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**Temné charaktery hlavních postav a užití humoru v Sakiho
povídkách jako nástroj kritiky soudobé společnosti**

**Black Humour and "Evil" Characters as a Tool of Social
Criticism in Saki's Short Stories**

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PROCLAMATION

I claimed that I was working on the bachelor thesis „Temné charaktery hlavních postav a užití humoru v Sakiho povídkách jako nástroj kritiky soudobé společnosti“ on my own and I used the resources mentioned in the bibliography part.

Český Krumlov, April 20, 2012

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Podpis autora

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ABSTRACT

The bachelor thesis deals with a literary topic of the main characters in H. H. Munro's short stories. His workings are well known for their humour but many of them have almost macabre background. To uncover the author's reasons for such attitude, there were chosen eight of his more or less known short stories to be analysed. The determining of Munro's perspective of social criticism was interesting especially because of the historical background. He wrote his best pieces of work at the turn of the 19th and 20th century which was the end of one of the most famous and successful era of the Great Britain. Munro's own burning life situation is reflected in his work as well.

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá literárním tématem charakterů hlavních postav v povídkách H. H. Munroa. Jeho práce jsou známé především pro svůj humor, ale mnohé z nich působí téměř strašidelnou atmosférou. Za účelem objasnění důvodů pro tento autorův postoj, bylo pro analýzu vybráno osm více či méně známých povídek. Pro zkoumání Munroovy perspektivy vidění světa bylo podstatné zaměřit se i na to, v jaké době tvořil. Svá nejlepší díla vytvořil na přelomu 19. a 20. století, což se dá označit jako konec velmi úspěšné a slavné éry Velké Británie. Muroova vlastní palčivá životní situace se ovšem v jeho práci také významně projevuje.

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Introduction

This bachelor thesis deals with a literary topic of Hector Hugh Munro's short stories' dark characters. The writer is known perhaps better by the pen name Saki. His life, piece of work and contemporary social criticism and sarcasm are in the thesis discussed too. The main topic of the thesis is the dark character of Munro's heroes.

To present this author precisely and exactly, it is convenient to show and analyse some of his short stories. The short stories provided to Munro sufficient amount of scopes for expressing his rather sharp sense of humour and his own view on the so often criticised society.

His piece of work and productions are very interesting to observe especially because of the attractive historical background. Even though born in Burma, he was a subject of the English Queen. He spent his life during the period of appreciable decline of the empire. The society raised, the industry was at the top like never before. But the foreign politic level was not. Many of the lead wars turned out badly. Moreover, the interpersonal relationships were still excessively prim. Creating of the literature which comments this attitude in such a humorous, sharp and truthful way was something very unique.

There are three most interesting points of view in which Munro did show his opinions and attitudes. These are: narrating by children, by animals and by Reginald and Clovis. To explain or at least to try to explain how this narrating works, eight of Munro's short stories shall be analysed in this bachelor thesis. These short stories are Sredni Vashtar, Munro's probably best known and most popular story, which lived to see many movie adaptations, too. The analysing part of the thesis shall begin just with Sredni Vashtar. The next analysis shall deal with Bertie's Christmas Eve. The overarching elements in these stories are primarily the children-ways of view. Both of the main characters were brought up with no

love. The coldness of their lives reflected on their environs. Another part deals with analysis of the short stories about the society. Each of the stories is masterpiece of wit and each one is based on conversation. The next stories narrating a tale of animals are The She-Wolf, The Boar-Pig and The Brough. All of these animals cause some problems or are malevolent. They blow up the human bad habits. And finally, there will be analysed two extra short stories which are especially interesting by their (in)direct criticism of contemporary circumstances in upper-middle-class families. And these two stories are Louise and The Byzantine Omelette. The criticism of the Edwardian Society is absolutely uncovered. There is as well perfectly visible criticism of leftist's tendency, which could be seen as a contemporary fashion. The shift towards the communistic way of thinking was mainly noticeable in Russia. Hector Hugh Munro, as an interested historian knew this tendency very well and used it as a theme for more of his works.

1. The Edwardian Society and Culture

The death of Queen Victoria in January 1901 and the succession of her son Edward marked the end of the Victorian era. While Victoria had shunned society after the death of her husband, Prince Albert, Edward was the leader of the fashionable elite that set a style influenced by the art and fashions of Continental Europe, perhaps because of the King's fondness for travel. The era was marked by significant shifts in politics as sections of society that had been largely excluded from wielding power in the past, such as common labourers and women, became increasingly politicised.

The Edwardian era was a period during which the British class system was very rigid. Economic and social changes created an environment in which there was more social mobility. Such changes included rising interest in socialism, attention to the plight of the poor and the status of women, including the issue of women's suffrage, together with increased economic opportunities as a result of rapid industrialisation. These changes were to be hastened in the aftermath of the First World War.

Hector Hugh Munro was born on the 18th of December 1870 in Akyab, Burma. It oneself sounds very unusually and unlikely but at that time Burma was a part of the British Empire. Munro's grandfather Samuel Mercer, the father of Hector's mother Mary Frances Mercer, was a Rear Admiral and thus the Queen's servant. Munro's father named Charles Augustus Munro was an Inspector General of the Burmese Police (Lane, p.II.).

It is possible that the artistic talent had Hector inherited from his cousin, the nephew of his mother Mary, because he was a successful writer known as Dornford Yates (Lane, p.II.).

As two years old child, Munro lost his mother. In the year 1872, she visited England. She was pregnant at that time and unfortunately was charged by a cow. This accident caused her miscarriage. Mary fell in the shock and depression and died very soon after that (Lane, p.II.). It must be said that she must have been very exhausted after the long journey from Burma to England. For a pregnant woman, the whole situation was certainly dangerous because the health condition of the people on those days was not very good, of course.

