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THE BEST OF ALL WORLDS: JOSEF LADA'S FAIRY TALE *KOCOUR MIKEŠ* AS CZECH IDYLL AND NOVEL OF EDUCATION

The article discusses Josef Lada's very popular children's book *Kocour Mikeš* [*Mikeš, the cat*] (1934–1936), which is still a part of Czech schools' curriculum. The series was inspired by Lada's own childhood as well as by "Puss in Boots" fairy tales. Lada had created his fairy tale by uniquely merging such literary genres as the idyll and the growing-up novel, and this article addresses the genre specifics of his story. Also it examines double function of childhood in "*Mikeš, the cat*" as the motif and the source of inspiration. The article gives special attention to the thesis that Lada's fairy tale is filled with nostalgia for his childhood' rural world, and this feeling adds to popularity of his story in industrialized Czech.

Keywords: Czech children's literature, Josef Lada, fairy tale, puss in boots, growing-up novel, idyll, childhood, autobiography

Josef Lada (1887–1954) was blessed with a double gift: he was a visual as well as a literary artist. To wider audiences he is probably best known for his iconic illustration of Jaroslav Hašek's novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*, in a Czech and German literary environment he is also a beloved author of children's books. Although he began his career as a draftsman and cartoonist, his career of more than forty years has been characterized above all by the symbiosis of pictorial and textual work¹. He is one of the pioneers of a Czech school of comics with his distinct style, featuring strong black outlines. Both, his literary his graphic works gravitate towards Czech topics and themes, and the treatment is always humoristic. Drawings from his books are reproduced on postcards and calendars, and are ubiquitous in Czech popular culture². Central theme

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of his books for children and adults is childhood and Czech country life. He gleaned motifs, names, and stories from his own childhood in rural Bohemia.

Lada came from Hrušice, a small village located thirty kilometers off Prague. In his recollection and his stories Lada made Hrušice into a Czech Arcadia, a fairy tale village: the scenery is lovely, people and animals live harmoniously side by side, suffering and pain are kept at bay and if they do occur, then only in ways that do not seem too harsh or overpowering. It is Lada's unique combination of wit and a homely atmosphere of merry pranks and deep solidarity that make his fairy tale books so appealing and secure their position as children's classics in Czech literature. Humor, an affirmative insistence of the pleasures of being small, a proudness of all things Czech — these are all aspects of Czech self-perception that characterize the world in Lada's children's books. Lada's texts and drawings prove to be all-generation books³ that belong as much to the adult canon of Czech culture as to that of Czech children's literature and school curricula.

First, let us turn to the history of this fairy tale novel. Like so many classics of children's literature, the fairy tales about Mikeš the cat saw the light of day because the author's daughters, Eva and Alena, were told bedtime stories by their father (or so the story goes).

I did not become a writer out of a desire for literary fame, but simply because I was forced to do so. Both of our children often asked me to tell them what I was doing when I was a kid myself. So, I told them how I played with shoemaker's hooves, how I skated and sleighed in the winter, how I grazed cows... And I also told them about our cat, Mikeš, whom I taught to speak, to walk on hind legs in shoes, jacket, and hat. Both children believed these stories and wanted me to tell them only about Mikeš [Lada 1960, 385]⁴.

Lada's stories of the puss in boots were first published in instalments in the journal *Radost* [Fun], a magazine for pre-schoolers and primary school children published by the Czech section of the Red Cross⁵. Because of their success the stories were then published in four parts in 1934–1936 in a book form⁶. This marked the beginning of Lada's career as a children's book author. Although he had participated in children's books before, he mostly contributed illustration to Czech classics. In the wake of Mikeš's success, he wrote and illustrated other children's books such as *O chytré kmotře lišce* (On the Cunning Uncle Fox) and *Bubáci a hastrmani* (Ghosts and Water Sprites) [Lada 1937, Lada 1938].

