

Dmitrij Tschizewskij's Reading of Jan Amos Komenský's *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce*



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SYNOPSIS

This paper deals with Dmitrij Tschizewskij's interpretation of Jan Amos Komenský's poetical work *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce*. In Dmitrij Tschizewskij's articles dedicated to this masterpiece of Czech literature the analysis of its structure and the exploration of its moral-religious message are intertwined. The fact that the work is an outstanding example of Baroque literature is of prime interest and allows for an innovative approach to its devices. Dmitrij Tschizewskij detects a structural quality of the poem which he is the first to name 'word chains'. In following the overwhelming quantity of this device he lays bare a unique verbal construction that consists of a multitude of word groups each of which belongs to a semantic field of its own. In order to capture the very essence of this procedure Dmitrij Tschizewskij makes use of notions which the rhetorical system offers. In pointing out the Baroque character of some rhetorical figures that Komenský adopts in his poem, Dmitrij Tschizewskij reveals the interplay between these figures and the 'world view' they convey — according to his twofold interpretive style.

KEYWORDS

Jan Amos Komenský; Baroque poem; structural strategies; rhetorical figures; interpretive style.

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I

As we know, Halle was the very place where Dmitrij Tschizewskij intensified his interest for the writings of philosophers and poets of the Baroque, especially for mystics and their language. This interest found its counterpart in his tremendously growing library which he seems to have collected in an early phase of his studies in this field.¹ Within this framework, Komenský, accidentally, became a prominent figure. In the library of the Franckeschen Stiftungen he rediscovered a part of *De rerum*

1 Angela Richter (2009) gave an enlightening account of his Halle years stressing the library aspect. She was the Halle Slavist to take care of the valuable library of rara and preciosa, published a catalogue and made the library accessible for reading.



FIGURE 1: The title page of the first edition of the *Labyrinth* text with the title *Labirynt Swęta a Lusthauz Srdce*, 1631 (Wikipedia).

humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica, a Latin manuscript of 3440 pages, estimated as the main work of the humanist and theologian Comenius. Inspired by this discovery, Tschizewskij started his thorough exploration not only of this not yet printed section of the *opus magnum* but also of Komenský's theoretical (pedagogical and linguistic) work, mostly published in Amsterdam, and with growing interest the novelistic poem written in the Bohemian Brother's mother tongue, *Labyrnt svęta a ráj srdce* (Komenský 1998), a brilliant example of Baroque literature.

In her introduction to a collection of articles dedicated to Tschizewskij's memory Angela Richter (2009, p. 15) mentions his various contributions to the journal *Analecta Comeniana* in which he continuously discusses new contributions to Comeniology, accentuating his own interest in the Baroque nature of the Bohemian author's philosophical and poetic productions.

In order to capture Tschizewskij's approach to Komenský's poetic novel I will try to shed some light on his innovative method of analyzing Baroque texts and on some of his poetological theses.²

² For more details concerning this aspect, compare my recent article 'Dmitrij Čiževskij as a researcher of Baroque', in Susanne Frank and Galina Babak (eds.), in print.

II

The general interdisciplinary occupation with the Baroque as an overarching cultural phenomenon culminated in a series of publications in the late 1950s and 1960s. One of the major works was Gustav René Hocke's *Manierismus in der Literatur* (1959) which delineates the Baroque as the climax of mannerism and exploring the irregular, ecstatic, enigmatic, ludic, and hypertrophic in a multitude of Western European literatures with a footnote hint (Hocke 1959, p. 121) to Tschizewskij's *Formalistische Dichtung bei den Slaven* (1958).³ The rhetoric of 'concettismo', the influence of Kabbalah and certain strands of mystical writings, including phenomena of the 'arcana', were subject to his explorations. Tschizewskij does not refer to Hocke directly but there are affinities in approach and in the main targets of interest. Instead, he insists on the studies of the forerunners in this field who provided ample literary material and a catalogue of descriptive terms: Ernst Robert Curtius and Heinrich Wölfflin, while also trying, of course, to establish a certain tradition in Baroque studies represented by Slavic scholars, naming partly forgotten fighters for the non-classical, such as the Polish Edward Poręmbowicz who already at the end of the 19th century defined Jan Andrzej Morsztyn as a Baroque poet and pupil of Giambattista Marino. He also quotes the Czech scholars — Josef Vašica, Zdeněk Kalista, and Antonín Škarka — who fostered research in this field.⁴

One of Tschizewskij's concerns was to elaborate the interrelationship between Baroque stylistics and the Baroque world view, the Baroque mind structure, which he explores across language, genre, and even epoch borders. Connecting the diachronic with the synchronic aspect, and combining a topological with a typological interest, he tries to answer questions concerning the genesis and tradition of certain stylistic phenomena and thematic complexes, as well as their functional transformation in a given ensemble of Baroque texts.

His rhetorically oriented analysis, finally, is meant to establish a typology of Baroque poetics. In order to defend this goal, Tschizewskij was ready with his texts to fight against a certain group of literary scholars who denied the legitimacy of the term 'Baroque' and its application to literature and culture,⁵ and he presented his concept for a Western scholarly audience whose members were not acquainted with Slavic Baroque literatures (Tschizewskij 1968).

