

ZTRACENÝ LIDSTVA RÁJ: LANGUAGE AND LOSS IN MÁCHA'S MÁJ

By Alfred Thomas

I.

Like all great national poets – Pushkin, Mickiewicz, Shevchenko – the Czech Romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha (1810–1836) has become a cultural monument in his own country, the subject of an ever-growing mass of scholarship. Yet in his short life-time and for a period after his death, Mácha's importance as a lyric poet of genius remained unrecognized in his native land. He even incurred the disapproval and hostility of his contemporaries for his refusal to conceive of literature in narrow nationalist terms. Since the beginnings of literary activity in the twelfth century, Czech literature has been *engagé*, circumscribed by local political considerations. Its principal feature is insularity rather than universality. Mácha rejected the traditional role of the didactic author and thereby transgressed the orthodox values of the *Obrození* [National Revival]. In 1840 the nationalist playwright Josef Kajetán Tyl, author of *Jan Hus*, presented a partial caricature of the Romantic Mácha in his story *Rozervanec* [literally, the one torn apart]. The title refers to the Byronic hero whose soul is divided by internal spiritual discord. Such a notion of division presupposes a humanistic ideal of unity and essence. By 'tearing apart' this ideal Mácha was in fact challenging the philosophical basis of the National Revival itself¹.

In the years following his death, Mácha's reputation began to grow. In 1858 the almanach *Máj* was founded in his memory. Its co-editors were Vítězslav Hálek and Jan Neruda; its principal adherents were Karel Jaromír Erben, Božena Němcová, Karolina Světlá and Adolf Heyduk². The first serious literary criticism of Mácha's work was a study by Jakub Arbes which appeared in 1886. From that time on there has been a steady flow of biographies and reminiscences, as well as more scholarly assessments of Mácha's *œuvre*³. Broadly speaking, there are three main areas of

¹ Tyl, Josef Kajetán: *Rozervanec* [The Man Torn Apart]. *Vlastimil* 1/3 (1840) 266–303. For the reception of Mácha's work from his death to the founding of the *Máj* almanac, see *Literární pout'* Karla Hynka Máchy – *Ohlas Máchova díla v letech 1836–1858* [The Literary Pilgrimage of KHM – the Reception of Mácha's Work 1836–1858]. Ed. by Pavel Vašák. Prague 1981.

² Měšťan, Antonín: *Geschichte der tschechischen Literatur im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Cologne-Vienna 1984, 113–114.

³ An exhaustive list of Mácha scholarship would be impossible here but the principal monographs are as follows: Arbes, Jakub: KHM; studie literární a povahopisné [KHM; literary and character studies]. Ed. by Karel Janský and Karel Polák. Prague 1941. – Pražák, Albert: KHM. Prague 1936. – Šalda, F. X.: *Mácha, snivec, buřič* [Mácha, Dreamer, Rebel]. Prague 1936. – Novák, Arne (ed.): KHM – osobnost, dílo, ohlas. Sborník k

Mácha scholarship: biographical perspectives⁴, literary antecedents⁵ and pure linguistic readings⁶. In the 1920s the Prague School of Linguists turned its attention to Mácha's work⁷. Since then Mácha studies have reverted to a more conventional consideration of his life and poetics within the political-cultural framework of the National Revival⁸. The break in the continuity of theoretical approaches to literature in post-war Czechoslovakia has denied Czech literary criticism access to contemporary models of theory, most notably French structuralism. This article aims to find common ground between the two schools by placing Jan Mukařovský's linguistic reading of *Máj* into the larger framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis⁹. The central theme of Mácha's *Máj* – the Oedipus complex – would appear to offer a suitable opportunity for a psychoanalytical study of the poem.

II.

Jacques Lacan's most important contribution to psychoanalysis was his synthesis of two previously unrelated branches of knowledge, the Saussurian concept of language as a system of signs and Freud's discovery that the human psyche can be divided into two areas – the conscious and unconscious. Lacan observed that Freud's analysis of dreaming as a twin operation of *Verschiebung* [displacement] and *Verdichtung* [condensation] corresponded closely to Roman Jakobson's distinction between meta-

100. výročí Máchovy smrti [KHM-Personality, Work, Influence. Almanac to Mark the Centenary of Mácha's Death]. Prague 1937. – Hartl, Antonín (ed.): Věčný Mácha – památník českého básníka [The Eternal Mácha – Monument to a Czech Poet]. Prague 1940. – Janský, Karel: Tajemství Křivokladu a jiné máchovské studie [The Mystery of Křivoklad and Other Mácha Studies]. Prague 1941. – Granjard, Henri: Mácha et la renaissance nationale en Bohême. Paris 1957. – For a general survey of Slavic Romanticism, see Jechová, Hana: L'image poétique dans le mouvement romantique slave. Reproduction de thèses, Université de Lille III. Paris 1982.

