

Part III: Five tides of postmodernism in Polish, Czech, and Slovak literature

Despite the fact that the history of postmodernism in particular West Slavonic literatures has not been written, already today a view from a comparative perspective, which would take into account both the inner development requirements of those literatures, their responses to the challenges of the master narrative of communism, and general outlines of the postmodern spirit as well as its literary strategies seen from the viewpoint of 1998, enables us to indicate certain joint tides in the development of postmodernism in West Slavonic literatures: Polish, Czech, and Slovak.

1. The archeology of modernism or postmodernism as the literature of exhaustion and its West Slavonic modifications

This theme encompasses phenomena associated primarily with the theory of the *nouveau roman*, linguistic and autotelic reflection on literature, self-referentiality as well as a tendency towards artistic anti-representation.

At the turn of the 1950s, various political thaws were accompanied by a gradual permeation into West Slavonic countries of the new accomplishments of French literature, no longer only of the so-called progressive orientation, i. e. favouring communist transformations. At this time, wide acclaim was won by the theory and praxis of the *nouveau roman*. The ensuing discussions inquired about representation, encountered also in local Polish tradition.

An awareness of the fact that "the tongue lies to the voice, and the voice to thoughts" was present already in Polish Romanticism (the cited sentence comes from the *Great Improvisation* by Adam Mickiewicz). Difficulties connected with deciphering the identity of an individual entangled in the language and its antinomies were tackled at the beginning of our century by Karol Irzykowski in his self-thematic, multistoried novel *Pa, uba* (1903), which is essentially an ingenious study on representative lies, generated by the writers' inability to free themselves from the pressure of existing intellectual, linguistic and literary conventions.

The question concerning the nature of the narrative in the process of arriving at the truth about the surrounding world and issues dealing with the identity of the individual, submerged in the "black sea" of unclear and puzzling problems, as well as the identity of the person who wields ultimate control over the narrative, were posed in 1961 by Wilhelm Mach in his novel *Góry nad czarnym morzem* (Mountains over the black sea), in which a structure of reflections on the manner of writing novels is added above the "normal", traditional structure of a novel. The mediator between both structures is Aleksander, a figure composed of the hero of the novel and his double - Xander, who "suggests the similarity and even identity of the author's 'I' " and the devised "I" (or He) (Mach 1961:11). The intention of those operations, which

render the black sea of uncertainty that encompasses reality as well as literary mediation in its depiction even murkier, rather than explaining them, was not to proclaim *the death of the novel, the death of the author, or zero degree writing*, as was the custom of the theoreticians of the nouveau roman, "but to oppose existing conventions of the novel and linguistic clichés, in order to be able to better grasp the shape of reality in the transformations of time". Critics participating in the discussions provoked in Poland by the nouveau roman recognised the literary work by Wilhelm Mach to be "a supra- novel" rather than an "anti-novel", and granted him a rank higher than the one ascribed to the works of Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor or Nathalie Seraut; the Mach novel was considered to be more interesting than the mass-scale and already commercialised rebours production of the nouveau roman, engaged in minute descriptions of a daily life, reified, cold, and alien towards man ("Współczesność" 1962: 1).

The fashionable codes of the anti-novel were also applied by the creator of Polish science fiction, the eternal experimenter Stanisław Lem, predominantly in his capacity as the author of two meta-fictions - the detective novel *Sledztwo* (1969, *Inquest*) and a collection of critical studies devoted to literary works he had invented: *Doskonała próżnia* (1971, *A Perfect Vacuum*).

In Czech literature, first place within the anti-representative prose of the nouveau roman type is held by the works of Vera Linhartová author of five books from the years 1964-1968, the most interesting being a collection of four novels in the volume entitled *Přestřež*. This is prose composed of linguistic questions (concerning the character of the linguistic statement) and epistemological inquiries (about the nature and existence of truth). The main theme is the linguistic "incapability" of producing an adequate reflection of reality, both in speech and in writing. Its source, in the opinion of Linhartová, is to be found in the imprecise way in which man expresses his thoughts, which frequently leads to fatal consequences, since it is not things in themselves, objects, situations, and unnamed issues, but words, definitions, and descriptions which possess major causative force. They may bring us closer to the truth, but, as a rule, they take us further from it, leading to numerous misunderstandings, especially in those instances when they speak about truths resembling each other jako vejce k vejcu (like two eggs). This is to say, declares the paradoxical conclusion drawn by Linhartová, that the deviousness of our speech depends on its closeness to the truth, since increasing similarity signifies the growing threat that the chasm separating the truth of the statement from the truth due to reality will become even deeper (Linhartová 1993:322).

The post-structuralistic prose treatises by Linhartová dealing with the language, in which the latter appears often in a personified form, are inscribed into assorted, broken plots, frequently resembling an inquiry conducted by a detective. In contrast, however, to the crime story, they rarely offer unambiguous solutions. In the prose of Věra Linhartová which is undoubtedly a legacy of the neo-avantgarde, the foreign reader is struck by the style of the statement - dull, with traditional verbal constructions, as rationalised as possible, and indicating more its connections with the classical tradition of Czech

structuralism than with the heritage of Czech surrealists, with which Linhartová was associated for many years, and which was full of unexpected and brilliant metaphors and images. Žilka (1997) and Krausová(1976: 451-469) wrote that techniques characteristic for the nouveau roman appeared in Slovak literature already in the 1960s in the works of Jan Johanides and Rudolf Sloboda. Self-thematic reflection and the creation of the meta-novel took place as late as the 1980s, a period which witnessed the publication of *Rozum* (The Mind, 1982) by Rudolf Sloboda. The self-thematic quality comes down to the reflexions of the narrator and hero of the novel in one person, concerning the preparation of a screenplay about Don Juan from Žbokriek. The novel is written from the viewpoint of a plebeian sage, and undermines belief in the Hegelian Absolute Intellect, giving rise to extensive discussions which in Slovak literature initiated a current of autotelic deliberations and praxis. Nine years later, they were expressed in the works of Dušan Mitana, author of the meta-novel *Hľadánie strateneho autora* (1991, Quest for the Lost Author). This novel, however, contains a special message connected with the current of the so-called search for God; as a result, we find it among a group of works pertaining to metaphysical, esoteric, transcendental, and religious problems.

In West Slavonic literatures, self-thematic prose, born during the "Sturm und Drang" period of the nouveau roman, produced numerous offspring, both in the domain of the novel itself, which at present evolves towards deconstructionism (Poland) or post-structuralism of the "Tel Quel" orientation (Czech Republic), as well as accompanying literary critique. In Poland, its path was paved by Tomasz Burek, Henryk Bereza, and Tadeusz Komendant -- critics loyally supporting all symptoms of meta-fictional, autotelic, and meta-novel reflection in literature. In Czech literature, the same function was fulfilled by Sylvia Richterová and Daniela Hodrová author of excellent works on the theory of literature, devoted to the theory of the novel in general: *Hledání román* (1989, A Search for the Novel) and *Román zasvěcení* (1993, The Initiation Novel).

During the 1990s, autotelic self-referential novels multiplied on a mass scale. They include Krzysztof Bielecki's *End and Fin Company* (1992), which develops a meta-fictional critique of the narrative in a world of values succumbing to incessant deconstruction, and the novel *Narracje* (1992, Narratives) by Tomasz Sęktas, a follower of the late Borges, reducing to an absurdity the thought that real events and illogical coincidences cannot be expressed, since the mirrors in which they seek their reflection are crooked and those who try to interpret them are themselves suffering from a deranged identity. The only solution is to write about "non-events", in other words, about that which never took place (Sęktas 1992: 135).