In his memoir, Lada elaborates on the creation of the Mikeš stories and goes to length to describe how he mined the tales his grandmother told him and his childhood memories in order to come up with a new story every evening. The memoir thus stresses two aspects that are crucial for creating a fairy tale — orality and the link to a pre-existing textual repertoire since Lada made use of Czech as well as international fairy tales for creating his own stories. Lada's stories are fueled by various sources, not all of them belonging to folk culture or his own childhood. He also draws heavily on the literary models that were developed by Perrault in his fairy-tale *Le Maître Chat, ou Le Chat Botté* (1697)⁷ and by Ludwig Tieck in a German adaptation of Perrault called *Der gestiefelte Kater* (1797) as well as the fairy tale by the same name in the 1812 Grimm collection⁸, as well as other tales of animal helpers, all of which Lada fuses with the Czech tradition of idyllic writing⁹, elements of the Bildungsroman, and contemporary motifs favored by the Czech avant-garde such as circus and variété. This connection has been first established in the Czech context by the art critic and philosopher Karel Teige, a contemporary of Lada. Though he was more concerned with modern forms of humour such as Dada, he explores the poetic possibilities of the circus, stressing the need for laughter and enchantment [Teige 2004].

Before I go into detail analysing the text, I want to outline briefly the plot of Lada's fairy tale novel. I focus here on the first two parts that tell the story of the shoemaker's son Pepík (which is a diminutive of Lada's own name Josef) and his cat Mikeš. Pepík teaches Mikeš how to talk and walk on two legs: skills that the cat passes on to his friends, the pig Pašík and the goat Bobeš. The adventures of Mikeš in the small village Hrušice form the core of the book. Having smashed grandmother's milk jug, Mikeš leaves the house out of remorse and shame. He wanders through the countryside, meeting friendly people and animals. Finally, he finds a new home in the circus Kludský, and he begins his travels over rural Bohemia. After a successful career in the circus, he returns home a rich man driven by nostalgia and homesickness. However, the story does not end here. The young readers demanded a sequel. In the third and fourth instalments, Lada describes a symbiosis of circus and village world. Mikeš and director Kludský purchase a house in Hrušice where all the protagonists live together between tours of the circus, which now feature Mikeš and his friends as the special attraction. In the end, people and animals form a large family, inclusive of exotic animals such as elephants, lions and monkeys. The story is told by a narrator who seems to be rooted in the same milieu as the characters and reports on

the adventures of the cat in an affectionate, sometimes slightly ironic tone. He often addresses his young audience directly, anticipating ways of reception and difficulties of understanding. Story-telling grounds the plot structure of the Lada's text, reproducing the archetypal *mise-en-scène* of fairy tales and highlighting story-telling as a communal experience. Lada also makes ingenious use of the novel of education plot, letting his cat hero run the full trajectory of leaving home, traveling the world, and returning home a wiser and better being. In addition to this personal growth he has won a new appreciation for his idyllic country home which he nevertheless tries to improve according to his newfound wisdom.

An animal novel of education

Lada's version as well as the ones by Perrault, Tieck, and that of the Brothers Grimm stress the aspect of formation and development of the main character who achieves fame and wealth through his special skills. Already the versions printed by Perrault and Grimm correspond less to a magic fairy tale than to a novella due to their plot scheme. Even in these variants, the text emphasizes the "developmental psychological determinants of the young man," who is not shoemaker's but a miller's son. In Perrault's collection, the fairy tale is accompanied by verses that explain its meaning and point out to the reader that "l'industrie et savoir-faire" [hard work and know-how] are more important than noble birth and money [Köhler-Zülch 1993, 1077]. In many ways, Mikeš and Pepík are Lada's textual alter egos — exactly as the writer, they leave their rural place of birth and transform themselves into artists, one becoming a circus artist and writer, the other a painter.

The human counterpart of Mikeš, Pepík, also bears autobiographical features of the author sharing his humble roots, the talent for the arts, and a loving family [Vojvodík 1999, 89]. Both Mikeš and Pepík embody virtues such as compassion, charity, and community spirit, which, in spite of all the mischief and every prank they pull, ultimately determine their actions. They appear to be two sides of the same person, a fact which underlines the humanity of the Mikeš's story¹⁰.

