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UDK 821.111(94).09 Patrick, W.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29162/ANAFORA.v5i1.9>

**Izvorni znanstveni članak**  
***Original Research Article***

Primljeno 13. studenog 2017.

*Received: 13 November 2017*

Prihvaćeno 10. svibnja 2018.

*Accepted: 10 May 2018*

## CRITICAL RECEPTION OF PATRICK WHITE'S FICTION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

### Abstract

This paper deals with the critical reception of Australian writer Patrick White's fiction in Czechoslovakia, and provides an analysis of both the socio-historical context related to the publication of and the critical response to White's fiction in Czechoslovakia as manifested in the essays (afterwords to the translations) and select reviews of his work. The article emphasizes the specificity of the critical reception of White's fiction in Czechoslovakia, especially due to the critics' objective and non-ideological treatment of his work, as well as the loss of interest in White's fiction by both the publishers and the critics in the period after 1989.

**Keywords:** Critical reception, Patrick White, Australian literature, modernism, modernist literature, Czechoslovakia

The title of this paper, which implies a certain ambiguity since Czechoslovakia split into two independent countries, the Czech and the

Slovak Republic, in 1993, is purposely *chosen in order to emphasize the fact* that all translations of Patrick White's fiction into Slovak and Czech were published during the existence of the former authoritarian regime in ex-Czechoslovakia, predominantly in the 1980's. During the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, before 1989, critical views and reception of not only Australian but also other "Western" authors was influenced by the socio-political and extra-literary, rather than the literary and aesthetic context. Thus, if we speak about the publishers' selection and translations of these works, most of the texts translated in this period were written by "the Western" authors who either sympathized with communism or were themselves communists. In connection with this and in keeping with Marxist-Leninist ideology, preferred were the works that employed the social or socialist realist method of writing and emphasized optimism, humanity, positive human values, and a sympathy with socialism and the exploited working class. Literature was thus understood as a political and ideological tool in the communist struggle against capitalism, rather than an expression of a writer's artistic mastery. This political and ideological situation was influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology as applied to literature in the ex-Soviet Union, and, consequently, spread to other ex-communist countries. Such an ideological and political function of literature was most clearly expressed by Zhdanov during the 1934 First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. In Zhdanov's view, "The truthfulness and historical exactitude of the artistic image must be linked with the task of ideological transformation" (qtd. in Carter 4). In this context, then, and in connection with translations of Australian literature in ex-Czechoslovakia, the writers, such as Alan Marshall, Katherine Susanah Prichard, James Aldridge, Frank Hardy, Dymphna Cusack, Dorothy Hewett, and Eric Lambert, who either sympathized with communism or used the social or socialist realist method of writing, were the most preferred authors for translation in this period. The works of these writers were often reviewed and analysed with a necessary ideological commitment, but it must also be said that these works were not necessarily of a low artistic and aesthetic quality.<sup>1</sup> However, in such a situation and atmosphere, Patrick White's

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, K.S. Prichard's *Coonardoo*, Alan Marshall's collection of myths, etc. For further analysis of the left-wing oriented Australian authors, such as James

fiction would be rather problematic because of its modernist scepticism, the rejection of “the Australian realistic tradition,” White’s often decadent and immoral characters, and his interest in the negative aspects of human consciousness. This qualifies White as an outcast among his fellow Australian writers, who held a much more favourable position for translation into both Slovak and Czech before 1989.

