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BOHUMIL FOŘT

JIŘÍ KRATOCHVIL'S POSTLOVED POSTMODERN

Frame breaking is a risky business.
Brian McHale

Kratochvil's collection of short stories called *Má lásko, postmoderno* (*My Love, Postmodern*) (Kratochvil, Jiří: *Má lásko, postmoderno*. Atlantis, Brno 1994) was published for the first time in 1994. However, it remains uncertain when the book was actually written – not surprisingly if we take into account the fact that Jiří Kratochvil belongs to the group of Czech authors who before 1989 simply had not been published. The explicit date of production which is not mentioned anywhere in the text is, from the point of view of interpretation, an element that preserves it from the possibility of one-sided political explanation. Nevertheless, the collection is considered important for the field of Czech postmodern literature and for its further development. This study seeks to uncover the specific features of Kratochvil's postmodernity.

Regarding the analysis of any book, there are always some important questions that arise during the act of reading – to answer these questions means to substantionally contribute to the interpretation of the book. In general, in Kratochvil's case, the most important thought that enters the reader's mind is the idea of a highly centred text. Indeed, the text itself is nearly hypercoherent. When Umberto Eco introduced the notion of 'the model reader'[1] he referred to a text strategy, to some general features of a text, that should be followed during the act of reading in order to uncover the meaning of the text; in Kratochvil's book the textual power to develop and lead its own reader is substantially supported. The suggestion that the text not only creates and leads its own reader, but also makes the reader a participant in the complex system of reference in postmodern literature could be considered as too strong; nevertheless, uncovering the general role and ways of the text's complex reference could bring up important suggestions about the role of the reader in postmodern literature.

1 See especially Eco 1979, ppg. 7–11; also Eco 1994.

Above, I mentioned essential questions that the reader usually asks during the act of reading in conjunction with a latter interpretation. First of all, the reader is normally interested in the active origin of the text, i.e. its author. To discuss the author of this particular text, at least at this stage, does not seem to be a matter of any special or additional research: the author, by himself, tells us explicitly about himself, though the information could be viewed as rather unsatisfactory. The way the author refers to himself is part of a general referential strategy. At the very beginning the author introduces himself in "The Author about Himself" ("Autor o sobě") in a rather poor way: the only pieces of information he tells us are when he was born, which books he has published, and some things about his stories:[2] "I was born in 1940 in Brno, where most of my stories take place. Elsewhere I have already said that Brno is a metropolis of obscurity; therefore, my stories are also obscure, dubious, odd…"[3] Not suprisingly, the author also tells the reader about his motivation to write this particular book, in the section named "The Author about the Book": "More than thirty years after I had been amazed by Peter Altenberg's *Minute Novels*, I tried to write their postmodern alternative… What is postmodern about my stories? For example, the fact that in all of my thirty-seven short stories I used just one short sentence from Altenberg's thirty-seven stories. The short stories are built up around Altenberg's sentences in the same way that houses used to be built around wells in Buenos Aires."[4] So far all the references are an integral part of the way the author develops and leads his readers. Furthermore, if one takes into consideration the entire name of the collection, *My Love, Postmodern*, we enter a complex but integral network of structured reference, that shows the way to enter the entire text. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that some answers precede possible questions, a fact that

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2 Occasionally, the strong role of the author is considered specifically as one of the most significant features of postmodern literature: "Postmodernist fiction has brought the author back to the surface… the postmodernist author is even free to confront us with the image of himself or herself in the act of producing the text" (McHale 1987, 199). See also Hutcheon: "The postmodern author is no longer the inarticulate, silent, alienated creator of the romantic/modernist tradition" (Hutcheon 1989, 19).

3 "Narodil jsem se v roce 1940 v Brně, v němž se odehrává i většina mých příběhů. Kdesi jsem už o Brně řekl, že je metropolí obskurity, a proto i mé příběhy jsou obskurní, pochybné, podivínské."

Sometimes, as one of the most significant features of postmodern literature is considered the specifically strong role of the author: "Postmodernist fiction has brought the author back to the surface… the postmodernist author is even free to confront us with the image of himself or helself in the act of producing the text" (McHale 1987, 199). See also Hutcheon: "The postmodern author is no longer the inarticulate, silent, alienated creator of the romantic/modernist tradition" (19).

4 "Více než třicet roků poté, co jsem byl okouzlen *Minutovými romány* Petera Altenberga, jsem se pokusil napsat jejich postmoderní obdobu… A co je na nich postmoderního? Například to, že v každé z těch sedmatřiceti povídek jsem použil jedné (krátké) věty ze sedmatřiceti Altenbergových povídek. Jsou to povídky vystavěné kolem Altenbergových vět, jak se kdysi v Buenos Aires stavívaly domy kolem studní."

supports the idea of a highly centralised narrative power, whilst still keeping the game of make-believe and its procedures very transparent.

