

# PRESENCING, HISTORICITY AND THE SHIFTING VOICE OF WRITTEN RELICS IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BOHEMIA<sup>1</sup>

by Andrew Lass

„Listiny nám musejí být svaté, jinak pozbývá historie spolehlivosti.“

Josef Dobrovský, *Literarisches Magazin*, 1786

## I. Theme and Variations

Literacy, in the very wide sense of the term, has played a crucial role in defining the modern Czech nation, and literary history appears to have the same central importance for the articulation of this people's essence and past as does their political and religious history. In fact, one gets the impression that it is precisely the literary and artistic object that provides Czechs with an expressive vehicle of special cultural value. This object defies and transcends the vicissitudes of Czech history which, as we all know, was usually not – so to speak – their own. It was toward the end of the 18th century that the Czech elites began to assert themselves as nationals and that a conscious effort was made to give a virtually dead language national status. A need for a Czech literature was expressed and the past was searched for its roots. This was the beginning of the movement known as the National Revival (*Národní obrození*), that was to preoccupy the 19th century and last until the fall of the House of Habsburg in 1918. But many Czechs will agree that the national Revival is not over yet. They mean to imply not only that Czech history remains in the hands of 'others' but also that the obsessive spirit of nationalism, often quite petty and sometimes rather dangerous, having permeated virtually everything, threatens to trivialize the very qualities it was initially meant to promote. That is to say, in the initial effort to produce cultural value that would be both nationally unique and of international (i. e., West European) stature, the over zealous focus on the autochthonous *naše* ('ours'), tends only to reinforce the boundaries of isolation that have been so successfully erected by the corrupt political regimes. Indeed, the writing of Czech national history only illustrates the general insight that any demand for authenticity and originality implies the possibility of falsifi-

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cation, and the institutionalization of remembering, from the very outset, guarantees the same for forgetting<sup>2</sup>.

The following incident is illuminating. When abbé Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829), the eminent Czech scholar and critic, considered by many today as the founder of Slavic philology, received the poem “Vyšehrad”, he reviewed it as the oldest and most beautiful piece of poetry and included it in the last edition of his *Geschichte der Böhmisches Sprache und älteren Literatur* (1818). He also expressed his excitement over the *Královedvorský* manuscript (*RK*) found by Václav Hanka in 1817 which contained fragments of epic poetry celebrating the dawn of Czech history. “The tone of the national folk song is quite apparent” he wrote and continued “After confronting these small examples, who could resist wanting to see the exceptional collection complete, characterized as it is by a lightness of reading, purity and correctness of the language, by such strength and beauty?”<sup>3</sup> But when in 1818 the National Museum received another manuscript discovered under mysterious circumstances, Dobrovský saw that the Czech intellectual community had been made victim of what would turn out to be the most protracted and scandalous case of literary and historical forgery in the Western tradition. After a lifetime devoted to separating the legendary from the evidently ‘factual’ in Czech historical materials, he was the first to identify the text of the *Zelenohorský* manuscript (*RZ*) as a fake and name his former student Hanka as the author who, in creating the old Czech had so carefully studied his teacher’s works. Of course, Dobrovský took it as a personal offence. But the Romantics, having put his scholarship to use in the cause of nationalism, were less concerned with the enlightened notion of objectivity, according to which ‘facts speak for themselves’<sup>4</sup>.

There is, perhaps, some irony in the fact that the Czech National Revival went to such an extreme in writing a literary history by utilizing the knowledge established by the preceding scholarship, especially, as one recalls that the battle cry of the Romantic Movement was to deny any historical sensibility to the Enlightenment. They rebelled against its hyper-rationalist practices by maintaining the particular as against the universal, the poetic against the logical. But of course the historicism that came to dominate the nineteenth century, and the nationalism that it was linked to, was only made possible by the work of the 17th and 18th century scholarship that had brought the desecularization of theological history to its logical conclusion<sup>5</sup>. For after all, whether or not the *RKZ* is authentic, the possibility of falsification, one which would involve the physical construction of an historical object, assumes a high value placed on such

<sup>2</sup> How central the question of culture and especially literature is to the sense of national identity and cultural provenance in Central Europe is clear to the Western reader of Milan Kundera’s work or of Cross Currents. A Yearbook of Central European Culture.

<sup>3</sup> *Dějiny české řeči a starší literatury*. In: Jedlička, J. (ed.): Josef Dobrovský. Výbor z díla. Prague 1953, 394–395.

<sup>4</sup> While Dobrovský never openly denounced the *RK*, in private he saw both as fabricated by Hanka and his friends. For a good summary of the *RKZ* case (the two manuscripts are usually discussed together), see Otáhal, M.: *The Manuscript Controversy in the Czech National Revival*. Cross Currents 5 (1986).

<sup>5</sup> Cassirer, E.: *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. Princeton 1968, and Dilthey, W.: *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert und die geschichtliche Welt*. Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 3. Göttingen 1927, before him, were the first to argue and fully develop this point.

historical objectivity. It requires a well established historical consciousness that in understanding historical narrative in terms of a new kind of facticity could conceive of the construction of historical truth in physical terms<sup>6</sup>.

To Dobrovský it must have felt as if he had gone full circle. As if Hanka and his group were trying to piece back together what he had so painstakingly undone. To confront the RKZ at the end of his career was to face a complete reversal in the work with which his career had started in 1778 when at the age of 25 he questioned the authenticity of the Prague fragment of the Gospel of St. Mark.

