

# The Philosopher Ladislav Klíma in the Eyes of his Contemporaries

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This paper reflects upon the reception of Ladislav Klíma by his contemporaries. The main emphasis is put on the so-called younger generation of philosophers gathered around the journal *Ruch filosofický*. Their attitudes towards Klíma echo the opinions of other philosophers and academics, as well as a number of famous writers such as Jaroslav Seifert, F. X. Šalda, Karel Čapek and Otokar Březina. The sources for my study are primarily reviews of Klíma's works along with his correspondence, while other rich sources include obituaries or occasional anecdotes written by his friends.

Ladislav Klíma was considered predominantly to be a philosopher by his contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> In addition to articles for periodicals and newspapers and one theatrical comedy, he only published three books during his lifetime – *The World as Consciousness and Nothing* (*Svět jako vědomí a nic*), *A Second and Eternity* (*Vteřina a věčnost*), and *Tractates and Dictates* (*Traktáty a Diktáty*) – all of which are philosophical works. He did, of course, write literary works as well, although rather for the sake of his own interest, entertainment, and, as he confesses to his good friend and patron Emanuel Chalupný,<sup>2</sup> and also

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1 In a letter to Emanuel Chalupný, Ladislav Klíma writes: “It is wholly true that I am no belletrist...” Klíma reacts here to Chalupný's criticism of his “romanettos”. Chalupný read them in manuscript form and wrote to Klíma telling him that he is a philosopher, not a belletrist. Klíma, L. – Kabeš, J. (ed.), *A Spiritual Friendship: Mutual Correspondence of Ladislav Klíma with Emanuel Chalupný and Otokar Březina* (*Duchovní přátelství: vzájemná korespondence Ladislava Klímy s Emanuelem Chalupným a Otokarem Březinou*). Praha, Jan Pohořelý 1940, p. 106. In another letter to Chalupný, Klíma writes: “My ‘belles lettres’ are, first and foremost, philosophical works, and only in a secondary sense are they literature; their literary qualities stand subordinate to their philosophical ones and they desire to be judged accordingly!” *Ibid.*, p. 48.

2 “– In the past two years, I have churned out for my own entertainment and recuperation a cartload of ‘bel’ lettres, ten times more realistic and filthy than Zola, 10 times more fantastical than Hoffmann, Baudelaire, 10× more cynical than Grabbe, 10× more paradoxical than Wilde, 10× coarser than Havlíček, 10× more effective means for the induction of vomiting than ‘The

to Alois Friedler, as a sort of self-therapy.<sup>3</sup> All his literary work was, however, published only posthumously and in the form of unfinished texts which Klíma's partner, Kamila Lososová, attempted to organise and partially finish writing herself. Nevertheless, Otokar Březina saw that as a deep offence to Klíma's legacy and therefore objected to their publication.<sup>4</sup>

In this study, I aim to present the most comprehensive view possible of how the philosophy of Ladislav Klíma was received in his time. Some may be surprised by the quantity of positive responses to Klíma's persona and work, which, in fact, vastly outnumber negative reviews and attitudes.

### Klíma in His Own Eyes

When Klíma published his debut work *The World as Consciousness and Nothing* in 1904, it did not, at first, elicit any reaction whatsoever. It was not until seven months later (20 May 1905) that Klíma received the first feedback<sup>5</sup> in a letter from Emanuel Chalupný, who writes that Otokar Březina has drawn his attention to a very intriguing treatise, written by Klíma and that he is eager to discuss several of the ideas presented in it with Klíma himself.<sup>6</sup> Klíma replies to Chalupný two days later, excited by the attention of Otokar Březina, whom he considers to be “the only great Czech writer [...] and a man of wholly extraordinary, truly deep mind”.<sup>7</sup>

The correspondence continued and a friendship was soon forged between the two thinkers. Chalupný sends his *Introduction to Sociology (Úvod do sociologie)* to Klíma along with a few words about why, in his opinion, Klíma's first work had gone unnoticed. According to Chalupný, Klíma himself was the root of this failure since he had not promoted the book enough. Chalupný had only found out about it through Březina, and when he had recommend-

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Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart,' in short, a non plus ultra of indecency, villainy, and madness.” Ibid., p. 41.

- 3 “... just this year have I written about 250 coherent pages in German, about a quarter of a novel, [...] – By the way, it’s a pity that I did not continue in this endeavour, that I could not devote myself fully to it. It was very pleasant living entirely in those faerie regions, very healthy for me; it might have even saved my life or at least my sanity [...]” Ibid., p. 99.
- 4 “It is a morbid book; merely an unfinished sketch of something that has yet to be written, [...]. Klíma’s reputation will suffer severely (from the book’s publication), since (his enemies) will draw conclusions from it and will see in it merely the consequences of disease and alcoholism.” Chalupný, E., *Letters and Opinions of Otokar Březina 3 (Dopisy a výroky Otokara Březiny 3)*. Praha, Fr. Borový 1931, p. 180.
- 5 “Your letter is the only reaction to my book that I have received, – soon it will be 7 months since its publication.” Klíma, L. – Kabeš, J. (ed.), *A Spiritual Friendship*, p. 12.
- 6 Ibid., p. 11.
- 7 Ibid., p. 12.

ed it to his friends, none of them had heard about it either. Another aspect also damaging the book's chances of success, according to Chalupný, was its anonymous authorship (the cover of the book bears merely the initial "L."), while Klíma had been very keen on this feature, believing it would attract potential readers.