This story of self-improvement and artistic achievement follows the basic structural principles of the *Bildungsroman*¹¹, whose prototype is Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. Mikeš' development from "silent creature" (*nemá tvář*) to playwright, circus director, and benefactor. This development follows the pattern of a true novel of education: leaving home, adventures in the wide world, return and reintegration into the world

previously left behind. In Lada's textual world the reason for leaving home is a mishap — a broken milk jug — but it is experienced as a catastrophe, since it might destroy a happy home. A catastrophe that is only aggravated by the fact that the home which Mikeš leaves is depicted as the perfect idyll but is necessary for the plot of the educational novel to unfold. Without this disturbance of the idyllic equilibrium there would have been no need to set out for the world. Both the trigger for the protagonist's departure and the resulting adventures are within the bounds of a child's horizon — hunger and cold are Mikeš's greatest enemies. Additionally, poverty is addressed and used as a motivation for action. However, like everything else in Lada, even the depictions of poverty are mitigated by the cohesion of the community. In the end, Mikeš returns home and takes a new place that corresponds to his experiences and also his financial wealth. He becomes a homeowner and patron of his friend Pepík and enjoys true happiness by sharing his good fortune. Since, as Franco Moretti has noted "happiness [is posited] as the highest value" in the Bildungsroman [Moretti 1987, 8]. Thus, the lesson to be learned from this fairy tale formation is that values such as solidarity, diligence, and a sense of belonging to one's homeland, are conducive to success. This is a lesson Mikeš has internalized from the very beginning, even before he left for the wider world. Mikeš embodies in the most beautiful way what Wilhelm Dilthey calls in his reflections on the Bildungsroman "the optimism of personal development" [Dilthey 1988, 120–123], the confidence in the possibility of improving oneself and the world.

In fact, Mikeš's educational process begins even before he leaves his rural home, namely, at the moment when he learns to speak. In many ways, speaking also means not least storytelling. The story of Mikeš the cat contains several embedded narratives. Here, the animals themselves become narrators, taking the place of the authorial narrator and relating anecdotes, experiences, but also fairy tales and legends. The grandmother tells the little Načiček a story about the times Mikeš was a kitten and stupid, and the goat Bobeš tells a story about the "goat Kokeš". The greatest narrator of all is, of course, Mikeš himself; in this respect, too, he proves to be the alter ego of his author. He tells fairy tales, for example about the "good wheelbarrow", but he also entertains those at home with his reports from the big world and from the Circus Kludský. In the village world, storytelling is the fundamental artistic talent, since it is a popular pastime. The preferred genre is the fairy-tale narrative, which in a way mirrors the narrative world in which Mikeš and his comrades move. Lada writes in his memoirs:

Like all children, I loved fairy tales. However, I very rarely held fairy tale books in my hands, and therefore, like the other children, I had to rely on oral storytelling. My mother told me fairy tales only when I was very small. We children told each other fairy tales while we were out grazing... [Lada 1960, 91].

It should be briefly pointed out here that Mikeš is not only learning to speak, but also to write and to read. All beginnings are difficult even in writing, as Mikeš's letter to Bobeš show, a fact that Lada mines for jokes. In the course of the story, he writes several letters and composes small plays featuring his friends Bobeš and Pašík. Once he has mastered the art of composition, he drafts and stages a "fable" (bajka) on the behest of Herod the Lion called "The Decent Shepherd and the Grateful Lion" [Lada 2000, 245]. His forays in the realm of literature also mark a rupture with the idyllic chronotope, since it shows Mikeš has reached a new stage of awareness and it also points the reader towards the fact that the idyll has been subject to outside influences.

Lada's text also contains several metatextual references to the author himself. Especially, the last two instalments abound in this type of self-referential humor that transcends the fairy tale aesthetic. Commenting on the image of a piglet on the wall of Bobeš's stable, Pašík says: "This must have been painted by a great artist. <...> Maybe Mr. Lada or Mr. Rada painted it?" To which Bobeš replies, "Lada or Rada, I couldn't care less!" [Lada 2000, 226]. In another embedded narrative about the clever yard dog Sultan, the cat Mičinka whose kitten Sultan has recovered, says: "I'll run to Mr. Lada in a minute and ask him to write about you (animals are polite and use formal terms of address!) and draw you for his book. And then you will become famous all over the world..." [Lada 2000, 284]. The author concludes this episode by addressing the children directly, asking them to go to Hrusice and visit Sultan's doghouse, located on the first estate just behind the church. Lada's approach to self-reflexivity accomplishes two things at the level of form and cross-writing, it tightens the link between author and protagonists and it opens the text for the adult reader cherishing these metatextual references.

