Outside of a Logocentric Discourse? The Case of (Post)modern Czech "Women's" Writing

Jan Matonoha

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Department of Slavonic Studies

School of Modern Languages and Cultures

University of Glasgow

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Abstract

This thesis aims to examine the nature of the relationship between the kind of textual politics, here referred to as a "women's writing", and the dominant discursive practice of our culture, whose logic and functioning is best encapsulated in the Derridean term "phallogocentrism". Women's writing, then, is here defined as that kind of writing which locates itself outside the domain and logic of a phallogocentric discourse, trying to challenge and undermine its hegemonic status. In this respect, women's writing is not delimited by the sex of an author, but by his/her gendered subjectivity, by his/her position within the discursive formation and his/her attitude to hegemonic language practices. Thus, besides the Czech writers Milada Součková, Věra Linhartová, Sylvie Richterová and Daniela Hodrová, the writing of a male author Bohumil Hrabal has been also introduced into the thesis.

Women's writing, as understood in this thesis, a) critically reflects upon the role of language as a decisive medium for our thinking b) questions the notion of subjectivity, which is usually equalled with the Descartean Ego and is conceived as an autonomous and sovereign entity. The authors discussed here are aware that we all are inevitably "inserted" into language. Therefore, they highlight the formative role of language by means of an ironic, palimpsest-like re-writing of conventional literary narratives, as well as by means of textual politics defined by a constant displacement of meaning. The critique of the phallogocentric concept of subjectivity is on the one hand informed by the decentering of the identity of the narrating subject, and on the other by one's awareness of one's epistemic situatedness within a particular discursive space. The process of language mediation within women's writing as I see it takes the form of a radical reassessment of conventional genres such as, for example, autobiography. Within the autobiographical texts discussed here, fragmented topologies of memory provide an ambiguous space for an attempted integration of a discontinuous identity. Women's writing also highlights the fact that "Otherness" remains unintelligible within the logic and practice of the hegemonic phallogocentric discourse.

The logic and economy of women's writing is determined by the tension between its drive towards non-phallogocentric discourse, and its paradoxical, yet inevitable dependence on symbolic codes and hegemonic discursive practices. The

subversive potential of women's writing, as understood here, is thus not situated within a space seen as a radical "beyond" or "outside", but it is directed inwards, into the fissures of the phallogocentric discourse itself.

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1. Introduction

The present thesis stems from two observations I have been struck by when I preoccupied myself with Czech Studies and literary theory of Anglo-American provenance. The first observation is that there has been considerable attention paid to the issues of gender, feminism and literature over the past thirty years or so, and that the notions such as a language, power, body, knowledge, the Other, identity, subjectivity, difference, discourse and the like have been heavily theorised in recent Anglo-American literary theory. The second observation is that while in the field of Czech Studies quite a number of works have been published on modern Czech woman authors, no theoretical framework for such analyses and interpretations has been worked out yet in the Czech context. The basic aim of this thesis is then to try to bring this situation into some balance, that is to set up a theoretical framework and consider several selected Czech authors in a more specific context, namely the context of "women's writing". What makes the question of women's writing so intriguing is the fact that the whole range of the above mentioned notions (language, power, body, knowledge, the Other etc.), so crucial to contemporary theoretical thinking, is played out here. Approaching the same questions of the focus of the thesis from a different angle, I can say there has also been another, more personal impetus setting off this study, namely, the combination of my interest in the writing of several 20th century Czech authors, and the fact that for some time I have been intrigued by the possibilities of destabilising a logocentric discourse, or of locating oneself beyond or outside the frontiers of its hegemonic domain.

There is a wide range of various questions that could be raised in respect to the theoretical notions mentioned above. To name just a few: what is the role of a language in the processes of establishing one's (gendered) identity? How do individuals acquire and negotiate the position within the prevailing discursive field? How does a particular hegemonic discursive paradigm gain its justified, "self-evident and natural" status erasing all traces of its arbitrariness and its very own genealogy? How should one assess the role of literary texts in regard to this

discursive formation of gender identities? In the present thesis, it would not be possible to tackle all of these questions. (I shall touch upon some of them briefly and selectively in the theoretical part of the thesis.) I will have to confine myself to one particular area of enquiry in regard to this "discourse – subjectivity – text" nexus. The questions I would like to address are as follows: Are literary texts capable of opposing, challenging or undermining the prevailing hegemonic discursive practice? Could they succeed in stepping out, beyond the boundaries of a "phallo-logo-centric" discourse? If that is the case, what would be the means by which literary texts could destabilise a hegemonic position of a phallogocentric discourse, then? (The Derridean term "phallogocentrism" is discussed in more detail below, in the chapter 1.2.)

Apart from these questions, there is yet another reason why I have found the problems of women's writing worthy of attention, namely the fact that women's writing as such appears to promise the possibility of taking a marginal perspective, looking at the ordering, categorisation and communication of our perceptions of reality from a somewhat "awry" angle, from an unprivileged position, untainted by the dominant discursive practices. It is particularly in this respect that Toril Moi values Julia Kristeva's writing: "Kristeva's alien discourse undermines our most cherished convictions precisely because it situates itself outside our space, knowingly inserting itself along the borderlines of our own discourse" (Moi 1985: 150). When asking about two possible features that would distinguish the approach of the woman's writing from hegemonic practices of phallogocentrism, two elementary points might be cited. Women's writing – unlike phallogocentric discourse – takes neither language (as a means of communication and control over reality), nor subjectivity (as a self evident, autonomous, coherent entity, understood as a Descartean Ego) for granted.

Last but not least, there is also one indirect intention contained in this study. By means of this thesis, I would like to present a more balance view of the prevailing image of modern Czech literature that in the Anglo American context consists namely of male authors such as Milan Kundera, Ivan Klíma, Arnošt Lustig, Josef Škvorecký or Ludvík Vaculík. Women authors are conspicuously left out of the

picture.[1] And incidentally, all the stated male authors might be arguably labelled as displaying rather striking and overt sexist characteristics in both their fiction and public appearances.

In sum, the prime objective of the thesis is to assess – with some degree of complexity – the role and the potential of women's writing in regard to its capability to resist, contest and subvert the existing dominant "phallo-logo-centric" discourse, i.e. the hegemony of seemingly self-evident discursive practice which the modern power/knowledge nexus is based on. In this regard I would like to stress that the analysis of five Czech authors is not the primary goal or purpose of the thesis, but aims rather to serve as a springboard for outlining possible answers to questions concerning the potential of a literary text to destabilise the hegemonic status of the phallogocentric discourse.

With the exemption of Milada Součková (1899-1983), who is both a crucial, early precursor-figure in the history of (post) modern Czech women's writing, all the authors discussed here are contemporary ones. Their writing, given the fact they have published more or less from the early sixties up to the present day, could be ranked both within the sphere of the "second avant-garde" as well as within the paradigm of post-modernism. The authors under discussion here are Věra Linhartová (born 1938), Sylvie Richterová (born 1945), and Daniela Hodrová (born 1946). I have also included Bohumil Hrabal in this list. The prime reason for introducing Hrabal into the thesis and considering him in the context of women's writing is my wish to break the sex-based criterion of the selection. In accordance with Kristeva's understanding of what women's writing represents and what the nature of its subversive potential is, I see the positionality of the given author within the order of discourse as a relevant and decisive factor in this matter, not his or her sex. (For a more detailed account of this question see Chapter 1.3.3 and the chapter on Julia Kristeva below.)

As to its structure, the thesis is laid out as follows: the first half of the thesis (i.e. the first two chapters) presents the basic terms employed in the thesis and outlines a methodological framework and context for further contemplation of the

[1] In respect to Rajendra Chitnis' recently published book (Chitnis 2005), this is only partially true though; see also the footnote n. 4, p. 8 in this thesis.

problems of women's writing as they are treated in the writing of those Czech women authors in the second half of the thesis. The meaning of the basic keywords as understood and used here, such as discourse, phallo- and logo-centrism, gender, and women's writing, will be specified in these introductory chapters (Chapters 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3; a more complex understanding of the meaning of the basic terminology, however, should emerge not only from the definitions provided in the aforementioned chapters, but also from the contextual employment of the terms throughout the text of the thesis). The aim of the third chapter is to track down and disclose the particular textual, discursive and epistemic features of the texts by the authors under discussion (Součková, Linhartová, Richterová, Hodrová and Hrabal), which would set their writing against the logic of phallogocentrism. Each chapter of this part thus represents the answer to the question about what the possible means of questioning and destabilising a phallogocentric discourse can be. The points of resistance and destabilisation shall be further discussed specifically in the context of each author's *oeuvre* in the fourth chapter, which is divided into subchapters, each of which discusses the works of one individual author.

In terms of methodology, attention is paid to the examination of narrative procedures and thematic analysis as practised in the structurally oriented types of literary inquiry. The issues of writing that locates itself outside of the phallogocentric discourse, and the questions of a gendered subjectivity as translated into textual practice, are addressed within the framework of post-structuralism, post-feminism and to a lesser extent of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

I would also like to explain briefly at this point why I have used the term "women's writing" and avoided the use of the term *écriture féminine*. Although it is true that the concept of "women's writing" refers to the tradition of rediscovering silenced or forgotten voices of female writers, while my work is not so much a historical inquiry as a theoretically grounded analysis, I have decided to stick to the term "women's writing", for I do not wish to ally myself too closely with the legacy of H. Cixous' and L. Irigaray, whose theorising on the issue I have tried to assess in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Thus although my understanding of matters discussed in this thesis has been very much inspired by their thinking, I would not wish to identify my perspective with the concept of *écriture féminine* as presented in their work. Instead, my ambition was to re-assess their tenets in a critical and selective manner and to

complement them with further ideas, which I have taken from Jacques Derrida and from the key themes contained within literary texts produced by the five Czech writers discussed in this thesis.

By way of introduction, I would also like to discuss briefly two points. Firstly, given the topic I have chosen for my thesis, I think I cannot omit a few preliminary remarks on my methodology and on the question of a theoretical introduction as an indispensable aspect of the thesis. In a few words I would like to comment on the nature of the relationship between the "theoretical" apparatus and "practical" parts of the thesis and justify the overall set up and particular segments of the thesis in this context. I have to state straight away that the focus of this thesis cannot be said to be in a close reading of selected woman authors, leaving all the preceding parts as a mere obligatory theoretical introduction. The theoretical observations, included in the first half of the thesis, are not meant simply to function as heuristic tools enabling one to achieve some major interpretative objectives of literary analysis. Moreover, they are not meant to have the status of some rigid, clear-cut definitions. They are rather intended to provide a conceptual space where the issues under discussion could be situated in, to serve as a certain conceptual context within which the notion of women's writing might be approached and contemplated. What I would like to emphasise here is the fact that certain theoretical parts of the thesis do not translate immediately into an overall applicable methodology. However, this does not disqualify them from playing an important, although indirect role in the thesis' argument. They show what problems are at stake and contribute significantly to developing the conceptual context in which the issues of women's writing can be discussed. For instance, Derrida's contemplation of Nietzsche's employment of the metaphor of a woman does not directly contribute to the thesis's argumentative and interpretative apparatus, yet it is crucial in marking the way in which a subjectivity is understood here not as a sovereign Descartean Ego, but as an essentially unstable and contested institution. In short, the present thesis is not meant to be perceived in terms of the binary dichotomy of interpretative tools as applied to the material of primary texts. The focus of the thesis essentially is in the "theoretical" question regarding the possible ways of destabilising a logocentric discourse, as manifested by particular features and qualities of the writing by a handful of Czech authors. Having said that, I also have to add that despite the fact that some basic

information on biography and oeuvre is provided here, the thesis makes no pretence at providing an exhaustive and complex textual analyses of these authors. A certain basic familiarity with the works of the authors discussed here is thus necessary.[2]

The second point I would like to touch upon briefly, before I get to discuss the key terms employed in the thesis, is the question of the status of gender studies as a subject of academic enquiry and public debate in the Czech context. As regards the gender debate in the Czech Republic, it could be claimed that although there have been some achievements over the past fifteen years, [3] the issue of gender studies still has not attracted the attention of the wider academic community and the general public discourse as a relevant, meaningful and legitimate subject of debate. Generally, the question of feminism is still an unacknowledged issue restricted to a narrow circle of intellectuals and academics and is only gradually becoming to be a perceptible issue for the public. The Czech public and the academic community still have to realise that it is wrong to think that the question of feminism is only the problem of women and their gender positions and relationships. The Czech public does not realise that gender inequality affects society as a whole, that it is an issue

[2] Apart from the general research intention of the thesis, which is to focus on the very issues of women's writing and its subversive potentialities, two practical factors have also influenced the fact that the primary sources have not been used very extensively in any detailed textual analysis. First of all, none of the novels discussed here has been fully translated into English. There are only a few selected passages translated from the oeuvre of these authors (Hrabal's novels are an obvious exception to this). These several excerpts from the novels of Linhartová, Richterová, Součková, which have been translated into English (and which are indicated in the list of primary sources) cannot meet the requirements that a more detailed textual analysis would involve. More importantly, the points I am trying to make are mostly rather difficult to illustrate by quoting a few sentences; the nature of the phenomena discussed in this debate is too complex to be easily illustrated by a simple quote of a few sentences from a literary text. They are much more a matter of larger textual procedures and strategies.