It is in referring to the appeal function of Baroque poetry that Tschizewskij approaches its strategies, stressing hyperbolism, risky antitheses, the weird, the unusual, the unprecedented, the shocking, and closes his characteristics with a sceptical remark:

3 *Formalistische Dichtung bei den Slaven* (1958), a collection of Slavic poetical texts of different literary periods characterized by playful experiments from medieval to futuristic examples.

4 In this respect it is enlightening to follow Tschizewskij's correspondence with Škarka, recently published by Marie Škarpová et al. (2024).

5 Tschizewskij's 'baroquism' includes Russian literature of the late 17th to the beginning of the 18th centuries. This claim was repudiated by Soviet literary scholars. 'Classicism' is the notion they used to characterize Russian literature of that period.



What usually happens with every style, the highest achievements of Baroque are exposed to internal risks, even to deterioration, leaving the seriousness of the exceptional for the merely grotesque, the internal emotion for entangled, decorative, purely external, superficial traits of the artwork. The drive for originality leads to overdoing, exaggeration, in order to enhance, to hyperbolize, to reach a merely 'ludistic' ['spielerisch'] originality ignoring the content by copious variations of forms. Instead of emotion [Erschütterung], the serious pathos, we are confronted with empty declamation and theatrical effects (Tschizewskij 1968, pp. 210–211).⁶

Poetic strategies of eccentricity, of unbridled forms, are termed 'formalistic' belonging to this larger domain of word play, lingual manipulations, and alliteration, versus *cancrini*, versus *rapportati*, *carmina echoica*, *acrosticha*, that is strategies void of an idea. The absence of an idea illustrating a certain worldview and representing a certain mind structure leads Tschizewskij to a split aesthetic evaluation of a variety of Baroque texts. This evaluation has a moralistic implication, yet it is ambivalent. Because there is an unveiled pleasure in detecting excitingly new stylistic adventures, the mastery of language. It is in this domain that he feels compelled to define stylistic and generic features, emphasizing their innovatory character. His thorough knowledge of rhetoric as a descriptive and proscriptive system enables him to precisely define the devices Baroque authors make use of. In his exemplary reading of Komenský's *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce* he proceeds in this vein.

III

We learn from Jana Stejskalová's publication (in Čyževskij 2017) that Komenský's masterpiece was a topic of Tschizewskij's studies apparently much earlier. In 1941 he dedicated a manuscript on this subject to Jan Mukařovský, honouring his 50th birthday. The text in the printed edition, provided and commented by Stejskalová (*KLabyrintu světa*), contains two parts combining a rhetorical analysis with an interpretation of the thematic level of this eminent example of Bohemian poetical prose. An article recalling the 2nd part of his Czech exploration concerning what he calls the 'content of a literary text' was published in English (cf. Tschizewskij [1953] 1972). The analytical part of his study (nearly identical with the manuscript version) was published in German (cf. Tschizewskij [1957] 1983). His interest concerning the content or the-

⁶ 'Und wie bei einem jeden Stil liegen in den höchsten Leistungen des Barock die Elemente der inneren Bedrohung, ja des Verfalls, die von dem Ernst des Eigenartigen zu bloß ‚Groteskem‘, von der inneren Bewegtheit zu verwickelten dekorativen, aber rein äußerlichen, ja oberflächlichen Zügen der Kunstwerke führen. Die Vorliebe für Originalität und Übertreibung führt zu dem Bestreben, jede Einzelheit zu steigern, zu hyperbolisieren, zu einer bloß ‚spielerischen‘ Originalität, zu Überlastung des Inhalts durch die Formvariationen, und an die Stelle der in die Tiefe dringenden Erschütterung, des ernstesten Pathos, tritt die Deklamation und theatralische Effekthascherei'. — Translation, unless otherwise noted, by me — R. L.



FIGURE 2: A page from Jan Amos Komenský's *Orbis Pictus. Svět v obrazích. Die Welt in Bildern. Le monde en tableaux*, Hradec Králové 1883 (in my library, R. L.).

matic level⁷ leads him to read this novelistic poem as a *speculum mundi* that seems to dissimulate the existing world, unable to mirror, to reflect its reality. Komenský's image of the world as a labyrinth, seen from Tschizewskij's perspective, means the negation of the world as a book (an often used metaphor) which implicitly means that the knowledge which the world has accumulated about itself falls prey to total annihilation: the labyrinth turns out to be a negative encyclopaedia.

The *Orbis pictus* of 1658, we can add, will revert this negativity into a positivity of reliable signs (cf. Lachmann 2022). In other words, Komenský's general approach to

⁷ Stejskalová in her reading of Tschizewskij's study refers to 4 different thematic fields (Čyževskij 2017, pp. 14–16), which reappear in the English version.

