

# Roland Barthes's Masks in Bohumil Hrabal's *Gaps*: Accounts of a Transfer, Transfer of Accounts

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GABRIEL: I mean, as you're probably aware, Barthes said, 'The cultural work done in the past by gods and epic sagas is now being done by laundry detergent commercials and comic-strip characters'

[...]

CLARA: Hang on. Who's this Barthes guy? Which Birdman is he in? (Birdman).<sup>1</sup>

This article analyzes Roland Barthes's presence in Bohumil Hrabal's text *Gaps* (thus the title of English translation of *Proluky* by the Czech Canadian Tony Liman)<sup>2</sup> as a transferring and transferred reading. The reading is a transferring one, since Barthes' text (*Writing Degree Zero*) negotiates a very different field of operations than that of Hrabal. It is a transferred one because, among other things, Barthes is reading a number of texts in his writing, and Hrabal's text transfers these readings as well. Accounting for these transfers involves also a transfer of accounts, also in the sense of an assessment of the value (and values) transferred by means of the *Barthes-import* performed by Hrabal's text. In saying this, I am addressing the *aesthetic value* (also in Mukařovský's sense) of the respective texts, keeping in mind their respective posi-

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1 <[http://d97a3ad6c1b09e180027-5c35be6f174b10f62347680d094e609a.r46.cf2.rackcdn.com/film\\_scripts/FSP3823\\_BIRDMAN\\_MINI\\_SCRIPT\\_BOOK\\_C5.pdf](http://d97a3ad6c1b09e180027-5c35be6f174b10f62347680d094e609a.r46.cf2.rackcdn.com/film_scripts/FSP3823_BIRDMAN_MINI_SCRIPT_BOOK_C5.pdf)> [pp. 11–12 of the pdf version of the script; 11. 5. 2015]. This is not an actual quote, but rather a paraphrase of Barthes's references the detergent 'Omo' in *Mythologies*.

2 My contribution focuses on Hrabal's text *Proluky* in the original, but also to a certain degree on the English translation when it does conspicuous or instructive things, such as omitting the reference to Ignát Hermann's novel *U snědeného krámu* (in contrast to the French translation, which includes the reference and if only for that reason plays a certain role here) in the passage which explicitly mentions Roland Barthes. Problems and individual choices of the English translation are significant to a lesser degree; in some cases I will be mentioning these as well. It seems to me generally that a discussion of a Czech text precisely in the context of *transferring readings* needs to take account of the translation of the text into the language in which this discussion is taking place. I did this extensively in my German language analysis of *Kdo jsem* (Hrabal 1995b; cf. Meyer 2014) with reference to the German translation which took many incomprehensible liberties, including leaving out a third of the text altogether.



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tion within the social systems and official institutions which assign value (or valuelessness in the form of *liquidation*) to writings and their writers and provides them with or depletes them of social and political *capital*.

The transfer discussed here applies to the location of the texts in question in their time and/as their culture, but also to operations along genre borders which are, in turn, determined by respective historic-cultural placements of the texts as a whole. In the context of the genre question, I give particular attention to the autobiographical<sup>3</sup>, since this is a key aspect of the Hrabal text in question, but also of the writings of Barthes and Hrabal in general. This, in turn, makes the issue at hand potentially interesting not only for Hrabal studies, but also for Barthes studies.

The specific textual configuration at hand is an example of the appearance of Barthes's texts in Hrabal's work in general, particularly in the early 1980s. This case of *transferred and transferring readings* has been essentially ignored by Hrabal scholarship to date,<sup>4</sup> but is actually a significant factor in the self-positioning of Hrabal's texts from the point of view of culture, genre, traces of memory and other key aspects of Hrabal's writing.

Hrabal's text is in effect an acting-out of Barthes's theories (a transference from analytical description to performance).<sup>5</sup> This is one of the factors which make this case relevant not only for the analysis of Hrabal, but also for Barthes scholarship. One might even speak of an acting out of Barthes a way similar to the Barthes paraphrase in the recent film *Birdman* (2014): 'Barthes said, "The cultural work done in the past by gods..."' (see motto). This too is a *reentry* of the theory of (ideologies of) fictional narrative into fictional narrative itself. In the case of *Birdman* it is a literal acting-out in a meta-theatrical setting. In the case of Hrabal's *Proluky / Gaps*, the repetition of the gesture of pointing to one's own mask also has a theatrical quality, which makes it not insignificant that the Barthes reference in the Hrabal text occurs in the context of an author's reading — also a theatricalization of the text and a self-representation of the author's body.<sup>6</sup>

Accounting for this transfer means not only naming the (types of) borders along which the transfers take place. It also means giving an account of how writing/écriture positions itself with respect to a history of writing which it is openly and consciously writing itself into (and in doing that offering resistance to). In the case of Barthes's writing of the early 50s, it is an at least quadruple self-positioning in connection with Descartes

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3 On the autobiographical in Barthes's writing see Brown 1992, p. 119 f, Stafford 1998, p. 193 f., Ette 1998, p. 414 f., Martin 2003, p. 105 f., Gil 2012, p. 416 f., Rylance 1994, p. 103 f. Schabacher 2007 is most the extensive newer study on this issue, Kennedy 1981 is one of the first.

4 Jankovič (1996, p. 147 f.) writes about Barthes in Hrabal's later work, calling the section of the book *Larvatus prodeo*, but there is no analysis of the indirect reference to that Descartes quote in *Proluky/Gaps*. See James 2012, particularly p. 98 f., as well as Fulka 2010. Of particular interest is the study Češka 2010, which with reference to the concept 'the death of the author' precisely addresses the general status of Hrabal's Barthes paraphrases and their paradoxical affirmation and negation of Barthes's positions. .

5 On Barthes and performance see Scheie 2000.

6 The author's body between sex and gender and as the producer of the material of the *messy text* was the subject of a talk I gave in December 2014 in Erfurt at a conference on Hrabal which I co-organized with Alfrun Kliems and Alexander Wöll. Some of the thoughts of this paper were taken up in this one.

(source of the mask image), the *bourgeois novel* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *écriture blanche* of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Camus, Blanchot) and Sartre's conceptualization of *littérature engagée*. Hrabal's writing of the early 80s has many implicit intertextual orientations. It names explicitly a number of names, and crucially refers the writing of Karel Marysko and Roland Barthes as contemporaries (more specifically: as 'Mr. Marysko' and 'Mr. Barthes'). Although it is an abridgement of the entire account which needs to be told, I am isolating the one case of Barthes in this network, and thus treating the (at least) quadruple network which Barthes brings into the mix only on the periphery of my argumentation.

It is in my view legitimate to account for this one transfer basically outside the intricate intertextual network in the Hrabal text, among other things due to the implications it brings to bear on an assessment of Hrabal's writing in a European (theoretical and literary) context, which in my view still needs to be worked through in many areas.

### JANKOVIČ'S DISAPPEARING ACT: MISSING BARTHES

*Všechno, o čem Eliška vypráví, je ovšem sebevypovědí Hrabalovou [...]. Trilogie nazývaná zkráceně Svatby v domě je vrcholným dílem Hrabalova ironického narcisismu. [Everything about which Eliška tells is of course a statement of Hrabal about himself /.../. The trilogy called In-House Weddings is the pinnacle of Hrabal's ironic narcissism] (Jankovič 1991, p. 193, trans. H. M.).<sup>7</sup>*

The most elaborated account of the voice(s) narrating the trilogy was provided over twenty years ago, and it seems like this account created a consensus, since the position has not been fundamentally critized. If so, I would like to break with that consensus. I am, of course, speaking of Milan Jankovič's Hrabal monograph, and also his articles on Hrabal, two of which are specifically on the trilogy and one of which concentrates solely on *Proluky / Gaps*.

As far as the nature of the voicing in the trilogy is concerned, a comment on *Vita nuova* is revealing for Jankovič's whole methodology:

*At a closer look, we would find features of differentiation (be they psychological or linguistic), but soon we discover that these differences are completely beside the point. The one speaking with us or the one conducting his conversation is a single narrator who integrates all those voices. The most contemporary and the most distant times are mixed and fused with each other, as if it were all one time. From this point of view it stops being important whether Eliška's narration is fictional or not. Everything has in a certain sense created its own space and time, a space and time of the mixing of all of this [...].<sup>8</sup>*

7 None of Jankovič's studies on Hrabal have been translated into English. The chapter *Psaní proudem* from his Hrabal monograph of 1996 was translated into French (Jankovič 2002). It is interesting to note that the title includes the term *écriture* ('écriture de flux'), but that no attempt was made to apply it to Barthes's concept of *écriture* for the French edition of the study.

8 'Při pozornějším pohledu bychom našli příznaky jejich rozlišení (jazykového nebo psychologického), ale brzy zjistíme, že o takové rozlišení vůbec nejde. Promlouvá k nám či vede

The statement that ‘features of differentiation’ are ‘*completely* beside the point’ (‘o takové rozlišení *vůbec* nejde’) is quite extreme. The concept of ‘a single narrator who integrates all those voices’ is from the point of view of narratology more than questionable. It is not clear what ‘integrate’ (integrovat) could mean, besides perhaps a Mukařovskian dynamic unity of meaning. But the idea of ‘integration’ seems to fall behind the complexity of Mukařovský’s concept of dynamism. Indeed, it seems to reduce everything to authorial intention, which is an odd move indeed for a structuralist.

Jankovič’s general figure of thought is the ‘stream’ (*proud*), and it seems that it is applied not only to the syntagmatics of the text but rather also on the narratological level as well. For Jankovič there is ‘mixing and fusing’ on many levels. Taken to its logical extreme on the narratological level, the individual voices lose their identity and integrity altogether: ‘integration’ replaces integrity ‘completely’.

The analysis which I will be conducting presently calls this view into question, for it insists on the strict separation of voices as opposed to the *one for all* reading strategy suggested by Jankovič. Otherwise, as I would claim, the Barthes reference makes no sense. For it refers to the implementation of third person narrative and thus of the differentiation of a multiplicity of voices, even if this is a case of *mere* masking. The voice still needs to be posited before it is *unmasked as a mask*. Having said that, it is important to note that Jankovič’s approach brings other aspects to the fore which outweigh his programmatic *narratological oversimplification*.

