

**WHEN THE SOLEMNLY ENLIVENING RETURNS REPRESENT
THE CRYSTALLIZED CULMINATION OF AN AUTHENTIC
POET'S UNIQUE BODY OF WORK
- REVIEW OF THE WORK OF JOZEF DANÍK**

FRANTIŠEK HEISER

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59505/IRHNS.22352007.2023.4.05>

Jozef Daník is again knocking on the hearts and minds of the Slovak soul longing for wisdom, truthfulness, tenderness and sincerity. No, we are not wrong. He comes convincingly, courageously and humanly with the aim of a credible testimony about times past, and present, but also those that repeat themselves in the individual stages of our life cycle and present themselves always in a different, deeply humanly felt, understood, but also painful form. Whatever Daník's life experiences, opinions and attitudes were influenced by a furore of not exactly the most optimistic, often very diverse, complicated and dramatic experiences, but nevertheless the gifts of life, which understandably include not only joy, well-being, but also sadness, fears and sorrow, in his artistic world clearly prevails an inexhaustible desire for a full, harmonious, dignified, optimistic and non-conflicting earthly existence. Daník is a sensitive poet and invites us non-violently into the world of his thoughts, experiences, feelings and attitudes. He does not impose himself, but the stamp of his personality, his artistic vision of the world does not leave us indifferent.

Daník's jubilee, **twentieth**, poetry collection, **Návraty a asociácie** (Returns and Associations), sees the light of day when it seems, the total subversion of our hard-fought Slovak statehood, sovereignty and identity is reaching its climax. We are constantly affected and perverted from all fronts of our social, cultural, economic and political life enter our lives and human destinies. It is the 21st century. There is a real war close to our borders, no cyber war, and there is rightly fear and concern at play for the fate of our people, our fragile republic that our forefathers fought for us in incredibly complex, dramatically tragic socio-political circumstances. Life in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy was marked by all this.

The Slovak greats of the 19th century, soulful nationalists, priests, patriots and prophets, as if rising from their graves, called resolutely, from afar, for the rescue and salvation of the precious, vast, Slovak national culture, Slovak statehood, the small but diamond-encrusted Slovak land. The spirit of Slovakness, nationalism, courage and incorruptibility should penetrate all layers of Slovak society in the 21st century, because the current metamorphosis of the European Union, of which we have been a full member since 2004, is currently directing us to a bad, completely unfavourable, dehumanising, humiliating and vassal status for our nation. Let us not forget, yes, we are Europeans, but first and foremost we are Slovaks, from Slovakia... As it is beautifully sung in a song "... Ja som slovak, ty si slovenka, daj mi rúčku" (I am a Slovak, you are a Slovak, give me a hand...) "...A nikdy nezabúdajme – v našich žilách koluje predovšetkým slovanská krv" (And let us never forget - it is primarily Slavic blood that runs in our veins).

For a moment, we will purposefully digress and stop at the poetic work of an important Slovak Romantic poet of the 19th century, whose work is incredibly relevant and inspiring to us today, in these confused times - Samo Chalúpka (1812-1883), a dignified and wise evangelical priest, who was born 211 years ago in Horná Lehota near Brezno. He is the author of several books of poetry. These include, for example: the book *Turčin Poničan*, *Jarná pieseň*, then *Spevy*, which contained poetic works such as *Likavský väzeň*, *Juhoslovanom*, *Kráľohľská*, *Večer pod Tatrou*, *Branko* (*Turčin Poničan*, *Spring Song*, *Songs*, *Likava Prisoner*, *South Slavs*, *Kráľohľská*, *Evening under the Tatra*, *Branko*). It is from this last poetic composition that these words of his are prophetically revived today, in 2023, in the 21st century, after more than 210 years: "Pravde žil som, krivdu bil som, verne národ svoj ľúbil som" (I have lived truthfully, I have beaten injustice, I have loved my nation faithfully).

Most importantly, inherent to Samo Chalúpka is the captivatingly rousing and heroic work of *Mor ho!* /We lightly remind you that it is a reaction to the expansion of the Roman Empire into the historical territory of today's Slovakia/. Jozef Daník was inspired by Samo Chalúpka when writing one of his poems. We will quote briefly and substantially from *Detvan*:

A ty mor ho! - hoj mor ho! detvo môjho rodu, kto kradmou rukou siahne na tvoju slobodu. A čo i tam dušu dáš v tom boji divokom: Mor ty len, a voľ nebyť, ako byť otrokom! (Author's note: the following translation should be understood only as a loose translation to approximate the content of the above verse, given the poetic language used: "And you kill him! - hey kill him! Child of my race, who with a stealthy hand reaches for thy liberty. And what a soul thou shalt give even there in that fierce fight: Thou rather shalt not be than to be a slave!").

