



## **The Citizen Real and Imagined: Václav Havel's "New Year's Address to the Nation"**

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*This article examines Václav Havel's 1990 speech "New Year's Address to the Nation" as a case study of the way political speech presented during democratic transition constructs the role of the citizen. In their analyses of the rhetorical construction of citizenship during transition, various scholars have focused on the textual invocation of model national figures and the construction of a distinct transitional people through the development of narratives of common community that eclipse anomalous discourses. Few scholars have expanded their rhetorical analyses to include a discussion of whether the "ideal" citizen constructed in transitional speech is capable of resonating with the "real" citizens. Accordingly, few scholars have examined the implications of the magnitude of this resonance for the success or failure of a speech's mandate. My analysis of Havel's text addresses this gap in the literature and begins to illuminate the implications of a speech's ability to capture accurately the diverse expectations, life circumstances, and needs of the real citizens within the construction of the implied auditor. Through this method of analysis, I argue that Havel's speech directing the Czechoslovak people towards the public performance of morality and democracy was unsuccessful for two reasons. First, the text constructs democracy as a character in its own right and as the prerogative solely of past national leaders rather than of the contemporary citizenry. Second, the text overemphasizes citizen agency within the context of their participation in the regime and thus minimizes the role average citizens played in sustaining a tradition of democratic dissent throughout the years of the regime. Together, these factors create a narrative disconnect between the true Czechoslovak citizens and the citizens constructed by the text, demonstrating the failure of Havel's speech to successfully engender audience adaptation to the role of the "new" citizen that his speech constructs.*

## Introduction

The presentation of a speech by a political leader on the brink of a proposed or actual governmental transition to democracy provides a profound opportunity for the rhetorical construction of a redefined “new” citizen. The ability of the populace to adapt to the proposed responsibilities of this archetypal new citizen will play a crucial role in determining both the success of the transition and the nature of the post-transition society and government. The former president of Czechoslovakia Václav Havel’s 1990 “New Year’s Address to the Nation” is a powerful example of such a text. The speech was delivered at the precise moment of transition between a 40-year totalitarian regime dictated by the Czechoslovak Communist Party and a weeks-old fledgling democratic government formulated following the peaceful Velvet Revolution in November and December 1989.

The revolution began with a resurgence of public organization and the formation of interest groups focused on human rights and the necessity of free expression (Wolchik 42). In contrast with previous calls for intra-system reform, the Velvet Revolution involved an increasing number of youth who actively advocated the return to a multi-party democratic system (45). The Velvet Revolution also successfully mobilized a resilient umbrella opposition group known as the Civic Forum under the leadership of Václav Havel himself. In 1988 and 1989, angry citizens followed the example of activists in other central and eastern European nations and publicly protested the regime, culminating in a series of student-led rallies in central Prague beginning on November 17, 1989. Public anger stemming from the use of violence against protesters by government forces, combined with momentum from the collapse of the Honecker regime in East Germany and weakening Soviet influence, resulted in “a wave of mass demonstrations” and the ultimate capitulation of the regime (49). The Civic Forum began meeting with Communist Party leaders to discuss the transition to a democratic government. On December 29, 1989, Václav Havel became the nation’s president due to intense popular demand (Wilson 23). Just three days later, on January 1, 1990, Havel presented his famous address on national television. The speech called the Czechoslovak people to both recognize their complicit role in perpetuating the life of the regime and to shift from the prevailing national attitude of self-interestedness to one of mutual cooperation and understanding. Havel thus appealed to the Czechoslovak people to continue the project of accessing and implementing their suppressed democratic and moral values that they had begun during the Velvet Revolution.

The text is commendable for its refusal to paint the citizens as passive victims of the previous regime and its resulting recognition of the citizens’ agency and thus their profound potential to enact a moral politics. However, historical evidence from the years following the regime’s demise demonstrates that the speech did not succeed in directing the Czechoslovak people towards the public

performance of morality and democracy. In the following paper, in order to illuminate the rhetorical conditions for this failure, I argue that two aspects of the text pave the way toward the inadequacy of Havel's message and the disintegration of Czechoslovak society. First, the text constructs democracy as a character in its own right and as the prerogative solely of past national leaders rather than of the contemporary citizenry. Second, the text overemphasizes citizen agency within the context of their participation in the regime and thus minimizes the role average citizens played in sustaining a tradition of democratic dissent throughout the years of the regime. Together, these factors create a narrative disconnect between the true Czechoslovak citizens and the citizens constructed by the text, demonstrating the failure of Havel's speech to successfully engender audience adaptation to the role of the "new" citizen that his speech constructs.

### Literature Review

In the current literature regarding the rhetorical construction of citizenship during periods of democratic transition, scholars have tended to employ one of three methods of analysis. The first method is a rhetor-centered approach that analyzes how the speakers construct "ideal" national citizens by prescribing them with particular characteristics and constrained spheres of action. The second group of scholars explores how transitional texts invoke influential national figures both past and present in order to provide citizens with models for action and a sense of ideological and national continuity. The third group investigates the rhetorical construction of transitional peoples through the development of narratives of common community that transcend temporal boundaries and eclipse anomalous discourses. Often, these scholars focus on the particular actions the narrative path directs the citizens to carry out and the transcendent power of the concluding moment during which the citizens are charged with fulfilling the imperatives of the constructed history.

A portion of my essay concerns how Havel's text constructs the ideal citizens of Czechoslovakia, mirroring the work of the first group of scholars. However, the overarching framework of my essay is the analysis of Havel's narrative form, under which the construction of the ideal Czechoslovak citizens is subsumed, as these citizens are cast as characters called to undergo a process of transformation and character development throughout the course of the narrative. This differs from the work of the first group of scholars, who solely investigate the construction of the role and image of the ideal citizens at a static point through the constraining rhetoric of the speaker. Therefore, this literature review will focus on the work of the latter two groups of scholars, as their texts are the most directly concerned with the narrative structure, character development, and usage of well-known historical figures as characters that I will later analyze in Havel's speech.