Jankovič concentrates on the text as a whole, mainly with respect to its rhythm. Indeed, his interest goes beyond the Hrabal text and concerns general theoretical issues which seem to be derived from the Mukařovský’s thinking, particularly as concerns the nature of the aesthetic. Jankovič makes use of Hrabal’s ‘autobiographical trilogy’ in order to attempt nothing less than a diagnosis of Czech literature of this present time, or, to put in terms of Mukařovský’s approach: in order to describe the fate and state of the contemporary ‘aesthetic norm’, which is apparently viewed in the early 90s to include Hrabal’s prose of the early 80s. Jankovič is generally concerned with ‘cases in which traditional borders are erased or blurred: the border between fictional and autobiographical narration, between epic and lyric prose’ noting that this ‘creates a new focus on the border between prose and poetry as well’. Apparently referring to Mukařovský’s notions of the aesthetic, Jankovič states that ‘the question of artistry needs to be asked in each case anew, since the mixture which this literature represents is extremely changeable’.

Jankovič does not consider the theories of Roland Barthes, in contrast to those of Jan Mukařovský, to be relevant for ‘cases in which traditional borders are erased or blurred’, even though someone even vaguely familiar with Barthes’s work must know that ‘the border between fictional and autobiographical narration’ is of central concern for Barthes on many levels and that operations on that border and about that border can be found in any number of Barthes’s texts.

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svůj hovor jediný vypravěč, který integruje všechny ty hlasy. Mísí a slévá se nejsoučasnější a velmi vzdálený čas vyprávěného, jako by to byl čas jeden. V této perspektivě přestává záležet i na tom, nakolik je Eliščino vyprávění fikcí. Vše jako by si vytvářelo svůj vlastní prostor a čas, prostor a čas smísení toho všeho [...]’ (Jankovič 1991, p. 40).

To take a step further, it also seems not to occur to Jankovič to recognize the reference to Barthes in the very texts he is discussing as the signal which it is: a reference to the fact that the play with voice in text of the trilogy cannot only be described in Barthes's terms, but also and above all that the text makes it clear that it is aware of this and wants to include this awareness in its field of signification. Jankovič is so dedicated to the *structuralism* of his teacher in Prague that he ignores the fact that the Prague author he is analyzing is openly drawing his inspiration from another (post- or para-)structuralism, that of Barthes in Paris. To put it another way: Jankovič ignores the fact that another border which Hrabal's text is 'blurring' is the one between literature and theory itself. Like many readers of Hrabal, Jankovič underestimates the sophistication of the texts he is treating.

This concerns the texts' play with voice and authorship, as well as other aspects, e.g. with gender, space and the political, just to name three. It is no coincidence that these are all issues of post-structuralist theory, or at least theory after Mukařovský.

## BARTHES THE DRIFTER POSITIONING THE MASK

*Alles, was tief ist, liebt die Maske; die allertiefsten Dinge haben sogar einen Hass auf Bild und Gleichnis* (Nietzsche 1999/IV, p. 57).

Barthes, in addressing the showing-of-mask, is calling the illusion of naturalism in the *bourgeois novel* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into question. More specifically, he takes up the use of the third person and of the conventional past tense or 'preterite' (*passé simple*), and in this context brings the figure of the mask into play Hrabal's narrator (of Hrabal).

Barthes's operation takes place in the form of a reference to the passage in Descartes' *Préambules* where one famously reads 'I advance masked'. Barthes takes the thought a step further by stating that 'what writing does in the novel' is to 'put the mask in place and at the same time point it out' (Barthes 2012, p. 34). He specifies later in the same chapter: 'The preterite and the third person in the Novel are nothing but the fateful gesture with which the writer draws attention to the mask which he is wearing' (Barthes 2012, p. 40). Immediately following this is the sweeping statement in which Barthes explicitly quotes the Cartesian formulation in Latin: 'The whole of Literature can declare *Larvatus prodeo*' (Barthes 2012, p. 40).

Brown, at the end of the second chapter of his extended elaboration of the concept of the 'drift' (*la dérive*) as the key feature of Barthes's *écriture* (meaning both Barthes's concept of *écriture* and Barthes's own writing), notes that for Barthes 'the subject of reading and writing can no longer be isolated in self-present authenticity' and thus cannot 'be located in the intention to mean' (Brown 1992, p.109). Brown links this position with writing's 'point[ing] to its mask in silence'. This pointing, in turn, 'may take the form of a punctuational quirk, an unacknowledged citation, an allusion to science, or a lexical impurity'. Paradoxically, 'its sociability lies in its distance and otherness' (*ibid.*).

The mask thus becomes a metaphor for various manifestations of 'distance' motivated by the reluctance or refusal to participate in the illusion of naturalness forced

on speakers of language by the dominant ideology of the language's culture. In *Writing Degree Zero*, the workings of this ideology are expressed by the collusion of *Nature* and *History* written with capital letters in formulations like 'la langue est comme une Nature qui passe entièrement à travers la parole de l'écrivain' and 'Roman et Histoire ont eu des rapports étroits dans la siècle même qui a vu leur plus grand essor' (Barthes 1993, p. 145, 155). The issue is a kind of writing which does not directly oppose the ideology and does not fall into silence, but which continues on and 'points to the mask'.

In connection with Hrabal it is of great significance that the 'drift', which Brown rightly works through as the key figure of thought and writing in Barthes's work (later he adds in 'scribbling', an issue I will take up later), decenters the writing subject. It does so even at the same moment when the writer seems to be placing her/himself into the foreground (i.e. in writing which in one way or another participates in the autobiographical mode). This Barthesian gesture of self-decentralizing at the moment of seeming self-foregrounding is something one recognizes immediately at even the most cursory look at the writing of Hrabal, particularly in the case at hand, when the writing seems to deflect its 'male' subjectivity to that of the narrating (grammatically female) spouse.

### **Hrabal's *Proluky* / *Gaps*: Genre (as) Masking**

*Genres are not to be mixed.*

*I will not mix genres.*

*I repeat: genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix them* (Derrida 1980, p. 55).

*It is inevitable [fatal], both just and unjust, that the most 'autobiographical' books (those of the end, as I have heard said) begin at death to conceal all other books* (Derrida 2001, p. 66).

The discussion of the novel in *Writing Degree Zero*<sup>9</sup> is, of course, a direct negotiation of genre, of the interface between *écriture* and genre or of how *écriture* becomes genre and deals with (and resists) the baggage the genre brings with it.

I already mentioned the function of Hrabal's text with respect to the positioning and self-positioning of genre. It is indeed important to underscore the fact that it is difficult or perhaps impossible to assign Hrabal's text of the early 1980s to a particular genre<sup>10</sup> (a feature which it shares with many of Barthes's texts, which is no coincidence, I would claim), and so I simply call it a 'text'.

It is counterproductive, to say the least, to simply call *Proluky* / *Gaps* — or the entirety of the trilogy — an 'autobiography'. Milan Jankovič speaks of an 'autobi-

9 Another philological issue which I can't even begin to touch on here is the question of the Czech editions and the Czech reception of Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*, the only significant Barthes text translated into Czech in the 1960s — in 1967 *Nulový stupeň rukopisu*, most likely causing Hrabal to refer to Barthes's 'écriture' as 'rukopis' (literally 'manuscript') on other occasions of referring to *Writing Degree Zero* and to Barthes in general, including to later texts such as the inaugural lecture. See Meyer 2014 and references there.

10 On genre in Hrabal's texts see Voisine-Jechova 2002.

ografická trilogie',<sup>11</sup> which is somewhat ambiguous, since it could be translated as 'trilogy consisting of autobiography/autobiographies' but also as a 'trilogy in the autobiographical mode'. A number of other analysts, critics and publishers also apply the term *autobiographical* directly and unambiguously to one or more of the three books.<sup>12</sup> The problem with this designation is not that the texts bear no relation to the autobiographical, but in a sense the opposite: they indeed actively negotiate their own genre in its relation to the autobiographical and for that reason are precisely not simply autobiographies. The direct designation of them as 'autobiographies' or of the entirely as an 'autobiographical trilogy' (in the first sense) blocks all roads towards a meaningful comprehension of this (self-)negotiation.

Derrida's Barthes eulogy *The Deaths of Roland Barthes* (Derrida 2001) works through many of the points mentioned here, especially that of genre, and can in a sense be set parallel to Hrabal's Barthes-work of the early 1980s, particularly considering the fact that *Kdo jsem / Who I am* can also be read as an indirect Barthes-eulogy (it names the date of Roland Barthes's death as the finishing touch on an chapter about numbers).

Derrida shows Barthes negotiating his own genre work, quoting Barthes's self-observation in *Camera lucida* on being 'torn between two languages, one expressive, one critical' (quoted in Derrida 2001, p. 52). Derrida comments that 'as early as *Writing Degree Zero*, all this passes through the Novel and "The Novel is a Death" — the beyond of literature as literature, [...] literature producing itself and producing its essence as its own disappearance' (Derrida 2001, p. 53). Derrida shows Barthes to be implicating and questioning his own, i.e. Barthes's own genre orientation in this negotiation of genre (and of expressive media in general, including photography), ostensibly playing the role of a critic, and at the same time being ever more strongly attracted by the 'expressive'. A similar self-reflective genre work can be found in Hrabal's writing, which — above all in *Kdo jsem / Who I Am* — gives us a certain amount of evidence for the fact that the self-reflective genre work in Hrabal's writing is itself a reading of Barthes's self-reflection on/of genre.

Be that as it may, the title of the text *Proluky / Gaps* itself can, among other things, be read as a reference to the *gaps* between genres which the text occupies, particularly considering the fact that the word *proluka* often refers to gaps between houses and the fact that whole trilogy can be read as the autobiography of a house (the plot of the trilogy begins with the entrance of the hegemonic female narrator into the

11 The chapter on this subject in Jankovič's book is called *Psaní proudem — autobiografická trilogie* (Jankovič 1996, p. 114)

12 For instance, the back cover of the English translations of each of the books of the trilogy, including the 2011 edition of *Gaps*, sports the designation 'autobiographical trilogy'. At the same time, *Gaps* is designated on the front cover as 'A Novel', as is *Vita nuova* (Hrabal 2010), something which is not the case for the 2007 English language edition of *In-House Weddings* by the same translator in the same series at the same publishing house. The only reference of this kind is in the copyright notice, referring to the 'trilogy' but not to the genre of the texts of which the 'trilogy' is comprised: 'In-House Weddings is the first volume in a trilogy that includes *Vita Nuova* and *Vacant Lots*'. Note the diverging translation of the title of what then, four years later, became *Gaps*. The German translation also uses the term 'novel' (Roman) on the title page (Hrabal 1999).

communal and conjugal apartment on 24 Na Hrázi street in Prague and ends with her vacating, the emptying of this space). The idea that the text *Proluky / Gaps* — like the whole trilogy *containing* it — is concerned with a house and thus with ‘gap sites’ or ‘empty sites’ on a city street, seems uncontroversial to me. In this context, the house would serve as a metaphor for genre, e.g. as something which frames and contains the emission of words. In a sense, the text as a metonymically designated architectural structure is a more or less hospitable home, a space which willingly receives guests, be they voices, (inter)texts and/or genres.

