

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk as a Subject of Scientific Apology after 1989

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Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk features in a number of texts, especially in connection with his political activity as president of Czechoslovakia, or his activities during the First World War. In fact, there are only a few significant texts that give a biographical summary of T. G. Masaryk's lifelong work. In the Czech post-1989 environment, these are, in particular, the texts by Stanislav Polák and Jaroslav Opat, published at the turn of the millennium, but prepared in part during the dissent era. Notably, Polák's extensive, seven-volume work, *T. G. Masaryk. Towards Ideal and Truth*, however, shifts from the genre of scientific biography to that of apology, a defence of Masaryk's actions as moral in all circumstances. This study draws attention to the blending of the scientific biography of prominent Czech political personalities with their "hagiography," an uncritical defence which subsequently permeates historical thinking and the interpretation of Czech history as a whole.

Keywords: T. G. Masaryk, Czech history, biography, historical thinking, science and politics

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Biographical Research and the Personality of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

Biographical research is linked to several variables, reflecting not only history itself, but also the present and, above all, the expectations that society has and to which it seeks continuity.¹ In this way, society reshapes

¹ See Jana WOHLMUTH MARKUPOVÁ, *Between 'Creators and Bearers of the Czech National Myth' and an 'Academic Suicide': Czech Biography in the Twenty-First*

its individual and, by extension, collective memory. For example, in times when Czech (Czechoslovak) independence is threatened, we more readily recall Jan Žižka; if we want to identify ourselves as part of Western Europe, we prefer Charles IV – as sociological research from the 20th century has shown.² The interpretation of history is clearly influenced by the generational aspect; the continuity of historical knowledge between the individual scientific generations is thus always disrupted again and again by external conditions.³ The new perspective, of course, becomes routine over time,⁴ which is domesticated and often forgotten, but society or science can return to it again, although it will usually be an altered narrative influenced by the new reality.

History has always been interpreted to some extent as the history of rulers, politicians, and warlords, and so, in the stories of the past, the ruler represented nations or the history of countries. The biographical turn, however, came with different perspectives on the individual, linking biography with microhistorical studies, moving from macrohistorical interpretations to details that often alter the interpretation of the whole.⁵ This is, of course, also very interesting in the Czech context, not least in connection with the view of reality and myths surrounding the personality of the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.⁶

Century, in: *Different Lives. Global Perspectives on Biography in Public Cultures and Societies*, (edd.) Hans Renders, David Veltman, Leiden–Boston 2020, pp. 182–196. See also Nigel HAMILTON, HANS RENDERS, *The ABC of Modern Biography*, Amsterdam 2018.

² See *Historické vědomí jako předmět badatelského zájmu: teorie a výzkum*, (ed.) Jiří Šubrt, Kolin 2010; JIŘÍ ŠUBRT, JIŘÍ VINOPAL et al., *Historické vědomí obyvatel České republiky perspektivou sociologického výzkumu*, Prague 2013.

³ NATHAN PERL-ROSENTHAL, *Generational Turn*, *The American Historical Review* 117/2012, no. 3, pp. 804–813.

⁴ GARY WILDER, *From Optic to Topic: The Foreclosure Effect of Historiographic Turns*, *The American Historical Review* 117/2012, no. 3, pp. 723–745.

⁵ HANS RENDERS, BINNE DE HAAN, JONNE HARMSMA, *Biography as critical method in the humanities and in society*, in: *The Biographical Turn. Lives in History*, (edd.) Hans Renders, Binne de Haan, Jonne Harmsma, London 2016, p. 5.

⁶ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937) was born into the family of a coachman (whose actual paternity, however, is disputed), and as a grammar school student lived with the family of a local police director. He was to tutor his son and later studied with him at a university in Vienna. Masaryk later studied in Leipzig, where he met his future wife, an American, Charlotte Garrigue. In Vienna, he habilitated with his thesis *Suicide as a Social Mass Phenomenon of Modern Civilization*, but he focused mainly on sociology. In 1882, he was appointed extraordinary professor at

Czech historical thinking has long been associated with a dispute over the meaning of Czech history. That is, which is more important – the humanistic idea, emphasised primarily by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, or the national one, represented by historian Josef Pekař.⁷ This dispute, dating back to the end of the 19th century, has not been fully resolved to this day, not least because the great biographies of T. G. Masaryk have always been written by his admirers.⁸ (Nobody was too keen, especially

the University of Prague, and in 1897, he was appointed full professor. After arriving in Prague, he briefly dabbled in positivism but then turned to romantic conceptions of Czech history (to František Palacký) and emphasised humanitarian ideals in history. He was involved in a number of political and scientific controversies, including the dispute over the authenticity of medieval manuscripts related to Czech history. He was one of the great opponents of anti-Semitism (Hilsner affair, 1899). At the outbreak of the First World War, he went into exile (France, USA, Russia), where he joined the foreign resistance against Austria-Hungary. After the war, he became President of Czechoslovakia (1918–1935). His views and attitudes have always stirred up great controversy. Indeed, since the beginning of the existence of the independent Czechoslovak state, great differences in the interpretation of T. G. Masaryk's role in the creation of Czechoslovakia have been evident in Czech and Slovak politics and historical scholarship. See e.g. BOHUMIL JIROUŠEK, *České (československé) politické kruhy v meziválečné době a jejich vztah k americkým Slovákům*, in: V sukoli času. Michal Bosák a jeho doba, (edd.) Peter Švorc, Martin Bosák, Košice 2020, pp. 195–203; MICHAL KŠIŇAN, *Štefánik's Death and the Czecho(Slovak) Identity*, in: Transregional versus National Perspectives on Contemporary Central European History, (edd.) Michal Vít, Magdalena M. Baran, Stuttgart 2017, pp. 149–160; Ivan ŠEDIVÝ, *T.G.M. K mytologii první československé republiky*, Prague 2022, also p. 91.

⁷ Since the end of the 19th century, Czech culture has been marked by contradictions between the philosophical conception of Czechism, which, under the influence of liberal nationalism, saw the mission of the Czech nation in spreading humanistic ideals (especially T. G. Masaryk), and the historically embedded tradition, which, in the spirit of contemporary historicism and positivism, emphasised primarily the national concept, which forms the main link between the national past and the present (mainly Josef Pekař but also Jaroslav Goll and others). See *Spor o smysl českých dějin I–II*, (ed.) Miloš Havelka, Prague 1995–2006. Compare also MILOŠ HAVELKA, *Dějiny a smysl. Obsahy, akcenty a posuny „české otázky“ 1895–1989*, Prague 2001. A confrontation of the views of both personalities was attempted by MARTIN KUČERA, *Pekař proti Masarykovi*, Prague 1995.

