

## Divergence of feminine and masculine worlds in prose texts by Olga Tokarczuk and Edmund Hlatky

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**Abstract:** In the present study, the author focuses on the interpretation of prose texts by the Polish author Olga Tokarczuk and the Slovak writer Edmund Hlatky. He finds a high degree of thematic-motivic congruence between their texts, which is related to the depiction of divergences between the character of the so-called feminine and masculine worlds. The author's main focus in the study is on the detailed portrayal of the characters and the specifics of their interaction with the world around them. In the case of Olga Tokarczuk, he focuses on the prose books *House of Day*, *house of Night* and *Playing on Many Drums*, and in the case of Edmund Hlatky on his short story collections *Autumnal Haze* and *Glory and Mystery*. The author observes the psychology of the heroes in life's exposed moments and trials, examines the degree to which the use of religious motifs and the Bible is functional, and analyses the degree of tragedy that weighs on the heroes in their different psychological states and in their search for the meaning of life. The author finds a high degree of similarity in the portrayal of the female characters in the two interpreted novelists, which can be seen from the aspect of biblical heroism, redemption or at least from the aspect of peaceful loving asylum, which stands in contrast to the male characters.

**Key words:** Olga Tokarczuk, Edmund Hlatky, literary comparatistics, interpretation of a fictional text, feminine world, fragmentarization, metaphysics, psychology of the subject, communication aesthetics

### Rozbieżność świata kobiecego i męskiego w tekstach prozatorskich Olgi Tokarczuk i Edmunda Hlatky'ego

**Abstrakt:** W niniejszym opracowaniu autor skupia się na interpretacji tekstów prozatorskich polskiej pisarki Olgi Tokarczuk i słowackiego pisarza Edmunda Hlatky'ego. Stwierdza wysoki stopień zbieżności tematyczno-motywacyjnej między ich tekstami, co wiąże się z przedstawieniem rozbieżności między charakterem tzw. świata kobiecego i męskiego. W badaniu autor skupia się przede wszystkim na szczegółowym portretowaniu postaci i specyfice ich interakcji z otaczającym światem. W przypadku Olgi Tokarczuk koncentruje się na jej książkach *Dom dzienny*, *dom nocny* i *Gra na wielu bębenkach*, a w przypadku Edmunda Hlatky'ego na jego zbiorach opowiadań *Jesenny opar* (Jesienna mgła) oraz *Sláva a tajomstvo* (Sława i tajemnica). Autor śledzi psychologię bohaterów w ich najważniejszych momen-

tach i próbach, bada, w jakim stopniu wykorzystanie motywów religijnych i Biblii jest funkcjonalne, a także analizuje stopień tragizmu, który ciąży na bohaterach w ich różnych stanach psychicznych i poszukiwaniach sensu życia. Autor odnajduje wysoki stopień podobieństwa w przedstawianiu postaci kobiecych w dziełach obojga interpretowanych pisarzy, które można postrzegać przez pryzmat biblijnego heroizmu, odkupienia lub przynajmniej w intencjach spokojnego, życziwego azyłu. Co ważniejsze, wszystkie te aspekty kontrastują z charakterem męskiego świata, przedstawionego w tekstach obojga analizowanych pisarzy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Olga Tokarczuk, Edmund Hlatky, komparatystyka literacka, interpretacja tekstu artystycznego, świat kobiecy, fragmentaryzacja, metafizyka, psychologia podmiotu, estetyka komunikacji

The Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk, Nobel Prize winner for Literature (2018), and the Slovak novelist Edmund Hlatky probably need no special introduction - they have received great acclaim in their respective countries, both from the point of view of professional literary critics and readers alike. As far as Olga Tokarczuk's work is concerned, in this study we will deal with two of her prose books – *House of Day, house of Night* (orig. *Dom dzienny, dom nocny*, 1998) and *Playing on Many Drums* (orig. *Gra na wielu bębenkach*, 2001). These books are in several respects highly comparable to the prose works of E. Hlatky (his *Autumnal Haze* [orig. *Jesenný opar*, 1999] and *Glory and Mystery*<sup>1</sup> [orig. *Sláva a tajomstvo*, 2001]) - in both cases of novelists we witness the creation of a kind of ideal feminine world in which male characters find protection, refuge and long-term asylum. In Tokarczuk's *House of Day, house of Night*, which at first glance is rather a collection of prosaic features or rather autonomous fragments, such clues involve the first-person narrator, forming an inseparable communicative double with her strange neighbour Marta in a remote rural setting and the topos of the nearby town of Nowa Ruda. Otherwise, Tokarczuk's book is interspersed with a multitude of allusions and digressions, seemingly torn pages from a diary, recorded dreams, regional legends or remarkable recipes. A new dimension of symbolism is represented here by the mystically significant female characters, who, unlike the male ones, are characterized by antique stoicism, foresight, and who are the natural bearers of generational experience as their destiny is pervasively interfered with by unearthly forces. Such, for example, is "the merciful Marta"<sup>2</sup>: a being not quite of our world,

<sup>1</sup> Since there are no official English translations of all the works we have interpreted, we will base ourselves on the Slovak versions of the books, and so in the case of O. Tokarczuk as well as E. Hlatky. In the case of quotations from these texts, we give in the text of the study the English translation and in a footnotes the original wording in the books we actually worked with. We follow an identical procedure in the case of quotations from secondary literature.

<sup>2</sup> orig. "milosrdná Marta", in O. Tokarczuk, *Dom vo dne, dom v noci*, Bratislava, Aspekt, 2002, p. 295.

one might say, whose physical existence is governed by, or intrinsically dependent on, the cycle of the seasons, the intrepid workings of the miraculously nourishing, vegetative energy of the cyclical spring:

I could guess where Marta came from. Why she did not exist for us in winter and appeared in early spring (...) It could have been that she was awakening in March. At first she lay motionless and didn't even know if her eyes were open - it was dark everywhere anyway. She didn't even try to move, because she knew that only her mind had woken up, not her body. The body was still asleep, and a moment's inattention was enough for the mind to succumb to its dreamy power again...<sup>3</sup>.