This painful loss changed Hector's life forever. The element of the child brought up by someone else is repeating in more writings. After the death of his wife, Charles Munro decided to send his three children, Hector, Charles and Ethel, back to England to be brought up by their grandmother and aunts (Lane, p.III.). The whole life changed for little Hector. The household of his grandmother and her two spinster daughters was lead very strictly and toughly. For a child who was used to have at least minimal freedom was this new way of life unexpected. The elements of consequences and impacts of this upbringing are later well visible in Munro's pieces of work, especially then in the famous *Sredni Vashtar*.

Formal education got young Hector Hugh Munro at Bedford Grammar School and later at Pencarwick School in Exmouth, Dover (Lane, p.III.). After finishing the school and yet graduated, he worked as a journalist for *Westminster Gazette*, *Daily Express*, *Bystander*, *Outlook* or *Morning Post* (Lane, p.III.).

The meetings with father were too rare because of the huge distance between them. But when the father retired, he took Hector and his sister Ethel to travel to fashionable European spas and famous tourist resorts (Lane, p.III.). This was the real place for a young and talented journalist. He could observe other guests and visitors, who were very interesting for the beginning author to be studied. The arrogance, self-importance and posh manners which they presented were very inspirational. It is possible to dare to estimate that many of his later protagonists have their models right in the resorts and spas which had young Munro visited.

After such relative leisure time, Hector followed his father and in the year 1893 entered into Indian Imperial Police. From India was he posted back to Burma (Lane, p.III). Munro's attitude to colonialism is not clear. The fact is that he later joined the Royal Army in the First World War although it was not obligation. It reflects to his strong national sense. The satire and witty criticism was one of the Munro's attitudes to express some dissatisfaction, but the defence of homeland was another.

Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately for his creation, after two years has he contracted malaria. He was forced by circumstances to resign and return to England (Lane, p.III). During the Burman period of his life, his pen name Saki came to existence (Byrne, p.IV). There are two possible sources of this pen name. One of them is a reference to a cupbearer in the poem *Rubáiyát* by Omar Klayyam. It is a Persian poem with eponymous character. The second possible source is a South American primate, a small, long-tailed monkey from the Western Hemisphere (Byrne, p.IV). This animal is a main or central character in *The Remolding of Groby Lington*.

There is one important element which should be mentioned in Saki's biography because it can help to comprehend his attitude and his own experience with the Victorian and later Edwardian society in the way in he personally went through it. Hector Hugh Munro was a homosexual. In the time when sexual relationships among men were a criminal act, this fact meant a real problem. Hardly can anybody imagine the difficulty and the unbearable burden of having no chance to express oneself in the way he really was. The impossibility of living up ones own to expectations must have been destroying and sad. The whole of his life he kept his homosexuality private (Lane, p.IV.).

Despite the fact that the minds about homosexuals are strict and gays are seen as weak, effeminate and unmanly, it is to be said that Hector Hugh Munro has died as a hero. In the age of 43, he refused the commission and joined the Royal British Army as an ordinary soldier (Lane, p.IV). In spite of the fact that he was not

drafted to the army because of his age, he felt the civic duty to join it. It refers to strong cognizance of the social duty.

Even if he was still sick and injured, he returned again and again back to the battlefield (Lane, p.IV).

On the 14th of November 1916 in France he was sheltering in a shell crater, when he was shot from a German sniper (Byrne, p.V).

The majority of the information we have about Saki, comes from his sister Ethel H. Munro (Lane, p.V). For unknown reasons she destroyed most of his papers and later wrote her own account of their childhood. Her perspective was rather prejudiced, so that the information she gave to the readers are not always true. Despite the loss of his personal diary reflecting his childhood, Saki became very popular and timeless author. His satires are still topical because he focused his mind on those parts of human character which are immortal in any era.

2. Themes and Elements in Munro's Workings

The writing career of Hector Hugh Munro started by working for the newspaper such as *the Westminster Gazette*, *Daily Express*, *Bystander*, *Morning Post* and *Outlook* (Lane, p.II). It was a perfect opportunity for him to gather practice and experiences.

Munro's first published book is *The Rise of the Russian Empire*. It was published in 1900 and it was a historical study. *The Rise of the Russian Empire* is Munro's only non-fictional book. This historical study was modelled upon Gibon's famous *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Lane, p.III).

The collection of short stories followed in 1902. The volume was called *Not-So-Stories* (Lane, p.III). Within the years 1902 and 1908 worked Munro as a foreign correspondent for *The Morning Post* again. He travelled through the Balkans, Russia and later lived in Paris, France (Byrne, p.I). His excursions of these countries served as a source for Munro's later short stories and the eastern motives were used very often.

Back in London he wrote most of his best known and most popular stories. He settled in a flat at 97 Mortimere Street, London (Lane, p.II).

A very interesting piece of work was a historical novella *When William Came: London under the Hohenzollerns*. The book was published immediately before the First World War, in the year 1913. The main character is the German Emperor William II. The plot narrates in *what-if-form* what all might happen if this emperor conquered England (Lane, p.II). The piquant circumstance is, that William II. was the grandson of Queen Victoria. This young emperor did never evince respect to her. He honoured solely the German branch of the dynasty and at that he spurned his mother Victoria, the first daughter of Queen Victoria

(Plaidy, p.56). In William's era the growth of one of the most important politicians of the 20th century Otto von Bismarck came.

The German Emperor was rather more criticised for his directness and invasions. The example of such aggression though the British royal family was the war with Denmark, the homeland of Queen Victoria's daughter-in-law. Denmark was drawn into the war of Schleswig-Holstein. The accident caused a hard dissension in the family. The Queen could not oppose to her grandson William II., but she sympathized with the princess Alexandra, the wife of the oldest son (Plaidy, p.59).

In the novel *When William Came*, the Hohenzollerns turned out to be excellent administrators and sportsmen, who shared with the British a love of hunting and country sports.

The most frequently elaborated papers were the short stories and fables. The most highly valued ones are very often macabre. The usage of fables and animal motives and elements is a very advantageous form for expressing the sharp social criticism. Munro reflected the bad human habits by the animals. It was much more suitable for the society and it helped to the pieces of work last out until nowadays because the human reactions and features do not change in any era. This is the unique and excellent aspect of Munro's short stories. The human characters stay the same independently of the time or place.