⁴ See Janský, Karel (ed.): KHM ve vzpomínkách současníků [KHM in the Memories of his Contemporaries]. Prague 1958. – Štěpánek, Vladimír: KHM. Prague 1984.

⁵ See the articles in *Osobnost* for Mácha's relation to Byron, Polish and German Romanticism. – Also: Wellék, René: Mácha and English Literature. In: *Essays on Czech Literature*. The Hague 1963, 148–178.

⁶ Mukařovský, Jan (ed.): *Torso tajemství Máchova díla* [Torso of the Mystery of Mácha's Work]. Prague 1938. – Mukařovský, Jan: *Kapitoly z české poetiky* [Chapters from Czech Poetics]. 3 vols. Prague 1948. Vol. III: *Máchovské studie* [Mácha Studies].

⁷ Mukařovský, Jan: *Genetika smyslu v Máchově poesii* [The Genesis of Sense in Mácha's Poetry]. In: Mukařovský: *Torso 1938*, 13–110. – Jakobson, Roman: *K popisu Máchova verše* [Toward a Description of Mácha's Verse]. In: *Ibid.* 207–278. – Havránek, Bohuslav: *Jazyk Máchův* [Mácha's Language]. In: *Ibid.* 279–331.

⁸ See the recent collection of articles dealing with Mácha's relation to Byronism, Romantic painting and Czech history. In: *Prostor Máchova díla-soubor máchovských prací* [The Space of Mácha's Work – a Collection of Essays on Mácha]. Ed. by Pavel Vašák. Prague 1986.

⁹ This article draws principally on two areas of Lacan's thought, the mirror-stage and the indeterminacy of the sign. See: Lacan, Jacques: *Écrits*. Paris 1966, especially: *Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je*. *Ibid.* 93–100, and *L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud*. *Ibid.* 493–528. – Also Lacan, Jacques: *Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*. Paris 1973, in particular: *Le Sujet et l'Autre: L'Aliénation*, 185–195.

phor (the dominant device of verse) and metonymy (the dominant device of prose) as the fundamental binary operation of language¹⁰. Lacan's analysis translates psychic functions into these two linguistic functions; metaphor is seen as the origin of symptom, as it replaces one signifier with another, while metonymy is seen as the origin of desire¹¹. To elucidate this distinction, let us quote Frederic Jameson's succinct definition of metaphor and metonymy in *The Prison-House of Language*:

... language can never really express anything: only relationships (Saussurian linguistics) or sheer absence (Mallarmé). Thus language has of necessity recourse to indirection, to substitution: itself a substitute, it must replace that empty center of content with something else, and it does so either by saying what the content is like (metaphor), or describing its context and the contours of its absence, listing the things that border around it (metonymy). Thus language, by its very nature, is either analogical or fetishistic ...¹².

The connection between linguistics and psychoanalysis culminated in Lacan's revolutionary assertion that "l'inconscient est structuré comme un langage" [the unconscious is structured like language]. Lacan moves away from the old picture of the Freudian *id* as the repository of hidden desire and instinct which manifests itself randomly through the medium of dreams and slips of the tongue:

It's wrong to think that the unconscious exists because of the existence of unconscious desire, of some obtuse heavy, caliban, indeed animalic unconscious desire that rises up from the depths, that is primitive, and has to lift itself to the higher level of consciousness. Quite on the contrary, desire exists because there is unconsciousness, that is to say, language which escapes the subject in its structure and effects, and because there is always, on the level of language, something which is beyond consciousness, and it is there that the function of desire is to be located¹³.

Lacan proceeds to study the development of the subject from its precognitive and pre-linguistic stage to its emergence as an individual with access to language. Let us quote once more from Jameson's description of the Lacanian system where it embodies more characteristic Freudian phenomena:

... the experience of the mother is one of initial plenitude from which the infant is brusquely severed. Thus, the separation from the mother results in a kind of primal lack or *béance*, a "gaping" and it is this traumatic experience which is customarily felt (by both boys and girls) as a castration. Note that just as language is a kind of *béance* or opening onto the Other (it is never a plenitude itself, always

¹⁰ See Jakobson, Roman: Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances. In: Selected Writings. Hague-Paris 1971, 239–259, especially, 254–259 (the metaphoric-metonymic poles).

¹¹ Jameson, Frederic: *The Prison-House of Language – A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. Princeton 1972, 122.

¹² *Ibid.* 122–23.