[3] There are two gender studies departments and M.A. study programmes at two major Czech universities, two autonomous research units at the Sociological Institute of Czech Academy of Sciences, a specialised gender and feminist library and a publishing house, a feminist conference with about 150 people attending has taken place recently, major works of feminist canon are being translated, distinguished Czech scholars (Šiklová, Havelková, Čermáková, Šmausová, Šmejkalová, Kalivodová, Knotková, Vodrážka) publish in established international journals, and a younger generation of scholars is active in this field (Oates-Indruchová, Pachmanová, Heczková, Hanáková, Jonssonová, Linková, Červinková), also, there has been ongoing co-operation with distinguished Slovakian philosophers (Kiczková, Szapuová, Farkašová) who are very active in the subject of feminist epistemologies. The way I briefly portray Czech feminism here however is not meant to provide an accurate picture of the contemporary Czech feminist scene but to chart the dynamics that I think is undoubtedly different than the one in the West. (Even merely in quantitative terms of books published, gender policy regulations implemented, overall gender sensitivity, prevailing media representations, gender mainstreaming, affirmative action, equal opportunities policy and women participation in decision making bodies etc.) The issue is not only what Czech feminism has been able to achieve to date but also what its chances are to penetrate into Czech academic life and to establish itself there as a default position.

involving an acknowledgement of one's epistemological position. On the academic and social levels, most mainstream academics fail to see gender as a legitimate area of enquiry, as well as an important dimension in which one's subjectivity is situated. In short, the inability to articulate this issue is indicative of Czech society's inability to identify its blind spots, false presumptions, its embeddedness in the power/knowledge complex. Particularly in the context of literary studies, criticism that examines the literary text from the perspective of gender studies is still eclipsed by the well-established and flourishing tradition of structuralism (or in part the reader's response theory). Although the British-American perspective is slightly different, often focusing on those areas of Czech literature which have been, to varying degrees, ignored by Czech academia, it can be claimed that very little has been published on the subject of Czech women's writing in English.[4] Thus one of the main reasons for my focusing on this particular topic in my thesis is the very unwillingness and to some extent the intrinsic – as well as historically induced instrumental and theoretical – inability of the public and mainstream academic debates to reflect on the issues of feminism and gender studies as problems. This (in)ability on the part of commentators to name and scrutinise their own unreflected patriarchal assumptions and epistemological positions (with all the respective power implications) are widely apparent.

I would like to take the opportunity now to touch upon the few objections that have been raised with regard to this thesis. One objection I would like to address pertains to the issue of an oversized and lengthy theoretical introduction that does not live up to the agenda of contemporary feminist thinking. An objection has been voiced too that in the thesis, a rigid theoretical framework has been drawn into which suitable authors have been merely recruited.

It is hard for me to decide whether there have been tacit, unacknowledged assumptions at play that have pre-determined the choice of writers discussed here or whether my selection of authors has been the result of contemplating the key issue of this thesis, alongside my simultaneous (and haphazard) reading of both theoretical

[4] There are some well researched, relatively representative, yet very brief and selective interpretations provided by Robert Pynsent and Veronika Ambros in the *Central European Woman's Writing* (Pynsent, Ambros 2001) as well as the short, concise entries in the Routledge lexicon by Elena Sokol (Sokol 2001), a few words of comments by Alexandra Büchler's selection of modern Czech fiction, or

and literary texts. I can understand there can be different views of this matter, although unsurprisingly, I myself tend to believe the latter has been the case. As I have stated above, my prime aim was not to provide an extensive historically-oriented account of various Czech female writers, but to set up a theoretical and conceptual framework for answering the question about the characteristics of the discursive space within which non-phallogocentric writing could locate itself. Trying to do so, my ambition was not merely to repeat Cixous and Irigaray's concepts of *écriture féminine* but to stress selectively what I perceive as their productive aspects and to combine these with further sources that I have found either in Derrida's writing on feminism or motifs I see featuring in the writing of the five Czech authors themselves. In this regard I can say it was the writing of the Czech authors that has inspired and informed my argument. Here it would be useful perhaps to point out that although the individual titles are not cited there, Chapter 3 (p. 52) of the thesis deals with the context of the writing produced by these five Czech authors. This particular chapter attempts to develop the central motifs of their writing into conceptual keywords (see chapters 3.1-3.7).

An alternative approach that could have been taken and which I deliberately decided not to follow would be to look (less selectively) across a wide range of texts and authors and ask various questions derived from a more contemporary feminist agenda (e.g. questions on intersectionality, on post-colonial issues etc.). Such an approach would in my view be probably much more extensive, mechanical and eclectic. Leaving aside the fact that the yardstick of contemporaneity is questionable in itself, I feel that the topics of this thesis such as the issue of appropriating reality and one's heterogeneous and multiple subjectivities through language, the issue of the discursive controlling and colonising of otherness, the issue of the contested Self that is constructed through the imbrication of discursive practices and singular bodily experience quite close to the themes of contemporary feminist thinking. In sum, my intention was not to map extensively a wide range of Czech female authors and read them against the backdrop of various issues of contemporary feminism(s), but to tackle to the question of those modes of writing that could locate itself outside of the logic of phallogocentrism.

Bronislava Volková's book *Feminist Semiotic Journey* (Volková 1997) dealing selectively with specific topics (images of women in the works of Czech male writers etc.).

In the following subchapters (1.1.1 – 1.3.5) I would like to present the basic theoretical keywords employed in the thesis (discourse, power, phallogocentrism, writing, gender, subjectivity), as well as to outline the general conceptual framework I have adopted for a discussion of the issue of women's writing.

1.1 Nodal points: discourse, subjectivity, text

As stated above, I would like to examine the complex nexus of pivotal notions of language, knowledge, power and identity, which has been so concisely encapsulated by Foucault in his usage of the word "discourse", in the context of Czech women's writing. Before getting into a discussion about the relation of literary texts to prevailing discursive practice, I would like to touch upon the notion of discourse itself and to sum up briefly the meaning and function which it has acquired in Foucauldian use.

1.1.1 The notion of discourse in humanities

The term *discourse*, undoubtedly, is one of the crucial concepts in contemporary humanities. Its appearance designates the overall massive shift from the humanistic, anthropocentric paradigm of consciousness towards the structural paradigm of language. The diversity of its usage is vast, the specific meaning depending on the methodological framework of its deployment: syntax analysis, ethno-methodological analysis, text linguistics, conversational analysis, historiography, sociology, linguistic criticism, gender studies, etc. The term is essentially multilayered and there are various relationships of close adjacencies and transitions between its particular meanings. However, there are at least three general types of its usage and understanding that could be traced in Foucault's works (and successively in various texts in the humanities).

a) Discourse is understood as any act of speech activity whatsoever. In this regard, the stress is on the aspect of linguistic constitution of our perception, categorisation and conceptualisation of reality.

b) Sometimes, a particular corpus of texts sharing a common topic or object is referred to as discourse. (Though, strictly speaking, we shall put it rather in the somewhat reversed perspective: the objects are not simply referred to by discourse;

on the contrary, they are always already articulated in and constituted by a particular discursive formation.) For instance, we can talk about the discourse on feminism, discourse on abortion, discourse on same-sex partnership registration etc.

c) Finally, discourse seen as an order of knowledge is something that structures, delineates, and "controls" everything we think and talk about. It is precisely these restrictive and "normalising" features of discourse that have been highlighted by Michel Foucault. He has pointed out that everything we say always already takes place in some sort of "a language game" (Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*, 1958) with specific rules and codes. The domain of our knowledge and speaking is divided into particular spheres and fields following certain discursive regularities and modalities.

The functioning of discourse could be simply summed up as follows: no one can say whatever, however, wherever and whenever he or she wishes to. The entire bulk of all utterances we make everyday is subjected to complex processes of exclusion and rarefaction. Thus, it is only the minor part of our statements that enters the circulation of publicly accepted and legitimised discourse. The seemingly natural and self-evident character of our thinking and speaking of reality has been established through these permanent, ubiquitous but implicit, silent and unnoticed processes of exclusion and normalisation. Discourse with its regularities represents an epistemological backdrop to our utterances, thus delineating the permitted space for our speaking. It is something that enables and legitimises our statements, disabling, disqualifying and discarding any alternative conceptualisation of reality at the same time.

1.1.2 Dispersion of power. The Foucauldian perspective

When formulating his concept of discourse, Foucault came forward with a term (of an obviously Nietzschean origin) used rather rarely in the humanities as they had existed up to that time. The term was "a power". But in Foucault's rethinking, there is an apparent shift in meaning and usage of the word "power". In this understanding, the power is an entity that does not emanate from any central, institutionalised source. It is something what is – like a language – without a centre, stretching and reduplicating through every single utterance that takes place within the given

discursive field. It does not gain its authority by repression, proscription or violence. It is created by the sole participation and compliance of all members of the epistemological community, whose consent is won tacitly without any explicit acknowledge. The effect of power stems from its omnipresence. And the omnipresence exists not because the power would intervene or sneak everywhere, but because it comes from everywhere.

The Foucauldian usage of discourse appears to be at first sight of quite a deterministic nature. This, however, is by no means the fact. Each discourse and discursive practice is always opened to change. This is basically due to two reasons. Firstly, there never is only one exclusive discourse in operation, but a plurality of different competing discourses. True, the ultimate goal of each discourse is to achieve a hegemonic status within its particular discursive domain (and the term "hegemonic" I use here in the Gramscian sense, i.e. hegemonic discourse would be that one which appears as though unquestionably, naturally given and existing a priori and on its own). This, however, is never the case, it is always a matter of a scale which particular discourse takes over a particular domain, still sharing its "ruling" with other competing discourses. (Thus for instance, despite the fact the notions of body or nature have been colonised almost entirely by discourses of atomising Western physics, biology and medicine, there still operate alternative discourses of an holistic nature pointing out aspects of our bodily existence tightly linked and embedded in our natural environment, which remain unseen by the Western eye.) Secondly, as Judith Butler points out (Butler 1993), in order to be maintained and kept valid, discourses have to be constantly performed, circulated and cited. And it is just the very fact and necessity of performance that leaves discourses "vulnerable", opened to change, shifts, alterations, and ultimately subversion. This fact is particularly important with regard to literary texts' potential to question and destabilise hegemonic discourses of our culture and social spheres.

1.1.3 Possible types of enquiry

Generally, when dealing with the relationship between discourse, gender and literature, we can identify at least three different problems and topics, of which I shall attempt to address the third one only, leaving the first two aside, since these are

beyond the scope of the present thesis. Firstly, on the level of social interaction, we can examine the way gender identity itself is being moulded and negotiated in the circulation of various public discourses, such as scientific, medical, juridical, pedagogical, journalistic discourse. An enquiry addressing such sort of phenomena would involve an examination of the process that governs, controls and administrates a body within public space and institutions. The Foucauldian analysis of juridical and medical discourse and practice would be an example of such an approach. Secondly, on the level of literary history, we can observe how a specific insertion of women authors into the literary tradition or the particular stage of literary evolution could both promote as well as inhibit their autonomous expression. Gilbert's and Gubar's work could be cited as this type of an academic enterprise. Thirdly, we could focus on the way in which the response of individual literary texts to the prevailing discursive paradigms' tries to debunk and undermine their practice (not necessarily consciously). Compared to the first two approaches, this sort of enquiry has a relatively narrow scope focusing as it does on a close reading of individual literary texts. However, the two above-mentioned areas of enquiry are still present as a backdrop to which each literary text indirectly and implicitly refers. In all its aspects (narrative strategies, modality, subject position, rewriting of numerous common sense notions etc.), any given literary text makes a (counter) statement, setting itself against or alongside established discourses circulating in various discursive domains. The literary text always has to locate itself both within a structure of various established discourses and within a given literary tradition/canon, either adjusting itself to the given pattern, or trying to challenge, dispute and even change the given discursive terrain.

1.1.4 Negotiating a language meaning and an individual subjectivity

Having said that these processes occur predominantly within the sphere of discursive practice, I would like to point out the role of literary texts written by women in terms of their negotiating and challenging the dominant discourses that shape not only our

understanding of what gender identity is, but also what knowledge, subject, representation, language, as the cornerstones of our self-perception, represent to us. Thus this thesis will be preoccupied not so much with the "problem of women in literature", with motifs of women, as with the language deployed in the texts written by the particular authors presented here. In my understanding, literary texts are places where boundaries and frontiers of our discursive formations are being challenged, rewritten and relocated. Instead of assessing these texts in terms of artistic achievements, I would like to examine them in terms of their implicit discursive attempts at negotiation and struggle with the established discourses.