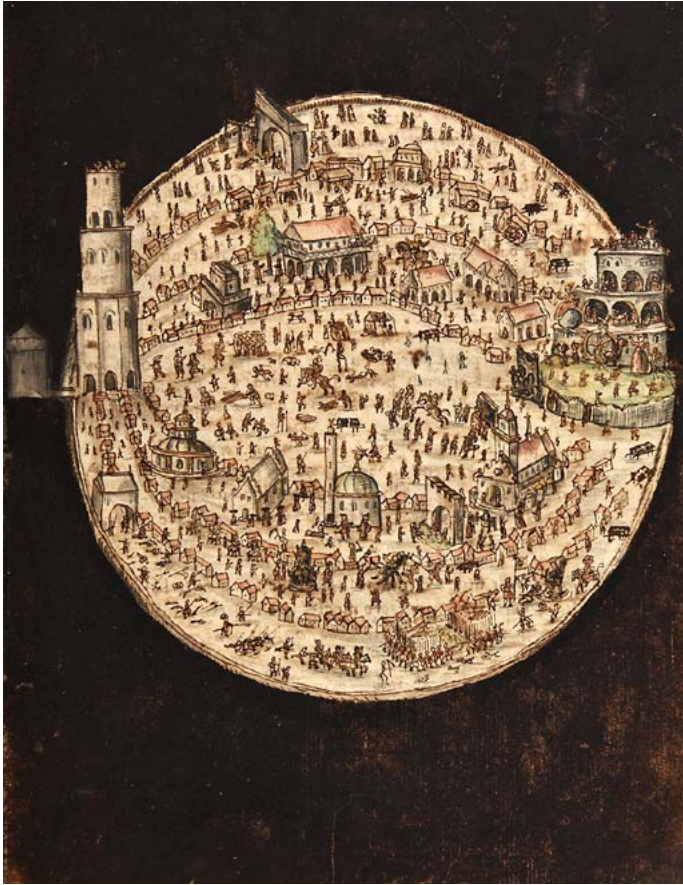


FIGURE 3: Komenský's drawing in the first version of the *Labyrinth*, 1623 (The National Pedagogical Museum and Library of J. A. Comenius, Prague).

culture and its sign structure is definitely binary. His pedagogical project of *Orbis pictus* belongs to the tradition of system building with the assistance of pictures, alphabet, grammar, and intelligible signs which is meant to deliver a complete description of the visible, discernible world, a description which is instructed and guided from above: God's eye in an overarching triangle (the trinity emblem) can be seen in this function.⁸

Whereas the *Orbis pictus* is a universe ordered by God and inhabited by people who pursue meaningful actions, individuals coming into the world and leaving it as a world which was conceptually captured and described in all its appearances, the labyrinth is opaque, denying all rational approaches, depicted as utterly deficient, morally detestable, and as an evil world, a *zlý svět*, bereft of sense and order. The pilgrim who has left his heart-chamber is met by two guides who allow him a bird's-eye view of the world, a gaze from high above. This perspective offers a scene of utmost incomprehensible, incoherent human actions, a fragmented world made of sense debris. There is a frequency of to and fro, *sem a tam*, which seems to rhythmize the text, an image

⁸ For the emblematics in Komenský's writings, see Schadel (2003).

which permeates and encapsulates it, it appears as an insect-like swarming ‘*hmyzilo*’ (Chap. VI, 6). This image recalls a passage in Lukian’s *Charon*, where the gaze from above meets a swarming of ants. It is, of course, Tschizewskij who detected this intertextual bond between these texts, which both, according to Bakhtin’s genre terminology, belong to the tradition of the Menippean satire. His reference to Lukian is one of his strategies for embedding Baroque literature in a broader historical context. In all of his works, he recalls classical texts in order to trace a tradition back to its origin.



IV

Following the picture of the labyrinth which Komenský himself depicts in the shape of a circle structure we discern buildings at certain points, paths or circuits (six in all according to the text), which circumvent rather irregularly the inner space which is the world and the world-town in one. The labyrinthine web dissolves the idea of a pedagogical and system-oriented encyclopaedia and shatters the assumption of universal laws and reliability of rules. It reveals itself as a place that is completely detached from a world governed by order. Accordingly, the topic of order-disorder is the prevailing one in Tschizewskij’s reading, which includes two approaches, sometimes coinciding. His leading idea here means that a verbal figure is simultaneously a figure (form) and a thought (content). In order to capture the core of the multi-layered text he addresses it from these two perspectives. His prevailing goal, therefore, consists in analyzing the stylistic construction of the novelistic poem and in studying its central object: the striving for wisdom and religious tranquillity and its acquisition after a long and puzzling search for it. In addition to Tschizewskij’s analysis of structure and content, the narrative aspect of the text appears to be of interest. The experiences gathered by the pilgrim on the different stations and phases of his wanderings, the play of questions and answers between him and his unreliable guides are narrated from the pilgrim’s perspective, which the storyteller has adopted as his alter ego. Or, to put it differently, it is a first-person narration about the ‘fantastic’ experience of learning, an introduction into the mechanism of the world and its rules. Yet, the lessons the agents in this novel of education are offering turn out to be utterly misleading. Only religious enlightenment will finally rescue the pilgrim from the intellectual tortures he has to endure. The novel of education, however, is also a novel of adventure, one of both body and mind. The rhetoric of the *Orbis pictus*, a rhetoric of an unequivocal correspondence between word and object, *nomenclatura* and *res*, i.e., a rhetoric of *claritas*, *perspicuitas* and, according to its conciseness, also of *brevitas*, has its counterpart in the rhetorical equipment of the *Labyrinth* which Tschizewskij sees as being governed by *ambiguitas*, *aequivocatio*, and *amplificatio*.