Marta's life is not subject to the laws of rationality and formal logic; it transcends the horizon of empiricism of the visible world as the time in which it moves – its length is indefinite and probably unlimited. In the person of Marta, thanks to her Matusalemic performance, the vicissitudes of the human age converge more insistently, from that she selects extraordinary insights and renders them with surprising certainty, even austerity. On her shoulders, as it were, rest the heavy burdens of the past, which always make the new present more and more wearisome for her, so that she finally begins to spontaneously fall into a smooth hibernation, only to be resurrected to life again for a predefined time.

Unsurprisingly, even the protagonist actually knows very little about Marta, despite the fact that the two of them talk a lot:

I had to make assumptions about everything, and I was aware that I was letting my imagination run wild. I'm creating Marta with all her past and present. For as soon as I asked her to tell me something about herself, too, about the time when she was young, what it was like then, what seems so commonplace now, she would change the subject, turn her head away to the window, or simply shut up and concentrate on chopping cabbage or braiding her own hair – the hair of a stranger<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the stories Marta recounts are almost impossible to remember: even if they were not specific enough, they could not form a meaningful whole, rising out of the densest fog of the imaginary:

Many of the things Marta talked about I did not remember. They left a kind of bland punchline, like mustard dried on the edge of the plate after eating the main course. Some scenes - either scary or amusing. Some images taken out of context - that children were fishing for trout in a stream with their bare hands. I don't know why I was hoarding such details, but I was forgetting the whole narrative, the story, which after all had to mean something if

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<sup>3</sup> orig. "Mohla som si domyslieť, odkiaľ sa tu Marta vzala. Prečo pre nás nejestvovala v zime a zjavovala sa v skorú jar (...) Mohlo to byť tak, že sa prebúdza v marci. Najprv ležala nehybne a ani nevedela, či má otvorené oči – aj tak bola všade tma. Ani sa nepokúšala pohnúť, lebo vedela, že sa prebudila iba myseľ, nie telo. Telo ešte spalo a stačila chvíľa nepozornosti a myseľ mohla opäť podľahnúť jeho snovej moci..." (ibid., p. 360).

<sup>4</sup> orig. "Všetko som si musela domýšľať a uvedomovala som si, že popúšťam uzdu fantázií. Vytváram si Martu s celou jej minulosťou aj súčasnosťou. Len čo som ju totiž poprosila, aby porozprávala aj niečo o sebe, o časoch, keď bola mladá, ako vtedy vyzeralo to, čo sa teraz zdá také samozrejmé, zmenila tému, odvrátila hlavu do okna alebo jednoducho zmĺkla a sústredene krájala kapustu alebo si zapletala tie svoje – cudzie vlasy" (ibid., p. 11).

it was already a story with a beginning and an end. I remembered only the pits, which my memory – rightly – then had to spit out<sup>5</sup>.

Marta reconstructs time in her mind on the basis of rather unconventional perceptions. For example, although she recalls in detail “*different times, many times, even such as the votive images in Wambierzyce show*”<sup>6</sup>, she does not recognize it according to the people “*who lived at that time, for people are pitifully similar to each other, they are always the same, but according to the colour of the air, the shades of green, and the way the light falls on objects*”<sup>7</sup>. Marta’s universe of memory is filled with the conversions of colours, sounds, warmth, smells, sunlight filtered through the air, etc., which, in addition to the sensory “*tinging*” of all earthly things, give rise only secondarily to a distinct reminiscence. The nature of her being and her perception of the external world make her angel-like. Here we could paraphrase the literary scholar Marta Součková: Marta remains until the end, as it were, without a story of her own, she is a character whom one does not need to want to understand at all costs (which is probably not even possible), although she helps to understand the meaning of other stories and illustrates with ease the recesses of the human psyche<sup>8</sup>. We might add that Marta’s unmissable otherness is defined in one particularly vivid and vivid dream of the narrator in the conclusion as follows:

Immediately afterwards I dreamt that Marta had the germs of blinite wings on her back. She threw her blouse off her shoulders and showed them to me. They were small, still attached to the skin, wrinkled like the wings of a butterfly; they pulsed gently. ‘So it was this,’ I said, because I was convinced that those wings explained everything<sup>9</sup>.

In the novel, however, Marta simultaneously co-creates an important link to another dimension of otherness – the feminine world, which, with its reality-softening profile, stands in opposition to most of the male characters. The latter is represented by the alcoholism-ridden Marek Marek, who beats his tyrannical father to death before hanging himself; the arrogant

<sup>5</sup> orig. “*Veľa vecí, o ktorých rozprávala Marta, som si nezapamätala. Zostávali po nich akési nevýrazné pointy ako horčica zaschnutá na okraji taniera po zjedení hlavného jedla. Nejaké výjavy – buď strašidelné alebo zábavné. Nejaké obrazy vytrhnuté z kontextu – že deti lovili pstruhy v potoku holými rukami. Nevie, prečo som hromadila takéto detaily, no zabúdala som na celé rozprávanie, na príbeh, ktorý predsa musel niečo znamenať, keď už bol príbehom so začiatkom a koncom. Zapamätala som si iba kôstky, ktoré potom moja pamäť – oprávnene – musela vyplúť*” (ibid., p. 13).

<sup>6</sup> orig. “*rôzne doby, veľa časov, dokonca aj také, aké ukazujú votívne obrazy vo Wambierzyciach*” (ibid., p. 267).

<sup>7</sup> orig. “*ktorí vtedy žili, ľudia sa totiž navzájom žalosťne podobajú, sú stále rovnakí, ale podľa farby vzduchu, odtieňov zelene a spôsobu dopadu svetla na predmety*” (ibid.).

<sup>8</sup> see M. Součková, *Deň, noc, svitanie, súmrak*, in Romboid, XXXVIII, No. 2, 2003, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> orig. “*Hneď potom sa mi snívalo, že Marta mala na chrbte zárodky blanitých krídel. Zhodila si z pliec blúzku a ukázala mi ich. Boli malé, ešte prirastené k pokožke, pokrčené ako krídla motýľa; jemne pulzovali. ‘Takže išlo o toto’, povedala som, lebo som bola presvedčená, že tie krídla všetko vysvetľujú*”, in O. Tokarczuk, *Dom vo dne, dom v noci*, Bratislava, Aspekt, p. 358.