Compared to previous collections, such as *Vzbura rokov* (The Revolt of Years, 2016), *Zahmlený čas* (Foggy Time, 2019), *Kvapky smiechu a sĺz v rieke života* (Drops of Laughter and Tears in the River of Life, 2020), and *Rodokmeň nedozretého lístia* (The Family Tree of Unripe Leaves, 2022), Jozef Daník's jubilee collection of poetry, **Návraty a asociácie (Returns and Associations)**, also contains numerous prose works and texts whose scope and content, subject matter and structure, have not yet been known to readers. One of them is a prose piece entitled **The End of Summer 1952**, in which Daník very vividly told his story of how he listened with admiration and emotion to the actor Karol Machata (it was a generation of acting greats who unparalleled, compared to some of today's 'actors', formed and still form the golden fund of our spiritual culture), who with his manly, deep, thunderous voice recited on Devín in the year in question the heroic composition by Samo Chalúpka *Mor ho! We are moved to affirm the incredible relevance, truthfulness and tremendous power of the poet's words even in our times.*

Jozef Daník, in one of his poems, found in the second chapter of *Returns and Associations*, entitled **Mlčanie času s otázkou** (The Silence of Time with a Question), specifically in the poem **Sneží** (Snows), clearly introduces us to our current, joyless Slovak reality, and asks, **"Nemáme pamäť? Kdeže je vôľa? Rozkazy, gestá, poklony. Strácame seba v lese ľudstva, lebo sme stále poddaní?"** (Have we no memory? Where is the will? Orders, gestures, compliments. Are we losing ourselves in the forest of humanity because we are still subjects?).

And this precious idea is followed up in art form by the calls **Pri Lipke zvrchovanosti** (At the Linden of Sovereignty). From his thoughts we select: „Čo sa deje, veď Slovák k novým métam speje. A dni sa vracajú späť. Zdvihnime hlavy. Nie zajtra, ale hneď! Keď chceme, aby pieseň nad Tatrami mohla ďalej a nahlas znieť“ (What is happening, for the Slovak is moving towards new goals. And the days are coming back. Let us raise our heads. Not tomorrow, but now! If we want the song over the Tatra Mountains to continue to sound loud).

Into this circle Daník incredibly convincingly incorporates the prose under the title **Proti vojne sprievod kráča** (Against War the Parade Marches) - "I am a poet who is in no hurry. I am a man who is not silent". Appropriately, he has also included the poems **Výzva k mieru** (A Call to Peace) and **Dych leta 2022** (The Breath of Summer 2022) in the structure of the collection *Returns and Associations*. The short prose poem entitled *February 2023 – Janošík, alebo inak* (Jánošík, or else?) deserves special attention - "Will there still be those who will stand up against injustice? Or again to slavery? What do we want then? Where will we find you?".

The skeleton of Jozef Daník's jubilee collection of poetry, **Returns and Associations**, consists of five chapters. The fifth part of the collection is aptly titled *Miesto doslovu autora* (The Place of the Author's Afterword), which contains around 30 poems, verse prose and interesting prose pieces. For the sake of illustration, let us mention a few: *Keď počítáš hviezdy*, *Ženám*, *Vôňa jarného dňa*, *Mesiace knihy*, *Jozefovské variácie*, *Plávalatykus* (When You Count the Stars, To Women, The Scent of a Spring Day, The Moon of the Book, Joseph Variations, "The Swimming Pool"), and many others.

The first chapter is entitled **Prvé kroky a pády** (First Steps and Falls). The poems here include: *Čas predsavzatí*, *Čas hľadania*, *Tvar času*, *Verše a asociácie*, a mnoho ďalších. (A Time of Resolutions, A Time of Searching, The Shape of Time, Verses and Associations, and many others).

The second chapter, discussed in passing earlier in the text, is called **Mlčanie času s otázkou** (The Silence of Time with a Question) and is the most extensive, interspersed with verse, verse prose, and small prose pieces. To mention just a few: *Pamäť Trojkráľová*, *Rúfusov Mikuláš*, *Máj, máj, máj*, *Vyznanie mame*, *Pozdrav olympioničke*, *A národ*, *Požiar naftovej veže*, *Roky ako diamanty*, *Rany osudu* (The Memory of the Three Kings, Rúfus's Nicholas, May, May, May, Confessions to Mum, Salute to an Olympian, A Nation, The Fire of the Oil Tower, Years as Diamonds, Wounds of Fate), and many more.

The third chapter, **Detské roky v škole** (The Childhood Years at School), takes us into the wondrous world of school days when the school purposefully shapes the malleable little man and where the foundations are laid for the later professional and character attitudes of independent, adult human beings. Jozef Daník very appropriately depicts the world outside the school in artistic form. In his works, he also points to the colossal, irreplaceable, unique role of the family in the all-round formation of the child's personality. An incredibly perceptive, malleable personality, believing in truth and goodness, who absorbs not only knowledge but also life's wisdom, truths, joys and sorrows of his family into his soul. And especially the moral attitudes of the dominant pillars of the family – father and mother. Grandparents, their siblings, their own siblings, brothers and sisters and other relatives. I will mention at least some poems that warm us and that bring us back emotionally and with nostalgia to the times we often speak of today – 'as if it were yesterday', and that actually like a whirlwind, decades and decades have flown by that have ennobled us, cultivated us, and infused us with strength for the next years of an unrepeatable, unique, and often difficult life.