V

According to his twofold interest, Tschizewskij addresses the formal or constructive side of the poem with counting the nouns on the title page of the work, which confronts the reader with one of its standard devices — sound repetition:



Labyrint světa a ráj srdce, to jest světlé vymalování, kterak v tom světě a věcech jeho všechněch nic není než matení a motání, kolotání a lopotování, mámení a šalba, bída a tesknost, a naposledy omrzení všeho a zoufání: ale kdož doma v srdci svém sedě s jediným Pánem Bohem se uzavírá, ten sám k pravému a plnému myslí upokojení a radosti že přichází (Komenský 1998, p. 119).

Das Labyrinth der Welt. *Das ist eine klare Beschreibung, wie in dieser Welt und allen ihren Dingen nichts herrscht als Irrung und Verwirrung, Unsicherheit und Bedrängnis, Lug und Trug, Angst und Elend, und zuletzt Ekel an allem und Verzweiflung und Das Paradies des Herzens* *Das beschreibt, wie nur der, welcher zu Hause in seinem Herzen wohnt und sich mit Gott allein darin verschließt, zum wahren und vollen Frieden seiner Seele und zur Freude gelangt.* (Comenius 1970, frontpage)⁹

The enumeration is followed by a regulating element which seems to promise a clear-cut structure and calculated arrangement of textual components. These are the word chains which Tschizewskij was the first to define and name as *Wortketten*. He is aware of Komenský's stylistic strategies and the poetic effect which ensues from the assemblage of words belonging to the same grammatical category. It is part of his analytical handicraft that he counts the varying numbers of the chain-segments, paying attention to rhythm, the effect of shorter and rather lengthy chains containing a quantity of members from 15 to 37.

When counting the word chains containing three or more elements we find 582 of such chains on the 140 pages of the modern edition. We proceed carefully paying attention only to obvious cases. We notice that in some places Comenius intensifies their effect. [...] The frequency of word chains decreases according to the number of elements packed into one chain (Tschizewskij 1983, p. 4).¹⁰

What is amazing in his analysis of the changing quantity of members in one chain is that, in counting them, he means to discover a certain poetical trait in Komenský's novel. Tschizewskij dwells on expounding this trait by pointing out word play — a variety of ludic forms — and he is eager to discern the types of word chains the author uses. There is one type which functions as the dissection/division of a certain term into minor terms, and there is another which works as the assemblage of names for a multitude of objects interrelated by contiguity. His me-

⁹ In want of an adequate English translation I shall cite the original and the German version by Zdenko Baudnik (Comenius [1907] 1970), C. J. Bucher, Luzern — Frankfurt a. M 1970, with a foreword by Pavel Kohout. Tschizewskij did not think much of this translation.

¹⁰ 'Wenn wir die Wortketten von drei und mehr Elementen zählen, so finden wir auf den etwa 140 Seiten des modernen Druckes nicht weniger als 582 solcher Wortketten. Bei der Zählung verfahren wir recht vorsichtig und beachten nur solche Stellen, wo die Wortketten ganz augenscheinlich sind (und, wie wir sehen werden, erreicht es Comenius durch allerlei Kunstgriffe, daß die Wortketten noch auffälliger werden). [...] Die Häufigkeit der Wortketten nimmt mit der Zahl der ‚Glieder‘, der Elemente der Ketten ab'.



ticulous account of these members and their analysis from a rhetorical-stylistic perspective is nearly exhaustive, betrays a fervent (nearly enthusiastic) interest in Komenský's lingual ingenuity. The creation of registers and catalogues of certain types of chains leads to discern the complex verbal architecture of this multi-layered work. Special attention is paid to the phonetic structure of the chains, the frequency of alliterations, and to another surprising device: the play with opposite pre-syllables of a given verb producing a certain rhythm. We see this, for example, with *dobývají a odbývají*, and *skládají a rozkládají*. It goes without saying that he highlights the abundance of *homoioteleuta* which the grammatical possibilities of Slavic languages provide, as well as the frequent word-play devices: the combination of two phonetically matching verbs: *rvanice a pranice; sekali a flekali; prudili, studili; vázali, mazali*.

In other words, with Tschizewskij's analysis we understand that the scene of utmost disorder and disquieting senselessness that the labyrinth represents, is met by an impressive counterpart: the regularity of word chains which construes this worldly labyrinth. It abounds in alliterations, parallelisms, and repetitions that bridle the arbitrariness, chaos, and absurdity of the world. His meticulous account of these members and their analysis from a rhetorical-stylistic perspective is nearly exhaustive, betraying a fervent interest in Komenský's lingual ingenuity. The creation of registers and catalogues of certain types of chains highlights the complex verbal architecture of this multi-layered work. The labyrinthical chaos is framed by a manifest order, i.e. by a lingual geometry, leading the reader to presume that the labyrinth, in spite of the evident *conundrum*, is a well-designed construction. The word chains can be seen as architectonic factors. Or, to put it differently, the chains represent an order of their own, an order which is dictated by language itself. The grammar that Slavic languages make use of allows for a variety of lingual devices such a grammatical rhyme, *homoioteleuta*, that are highlighted by the analysis in question (these structures serve as excellent illustrations of Roman Jakobson's 'Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry', 1981).