Hrusice — Arcadia in Bohemia

Josef Vojvodík has shown that it is precisely Lada's preoccupation with the idyllic that links him closely to the culture of Czech national revival [narodní obrození] [Vojvodík 1999, 80–107]. Literature and criticism from this period established the image of Bohemian countryside as an idyll and became a Czech autostereotype. Consequently, Lada who

idealized rural Bohemia more than any other artist in the 20th Century, was elevated to the rank of “national artist” in 1947. His depiction of the Czech village follows the tradition of Božena Němcová’s (1820–1862) novel *Babička. Obrazy z venkovského života* (1855) [The Grandmother. Pictures from Country Life]. With her immensely popular novel, Němcová created the blueprint for following generations of writers as well as a main protagonist who functions as a national figure of identification just as later on Lada’s characters. Němcová’s novel, like Lada’s fairy tale novel, is the result of a nostalgic retrospective of the world of childhood. It is important to note here, that already during Němcová’s time and even more so at the beginning of the 20th Century, this rural idyll was disappearing, the myth of Arcadian Bohemia already had a nostalgic ring to themselves. By the end of the 19th Century a lower percentage of the population was engaged in agriculture in the Czech lands than in any other part of the Austro-Hungarian empire and industrialization was progressing rapidly¹². The Bohemian landscape was punctuated by mining, metallurgical, chemical, textile, glass and porcelain and machine industries, and many of them changed the landscape irrevocably, and pollution was a grave problem. And in the 1930s agriculture had long been superseded by industry as the main source of income for the majority of the Czech population. Lada’s images of self-sufficient rural communities complete with cherry orchards and the obligatory Bohemian fishponds were a projection into a long-lost past, even if they pretended to depict a world of yesterday that was just briefly gone but could be restored any time. In more than one way, the Hrušice of his Mikeš’ stories presents itself as Foucauldian *heterotopos*, that is places “that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” [Foucault 1986, 22–27]. *Heterotopoi* create “spaces of illusion”, that mirror real spaces, just as Lada’s Hrušice presented and idealized image of Bohemian countryside, instead of the messy landscape corrupted by industrialization and rural poverty. In Lada’s case this was the setting of his imaginary childhood. Fairy tales as well as the genre of the idyll with their noted timelessness and their images of unsophisticated but happy lives that are not changed or interrupted by time are destined to create such heterotopoi.

The fictional worlds in *The Grandmother* as well as the world in Lada’s *Mikeš* are mostly free of major conflicts and unhappiness. The uncanny finds no access here. Lada’s depiction of village life in Hrusice

largely coincides with traditional Czech notions of the idyllic. With the national revival in the 19th century, the village and the farmhouse become the preferred topoi of national self-dramatization. They form the background for the Czech variant of the idyll: it is their remoteness and their distance from civilization that predestine them to be the setting of the idyll. The village idyll with its farmhouses is perceived as a profoundly Czech place [Macura 1997, 43–63]. Here, it is important to point out the importance of Lada's illustration. They gave shape to this idyllic universe and are to this day its epitome.

Lada's idyll is organically tied to Hrusice and the Central Bohemian countryside. "This little spatial world is limited and sufficient unto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way with other places, with the rest of the world" [Bakhtin 1982, 224–236]. This connectedness is particularly evident in Lada's drawings, which show the same village in the course of the seasons, linking natural phenomena and the events of human life [Bakhtin 1982, 226]. What is specific to Lada's conception of idyll is not its general coziness but rather its ability to integrate impulses from the outside. His fairy-tale idyll — and this is a fact that heightens the fairy-tale aspect of the story — is not threatened by outsiders or town-life. Outsiders like ringmaster Kludský integrate easily and quickly into the rural world, they are almost absorbed by it, but other than that the outside world does not feature in Hrusice.