The dernier cri of this fashion is -- as Kuźma puts it -- is *Fabulant* by Anna Burzyńska (1997), whose hero decides to write a great novel, but is incapable of keeping his promise because, according to the rules

of the literary game established by Derrida, he is imprisoned within a network of quotations taken from other books, and is only capable of repeating that what has already been written.

The novel "derides postmodernism, post-structuralism and deconstruction. The 'Babylon sect' club is engaged in playing the 'difference' by Derrida, and the 'solidarity and variety' by Rorty, while a guru resembling Umberto Eco warns that 'postmodernism is like scarlet fever. It supposedly no longer exists but one has to go through it in order to become totally convinced that one will not become infected' " (Kuźma 1997: 70).

In the Czech Republic, the works of classical female representatives of antirepresentationism -- Věra Linhartová and Sylvia Lichterová-- give rise to uninterrupted great interest (mainly within the group of professional experts on literature), i. e. because they continue a current forbidden in Czechoslovakia for a period of twenty years.

Nonetheless, West Slavonic anti-representation and self-reflective novels as well as theories associated with them never found themselves in the centre of the interest of literary critique to such a degree as in American postmodernism; nonetheless, they fulfil a function similar to the one which was ascribed to their "anti-representation counterpart" in the West -- they shattered the traditional Balzacian and post-Balzacian novel, together with its accompanying world of values. In America, this world was described by postmodernists as "false humanism"; in Slavonic countries, experimental prose toppled not only classical models but also attacked new ones, established after the war together with the doctrine of socialist realism, imposed upon those countries. Into a programme-like socialist optimism it introduced Mach's "*black sea*", questioned the linear conception of the development of society and its literary equivalent (Sloboda's *Rozum*), and contrasted its own theory and practice with the Stendhal conception of literature, envisaged as a mirror strolling down the road, a theory which later became expanded by means of the doctrinal interpretations of Georgy Lukacs (Linhartová's *Prostořec*). Ignoring the demands of such categories as "typical", "class", "optimism", "collectivism", etc., which at that time socialist countries recognised as a condition necessary for "truth" in the novel, and by focusing attention on difficulties connected with reaching the essence of phenomena by resorting to thought and language, it inscribed itself *avant la lettre* into the postmodern sociocode. One of the determinants of the latter, especially at the stage of the impact of the nouveau roman and the celebrated thesis propounded by Derrida: "Il n'y a pas au de hors texte", the question about the manner of portraying reality, appeared to be more important than reality itself.

2. The West Slavonic theatre of the absurd nad the grotesque

Game, play, and playfulness are keys opening all the locks leading to treasures concealed in the labyrinths of postmodern literature.

Polish, Czech and Slovak postmodernism, viewed from the present-day perspective, appears to be not so much a domain of empty games as of meaningful games, in other words, those which possess direct references to non-literary reality and which turn that reality into an object of that game. The purpose of the game is life itself.

The themes of assorted games are the absurdities produced by the realisation of communist utopia, the so-called real socialism; they also include, especially in Poland, certain strata of natural tradition and Polish stereotype behaviour, which have become outdated before the eyes of contemporary writers. Finally, such themes include socialist newspeak. Due to the presence of censorship in the political life of those countries, games of this sort are highly metaphorised and full of assorted allusions, written in an Aesopian language. Their comprehension calls for contact between the writer and the readers -- a reference to universally comprehensible codes and their restructuralisation in the spirit of new concepts, an anti-fundamentalistic ideology.

The greatest importance in this process is assigned to the theatre of the absurd and the grotesque, which developed strongly already at the end of the 1950s in the works of outstanding playwrights. Sławomir Mrożek, author of such plays as *Męczeństwo Piotra Ochey* (1959, *The Martyrdom of Piotr Ochey*), *Indyk* (1960, *The Turkey*) or *Zabawa* (1962, *Fun*), as well as Tadeusz Różewicz, predominantly as an author of *Kartoteka* (1960, *The File*) and *Nasza mała stabilizacja* (1964, *Our Small Stability*). The premises of such a theatre are close to certain Western writers, including the "late" Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet or those whom Ihab Hassan described as the co-creators of postmodernism, representatives of the literature of *silence* so dear to him at the time; the same holds true for the works of E. Ionesco and E. Albee, whose plays are similarly encoded. Writing their dramas of the absurd, Polish authors were aware both of their spiritual affiliation with Western playwrights and their own distinctness. These differences were captured most aptly from the perspective of the four decades, which passed from his first one-act plays, by Sławomir Mrożyk, father of the Polish theatre of the absurd:

"As regards the theatre, this was the time (the second half of the 1950s) when the West witnessed the emergence of the 'theatre of the absurd', and by pursuing our own 'theatre of the absurd' we felt sanctioned on a world scale (...). Nonetheless, there was a difference between their and our 'theatre of the absurd'. They were of the opinion that life and existence themselves are absurd (see: existentialism), while we believed that it is the governing system which is absurd, and that without it our life would be meaningful. We were not interested in existentialist profundities and remained concerned with something much more urgent, namely the pressure of the totalitarian system"(Mrożyk 1997: 15) Thus, the object of this game

was grave, and involved undermining the sensibility of the system or protest against its delusions, reductionism, and utopian premises claiming that it is possible to control everything, even the dreams and hopes of the citizens. This aspect was placed in the forefront primarily by such as mentioned plays *Policja* (1958, Police), *Indyk* (1960) and *Zabawa* (1962), full of intertextual critical references to stereotypes of national culture, encoded not only in Romantic literature but also in its modernistic successor. In the spirit of postmodernism, Mrozek's drama *Tango* (1964) settled a brilliant and extremely funny account with the historical avantgarde, showing how rapidly the twentieth-century avantgarde had aged and became its opposite, i. e. a classic, while *Rzeźnia* (1973, Slaughterhouse) entirely disqualified the modernistic, metaphysical idea of pure beauty by confronting it with the cruelty of human nature and Nature in general.

In contrast to Mrozek, Różewicz was familiar with the problem of the absurdity of existence which he tackled, alongside infernal descriptions of banal daily life, in his drama *Stara kobieta wysiaduje* (1969, The Old Woman Gets Out). The absurdity of existence totally dominated the imagination of Tadeusz Kantor, author of a unique theatre and such outstanding works as *Umarła klasa* (1975, The Dead Class) and *Niech szczerą artyści* (1985, Let the Artists Die). Similarly to Beckett, Kantor was fascinated by death, transition, and the desintegration of man and civilisation, and frequently recycled material taken from Witkacy.

According to Mrozek, the inauguration of a battle waged by literature against the totalitarian system was feasible once the terror declined and the system began showing first symptoms of disintegration. In Poland, this process began in the second half of the 1950s, and a breakthrough was produced by the events of October 1956. In Czechoslovakia, the apogee of such desintegration took place during the Prague Spring (1967-1968), while in Russia -- at the time of the Gorbachev-inspired *perestroika*. Here also, as Herta Schmid draws attention, there emerged plays whose literary code, based on the principle of the absurd and intertextuality, posses a universalism that becomes part of the Western sociocode of the literature of the absurd (Schmid 1984: 176). From the late 1960s until the 1980s these are the plays by Alexander Vampilov, Andrey Almarik and Alexey Axenov; the works of the last two authors, only some of which were staged, contain comical references to the Polish Solidarity movement (*Aristofania s lyaguskami* by Almarik and *Tsaplya* by Axenov).