He is considered a master of the short story and is often compared to O. Henry and Dorothy Parker. He was strongly influenced by Oscar Wilde and Lewis Carroll. He himself influenced A. A. Milne, Noël Coward or P. G. Wodehouse (Byrne, p.V).

Quite a good example of Munro's typical fable is his short story called *Tobermory*. Tobermory is a cat who has seen too many scandals through the country house windows. It learns to talk and starts to repeat the vicious comments about each other. Munro published his books in the middle of the strong

Edwardian era. It was absolutely impossible to write things like these directly. But in the case that the shocking story was narrated by a cat, the audience was not so strict to it. The hidden criticism was full of wit but correct and proper nevertheless.

In the year 1911 a volume *The Chronicles of Clovis* was published (Lane, p.III). Clovis, as a main character and protagonist, was a kind of Munro's alter ego. He felt no problems to express his attitude, even if he was in the company of top-drawers.

Next to the animals, there is a motive of children and elements of the Eastern Culture in Munro's work, for example the motive of reincarnation in Laura. The Eastern Culture motives are as well very well visible in the short story Sredni Vashtar. The worshipping of some animal as a God stands very sharply defined against Christianity. Although perhaps it was only a pose or obligation, the Christianity was still the main connecting element of the contemporary society. Munro criticised the hypocrisy of Christianity very sharply. The origin of this attitude is probably in Munro's Burman childhood and boyhood (Lane, p.IV). After the years of freedom, he was forced to settle down in cold England, in the house of a strict grandmother. The escapes to warmness and revolt of Burma were quite legitimate.

Two of his most famous heroes, Reginald and Clovis, are portrayed in a series of stories in which they shock the conventional world or leave the reader to read between the lines. It seems that Munro was desperately bored with the society and criticised it for its strictness and discipline (Byrne, p.IV). But the roots of it were most likely right in his inner pain of his family life and loss of his mother.

The fact that the dark characters in Munro's writing show to the reader not only the amusing side of his mind, but the disillusion and dissatisfaction of his own life, is obvious. He must have felt a huge emptiness and perhaps wrath which could spring in unfulfilled intimate life.

The special section is Munro's attitude to the humour. His sense of humour was not odd at all. Even if his stories give the impression of immorality, they are moral. The author's aim is to rear the reader and to give a moral example (Hornát, p.IX).

The era of realism in the literature was towards in the end and the audience wanted to read something new and fresh. This offered mainly unexpectedly popular Oscar Wilde. The serious topics in the literature were not accepted by Munro fully. He did not believe in the success of the effort of the topics like love, pain, hate or poverty. The authors like G. B. Shaw or H. G. Wells struggled to reform the society and rebuild it. Munro did not believe in that. The social, economical or political spheres were criticised and there were attempts of improving them. This Munro's diversion caused his special and exceptional position among the other contemporary authors (Hornát, p.XIV.).

3. The Short Stories Subjected to Analysis

Sredni Vashtar

Bertie's Christmas Eve

The Boar-Pig

She-Wolf

The Brough

The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope

Louise

The Byzantine Omelette

3.1. The Grim Children

It is obvious that the motive of children attracted Munro's attention. The roots of it are very probably in his childhood. It could be seen as author's way how to deal with the emptiness of his life during the years at grandmother's place. The hate and desire for revolt is surely overstated to impact comically but it still freezes. The bad character features of the adult members of families or households are reflected right on the background of the innocent and pure children.

3.1.1. Sredni Vashtar

To show exactly the freezing and macabre way in Saki has written, the short story *Sredni Vashtar* was chosen to be analysed at the very beginning.

The main character in this tale is a little boy whose name is Conradin. He is 10 years old and is brought up by his cousin and guardian Mrs De Ropp. There is a striking analogy between the character of this little boy and the author himself. The cousin and guardian Mrs De Ropp is nobody else than Munro's grandmother.

Right at the beginning of the story it is said that Conradin would not live another 5 years. This is an opinion of a silky and effete doctor. It is not clear if this bad prospect of the boy's short life was the reason why Mrs De Ropp took him to her house but it is rather probable.

Despite the fact that Conradin is a very young boy and in the prime of childhood, he is not like other children. The childhood is seen as a period of innocence. But Conradin tends much more to some violent actions. He hates his cousin Mrs De Ropp but is able to mask it because he has to. There is something hidden and cruel between them. Mrs De Ropp is not a loving woman who wants to give a loving and pleasant home to Conradin. She is not willing to show or give him any

affection. (Her act of taking Conradin into her house was rather the act of showing to the neighbours and acquaintances that she fills the Christian commitments. He calls her very coldly “the Woman“.

There is nothing but loneliness, dullness and bans in Mrs De Ropp’s house. This is a very important for the whole plot because Conradin, on his quest for escape, finds a hidden tool-shed in the corner of the garden. The author describes it as a cathedral. Conradin, as a suffering child, feels only emptiness and lack of love. In the tool-shed he spends day after day. He remembers his family members, “familiar phantoms“, probably author’s memory at the mother. And, there are as well “two inmates of flesh and blood“, a Houdan hen, a kind of fowl, and a large polecat-ferret. The relationship to the hen is quite well understandable, Conradin likes her, wants to protect her. But his relationship to the ferret is much more dark and deep. It is a mixture of admiration and fear. Conradin is proud to possess such a treasure. One day, the ferret gets its own name – Sredni Vashtar. It is an unusual name for a beast, but it was not beast any more. “It grew into a god and a religion“. Why did Conradin choose right this name? It should perhaps accent the contrast between his religion – Hinduism, and Mrs De Ropp’s religion – Christianity. Hinduism is in the story represented by red flowers, red berries and by using of a nutmeg. The red is the colour of violence or revolt here.

Conradin has to go to church once a week. He describes it as “an alien rite in the House of Rimmon“, a false Syrian god. But for Conradin the only one god is Sredni Vashtar the Beautiful.