Following Bakhtin, one can identify three types of the idyllic in Lada's text and images — first, the idyll as a return to the world of childhood, second the idyll as *aetas aurea*, a harmonious coexistence of man and animal, and third, the idyll as the world of sleep and dreams. The fictional world inhabited by Mikeš, Bobeš, and Pasšík, grandmother, and Pepík, is a timeless and stable. Despite the fact that Pepík grows up and moves to Prague and Mikeš becomes world wise and rich, the passing of time is not thematized. As in the classical Greek idyll, the "temporal boundaries" are blurred, to speak with Bakhtin [Bakhtin 1982, 229].

It is a world, populated by the very old and the very young. Children and animals seem interchangeable, they are treated the same and they behave the same. Some are boisterous like Bobeš, the goat, and Pepík, the cobbler's son, some are sensible like Mikeš and Marie, the tailor's daughter. The animals, especially Mikeš, the little pig Pašík and the goat Bobeš, are on equal footing with the human actors. Their opinions are heard and they even have authority to give orders. When Mikeš shows up in Hrusice with his circus friends, the grandmother gets into a frenzy, not because she is afraid of the lion, but because she does not have enough food in the house to feed the strangers: "If you are Mikeš's

friends, you are also my friends, and then surely I cannot let you go away without food” [Lada 2000, 182]. Sharing bread as a nurturing and communal act plays a major role in the chronotopos of the idyllic and in Lada’s fairy tale novel. Unsurprisingly, communal eating features prominently in Lada, since following Bakhtin the adjacency of children and food is a typical feature of the idyllic [Bakhtin 1982, 227].

Men and animals form a mutual beneficial community, helping each other out and taking care of each, for example, when the animals raise money in order to finance Pepík’s studies at the art academy in Prague. These substories are reminiscent of the motif of the grateful animal that forms the nucleus of the folk-tale “Puss in Boots”. Mikeš and ringmaster Kludský buy a house, to accommodate everyone — the circus animals and the village animals, the grandmother and the shepherd.

And one day, when Mikeš looked at his work, when he saw the children in the garden with his friends, when he saw the animals roaming, and when he thought about grandmother, Mr. Kludský, and the old Švejda sitting by the oven and chatting, he smiled and said gladly “Zlatý domov” (Home sweet, home) [Lada 2000, 260–261].

The last words of the quote as well as the title of the fourth volume “Zlatý domov” (Golden or Sweet home) are vaguely reminiscent of the Czech national anthem *Kde domov můj* and are another hint towards the entanglement of the national and the idyllic in Lada. Similar comments are repeated throughout the book. A description of the house on Christmas eve, for example, culminates in the following lines:

Our dear cat Mikeš... was happy because his life’s dream had been fulfilled, because everyone was gathered under the same roof, they all got on with each other and had a good time. He was happy because he could help others. His life’s dream had come true! [Lada 2000, 323].

This nocturnal idyll is matched by the illustrations that show a village in winter. Snow-covered roofs, children playing snowball or building snowmen, warmly clad figures — all these images do not show icy winter torpor, their main message is coziness. Bohemian winter is outdoor fun and warmth of the house, as those smoking chimneys suggest. Here, as elsewhere in the book, work is absent, or, if depicted, then only as a joyful pastime. The apex of this coziness and homely fun, is naturally Christmas eve. The culmination of the winter joys is Christmas Eve. The celebration of Christmas Eve is perceived as a profoundly Czech ritual that once again unites the idyllic and the national, bringing people and animals together¹³. The last quotation points to another variety of

the idyllic that plays a major role in Lada's work: the nocturnal world of dreams and sleep. Many of Lada's favorite motifs are night images: the night watchman blowing the hours, a water sprite resting by his lake in the evening.