However, there are at least two important moments, both literary and extra-literary, which probably contributed to the decision of the publishers to translate White’s works into Slovak and Czech – the awarding of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1973 to Patrick White and the fact that, in ex-Czechoslovakia, the 1980’s was a period marked by a loosening of political pressure and control over civilian life and institutions, including state-controlled publishing houses, by both the state communist authorities and the former USSR. This loosening of political pressure and control in Czechoslovakia’s atmosphere was influenced by the perestroika doctrine of the USSR president and leading politician, Gorbachev, and openness which democratized the communist regime and influenced most of the European communist countries controlled by the former Soviet Union. Such a situation also influenced the critical approach to Patrick White’s fiction in Czechoslovakia, which manifested itself in critical studies of his works and reviews by the Slovak and Czech critics. These critics mostly dealt with Patrick White’s style, themes, and the aesthetic value of his work. With the exception of the translation of some short stories published in Slovak and Czech in popular and literary journals exclusively, the published works were Patrick White’s novels that were translated into these languages (the official languages of ex-Czechoslovakia) between 1962 and 1986, and especially in the 1980’s. In this period, three of Patrick White’s novels, *The Tree of Man*, *Voss*, and *A Fringe of Leaves*, were translated into Czech and Slovak. What is quite paradoxical is that despite the publication of a high number of copies of these books, they were scarcely reviewed. It is significant, however,

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Aldridge, K.S. Prichard, Frank Hardy, or A. Marshall, and the critical reception of Australian literature in Slovakia after 1945, see Kušnír’s “The Critical Reception of Australian Literature in Slovakia after 1945.”

that this shortcoming was compensated by a close study of White's fiction in the afterwords to these translations. The afterwords in White's books were translated into Slovak and Czech and were often written in the form of longer critical essays on White's fiction that introduced Patrick White's work to Czech and Slovak readers.

White's first book to be translated in ex-Czechoslovakia was his novel *A Tree of Man*. It was translated only into Czech as early as 1962, and published by Prague's publishing house SNKLU in its edition devoted to "contemporary world fiction." Both White's novel, life, and literary career were introduced to the Czech and Slovak readers in the afterword entitled "Patrick White a jeho vize lidského osudu [Patrick White and His Vision of the Human Condition]" by a well-known New Zealand scholar working in this period as an expert in Anglophone literatures at Charles University in Prague. What is interesting is that Ian Milner was not only an associate professor in English literature and a well-known expert in the field but also a controversial personality because of being allegedly a spy (see Heenan). The novel's re-edition, however, was published by a different publishing house, Svoboda (Liberty), more than twenty years later, in 1984. What is paradoxical is that this book has not been translated into Slovak and that, according to my bibliographical research, neither a review nor a critical article on these translations has appeared in Czech or in Slovak. Despite the fact that the early 1960's was a period of the beginning democratization of the Czechoslovak communist regime, still the publication of this novel by White – a text with a pessimistic worldview and a complicated narrative that was quite far away from the optimistic vision of the world generated by the socialist realist writers supported by the communist regime in Czechoslovakia – was a rare exception in the publication policy of the Czechoslovak publishing houses. Since the novel had been published before Patrick White was awarded a Nobel Prize for literature, one might assume that its translation was initiated by the Australian literature scholar and author of the afterword, Ian Milner.

What needs to be emphasized, however, is the fact that the publishing activities of Slovak and Czech all state-owned and controlled publishing houses did not seem to be systematically coordinated. When a translation of a particular author was published in Czech, because of the language