With the exception of Kenneth Zagacki, very few of the following schol-

ars expand their textual analyses to include a discussion of whether the textually constructed “ideal” citizen is capable of resonating with the “real” citizens. Accordingly, few scholars have examined the implications of the magnitude of this resonance for the success or failure of a speech’s mandate.

My analysis of Havel’s text will address this gap in the literature and begin to illuminate the implications of a speech’s ability to capture accurately the real citizens within the construction of the implied auditor. This means of analysis recognizes the importance of investigating not only the methods of constructing implied auditors, but also the existence and reactions of the citizens who receive the messages of political speech with diverse expectations, life circumstances, and needs.

*The Use of Current and Historical National Figures:*

Both Vera Sidlova (2011) and Kenneth Zagacki (2004) investigate how transitional texts reference recognizable national figures and selected aspects of these figures’ lives or political philosophies in order to provide models of civic engagement for current citizens. The significance of this approach comes from its analysis of how the usage of such figures and the emphasis on carefully chosen elements of their lives constrain the future character and actions of the rhetorically constructed ideal citizen within definitive boundaries. These boundaries serve to provide the auditor with a sense of ideological continuity and common community across lengthy periods of time. In this way, through the connection and synthesis of disparate identities and eras, the use of valued national figures within transitional narratives becomes a rhetorical trope signifying optimism in the imminent possibility of national rebirth and regeneration.

In his article “Rhetoric, Dialogue, and Performance in Nelson Mandela’s ‘Televised Address on the Assassination of Chris Hani,’” Kenneth Zagacki explores how Nelson Mandela constructed and publicly presented the role of the ideal South African citizen during a time of extreme racial tension. He investigates how Mandela’s transitional speech utilized specific characteristics and actions of contemporary public figures, including that of the rhetor himself, to provide a concrete model for citizen behavior. After the assassination of the vocal anti-Apartheid activist and African National Congress leader Chris Hani, Mandela addressed his country on national television in the hopes of providing direction and reconciliation after the shock of Hani’s death. Zagacki argues that the power and motivational influence of the speech stemmed in large part from Mandela’s connection with the ethos of the audience, as he “performed the behavior and political change he advocated” by simultaneously addressing South African blacks and whites in a calm and thoughtful manner, “using his transformed moral authority to raise them up as well” (712, 723). Thus, Mandela’s call for South African citizens to reach out to each other and cooperate in a process of national dialogue

is given its force by Mandela's own rhetorical performance of the desired action.

Zagacki also examines how Mandela's speech uses the figure of Hani himself and chosen aspects of his life story in order to provide an additional model of exemplary civic engagement for South African citizens. He suggests that Mandela's task was to "[work] out the ramifications of Hani's death in a manner that considered the interests of many competing parties, including the black militants and white conservatives" (710). Accordingly, Mandela had to eulogize the contentious figure of Hani in such a way so as to invite mutual understanding rather than foment further discontent and social division. Zagacki asserts that Mandela's choice to "[interpret] Hani's death in terms of larger democratic ideas and goals, around which he believed all races could rally," as well as his usage of the words "wisdom" and "responsibility," provided Mandela's characterization of Hani with a motivational persona after which South Africans could model their future actions in the hopes of transcending fear and mistrust (717). Together, Mandela's invocation of Hani's deliberative wisdom and his calm dialogic performance that relocated national discourse to a context of peace rather than brutality became the conceptual base upon which South Africans were charged with developing community reconciliation.

While Zagacki gives a clear and persuasive account of how transitional speech can utilize the figure of both the rhetor and contemporary leaders central to the current discourse to call for future action, a discussion is needed concerning how distant historical figures can be invoked and repurposed in a similar fashion. Vera Sidlova's analysis of Havel's "New Year's Address to the Nation" can help us understand how the ideas and histories of relevant historical figures can be accessed and applied in presidential speech in order to delineate the ideological and material paths the citizens must take in the future. Sidlova notes Havel's mention of various democratic and moral "heroes" throughout Czechoslovakia's history, including Petr Chelčický, Jan Ámos Komenský, and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. She argues that, in Havel's speech, "the characteristics possessed by heroes act as models for the audience and the political positions they ought to adopt" (Sidlova 64-65). Through his invocation of these model figures, Havel demonstrates that virtuous and moral citizenship has survived throughout Czechoslovakia's history despite the regime's attempts to constrain or redefine it. Thus, these three examples construct a particular national history around a resilient thread of democratic engagement that Sidlova contends "[created] a sense of confidence, agency, and manageability" that Havel argued would be inherited by the generation to whom he spoke (67).

Sidlova's analysis of the historical references in the text is essential to understanding the reasons behind Havel's selective references to past leaders in the hopes of producing an atmosphere of hope and possibility. However, neither Sidlova nor Zagacki discuss why, for rhetors, the invocation of current or histor-

ical public figures and heroes may not be enough to truly inspire current citizens without a clear verbal demonstration of the relevance of such figures and their continued impact upon the nation's current standing and the circumstances of its citizens. The insights of both scholars could be built upon through a discussion of additional rhetorical tropes that are frequently employed by national leaders in order to inspire citizen action.

*The Narrative Form:*

Thomas B. Farrell (1993) and Maurice Charland (1987) explore how metaphors and narratives are applied in transitional texts to prescribe pathways for citizen engagement whose endpoints come to appear inevitable through their binding and coherent construction. Farrell demonstrates how the narrative in Havel's speech reformulates common conceptions of civilian participation during the forty-year totalitarian regime in order to create a history that leads to democracy, while Charland explores how an unfinished narrative can create an imperative for "proper" citizen action to complete the story. Both scholars make significant contributions to the related literature through their demonstration of how historical narratives can constantly be shifted and reformulated by privileging or redefining events and identities in order to construct a logical mandate for current and future citizens to "finish" the narrative.