Klíma objected that he had never longed for immediate recognition and did not expect success or fame: "An audience is an audience, i.e. it is never any good."<sup>8</sup> However, he did expect a certain amount of attention thanks to the eccentricity or, as he says, strikingness (*frapantnost*) of the work. This, in his opinion, is evident throughout the whole book, both in the ideas expressed as well as in the overall composition – in their originality, paradoxicality, daringness, ruthlessness, and un-Czech nature... Klíma wanted to cause a sensation – some expression of disapproval, repulsion, scorn, ridicule. He believed that he would be branded a madman thanks to this book; perhaps he even wished it. It was a role which he often placed himself in – the role of a madman whom nobody understands, the role of a controversial, offensive figure. Klíma explains the fact that the book shocked nobody by declaring that the audience must be suffering from acephalia, a congenital defect characterised by the absence of the head.<sup>9</sup> His intention alone to make his work "an example of madhouse literature"<sup>10</sup> makes Klíma an extraordinary phenomenon of Czech philosophy of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Klíma's Philosophical Confession

More than twenty years later, a series of Klíma's articles titled *My Philosophical Confession* (*Moje filosofická zpověď*) was published in the journal *Nová svoboda*. At the request of the journal's editorial board, Klíma's long-time friend, Emanuel Chalupný, wrote the preface to the series. In the preface, he recounts how Ladislav Klíma has been brought up by his father to feel a "deep, belligerent Czech nationalism and hatred towards the Habsburg dynasty",<sup>11</sup> which resulted in his official expulsion from all the schools in Austria at the age of 17 and consequently devoted himself to self-study and developing

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8 Ibid., p. 16.

9 "If just 100 people skimmed through the book, each for at least 15 minutes, they would find enough things that would deeply harm the moral sensitivity of those pachyderms; and given the blabbering of the generis humani, at least 2 expressions of indignation would certainly appear in the press, – and then simply *fama cresceret eundo...* – this would most certainly happen if humanity was not afflicted with acephalia..." Ibid., p. 18.

10 Ibid., p. 16.

11 Klíma, L., *My Philosophical Confession I* (*Moje filosofická zpověď I*). *Nová svoboda*, 2, 1925, No. 20, p. 328.

his own philosophy.<sup>12</sup> The “impractical philosopher”<sup>13</sup> subsequently relied on the support of his admirers, who included Emanuel Chalupný and Otokar Březina, until his death.<sup>14</sup> Chalupný warns in his preface against Klíma’s philosophy, which is “ostentatiously contemptuous of the democratic and social endeavours of the current age”<sup>15</sup> He adds that not one of Klíma’s admirers agrees fully with his philosophy, but that they, nevertheless, endorse Klíma as a “thinker of the first order”<sup>16</sup> and one of the most daring contemporary metaphysicians precisely due to these qualities of his, “regardless of whether or not he sings along to our tune.”<sup>17</sup> Chalupný also notes that history knows cases when a not entirely pro-democratic philosophy, an “aristocratic” philosophy,<sup>18</sup> gave rise to completely different movements and often had democratic effects.

Klíma was perceived by the public as an “oddity”,<sup>19</sup> a “morbid phenomenon”,<sup>20</sup> Seifert called him a “notorious philosopher and trouble-maker”.<sup>21</sup> A philosopher par excellence living on the financial benevolence of his friends, employed just three times in his life, each time just for a few months.<sup>22</sup> “More carefree than Diogenes”,<sup>23</sup> is how Karel Čapek remembers him in an obituary published in *Lidové noviny*. Klíma was not averse to these judgements about him; on the contrary, he helped stimulate them in his confession. He had decided as a teenager never to attend school and never to get a job<sup>24</sup> – in his own words: “(I wanted to) live without civil employment, freely, like a hermit, alone with myself”.<sup>25</sup> His originality and, as they said at the time, queer-ness<sup>26</sup> attracted reviewers and readers. Many highlighted his authenticity as a philosopher, artist and individual.

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12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Fischer, J. L., Ladislav Klíma: A Second and Eternity (*Vteřina a věčnost*). *Jihočeský přehled*, 2, 1927, No. 6, p. 172.

20 Krejčí, F., Ladislav Klíma. *Česká mysl*, 24, 1928, No. 3, p. 281.

21 Seifert, J., *All the Beauty of the World (Všecky krásy světa)*. Praha, Eminent – Knižní klub 1999, p. 211.

22 Klíma, L., *My Philosophical Confession I*, p. 328.

23 Čapek, K., Ladislav Klíma. *Lidové noviny*, 36, 1928, No. 203, p. 5.

24 Klíma, L., *My Philosophical Confession I*, p. 328.

25 Ibid., p. 329.

26 “A loner, a queer.” Pelikán, F., *The Deceased Ladislav Klíma (Ladislav Klíma zemřelý)*. *Ruch filosofický*, 8, 1929, No. 2, p. 120. “In every way the ‘queer and lunatic’, Klíma has earned a secure place in the (albeit scant) history of Czech philosophical thought.” Procházka, R., Ladislav

With his confessions, published in *Nová svoboda*, Klíma created a legend about himself, building on an idea of man who is no longer troubled by the sentiments of the soul,<sup>27</sup> who spent his entire childhood in the woods<sup>28</sup> avoiding contact with other people including his own parents and siblings, whose touch he despised,<sup>29</sup> a man who devoted his entire life to the endeavour of attaining egodeism.