The author in "The Author about himself" tells the reader two important things: "First of all, the worlds of my short stories are going to be unusual, obscure, supernatural, but this obscurity is based on the obscurity of the real, on the metropolis of obscurity, Brno." In this way, fiction uncovers the true basis of reality – if the reality itself is obscure then the non-authenticity of obviously supernatural fictional worlds is relative. Thus the relativeness itself becomes part of such a reference. In this case a simple question remains: "Is there any obscure reality that we simply fail to see, or is this obscure 'reality' just a pure fictionalisation of *the* reality?" Not surprisingly, the correct answer has to be: "It is just fiction; there is nothing real about it!" BUT, this unseen obscurity of our reality remains its property in the space of the possible; and the relationship between the possible and the real could be an important part of the basis of our interpretation. Because of the complex features and reference of Kratochvil's stories, the Possible influences the Real in the sense that it influences its own object of reference.[5] This dual, fictional-actual reference, seems to be a crucial point of any theoretical grasp of the notion of postmodern literature. For example, McHale considers the relativisation of the fictional reference to be the essential postmodern-literature feature. According to him, postmodern literature: "Intended to establish an absolute level of reality, it paradoxically *relativizes* reality; intended to provide an ontologically stable foothold, it only destabilizes ontology further" (McHale 1987, 197). Obviously, another question has to be asked: "real, compared to what?" (McHale 1987, 96).

As the reader can see the name of the book itself includes the notion of 'postmodern' – this kind of reference aims at certain cultural construct, on one hand, but on the other hand, it instructs the reader how to approach the text. At the same time, however, the text creates an object of its own reference – under the condition that the reader considers the reference serious, i.e., when he does not consider the author a liar in the actual world. At this point there arises the necessary suggestion that this kind of double reference is the basic referential strategy in the book.[6]

Speaking about different levels of Kratochvil's complex reference, in the author's description of the genesis of his work ("The Author about the Book"), the author not only refers to the work that has inspired him and to the parts he has used in his own short stories, but also directly shows the entire construction strategy of his own book, which is based on an eclectic combination. The explicit

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5 Brian McHale writes in this case about a kind of dual ontology: "…the ontological structure of the projected world is essentially the same in every case: a *dual* ontology, on one side our world of the normal and everyday, on the other side the next-door of the paranormal or supernatural, and running between them the contested boundary separating the two worlds" (McHale 1987, 73).

6 "Postmodernism´s distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale ´nudging´ commitment to doubleness, or duplicity" (Hutcheon 1989, 1).

intertextual and construction references are once again two parts of one dual reference and they support the direct leadership of the reader by the text. The initial uncovering of a referential strategy thus not only encloses the space of the reader and determines his movement inside it, but also provides the reader with a code to enter the textual space of the book.

Of course, in the referential introduction there always remains an Unknown, which is its organic part, i.e., the notion of the postmodern. This introduction should not be a theoretical essay about the postmodern; it should rather point out the ways that something seen as connected with postmodern strategies and procedures participates precisely in the structure of the book. Because of the fact that the analysis of textual reference is an important part of the analysis of this particular book, I would like to mention Brian McHale's distinction between modern and postmodern literature, which is based on a particular feature that could be uncovered by an analysis of reference. This same feature/distinction provides us with the basis for interpretation; interpretation, at the same time, is a procedure that reveals the meaning of the book. McHale employs Jakobson's term 'dominant' to assign this feature: "The dominant of modernist fiction is *epistemological*. That is, modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as… 'How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it? Other typical modernist questions might be added: 'What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable?' The dominant of postmodernist fiction is *ontological*. That is, postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like… 'Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?' Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world it projects, for instance: What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured?" (McHale 1987, 9–10).

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that McHale does not say that modern literature is epistemological in general, whereas postmodern literature is merely ontological; the author simply uses Jakobson's term of the 'shifting dominant' of the whole system of a literary work's components to chart the development of literature. It would be very short-sighted not to consider the reception side of the process of literary communication and its development when, we consider the term 'dominant'. This fact may have serious consequences for the consideration and limitation of the very term "postmodern literature". Obviously, McHale must enter the realm of the reception of literary artworks when he goes on to discuss the differentiation of the dominants, though he does not say so explicitly: "This in

a nutshell is the function of the dominant: it specifies the *order* in which different aspects are to be attended to, so that, although it would be perfectly possible to interrogate a postmodernist text about its epistemological implications it is more urgent to interrogate it about its ontological implications. In postmodernist texts, in other words, epistemology is *backgrounded*, as the price of foregrounding ontology" (McHale 1987, 11). Of course, the general literary strategy influences the way a literary artwork is supposed to be approached and, conversely, the act of reading influences literary strategies and their reference.