### *II. Fragmentum Pragense Euangelii S. Marci vulgo Autographi*

When, after his coronation in 1354, the Bohemian King and Emperor Charles IV. travelled through northern Italy he found little difficulty in applying his influence on the patriarch of the town of Aquilia and securing from him a section of the manuscript of the Gospel of St. Mark said to have been an original autograph written by the apostle himself. Charles IV., who was something of a collector of relics, had this fragment, describing the passion of Christ (chapters 12, 21–16, 20), sent ahead back to Prague where its arrival was to be observed and celebrated in front of its gates by a procession of all the city's priests. He accompanied the relic with a letter and attached his own commentary describing the history and legend of the document. On his instruction a golden and pearl case was made to house the manuscript and, hereafter, it was to be read from every year during mass on Easter Sunday. This tradition was maintained and extended to include the day of Ascension and though reading from it was eventually dropped, certainly up until the late eighteenth century it was brought out several times a year as an object of deep religious sentiment. Charles IV. hoped to bestow further grace on the city of Prague by the securing of this fragment. He certainly succeeded in making it an object of local patriotism. The same, by the way, happened to the remaining section of the Gospel which, after having been placed for safety 40 km north of Aquilia in the city of Cividale del Friule, was claimed by the Venetian doge Tomaso Mocenico for the Republic of Venice. As if the presence of the apostle's bones in the cathedral of St. Mark, stolen from Alexandria in 828 A. D., were not enough. Its arrival in Venecia was greeted with great pomp; an endless procession of clerics and citizens led to the placement of the first part of the Gospel in the cathedral. There it became, very soon, illegible as it rotted and rapidly turned to dust making its Prague counterpart, which remained in fine condition, all the more valuable.

Contrary to the now common belief, Dobrovský was not the first to challenge the authenticity of the autograph. Several authors had taken up the case before. Most notably, it was the analysis by the Italian scholar Lorenzo Della Torre whose work

<sup>6</sup> In the numerous secondary literature pertaining to the RKZ manuscripts – and one may want to argue that this corpus of scholarly arguments, angry pamphlets, and fictionalized histories is the RKZ case – the fact that the case highlights the epistemological presuppositions of historical consciousness has not drawn any attention. There is, finally, some interest in the political history of the case (e. g., O t á h a l, *The Manuscript Controversy* 1986), but all the literature remains within the previously established parameters of historical discourse in which the very possibility of the RKZ fabrication arises.

from the mid 18th century had firmly established that the Prague and Venetian fragments belonged together and as such were part of an original containing the other three Gospels (Mathew, Luke and John). It was hard to believe that Mark would have written all four and, what is more, in Latin! Thus it was established that the whole<sup>7</sup> manuscript originated around the sixth century as one of the renditions of St. Jerome. Della Torre's work remained obscure, though it did manage to provoke some Venetian conservatives to come to the relic's defense.

Dobrovský's work *Fragmentum Pragense Euangelii S. Marci vulgo autographi* (1778), though it rested on the work of Della Torre, was innovative in several ways. For one, his work was better organized. By a critical comparison with Greek texts and other Latin variants, he was able to show that the Prague fragment came closer to the original text of St. Jerome, the *Vulgata*, than the official *Clementinus* editions canonized after the Trident Council of 1546<sup>8</sup>. The fragment was not, as he pointed out, a source of the earlier translation, the *Itala*. His analysis also paid attention to the physical properties of the document (it was written on animal skin and not Egyptian papyrus), to the script itself (the uncial letters placed it into the sixth century) as well as to the comparative philology of the text, to which we will return later. He was also the first to use Slavic translations of the Bible as part of the textual apparatus<sup>9</sup>.

Dobrovský also confronted some forceful resistance. This not only in the form of an attack by the Italian apologist Comoretti, whose objections it was not hard for him to refute. He suffered a reprimand from the ecclesiastical order and ridicule from the booksellers who, it was said, refused to carry his study. In a letter from his friend Augustin Helfert he learned: "I introduced your study in Hradec Králové to the Bishop and his vicar. [. . .] Mr. Heiden, a former Jesuit, at one time professor of church history in Prague, having praised your scientific endeavor, admitted that he had once worked out a study of identical content but was frightened off by the *kisses so often placed on the characters* written by St. Mark himself"<sup>10</sup> [emphasis added].

### III. *Presencia et Potencia*

That the abbé had dismantled a late medieval relic only to prepare the road for the production of a modern one (RKZ), need not be belabored. We also need to go beyond the obvious fact, illustrated by our two cases, that any naming of reality that consists

<sup>7</sup> It is referred to now as the *Cividad-Venetian-Prague* manuscript.

<sup>8</sup> Due to Dobrovský's critical edition, the Prague text was included among the 30 manuscripts, selected from over 8000, used for the new Oxford reconstruction of Jerome's reading, edited by Wordsworth and White sixty years after Dobrovský's death, in 1889.

<sup>9</sup> Bohumil Ryba's introduction (Úvod) to the most recent edition of this work, Dobrovský, J.: *Fragmentum Pragense Euangelii S. Marci*. Prague 1953, offers an exhaustive account of the history of the *Fragmentum* and of Dobrovský's critical analysis. He adds to the support of Dobrovský's conclusion by bringing attention to evidence not commented upon by the latter.

<sup>10</sup> "... timuisse vero oscula tam impressa characteribus ab ipso S. Marco pictis", Ryba, Úvod 1953, 11 n. 21.

of representing it in its absence, involves more than just the identification of a trace. It demands the production of such reality which is simply tantamount to the *manufacturing* of the trace. Thus the written relics like the bones of the Saints get stolen, censored, airbrushed or made up altogether. We only find this kind of artifice exceptional because it is contrary to our established notions of truth, but it takes little to realize that such truth rests on the dualistic conception of the universe in which what is not immediately apparent is said to be the more real. It is a definition of reality that depends on the production of signs, where the death of the real is the condition of the life and value of truth. This is no play on words, for in the Western tradition of which we are the inheritors, it took the death in the hands of evil (*passio*) to become, to exist as, the true sign of Christ. Hence the power (*potencia*) of the sign, like the truth value of the sermon, depends on the initial absence of its source.