At the same time, the text not only occupies the empty space of genre (to me more exact: empties the space of genre), but also masks its own genre activity by provoking readers to treat it as a simple ‘autobiography’, which it is not. Many readers, editors and critics seem to have fallen into this rather obvious and equally tempting trap. This trap can be treated as part of the text’s strategy. The complexity of genre is not just a technical aspect of the text, but is an essential object of the text’s discourse and is a significant factor in the text’s transfers. I hope to have made that clear in my remarks on the work with genre and/of the novel in Barthes *Writing Degree Zero*.

At least two clear signals in the Hrabal text are of importance for my claim that the negotiation of genre is a pivotal programmatic issue for the text:

1. The fact that the first two texts of the trilogy do contain genre designations, albeit unorthodox ones (‘dívčí románek’ [girl’s novelette] in the case of *Svatby v domě* and ‘kartínky’ [Russian word for pictures] in the case of *Vita nuova*), shows that the texts explicitly position themselves with respect to their own genre, and that the absence of such a designation in *Proluky* can be viewed as a sort of *minus technique*, i.e. as a call to reflection about the genre the text might belong to.

2. The reference to Roland Barthes in the third text of the trilogy, which, as I said, has no genre designation as a whole, addresses a fundamental critique of the realistic novel written in third-person fiction (and in the conventional past tense — *passé simple*), making the reference a directly elaboration of genre theory and of the genre of the text itself.

Viewing the two signals together, one can come to the following preliminary conclusion: The obvious and marked attention to genre work in combination with the direct reference to Barthes’s work with the novel places the Barthes reading at the core of the text’s intense self-positioning with respect not only to genre, but to many other key textual parameters, this certainly warrants a closer look at the interface between the two bodies or writing and the transfer operations performed between the two.

#### **‘HRABAL’, ‘BARTHES’, MASKS: A BRIEF SKETCH OF CONTEXTS IN SEEMING DIAMETRICAL OPPOSITION**

*Having deprived himself of any means of explaining how these modes of writing came into existence, Barthes is none the less a superlative, albeit tactical, critic when it comes to analyzing them and awarding praise and blame. Praise depends [...] mostly on a profoundly Barthesian criterion. This criterion can be summed up in the word distance. It is the common denominator of his efforts to promote certain modes of writing (Lavers 1995, p. 146).*



*Jste spisovatel Hrabal? Můj muž přikývl a ještě víc zrudnul a mladík vytáhl legimaci a představil se jako úředník ministerstva vnitra. [Are you Hrabal the writer? My husband nodded and went even redder and the young man pulled out his ID and introduced himself as a clerk from the Ministry of the Interior (Hrabal 1995a, p. 474, Hrabal 2011, p. 51).*

Barthes's and Hrabal's writing contexts are radically different, and seem in many ways to be diametrically opposed. For an account of the transfer, it is important to sketch in broad strokes the weight this issue brings to bear on a *mutual enlightenment* Barthes and Hrabal might provide for each other.

In describing/advocating an 'écriture blanche' in accordance with a 'degree zero' of writing, Barthes attempts to come to terms with a circumstance of language which remains a fundamental assumption throughout his work: the assumption that the language in which a writer composes his works carries a huge amount of baggage which the writer cannot simply dispose of. In the late 1970s, he will famously call this feature of language 'fascist'.<sup>13</sup> Due to this feature of language, the writer must empty his writing, take a posture of maximal 'distance', as it is phrased by Annette Lavers in her summary of Barthes theory (Lavers 1995, p. 146).

Without getting into great detail on the possibilities and meaning of this 'blank writing' (literally 'white writing') in the late 40s and early 50s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in France, I would like to underscore the fact that Barthes addresses the mask in the context of radical critique. The gesture of moving forward wearing the mask and at the same time pointing to it, this Brechtian gesture,<sup>14</sup> is part of the *self-distancing*, worked out by Lavers, which is necessary for resisting the ideological forces literature needs to confront.

In Barthes's case, these ideological forces are those of bourgeois society, and even if Barthes in *Writing Degree Zero* is looking for a path of departure from an orthodox Marxist tradition (above a nuanced alternative path to that of Sartre), it is the opposition to bourgeois ideology which serves as the fundamental concern of Barthes's text.

In paraphrasing the Barthes formulation, Hrabal re-contextualizes it in a seemingly opposite societal configuration: the bourgeoisie has been officially driven from power and supposedly no longer holds sway in the Czechoslovak 'people's republic' after over twenty years of Stalinism and Neo-Stalinism. The question to be asked here is whether the *Proluky / Gaps* text is setting up another societal configuration as equivalent to the bourgeois society which *Writing Degree Zero* is addressing, or whether the text is to read as a parody or pastiche of Barthes's *texte marxissant*, perhaps going so far as to set up an ironic equivalence between *socialist* 1980s Czechoslovakia and *capitalist* bourgeois society.

13 'La langue, comme performance de tout langage, n'est ni réactionnaire, ni progressiste; elle est tout simplement: fasciste; car le fascisme, ce n'est pas d'empêcher de dire, c'est d'obliger à dire' (Barthes 1978, p. 14).

14 On Barthes and Brecht see Shookman 1989, Carmody 1990, Bident 2012, p. 49 f., Gil 2012, p. 196 f., Martin 2003, p. 24 f., McQuillan 2011, pp. 61–63, Rylance 1994, pp. 98–99, 139–40 and passim, Stafford 1998, p. 38 f. and passim.

In any case, neither *Writing Degree Zero* nor *Proluky / Gaps* is conceivable without a very specific political constellation. These constellations cannot be ignored. They are of course radically different, due to the time gap of 30 years and the widely divergent cultural and political situations of Paris of the early 50s and Prague of the early 80s. Ironically, Hrabal's situation after 1968–1969 is a grotesque fulfillment of Barthes's vision of Stalinism formulated in the late 40s and early 50s.

Barthes's text is grappling with Sartre's existentially influenced concepts of literature and modes of anti-bourgeois engagement in the present, also in its inheritance of the *bourgeois novel* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also in connection with a critique of Stalinism, which is relevant both for the heritage of the novel and for the contextualization of Hrabal's text in the neo-Stalinist Czechoslovak *normalization*. The historical and political subject matter of the past tense perspective of the entirety of *Proluky / Gaps* is the entirety of the liberalization period starting in the mid-1960s (allowing the narrator to pick up the first published book of 'můj muž'<sup>15</sup> as the first event of the narrative), followed by the Warsaw pact invasion of August 1968 and the ensuing first months of *normalization* which produces 'people in liquidation', one of whom is 'můj muž'. This too is obviously a time of huge upheaval which could leave no thinking person indifferent to political questions. It is just as present here as in texts whose narrators claim to take no interest at all in changing the worlds (or language), such as Hrabal's *Kdo jsem / Who I Am*.

In a recently published study I analyze that very text, which much more obviously and thus seemingly more centrally negotiates a Barthes text (Meyer 2014) — this time a work towards the end of Barthes's oeuvre: the inaugural lecture delivered at the *Collège de France*, the very one in which Barthes speaks of the 'fascism' of language.<sup>16</sup> I analyze it as a prime case of the performance and negotiation of distance — something which some consider to be the central strategy of Barthes's *écriture* (Lavers 1995).

The Hrabal text addresses directly the question of political *engagement* and, as already stated, explicitly denies having any interest in such a thing. This is a clear indication that the references to Barthes in Hrabal's texts of the early 1980s take place in full consciousness of Barthes's reflections on the conditions of being politically *engagé*, both at the beginning of his oeuvre in the late 1940s and at the close of the 1970s.<sup>17</sup>

Each of the two texts in its own way places itself within what might be called the 'history of Marxism' in the broader sense, but at opposite ends of the history, so to

15 I refer to the person the narrator refers to as 'my husband' in precisely this manner in Czech: 'můj muž'. It is the only designation of absolute certainty which one can use for the figure.

16 See Meyer 2014; on Barthes at the *Collège de France* see O'Meara 2012.

17 See Ottmar Ette's (1998, p. 62 f.) incisive comments on the close relationship between *Writing Degree Zero* and the inaugural lecture, particularly with respect to the status of language itself. It is precisely the baggage which language brings with it before a writer starts using it, be it 'bourgeois' or 'fascist', which motivates Barthes to recommend a 'blank literature' in *Writing Degree Zero*. Ette's insight makes it all the more significant (for a complete view of Hrabal's Barthes references, which I can only hint at here) that Hrabal refers to these two particular works of Barthes.

speak. Hrabal's text emerges as a viewing of the shambles created by over 30 years of official Czechoslovak *Marxist statehood*, while Barthes's book *Writing Degree Zero* is comprised of texts written at the moment when this *peoples' republican statehood* is just being established. This is not just a chronological coincidence. Barthes's diagnosis of 'triumphant Stalinism' (p. 23) as a position within which there is 'no more lapse of time between naming and judging', as a set of practices 'presenting reality in a prejudged form', using 'tautology' and operating on a 'penological' (all on p. 24) basis, is very precisely a prognosis of the production of the category of 'writer in liquidation' which Hrabal's text retraces from the beginning of *normalization* in 1968–1969.

The central event in the middle of all of this *normalizing* is nothing other than a birthday party (based no doubt to Hrabal's 55<sup>th</sup> in March of 1969), this in turn being the very location in which the name 'Hrabal' is connected to the *profession* of the 'scribbler' ('škrabal'). The biological birth celebrated in March of 1969 can be seen as an echo of the appearance and disappearance of the biological father which sets the stage for the Barthes reference.