Andrei Mos, instinctively exploiting the situation when the gullible and romantically-ideal-bound Kristina comes to Czestochowa thinking he's her charming dream suitor Amos; the occasional cannibal Ergo Sum, a high-school Latin professor by profession, who, as a result of eating human flesh during the Second World War, or under the influence of Plato's prophecy about man-eaters, begins to turn into a werewolf; or the monk Paschalis, with strong transvestite tendencies, maintaining a homosexual affair with Brother Celestine, or else the author of the biography of Saint Kummernis of Schonau, who, at the time of the episcopal audience, uses the services of a harlot and eagerly indulges in carnal lust. In short, the "man-world" here is predominantly a space of conflict, pride, impurity, damnation and death, that is to say, a hotbed of destructive, paralyzing tragedy, confronted by the redemptive tragedy of women's noble, humble resolve to face the adversities of life, even with the knowledge that they will inevitably be subjected to trials and sufferings. Such character traits are especially present in Tokarczuk's portrayal of Saint Kummernis, the character of the "found" manuscript, whose story is a testimony to the following of Jesus Christ, the spiritual power of ecclesial celibacy, boundless goodness, and a particularly cruel martyr's death. Kummernis is endowed with a supernatural beauty that disturbs those around her to such an extent that her own father, ruined by constant warfare and accrued debts, promises her to the wealthy knight Wolfram von Pannewitz despite her pleas, forcibly removes her from the convent, and when she refuses to do his bidding, locks her in an icy, windowless chamber and keeps her hungry and thirsty for weeks. Saint Kummernis has miraculous powers from God - for during her time in her cenotaph deep in the mountains, she healed people and animals, ridding them of possession, were wolfism, and incurable insidious diseases, and so no sooner does she find herself behind the walls of her father's fortress, alone in an inhospitable cell, than she is not at all troubled, but in her prayers she asks for forgiveness and help.

When one day the alcohol-fuelled Wolfram longs to get his hands on the chosen one, he is confronted with a monstrous sight: the dazzlingly beautiful face of Kummernis is covered with silky white hairs, as if with a continuous goatee. The old baron (the saint's father) has the monster bricked up in her chamber the very next day, but before, in unbridled fury, he soon tears down the fresh wall, stabs his daughter with a dagger, and nails her to the wooden beams of the attic (*"If God is in you, then die like God!"*<sup>10</sup>), Kummernis wages a triumphant match with the Devil. The triadic temptation unfolds as the appearance of Satan in the form of an infant, a Bishop, and a Holy Crucifix with the Savior's faceless body, but she is not fooled by the assault on her mother's affections, nor by the reproachful speech of the church leader, nor by the guilt that seizes her at the image of the mutilated

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<sup>10</sup> orig. *"Ked' je v tebe Boh, tak umri ako Boh!"* (ibid., p. 90).

Christ: she lovingly clasps the infant to her bosom, puts her breast to his lips; she makes the sign of the cross before the Bishop, calmly remarking that all his strength comes only from doubt; and finally, at the moment when the disconcerted Devil perceives that Kummernis has recognized him even under the mask of the sacralia, he is compelled to confess to her:

The Devil cried out all distressed: how? I am to confess to a human being? But he saw that he had no other way out, and so he began to speak, first angrily, then with increasing humility. And he confessed to her for three days and three nights, and finally asked the whole human race for forgiveness for all the evil he had done. Kummernis said to him: Are you not also a child of God like me, like all men? And when he answered her, she knew the mystery of God and released the half-dead Devil from her grasp<sup>11</sup>.

The motif of preserving the purity of faith and the literally Golgothic martyrdom of female heroines is accentuated several times in Tokarczuk's text. In other words, this motif stretches like a seeping bottom line of the narrative, like a kind of echo of history, full of indomitable will and deeply reconciled self-sacrifice. As if from the bowels of an elite panopticon, they parade before us

Saint Agata, who refused to give her hand to the pagan king of Sicily... They cut off her breasts. Saint Catherine of Alexandria was trampled by horses and had her head cut off; or Apollonia, the bulwark of the faith in times of persecution: they tied her to a pole and pulled out all her teeth, one by one. Or St. Fina, who, paralyzed herself, compounded her torment by sleeping on a bed of stone, until at last she was eaten by a rat<sup>12</sup>.

This actually symbolically underlines a certain historically conditioned hardening of the feminine character, the sensitive authority of the great feminine archetype, which in her work, pointing already to the election of the Mother of God and her irreplaceable role in the act of redemption, is also newly emphasized by E. Hlatky. The transformation of this factor into the present is also reflected in Tokarczuk's prose in the more strikingly demarcated opposition of the feminine and masculine principles, which can be figuratively demonstrated as the opposition of the calm and the disturbing. It is enough to compare the symptomatic behaviour and its contexts in both types of characters.

A certain theological suggestion, which is related to the everyday experience of the protagonist, is also present in the prose of E. Hlatky. Although

<sup>11</sup> orig. "*Diabol vykrikol celý zúfalý: Akože? Ja sa mám spovedať ľudskej bytosti? Videl však, že nemá iné východisko, a tak začal hovoriť, najprv zlostne, potom s čoraz väčšou pokorou. A spovedal sa jej tri dni a tri noci a napokon požiadal celý ľudský rod o odpustenie za všetko zlo, ktoré mu spôsobil. Kummernis mu povedala: Vari nie si takisto dieťaťom Božím ako ja, ako všetci ľudia? A keď jej odpovedal, spoznala tajomstvo Boha a vypustila polomŕtveho Diabla zo svojho zovretia*" (ibid., p. 88–89).