For Farrell, the greatest task facing Havel at the moment of his speech's presentation was to construct a narrative that engendered a "participatory public sense" to counteract the citizens' decades-long slide into complacency that had only recently been abrogated by the events of the Velvet Revolution (267). In his analysis of Havel's speech in his book *Norms of Rhetorical Culture*, Farrell examines how Havel redefines the role citizens played in their own suppression under the totalitarian regime in order to generate hope for the betterment of Czechoslovak society. Farrell asserts that Havel's call for the citizens to recognize that they played a complicit role in sustaining the regime introduced a "new citizen" with a "modern consciousness" that was "not egoistic, that [was] aware of the price already paid for its realization, willing to listen to others and to forgive" (272). In his evaluation of the address, Farrell argues that the result was a "luminous moment which all assembled could treasure through their own collective authorship" (272). Thus, through Havel's narrative shift and reformulation of citizen participation, the speech makes clear the power civilians hold to determine their own destiny even in times of great trouble, recasting the narrative of the Czechoslovak people in the pursuit of a better future.

In addition to his focus on Havel's assignment of agency to the citizens in their own oppression, Farrell notes Havel's efforts to clarify that Czechoslovakia's democratic past also belongs to the current citizens by implying that "the past several generations are, in this larger scheme of Czech heritage and tradition,

an aberration” (269). A lengthier in-depth discussion of Havel’s attempt to convey that the nation’s democratic past is retrievable would make Farrell’s analysis of the speech stronger, as there is a clear tension between the era of the regime and the democratic government that flourished between the world wars. In Havel’s narrative, they both “belong” to the current citizens, yet a contradiction seems inherent due to the democratic nature of one era and the extremely oppressive nature of the other. How can a text on the edge of democratic transition invoke both the nation’s democratic past and its totalitarian past while maintaining a clear goal for citizen action?

Maurice Charland explores a similar problem in his discussion of Québécois sovereignty rhetoric, demonstrating that the issue can be overcome or at least lessened through the use of a narrative form that coherently connects disparate historical events and peoples to present a believable story with a clear invitation for action. In his article “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*,” Charland contends that the pro-sovereignty “White Paper” document unites disparate French-speaking populations in Canada across time and thus creates a myth of continuity centered on an oppressed collective subject with a “transcendental collective interest that negates individual interest” (139). The resulting smoothly flowing logical narrative suppresses contradictory information and identities and constructs a distinct “Québécois” people, an image that presents an alternative to the non-nationalistic “French-Canadian” community.

Charland contends that this new story and its “asserted existence of a particular type of subject, the ‘Québécois,’” constrains both the ideological goals and future action of the “true” Québécois citizen (134). The text sets the Québécois citizen upon a path that can only function within a nationalistic context by rationalizing the construction of a distinct people in such a way as to make sovereignty the sole logical ending to the text’s mythical narrative. As Charland argues, “the narrative’s existence as a text is predicated upon *Québécois* asserting their existence as a collective subject through a politics of independence” (140-141). Thus, according to Charland, the role of the citizen is to vote for secession by following the logical pattern laid out before them “so as to maintain the narrative’s consistency” (141). When the Québécois realize the “rightness” of this discourse, the “White Paper” will become a powerful force for predicating action in favor of the necessary liberation of the narrative’s protagonists (142).

The power of these two articles comes from their demonstration of how the construction of a particular narrative can both constitute a people and direct their actions in such a way that group membership is predicated upon fulfillment of the text’s central mandate. These scholars’ investigation of the construction of transitional citizenship can be furthered by analyzing not only the specific rhetorical methods of construction, but also the viability of the text’s mandate and the environmental factors that influence its effectiveness. In this way, my analysis of

Havel's text and its surrounding context will begin to illuminate whether the text was an intuitive call to action that was capable of resonating with the real Czechoslovak citizens or if it was an unrealistic mandate that did not sufficiently capture the true citizens and their values and deeds and thus failed to provoke the moral shift for which Havel called. I will thus explore the question of whether there was a disconnect between the citizens constructed in the text and the citizens in real life that diminished the effectiveness of Havel's speech and its ability to engender a "participatory public *sense*" in the manner that Havel desired (Farrell 267).

### **The Characters of the "New Year's Address"**

In order to reveal the potential sources of disconnect between the "real" citizens of Czechoslovakia and the citizens constructed in Václav Havel's speech, I will analyze the way the nation's previous democratic leaders, Havel himself, the "average" Czechoslovak citizens, and the forces of democracy and morality are constructed within the text's narrative framework. I argue that the nature of these constructions damages the credibility of Havel's text for two reasons. First, the differing levels of democratic and moral agency afforded to particular characters overemphasize democracy as a force enacted by past political and religious leaders rather than by the current citizens. Second, due to this unbalanced distribution of agency, the current citizens' active compliance with the regime is presented as the strongest example of their self-determined action, obscuring and derogating their role in democratic dissent during the regime.

#### *Czechoslovak Democracy as Performed by National Leaders*

Through the presentation of his 1990 "New Year's Address to the Nation," Havel hoped to call the Czechoslovak people to continue the project of the Velvet Revolution by redefining their nation upon the foundational value of moral democracy at the precise moment of transition between a four-decade totalitarian regime and the nation's fledgling modern democracy. In order for the task of fomenting a moral democratic politics to seem truly possible rather than insurmountable, Havel desired to construct a particular narrative of Czechoslovak history that presented democracy and morality as enduring forces that the leaders of the Communist regime had failed to destroy or reconstitute for their own ends. Havel thus invokes three past model leaders in his speech in order to begin the historical narrative with strong examples of democracy and morality. He builds upon this foundation with consistent metaphors that present morality as a continual thread winding throughout the nation's history. Additionally, the text's invocation of the momentous events of the Velvet Revolution and the characterization of Havel himself present the Czechoslovak citizens with a strong imperative to complete the narrative by building a democratic future based upon a politics of cooperation and understanding.