similarity between Slovak and Czech, it was anticipated that the book would be read by both the Czech and Slovak readership. On the other hand, the lack of critical response to this translation was compensated by an afterword to the second edition of the book published in 1984 in 20,000 copies. This afterword by Antonín Přidal, entitled “Creation of a Man in the Australian Bush,” is a critical study, rather than a review, of White’s *The Tree of Man*. Přidal was a well-known Czech translator from English, and his afterword essay provides a close analysis of the novel. It is an analysis of the novel written in a semi poetic, but also academic style. This essay does not bear any trace of ideological commitment, which could be expected in the period of the book’s publication. It analyses the main narrative strategies and themes of the novel, emphasizing White’s scepticism concerning his disbelief in the ability of language to express the beauty of things, which manifests itself, in Přidal’s view, in White’s depiction of Amy and Stan, the main characters from the novel. Despite this, however, Přidal appreciates White’s ability to express silence and the materiality of objects through a specific “language which returns to ambiguous words and sentences their shape and light and thus extends their possibilities” (Přidal, “Stvoření člověka” 443–44). What Přidal values about White’s style is White’s use of poetic imagery and lyricism as well as his ability to explore human consciousness and dreaming through the narrative reminiscent of, as he argues, a “poem in prose” (“Stvoření člověka” 444). Analysing the main character of the novel, Stan Parker, he emphasizes White’s untraditional depiction of this character in the context of the Australian literary tradition, especially that of a settler novel. He understands Stan as a specific character because he is not depicted as a romantic bush character seeking adventure, but as a symbolic character seeking a sense of life. Stan’s exploration of the bush and nature is understood as a metaphor of the self-exploration of Stan’s personality. Seeing autobiographical elements in the depiction of Stan, Přidal further comments on White’s bush experience similar to Stan’s and points out the Australian critics’ negative response to the novel because he has depicted a hesitant, rough, untypical, unrepresentative, and unheroic Australian character who was in contradiction with the humorous, strong, and courageous pioneer characters conquering nature, known from the Australian literary tradition (“Stvoření člověka” 445–46). Přidal

emphasizes White's rejection of the glorification of the bush and nature, which he illustrates in his analysis of tree symbolism. He further describes Stan and Amy's story as reminiscent of both the Baucis and Philemon story and as the Biblical legend on the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden. In Příklad's view, this Biblical legend is reminiscent of the story of Stan and Amy, who have to struggle for survival in the Australian bush. Příklad also understands Stan and Amy's struggle and life in the bush as both a mission and a search for order in the chaotic bush environment. Thus, both acquire the status of marginality, "outcastness" because, in Příklad's view, they do not share the same materialistic values as other characters. Příklad further understands the symbolic meaning of the *Tree of Man* as an unmythical *Tree of Knowledge* revealing to Stan his sense of life, which lies, in his view, in life itself. What is interesting is also Příklad's understanding of loneliness as a symbol of isolation, standing in opposition from his children's materialistic and artificial values, represented by their haunt for success. In this context, then, Příklad sees his grandson as a hope and a symbolic representative of possible recuperators of Stan's values which should be "re-discovered, named and fulfilled with meaning" ("Stvoření člověka" 449), and which are represented by Stan's grandson's role of a potential poet. Despite the fact that the book was published in a large number of copies and that the review of the book was rather favourable for White, there are several possible reasons why this novel remained rather neglected or almost overlooked by general readers. The main reason was the absence of marketing and promoting strategies and the only existing promoting strategies were those exclusively connected with the state-owned and Communist Party-controlled television, radio, media, and press in Czechoslovakia during the totalitarian regime. This means that because White's ideologically "harmful" fiction was not in keeping with the communist values and ideology, it was not promoted by these media. The communist regime-controlled state propaganda had influential promotion tools to support the publication of White's works, but it seems that it was mostly due to ideological reasons that his works were not promoted. The other reason is that Australian literature was not, and still is not, well-known in either ex-Czechoslovakia or current Slovakia, and that there is a lack of experts in the field who would promote translations from Australian

literature. In addition, there was almost no mention of Australian literature in the primary and secondary school curricula, and no university in Czechoslovakia offered a course in Australian literature. Finally, the complexity of White's style and his pessimistic vision of the world would probably have distracted the general readership from reading not only this novel but possibly also all of his novels, as dubious as this idea may be.