### Emanuel Chalupný, Discoverer and Patron of Ladislav Klíma

When, thanks to Březina, Chalupný discovered *The World as Consciousness and Nothing*, he wrote a review of it and submitted it for publication to the journal *Česká mysl*. The editor in chief of the journal František Krejčí rejected the review, commenting that

“the work which Your article deals with consists of aphorisms, which are not bound by the cement of logic to form a coherent whole, and, in fact, impart nothing that would open up any new perspectives.”<sup>30</sup>

Chalupný subsequently rewrote the article and Krejčí finally published it.<sup>31</sup> Chalupný points out in his review that Klíma “shows a great aptitude for observation”,<sup>32</sup> and that “his thoughts are not merely formulated, but also lived and ruthlessly expressed”.<sup>33</sup> In reaction to Krejčí’s criticism of Klíma’s aphoristic style, Chalupný states that

“(Klíma) writes in aphorisms because he considers the subject of philosophy to be alogical, and the artificial implementation of logic in it to be absurd for noetic reasons.”<sup>34</sup>

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Klíma, the Philosopher of Paroxysm (Ladislav Klíma, filosof paroxysmu). *Lidové noviny*, 36, 1928, No. 208, 20. 4., p. 7. Etc.

27 Klíma, L., My Philosophical Confession I, p. 328–330.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Notes. See Zumr, J., Emanuel Chalupný – The Discoverer and Mecenary of Ladislav Klíma (Emanuel Chalupný – objevitel a mecenáš Ladislava Klímy). In: Gilk, E. – Hrabal, J. (eds.), *Eternity is Not a Pocket With a Hole So That Something Could Fall Out of It. A Collection of Essays Dedicated to Ladislav Klíma* (Věčnost není děravá kapsa, aby se z ní něco ztratilo. Soubor studií věnovaných Ladislavu Klímovi). Olomouc, Aluze 2010, p. 6. Available online at [www: http://klimaladislav.sweb.cz/Klima\\_sbormik.pdf](http://klimaladislav.sweb.cz/Klima_sbormik.pdf) [cit. 25. 3. 2020].

31 Chalupný, E., *The World as Consciousness and Nothing*. Written by L... (Svět jako vědomí a nic. Napsal L...). *Česká mysl*, 7, 1906, No. 2, 1. 3., p. 143–144.

32 Ibid., p. 144.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

Nevertheless, Krejčí could not resist adding a footnote:

“Unless an author has already published other, systematic texts in which he attempts to justify his arguments, writing in aphorisms is always a flaw and also proof that the author merely scratched the surface and did not think his ideas through deeply enough.”<sup>35</sup>

In his review, Chalupný also devotes some space to a topic in which Krejčí probably diverges from Klíma the most, i.e. the topic of metaphysics, which was wholly rejected by the contemporary philosophical community:

“The author considers the loftiest of mental states to be artistic ones and the mental activity of the highest order to be that of metaphysics. He ascribes a low value to exact sciences and rejects systematicity in philosophy.”<sup>36</sup>

At the time when positivism still dominated Czech philosophy, fifteen years before the wave of resistance spearheaded by *Ruch filosofický* rose up against its austere exactness, Klíma comes as a breath of fresh air into the Czech philosophical milieu.

Chalupný’s article was the only reaction that Klíma’s debut work<sup>37</sup> had elicited until 1911, when Karel Horký devoted a special issue of the magazine *Stopa* to the book. The issue ended with the note: “We shall reveal the name of the author of ‘the book that nobody has read’ and that inspired this special issue of ‘Stopa’ in the next issue [...]”<sup>38</sup> The following (24<sup>th</sup>) issue with an editorial by Josef Kodíček, titled *The Author of the Unread Book (Autor knihy, která nebyla čtena)*,<sup>39</sup> revealed Klíma’s name, introducing him to the public for the first time. Josef Kodíček remained an adherent and friend of Klíma’s and after his death wrote an obituary about him for the magazine *Literární svět*.

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35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Apart from an article in *Přehled*, a magazine redacted by Emanuel Chalupný – an article identical with the one published in *Česká mysl*.

38 Klíma, L. – Kabeš, J. (ed.), *A Spiritual Friendship*, p. 97.

39 Kodíček, J., *The Author of the Unread Book (Autor knihy, která nebyla čtena)*, [úvodník]. *Stopa*, 1, 1910–1911, No. 24, p. 711.