The text begins by introducing the narrator, Václav Havel, as a character

in his own history. He comprises a narrator and a leader whom the citizens can trust implicitly, as his character is presented as a true break from the past through the textual differentiation of his political philosophy and methods from those of the communist leaders. The “New Year’s Address” begins with an exposition of the lies and empty promises of the regime, which are immediately relegated to the ashes of history with the bold statement, “I assume you did not propose me for this office so that I, too, would lie to you” (Havel 1990 3). The text invokes a recurring metaphor through its construction of the narrator as a leader distinct from the communist rulers, as Havel states that, “For decades our statesmen and political leaders did not look or did not want to look out of the windows of their airplanes” (3). This metaphor characterizes the leaders of the old regime as uninterested in and distant from the plight of the civilians, encapsulated in their state-provided machinery that allows them to ignore what is happening below them. Later in the text, Havel expresses his desire to reverse this trend and become “a president who will . . . look out of the windows of his airplane” (8). Thus, the text differentiates Havel from the leaders of the past by characterizing him as a trustworthy president who will pay unconditional attention to the desires and needs of the Czechoslovak civilians.

The image of Havel that the “New Year’s Address” paints closely matches Havel’s description of the motives behind his entry into politics as the first president of a free Czechoslovakia in his memoir *To the Castle and Back*. While Havel was initially unsure about whether he should assume the office of president following the Velvet Revolution, the sense of duty he felt to the Czechoslovak people was the decisive factor in his eventual agreement to seek the presidency. Referring to his leadership role in the Velvet Revolution, Havel writes, “Had I—as the central figure in this process—suddenly refused any further engagement, refused to bear the consequences of my own previous actions, it would have turned all our efforts upside down and been a slap in the face to everyone” (Havel 2009). Thus, Havel’s motive for entering the institutional political realm was his feeling of responsibility toward the people; as he had led them during the revolution, he must continue to do so as their president. In contrast to the Communist leaders of the past, Havel demonstrates through his writing a strong desire to continue his service to the people in his new position, never losing his commitment to creating a moral politics. Thus, while he recognized the immense power that comes with the office of president, he desired to use this power not as “an end in itself but rather [as] the true expression of a desire to serve a good cause” (Havel 2009). This good cause would be the moral betterment of the Czechoslovak nation and the well-being of the people, a cause that closely corresponds with Havel’s image of himself in the “New Year’s Address” as a president who will “look out of the windows of his airplane” and genuinely serve the people (Havel 1990 8).

It is essential to the credibility of Havel’s narrative that he invokes further well-known historical figures besides himself that will provide the current

citizens with models of civic engagement and a sense of ideological and community continuity with the nation's democratic past. The first historical character mentioned within the democratic narrative is Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia whose democratic administration flourished during the interwar period following the foundation of the Czechoslovak nation in 1918. His political philosophy "included a deep attachment to and respect for the institutions and procedures of self-government ... and a commitment to social justice" (Wolchik 4). The use of Masaryk's name and the images of Czechoslovakia's democratic past it brings forth mirror Havel's call to access values of the past and also serves to connect the politics and personalities of the two leaders, who have both been portrayed by the anthropologist and philosopher Ernest Gellner as "intellectuals and moralists, deeply concerned with the moral basis of politics, and in particular, the moral basis of their own participation in politics" (45). The text thus implicitly characterizes Havel as a moral and democratic leader even before he begins to enact the duties of his new office.

Additionally, the use of Masaryk's name and ideas on the particular date constitutes a reminder of the nation's first New Year's address performed by Masaryk in 1928 on the tenth anniversary of the nation's formation. On this day, Masaryk grandly stated that "Democracy is not just a form of state ... it is a view of life. The basis of democracy is agreement among people, reasoned intercourse, love and humanity" (Vaughan). Havel directly expresses this conception of democracy when he states that "Masaryk based his politics on morality. Let us try, in a new time and in a new way, to restore this concept of politics" (Havel 1990 7). Thus, through the demonstration of past successes of democratic and humanistic leadership, the text urges a return to what is innate, familiar, and truthful by grounding its mandate in reality rather than abstract speculation about the future.

In addition to Masaryk, Havel also combines the names of Petr Chelčický and Jan Ámos Komenský with a simultaneous reference to both Masaryk and Jesus when he states, "Our first president wrote: 'Jesus, not Caesar.' In this, he followed our philosophers Chelčický and Comenius. I dare say that we may even have an opportunity to spread this idea further" (7). By combining references to various model citizens responsible for shaping Czechoslovakia's historical path to democracy with a reference to the ultimate model citizen for those who follow the Christian religion as Havel did, Havel provides his listeners with an image of the Czechoslovak nation as a historical stronghold of democracy and Christ-like morality despite the intrusion of the areligious totalitarian regime. As Farrell astutely argues, the use of these figures demonstrates Havel's desire to "displace the myth of irreversibility that is often applied to a world after virtue. As he carefully portrays it, the past several generations are, in this larger scheme of Czech heritage and tradition, an aberration" (269). Thus, the references to past leaders unite the current citizens and those who promoted democracy in the past within a single national community, painting an image of a Czechoslovak citizenry capable of

enacting democracy and morality no matter the temporal situation and ideological atmosphere.

*The Role of the “Average” Citizen*

Despite this sense of hope in democratic citizen action, before the narrative reaches the point of the Velvet Revolution, the only roles the Czechoslovak citizens themselves assume in the narrative are either as pawns of the regime or active agents solely within the context of their cooperation with the regime. At various points, Havel builds contradictory images of the citizens as both passively acted upon by the regime and as actively sustaining the regime through their quiescence and often complicit participation. In both iterations, the average Czechoslovak citizens in Havel’s narrative are consistently constructed only within the frame of their relation to the totalitarian regime. Throughout the development of this double-sided construction of the citizen, only at the point of the Velvet Revolution do the citizens themselves actively *perform* democracy within the particular historical narrative Havel formulates.