<sup>12</sup> orig. "*svätá Agáta, ktorá odmietla dať ruku pohanskému kráľovi Sicílie... Odrezali jej prsia. Svätá Katarína Alexandrijská bola rozkásaná koňmi a odtáli jej hlavu; alebo Apollónia, opora viery v časoch prenasledovania: priviazali ju k stĺpu a vytrhali jej všetky zuby, jeden po druhom. Alebo svätá Fina, ktorá ochrnutá sama umocňovala svoje muky tým, že spala na kamennom lôžku, až sa napokon nechala zožrať potkanom*" (ibid., p. 218).

his novels do not exemplify female saints (as is the case of O. Tokarczuk), the female characters and their actions are closely related to biblical peace, goodness, justice and perhaps even salvation. Edo Driapal – the hero of the longer short story, indeed of the whole book *Autumnal Haze* by E. Hlatky – begins his narrative with startlingly austere information, in which uninteresting reports about age and physical proportions appear comically side by side with almost diagnostic affectations in the form of a full-page copy of a schizophrenic's letter and a statement about his return from a psychiatric hospital. Driapal seems to have intended from the first moment to build in the reader a kind of distrust, detachment, and exaltation that would intervene early and effectively as a preventive in favor of verbalism and confusion of statement. His reassurance of an inner seriousness, from which even his frequent self-irony or sarcastic sneers, with which he eventually confesses to epilepsy, do not detract, then goes hand in hand with maximally disciplined language, grammatically correct sentences, flowing easily but thoughtfully.

The source of Driapal's anxiety and restlessness is above all the past and the prevailing culture of rapid forgetting, the individual inability to understand what he has experienced - the hidden messages that his memory with relentless intensity painfully "throws up" into the present, and which are at the same time the only "key" to his personality for the psychiatrist Jozef Pich. Only he is allowed to know the traumatic experiences of Driapal's childhood. He is convinced that he can free him from them, or neutralise him into a position of painlessly communicable content, of time brought out of darkness into light, which will no longer signal things present or past and will not need to be interpreted in any special way. However, thanks to his exceptionally sensitive perception of life's circumstances, Edo Driapal permanently finds himself in a kind of chaotic, past-present or present-past time. He looks for an objectively justifiable reason behind every decision and action, not just his own, in the past, which would have a mirror alternative in Heaven and would thus be a reliable part of God's plan for the visible world:

And maybe I wouldn't have made it to a psychiatric ward with my anxiety and fear, somewhere I would have been the only person spared from terrible pain, and my snake wouldn't have slithered out from behind a sleeping bush. The young man shuddered at the thought: in my childhood I dreamed for days that I would become a musician. If I had become one, the song Imagine would not have been written, Lennon would not have been killed, and Esperanto would have become just a duplicitous alternative to the old language of music... And perhaps the young man would have become a kind of musicianly, over-ambitious Karl from Dostoyevsky's book *Netochka Nezvanova* and would never have gotten to such an enchanted reading of Dostoyevsky...<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> orig. "A možno by som sa so svojou úzkosťou a strachom nedostal až na psychiatriu, niekde by bol jediný človek ušetrený od strašnej bolesti a spoza spiacého kra by sa nevyplazil môj had. Mladý muž sa zachvel pri tejto myšlienke: v detstve som niekoľko dní sníval, že sa stanem hudobníkom. Keby som sa ním stal, nevznikla by pieseň Imagine, Lennona by nezabili a esperanto by sa stalo len podvojnou alternatívou starého jazyka hudby... A možno by sa mladý muž stal akýmsi hudobníckym, nadmieru tížiadostivým Karlom z Dostoje-

The protagonist of Hlatky's prose voluntarily takes upon himself the burden of collective guilt, a mass crime that is nonpunishable under normal, everyday circumstances, because the individual's wrongdoing in it does not reach the fulfillment of an indictment under any particular criminal code. Driapal transforms himself into an intersection of discordant threads leading from oblivion into living memory; he wants, like Christ, to shoulder the hereditary sin of humanity and yet be held hostage by the people of the secret good - a community whose workings are revealed in a mystical dream to his wife Jane. These individuals, who continually help other people without any claim to reward, never reveal their own identity. If the person they have helped does recognize them, he immediately becomes one of them and begins to do good in secret - without repenting of his sins and doing secret good, his life is no longer meaningful. It is a complete renunciation of the desire for worldly success, of vehement ambition, and of all the indulgent qualities by which mankind "cultivates" material hedonism and prideful ego. The construction of a spiritual temple, however, reaches pathological proportions in Edo Driapal's life, especially by importing inauthentic pain into his interior, which reels under its sustained onslaughts in self-incriminating convulsions. His insistent sense of guilt and responsibility goes so far that, after reading an austere newspaper report about a bizarre murder committed by a physically and nervously paralyzed pensioner on a sleeping friend with the last of his strength and with the help of a specially made stabbing glove, he quite naturally accuses himself of the deed.

The attention, with which Edo Driapal observes the surrounding events, gradually transforms him into one all-perceiving and (co-)feeling "big-ear"<sup>14</sup>, which, like a resonant opening, multiplies every slight sound, movement or hint of a tremor. But instead of a clearly articulated speech, the "big-ear" registers a babble, an avalanche of tongues, concentrating in a disconcerting way all the transgressions, wrongs and pains which, thanks to their merging into an amorphous splashes, are no longer comprehensible to the ears of the "human sea"<sup>15</sup>, undecipherable, but all the more deafening and unbearable in their effect on Driapal. This character begins to be depressed by the consciousness of the voluntary desensitization of humanity, which, out of indifference and fear, often settles for limited information, distorted snippets of reality, media falsifications of events, in a word, lies, just to avoid having to worry about more of them, unconsciously unmanageable, distressing problems and fantasies, or by undermining a systematically "cultivated" resistance to evil (in relation to the above, one could speak of "cultivating" one's own incompleteness, of "making oneself incomplete" in relation to the transcending dimension of suffering).

uského knihy *Netočka Nezvanovová a nikdy by sa nedostal k takému očarovanému čítaniu Dostojevského...*, in E. Hlatký, *Jesenný opar*, Bratislava, Slovenský spisovateľ, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> orig "veľucho" (ibid., p. 44).

<sup>15</sup> orig. "ľudského mora" (ibid.).