⁸ This tradition was established by Masaryk's students who wrote praising articles in contemporary press on the occasion of Masaryk's sixtieth birthday (1910), including writer Jan Herben. Between the wars, various Czech philosophers (J. B. Kozák, Josef Král) wrote celebratory texts, joined by the aesthetician and historian, Zdeněk Nejedlý, with his unfinished four-volume synthesis from 1930–1937. After the Second World War, we can mention theologian Josef Lukl Hromádka with his book *Masaryk mezi věčejškem a dneškem* (1947). T. G. Masaryk was also briefly,

in the interwar years, to join the ranks of his open opponents.) Notable exceptions to the positive view of Masaryk occurred in times of totalitarian rule. One only has to look at the 1950s, when Masaryk's legacy was completely destroyed by the communists who saw him as a sellout to the capitalists and capital, and who claimed that he wanted to have the main representative of world communism, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin,⁹ murdered. Another example may be the collaborationist journalists during World War II – the “historically” conceived texts of Karel Lažnovský and Emanuel Vajtauer, who rejected the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) for cooperating with the victors of the First World War and opposed interwar Germany or directly Adolf Hitler's policies, including Czechoslovakia's nationality policy, which did not favour the Sudeten German minority.¹⁰

As for the critical views of T. G. Masaryk among foreign authors, the Czech American historian Josef Kalvoda is particularly vocal – and mostly rightly so, but his interpretation of Masaryk's life sounds too Machiavellian and sometimes even amoral in the Czech context. Czech historiography is (for now?) unwilling to acknowledge such a perspective as the actual reality of Masaryk's impact – from his university career to his presidency – although, Czech historians are aware of his “flip-flops,” including the unfulfilled promises of the Pittsburgh Agreement

positively perceived by the public during the Prague Spring of 1968 (e.g. texts by Milan Machovec).

⁹ *Dokumenty o protilidové a protinárodní politice T. G. Masaryka*, (edd.) František Nečásek, Jan Pachta, Eva Raisová, Prague 1953; VÁCLAV KRÁL, *Dokumenty o protilidové a protinárodní politice TGM*, Prague 1953 (Edition of lectures for educational discussions).

¹⁰ BOHUMIL JIROUŠEK, *Emanuel Vajtauer a kolaborační interpretace české minulosti*, Vojnová kronika 2/9 (2020), pp. 44–49; BOHUMIL JIROUŠEK, *Hovory s dějinami Karla Lažnovského*, in: Marek Syrný et al., *Slovensko a Európa v roku 1940*, Banská Bystrica 2020, pp. 181–185. During the socialist era, philosophers with a rather detached view of Marxism, Milan Machovec and Jan Patočka, were mostly capable of a more balanced view. See MILAN MACHOVEC, *Tomáš G. Masaryk*, Prague 1968, who sees Masaryk as a leader in the foundation of Czechoslovak statehood. (This is apparent especially in the preface to the second edition, published in the same year.) JAN PATOČKA, *Tři studie o Masarykovi*, Prague 1991, p. 23, understands Masaryk's activities during the war as the implementation of Czech philosophy. (The study was originally published in JAN PATOČKA, *Dvě studie o Masarykovi*, Toronto 1980). Both authors more or less ignore Masaryk's political activity from a historical-factual point of view. In this context, we can also mention the publication EVA SCHMITD-HARTMANN, *Thomas G. Masaryk's realism origins of a Czech political concept*, München 1984.

during World War I, which subsequently complicated the coexistence of Czechs and Slovaks in one state.¹¹ According to Kalvoda, Masaryk was a mediocre student, and later he was “isolated from the mainstream of Czech intellectual life. But he was even more isolated in the political sphere.”¹² This, of course, changed with World War I, though Kalvoda clearly sees the moral superiority on the side of Karel Kramář,¹³ against whom Masaryk schemed together with Edvard Beneš:¹⁴ “Kramář combined the qualities of a warrior and a martyr. As a fighter, he led the nation to independence – on 28 October 1918 while his opponents led the

¹¹ During the First World War, T. G. Masaryk repeatedly promised American Slovaks in the U.S. (the Cleveland Agreement of 1915 and especially the Pittsburgh Agreement of 1918) some form of a separate parliament (i.e. autonomy, federation) in Slovakia within Czechoslovakia, which he subsequently downplayed and rejected. The Czechoslovak government was willing to fulfil its promise only in autumn 1938, when Czechoslovak integrity began to crumble after the loss of part of Czechoslovak territory (Munich Agreement, the first Vienna Arbitration). See JOSEF KALVODA, *Genese Československa*, Prague 1998, also pp. 25–39, 252–281, 549. The book was published in English in New York in 1986 (*Genesis of The Czechoslovakia*).

¹² J. KALVODA, *Genese Československa*, p. 38.

¹³ Karel Kramář (1880–1937) formed the political circle of the so-called Realists in 1889 together with Josef Kaizl and T. G. Masaryk, but they soon parted ways and Karel Kramář joined the Young Czech Party and eventually became its main representative. During World War I, he was arrested by the Austro-Hungarian authorities for treason, but was granted amnesty by the new emperor, Charles I. After World War I, he became the first Czechoslovak Prime Minister. He distrusted the abilities of Edvard Beneš, who had been appointed foreign minister by T. G. Masaryk, and so he spent most of his time at the Versailles Peace Conference, leaving him no time to concentrate on the upcoming parliamentary elections. As a result, his political career more or less ended in 1919, after which he was just a regular member of parliament.

¹⁴ Edvard Beneš (1884–1948) was a student of T. G. Masaryk, who studied sociology and followed him into exile during World War I. He was Masaryk's lifelong close associate, served as foreign minister in all Czechoslovak governments between 1918 and 1935, and in 1935, Masaryk promoted him as his successor to the presidency, abdicating in the autumn of 1938. After leaving for Great Britain, Beneš gradually worked his way to become the head of the Czechoslovak resistance in London. (In 1940, he assumed the office of president in exile.). His trip to Moscow in December 1943 and the signing of the Treaty on Friendship, Mutual Assistance, and Postwar Cooperation between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is considered Stalin's first success in building the external Soviet empire. In 1945–1948, Beneš was again President of Czechoslovakia, in which office he “contributed” to the transfer of power to the Communist Party in February 1948.

country to surrender on 30 September 1938.”¹⁵ In the context of today’s political situation, it is certainly worth mentioning that, according to Josef Kalvoda, Masaryk was against an independent Ukraine at the end of World War I because he feared that the country would be inclined to cooperate with the Germans and Austrians.¹⁶ Similarly, Kalvoda draws attention to Masaryk’s cooperation with the British Secret Service before World War I, and to his tasks during the war, which in many ways determined, for example, the country’s relationship with Russia.¹⁷

As much as most historians find Masaryk’s humanistic ideals – inherited over the centuries from humanism to the 19th century, with the exception of the Baroque period – difficult to grasp and historically justifiable, ethicists and philosophers thinking about the moral development of society find them appealing because there are not many truly original philosophers in the Czech past.¹⁸ As a result, the discussions about the disputes between T. G. Masaryk and Josef Pekař continued even after their deaths and although they fell into a grey zone with World War II, they resonated strongly in the Czech dissident thinking of the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁹ After all, one of Václav Havel’s first acts as president of Czechoslovakia was the restoration of the T. G. Masaryk Institute on Janu-

¹⁵ J. KALVODA, *Genese Československa*, p. 549 (note no. 52 to Chapter 18). In the Munich Agreement of September 30, 1938, the votes of Italy, Germany, Great Britain, and France decided that Czechoslovakia had to cede the territory inhabited by the German minority to Germany, which had already annexed Austria. By accepting these demands, the Czechoslovak territory became militarily impossible to defend, and in March 1939 it was disintegrated, the Czech part became a protectorate of Hitler’s Germany, and Slovakia became Hitler’s vassal state.

¹⁶ J. KALVODA, *Genese Československa*, pp. 257–258.