¹³ *Ibid.* 138; quoted in: *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* Paris 1968, 252–53.

in its very structure a formed incompleteness, waiting for the Other's participation), so also the phallus is to be understood as part of the realm of the Symbolic rather than as the penis itself. The phallus is thus a linguistic category, the very symbol of lost plenitude, and sexual desire, insofar that it is an attempt to regain that plenitude, to repossess the phallus, is also a ratification of its loss. This is to say that neurosis for Lacan is essentially a failure to accept castration, a failure to accept the primal lack which is at the center of life itself: a vain and impossible nostalgia for that first essential plenitude, a belief that one really can in one form or another repossess the phallus¹⁴.

The opposition of the Imaginary to the Symbolic Order in Lacan's system is a distinction between the subject's illusory concern with his own image and his ultimate acceptance of "the secondary status of consciousness with respect to the linguistic order itself"¹⁵. Language, according to Lacan, functions like the unconscious in that the signifier is always in pursuit of a signified which can only manifest itself elsewhere as another signifier. This enactment of deferral also appears in the mother-child relationship and is the basis for Lacan's account of the Oedipus complex¹⁶. In Lacan's view, the role of language (or as he puts it, the role of the signifier) is of primary importance. Once the subject has acquired language, then all the pre-verbal structures are altered to fit in with the language system. Access to language involves an awareness of difference and differentiation (the difference of the signifier) and an awareness of the loss of illusory wholeness which follows the child's initial experience of itself as an intact being separate from its mother (Lacan's figurative account of the mirror-stage)¹⁷.

III.

Before turning to *Máj*, we should consider the unhappy life of the poet himself. Karel Hynek Mácha was born in Prague of lower middle-class parents. He attended Prague University where he studied law, but his real interest from an early age was writing. He began to compose verse in German but subsequently turned to the Czech language. His modest output in verse and prose constitutes the greatest literary achievement in Czech literature, and his masterpiece *Máj* is not only a milestone in Czech poetry, it is also one of the most significant products of European Romanticism. Like all the Romantics, Mácha died at an early age – at twenty-six of an intestinal infection caused through overwork and wilful self-neglect. But Mácha was not a self-styled, alienated Romantic; on the contrary, he participated actively in the intellectual circles of his day. He took a leading role in the Czech-language theatre which in the 1830s was emerging from the neglect of previous generations. The poet liked to shock and outrage the Prague bourgeoisie: he was to be seen on the streets of Prague, cutting a dashing figure in a dramatic red-lined cloak, broad-rimmed hat, riding-boots and

¹⁴ Ibid. 172.

¹⁵ Ibid. 170.

¹⁶ See Lacan, Jacques: Le séminaire sur "La Lettre volée". In: Lacan 1966, 11–61.

¹⁷ See Lacan: Le Stade Miroir 1966.

spurs. At the same time, Romanticism was not merely a pose; it was a state of the soul, a source of profound *Weltschmerz*. Like the German philosophers of the age and their literary counterparts, the Jena Romantics, Mácha was preoccupied in his verse with the fundamental problems of being, language and temporality. His poetry displays a reversal and, by implication, subversion of the received orthodoxies of the time – on the level of language, ontology and philosophy.

The poet's letters and diaries reveal a mind prone to neurosis. Mácha's intense sexual energy was channelled into his passionate relationship with Lori Šomková, the beautiful if unintelligent daughter of a Prague bookbinder. A passage from Mácha's diary, dated 17 September 1835, relates how the poet, his friend Karel Sabina and Lori were returning to Prague after a walk in the country-side when Mácha broached the delicate subject of marriage:

Jak jsme šli já, Lori a Sabina ku Praze, já jsem žertoval, že (j)si ji nevezmu atd. Sabina pravil: "Sie lächelt zu dem Schmerz – Scherz will ich sagen", a ona odpověděla: "Sagen Sie nur Schmerz"¹⁸.

Sabina, Lori and I were walking to Prague. I joked that I would not marry her and so on. Sabina said: "She is smiling at the pain – I mean at the joke" to which she answered: "Rather say pain".

This episode illustrates the classical Freudian slip of the tongue whereby the unconscious is momentarily bared in a lapse of speech. Here the subject, Sabina, substitutes *Schmerz* [pain] for *Scherz* [joke]. It is significant that Mácha entered this incident into his diary for it reveals, quite apart from his personal concern with his fiancée's response, an interest in the relationship between language and the unconscious. As we shall see when we come to a close reading of *Máj*, this relation is manifest within the very structure of Mácha's poetic language.

Mácha was obsessed by the fear that he was not Lori's first lover, a retrospective jealousy which is irrational precisely because the allegation can never be proved or disproved. In a letter to his parents, dated 2 November 1836, he reveals his fury at discovering that Lori had left their house without his permission:

Jak jsem ale dostal psaní a četl jsem, že Lori byla od nás z domu, tak jsem se rozvzetklil, že jsem mohl z toho mít smrt. Také od těch časů tuze špatně vypadám. Všecko jsem tu roztřískal a myslil jsem, hned že musím jít odtud, a ona, že může dělat co chce. Já vím, proč nechci, aby jen z domu ani nevycházela¹⁹.