In Driapal's tribulation, there begins to flash more and more clearly in the spiritual tenor what we might call, in the vein of French philosopher and theologian Teilhard de Chardin's reflections, an awareness of the presence of the ultra-human, of the transcendent attraction of the funducing "over-person", of the "over-love" which "can out of psychological necessity, master, capture and unite the multitude of the other loves of the earth"<sup>16</sup>, to create a space for inter-individual human co-reflection, a cosmic personalizing focal point of unification - the Omega point, which is the renewed name of God.

Edo Driapal's life pulsates factually in a texture of double belonging - the first is a "taking in" of all that is sublime and noble in this world, a projection of a private Visionia - "*the land promised to the deepest truth*"<sup>17</sup>, a time of all-encompassing redemption and love, "*a great glorious feeling that cannot be uttered*"<sup>18</sup>. However through love, beauty, tenderness, humility, self-sacrifice, goodness, etc., one can experience and with bated breath thus enter an entirely new stage in the evolution of mind-spirit-consciousness, which, on the way to the final union at the Omega Point, leaving behind the material world, beyond time and space, heralds the radically different order of a new world.

Driapal thus visibly adds a prophetic apocalyptic dimension to his thoughts - for example, when he speaks of an inevitable, imminent upheaval that will fundamentally change (not only) his life, or when he indignantly approaches the exegesis of the Bible with the words "*It is December 2, 1995. It's going to be a whimper when Psalm 149 and 150 happen!*"<sup>19</sup>. The second case of outlined-perhaps, here may be better *co-responsibility*, is signified by the conviction of complicity in fundamental sin, in "*the terrible act by which a civilization hostile to God has made this world and plunged it into permanent crisis*"<sup>20</sup>; on "*the determining triumph of violent evil, the world's malicious plan, the disruption of the miraculousness of being in favor of the victory of the speculative component of consciousness, that dark blackness by which the destroying weapon is invented and the inevitable war is planned*"<sup>21</sup>, where "*on one side of the barricade stand the*

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<sup>16</sup> orig. "může z psychologické nevyhnutelnosti zvládnout, zachytit a spojit množství jiných lásek země", in G. Martelet, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin neboli to, co je vlastní člověku, v jeho vztahu k tomu, co je vlastní Bohu*, in Kol.: *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Svatá Hmota (Soubor studií)*. Studijní texty Centra Aletti, Olomouc, Velehrad, 2005, p. 74.

<sup>17</sup> orig. "zeme zaslúbenej najhlbšej pravde", in E. Hlatky, *Jesenný opar*, Bratislava, Slovenský spisovateľ, 1999, p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> orig. "veľkého slávneho pocitu, ktorý sa nedá vypovedať" (ibid., p. 93).

<sup>19</sup> orig. "Píše sa 2. december 1995. To budú frkoty, keď sa stane žalm 149 a 150!" (ibid., p. 98)

<sup>20</sup> orig. "strašnom úklade, ktorým civilizácia nepriateľsky naklonená Bohu porobila tento svet a vrhla ho do permanentnej krízovosti" (ibid., p. 91).

<sup>21</sup> orig. "určujúcom triumfe násilnickeho zla, záškodníckom pláne sveta, poruche zázračnosti bytia v prospech víťazstva špekulantskej zložky vedomia, tej temnej čierňavy, ktorou sa vymýšľa ničiaci zbraň a plánuje nevyhnutná vojna", in E. Hlatky, *Sláva a tajomstvo*, Bratislava, Slovenský spisovateľ, 2001, p. 61.

*suffering people supporting the human suns, and on the other the people supporting the black holes*<sup>22</sup>.

In this eschatological polarity we should probably look for the sources of Driapal's personal dispersion, which is particularly determined with diagnosed schizophrenia, appearing as a motif not only in *Autumnal Haze* but also in the following short story collection *Glory and Mystery* by Jan Zmak. However, a concentrated examination of both short story collections reveals a noticeable shift in the structuring of the subject - while in *Autumnal Haze* the ontological condition for further perspectives is the dominant "Christian grammar"<sup>23</sup>, from which a Christological plan of redemption and hope in a higher justice, a pure faith in the infallibility and omnipotence of God's laws, sharply delimiting the boundaries of evil, unfolds; thus, in *Glory and Mystery*, disillusionment with the inaction of God and the ineffectiveness of prayer sets in. Driapal's inner survival is optimistically realized only in the form of a vertical monologue, a top-down critique, which Irene H. Shaferova calls the static model of being, against which she places the "dynamic model of being"<sup>24</sup>, where one "works primarily through horizontal dialogue and empathy"<sup>25</sup>.

Verticality in E. Hlatky in the indicated context highlights instances of the type of the *individual, individuality* in cooperation with the *Over-Self*, which, respecting Shaferova's dynamic model, are exposed in the world to collisions with other ideological or digital "strongholds", ethical systems, moral conventions, but equally extremes. This is also why Hlatky's hero is reluctant to confront himself in a quasi-horizontal communicative circuit, which he often perceives as the action of a dangerous mass, crowd or human sea; this is why there is so much uncertainty, doubt and outward silence in his work; and, finally, this is why there is so much expectation in relation to the transcendental space, under the influence of the dissolution of which he begins to understand his own healing "not only in the sense of the restoration of the lost order, but also in the sense of salvation, where the remedy is Christ himself (Christus medicus)"<sup>26</sup>.

The doubting person who carefully reflects on personal failures, mistakes and ridiculousness, admits a measure of responsibility beyond himself, and attempts to accurately name the disheartening issues of life, is infinitely more vulnerable, fragile, less confident, insecure, and ultimately increasin-

<sup>22</sup> orig. "na jednej strane barikády stoja trpiaci ľudia podporujúci ľudské slnka a na druhej ľudia podporujúci čierne diery" (ibid., p. 14).

<sup>23</sup> orig. "kresťanská gramatika", in I. H. Shaferová, *Od noosféry k teosfére: cyklotrony, cyberspace a Teilhardova víze kosmické lásky*. In: Kol.: *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Svätá Hmota (Soubor štúdií). Studijné texty Centra Aletti*, Olomouc, Velehrad, 2005, p. 115–117.

<sup>24</sup> orig. "dynamický model stávání" (ibid., p. 109).