VI

Let us have a closer look at some of the chains¹¹. The first example tells us about the first encounter of the pilgrim with the so-called noble human race, where the semantic field of expressions for human movements and modes of behaviour are enumerated:

Nebo jedni chodili, jiní běhali, jiní jezdili, jiní stáli, jiní seděli, jiní leželi, jiní vstávali, jiní zas léhali, jiní se rozličně vrtěli; [...] Potkali-li se kteří, rozličného tu bylo kejlování, rukama, usty, koleny a jinak k sobě se toulení a choulení, sumou rozličné třeťy (Chap. VII, 2, Komenský 1998, pp. 137–138).

11 In order to emphasize Tschizewskij's analytical approach I will enlarge the number of quotations.



Denn einige von ihnen gingen, andere liefen, wieder andere ritten; einig standen, andere saßen oder lagen, einige erhoben sich, während andere sich wieder niederlegten oder in verschiedener Weise sich drehten und sich wanden; [...] Wenn einige von ihnen sich begegneten, trieben sie allerhand Gaukeleien mit Hand und Mund, man sah sie Verbeugungen machen und dergleichen, sich aneinanderschmiegen und biegen, kurzum allerhand Possen treiben. (Comenius 1970, p. 42)

This is an agglomeration of alliterations, parallelisms, and *homoioteleuta*, which exhibit the senseless, contingent, arbitrary movement and behaviour in a meaningful and definite language form. In Chapter XIV, 'Between physicians', the description of the *praxis medendi* comprises 18 chain members:

Pak vařili teprv, pařili, prařili, škvařili, prudili, studili, pālili, sekali, řezali, bodli, šili zas, vázali, mazali, tvrdili, měkčili, zakrývali, zalévali a nevím co víc nedělali. (Chap. XIV, 3, Komenský 1998, p. 193)

Und nun begann ein Kochen, Sieden, Brühen, Beizen, Sengen, Kühlen, Brennen, Hacken, Schneiden, Stechen, Zusammennähen, Verbinden, Salben, Versteifen, Lockern, Abwaschen, Einreiben und weiß Gott was alles noch. (Comenius 1970, p. 119)

Fourteen chain members narrate about the perversity of Christians:

a vidím v pravdivé pravdě, že pijí a blijí, vadí se a bijí, lstí i mocí jední druhým berou a derou, bůjností řehčí a skáčí, výskají a pískají, smilní a cizoloží, huř než jsem které jiné viděl (Chap. XVIII, 6, Komenský 1998, p. 201).

Ich fand nun, daß sie wirklich fraßen und sofften, haderten und rauften, einander mit Gewalt und List beraubten und schunden, vor lauter Übermut krähten und wieherten, lärmten und tobten, hurten und die Ehe brachen, ärger als ich es sonst irgendwo gesehen. (Comenius 1970, p. 130)

The elaborate depiction of extreme cruelties — torture, hanging, skinning, quadripartition (recalling Lucan's *Pharsalia*) — rivals the sight of the body exposed to decay and peril, an illustration of the topic of decline and death. There are also images of women in old age which in laying bare the ugliness of this state can be read as anti-Petrarchist and misogynist counter-pieces to the tableaux of impeccable and adorable beauty which adorn Renaissance poetry and paintings. Presumably, Tschizewskij would have accepted this remark.

Another example in this vein — the mistreatment and murder of the prophet Salomon after the failure of the Salomonic mission (which was meant to revert moral disorder into order) — is mentioned with ten elements:

Protož někteří tu hned před očima mýma do ohně metáni, jiní do vody házíni, jiní věšeni, stínáni, na kříž rozbíjeni, kléšťemi trháni, řezáni, bodeni, sekáni, pečení na roštích (Chap. XXXV, 4, Komenský 1998, p. 265).

Darum wurden auch einige vor meinen Augen verbrannt, ersäuft, andere gehenkt, enthauptet oder ans Kreuz geschlagen, mit Zangen zerfleischt, zersägt, gespießt, gevierteilt, auf dem Rost gebraten, daß ich die grausamen Todesarten gar nicht alle aufzählen kann. (Comenius 1970, p. 218)



In the arrangement of the chains, Tschizewskij discovers another stylistic trait in the text, which he terms '*Verlangsamung*' (Šklovskij's *zamedlenie*). This, in change with acceleration in the verbal arrangement, provides a temporal moment which governs the pilgrim's movement in the circuits of the labyrinth. It is a certain strategy of rhythm or rhythmic effect, which allows for alliterations and *zvukovye povtory* (phonetic repetitions).