The Foucauldian concept of discourse and power is thus important for us in two regards. Discourse, as textual practice, can be confronted by another opposing textual practice. One might label the idea that the hegemony of established discourses could be challenged by literary texts as naïve and simplistic, or at least idealistic, since the very authority and legitimacy of a particular discourse is not based purely on its "textual quality", but it stems from the complex nexus of power and knowledge, from its insertion into complex societal practices in which it gains its "natural" character and is being endlessly and recurrently performed. The way we could counter this objection of too simplistic an approach would take us to the second crucial Foucauldian term we mentioned above, power. The strength of a discourse resides in the fact that it spreads throughout the social sphere, both in practice and usage, and does not have any particular centre. Yet at the same time, this very fact represents a weakness of any discourse, since it could be destabilised from any point at any time. The literary text, as a specific societal institution and practice, can therefore be a decisive factor in destabilising any alleged "naturalness" and authority of hegemonic discourses. In a literary text, as Moi observes, "the meaning of the sign is thrown open – the sign becomes 'polysemic' rather than 'univocal' – and though it is true to say that the dominant power group at any given time will dominate the intertextual production of meaning, this is not to suggest that the opposition has been reduced to total silence. The power struggle intersects in the sign" (Moi 1985: 158).

1.1.5 The ambivalence of resistance and complicity

The discursive power struggle and the critique of phallogocentrism however entail considerable dilemmas. Firstly, there is the issue of a paradoxical complicity with the very order and logic that is meant to be questioned. According to Kenneth K. Ruthven, "critique of androcentrism is itself a somewhat reactionary activity, because it keeps women dependent on male modes of writing and thinking about writing; for in order to dissent androcentric premises you have to engage in dialectic with them, and to that extent you are compromised by permitting the grounds of the debate to be determined by those premises" (Ruthven 1984: 93). Secondly, there is on the one hand the unquestionable need to gain an authority to assign names, and thereby to influence and negotiate social reality. Toril Moi points out the importance of acquiring access to the discourse, or setting up a discourse of your own, a discourse that would not be liable to conform to the hegemonic phallogocentric one. On the other hand, however, she strongly warns against the negative side of claiming the right to delimit reality through name giving. For at the same time, there is a danger of lapsing into masculine logic and the urge to control and master reality through giving names, ordering into categories. Moi observes: "Definitions can certainly be constructive. But – and this is the point overlooked by such arguments – they can also be constraining (...) many French feminists reject labels and names, and 'isms' in particular – even 'feminism'and 'sexism' – because they see such labelling activity as betraying a phallogocentric drive to stabilize, organize and rationalize our conceptual universe (...) To impose names is not only an act of power, an enactment of Nietzsche's 'will-to-knowledge'; it also reveals a desire to regulate and organize reality according to well-defined categories" (Moi 1985: 159-160). As Ruthven points out, "naming is (...) construed as a masculine activity, a manifestation of that passion for organisational tidiness which, in seeking to 'master' reality by enclosing it in categories, ends up ignoring things which don't fit, such as problems without names" (Ruthven 1984: 94).

In the Czech context, the dilemma involved in participating in the phallogocentric discourse (i.e. whether to accept the rules of game or to adopt the will to control and mastery) is, I am afraid, very much in evidence in writing which is perceived as feminist-orientated. This type of writing displays a great many

conventional male virtues, such as an urge to control, dominate, attack, ridicule, mock. In the writing of Alexandra Berková or Zuzana Brabcová, both self-professed feminist or gender activists (still rather a rare phenomenon in the Czech cultural milieu), all these qualities are strongly present. The futility of attacking, of setting up an anti-chauvinist discourse that ultimately ends up trapped within the very logic that it strives to criticise, is one of the reasons why I do not focus on literature that strives to **name** women's problems from the feminist's point of view. Precisely because of the reasons discussed by Moi, I have opted rather for the type of writing that pursues its aims in a straightforward manner, addressing the problems of language and its categories as a crucial point of the power – knowledge – subjectivity problem.

1.1.6 Textuality of literature and discursive practices

Another matter that has to be addressed is the difficult question concerning the way we understand the nature of a text and textuality in terms of its discursive functioning, i.e. the question concerning the relationship between literary, narrative techniques, and epistemic, discursive procedures. Literature in general is sometimes conceived as some sort of a free and provisional space where possibilities lacking any chance of being materialised could be experimentally played out. In my understanding, the opposite is truth. Texts – literary ones included – are not a volatile, soft setting for "hard reality's" rehearsals, for they represent the very crucial space where our epistemic categories are being negotiated, where discursive practices take place, where our perception of reality is shaped having been subjected to complex discursive rules and regularities. At the same time, we can claim reality itself is very much of a textual nature. This means in reality too, we determine and delineate the identity, position, a character of a signified object by the particular signifier we decide to ascribe to it. Or better to say, it is not our free will, but regularities of discursive practice that determine and categorise the status of an object by situating it in a particular structure of signification. Thus, the importance of a given literary text does not reside in the fact that it provides some preliminary battleground for our struggle with reality. It lies essentially elsewhere, namely in the fact that it provides a reservoir of possible meanings, epistemic categories and discursive modes, shaping consequently the way we encounter and understand

reality. Since the division between social and linguistic has been debunked and social categories have started to be seen as textually, discursively constructed and shaped, the text of literature can no longer be seen as a mere literary device. It is a discursive performance, an act within the discursive field. In short, social reality is always already fuelled and imbued with discursive (textual and narrative) patterns, and vice versa (within its "archaeological strata", texts store the traces of the particular discursive operations they were deployed in).

However, there remains one question yet to be answered: what are the actual means by which a literary text can achieve these goals? Summing up Toril Moi's position in *Textual/Sexual Politics*, we might claim that it is precisely the very style, language of literary texts (in Moi's analysis texts by Virginia Woolf) that carries their real subversive potential. According to Moi, it is not the "message", however politically loaded, which matters, but the language and narrative strategies deployed in women's writing. In contrast to that, politics operating on the level of challenging particular issues, questions, topics, only reasserts the very targets it is attacking. Thus, an examination and „subversion" of the prevailing gender order is to be undertaken on the deeper level of its structural organisation and governing, i.e. in the sphere of its discursive practices. As rules of our self-governing, self-disciplining are embedded there, in the sphere of textual/discursive practices, by dealing with texts we are getting to the heart of our conceptual tools and categories that mould and define our identity and social interaction. The importance of literary texts is that they have a potential to initiate a change, a paradigmatic shift, an alteration of discursive practices and the field of discursive negotiation where our identity is being established. They represent places where new positions for expressing alternatives about reality have been opened up. Thus what is at stake here are not primarily intrinsic

literary values and artistic achievements, but the ways in which language is used, defining our cognitive categories and governing our social interaction.

In this chapter I have tried to define the notion of discourse and outline its relationship to the textual and discursive nature of literary texts. There is also a further distinction that could be made between the logic and functioning of the logocentric discourse and discursive practices of literary texts. Against the features

of the logocentric discourse of our culture with its will to knowledge and stable epistemological categories, Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak sets the processuality of literary discourse that openly plays out the unmanageable nature of language and reality. "Whereas in other kinds of discourses there is a move toward the final truth of a situation, literature (...) displays that the truth of a human situation *is* the itinerary of not being able to find it. In the general discourse of humanities, there is a sort of search for solutions, whereas in literary discourse there is a playing out of the problem as the solution, if you like" (Spivak 1987: 77). Non-phallogocentric writing does not name problems nor offers solutions to them but simply stages tensions and contradictions in its discourse. Spivak further describes a literary text as a "weave of knowing and not-knowing which is what knowing is" (Spivak 1987: 78).

1.2 Phallogocentrism. Phallus, Logos, and writing

In the following section I would like to delineate the keyword frequently occurring throughout the thesis and its basic theoretical assumptions, that is, the notion of "phallogocentrism". The term was coined by Jacques Derrida and it marks his substantive critique of the epistemological authority of the Western philosophical tradition.

1.2.1 Phallocentrism

Before discussing the term "phallogocentric" itself, however, I would like to illuminate in a few words the term occurring in the first part of this influential neologism, i.e. the Lacanian term "phallus". In Lacan's terminological apparatus, "the phallus signifies the moment when the law of the 'father' (understood as figurative) precipitates the child into the symbolic order of difference and signification. Lacan calls this moment "castration", a term that refers equally to both sexes and that designates a necessary loss of the imaginary relation with the mother, for if the individual is not differentiated in this way he or she will be psychotic" (Carpenter 1997). In Lacan's theories, detaching oneself from undifferentiated identity with the maternal body and from bodily polymorphous jouissance is a condition of acquiring the very sense of identity, i.e. differentiating between what

counts as the Self and what represents the Other. Accepting the symbolical authority of a phallus constitutes entry into the symbolical order, i.e. into the language and social structures. The demise of polymorphous, plural sexuality is the very condition of constituting one's subjectivity. The constitution of one's subjectivity is thus inevitably accompanied by subjecting oneself to the authority of language and social structures.

As to phallocentrism, the term generally refers to the tendency of our culture to be centred on and organised by the logic and authority of the phallus as a prime signifier. For Irigaray, phallocentrism occurs whenever two sexual symmetries are represented by one. "If knowledge and systems of representation are phallocentric, then two discourses, two speaking positions, and perspectives are collapsed into one. As the sexual other to the One [i.e. male] sex, woman has only been able to speak or to be heard as an undertone, a murmur, a rupture within discourse" (Grosz 1990: 174). According to feminist critique, this homogenising nature of phallocentrism is "confronted with a multifaceted female desire" (Rees 1997). As Luce Irigaray writes, this desire radically problematizes phallocentrism, "upsets the linearity of a project, undermines the goal-object of desire, diffuses the polarization toward a single pleasure, disconcerts fidelity to a single discourse" (Irigaray in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, quoted from Rees 1997). Women's writing in this regard represents the unwillingness to comply with the norms and rules of this paternal, phallogocentric language. At the same time however, it foregrounds the inevitable insertion in the language and symbolic structures. Thus women's writing takes the form of ruptures, ambiguities and displacements, which as such manifest the tensed and dissenting relationship to phallogocentric discourse. It is only by means of this indirect negativity that this relationship can be made visible.

Having said this, one more remark has to be made. When criticising the nature of phallogocentric logic, the important thing one has to bear in mind is the fact that every conceptual category and each aspect of individual subjectivity is to a certain degree inevitably tainted by phallogocentrism. Abandoning the relationship to the maternal body in favour of accepting the law of the father and the authority of the phallus is the very condition of individuation and constitution of the Self, which thereby acquires the ability to recognise what surrounds it as the other, as what is

different from the Self. Similarly, Derrida highlights the inevitably metaphysical nature of our critical thinking, which is doomed to work with and reduplicate the very categories it is about to deconstruct.

1.2.2 Logocentrism

This observation takes us to Derrida's critique of the prevailing epistemic and ontological tendency of our culture, which Derrida has called Logocentrism. His thorough analysis of the displacement of meaning, which takes place in writing, has provided Derrida with a basis on which to scrutinise the way Western metaphysics and culture relies on the alleged authority of an origin, a presence, a voice, the authority of an original intention, of the founding law of the father. Derrida argues that these very entities as such remain inaccessible and are only set up in the discourse in order to prevent the structure of our thinking from collapsing into the process of "différance"[5] and continuous slippage of meaning. It is the authority of logocentrism what strives to cover and override the nature of a signification, language and our conceptual categories, which for Derrida are based on the figure of différance, i.e. on the continuous changes and shifts in the structure of signifiers. Thus Derrida discloses the logocentric nature of our epistéme at the very elementary moment of meaning production: "By all rights, it belongs to the sign to be legible, even if the moment of its production is irremediably lost, and even if I do not know what its alleged author-scriptor meant consciously and intentionally at the moment he wrote it, that is, abandoned it to its essential drifting" (Derrida 1991a: 93). It is the fundamental denial of this very fact that the meaning, authority and intention in its full presence can never be guaranteed, that defines and establishes the logocentric nature of the hegemonic discourse within our culture. As Derrida points out: "This essential drifting, due to writing as an iterative structure cut off from all absolute responsibility, from consciousness as the authority of the last analysis, writing orphaned, and separated at birth from the assistance of its father, is indeed what Plato

[5] "Différance is a neologism coined by Jacques Derrida. Derrida makes this differ from more conventional 'différence' by spelling it with an 'a'. (...) He does so in order to acknowledge simultaneously that which differs (spacing) and that which defers (temporalization) as the condition of signification, meaning, ontology and identity" (Wolfreys 2004: 62). In Derrida's words, différance is "the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general, is constituted 'historically' as a weave of differences" (Derrida " Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy*, 1972, English translation 1982. Quoted from Wolfreys 2004: 62.

condemned in the *Phaedrus*. If Plato's gesture is, as I believe, the philosophical movement par excellence, one realizes what is at stake here" (Derrida 1991a: 92). To put it briefly, Derrida's term 'logocentrism' can be said to refer to "the bias in Western metaphysical thinking in favor of the linguistic 'presence' of speech ('logos') over the linguistic absence of writing: a bias carried over the into the social structures grounded by metaphysics (for example, Judeo-Christianity, morality, political structure, patriarchy)" (Brunk 1997).