<sup>25</sup> orig. "pracuje predovšetím skrze horizontálny dialóg a empatii" (ibid.).

<sup>26</sup> orig. "nielen v zmysle obnovenia strateného poriadku, ale aj v zmysle spásy, kde liekom je sám Kristus (Christus medicus)", in M. Kašparů, *V plášti aj dalmatike*, Bratislava, Karmelitánske nakladateľstvo, 2006, p. 34.

gly lonely. The distance between him and the institutions inevitably grows into an uncomfortable, painful contradiction, since, as Juraj Briškár puts it, “their systematics allow them to take no notice of the individual, to overcome the physical brokenness and imperfection of his lonely existence”<sup>27</sup>. However, from the confusion that in *Autumnal Haze* also accompanies the radical formation of views under the influence of practical Christian faith, the rediscovery of the way of the cross and hope, stemming from the awareness of the status of the created being in the sense of the imago dei, Hlatky in *Glory and Mystery* moves on to a new, much more principled “confusion”. Statements such as “*my faith is too weak, I need to see*”<sup>28</sup> or “*I pray little, I said. I regard prayer as a useless thing. If God wanted to help me, he would have done so long ago*”<sup>29</sup>, interspersed with passages of outright mystical rapture worthy of the medieval Desert Fathers.

It is as if every conviction and perception had its dark or lighter counterpart, an expression of rise and fall, exaggeration and diminution, a consciousness of an unworthy micro-article and yet an exalted „cosmicity“. “*I am a worldly agent, the whole world moves with me and my movement. It is I, the sun of this world, besieged by gravitating bodies - by men*”<sup>30</sup>, the narrator in the short story *The Tree*<sup>31</sup> says, while at the same time completely masculinizing himself, referring to his own unfreedom, dictation and determination, “*permanently under the suggestion and hypnosis of the world’s forces*”<sup>32</sup>, or in the thrall of an absurd criminality. To the direct, self-critical question “*And what am I?*”<sup>33</sup>, the protagonist answers without thinking: “*Bad, naturally, good is dull, obvious, uninteresting*”<sup>34</sup>, and even before that, in the very incipit of the narrative, he warns: “*I confess that I am a strange, truly evil personality, dragged hither and thither by unknown psychic forces, I resemble a water lily that never submerges, always carried by water when threatened*”<sup>35</sup>.

The human being in Hlatky’s prose is, as it were, essentially touched by what E. Drewermann calls the *core of the tragic*. There, according to

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<sup>27</sup> orig. “ich systematika dovoľuje nevnímať si jednotlivca, prekonávať fyzickú pretržitosť a nedokonalosť jeho osamelej existencie“, in J. Briškár, *Elementárne situácie v literatúre*, Levoča, Modrý Peter, 2005, p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> orig. “*moja viera je prislabá, potrebujem vidieť*“, in E. Hlatky, *Sláva a tajomstvo*, Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2001, p. 83.

<sup>29</sup> orig. “*Málo sa modlím, povedal som. Pokladám modlitbu za zbytočnú vec. Keby mi chcel Boh pomôcť, už dávno by to urobil*“ (ibid., p. 82–83).

<sup>30</sup> orig. “*Som svetodejný činiteľ, so mnou a s mojím pohybom sa hýbe celý svet. Som to ja, slnko tohto sveta, obliehané gravitujúcimi telesami – ľuďmi*“ (ibid., p. 31).

<sup>31</sup> orig. *Strom*

<sup>32</sup> orig. “*trvale pod sugesciou a hypnózou svetových síl*“ (ibid, s. 30).

<sup>33</sup> orig. “*A ja som aký?*“ (ibid.).

<sup>34</sup> orig. “*Zlý, prirodzene, dobro je nudné, zjavné, nezaujímavé*“ (ibid.).

<sup>35</sup> orig. “*Priznám sa, že som čudná, skutočne zlá osobnosť, vláčená neznámymi psychickými silami sem a tam, podobám sa leknu, ktoré sa nikdy neponorí, v prípade ohrozenia ho vždy nadnesie voda*“ (ibid., p. 29).

him, belongs the experience that “one tries with all one’s might to protect oneself from a certain act, but in spite of this, or even precisely because of it, as if under unavoidable pressure, one has to commit it”<sup>36</sup>. Here, the forces of the unconscious constantly frustrate the conscious will, or rather the unconscious forces, and the guilt that is “the inevitable consequence of conflict on the basis of the unfulfilled demands of morality”<sup>37</sup> completes the merit of the tragic. Individual and collective transgression begins to “oscillate“ in the differentiation between noetic-ontological “grammars“ and the authentic self, leading „to a pathology of fragmentation and to the collapse of rationality“<sup>38</sup>; it signals an inexpressible meaning „which flows through the network of meaning and leaves only a trace of madness and chaos, is only the opposite of the notion of rationalized and controlled meaning. Such pessimism requires as an accompaniment a good deal of mysticism“<sup>39</sup>. Continuing in the spirit of the ideas of Terry Eagleton, the tendency towards conceptual tyranny in Hlatky’s hero is then „counterbalanced“ by conceptual indeterminacy, a communicative asceticism, filled with ideas about the fatal (co-)responsibility for the present and the dangerous consequences of ignoring the meaning of the past, which, although in subtle hints it also proffets the future history of violence or at least the way it will be perpetrated, one cannot comprehend it due to one’s ever greater inattention and impatience to analyse anything in more detail. To put it in a simplified form, Edo Driapal is hurting the whole world.

It is the deep emotional affection between man and woman that for Hlatky is a state of supreme spiritual sanctification and mental rapture, by the beauty of which one can effectively “*torture evil as a phenomenon and, under its terrible consternation, the fear of its eternal users, execute judgment upon it*”<sup>40</sup>. In *Glory and Mystery*, it is the already clearly delineated idea of the feminine world, the feminine *Ultima Thule*, influencing the mindset and life of the heroes through the concrete Eva, Jarmila, Rubena, Zuzana or Tamaria, in whom glimpses of the prototypical “*great*

<sup>36</sup> orig. “človek sa so všetkou silou snaží chrániť určitého činu, ale napriek tomu, ba dokonca práve preto, akoby pod nevyhnutným tlakom, sa ho musí dopustiť“, quoted by R. Šarka, Genealógie drámy hriechu, in *Viera a život – časopis pre kresťanskú orientáciu*, XVII, No. 5, 2007, p. 76.