The Slovak readers were introduced to Patrick White's works through a Slovak translation of Patrick White's *Voss* in 1977, which was followed by a Czech translation of the same novel in 1980. The Slovak edition was published in 22,000 copies by Slovenský spisovateľ (Slovak Writer) publishing house, one of the biggest, most prestigious, and still existing Slovak publishing houses. The Czech edition was published by Prague's publishing house, Svoboda (Liberty), in 85,000 copies. What is interesting is that, according to the bibliographical records, this novel was not reviewed in the Czech print media, and the Slovak translation of this novel launched White's literary reputation in ex-Czechoslovakia among both the Slovak and Czech readers. The afterwords to the book have become an important source of information on White's life, work, and literary career. Jozef Olexa, a well-known Slovak translator and scholar in British and American literature, has written a detailed survey of the author's life and work, and introduced the basic aspects of his fiction in the afterword to White's novel *Voss*. This afterword was more a literary essay than a simple biographical article. In the essay, Olexa gives a critical evaluation of White's fiction without any ideological or political bias. At the very beginning, Olexa points out the "mannerism and cliché" (471) of White's style and his interest in the stream-of-consciousness method, which also influenced, in Olexa's view, White's later works. Olexa sees a similarity between White's, Eleanor Dark's, and H.H. Richardson's styles (472) and points out White's depiction of suffering as a source of progress, his interest in social relations, inner life of characters, and their search for meaning of life. Olexa considers these issues to be some of the main aspects of his work. He also points out White's rejection of the realistic method of writing (473), his being inspired by William Faulkner's narrative strategies, as well as his depiction of individualized myths and Sarsaparilla and Barranugli, the Australian setting, which to Olexa is reminiscent of a microcosm known from Faulkner's

novels. Olexa appreciates the mastery of White's narration and his ability to convincingly depict the characters' mental states. Further characterizing White's writing style, he points out White's interest in irrationality, collective unconsciousness, and archetypal models, such as the myth of preserving humankind (White's novel *The Tree of Man*), suffering and the Crucifixion (in *Riders in the Chariot*), and explorer and Messianistic myth (in *Voss*). Olexa further closely analyses White's other novels (*The Aunt's Story*, *The Living and the Dead*) and defines his characters as characters with tormented minds who search for a sense of life. On the other hand, he criticizes White's use of convoluted and ambiguous symbolism, fantasy, imagination, and unconsciousness. This afterword further summarizes the plot of some of White's other novels and analyses *The Tree of Man*, especially the symbol of a tree. Like Antonín Přidal in his afterword to *The Tree of Man*, in his afterword, Jozef Olexa also interprets Sam and Amy Parker as an alienated couple struggling with nature and searching for the meaning of life, which Stan finds, in Olexa's view, in the constant recuperation of a creative potential of a man and in nature (477). Quite paradoxically, despite the afterword with an extended biographical note that is a fine introduction to White's life and literary works, not much space was devoted to *Voss* in Olexa's afterword. Pointing out White's historical inspiration with the Leichard expedition and briefly summarizing the composition of the novel, Olexa mainly focuses on White's depiction of *Voss* as a Messianistic character evoking respect (476), a visionary character and a representative of a Bergsonian life force, although Olexa also understands him as a dreamer and maniac, which he considers to be an expression of White's negative attitude to such characters.

Patrick White's *Voss* was more closely analysed and White's fiction introduced in a review published in *Romboid*, a Slovak literary journal, by Igor Navrátil, a well-known Slovak translator from English. Like Olexa, Navrátil also sees the similarities between White's and Faulkner's style and considers *Voss* to be "a mystical symbol of unbreakable forces and spiritual values of a man" (83). What is quite interesting is that Navrátil considers the composition of the book to be quite traditional, but praises "a specifically 'Australian' style characterized by a frequent occurrence of poetic words, poetic language, and almost impressionistic images" (84). Despite the



reviewer's critique of White's unconvincing depiction of characters who, in his view, cannot find the way out and are lost in the plot (84), he finally praises the publishing house for bringing the geographically and thematically unknown Australian literature to the Slovak reader (84).