It is the reverse side of this absence that I wish to concentrate on here. Generally speaking, just as it is the case that the sign depends on the absence of that which it said to stand for, so, conversely, it is on this duality of the sign that the *presencing* of that which is absent relies. Such is the fundamental value of the relic in early Christianity. As Peter Brown, in his excellent study of the cult of the Saints<sup>11</sup>, has pointed out, the relic played a decisive role in the spread and solidification of the Christian world. It was the physical presence of the holy, the *presencia*, that was held in the highest esteem in late antique and early-medieval piety. Initially, it was through the movement of people within the proximity of the relics, the pilgrimages, later it was the translations, the movement of relics to establish new communities, that held center stage. The *presencia* that was so central to this cult meant nothing less than the understanding that one was in the presence of an invisible person. And to possess the holy, whether on the person of the travelling monk or in the church, was to be able to show the *gracia* that God had granted. Thus Christianity conquered Europe, Asia Minor and Northern Africa by the spreading of thousands of small fragments of the body of Christ and of the Saints. Through this ritual process of movement and contact the physical body and its suffering became the collective representations of the Christian world.

There are two primary qualities that this *presencia* was endowed with. *Potencia* and *concordia* were both virtues highly desirable by both individuals and communities of early Christianity. The arrival of relics was to bring concord to the community for it was to bring together in harmony all in one body, and it was the transformation of the negative power through the suffering and death of the saint, that gave *presencia* the true potency on which many a cult, with its possessions, cures and revelations, was based<sup>12</sup>.

I shall note here only in passing, that the interest Charles IV. expressed in the Fragment of the Gospel of St. Mark and the tradition that was established for it, would be better understood if one followed the analysis suggested by Peter Brown for the cults

<sup>11</sup> Brown, P.: *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago 1982.

<sup>12</sup> The actual arrival of the relics commanded the most attention. It was the *adventus* the "arrival in state" of the Roman emperor that the annual celebration of the arrival of the saint's *presencia* among its new worshipers was modeled on. As among the Romans before, this arrival registered the moment of ideal concord as all the groups came together, united, to welcome and acclaim the newly elected ruler.

of early Christianity<sup>13</sup>. For our purpose it is more important to ascertain whether and if so to what extent Dobrovský's treatment of the Prague fragment altered this tradition. He had effectively neutralized the identity of the fragment as a direct trace – both physical and vocal – of a saint, but did he thus destroy all its potency? Does this mean that it is no more a vehicle of *presencia*? The answer depends on our understanding of what it is that changed in the secularization of the religious trace. Indeed, the strong responses to the RKZ forgeries in Czech political and cultural life demonstrate quite clearly the persistence of these qualities within the new conception of reality. Its manufacture presumed not just a modern historical consciousness. It rested on the role of the written document in establishing the presence of a past, the historical past. Its *presencia* was not only to exert a *potencia*, its aim (one which seemed to spend its time failing) was a concordance, a unique national identity, a common voice that was to claim its origin not in divine grace but at the beginning of historical time.

#### IV. *From the European Middle Ages to the Enlightenment: The Shift in the Voice of Presence*

To understand fully the obsession that the close of the eighteenth century and the following one had with the historical and in the final instance literary object, the hold that 'history' and 'literacy' had on the minds of the 'awakening' Czech nationalism, it is necessary to first figure out how in fact these objects were constituted, or better still, what changes had the conception of 'reality' and 'certitude' undergone within the wider context of European thought. Contrary to common opinion, the Enlightenment was not the time in which religion found its final downfall. It was, rather, the period in which religion was the central preoccupation; the questions asked demanded a fresh articulation of faith. Yet, what came out of this period of intensive reconsiderations was the final separation of history from religion. The secularization of the former resulted in a notion of the historical object as well as of the object of history that retained within the new historical consciousness the very presuppositions of historicity – the voice of presencing – that was central to *historia* in the 12th century.

#### *Theology of History*

As the methods of critical scholarship developed through the pioneering work of Dobner<sup>14</sup> and Dobrovský in the latter part of the 18th century, the concern for early documents took on decisive importance. If the true history of Bohemia was to be

<sup>13</sup> Again, none of the critical scholarship concerned with the Prague fragment since Dobrovský has paid any attention, beyond the reporting of 'facts', to the symbolic process that ties this object to its local history.

<sup>14</sup> An older contemporary of Dobrovský, Gelasius Dobner (1719–1790) is credited with being the first to take on a systematic critical revision of historical sources in the Bohemian context. He is best known for his latin translation of the Czech 16th century chronicler Václav Hájek, *Wenceslai Hayek a Liboczan Annales Boemorum*. In his lengthy annotations to this work Dobner questioned Hájek's historical reliability and corrected many of the latter's confabulations that had, until then, been taken as facts.