<sup>37</sup> orig. “nevyhnutným dôsledkom konfliktu na základe neplnených požiadaviek morálky“ (ibid.).

<sup>38</sup> orig. “k patologii fragmentace a ke kolapsu racionality“ in I. H. Shaferová, *Od noosféry k teosfére: cyklotrony, cyberspace a Teilhardova vize kosmické lásky*. In: Kol.: *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Svätá Hmota (Soubor studií). Studijní texty Centra Aletti*, Olomouc, Velehrad, 2005, p. 115.

<sup>39</sup> orig. “který protéká skrze síť smyslu a zanechává v ní jen stopu šílenství a chaosu, je pouze opakem pojmu racionalizovaného a řízeného významu. Takový pesimizmus vyžaduje jako doprovod notnou dávku mysticismu“, in T. Eagleton, *Sladké násilí. Idea tragična*, Brno, Host. Studium, 2004, p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> orig. “mučit zlo ako jav a za jeho strašnej konšternácie, strachu jeho večných užívateľov, vykonať nad ním súd“, in E. Hlatký, *Jesenný opar*, Bratislava, Slovenský spisovateľ, 1999, p. 100.

woman of women' are seen"<sup>41</sup>. In the conclusion of the *Autumn Haze*, love, in the form of a definition, is presented as "wandering through the eternal memory of creation in the trinity of spirit, body, word"<sup>42</sup>, or, based on the interpretation of Psalms 149 and 150, as „an outburst of word and music"<sup>43</sup> (ibid. 102), while in *Glory and Mystery* it takes on the nature of a more addressable code in the new triad "God - word - woman: a holy trinity for man"<sup>44</sup>, whereby the love of woman – "the original one, untainted by the pettiness of reality"<sup>45</sup> - is elevated to "the supreme mystery of life"<sup>46</sup>.

The motif of the general failure of the male character in various zones of life, with the subsequent redemptive compensation in the so-called feminine world, is typical of the prose texts of O. Tokarczuk and E. Hlatky: whether it is in the role of a father, due to mental illness and alcoholism somehow legitimately, though against his will, in the role of a husband, later for the same reasons in the position of a reliable employee, and due to faith doubts also in the basic questions concerning the Christian perception of God. Hlatký's hero, for example, is unable to detach himself from the antisocial environment of the pub, to renounce the cigarettes he chooses at the expense of food, or even, at a crucial moment, to point out the elementary fact that man has a God-given free will:

What about wars?, Viera asks. What about the wars in Yugoslavia and Chechya? Why does your God allow that? Why doesn't he intervene in conflict areas? After all, if there is so much evil going on in the world, it is clear that we are without oversight. Evil is winning. Am I right? She got me. I didn't know what to say to her...<sup>47</sup>.

However, despite what has been quoted above, it is through women, or at least in their proximity, that Hlatký's protagonists find a distinct certainty, an unwavering personal credo, or an island of salvation of sorts. "...I'm a bit of a feminist. I believe in a strong feminine intuition"<sup>48</sup>, it sounds in the dialogue with Viera, while in the short story *Paľko* from the same book the hero already exegetically solves the question "why doesn't the universal femininity have its Bible yet?"<sup>49</sup>, in the sacred love of which lies the only

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<sup>41</sup> orig. „veľkej ženy žien“, in E. Hlatký, *Sláva a tajomstvo*, Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2001, p. 110.

<sup>42</sup> orig. "putovanie večnou pamäťou stvorenia v potrojnosti duch, telo, slovo", in E. Hlatký, *Jesenný opar*, Bratislava, Slovenský spisovateľ, 1999, p. 101.

<sup>43</sup> orig. "výbuch slova a hudby" (ibid., p. 102).

<sup>44</sup> orig. "Boh – slovo – žena: svätá trojica pre muža", in E. Hlatký, *Sláva a tajomstvo*, Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2001, p. 60.

<sup>45</sup> orig. "tá pôvodná, neskalená malichernosťou reality" (ibid., p. 118).

<sup>46</sup> orig. "najvyššie tajomstvo života" (ibid.).

<sup>47</sup> orig. "A čo vojny?', spýtala sa Viera. Čo vojna v Juhoslávii a v Čečensku? Prečo to tvoj Boh dopúšťa? Prečo nezasahuje do konfliktných oblastí? Veď ak sa deje na svete toľko zla, je jasné, že sme bez dozoru. Zlo víťazí. Nemám pravdu? Dostala ma. Nevedel som, čo jej odpovedať..." (ibid., p. 85).

<sup>48</sup> orig. "...som tak trochu feminista. Verím v silnú ženskú intuíciu" (ibid., p. 111).

<sup>49</sup> orig. "prečo nemá zatiaľ svoju Bibliu aj všesvetové ženstvo?" (ibid.).

fulfilled way of life<sup>50</sup>. This preference, resp. inclination to create the female world as characteristically superior, even redemptive, is also present in Olga Tokarczuk's work, although it is not always limited to religious explications. In the short story collection *Playing on Many Drums* we meet heroines who, despite their difficult fate, are characterized by discernment, understanding, patience and a forgiving attitude towards human weaknesses, possessing the necessary insight and strength in emotionally fraught moments, while their male counterparts are often portrayed as restless, lacking in sensitivity, disoriented, mentally ill or self-satisfied individuals. In the short story *The Chessboard Horse*<sup>51</sup>, the female fox terrier stands closer to the protagonist, while the husband is a source of tension and alienation, a distant subject, disappearing behind the abyss of emptiness; Professor Andrews of the story *Professor Andrews in Warsaw*<sup>52</sup>, after he loses contact with Gosha, the young assistant who is supposed to accompany him around the Polish metropolis, is, despite his experience, respectability, education and affiliation to a methodologically sophisticated school in modern psychology, a touching example of utter cluelessness, childish embarrassment and inability to provide for his elementary needs; Samborski, the writer of the short story *Subject*<sup>53</sup>, even pities his own literary alter ego, a double unexpectedly materialized in his real pragmatic world of people, which arouses animosity in him: "*Nasty guy, buffoon. He couldn't look at him, he felt a real disgust, as if that one were made of some aged gelatine, as if he were a hardened goosefoot with cold feet, a goosefoot in human form - something like a porcine, animal satisfaction hovered over him*"<sup>54</sup>, and so on.