When I received the letter and read that Lori had left our house and had been home I flew into a rage so strong that I could have died. Since that time I have not looked well. I smashed everything to pieces here and thought that I must leave straightaway and she could do what she wants. I know why I don't want her even to leave the house.

This scene recalls the oedipal scenario of *Máj* where the hero Vilém, having un-

¹⁸ Jan sk ý, Karel (ed.): Spisy KHM [The Works of KHM]. 3 vols. Prague 1972. Vol. 3: Literární zápisníky, deníky, dopisy [Literary Notebooks, Diaries, Letters], 284.

¹⁹ Ibid. 339.

wittingly slain his own father for the seduction of his beloved Jarmila, is tormented by his guilt and by the fallen state of the girl:

Sok – otec můj! vrah – jeho syn,
 on svůdce dívky mojí! –
 Neznámý mně. – Strašný můj čin
 pronesl pomstu dvojí.
 Proč rukou jeho vyvržen
 stal jsem se hrůzou lesů?
 Čí vinu příští pomstí den?
 Čí vinou kletbu nesu?
 Ne vinou svou! – V života sen
 byl jsem já snad jen vyváben,
 bych ztrestal jeho vinu?

My rival is my father! His son the murderer; he the seducer of my girl! – Unknown to me. – My terrible deed has reaped a double vengeance. Why cast out by his hand did I become the fear of the forest? Whose guilt will the morrow avenge? By whose guilt do I bear a curse? Not my own guilt! – Was I lured into the dream of life only to be punished for his guilt?

Mácha's personal neurosis is here transmuted into mythical, poetic form. We are now in the realm of the Symbolic Order where conventional categories of identity – father, son, girl-friend – are transfigured into symbols. The father becomes the Father, the figure of the Law to whom the subject appeals for justice and recognition. He is the all-determining signifier to which the subject defers in its futile quest for ultimate signification; for, like the mythic father of the Oedipus complex, the signifier is always absent. The curse of which Vilém speaks – a curse imposed randomly by an unjust father – is akin to the primacy of the signifier in its relation to the subject: the perpetual deferral of meaning, implicit in the constant fading of the signifier, constitutes the “curse” of the subject in its search for legitimation in language. When Vilém poses the despairing question: “By whose guilt do I bear a curse?”, he is articulating the dilemma of the individual whose access to meaning, and thereby being, is forever postponed. The source of this “guilt” cannot be located because, like the signifier, it is only present elsewhere. The sense of inconsolable loss which results from the postponement of meaning is equivalent to the figure of Jarmila, the shifting locus of desire. Just as language is always-already in a state of deferral, so too was the girl “fallen” before Vilém knew her: “Proč klesla dřív, než jsem ji znal?” (II) [Why did she fall before I knew her?].

The neurosis which links Mácha's letter to his parents with the diary entry already cited is the subject's fear of loss (castration), the profound sense of which informs all of Mácha's writing. In a letter to Lori from Litoměřice, where he was employed as a solicitor, he writes in threatening, bullying terms:

Ich befehle also, streng befehle ich Dir, daß Du nicht aus unserm Haus hinausgehst, nirgendshin, unter keinem, gar keinem Vorwand; nicht zur Messe, nicht zur Beichte, nicht zum Katechismus, nirgendshin; oder – so wahr mein Gott und meine Seele lebt, und bei meinem Leben schwör ich Dir, Du siehst mich niemals wieder²⁰.

²⁰ Ibid. 340–341.

I order you, I order you most strongly not to leave our house, to go nowhere, under any circumstances; not to mass, not to confession, not to catechism, nowhere; or, as God and I live, I swear on my life that you will never see me again.

The need to keep Jarmila under lock and key is a universal neurosis; there are numerous instances of incarceration in literature and in life²¹. In the poetic landscape of *Máj* this neurosis is expressed in the isolation of the characters, Vilém and Jarmila. But in *Máj* it is Vilém who is incarcerated in a prison-cell while Jarmila sits by the lakeside. They are separated by an expanse of water, symbolic of potency to which neither has access.

On 2 October 1836, Lori gave birth to a son. Mácha journeyed back and forth between Prague and Litoměřice to visit mother and child. An intriguing passage in Mácha's correspondance is the poet's account of the child's birth. In place of parental joy, we find anguish as if the very idea of new consciousness were a source of grief to the father, a kind of cosmic guilt akin to Vilém's curse in *Máj*. Mácha writes to his friend, Eduard Hindl (8 October 1836):

Již jsem Vám jednou psal, co to dítě již v matce zkusilo, a to ne všechno – to zkusilo opět při svém porodu –; ale hledí mu to z obličej. Zvráštěné čelo hluboko přes oči naklenuuté, vystupující žíla na čele, zamračené temnomodré oči, a ten hluboký smutek v tak malém obličej, Eduarde, to je můj syn . . .²².