established and its earliest literary accomplishments defined, it was necessary to decide on the authenticity of the source and then proceed to isolate the factual historical accounts from the medieval narrative that appeared to be full of fictitious renditions and embellishments. A couple of centuries of modern Czech medievalists has, since then, been devoted to questions of authenticity, the reconstruction of accurate history or the identification of popular folk themes. Scholars have worked under the impression that the medieval source cannot be trusted at its face value, that the truth must be teased out from underneath the debris of accumulated mystifications and superstitions. Thus the past needs help to speak up, for the truth is always hidden behind appearances. Anyone familiar with the classical formats of early medieval historiography knows that the three established genres – the description of deeds (*gesta*), the chronicles of events (*annales*) and the lives of kings or saints (*vitae*) – lacked a concern for what we now recognize as historical causality or for the distinction between the historical and the legendary. Revelations and fables were presented as integral parts of the descriptions. However, it is not as if the 12th century Czech chronicler *Cosmas* lacked any idea of facticity for he made a clear separation between the fabulous narrations of the elders and those of the eye witness<sup>15</sup>. *Christianus* presented the lives of the patron Saints, Wenceslas and Ludmila, as one of deeds and miracles. But his aim, too, was to set history straight!<sup>16</sup>

The study of a 12th century monk Hugh of Saint-Victor's deliberation on *historia* by the modern French scholar M. D. Chenu<sup>17</sup>, helps place the modern historians concern into proper perspective. According to the author, *historia* covered a content as well as a manner of thinking about things religious, about the purpose of man on earth. It was conceived as a practical art of instruction. The religious story it was engaged in was to be understood as a divine plan, a necessary progression in the economy of salvation. It required attention to the examples (*exempla*) with which *historia* served mankind through prefigurations of the future. The past history remained present as the presence of the divine in the mystical sense. Remembrance of the past was not simply historical memory, it was an archetypal memory in which it was the theologian's task to identify the types, the *exempla*, that would inform Man's conduct and allow him to understand his place within the unfolding stages of Christian time. Thus the dogma of Christ was not a matter of a logic or metaphysic, it was a progression of events, a series that required a method appropriate for its understanding. This method was not to be confused with the secondary elaborations of allegory. It was a method bound to the *littera*, the literal level of the text in which the story was told. The same

<sup>15</sup> *Cosmas* divided his chronicles into two parts, distinguishing between the "fabulous storytelling of the elders" and the "truthful renditions of the trustworthy."

<sup>16</sup> *Christianus*, was either a 10th century monk, in which case his *Vita et passio sancti Wenceslai et sancte Ludmille ave eius* can be considered an authentic rendition from the pen of an 'eye witness' or, as some have argued, a 14th century 'forger' who, in creating a copy of a now lost original, signed his name to the dedication and so created a 10th century source. The *Christianus* case which has, technically speaking, never been settled, became the focal point of a heated debate within Czech historiography during the first half of this century.

<sup>17</sup> The present argument is taken from his "Theology and the New Awareness of History", see Chenu, M. D.: *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*. Chicago 1983.

ambiguity of the term history that we recognize today, the story as against the institutionalization of this narrative activity, and that has led recent scholars to recongize the inseparability of the discipline and its object, was quite explicitly understood as fundamental to *historia* in the 12th century.

The 12th century theological historian modeled his method and his understanding of factuality on the classical Greek model. *Historia*, in the Greek sense ἱστορέω, meant the recounting of what one saw, *quod est video et narro*. There was a restricted sense to this expression; it simply set the requirement that only the eye witness had the authority to render events as truthful. Dominick LaCapra reminds us that the 'eye witness' retains the same status in modern historiography<sup>18</sup>. This narrow definition, in which perception is the criterion of evidence, for – as Edmund Husserl was to point out<sup>19</sup> – it is what secures the identity of the object (its self evidence), did not by any means exclude miracles or revelations. These, too, were recognized to lie within the range of direct evidence accounted for by the senses. But *historia* was understood in a more general sense as well. As suggested above, it was the significance assigned to the immediate meaning of the words. It was the attention to the literal content of the story, to the reality prior to any metaphysical interpretation. The concern for meaning *sensu stricto*, for the literal interpretation of the sacred text, anticipates the idea that the true, original, meaning is fixed in the text for it is, in Husserl's terms again, an ideality. In the deliberations of the medieval historian we can already recognize the very same principles that will be said to inform the 18th century historian rebelling against the preceding theological dogmatism. And the modern, positivist, recognition of the problem of objectivity can be described as an attempt to separate the independent truth of the historical event from the dogmatism of its definition. With an emphasis on direct evidence, the belief in the indubitability of perception is matched by the equally strong insistence on the presence of meaning in the word. The underlying metaphysics of presence, as we shall see, remains the same in both cases.

### *History of Theology*

The challenge to religious thought in the eighteenth century is said to have been posed by Pascal, for he had restated the problem of theodicy, the question of the relationship between evil, God's providence and justice (first and most clearly formulated by Leibniz) in Cartesian terms. He argued that the fact of Man's original sin, the powerlessness of his reason in face of the truth of revealed faith could be documented by the application of reason itself: simple observation would lead us to the inevitable conclusion that man is divided against himself, burdened by profound contradictions as he strives to transcend himself only to find himself tied down by his own imperfections. The resolution of this paradox, in which reason is set up as the independent

<sup>18</sup> LaCapra, D.: *History and Criticism*. Ithaca 1985, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Husserl, E.: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. First Book. Den Haag 1983. A very clear discussion of the primacy of 'seeing' in Husserl's phenomenology of self-evidence can be found in Kohak, E.: *Idea and Experience*. Edmund Husserl's Project of Philosophy in *Ideas I*. Chicago 1978.