¹⁷ JOSEF KALVODA, *Z bojů o zítřek III. Historické eseje*, Kladno 1998, pp. 22–23. (The study Dr. Karel Kramář was originally printed in 1981.) Kalvoda’s thinking is summarised by JAN CHOLÍNSKÝ, *Poutník Josef Kalvoda*, Kladno 2002, pp. 229–254.

¹⁸ A certain understanding of his concepts is shown, for example, by French historian Marie-Élizabeth Ducreaux in her writings from the 1990s. In (Czech version) MARIE-ÉLIZABETH DUCREAU, *Kultura – zbožnost – symbolická politika*, Prague 2023, pp. 334–355, although she also criticises his theories from a philosophical point of view for their lack of homogeneity and for internal contradictions, which, according to her, were first discovered by Jan Patočka. We have to oppose this because Pekař’s criticism pointed to this inhomogeneity and strong internal contradictions already in the first half of the 20th century.

¹⁹ *Pekařovské studie*, (ed.) Eva Kantůrková, Prague 1995 (originally published in the samizdat form); *Spor o smysl českých dějin II*, (ed.) Miloš Havelka. See opening editor’s study.

ary 4, 1990,²⁰ because Masaryk became the role model that Václav Havel followed. If we look for the democratic traditions of Czechoslovak/Czech statehood, we can hardly find them anywhere else, apart from the domestic resistance and Karel Kramář, whose influence was later rather marginal in Czechoslovak politics, covered by the activity and myth of the “president-liberator.”²¹

This adoration and mythicising of T. G. Masaryk, however, raises several problems in the interpretation of modern Czech history, even before World War I, and among others, the dispute over the *Dvůr Králové* and *Zelená Hora* manuscripts.²² T. G. Masaryk pursued a political career since the 1880s, and politics requires compromises, often very complicated ones, as Václav Havel himself had to learn. Though, as a philosopher, Havel did not think much about these compromises and did not reflect on them except that he preferred “non-political politics” to a party system based on open rivalry. According to Havel, what runs through all the work and actions of T. G. Masaryk is the idea of the moral: “It runs through the whole of Masaryk’s work, it is the starting point or axis of his thinking, and it is also the key to understanding his life’s work, his attitudes, his politics. This idea lies in the strong conviction that politics is and must be anchored in morality, that truth is above all a moral category, and that truth is the best ground for politics. Whenever Masaryk reflected on the Czech question, on the meaning of our struggle for self-liberation, and even on the very meaning of our national existence, he returned to this idea again and again to eventually lay it down as one of the constitutive values of the new Czechoslovak state.”²³ Havel

²⁰ *Obnovování Ústavu T. G. Masaryka*, in: Masarykův sborník VIII, Prague 1993, pp. 197–199. This institute is linked to the Czech Academy of Sciences, now with the Masaryk Institute and the Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

²¹ Lex Masaryk – the Act of Merit of T. G. Masaryk was adopted in February 1930.

²² The dispute over the authenticity of the manuscripts in question emerged in 1886, although doubts about their authenticity had been raised ever since their discovery. T. G. Masaryk was heavily involved but most of those around him were aware that he was largely concerned with his political career, which he wanted to secure. This was in contrast to Jan Gebauer, who had major scientific doubts. Masaryk’s scientific career was thus probably slowed down by this dispute, while Gebauer’s scientific career was not affected, and in some respects, it was even boosted.

²³ Václav Havel’s speech at the unveiling of the Masaryk Monument in Olomouc on 7 March 1993 was included in his book as Václav Havel’s Introductory Word by ALAIN SOUBIGOU, *Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk*, Prague–Litomyšl 2004, pp. 7–9, quotation p. 7.

is certainly right that the moral dimension of politics is its essential part,²⁴ without which we can hardly speak – in the Max Weberian sense – of the legal possession of power, but we must nevertheless acknowledge the virtues and flaws of historical figures.

The interpretation of T. G. Masaryk in Czech historical studies²⁵ illustrates above all the disrupted continuity of the political and social development of Central Europe in the 20th century. The adoration of the founder of the state was replaced by his condemnation and later, by a return to the First Republic and its interpretation of the Czech (Czechoslovak) past, which was evident in dissent and official scholarship shortly after 1989, and which is most visible in the case of T. G. Masaryk to this day.²⁶ Thanks to Czechoslovak dissent as such, and to Havel as his conscious successor, Masaryk belongs among the main constitutive myths of the modern Czech national tradition. This tradition has only been somewhat broken by French historian Alain Soubigou²⁷ with his major biography, or Canadian political scientist Harold Gordon Skilling,²⁸ and Polish historian Janusz Gruchała.²⁹ These authors, however, stand outside Czech society. Nevertheless, they too are influenced in some interpretations by the Czech historiographical tradition, e.g. in interpreting the roles of the opponents of the *Manuscripts* in Czech society at the end of the 19th century,³⁰ where the novelty of T. G. Masaryk's

²⁴ A. SOUBIGOU, *Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk*, p. 9.

²⁵ For the Slovak view (including the views of Václav Chaloupecký for the interwar period), see JÁN MLYNÁRIK, *T. G. Masaryk v slovenskej historiografii*, Český časopis historický 89/1991, pp. 185–197.

²⁶ Among the collective works it is worth mentioning especially the book VRATISLAV DOUBEK, LADISLAV HLADKÝ, RADOMÍR VLČEK et al., *T. G. Masaryk a Slované*, Prague 2013; RICHARD VAŠEK, “Račte to podepsat libovolnou šifrou”: prezident Masaryk jako anonymní publicista (1918–1935), Prague 2018. This publication shows how President Masaryk tried to influence Czech public opinion as an anonymous columnist and gain support for his views in the newspapers.

²⁷ ALAIN SOUBIGOU, *Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk* (first French edition is from 2002).

²⁸ H. GORDON SKILLING, *T. G. Masaryk, Proti proudu 1882–1914*, Prague 1995. (The English edition was published a year earlier.)

²⁹ JANUSZ GRUCHAŁA, *Tomasz G. Masaryk*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1996. (The book was published also in English.) Among foreign Czech studies and political science scholars, we can also point to other authors, for example, Stanley B. Winters or Jiří (George) Kovtun, but their works are mostly editorial and partial studies on the topic.