In Czech literature, the current of the absurd and the grotesque assumed numerous forms, but greatest importance for the development of postmodern tendencies is ascribed to the works of V. Havel, whose first play: *Záradní slavnost* (Festivity, 1963), which reduces to an absurdity the bureaucratised, Party language dominating in Czechoslovakia, was a strong blow dealt against a system leading to the alienation of the individual, embroiled in universal lies. The next plays, published officially or clandestinely, evolved distinctly towards postmodernism, while Havel's essays on current civilisation,

envisaged as attacks against technocracy rampant both in socialism and capitalism, are amazingly concurrent with the spirit of the reflections pursued by J. F. Lyotard in *La condition postmoderne*.

After the "total ban on publishing" Havel's plays, emphasis must be placed on the major role played in the development of Czech thought and aesthetics alternative vis a vis socialist realism by chamber theatres, such as the Divadlo za branou, Semafor, or the Ivan Vyskočil theatre, relegated to the distant peripheries but nonetheless greatly popular. In an atmosphere of universal aversion towards major social and historical themes, the playwrights of those theatres demonstratively abandoned great narratives. This tendency was accompanied by the rejection of the convention of theatrical art conceived as closed, definitively completed, and possessing a distinct dramatic construction. The comedies and dramas performed on small stages were typical for their postmodern fragmentation, the absence of a hierarchy, decentralisation, non-selectiveness, a penchant for intellectual games, and the breaking up of main motifs into parts by assorted poetic, musical, and technical insertions. Collage and montage were crucial words in reference to the structure of those spectacles. Plays were also staged in the form of happenings and performances. They made direct appeals to the imagination and sense of humour of the spectators and, in contact with the audience, developed verbal improvisations on a given subject. Such a formula became obligatory in the Vyskočil theatre, known for its high intellectual merits, whose plays are characteristic for their animosity both towards ordinary logic and the imperial logos, since even the greatest foolishness can be explained logically and the greatest nonsense can be unmasked by means of para-logic. This is the spirit of *Malé hry*. *Maléry* (Little Plays. Small Problems, 1967) by Vyskočil and Schmidt, which opened space to a multiplicity of options by means of the introduction of dialogue and polylogue and accentuating the spontaneous discovery of the world by a person unfettered by any sort of ideology.

In Slovakia, the current of the absurd and the grotesque, initiated in in Slovak prose by Dominik Tatarka's *Démon súhlasu* (1963, Demon of Agreement or Demon of Consent), was prolonged by the metaphorical dramas by Peter Karváš, written during the period of a struggle for so-called socialism with a human face, and depicting the surge of horrifying absurdity in public life. They include *Vel'ká parochňa* (Great Wig, publ. 1964, staged 1965), *Experiment Damokles* (The Damocles Experiment, publ. 1966, staged 1967) and *Absolútny zákaz* (Absolute Ban, publ. 1970, staged 1969).

During the so-called *consolidation*, a period characterised by growing suspicion towards that which undermined the totalitarian model of socialist realism, postmodern rebellion was taken over from the official stages by so-called studio theatees, relegated to the peripheries of literary life, and by assorted poetry stages, often created by amateurs, whose spontaneity, programme-like subjectivism, humour sensitive to the schizophrenic rent of culture and accompanying language deformations forced through an alternative model of literature and a comprehension of the world not as a sphere of compulsion but as emancipation from so-called historical necessities, with the aid of irony, skepticism, humour and fantasy.

Foremost place among the studio theatres was taken by Divadlo na korze (Theatre on the Corso), created by Milan Lasica and Július Satinský writers conducting brilliant games with words, unmasking falsehoods contained therein, authors of numerous adaptations and travesties of known works as well as three original plays: *Nikto nie je za dverami* (There is No One Behind the Doors, 1982), *Nás priateľ René* (Our Friend Rene, 1982) and *Den radosti* (Happy Day, 1986) -- a prediction of the unavoidable end of communist social utopia which consisted of enforced salvation of the world. Their undertaking was supported by L'ubomír Feldek who shattered not only ideological stereotypes, as in his play *Umenie neodist'* (The Art of Staying, published and staged in 1988), but also plays on national themes: *Janošík podl'a Vivaldího* (Janosik according to Vivaldi, published and staged in 1979). A major contribution to the task of bursting the balloons of official ideology was made also by the amateur folk theatre of Stanislav Štepka - the Radošín Naive Theatre, which remained naive only outwardly and actually was deeply subversive in posing the simplest questions about the meaning of the life of the average person, buried underneath slogans and trying to liberate himself from their burden. Šepka was the first in Slovak literature to embark upon the taboo problem of the Janošik tradition in the form of a comedy: *Jááánošíík* (1970). The author confronted composite intertextual games, referring to high literature, with Slovak folk tradition and the official class interpretation of the myth about the brigand, scoffing at the stereotype contained therein.

The liquidation of the totalitarian system denoted for Mrožek the demise of the absurd, and thus of the literature and theatre of the absurd. In the West, existentialist eschatology silenced the theatre of Beckett and Genet, but in Poland this feat was achieved by the impact of the fall of communism, whose absurdities nurtured it.

It is rather difficult to agree with the statement that we are experiencing a lack of absurdities, which still seem to thrive; undoubtedly, the paradigm of the theatre of the absurd came to an end at a time when censorship was supplanted by the freedom of speech, while the foundations of entire literary poetics, based on the above mentioned allusion, Aesopian language, and winks made at the audience behind the back of the censor, had toppled. The observation made by Mrožek is, to a certain measure, confirmed by the most recent works of Tadeusz Różewicz, who rewriting his universally known *Kartoteka* (1960), changed it into *Kartoteka rozrzucona* (1997, The Scattered File), and performs all kinds of provocation (the actors read a lengthy series of articles about beer in the hope that the audience will become bored and leave).

"The Różewicz provocation seems to consist in his obstinate recurring attempts at playing on a long-broken chord, obviously well aware of the fact that no sound will be produced" (Gębala 1998: 163).

Such a sound will not be heard because beer means beer, and an article signifies an article, and not an allusion to the system of governance, its injustice or the idiocy of current politics. All those things are described outright, and a spade is called a spade.

3. The prose of incredulity vis a vis great narrative and fascination produced by a multitude of reasons

The novel is regarded as the proper domain of postmodernism. Together with the novel, which dominated in West Slavonic communist countries, we enter the *mare tenebrarum* of the quantitative accomplishments of the epoch, out of which critics and scholars gradually extract sociocodes of postmodern prose.

Intertextualism, multiplied in studies into postmodernism, is not the most useful key for distinguishing postmodern literature from the writings of the last few decades, since literature has been intertextual from the very beginning of the world, and moved within a network of impacts and dependencies, which were always perceived and described, better or worse. Nevertheless, the fashion for Derrida and Kristeva, who claimed that "there is nothing beyond the text", as well as the forceful influence of Luis Borges, that antiquarian of contemporaneity, arguing that all books have been already written and arranged in a single bookcase, were the reason why numerous scholars placed intertextualism in the centre of their attention. We may ask, however, whether every intertextual work is postmodern, and what is the nature of the determinants of postmodern intertextuality, a question I leave unsolved.

Respect for the spirit and nature of postmodernism, which is the spirit of variety and multiplicity and not a single principle that, *nota bene*, does not stand up to critique, since life and its transformations always introduce something new into literature, obligates us to consider postmodern literature from numerous viewpoints, and not a single one; it also places upon us the duty of taking into account, within its changes, the forces of the impact of reality, elements of representation, which can be discerned behind even the most complex and postmodern literary strategies.