agency to confront Man's spiritual world just as it had already redefined the natural world, resulted in a dramatic shift in the conception of religious experience and thence in the voice of the historical object. Voltaire used common sense to maintain human contrariness to be natural, Shaftsbury placed the self-evidence of truth within the realm of pure beauty as the result of free inner intellectual and formative activity (revealing the true divinity of man), while Rousseau moved the guiding principles of human existence into society itself. (For him, the need for the social contract confirmed that Man's true motivation was actually quite base). This change in the relationship between God and truth, placed theology on par with other fields of knowledge into a position of the *explanandum*. It was no more the source of dogma but rather a source of debated issues submitted to the independent intellectual force of reason. The reversal led theology to reject the doctrine of original sin, to maintain that both the good and bad in man is an internal condition, his fallibility, like the deception of his senses, a lapse of judgement which is a free act of the intellect for which reason must supply the correction. Here deism, or natural religion, is pitted against revealed religion and the truth of God is internalized and universalized rather than being dictated by the literal word of the scripture (the original position of the Reformation) or by the tradition of the Church, (which was now seen as nothing more than the accumulated paraphernalia of superstition). From now on, faith is defined as an inner truth and dogma as the ignorance that parades as truth, the most dreaded foe of knowledge. "The former testimony I find within myself inscribed by the hand of God; the latter has been written on parchment and marble by superstitious people", wrote Diderot<sup>20</sup>.

Several continuities as well as discontinuities emerge when we compare this new conception of historical knowledge with what we had said about 12th century *historia*:

The belief that *Revelation* offered a unique ground of certainty had been undermined. Initially, revelation was, next to natural religion, considered an equal though different manner in which the knowledge of God was disclosed<sup>21</sup>. But because its authenticity now depended on its universality, it could not be considered bound by any spatio-temporal limitations. This was the logic that supported the call of the Enlightenment for religious tolerance and worked to undermine the authority of Church ritual, as it questioned the validity of local cults of saints or the belief in the present power of relics. As the empirical certainty of faith supplanted syllogistic proofs, "my experience is my proof" wrote the German scholar Jerusalem, revelation lost out completely as an objective source of knowledge. At best it served to sanction truths that were in keeping with the formal investigations into the history of dogma.

The *literalism* of the Reformation that maintained that every word, indeed every letter of the Scripture, was immersed in sanctity and so could claim the same validity as revelation, also had difficulty holding ground against Cartesian philosophy. And though the first call for the authenticity of the books of the Bible came within and in defence of the Church<sup>22</sup>, the insistence on the historicity of the text ended up under-

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* 1968, 171.

<sup>21</sup> Such was the position maintained by Tindal, M.: *Christianity as Old as Creation*. London 1730.

<sup>22</sup> The Catholic theologian Simon R.: *Histoire critique du vieux Testament*. Paris 1678,

mining the very notion that the adoption of the historical inquiry was meant to prove: The humanistic Reformation of Erasmus maintained that the restoration of the original text of the Bible would amount to an act of purification thanks to which the sublime simplicity of the Truth could be brought forth from behind the later additions and falsifications. But in a more radical approach, Spinoza argued that the Bible with all its miracles and prophetic visions must be expelled from the region of philosophical truth. True faith was a matter of emotion and therefore did not convey objective insight, just the vagaries of the individual's imagination. In his words the Scripture is not the source of our comprehension of the Being of all things, it is merely one of the things. The divine text is a natural object, its interpretation demands an empirical investigation of its history<sup>23</sup>.

In the Bohemian, as well as in the larger, Slavic, context Dobrovský's efforts played a pivotal role in this process of transition. Of the many themes that concerned him, two can be identified as crucial: his life long interest in comparative Slavic philology and his virtual obsession with the unmasking of the received traditions masquerading as historical truths. Dobrovský's legacy to the National Revival is really that of a humanist. He remained in both his method and belief a classical scholar. In his earlier works, such as the one discussed in this paper, it is clear that the biblical script is reevaluated as *text* – most often on *philological* grounds – but not questioned for its theological value. The historization of the work did not result in its secularization. Similarly, while Dobrovský's initial response to the RK discovery can be said to disclose Romantic ideals his universalist concerns would override nationalistic ones as his critical evaluations often meant the dismantling of local legends which, as in the case of the Prague Fragment, was not viewed favorably by the ecclesiastical order, and which, in his later works that took on local Czech legends (secular and sacred), did not hold up, in principle, against the Romantic imagination of the nationalist historians in the early part of the nineteenth century.

The change in the truth value of the Prague Fragment was the result of a twofold shift in the kind of 'absent' object (reality) that the document's contemplation activated: 1) For one, treating it as a *copy* decreased the sacred value of this written relic. A discussion of its 'physical' properties – and here Dobrovský closely followed the work of Della Torre – retraced it to a time that excluded the possibility that as an object the relic was endowed with a holy *presencia*. Placed in a new historical context redefined

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argued that the Protestant reliance on verbal inspiration is indefensible. The compilation and publication of corroborative historical materials on the Church's history was actually initiated in a systematic way within the Jesuit order by the bollandists who, starting in 1643, launched a monumental edition of testimonials and documents regarding the lives of the saints, *Acta sanctorum*. Among the Czech Jesuits, Bohuslav Balbín (1621–1688) was an important contributor to this project.

<sup>23</sup> "I may sum up the matter by saying that the method of interpreting scripture does not widely differ from the method of interpreting nature – in fact, it is almost the same. For as the interpretation of nature consists in the examination of the history of natural phenomena on certain fixed axioms, so Scriptural interpretation proceeds by the examination of Scripture, and inferring the intentions of its authors as a legitimate conclusion from its fundamental principles." Spinoza, quoted in Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* 1968, 184–185.

it as a document from the sixth century, a link in the complex secular history of the Bible and as an object that had since its inception accumulated additional value stemming from its own history. In this case, as a direct commentary on the 14th century from the very hands of Charles IV.<sup>24</sup>

2) The most innovative contribution resulted from Dobrovský's philological analysis of the text, specifically, from the 'etymology' of certain key words<sup>25</sup>. The vulgar (folk) Latin that he identified in the text of the Fragment marked a second shift in the document's voice, from the supertemporal *presencia* of the apostle to the earthly presence of the plebs. *Scendens* instead of *sciendens*, Dobrovský argued, "is not a mistake in spelling, but a remnant of folk latin speech."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, he identified *destruet* as the folk *pronunciation* of the present form of *destruit* and the use of *cenaculus* as appropriate in folk speech<sup>27</sup>.