³⁰ New perspectives in this regard are brought by *Rukopisy královédvorský a zelenohorský v kultuře a umění I–II*, (ed.) Dalibor Dobíáš, Prague 2019. The problematic nature of Masaryk's arguments in his sociological analysis of the manuscripts is also

arguments and his role in the manuscript dispute are often overestimated by his biographers,³¹ or interpreted as a fundamental scientific decision, while he was also seeking to enter politics. The intensifying dispute between the Young-Czechs and the Old-Czechs, which led to the division of Czech deputies at the Imperial Council (in the Viennese Parliament) into two clubs, was also reflected in the developments at the university, where the older generation of scholars, due to age limits (compulsory retirement age), gradually began to lose ground at the end of the 1880s.³² This meant that the younger generation was able to tell their version of the story even after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, while the older generation of historians died at the beginning of the 20th century.³³

However, if we look at the key texts concerning the scientific apologetics of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk from the end of the 20th century, we have to focus on the works of Jaroslav Opat (1924–2015) and Stanislav Polák (1936–2017). The first was directly involved in dissent as a signatory of Charter 77, while the second was a reluctantly tolerated archivist in Příbram. Both of them could thus fully develop their careers only after 1989, although they had been engaged with Masaryk's work in the previous years, when Masaryk had represented a certain symbol of hope for them. The ideological return to the First Czechoslovak Republic, conveyed by Masaryk, represented a return to democracy, to tradition, to an interpretation of the past that, despite all limitations, could be considered as fact-based, "true," and uncorrupted by the Soviet import of Leninist and Stalinist pseudo-science. However, this enthusiasm – coupled with limited access to foreign literature and archival funds – easily slipped into one-sidedness, into overestimating the positive qualities of T. G. Masaryk and his role in Czech and Czechoslovak society, science, and culture, which was of course reinforced by Karel Čapek's *Talks with*

pointed out by JIŘÍ ŠTAIF, *Historici, dějiny a společnost. Historiografie v českých zemích od Palackého a jeho předchůdců po Gollovu školu*, Prague 1997, pp. 234–236.

³¹ Masaryk's sociological arguments were perceived by the majority of experts of the time as erroneous, based on ignorance of contemporary Czech historiography, when he actually argued against the manuscripts with the historical situation that had been constructed by the Romantic science of the first half of the 19th century on the basis of these manuscripts, which Josef Kalousek, for example, had managed to reject several years earlier.

³² BOHUMIL JIROUŠEK, *Josef Kalousek. Historik v národní společnosti druhé poloviny 19. století*, Prague 2018, pp. 134, 142–143, and others.

³³ See, for example, BOHUMIL JIROUŠEK, *Mýtus zaprodance: Wacław Wławiwoj Tomek v české historiografii*, *Moderní dějiny* 16/2008, suplementum 1, pp. 370–377.

T. G. Masaryk (published in 1928), which were published in 1969 but were soon banned until 1989.

T. G. Masaryk as Seen by Jaroslav Opat

Jaroslav Marek, a historian of modern culture who was banned before 1989 for sympathising with the Prague Spring of 1968, reflected on Opat's book, *T. G. Masaryk (1882–1893) Philosopher and Politician (Filosof a politik T. G. Masaryk 1882–1893)*,³⁴ which in fact launched the era of officially published major scholarly apologies of T. G. Masaryk in 1990.³⁵ Marek reminds us – in connection with Opat's preface to the official edition – of its origins, the first version being a samizdat typescript from 1987, the same year the book was published (slightly extended) by the exile publishing house Index in Cologne.³⁶ The book is based on archival research rather sparingly; however, it is a well-founded interpretation of Masaryk's published texts from the period, a guide to his thinking at the time, though it often lacks a broader context of the events in question, which is of course influenced by the limited research on these topics at the time and the almost non-existent literature on the development of Czech science in the late 19th century.³⁷ Jaroslav Opat mostly avoids some activities that are controversial in terms of interpretation; he takes note of them but does not comment on them. An example of this is his description of the meeting between Jan Gebauer, Jan Kvičala, and T. G. Masaryk, where the publication of Gebauer's objections to the authenticity of the *Dvůr Králové and Zelená Hora manuscripts* was agreed on: "The agreement reached by the three men on that day featured three main points: a) Gebauer would publish his scholarly objections to the *Dvůr Králové and Zelená Hora manuscripts* in the *Athenæum* magazine; b) Masaryk would ask Gebauer by a special letter to publish his critical interpretation in the *Athenæum*; c) Kvičala would support the con-

³⁴ JAROSLAV OPAT, *Filosof a politik T. G. Masaryk 1882–1893 (Příspěvek k životopisu)*, Prague 1990. It was preceded only by a small booklet of less than fifty pages by Stanislav Polák. See STANISLAV POLÁK, *Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk*, Prague 1990.

³⁵ JAROSLAV MAREK, *Jaroslav Opat, Filosof a politik T. G. Masaryk*, Český časopis historický 89/1991, pp. 458–461.

³⁶ J. MAREK, *Jaroslav Opat, Filosof a politik T. G. Masaryk*, pp. 458–461.

³⁷ J. OPAT, *Filosof a politik T. G. Masaryk 1882–1893*.

frontation, which the participants of the meeting expected to break out, non-publicly.”³⁸ Opat highlights the fact that the agreement was made by all three of them. But since Jan Kvíčala would later distance himself from it, Opat comments only on the content of Masaryk’s “pre-arranged letter.”³⁹ He does not give any thought to the paradox that the fight against forgery begins with a fictitious (forged, pre-arranged) letter.⁴⁰ The apologetic approach to Masaryk also typically (often) mentions the July 1887 lawsuit against T. G. Masaryk by a group of professors at the Faculty of Arts of the Czech Charles-Ferdinand University,⁴¹ without any mention of the fact that this lawsuit was actually a reaction – a retaliation for T. G. Masaryk’s lawsuit against the then rector of the university, Wacław Władysław Tomek, in June of the same year,⁴² which, of course, renders the moral “superiority” of T. G. Masaryk in the dispute, his generosity and restraint, problematic to say the least.

Marek’s review of Opat’s book is generally positive and approving, which is not surprising. Marek himself at the time was engaged with the work of Masaryk’s fellow fighter in the manuscript dispute, historian Jaroslav Goll, in a similarly admiring manner,⁴³ also more or less without reflecting on the problems and controversies that Goll’s school and Goll’s work stirred up.⁴⁴

In addition to a series of partial studies,⁴⁵ Opat built on this book with an interpretation of Masaryk’s entire life, which he published in 2003 under the title *Guide to the Life and Work of T. G. Masaryk: The Czech Question Yesterday and Today* (*Průvodce životem a dilem T. G. Masaryka –*

³⁸ J. OPAT, *Filosof a politik T. G. Masaryk 1882–1893*, p. 141.

³⁹ J. OPAT, *Filosof a politik T. G. Masaryk 1882–1893*, p. 142.

⁴⁰ J. OPAT, *Filosof a politik T. G. Masaryk 1882–1893*, p. 141.

⁴¹ J. OPAT, *Filosof a politik T. G. Masaryk 1882–1893*, p. 180.

⁴² Compare B. JIROUŠEK, *Josef Kalousek*, p. 150, ROMAN PAZDERSKÝ, *Historik Wacław Władysław Tomek a české dějepisectví 19. století*, Prague 2020, p. 207.

⁴³ JAROSLAV MAREK, *Jaroslav Goll*, Prague 1991.

⁴⁴ See, for example, ZDENĚK BENEŠ, *Pojmy jako předmět historiografického studia (Příklad: Gollova historická škola a její zakladatel)*, Český časopis historický 93/1995, pp. 359–397; BOHUMIL JIROUŠEK, *Jaroslav Goll. Role historika v české společnosti*, České Budějovice 2006; ROMAN PAZDERSKÝ, *Jaroslav Goll – seine Bedeutung und seine Einfluss auf die Entwicklung der tschechischen Historiographie*, Prague Economic and Social Papers 18/2013, pp. 97–113.

⁴⁵ See, for example, JAROSLAV OPAT, *Masarykiana a jiné studie I–II*, Prague 1994–2006.