We accepted the assumption that postmodernism is only one of many literary sociocodes. Nonetheless, postmodernity, understood as resistance against haughty modernity, its belief in the power of leftist or rightist utopias, either Eastern or Western, and its master narratives, delineates the range of a new situation in which that code develops. Lyotard did not announce incredulity towards master narratives until 1979. The grievousness of the social utopia of communism in regions affected by its impact enabled writers living in "real socialism", much earlier than the Western followers of the left wing, under the spell of socialism, to perceive and present, in a confrontation with facts, the unreliability of the communist narrative and the threats to human liberties concealed therein, as well as spiritual and physical

subservience, hidden by a constant reference to the Intellect. The birth of postmodern prose within the communist version of modernity is associated with resistance against totalitarian thought or, to put it more broadly, the limitations and absurdities of fundamental thought.

a) Polish postmodern prose in a magic circle between a catastrophism and an impossibility

In Polish prose, a prelude to this process of tackling doctrinal and civilisational threats was composed of the postmodern works by Witkacy (their postmodern nature was accentuated by the West, although they possessed numerous intellectual ties with the modernist theory of art and metaphysics, against which the postmodernists tried to protect themselves by resorting to irony). This precursor of the Polish theatre of the absurd and the grotesque in their catastrophic and carnival versions, anticipated, both in his dramas and his prose and aesthetics, the approach of the most primitive and dangerous versions of totalitarian ideologies from the East. Witkacy demonstrated his catastrophism already in 1919 in a study *O zaniku uczuć metafizycznych w związku z rozwojem społecznym* (1919, On the Disappearance of Metaphysical Emotions in Connection with Social Development). Anxiety in the face of the encroaching era of totalitarianism and universal uniformisation, which would inevitably put an end to all individualism and freedom, imbues such novels as *Pożegnanie jesieni* (1927, Farewell to Autumn) and *Nienasycenie* (1930, Unfulfillment,) whose heroes spasmodically seek refuge against the looming end of the world in sex and drugs. Witkacy perceived the fulfilment of his darkest prophecies in the events of September 1939 and the Soviet invasion of Poland, and committed suicide.

After 1945, numerous writers were compelled to cope with the end of Polish "golden freedom" in public life. They included Tadeusz Konwicki, who initially, similarly to all young men of letters, was involved in the co-creation of master narratives, as evidenced by his socialist realistic novels: *Przy budowie* (1950, On the Construction Site) and *Władza* (1954, Authority) but soon liberated himself from the miasma of socialist realism, and in *Sennik współczesny* (1963, Contemporary Dream-book), nota bene regarded by the critics as the "Polish dream-book" (Lisiecka: 305), created the core of a new type of prose, in which events take place in reality and in a dream, and wartime nightmares mingle with the banality of everyday existence, alien to the requirements of a new era and concerning a group of people deported from the former Polish borderlands to a locality which is soon to be flooded. In *Sennik współczesny*, full of personal recollections of the hero, and a novel which is not quite postmodern but already pursuing that direction, and in which the grotesque is combined with the macabresque, Konwicki shows his real face by transmitting a feeling of the ambiguity of the new situation in which the country found itself in the wake of World War II, and in which it was no longer clear who was a friend and who a foe, and where betrayal, concealed under the label of ideology, was located. *Sennik współczesny* is noteworthy also due to the fact that twenty years later, in conditions of similar, enormous social uncertainty, other contemporary national dream-books appeared in the works of Czech and Slovak underground writers, both as a literary statement

and, more frequently, endowed with an autobiographical character (*Český snář* by Ludvík Vaculík and *Písačky* by Dominik Tatarka -- see further).

A demonstration of postmodern (*avant la lettre*) uncertainty and ambiguity became a prominent feature of the later works by Konwicki, similarly to an awareness of the comic aspects of life in the Polish People's Republic, shared by authors of the theatre of the absurd and the grotesque, and the danger concealed within this apparent banality. In *Wschody i zachody księżyca* (The Rising and Setting Moon) Konwicki appears as an opponent of the communist system, describing in a lofty and capricious manner Polish reality composed of great solidarity movements, interrupted by the proclamation of martial law in 1981; "he does not write a document but rather creates the illusion of such a document", and by freely dealing out praise and criticism to those fighting on both sides of the barricade, "he strives at creating a certain equilibrium of assessments", indispensable for the postmodern creative stand (Możejko 1995: 95).

This is the attitude taken by Konwicki also in many other of his works, including the celebrated novel *Mala apokalipsa* (1979, Little Apocalypse), which paints a grotesque image of the totalitarian peril not only of the ruling communist system but also of the opposition, which demands for the sake of a victory of other "only correct reasons" that the hero commit an act of self-immolation in front of the much hated Palace of Culture.

Konwicki becomes part of the postmodern paradigm not only owing to his ambiguous perception of reality and the experiencing of its fluidity, indefiniteness, strangeness, and amorphism, but also due to a number of autotelic writer's strategies entailing a novel about a novel, stories about stories, and the involvement of the reader into this game.

The concept of ambiguities is also the key to *Miazga* (Pulp), a novel by Jerzy Andrzejewski, who began writing it in 1963 and completed it at 1970, censors permitted the novel to be published as late as 1982.

Closing the novel at the beginning of the 1970s, i. e. after the March events of 1968 year and a trial of smugglers of emigre publications (a description of this trial opens the meta-novel), Andrzejewski had already accomplished two great narratives: Catholic and communist, which he co-created by means of his own works. At the end of the 1960s, he perceived and described the demise of the totalitarian narrative, showing its disintegration in categories and close-ups similar to postmodernism. This feature is indicated by the amorphous structure of the novel, composed of numerous narratives: notes from a private diary of the author, remarks about books which he read, conversations with assorted people, and fragments of the classical narrative in which something takes place and in which the author astounds the reader with his art, accompanied by glimpsed scenes and stories, devoid of any attempts at rendering them loftier, and in which the Polish cultural commonplace and its vulgar language come to the forefront. The multi-vocal

and multi-stylistic nature of this work corresponds to the amorphous structure of the reality described by Andrzejewski, which, similarly to the titular "pulp", is totally deconstructed and devoid of value. The deconstruction and fragmentation of reality is accompanied by its ambiguity and a constant questioning of assorted events (Go,aszevska 1995: 211-220). The conception of culture itself also changes. The author of uplifting Party books such as *Opis bitew i potyczek z Zadufkami* (1953, A Description of Battles and Skirmishes with Haughties) notices that Polish culture is no longer a space devoted to the creation of new socialist ethics, but a profound spiritual wasteland. Its shallow nature, deprived of roots, brings it closer to the Deleuzian conception of the rhizome, which spreads only under the surface. The author resigns from a global interpretation of phenomena and a reference to some sort of absolute truths which he once discerned in religion and then Marxism. Only the still glowing national feelings continue to pulsate under this surface.

Miazga is a novel symptomatic for the 1970s, a period in which the Polish intelligentsia lost its illusions, and which signified the end of all hopes for changing socialism into a democratic system, a premonition of the agony of the system, and a fear that this agony may last too long. In this instance, the disappearance of master narratives is linked with a felling of emptiness and political exhaustion.

An interesting postmodern phenomenon involves the late historical novels by Teodor Parnicki, whose attention encompassed global mixtures of peoples and cultures. Parnicki wrote usually according to the principles of circumstantial evidence, intent on discovering the truth about events and their heroes, deeply hidden in the tenebrous past. The multiplication of uncertainties is favoured by the narrative itself, constructed out of subjective transmissions confronted with equally uncertain transmissions by other persons; we are never certain what is true and what is false, what is a lie, libel, or ordinary gossip. At the same time, the figures are not merely fictitious or devised by Parnicki, but also include personae embroiled into the plot and taken from the literary works of other authors (e. g. Sienkiewicz's Zagłoba), a procedure which renders the situation depicted in a novel even more complicated. Either with or without actual and doubly fictional figures, history in Parnicki's novels assumes the form of a labyrinth of mysterious paths and routes, in which we get lost time and time again. The multiplicity of alternative historical and fictional worlds is the object of the self-thematic reflection pursued by the writer in a number of his works, chiefly in the novel *Zabij Kleopatę* (1968, Kill Cleopatra) and a volume of autobiographical essays: *Historia w literaturze przekuwana* (1980: History Transformed into Literature).