One day, Mrs De Ropp gets a terrible toothache. Conradin knows for sure that this happened because Sredni Vashtar wanted it.

What is important is that Sredni Vashtar is of course loved and admired by Conradin, but the only friend of his is the Houdan hen. She is never a part of Conradin’s religion. When Mrs De Ropp finds out that her cousin spends his time in the tool-shed with a hen, she decides that it is not a good activity for a little boy

and takes the hen away from him. But she does not know that this is a huge mistake of her. Conradin feels too helpless to be able to say anything. He assumes this message quietly and calmly. He is forced to go back to “the world he so hated“. Conradin is full of hate and wrath. The only creature which can help him is Sredni Vashtar.

Every day and every night he prays to Sredni Vashtar: “Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar“. He does not say what his god should exactly do. But Sredni Vashtar as a god must know what he should do.

Mrs De Ropp wants to know the secret of the tool-shed and finds in Conradin’s bedroom a hidden key from the Sredni Vashtar’s hutch. She goes to the tool-shed. “The woman needs to know about everything“. Conradin watches out of the window and waits what his cousin is going to do. He doubts his success because the Woman triumphs always. Conradin tries to sing the mantra, the hymn of Sredni Vashtar. Nothing happens for a while. Suddenly, the polecat-ferret runs out from the tool-shed and leaves! Here, the Sredni Vashtar, as a beast and a symbol of Conradin’s liberty, leaves his servant. Conradin is not sad. He knows that he is free now because he knows what has happened to “the Woman“. He sits down to eat the toast and spreads the butter on bread very thickly because he feels the satisfaction of “The Woman’s” leaving. This is a symbol of victory. The liberation causes that Conradin indulges the snack again.

The Story of Sredni Vashtar is great to read. The personal tragedy of a little boy, who has found a house to stay in but he did not find a loving family, is freezing. He has to bear the coldness of his guardian and needs just to find a warm place to live.

Of course that the ferret is not a god, it is just an imagination of an unhappy child. The fact is that Mrs. De Ropp left even if Conradin’s wish was only a dream. The

bad things which Conradin has to go through, changes into his revolt. The power of child's wishes needs to be taken into account as well.

Not only that the short story is macabre, it is in some special way very witty. Although the reader knows that Conradin is indirectly guilty of the death of Mrs De Ropp, he supports him inertly.

3.1.2. Bertie's Christmas Eve

The next short story to the topic called Grim Children is *Bertie's Christmas Eve*. The plot is not strictly about a child but about a young and almost adult man. The main character of the story is Bertie Stefink, who came home to England to visit his guardian and uncle, Mr. Stefink. Mr. Stefink lives in a big house with his wife and children.

The plot takes place at Christmas. Bertie came to spend the Christmas with the family. He travelled the whole year around the world. According to the family members, he does not live a suitable life. If he was a Crown Prince he could spend his time once in Australia, once in Ceylon, but as a son of not so highly esteemed man, he should be more moderate.

Bertie's plan was to stay in England a little bit longer but Mr. Stefink's aim was slightly different. After a few days, the guardian started to do steps to send Bertie away again. The house full of guests offered to Bertie, who was disappointed with the necessity to leave so soon, a great opportunity to revenge in a witty way.

After the opulent dinner, one of the guests put forward to go to the stall and try to listen to the cows. He explained it as a Russian folk habit. Mr. a Mrs. Stefink agreed because they wanted to give a chance to the young people, their daughter and this young guest, to get together. The parents hoped in their engagement. The

whole company, apart from Bertie, went to the stall. For Stefink's nephew it was a huge chance. He locked them all in the stall and went back to the empty house full of drink and food. Out of the stall window, the pale faces of the company observed the arrival of a group of drunk young men. They were invited by Bertie to the house and the "rotten Christmas party" started. After some time, the bunch left and Bertie unlocked the stall door and singing let the family to leave the cows.

It is obvious that the motive of coming back to England to visit the family is Munro's own experience. A very important element here in this story is again the not-loving surrounding. The fact that the Stefink family hosts very kindly unfamiliar guests but cannot give a little bit of love to its own young member is freezing but rather hidden in this story. It might be a criticism of the Christian hypocrisy and moral, very similarly like in *Sredni Vashtar*.

Bertie, who does not want to leave the home as soon, was angry during the whole evening. The whole family planned his departure and he haunted them by singing a song called "*Don't say goodbye but au revoir!*" to demonstrate that even if they sent him to Rhodesia, he shall come back again. This is one of Munro's clever and typical pranks.

Another important motive which is probably autobiographical was the pointing at the Russian tradition of speaking animals. Munro worked as a journalist and thanks to this profession he travelled across Russia. As an author he elaborated the Russian history so he was acquainted with the Russian folk traditions very well. There were some moments in more of his workings in which he used his experience from this travelling. He enjoyed mocking people who knew the foreign habits only peripherally and used them as facts. Their doing had only one aim – to be interesting in a special way and to entertain the company.

Contrary to *Sredni Vashtar* and the boy's kind of revolt, the revenge in this story is not as fatalistic. Nobody dies, nobody is hurt. The revolt was not deadly and

painful. It was rather childish and funny. The pain of an unwanted child, however, is the same or at least comparable.

The dark side of the characters belongs to the family and to Mr. Stefink, especially. Bertie's prank could only assure Mr. Stefink that the decision to send the boy away was right because Bertie and his friends devastated the reserves of Champagne and alcohol.

3.2. The Nasty Animals

There are three basic motives of narrating in Munro's short stories. One of them is the perspective of the animals. Despite the fact, that the main characters are even though mostly people who are mocked, the animals play an essential role in the plot. Their function is mainly to depict the human bad habits and positions. There are many fables in Munro's workings. The less known of them were chosen to be presented and to demonstrate the author's great narrating ability. Each of the chosen stories is more likely conversational and the criticism is more or less hidden.