Česká otázka včera a dnes).⁴⁶ The work integrates most of the interpretations from the previous book and continues the interpretation of Masaryk's life and work, expanding the moral dimension of Masaryk's activities into the later decades of his life by making critical judgments that cannot be factually verified, such as: "He had quality colleagues and reliable support in various places in the political leadership of the country,"⁴⁷ or in relation to Karel Kramář: "Even in the ideological and political discourses that they had, sometimes even in serious disputes, they were always highly respectful of each other, Masaryk's attitude being almost chivalrous."⁴⁸ This judgment can be considered either fatal ignorance or hypocrisy of the author because Masaryk consistently schemed against Kramář and others,⁴⁹ as evidenced by the existence of the pressure group in the Castle.⁵⁰ Opat refuses to refer to T. G. Masaryk as a "head of state" but is happy to call him "the ruler," which may in many ways portray Masaryk as an enlightened monarch with a tendency to absolutist control of the country, even though the constitution did not grant him almost any formal power. However, Opat sees Masaryk the "ruler" as the "supreme official" who creates "the space for an open democratic society; a society based on educated, responsible, hard-working citizens."⁵¹ In this way, Opat appreciates Masaryk as a "democrat-humanist,"⁵² which, according to him, is reflected in Masaryk's philosophy and practical politics seeking "harmony in life."⁵³

Opat is in many ways very optimistic, which is undoubtedly related – as already mentioned – to his involvement in dissent in the 1970s and 1980s, when Masaryk, or rather clinging to the idealisation of him, became a source of hope for better political conditions and Opat's life at that time. At the very end of the monograph, however, he clearly takes the position of the author of the myth that is supposed to be a model to be followed: "I have tried to briefly capture what he did and accomplished

⁴⁶ JAROSLAV OPAT, *Průvodce životem a dílem T. G. Masaryka. Česká otázka včera a dnes*, Prague 2003.

⁴⁷ J. OPAT, *Průvodce životem a dílem T. G. Masaryka*, p. 311, mentions Edvard Beneš and Antonín Švehla.

⁴⁸ J. OPAT, *Průvodce životem a dílem T. G. Masaryka*, p. 320.

⁴⁹ J. KALVODA, *Genese Československa*, among other p. 549.

⁵⁰ A. SOUBIGOU, *Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk*, pp. 268–270.

⁵¹ J. OPAT, *Průvodce životem a dílem T. G. Masaryka*, pp. 319–320.

⁵² J. OPAT, *Průvodce životem a dílem T. G. Masaryka*, p. 485.

⁵³ J. OPAT, *Průvodce životem a dílem T. G. Masaryka*, p. 485.

for his native country, for Central Europe, for the Balkans and for the rest of the world. I am convinced that Masaryk's legacy, his life's work, is still a force that can speak positively to us today. Let us think, inspired by his life, how we can contribute to making the heart of Europe today a good, healthy beating heart for the rest of the world. And let us make sure that the rest of Europe, especially the great powers, treat this heart as their own. For Europe's own sake; for the sake of the generations now and those yet to come."⁵⁴

Despite some comments suggesting that Opat's book tends towards a mythological conception, we must agree with contemporary Czech historian Jindřich Dejmek that the book is "in fact the first modern Czech attempt at a more detailed interpretation of Masaryk's entire political and intellectual activity."⁵⁵ Although as a reviewer, Dejmek was aware that Opat did not pay much attention to more recent literature, he actually considered this to be the only major flaw of the whole work, apart from the impossibility of fully covering Masaryk's political activity within the scope of the book.⁵⁶ He admitted, however, that critical research on T. G. Masaryk should not settle for a one-volume compendium, but should – as in the case of other prominent European political figures of the time – result in a multi-volume biography of Masaryk, which Stanislav Polák is working on.⁵⁷

T. G. Masaryk as Seen by Stanislav Polák

After 1989, Czech historiography had high hopes for a multi-volume interpretation of Masaryk's life and work and associated such a possible outcome primarily with Stanislav Polák. In the early 1990s, he published two small booklets about T. G. Masaryk (1990) and his wife Charlotte Garrigue Masaryk (1992),⁵⁸ and, more importantly, the first three volumes of the great biography of T. G. Masaryk, which, however, were

⁵⁴ J. OPAT, *Průvodce životem a dílem T. G. Masaryka*, p. 496.

⁵⁵ JINDŘICH DEJMEK, *Jaroslav Opat, Průvodce životem a dílem T. G. Masaryka*, *Český časopis historický* 10/(2005, pp. 675–680, quotation p. 675.

⁵⁶ J. DEJMEK, *Jaroslav Opat*, p. 680.

⁵⁷ J. DEJMEK, *Jaroslav Opat*, p. 680.

⁵⁸ Polák's bibliography, which after 1989 is dominated by texts on T. G. Masaryk, is brought by VÁCLAVA HORČÁKOVÁ, *Výběrová bibliografie prací Stanislava Poláka*, *Středočeský sborník historický* 37/2011, pp. 24–34.

almost unnoticed when published and covered Masaryk's life only until 1882 when he arrived in Prague.⁵⁹ Polák had prepared for the elaboration of Masaryk's life and work for decades and he had already distributed some texts on Masaryk in the "samizdat" form among his friends in the 1980s. A great deal of credit was due to his friend and archivist from Benešov, Jiří Tywoniak, who introduced him to the legal representatives of the Masaryk family, which only increased his interest in the subject.⁶⁰ Polák, a son of a high school teacher, had problems with the communist regime since the 1950s, so after 1948, he also experienced poverty. Thanks to his brother who emigrated to Sweden, he knew Western literature, which hindered his chances of entering scientific institutes under socialism. Yet, he worked for many years in the Příbram District Archive, mostly as its director.⁶¹

After the revolution in 1989, he moved to Prague in the early 1990s to join the Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS), where his interest in regional topics and the relationship between graphology, historical script, and psychology fully shifted to Masaryk research.⁶² Polák defines his approach in two fundamental texts that reveal his concept of Masaryk's biography.⁶³ He approaches his biographical study of T. G. Masaryk with long-standing scholarly interests in psychology or graphology,⁶⁴ but more or less without the knowledge of any relevant literature on biographical research, and so he seeks guidance in the unfinished interwar projects of Masaryk biographies, in particular from Zdeněk Nejedlý.⁶⁵ The fact that he reflects theoretically

⁵⁹ STANISLAV POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk: za ideálem a pravdou. Kniha 1–3 (1850–1882)*, Prague 1994. It is in fact a single volume of less than three hundred pages, and the reviewer, Jindřich Růžicka, points out that the work was published as juvenilia by the author's own publishing house in a mere thirty copies. JINDŘICH RŮŽICKA, *Stanislav Polák, T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou. Kniha 1–3*, *Český časopis historický* 93/1995, pp. 291–297.

⁶⁰ JAROSLAV PÁNEK, *Za ideálem a pravdou. Cesta Stanislava Poláka od regionální historie k životopisu T. G. Masaryka*, *Středočeský sborník historický* 37/2011, pp. 6–23.

⁶¹ J. PÁNEK, *Za ideálem a pravdou*, pp. 6–23.

⁶² J. PÁNEK, *Za ideálem a pravdou*, pp. 6–23.

⁶³ STANISLAV POLÁK, *Životopis T. G. Masaryka jako úkol*, in: *Masarykův sborník IX, 1993–1995*, Prague 1997, pp. 29–40; STANISLAV POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, *Český časopis historický* 89/1991, pp. 761–776.