#### HRABAL-ŠKRABAL, AND SCRIBBLER BARTHESE: THE UNCHARTED TERRITORY OF BARTHES AND/IN HRABAL

*Nikdy mi ani ve snu nenapadlo, že bych si přál anebo chtěl změnit politické události, ve kterých jsem žil.* [It never occurred to me, not even in my dreams that I should wish or want to change the political events in which I lived] (Hrabal 1995b, p. 221; first sentence of *Kdo jsem / Who I am*, trans. H. M.).<sup>18</sup>

*'Changer la langue', mot mallarméen, est concomitant de 'changer le monde', mot marxien. il y a une écoute politique de Mallarmé, de ceux qui l'ont suivi et le suivent encore* (Barthes 1980, p. 34).

There are no Hrabal texts of the early 80s which are more important than *Kdo jsem / Who I am* and *Proluky / Gaps*, and both of these texts, particularly the former, hinge on readings of Barthes. Despite this, as I already mentioned, the role of the thinking of Roland Barthes for Bohumil Hrabal's has not been subject of any extended serious scholarship, neither on this period nor on any other.<sup>19</sup>

I would claim that this is an issue which is of key importance for the study of Hrabal at least in this last decade of 'state socialism' in Czechoslovakia — as well as for the study of the culture of decaying 'state socialism' itself — and is at the same time an illuminating case of transferred and transferring reading. In addition, it opens

18 There is no English translation of this text despite its centrality for the comprehension of Hrabal in this period and also beyond this period.

19 Since it was not the main concern of the article, I had not come upon Annette Lavers' insight that precisely 'distance' is at the core of Barthes's concerns in *Writing Degree Zero*, which is obviously of supreme relevance for a contribution to a volume covering the very issue of 'Distanz'.

up a discussion of the negotiation of Barthes in fictional and quasi-fictional writings, as well as in other media (including the already mentioned film *Birdman*). This negotiation can be read as an extension of Barthes's own work on and at the interface between theory, fiction and autobiography.

We are dealing with texts which are central and canonical in the French 1940s and 1950s and the Czech 1970s and 1980s (as well as the French 1970s, if one includes the reading of Barthes's inaugural lecture in *Kdo jsem / Who I am* or Derrida's aforementioned link of *Writing Degree Zero* with *Camera Lucida*). One can thus broaden the perspective even further and speak of a significant chapter of Czech-French literary relations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps even the most significant of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Hrabal's concern with the status of his own writing and at the same time with the possibility of the autobiographical in his specific discursive situation of 'liquidation' in the *normalization* after 1968 so uncannily echoes the concerns in the same field on the part of Barthes that it seems impossible to ignore it. One needs only look at the figures of thought at the core Andrew Brown's (1992) influential study of Barthes which has not lost its relevance despite its emergence almost a quarter century ago. Brown's main terms of 'figures of writing' which he works through in Barthes's texts are as follows: 'drifting', 'framing', 'naming' and 'scribbling'. All of these issues and techniques and not only generally important for a Barthes-Hrabal comparison, but are very specifically applicable to the writing configuration analyzed here, a configuration which can be summed up in the 'standard' held up at the birthday party in March of 1969 which is described in the last part of *Proluky / Gaps*: 'Ať žije Bohumil Hrabal, slavný český škrabal'. This phrase is translated in the official English version as 'Long Live Bohumil Hrabal, Famous Czech Scribe' (Hrabal 2011, pp. 122–124), but is clearly better translated as 'Long Live Bohumil Hrabal, Famous Czech Scribbler' or 'Famous Czech Scribe and Scribbler'.

Andrew Brown's general definition of the concept of 'the scribbler' is directly applicable in this context applicability: 'fascination for writing itself — writing, as it were, rather than what writing says' (Brown 1992, p. 8). When he goes more into depth, Brown describes a 'writing down' rather than just 'writing' which reminds one of the Hrabal's describing himself as a 'zapisovatel' (roughly: someone who takes notes) rather than 'spisovatel' (writer).<sup>20</sup> He shows us Barthes concerned with 'showing', with reproducing the gesture and the forms of the object being put into writing, particularly if this object is one already culturally gestured and formed.

## READING THE BARTHES PASSAGE IN *PROLUKY / GAPS*

[...] nalil vodky a nastavil ji proti mému muži. Pane Hrabal, jsem váš žák, ukázal jste mi cestu, jsem četbou vašich knížek opět člověk, nikoho už se nebojím, připijte mi! A můj muž se začal dávat [and then he poured my husband a shot and put it in front of him. Mr. Hrabal, I am your student, you showed me the way, reading your books

20 See various texts in the 18<sup>th</sup> volume of *Sebrané spisy Bohumila Hrabala* with the title *Ze zápisníku zapisovatele* (Hrabal 1996).

*made me into a human being again, I'm not afraid of anyone anymore, drink a toast to me! And my husband looked like he was going to throw up]* (Hrabal 1995a, p. 454, Hrabal 2011, p. 33).

I hope to have put the reader in a position to begin an adequate assessment of the entrance of Barthes into Hrabal's text. We are dealing with the 58<sup>th</sup> of the 146 sections<sup>21</sup> into which *Proluky* is divided. In the plot of the narrative we are located in the first act of the drama, between the appearance of the first book of 'můj muž' and the Warsaw pact invasion of Czechoslovakia (in Hrabal's life between 1965 and 1968), which begins in section 78. One might in general say that section 5 is an account of the effects of writing entering a discursive sphere, indeed of the birth of a certain type of discursivity (or the renewal of a type of Czech discursivity which was attacked both by bourgeois and Stalinist cultural politics: the anarchic Hašek-tradition).<sup>22</sup> The reader of *Proluky / Gaps* has already been told that 'můj muž' is deathly afraid of public readings.

*Od té doby, co se stal spisovatelem, od té doby, co vydal třetí a čtvrtou knížku, od té doby byl můj klenot zván na besedy se čtenáři, do škol a knihoven, a vždycky s tím pozváním souhlasil, ale pořád se radoval, že do té doby onemocní, že se něco stane a on nebude muset dělat besedu se svými čtenáři. A pak přišel den, který už se nedal odvolat a můj muž se rozkládal strachem, když se vydal na tu besedu, dokonce jezdil vlakem, autobusem, někdy musel přespát, ale pokaždé, i když to bylo v Praze, se roztrásl, byl bledý, mluvil z cesty a loučil se se mnou, jako by šel do nemocnice na operaci nebo do kriminálu. [From the time my husband became a writer, from the time he published his third and fourth books, from then on that jewel of mine was invited to make appearances before his readers, at schools and libraries, and he always accepted the invitation in the hopes he'd get sick before the day came, or something got in the way so he wouldn't have to go. And the day came, and it couldn't be shirked, and my husband trembled with fear as he set off for his appearance, sometimes he took a train, or a bus, sometimes he even slept over, but without exception /, even if*

21 All of the Hrabal texts of the early 1980 present great philological problems, one of which is determining where the sections of *Proluky* begin and end. In my account here I refer to the sections in Hrabal 1995b. I also quote exclusively from this edition, without, however, extensively addressing the philological problems involved in every edition of the text.

22 On Hašek and Czech discursivity see Meyer 1996 and Meyer 2010. The Stalinist and post-Stalinist aggrandizement of a Leninist Hašek to the detriment of an anarchist Hašek is a story which is yet to be told and indeed needs to be told, since it is a key process in Czechoslovak post-1948 philology. It is important for my topic insofar as Hrabal in a sense acts out the philology which was missing in official Czechoslovak academic discourse, this being a clear *autophilological* function of his texts (on *autophilology* in cases of Czech literature in the 1950s see Meyer 2010 and 2015 and other literature quoted there). This, in turn, is a significant aspect of the entrance into official Czechoslovak discursivity which forms the beginning of the plot of *Proluky / Gaps*. I thank Anna Förster for discussions on this topic which have made many things clearer to me.

*it was in Prague, /<sup>23</sup> he always got the shakes and was ashen, he rambled on and said good-bye to me like he was on his way to the hospital for an operation, or to jail.] (Hrabal 1995b, p. 472, Hrabal 2011, pp. 49–50).*

Before this intense dislike and fear of meeting up with readers sets in, there is a remarkable scene of one of the first autograph sessions in the middle of Prague which is worth quoting at length:

*Můj klenot seděl v knihkupectví tam na Národní třídě a byla autogramiáda a můj muž si nechal ušít krásný šaty a měl kravatu a jeho čtenáři se tísnili kolem stolečku, a vedle mého muže seděla mladá dívka, asi prodavačka z knihkupectví, a rozevírala nabízené knížky a dávala je pod pero mého muže, který zvedal oči a díval se do očí čtenářů a vlídně se vyptával, co tam má napsat, a pak tam máznul svůj podpis a byl z toho dojatý, sám ze sebe měl ne radost, ale byl z té pocty naměkko, dokonce šilhal a stácel levé oko, seděl tam opravdu jako syn rabína z Nikolsburku, a já jsem stála v koutku a dívala jsem se přes knížku veršů na svého muže, tak schována za knížku veršů dívala jsem se jak detektiv a viděla jsem, jak ten můj klenot tam dělá kašpařiny, že ty kašpařiny ale vycházejí z něj, že tuhle chvíli sám sobě věří a věří těm svým čtenářům, pro které napsal tu svou Perličku na dně, když jsem se do ní podívala doma, tak kampak se hrabala ta jeho Perlička na Zbabele, na Nylonový věk pana Škvoreckého, a jednu povídku pana Čechova bych vyměnila za všechny povídky Perličky na dně... ale mátlí mě ti jeho čtenáři, kteří se dívali na ten můj poklad jako na zjevení, dokonce se před mým mužem červenali a koktali, jak byli v rozpacích z toho štěstí, že mohou vidět slavného spisovatele a mluvit s ním. A tak, jak rostla fronta až ven před knihkupectví, viděla jsem, že roste i sebevědomí mého muže, už se usmíval, už z něho spadla ta nervóza, můj muž dovedl být přirozený jen v těch libeňských hospodách, jak jsme zašli někam do restaurace, jak jsme někdy byli ve společnosti pěkně oblečených lidí, kteří se uměli chovat a uměli jíst a hovořit, tak můj muž zbledl a dělal jen samý chybný výkony a rudnul a koktal a vzpamatoval se, teprve až když jsme zase byli venku, hrozně se z těch slušných lidí potil. Ale tady, při autogramiádě, když mu nikdo nic nenamítal, když viděl jen samé slušné lidi, kteří mají mindráky před panem spisovatelem. tady můj muž byl a choval se tak jako u pana Vaništy, tak jako na Staré poště. A pak už prodavačky zamkly hlavní dveře a tam skrze sklo tloukli dlaněmi další čtenáři, ale bylo to marné, bylo šest hodin a ti poslední dostali poslední podpisy. Můj klenot se zvedl, tak jako jsme odcházeli od svatby ze Zámečku, vonělo z něj pivo a stock... měl kruhy pod očima a kruté vrásky kolem úst, mávl rukou a poděkoval paní vedoucí, dokonce jí políbil ruku. [My jewel went to the bookstore there on National Avenue for the book signing and he wore a beautiful suit made for the occasion and he was decked out with a necktie and his readers crowded round the table while a young woman, most likely a salesclerk, held each book open for my husband to sign, and my husband looked every one of those readers in the eye and asked kindly what they'd like him to write, and then he scrawled his signature and was moved by the whole thing, not like he was pleased with himself, more like all that admiration made him weak in the knees, and he*

