# Constant Elements and Changes of Lyrical Principles in Poetry, Prose, and Drama in 20th-Century Czech Literature. A Case Study of František Hrubín

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**MÁLKOVÁ, I.: Konštantné prvky a zmeny lyrických princípov v poézii, próze a dráme v českej literatúre 20. storočia. Prípadová štúdia František Hrubín**
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František Hrubín (1910–1971) exemplified a distinctive type of lyricism in Czech literature starting in the 1930s, with melody and metaphor serving as the hallmark characteristics of his lyrical style. Over time, lyrical etudes gradually transformed into lyrical-epical ballads. Hrubín's lyrical principles reflected his personal, historical, and axiological context. His prose and drama explore the theme of the journey from life to death, presenting various temporal concepts such as the coexistence of multiple temporal layers and temporal overlaps. As a result, our understanding of the present is shaped by memory and recollection, juxtaposing the fleeting with the eternal. The lyrical subject evolved into a lyrical representative or speaker, which is evident in Hrubín's lyrical-epical works, the characters in his plays, and the narrators in his prose. Hrubín's lyrical landscapes, oscillating between urban and rural settings, unveil a liminal conception of the lyric that blurs the boundaries between documentary and contemplative lyric.

**Kľúčové slová: lyrické princípy, metafora, poézia, próza, dráma, 20. storočie, česká literatúra, František Hrubín**

From the perspective of the lyric, 20th-century literature associated with Central Europe provides several approaches for systematic study and interpretation. It can be analysed through a literary historical lens, highlighting that poetry is thematically and motivically linked to the two world wars, the Holocaust, the "Iron Curtains", waves of emigration, and the tension between freedom and power. One can concentrate on poetics – the liberation of words, lines, and poetic forms – as presented by the diverse currents of the avant-garde across various languages and historical periods. It is also possible to focus on the poles[1] of destruction and fragmentation, discovering in lyrical imagery alternative expressions of a civilization that repeatedly finds itself in a state of upheaval. Reverberations of themes and echoes of formal devices, structures, genres, and expressions resonate throughout the century, and their evolved forms can still be recognized.

František Hrubín (1910–1971), the Czech writer whose work is examined in this study, experienced several significant historical turning points, including both world wars in Europe, the rise of Communism in Czechoslovakia, the emigration and imprisonment of friends for ideological reasons, and his own marginalization from public literary life. Historical and literary circumstances inspired this profoundly lyrical author to translate plays and poetry, compose children's poetry, create original dramas and prose stories, and engage with film studios. He collaborated with prominent directors in live-action films and particularly in the realms of animated and puppet films. He wrote short stories for film, texts for puppet performances, songs for fairy-tale films, and he adapted his own poetry, novels, and plays into film scripts.

The character of Hrubín's lyric is shaped by the nature of literary events and the trajectory of his life, whether that be expressed through his original drama, poetry, or prose. In every literary form, through lyrical elements and principles, he reconnects with the roots of poetic tradition and humanity. Bedřich Fučík (1900–1984), an important literary critic and editor and one of Hrubín's friends, who himself became a political prisoner, expressed this in response to the poem *Lešanské jesličky* [Lešany Creche] in a letter dated 27 December 1970: "I am moved by the experience you have gone through in your life, and I ask you to once again accept my heartfelt thanks for all that I have come to know through you and your words."[2]

## Lyrical principles

Lyrical principles act as a lens for examining Hrubín's dramatic, poetic, and prose works, which represent a phenomenon that embodies the intricate characteristics of poetry, prose, and drama in Czech literature from the 1930s to the 1970s. They can be broadly defined at the outset. Contemporary lyric theory aligns with Eva Müller-Zettelmann's definition. Lyrical tendencies are marked by brevity, a diminished fictional element, a more intense formal organization,

1 Here we need to keep in mind the true nature of the pole as a point through which an imaginary axis of rotation (e.g. of the earth, but also of attitude) can be guided.

2 Memorial of National Literature – Museum of Czech Literature Prague, Czech Republic. Archive collection of František Hrubín. Own correspondence. Received: Fučík, Bedřich to Hrubín, František, letter dated 27 December 1970.

a greater degree of aesthetic self-reference, increased deviations from linguistic norms, and an elevated level of epistemological subjectivity (Culler 2020: 54). From an alternative viewpoint, the parameters of the lyric serve as tools for lyrical expression – considering the lyrical mode as an event and lyrical speech as a ritual. The lyric's explicit hyperbolicity is also highlighted (Culler 2020: 54–58). In relation to language and utterance, the foundation of the lyric remains "ritual performative speech" (Culler 2020: 69) and an "inductive approach" (Culler 2020: 27). The inductive approach can also be utilized in contemporary analysis, particularly in fields such as architecture, where it refers to a perspective for perceiving a city's internal spatial structure or a method for understanding how an overarching image of transformation is constructed. The latter parameters, related to the linguistic and structural dimensions of the work, will be crucial for identifying the lyrical principles in Hrubín's writing.

The outlined dimensions of the lyric – both general and selective – along with the principles that define it, ultimately connect back to ancient classifications and the foundational concepts found in literary theory dictionaries. To grasp the principles of lyric, it is essential to consider categories such as form, genre, language, trope, figure, and speaker. This study examines genre through the lens of Aristotle's rhetorical theories with a particular focus on epideictic speech, which emphasizes praise and blame as well as virtues and vices (Culler 2020: 40). At the heart of this discussion is the nature of the speaker – encompassing the poetic "I", the lyrical subject, the narrator, and the scenic voice – which is rooted in the belief that poetic expression is "a certain mode of being in the world" (Culler 2020: 39). These utterances also reflect an awareness of the characteristics of the selected language (Czech), including its distinct rhythm and melody, its historical linguistic echoes, and elements derived from folk culture.