The concern in this 'etymological recovery' is to settle matters of dating by means of identifying a linguistic *usage*. Does it matter what these words *mean*? In this work of historical criticism, the focus is on the intimating function of the word (*logos*) independent of its meaning though certainly with its possibility in mind. Not surprisingly, Dobrovský's method employs the 'sound' of meaning as much as the 'sight' of the script. The point is, these physical properties serve as the vehicles of presencing through which the authenticating voice of a new 'past present' is actualized. This brief look at Dobrovský's treatment of the *Fragmentum* is sufficient to show that the method used in changing the document's historical (and therefore religious) value is, in its efficacy, supported by the underlying principle of presencing.

The reliance on folk to help authenticate the document in terms of a specific historical date, is not coincidental. We can recognize in this move a consistency of interest that Dobrovský maintained throughout his career in folk materials. It is he, after all, who stood at the inception of the National Revival and the national sciences (including ethnography and folklore) that gained official approval at the close of the 18th century<sup>28</sup>. This reliance on folk is of decisive importance in another respect; it documents the persistence of the *vox populi* (voice of the people) into the modern era, as it simultaneously places the transition in its conception within the tradition of biblical criticism. However, this concept of the folk should be understood as a *logical* term within a rationalist epistemology. There is little interest in the pristine value of 'folk' in the sense introduced by Rousseau for the 'noble savage' and employed, closer to Bohemia,

<sup>24</sup> The relic has since gained value as an autograph of the Emperor, illustrating the beauty of his personal script.

<sup>25</sup> I am using the term 'etymology' in a wider sense to cover the principle of recovery of a linguistic value, a meaning or voice, that is different from the one 'at hand'. One may think of it in terms similar to Foucault's use of 'archeology'.

<sup>26</sup> "*non errores esse puto aut libertatem orthographicam, sed reliquias vulgaris idiomatis latini*", Dobrovský, *Fragmentum Pragense* 1953, 58.

<sup>27</sup> "*cenaculum grandem, e pro oe, nos enim coena scribimus; in vulgi sermone usurpari poterat cenaculus*", *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>28</sup> The official status of the sciences, especially those concerned with Czech language and history, can be said to have improved after the speech of Dobrovský to the Czech Learned Society in honor of the coronation of Leopold II. in Prague, on September 25, 1791. The financial gift from the King helped give the society the badly needed official stamp of approval.

by Herder. Dobrovský was little influenced by the latter, certainly not in his earlier years. The impact of Herder's notion of 'national genius' and his positive description of the Slavic people came later, in the early part of the eighteenth century, when it added intellectual fuel to the interest Czech Romanticism gave to the reification of the 'folk'.

The temporal relativization of the truth value of the written object set the stage for the possibility of a return inquiry, a 'questioning back' of the object about its historically preceding forms. The shift which disposed of revelation as the source of evidence and denied the *logos* a literal meaning, this move drastically restricted the presencing power of the Scripture. The *object of presencing was transformed* as the theological orthodoxy that informed the medieval narrative changed in favor of a rationalistic view of history. We now give factual credibility only to that which meets our idea of what is Rational for that is what is Real, as Hegel maintained. But *the phenomenon of presencing was itself preserved*. Its own power of disclosure rests on the presupposition that the face of origin lies dormant within the text, that the rational interpretation of the object accomplishes an presentation, a bringing forth to consciousness of truth, for it is here, in this *sense* of presence, that all self-evidence remains grounded. While the truth is said to hide behind the profusion of distortions, it is within these distortions that the traces of the original meanings are identified. This paradox of dualism persists from the medieval into the modern world-view<sup>29</sup>. On it, too, depended the manuscript's *potencia* for the awakening Czech national identity in which the historicity of the written word had and continues to have such a decisive role.

#### V. *Implications: The Voice of Presence as a Shifter*

But what of this presencing? How can we account for this semantic phenomenon that is lodged in the physical properties of its vehicle, the signifier, regardless of any meaning that the sign is to convey? Is there Being outside of language? One must pay attention to the deconstructive critique of structural linguistics which "always studies the *phone* and *logos*, never the outlawed *graphie* or *trace*. Speech is celebrated; writing condemned"<sup>30</sup>. To this we should add what is phenomenologically self-evident, i. e., that *we are condemned to meaning*. This insight is 'lost' to structuralism which, in being concerned with the logic of signification, has delegated meaning to structure. Semiosis is what we are undoubtedly engaged in but it is the being in meaning that is experienced. It is not enough to state that the similarities we have noted, in the diffe-

<sup>29</sup> The dualistic world view is not particular to civilization. A concern with presencing and the power of objects through which this is accomplished is, of course, characteristic of 'traditional' societies. The notion of *The Dreaming* among Australian Aborigines and the presencing power of the sacred boards (*churinga*) are a good example. See, e. g., Lévi-Strauss, Cl.: *The Savage Mind*. Chicago 1969. — Munn N.: *The Transformation of Subjects into Objects in Walbiri and Pitjantjatjara Myth*. In: Berndt, R. M. [ed.]: *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*. Nedlands 1970, and most recently Myers, F.: *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*. Washington 1986. It is perhaps ironic that what has been discussed here is, in the ethnographic context, said to be typical of magical thought. It could be equally well argued not only that 'modern' thought persists in being magical but, also, that 'primitive' thought is not devoid of historicity.