In his speech, Havel first lays the groundwork for describing citizen participation in the regime by recounting the destruction the totalitarian government had caused the nation and the way it transformed citizens from moral beings into tools manipulated to achieve its own ends. Havel states that “the previous regime—armed with its arrogant and intolerant ideology—reduced man to a force of production and nature to a tool of production. In this it attacked . . . their mutual relationship” (Havel 1990 4). The instance of personification at the start of the statement depicts the totalitarian government as an inherently war-like figure, as a weaponized state that is armed against its own citizens can never be said to be democratic or capable of promoting morality. The violent regime thus distanced the citizens from both life and self-determined decision-making as they lost their autonomous humanity and were reduced to “nuts and bolts of some monstrously huge, noisy, and stinking machine” (4). This metaphor once again details the dehumanization and mechanization of the citizens, portraying the state as an overwhelming force capable of destroying anyone that dared to raise a voice of dissent against it. The resulting sense of the extreme power imbalance between citizen and state makes it possible to understand why an entire nation seemingly self-destructed and became resigned and complacent in the face of such hardship.

This complacency plays into the narrative’s description of the main problem facing the Czechoslovak people that directly results from their mechanization at the hands of the regime, as this phenomenon has dangerously weakened the humanizing force of morality. Havel argues that “the worst thing is that we live in a contaminated moral environment” and that “concepts such as love, friendship, compassion, humility and forgiveness lost their depth and dimensions” (4). The citizens had lost their cooperative spirit and transformed into pure psychological

egoists who carried out the goals of the regime in the hopes of their own benefit, therefore relinquishing their ability to act in a moral manner towards their fellow citizens. Eliminating this entrenched immoral environment constitutes the hugely difficult problem that faces the new Czechoslovak government at the moment of transition, and the future appears irrevocably bleak.

At this point in the narrative, a particular metaphor describing the population's descent to immorality initiates the text's descriptions of active behavior on the part of the citizens. The narrative presents the loss of morality as a learned behavior, as the people "learned not to believe in anything, to ignore each other, to care only for ourselves" (4). This trope signifies that immorality is not an intrinsic feature of human nature and can thus be conquered. Yet, this instance is the first point in the speech's narrative when the citizens have clear agency in their actions. Thus, the first completely self-determined act of the Czechoslovak citizens within the narrative is to actively transform themselves into self-interested beings that are unwilling to demonstrate altruism or compassion. The momentous question that follows concerns whether the citizens will truly be able to redevelop their lost morality and empathy. For Havel, in order to do so, the citizens must accept their active role in the past regime, as this realization is the necessary first step to repurposing this agency towards the formation of a humanistic and trustworthy new government based upon the principles of cooperation and benevolence.

In his description of the role the citizens played in perpetuating the past regime, Havel tells his people that "we had all become used to the totalitarian system and accepted it as an unalterable fact of life, and thus we helped to perpetuate it" (4). As the citizens became enveloped by the ideology of the regime, they actively participated in keeping the regime alive through their learned refusal to practice dissent. As Havel tells the Czechoslovak people, they became not victims, but cocreators of the regime (4). In concordance with this image, at only two points in the narrative before the events of the Velvet Revolution are any Czechoslovak citizens represented in their attempts to protest against the regime. First, Havel states that, "Only a few of us were able to cry aloud that the powers that be ought not to be all-powerful," implying a muted example of dissent (4). Later in the text, he references the commendable actions of "those who rebelled against totalitarian rule, and those who simply managed to remain true to themselves and think freely" (6). These cases at the very least recognize that some citizens actively worked against the regime. However, the references are abstract and do not reference any concrete examples of rebellion, giving the statements a diminished possibility of connecting with the audience and provoking reflection about their experiences in personal or organized dissent. Thus, before the history constructed by the text reaches the revolution, the Czechoslovak citizens are almost consistently depicted either as victims of the communist regime or as actively contributing to the life-destroying regime and their resulting self-destruction.

Before the narrative departs into the future, Havel briefly describes the role of the citizens in the Velvet Revolution. He grandly declares that the “meek, humiliated, skeptical, and seemingly cynical citizens of Czechoslovakia found the marvelous strength to shake the totalitarian yoke from their shoulders” (5). Yet, based upon the narrative’s prior characterization of the role of the citizens, it is difficult to understand how the citizens were able to break free from the chains of totalitarianism that they themselves had helped wrought. This is the point in the narrative where Havel first invokes the “characters” of democracy and morality, which he uses to explain the success of the Velvet Revolution—the citizens, many of whom had “never [known] another system,” were able to successfully engage the “humanistic and democratic traditions” that “did indeed slumber in the unconsciousness of our nations” (5, 6). In Havel’s interpretation of the concept of morality, the Velvet Revolution represents the ultimate example of moral behavior. During the revolution, the citizens successfully performed the moral attributes of “love, friendship, compassion, humility, and forgiveness” that had been lost during the regime (4). Their peaceful protest demonstrated a shift from extreme self-interestedness to cooperative, peaceful, and mutually beneficial community behavior, a concept that forms the basis for Havel’s conception of morality.

Havel’s narrative then transitions to the future, when the citizens must continue to employ their sleeping morality and creative potential, drawing on their formative experiences in the Velvet Revolution. An essential part of the shift to morality comes from reflecting upon the past and recognizing the horrors citizens of other oppressed nations experienced during their own battles with totalitarianism. For example, Havel invokes the blood spilled in Poland and Hungary during the course of their suffering under communist regimes. It is likely that Havel is referring to the 1956 revolution in the case of Hungary, a weeks-long wresting of power from the ruling party initially sparked by student demonstrations. The revolution was brutally crushed by Soviet forces and left thousands of resistance fighters and civilians dead or wounded (Romsics 303-311). In the case of Poland, Havel may be referring to the massive retaliation committed against those who protested the consolidation of power in the hands of the communists around the years 1945-1948, when thousands were falsely accused of crimes, tortured, killed, and deprived of all political and legal rights (Paczkowski 234). By recognizing these and similar struggles, the Czechoslovak people can begin to form a more nuanced picture of the role average citizens play in totalitarian regimes and the subsequent transition from these regimes to democracy. Havel calls the people to appreciate the non-Czechoslovak freedom fighters who endured much more violent uprisings against the ruling totalitarian system and who died for their actions and words, establishing a debt to those who have paid dearly to assist Czechoslovakia in its own fight against totalitarianism.