VII

Referring to 'the dark' as a poetic instrument in the second part of the poem devoted to the calm chamber of the heart, Tschizewskij uses the term '*Verfremdung*' (Tschizewskij 1968, p. 237). The device serves as the estrangement of hitherto unknown religious experiences, which are clad in bold dark metaphors. Yet *Verfremdung* is also meant as an aspect of what he calls the 'inadequate perspective', a concept which he endows with a double meaning: the inadequacy of perceiving the real world, the gaze of the naïve observer who is unable to grasp the monstrosity of the sight he is confronted with, and it means to grasp the very essence of it. The inadequate perspective which turns out to be a version of *ostranenie*, a key notion of Formalism (i.e. Viktor Šklovskij) refers to the world view which in Komenský's *Labyrinth* is disclosed as being disturbingly odd and strange.

Both the inadequacy of the gaze and dominant *stilisticum* of the word-chains illustrate the metaphorical complex of the question of one of the guides, addressing the pilgrim: 'Slýchal-lis kdy co o kretenském labyrintu?' ('Have you ever heard about the labyrinth of Crete?'; Chap. II, 2, Komenský 1998, pp. 128–129).

VIII

The question 'have you ever heard about the Cretan labyrinth' is a metatextual device hinting at the author's knowledge of a myth and the famous motif extant in literature and art, and used as a metaphor in narratives about spiritual pilgrimages. Tschizewskij refers to texts like Herrmann Hugo's *Pia desideria*, with a labyrinth as its frontispiece and a wandering soul in the guise of a pilgrim, or the works of the Rosicrucian Andreae's social-religious *Christianopolis* of 1619, which follows Morus' *Utopia* and Campanella's *Civitas solis* (Ms. 1617). The topic of the labyrinth seems to have been ubiquitous, especially in the various 17th-century poetical works in which this subject appeared. Of course, it is Tschizewskij who proves these references.¹²

12 Tschizewskij's quotation of ancient, medieval, and 17th century authors or literary works illustrating a certain tradition of literary motifs was approved and adopted by scholars of Comeniology; see Stejskalová in Čyževskij 2017, pp. 17–18.



The labyrinth as a figure of thought, as a literary and artistic motif, as a myth and allegory, has a long European history (beyond its Baroque *mise-en-scène*) (cf. Burrich-ter 1995). But, of course, it was the Baroque era to be especially fond of the labyrinth as an overwhelming, multi-faceted metaphor. Hocke, the literary scholar mentioned above, called his cardinal work ‘Die Welt als Labyrinth’ (1957) in which he refers several times (pp. 102–103, 126, 138) to Komenský’s *Labyrint světa*. After mentioning a couple of Baroque (in his terminology ‘Manneristic’) authors of labyrinth-texts, he writes: ‘As a matter of fact we are approaching a climax: in 1631 Comenius, i.e. Jan Amos Komenský, a Czech polyhistor (1592–1670), known all over Europe, published a poem “Labyrinth der Welt”’ (ibid., p. 102).¹³ Hocke adds a short summary stressing the motif of the world upside down, the experience of delusion, and the function of the false glasses (ibid.). The antidote to this experience is pleasure, in which the pilgrim partakes after his return to his *ráj srdce*. In the first version of the text (1623) this space of seclusion was called ‘*Lusthauz srdce*’. The original title (see Figure 1) encompasses the two opposite spheres the poem is unfolding: the abominable world and the calm chamber of the heart. The *Lusthauz* as counterpart to the disquieting outer world conveys a hue of the hedonism which we know from the *lustgarten*-labyrinth in Renaissance paintings or from the labyrinth circles in European parks. Komenský’s hedonism, however, is a religious one. The splitting of the metaphor in two semantic fields is one of the poetic achievements of this text. The other is the coincidence of disorder and orderedness.

The irregular structure of the labyrinth drawn by Komenský is a modification of the various renderings of the Cretan examples which we can see in art and architecture. Most of them show geometrically structured circular paths, which seem to promise an exit. In Komenský’s world in disarray, they appear to be rhizomatic, neither straight lines nor conveying the possibility of an exit. The labyrinth, instead, is a *tmavá jáma*, a pit, a ditch, an inversion of the true, good world, it is a *zlý svět*, in which the reality of things, actions, and circumstances dissipates into simulacra. Though Tschizewskij did not use this expression, it fits into the semantics of the ‘inadequate perspective’.

IX

Tschizewskij points out that Komenský’s labyrinth does not appear as the result of a positive human achievement or even something made by human hands. It is instead the work of a Demiurge, a parody of the real world. It seems that the semantic structure is permeated by a Gnostic subtext, an atmosphere of an utmost distanced Godhead that penetrates the universe, for which the creator does not seem to be responsible, entangling the pilgrim in a sphere of delusion or infatuation from which he tries to flee. Infatuation, *mámení*, is one of the leading terms, and although the names of one of the two pilgrim’s guides, *Všezvěd Všudybud*, seem to promise wisdom and

¹³ ‘Doch wir nähern uns einer Klimax: 1631 veröffentlichte Comenius, d. i. Jan Amos Komensky, ein in ganz Europa berühmter tschechischer Polyhistor (1592–1670), ein Poem: Labyrinth der Welt’.