When we come back to the author's foreword we can see another specific tool of reference: he refers transparently to parts of somebody else's texts which he uses for his own purpose (Altenberg's novels). In this particular case we can speak about allusions. In the whole book there are many allusions referring directly to pre-existing texts (texts by Franz Kafka, J. L. Borges, Karel Hlaváček, H. P. Lovecraft, K. J. Erben, A. E. Poe, Karel Čapek, Pafka Kohout, Martin Heidegger, as well as several movies, many of them left uncovered). For the purposes of discussing Kratochvil's short stories it is definitely worth using the term allusion in its strict intertextual sense: "*Allusions* direct the interpreter from one literary text to other texts, to artwotks, and so on. The text's meaning can be grasped without identifying the intertext but is enriched, often quite substantially, by its discovery" (Doležel 1998, 201). In fact, in our texts we can very often meet allusions that refer to their prototext on different levels, in different ways, and with different powers – accordingly I ought to widen the sense of the term for my purpose. The property the allusions usually have in common is a very transparent channel of reference: they want to be easily uncovered, they explain their obsession to get uncovered, though, as I have already said, they refer to their sources on different levels and in different ways; accordingly, they employ different procedures of uncovering.

Most of the allusions depend on some kind of motivic or thematic resemblance to the original texts, but there are also some ones that are based on usage of stylistic devices; the resemblance between a prototext and a metatext is then established without any strong reference to one particular text, but is based on some pertinence to a specific set of texts. It must be emphasised that when I use the term "allusion" I am employing it in a wider sense than usual, but still necessarily avoiding any similarity between my usage of "allusion" and something that might approach Bachtin's notion of "polyvoiced" words that form the basis of his notion of intertextuality. I believe myself to be justified in using it in the wider sense simply because, as I have already mentioned, all the allusions are of a truly transparent type. Definitely, the transparentness (unconcealedness) allows us to pick up, in a relatively easy way, all the first-level references; a second-level reference has to be taken into consideration once we begin to examine sets of allusions and their combination in particular short stories, or better, within their own frameworks of reference (as wholes).

In general, Kratochvil's short stories can be characterised specifically as a collage combining parts of original texts with parts of pre-existing texts and with

parts of texts that firmly refer to some pre-existing texts, to the extent that our knowledge of the original texts can be very important in explaining references to the secondary ones. In a very definite way, the result of such a combination is an eclectic mixture with its own meaning.

From a stylistic point of view, Kratochvil uses many different narrative modes in a number of literary genres: we can find almost the whole range of classical narrative forms, like objective Er-form narration, subjective Ich-form narration, several dialogic and monologic forms, mixtures of different narrative modes and levels, as well as some narrative strategies that are considered very postmodern, for example, self-referential and self-perceptual narration.

Allegory, as used for purposes of postmodern literature, crosses the area of an allegorical image of reality. Firstly, postmodern allegories ofter refer directly to concrete allegories that become schematically structured in allegorical genres. Secondly, postmodern allegory, because it rigorously follows classical allegorical schemes and uses their strategies and devices, very often has a strong parodic accent.[7] It disrupts the genre of allegory by its dual reference: it refers to allegorically represented reality and to the allegory itself; the latter violates the very effect of the allegorical image. It refers to allegory itself so rigidly that the side-effect that appears as a result of such a confrontation is almost a metatextual disclosing of allegory and the ways it functions. The final disruption thus gains a strong parodic flavour: "The transparency and mechanical symmetry of the allegory alerts us to the parodic intention… Parody of allegory, then, is allegory reflecting upon allegory. With this turn of the screw of self-consciousness, postmodernist allegory would appear to have distanced itself from what we are still apt to think of as the 'naïveté' of traditional allegories" (McHale 1987, 145). The difference between postmodern allegory and its classical form lies in the generally ambiguous structure of postmodern fictional worlds: they are eclectic mixtures made of several themes and motifs and built up by employing several narrative devices and strategies; they are strongly relativised (as frames of reference) and, furthermore, because of their specific manners of reference the image of the actual world is relativised as well. Thus, the allegory lacks its own reference because an allegorical reference needs a stable framework of reality; in this case even the trope of allegory lacks its firm boundaries: "This elusiveness is an inheritance from the founding texts of postmodernist allegorical practise… Everything is *potentially* allegorical, but nothing is *actually* an allegory; the trope seems to lack a specific literal level or frame of reference" (McHale 1989, 141).