Childhood

Lada was well aware of the imaginary nature of his literary creations, as can be seen in his memoir where he describes a return to his ancestral home: "The old shingle roofs were gone, gone were the old trees, without which the village now looked empty." And he is quick to point out that it is not only the outside appearance that has changed. "Many who were crucial to the character of the village, had Charon now taken to the other side of the river and the only thing that remained were stories about them" [Lada 1960, 273–274]. As Lada counts the dead and the damage done to the houses and gardens, his text oscillates between reminiscent reconstruction and elegiac evocation of irreparable loss. The rural childhood world that is evoked in his fairy tales and pictures had disappeared already before he wrote his stories as well as his memoir. The main message is a remembrance of things past, that remains real and beautiful however commodified or kitschy it is itself. The popularity of this particular story as well as other fairy tale narratives seems to serve a vital cultural purpose of treasuring things that were discarded by a culture that eliminated them once their economic utility was gone. The popularity of Lada's fairy tales remains high to this day, thus testifying not only to the popularity of Arcadian Bohemia in collective Czech memory, but also the lasting appeal of childhood fantasies.

In *Chronicle of my Life*, Lada stresses his childhood as the main source and inspiration of his graphic and textual work:

Everything was so mysterious, wonderful and fairy-tale-like, and yet I spent my childhood on a tiny patch of earth, between the tiled stove and the hearth. Everything I saw seemed magical: the trees full of white blossoms, later when they bore fruit, and still later in winter, bare and then covered with snow. My imagination was stimulated by everything I saw and heard [Lada 1960, 31].

Another source of inspiration were the stories about thieves, poachers and hunters, about ghosts and forest spirits, about water sprites and mermaids that his grandmother told him. These stories and adventures took on outsized proportions in the child's mind and fired his imagination. In retrospect, it is precisely the loss of this magical world view, the loss of

this unmediated perception of beauty, mystery, and nature that fills Lada with deep nostalgia. Transience and loss, two themes unbreakably linked to memory, are present in Lada's paintings through the motif of the ruin as well as his preference for wintry landscapes [Vojvodík 1999, 86].

In his memoir, Lada writes that childhood provides artists with a great treasure: "A happy childhood is obviously a never-ending source of ideas and motifs for artistic work for a writer and certainly also for a visual artist" [Lada 1960, 140]. In a similar vein, the German writer Erich Kästner also underlines the ways in which his happy childhood has grounded and inspired his work. In his opinion, good books are not created because you have children of your own or you know children, but because you know a child from a bygone era: yourself. Such children's books "are generally not works of observation but of memory" [Kästner 1998, 657]. The children's book researcher Hans Heino Ewers has drawn attention to the fact that many children's books have childhood memories of the author on the subject [Ewers 2001, 336–357]. And that memories of childhood often enough provide the impetus for writing a children's book.

A parallel reading of Lada's childhood memories and *Mikeš the Cat* shows that the author recalls key scenes of his childhood in both texts. In his novel for children, however, he does not stop at reminiscent reconstruction; he also implements and acts out the memory images with the help of his animal protagonists. Neither Mikeš and Pepík nor the real author, who would have had every reason to clash with his father, experience a conflict of detachment. After all, his father had put him into a shoemaker's apprenticeship against his will. In Lada's memory, however, this conflict fades in the context of the many happy hours they spent together. Here, the idyll as a narrative pattern prevails over a critical look at society which Lada's biography certainly would also have allowed for, but instead of elaborating on rural poverty and the hardships of country life, Lada depicts the joys of life in the countryside. Lada's work can be read as an imaginary return to childhood, into a pastoral idyll that no longer exists [Vojvodík 1999, 84]. It can also be viewed as a symptom of crises. It can be read as an attempt to stop the endlessly turning wheels of time, culture and consumption and freeze a status quo of self-sufficiency. The center of this nostalgic universe in the memoir as well as in *Mikeš* is the oven, which radiates warmth and is related to story-telling as communal activity and shared pastime. The village and the small house serve as a safe haven, while the outside world is a place of destruction and danger. The childhood world that Lada conjured up in his books and pictures had long since disappeared

when he died in 1957. War and industrialization had put an end to it. This made Lada's Mikeš all the more important for Czech audiences, young and old.