## Lyrical principles defining the poetics of Hrubín's work

The historical definition of lyrical principles for a specific author provides more insight into their poetics than a general framework. Throughout Hrubín's forty-year creative career, his work was examined and analysed by several prominent figures in 20th-century Czech literary criticism. One of the most notable assessments was made by František Xaver Šalda (1867–1937), who recognized melody and metaphor as key characteristics of Hrubín's artistic expression.[3] František Halas (1901–1949), a leading figure of Czech interwar poetry, defined the lyric through perspectives that resonated with Hrubín. For Halas, lyrical poetry remained a realm of the mother tongue – marked by simplicity and by revelations of the mysteries of life and death. The lyric offers "glimpses into the meaning and marrow of things" (Halas 1958: 16), bringing both unease and sensory disruption but also "the miracle of new vision and of a state of rebellion" (Halas 1958: 13). Halas was convinced that lyrical poetry "returns reality to its original chaotic state, with the awareness that this state conceals lyrical princi-

3 Šalda, a founding figure of Czech literary criticism, wrote: "A quiet ecstatic, who sees what escapes others: ultraviolet colours and tones; a beguiling melodist, all the more beguiling because the melancholic song of his blood is broken into sobs by a longing for spirituality and a sorrow of the unredeemed. [...] Hrubín is often a master, thanks to his magic wand called metaphor" (Hrubín 2010: 351).

ples within other non-lyrical forms and genres, in which they might crystallize in new and unrepeatable ways" (Halas 1958: 9). He believed that the poet's language represents "the childlike speech of the world, [...] as well as its wise memory, ultimately distilling the very essence of all knowledge" (Halas 1958: 9).

Emanuel Frynta's (1923–1976) reflections as a translator, essayist, and poet are also crucial, as they trace Hrubín's evolution from his debut to his final works. In his letters and essays, Frynta highlights several lyrical principles in Hrubín's work: a constant engagement with unsettling reality; a sensitivity to language that echoes the past, is challenged by the present, and which resonates with the sounds of the future; and an openness to all impulses, whether they shake the creator physically or emotionally. In 1947, when Frynta reflected on the worn-out nature of poetic devices in Czech poetry, he expressed concern about the reliance on poetic props, rhythmic and formal precision tending toward schematism and automatism, and the deformation of poetic language that operates with "an expressive register already subconsciously felt by the reader as something familiar". He was troubled by the fact that lyrical "'loci communes' enter the work effortlessly, automatically, and are therefore perceived automatically" (Frynta 2013: 26–28). At the same time, in a letter to Hrubín written during this period, and despite his usual critical stance, Frynta offers encouraging words of recognition for Hrubín's poetic work. From the perspective of this study, he identified several of Hrubín's lyrical principles:

> It is also clear to me how greatly you contribute to the necessary regeneration of the Czech poetic language – through your new expression and bold vision, grounded in a new primary relationship to reality (by which I mean both material and spiritual reality). And for another reason your poems [...] are remarkable: they contain a metaphysical unrest, not a passive static quality [...]. That is the very generative process of seizing things (in the broadest sense) in their mysterious dynamism drawn from cosmic connections.[4]

In his public and private reviews of Hrubín's books after the Second World War, Frynta identified the "monumental simplicity" of expression and a profound awareness of life's roots, grounded in a specific place on Earth and in death, as key aspects of his work. Frynta explicitly highlighted the presence of "a love for the ancient land, for the native land with the banner of the dead in its roots, for that land which calls from the ages into the present" (Frynta 2013: 7). He particularly valued Hrubín's ability to let an archetypal being – one that still holds mystery or a message – enter a poem. Supported by Hrubín's work, Frynta believed that a poet must listen and that a poet's language must remain "a site of discovery, a witness-bearing system of imprints from that great universe of poetry" (Frynta 2013: 262). He believed that the lyric must simultaneously (and paradoxically, though typically for 20th century Czech poetry) "enlist the help of everyday human speech" (Frynta 2013: 263).

4 Memorial of National Literature – Museum of Czech Literature Prague, Czech Republic. Archive collection of František Hrubín. Own correspondence. Received: Frynta, Emanuel to Hrubín, František, letter dated 28 March 1947.

The characterizations provided by Šalda, Halas, and Frynta are essential markers for defining the lyrical principles in Hrubín's work. These principles also permeate every facet of his creative activity. Linguistic and poetic principles contribute to the definition of genre and transform it. The conventions of artistic forms – such as film, fiction, and theatre – are stretched beyond their traditional limits, revitalizing and timelessly enhancing the figurative expression found in Hrubín's work.

## Selected lyrical principles in Hrubín's work

The lyrical principles outlined above are consistently present in Hrubín's work. They develop distinctive authorial traits that impact the thematic, formal, and generic elements. Their transformation is linked to the experience of new human and professional realities. These lyrical principles interweave and transcend boundaries, including those of individual poetic tropes and figures as well as traditionally defined literary genres. They create a distinctive synthesis of the lyric, epic, and drama. These elements can be identified throughout Halas's statement, which suggests that a chaotic state unveils additional possibilities that are uniquely and unpredictably embodied by various metaphorical images, forms, and genres. At the same time, they transform into what Halas referred to as a "repository, a testimonial system of imprints of the great universe" (beyond mere poetry).

This study examines the distinctive principles and their essence in Hrubín's final creative period, placing a special emphasis on the dramas *Srpnová neděle* [August Sunday] (1958), *Oldřich a Božena* [Oldřich and Božena] (a 1968 stage production, published in 1969), and *Kráska a zvíře* [Beauty and the Beast] (1970). To grasp the characteristics of the lyrical principles in these works, this study also examines Hrubín's contemporaneous contributions to poetry and prose publications, poetic cabarets, and film from the late 1950s through to the early 1970s. By employing these lyrical principles, the study intends to showcase the semantic dynamics present in the poetry collections and compositions *Proměna* [The Transformation] (1957), *Romance pro křídlovku* [Romance for Flugelhorn] (1962), *Černá denice* [The Black Morning Star] (1968), and *Lešany Creche* (1970), as well as in the prose works *Doušek života* [A Sip of Life] (1949) and *Zlatá reneta* [The Golden Reinette] (1964).