In Kratochvil's texts, allegory is probably the most potent narrative and semantic device employed – it penetrates all levels of the narration. The fact becomes obvious, especially when we consider the whole scale of images he uses, exhaustively or just partly, in the stories. Some of them are, for example, constructed as fairy-tales. Again, the structure of a fairy-tale is used for the purpose of a dual reference: First of all, a fairy-tale itself has (not only in Czech cultural context)

7 See Hutcheon 1989, p. 61, for a discussion of parodic intertextuality.

a very transparent and culturally firm reference. Using the fairy-tale structure as a part of an outer text (in the case of Kratochvil's stories usually a set of several eclectically connected elements) does not mean only using this specific narrative structure, but also refers to it as a structure that carries its own culturally specific semantics. Kratochvil explicitly shows us the strategy he follows in a short story called "Ltd." ("s r. o."). The main part of this short story has an obvious fairy-tale shape. However, the fairy-tale is used only as an advertisement for a product of a pharmaceutical company. A fairy-tale thus becomes only a copied strategy that serves a totally different aim. Moreover, there is the following chain: the short story uses the genre of an advertisement that uses the genre of a fairy-tale. However, this "matrioshka"[8] technique is not the only one that appears in our texts – the more common one is a technique of composing texts from elements that resemble pieces of a puzzle; the technique then becomes a puzzle-setting-technique.

Mentioning fairy-tales and the puzzle-technique, I would like to point out one of the stories called "Lesson on Semiotics" ("Lekce ze sémiotiky") that precisely follows the described scheme. Without a doubt, the story is obviously structured in a fairy tale way – a young man is searching for his beloved blonde Swedish sweetheart (Golden-hair) who has been kidnapped by a foreign despotic emperor.[9] Once the young man finally reaches the emperor's palace, he realises that there is a symbol of a golden hammer and sickle on top of it. So far we can imagine a typical modern version of a very common fairy tale story about a young man searching for his kidnapped beloved, though it seems that both the circumstances of the kidnapping and the symbol of the emperor's power refer to something that is (was) part of our actual world; a nameless fairy tale evil gets its own political name – so far the whole thing looks like a great political allegory, albeit somewhat kitchy. The effect of this particular allegory arises from a tension between a fairy-tale "once upon a time" and a historiographically attested sad part of East European history. Up to this point everything is somehow familiar; the message is relatively clear. Nevertheless, once we go further into the story, it suddenly changes shape diametrically: the phrase/statement "The interior of the emperor's palace has the shape of a Labyrinth"[10] moves us immediately to the world of Jorge Luis Borges' short story "The House of Asterion" (*Fictiones*). This connection might be just an allusion of the so-called weaker type – they are similar. But the similarity goes so far that in our story we can find a sentence: "And I was really surprised how easily I found him and how easily I seized him, because he did not even try to defend himself,"[11] while in Borges' story the very

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8 It is important to mention that I use the term 'matrioshka' in totally different context than McHale's use of the term 'babushka', as we shall see later.

9 The reference to Berija's mythicized practice of treating his lovers becomes more than obvious here.

10 "Vladařův palác měl vevnitř podobu Labyrintu" (p. 47).

11 "A zaskočilo mne, jak snadno ho našel a jak snadno jsem ho dostal, protože se ani nepokusil bránit" (p. 47).

last paragraph runs: "The morning sun reverberated from the bronze sword. There was no longer even a vestige of blood. Would you believe it, Ariadne? Said Theseus. The Minotaurus scarcely defended himself ."[12] If the former example was merely some sort of similarity, this then is an allusion in the strictest sense. Whereas in Borges' story the Minotaurus is killed, Kratochvil's story goes on – the young man does not kill the Beast because he realizes that Beauty and the Beast are in fact the same – instead of killing him he marries him (her). The end of Kratochvil's story can be interpreted in many different ways – we can refer to a yin and yang balance, to some kind of an eternal unity and oneness, to some Nietzschean source or to the eternal power of evil, an so on. A fairy-tale is blended with political reality, with Borges' short story and with something else – all four allusions, or references, are blended together, and all of them influence the reference of the whole. Futhermore, I believe that "influence" in this case has a greater effect of "clouding".