Yes, primary school is a magical environment where we learn the basics of individual sciences, where we meet new classmates and teachers, where we

cultivate our first friendships, where the first fragile loves are born, and where the foundations of pupils' moral and personality profiles are also formed. It is full of ideals, hopes, light-heartedness, and playfulness, but also tears and disappointments. In one of his short prose pieces, Jozef Daník recalls his school meetings with the writer Ľudo Zúbek, later a prominent Slovak novelist, playwright, translator and editor. Perhaps it was also these meetings with his pupils that ignited a spark of hope in the soul of Jozek Danik, eager for knowledge and discovering the world, to become at least a little bit like 'uncle poet'. /We would like to remind you that Ľudo Zúbek, like our jubilant Jozef Daník, was a native of Malacky. The author of excellent works, such as Skrytý prameň, Doktor Jesénius, V službách Mateja Hrebendu, Murársky chlieb, Jar Adely Ostrolúckej, Ríša Svätoplukova, ... (Hidden Spring, Doctor Jesénius, In the Service of Matej Hrebenda, Murársky chlieb, Spring of Adela Ostrolúcka, Empire of Svätopluk), .../.

Let us mention at least some of these poems: Rozprávky, Ako dni bežia, Vylomeniny a tresty, Na postriežke, Rozlúčka so Záhorím, Tatko Karlo, Narodila sa nám sestrička (Fairy Tales, As the Days Go By, Carrying-on and Punishments, On the prowl, Farewell to Záhorie, Dad Karlo, A Little Sister Was Born to Us), and others.

The fourth chapter introduces us to a versatile high school student, an excellent athlete, coach and referee, musician, painter...Its title is: **Stredoškólák – dorastenec** (High Schooler – Adolescent).

The fifth chapter is a declaration of love for Liptov, where Jozef Daník lived and created art his entire productive life. Yes, this chapter has a captivating and unambiguous title: **LIPTOV, MY LOVE**. Read it calmly and quietly - you will be enchanted by all that is of essential importance and life meaning in the list of values of our jubilant poet.

Now we bring some of Danik's verses and thoughts to complete our ideas, attitudes and feelings about their author. Where, and in which poems and prose texts these author's thoughts are to be found, will be your task, you have to find them yourself, to feel them internally and to understand them. Calmly sit back and slowly move, translate into the world of Danik's vision, thinking and feeling.

„...Slová sú slabé na city z búrky. Na chvenie, ktoré obrátilo svet. Aj kvet je málo, i keď pieseň v sebe nesie. Viem. Po živote stále cítim smäd“ (...Words are weak for the emotions of the storm. For the trembling that turned the world. Even a flower is little, though a song carries in it. I know. I still feel thirsty for life.),

„...Život je predsa taký krásny. Ide si stále po svojom. Len my sa chceme zastaviť

a zmeniť smer. Je to len prelud, to mi ver“ (...Life is so beautiful. It's always going its own way. We just want to stop and change direction. It's just a mirage, believe me.),

„...Ženy, čo nahlas kričia o mieri. Prečo ich nepočuť? Prečo im nikto neverí? Či vtedy sa zobudíme, keď na nás puška zamieri? (...Women who shout loudly for peace. Why are they not heard? Why does no one believe them? Will we wake up when the gun is pointed at us?),

„...dozreté chvíle sú dnes iné, viac žité, možno boľavé, no v srdci ukrývajú diamanty a sladkú pieseň, slnko voňavé“ (...the ripe moments are different today, more alive, painful perhaps, but they hold diamonds and sweet song in their hearts, scented sun.),

„...spomínam, kreslím, spriadam slovíčka, ďakujem otec, drahá mamička. Bozk na diaľku posielam. Slza steká na líčka“ (...I'm remembering, drawing, spinning words, thank you dad, dear mommy. I send a kiss from afar. A tear trickles down my cheek.).

You will create a plastic picture of the jubilating poet Jozef Danik after reading his **twentieth collection of poetry**. Its author comes quietly, with a smile, calmly and thoughtfully, and in an artistic dress and precise rendering, he further reveals to us his inner emotional-moral and value world, dominated by his relationship to his homeland, to people, to his birthplace, his family, to his ancestors, to women and children, to nature, to traditions and customs, to our original and inimitable culture, to the Slovak language (in all its dialectal variants, especially the Záhorie-Malacky dialect), and basically to everything living, human, valuable and natural. At the same time, the culminating Daník sensitively acquaints us with the milestones of his life, with his emotional vision of the then, historical, but also current social reality.

Contact:

Assoc. Prof. PaedDr. Mgr. František Heiser, PhD.,
Catholic University in Ružomberok
Faculty of Education
Hrabovská cesta 1
034 01 Ružomberok
Slovak Republic
e-mail: frantisek.heiser@ku.sk