⁶⁴ J. PÁNEK, *Za ideálem a pravdou*, *passim*.

⁶⁵ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*.

on the concept of biography is actually a novelty in the Czech context, although in many respects we may question or wonder what he means, for instance, when he says that “biography has always been a particularly rewarding field for fictionalizing dilettantes.”⁶⁶ It seems that he did not fully distinguish between scientific biography and popular biographies of various celebrities or well-known figures; after all, the genre was only emerging in post-totalitarian society.

However, it is clear to Polák that scientifically-conceived biography is “a full-fledged historical discipline, requiring scientific preparation no less demanding than other branches of history.”⁶⁷ According to him, the basic methodological cornerstones of a biography are subject of the book and the temporal dynamics.⁶⁸ This, in turn, severely limits the options of approach to the biography. Polák takes an a priori approach here, stating that “the author, before beginning his own work, must have a thorough understanding of the personality’s character through systematic psychological knowledge,”⁶⁹ which will logically lead to assessing all the actions of a given personality either always as positive or always as negative, although in reality it is not so simple with the identity of any person. Polák’s “Masaryk character” was much more contradictory. Polák’s insistence on temporal dynamics assumes that events should always be interpreted in chronological sequence (by years) within the whole book and should not be related to individual themes. (Thus, he rejects Nejedlý’s interwar concept, which approaches certain themes in Masaryk’s life and work with thematic interpretations.)⁷⁰ This strictly chronological perspective, however, leads to omitting or excusing various inconsistencies in Masaryk’s opinions and actions, which are scattered throughout the biography. In fact, Polák refuses to judge Masaryk as

⁶⁶ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, p. 761. Compare also to LENKA REZNIKOVÁ, *Biografie jako textová a sociální praxe. Ke konjunktuře žánru na prahu modernity*, *Dějiny – teorie – kritika* 12/2015, no. 1, pp. 93–117. <https://doi.org/10.14712/24645370.2715>. This publication draws attention, among other things, to the problems of the genre of biography at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (during Masaryk’s lifetime) and also presents the core literature on biographical writing before 1989.

⁶⁷ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, p. 761.

⁶⁸ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, pp. 761–762. Compare also to S. POLÁK, *Životopis T. G. Masaryka jako úkol*, p. 35.

⁶⁹ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, p. 761.

⁷⁰ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, notably pp. 762–763.

an expert because trying to understand his contribution to individual scientific disciplines does not bring any results. (Experts consider him to be insufficiently knowledgeable about the topic he writes about.)⁷¹ According to him, those who want to understand Masaryk must be able to read “between the lines” of his scientific texts and political acts,⁷² to be willing to look for a higher truth, which remains hidden to the experts behind the contradictions that, in the case of Masaryk, are apparent at first sight.⁷³

We may, of course, wonder whether Polák would have been keen to take such a heroic view of Masaryk if Masaryk’s career had ended before the First World War, since his scholarly work did not have much impact at the time, and one may doubt that it would have attracted attention in the future. However, the foundation of Czechoslovakia makes Masaryk a hero – and not only for Polák – as much as the followers of Masaryk’s cult do not realise that Czech culture and Czech statehood were already so well developed before World War I that they would have somehow manifested their vitality even without Masaryk. Polák thus admits that before he started writing Masaryk’s biography, he already had “a kind of preliminary ideal reconstruction of past events in their ante and post,”⁷⁴ and he really succumbs to the charisma of a man who can fight even at an older age, who stays healthy and resilient at an age when others enjoy their rest.⁷⁵ “The work of T. G. Masaryk is, perhaps more than in the case of anyone else, inseparable from his personality. It is true that his judgments tended to be peculiar, one-sided, ‘unscientific’: had they been pronounced by anyone else, they would often have been empty, eccentric or expressly incorrect; pronounced by Masaryk and supported by his personality, they became creative acts,” Polák writes.⁷⁶ If before World War I writer Jan Herben wrote a book called *Masaryk’s Sect and Goll’s School* (*Masarykova sekta a Gollova škola*) (1912), there is no doubt that Polák found himself in the Masaryk sect, which is naturally reflected in the greatest biography of Masaryk ever written.

⁷¹ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, p. 764.

⁷² S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, p. 766.

⁷³ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, among other p. 768.

⁷⁴ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, p. 762.

⁷⁵ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, p. 767.

⁷⁶ S. POLÁK, *Osobnost T. G. Masaryka – zamyšlení nad metodou životopisu*, p. 772.

The lower cover of Polák's book, or rather of all the individual volumes, points to his conception of Masaryk's biography: "He had been preparing for a major biography of T. G. Masaryk, if the circumstances of the time allowed it, for many years before November 1989. From the very beginning, he planned his work to go beyond the theoretical (scientific-historical) area and to have an impact in the moral sphere as well: this biography should fill a significant gap in the series of biographies of our outstanding personalities – biographies that are generally postulated as an absolute necessity in the literary fund of every cultural nation."⁷⁷ In the first volume of Masaryk's biography, where most of the actors are not generally known personalities, the problems that this concept creates are not yet so evident; his childhood and young adulthood takes place in a relatively anonymous environment, we may at best come across his patrons. Even so, there is an exaggerated and often naive psychologisation, for example, in the context of his honeymoon: "No, it really was no ordinary honeymoon. After all, the woman who shared it with him was no ordinary woman. It was his Charlie, who could understand him so perfectly in all matters, whose thoughts were going towards the same goal as his."⁷⁸ Beginning with the second volume, which largely focuses on the period around the manuscript dispute, it is evident that this concept inevitably creates a fundamental interpretive problem for Czech culture. According to Polák, the ones who stood on the same side as Masaryk were the good ones, while his opponents were the bad ones.⁷⁹ This becomes even more apparent in the third volume, when many of Masaryk's friends broke with his views and with him as a person, when Masaryk began to create his own conception of Czech history which seems unrealistic to the more realistic (positivist) scholars. In the last decade of the

⁷⁷ STANISLAV POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou I*, Praha 2000, book cover. The biographical portraits by S. Polák are similarly conceived in the other volumes of this biography of Masaryk. See also S. POLÁK, *Životopis T. G. Masaryka jako úkol*, where he points out the necessity of writing Masaryk's monograph as a scientific and moral work (p. 31) and believes that "a reader looking only for an evocation of Masaryk's life story can read only the main text, while a scholarly historian can concentrate on the notes" (p. 39).

⁷⁸ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou I*, p. 287. Compare also with p. 288, where he recounts Masaryk's request to his surprised father-in-law to provide him with funds for three years of life after his marriage ("The sum needed would be a trifle for a wealthy father-in-law.").

⁷⁹ STANISLAV POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou II*, Prague 2001, passim.