23 This phrase was not translated.

*sat there and he really did remind one of the son of the rabbi from Nikolsburk, and I stood in the corner and peered out from behind a book of poetry, I hid behind the book of poetry and eyed my husband like a detective, watched that jewel of mine perform his shenanigans, but he seemed sincere, like just then he had confidence in himself and in those readers of his, for whom he wrote his Pearl of the Deep... at home when I flipped through the book it certainly was a far cry from something like Mr. Škvorecký's *Cowards or Nylon Age* and I'd trade every one of those stories in Pearl of the Deep for just one story by Mr. Chekhov... but what threw me were those readers who looked at that jewel of mine in awe, they even blushed and stammered in his presence, so excited were they at the chance to see and hear the famous writer... And so as the line in front of the bookstore grew, so too grew my husband's confidence, he was all smiles now, no longer the nervous wreck... my husband could only be himself in those Libeň pubs of his, the moment we entered some restaurant where people were well dressed and behaved accordingly and engaged in polite conversation, my husband paled and seemed confused and stammered and blushed, and he only came to his senses once we were back outside — polite company gave him the sweats something awful... But here, during the book signing, where he was unrestrained by etiquette, where he was surrounded by well-behaved people who all felt inferior to the great writer... here my husband behaved as he would at Mr. Vaništa's, as he would at The Old Post... And then the salesgirls locked the front doors and outside still more readers pounded on the glass, but in vain, it was six o'clock and the last signatures went to those inside... That jewel of mine got up to go, and same as when our wedding ceremony wrapped up at the Little Chateau, he reeked of beer and brandy... he had dark circles under his eyes and deep lines around his mouth, he waved and thanked the manager, even kissed her hand.] (Hrabal 1995b, pp. 431–432, Hrabal 2011, pp. 10–11).*

This passage is remarkable due to its setting up a confrontation of two social spheres and its presenting a moment in which 'můj muž' does not get an inferiority complex, i.e. does not feel intimidated by 'people who know how to behave', since the whole world has for one bright moment become a beer hall, a 'hospoda' ('jako u pana Vaništy, tak jako na Staré poště' ('behaved as he would at Mr. Vanista's, as he would at The Old Post') in which he fears nothing and no one. It is a rare moment of empowerment in the official sphere for 'můj muž', who otherwise avoids all personal and bodily contact with officialdom.

It is significant here that the word 'hrabal' appears as a verb: 'tak kampak se hrabala ta jeho Perlička na Zbábělce, na Nylonový věk pana Škvoreckého' ('it certainly was a far cry from something like Mr. Škvorecký's *Cowards or Nylon Age*'). It appears in close proximity to the act of signing his name, which is presented as an act described with the verb 'mazat' ('scribble'). It is at the same time connected with 'můj muž' inscribing himself with his writing into the intertextual network of world literature or at least Slavic literature (Škvorecký, Čechov).

This is the most extensive account of an encounter of 'můj muž' with readers before the passage ending with the Barthes reference, and thus there is cause to see a certain equivalence between them. The key structural difference between the two passages is that the voice of the account is assigned to 'můj muž'. As far as Czech

cultural geopolitics go, we are not in the center of the headquarters of Czechoslovak discursive hegemony, Prague, Národní, but in Brno. Thematically the key factor is less geography than biology, the issue of 'birthplace'. It is a move from ultimate masking and costuming to ultimate 'stripping down to the skin'. But it is precisely here that 'Mr. Barthes' and his mask motif are introduced.

I will begin the close reading by commenting on those specifics of this particular passage which pertain to the narrative line followed by the text at this point.

Barthes appears at a pivotal moment in the positioning of 'můj muž' within his biological family and his marriage. It is equally significant that the narrative structure here is unusually intricate. We are dealing with the by far longest passage of reported speech of 'můj muž' in the book. This extended reported speech is, in turn, framed by a foot-washing scenery which appears to give it a particular significance for the narrator and 'můj muž', indeed to give the narrator a motivation to state '[at that moment] I knew that he was my husband and I was his wife'<sup>24</sup> (Hrabal 2011, p. 57; 'a té chvíle jsem věděla, že on je můj manžel a já jsem jeho manželka').

Since the Barthes quote addresses the issue of third person narrative, it is important to underscore the fact that we are dealing with first person narrative within third person narrative which introduces a second and a third voice reported an embedded third person narrative: the voice of 'this guy, pince-nez in hand' and that of the 'emcee' ('pořadatel').

In this context I would like to return to the *Birdman* reference from the beginning of my text. Keeping in mind that Roland Barthes appears in Hrabal's text as 'Mr. Barthes', there is here, as in *Birdman*, a vision of the actual person Roland Barthes appearing on the fictional and/or theatrical stage. In the colloquy in *Birdman* (Barthes-man?) Barthes is ironically and absurdly a figure actually flanking a superhero played in the past by Riggan, one of the people involved in the colloquy about Barthes (one who, like Riggan's actress Clara who creates the absurd vision, doesn't really know who Barthes is). In being called 'Mr. Barthes', Hrabal's Roland Barthes is also part of a cast of characters operating on various levels, both systematically and narratologically. He is also part of a colloquy concerning the *gods and epic sagas* doing 'cultural work', these *gods and sagas* concerning biological and social fatherhood. By specifically addressing the act of pointing to one's own mask, 'Mr. Barthes' as a mediating figure brought into the colloquy by an expert, produces the vision not of a figure flanking the superhero Birdman, but rather of a figure who negotiates models of fatherhood.

I would claim that the positioning of the biological is at the same time a distancing from bourgeois ideology's equation of 'History' and 'Nature' which Barthes views as the role of literary *écriture*. It is this act which empowers the name 'Hrabal', which is precisely the name not provided for him by the biological father.

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<sup>24</sup> The English translation leaves out the words 'at that moment' ('té chvíle'), which are important since they further underscore the event as such.



### ...A TEN ČLOVĚK POVÍDÁ... / ...AND THE GUY SAYS...

*Povídám, maminko...* [So I say, Mother]<sup>25</sup> (Hrabal 1995a, p. 432, Hrabal 2011, p. 12).

*The preterite and the third person in the Novel are nothing but the fateful gesture with which the writer draws attention to the mask which he is wearing* (Barthes 2012, p. 40).

Let us go through the passage in question voice for voice. I will be restricting the analysis to narratological aspects (voice, frame, time) and will refrain from getting even deeper into the passage and its individual motifs, with the exception of the issue of biological and *spiritual* fatherhood. I will begin with the individual voices and technologies of addressing, then take up the framing of the voices on the part of the *hegemonic female narrator*.

Putting the Barthes-Hrabal transfer (i.e. the *Degree Zero-Gaps* transfer) to the fore means not only focusing on the passage in which Barthes is mentioned, but also focusing on voice, since the main interest is the meaning of the voice as mask in the Barthesian/Cartesian sense. Thus I will be mainly locating and retracing the negotiation of the placing of a 'third person preterite' mask on one's *narrative face*. Thrice naming the name *Hrabal* in this passage is from this point of view not a *breakthrough* to the authentic author, but, quite the opposite: it plays through the naming of the name as mask. It intentionally only scratches the surface. This seems to be the only plausible interpretation of the assigning of the Barthesian mask-donning to the figure of an actor who has decided to be a fool and a clown.

Transitions from one voice/mode to another are key here. I count twelve of them within the passage. I hope that, in counting them and accounting for them, I establish their value for the text and make my skepticism about assuming the existence of 'a single narrator who integrates all those voices' (Jankovič) plausible.

The twelve changes of voice/mode are as follows:

1. from the embedded narrator 'můj muž' to the representative of the biological father;
2. from the representative of the biological father to the embedded narrator 'můj muž';
3. from the embedded narrator 'můj muž' to the master of ceremonies of the reading;
4. from the master of ceremonies of the reading to the embedded narrator 'můj muž';
5. from the embedded narrator 'můj muž' to the biological sister;
6. from the biological sister to the embedded narrator reporting his own speech;
7. from the embedded narrator reporting his own speech to the embedded narrator reporting events;
8. from the embedded narrator to the master of ceremonies;
9. from the master of ceremonies to the embedded narrator reporting events;
10. from the embedded narrator reporting events to the embedded narrator reporting speaking about past speech of his own in past tense;
11. from the embedded narrator reporting speaking about past speech of his own in past tense to the embedded narrator reporting speaking about Barthes' speech in the present tense;
13. from the embedded narrator reporting speaking about Barthes' speech in the present tense to the Barthes paraphrase.
- 13 from the Barthes paraphrase to the embedded narrator's expansion

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25 Also translatable as 'I am telling [the story], Mother'.

of the paraphrase (with undisclosed authorship). Our direct subject matter is comprised, of course, of the last three voice transitions, i.e. transitions 11, 12 and 13. The previous nine transitions prepare the *narrative ground* (a ground ultimately stood on barefoot by the hegemonic female narrator, from whom the transition from zero to 1 and from 13 to zero takes place — something I will discuss in the next section). This *narrative ground* is thematically something which deals with the first person narrator (embedded in another first person narrator) weighing the effects of biological and social birth and placing this, in turn, in historical contexts from Austria-Hungarian Moravia to the communist Czechoslovak state. The transitions between types of *person* (peppered with the Socialist call to the ‘comrade’) cross lines of family and their *representatives* and thus place the reader at those borders and at the same time make those borders visible. The embedded narrator, marked constantly as the familial marital, but also gendered ‘můj muž’ in the overriding narration of female hegemony, creates arrangements of its own origin. This is staged at the place in which *its body* appeared on the earth, and at the same time the voice of this body intones the literature (fictional voicing, cultural activity) which has caused its *native town* to invite the owner of this body, addressed officially as ‘comrade’, be part of its cultural sphere.