Notes

- ¹ For a short biography of Lada see [Mn 1993, 1119–1121].
- ² There is a website devoted to Lada merchandise: <https://www.joseflada.cz/en/>.
- ³ Lada's œuvre could also be seen as a form of cross-writing or “crossover literature.” Both terms are used to describe the phenomenon of the shifting boundaries between children's and adult literature and the corresponding forms of reading across the age-divide. For a discussion of cross-writing and all-generation in children's literature studies see [Falconer 2009, 366–379].
- ⁴ All translations from Czech in the following, unless otherwise indicated, are by the author.
- ⁵ In his autobiography, Lada mentions that the stories were first published in *Radost* (published from 1921–1941), see [Lada 1960, 386]. For further information on the journal see [Švec 2014, 344–346]. Other sources place them in *Lípa* which targeted older children and was also published by the Czech section of the Red Cross. See [Zpk 1993, 1188–89]. The journals counted many of the most acclaimed writers of these two decades among their contributors.
- ⁶ The text was published in four parts *O Mikešovi [About Mikeš]*, *Do světa [Into the World]*, *Cirkus Mikeš a Kludský [Circus Mikeš and Kludský]*, *Zlatý domov [Home sweet Home]*. The quotations in this article are taken from [Lada 2000]. The English translation from 1966 by Renata Simmonds *Purrkin the talking cat* is out of print, quotes therefore will be taken from the Czech edition.
- ⁷ Perrault's text already draws on older folk tales that circulated in the Romance language area and had grateful, helpful animals as their theme. In fairy tales of this type, the animal, through its knowledge of “human behavior... procures social advancement for a have-not by bluff and deceit” [Köhler-Zülch 1993, 1070].
- ⁸ For a commentary the Grimm version see [Uther 2013, 407–414]. Uther points out that the fairy tale was later left out of the collection of folk tales due to its literary character. The Czech philologist Jiří Polívka who cooperated with and commented on the Grimm collections helped popularize the fairy tale in the Bohemia.
- ⁹ Images of the idyllic are a staple of Czech literary self-representation since Božena Němcová's novel *Babička [The Grandmother]*. The literary Biedermeier infused the idyllic further with national connotations. For a discussion of the “fairy tale idyllic” with regard to Němcová see [Hrbata 1999, 41–52].

- ¹⁰ Walter Scherf notes that in both Perrault's and Grimm's versions the tomcat (the helper figure) is more important than the its human counterpart, the miller's son. Cf. [Scherf 1995, 491–495].
- ¹¹ For an outline of the Bildungsroman or novel of education see [Moretti 1987].
- ¹² For a short description of the effects of industrialization and its speed see [Cibulka 2018, 383–389].
- ¹³ Though as heated discussion in 2010 shows, the inclusivity has boundaries. In 2010 the Czech Association of Roma accused the book of anti-ciganism and demanded that the books be removed from school reading lists. For summary of the discussion see [Segl 2018, 30–32].

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**ЭТОТ ЛУЧШИЙ ИЗ МИРОВ: СКАЗКА ЙОЗЕФА ЛАДЫ О КОТЕ
МИКЕШЕ КАК ЧЕШСКАЯ ИДИЛЛИЯ И РОМАН ВОСПИТАНИЯ**

В статье анализируется литературная сказка чешского художника, иллюстратора и прозаика Йозефа Лады (1887–1957) о говорящем котике Микеше. Сказка, написанная в 1934–1936 гг., до сих пор пользуется широкой популярностью и входит в программу чтения в чешских школах. Первоначально сказка о котике Микеше публиковалась как цикл и была навеяна воспоминаниями о собственном детстве Лады и известным ему сюжетом сказки о котике в сапогах. В статье рассматриваются жанровые особенности сказки, представляющей своеобразное соединение идиллии и романа воспитания. Особое внимание уделяется анализу созданного Ладой уходящего мира деревенского детства — главного источника не только вдохновения, но и ностальгии автора по исчезающему миру чешской деревни в индустриальной Чехии 1930-х гг.

Ключевые слова: Чешская детская литература, Йозеф Лада, литературная сказка, «Кот в сапогах», роман воспитания, идиллия, детство, автобиография