3.2.1. The Boar-pig

The plot of the story sets in the park of a country residence. The essential roles play a male-pig and a little girl, who uses the animal as a tool for punishing two ladies.

A mother and her daughter try to get to a party. They did not get the invitation but because of the social reasons they need to be there. One of the invited people is the Princess. The only way how these ladies could get to the garden party and not to be seen was to sneak across the park. Their effort was foiled because the park gate was locked. Both ladies did not light upon a little girl sitting in the tree top and observing them. The girl, named Matilde, was a niece of the hostess throwing the party. Matilde decided to let out a huge pig that was closed in its sty because of the party. In the meantime, the ladies considered that their effort to get to the garden is useless and wanted to go back to home. Unfortunately, there appeared a huge pig in their way. They both were frightened. Suddenly, they saw a girl sitting in the tree top and they asked her for help. The girl started to speak French and explained that she cannot help them because she was punished. This punishment is to speak French during the whole afternoon and to stay in the park during the party her aunt was giving. After the urge and appeal of the ladies, Matilde agreed

to help them and send the pig away. The ladies had to pay her fairly a lot of money for it. Matilde jumped down of the tree and very easily got the pig to its sty. Both ladies were angry because they considered that the dangerously looking pig was a cuddly animal and it was not necessary to pay the girl at all.

The story is among the others Munro's short stories quite exceptional because the main character was a girl, not a boy. The rest of the characters, however, are rather typical. Two dull but ambitious women, who cannot bear the fact that they were not invited to a party, are examples of the contemporary hypocrisy in the society.

According to the title of the story it seems that the main character is a boar-pig but it rather plays a role as a tool of a little girl. This girl did not await any bigger adventure until she got the idea to let the pig, probably her pet, out of the sty. Her primary aim was not to get the money from the interlopers. She just wanted to let the pig to have as good afternoon as the guests of her aunt have. The opportunity to earn some money and to punish somebody maliciously was some extra bonus. Matilde, as an instigator of the prank, is a very clever and capable girl. She does not agree with the way how the ladies wanted to get to the garden and punish them by humiliation. The idea to use the pig as a means of achieving the girl's aim came unexpectedly.

At the very first sight, it was the pig what represented the darkness. It was described as a huge monster, as something dangerous. The fact is that the author wanted to express the gloom characters of the two ladies. They were not only impolite and improper, but stupid. In the conversation between them and the girl was it especially obvious.

The point of the story seems to be that people might respect their social status. The attempts to superior oneself could be punished. It does not matter if the punishing person is only a little girl.

3.2.2. She-Wolf

As the next subjected short story *The She-Wolf* shall be analysed. A very witty plotline was probably inspired by Munro's experience. The main characters are Clovis Sangrail, the author's alter ego, Leonard Bilsiter, a tiny cheater and self-styled magician, Bilsiter's aunt, Lady Hampton and Lord Pabham, a wild animal breeder.

Leonard Bilsiter spent two days of his business trip to Russia in the train compartment with a man who related about the Siberian folk magic. After the homecoming, Leonard, who was always tending to the supernatural topics, used the man's stories as his own. His old aunt made him a very good promotion and told about the preternatural ability of her nephew to everybody. So it happened that Leonard and his aunt were invited to the house of Lady and Lord Hampton. Especially the lady was very interested in magic and fantasy. Right from the beginning she wanted Leonard to transform her in a she-wolf. He disapproved it of course because his magician ability did not exist at all. He was only able to talk about his alleged previous tricks. The whole company did grasp why he does not want to transform Lady Hampton and decided to mock Leonard a little bit. Clovis asked Lord Pabham to bring one of his wolves and put it in the conservatory. So it was. After the dinner, Lady Hampton pretended she disappeared and instead of her there appeared a she-wolf. The most shocked person in the whole company was of course Leonard. Everybody asked him to transform Lady Hampton back but he repeatedly said that it was not him who changed the Lady in a wolf. After some time the she-wolf disappeared and Lady Hampton came back. She pretended to be charmed by Leonard's trick. He must have confessed that it really was not his business. In the moment Clovis said, that it was him who did the trick. He said, he was always interested in the Russian folk magic and he was pleased to fulfil Lady Hampton's will. Leonard's wrath was in the moment really enormous.

The malicious feature is represented definitely by Clovis Sangrail. He was the punishing element of the story. The new and unusual attribute is the fact that he found the fellows for doing such a mischievous trick. It only proves that the people having higher status are not necessarily dull and prim.

The punished one is the self-styled magician who had the bad luck that he met people who knew about his business much more than he did. His doing was not really dangerous to the company. The other guests and their hostess were just slightly irritated by being cheated.

The Russian and eastern symbolic is for Munro a typical motive. Perhaps it was only a fashion to admire something more hot-blooded than the prim culture of the West but it definitely is a symbol of forming a definite opinion of the author. He regarded the eastern culture as the clearer one and the eastern people as more open and sincere.

It is to be mentioned that wolf, as an animal, is in the literature mostly presented as a bloodthirsty beast. By Munro is it a cuddly and mild animal. This could be seen as well as crystallization against the western, Christian culture.

Munro, an expert in Russian life and history, let himself to punish somebody else by means of Clovis Sangrail. H. H. Munro discoursed by Sangrail's mouth.

3.2.3. Brough

The last of the stories about the animals is *The Brough*. It was chosen because it is very witty but not cruel at all. The main character is a horse of the Mullet family. This horse is very unusual for its unexpected manners. Because of his often and incomprehensible fits it is not possible to ride him. The family needs to get rid of him. Luckily, the opportunity to sell the horse really came. A new man, Mr. Penricarde, moved in the town. He showed interest to buy Brough. Mrs. Mullet

would be blissfully happy for the possibility to sell Brough, if Mr. Penricarde did not want to marry one of her six daughters. She felt the dilemma that if they would sell the horse to Mr. Penricarde, he would probably be killed by Brough yet before the wedding. This would cause problem because her daughter really wanted to wed. They had to prevent Mr. Penricarde to saddle Brough up. A whole succession of failures caused that Mr. Penricarde was really threw down by Brough but he imputed it to himself. On the list of the wedding presents, there was Brough as the groom's gift to the bride.