Kratochvil's allegories very often paraphrase or resemble fairy-tales, ballads, parables, or fantasies. Regarding to parables, I would like to examine one particular short-story called "Legend of the Eternal Return" ("Legenda o věčném návratu") that reveals another aspect of Kratochvil's work. In this highly allegorical story there appears a mouse that is in fact an incarnation of a Generalissimo who is obsessed with dictating his own memoirs and is therefore searching for a secretary. He finds a young woman, Miss Jahodová, whose father used to be fiercely loyal towards the Generalissimo, and who is willing to help him. Some time later, after an argument she decides to get rid of the mouse-Generalissimo and buys a cat. As soon as the mouse-Generalissimo is killed and eaten by the cat, the Generalissimo is incarnated in the cat. As soon as the cat is killed by Miss Jahodová, to be prepared (i.e., baked) as a delicacy for her boyfriend who wants to break up with her (the delicacy is supposed to convince him otherwise), the Generalissimo is incarnated in the young man's body. The funny thing is that once he becomes the young man, the Generalissimo is not interested in dictating his memoirs to the secretary any more.

I see two important aspects to this story: First of all, the idea of incarnation (reincarnation) via destruction and consummation of an enemy is highly allegorical again – this might document one of the ways that an evil power uses to impose its own power and survive.

The allegory of physical liquidation via one's digestive system (cannibalism) also occurs in a story called "Diary" ("Deníček") – it is a story which takes a form of an intimate diary of a young girl who has become used to eating human flesh "to protect people whom she loved"; she is so obsessed with eating it that she devours all the people in her homeland. Thus, at the very end of the story (and also of her life, since it takes some time to eat several million people) she looks forward to meeting the tasty and fresh flesh of the young soldiers of the famous Red Army as she welcomes them to her country. The message seems to be rather

12 Borges, J. L.: *Labyrinths*. Modern Library, New York 1983 (p. 140).

clear, in this case: the hunger of decline and corruption kills our own people and the only means of avoiding the increasing hunger can come from the Soviet Union.[13]

To return to the mouse-cat-young man story: alongside the idea of incarnation (reincarnation) of evil in this story there occurs another important idea that runs as a leitmotiv through several of Kratochvil's short stories: the idea of a thematised history. Of course, this idea is considered one of the most important distinguishing features of postmodern literature,[14] so it is hardly innovative. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that one of the most important achievements of postmodern literature is the fact that it questions both the status of the narrative act as history as well as the status of history itself: "Postmodern historiographic metafiction simply does all of this overtly, asking us to question how to represent – how we construct – our view of reality and of our selves" (Hutcheon 1989, 42). It is obvious that historical worlds, similar to fictional worlds, are just the result of some descriptive procedures. In the case of postmodern literature we meet the motif of thematized history in different shapes and to different degrees. The most effective and innovative postmodern forms seem to be those which somehow violate either the idea of "real" historical worlds or the standardized notion of the relationship between historical and fictional worlds; sometimes the two forms are mixed.[15]

In "Legend of the Eternal Return" the Generalissimo is deeply obsessed with the necessity of recording of his memoirs. Why? He seems to be a real postmodern creature because of his awareness of the power of historiography. As soon as postmodern literature uncovers the power of narrative creation it also uncovers the power of a specific narration called history – and in this way helps to uncover an incredibly powerful tool of our reality-making.

In the collection we find a short story that refers directly to a connection between The Real and The Described – "Lovesong" ("Milostná píseň"). The story is rather simple: a very young and talented writer[16] is chosen to record the history of the rule of the most-powerful-man: "He was a man whose name has never appeared anywhere, who will never appear, and whose face has never tasted the

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13 Similar horror and cannibalistic motifs in Czech political allegories can be found in Harníček's *Maso* and Křesadlo's *Mrchopěvci*.

14 Hutcheon speaks generally about the three most important forms of postmodern literature: self-conscious, self-contradictory, and self-undermining statements (Hutcheon 1989, 1).

15 McHale illustrates concrete types of postmodern historical literature: "Apocryphal history, creative anachronism, historical fantasy – these are the typical strategies of the postmodernist revisionist historical novel. The postmodernist historical novel is revisionist in two senses. First, it revises the *content* of the historical record, reinterpreting the historical record, often demystifying or debunking the orthodox version of the past. Secondly, it revises, indeed transforms, the conventions and norms of historical fiction itself" (McHale 1987, 90).