## Otokar Březina

Emanuel Chalupný published the book *Letters and Opinions of Otokar Březina (Dopisy a výroky Otokara Březiny)* in 1931, that is, after the deaths of both Březina and Klíma. In the chapter “Ladislav Klíma”, we learn that Březina regarded Klíma as the greatest Czech philosopher of all and that “Klíma is a sound that is essential for the symphony of our souls.”<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, Březina allegedly told Chalupný that

“Once, I got annoyed at him for making fun of me for saying that man ‘will take his place’ among the princes of the cosmos; I meant it symbolically, of course; but what should one expect from others if one is misunderstood even by Klíma?”<sup>41</sup>

According to the testimonies of both geniuses, the first meeting of the two philosopher-poets was beautiful.<sup>42</sup> Friendship with Ladislav Klíma was, however, not always beautiful and was also often difficult. Whenever Březina, who spent most of his time in Jaroměřice and Luhačovice, came to Prague, he would stay with his good friend, the artist František Bílek. In a letter written to Březina in July 1920, Klíma proposes that they meet up when he next comes up to Prague to stay at Bílek’s again, saying this would be the most practical solution for him. Bílek did not particularly like Klíma which, it seems, Klíma knew, and so he suggested meeting at another friend of theirs, a certain Mr. Srb, who lived ten minutes away from Bílek’s house. Březina, however, tactfully apologizes later that he had spent only a short while in Prague and had time to meet up. Klíma did not reply until a year later in December 1921, when, in an obviously chaotic state, he asks for a financial loan.<sup>43</sup>

Both Březina and Chalupný had great respect for Klíma’s judgment, as is evident in one of Březina’s letters:

“Dear friend, if you deem it proper, please, use my name and good word wherever it could be of benefit to our philosopher. For those who work

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40 Chalupný, E., *Letters and Opinions of Otokar Březina*, p. 180.

41 Ibid.

42 They met only after many invitations and expressed wishes had exchanged hands: In a letter from Ladislav Klíma to Otokar Březina from 26. 7. 1915, in a letter from Březina to Klíma from 15. 8. 1915, in a letter from Klíma to Březina from 18. 8. 1915, Klíma to Březina 28. 9. 1915, Březina to Klíma 4. 7. 1920. See Klíma, L. – Kabeš, J. (ed.), *A Spiritual Friendship*, p. 65, 68, 69–71, 73–75, 90.

43 Ibid., p. 91.

with their minds, however, this will not be necessary; for them, the work that our friend has done speaks for him in his stead. We cannot do more for him that he himself has.”<sup>44</sup>

The concern of both writers for “their philosopher” is touching and we get perhaps the best picture of their relationship from a sentence written in an unsent letter from Březina to Chalupný:

“If, however, I am ever graced with the opportunity to put forth my personal testimony of Klíma as a man who was good, strangely gentle in his soul, defenceless in the midst of this world whose power he celebrated and loved – with luck, a different, more appropriate occasion to do this will present itself one day.”<sup>45</sup>

It is just a pity that Březina never had the chance to realise his intention, since he died shortly after writing this, less than a year after Klíma’s death, on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1929.

### Klíma’s Literary Friends

In his book *All the Beauty of the World* (*Všecky krásy světa*), Jaroslav Seifert describes his meeting with Ladislav Klíma. One evening, Klíma and Seifert’s mutual friend, the poet Arnošt Dvořák, accompanied Seifert to a wine bar called *U Šuterů* in the centre of Prague where Klíma, “the famed philosopher and trouble-maker”,<sup>46</sup> was already waiting for them. Seifert recounts how the “at first lively and interesting conversation with this man turned into a drinking session, during which [Klíma] drank himself almost into oblivion.”<sup>47</sup> In the end, Seifert had to walk the staggering Klíma home.

Earlier that evening, Seifert had allegedly managed to arrange a meeting between Klíma and one of Klíma’s greatest admirers, František Halas, who grew up reading *The World as Consciousness and Nothing* and counted it among his most favourite books. Halas had supposedly been brought up at his grandmother’s flat in Brno, in the poorest household that Seifert had ever encountered. In the squalid room where Halas slept, there was nothing but a straw mattress, a cage with a squirrel in it, and a small bookcase with *The Communist Manifesto* and Klíma’s *The World as Consciousness and Noth-*

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44 Chalupný, E., *Letters and Opinions of Otokar Březina*, p. 179.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

46 Seifert, J., *All the Beauty of the World*, p. 211.

47 *Ibid.*



ing in it. “That was the world where the young Halas began to live his life. Those were the pages that the poet leafed through when seeking inspiration for his first verses.”<sup>48</sup> For some reason, Klíma never made it to that meeting, and died just a few months later. Seifert recalls “I found it touching that, just a few hours before his death, he remembered me and sent me two of his books, *The World as Consciousness and Nothing* and *Matthew the Honest (Matěj Poctivý)* with a friendly dedication”.<sup>49</sup>

Another one of Klíma’s Czech literary friends was F. X. Šalda. Klíma and Šalda knew each other well and had mutual respect for one another; they exchanged letters and Šalda even published some of Klíma’s articles in the magazine *Tvorba*. There is a poem dedicated to the memory of Ladislav Klíma in the fifth part of *Šalda’s Notebook (Šaldův zápisník)*, which Šalda began to publish in 1928, continuing with it until his death in 1937.<sup>50</sup>

### J. L. Fischer

Now, I move on from Klíma’s personal acquaintances to reviews of his philosophy in the true sense of the word. In a study published in the journal *Naše věda*, Fischer embarks upon an interpretation of Klíma’s philosophy, not refraining from including judgments on Klíma himself. This is a common feature in most reviewers of Klíma’s work; Klíma’s personality is so inseparable from his philosophy that reviewers often resort to *ad hominem* assessments of it. Fischer notes that two features are characteristic for Klíma: an immoderate rationalism and “an almost monstrous” hypertrophy of the intellect.<sup>51</sup> Intellect, will, and animality – those are, according to Fischer, the three pillars of Klíma’s philosophy. Klíma went from his initial scepticism,

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48 Ibid., p. 206.