I have already told you what the child experienced in its mother's womb and what it experienced after birth; it shows in his eyes. The wrinkled forehead arched deep over the eyes, the vein protruding on the brow, the gloomy dark-blue eyes, and the deep sadness on such a small face, Edward, that is my son . . .

Here Mácha seems to be relating the primal scene of the Oedipus complex: the child is born as the father enters, symbolic of his disruption of the libidinal relationship with the mother. It is curious that Mácha chose to live far from his fiancée and family in Litoměřice (financial necessity apart). In a letter to his parents, dated 28 October 1836, he writes of his loneliness and isolation in Litoměřice:

A teď' jsem sám a sám, jeden pro sebe, se žádným nemluví, na žádného se nepodívám; mně již beztoho dávno celé lidstvo bylo protivné . . .²³.

And now I am alone, by myself, I don't speak to anyone, don't look at anyone; for a long time now the whole of mankind has been anathema to me . . .

The paradox of Mácha's position, his simultaneous longing for and detachment from Lori, finds an echo in the *dramatis personae* of *Máj*: the lovers are doomed never to meet. Mácha depicts a world of flux in which every creature and thing is engaged in a futile quest for fusion with another creature or thing, destined to act out its mime of love in a spiritual void.

²¹ Compare the confined lady of the medieval love lyric to whom only the lover has access; also, in modern times, Proust's incarceration of his chauffeur.

²² Jan s k ý (ed.): Spisy 1972, 329.

²³ Ibid. 338.

IV.

Mácha's masterpiece, the lyrico-epic poem *Máj*, consists of four cantos, punctuated after the second and third cantos by an intermezzo. The structural symmetry of the poem is matched by the almost classical rigour of its motifs – the vernal setting, the lake, tower, gibbet, hunting-horn, and so on. This external regularity conceals a complex linguistic structure. *Máj* is characterized by strange semantic reversals of normal poetic practice, most clearly apparent in the unexpected appositions of verbs, nouns and adjectives. Like the undisturbed waters of its setting, the surface impression of the poem is of stasis; but at the heart of the work is a profound sense of flux and instability. The acoustic effect of *Máj* – the beautiful cadences and internal assonances – hints at the Sublime to which all Romantic art aspired. Yet this euphony shields a hollowness of sense and being which begs important questions about the Romantics' understanding of reality. In his study of *Máj*, entitled "Významová stránka Máje" [The Semantic Aspect of *Máj*], Mukařovský analyzes the poet's unusual use of epithets²⁴. He detects a semantic uncertainty in Mácha's language arising from the discrepancy between the sense of the noun and the adjective or verb to which it stands in apposition, as in the opening couplet of the poem: "Byl pozdní večer, první máj, / večerní máj, byl lásky čas"²⁵ [It was late evening, the first of May, / the evening of May, the time of love]. In the unit *večerní máj*, a semantic uncertainty results from the incongruous apposition of the noun "May" and the adjective "evening". The word "May" loses its semantic potency or, as Mukařovský puts it, the word is denied a semantic kernel [*jádro*]²⁶. In structuralist terminology, the signifier (the word "May") is detached from the signified (the range of associations evoked by the linguistic sign). In a similar way, Lacan refers to the indeterminacy of the signifier in the chain of desire and lack²⁷. Mukařovský speaks of the *zamlženost* [haziness] of Mácha's language by which he means the absence of a centre of gravity as illustrated in the unit *večerní máj*. The linguistic peculiarities of Mácha's poetic discourse illustrate Lacan's observation with regard to psychoanalysis, that the subject is constantly "fading" in the field of the Other just as language is deferred along an axis of endless signifiers²⁸. Here Mukařovský introduces the important thematic motif of reflection²⁹. To illustrate this motif, let us take the passage in the first canto where Jarmila sits by the lakeside, waiting for the boatman to ferry her across the water:

Tiché jsou vlny, temný vod klín,
vše lazurným se pláštěm krylo;
nad vodou se bílých skví šatů stín,
a krajina kolem šepce: "Jarmilo!"
v hlubinách vody: "Jarmilo! Jarmilo!!"

²⁴ Mukařovský 1948, 110–150.

²⁵ For the edition of *Máj*, see: Spisy KHM. Prague 1959. Vol. 1, 19–51.

²⁶ Mukařovský 1948, 113–114.