Brough is more likely amiable story by Saki. The whole plot takes place in the countryside and there is no sharper humour or sarcasm demonstrated. One of the characters is Clovis Sangrail and he is the only person of the whole story who seems to be biting.

As it was presented previously, the animal is in the centre of the plot and does play an essential role for the whole storyline.

Mrs. Mullet is the character who impresses sweetly funny. She wants to marry the daughter with a rich man but in the same time she wants to sell a horse which costs her money and is good for nothing. She tries to find some help and ask for a piece of advice Clovis Sangrail, a neighbour of the family. He is the initiator of the ideas how to prevent Mr. Penricarde to ride the nappy and bucking horse. As it is in the habit of Saki, Clovis's ideas cause almost worse than better solutions.

Brough, as a horse, is a symbol of self-will, obduracy and ability to cause problems.

One of the very unusual aspects of the story, which is to be mentioned, is love. Mr. Penricarde and Ms. Mullet fell in love independently on the occasions. And the fact that after all, the groom gave the bride the terrible horse as a present, testify his sense of humour.

3.3. The Prim Society

The criticism of the society is Munro's rewarding topic. He himself was very often criticised by the family and relatives because of his difference and divergence. To comment them openly was absolutely impossible but with some help of the literature it changed. The human characters and features are constantly the same, that it is the reason why Munro's heroes can be recognized in the nowadays society and company as well as in the past.

3.3.1. The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope

The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope was chosen to be presented because of its difference from the other stories. The motive of songs was by Saki not very common.

The main characters of the story are Septimus Brope, Clovis Sangrail, his aunt and one of the aunt's friends. The aunt's friend is at the same time the Lady who hosts the whole company.

Septimus Brope was invited to visit Mrs. Riversedge in her house. He was known as an editor of one catholic magazine. He was considered as an expert in a branch of sacral buildings. Mr. Brope seemed to be a little bit taciturn. The bigger surprise it was, when Clovis's aunt informed the company that she found out that Mr. Brope has a love affair with her chambermaid. Nobody could believe it. Clovis's aunt presented the proof, a list of paper with a short text. The text demonstrated clearly love to some Florrie. And the chambermaid's name was Florinda. The whole company admitted the proof and was shocked by the scandal. Such a moderate man was so vicious?

Clovis, as a man, was asked by the ladies to give Mr. Brope a good talking. After the lunch, Clovis invited Mr. Brope to the drawing room. It took some time but

finally Clovis grasped that Mr. Brope is not a womanizer but secret author of not very chaste songs. These songs were very famous and popular and earned to Mr. Brope very good money. Mr. Brope asked Clovis very pleadingly not to tell anyone the truth. Clovis agreed but he asked for a reward. Mr. Brope must only consent. He paid to Clovis a trip to Croatia and a part of the royalty for the songs. Finally, Clovis got a beautiful tie-pin from his aunt because he persuaded Mr. Brope not to marry the aunt's favourite chambermaid.

A few weeks later, a very popular song came out.

"How you bore me, Florrie,

With those eyes of vacant blue;

You'll be very sorry, Florrie,

If I marry you.

Though I'm easy-goin', Florrie,

This I swear is true,

I'll throw you down a quarry, Florrie,

If I marry you."(Saki, p.109).

The only one and indisputable dark character in this story cannot be determined. Each of the depicted characters has his or her dark side. The most obvious one is probably Clovis Sangrail, who abused the difficult situation of Septimus Brope. Clovis punished him as a trickster. Mr. Brope posed as somebody else and let his friends to house him. He had to hide his real job because of the public opinion. As an expert in a serious branch, he could not admit that he earns huge money by publishing dirty songs. Clovis could not miss out the chance to get himself to the punishing position.

Seemingly, there are a few more dark features in the story. For example the two older ladies, who felt to be entitled enough to judge the other peoples' acts. The interpersonal relationships were under the control in more spheres, as it was mentioned at the very beginning of the thesis.

3.3.2. Louise

Louise is a short story build on conversation. According to the title, a girl named Louise is the main character. She does not appear personally during the whole plot but she plays an essential role and is mentioned in every moment of the story. The next characters are two Louise's aunts. The older one, Lady Beanford, was a widow who was attached to her diseases. Her sister, Lady Jane, was considered the most forgetful woman in Middlesex. Louise, their niece, lived together with the two ladies. One day, Lady Jane came to have a snack and her sister asked her, where Louise did linger. Lady Jane tried to remember but she could not. They were together in the city, at Harrod's, in the park but where she could stay?

The ladies called to Lord Carrywood, if Louise did not stay in his house when she brought him a visiting card. Lord marvelled at it. Of course, Louise is not in his house.

Ladies called the valet. He informed them that Ms. Louise did not leave the room the whole day. She was asked by Lady Jane to read a book to one of the ill cook assistants.

In this short story does not appear any maliciousness or any effort to punish somebody. It is a pure sarcastic description of the way of thinking of the esteemed people. The both ladies persuade each other how they love their niece and how lovely she is. But nor Lady Jane nor Lady Beanford do not know where the girl the whole day is.

There are some funny moments as for example the telephone conversation between Lady Jane and Lord Carrywood. He thinks that the Lady asks him, if he saw Louise, the opera. When it is taken into account that both ladies talk about a living human being as about a thing or object, it seems to be sad.

Their characters cannot be described as sweetly naive or silly but as selfish and cold-hearted. Munro mocks them rather sharply.

3.3.3. The Byzantine Omelette

The very last Munro's story chosen for this bachelor thesis is *The Byzantine Omelette*. As the title indicates, it is a story of the higher social class. The Byzantine omelette is a special kind of dish which was popular by rich people.

The main characters are Lady Sophie, her esteemed guests and her servants and staff.