Polish literary critics maintain that the prose of Parnicki, together with its intellectual profundity and cognitive horizons, supersedes everything that has been written on the subject of history and its unsolved labyrinths by Luis Borges, the great antiquarian of contemporaneity and deity of postmodernists. This assessment appears to be quite reasonable from the point of view of the intellectual message of Parnicki's historical novels. A decisive factor for the success enjoyed by Borges is both the intellectual message of

his works and their form -- unusually concise and outright aphoristic. On the other hand, the novels of Parnicki constitute a great flood of words, images, and tales. In other words, comparisons of this sort will not lead us very far.

Nevertheless, Parnicki's works retain their significance because their author chooses his heroes amongst people of a complicated and indistinct ethnic past, the Others, the Different, the Aliens, who emerge from various regions of the world are born of mixed race, and who, in the conviction of the writer, are always the carriers of new ideas, introducing a creative ferment into world culture. In this manner, Parnicki promoted *avant la lettre* the idea of postmodern multi-culturalism, based on the "holy" postmodern principles of variety and pluralism.

Parnicki is not isolated in Polish postmodern literature. In the works of such writers as Andrzej Kułniewicz and Leopold Buczkowski, the prewar multi-cultural character of Polish territories, the majority of which belong to the former Soviet Union, is the object of a great lament concerning the lost multi-ethnic community which collapsed under the blows dealt by fascism or bolshevism.

In *Czarny Potok* (1957, Black Stream) and *Dorycki krużganek* (1957, Doric Arcade) Buczkowski depicts the spiritual disintegration which affected the races, religions, and cultural languages of the inhabitants of Podolia and Volhynia, accompanied by a disintegration of the traditional narrative; the novel loses temporal-spatial connections, the devised figures lose their unambiguous character and become blurred by the current of transformations, while their language, enrooted in other social structures and other periods, does not keep up with the changes introduced by an era of chaos and cruelty, and becomes its own parody. The documentary-collage interpretations proposed by the author are immersed in fantasy and myth. The representation of reality is portrayed in an extremely complicated manner, which, however, captures the metamorphoses of the period better than the traditional realistic novel.

In *Strefy* (1971, Spheres), Kułniewicz praises and mourns the cultural richness of the Polish-German-Jewish-Ukrainian community in Galicia, the former borderlands of Poland, which, despite various antagonisms, survived up to the outbreak of the second world war. This apotheosis of immense variety, shown against the backdrop of the colourless, uniform, and suppressed culture of the Polish Establishment of the 1970s, constituted a highly extraordinary phenomenon. Sensitivity to the multiplicity of cultures brought Kułniewicz close to postmodernism. He was not a radical and original innovator, as was Buczkowski, but he was well-read, and in his successive novels, none of which has been studied up to now, he adopted numerous Western postmodern techniques.

An interesting, albeit isolated phenomenon in Polish literature, is the emergence of the highly intellectualist, "professorial" novel, comparable to the ones written by Eco and Calvino in Italy or by

Kroetsch and Bowering in Canada, and containing a complicated system of meanings alongside the traditional plot, often of the detective novel, the adventure story, or the spy novel. Its most celebrated example is *Z po-wieść* (1989, *Z No-vel*) by the art historian Mieczysław Porębski, whose hero, in various historical embodiments, travels through numerous civilisations and cultures, trying to decode their iconic signs (described with professional mastery and a postmodern predilection for pastiche) in order to grasp the message of history.

It is simply impossible to envisage Polish literature without intertextuality, especially works copying with the Polish past. Those writers whom today we decipher as postmodern, try, with the assistance of radical irony, to dedoxify the past (the word dedoxification comes from the Latin *doxa* -- opinion), i. e. to cleanse it of all stereotype national images, whose sense they question in the light of new historical experiences. This trend is evidenced not only by the dramas of Mrożek but also his prose (i. a. his excellent story *Moniza Clavier*), the prose of Różewicz, Krzysztoń, and many others. Furthermore, the *Olga Lipińska* cabaret, devised already in the Polish People's Republic, up to this very day "entertains, muddles, and terrifies", to cite the words of Adam Mickiewicz, and is composed of quotations, mainly from Romantic literature, whose ironic references to the present-day condition of the Poles are a source of fun and instruction.

The fashionable palimpsest occurs in *Tristan 1946* by Maria Kuncewiczowa, in which observations based on the life and loves of the author's son are inscribed into the scheme of the mediaeval Tristan and Isolde; not so long ago, we would be inclined to follow the example of Northrop Frye and regard this novel as typical for the literature of cultural archetypes. In this case too, Polish national motifs appear distinctly, although the prime theme of the novel is love. Such questions and examples could be multiplied further.

b) Czech postmodern prose as a carnival masquerade of multiplicity of the truths

"Without pluralism there can be no postmodernism", Ihab Hassan proclaimed, adding, in concurrence with the American pragmatist William James, that it is "better to go without belief for ever than to believe a lie" (Hassan 1985:17).

If that sentiment, together with the opinion expressed by Welsch that pluralism is the core of postmodernism, is to be regarded as correct, then undoubtedly the precursor of thus understood postmodernism is the modernist Karel Čapek, all of whose works placed the epistemological problem of the multiplicity of truth in the very centre of attention. It is convenient to remember that William James was one of those to whom the young Čapek turned as he wrote his *Pragmatismus čili filosofie praktického života* (1918, *Pragmatism, or the Philosophy of Practical Life*). Those words of James, along with his oft quoted belief in the need for tolerance and respect for the ideas of others, profoundly influenced the

philosophical views of the author of *Továrna na absolutno* (1922, *Factory for the Absolute*), which we can regard as a true postmodern manifesto, that could be signed also by Richard Rorty, the guru of American postmodernism and yet another pragmatist and admirer of James.

Factory for the Absolute does not exhaust Čapek's deliberations on the multitude of truth; they permeate his essays and are to be found in his conception of anthropological pluralism, presented in the trilogy *Hordubal, Povetron, Obyčejný život* (*Hordubal, The Meteor, An Ordinary Life*). They are simply the contents of his life and the source of anxiety about the fate of mankind, but also the fount of magnificent fun, generated by observations of the limitations of the human mind and excessive pride in an exclusive truth (Janaszek-Ivaničková 1985 and 1989a). The word "play", crucial in the postmodern asyndeton of Hassan, plays an enormous role in the works of Čapek. But this is a type of play different from its postmodern counterpart. It is the play of rationalised discourses rather than that of unfettered grotesque imagination and black humour, so dear to postmodernism, although the works Čapek include also numerous elements of the grotesque.

In his studies on Czech postmodern literature, Bohuslav Hoffmann writes about the grotesque as a typical genre for postmodern art in general, "a genre which is capable, in a stylistically uniform manner, of expressing the tottering unity of the world, its heterogeneous pluralism. In the grotesque, heterogeneous thematic, ethical, and tectonic elements (high and low, tragic and comical, real and fantastic, vulgar and subtle, lofty and banal, ugly and beautiful, etc.) create stylistic unity, with emphasis placed on the low and peripheral position, from which human and artistic values are extracted" (Hoffman 1990:181). In my opinion, this is a correct approach to the comprehension and deciphering not only of Czech prose; the grotesque quality is strong, as we have noted, also in Polish and Slovak literature, but in Czech especially due to the role of the periphery, elevated to the rank of a centre (e. g. Hrabal) and the role of the corporeal low, contrasted with loftiness (e. g. Kundera).

