directly in the Uprising. These experiences became the creative impulse for their literary works and, subsequently, for their film adaptations.

The study offers close readings of Mňačko's novel *Death Is Called Engelchen* (1959) and its film adaptation directed by Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos (1963), Karvaš's play *Midnight Mass* (1960) and the film of the same name directed by Jiří Krejčík (1962). The study also discusses D. Tatarka's novella *The Rooster in Agony* (1959), which, according to the author, is based on the principle of existentialist philosophy in its treatment of moral choice, responsibility, and guilt. In this novella, maternal love is the cause of the execution of a 16-year-old son by German soldiers during the Slovak National Uprising. Ultimately, however, all three works identify war itself as the fundamental cause of death and suffering.

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