1.2.3 Phallogocentrism

Derrida further links logocentrism with the primacy of a phallus and defines phallogocentrism as "the complicity of Western metaphysics with a notion of male firstness" (Derrida 1997: 29). According to Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak,

> Jacques Derrida's critique of phallocentrism can be summarized as follows: the patronymic, in spite of all empirical details of the generation gap, keeps the transcendental ego of the dynasty identical in the eye of the law. By virtue of the father's name the son refers to the father. The irreducible importance of the name and the law in this situation makes it quite clear that the question is not merely one of psycho-socio-sexual behavior but of the production and consolidation of reference and meaning. The desire to make one's progeny represent his presence is akin to the desire to make one's words represent the full meaning of one's intention. Hermeneutic, legal, or patrilinear, it is the prerogative of the phallus to declare itself a sovereign source. Its causes are also its effects: a social structure – centered on due process and the law (logocentrism); a structure of argument centered on the sovereignty of the enduring self and determinacy of meaning (phallogocentrism) (Spivak 1997:44).

Like Spivak, Elisabeth Grosz comments on the issue of the phallogocentric urge to determine a single, representable and stable meaning.

> If Lacan begs women to tell him in what their pleasure consists, he is not prepared to hear what they have to say. The absence of an answer from women is clearly itself an answer – that this is a problem for men who want to know, to master, to name, that which is not theirs. Women, for Irigaray, are the sex which is not one: not one (like the phallus), but not none either! Woman is not one for she doesn't conform to the logic of singular identity, sexuality, and desire: the sex which is more than one, in excess of the one (organ) demanded from women's bodies to render them definable in men's terms (Grosz 1990).

As it has been pointed above, there is no easy way out from the domain of phallogocentrism. It is difficult to offer an easy alternative to hegemonic practices. In a non-phallogocentric way of writing, it is possible however at least to avoid the fundamental qualities of phallogocentrism. Elisabeth Grosz comments on the way Irigary approaches this problem:

> While Irigaray does not speculate on what a feminine language should be, she does imply what it cannot be: it cannot be based on phallocentrism – singular meanings, hierarchical organization, polar oppositions, the division into subject-predicate form, a commitment to the intertranslability of concepts. These values represent the privileged self-distance of masculinity and its denial of the material residue impervious to rational control (...) [phallogocentric] discourses refuse to acknowledge that their own partiality, their own perspectivity, their own interests and values (...) in order to maintain their 'objectivity', 'scientificity', or 'truth' (Grosz 1990: 179-180).

The awareness of the particularly located standpoint and the attention to Otherness and irreducible materiality of body, memory and subjectivity which cannot be colonised by unifying and homogenising concept of phallogocentric discourse, is something to be often found also in the writing of the Czech writers discussed below.

In sum, under the term of the phallogocentric discourse, we can generally subsume an ample range of attitudes and concepts, such as anthropocentrism, metaphysics of presence, ideology of identity, claims for universal rationality, unambiguous, manageable language and seamlessly unified, self-controlling subject. In contrast to that, the concept of women's writing could be characterised by awareness of local, marginal perspective, indeterminability of language meaning, irreducible Otherness, heterogeneity and heteroglossia of reality. Phallogocentrism can be further characterised by its urge to fix and control meaning, to posit some originary source of meaning which could be referred to as a source of unquestionable authority of the hegemonic social order. The literary texts examined in this thesis "fail" only in the task of "conveying meaning". What they do is destabilise the structure of constant meanings, conventional narrative procedures and conceptual

categories. They take textual semiosis outside of the realm of a logocentric functioning.[6]

In this chapter I have tried to outline the content and function of the term discourse, and to show what the links between discourse, textual practice and phallogocentrism are. I would like to conclude here that the important relationship of literature to discursive practices of phallogocentrism resides in the fact that a literary text can function as a space where hegemonic, phallogocentric discursive practices can be questioned, challenged and re-written. Since the nature of our conceptual and epistemic categories is a discursive one (as it has been pointed out above) and these categories do not represent any eternal, naturally occurring entities, their meaning and shape can be negotiated and re-articulated in the discursive practice of literary texts. Seen in this perspective, literature becomes one of the central fields where the critical examinations of hegemonic discursive practices take place.

In the next chapter, I would like to address the question of the nature of the relationship between the concept of women's writing and the body, a sexual difference, a gendered subjectivity, as well as a language and an experience.

1.3 Delineation of the body and the construction of gender identities

1.3.1 The gender / sex dichotomy re-written

The issues of gender and body represent a troubled area for feminism and the humanities in general, and a critical and deconstructive approach to the category of gender as such is required. I do not intend to get into a debate about gender as a social construct vs. essential nature, for the very distinction in itself appears to be a rather metaphysical and false dichotomy. Teresa de Lauretis speaks of the trap of conceptualising the gender as a (binary) difference, be it the difference that is seen to be based on a pre-existing sexual difference, or that which results from the processes

[6] Here I would like to include a brief note on why I do not use the preposition "beyond" when speaking of getting outside of the sphere of the phallogocentric discourse. The reason why I avoid this preposition is that the spatial metaphor, which the preposition includes, seems to imply the idea of a linear development, transgression or transcendence, the concepts which themselves belong to the very vocabulary of phallogocentrism itself.

of signification and socialisation that are built upon and further form the primary base of the pre-given physiological difference. She writes:

> To continue to pose the question of gender in either of these terms [i.e. sexual difference or cultural production], once the critique of patriarchy has been fully outlined, keeps feminist thinking bound to the terms of Western patriarchy itself, contained within the frame of a conceptual opposition that is 'always already' inscribed in what Frederic Jameson would call 'the political unconscious' of dominant cultural discourses and their underlying 'master narratives' (...) The first limit of 'sexual difference(s), then, is that it constraints feminist critical thought within the conceptual frame of a universal sex opposition (...), which makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the differences of women from Woman, that is to say, the differences among women or, perhaps more exactly, the differences *within women*. For example, the differences among (...) women who 'masquerade' (the word is Joan Riviere's) cannot be understood as sexual differences. From that point of view, they would not be differences at all, and all women would but render either different embodiments of some archetypal essence of woman, or more or less sophisticated impersonations of metaphysical-discursive femininity (De Lauretis 1987: 1-2).

In the last sentence quoted, De Lauretis also points out the fact that woman is absent from a phallogocentric culture. The nature of this absence is basically twofold. Firstly, she is denied an autonomous subject position, being caught up in the specular logic of masculine representation (as Irigaray analysed it in *Spéculum de l'autre femme,* 1974); secondly, her identity is overloaded with discursive constructs maintaing the "essential", stereotypical model of femininity (which is just the other side of the first reason). De Lauretis goes on to warn about the danger of being trapped in the very logic of the phallogocentrism feminism strives to oppose: "A second limitation of the notion of sexual difference(s) is that it tends to recontain or recuperate the radical epistemological potential of feminist thought inside the walls of the master's house, to borrow Audre Lorde's metaphor rather than Nietzsche's 'prison-house of language'" (ibidem). De Lauretis thus proposes that one should "think of gender along the lines of Michel Foucault's theory of sexuality as a 'technology of sex'" and advocates regarding gender as "the product of various social technologies (...) institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life" (De Lauretis 1987: 2).

This takes us to the Foucauldian approach to the body, to sexuality and to his ideas of the discursive formation of the body and the technologies of the Self (as analysed namely in Foucault's work *History of Sexuality, Volume I*, 1990). Although Foucault has never dealt with questions of gender as such, his writing on the power-knowledge-body nexus has become a strong impulse for reformulating some of the issues of feminism into a new paradigm of gender studies. The way Foucault described functioning of discourse and its role in shaping and determining our conceptualisation of reality has influenced deeply the understanding of the processes of establishing gender identity. It is precisely the term "discourse" which efficiently encapsulates the entire complex of all the repetitive semiotic acts of delimitation, self-identification and normalisation by which gender identity is construed. Gender identity is thus built gradually and tacitly by constant encounters with a number of disciplinary discourses, interpellating social narratives and through everyday acts of self-discipline which meet regulatory ideals of sex, general societal expectations and a number of implicit rules (ways of behaviour, care of the Self, living and acting in the socially divided space etc.). It is by the constant performing of these internalised, adopted regulative, normalising and disciplining processes of the Self that gender categories are being inscribed onto a body.

Seen in the Foucauldian perspective, the very category of sex – and the way it has been delineated as a underlying category of our thinking – is a discursive operation in itself, as Judith Butler has convincingly demonstrated in her Foucault-inspired deconstruction of the gender / sex dichotomy. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler sets out by claiming that

> the category of 'sex' is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a 'regulatory ideal'. In this sense, then, 'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls. (...) In other words, 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. (...) In this sense, what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect. And there will be no way to understand 'gender' as a cultural

> construct which is imposed upon the surface of matter, understood either as 'the body' or its given sex. Rather, once 'sex' itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm (Butler 1993: 1-2).

I shall discuss more fully the question as to what extent the sexual difference vs. gendered subjectivity are (ir)relevant to the concept of women's writing in Chapter 1.3.3.

1.3.2 Women's writing and the body

We can see that the Foucauldian concept of discourse, which Butler has so masterfully utilised, radically re-evaluates and re-orders some traditional dichotomies, such as the dichotomy of language and thinking (language is prior to thinking) or subject/agent and object/patient (we ceased to be a sovereign subject/agent of our thinking and speaking). This reversal applies to the problem of the body too. The Foucauldian approach has debunked the opposites which the traditional understanding of the body is based on: from the Foucauldian perspective, an outside has become a part of an inside, the culture has intervened in the body, the body as a surface has opened up for inscriptions of various cultural and societal parameters. The body, which once appeared to be the original, primal and natural, seen from this point of view has turned out to be an entity that is arbitrary, culturally conditioned and constructed by a complex discursive praxis. Something what seemed to belong to the most inner and intimate, is in fact something very much a matter of outside, a space which various cultural categories have been projected onto. The body is never raw or natural, and it never belongs to us alone and exclusively. It is a terrain with distinctly delineated spheres, discursively inscribed parameters and categories, it has a complex geography of public and private, permitted and proscribed. This enables us to perceive our body as some meaningful, intelligible entity, but at the same time, it makes it docile, controllable and easy to manipulate. Echoing Simone de Beauvoir, we could say the body *is* not, but always *becomes to be*, being constituted by discursive praxis and "interpellated" (Althusser[7]) by the

[7] Louis Althusser coined the term "interpellation" to account for the "production" of subjects in modern society. He explains the meaning of the term as follows: "(...) ideology acts or functions in such a way that it recruits subjects among the individuals (...) or transforms the individuals into

various semiotic codes (by language prominently) and symbolic orders which it belongs to. In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault seeks to describe the discursive praxis, which an individual body is subjected to and determined by. He explores the way "social narratives" in the "microphysics of power" impose a role of the engendered subject on an un-delineated body. These social narratives include a wide range of various procedures of interpellation, confessional practices, processes of self-mastery and recognition and other techniques of the self.

The Foucauldian way of articulating the issue of the body is particularly important for the type of writing we will focus on. Foucault has pointed out that the terms at stake in respect to the theme and problem of the body are not those seemingly straightforwardly linked to it, such as flesh or sex for instance, but the ones which are far less obvious, such as a language, knowledge, memory, available genres of speaking, the categorisation of our (self)perception. It is in precisely these terms that my chosen authors present the topic of the body.

Seen from this Foucauldian perspective, (re)writing the body by no means appears to be an easy enterprise. It seems that at best, it is possible to do no more than to rewrite and destabilise conventional narratives driven by phallocentric discourses. Coming up with attempts to refer to the body in an alternative, positive way is doomed to compromise with one of the available conventional discourses granting the body its visibility, most probably the essentialist one. (As has been mentioned above, the proliferation of discourses and representations of the female body has produced the result that within our culture, the woman's body is paradoxically overdetermined. Discourse which furnishes her body with its meanings, identity, and status, however, does not belong to her.) It appears to me that the body can hardly be approached and comprehend in any positive terms; it seems it can only be demarcated, delineated by the marked terrain of already discredited, unsettled and dubious narratives and discourses of phallocentrism.