49 Ibid.

50 “A somnambulist of beauty, towards your dream you have set forth, upright, steep, called by the magnet of love, on the ledges of temples you walked,  
[...]

From the stars, flying lightning fast, a great midnight butterfly is falling,  
upon the hearts, mouths, lips he sits; closing and opening his wings  
with a nervous, feverish tremble.

[...]

From your heart he has come to drink to regain new strength,  
to gulp in new colours, so that he would enlarge his breadth  
flowers’ spectral silence and the abyss’ heady exhale,  
over darkness, a rainbow stretched, and over the frost, a smile.”

Šalda, F. X., *Šalda’s Notebook 5 (Šaldův zápisník ročník pátý)*. Praha, Otto Gírgal 1928–1937; 5, No. 1, p. 230–231.

51 Fischer, J. L., Ladislav Klíma: *The World as Consciousness and Nothing, The Tractates and Dictates, A Second and Eternity (Ladislav Klíma: Svět jako vědomí a nic, Traktáty a diktáty, Vteřina a věčnost)*. *Naše věda*, 9, 1927–1928, No. 8–10, p. 153.

metaphysically grounded in Schopenhauer's concept of the Will, amended by Nietzsche, to the idea of absolute nothingness as a logical consequence of the shadow play of notions in which we live. According to Fischer, this is the first logically sound intellectual area of Klíma's philosophy. The second area, the cult of physical force and power, is rife with "serious inconsistencies"<sup>52</sup> and these two areas conflict with each other:

"One area knows only shadows and their play. The second knows only the wisdom of harsh individualism, whose cult of power is suppressed mainly by fundamentally aesthetic considerations."<sup>53</sup>

At the same time, however, these diverse, contradictory areas are "unified in Klíma's personality in a deeply paradoxical unity."<sup>54</sup>

In order to gain a better understanding of this assessment, let us look at Fischer's review of *Tractates and Dictates*, published in the magazine *Jihočeský přehled* just a couple of months earlier.<sup>55</sup> Klíma is viewed here as an oddity<sup>56</sup> whose eccentricity stems from his "unbridled cult of individualism",<sup>57</sup> through which he draws attention upon himself in "an age which is suffering from a catastrophic decline into individualism".<sup>58</sup> In Fischer's opinion, it is due to Nietzsche that individualism tended to be confused with some sort of rebellious cult of power, a typical expression of herd behaviour in its crudest form. However, individualism is, according to Fischer, an elemental reaction to this form of herd behaviour. This conflict between a cult of barbaric power and a clarified, pure form of individualism is, according to Fischer, reflected in Klíma. Klíma's indisputable and perhaps greatest achievement is that he brought the two-pronged problem of individualism back into the arena. Fischer writes that in Klíma's work there glistens a clear, clarified individualism which is always true to itself, always relying solely on itself.<sup>59</sup>

### Tractates and Dictates

When *Tractates and Dictates* appeared, it stirred up the greatest wave of reviews that Klíma had ever experienced. A review of it by Dr. Alfréd Fuchs appeared in the magazine *Československá republika*. The book impressed him;

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52 Ibid., p. 156.

53 Ibid., p. 157.

54 Ibid.

55 Fischer, J. L., Ladislav Klíma: A Second and Eternity, p. 172.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

he describes Klíma as a unique thinker in the Czech milieu, a true philosopher:

“A number of great thinkers have already featured in the history of the Czech nation, but not until now a single philosopher in the true sense of the word, that is, a man to whom thinking would be the same kind of passion, as creation is to an artist.”<sup>60</sup>

Unlike other great Czech thinkers, who “subjugate their thought to practical wisdom”<sup>61</sup> and whose philosophy serves as a kind of hygienic agent, a tool meant to advance them towards certain national or social goals, Klíma dives headfirst into the depths of mysticism, Absurdity, the Absolute, without attempting to be of any use to anybody, without feeling the need to turn philosophy into a remedy for the ills of the Czech nation. Klíma’s philosophy knows no boundaries; it is a genuine, pure philosophy without the admixture of psychology or sociology that was so common for philosophers of that era. Fuchs compares Klíma to Březina in whom he also sees “hints of this intellectual passion.”<sup>62</sup> Fuchs notes:

“Klíma has chosen his era very badly, since this is an era full of discussion and debate on how to bring people bliss through politics, socialism, and similar collectivist catchwords.”<sup>63</sup>

Regular contributors to *Ruch filosofický*, members of the younger philosophical generation Karel Vorovka, Ferdinand Pelikán, Tomáš Trnka, and Vladimír Hoppe, also expressed their opinions on the book. Even the “main antagonist” in the conflict of the younger philosophical generation of idealists with the older philosophical generation, the most influential Czech positivist, František Krejčí, had expressed himself favourably towards *Tractates and Dictates*, saying “the book glistens with profound ideas”.<sup>64</sup>

Karel Vorovka and Ladislav Klíma found such strong intellectual bond in the idea of free, unbound philosophising<sup>65</sup> that they became friends, ex-

60 Fuchs, A., *Tractates and Dictates (Traktáty a diktáty)*. *Československá republika*, 243, 1922, No. 91, p. 6.

61 *Ibid.*

62 *Ibid.*

63 *Ibid.*

64 Krejčí, F., *Ladislav Klíma: Tractates and Dictates. Philosophical Contemplations*. *Česká mysl*, 18, 1922, No. 3, p. 180–181.