²⁷ See Lacan: *Le Sujet et l'Autre* 1973, 188: "Le signifiant se produisant au Champ de l'Autre fait surgir le sujet de sa signification. Mais il ne fonctionne comme signifiant qu'à réduire le sujet en instance à n'être plus qu'un signifiant, à le pétrifier du même mouvement où il l'appelle à fonctionner, à parler, comme sujet".

²⁸ *Ibid.* 189.

²⁹ Mukařovský 1948, 150: "Jde o motiv, v Máji tak častý, odrazu ve vodní hladině".

Silent are the waves, dark the womb/wedge of waters, all is covered in an azure cloak; above the water gleams a shadow of white clothes, and the landscape whispers around: "Jarmila!" In the depths of the water: "Jarmila! Jarmila!!"

It is typical of Máchian reversal that Jarmila is endowed with less corporeality than her reflection. She is reduced to a shadow while her reflection is vibrant with colour and warmth. The word *stín* [shadow] stands in apposition to the vigorous verb *skví* [gleams] and the adjective *bílých* [white]. By undermining our orthodox expectations of the way language selects meaning, the poet appears to be highlighting a modern linguistic concern – the arbitrariness of the signifier in the semantic field. This passage typifies Romantic notions of self-reflexivity and reflection. For the German Romantics, reflection involves the relativisation of self³⁰. Brentano in *Godwi* introduces the metaphor of a mirror or looking-glass (*Glas*) to express the discrepancy which arises between the object and its image or perception³¹. The Jena Romantics, as Alice Kuzniar has argued, were deeply aware of the self-reflexivity of their poetry and were concerned to explore the relationship between language, being and temporality³². Fichte's thesis that perception and cognition are of necessity subjective exercised a profound influence on the poetry of Novalis. Fichte claimed that being is a second, derivative concept, leading him to define his Transcendental Idealism as the expression of this negativity³³. The problem with this position is that the self exists only inasmuch as it posits itself³⁴. The resulting split – that this reflected self is not itself but an other – exemplifies Lacan's theory that the subject is constituted in the field of the Other³⁵. Object and image or perception fail to correspond; this fracturing of the self, evident in the thought of Fichte, points to the Derridean *différance* and the rupture of the signifier from the signified evident in the peculiarities of Mácha's diction and syntax³⁶.

The rhyme *klín-stín*, illustrated in the passage above, performs a similar function to the *Schmerz-Scherz* Freudian slip referred to in Mácha's diary: the rhymes possess a coded meaning while the "message" of the poetic line is constantly deferred; that is, the message is transferred from the body of the text, where meaning conventionally resides, to the rhymes. This reversal, whereby the poetic line is metonymic while the rhymes are metaphoric, is characteristic of Mácha's subversion of orthodox linguistic practice. The polysemic term *klín* means both "wedge" and "womb"; "wedge" corresponds to Lacan's notion of the "bar" which separates Signifier (S) from signified (s) in the well-known formula for the psyche S/s³⁷. "Womb" symbolizes the subject's primal development before it gains access to language – in traditional symbolism, the first of May invoked at the beginning of the poem. "Shadow" stands for the subject's first experience of itself as a separate being and the subsequent entry into the Symbolic Order when the differentiation inherent in the subject's interaction with language gives

³⁰ See Kuzniar, Alice A.: Reassessing Romantic Reflexivity – the Case of Novalis. *Germanic Review* 63/2 (1988) 77–86.

³¹ *Ibid.* 78.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.* 79.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.* 84–85 and f./n. 16.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 80 and f./n. 23.

³⁷ Jameson 1974, 140, and Lacan 1966, 515 ff.

rise to a sense of loss and blurred identity (the mirror-stage)³⁸. The first of May is also the evening of May; the paradox of the poem's opening couplet is manifested within its mysteriously conjoined rhymes.

The rhyme *čas-hlas* [time-voice] introduces the important connection between being and temporality. The theme of temporality is important for the Romantics: Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* begins with the monotone ticking of a clock³⁹. The second canto of *Máj* resonates with imagery of time: as Vilém sits in his prison-cell and descants on the subjective nature of being, drops of water trickle down the wall as if measuring the infinity of time:

Za strážným opět temný stín
zahalil dlouhé síně klín;
hlubokou nocí kapky hlas
svým pádem opět měřil čas.

Beyond the watch dark shadow has again shrouded the womb of the long hall; the voice of the drop has again measured time with its fall through the deep night.

As with the Freudian slip, the significance of these rhymes is resistant to immediate understanding. *Hlas* [voice] is akin to the Derridean concept of *trace*. Jameson defines this term in the following way:

It is also the notion of *différence* or *différance*, by which Derrida means to stress the profound identity between what would in English be distinguished as to *differ* and to *defer*. Difference (which ... is the very basis of linguistic structure itself, and is in a sense at one with the feeling of identity as well) is a difference or deferring in its essential *temporality* (my italics), its structure as sheer process which can never be arrested into static presence; which, even as we become aware of it, glides beyond our reach in time, so that its presence is at one and the same instant an absence as well⁴⁰.