<sup>30</sup> Leitch, V. B.: *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction*. New York 1983, 26.

rent treatments of the Prague Fragment and of the RKZ, simply illustrate the complexities of metonymic relationships, that the case of the written relic – ancient or modern – is, quite simply, one of indexicality. Instead, by paying attention to the presencing activity itself, human agency is introduced into the traditional discussion of the relic as a type of sign. Effectively, the sense of presence that the intending subject experiences in ‘face’ of that which is absent amounts, to borrow a suitable term from linguistics, to a case of *deixis*, to a *shift* within the spatio-temporal orientation that constitutes our sense of presence-in-the-world<sup>31</sup>.

Husserl’s phenomenology of meaning and signification provides the basis for the singling out of presencing as an experience that, next to ideal objectivity, stands at the foundation of any historical consciousness. A brief review of the place of ideal objectivity in Husserl’s analysis of historicity will help understand the effective value of presencing and of the interplay between the two. Meaning, according to this philosophy, is an *idea* that is not particular to a specific occurrence (to an individual or context). Neither is it a psychic reality. It is an *ideal object*, articulate thought itself, constituted as the same to separate individuals and on different occasions. Though in no sense a condition of writing, writing does, of course, fix this identity beyond any immediacy of its actualization. The immanent phenomenal transparency of this ideality sediments, through writing, not only word’s articulate thought but a constancy which maintains a claim on being identifiable beyond the vicissitudes of the passage of time. A topic worthy of a separate discussion, it should be noted here that this identity of meaning, and therefore its ideality, is the outcome of the same process of repetition that continuously threatens to dissolve it. It is through the repeated usage, the multiplicity of perspectives, that an identity is constituted and it is because we ‘have seen it before’ that we can identify it again as the same in spite of the changing context of usage. Within the larger discourse of culture, the ideal objectivity of meaning becomes, as trace, the object that is given the truth value of being ‘original’, whether in the logical (essential) or in the temporal (prior) sense. Ideal objects are the condition of sense-history which always depends on the “having been before” of identity to become the “passing down” in history<sup>32</sup>. (The development of 18th century etymology

<sup>31</sup> “The essential property of deixis (the term comes from the Greek word meaning ‘pointing’ or ‘showing’) is that it determines the structure and interpretation of utterances in relation to the time and place of their occurrence, the identity of the speaker and addressee, and objects and events in the actual situation of utterance”, Lyons, J.: *Language and Linguistics. An Introduction*. Cambridge 1981, 170. The categories of person and tense are the most common forms of deictic shifters found in Indo-European languages. I am, of course, stretching the use of this term to cover a phenomenon which, as is argued here, I do not consider linguistic.

<sup>32</sup> Husserl, E.: *Origins of Geometry*. In: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Evanston 1978, 353–378, speaks of *Rückfrage* (return inquiry) as the questioning back through tradition to the origin of ideality. The *re-activation* of the original sense is then dependent on ideal objectivity. Constituted as an identity it in turn accounts for the sense of tradition and so for the very passing down of the ideality. “Thus, historicity becomes possible through return inquiry and reactivation, and yet both are possible only because there is an origin and tradition of ideal objects, because there is historicity”, Leavy, J. P. Jr.: *Preface: Undecidables and Old Names*. In: Derrida, J.: *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*. Stony Brook 1978, 12. But the ability to reawaken the origi-

serves as a poignant example of the scholastic interest in searching and finding in the text the original thought of bygone years.) It is clear from the materials discussed here that the ideality of meaning provided the mechanism for the tracing of the sacred or secular past within the immediately given. We have seen the immanence of God find its modern equivalent in the concept of folk. Both are taken as self-evident and transcendent and both have been pivotal to the social construction of, and concern for, *tradition*.

This sense that one can find within the immediately given the meaning/object that is, in itself, of the past finds support in the sense that one is in the presence of this, otherwise absent past. Historical documents are said to speak to us from the past, like God or the folk, they have a *voice*. This *sense of presence* is exactly what we mean when we say that we are caught up in meaning and it can be usefully analyzed, again in phenomenological terms, as the outcome of the asymmetrical relation between the appearance of an expression and its meaning-intention. While both are lived through, we live solely in the "enacting of sense, its meaning. And in so far as we do this, and yield ourselves to enacting the meaning-intention" Husserl continues "our whole interest centers upon the object intended in our intention and named by its means."<sup>33</sup> Our engagement with the phenomenal aspect of the signifier gives way the moment it releases us to the signified. "The function of a word (or rather of an intuitive word presentation) is to awaken a sense-conferring act in ourselves, to point to what is intended, . . . and to guide our interest exclusively in this direction."<sup>34</sup> It is on this interplay within the phenomenal aspects of the signifier, in the relationship between the passing awareness of the phenomenon of signification as against the meaning intention that we are caught up in, that the *presencing voice* is manifest<sup>35</sup>.

nal sense is always threatened by the sedimented, traditional, sense that covers it up. This is because the sedimented (historical) sense is interacting with the creation of new meaning within the present. This in Husserl's thought accounts for the loss, not only of the original sense of things, but of the very capacity to reactivate them and thus of being 'responsible' for them.

<sup>33</sup> Husserl, E.: *Logical Investigations*. London 1970, 282.