Thus on the one hand, the ideas put forward by Irigaray's and Cixous' theories of women's writing such as a rhythmic fluidity and contingency with a pre-symbolic Mother figure appear to me to be thoroughly dubious concepts resounding as they do with essentialist, archetypal or stereotypical proprieties ascribed to the

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subjects (...) by that very precise operation which I have called interpelation or hailing („„)" Althouser in "Ideology and ideological state apparatuses" quoted from Wolfreys 2004: 115).

notion of Woman. These habitual and essentialist qualities are attributed to women by anxious masculine imagery in order to fill in its unsettling, discomforting emptiness, instability and constant slippage of cultural meanings. On the other hand however, it should be clear that neither Cixous nor Irigaray's approach means a mere recourse to some pre-given, natural, essential qualities of female corporeality. As Dallery observes quoting Jane Gallop, "Irigaray's poetique du corps is not an expression of the body but a poesis, a creating of the body" (Gallop "Irigaray's Body Politic." *Romantic Review* 74, quoted from Dallery 1989: 58). "Speaking the body does not mirror or refer to a neutral reified body in and of itself objectively escaping all anterior signification: discourse already, always, structures the body" (Dallery 1989: 58). Summarising Kaja Silverman's account (taken from her text "Historie D'O: Construction of a Female Subject"), Dallery further refutes the idea that écriture féminine is a just a return to some "real", pre-cultural body:

> Through discourse the human body is territorialized into a male or female body. The meanings of the body in discourse actually shape the materiality of the real body and its complementary desires. Male or phallocentric discursive practice have historically shaped and demarcated woman's body for herself. Indeed, woman's body is overdetermined. Accordingly, speaking the body presupposes a real body with its prior constructions to be deconstructed in the process of discursively appropriating woman's body. In speaking the body, writing is pulsed by this feminine libidinal economy and projects the meanings of a de-censored body to be materially lived. A 'real' body prior to discourse is meaningless. (...) Writing the body is writing a new text, (...) new inscriptions of woman's body, separate from and undermining the phallocratic coding of woman's body that produces the censure, erasure, repression of woman's libidinal economy, her altérité" Dallery concludes (Dallery 1989: 59).

The idea that writing a body does not reside in any recourse to a "natural", pre-discursive body, but in the negotiation and re-writing of the discursive bodily inscriptions and parameters set by the hegemonic phallocentric discourse also takes us into the question of women's writing and sexual difference.

1.3.3 Gendering "women's writing" and the question of a sexual difference

Alongside the question stated in this chapter's title, I would also like to clarify the reasons why I stick to using the term "women's writing", and do not speak of, for example, "gender-sensitive writing", "female-oriented writing" or "female-centred way of writing". What should be emphasised in the first place is that I am not speaking of some alleged, presumed inherent qualities of feminine style or idiolect. (For a discussion on the idea of inherent female or male qualities see Chapter 4.2 on Věra Linhartová's writing.) The subject of this thesis is not the question of femininity, but of the kind of textual and discursive practice which locates itself outside of the sphere or epistemic boundaries of a phallogocentric discourse. It should be made clear that it is not the sex of the author that matters. Texts displaying such qualities do not have to be written by women, since the authority of a phallus and the logic of logocentrism are not specific to either sex.[8] Although there are factors linked with gendered subjectivity that matter, as far as non-phallogocentric ways of writing are concerned, this gendered subjectivity has nothing to do with the sexual difference (female / male sex), but with a particular position within a given ideological and discursive domain and power structure, within a given attitude toward language and hegemonic ideology and its discursive practices. The sort of writing that questions the hegemony of the phallogocentric discourse is not a quality or dimension of women's writing alone. The non-phallogocentric way of thinking and approach to reality could be arguably found, for example in the categories, conceptualisations, and world-views of non-European nations (where for instance dichotomies such as nature/culture or individual / communal / collective are articulated differently than in the phallogocentric discourse of European civilisation). The reason why we mention this is to underline the fact that what is at issue here are the discursive and ideological categories of our thinking, not the essentialist dichotomy of the female / male sex division. The notion of women's writing here is meant to refer to the sort of writing which locates itself outside of the logic of the

[8] In her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva in fact discusses only male authors such as Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Joyce, Artaud. Apart from female writers such as Lispector, Bachmann, Tsvetaeva, Achmatova, Cixous, too, focuses on male authors such as Kafka, Dostoyevsky, Mandelstam.

phallogocentric discourse and which tries to question its hegemonic, authoritative status. (For a discussion on this question see also Chapter 4.5.)

As has been pointed in Patricia Waugh's assessment of early feminist fiction (see above, Waugh 1989), the challenge to patriarchal culture and its phallogocentric discourse lies not in a mere reversal of gender roles and attributes but elsewhere. In my understanding it resides in a fundamental deconstruction of these categories as such. This is not to say we would be able to get rid of using words like male/female etc. Not only it is undesirable, it is simply impossible, since they represent the indispensable core of our general heuristic and conceptual tools, which enable us to contemplate the very idea of identity. What it does mean, though, is that we cease to take them as natural, inevitably given categories fixing rigidly the gender dichotomy and that we start using them as interchangeable and essentially floating signifiers – which they indeed are – needed for delineating the notion of a subject per se.

In the three previous chapters I have tried to demonstrate that the concept of women's writing requires us to overcome a too narrow and simplified understanding of the category of gender as a mere cultural moulding of our biological parameters. The category of gender is a very complex one and it encompasses a much wider spectrum of features than we tend to assume. It is not a simple distinction dividing the population into groups with a fixed set of ascribed roles and parameters. It is one of the most vital conceptual tools that enables us to draw distinctions and hierarchies in an otherwise dynamic and ambiguous reality, to adopt a certain sanctioned position in the constantly changing patterns of society, to situate oneself repeatedly in some functional behavioural model. Last but not least, it also provides us with an epistemic ground for self-perception and self-understanding. In this respect, my aim is not to measure and assess some ratio of femininity and masculinity on display in a particular author or style of writing, but neither do I find it desirable to try to avoid using female and male categories in our discourse. Reflecting upon gender as one of several organisational axes, a power point for structuring both an individual subject and societal space, makes one focus on the way that the literary texts under discussion constantly challenge, reinvent and destabilise this organisational category in the process of textual semiosis. I shall not observe the way categories of female and male are being orchestrated or rejected, but examine the very notion of subjectivity itself and the ways it is being enacted, negotiated and re-written. I shall

focus on the ways in which particular authors destabilise not only the idea of a clearly gendered identity of a subject, but the very idea of a homogeneous, seamless identity and subjectivity as such.

I have claimed that women's writing (as understood in this thesis) is not a matter of sexual difference but that it is a discursive position that strives to locate itself outside of the domain of phallogocentrism. As I have argued above (see also Chapter 4.5), this "non-phallogocentric" quality is displayed by some male writers too and cannot be attributed exclusively to women writers. (That is why Bohumil Hrabal is considered here too.) We might ask: in what regard is women's writing gendered, then? I think it is impossible to offer a single, easy answer. When trying to answer this question, I believe one must to point to the whole range of issues debated in the following chapters of this thesis. In other words, all that can be said on this matter is that, in my view, the gendered dimension of the term "woman's writing" is enacted in the entire range of all the topics discussed below. In this regard the notion of gender as understood here comprises a wide array of phenomena ranging from the issues of constant displacement of meaning and inevitable lack of control over communication and one's individual Self to the awareness of limits and im/possibilities of articulating one's embodied and discursively situated subjectivity.

One of the gendered aspects I would like to cite now, however, is that in women's writing, female characters often occupy a central place in the narrative. This is for example very much the case of all three central characters in Součková's *Amor a Psyché* or of the protagonist in Linhartová's story "The Room" or of the narrator's figure in Richterová's *Slabikář otcovského jazyka* (The Primer of the Father Tongue) for that matter. (See Chapters 3 and 4 for the debate of these Czech writers). At the same time, however, it is true that other works of the same authors are populated with both male and female characters and narrative foci are on the interaction of those characters. Such is the case of Součková's novels of *Zakladatelé* (Founders) and *Odkaz* (Legacy) where against the backdrop of the established genre of a realistic family saga (that is mocked and deconstructed throughout), the undoubtedly gendered issues of patriarchal dimensions of the entrepreneurial and scholarly culture of a Prague (petit bourgeoisie) dynasty is under ironic scrutiny. Defining one's identity and one's world in relation to the perceived male, paternal part of the "universe" plays a crucial role in Richterová's novel, whose title, *Slabikář*

otcovského jazyka (The Primer of the Father Tongue), is symptomatic for our topic (see more detailed debate in Chapter 4.3). Hodrová's fictional universe is very much defined by a panoply of numerous characters, fictitious, semi-fictitious, autobiographical, mythical and historical. And in Linhartová's writing, the very idea of a clear-cut, coherent and stable identity is totally debunked – both in the volumes *Prostor k rozlišení* (Space for Differentiation) and *Meziprůzkum nejblíž uplynulého* (The Intersurvey of Recent Past). In this regard, it should be also said that the gender aspect does not reside in the mere presence / absence of female characters but in the dynamics between the female and male figures and their respective conceptualising of reality and their own identities, as well as in the way they interact with each other or with their Selves. Thus the gender dimension does not precede other topics and motifs but is rather enacted in various themes such as the concept of in/coherent, unified / multiple, heterogeneous subjectivity, the possibility of controlling and managing communication and reality as such, the authorial voice exercising control over the textual dynamics of the work of art.

1.3.4 Paradigm of language vs. paradigm of experience

The word "experience" sometimes appears in the context of the debate on women's writing and a brief clarifying remark on the way it is used here is needed. There is the critical question as to whether our experience as such can be taken for granted as being available for us in any pure, a priori evident and given, easily accessible state, or whether it is inevitably always already mediated, formed and structured by discursive categories that grant it its intelligibility. I hope the earlier discussion on the Foucauldian approach to the body has proven the latter is the case. Thus somewhat elliptically speaking, I might say this thesis rests on the *paradigm of language*, not the *paradigm of experience*. By this opposition, I refer to the shift of an epistemological focus that took place within the humanities in the 1970's and is referred to as a "linguistic turn." Resting on a tradition of thinking going back to Nietzsche, de Saussure, Heidegger, and later Wittgenstein, philosophy and theory have re-evaluated profoundly the hierarchies of categories such as signified and signifier, speech and writing, content and structure, consciousness and language, autonomous subject and outer social determinants and so on. (For a discussion on some of these terms see the previous chapter.) Having argued that the idea that we

approach reality and ourselves unavoidably by means of a linguistic mediation (i.e. by a presumption of a pre-existing status of objects, which are merely reflected by the language) has been replaced with the idea that reality is always already structured by discursive structures and categories.

When speaking of the paradigm of a language and the paradigm of some experience, the question might be asked, whether the two can be easily separated? The answer is they cannot. (For a further discussion on the tension between the regulatory functioning of discourse and the singularity of the bodily situation see the Conclusion of the thesis.) The reason I draw attention this dichotomy is to highlight the point about the aspect of discursive mediation of experience. The stress on the paradigm of language is designed to point out that there is no experience prior to language. I do this to emphasise the important feature of the writing of the authors discussed here, which is that they focus on language structures without relying upon the unquestioned concept of some pre-given, pre-existing female or male experience. In this regard, women's writing is preoccupied not with expressing some primal, originary "experience", but with textual and discursive means and frameworks that make this experience possible, available and intelligible. Elaine Millard writes: "To look for evidence of an *écriture féminine* then implies a text that disrupts expectations of form and genre rather than any reflection of woman's experience" (Millard 1989: 161).

In this regard I wish to emphasise that the concept of women's writing as put forward here inherently comprises an awareness of the difficulty and obstacles involved, even impossibility of transgressing a given discourse, and that women's writing strives to address and stress the role of inevitable language mediation of individual experience and consciousness. Toril Moi remarks on this issue:

> If the Kristevan subject is always already inserted in the symbolic order, how can such an implacably authoritarian, phallocentric structure be broken up? It obviously cannot happen through a straightforward rejection of the symbolic order, since such a total failure to enter into human relations would, in Lacanian terms, make us psychotic. We have to accept our position as already inserted into an order that precedes us and from which there is no escape. There is no other space from which we can speak: if we are able to speak at all, it will have to be within the framework of symbolic language (Moi 1985: 170).