As has been noted, the first critical works on White's *Voss* introduced White as an author with a modernist sceptical vision of the world. The reviewers acknowledged White's innovative narrative techniques, partly reminiscent of William Faulkner's style, and his dedication to the reconsidering of well-known literary works and myths (the Bible, Bédier, and others) through his use of complex symbolism, and his rejection and reconsideration of the Australian realistic tradition, especially the Australian bush myth that is typical of this tradition. Similar features are analysed in the afterword to the Czech translation of *Voss*, which was published in an extraordinarily high number of 85,000 copies, probably because of the publisher's expectation of the readers' interest in White after his Nobel Prize Award (Czechoslovakia had some fifteen million inhabitants in this period). The afterword to the novel by the same translator of White's previous novel, Antonín Přidal, gives not only a survey of White's fiction but also provides another quite complex critical analysis of his work, especially of his novel *Voss*. In his article entitled "*Voss* and Others," Přidal devotes a considerable part to a quite detailed description of the source of White's inspiration, i.e. Leichard's expeditions, letters, and personality. Přidal characterizes White as an unconventional author with both his work and attitudes related to the new Australian civilization on a new continent. In Přidal's view, in his first two novels, *The Aunt's Story* and *The Tree of Man*, White asks the questions if, to what extent, and under what circumstances it is possible to penetrate into the heart of human lives (Přidal, "Stvoření člověka" 424–25). Characterizing *Voss*, he sees him as a romantic individualist longing for freedom, which is encouraged by his egocentrism reminiscent of the romantic heroes from Goethe's *Faustus* to Dostoevsky's characters ("Stvoření člověka" 425–27). On the other hand, Přidal sees Laura from the novel as a character quite opposite to *Voss* because of her, in his view, appreciation of and respect for life, resulting from her self-exploration. Last, but not least, Přidal points out manipulation as an important motif in the book, referring to the relationship between the victim and the victimizer, the

colonizer and the colonized. In his view, *Voss* does not become only an authoritarian manipulator but also a victim of the manipulation of his sponsors, which implies, in Přidal's view, a symbolic expression of the colonization of Australia. What is quite interesting in this article is Přidal's understanding of the ex-convict, Judd, who, in his view, can symbolically represent liberty with his approach to life and thus also danger to *Voss's* authoritarian behaviour. Přidal sees him as a "self-made, silent and almost strange but fair man" ("Stvoření člověka" 429), a character who is part of nature, not the idea ("Stvoření člověka" 429), whose values are supported by a real background, namely his family. Přidal sees *Voss's* love for Laura, on the other hand, as only an illusion and a romantic dream ("Stvoření člověka" 429). Although it is not explicitly stated in the reviewers' essays, the afterwords and reviews in *Voss* make evident that the Slovak and Czech critics appreciate White's use of complex symbolism, irony, complex depiction of the psychology of characters combined with their romantic individualism, poetic imagery, and overlapping of the real and the imaginary, which represent rather modernist narrative techniques that render a modernist vision of the world. In this review, on the one hand, the issue of oppression, exploitation, and colonialism may be understood as a theme resonating with communist ideology; on the other hand, as the 1980's was a period of growing liberalization of the communist regime, the reviewers could also afford to emphasize White's pessimistic vision of the world as a positive value, supporting the artistic quality of his work.

In 1978, before the translation of *Voss* into Czech, another important novel by White, *The Eye of the Storm*, was published by a prestigious publishing house, Odeon, in a considerable number of copies (82,000). It was translated by Mirek Čejka, who is also the author of the afterword to the book. In difference from Přidal's complex and analytical essays on White, Čejka's afterword provides brief biographical information on White and a basic survey of his works. What is ambiguous about this afterword is that most of it is written in italics, which may indicate that Čejka has simply translated another critic's views from English without giving any bibliographical reference. Thus, it is difficult to identify the authenticity of ideas, especially those characterizing White's opposition to typical Australian myths, such as the myths of the heroic explorer, the settler, and