## Principles of metaphysical unease

The principles of contrast, parallelism, overlapping, recurrence, and naming frequently emerge from juxtapositions in Hrubín's work. The restlessness and sensory disturbances that underpin Hrubín's poetics are grounded in fundamental traditional principles. As words, images, and timelines are presented side by side and in sequence – often repeatedly – they reveal not only their opposition but also their overlap. As a result, their unambiguity is disrupted, leading to their semantic transposition (variation) and transformation.

## The lyrical principle of contrast and parallelism

The lyrical principle of contrast and parallelism is constantly present throughout Hrubín's poetry, prose, and drama, evolving gradually over time. Extreme

values within the thematic realm (evil – good, life – death, youth – old age, love – barrenness, naivety – maturity, expectation – apathy, energy – fatigue, and the like) do not, over time, acquire further distinctive features. On the contrary, their controversial nature is shaped and heightened – perhaps paradoxically – by their closeness. These elements are positioned alongside each other, often in different iterations, leading to uncertainty in their definition. Doubts resurface: what is the true essence of what is portrayed or conveyed? What significance do the recorded events hold in the context of human life? What historical interpretation lingers with them?

Hrubín employs the principles of contrast and parallelism, as demonstrated in his plays by the staging of the speech and utterances of individual characters. Key dialogic scenes continue to feature evocative theatrical dialogues while also adopting the characteristics of staged monologues. In such a situation, each character delivers a self-identifying speech, addressing themselves or the audience rather than primarily focusing on their scene partner.

In the play *Oldřich a Božena aneb Krvavé spiknutí v Čechách* [Oldřich and Božena, or a Bloody Conspiracy in Bohemia], Hrubín utilizes the fact that that the main character of the entire conflict, Božena, never actually appears on stage even though many lines are addressed directly to her. In a monologue, Oldřich speaks to his lover, the mother of his unborn child, while simultaneously conveying covert yet derivable messages to the audience through metaphorical and allegorical language. The timeless message takes this form:

> And on your belly, there are a hundred times more touches, / than there are peas on a pod; when I step away, / you feel them under your skin and your legs long / like swift streams to keep flowing around me. / My freedom, my love, is only in you. If I were / to lose you, at that moment I would lose freedom too, / the sky blue, the wind, and the forests, all of it is you, / I am still not sated with you, still not full... / You won't be alone, my love, don't be afraid... / If it had to cost anything, I won't give you up! (Hrubín 1969: 26).

The character poses questions to the audience, including rhetorical inquiries, that extend beyond the confines of the play. The stage directions also reinforce the semantic shifts.

> *The stage darkens and the light falls only on Oldřich.* Guntr's Voice: Don't you feel that the ceiling suddenly got lower? / Tomorrow the beams might press your head down to your shoulders / and the walls will crush your chest and sides. The soul will have no place to fly out through. / How do you want to defend your freedom, / you poor little prince? / Are you willing to sacrifice it ... for one woman? // [...] Guntr's Voice *(stern, solemn):* What use are your firmly built limbs here, / little tyrant whose tiny realm / the geographer won't even mark on a map? (Hrubín 1969: 25).

The lyrical principle of the poetic figure transforms metaphor from a tool that defines the character of an image in a single poem in lyrical poetry,

or a specific theatrical scene in drama[5] into a parable involving the transition of metaphor into the framework of a genre. *Oldřich and Božena* is thus more than just another romanticized theatrical piece about a mythical national history.[6] The chosen subtitle (another variant of contrast) suggests this: *aneb Krvavé spiknutí v Čechách* [or a Bloody Conspiracy in Bohemia]. The play serves as a parable exploring sensuality and loving relationships enriched by a child, while simultaneously acting as an allegory for the global power structures that suppress naturalness and individuality.

The chosen means confirm once again that the lyric defines Hrubín's work. In the drama, there are prayers to God[7] as well as playful drinking songs and tender love songs. Through rhythm, rhyme, and melody, they echo folk songs,[8] featuring traditional motifs – such as a little bouquet, an embrace, or a bed – as well as the typical figure of addressing elements of nature, to whom one can confess the most intimate experiences.[9] Parts of the songs return as echoes throughout the play. They step out of their formal, generic roles in the drama to become significant semantic elements, reminding us that Christian imperial power also confronts something pagan. In this way, the play does not offer a straightforward interpretation of the situations.

## The lyrical principle of overlapping

The lyrical principle of overlapping in Hrubín's work profoundly influences the ambiguous nature of time, place, and language in his writing. This lyrical principle emerges from the juxtaposition between different lines and phenomena. Literary historian and editor Jiří Brabec employed an approach grounded in Hrubín's own motifs while editing his collected works to illustrate the shift in Hrubín's treatment of time, space, and reality: "He is devoted to capturing

5 When one of the main characters, Guntr, the envoy of the German emperor, humiliates Oldřich's brother Jaromír, he says: "You are like a piece of wood with a knot fallen out. They throw it into the fire, and from the hole left by the knot creeps timid smoke" (Hrubín 1969: 52). When assessing the poor education of the chaplain, he uses a metaphorical comparison: "And the little you heard there slipped away from you like a hare escaping a snare" (Hrubín 1969: 19).