sensible orientation, they are utterly misleading. The pilgrim is the naïve observer, ready for his ‘*speculare*’ (Latin in the Czech text, Ch. VI, 4, Komenský 1998, p. 137). Tschizewskij interprets the *speculare* as the pilgrim’s task to scrutinize the world, to study it. It is the guides who press him to do so. But, paradoxically, they hinder him from catching the adequate perspective. The semantics of looking, gazing, viewing, beholding coexists with that of bewilderment, confusion, erring, deceit, mirage. The *mámení* in which the pilgrim finds himself is answered by delusive glasses, *bryle mámení* (also *okuláry*), which he is forced to wear. It betrays a false perspective, a perversion of the true and innocent *speculare* (Chap. IV, Komenský 1998, pp. 132–133). Only in few instances does the wanderer happen to catch a glimpse of what is really going on. The pilgrim encounters the inhabitants of the labyrinth as individuals who wear masks to communicate with each other, and who look extremely odd when tearing them down. Komenský makes use of the comic aspect of the motif illustrating it with one of his famous chains: people without masks are in fact monsters, they are misshapen, deformed, animal-like.

Napořád byli trudovatí, prašiví či malomocní: a mimo to, některý měl svinský pysk, jiný psí zuby, jiný volové rohy, jiný osličí uši, jiný baziliškové oči, jiný liščí ocas, jiný vlčí pazoury: některé jsem viděl s pávovým vysoko vytaženým krkem, jiné s dedkovým naježeným chocholem, některé s koňskými kopyty etc., nejvíc pak bylo podobných opičím (Chap. VII, 4, Komenský 1970, pp. 138–139).

Und indem ich darauf achtete, sah ich, dass alle nicht nur im Gesichte, sondern auch sonst an ihrem Leibe in verschiedener Weise entstellt waren. Sie ware alle ohne Unterschied mit Krätze, Räude oder Aussatz behaftet, und außerdem hatten manche einen Schweinsrüssel, andere Hundszähne oder Rindshörner, wieder andere Eselsohren, Basiliskenaugen, Fuchsschwänze oder Wolfsklauen; ich sah auch einige, die einen hochaufgezogenen Pfauenhals, andere, die eine dem Schopfe des Wiedehopfs ähnliche Haube, wieder andere, die Pferdehufe hatten usw. Die meisten aber ähnelten Affen. (Komenský 1970, p. 43)

In Chapter X the pilgrim enters the next station of his exploration of the world’s labyrinth. It is the station or grade of the scholars of science and wisdom. Here Komenský is eager to lay bare the reality of intellectual training, the level of learnedness and knowledge which he conveys in a scene of bizarre actions, conditions, and institutions. His rhetoric here is at its peak. Tschizewskij illustrates his notion ‘negative allegory’ precisely with this section of the text: ‘The depiction of objects and happenings without using the proper names for them in order to cover their meaning’ (Tschizewskij 1968, p. 236).¹⁴ The pilgrim is bewildered by the grotesque show the scholarly world offers him. The library is allegorically transformed into a pharmacy, where chemical materials are mixed with one another. Knowledge is kept as a kind of show of objects in fancy tins, which are manufactured in different shapes and co-

14 ‘Die Schilderung der dargestellten Dinge und Verhältnisse unter “fremden Namen”, wobei der Sinn des Dargestellten verborgen ist oder die Existenz des Sinnes geleugnet werden soll’.



lours. Those who try some of their contents fall ill and begin to vomit. But the central point here is that scholars make ample use of the knowledge tins of their fellow scholars: the theft of foreign thoughts, the patchwork of incompatible ideas (in short a kind of scholarly intertextuality, a cause for vomiting).

There is still another aspect of interest: the representation of the senseless in images of the fantastic. Here Komenský takes recourse in the motif of *mundus inversus* and in paradoxical and similar devices which disclose a 'ludistic' moment in Tschizewskij's terms. Referring to some clue-terms in his erroneous encyclopaedia, the semantics of the *mundus inversus* unfolds. As a formula of inversion it can be detected in the following sentences: 'věc daleká blízká a blízká daleká; malá veliká a veliká malá; mrzutá krásná a krásná mrzutá; černá bílá a bílá černá etc.' (Chap. IV, 4, Komenský 1998, p. 132) — 'ein entfernter Gegenstand (erscheint als) nahe, ein naher entfernt, ein kleiner groß, eine großer klein, ein häßlicher schön, ein schöner häßlich, ein schwarzer weiß, ein weißer schwarz' (Comenius 1970, p. 34).

The inversion in these cases is caused by the falsifying glasses, *bryle*.¹⁵ The *Volksbilderbogen* dedicated to the *mundus inversus* topic — which Komenský might have been acquainted with — show such pictures of reversal and abrogation, illustrating the striving for trouble, even uproar. The function of social critique is imbedded in forms of utmost unreality. Nonsense too is a figure of inversion. In Komenský's labyrinth *mundus inversus* refers to an inverted logic, the inversion of that which exists: conditions, actions, thoughts. The inhabitants of this *mundus* seem to be helpless in acting and thinking in these queer surroundings. Another chain quoted in Tschizewskij's series of examples: 'nerozuměli, ani neodpovídali, aneb o jiném, než řeč byla, odpovídali' (Chap. VII, 5, Komenský 1998, p. 139) — 'sie verstanden nicht, sie antworteten nicht, oder antworteten auf etwas, wovon keine Rede war' (Comenius 1970, p. 44).