mateship (Čejka 557). Čejka, if he is the true author of the afterword to the book, further emphasizes egocentrism as one of the most common features of White's characters and points out the influence of such writers as Stendhal, Rimbaud, Proust, Pushkin, Turgenev, Pasternak, D.H. Lawrence, and other rather modernist authors on White's work. In difference from other critics, Čejka points out the lack of lyricism in White's language, but emphasizes his "poetic expression" (558), the psychologisation of his characters, and finally, he stresses the key role of White in the formation of the new generation of Australian authors in the twentieth century. What is quite paradoxical, however, is that Čejka does not analyse this translated novel in his afterword. Thus, being one of the first critical articles on White's work in ex-Czechoslovakia, this afterword briefly introduces Patrick White to the Czech and Slovak readership. More information on the book can be found on its blurb, in which an unknown author mentions the influence of the King Lear story on the composition of the book and characterizes the novel as a novel dealing with parent-children relationships which are further developed into the themes of justice, gratitude, compassion, cruelty, and love. The author of the short notice on the blurb commends White's use of poetic language, sophisticated composition, and a multidimensional picture of Australia represented in this novel.

It seems that White's *The Fringe of Leaves* especially stimulated a better critical response in ex-Czechoslovakia. The book was translated both into Slovak and Czech. It was even translated in two editions in Czech. The Slovak edition of the book was published by the well-known publishing house Smena (Shift) in 1981, in its special edition devoted to women's fiction, entitled "Eva." The short afterword to the book gives only basic information on Patrick White's life and literary career, and a brief analysis of the novel can be found only on the blurb of the book. It was written by an unknown author, perhaps the translator or one of the editors, and includes only a brief outline of the plot in which its author emphasizes the main character's process of self-discovery, especially after her captivity by the Aborigines, as well as her appreciation of human relationships and rejection of materialistic values. At the same time, the author of this essay emphasizes the "philosophical meditations and ideas" in the book, which are, in his/her view, full of humanism and poetic effectivity. The book, according to the

view of the author of this brief note on the blurb, is one of White's best novels.

A review of the book by Jasna Navrátilová, an occasional literary critic, appeared in the Slovak literary journal *Romboid* a year later. Navrátilová gives a brief outline of the plot but, at the same time, points out the seemingly simple fabula and adventurous character of the book, which in her view is misleading. Navrátilová further notes the semantic complexity of the novel and finds the main protagonist acting and behaving as a modern woman because of her rejection of conventional morality, hypocrisy, and wish to live a free life. At the same time, Navrátilová observes the paradoxical nature of the protagonist's tragedy, that is, her acquiring a new freedom after she had lost her family. Navrátilová understands the protagonist's captivity as an experience stimulating her spiritual transformation after her return to "civilization." The reviewer finally highly rates the book and points out White's stylistic mastery, poetic imagery, metaphors, philosophical ideas, humanism, artistic depiction of man's humiliation to nature, and the naturalistic descriptions of nature. Like other reviews of White's fiction, this review does not include any ideological or political bias, but focuses very explicitly on White's artistic qualities as well as thematic and linguistic aspects of the book, which are all highly commended, although not simplistically glorified. What Navrátilová appreciates the most is, however, not only White's stylistic mastery, but most of all his depiction of a woman who bears, in her view, the characteristics of a modern woman (95). This review also mentions the themes, although in a different context, which would be favoured by the communist propaganda, i.e. a positive view on women's liberation and the humanistic outlook. However, emphasizing these themes Navrátilová probably created a pretext to bypass Czechoslovakian communist censorship and publish her rather complex study of White's artistic mastery.

*The Fringe of Leaves* was later translated into Czech and was published in two editions, in 1983 and in 1986, by Prague's well-known publishing house, Odeon. What is interesting is that its second edition was published in an extremely high number of copies (130,000), which was perhaps stimulated by White's status as a Nobel Prize winner and probably due to the positive reviews of his previous books. Again, Antonín Přidal, a well-