6 From the history of Czech theatre, examples include plays such as Antonín Josef Zíma's *Oldřich a Božena: vlastenská původní činohra v 5 jednáních* [Oldřich and Božena: A Patriotic Original Drama in 5 Acts] (1789, the only surviving theatrical play from the early Czech National Revival) and Josef Krasoslav Chmelenský's *Oldřich a Božena: Spěvohra ve 3 dějstvích* [Oldřich and Božena: A Singspiel in 3 Acts, 1828]. Puppet plays were also popular: *Posvícení v Hudlicích aneb Oldřich a Božena* [The Feast in Hudlice, or Oldřich and Božena] and *Oldřich a Božena, aneb, Založení posvícení svatováclavského: veselohra ve 3 jednáních* [Oldřich and Božena, or The Founding of the St Wenceslas Feast: A Comedy in 3 Acts]. From the history of literature, one can recall lyric-epic works by authors like Adolf Heyduk (*Oldřich a Božena: idyla* [Oldřich and Božena: An Idyll], 1883) and Sofie Podlipská (*Oldřich, Božena a sv. Prokop* [Oldřich, Božena, and St. Procopius], 1905).

7 "Through suffering you visit us, we wither like wild apple trees, / at the windows of paradise at least shake off / the fruit of our souls, God ..." (Hrubín 1969: 18).

8 Hrubín used the same element in Beauty and the Beast, but there it is not a surprising feature since the subtitle *Lidová pohádka se zpěvy* [A Folk Tale with Songs] clearly defines the presence of this poetic genre. The love songs belonging to the male characters work with traits of courtly lyric poetry, while the merchant's song shows possible features of a marketplace song; however, a precise classification is lacking because only fragments of it repeatedly sound.

9 "Once I find out, lovely little flower, / who placed you by my bedside, / I will invite him in, embrace him with love, / and sleep beside him through the night. / I do not know yet, but I already sense it, / he comes to me on his own, I need not call him" (Hrubín 1969: 20).

a transforming reality, to fixing time in which 'from every moment are born thousands of new moments', and to space filled with the phenomena of everyday life as well as those that transcend the human horizon; within this plurality of relationships, things, and events, he situates the subject" (Brabec 1969: 128). This statement regarding a moment that generates subsequent singular moments in geometric progression is taken from the collection *Až do konce lásky* [Until the End of Love] (1961). Once again, we can observe both a contrast and a variation; in these quoted lines, Hrubín returns to the final poem of his debut collection from 1933, where the lyrical speaker longs for time to halt as he is experiencing a "moment of moments". Almost thirty years later, the poetic voice transforms this wish into a sense of gratitude for the fact that "time did not stand still". He permits time to flow again. Hrubín incorporates lived experiences from the distant past into the present moment, creating a uniquely layered understanding of time and meaning. This compositional technique also results in the intertwining of temporal planes in *Oldřich and Božena*. Events from the past enter the staged present and are interpreted within a particular (often subjective) context. The play's text simultaneously draws on the audience's contemporary context, while the character's viewpoint provokes reflection on the circumstances surrounding the play's initial performance, among other factors.

In Hrubín's work, the interplay of temporal lines disrupts the chronology. Both the past and present carry equal emotional significance and are equally vital to the identity of the lyric subject. In *Romance for Flugelhorn*, the added dates emphasize the intensity and interconnection of moments from 1934, 1933, 1930, and 1962. The protagonist of the novella *The Golden Reinette* returns, after decades, to the site of a moral failure, believing she can revisit the moments when she went astray and choose a different path – one that will bring profound meaning to her life. She exists in the present moment of her return yet reflects on and discusses situations from the distant past.

Similarly, the distinction between real and mythical time is blurred. In the poem *The Transformation*, moments from a summer afternoon in the city co-exist with the instant of Icarus's flight and fall. One of the female protagonists in the play *August Sunday* faces her first disillusionments in love and values, leading her to seek her own identity by moving into the "U saně" pub. The opening lines of *Oldřich and Božena* employ a framing device that facilitates a transition into a mythical past.[10] In *The Golden Reinette*, Jan experiences abrupt shifts in time that immerse him in narrative sequences that plunge him into an anxious sense of timelessness.[11]

The principle of layering time also illustrates Hrubín's intentional and meaning-making approach to poetic diction. In his poetic vocabulary, this is exemplified by the vivid epithet *dávný* ("ancient", "long-ago"). In his poetic

10 Hrubín defined the basic directions for the play as follows: "It takes place at the very beginning of the eleventh century on an autumn day – from early morning until midnight – at Oldřich's castle, lost in deep forests" (Hrubín 1972: 6).

11 "Jan's time is divided into past, present, and future moments, yet it is also unified; the past is layered upon the present, the past jointly determines the shape of the future, and the present is a future being actualized. Jan is so thoroughly woven into rotating time that, by centrifugal force, he finds himself in timelessness" (Opelík 1969: 129).

lines, it is naturally paired with the adverb *navždy* ("forever"). This forms a tangible representation of one of Hrubín's lyrical principles of contrast – the almost oxymoronic phrase *navždy dávný* ("forever ancient").[12] Times search for one another, and time unfolds into more time. Temporal layers overlap to establish a distinct sense of time within the poem, prose narrative, or theatrical play. In Hrubín's works, there is both a past that feels distant and a future that seems remote (Kožmín 1986: 75). The present moment carries the remnants of the past and helps shape the nature of what lies ahead.

To understand the variability of the lyrical principles of layering and overlapping, another example can be added. Hrubín's first prose work, *A Sip of Life* (1949), explores his childhood and is amplified by documentary elements such as family photographs. In lyrical-epical sequences, he captured the miraculous moments that marked the emergence of his own inner world and memories. He grounded everything in the natural landscape – where the elements, particularly water, prevail – and in the community of blood relatives. An additional layer of overlap among these elements and phenomena is present in the poetic composition *Lešany Creche – A Christmas Ballad* (1970).[13]

The landscape of childhood, marked by geographically precisely identifiable places,[14] is traversed by the biblical Herod who pursues the simple country folk Maria and Josef Padevět as they carry their child from baptism at Christmas time. In this intricately composed piece, fragments of an Advent hymn[15] and paraphrases from the Kralice Bible[16] resound. Simultaneously, intermezzi showcase excerpts from *A Sip of Life* which are linked to Hrubín's autobiography.