19th century, Masaryk spoke a lot about humanitarian ideals in history, about ethics,⁸⁰ but he found himself more or less isolated. Polák, however, does not reflect on why this is so, but rather solves the situation by slandering Masaryk's social circle, saying that they only thought of their own careers while Masaryk acted in an ideal and correct way.⁸¹ Polák does not take into account that Masaryk's social circle often thought the opposite,⁸² which is even more evident in the volume describing the first fourteen years of the 20th century, the period leading up to World War I.⁸³ Naturally, it is important to appreciate Masaryk's extraordinary bravery during the Hilsner affair, his public defence of a rural Jew unjustly accused of ritual murder. But otherwise, this volume is dominated by disputes with František Ladislav Rieger,⁸⁴ Karel Kramář,⁸⁵ and other politicians, and Polák does not shy away from very unflattering characterisations of these figures, including Franz Ferdinand Archduke of Austria-Este, whom he describes as "an uneducated, arrogant, and moody despot from the Konopiste Castle,"⁸⁶ or – in the next volume – the last emperor, Charles I, who, according to Masaryk's notes, was "uneducated, inexperienced, and ignorant of the state mechanism."⁸⁷ The socialist politician Bohumír Šmeral is in turn branded an "Austrian opportunist."⁸⁸

We can largely understand that Polák's reflections on T. G. Masaryk served as a source of encouragement for him throughout the two decades of normalisation, that they gave him strength during his difficult mo-

⁸⁰ STANISLAV POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou III*, Prague 2004, among others, pp. 32–42, 65, 111.

⁸¹ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou III*, for example, p. 114 in connection with Antonín Rezek, where he attributes Masaryk's influence to facts that had nothing to do with him.

⁸² See, for example, BOHUMIL JIROUŠEK, *Antonín Rezek, České Budějovice 2002*, pp. 71–72; *Český „konzul“ ve Vídni II. Politická korespondence c. k. ministra krajanu Antonína Rezka s mladočeskými politiky Václavem Škardou a Karlem Kramářem*, (ed.) Martin Klečacký, Prague 2017, p. 35, letter of A. Rezek to V. Škarda, November 1898.

⁸³ STANISLAV POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou IV*, Prague 2005.

⁸⁴ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou IV*, among others pp. 78–81.

⁸⁵ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou IV*, among others, p. 313, where Polák states that in 1910, Karel Kramář was afraid of Masaryk's political influence, of "dangerous competition from Masaryk," and of his leading role in Czech politics.

⁸⁶ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou IV*, p. 230.

⁸⁷ STANISLAV POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou V*, Prague 2009, p. 177.

⁸⁸ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou V*, p. 55.

ments under state socialism and just after its collapse, when Polák was unjustly accused of collaborating with the state security before 1989⁸⁹ and when he was only just accessing key sources on Masaryk's life.⁹⁰ Still, it is difficult to agree with many of his views, including: "[Minister Josef] Kaizl – a man without a political idea. Masaryk followed his own idea, now articulated politically. The question was whether he would not end up on a steep path with this idea, like a lonely wanderer."⁹¹ Polák, however, probably failed to realise how his a priori judgments lack any credibility when confronted with his efforts to glorify Masaryk. While in the case of Kaizl the lack of ideology is considered a fundamental flaw, in the case of Masaryk it is, instead, a virtue: "[Masaryk] did not propose any closed ideology to be believed, only an honest and critical effort to rectify human affairs. And such an approach is the least popular."⁹²

Polák concludes the fourth volume with the somewhat exaggerated statement that when Masaryk went abroad in 1914 due to the outbreak of World War I, he had left at home "the results of several months' work – a secret revolutionary organization sophisticatedly prepared and instructed; he took with him abroad a rationally constructed plan, taking into account all possibilities, based on a lot of precise information and numerical data, thought out by cool reasoning, by the method of science."⁹³ In Polák's conception, the domestic resistance is thus practically irrelevant; it was in fact prepared by Masaryk before he left and what is important is his stay abroad. This brings us to a question: how was Masaryk able to organise the domestic resistance, as even Polák admits that around 1910, Masaryk was completely abandoned, without friends,

⁸⁹ J. PÁNEK, *Za ideálem a pravdou*, pp. 15–16.

⁹⁰ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou I*, p. 475.

⁹¹ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou IV*, p. 75. Polák (p. 74) also draws attention to Masaryk's views on the then late Josef Kaizl, which are indeed very unfair: "... even Edvard Grégr pursued an idea, however superficial it might have been, workers have such an idea, everyone has it but Kaizl did not. He just worked on simple tasks as brought by the moment and pursued a purely personal goal – to become a minister. Sometimes he was useful." A much more balanced view of the political work of Kaizl, Kramář, and Masaryk is given by ZDENĚK ŠOLLE, *Století české politiky*, Prague 1998, where he discusses, among other things, many of their controversies, or VRATISLAV DOUBEK, *T. G. Masaryk a česká slovenská politika 1882–1910*, Prague 1999.

⁹² S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou IV*, p. 231.

⁹³ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou IV*, pp. 387–388.

and without ideological influence, as the “generational turn” was directed in a totally different direction, away from Masaryk?⁹⁴

Polák completes the myth of T. G. Masaryk as the founder of Czechoslovakia at a time when this myth is essentially dead, viewing Masaryk’s activities as the ideal while interpreting the activities of the Austrian government as a warning, in terms of “how the enemy is changing tactics and inclining towards a policy of appeasement.”⁹⁵ Masaryk’s politics, in reality full of backstage intrigue,⁹⁶ becomes a “symbol and legend” for Polák.⁹⁷ Polák writes about this legend without attempting to deconstruct it in any way.⁹⁸ He quietly ignores any inconveniences (e.g. the mental illness of his wife Charlotte Masaryk),⁹⁹ he does not oppose the fact that Masaryk published his opinions and defended his ideas under various pseudonyms,¹⁰⁰ and he does not mind the intrigues against Karel Kramář and in favour of the generally unpopular Edvard Beneš.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, it seems that with the volume dealing with the years 1919–1937, in fact with the main legacy of T. G. Masaryk as a politician, Polák ran out of steam. The volume is the thinnest of the whole work, not counting the supplementary volume seven, which is a summary, or an epilogue.¹⁰² Although, considering Polák’s interest, the volume was probably written at the very beginning; he wrote the study *The Personality of T. G. Masaryk* (*Osobnost T. G. Masaryka*) in the mid-1970s, let his circle of friends read

⁹⁴ STANISLAV POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou V*, p. 42.

⁹⁵ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou V*, p. 201. Compare also to e.g. p. 322, where the Austrian government is again described as an enemy.

⁹⁶ Compare to TOMÁŠ GEČKO, *Dispoziční fond T. G. Masaryka v pavučině klientelistických sítí a peněžních toků meziválečného Hradu*, Český časopis historický 122/2024, pp. 515–550.

⁹⁷ STANISLAV POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou VI*, Prague 2012, p. 169.

⁹⁸ See, generally, e.g. CHRIS LORENZ, *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit. Eine Einführung in die Geschichtstheorie*, Köln–Weimar–Wien 1997; STANISLAV SOUSEDÍK – EMILIO BETTI, *Úvod do rekonstruktivní hermeneutiky*, Prague–Kroměříž 2008.

⁹⁹ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou VI*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁰ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou VI*, p. 155.

¹⁰¹ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou VI*, among others. pp. 25, 40–41, 185–186, and others.