The most outstanding and acknowledged representatives of Czech postmodernism are M. Kundera, B. Hrabal and Ludvík Vaculík, in his later works. Among this trinity, the unrivalled king of postmodernism and postmodernity is Kundera, whose political tetralogy: *Žert* (1969, *The Joke*), *La vie est ailleurs* (1973, *Life is Elsewhere*), *La livre du rire et d'oublier* (1979, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*), and *Nesnesitelná lehkost byti* (1984, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*) not only attacks the master narratives of the era (first the communist, Eastern version, and then, in the course of growing familiarity with the West, also Western narratives, both leftist and rightist), and not only imbues them with the philosophy of contingency, pluralism, the negation of the iron laws of history, etc., as well as animosity towards all dogmas, but does so with the retention of all the rules of the postmodern play; he generates a literary discourse based on the counterpoint of assorted truths and lies, reflected in the mirrors which the heroes show one another. Those heroes are doubled by their alter egos, and the described events are

brimming with amazing psychological surprises and develop in a atmosphere of a carnival masquerade. In his capacity as a expert man of letters, Kundera avoids the boring postmodern enumeration of things, the shattering of the meanings of his own statement, Borgesian tautologies, the antiquitarian stand, and all moribund literature. In *L'Art du roman* (1966; 1998, *The Art of the Novel*) Kundera, an acknowledged master of postmodern irony, extols art inspired by God's laughter, which does not recognise any ideological certitudes or eternal truths (Kundera 1988:127-135). This relativism of the Czech writer, his irony, and form of expression met with the highest regard and admiration of Richard Rorty, the most celebrated American postmodern philosopher, who in his acclaimed essay *Heidegger, Kundera, Dickens* (1995: 151) discovered in the Czech author a kindred spirit, a creator of new democratic utopia, in which all living creatures enjoy the right to present their own arguments.

Obviously, those words refer not only to the above mentioned works by Kundera, but also to his entire creativity, which lately appears to drift in a direction opposite to the goal of global postmodernism, namely, more towards *nothing matters, anything goes* literature than political commitment, and more towards the literature of exhaustion than the literature of replenishment.

In contrast to Kundera, B. Hrabal perceived the emancipation of man from the pressure of dogmas and political factors, official ideologies, and an artificial bureaucratised language, the Czech newspeak, in a return to the natural world which cannot be enclosed in abstract theories. This is usually the world of the urban peripheries, populated by people who preserved their authenticity and are capable of speaking their own individualised language which, transferred to the pages of Hrabal's works, usually in a non-stylised form, retains the original speech of his heroes. Reality depicted in Hrabal's lyrical grotesque is luminescent. An enchantment produced by the world, its variety, and the irreducibility of human existence to a single formula comprises the most characteristic determinant of the postmodern orientation represented by Hrabal, alongside such techniques as the specific role of the narrator, who is simultaneously the hero and the author, developed intertextuality, etc.

Ludvík Vaculík is regarded as a postmodern author upon the basis of a single work: *Český snář* (1983, *Czech Dream-book*), the Czech sui generis counterpart of Tatarka's *Písačky*. The language of this expression of a dissident rebellion against the regime is extremely rich and differentiated, situated on the antipodes of political newspeak. Similarly to the majority of postmodern works, *Český snář* is heterogeneous in terms of its genre and located on the borderline between a diary and an autobiography, the belles lettres and literature of fact, fiction and document, composed of stylistically diverse fragments (snatches of letters, records of conversations, dreams, reflection, auto-reflection and meta-commentaries. Resembling Tatarka's trilogy *Písačky*, it remains non-cohesive, non-selective, and fundamental in its anti-fundamentalism, oriented towards the structures of life and thought in Czech socialism.

Hoffman includes into Czech postmodern prose also the later novels by Vladimír Neff, author of *Královny nemají nohy* (1973, Kings Do Not Have Legs), *Borgiov prsten* (1975, The Borgia Ring) and *Krásna čarodějka* (1980, Beautiful Sorceress). This at first glance monumental fresco is actually full of radical postmodern irony, which deconstructs the conventional understanding of history, and desacralizes conceptions of the Intellect, Truth and Progress, idolatrously venerated by frenzied crowds. The multICODES of the novel, achieved by the introduction of a parody of an adventure-thriller and assorted intertextual games, in the form of citations and pastiche, characteristic for postmodernism, enable a more profound rendition of the intellectual subtexts of the triptych and the attainment of the intended artistic effect (Hoffman 1991: 53).

Postmodern features are also present in the works of Vladimír Páral, accused of conformity by Czech literary critics, a writer aiming at the emancipation of the individual, by means of a grotesque parody and ridicule of stereotype behaviour, from the pressure of everyday life and vulgar materialistic thought, which embraces the most intimate spheres of human life. The Páral version of postmodernism is associated predominantly with the form of his works and the frequent insertion of new contents into old texts. This is the case in *Muki obraznosti* (1980, Tortures of the Imagination), which draws a consistent parallel between the life of the heroes of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, and the behaviour of a contemporary hero, the 23 year-old engineer Marek, towards the slightly older Zinadia, who is conceived as a measure for attaining a career, or in the novel *Profesionální žena* (1971, Profession: Woman), a parody of sentimental melodramatic films, such as the adventures of Angelique.

We find elements of postmodernism also in the absurd-grotesque works of Ladislav Fuks, full of existential horror, drawing particular attention to the novel *Nebožtí na bále* (1972, Dead Men at a Ball) and *Vévodkyně a kuchářka* (1983, The Duchess and the Cook). In the second, highly heterogeneous work, an extensive vista of the years 1897-1898, a stage in an epoch nearing its end, closer, however, to the tragic-comical epic than an epic poem, the central problem is the uncertainty of human existence, aiming, together with man-made civilization as whole towards unavoidable death. The frequently recurring and typically postmodern motif of the mirror, which reflects the dead and the living, focuses attention on the domination in human life of the chaos of things and the pressure exerted by those supposedly inanimate objects upon man.

A specific role in the battle against the great narratives was also played by postmodern science fiction - that episteme of postmodernism, especially its utopian version. The most known Czech dystopias included *Maso* (1981, Meat, published in Toronto) by Martin Harníček, translated into English and Polish, an allegorical, monotonous, and obsessive story about the state of brutalisation during the Husák normalisation in Czechoslovakia, when people, entangled into the totalitarian system, kill and devour each other. This sombre novel is written in a highly rationalised, cold, calculated, and logical manner. The

rationalism of the individual and the system, contrasted with growing layers of human cadavers, kept in a central storehouse, piles of corpses and living people, who at any moment might be slaughtered, produces not solely macabre effects. The author attacks that which modernism valued the highest - the human Intellect - showing that rationalism, the Intellect, logic, all that of which the modern era was so proud and of which communism tended to boast, do not have to serve the progress of mankind, but, on the contrary, could lead to its downfall. A similar problem is discovered in a successive dystopia by Harníček: *O Albinovi* (1981, On Albin), much more interesting than his first work, and showing not only the struggle for existence in the totalitarian system, where the ruling minority determines the limits of human life, subsequently subjecting the condemned men and women to so-called devitalisation (naturally, declaring that this is performed for the sake of the welfare of mankind), but also portrays the structure of Party authority and the methods for reaching its peak by climbing the rungs of power. Such methods are based on two factors: the ability to torture people intended for devitalisation, and homosexual liaisons between Party leaders. The descriptions of tortures, frequently involving the sexual orgasms of persons carrying out the devitalisation, comprise a typically postmodern unblocking of all taboos and disclosure of cruelty characteristic for human nature, whose development is particularly "favoured" by the clime of totalitarian systems. The images of bestiality depicted by Harníček resemble certain Nazi conceptions, especially the stimulation of cruelty among young people connected with the Party (exercises in "devitalisation"); nonetheless, the historical time of the origin of the dystopia as well as the accompanying illustrations by Karel Trinkewitz, another Czech dissident (showing, e. g. comrade Brezhnev speaking at a plenary meeting and tortured young men) leave no doubt which part of the world and which totalitarianism the author had in mind.