Director Vladimír Justl (1928–2010), who prepared a staging at the Viola poetic wine bar in Prague, captured the essence of Hrubín's authorial expression (the "miracle of vision, state of rebellion", recalling the poetics of František Halas) in his response to the manuscript of *Lešany Creche* as follows: "I believe

12 This can be understood as another of the hidden natures of metaphor in Hrubín's work – as a principle in which František Halas combined the "miracle of new vision" and the "state of rebellion". The subtitle "Christmas Ballad" of the poetic composition *Lešany Creche* shares this same nature.

13 For our purposes, it is important that this composition was first presented in a staged reading at the famous Viola poetry wine bar in Prague during the Christmas season, starting on 8 November 1969. It was published only in 1970.

14 The rocks in Obcizny and the path passing through places named Huštiny, Štrachovce, and others become part of the lyrical-epical composition. Hrubín once again demonstrates his sensitivity to the choice of naming, the revealed and hidden melody, and the sound symbolism in his works. The character of the naming – including onomatopoeia (as well as the aforementioned echoes of folk oral traditions) – refers to time, space, and semiotics, aiming to emphasize the movement of meaning-making. The poet and translator Ludvík Kundera (1920–2010) wrote to him on 19 July 1970: "And at the same time, I realize, looking at this little book [Lešany Creche], that your lines are probably entirely untranslatable. Those beautiful local names and the whole tone – one probably cannot even 'recast that in verse'" (Memorial of National Literature – Museum of Czech Literature Prague, Czech Republic. Archive collection of František Hrubín. Own correspondence. Received: Kundera, Ludvík to Hrubín, František, letter dated 19 July 1970).

15 The song *Byla cesta byla ušlapaná* [There Was a Path Well-Trodden] comes from the collections of František Sušil (1804–1868) – a theologian, priest, and collector of folk songs – in *Moravské národní písně* [Moravian National Songs] with melodies integrated into the texts (published in serialized editions from 1853 to 1859 and in book form in 1860).

16 The Kralice Bible was the first Czech translation of all the biblical books according to their original texts. It was published from 1579 to 1593 and is considered a pinnacle monument of Czech humanist translation.

this is a true ballad across the ages, moreover, expressing what remains valid and unchanged despite the passage of time. At the same time, the suggestive reality of your region and the dreamlike vision exist in tension, which, alongside the "story" itself, gives your piece a special dramatic quality."[17]

Hrubín himself, however, highlighted another aspect of the lyrical-epical narration in the programme for the performance: "The simple story, which in *Lešany Creche* is the pretext for the poem, really happened here in our village, long, long ago. I recorded it twenty years ago in a short prose piece. When I returned to it this year, a character entered it, who took it upon her shoulders and carried it across the abyss, having herself risen from the abyss."[18]

## Principles of recurrence and transposition

In Hrubín's work, the principles of recurrence and transposition pertain not only to naming choices[19] but also to the gradual transformation of the nature of metaphor. Throughout his body of work, motifs recur across his poetry collections, translations, theatrical plays, and prose. They reappear in lines of poetry, theatrical speeches, and in the dialogue of characters in stories from the height of Hrubín's creative period. The importance of this motif serves as a reminder of what was previously conveyed. The motif is also found in a currently undefined semantic position. It functions in a non-identical compositional role. Additionally, this is accompanied by further references or connections to classical literary works. In the concluding "overlapping" period, there are motifs such as wings and the flugelhorn,[20] along with themes and principles drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The etymology of the words *křídla* (wings/*Flügel*) and *křídlovka* (flugelhorn) distinguishes them from one another. In Czech, the similarity of their phonetic structures brings them together in lyrical expression. In Hrubín's work,

17 Memorial of National Literature – Museum of Czech Literature Prague, Czech Republic. Archive collection of František Hrubín. Own correspondence. Received: Justl, Vladimír to Hrubín, František, letter dated 10 September 1969.

18 Memorial of National Literature – Museum of Czech Literature Prague, Czech Republic. Archive collection of František Hrubín. [František Hrubín] – about him. Hrubín František: *Lešanské jesličky. Programy večerů v literární kavárně Viola z let 1969–1981* [Programs of evenings at the Viola literary café from 1969–1981], printed.

19 We can clearly see that Hrubín works with this principle, though with a somewhat different meaning-making approach, in his first original play *Srpnová neděle* [August Sunday] (1958). The distance between the nature of individual characters, the gap between immediacy and detachment, is expressed through the choice of the protagonists' names. The characters who are searching are only given first names (Zuzka, Hanka, Jirka), while those who are desiccated and hysterical, craving a charge of energy, are named only by – or predominantly by – their surnames (Mixová, Morák, Vach, Vachová). The name Morák additionally functions in Czech as a "speaking name", since Morák is the masculine form of Morana, a name for the figurine of Death. This symbolic Death figure is carried (being drowned or burned) in folk rituals at the end of winter to make way for the coming of spring.

20 It is important here to recall the etymology of the word: the Czech křídlo (wing/Flügel) in the root of křídlovka originates as a translation of the German Flügelhorn – a brass instrument whose unmistakable sound was used to summon the "wings" (units) of military or hunting formations. Hrubín himself uses both the Czech form křídlovka and the Czechified spelling fligorna in August Sunday (Hrubín 2011: 45, 83, 85).

their meaning is intricately connected to air, flight and descent, life and death,[21] movement, and the body. The iconic wings belong to Icarus (*The Transformation*) and are connected to themes of fatherhood, exile, faith bolstered by willpower, and a son's defiance. In *Romance for Flugelhorn*, the lyrical speaker experiences a sense of being "winged" – an erotic exhilaration – when a girl leaps onto the carousel seat behind him and her knees brush against his shoulder blades. In the same poem, the imagery of a wounded wing signifies failure, yet also conveys futility – particularly when the lyrical self's initial physical encounter with a sensual woman in the river's current clashes with the experience of pure romantic enchantment.