<sup>34</sup> In the context of the present discussion of written relics, and bearing the deliberate construction of the past by the RKZ forgers in mind, it is worth noting Husserl's use of the printed word as an example of the asymmetry discussed: Without its verbal character, it is but an external percept like any other. Once the print functions as text its presentation is altered, "the word remains intuitively present, maintains its appearance, but we no longer intend it, it no longer properly is the object of our 'mental activity'", *Ibid.*, 283. Jacques Derrida, in an early work devoted to this part of Husserl's theory of signs: *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Evanston 1973, suggests that in this notion of the 'effervescent' signifier lies the very foundation of phenomenology as a philosophy based on a primacy given to 'presence' and argues further that this is provided for by an insistence on 'vocality' as the primary expression of thought in language. For where writing fixes the ideality of meaning, speaking expresses this meaning in the immediacy of the present through the breath, spirit of the voice. Thus it is the voice of presence, the ephemeral presence of the material sound of meaning that, in being presence itself, places us in the midst (i. e., in the 'sense') of meaning.

<sup>35</sup> A parallel may be drawn between Husserl's crucial insight regarding the effervescent character of the signifier and his placement of intimation vis-a-vis meaning in expression, according to which an expression not only means but also intimates. The presence of meaning implies the intention of communicating a thought. This theme takes on a particularly semiotic development in Roman Jakobson's communication model of language "Closing Statement:

The asymmetry, in which the phenomenological 'body' of the sign (a physical presence) dissolves the moment it is produced, is then responsible for the presencing we have spoken of<sup>36</sup>. In any actualization of intention, the exterior nature of the signifier (the sound and its fixation in the letter are 'real' objects) clothes the signified (always an ideal object by essence) with the presence of the intending consciousness itself. The apodicticity of meaning, the being in the articulate thought as object (in our case in the original thought of the historical other), is secured outside of meaning in the *sense of presence* provided by the apparent transcendence of the sign. Indeed, it is the physical aspect of the sign that places us in the *presence* of meaning, and it is the possible fixation of *articulate thought*, that is, the presence of conscious being of another having of the world in expression, that accounts for the *potencia* in the animated *presencia* of the written relics. For while the expression places us in the presence of meaning as ideality, its phenomenal presence constructs its clothing as the *voice* of the other's Being.

This suggests a distinction lacking in Derrida's discussion of Husserl's metaphysics of presence<sup>37</sup>. If the analysis of the unequal relationship between the phenomenal and meaningful dimensions of the sign discloses a voice as the actualizations of presence, then the description of the sign qua object in the constituting intentionality of conscious life discloses this voice as a shifter. In the subject/object correlation of intentional consciousness the particular transcendent quality of the object meant corresponds to the equally specific position of the intending Ego. Consequently, any change in the positing of the object pole of experience is paralleled by a shift in the subject pole of its experiencing, that is to say, in Ego's manner of Being. To put it simply, in having an object one is placed in relation to it. Only this can account for the experience of sense-recovery beyond the expression's meaning, of the experience of the world as it was for the other, for the historiographer's ideal of recovering the past "as it really was"<sup>38</sup>.

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Linguistics and Poetics" in Sebeok, T. A. (ed.): *Style and Language*. Cambridge 1960, and most recently in Paul Ricoeur's *Interpretation Theory. Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth 1976, discussion of the "illocutionary act" of discourse. Yet, while expression finds its fulfillment in meaning and it can be argued that there is no meaning without intimation, intimation itself need not coincide with the presence of meaning.

<sup>36</sup> This 'Being-in' (*Da-sein*) meaning will, as Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* 1973, 19, correctly observes, later become Husserl's notion of sense (*Sinn*) and contrasted with meaning (*Bedeutung*). This concept will develop from a general phenomenological description of the presuppositional structure of conscious life, e. g., temporality and object constitution (*Ideen I*), to his essentially kinesthetic theory of the living body as the fundamental presence in the world (*Ideen II*). But it is in his earlier *Logical Investigations*, that we encounter this project in its initial, decisive, stage.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* 1973.

<sup>38</sup> Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory* 1976, 92, warns against the Romanticist claim that what is appropriated by the reading of a text is the coincidence with the 'genious' of another author. The omnitemporality of meaning (as ideality) frees the text from its original author and situation; "If we may be said to coincide with anything, it is not the inner life of another ego, but the disclosure of a possible way of looking at things, which is the genuine referential power of the text." The present paper neither advocates the Romanticist ideal nor disagrees with Ricoeur's analysis. The statement that one is "placed in relation" to the text is based on the distinction between the noetic and noematic (the subjective and objective) poles of meaning and therefore focuses on the experience structure that accompanies the intention of meaning.

Thus beyond the phenomenality of the voice that accomplishes the thematization of meaning only to deny itself in the process, there lies Ego's intentionality that, similarly, accounts for the possible shifts in the manner in which we occupy the world as object at the cost of denying itself as well. Finally, the reversal of this asymmetry is not only possible but desirable. In thematizing the sensual presentation of the logos against its intuitive content, of the sign qua signifier, both the ancient and modern relics aim precisely at this primary actualization of presence in which meaning remains essential in the role of ideal possibility.

This presencing and shifting aspect of the voice, together with ideal objectivity a critical component of historicity, lies outside of meaning, in sense. For to say, that "we are condemned to meaning" is simply to observe that when we speak we are as new to what we are saying as those who are listening, or, to put it in more radical terms suggested by the place of writing in the development of cultural identity, that the past can speak (as it often does) without having to say anything at all in order to animate presence as the potency we assign to the externalized intersubjective 'other', as spiritual, historical or logical essence.

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The aim is to provide a description that would account for the power of presencing or, for example, the Romanticist claim. The objective truth of this "placing in the presence of the absent other" is not argued here.