Moi is very critical of an unreserved reliance upon the unquestioned concept of experience that could be easily accessed and seen as a kind of a reservoir for an "authentic" literary expression. Moi suspects that in a famous book *Literature of Their Own,* Elaine Showalter actually "believes that a text should reflect the writer's experience, and that the more authentic the experience is felt to be by the reader, the more valuable the text" (Moi 1985: 4). She criticises Showalter for the assumption implicit in her approach that "good feminist fiction would present truthful images of strong women with which the reader may identify" (Moi 1985: 7). In contrast to that, Moi argues that what really makes a difference in the literary tradition and marks a break with the hegemonic patriarchal ideology of representation is the kind of writing that "radically undermines the notion of the unitary self, the central concept of Western male humanism" (ibidem). Moi writes that it is the highly complex network of conflicting structures – encompassing not only unconscious sexual desires, fears and phobias, but also a host of conflicting material, social, political and ideological factors – that produces the subject and its experience, rather than the other way round (Moi 1985: 10). To sum it up briefly, let us see what Dallery has to say about the question of the language and experience relationship. "Irigaray and Cixous see sexual difference constituting itself discursively through inscribed meanings. (...) American academic feminism (...) emphasizes the empirical, the irreducible reality of woman's experience; (...) postmodernist French feminism emphasizes the primacy of discourse, woman's discourse, without which there is no experience – to speak of" (Dallery 1989: 52).[9]

[9] One should add here that such a division (and the categories it uses) is a little schematic and refers rather to the 1960's and 1970's than to the current state of art. (American feminism has been strongly influenced by continental philosophy, as can be seen in the works of Joan Scott, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz.) The quote thus does not capture the diverse, rich, colourful, indeed labyrinthine scene of contemporary feminist thinking in the U. S. Although the balance between the French and the American versions of feminist thinking has changed dramatically over past few decades, I think the quote can illustrate in a nutshell one important heuristic difference between the two approaches. I have included it here to illustrate the difference between the two conceptual sets that I refer to as the paradigm of language and paradigm of experience. I do not see American feminism as a unified and political agenda. On the contrary, my own argument has been informed by American (post)feminist thinking, ranging from French-inspired deconstructive post-structuralism of Judith Butler to the

1.3.5 The post-structuralist approach to subjectivity

The examination of the language-experience relationship also takes us on to the post-modern critique of the concept of subjectivity and the Self, usually equated with Descartean Ego. First, however, let us take a brief look at the way Patricia Waugh judges the procedures of early, second wave feminist fiction. She argues that the need for different social models for individual practice, the claim for widened available positions and modes for women writing were in these novels directed into two channels, which both are equally irrelevant for more substantial change in the patriarchal set-up of our society. These were either a mere reversal of conventional male and female roles – it is a female character this time who pursues the goal of her sexual, social and professional self-assertion. Or the novels foregrounded and celebrated the essentialist female qualities of sensitivity for which they find no room within contemporary society, thus having recourse to the essentialist concept of gender and social relationships. What is important here is that the very framework and reference points for establishing and moulding one's identity remained unaltered. Waugh comments:

> Many of these texts [of early feminist writing] adhered fundamentally to a liberal-humanist belief in the possibility of discovering a 'true' self, and simply substituted female for male heroes and preserved more or less traditional quest plots. The concept of a 'person' can only ever be constructed out of available ideologies and discourses, and the dominance in the novel tradition of a liberal consensus offered to these writers a vindication of the apparent 'naturalness' of personal experience. (...) Such fictions did little to challenge the dominance of expressive realism with its consensus aesthetics: its assumption of the authority of omniscience or the veracity of personal experience in the first-person narration; its coherent, consistent characters whose achievement of self-determination signifies a new maturity; in assumption of a causal relationship between the 'real' inner essence of a person and the ultimate achievement of selfhood through acts in the world. Nor did they challenge the dominant liberal view of subjectivity, with its belief in the unified self and universal human nature (Waugh 1989: 23).

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thinking of Donna Haraway (1991) that has given me the idea of epistemic discourses that are aware of and work critically with their (inevitably) situated and partial perspectives.

When we come back to Moi's assessment of Showalter in this connection now, we can see that according to Moi, the humanism underlying Showalter's approach is as a matter of fact not a privilege and desirable reference point, but the very product and effect of the patriarchal ideology that feminism strives to attack. Indeed at the centre of this humanism there stands "the seamlessly unified self – either individual or collective – which is commonly called Man (...) gloriously autonomous [banishing] from itself all conflict, contradiction and ambiguity" (Moi 1985: 8). In the common and traditional approach of that kind, the humanist creator is "potent, phallic and male – God in relation to his world, the author in relation to his text" (ibidem).

Such a traditional humanist approach to subjectivity has been replaced by the Saussure-inspired, Derridean concept of a meaning and a Subject based on the structure of difference. Nancy Holland remarks that

> for Saussure, words exist only in (...) a system of difference. They always carry an internal reference to other words in the language of which they are a part and so permanently delay any final arrival at the pre-linguistic things themselves that words are supposed to name. Similarly, the modern Subject can be seen as a system of difference" (Holland 1997: 6). [...] "The post-modern world is one in which even the memory, the hope, or the dream of integrated Subject ceases to exist. It is a world of interminable psychoanalysis, of constant 'bricolage' or making do with spare parts, of a sexuality that can never restore the lost intimacy and immediacy at which it aims (Holland 1997: 4).

Similarly Patricia Waugh observes that "postmodernism situates itself epistemologically at the point where the epistemic subject characterized in terms of historical experience, interiority, and consciousness has given way to the decentred subject identified through the public, impersonal signifying practices of other similarly 'decentred' subjects" (Waugh 1989: 7).

Thus, since the linguistic turn, it has been difficult to maintain the idea of some original, authentic, clear and intrinsic experience being lived by women or men that would be devoid of constraints of discursive articulation and structuring both on the level of subject (the way we relate to our gender identity) and his or her perception and conceptualisation of reality (the way we relate to outer world and society). I opt here for this distinction between paradigm of language and experience as it helps to illuminate a difference between – in my view – a little too

straightforward and superficial assumption that it is possible to challenge patriarchal society without addressing its essential linguistic and structural preconditions, and the way of thinking and writing that is aware of the complicated relationship between language and experience.

So far, I have tried to delineate the conceptual backdrop against which I would like to think of the potential of a literary text to question and destabilise the hegemonic, phallogocentric discursive practice of our culture. The purpose of the discussion presented in the preceding passages has been also to stress that what is at stake in the case of women's writing is not a *female* identity and subjectivity. What we are confronted with here is the difficult question of what subjectivity means to us *in general*, how and by whom identity and subjectivity are being shaped, negotiated and established, how they are being changed, fragmented or possibly lost.

In the next chapter I will discuss the theories of four French post-structuralist theoreticians. I want to demonstrate which parts of their theorising on the concept of women's writing will be useful for the purpose of this thesis. In the second half of the thesis, I will try to point out the textual politics, narrative and epistemic strategies, as well as literary themes and topoi that differ from or defy the practices of the phallogocentric discourse.

2. Literary text and the concept of women's writing

Before I start to discuss the concept of "écriture féminine" as developed by Heléne Cixous and Luce Irigaray, I would like to touch upon the questions, as to where and when we can actually trace something that could be referred to as women's writing. The expression "women's writing" as used in this thesis contains implicitly a complex of specific presumptions and assertions that condition the term's meaning. It is not necessarily the case that every piece of literature written by a female author bears features and qualities that would set the text against the logic of a phallogocentric discourse. There is and always have been a large number of texts which are entirely compliant to the prevailing traditional and established forms of "male-centred" thinking and writing. Thus, these questions also necessarily involve problems such as the emancipation of literature written by female authors and the

development of a space for an autonomous female voice and a specific, alternative means of expression. As I mentioned above, a survey of the diachronic evolution of literature written by women would go beyond the scope of the present thesis, but a few issues have to be clarified here. Such an examination should reveal the way that any former literary discourse in its day prevented women authors from occupying "a room of their own."

Following Foucault's idea of a repressive hypothesis and "a discursive positivity", it would be possible to describe the way dominant discourses absorb all "Other", depriving the emerging alternative competing discourses of their potential threat to the prevailing discursive paradigm. This is carried out by opening up an ample number of positions from where to speak, but these positions are only those which have already been socially sanctioned and designated with the "appropriate" qualities and attributes inherent in the given prevailing discourses. Thus silencing the autonomous voice of women's authors was achieved not so much through imposed cultural censorship or repression, but rather by transposing their distinctive voice into the socially acceptable and sanctioned key.

In this respect, it is important to note that there were specific conditions and concomitant circumstances required to create a possible space where all the truly and genuinely autonomous topics and phenomena of women's writing could emerge. Quite symptomatically, the first autonomous expression, which did not reduplicate the traditional expectations about the "female" role in literature, was accompanied by a far-reaching and significant deconstruction of the traditional language usage and an experimentation with narrative techniques. Within the Anglo-American context, it is the name of Virginia Woolf that is most commonly associated with this tradition of writing. When I talk about women's writing, I refer generally to this context of literary expression.

In trying to clarify the concept of women's writing as understood in the present thesis, we could adopt yet another point of departure. We can attempt to locate the issue of women's writing in an outline of both the diachronic evolution and the synchronic stratification of feminism, which we could – obviously simplifying the complex and multilayered terrain of feminist thinking – roughly draw as follows: 1. feminism and the concept of Equality, 2. feminism as a Difference, 3. feminism as a Différance (post-feminism). Summarising Kristeva's position, Moi

sketches the three historical and political layers of a feminist struggle thus: "1. Women demand equal access to the symbolic order. Liberal feminism. Equality. 2. Women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference. Radical feminism. Femininity extolled. 3. (This is Kristeva's own position.) Women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical. The third position is one that has deconstructed the opposition between masculinity and femininity, and therefore necessarily challenges the very notion of identity" (Moi 1985: 12).[10]

At this point, I think it would be useful to employ a few comments by Derrida on feminism (as made in the interview with Christie McDonald entitled "Choreographies") in order to clarify more what I have in mind regarding the position of women's writing within the complicated and uneven terrain of feminism. Firstly, what Derrida suggests that we should question is the idea of diachronic, evolutionary stages of feminism. Over this, he favours the idea of synchronic stratification, i.e. seeing various feminist stances and streams not as merely successive stages, but as a topographies of various positions, as synchronic aspects of the same issue. He wonders if it would not be possible to view various recent and current stages of feminism as present already in the 19th century:

> Was the matrix of what was to be the future of feminism already there at the end of the last century? (...) (The word matrix in English like *matrice* in French comes from the Latin *matrix* meaning womb.) (...) Let us make use of this figure from anatomy or printing a bit longer to ask whether a program, or locus of begetting, was not already in place in the nineteenth century for all configurations to which the feminist struggle of the second half of the twentieth century was to commit itself and then to develop (Derrida 1997: 25).

Secondly, he scrutinises the troublesome dogmatism of asserting one's privileged position, even the privilege which could be that of the counter position, revolt or marginality. The trouble with this sort of stance is that it repeats the very same gesture of authority, and plunges into the grand narratives it criticises.

Your 'maverick feminist' [i.e. Emma Goldman, see below, JM] showed herself ready to break with the most authorized, the most dogmatic form of consensus, one that claims (...) to

[10] This classification by Moi is undoubtedly a little too schematic and simplified, ordering the difficult terrain and dynamics of feminist debate into the neatly organized narrative succesion, but it can however serve the purpose of drawing a basic outline which helps to point out the differences of attitudes towards subjectivity, discourse and language functioning among various streams of feminism.

speak out in the name of revolution and history. Perhaps she was thinking of a completely other history: a history of paradoxical laws and nondialectical discontinuities, a history of absolutely heterogeneous pockets, irreducible particularities, of unheard of and incalculable sexual differences; a history of women who (...) are today inventing sexual idioms at a distance from the main forum of feminist activity with the kind of reserve that does not necessarily prevent from subscribing to the movement and even, occasionally, from becoming a militant for it (Derrida 1997: 27).

In the same context, Derrida questions a topological metaphor or ideology of one, a proper, essential, "authentic" locus for woman, including the idea of sexual difference set up on the pattern of an opposition between the two sexes, which, disguised as Hegelian Aufhebung, effectively means a neutralisation of otherness and leads to the veiled prevalence of the masculine. Instead, Derrida promotes plurality of the places and positions women can occupy:

> Why must there be a place for woman? And why only one, a single, completely essential place? This is a question that you could translate ironically by saying that in my view *there is no one place for woman.* (...) It is without a doubt risky to say that there is no place for woman, but this idea is not antifeminist, far from it; true, it is not feminist either. (...) Can one not say, in Nietzsche's language, that there is a 'reactive' feminism (...)? It is this kind of 'reactive' feminism that Nietzsche mocks, and not woman or women. (...) And why for that matter should one rush into answering a *topological* question (what is *the* place of *woman*)? Or an economical question? Why should a new 'idea' of woman or a new step taken by her necessarily be subjected to the urgency of topo-economical concern? (...) This step only constitutes a step on condition that it challenge a certain idea of the locus and the place (the entire history of the West and of its metaphysics) and that it dance otherwise. This is very rare, if it is not impossible, and present us itself only in the form of the most unforeseeable and most innocent of chances (...) The lack of place for [*l'atopie*] or the madness of the dance – this bit of luck could also compromise the political chances of feminism and serve as an alibi for deserting organized, patient, laborious 'feminist' struggles (...), even though the dance is not synonymous with either powerless or fragility. (...) Each man and each woman must commit his or her own singularity, the untranslatable factor of his or her life and death (Derrida 1997: 27-28).