16 The reference to Pafka Kohout, Czech prominent communist poet of 1950s, is more than obvious here.

light of any photographic flash."[17] The ruler asks the young boy to describe his famous achievements: "He has created history and has asked me to write about it in the language of the old sagas and epics."[18] But when the story progresses we realize that, despite the discrepancy between the most-powerful-man's rule and the talented-young-boy's history writing (in fact two totally different discourses), they become strongly intertwined. The history describes reality but also predetermines it, according to its author's life; reality, being an object of the most-powerful-man's power and rule, must follow what has been written about it (prescribed) – to avoid any doubts: "…astonished, he read over my shoulder: 'The wind of treachery began to blow amidst the most worthy, and perfidy rattled the doors of our beautiful home, and for curs a cur's death!…' You do not mean it seriously, he became scared. But then he went and did it because he was a man of action, whereas I am only a labourer of the word."[19] In order to describe the very basis of the power of history, in the form of one of the narrator's dialogues with the reader, Kratochvil follows a parallel to modern quantum physics, the so called Butterfly Effect: "And all of you who write know very well that literature directly influences reality. It is impossible to set the point of a pencil to paper without switching on a laser beam, even a tiny one, perhaps miles away."[20]

What is the aim of this allegory? It definitely has a strong moral and political message: the young boy experiences a very strong erotic passion (whose object is an old, fat female gardener), which he himself calls the passion "wasteful love" ("pustošivá láska") – this opulent obsession and passion, parallel to the wasteful love of the young communist, highly influences his style of writing. If the most-powerful-man must follow what is prescribed for him in history, his rule necessarily becomes wasteful also. This is the reason why "the history of my homeland became a painful love song".[21] We can see that the circle of the relationship between reality and historiography and their meta-level has been locked: reality becomes described history and historiography becomes prescribed reality; both are the object of one narrative strategy. The whole allegorical set can be viewed as an allegory of postmodern practice itself: it refers exactly to the way postmo-

17 "Byl to člověk, jehož jméno se nikdy nikde neobjevilo a už taky neojeví a jehož tvář neokusila nikdy záblesků fotografických fleší" (p. 35).

18 "To on tvořil dějiny a mne požádal, abych o tom psal jazykem starých ság a hrdinských eposů" (p. 35).

19 "…četl mi ohromen přes rameno: I zvedl se vítr zrady přímo uprostřed znejvěrnějších a věrolomnost zalomcovala vraty našeho krásného domova a ti, kterým jsme dosud nejvíce důvěřovali, psům psí smrt… To nemyslíš vážně, polekal se. Ale pak šel a zařídil to. Protože on byl mužem činu a já dělníkem slova" (p. 35).

20 "…a vy všichni, co píšete, také víte, že literatura přímo ovlivňuje skutečnost a že není možné položit hrot tužky na papír, aniž by to – třeba kilometry odtud – nerozsvítilo aspoň maličké, bodové světýlko" (p. 35).

21 "…se dějiny mé země staly trýznivou milostnou písní" (p. 35).

dern literature functions in relativising the real; the allegorical meta-level thus follows only one general postmodern literary strategy.[22]

Regarding the connection between narrative and reality, there is another example of the relationship that further elucidates the points described above. In "Approximation" ("Přibližování") the narrator's landlord becomes so fat that he fills up his whole apartment and his only connection with the outside world remains the narrator himself. The narrator, informing his landlord about the real world, thinks that the most interesting news is of catastrophes and disasters. By describing real catastrophes and disasters the narrator brings these events slowly closer and closer to the landlord's apartment to keep them "real". He brings them so close that they become real: when he narrates a story about a giant spider entering their street, the narrator turns into the spider – this whole story is in fact a description of making unreal things real, or a description of the way postmodern literature effects reality.

From the history of Czech literature proceeds the important idea that any improper or immoral use of imagination has the power to become real, which bears an obvious connection to the typical paradigm of Crime and Punishment.[23] The theme of sin (whether deliberate or not) and of responsibility for one's own actions are other frequent leitmotives in Kratochvil's work. Punishment, of course, is and must be an integral part of this construction.

In "Ballad of the Elevator" ("Morytát o výtahu") four people meet in an elevator: a young man, a young woman, a man and an old woman; she is supposed to be snatched up to Heaven. Once the young couple realise that the elevator goes only to Heaven they decide to escape the trap – the only way to avoid Heaven is to commit a sin, the easiest in this case being sex: "And the idea was based on the realization that if they were to profane the elevator in an instant, it would no longer be able to fulfill its sacred purpose."[24] Several years later, a father (formerly the young man) discusses the sin with his son (who is the by-product of the sin), sitting on a hill above Brno and making his confession: "Holy old lady, travelling by elevator to Eternity! And how mother and I spoilt it for her! And how I have suffered on account of that my whole life. And it is immediately obvious that laughter creeps into the corner of his mouth. I was silent and gazed at the setting sun. For a while longer, father was on the verge of laughing but then he unbuttoned the collar of his shirt and laid his head on my knee. I took out the knife, testing its sharpness with my thumb, and lovingly put it to my father's throat."[25] This is a very transparent allusion to the very end of Kafka's *Trial*, albeit

22 "This is the confrontation I shall be calling postmodernist: where documentary historical actuality meets formalist self-reflexivity and parody" (Hutcheon 1989, 7).