To shed light on the principle of recurrence and transposition, one can also examine the relationship between quotations from Ovid and from Hrubín's literary texts. The mottos chosen for specific poetic works (*Romance for Flugelhorn*), along with the references to the structure of ancient tales in his poetry collections – particularly *The Transformation* and *Until the End of Love* – underscore Hrubín's inspired (and inspiring) return to *Metamorphoses* and that work's subsequent revitalization within the lyric principles of 20th-century Czech poetry. A key to understanding the transformation explored here appears in part of Ovid's opening sentence: *Mutatae formae in nova corpora* ("forms changed into new bodies") (Bureš 1946: 23). Given the roots of his imagery, Hrubín must have been fascinated by the connection between these stories and nature, the imagination of childhood, the enlivening of the inanimate world, the riddles of death, and the longing to find a form of memory in which life might endure (Bureš 1946: 23). His use of expressions, images, narratives, and parables may also have been shaped by an awareness of the circumstances of Ovid's creative life. Ovid's vivid images of transformation stemmed from an intimate knowledge of ordinary life, depicting scenes of love, eroticism, jealousy, fidelity, and faith. However, they also emerged during a historical period marked by the succession of rulers, struggles for power, wars, moral decline, and the loss of values – a time when the poet experienced the status of exile. From Hrubín's own life, we know that these were conditions and experiences he also had to confront both as a person and as a writer. This is why he could understand them on an initiatory level and, in turn, convey the depth and message of these metaphors – often in subtle and even allegorical ways.

After being marginalized from public literary life, Hrubín returned to poetry and intentionally utilized the principles of recurrence and echo. In *The Transformation*, he notably engages with the Ovidian metamorphosis as a parable for the first time.[22] He adopts the parable as a "figure of speech" and transforms it into a compositional tool. He lets a seemingly peaceful summer day in the city unfold, where a grandfather plays with his grandson by and in the water, while simultaneously allowing this scene to be infused with the Ovidian tale of

21 The flugelhorn is traditionally associated with melodies played at funerals, celebrations of birth, and weddings.

22 Ladislav Tichý quotes Jülicher's definition of parable as "a figure of speech in which the effect of a given sentence (or thought) is to be secured by the addition of a similar sentence, which belongs to a different domain and is assured of its effect" (Tichý 2004: 4).

Daedalus and Icarus, which is intertwined with tragedy. Their conversation, along with the father's painful apostrophes, takes on a metaphorical significance in its own right. By doing so, Hrubín distinctly alters his approach to metaphor, navigating the line between metaphor and metonymy as well as between poetic tropes and poetic figures.

Hrubín begins the poem *Syrinx* in the collection *Until the End of Love* with a quotation from Ovid[23] and subsequently presents it (within the scope of the present analysis) with the following defining lines:

> I sing a minor metamorphosis.
> To escape death, everything keeps changing –
> Rust-red autumn into winter, winter into spring.
> Thus the world endures through change alone.
> Forgive me, Ovid! (Hrubín 1961: 43)

The very echo of the original lines (note 23, Ovidius 1942: 34) and their dialogue within *Until the End of Love* resonate in the allusion to the motif of the reed and serve as a parable reflecting the essence of human life in the foundational scene of the play *Beauty and the Beast*. In this work, Hrubín utilizes lyrical principles such as transformation, contrast, apostrophes, self-address, and epithets as well as thematic and compositional devices, poetic figures, and modes of naming. He intentionally creates a highly distinctive texture that maintains tension between the familiar (the known and the remembered) and the unexpected. By employing these methods, he also connects different historical periods in the history of lyrical poetry, highlighting the strong relationship between the motifs of the reed and the rose.

In the following dialogue from *Beauty and the Beast*, Hrubín utilizes a principle he has previously explored in his work: juxtaposing two distinct dimensions (the beast's inner voice and his spoken words) and thereby illustrating the soul's struggle[24] with the body in the face of death:

> Voice of the Beast: Your bestial form, your beastly habits limited you, but at the same time protected you. Your soul was not disturbed by anything. It slept peacefully within the monstrous body, unaware of what feeling is, neither loving nor hating, unmoved by pleasure or disgust.
> Beast: There is no creature more dreadful than me! Neither beast nor man!
> Voice of the Beast: Until yesterday, it did not bother you that your face and body were covered with fur, that you had a moist snout, claws, and predatory teeth.
> Beast: Today ... today I am repulsed by myself!

23 "...with water hindering her way, she begged her sisters of the stream to transform her, how Pan, just when he thought he had Syrinx in his arms at last, was holding marsh reeds instead of the nymph's body, and then how as he sighed there, wind passing through the reed had made a subtle, plaintive sound" (Ovidius 1942: 34).

24 This interpretation is also based on a dialogue from *Beauty and the Beast*: "Beauty: [...] Who is singing? Beast: (softly) Perhaps my soul. If I even have a soul. Beauty: The song is beautiful. But I don't understand it. And it is so sad ... Beast: Like my soul ... sad, useless like a fountain in the rain. (He sighs)" (Hrubín 1972: 41).

> Voice of the Beast: You see, it was enough for you to see her ... her pale forehead, eyelids like two petals of a white rose, a body trembling with gentle unrest like reeds. And those petals of white roses lift, and her eyes rest upon you ... (Hrubín 1972: 35)

Hrubín's *Romance for Flugelhorn* unmistakably opens with a motto that defines his inspiration from Ovid. He cites Ferdinand Stiebitz's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[25] Moreover, the concept of the entire poetic composition corresponds closely to the character that Stiebitz attributed to *Metamorphoses*. In Hrubín's work, events and viewpoints of the speakers overlap and frequently unfold across different temporal dimensions (past, present, future). Modes of fiction and reality, actual locations and *topoi*, and identifiable eras experienced by 20th-century generations appear, often almost interchangeably, alongside the experiences of distant ancestors. Within the compact form of a poem, poetic composition, novella, dramatic scene, or, indeed, an entire play, Hrubín captures the genesis of a particular feeling or experience and almost simultaneously transforms it into a message.