known Czech translator and English scholar, was both the translator of the book and the author of the critical analysis of White's work, which was published in the form of an afterword to the book, entitled "Isolde and Tristan in an Australian Bush." As the title of the essay and a brief introductory quotation from J. Bédier's *Tristan and Isolde* implies, Přidal sees a parallel between White's and Bédier's story and analyses the novel mostly in the context of Bédier's story. Přidal considers Ellen Roxborough, the main character of the novel, to be one of the tragic characters known from most of White's novels. At the same time, he tries to explain the historical and geographical contexts of the period in which the novel is set, especially the danger connected with the hostile Australian setting in the late nineteenth century, that is, the setting Ellen had to cope with in the novel. In addition, Přidal comments on the possibility of White's drawing on a real historical event as the source of inspiration for the novel, namely on Lieutenant Otter's account of the Stirling Castle ship, its shipwreck, and the adventures of the sailors who survived, which Přidal describes in detail ("Izolda a Tristan" 336–37). After introducing the historical context and White's historical source of inspiration for the novel, Přidal highly rates White's multilayered narrative and the struggle for survival is understood as a test of life values ("Izolda a Tristan" 337). Přidal further devotes quite a considerable part of his afterword essay to a detailed analysis of Austin Roxburgh, another important character in the novel. He sees this character as an old man who is spoilt by his comfortable existence and fails as a representative of the Victorian illusion on the stability of traditional order ("Izolda a Tristan" 337–38). Přidal further understands his journey to Van Diemen's land as a symbolic confirmation of the stability of his vision of the world which, in Přidal's view, fails. He also emphasizes the role of an accident in Austin's life as a symbolic revelation of the unpredictable and the accidental, which is in contradiction with the Victorian belief in the stability of order. Přidal sees Ellen from the novel in a similar way, but her adultery is understood only as a minor offence in comparison with other tragedies connected with the Victorian morality and ideals. What is further appreciated in the novel is White's depiction of the psychology of the characters and his treatment of the fragile difference between humanity and evil. In addition to this, Ellen is understood as a character representing

“social responsibility” that is in opposition to the chaotic and uncertain world. What is, however, valued more by Ellen, according to Přidal, is not necessarily a religious belief, but a value of love as represented by the Tristan and Isolde myth, although it bears tragic undertones. Přidal does not analyse the connection between White’s novel and Tristan and Isolde closely, but highlights tragedy and love as common features of both stories (“Izolda a Tristan” 341). This afterword is thus not only a simple retelling of the plot but it also becomes a close and fine analysis of the novel. Reading this review, the communist authorities in Slovakia would probably have appreciated Přidal’s emphasis on Ellen’s social responsibility, even though this interpretation served as yet another hidden pretext against the censorship of White’s work.

## Conclusion

As can be seen from the above analysis, the critical reception of Patrick White’s fiction holds a specific status in the critical reception of Australian literature in Czechoslovakia. In difference from other Australian authors translated into Slovak and Czech, the critical reception of his works was neither influenced by the socio-political situation nor by the ideology in the period of their publication, which was a period of authoritarian regime, communist ideology, state-controlled publishing houses, and censorship. Despite this fact, Patrick White’s works were mostly treated and analysed from the point of view of White’s use of narrative techniques, his aesthetics of modernism, and most of the reviews and essays on his work emphasized the literary and aesthetic quality of his work. At the same time, most of the reviewers and critics emphasized White’s sceptical vision of the world, the role of his work in the context of Australian literature of the period, as well as his rejection of the realistic method of writing typical of the Australian literary tradition. In addition, some critics pointed out a loose connection of White’s work with other important works, such as the Bible, J. Bédier’s *Tristan and Isolde* (Přidal), as well as White’s innovative treatment of the Australian bush myth and his use of symbolism. The popularity of White’s fiction among publishers, academics, and reviewers might have been stimulated by his status as a Nobel Prize winner for literature, and most of his works were translated and published in both Slovak and Czech in the

period when he became known as such, that is, between the 1970's and 1980's. With a modest exaggeration, it could even be said that the translations of White's works into Czech and Slovak as well as their critical reception represented a certain form of resistance against both the socialist realist method of writing and the communist authoritarian regime in Czechoslovakia in this period. Whereas other Australian authors, such as James Aldridge, Alan Marshall, Frank Hardy, and K.S. Prichard, were presented to the Czechoslovak readership mostly as communist authors using the realistic, social, and socialist method of writing, emphasizing positive human values, socialist optimism, class struggle, and egalitarianism, Patrick White's works were understood by the critics almost as an opposition to these authors because of his rejection of the social and socialist method of writing, his scepticism, and his interest in the destructive power of human nature.