Returning to Moi's differentiation of feminism, let us just repeat that the first stage or position could be characterised by the endeavour to gain *the same* rights and

status as men. Consequently, this position complies and identifies itself with the patriarchal and masculine paradigm. In contrast to that, the second stage would set against the claim for *sameness* the claim for the acknowledgement of and respect for the *difference* in nature, identity and abilities between women and men. The third position, where I would locate the concept of women's writing, could be characterised by the stress on the question of identity itself and the practices of its constitution and construction. It does not presuppose any unified female subject with any natural, born and binding identity (and rights, features, roles etc.). On the contrary, it questions profoundly the very idea of identity as something solid or essential. Rather than criticise and attack the unfair position of women and defend women's rights, it attempts to follow goals of a different and more intricate nature, namely the goal to subvert the masculine discourse based on the vision of an autonomous, unconditioned intellect and self-determined independent subject. The sort of writing produced in this context and line of thinking endeavours to open up some alternative spaces and Deleuzian lines of flight challenging constantly the logocentric idea of metaphysics of presence and singular, fixed and manageable meaning. Such a stance regarding logocentric ways of writing is nicely illustrated at the beginning of Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics*. Quite symptomatically, Moi begins her book with quotes from Elaine Showalter's assessment of Virginia Woolf's writing as presented in Showalter's book *Literature of Their Own.* Generally, within the context of post-structuralist thinking, Moi appraises the very features of Woolf's textual strategies, which Showalter criticises.

> Showalter gives the impression (...) that Woolf's use of repetition, exaggeration, parody, whimsy and multiple viewpoint in *Room* contributes only to creating an impression of strenuous charm, and therefore somehow distracts attention from the message Woolf wants to convey in the essay. She goes on to object to the impersonality of *Room*, an impersonality that springs from the fact that Woolf's use of many different personae to voice the narrative 'I' results in frequently recurring shifts and changes of subject position, leaving the critic no single unified position but a multiplicity of perspectives to grapple with (Moi 1985: 2).

The features Moi highlights in Showalter's sceptical discourse on Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando* and an essay *Room of One's Own* are the very ones which provide the potential to challenge the hegemonic ideology of unified, homogeneous Self and the

metaphysics of a stable, fixed meaning. In the above-mentioned interview with Derrida, Christie McDonald evokes the name of Emma Goldman, "a maverick feminist from the late nineteenth century, [who] once said of the feminist movement: 'If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution'" (Derrida 1997: 23). Although Derrida responded to the question only implicitly, one might add that such a stance not only demonstrates the diversity of feminism, defies the idea of emancipation as divesting oneself of feminine qualities and progression towards maleness, but it could also be seen as evoking a sort of Nietzschean Dionysian dance with its embracing of unpredictability, madness and irreverence to all categorisations.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have tried to describe the mechanics of the relation between discourse, literary tradition and the dynamics of the feminist debate, making some preliminary comments on the theories of women's writing. In the following four chapters I shall briefly outline the ways Hélène Cixous (Chapter 2.1), Luce Irigaray (2.2), and Julia Kristeva (2.3) approached and understood the idea of women's writing. Basing myself predominantly on Toril Moi's assessment, I would like to discuss the major features of écriture féminine, the possible productivity and fruitfulness of this notion, as well as its potential problems and drawbacks. Commenting on Jacques Derrida's writing (Chapter 2.4), I will also try to clarify the key notion used in the title of this thesis, i.e. logocentrism and logocentric nature of hegemonic discourses of our culture. In addition, I would like to include a few further comments by Derrida on the figure of woman (and here I am referring by the term "figure" both to the meaning of the figure as a personality as well as a figure of speech, as a textual and rhetorical device).

2.1 A body in plural: Cixous

What should be noted first of all in connection with Hélène Cixous's idea of woman's writing is that she neither presents, nor is willing to present, any positive definition of what women's writing actually is or could be. She strongly advocates the notion of difference that is truly vital to her thinking. Against Western philosophical and literary thought caught up in the endless series of hierarchical binary oppositions that always in the end come back to the fundamental couple of male/female (activity/passivity, culture/nature, logos/pathos, passion/action etc.),

Cixous sets multiple, heterogeneous difference, informed very much by the Derridean concept of différance. For Derrida, signification is not produced in the static closure of the binary oppositions, but by an open-ended interplay between the presence of one signifier and the absence of others. "The interplay between presence and absence that produces meaning is posited as one of deferral: meaning is never truly present, but is only constructed through the potentially endless process of referring to other, absent signifiers" (...) Western metaphysics comes to favour speech over writing precisely because speech presupposes the presence of the speaking subject, who thus can be cast as the unitary origin of his or her discourse" (Moi 1985: 106-107). This idea that the nature of our concepts could be better approached by means of absence and negativity, by what they are not is why Cixous offers no positive, stable delimitation or definition of what she holds to be women's writing. Nevertheless, this is only partly true and there are certain features, which according to Cixous are constitutive to the project of écriture féminine as she portrays it. One of the points that are central to Cixous' thinking is the difference between masculine and feminine libidinal economy (the realm of the Proper and the realm of the gift): "Where does the difference [between male and female] come through in writing? If there is a difference, it is in the manner of spending, of valorizing the appropriated (...) In general, it is in the manner of thinking any 'return', the relationship of capitalization, if this word 'return' is understood in its sense of 'revenue' (...) But she does not try to 'recover her expenses.' She is able not to return to herself, never settling down, pouring out, going everywhere to the other" (Cixous, in "Sorties", quoted from Sellers 1994: 43-44). "If a man spends, it's on the condition that his power returns" (Cixous, "Castration or decapitation", quoted from Moi 1985: 112). "For the male psyche, to receive is a dangerous thing. (...) In the Realm of the Proper, the gift is perceived as establishing an inequality – a difference – that is threatening in that it seems to open up an imbalance of power. Thus the act of giving becomes a subtle means of aggression, of exposing the other to the threat of one's own superiority. The woman, however, gives without a thought of return. (...) Cixous adds that woman gives because she doesn't suffer from castration anxiety (fear of ex-propriation, as she often puts it) in the way men do" comments Toril Moi on this question (Moi 1985: 112-113).

Another point that Cixous stresses is "that the inscription of the rhythms and articulation of the mother's body which continue to influence the adult self provides a link to the pre-symbolic union between self and m/other, and so affects the subject's relationship to language, the other, himself and the world" (Sellers 1994: 29). Cixous also celebrates multiplicity that is forever non-identical with itself. "Where the wonder of being several and turmoil is expressed, she does not protect herself at seeing, being, pleasuring in her gift of changeability. I am spacious singing Flesh: onto which is grafted no one knows which I – which masculine or feminine, more or less human but above all living, because changing I" (Cixous, in "Sorties", quoted from Sellers 1994: 45).

In outline, Cixous' idea of écriture féminine appears as an important and promising possibility to debunk the phallogocentric nature of our culture, but when spelled out and put into practice, it is however far from unproblematic. Despite the effort to retain the non-positive delineation of women's writing, her project "is riddled with contradictions: every time a Derridean idea is evoked, it is opposed and undercut by a vision of woman's writing steeped in the very metaphysics of presence she claims she is out to unmask," Toril Moi observes (Moi 1985: 110). The notion of women's writing that Cixous offers turns out to be "no less than a lyrical, euphoric evocation of the essential bond between feminine writing and the mother as source and origin of the voice to be heard in all female texts. Femininity in writing can be discerned in a privileging of the voice: 'writing and voice (...) are woven together' (La Jeune Née, 170). The speaking woman is entirely her voice: 'She physically materialises what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body (...) The Voice, a song before the Law, before the breath was split by the symbolic, reappropriated into language under the authority that separates'" (Cixous, The Laugh of Medusa, 251/44, La Jeune Née, 170, 172, quoted from Moi 1985: 114). On this, Moi further comments: "Fundamentally contradictory, Cixous's theory of writing and femininity shifts back and forth from a Derridean emphasis on textuality as difference to a full-blown metaphysical account of writing as voice, presence and origin. (...) In her eagerness to appropriate imagination and the pleasure principle for women, Cixous seems in danger of playing directly into the hands of the very patriarchal ideology she denounces" (Moi 1985: 121, 123). I share Moi's discomfort about the fact that

Cixous' concept of writing as "ecstatic self-expression casts the individual as supremely capable of liberating herself back into union with the primeval mother" and that writing for Cixous after all is "always in some sense a libidinal object or act" (Moi 1985: 125, 126). Thus although Cixous strives cautiously to avoid the traps of static binary oppositions, positive definitions and fixed categories, unfortunately she is not always successful in this endeavour. However important Cixous' theoretical texts have been for the evolution of the very idea of an alternative, dissenting voice countering hegemonic discourses of logocentrism, I can say from the outset that in many respects I perceive her project as intrinsically problematic.

2.2 A woman that cannot be named: Irigaray

> As opposed to possible essentialist expectations, the works of Luce Irigaray show quite clearly that the very notion of women's writing is by no means self-evident and a priori guaranteed. As Elisabeth Grosz observes, "Irigaray does not aim to create a new women's language. Her project, rather, is to utilize already existing systems of meaning or signification, to exceed or overflow the oppositional structures and hierarchizing procedures of phallocentric texts. She stresses their possibilities of ambiguity (...) She refuses the 'either / or' logic of dichotomous models by presenting the feminine as a mode of occupying both alternatives, exerting a 'both / and' logic difference in its place. To speak as woman is already to defy the monologism of discursive domination under phallocentrism" (Grosz 1990: 176). Compared to Cixous's approach, Irigaray clearly goes even further in her insistence on that women's identity and means of expression are that of indirect negativity or a masquerade within the confines of the metaphysics of logocentrism. Commenting on Irigaray in the Derridean vein, Toril Moi observes that "it is impossible to produce new concepts untainted by the metaphysics of presence. (...) Deconstruction (...) is in other words self-confessedly parasitic upon the metaphysical discourses it is out to subvert. It follows that any attempt to formulate a general theory of femininity will be metaphysical. This is precisely Irigaray's dilemma: having shown that so far femininity has been produced exclusively in relation to the logic of the Same,

she falls for the temptation to produce her own positive theory of femininity. But, as we have seen, to define 'woman' is necessarily to essentialize her" (Moi 1985: 139). Thus, instead of promoting the emancipative rights to equality, Irigaray – seemingly paradoxically – starts with pointing out the fact and the ways in which a woman is systematically absent from our culture, its representations and hegemonic discourses:

> The female difference is perceived as an absence or negation of the male norm. (...) In our culture, woman is outside representation: 'The feminine has consequently had to be deciphered as forbidden, in between signs, between the realised meanings, between the lines' (...) Western philosophical discourse is incapable of representing femininity/woman other than as the negative of the reflection" (*Spéculum de l'autre femme*, 20, quoted from Moi 1985: 132). [...] Woman is not only the Other, as Simone de Beauvoir discovered, but is quite specifically man's Other: his negative or mirror-image. This is why Irigaray claims that patriarchal discourse situates woman outside representation: she is absence, negativity, the dark continent, or at best a lesser man (Moi 1985: 133). [...] Subjectivity is denied to women, Irigaray claims, and this exclusion guarantees the constitution of relatively stable objects for the (specularizing) subject. (...) Without such a non-subjective foundation, Irigaray argues, the subject would not be able to construct itself at all. The blindspot of the master thinker's is always woman; exiled from representation, she constitutes the ground on which the theorist erects his specular constructs (...) (Moi 1985: 136).

However, Moi is far from being at ease with the whole of Irigary's attempt to theorise woman. Moi is particularly worried that Irigaray's "mimicry of the patriarchal equation between woman and fluids (woman as the life-giving sea, as the source of blood, milk and amniotic fluid...) only succeeds in reinforcing the patriarchal discourse. This failure is due to her figuring of fluidity as a positive alternative to the depreciating scopophilic constructions of the patriarchs. The mimicry fails because it ceases to be perceived as such: it is no longer merely a mockery of the absurdities of the male, but a perfect reproduction of the logic of the Same. When the quotation marks, so to speak, are no longer apparent, Irigaray falls into the very essentialist trap of defining woman that she set out to avoid" (Moi

1985: 142). For an alternative approach that would manage to avoid the essentializing traps of the positive naming that women writing could be, Moi turns to a consideration of Julia Kristeva.

2.3 Interdependencies of Semiotic and Symbolic: Kristeva

Kristeva was one of the scholars who marked a shift from the static structuralist concept of language towards a more processional, context-bound idea of text as discourse taking place in a particular pragmatic, social situation. Indeed, she was quite radical in de-centring the homogeneous character of the text as a closed, self-contained unit by stressing the inherent intertextual nature of any text. Moi remarks that unlike within the prevailing tradition of linguistics, for Kristeva, language is "a complex signifying process rather than a monolithic system" (Moi 1985: 150). "Kristeva has coined the concept of intertextuality to indicate how one or more systems of signs are transposed into others," Moi writes (Moi 1985: 154). Kristeva's project is also strongly embedded in that tradition of thinking which has taken a critical stance to the intellectual legacy that has based itself on the (tacit) assumption of a transcendental or Cartesian ego that has served as a founding epistemological element guaranteeing a perceived identity and coherence of European culture and its signifying practices. "Without the divided, decentred, overdetermined and differential notion of the subject proposed by these thinkers [i.e. Marx, Freud, Nietzsche; J.M.] Kristevan semiotics is unthinkable," writes Toril Moi (Moi 1985: 150).