In the poetry collection *The Black Morning Star* (1967), in the section *V noci někdo zaklepal na dveře* [Someone Knocked at the Door at Night], there is a profoundly human and impactful scene. It emerges from a simple situation: the speaker, after hearing a knock at the door, gradually approaches to open it. He approaches the large door slowly, experiencing a painful transformation as he acknowledges that the journey to the door reflects an inner, agonizing process of accepting his mother's death. This moment is marked by his first loud call to her since her passing: "Mother!" At the same time, through this apostrophe, he also accepts his own mortality.

> Someone knocked at the door in the night // Someone knocked at the door to the hallway / of the Lešany cottage. // My heart began to pound. // I climbed down and tiptoed across the room, / something warned me: Don't go there! / and something drew me there – I couldn't resist it, / in the meantime, I had grown somewhere, / in the meantime, I had wandered and loved somewhere, / in the meantime, I had dreamt happily somewhere, / and yet all the while, I was slowly moving through the room / and someone kept knocking at the hallway door, / in the meantime, I had lived among people, / trusted them and let myself be deceived, / deceived them and deceived myself, / but still that someone never stopped knocking / and I kept slowly moving through the room and the hallway / holding my breath.
>
> I slammed the door shut and bolted it tight, / my heart burst from my chest and outgrew me, / I got in its way, a small trembling clot of fear, / but I will stand by that door forever / and in the meantime, somewhere, I'll be intoxicated by the feeling / that I still exist, that I am, / I will stand by that door forever, / feel the cold of the iron bar in my fingers, / shooting straight to the heart, / and press the palm of my other hand against the wood, / behind which, enormous, motionless,

25 "You ask for great things; this gift is beyond your strength, Phaethon, your boyish age cannot master it. You are mortal, yet what you desire is not mortal" (Stiebitz 1942: 40).

/ you wait, / you who passed beneath the springs of wells to reach this threshold. // And one day I'll open it / and leave it wide open (Hrubín 2010: 312, 323).

In *The Black Morning Star*, Hrubín crafted a lengthy interior monologue for his lyrical speaker; however, since it is presented as a form of self-address, it unfolds as a dialogue. The "I" engages in self-reflection while simultaneously articulating openly, narrating the story of his life without pretence and with profound emotion to his deceased mother. The confession is rife with moments of failure, defeat, lies, and self-deception; however, it also reveals traits that harbour a hopeful human identity, including courage for action and a message – whether from the past, present, or future – regarding the essence of humanity.

In *Oldřich and Božena*, Hrubín has one of the characters utter words that are a variation of the preceding "lyrical scene", intensified through metamorphoses.

> Guntr: Fear the death that comes slowly. / At first you hear it from afar, it's singing ... you mistake it for love. Then it comes closer, laughs and cheers ... you take it for a good companion ... / *(As if to himself)* It knocks at the door. It knocked at mine too, but I didn't open ... (Hrubín 1969: 33)

In *Beauty and the Beast*, this perspective may be linked to the dialogue between the Voice of the Beast and the Beast himself.

> Voice of the Beast: Already now, human fear of death falls on you like a cloud. As long as you were only a beast, you had no idea you would die. And you will die at the moment your transformation into a human is complete!
> Beast: So be it! I have hands – but whom would I embrace? I have human eyes – but who is here, on whom I could rest my gaze with tenderness? I will have a mouth and lips like a man – but where is the being with whom I might unite in a kiss? (Hrubín 1972: 71).

Other variants of the principle of recurrence and temporal layering, along with their simultaneous disjunction and the principle of allusions to well-known texts, while transforming them into the author's own imagery to capture the uniqueness of each moment, can also be observed in *The Golden Reinette*. This is confirmed by contemporary criticism: "The poet's whirlwind imagery – visual, even cinematic [...] – obsessively shatters any continuity. It breaks causality. It smashes contrasts. It piles unpredictability upon unpredictability. It flashes between scenes and exchanges meanings" (Opelík 1969: 128).

Hrubín's retelling of Charles Perrault's *Beauty and the Beast* distinctly embodies the theme of transformation. It embodies both the essence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*[26] and the qualities of afairy tale, lacking sentimentality and in-

26 *The Metamorphoses* is a collection of "poems that tell of transformed changes of humans" (Bureš 1946: 23).

corporating an almost ironic reference to various aspects of human reality.[27] Even here, Hrubín did not relent in his pursuit of an authorial expression that transcends the boundaries of literary genres and forms of theatrical art. He deliberately ignored any notions of genre hybridization.

Within the principles of allusion and transformation, one can also reference Hrubín's engagement with archetypes. In *The Black Morning Star*, the archetype of the mother serves as a gateway to the otherworld for the speaker. In *Romance for Flugelhorn*, Terina embodies the apotheosis of youth and pure romantic feeling, whereas Tonka represents the zenith of physicality and erotic desires; the grandfather symbolizes the archetype of old age, embodying respect for the gradual decline of life's energies, and the father stands for responsibility and steadfastness. In *Lešany Creche*, Marie epitomizes motherhood, whereas Josef represents the archetype of the ungrateful and wounding man – a flawed, uncertain, yet loving father. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Beauty exemplifies fragility, naivety, and purity, transferring her love for her father to her relationship with the Beast, which ultimately lifts his curse. In *Oldřich and Božena*, Božena symbolizes song, laughter, passion, physicality, and instinctual motherhood, while Oldřich represents the archetype of masculinity, characterized by a fervour for battle, hunting, drinking, and loving, and marked by courage and a resistance to foreign domination. In a different variation, these convey the lyrical principles of the (initial) inductive assembly of the overall image of transformations, the transformed essence of the "quiet ecstatic state" (Šalda), and the "mysterious dynamism of cosmic connections" (Frynta).