The verbal engineering, an art in its own right, and the ambivalent semantics of the mundane, profane, and sacred or religious, inform this new interpretation of the labyrinthine concept. Komenský's version of it has absorbed different traditions. Tschizewskij in this context refers to Gnostic, Hebrew, ancient and Baroque-Christian elements: *vanitas*, *acedia*, *melancholia*. Both the evil and the good labyrinth, the *Lusthauz/paradise*, the hedonistic place of religious retreat, are represented in mirroring rhetorical constructions. *Ambiguitas* and *aequivocitas* of the worldly sphere are transmitted into the unequivocal language of salvation. Following Tschizewskij's understanding of the function of rhetorical strategies, one could say that rhetoric here has a double task: to narrate the adventures of the heart, and to explore the limits of reason, which is challenged by *adynaton*, *mundus inversus*, and *oxymoron*.

15 Hocke (1957, p. 126) mentions this motif in connection with Baltazar Gracián's *Criticón*, written in 1651, 20 years after Komenský's poem, and he compares the two authors: the Bohemian Brother with the Spanish Jesuit. This coincidence consists in the labyrinth-topical, but also in the motif of the wrong perception of the world due to the use of instruments for sight (falsifying glasses, the delusive mirror). Cf. the Czech edition *Komenský kontra Gracián: Pansofie prodromus aneb O pravé a plné moudrosti. Gracián kontra Komenský: Příkladní orákulum aneb Umění moudrosti*, ed. Květa Neradová and Hugo Schreiber. Evropský literární klub, Prague 2006.

The ornamental structures of the word chains, the *homoioteleuta*, the repetitions ultimately serve a purely religious goal, and the verbal construction itself can be seen as the confession.



X

Tschižewskij provides the following summary of his analysis: the word chains, in his view, appear as the enactment of the ‘*schlechte Unendlichkeit*’. Here he corrects the common opinion that this formula is Hegelian. He instead refers to Nicolaus Cusanus, whose work presumably was known to Komenský. The word chains in his understanding are meant to confront the reader with the inexhaustible, the ‘*schlechte Unendlichkeit*’, the multifariousness of mundane empirical things, conditions, professions, happenings devoid of sense, and to show a path towards a sphere of harmony and the union of the Divine with Christian life. But in order to show both the *schlechte Unendlichkeit* and Divine, tools are necessary which only language and language alone can provide. In Tschižewskij’s analysis, the poetic creation of the *Labyrinth světa* and *ráj srdce* is revealed as an overwhelming *Sprachkunstwerk*.

The *zlý svět* and the *ráj* mutually then reflect one another. Tschižewskij discloses this transformation of ambiguities into the language of salvation. The ornamentality of the word chains, the *homoioteleuta*, figures of repetition, constructivist moments, serve the idea of salvation. In terms of the treatment of language, however, one cannot deny a certain enthusiastic embrace of its inexhaustible possibilities, and some of the word-chains have an ecstatic moment (especially in repetitions). The *conclusio* of the *Labyrinth světa* is a hymn, which is at the same time a play with a religious-pedagogical and poetical discourse. It is a play which seems to result in a kind of *furor poeticus* when reading the following lines: ‘Hotovo jest srdce mé, Bože, hotovo jest srdce mé, zpívati a plésati tobě budu. [...] Duše i tělo mé pléše k tobě, Bohu živému’ (Chap. LIV, 2, Komenský 1998, pp. 311–312) — one of the meanings of *plésat’* is to dance. ‘Mein Herz, o Gott, frohlocket Dir entgegen. [...] Mein Leib und meine Seele jubeln Dir, dem lebendigen Gott, entgegen’ /Comenius 1970, pp. 277–278/). The end, however, seems to be rather conventional with its Latin ‘*Gloria in excelsis Deo*’.

Tschižewskij’s close reading of the text reveals the extent to which he was charmed by Komenský’s use of his mother tongue. (He himself, the analyst, must have had an excellent knowledge of Czech.) Highlighting the ingenuity of Komenský’s verbal art, he suggests the creator of the *Labyrinth* might have invented a couple of words to make them match with the ‘given’ ones (cf. Tschižewskij, 1983, p. 12): *rvanice a pranice; natáhali a namáhali; doly, zmoly; drbali a trhali; hluk a zvuk*. It was the inexorable charm of Komenský’s language, its poeticity, which triggered this analysis, the meticulous quotations of the word chains and variety of ludistic forms. Tschižewskij’s leading idea, that a verbal figure is simultaneously a figure (form) and a thought (content) — mentioned above — is a rendering of the form/content dualism of its own and invites us to read Komenský’s poetic masterpiece in the light of this idea.¹⁶

16 Compare the exclusively philosophical interpretation by Bernhard Josef Stalla (2004).



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