Lady Sophie was a very rich woman. It is possible to say that she had a fashionable hobby – to visit the socialistic conferences. It was quite comfortable to express such declarations when she was rich enough. One of the things she could do for her employees was to allow them to join the unions.

One day, Lady Sophie got an important guest, a Syrian duke. His favourite meal was Byzantine Omelette and so she hired Mr. Gaspar, an expert in preparing of this dish. Suddenly, the Lady's room entered the chambermaid and informed her about declaring a strike. It was found out that Gaspar worked as a strike-breaker and as long as he will stay in the house, the whole staff will not work. Lady had to get over it and dismissed the cook, Mr. Gaspar.

A few minutes before the dinner, the valet entered the drawing room and announced that there will be no dinner at all. Mr. Gaspar was a member of the unions uniting the kitchen staff and they declared the strike because of his dismissing.

The doctors banned Lady Sophie to visit the socialistic conferences because these caused her a strong anxiety.

As it was mentioned in the Introduction, the leftist tendencies were mocked by Saki very often. It was not the tendency of Munro to criticise poor or working people or proletariat. Munro wanted to point at the mistrust in the rich people who had the socialism as a hobby. Of course it was not a real socialism but only a theoretical chatter about the egalitarian ideology. The rich who visited these conferences were by Saki sharply criticised. They could afford such opinions only because being so rich.

The darkness of the characters is probably not only one. Lady Sophie is shown as a poseur. When there goes everything smoothly, she can afford to sympathize with the unions and interpersonal equality. But there came a situation in the real life when Lady Sophie turned out to be pretty posh and not convinced about the equality and eligibility for the servants to have their rights.

The mocked in this story are the unions and left-wingers as well. They are showed as not very reliable and steady. They declare the working people to hold together but in fact they work contradictorily.

4. The Summary of the Dark Characters in the Chosen Stories

The darkness of the characters is not always obvious in the very first moment. All of the stories are funny, witty and clever. A reader must concentrate on the mood of the whole story to uncover the freezing atmosphere of it.

Many of the characters make the impression of lightness and blitheness. After the investigation it is clear that the author wanted to pass on a message of making the society a little bit better and purer.

The elements of darkness manifest themselves in each story differently. Once, the darkness is nearly light and safe, once it is deep and gloomy, dangerous. It seems that if the story narrates about the society and tiny cheaters or dull ladies, the author is more lenient. In the case that the story is about children and childhood, Munro gets himself to the position of wrath and retribution. It does not matter if the wrath is hidden behind the humour like in *Bertie's Christmas Eve*. In such a situation, Munro's characters seem to be heartless, right in the same way as their tormentors.

The very first short story of this bachelor thesis was just *Sredni Vashtar*. It is a story of a little boy, who was expected to die too soon. His own cousin and guardian, was charged to take care of him. She did this with doggedness and no love. It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to determine, who was the dark character of this story. At the very first sight it must be Mrs. De Ropp but what if Conradin was full of hate too? Of course he was. His frustration of the coldness and strictness, of having no home, must have been unbearable. He let his feeling to be shown by the dint of an animal, a pole-cat ferret. This animal is a symbol of hidden energy and the reign of oneself. Conradin was allowed to gain this monster for a moment to achieve his aim – destroy the Woman. But the power was too dangerous and strong to be kept in a hutch.

It is to be mentioned that in this short story there are three dark characters. Each of them has a different motive and reason. But each of them expresses Munro's own old frustration. Perhaps this is the reason, why right this story impresses so forcefully.

The second story, *Bertie's Christmas Eve*, gives the reader the impression of humour and lightness much more than *Sredni Vashtar*. It is one of the conversational short stories by Munro. Again, it is not easy to determine the originator of the dark features. The motive of an unwanted boy, who came home only for a few weeks but the family sends him away, is very probably lived out by the author, as well. The boy's frustration is not smaller than the frustration of Conradin but the tool of revenge is slightly different. It is much less fatalistic and it is seen as a wit.

The darkness of the characters is again more obvious by the boy Bertie. But the not-loving manners of the rest of the family are freezing. They all host very kindly important but foreign people but do not want to have under their roof their own young relative. The story has a great plotline and the reader roots for Bertie's mischief after all.

The third story which was presented and chosen was a part of the chapter called *The Nasty Animals, The Boar Pig*. As it is in the habit of Munro, it is not a typical fable narrated by talking animals. The animal, a huge Yorkshire white male-pig, was used as a tool of a little girl to earn her some money. The dark element is presented by the ladies, a mother and her daughter, trying to get to a party. They do not have the invitation but because of the social reasons they need to be at the garden party. These ladies would not hesitate a minute to criticise such manners by someone else.

The little girl, a little bit annoying as well, punished them very humorously and considerably.

The next story of the animals as tools for people is *She-Wolf*. The animal element is presented by a wolf, what is very often a symbol of the blood-thirst. In this story the she-wolf is a very mild and cuddly animal. Munro's own autobiography is depicted in the element of Russian folk magic. The darkness of the character is partly represented by a tiny cheater, Mr. Bilsiter. But in fact, his doings do not endanger anybody. Here dominates the maliciousness of Clovis Sangrail, Munro's alter ego much more. The very unusual trait of directly this short story is that Clovis found another partners in the company successfully.

One of the chosen short stories was *The Brough*, as well. It is one of the most famous and favourite one. The darkest element is represented by Clovis Sangrail himself. But, what has to be mentioned, the whole story is rather kind. The whole atmosphere is very calm and the solution of a problem caused by a nasty horse of one family was not complicated. Clovis Sangrail seemed to be manifested as a friendly and helpful man. His usual picking at the others was not demonstrated. Then, the worst seems to be the horse, well-known for its fits and unexpected manners.

The next part concerns to the short stories about the manners of higher society. Munro's clever and exceptional style of humour impresses very acridly. In *The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope* plays the main role a young intelligent man, an editor of a Christian magazine. It is uncovered that he probably has a love affair with one of the chambermaids. It is a very scandalous situation in a house of highly esteemed family. But finally it is clear that the truth is somewhere else. Mr. Brope is a composer of saucy songs. This secret job earns him huge money. Clovis Sangrail found it out and let himself to be paid for his silent. It is hard to say, whose character is the darker one. If Mr. Brope's, who lies to his surrounding, Clovis's, who asks the payoff or the company's, which should better take care of themselves.