Quite another type of science fiction is represented by Egon Bondy's *Invalidní sourozenci* (1991, Invalid Siblings), considered to be the catechism of the Czech artistic underground. The novel, written in 1974, is situated on the borderline between utopia and dystopia. Its plot takes place in the year 2600, in a country flooded by rising murky waters. The floating "corpse of the world" is one of the signs of the looming apocalypse.

Bondy would not have been himself had he not introduced into this dark picture elements of carnivalisation, not necessarily of the Bakhtin type but stemming from local sources of Czech humour, the Czech "legrace" (mockery). He achieved this by emphasising a large green arse, seen among the decomposing human and animal limbs scattered around the "corpse of the world". It becomes the object of games played by local boys until their attention shifts to yet another plaything -- the head of a goat. The accentuation of the green buttocks and the strange goat's head enables the writer, at the very beginning of his science fiction, to lighten the depressing atmosphere of the apocalypse by rendering the portrayed landscape not only tragic, but also, to use a Czech term, "srandovný, in other words, comical, although the word sranda come from srat (to defecate), and grants a specific aura.

The society inhabiting the land submerging deeper and deeper into the turgid and malodorous waters is a dystopian vision of Czechoslovakia. The text contains numerous references to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, carried out by "allied armies" in 1968, and the so-called normalisation conducted by President Gustav Husák, when the country of "goulash socialism" became dominated by total inertia. In Bondy's novel, society is composed of two hostile camps: the so-called dignitaries (Party activists, members of the militia, the armed forces, and special forces) together with the subservient intelligentsia, on the one hand, and the camp of intellectuals and artists, relegated to the social margin, and described by the rulers as "invalids", on the other hand.

Despite the fact that the framework events of the plot are apocalyptic, the crucial word for the Bondy brand of science fiction is not eschatology, but postmodern playfulness. Invalidni duchodci (pension receiving invalids), whose members include the main heroes of the novel, half-siblings marked with the letters A and B, do not toil, but indulge in assorted pleasures. The novel not only brings to life the old alcoholic paradigm, but also gave rise to a new narcotic paradigm, a symptom of postmodern times. Both play a considerable role in isolating the invalids from the spreading horror, which is produced by the blind faith of fighters for a better tomorrow and a successive scientific technical revolution, which is to bring the final realisation of a brave new world, but ends with the annihilation of everyone, with the exception of the happy and good-humoured invalids.

The life of the invalids is concentrated in a semblance of hippy communes, although their members are not necessarily young. In conditions full of joy, friendship, and happiness produced by the feeling of inner freedom, they create an alternative underground culture, contrasted with the academic spirit of the communist Establishment, which, on par with the quasi-culture of the "dignitaries", is an object of incessant irony and derision.

In accordance with the rules of postmodern poetics, which likes to mix fictional and real persons, the dead and the living, the Bondy novel is inhabited, apart from imaginary figures, also by authentic persons, such as Jan Lopatka, the Czech dissident to whom Bondy entrusts his testament. The underground is peopled by wandering spirits of authentic prophets or followers who assumed their names, the ghosts of Sir man Maharisi (who in the novel appears as Sakti Maharisi), the holy dervish Hafiz ben seych Al Ahdrü, and the fundamentalist spokesman of religious movements, Roi Solai, whose intellectual aggression gives rise to fear. A comic couple (who bring to mind a Russian version of Don Quixote and Sancho Pancho) assume the form of the bearded Marxist Lev Davidovič Mandelbaum, struggling for the luminous future of mankind, and his foolish faithful servant Osip, who drives a Russian troika. Finally, Egon Bondy himself appears in the novel as the no longer living cult classic of anti-regime poems and the co-founder of the Plastic Group underground music band, persecuted for performing the works near to John Cage, a postmodern guru also of the American youth.

The author of a post-script to the Bondy novel writes that was recognised as the "catechism of the Czechoslovak underground and not of some sort of a general underground, because this form of life bore no similarities to its lemonade counterpart in the United States and Western Europe" (Strýko 1991: 5). With all certainty, this rather jocular remark is close to the truth, because the end which history wrote to Bondy's novel differed greatly from the fate of alternative culture in Euro-Atlantic culture. In the latter, people harbouring views about art different from those proclaimed by the Establishment, or performing or listening to music different from the favourites of the rulers, were not imprisoned. The latter penalty was the plight of the Plastic People of the Universe rock band, a fact that, according to Strýko, stimulated Czech dissidents to announce the famous Charta 77, written in the defence of civic liberties and the freedom of culture.

c) Slovak postmodern prose under the sign of the rebellion against 'The Demon of Agreement'

From the viewpoint of its contents and form, the first actual postmodern prose in Slovak literature, and probably in Czechoslovak literature as a whole (Kundera's *Joke*, dealing with a similar topic, was written thirteen years later) is the mini-novel by D. Tatarka *Démon súhlasu* (1956, Demon of Agreement, or Deomon of Consent), which in a grotesque-absurd light showed Slovak intellectuals possessed by the binding ideology and unable to free themselves from it. *Démon súhlasu* was one of the first prose works signalling the opening of literature to new possibilities of artistic expression towards parody, black humour, and the absurd grotesque. This process was closely associated with the death of Stalin and the spirit of the thaw, making possible greater proximity with Western culture (quite often via Poland, where liberalisation made greatest progress) as well as a return to experimental literature.

The new currents made the greatest imprint in works by Ján Johanides from the 1960s, such as *Súkromie* (1963, Privacy), an account with Stalinism. At this time author sought inspiration in existentialism and the nouveau roman, which produced a complex narrative literary strategy and an in-depth psychoanalysis of the individual, whose authenticity and identity were shaped by resistance against the institutionalised form of existence. *Súkromie* contains very interesting references to Albert Camus and his works, written from the perspective of an opportunist hero who does not believe in the possibility of revolutionary solutions.

A postmodern battle against the great narrative about the emancipation of man was waged expressis verbis by Dominik Tatarka in his autobiographic trilogy *Pisáčky* (Scribbling, written from the 1970s and published abroad in the late 1970s and the 1980s). In this polymorphic, decentred, and collage work the story about the bitter plight of the dissident is composed of fragments of a diary, reminiscences from the past, letters to a lover, commentaries on political themes, images of reality, and dream-like night visions. Everyday life adjoins magic, the high style coexists with the low style, shocking descriptions of sexual

experiences -- with a prayerful attitude towards adored women, poetic surrealistic depictions of nature -- with a vulgar vocabulary employed by Tatarka to attack representatives of the hated Husak regime. The author's attitude towards time changes radically. Linear time, linked with the metaphor of progress, is replaced by ritual time, associated with the cycle of the life of nature, birth and death. A typical feature of Tatarka's novel is a postmodern approach to nature. In accordance with the spirit of the new ecological vision, the author discerns a profound cosmic union between man and animals, birds and plants (Janaszek-Ivaničková 1996a and 1996b).