Havel further reinforces this debt in his statement that “Without the changes in the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, and the German Democratic Re-

public, what has happened in our country could scarcely have happened” (Havel 1990 6). Here, Havel refers to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the transitions of three nearby nations from communist totalitarian regimes to capitalist democracies. In Hungary, a resurgence of organically initiated political parties challenged the dominance of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party and agreed to form an Oppositional Roundtable on March 22, 1989, in order to list demands for a new constitution and a shift to democracy (Romsics 432). A wave of liberalizing reforms and talks between the Oppositional Roundtable and the Socialist Workers’ Party resulted in the publication of the democratic “October Constitution” on October 23, 1989 (435). In the spring of 1990, long-awaited free elections for president were held, signaling the end of the communist regime in Hungary (438). In Poland, coal miners protesting the repressive policies of the Polish communist leadership at the Manifest Lipcowy mine initiated a series of strikes around the nation beginning on August 15, 1988. On August 31, the government met with Lech Walesa, leader of the opposition organization Solidarity (Paczkowski 491-492). Similar to the events in Hungary, round table talks ending on April 5, 1989, led to the promise of free parliamentary elections, which were overwhelmingly swept by Solidarity candidates (504). The process of formal democratization culminated on August 24, 1989, when the Polish parliament elected Tadeusz Mazowiecki the first prime minister under the new democratic system (509).

Havel’s invocation of the changes in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) calls to mind the momentous events preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the German nation. In the spring of 1989, 39,000 East Germans fled to neighboring nations, and massive protests against the Soviet-aligned communist government took place in Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin through the beginning of autumn (Hirschman 187-192). The resignation of Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the leading Socialist Unity Party, on October 18, 1989, and the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9 signaled the impending end of Socialist Unity Party dominance and the subsequent free elections and reunification with West Germany on October 3, 1990 (193). The introduction of these nations and the resulting images of the civilians who suffered under repressive regimes yet managed to unite to overthrow their oppressors endows the Czechoslovak citizenry with a concrete imperative to shift their future politics to morality, as “every instance of human suffering concerns every other human being” (Havel 1990 6). Thus, the text assigns the citizens a *duty* to act in a moral manner and work towards democracy, both to repay their debts to the people of other nations and to make their own nation strong.

Within the context of the speech’s future narrative, the ultimate duty of the citizen is to fully embrace morality and create a politics that is “an expression of a desire to contribute to the happiness of the community rather than of a need to cheat or rape the community” (7). Shifting the narrative in a more utopian direction, the ultimate dream of a moral practice of politics is the creation of a nation

that can “permanently radiate love, understanding, [and] the power of the intellect and ideas” (7). Thus, the duty of the citizen is to perform virtuous acts with the happiness of others in mind, eradicating their previous posture of selfishness and robotic fulfillment of the immoral goals of the totalitarian machine.

This duty is delineated along with a reminder of the ever-present antagonist, warning the citizens that the past and its challenges will never truly be distant and unthreatening. Havel tells the nation that “our main enemy today is our own worst nature: our indifference to the common good; vanity; personal ambition; selfishness; and rivalry,” once again demonstrating the ability of the citizens to actively determine their destiny for better or for worse (8). Havel calls the public to “not allow the desire to serve oneself to blossom once again under the fair mask of the desire to serve the common good” (8). Through the use of this mask metaphor, the text constructs both morality and self-interestedness as inherent to human nature and the public performance of values. Through the metaphor, Havel instructs the citizens to carry out a complete shift to focusing their actions around the common good rather than a partial shift that can only be deemed a fragile mask. As the people actively resist the urge to slip back into the old attitudes of complacency, helplessness, selfishness, and ignorance, this will decrease the risk of counterfeit or inauthentic cooperative behavior.

### *The Role of the Characters of Democracy and Morality*

Havel’s speech is intended to be an invitation to the citizens of Czechoslovakia to begin to practice a cooperative moral politics and to return the nation to its prior status as a stronghold of democracy. The forces of democracy and morality can be read as their own characters in Havel’s narrative, which has a strong impact on Havel’s ability to adapt the speech to his particular audience. He consistently presents democracy, morality, and other related humanistic forces as “slumbering” within society during the time of the regime. This instance of personification presents an optimistic view of the shift from totalitarianism and immorality to democracy and morality by representing democracy as a sleeping force that must solely be awakened to return Czechoslovakia to the glory days it experienced before World War II. Throughout the text, Havel similarly refers to “the enormous human, moral, and spiritual potential and civic culture that slumbered in our society” and the “humanistic and democratic traditions ... [slumbering] in the unconsciousness of our nations” (5, 6). These examples of personification depict democracy and humanism, while weakened, as maintaining an intrinsic place in society even during the decades of oppression, demonstrating Havel’s desire to present the totalitarian government as an aberration in the nation’s history. Thus, his usage of the slumbering metaphor parallels his invocation of the figures of Masaryk, Chelčický, and Komenský in this respect.