Trace underlines the paradox of signification: in order to be aware of it, it must already have happened; as Jameson puts it, "Meaning is in its very structure always a trace, an already-happened"⁴¹. In the light of such a theoretic understanding of the poem, the thematic significance of the conjunction "voice" – "time" becomes apparent. "Voice" is that which is of necessity deferred, an echo of authentic meaning, forever subject to temporality. As Hegel puts it, "Wesen ist, was gewesen ist" [Being is what has already been]⁴². The "musicality" of *Máj* – a characteristic most often observed by critics – is a structural equivalent to the way the trace functions within language: the euphony of Máchá's language is a "trace" of that mythic state where pure sound and pure meaning exist separately⁴³.

³⁸ Lacan: *Le stade du miroir* 1966, 94: "Mais le point important est que cette forme situe l'instance du *moi*, dès avant sa détermination sociale, dans une ligne de fiction, à jamais irréductible pour le seul individu ...".

³⁹ Kuzniar 1988, 82.

⁴⁰ Jameson 1974, 174.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 175.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.* 174–175.

The setting of Vilém's meditations is reminiscent of the jewelled hall where Catherine of Alexandria has a vision of God the Father and the Virgin Mary in the fourteenth-century *Život svaté Kateřiny* [Life of St. Catherine] (c. 1375). The saint beholds an artificial sun, moon and stars revolving round the vault of the edifice:

Tudiež na téj sieni sklepeš
slunce, měsíc, při tom hvězdy
podobensvím týmiž jězdy
stviechu, jakož Boží mocí
dú na nebi dnem i noci,
časující všechny chvíle⁴⁴.

Also on the vault of the hall a sun, moon and stars shone, simulating real orbits, as they perform in the heavens day and night by divine power, measuring every moment of time.

In the medieval world-picture time is ordained by God's power, existing above and beyond man's temporal existence. The conjunction of "voice" and "time" suggests that, for Máchas, this model of objectified time is no longer valid. Now man's being and time are intimately enmeshed: not only is being subject to time; time is also subject to being. Máchas's world-picture is so *subjectified* that eternity is subsumed into man's temporal existence; in short, human consciousness is infinite⁴⁵. It is this insight which prompts Vilém's sense of terror in his prison-cell:

"A jestliže jsem vůlí svou
nejednal tak, proč smrtí zlou
časně i věčně hynu? –
Časně i věčně? – věčně – čas –"
Hrůzou umírá vězně hlas
obražený od temných stěn . . .

"And if I did not act by my own will, why do I perish a cruel death in time and eternally? – In time and eternally? – eternally – time –" The voice of the prisoner dies with terror, echoing from the dark walls . . .

Typically of the poem as a whole, meditation dissolves into repetition and incantation as if the limits of cogitation have been reached. When Vilém's voice dies at the implication of his own thoughts, the prison (a metaphor of the mind) echoes his words, an acoustic equivalent to his self-reflexive meditation. *Obražený* [literally, reflected or mirrored] reinforces the all-pervasive imagery of reflection central to the message of the poem.

Repetition is fundamental to the poetic structure of *Máj*: intimately related to the problem of identity and being, it continues where reasoned thought breaks down. In

⁴⁴ Hrabák, Josef (ed.): *Dvě Legendy z doby Karlovy: Legenda o svatém Prokopu a Život svaté Kateřiny* [Two Legends from the Time of Charles IV: The Legend of St. Procopius and the Life of St. Catherine]. Prague 1959, 147.

⁴⁵ Compare Büchner's play *Dantons Tod* [Ed. by Margaret Jacobs. Manchester 1974] where Danton, shortly before his execution, has a similar insight to Vilém's concerning the indestructible nature of consciousness: "Der verfluchte Satz: Etwas kann nicht zu nichts werden! Und ich bin etwas, das ist der Jammer! – Die Schöpfung hat sich so breit gemacht, da ist nichts leer, alles voll Gewimmels."

the first canto, the description of Jarmila as she sits by the lakeside sets up a metonymic relation to the subject. The girl is denoted by a triad of synonyms: "Za růžového večera / pod dubem sličná děva sedí" [At rose-coloured evening / the lithe maiden sits under the beech-tree]; "Po široširé hladině / umdlělý dívka zrak upírá . . ." [Across the wide surface, the girl bends her weary glance]; "dívčina krásná, anjel padlý" [beautiful girl, fallen angel]. The semantic development is diachronic or syntagmatic and is therefore akin to metonymy rather than to metaphor which would involve a synchronic or paradigmatic mode⁴⁶. By enabling both devices to co-exist in a poetic discourse where metaphor is conventionally dominant, *Máj* embodies the close relation of language to the unconscious (Freud's metonymic *Verschiebung* and metaphoric *Verdichtung*).