From the 1980s, the leading representative of postmodern literature is Pavel Vilikovský, translator of British and American literature into Slovak and an expert at using the postmodern code. His numerous novels, once written for the samizdat and published at the end of the socialist era, include *Večne je zelený*. (1988, Evergreen...), *Kôň na poschodí slepec vo Vrabľoch* (A Horse on the Storey, a Blindman in Vrabľ, 1989) and stories: *Eskalácia citu* (Escalation of Emotion, 1989) and *Slovenský Casanova* (Slovak Casanova, 1991). Vilikovsky introduced into Slovak literature the up to then forbidden or non-existent problems of homosexuality, prostitution, diverse sexual perversions, etc. In *Slovenský Casanova* he made bold usage of the postmodern principle of intertextuality, and with the aid of a pastiche, parody and persiflage of assorted dogmatic texts, suffering from an inflation of words, and cited in letters to a lover, he discredited the erotic impotence and intellectual sclerosis of a contemporary Slovak Casanova -- Party agitator and activist, whose love conquests were accomplished among old-age pensioners gathered at lectures given by him in a Political Education Home.

The object of numerous intertextual references in *Večne je zelený* and *Krutý strojuvodka* is the national history of Slovakia and the Slovak national character. The Vilikovský intertextualism serves a ruthless besmirching of all national sanctities, especially those connected with the Štúr period, which now, after the regaining of independence, i. e. from 1991, is the object of a boundless and uncritical cult.

The growing leniency of censorship made it possible for new names to appear in Slovak literature or a return to the literary scene of former dissidents, headed by Martin Bútora and Pavel Hríz. The new postmodern talents included Peter Pišťanek, author of *Rivers of Babylon* (1991), a novel portraying the life of the demimonde. By employing numerous codes regarded as low, such as the crime story, the spy story, the thriller, and even the comic book, he created a veritable manners and morals thriller, showing a terrifying image of early capitalism in Czechoslovakia, when primitive tricksters and bandits, lusting after money and power, compete for key state positions.

Postmodernism is also attracting writers of the older generation, especially those who always kept up with changing literary fashions. They are, in the first place, Peter Jaroš who in his most recent novels, such as *Psy sa ženía* (Dogs are Marrying, 1990), or *Milodar slučka* (1991, The Noose is a Blessing) applied,

among others, the postmodern strategy of the game of writing texts about texts, and in a kaleidoscopic interpretation, mixing together the present and the past, embarked upon settling accounts with the methods used by the communist authorities to manipulate people.

4. A new phenomenon in postmodernism -- literature in the shadow of the spirit

An entirely new phenomenon, rather unexpected in postmodern literature which was supposed to be consistently immanent, secular, and free from the temptations of transcendence, is the metaphysical novel revealing a transcendent, esoteric, and frequently occult and religious character -- a novel which remains in the shadow of the spirit.

An outstanding representative of this trend in Czech literature is Daniela Hodrová author of novels translated into numerous European languages: *Podobojí* (1991, Under Two Forms), *Kukly* (1991, Chrysalis) and *Théta* (1992, Théta- the sign of death), components of the trilogy *Trýznivé mesto* (Town of Suffering), a story about Prague and its history seen from the perspective of a female narrator who lives next to the one of the local cemeteries. The trilogy is peopled by a crowd of living and dead figures, fictional and real, authors of the belles lettres as well as their literary personae, ensconced in Czech national tradition, whom Hodrová treats on par with the fictional figures of her own making. The author, an expert on the Middle Ages, brings to life old beliefs, agnostic and esoteric myths, and sets into motion the rich resources of secret knowledge with which magic Prague, a town remembering the times of Emperor Rudolf II and occult decadence from the turn of the nineteenth century, concentrated on the symbolic of infinity and the passage of time and death, once abounded. In *Trýznivé mesto*, Hodrová shows the coexistence of the living and the dead and, in a reference to Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, she descends into the abyss of spirits.

In Slovak literature, the quest for God is performed by Dušan Mitana. In *Hľadanie strateného autora* (1991, In Search for the Lost Author), written in accordance with the rules of postmodern meta-fiction, involved in the explanation of the creative process, the author conducts a complicated game with his readers, his wife, whom he abandons, and his friends, whom he avoids, trying to conceal the true reason for his absence. The latter is caused by a quest conducted by the hero, in other words the author himself, for God-Demiurge or for the possibility of negating His existence. The book brims with footnotes explaining different religions (from Sumerian cults to Jehovah's Witnesses), and constitutes the history of an atheistic lack of belief that ends with a discovery of traces of Christ and the author's acceptance in his real, non-fictional life, of the cognomen of Krist; this is yet another game with the reader, since the name Krist not only brings to mind Christ, but also the maiden name of the author's wife: Kristová. In one way or another, from that time on new books by the author of *Hľadanie strateného autora* are published under the name of Dušan-Krist Mitana.

Polish literature and its new inquiries are concerned not so much with finding God as with discovering and deciphering the Book containing the mystery of the essence of the world, the anthology of human existence, the truth of history or rather its absence. This is the theme of *Podróż ludzi Księgi* (1996, A Journey of the People of the Book) by Olga Tokarczuk, a novel written in a double literary convention, i.e. that of a philosophical discourse and a fairy-tale-travelogue. In a creative dialogue with *The Name of the Rose*, the author develops the topos of the holy book, so fashionable in postmodernism (Tokarz 1997: 78).

5. Postmodern intertextual empty games, or a return of the "nothing matters, anything goes" postmodernism

The postmodern literature of a game played for the sake of a game, and of the nothing matters, anything goes variety continues to be cultivated by numerous representatives of the younger generation of writers; in Poland, this is the brulion generation or the so-called Parnassus bis, i.e. authors born after 1960. They include Manuela Gretkowska, who shocks her readers with assorted sexual perversions, necrophilia and Parisian spleen in such works as *Kabaret metafizyczny* (1995, Metaphysical Cabaret) or *Tarot paryski* (1995, Parisian Tarot). In the Czech Republic, literature of this type is represented by the talented parodist Michal Viewegh, author of *Nápady láskavého konfigurační* (Ideas of a Kind Reader), a collection of 21 entertaining pastiches -- a parody of Czech (Hrabal, Kundera, Richterov and ákvorecků) and foreign writers, e.g. Moravia, Saint-Exupery and Miller; to a certain measure, the same trend is cultivated by Jiří Kratochvíl, who in his charming and highly imaginative novels employs elements of postmodern poetics for purely commercial purposes, as the author himself admits. Apparently, the same targets are served by the witty and terrifying stories about Stalin who, changed first into a mouse and then a cat who devoured the mouse, dictates his reminiscences to Miss Yagoda (her surname alludes to the famous KGB chief) with a horrifying effect (Kratochvíl, *Ma lžsko*, post-moderno, 1994). This volume, dedicated to Ivan Vyskočil, master of Czech absurd-surrealistic humour, contains numerous reference to Luis Borges.

In Slovakia, an excellent example of "nothing matters, anything goes" literature are the works of Tomáš Horváth, a young man of letters and a professional theoretician of literature, and thus an expert on its games, as well as an author of two volumes of novels. The most recent one, *Niekoľko náhlých konfiguracií* 1997, *Several Sudden Configurations*) contains seven stories presenting events in accordance to early recipes for a postmodern work, and thus are deprived of any sort of logic and causal-effective relations. They are also devoid of sense. These texts about other texts include intertextual references, so dear to postmodernism, to particular fashionable living authors as well as those of the past (such as the classic Marquis de Sade and his perversions, or John Barth and Anthony Burgess).

Absolutely nothing stems from those novels apart from the fact that the author flaunts his familiarity with fashionable motifs and tries to draw the reader into solving his puzzles. The impact of snobbery and fashion upon postmodern literature is so great that no one dares to express his disapproval outright. The majority of the above mentioned works are moribund already at birth.