23 In Czech literature firmly connected with work of Karel Jaromír Erben.

24 "A nápad byl založen na tom, že když teď okamžitě trošku znesvětí výtahovou kabinu, nebude už moci dál sloužit svému posvátnému úkolu" (p. 23).

25 "Svatá stařenka cestující výtahem na Věčnost. A jak jsme jí to s maminkou pokazili! A kvůli tomu já se celý život trápím. A hned je vidět, jak mu smíchy cuká v koutcích úst. Mlčel jsem a díval se na zapadající slunce. Otci ještě chvíli cukalo v koutcích, ale pak už si sám rozepnul

in a slightly different version, mainly because of the inclusion of laughter. Is this irony? If so, what about? Maybe about the *Trial* and the ways in which it is usually interpreted. Or perhaps that Kafka's novel is a funny one, from the author's point of view. Here we can see the very basis of Kratochvil's strategy: the eclectic montage works exactly the same way – clouding possible interpretations and bringing various parodic elements into it.

As we can see, in Kratochvil's stories there occur many different types of worlds; for example, in "Lovesong" a specific world seems to be inserted into another world that strongly resembles the actual world of the former Czechoslovakia. It goes without saying that to speak about any fictional world as if it were the actual world would be incorrect. On the other hand our intuition tells us that there are many different types of worlds in different fictions. One criterion we can use to analyse their variety is their relationship with the world we consider actual – as a result of which we label them possible, impossible, counterfactual, and so forth.

Many of Kratochvil's short stories take place in a specific world-mixture that can be called a hybrid-world. In general, there are fictions that do not violate our notion of the real world; on the other hand there are fictions that violate the notion substantially. In the case of Kratochvil's stories we often run into a world which, though different from the world of our reality, is placed in a world that highly resembles it. In "Legend of the Eternal Return" a miraculous world of speaking animals and eternal reincarnation is placed in the world of the common love story, while in "Ballad of the Elevator" the miraculous elevator to Heaven, the place of sinful sexual intercourse, is situated in a place that really exists (Brno, 42 Veveří Street).[26]

Nevertheless, there is one possible objection: are we not too bold in calling these places worlds? Maybe we should call them "miraculous spaces" or "subworlds", but we should bear in mind that they are merely fictional entities, not real worlds. Moreover, there is one more reason to retain the term "world" – fortunately in the book there is at least one example that definitely and literally refers to different fictional worlds. I must emphasize that the so-called multiplicity of fictional worlds is another popular aim of theoreticians, and is very often mentioned as a distinguishing feature of postmodern literature. Multiplied fictional worlds vary in many ways, the most common type occurring in the case of self-referential narrative that thematizes the act of narration.[27]

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límec košile a položil mi hlavu na koleno. Vytáhl jsem nůž, zkusmo se dotkl bříškem palce jeho ostří a láskyplně ho přiložil k otcovu hrdlu" (p. 24).

26 This feature has already been mentioned in the theoretical literature: "The strategy of interpolation involves introducting an alien space *within* a familiar space, or *between* two adjacent areas of space where no such 'between' exists. This strategy has a long history prior to its adaptation to postmodernist use" (McHale 1987, 46).

27 McHale specifies certain features of this kind of postmodern text: "…texts that seem both open and closed, somehow poised between the two, because they are either *multiple* or *circular*" (p. 109), and explicates the way they function in world-production: "Both types of

One of the most transparent examples of such a world can be found in Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*... In the case of Kratochvil's short stories we find multiplied worlds of a rather different shape. In "Ballad from the Mists" ("Balada z mlhy") the medium of trans-world transfer occurs via "mist"; in "From Gulliver's Travels" ("Z cest Gulliverových") the path to other worlds proceedes through the vaginas of various women; in the Heideggerian "Shepherd of Being" ("Pastýř bytí"), it is just a train. I would say that the first two are similar from the point of view that the main characters keep entering different worlds (via mist and vagina, respectively) and become real trans-world travellers. In the last case the traveller enters his own world again and again and thus the total quantity of being is gradually increased. The main character enters the same world repeatedly, such that he is the one who is continually multiplied and because of the increasing quantity of being he gradually becomes a sheep of being, and so on, ad absurdum.[28]

I have already mentioned that Kratochvil's fictional worlds usually consist of landscapes or structures we could consider natural, as well as of some miraculous elements or subworlds. Significantly frequent are the combinations of a fictional world that refers to the actual political situation in the former Czechoslovakia with various miraculous elements, or with elements that refer to different fictional worlds, usually already existing. However, one more feature should be emphasized as it is considered a specifically postmodern one, with regard to worlds containing miraculous elements – the bizarre (natural-miraculous) viewed as natural by its inhabitants. These worlds follow Kafka's world of *Metamorphosis*, where people are not surprised, no matter what happens in their world. An elevator to Heaven, speaking animals, doubles (doppelgangers), trans-vagina travels – nothing surprises them. This fact, so to speak, totally shifts our point of view towards the genre of fantastic literature.