An illustration of the "disturbing" male element can be found in the short story "Che Guevara", where the psychologically deranged bearer of the name of this famous revolutionary throws himself into the whirlwind of everyday events during the general strike and causes a lot of trouble for a psychology student, his tutor, who does therapy in her spare time: "*I also saw that he joined the demonstration. He stood up. He marched. He was shouting 'Hände hoch!' or 'Gestapo!', which was just reproducing some recordings from the war that he had a head full of...*"<sup>55</sup>. In *House of Day, house of Night*, the aforementioned motif culminates in the much more dangerous actions of the 'man with a saw', which already has the features

<sup>50</sup> see *ibid.*, p. 117-119.

<sup>51</sup> orig. *Kôň zo šachovnice*.

<sup>52</sup> orig. *Profesor Andrews vo Varšave*.

<sup>53</sup> orig. *Podmet*.

<sup>54</sup> orig. "*Odporný chlap, šašo. Nemohol sa naňho pozerať, cítil naozajstné zhnusenie, akoby bol tamten stvorený z nejakej zostarutej želatíny, akoby to bola stvrdnutá huspenina so studenými nožičkami, huspenina v ľudskej podobe – vznášalo sa nad ním čosi ako prasačie, zvieracie uspokojenie*", in O. Tokarczuk, *Hra na mnohých bubienkoch*, Bratislava, Drewo a srd, 2003, p. 65.

<sup>55</sup> orig. "*Videla som aj to, že sa pripojil k demonstrácii. Vystrájal. Pochodoval. Vykrikoval: 'Hände hoch!' alebo 'Gestapo!', čím iba reprodukoval nejaké nahrávky z vojny, ktorých mal plnú hlavu...*" (*ibid.*, p. 168).

of a doom-laden, titanic intrusion into a quasi-naturalistic idyll, or rather a quiet classical setting with time passing leisurely and consistently:

His arrival was always heralded by a noise. A screeching mechanical howl that bounced like an immaterial ball off the valley slopes, stopping each time near the terrace. Our heads would be raised in alarm, the bitches' fur would bristle, the goats would begin to run frightened around the tree to which we had tied them. Only then did he himself appear - a tall thin man coming out of the woods, waving a chainsaw over his head as if it were a machine gun, and he seemed to be coming not from the birch grove, but from the battlefield, from among the charred tanks, from under the ruins of bridges blown up. In his gesture we registered triumph - that shaking of a piece of iron, sometimes even the pressing of the saw starter and the subsequent howl that cut the valley into tiny pieces<sup>56</sup>.

Tokarczuk points here to the specific world of women as a harmonious *Ultima* or *sui generis* value, capable of reconciling even principled contradictions, and the world which is most strikingly portrayed in the figures of Saint Kummernis and the merciful Marta. Likewise, the statuesque metaphor of the house - a space of inherent, proportionally balanced, harmonious pulsation, i.e., of inner certainty and outward immutability - symbolizes the work and domain of female hands, of feminine action, which is rivaled by an undirected and destabilizing masculine force from without. It should be added that the positions outlined could perhaps be considered by many as manifestations of (post?)modern feminist discourse/writing, and the symptomatic feminine aspect as key in focuses the interpretation, but for us these are overly diffuse and vague signals that, in terms of the overall interpretation, have no potential to differentially show to something essential, directional. We consider the more important position here is M. Součková's study, which, on the basis of Tokarczuk's identical texts, underlines "the inherent difference in the female worldview that exists despite the fact that no one has yet succeeded in defining a female poetics and attempts to describe the language or syntax of female authors have also failed"<sup>57</sup>. On the other hand, we too are willing to admit only a certain

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<sup>56</sup> orig. "Jeho príchod zvestoval vždy hluk. Škrípavé mechanické zavújanie, ktoré sa ako nehmotná loptička odrážalo od svahov doliny a zastavovalo sa zakaždým neďaleko terasy. Znepokojene sme dvíhali hlavy, sukám sa ježila srst', kozy začínali prestrašene pobehovať okolo stromu, ku ktorému sme ich priväzovali. Až potom sa zjavoval on sám – vysoký chudý muž, ktorý vychádzal z lesa a mával nad hlavou motorovou pilou, akoby to bol guľomet a on akoby nevychádzal z brezového hájika, ale z bojiska, spomedzi ohorených tankov, spod ruín mostov vyhodенých do vzduchu. V jeho geste sme zaregistrovali triumf – to potriasanie kusom železa, občas dokonca aj stlačenie štartéra píly a následné zavutie, ktoré porciovalo dolinu na drobné kúsky", in O. Tokarczuk, *Dom vo dne, dom v noci*, Bratislava, Aspekt, 2002, p. 269.

<sup>57</sup> orig. "prirozenú odlišnosť ženského pohľadu na svet, ktorá existuje napriek faktu, že sa doteraz nikomu nepodarilo definovať ženskú poetiku a zlyhávajú aj pokusy opísať jazyk či syntax ženských autoriek", in M. Součková, *K poetike ženských autoriek v slovenskej a poľskej próze po roku 1989*, in *Slovensko-slovanské jazykové, literárne a kultúrne vzťahy* (zborník z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie). Prešov, Acta Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Prešoviensis, 2007, p. 477.

functional or justified specification of the meaning of the female subject in the work of this Polish novelist, which is present in comparable contexts in E. Hlatky, but this is precisely why we cannot agree with M. Součková's other statement when she says that "Tokarczuk's texts do respect gender difference, but without clear attributes attributed to men or women"<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> orig. „v textoch Tokarczukovej sa síce rešpektuje rozdielnosť pohlaví, no bez jednoznačných atribútov prisudzovaných mužom alebo ženám“ (ibid).