65 “However, I stand firmly behind the right of every person in the world to philosophise as they want, and to hold onto that specific philosophy and that manner of philosophical work that one likes, and to which one feels they have a natural disposition.” Vorovka, K., *Vorovka on the*

changed letters, and frequently visited one another. Vorovka's life was starkly different from that of Klíma's – having successfully completed studies at *gymnasium* (grammar school), Vorovka went on to study mathematics and physics at university, and subsequently taught natural sciences at a secondary school. He found a liking in the philosophy of mathematics which he lectured at the Faculty of Science of Charles University in Prague.

Vorovka's book *Scepsis and Gnosis* (*Skepsa a gnóse*; 1921) fascinated Klíma.<sup>66</sup> Vorovka and Klíma became acquainted thanks to *Ruch filosofický*, to which Vorovka frequently contributed, while Klíma contributed just one, *Absurdity and the Absolute* (*Absurdita a absolutno*),<sup>67</sup> where he introduced his philosophy, i.e. egosolism. Vorovka reacted to *Tractates and Dictates* with an article, the purpose of which was neither to be a critique or review of the book – the text was more an essay on Klíma himself than on his book. According to Vorovka, Klíma “cannot be cornered in the same way usually reserved for philosophers, that is, by proving him guilty of contradictions”.<sup>68</sup> Vorovka understands that the shocking passages are written with humour and that even the serious passages “eventually turn out to be a lot of fun”.<sup>69</sup> He appreciates Klíma's singularity and originality:

“We are so much alike that it is almost disgraceful. All the more should we value the opinions of those who differ from us diametrically [...]. Klíma is not just another of our singularities, he is the one and only singular.”<sup>70</sup>

Vorovka sees in Klíma a man whose cynicism hides and masks his love for everything that is noble in man. Vorovka sees a geometrical exactness in Klíma's aphorisms: “often they are the very apex of thought reached through the shortest possible paths”.<sup>71</sup> He also praises his style:

“A grand prize could be given to the man who finds a clichéd comparison or hackneyed collocation in Klíma's work.”<sup>72</sup>

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Struggle for Freedom of Czech Philosophy (Vorovka o boji za svobodu české filosofie). *Ruch filosofický*, 8, 1929, No. 2, p. 128.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 14–19.

67 Klíma, L., *Absurdity and the Absolute* (*Absurdita a absolutno*). *Ruch filosofický*, 2, 1922, No. 2–3, p. 1–7.

68 Vorovka, K., Ladislav Klíma, *Tractates and Dictates*. *Ruch filosofický*, 2, 1922, No. 8–10, p. 73.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

70 *Ibid.*

71 *Ibid.*

72 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

In contrast to Vorovka, a rather critical reaction to Klíma came from Vladimír Hoppe. He begins his review of *Tractates and Dictates*, published in the magazine *Naše doba*, with the following words:

“This bold and idiosyncratic book of Klíma’s has to some extent been accepted with great praise by critics, as if it puts forth a wholly new view on life and the world.”<sup>73</sup>

Hoppe does not identify with the critics’ opinion and sees in Klíma a similar phenomenon in Czech philosophy as Max Stirner was in German philosophy, although in Hoppe’s opinion Klíma does differ from Stirner in some aspects. Klíma’s solipsism, his egosolism and egodeism, are, according to Hoppe, “a titanic reworking of the old subjectivist, Stirnerist principle of not acknowledging any worldview other than that inside of us.”<sup>74</sup> Hoppe calls this “a superficially attractive egoism” sufficient only for a narrow view of life and for mere survival, due to which Klíma closes in on himself as if “into the narrow and stifling crypt of his own little Ego”<sup>75</sup> which, according to Hoppe, signifies a clear contradiction in Klíma’s opinions. On the one hand, Klíma is absolute, he is God, on the other hand, he writes that “this world [...] [is] a grandiose self-deceit, a sublime game of hide-and-seek that it plays with itself,<sup>76</sup> [...]” which necessarily negates Klíma’s own absoluteness. If Klíma is God, then, according to Hoppe, he is merely “[...] a lowly variety or rather a monstrosity of true God, with a complete lack of *raison d’être*: by his existence, he also brings about his own end.”<sup>77</sup> Hoppe sees but a caricature of God in Klíma.

Hoppe also criticises Klíma’s “strange philosophical erudition”,<sup>78</sup> his “haughty attitude”,<sup>79</sup> that has Klíma convinced that nobody before him had ever asked the philosophical question “Is there something else apart from my own ego?”, and which forces Hoppe to assume that Klíma had not read Kant attentively enough and had not fully contemplated the problems Kant deals with in *Critique of Pure Reason*. Otherwise, as Hoppe claims, Klíma could not have come to the conclusions he presented in his book.

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73 Hoppe, V., Ladislav Klíma: *Tractates and Dictates*. Philosophical Contemplations. *Naše doba*, 30, 1922, No. 3, p. 186.