Cantos one, three and four each end with the calling of a name – *Jarmila*, *Vilém*, and, finally, in unison with the poet's own name *Hynek*. This juxtaposition of fictional and real names does not merely serve to equate art and life; we can interpret the association of the poet with his heroes as an awareness of the all-determining signifier in the way it selects and defines identity. "Hynku! – Viléme! – Jarmilo!" – the final line of the poem offers a diachronic/syntagmatic arrangement reminiscent of the synonyms for "girl" cited above. The final figure of speech in the poem is apostrophe – an address to something elsewhere. On every level of the worksyntax, semantics, figures of speech – we perceive a dynamics of postponement and deferral. Assuming an "individual" voice toward the close of the poem, the poet-narrator yields his final paradox: "Bez konce láska je! – Zklamanát láska má!" [Love is without end! – Cursed is my love!] The apostrophe at the close of the poem is the calling of an "I" to a "you"⁴⁷. For Máchá, the mysterious force that propels the dynamics of deferral and loss is precisely this love, the desire to become the Other. The fusion of matter is the driving principle in Máchá's universe. When Vilém is executed, the blood from his severed head flows into the mother-earth, the "only homeland":

Ach v zemi krásnou, zemi milovanou,
v kolébku svou i hrob svůj, matku svou,
v vlast jedinou i v dědictví mu danou,
v šírou tu zemi, zemi jedinou,
v matku svou, v matku svou, krev syna teče po ní.

Into the beautiful land, into the beloved land, into his cradle, his grave, his mother, into the only homeland and inheritance, into the wide earth, the only earth, into his mother, his mother, the son's blood flows after her.

Motion without stasis; this constitutes the tragedy of the Máchian world-picture. Man is doomed to love but cannot find a locus or aim for his love: "... nikdy-nikde-žádný cíl." (II) [... never-nowhere-no aim]. In distinction to the medieval and Baroque cosmos, the spheres in the heavens are no longer held in a pre-ordained orbit, their harmony a hymn to the Creator⁴⁸; they are rent apart, bent on a quest of love for each other and for *themselves*:

⁴⁶ Jameson 1974, 122.

⁴⁷ Compare the relation of the "I" to "you" in Novalis: Kuzniar 1988, 80.

⁴⁸ See Číževský, Dmitri: Kleinere Schriften. Vol. 2: Bohemica. Munich 1972, 240–286.

I světy jich v oblohu skvoucí
 co ve chrám věčné lásky vzešly;
 až – se milostí k sobě vroucí –
 změnivše se v jiskry hasnoucí –
 bloudící co milenci sešly ...

And their spheres gleaming in the firmament, rose as into the temple of eternal love; until – ardent with love for each other/themselves – changing into extinguished stars – they came together like wandering lovers ...

In identifying desire as a quest for narcissistic fulfilment, Mácha approaches the Lacanian definition of the Freudian drive (*Trieb*) as a search for self-fulfilment:

To this mythical representation of the mystery of love, analytic experience substitutes the search by the subject, not of the sexual complement, but of the part of himself, lost forever, that is constituted by the fact that he is only a sexed living being and that he is no longer immortal⁴⁹.

In his *Écrits*, Lacan poses the question why metaphor is related to being while metonymy is linked to its lack ("Le désir est une métonomie")⁵⁰. It is a question which strikes at the heart of my study of *Máj* where metonymy and metaphor assumed reverse relations in a poetic discourse where metaphor is conventionally the dominant device. Following Lacan's equation of these binary oppositions with the fundamental problem of psychoanalysis, we can claim that Mácha's poem actually *enacts* the bi-polarity of being and absence, language and loss.

My reading of the poem *Máj* attempts to draw on two related theoretical traditions – the linguistic analysis of the text in the sphere of semantics – as represented by Jan Mukařovský and the Prague School – and the linguistic/psychoanalytical approach of Jacques Lacan and French structuralism. My study of the relationship between language and the unconscious in *Máj* moves away from the traditional concern with metaphysics to a consideration of the relationship between language and the psyche. Mácha's allegedly cold spectral world is not akin to the Platonic cave of shadows. For him, being and language fail to reflect an authentic reality outside the white, gleaming tower where Vilém experiences consciousness. Mácha's landscape of deferral and loss, a landscape of beautiful if hollow euphony, gestures rather to Nietzsche's prison-house of language and to the modern world beyond*.

⁴⁹ See the English translation of Lacan: *Les Quatre Concepts 1973: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Harmondsworth 1977, 205. – For the original passage, see: *Les Quatre Concepts*, 197.

⁵⁰ Lacan 1966, 528.

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