A very great and clever conversational short story is called *Louise* and was chosen as the last but one. The title attests to the name of a girl who herself does not appear in the story personally, but is indicated. Two older ladies, aunts of Louise, persuade each other that their niece is important and very favourite but the fact is, they do not appreciate her higher than a thing, namely two tickets to the theatre. The darkness of their characters is definitely represented by the dull lack of the interest. Munro mocks people who hardly are able to take care about themselves.

The very last short story chosen for the chapter about the prim society is a genial master piece *The Byzantine Omelette*. It is a beautiful criticism of leftist tendency demonstrated just for the effect. Munro, as a convinced royalist, did not value the Fabians and socialists very highly. But absolutely not-benevolent he was to the people who only acted such a membership because of some fashionable reasons. The dark character and element is represented on both sides. The Lady, who considered herself as a friend of proletariat and the trade unions, which do not hesitate to play a dirty trick on an employer.

More or less, Munro's heroes come from a real life. As it was mentioned, his motives and themes are timeless. The people, it does not matter if rich or poor, clever or dull, healthy or ill, are still the same. It does not depend in which era we already are and live. And this is the reason why Munro's stories never die and why they have their readers after more than one hundred years.

Conclusion

As there was presented, H. H. Munro used various means to express his attitude to the contemporary society. It might seem that he offered only a pure criticism without any suggestion to improve or reform the society. The truth is that he did so. As it was found in the sources, he was strongly moral person even if he did not fit in the hypocritical ideas of the society or family. As a foreign correspondent he travelled a lot and got the opportunity to observe, beside other things, culture and lives in many different countries. These topics were often elaborated by him in many of stories.

The most burning topic for Munro was the society and the situation of it. The author's own attitude and experience were used to demonstrate his conviction about the interpersonal relationships and arrogance of some people.

The bachelor thesis was focused on the dark side of Munro's characters. The main protagonists of the stories chosen for the analysis are children, animals or posh people. The privilege status among the characters has almost always Munro's alter ego, Clovis Sangrail. Clovis Sangrail is a kind of man, who is not restrained or moderate. He is able to react in any situation. Very often it is him who punishes the people and he does it as clever that the punished are grateful for it. The example for such situation was obvious in *The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope*. Mr. Brope had to pay Clovis for keeping of the secret. Another of Sangrail's role is an advisor in various situations. One of these was his activity in *Brough*. He helped very usefully to the family to sell a horse. Clovis, if it is possible to say so, is attending instead of the author in many of the stories. He seemingly does not appear in the plot but in fact he is the mover of it. Every witty plotline is confused by him.

The next means of the author are animals. The animals, living creatures, as a constituent of the nature, were used by Munro perhaps because of their ability to

give somebody fright. Munro's interest in natural and supernatural phenomenon is very important to be manifested. It is probably connected with Munro's Burman childhood and origin. There are clear indications of Munro's tendency to Hinduism in *Sredni Vashtar* or in *Laura*. The animals in both stories were invoked and worshipped as gods. There were some sacrifices as nutmeg and red flowers in *Sredni Vashtar*. In *Laura* appears the act of reincarnation. Something of this sort would not be possible to be allowed in Christianity. It could be supposed that Munro felt a huge dissatisfaction of coldness of the Western Christian culture and longed for red and warm Eastern culture. The natural aspect was probably chosen and used for its volatility and inconstancy. Natural and supernatural acts appeared obviously in *She-Wolf* and *Sredni Vashtar*.

It seems that the satire and social criticism of Munro's stories has not a deeper reason but the author really wanted to reform the society. His main protagonists were always in some special way lonely. The aim of them was primarily not to harm or even to kill somebody. In a common life situation they would probably not be able to hurt anybody. The circumstances caused the very opposite. The example for this statement might be Matilde, the girl in *The Boar-Pig*. She must have been a little bit disobedient but just in a common childish way. As far as she was banished from the garden party and left to be alone. The loneliness caused that she had to search for a new adventure and make some mischief.

Munro's characters are almost always forced or provoked to make some revolt. If they get the opportunity to revenge, they are nearly bloodthirsty and cruel.

Shrnutí – Summary

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem Temných charakterů hlavních postav v Sakiho povídkách. Zdánlivě prostě a vtipně laděné příběhy různých typů charakterů postav se při bližším zkoumání ukázaly jako mnohem hlubší. Pojícím elementem se stala ostrá kritika soudobé společnosti a jejího pokrytectví.

Munroova schopnost poukázat na nežádoucí společenské jevy působí sice komicky, ale výsledný efekt je spíše děsivý. A to především díky některým typům zvolených protagonistů.

Pro zpracování tohoto tématu bylo nejdůležitější vytyčit si základní otázky. První z nich byla, do jaké míry ovlivnila autorovu tvorbu doba, ve které žil a publikoval. Přelom 19. a 20. století byl érou technického rozmachu, ale i ekonomického úpadku v důsledku mnoha válek. Pro správné pochopení této části práce byly prostudovány některé knihy o historii a kultuře počátku 20. století.

Následující část práce se zaměřila na autorův vlastní život. Zvláště některé situace z raného dětství ovlivnily, jak bylo zjištěno, jeho tvorbu více než významně.

Dalším podstatným prvkem práce bylo vytyčení konkrétních povídek, které byly analyzovány. Pro tuto část bylo nutné prostudovat povídkové svazky, které byly vydány, a zvolit z nich povídky, které nejlépe zapadají do tématu celé práce a nabízí možnosti analýzy.

Analýzy jednotlivých povídek byly zaměřeny na téma Temných charakterů hlavních postav a na určení toho, jaké symboly nebo autobigrafické prvky H. H. Munro použil a proč.

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