While these metaphors serve an optimistic function in the text by pre-

senting morality and democracy as forces intrinsic to society, another line in the speech illuminates how Havel's choice to employ the sleeping metaphor may have contributed to the failure of the speech to completely adapt to its audience. When Havel explains how he believes the Czechoslovak citizens were able to successfully defeat the regime during the Velvet Revolution, he states that the "humanistic and democratic traditions" had been "inconspicuously passed from one generation to another so that each of us could discover them at the right time and transform them into deeds" (6). This statement does indeed represent Havel's enduring trust in the possibility of true change and his recognition of the astounding power of Czechoslovakia's citizens to revolt against a regime that had oppressed them for so long. However, these particular metaphors are unclear in their assignment of agency to the Czechoslovak citizens, as democracy and humanism are presented as characters of their own, with their own distinct history, that sustain themselves throughout the period of the regime. The citizens in Havel's narrative, up until the time of the Velvet Revolution, thus appear to solely *transfer* democracy rather than to own or perform it. When the moment of revolution arrives, democracy and morality are awakened, yet Havel's metaphor does not portray this awakening as invoked and implemented by the citizens themselves. Rather, the citizens represent those who blindly carried democracy and morality across time, only "discovering" them at the very end of the regime.

As I have argued, the citizens appear to actively perform democracy only twice in Havel's narrative—during the democratic regime that flourished before World War II and during the events of the Velvet Revolution. However, the consistent democratic agency of the citizens in reality becomes obvious when the historical context of Czechoslovakia is taken into account. Several examples from Czechoslovakia's history make Havel's claim that "Only a few of us were able to cry aloud that the powers that be ought not to be all-powerful" appear a weak recognition of the power of the citizens to consistently perform their displeasure with the regime despite the great threat of reprisal. For example, the events of the Prague Spring demonstrate this power. Public polling data from the 1960s demonstrated the population's consistent approval of and appreciation for the democratic republic that flourished during the interwar period, illustrating the public's "abiding belief in political pluralism and attachment to democratic procedures" (Wolchik 110). Towards the middle of the regime's duration, citizens demonstrated significant dissatisfaction with and alienation from the government, culminating in the 1968 Prague Spring, a short period of reforms undertaken by Communist Party leader Alexander Dubček. Restrictions on the freedom of the press, speech, and assembly were loosened by party leaders eager to appease the citizens and their democratic proclivities by "[devising] a form of socialism better suited to Czechoslovakia's democratic traditions" (32).

The Prague Spring was instigated and supported by intellectuals, writers, and playwrights who criticized the overbearing reach of Communist control into

all aspects of Czechoslovak culture, and a resurgence of civic action immediately followed the reforms (Farrell 267). The citizens were quick to take advantage of their renewed freedom of assembly and began to establish student and youth organizations, labor unions, and women's organizations, revitalizing the nation's tradition of voluntary association (Wolchik 33). Although the Prague Spring failed to provoke lasting change due to the Soviet Union's reactionary invasion of Czechoslovakia and the government's subsequent return to pro-Soviet policies, the period demonstrates that the Czechoslovak citizens succeeded in actively promoting democracy during the years of the regime, a fact that is underemphasized in Havel's speech.

Havel's own activities around the time of the Prague Spring are characteristic of the courageous intellectuals and artists who risked state repression to freely produce their works while simultaneously demanding governmental reform. A playwright himself, Havel produced a number of plays in the years leading up to the Prague Spring that made clear the trials of living under the communist system, including "The Garden Party." Due to the critical nature of Havel's plays, the government began to consider him a threat to their control and proceeded to ban his works from the stage in 1969. However, Havel's plays maintained their popularity throughout the public. They were illicitly circulated among civilians and thus "profoundly influenced the Czechoslovak people's awareness of their plight under communism" (Conlogue). In addition to producing works that refused to ignore the failures of communism, Havel led the non-Communist section of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union (Wilson 23). Thus, through his writing and leadership around the time of the Prague Spring, Havel demonstrated his commitment to resisting the regime and producing social change through the free expression of the creative spirit and a willingness to form coalitions of citizens in the hopes of mutual betterment. During the Prague Spring, Havel and his fellow artists, playwrights, and dissidents directly performed the democratically oriented tasks he would later call the Czechoslovak people to enact following the fall of communism, yet this fact is not obvious from the text of his speech.

The events of the Charter 77 movement provide additional evidence for the proliferation of dedicated and democratic citizen action. The "normalization" period that followed the dismemberment of the Prague Spring reforms and Dubček's replacement by Gustáv Husák, a leader more willing to "roll back the clock to the pre-1968 period," involved increasing censorship, a greater focus on hardline Soviet policies, and the re-subordination of voluntary associations (Wolchik 36). These policies, combined with a placating improved standard of living and greater access to diversified consumer goods, led the people to adopt what Farrell describes as a pervasive "attitude toward power that bordered on cynical resignation" (268). Despite this sentiment, less than ten years later, a dissident civic movement involving over 700 intellectuals and disillusioned former Communist Party leaders emerged in January 1977. The group released a manifesto

known as the Charter 77 that publicized the Party's human rights violations and urged Czechoslovak leaders to fulfill the demands of international human rights agreements (Wolchik 38). Thus, even during the demoralizing period of normalization, citizens continued to find space for public enactment of their tenacious democratic values.

## Conclusion

The main themes of Havel's speech, such as his recognition that democracy and morality were always part of Czechoslovak society and his assignation of agency to the citizens both during and after the regime, are essential factors in influencing the citizens to remake their society with a stronger focus on morality. In this vein, Farrell argues that Havel's call for the citizens to recognize their complicit role in continuing the life of the regime constructed a "new" citizen who would be "willing to listen to others and to forgive," resulting in a "luminous moment which all assembled could treasure through their own collective authorship" (272). I argue that the moment was, in fact, not luminous, as although Havel's speech did recognize the power civilians hold to determine their own destiny, the text was both rhetorically and materially ineffectual in transferring citizen agency from its negative conception in participating in the regime and its positive conception in carrying out the Velvet Revolution and the changes Havel proposes for the future. I contend that this fundamental conflict stems from the speech's reliance on past national democratic figures and its weak recognition of the agency of the current citizens in any context other than their complicit role in the previous regime.