74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.*

78 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

79 *Ibid.*

Ferdinand Pelikán wrote a review in the educational supplement of *Národní listy* titled *The Philosophical Illusionist and Ludibrionist (Filosofický illusionista a ludibrionista)*. He finds Klíma's coarse language in *Tractates and Dictates* objectionable, and consequently the book "cannot elevate the force of thought to the mysterious beauty and sublimity which Klíma desires."<sup>80</sup> He also dislikes Klíma's self-abandonment and desire to fly high as a bird in the heights of "useless" philosophy:

"Klíma's will is a mood, and a momentary one at that, which does not mean a cultural movement. [...] no effort is made whatsoever at creating some stable cultural values, and all those gleaming contradictions and paradoxes dissolve at once into a silhouette of a careful philologist and journalist suddenly plummeting from the 'superstructure' that he had created for himself."<sup>81</sup>

Trnka's review was published in the magazine *Lumír*. In it, he calls Klíma his antipode<sup>82</sup> since, unlike Klíma, he believes that reality is justified, and he seeks an ethical principle grounded in reality. Klíma, Trnka writes, claims that "God is an endless succession of suicides"<sup>83</sup> and that all reality is an unjustified creation of existences that finds justification only in "a heroic suicide, in negation of oneself",<sup>84</sup> of course, only in the suicide of someone who has come to know nothingness and life perfectly. Trnka writes that Klíma will come inexorably to the conclusion of deifying his own "I", to egosolism and egodeism. Trnka states that "Klíma is the personification of the crisis in today's philosophy," and continues that

"he is a necessary reaction to the static and dynamic conception of reality; he is a necessary negation of both. But he is only a negation."<sup>85</sup>

Trnka values Klíma's heroism in tearing down old norms upon whose ruins something new can be built. Nevertheless, he doubts that Klíma is capable of building anything.

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80 Pelikán, F., *A Philosophical Illusionist and Ludibrionist (Filosofický illusionista a ludibrionista)*. *Národní listy (Vzdělávací příloha)*, 62, 1922, No. 118, p. 13.

81 Ibid.

82 Trnka, T., Ladislav Klíma: *Tractates and Dictates. Philosophical Contemplations*. *Lumír*, 49, 1922, No. 5, p. 275.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

## Obituaries

When Klíma died in April 1928, the daily press and magazines were flooded with obituaries. Most of them honoured the memory of the deceased and kept to the principle of speaking only good of the dead. The only exception was František Krejčí, who wrote his obituary for Klíma for *Česká mysl*.

“He was a diseased phenomenon in both social and literary life [...]”,<sup>86</sup> Krejčí writes already in the first sentence. He then claims that judging from how Klíma’s friends remember him, it is clear that they were disconcerted by his works and public demeanour. In reality, however, most of the obituaries were actually heartfelt and favourable towards Klíma, as we will show below. According to Krejčí, Klíma’s supporters were only blinded by his extravagance, and Krejčí himself attributes all peculiarities in Klíma’s literary works to his “diseased organism”<sup>87</sup> and proclaims that Klíma was not a philosopher, but a poet who merely wanted to philosophise, to solve philosophical problems, but then solved them through poetry, which Krejčí does not consider a valid philosophical method. “My conviction is that a philosopher cannot be a poet,”<sup>88</sup> Krejčí concludes.

Another obituary was written by the aforementioned Josef Kodíček. He wrote to *Literární svět* about Klíma that “[...] his life is going to be a legend” and he was not far from truth. According to Kodíček, Klíma was a free, independent, brave man, tirelessly struggling to free himself from the human and heading towards the divine.<sup>89</sup> Kodíček sees the main value of Klíma’s work in his walking the same path as his teachers and in that his work is “a true to life expression of personality, it is not something artificial or studied.”<sup>90</sup>

Kodíček also speaks of Klíma’s “being among people”<sup>91</sup> – he speaks of those who described Klíma as an unhappy, gloomy and pessimistic, failed, unemployed, and uneducated man – after all, he was not even a professor. But Klíma was not, according to Kodíček, unhappy, and he personally does not find any gloominess or pessimism in his work. “His concept of nothingness is

86 Krejčí, F., Ladislav Klíma, p. 281.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid., p. 282.

89 “To him, who of all people came closest to being absolutely uncompromising, he who fought the greatest humanly possible fight to become something ‘wholly’. That impossibility to be something *wholly*, to think *wholly*, to be free *wholly*, that tragical contradiction of every person, over which people smile because they have already given up before they even started fighting, that tragedy of all people of the most lofty type, whether their name is Christ, Tolstoy, Beethoven, Nietzsche, that impossible effort towards totality [...]” Kodíček, J., Lad. Klíma. *Literární svět*, 1, 1928, No. 17, p. 1.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

at the same time a concept of radiance.<sup>92</sup> Kodíček likens Klíma's "scolding of human traits"<sup>93</sup> to a fatherly reprimand that is meant to rouse one to become a better individual. He also speaks of Klíma's reclusion which, in Kodíček's opinion, does not lack purpose, but rather due to the necessity of "a spiritual worker"<sup>94</sup> to concentrate on himself. Kodíček ascribes Klíma's theoretical expression of disdain for everything human to a sense of humour.<sup>95</sup> "There was not a more gentle and charming man among us!"<sup>96</sup>