One could claim also that the transitions provide not only thematically, but also structurally exemplary material for the introduction of the Barthesian mask by embedding third person narration in first person narration (embedded in another first person narrative) and thus directly negotiating the very relationship of narrative person which is at the core of Barthes’s problematization of third person *bourgeois naturalism*.

I will discuss the embedded voice of ‘můj muž’ and the twelve transitions either singly or in groups. The voice of ‘můj muž’, the embedded narrator, sets in as follows:

*Všecko dobrý, až když už jsem stoupal do sálu, tak tam v zatáčce stál takový člověk, v prstech držel skřípec, vedle něj stála ženská, a ten člověk povídá. [Everything was fine, right up until I was ready to make my appearance, and standing there in the hall is this guy, pince-nez in hand, and he’s with a woman, and the guy says]. (Hrabal 1995a, p. 479, Hrabal 2011, p. 56)*

Interesting in the context of our argumentation is the switch from past to present, which is not unusual or conspicuous, but can arguably be connected to an emphasized presence of the voice embedded in the embedding: the voice of the present biological sister’s and the absent biological father’s representative, designated as ‘this person’ (‘ten člověk’). Voice transition 1 leads to:

*Jsem pověřen, vy jste pan Hrabal, nebo nejste? Jste! Pověřil mě můj kamarád, bývalý rakouský důstojník, abych vám oznámil, že vy jste jeho syn. A tohle je vaše sestra. Že lituje, že si vaši maminku tenkrát nemohl vzít, ale odejel na bojiště na Halič, tady prosím je jeho fotografie jako rakouského důstojníka v plášti, tady v kabátci vojenském. Pak, když válka skončila, tak už vaše maminka byla provdaná, ale to víte, je tady krev, váš vlastní tatínek, bývalý rakouský důstojník, je to už dědoušek, hrozně toho lituje, ale to víte, mladá krev tenkrát za Rakouska. a tady prosím jsou fotografie z nynější doby [I have been entrusted, you are Mr. Hrabal, are you not? You are indeed! I have*

*been entrusted by my friend, a former Austrian officer, to inform you that you are his son. And this is your sister. He regrets that he was unable to marry your mother back then, but he was off to the battlefield in Halič, if you please, here is a photograph showing him as an Austrian officer in uniform. By the time the war was over your mother was already married, but regardless, this is your own flesh and blood, your own father, a former Austrian officer, he's on in years now and deeply regrets what happened, but you know how it was back then, young blood for Austria. and if you please, here are some photographs from back then* [sic!! — see below for correction — H. M.] (Hrabal 1995a, pp. 479–480, Hrabal 2011, pp. 56–57).

It is to the voice of this *representative*, of this 'comrade' of the biological father that the first long passage from a single perspective is assigned (the second such extended passage is in the voice of 'můj muž'). The *representative's* underscoring of 'blood' ('krev', translated as *flesh and blood*) in combination with the naming of Hrabal's name is a particularly important feature of this extended addressing of the embedded narrator in the town of his birth.

It is all the more significant in combination with the vocal moderation of the handing over of the photographs given the central importance of photography in the work of Roland Barthes: 'if you please, here is a photograph showing him as an Austrian officer in uniform', then 'a tady prosím jsou fotografie z nynější doby' (translated as 'here are some photographs from back then...', which is incorrect — it should be 'here are some current photographs [of him]'),<sup>26</sup> The voice of the *representative* performs a deictic moderation of the passing over of photographs of the 'Austrian officer' at the time of his fathering 'můj muž' and at the current time a half a century later, when 'můj muž' is presenting the writings he wrote, i.e. 'fathered' to people in the town where he was born. This brings two types of representation into play: standing in for the father and giving visual evidence of the father at the two crucial moments of his entering the life of 'můj muž': the first time and most probably the last time.

In connection with Barthes, it is the presence of photography itself which takes on singular importance. One necessarily returns to Derrida's simultaneous reading of *Writing Degree Zero* and *Camera Lucida*, particularly his linking of 'blank writing' with 'punctum' as two diverse (and equally impossible) strategies of what one might call *flight from code*, i.e. as types of signification which flee from context tainted with ideology, and in doing this address the recipient in the ideological context he is located and make this context *alien* (in the sense of *ostranenie*). In the case of photography, what is of key significance is the punctum which must necessarily 'prick' or 'wound' the viewer by giving him/her the illusion of unique addressing of him/her alone.

Let us bring this to bear on the constellation in the Hrabal's text. The moderation of the photographs handed over to the embedded narrator calls forth a multiple *nakedness* — that of the photograph itself (punctum as bared of all context, of all stadium), that of the body of the newborn son of the biological father being (doubly) *represented* here, and above all that of the '[flesh and] blood' which this *representer* addresses practically in the same breath as the moderation of passing over the photographs. It is parallel — this is Derrida's point — to the paradoxical 'blank writ-

26 The French translation is correct in this point: 'voici des photos récents' (Ha516).

ing' which is simultaneously the salvation and the end of literature in *Writing Degree Zero* — to a writing which casts aside all masks and attempts to just *be what it is* (as opposed to a writing which embraces its own necessary masking — in this case of the Hrabal's text in the form of accepting the role as fool and clown).

The transition to the voice of this *father representative* is the core of the passage from the point of view of *autophilologically* addressing its own methodology. This very first transition of voice frames all others and also prepares most directly the Barthes transitions at the end of the passage.

Voice transition 2 leads to:

*A předal mi paklík těch fotografií a já jsem se díval na tu moji sestru, měla ty samé vysedlé lícní kosti, ten samý kocouří ksicht jako já. Pak ze sálu vyšel pořadatel a volal [And he handed me a deck of photos and I glanced at my sister, she had the same high cheekbones, the same catlike face as mine. Then the emcee came out of the room calling] (Hrabal 1995a, p. 480, Hrabal 2011, p. 57).*

Considering all this, the transitioning back to the embedded narrator is all the more astounding in its reference to the physical similarities to his first-seen sister and the immediately registered similarity of both of their faces to those of cats. The reference to 'kocouří ksicht' ('ksicht' is translated neutrally as 'face' in English and 'visage' in French, but is more colloquial). Aside from this cat reference informing all the extremely frequent cat references in the book (and in other books of this period and subsequent periods), the immediate juxtaposition of the deck of photos and the observation of the sister's face picks up on the *blood and photo* discourse quoted in the words of the *father representative*. He takes the photos and does not look at them, but rather looks at the face, thus creating a new equivalence. The same voice then reports on the invasion of the voice of officiality, calling on him as a 'comrade' to play his public role. One can speak in this case without exaggeration and forced reading conclusions of an immediate collision of 'punctum' and 'studium', of absolute bodily uniqueness beyond signification and the call to enter to purely social sphere with all of its ideologies, rhetorics, and context(ualization)s. The raised volume of 'calling' highlights the insistence contained in the hearing of this voice.

It is also an official calling on of the voice we are *hearing privately* to *speak officially* and thus a contrast between these callings. It is the tension between those two callings which forms the core of the book, bringing the private narrative constellation to bear on the moment of the emergence of the *public Czechoslovak writer* and the consequences of this emergence (also for the body of that writer, whose serious illnesses, requiring an operation, are the subject of a long section).

Voice transition 3 leads to:

*Hledá se soudruh Hrabal, za pět minut začne beseda! [We're looking for comrade Hrabal, five minutes until we start!] (Hrabal 1995, pp. 480, Hrabal 2011, pp. 57).*

The transition from the emphasis of the calling up of the voice and the content of the calling itself is again extremely self-revealing, in that it announces a search for 'com-

rade Hrabal'. After the voice of the *father representative* named the name Hrabal once already, now the representative of *socialist statehood* names the name again, but no longer with the bourgeois Mr., but rather with the communist 'comrade'.

Transitions 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 I will treat together.

Transition 4 is to:

*A já jsem stál se svou sestrou, políbil jsem ji tak, jako se líbají kočky, když se potkají. Moje sestra mi řekla [And I stood there with my sister, I gave her a kiss, a peck like cats give each other by way of greeting. And my sister told me] (ibid.).*

Transition 5 is to:

*Tatínek se sem bál přijít, zdali mu odpustíte, tak přijďte zítra k nám, podívat se na našeho tatínka, přijdete, prosím? [Father was afraid to come himself, he didn't know if you could forgive him, would you consider coming to our place tomorrow, to say hello?] (ibid).*

Transition 6 is to:

*A já jsem řekl, že si to rozmyslím, [And I told her I'd think about it,] (ibid.).*

Transition 7 is to:

*a ze sálu...<sup>27</sup> [and then a voice came from the ballroom] (ibid.).*

Moving from telling of the parting from the sister with a 'cat kiss' to the words of the sister, then to embedded narrator's report of his own speech announcing his intention to reflect, then to the report of the place where words of officiality are calling him to order, these four transitions form the axis around which the section turns. On each side of the axis is a long speech, the first by the *father representative*, the second by the embedded first person narrator himself. The latter is flanked by the Barthes reference as a closing account of itself and its discursive location. This structure demonstrates how precisely composed the passage and its voices are.

The axis surrounding the words of the biological sister center on a gender border analogous to that between the male embedded narrator and the hierarchically higher female narrator. But this relationship is one not of gender, but of sex, i.e. of pure body, with no discursive elements developing or being allowed to develop in the end — despite the call of the sister to create some kind of discursive connection to the biological father (the long inner speech of the embedded narrator declares and explains this refusal). It is just as bereft of actual talking as the relationship with the cats, and thus the bodily resemblance of the both of them to cats which the embedded narrator notes is apt and programmatic.

<sup>27</sup> In the edition currently circulating one reads 'a ze sálu zahřmělo', literally 'it thundered from the hall'. This is the only significant deviation between the version of *Sebrané spisy Bohumila Hrabala* and that edition placed in distribution by the publisher Mladá fronta. The 'thunder' adds to the authority of the calling voice and gives it perhaps an ironically infernal quality.

The transition to the naming of the location of the official voice calling for a second time and insisting on the entrance into the public sphere activates the tension already mentioned between the public and the private. It is insisting that the narrator's body, the body of the writer, move into contact with the social scene set up for it. This border is made spatial and thus literally visible — it is the border to the gathered public of his town of birth which marks its ruling state's (temporarily, as it turns out) making the words of this embedded person politically *sayable* by making his words publically audible and his body publically perceptible.