In order to persuade his citizens to recognize the necessity of making a moral and democratic transition, Havel had to navigate the role of the Czechoslovak people in multiple disparate contexts. While others have praised his blunt assertion that the people played an integral role in their own oppression, I contend that this assertion is a main source of the speech's failure to adapt to its audience. This is due to the fact that Havel attempts to present the era of the regime as an aberration in the history of the nation while simultaneously incorporating the regime and the citizens' role in it in his narrative in order to provide a rationale for democratic transition. For the regime to have been a true aberration in the march of national history, the citizens would have had to have played a significantly less active role in both the longevity of the regime and the protests against it. However, as historical analysis reveals, and Havel himself recognized, Czechoslovak citizens remained at least partially in control of their own destiny from the nation's creation to the events of the Velvet Revolution. Examples from the history of the nation show that the citizens were at various points able to enact democracy despite the barriers they faced, yet also fell victim to complacency and resignation. Thus, the role of the true Czechoslovak citizen had always been a multi-faceted one and included moments of both compliance with the regime and active protest

against the established order.

The text of Havel's "New Year's Address," however, overemphasizes the role of the current citizens in the context of their participation in the regime by presenting their recognition and acceptance of this role as the most necessary condition for the creation of a democratic society at the expense of any emphasis on their continued protest against the regime that culminated in the Velvet Revolution. Indeed, other than their role in the Velvet Revolution, the current citizens whom Havel addresses are depicted in the text's narrative solely within the context of their complicit cooperation with the previous regime. The few references to any democratic action are abstract and do not call on specific events in the nation's history that demonstrated the citizens' democratic agency, such as the Prague Spring and the Charter 77 movement. This problem is compounded by the text's resulting reliance upon democratic leaders active in times long past in order to portray the possibility of reconstructing a moral society.

Havel attempts to draw a clear communitarian connection between these citizens and the current citizens by claiming Masaryk, Chelčický, and Komenský using the "our" pronoun. However, the current citizens may have felt less affinity with these figures than Havel desired them to due to both their temporal distance and their status as national leaders and heroes rather than "average" citizens like themselves. Additionally, the text's inclusion of these figures as true examples of democracy, combined with Havel's lack of references to events during which the current citizens displayed similar tendencies, paints an image of democracy as belonging to distant historical figures rather than to the current citizens in any context other than that of the Velvet Revolution.

As previously established, the particular citizens that are constructed by Havel's text demonstrate their agency primarily in two very disparate ways: their cooperation with the regime and their participation in the Velvet Revolution. For the listener, Havel's description of their role in such a way may have seemed disjointed, as the citizens appear to robustly enact democracy during the Masaryk administration but barely again until the Velvet Revolution, yet democracy was somehow able to survive during the time between. Because of the lack of references in the text to concrete examples of dissent during the communist regime, the text's claim that democracy and morality were always able to survive, however weakly, presents a series of open-ended questions that the text is unable to adequately answer—who was responsible for the survival of democracy? If the citizens had truly become as self-interested as Havel claims, how is it that democracy was able to survive at all? Havel's solution to this problem through his usage of the slumbering metaphor provides an unsatisfactory answer, as it is arguable that democracy can truly be sustained without acting upon it, that it can simply be "accessed" rather than developed in a lengthy process of national discovery and self-determination. This idea is a crucial element whose lack of presence in the

“New Year’s Address” may partially explain the speech’s inability to adapt to its audience, as Havel did not make clear that the process of recovering democracy would be arduous and time-consuming and would not solely depend on the citizens’ recognition of their role in the regime and their continuation of the project of the Velvet Revolution.

In addition to the rhetorical features of Havel’s speech that detracted from its ability to adapt to its audience, various environmental factors additionally put the efficacy of his words in danger and provoked uncertainty about the possibility of enacting his proposed shift to morality. Although the Velvet Revolution represented a surge towards good will, Havel himself recognized that the morality of the people was “incoherent, suppressed, confused, crippled and perplexed—as though it does not know ... where to find meaningful outlets” (*Summer Meditations*, quoted in Wilson 23). Directly after the revolution, Havel noted “an enormous and dazzling explosion of every imaginable human vice,” as the crime rate escalated, the enticing words of demagogues began to gain traction, and racism against Czechoslovakia’s Roma population flourished (23). These environmental factors made uncertain the possibility of a humanistic paradigm shift in Czechoslovakia following the governmental transition and cast doubt on the ability of the citizens to fulfill Havel’s mandate.

It can be argued that Havel’s speech failed in foreseeing these problems that would almost inevitably accompany regime change and did not provide a satisfactory framework for either diminishing them or working past them. The speech lacked a framework for overcoming the legacy of communism, despite its recognition of the possibility that democracy might not prevail in the line “our main enemy today is our own worst nature: our indifference to the common good; vanity; personal ambition; selfishness; and rivalry” (Havel 1990 8). The speech did not, beyond a call for them to do so, provide a concrete plan for the citizens to develop a moral politics, and did not anticipate the divisive nature of post-Communist politics that included “the not inconsiderable existence of radical political currents on both the left and right” within the separate contexts of both the unbalanced Czech and the Slovak communities (Krejčí and Machonin 214).

Additionally, the inability of the speech to anticipate solutions to future problems may be due in part to its reliance on reflection on the past. Rather than privileging the nation’s impressive growing history of dissent that culminated in the Velvet Revolution in a forward-looking manner, the speech relies upon the government that flourished between the wars as its primary example of morality and democracy. This period, in addition to its lack of temporal and generational connection to the citizens whom Havel primarily addresses, carries with it implicit associations with imminent difficulties—the Masaryk regime was, after all, destroyed by outside forces and thus does not represent a complete model of the sort of national self-confidence and sustainability that Havel desires to inspire

within Czechoslovakia. It is possible that these factors diminished the speech's ability to adapt to its audience members, who had consistently demonstrated their democratic proclivities, a fact that is brushed over by Havel's narrative, and who would have benefited from a more concrete framework for action in order to transition their democratic civic engagement from the realm of dissent to the realm of public institutions.

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