Except for a couple of typically postmodern experiments, even the most bizarre and hybrid worlds in Kratochvil are based on common narrative modes and forms – there are none that would really challenge conventionally structured forms of narration. On the other hand, I cannot say that the short stories are merely conventionally shaped narratives with a series of bizarre motifs – such a statement would be false indeed.

It is evident that many of the short stories are just combinations of specific narrative forms and strategies connected with allusions to a number of discourses. This combination creates an unique referential framework which becomes a base for possible interpretation. The transparent allusions to other literary works, the mixture of the natural and the fantastic (the miraculous), the allegories and explicit references, the eclectic use of particular narrative forms, motifs and schemes

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strategy [Chinese box and Russian *babushka* doll] have the effect of interrupting and complicating the ontological 'horizon' of the fiction, multiplying its worlds, and laying bare the process of world-construction. A recursive structure results when you perform the same operation over and over again, each time operating on the product of the previous operation" (McHale 1987, 112).

28 McHale refers to these structured-world novels as "trap novels". See McHale 1987, p. 126.

– all these provide us with unique material for interpretation. The collage we have been offered mixes together many first-level (direct) and second-level (indirect) references; the joy of making the collage violates stable referential structures, purposely or not. The polysemantics of the texts seem to be not only a by-product of their structuring, but also an essential aim.

At the very beginning I quoted McHale's hypothesis about the difference between modern and postmodern literature – postmodern literature, according to him, was supposed to be centered around basic ontological questions. If we propose that the most important ontological question is: "What is a world?" then, to some extent, Kratochvil's work answers a slightly different question: "What is a fictional world?" or better yet: "What may a fictional world be?" If we propose that the world we consider actual is just a construct of a discourse, to a great extent created, developed and supported by a procedure of narration, then we can hopefully say that the question asked by postmodern literature contributes significantly to the approach of this ontological questioning. This seems to destroy some discursive structures whilst producing or inspiring new ones: "Nowadays everything in our culture tends to deny reality and promote unreality, in the interests of maintaining high levels of consumption. It is no longer official reality which is coercive, but official *unreality*; and postmodernist fiction, instead of resisting this coercive unreality, acquiesces in it, or even *celebrates* it" (McHale, 219).[29] Nevertheless, it is probably no deep philosophical, innovative adventure that tempts readers to read and enjoy postmodern literature – the joy of reading more likely has its basis in some specific construction of the possible realm with certain unique features, in both the destruction and production of texts and worlds, in the mixture of known and new forms, motifs and ideas, and in the search for new contexts and discourses.[30] In this respect the reader's expectation can be fulfilled, at least to a remarkable extent, by reading and enjoying Kratochvil's book.

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29 See also: "The postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life" (Hutcheon 1989, 2).

30 "There are other kinds of border tension in the postmodern too: the ones created by the transgressions of the boundaries between genres, between disciplines or discourses, between high and mass culture, and most problematically, perhaps, between practice and theory" (Hutcheon 1989, 18).

JIŘÍHO KRATOCHVILA POSTMILOVANÁ POSTMODERNA

Studie se soustřeďuje na jedno z klíčových děl české postmoderní literatury, sbírku povídek *Má lásko, postmoderno* Jiřího Kratochvila. Za použití teoretických nástrojů popsaných v pracích dvou předních teoretiků postmoderní literatury, Lindy Hutcheon(ové) a Briana McHalea, analyzuje jednotlivé formální a obsahové rysy Kratochvilových povídek. Na základě této analýzy pak nabízí jistou typologii prostředků a strategií, které Kratochvil používá k vytváření své vlastní osobité verze postmoderní literatury, respektive svých osobitých postmoderních světů – se všemi ontologickými důsledky a rysy, které pro tyto světy plynou. Autor studie vychází z předpokladu, že celá Kratochvilova kniha, a to včetně úvodních autorových poznámek o knize a o sobě samém, tvoří jednotný a záměrně strukturovaný celek, který tvoří specifickou významotvornou platformu. Na základě této platformy nabývají jednotlivé Kratochvilovy prostředky a postupy specifických významů, a zpětně tak přispívají k utváření této platformy.