The next transition is from the place of the official meeting to the voice of officiality itself with its own time considerations noting that the official colloquy has (always) already begun.

Transition 8 is to:

*Prosím soudruh Hrabal, beseda začala!* [Comrade Hrabal, if you please, we're starting] (Hrabal 1995a, p. 480, Hrabal 2011, p. 57).

Transition 9 is the one which immediately frames the long colloquy of the embedded narrator, the voice of 'můj muž':

*A já jsem byl na besedě ve svém rodném městě, několik minut po tom, co jsem poprvé uviděl svou sestru, držel jsem se pořád těch letitých podobenek muže v uniformě starého Rakouska, a kdosi hovořil o mně, o mém díle, vytáhl jsem některé podobenky, ano, byl to hezký člověk, dokonce krásný člověk. ale čím déle jsem se díval na ty podobenky, tím víc a jasněji jsem věděl, že zítra nepůjdu navštívit tohoto tatínka, otce, že můj tatínek je ten, který sice není můj tělesný otec, ale který mě vychoval, který říkal, propadat můžeš na realce každý rok, ale maturitu mít musíš, který mě nechal vystudovat, který měl za moji maminku hrozný pocit viny, Francin, ten, který se promítal do Žemly z knížky U snědeného krámu. Taky jsem tam nešel, ani za sestrou, udělal dobře ten můj tatínek v rakouské uniformě, že za mnou nepřišel, teď už sám sebe chápu, proč mám pořád ten pocit viny, protože jsem žil vinou, kterou trpěl Francin a maminka. A tak bez viny jsem pořád šel do viny, pořád jsem prchal a prchal před tou vinou, která ve mně byla, ještě než jsem se narodil* [And there I was, in the town I was born in, at an author's appearance, just minutes after seeing my sister for the first time, and I held those worn photographs showing a man dressed in the uniform of old Austria, and as someone in the background went on about me and my work I looked at those photos, and he certainly was a handsome man, in fact remarkably so, but the more I looked the more convinced I was that tomorrow I would not go see my father. My real father, though not my biological one, was Francin, the man who raised me, the man who told me I could flunk high school every year but I'd have to get my diploma, who allowed me to go to university, and who had a terrible feeling of guilt on my mother's behalf. And so I didn't go, not even to see my sister that father of mine in the Austrian uniform did well not to come see me, now I finally understand myself, why I always carry that feeling of guilt. I assumed it from my mother and Francin and without actually being guilty of anything I bore that guilt, always and endlessly fleeing before that sense of wrongdoing, which was in me even before I was born] (ibid.).

For our purposes it is important to note that this second longer colloquy belonging to one voice also has the father-photographs at its core. The simultaneity of the voices of the readers questioning the work of the writer and the effects of the father-photographs seems to evoke the border between *studium* (contextualization, code) and *punctum* (the gesture of uniqueness of addressing and thus of the absence of code). The naked corporeality represented by the photographs is presented as seductive and at the same time unacceptable: Francin, the assumed father totally accepted, also with the 'guilt' he brings and associated with literature and film of the first republic (Herrmann, Frič) is chosen over this bodily father figure oddly connected to Austria by means of the uniform repeatedly stressed (either as his own observation or as an echo of the words of the father representative who points out this detail, this in turn determining whether it is to be viewed as a reality or as a costume).

In the context of my argumentation it is important to note that all three mentions of the photo(graph)s utilize the word 'podobenka', while in the colloquy with the *father-representative* both voices use the word 'fotografie' (also three times — again a sign of careful composition). This fact alone makes it clear that it is essential to differentiate between voices, and that the claim that all the voices are *integrated into one* is extremely problematical. The word 'podobenka' underscores — at least etymologically — the similarity of the image with its object, while, in contrast to 'podobizna', it can today only designate a photograph.<sup>28</sup> If the usage were not so clearly complementarily distributed, the use of 'podobenka' would not be conspicuous. Given the clear distribution, it seems justified to bring the issue of similarity into the discussion — of similarity as a bodily feature but also as a poetic or poetological quality (the embedded narrator *thinks* the word 'podobenka' while listening to questions about his word asked by his reading public, and this in some way answers with this word).

Given the fact that the passage ends with a reference to the mask, it is plausible to consider this to be the paraphrase of one of Nietzsche's most well known formulations concerning the mask: 'Alles, was tief ist, liebt die Maske; die allertiefsten Dinge haben sogar einen Hass auf Bild und Gleichnis' (Nietzsche 1999/IV, p. 57). Here, it is — as in the case of 'podobenka' — important to underscore the basic meaning of similarity contained in the word 'Gleichnis[s]'.<sup>28</sup>

In this context, the narrative transition from the call of the embedded narrator into the public hall to this colloquy, which in turn negotiates various cultural, familial and ethical identities, is an ingeniously structured focus on the multiple embedding of the subject at hand. The border marked by the transition complex, indicative and central. On the one hand there is the insistence of the state of being (always) already embedded in whatever place its contingent administrative policies assign to those subject to its absolute power. On the other hand is the inner negotiation between the bodily lineage (from Austria) and the personally chosen lineage (from the first Czechoslovak republic). The first is marked by the poke, the *punctum* of the father

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<sup>28</sup> The word 'podobenka' designated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the larva of an insect. It is used two other times in *Proluky*, both in the meaning of 'photograph': 'kde leželo plyšové album s podobenkami všech předků mého muže' 'tetka položila koláčky a talíř s masem a salátem na desku, chvíli tady setrvala, dívala se na podobenku na náhrobním kameni, tam byla fotografie mladíka, pak vyleštla přepečlivě celou hrobku'.

materially visualized in the photographs, while the second is subject to cultural contextualization, including literature and film in circulation in the historically *bourgeois* sphere.

This is what prepares the tenth transition, the one to the Barthes complex. Crucially, the first step is the embedded narrator's commenting on his own previous narrations vis-à-vis the hegemonic female voice, which is voice transition 10:

*a tak, jak už jsem ti říkal, [and like I already told you] (Hrabal 1995a, p. 480, Hrabal 2011, p. 57).*

The self-reference to his own Barthes reference in the past presents a further element of the embedded narrator's cultural self-historization and systematic self-positioning. The reference to the Barthes formulation is revealed to be a repetition, perhaps even a regularly repeated phrase in the communication between the embedded narrator and the main narrator. It is marked as a known, or perhaps even a standard perception in the background of all passages of the border between the two voices. There follows to move to a voicing with the same *authorship* but in another mode: the first person embedded narrator, after referring to his 'having said' the formulation of Barthes, makes Barthes not as much into a philological or philosophical authority, but much more into a figure in the fiction by giving him the name 'Mr. Barthes' (like 'Mr. Marysko'). Thus the function of transition 11:

*jak říká pan Barthes, [like Mr. Barthes says,] (ibid.).*

The same verb *říkat* (in the imperfective mood, designating an act in progress and in the present also possible a repeated act) is used for both, but the embedded narrator refers to himself in the past, while 'Mr. Barthes' speaks in the present. This puts him on the same modal level as the *father-representative* at the beginning of the passage, thus creating an equivalence which informs the twelfth transition: to the Barthes paraphrase itself:

*kráčím sice vpřed, ale prstem ukazuju na svou masku, [Although I forge ahead, I point to this mask of mine] (ibid.).*

The thirteenth and last voice transition is a transition hidden to those who aren't familiar with the Barthes quote, for it brings elements into the discussion which are absent in Barthes without marking them as such:

*kerou jsem si nasadil jako herec, který si usmyslil, že bude dělat kašpara, šaška [which I wear like an actor who has decided to play the clown, the fool] (ibid.).*

By smuggling the clown and the fool into the making words supposedly belonging in their entirety to Barthes, the text performs a remarkable double gesture of voicing: the element is imported, and this importing itself marks itself as the act of a clown who juggles with the Barthes text in a manner which contaminates it, but in naming the clowning, cancels the clown-like activity as primary work with the text. In this



way, the double third person narration of the embedded narrator speaking about him as one who quoted Barthes in the past and of the Barthes words themselves undergo an operation which one could view, in turn, as being Barthesian — they ‘drift’ away from the direct designation of a subject matter and *unmask*’ their own drifting.

In accounting for the transfer of Barthes’s words to the context (and negotiation of contextualization itself) in the Hrabal text, I have only marked the most basic effects of the transitions from one narrative voice or mode to another. Much more work would need to be done on the explanation of individual motifs and of course of the intertextual (and intratextual) references which go beyond the Barthes paraphrase and interact with it. I leave this for more in-depth study and move on to the larger framing of all of the operations sketched here. I will only cast a brief glance at this last topic.

### NAKED FRAMING: THE WASHING OF FEET

*Useknutá noha. Viktorinus* [Severed feet. Victorinus] (*Legenda zahraniá na strunách napjatých mezi kolébkou a rakví*, in Hrabal 1994, p. 350, trans. H. M.).<sup>29</sup>

*Když ji vedli nahou do nevěstince, zahalili ji andělé do jejích vlasů. Ovce. Agnes* [As she was led into the bridal chamber, angels hid in her hair. A sheep. Agnes] (*ibid.*, p. 352).

Having broken down the embedded narrative and all of the embedding contained in it, I will take one step back and one step forward in the narratology and look at the framing which brackets the embedded narration of ‘můj muž’. The transition from zero to one is as follows:

*seděl u stolu, hrál si s pivním táckem, prsty mu kmitaly, nedovedl zastavit tu jejich hru s kulatým papírovým táckem s nápisem Zlatý tygr. Tak jaký to tam bylo? povídám a vnořila jsem špinavé, zaprášené nohy do lavoru. Poklekl, mydlil mi a omýval ty moje nohy a tiše vykládal* [he sat at the table playing with a beer coaster, fingers going like crazy, he couldn’t stop fiddling with that round paper coaster from *The Golden Tiger*. So how was it? I asked as I plunged my dirty, dusty feet into the tub. He kneeled down and lathered and washed my feet and then said quietly] (Hrabal 1995a, p. 480, Hrabal 2011, p. 57).

The transition from twelve back to zero ends in the unexpected and rather dramatic declaration of the hegemonic female narrator that she recognized that she and ‘můj muž’ are really husband and wife:

[...] *hovořil můj muž, dívala jsem se na něho dolů, klečel přede mnou a umýval mi nohy, myl mi nohy a té chvíle jsem věděla, že on je můj manžel a já jsem jeho manželka.* [so said my man, kneeling before me, washing my feet, and I knew that he was my husband and I was his wife]. (Hrabal 1995a, p. 480, Hrabal 2011, p. 57).