¹⁰² STANISLAV POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou VII*, Prague 2014. This volume is given the subtitle *Personality*, while the other volumes are supplemented only with information about the years to which the volume is dedicated.

it in typescript (samizdat), and it was their encouragement that led him to work further on Masaryk's full biography.¹⁰³

Although the reader might expect some powerful message in a supplementary volume of this kind, this is not really the case. It is rather a somewhat shallow reflection on faith, logic, and tradition. Perhaps Polák himself – possibly based on the reactions of his fellow scientists – suspected that he had written a conceptually very outdated work when he admits in his conclusion that perhaps sometime in the future “a more comprehensive testimony will be presented – a testimony about the mentality of the new generations who are already looking at many things in a new and often very different way.”¹⁰⁴ He reveals his own motivation, perhaps his primary inspiration, by quoting T. G. Masaryk, who once wrote that “a good biography will be the primary source of learning for a child and a nation. One can safely assess the cultural level of a nation by the biographies of its men...”¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk is, of course, the object of apologies by other authors. Among them, let us mention Marie L. Neudorřlová,¹⁰⁶ who mainly focuses on her admiration for Masaryk's scientific work and teaching, without seeking to confront his opponents,¹⁰⁷ or Miloslav Bednář,¹⁰⁸ who works mainly with philosophical concepts of the Czech past

¹⁰³ S. POLÁK, *Životopis T. G. Masaryka jako úkol*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁴ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou VII*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁵ S. POLÁK, *T. G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou VII*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁶ MARIE L. NEUDORřLOVÁ, *T. G. Masaryk – politický myslitel*, Prague 2011, or e.g. MARIE L. NEUDORřLOVÁ, *Příspěvek T. G. Masaryka před rokem 1914 k rozvinutí podmínek k vytvoření demokratického Československa*, in: *Československo 1918–1938/2018*, (edd.) Petr A. Bílek, Bohumil Jiroušek, Lukáš Novotný, České Budějovice 2018, pp. 284–298.

¹⁰⁷ However, on occasions, for example, in relation to Karel Kramář, she does not shy away from it either. M. L. NEUDORřLOVÁ, *T. G. Masaryk – politický myslitel*, p. 10: “Unlike Masaryk, Kramář was willing to retreat from democratic principles in his political work and to make considerable compromises for the sake of his career and the position of the Young Czech Party, which had already abandoned its main democratic principles in the mid-1890s.”

¹⁰⁸ MILOSLAV BEDNÁŘ, *České myšlení*, Prague 1996, or MILOSLAV BEDNÁŘ, MILAN HLAVAČKA et al., *Válka a revoluce jako hybatelé dějin a česká dějinná zkušenost*, Prague 2021.

and the history of Czech philosophy, where he sees problematic historical lines in Czech philosophy similar to those pointed out by T. G. Masaryk and traces them to the second half of the 20th century, especially to Jan Patočka. Bednář, however, is primarily concerned with philosophy and does not dwell much on Masaryk's confrontations with his contemporaries. A more balanced view of T. G. Masaryk was presented in the 1990s by Lubomír Nový.¹⁰⁹ His book, however, has become somewhat overshadowed by others,¹¹⁰ probably due to the fact that he had already dealt with Masaryk – in a Marxist-Leninist way – in the 1960s. Nevertheless, he addresses the complex and rather incomplete nature of Masaryk's thinking, as well as the fact that Masaryk's conception of history made it possible for Zdeněk Nejedlý and Marxist-Leninist interpretations of the Hussite movement, the search for “progressive” traditions in history, and the communist regime in Czechoslovakia to build on it. Among foreign authors, we could also mention Bruce R. Berglund, whose book *Castle and Cathedral in Modern Prague*, which discusses, among other things, Masaryk's vision of the Prague Castle as a sacred place of the Czechoslovak Republic, also shows certain desacralisation tendencies. He believes in Masaryk's ideal motives, although in many ways these motives were unclear even to Masaryk's closest circle.¹¹¹

In this sense, it is indeed understandable that many humanities scholars are trying to find a higher, more logical meaning in the creation of Czechoslovakia, to find some “stories that historians tell their tribe around the campfires at night,”¹¹² but the problem is that the authors in question sometimes confuse the “justification” and the “clarification.”¹¹³ Masaryk – like Václav Havel – will always be relevant to the humanities and the social sciences, including political science,¹¹⁴ but the reflec-

¹⁰⁹ LUBOMÍR NOVÝ, *Filosof T. G. Masaryk. Problémové skici*, Brno 1994.

¹¹⁰ Lubomír Nový's interpretations of T. G. Masaryk were mainly reflected upon by the literary critic and former dissident FRANTIŠEK KAUTMAN, *Promýšlet Masaryka*, in: Masarykův sborník IX, 1993–1995, Prague 1997, pp. 117–131.

¹¹¹ BRUCE R. BERGLUND, *Hrad a katedrála v moderní Praze. Touha po posvátnu ve věku skepse*, Prague 2021, i.a. pp. 173, 211–216 (cf. also English original BRUCE L. BERGLUND, *Castle and Cathedral in modern Prague. Longing for the Sacred in a Skeptical age*, Budapest–New York 2017).

¹¹² DUŠAN TŘEŠTÍK, *Dějiny ve věku nejistot*, in: *Dějiny ve věku nejistot. Sborník k pětiletosti 70. narozenin Dušana Třeštíka*, (edd.) Jan Klápště, Eva Plešková, Josef Žemlička, Prague 2003, p. 33.

¹¹³ D. TŘEŠTÍK, *Dějiny ve věku nejistot*, p. 34.

¹¹⁴ See MILAN ZNOJ, *České spory o liberalismus: Masaryk a Havel*, Prague 2024.

tions on both figures' influence should not be some kind of "false sagas." In the future, research on Masaryk, which is quite intensive although largely material¹¹⁵ at present, must be followed by a new, synthesising conception of Masaryk's biography. Unfortunately, Polák's biography of T. G. Masaryk is not the case. It involved an enormous amount of work that was ultimately wasted. Its tendentiousness makes it unacceptable and, in terms of interpretation and largely also factual accuracy, useless for researchers who study any aspect of the period that involves Masaryk. Moral biographies cannot be part of a liberal science because they constitute a legend intended for believers; perhaps this is where Polák meets Masaryk's concept of religion. Our assessment of Opat's biography of T. G. Masaryk is that it is slightly better in its interpretation of Masaryk's life, although the book is much shorter. However, it mostly deals with the interpretation of Masaryk's scientific work, which could serve as an initial insight into Masaryk's thinking, an area for future research.

The only hope for new research is to examine Masaryk more completely, to consider, for example, whether Masaryk's reflections on Central European cooperation between nations, his support for the League of Nations, or his pan-European efforts¹¹⁶ did not in fact realise the concept of building a national Czechoslovak state conceived in full, and that it did not offer as many guarantees for the future as was optimistically believed after the establishment of the Czechoslovakia. This is what this study encourages because it is essential to realise the limits of the existing biographies of Masaryk and of the biographers who saw him as virtually infallible.

¹¹⁵ Extensive editorial activity (e.g. writings, correspondence) related to T. G. Masaryk is evidenced in particular by the scientific outputs of the Masaryk Institute and the Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences, often in cooperation with the T. G. Masaryk Institute, o. p. s., which can also be found on their website. See UTGM, *Ediční řady TGM*, <https://utgm.cz/edicni-rady-tgm/> (accessed on 15 July 2025), MÚA AV ČR, *Publikace*, <https://www.mua.cas.cz/cs/publikace> (accessed on 15 July 2025).

¹¹⁶ F. KAUFMAN, *Promýšlet Masaryka*.