An obituary written by Klíma's long-time admirer, František Kocourek, for the magazine *Pestrý týden* captures accurately the duality of Klíma's personality: a brutal theoretician and a gentle man. Kocourek was "weaned" on Klíma – as a student, he read his *Tractates and Dictates*, and he found his literature "extremely appealing for its strength and spontaneity which can neither be hidden nor feigned".<sup>97</sup> Once a week, Kocourek held reading sessions at his home where he read books aloud along with other students, books that included Klíma's works as well. The author recounts how Ladislav Klíma captured the heart of his brother, who derided other philosophers and writers, and how he would even give his girlfriends the *Tractates* to read, saying "There is something to be learnt about life in this book."<sup>98</sup> Klíma appealed to young people, because he wrote about new things and because he wrote about old things in a new way. Because he was authentic and unrestrained and honest. He was "their" Klíma. "His bravery [...] his folksiness [...] his alienation in the world of philosophers and scholars"<sup>99</sup> made an impression on people. Dr. Kocourek eventually met with Klíma and was surprised. He had never seen a single photograph of him before and, because of his writing style and bold philosophy, he imagined him to be a big, strong man with and energetic face and a firm gaze. Instead, he was met by a slim, gentle man, full of humility.<sup>100</sup> Kocourek went to visit him on his deathbed in Prague's

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92 Ibid.

93 Kodíček, J., *Lad. Klíma*, p. 2.

94 Ibid.

95 "Speaking of boxing, he expressed wonder at why boxers nowadays no longer fight with iron gloves and without any rules. However, when he once saw boxing in real life, he started shaking so much as the first punch landed that he had to leave the hall, forgetting his pipe and walking stick. Those who know what those two items meant for him will understand what shock must have overcome his stoic mind." Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 Kocourek, F., *To Ladislav Klíma (Za Ladislavem Klímou)*. *Pestrý týden*, 3, 1928, No. 18, p. 6.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 "And at the table, there sat a slim man whose eyes gleamed in a flood of a sort of childlike gratitude, and beneath his rather reddened nose he had a wild beard. He seemed like a shoemaker and he spoke like a devoted servant, never forgetting to use titles while addressing people." Ibid.



Vinohrady hospital in March 1928. “On the blanket, there lay shrivelled hands. From his gaunt face, his eyes shone brightly and triumphantly.”<sup>101</sup>

Karel Čapek’s obituary for Klíma, published in *Lidové noviny*, radiates warmth and this is reflected also in its humorous tone.

“With the passing of Ladislav Klíma we are losing one of the very few eccentric and bohemian people who are so rare in our sober lives. [...] Poorer than a beggar at a church door, more carefree than Diogenes, this joyfully gloomy philosopher made his living by any available means: through his friends, by cleaning sewers, or by thinking up get-rich-quick projects, such as manufacturing a tobacco substitute or publishing pornographic novels.”<sup>102</sup>

All the things that Čapek names here are known facts, but he did make a slight error – Klíma did not write pornographic novels, this false information arose on the basis of certain passages from his novels *Glorious Nemesis* (*Slavná Nemesis*) and *The Sufferings of Prince Sternenhoch* (*Utrpení knížete Sternenhocha*). But Čapek could not stop himself from moralising a little:

“Diogenes, living in his empty barrel, was like a lord of the manor compared to Ladislav Klíma; at least, there is no evidence that he ever sold or drank away his barrel, or even took out a mortgage on it.”<sup>103</sup>

Březina disapproved of Čapek’s obituary especially due its emphasis on Klíma’s relationship to alcohol: “He should not have written that. People are now going to connect this absurdly with his philosophy.”<sup>104</sup> Čapek concludes his obituary by saying:

“[...] in our moral environment, it was Klíma’s originality that cost him all his respect, and perhaps even his life. Official philosophy did not recognise him. He lived as a bird of the heavens; and, as a bird of heavens, he should fall into some furrow where wild nature can flourish in all its beauty and nothingness from his decrepitude remains.”<sup>105</sup>

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101 Ibid.

102 Čapek, K., Ladislav Klíma, p. 5.

103 Ibid.

104 Chalupný, E., *Letters and Opinions of Otokar Březina*, p. 179.

105 Čapek, K., Ladislav Klíma, p. 5.

## Conclusion

Ladislav Klíma, a singular, philosopher, writer, artist, eccentric, a morbid phenomenon... sometimes overlooked by the eyes of his era, often misunderstood by his contemporaries, but never spurned. Contemporary sources show that although only a handful of people agreed with his philosophy – virtually nobody in academic and literary circles – the great majority of those who came into contact with his literature and philosophy, or with Klíma himself, respected him as a passionate philosopher – honest and original – and a gifted artist and author, regardless of whether they were casual readers or contemporary literary giants. Klíma, who tried to provoke not just with his philosophy but also with his appearance, ran into an obstacle which he had not foreseen – the indifference of the general public towards trouble-makers like him. His philosophy could not have spoken to everybody, and due to its spontaneity, often bordering on offensiveness and a tendency to make fun out of things that others take deadly seriously; it repels milder natures and, conversely, attracts those who want to play even in adulthood, those who are *homo ludens* just like he was.