29 There is no English translation of this text.

The image of the speaker of the embedded narration, marked as male, washing the female main narrator's feet as he tells his tale should not be ignored. It seems to be a travesty of one of the two famous foot-washing or foot-anointing scenes of the New Testament, i.e. either Jesus washing the disciple's feet, or, more likely, Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus' feet with costly oil. The reversal of the gender roles, making the female narrator into the Christ figure, should be noted.

The image of bare feet is important in Hrabal's writing of the 1980s in at least one other context — in the already mentioned text *Kdo jsem / Who I am*. As I already discussed in my first analysis of the text which alone due to its title might be called autobiographical (but of course it is not simply autobiography, indeed also due to the mediation of Barthes), the seemingly anarchic text ends with the image of bare-footed women traversing the Moravian countryside. It would be going too far to describe the passage in *Kdo jsem / Who I am* as directly complimentary to this scene in *Proluky / Gaps*, but it is striking that the foot-washer has just returned from a trip to the very area of Moravia where the peregrination of the bare-footed women is taking place.

In the analysis of the article (Meyer 2014) I noted that the narrator of *Kdo jsem / Who I am* describes both his own liking for going barefoot and the barefooted wandering women of Moravia. This gives the motif a transgendered quality which is important for the context I am writing about here. Stripping feet bare in order to wander, then donning the shoes again upon the arrival in town — this seems to be the opposite of what we are dealing with here: the removal of footwear in preparation for playing the role of a listener, not a teller.

In my specific analysis I underscored the fact that thematizing bare-footedness underscores walking itself, i.e. literally setting-foot (Begehung) and its impression on the body, rather than the goal of the journey, and significantly enough the goal of the journey in the seventh and last section of *Kdo jsem / Who I am* is the place of the very birth whose biological fatherhood stands in question in the passage of *Proluky / Gaps* which contains the Barthes reference: Brno-Židenice.

I further note in that other study that the images of bare-footedness bring together the present of fetching water in Kersko barefoot and the long-gone past of the bare-footed wandering women, and that both seem to be part of a quasi-Rousseau-esque critique of civilization which is in contrast with another passage in the fourth section of the text which demonizes practically applied numbers — an example of this practical application being the numerically expressed sizes of shoes and clothing. A sphere of non-quantification, of peregrination with no particular destination: this is the bare-footedness with which the text *Kdo jsem / Who I am* ends.

In addition, the non-progression and the non-quantification is also a factor in the departure and distancing from history itself which plays a large role in the text which begins with a rejection of all actions which might actually change (historical) reality (this, in turn, being a pastiche or parody of Barthes's inaugural lecture). In the context of my analysis here, one might say that this distancing from history is a version of the 'blank writing' which Barthes advocates in *Writing Degree Zero*: the only escape from a (or in a) language poisoned by malicious history.

In a general sense the narrator revealing her soiled bare feet as a preparation for 'můj muž' telling her the story of his biological father brings images of corporeality together in a manner which is extremely ambivalent. The tale told by 'můj muž'

tells of nothing but the utter rejection of any connection to the corporeal bond of biological fatherhood on the part of the 'Austrian officer'. The washing of the feet as the *stage direction* for this speech can thus not be an affirmation of corporeality itself. It would affirm all the more the biblical references mentioned earlier, particularly that of Martha's sister Mary anointing Christ's feet by spreading costly oil upon them with her hair — Mary being the very one whose job it is to listen, indeed to listen to the wisdom of a Savior whose role in history is to overcome the power of the flesh itself — except it is the woman whose feet are being washed/anointed, not the man.

Still, the rejection of the biological father which is the upshot of the story told by 'můj muž' is in its own way an overcoming of the flesh and of biological family analogous to that of Christ, who says:

*There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, / but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10: 29–30).*

It would be possible and indeed quite enlightening to follow this biblical trail further, but that will have to take place in another study. I note here that this too is a transferring and transferred reading.

## THE ENDS OF A CLOWN-MASK, THE CLOWN-MASK OF AN ENDING

*Vždycky jsem byl tím kulovým filkem, který se prochází ve slunci s rolničkou v ruce, ta zdánlivě šaškovský čepice mne provází i dnes [I was always that Schellenober (queen/jack of diamonds)<sup>30</sup> walking in the sun with a jingle bell in his hand, and this seeming fool's cap accompanies me till today] (Hrabal 1995b, p. 221, trans. H. M.).*

Truly: *hrabal* means *he dug, he scratched or he raked*. It is impossible to tie off all the loose ends left in these remarks, including, as I just noted, with the implications of the *Christological* framing just sketched (it seems to link up to the appearance of Jesus Christ and the other biblical figures and Catholic saints in texts ranging from *Morytáty a legendy*<sup>31</sup> in the 60s to *Too Loud a Solitude* in the 70s, perhaps even to the *Kain* complex which goes back to the early 50s). It is impossible to even hint at the directions such an analysis might take.

<sup>30</sup> The name of this card in the *Deutsches Blatt* for games like Schafkopf, Skat and the Czech Mariáš cannot be translated in terms of the French card system, since the German/Bohemian card system has no female figures, while at the same time the position of the *Ober/filek* corresponds to the queen, and *Schelle/koule* corresponds theoretically to diamonds.

<sup>31</sup> In this context it would be essential to take up the brilliant study of Xavier Galmiche (2002) on *Morytáty a legendy* as a 'collage de genres', particularly since there is a special focus on the most relevant text for the issue, *Legenda zahráná na strunách napjatých mezi kolébkou a rakví*.

It is possible only to note that our work in this field has just begun and marvel at the fact that his work is beginning so late in the course of Hrabal studies, thus short-changing a body of writing whose value for the working through of *transferred and transferring reading* is enormous. I hope to at least have demonstrated the enormity of this value.

Coming back to the issue of *transferred and transferring reading* itself, I hope to have demonstrated that the exact manner and mode in which a writing reading (literally) incorporates the read text into its corpus need to be retraced with great patience. Things are more complex than they seem at first glance. The text's composition is the product of great literary handicraft (and craftiness) than the first impression of messy jottings might indicate, just as the impression of a simple masking of autobiography turns out to be a ploy of the text which many have fallen for.

I hope to have indicated that one needs to read with a mind to the complexity of the *hospitably receiving house* of the text. This *house text* reads by writing, i.e. receives by giving a new space. Having said this, I know I am, to give one example of possible complexities, potentially provoking a whole new discussion on the *writerly* and the *readerly* text coming out of Barthes's *S/Z*. The same must be said about an application of Derrida's late philosophy of hospitality which has been in the background of all references to the house, to the oikos.

Finishing my argument with the question of *cultural transfer*, I note that the issue of *natural language* and *national culture* is made extremely intricate in the Hrabal's text. This is indicated by the bringing of the *odd couple* of 'Mr. Marysko' and 'Mr. Barthes' onto the stage. But also the official *Neostalinist Internationalism* which frames the political surroundings of *Proluky / Gaps* as a text associated with a 'writer in liquidation' is a key factor for the assessment of the overdetermined border transgressed in the *reading writing* and the *writing reading* at hand. Much methodological attention could be paid to the reflection on the ideological which could in some way be derived from *East and West* or from the 'second World's' work with the 'First World'. However, all of these larger issues can only be properly addressed when one retraces the intricate steps the text itself is taking in dealing with appropriated alien texts such as that of Barthes. Precisely because this appropriation is takes place in the mode of self-declared 'clowning around', it needs to be treated as serious business.

The text plays at playfulness and masks the truth of masking. The work of *transferred and transferring reading* in the case of Roland Barthes is based on this essential double gesture which could be read as a comment on any 'semantic gesture' (Mukařovský) which might be associated with the model of authorship which a Hrabal's texts works though.

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## RESUMÉ / RÉSUMÉ

### **Masky Rolanda Barthesa v Prolukách Bohumila Hrabala: výklad přenosu a přenosy výkladu**

Zmínka o Rolandu Barthesovi v jedné klíčové pasáži Hrabalových *Proluk* je zde čten jako index opakování a vyjednávání autobiografická (které nesmíme zaměňovat s autobiografičností samotného textu, alespoň ne ve vztahu k autorovi, resp. jeho ženě jakožto nominální vypravěčce). Jankovič sice odmítal odlišování jednotlivých perspektiv a zdůrazňoval, že se řeč textu hroučí do textu „jediného vypravěče, který v sobě spojuje všechny [ostatní] hlasy“, avšak pečlivé čtení pasáže obsahující zmínku o Barthesovi — v níž se též objevuje Hrabalův biologický otec ve dvou verzích a v podobě balíčku fotografií — prokáže relevanci přesného odlišení obou hlasů a médií, k čemuž nutno vztáhnout Barthesova zkoumání distribuce hlasové a temporality v měšťanském románu, zároveň objasňující ironičnost postmarxistického vstupu do neostaliniistické scenerie. Tak vypadají podmínky pro (zatím nikdy důsledně provedené) přenesené i přenášejíci barthesovské čtení Hrabalových textů z osmdesátých let, zvláště těch domněle autobiografických.

### **Roland Barthes’s Masks in Bohumil Hrabal’s Gaps:**

#### **Accounts of a Transfer, Transfer of Accounts**

The mention of Roland Barthes in a key passage of Bohumil Hrabal’s *Proluky (Gaps)* is read here as an index of a repetition and negotiation of the autobiographical, which should not be confused with

the text itself being autobiographical, at least not with respect to its author (or the author's wife, the nominal narrator of the text). Despite Jankovič's insistence on not differentiating perspectives and collapsing all of the speech of the text into the voice of a 'single narrator who integrates all [other] voices', close reading of the passage mentioning Barthes — which is also the passage in which the biological father of Hrabal appears in the form of two representatives and a pack of photographs — makes it clear that exact differentiation of both voices and media is essential, and that Barthes' studies of the voicing and temporality of the bourgeois novel must be brought to bear on this, while of course accounting for the irony of the post-Marxist entry into a neo-Stalinist setting. These are the conditions for a transferred and transferring Barthes reading of Hrabal's texts of the 1980s (especially those deemed *autobiographical*) which has never been systematically and consequently thought through.

### KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA / KEYWORDS

Bohumil Hrabal; Roland Barthes; přenos; vypravěči; autobiografičnost / Bohumil Hrabal; Roland Barthes; transfer; narrators; autobiographical

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