## The lyrical principle of alternative spirituality

The images and expressions linked to transformation[28] through faithfulness and love – particularly in *Beauty and the Beast* – also reveal the presence of another element in the speakers and characters of Hrubín's work; this is the lyrical principle of alternative spirituality, defined as "spiritual intimacy and awareness of the sacred" (Galmiche 2023: 100). Xavier Galmiche, a French expert in Czech studies, explores the fundamental traits of this principle within the history of Czech lyrical poetry and relates it to the impact of religious transformations in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. He discusses "lay virtues", "courtesy", "consideration", "compassion", and "mutual empathy" (Galmiche 2023: 101). Galmiche also identifies a "continually renewed internal struggle over the interpretive modes of the need for spirituality" within 20th-century Czech literary history (Galmiche 2023: 105). Among his definitions, the one that best applies to Hrubín is the "presence of the story of a miraculous moment when 'the unbelievable becomes fact'" (Galmiche 2023: 105).

27 This is also evidenced by the Beast's ironic self-reflection: "How ridiculous you are! Everything trembled before you, for twenty years no human foot dared enter your kingdom... And now? It's fashionable, somewhere among people, for every lady to have some ugly little monkey, a deformed dog, a dwarf with a huge head. She has you!" (Hrubín 1972: 43).

28 Several interpretations are possible. One starting point could be the connection with a fairy tale, but the play can also be interpreted as a variation on the Ovidian transformation theme – this time depicting the metamorphosis of an animal into a human.

In Hrubín's work, elements of folk religiosity and echoes of Christian spirituality most often appear in relation to motifs or themes of death. These experiences can be subtly conveyed through words and gestures in *Romance for Flugelhorn* during the ritual washing and dressing of the grandfather after his passing; in the search for the child under the snow and the escape from Herod in *Lešany Creche*; and in the defence of the unborn child amidst betrayal, murder, and contempt in *Oldřich and Božena*. They can also be classified as a different category of transformation, specifically an authorial one.[29]

## Conclusion

Hrubín's artistic path was deeply rooted in the lyric. When he entered the field of lyrical literature in the 1930s, European poetry was experiencing a remarkable transformation. Conventional lines and traditional symbols were infused with subversive – yet inspiring – impulses through poetic language and associative imagery.[30]

The principles of traditional lyricism – melody, rhythm, and metaphor – consistently influenced Hrubín's authorial expression. His grasp of cinematic techniques – such as the relationship between image and speech, image and narration, and image and time, as well as the potential of recurring visual and sound motifs to capture emotions, connect disparate locations, and intertwine various temporal layers – fuels the continual transformation of his lyrical identity, embracing prosaization, speech as an expression of the lyrical speaker, and a return to tradition with variation. Even in the early interpretations of Hrubín's first poetry collections, repetition is characterized as "an expression of continuity" and "a gesture of familiarization" (Karfíková 1969: 197).

The expansion of Hrubín's creative endeavours into various forms of literary production – such as children's poetry, translations of Paul Verlaine and German dramas, prose, and original plays – significantly influenced the character of his major works. While these works are traditionally categorized in literary historical interpretations as poetic texts (e.g. *Romance for Flugelhorn*, 1962; *The Black Morning Star*, 1967; *Lešany Creche*, 1970), plays (e.g. *August Sunday*, 1958; *Beauty and the Beast*, 1969; *Oldřich and Božena*, 1969), and prose books (e.g. *A Sip of Life*, 1949; *U stolu* [At the Table], 1956; *The Golden Reinette*, 1964), they illustrate that Hrubín was, in fact, not confined by the limitations of genre. The rhythm of lines and the melody of poems fade into the background as the tempo of the lyrical speakers' utterances in poetic compositions, drama, and prose becomes more significant than the rhythmic compactness of individual lines and poems. Hrubín's metaphors are open to interpretation and add additional layers of meaning. Their presence in his work is not an act of imitation but rather further initiation. They present unexpected resonances and fresh, uplifting interpretations of significant literary themes. Hrubín's transformation of lyrical

29 At the beginning of his creative career, Hrubín was often placed alongside or compared with the prominent Catholic poet Jan Zahradníček (1905–1960).

30 It is worth noting Josef Kroutvor's characterization, in which he defines the impulses behind Apollinaire's Zone as "a modern poetic language of images and words", "a flowing sequence of images, associations, snapshots, and biographical data that resembles a documentary film more than a poem" (Kroutvor 2021: 227).

principles across all the genres in which he excelled serves as a metaphor in its own right. His prose and drama adopt the intricate structure and vivid imagery characteristic of his poetry.[31]

Apparent ordinariness and overwhelming moments – such as the endless fall of an atomic bomb, the caress of a breast, and the conception/birth of a child – are equally significant and serve as a commentary on the history of humanity in Hrubín's works. The seemingly factual quality of an image capturing a specific experience and its repetition – such as recurring questions in prose, refrains in poetry, and echoes in drama – provide an opportunity to relive a particular emotional or sensory state of an individual. The apparent simplicity serves as Hrubín's cipher. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s, we can revisit his work as a lyric document. In the voices of lyrical speakers in poetry and characters in dramas, as well as in the reflections of novella protagonists and in boyhood memories, the personal intertwines with the mythical through images of ordinary moments, blending the authentic with the figurative. In the final phase of Hrubín's oeuvre, intimate lyricism transforms into a myth-forming, ritual, and performative expression.

*Translation John Peter Butler Barrer*

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