Another interesting fact is that the reviews of White's works were rarely translated into Slovak and Czech, which was, however, compensated by close studies, mostly by Antonín Přidal, of White's translated texts. This might be explained by the nature of both White's fiction and the critical views on it. While the positive reviews of the left-wing oriented authors, such as James Aldridge, K.S. Prichard, Frank Hardy, or A. Marshall, were mostly in keeping with the socialist ideology of the period and could be approved by the existing state censorship, the critical views on White's fiction would have been banned by the censorship except when published in the form of extended biographical notes on White or critical essays hidden in the afterwords or prefaces to the translated works. There is no proof for this statement, but it is generally known that the censorship worked effectively in the publishing houses during the former communist regime in Czechoslovakia. In other words, the publication of each book in the exclusively state-owned publishing houses had to be approved by the publishing house's Committee of the Communist Party. As a result, most of the Czechoslovakian reviewers of White's fiction mentioned the themes, such as humanism, exploitation, negative aspects of colonization, or women's emancipation, which would have been favoured by the communist regime and might have served as pretexts for writing more complex, sophisticated, and ideologically unbiased studies of White's works.

On the other hand, despite the publication of a large number of copies and almost exclusively favourable reviews and studies of White's fiction, the lack of readers' interest in White's fiction may be explained by the lack of media and marketing support, all controlled by the communist regime, which were probably not interested in supporting an author who was neither a communist nor did he adhere to the socialist realistic writing method and emphasize communist values. Furthermore, this fact can also be attributed to the lack of experts and educational interest in the field. It is also important to note that almost all works by Patrick White were translated into Slovak or Czech in the 1980's and that this paper has discussed all the translations and available reviews of White's works. Despite the fact that there were considerably better political, socio-economic, and cultural conditions in ex-Czechoslovakia after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, and then, after the split of the countries, in Slovakia, no more works by Patrick White have been translated into Slovak or Czech. The interest of both the publishers and academics in Patrick White's work ceased after 1989, in a democratic situation when the new and private publishing houses were established and when censorship did not exist anymore. One might assume that this was caused by the fact that the stylistic and semantic complexity of White's fiction would probably not attract many readers and that its sales would not make a commercial profit. If we speak about the absence of reviews and critical essays on White's work in academic journals and literary magazines, especially after 1989, the most probable reason for this is an absolute lack of experts in Australian literature, but also of quality translators of literary works from English in Slovakia.



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# KRITIČKA RECEPCIJA KNJIŽEVNOSTI PATRICKA WHITEA U ČEHOSLOVAČKOJ

## Sažetak

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Rad se bavi kritičkom recepcijom književnosti australskog pisca Patricka Whitea u Čehoslovačkoj i analizira društveno-povijesni kontekst koji se odnosi na objavljivanje Whiteove književnosti u Čehoslovačkoj i njezin kritički odjek, vidljiv u esejima (pogovorima uz prijevode) i odabranim recenzijama njegova djela. U radu se naglašava specifičnost kritičke recepcije Whiteove književnosti u Čehoslovačkoj, osobito s obzirom na objektivan i neideološki kritičarski pristup njegovim djelima te gubitak zanimanja za Whiteovu književnost koji se nakon 1989. godine zbio među izdavačima i kritičarima.

**Ključne riječi:** kritička recepcija, Patrick White, australska književnost, modernizam, modernistička književnost, Čehoslovačka