As is the case with Jacques Derrida, in Kristeva, too, we find that there is stress on the difficulties of representing woman on the one hand, and the difficulties of finding a language of her own on the other. This is to be seen in Julia Kristeva's book *Revolution in Poetic Language* (originally 1974). Kristeva refuses to define what woman is. Woman "can only exist negatively, as it were, through her refusal of that which is given: 'I therefore understand by "woman" that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies'" ("La femme" 1974: 21, quoted from Moi 1985: 163). Kristeva thus divests her argument of the notions of masculine and feminine, arguing that the actual process of establishing identity takes place in the tension between the semiotic

and the symbolic, before the notions of male and female have emerged. Kenneth Ruthven points out the differences between the Lacanian and the Kristevan approach. For Lacan – since "femininity is a construct effected in language, and language exists (according to Lacan's system) only in the paternal Symbolic – women end up losers no matter what subject position they adopt, for they can only be either pseudo-males or marginalised females" (Ruthven 1984: 98). However, "the advantage for women in Kristeva's system is that it places le sémiotique and the Symbolic not in an order of supercession (such that the first has to be abandoned before the second can be attained) but in an order of interaction. Interplay between le sémiotique and the Symbolic constitutes the subject in process, which means that the chora can never be eliminated, no matter how much it is repressed" (ibidem). The important factor is that "the process [Kristeva] describes is not female specific, because people who are biologically male are capable of taking up a feminine subject position in the Symbolic. From Kristeva's position, therefore, it would be somewhat naive to conceive of the relationship between men and women as oppositional, for if women can be 'masculine' and men 'feminine' in negotiating the transaction between le sémiotique and the Symbolic, there is no point in isolating 'women' as a special category on biological grounds" (Ruthven 1984: 98-99). Toril Moi comments: "it is evident that for Julia Kristeva it is not the biological sex of a person, but the subject position she or he takes up, that determines their revolutionary potential" (Moi 1985: 12).

Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and the symbolic can thus help to answer the question whether women's writing is to be necessarily ascribed to women exclusively. However paradoxical it might appear, it is quite clear that on several grounds, Kristeva rejects the idea that women's writing is inherently female or feminine. Firstly, the term "women's writing" is by no means based either on the sexual or even gender difference, but on the position in the discursive formation, on the way an author relates to language and the prevailing discursive practice. "It is not, apparently, the empirical sex of the author that matters, but the kind of writing at stake" (Moi 1985: 108). For her, the idea of women's writing has much more to do with the attitude to language, with "marginality, subversion and dissidence" (Moi 1985: 164) than with gender identity.

Secondly, women's writing cannot be a matter of sex or gender, since it is a matter of relating and accessing a pre-symbolic, where the very notion of identity has not been yet established, let alone the sexual difference. Kristeva's "theory of the constitution of the subject and the signifying process is mostly concerned with developments in the pre-Oedipal phase where sexual difference does not exist. (...) The question of difference only becomes relevant at the point of entry into the symbolic order" (Moi 1985: 164).

Thirdly, the concept of women's writing as a space or a sphere of being in touch with semiotic weakens the gender division even more for the following reason. As Toril Moi points out, in the process of the subject's constitution, there are two options for both girls and boys: "mother-identification, which will intensify the pre-Oedipal components of the woman's psyche and render her marginal to the symbolic order, or father-identification, which will create a woman who will derive her identity from the same symbolic order" (Moi 1985: 164). Identifying with semiotic, with the pre-Oedipal Mother figure, does not mean, however, entering into the sphere of some sort of essential feminine. For it is true that "the fluid motility of the semiotic is indeed associated with the pre-Oedipal phase, and therefore with the pre-Oedipal mother", but the pre-Oedipal mother as a figure encompasses both masculinity and femininity. "This fantasmatic figure, which looms as large for baby boys as for baby girls, cannot (...) be reduced to an example of 'femininity', for the simple reason that the opposition between feminine and masculine does not exist in pre-Oedipality. (...) Any strengthening of the semiotic, which knows no sexual difference, must therefore lead to a weakening of traditional gender divisions, and not at all to a reinforcement of traditional notions of 'femininity'" (Moi 1985: 165).

Nonetheless, there surely are reasons for linking the subversive types of writing with femininity, even though this type of femininity is understood quite specifically by Kristeva. As Toril Moi points out,

> femininity and the semiotic do, however, have one thing in common: their marginality. As the feminine is defined as marginal under patriarchy, so the semiotic is marginal to language (...) If 'femininity' has a definition at all in Kristevan terms, it is simply (...) as 'that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order'. This relational 'definition' is as shifting as the various forms of patriarchy itself, and allows her to argue that men can also be constructed as marginal by the symbolic

> order, as her analyses of male avant-garde artists (Joyce, Céline, Artaud, Mallarmé, Lautréamont) have shown. (...) Kristeva's emphasis on marginality allows us to view this repression of the feminine in terms of positionality rather than of essences" (...) If patriarchy sees women as occupying a marginal position within the symbolic order, then it can construe them as the limit or borderline of that order. From a phallocentric point of view, women will then come to represent the necessary frontier between man and chaos. (...) Women seen as the limit of the symbolic order will in other words share in the disconcerting properties of all frontiers: they will be neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown (Moi 1985: 166-167).

In order to understand what Kristeva sees as the subversive potential of women's writing, it is necessary to take a closer look at her concept of the semiotic – symbolic couple. For Kristeva, signifying practices are constituted by the interaction and tension between two principles: the semiotic (pre-Oedipal basic pulsions) and the symbolic (the sphere of language based on sets of differences and delineated objects). Moi writes that for Kristeva, "signifiance is a question of positioning. The semiotic continuum must be split if signification is to be produced. This splitting of the semiotic chora is the thetic (from thesis) phase and it enables the subject to attribute differences and thus signification to what was the ceaseless heterogeneity of chora. (...) Once the subject has entered into the Symbolic Order, the chora will be more or less successfully repressed and can be perceived only as pulsional pressure on symbolic language: as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences in the symbolic language" (Moi 1985: 162).

Thus Kristeva locates the disruptive and subversive potential of writing into the nexus of the unconscious urges of the semiotic and symbolic order (the order of Father by Lacan). For Kristeva, the inevitably processional nature of any subversive act of writing comes down to the nature of the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic, which is one of constant tension, mutual interdependency and fragile stability. The disruptive forces of the semiotic, its undifferentiated and undifferentiating continuity with the maternal body and its links with unconscious urges can only manifest themselves indirectly, always already through the order of the symbolic, which they destabilize and disturb, but never completely overthrow. The subversive semiotic can only manifest itself as ruptures in the symbolic order, never as a positive quality (referring to the qualities of a biological sex). Toril Moi

sums up the reasons why the semiotic cannot present itself as a quality which could be pointed at and can only speak in the code of a negativity and indirect manifestations as follows. "(...) if these unconscious pulsations [spasmodic force of the unconscious linking an individual to pre-Oedipal mother-figure] were to take over the subject entirely, the subject would fall back into pre-Oedipal or imaginary chaos and develop some form of mental illness. The subject whose language lets such forces disrupt the symbolic order, in other words, is also the subject who runs the greater risk of lapsing into madness (Moi 1985: 11). The Kristevan approach shows quite distinctly how difficult and far from self-evident the notion of women's writing indeed is. I shall return to a discussion of the paradoxes and irreducible tensions later when I come to comment on the possible textual devices in women's writing.

2.4 A "woman" in the regime of quotation marks: Derrida

The prime aim of this chapter is to consider Derrida's exposition of the issues of woman's identity (namely in connection with Nietzsche's abundant metaphors for a woman), which I hope will, at least indirectly, illuminate the features of negativity, positionality and the shifting nature of woman's writing as understood in this thesis.

In his short book *Spurs. Nietzsches's style*, Derrida examines among others the ambivalent and diverse nature of Nietzsche's motif of a woman figure recurrently appearing in Nietzsche's books (Joyful Wisdom, Beyond Good and Evil, Twilight of Idols). Derrida is quite fond of this often contradictory metaphor used by Nietzsche, basically because it ultimately defies the metaphysics of presence, the phenomenon upon which Western philosophical and intellectual tradition essentially relies (as Derrida disclosed and convincingly described, namely in his critical analysis of the meaning of language). What interests me, as far as my argument is concerned, is that within the logic of Derrida's reading of Nietzsche, there cannot be posed any essence or truth of femininity of womanliness which women's writing could draw on. On the contrary, for Derrida, woman is principally inaccessible, she epitomises a figure of constant deferral. Here (as well as in one of the titles below) I use the word "figure" both in the sense of a personal identity and as a rhetorical and cognitive device. Derrida claims that "there is no such thing as the truth of woman, but that is because this abyssal divergence of the truth, this non-truth is the "truth". Woman is a name of

this non-truth of truth" (Derrida 1991b: 359). "That which will not be taken in (by) truth is – *feminine*, which one must not hasten to translate by femininity, woman's femininity, feminine sexuality, or by any other essentializing fetishes" (Derrida 1991b: 360).

As opposed to the conventional humanist idea (expressed through the spatial metaphor of depths), Derrida claims there is no essence or truth to be found on the bottom or in the depths of womanliness. For Derrida, woman as truth is the truth of a surface, a veiling. The appeal of the truth is not that it is true, which it is not, but that it is hidden. The penetrating nature of women's writing is that it endlessly glides on the surface of signification. It acknowledges its true face, but the thing is there are always already several of these true faces, identities, positions. "Woman, truth, is scepticism and veiling dissimulation (...)" Derrida quotes passages from Nietzsche's *Joyful Wisdom, (64, Sceptics and also Introduction)*: "Women (...) believe in the superficiality of existence as in its essence, and all virtue and profundity is to them only the disguising of this 'truth'" (...) "'Truth' would be but a surface, it would only become profound, naked, and desirable by the effect of a veil – that falls over it (...) But should that veil be suspended or be allowed to fall in a different way, there would be no more truth, or only 'truth' – so written" (Derrida 1991b: 361). "'Women' takes so little interest in truth, she believes in it so little that she is no longer concerned even by the truth as regards herself. It is 'man' who believes that his discourse on woman or truth *concerns* woman – circumvents her. It is "man" who believes in the truth of woman, in woman-truth" (Derrida 1991b: 363). Similarly, we could read this re-valorisation of the traditional dichotomy of surface and lack, superficiality and profundity in Nietzsche's statement from his *Twilight of Idols* (the section "Maxims and Arrows"): "Women are considered deep – why? Because one can never discover any bottom to them. Women are not even shallow" (Nietzsche 1968: 25). In Derrida's view, woman's identity does not reside in some kind of one, secret or profound essence but precisely in the constant displacement of identity, in the constantly changing positions and "masks". (Cf. a famous essay by Joan Riviére „Womanliness as a Masquerade", 1929.) When discussing Derrida's interpretations of Nietzsche's textual strategies (as Derrida has put them forward in his book *Spurs. Nietzsches' Styles,*), Libuše Heczková speaks of the notion of mobile metaphors and says: „The metaphor of a woman as the image of the truth of life (in Nietzsche's

writing) represents the emptying of the meanings that are contained in these very words (life and truth). This constant translating and emptying of these meanings leaves us, as a result, with an empty mask, a mirror without a reflection, a surface." (Heczková 2003: 92).

Ultimately, Derrida locates woman beyond the decidable opposition of truth and non-truth, suspending its validity and installing the regime of quotation marks (like the truth about 'truth' is there is no decidable, singular 'truth'):

> There is no one woman, no one truth in itself about woman in itself: that much he did say, along with the highly diverse typology, the horde of mothers, daughters, sisters, old maids, wives, governesses, prostitutes, virgins, grandmothers, big and little girls. For this very reason, there is no one truth of Nietzsche or of his text. The phrase one reads in *Beyond Good and Evil*, 'These are only – my truths,' which underscores '*meine* Wahrheit sind,' occurs in a paragraph on women. "My truths" implies no doubt that these are not *truths* because they are multiple, variegated, contradictory. There is no one truth in itself, but what is more, even for me, even about me, the truth is plural. (...) There is no truth in itself of sexual difference in itself, of man or woman in itself; on the contrary, the whole ontology, which is the effect of an inspection, appropriation, identification, and verification of identity, presupposes and conceals this undecidability. (Derrida 1991b: 372-3) "(...) the question of woman suspends the decidable opposition of the true and the non-true, from the moment it installs the epochal regime of quotation marks for all concepts belonging to this system of philosophical decidability, once it disqualifies the hermeneutic project that postulates a true meaning of a text and liberates reading from the horizon of the meaning of being or the truth of being (...) (Derrida 1991b: 374).

Derrida's position could be summed up by Nancy Holland's words. "By revealing the structure of difference at the base of any claim to truth or essence, deconstruction also says two things about women: they do not exist *as such* in traditional phallogocentric discourse (which is defined, as Rorty suggests, by their necessary exclusion), but they also do not exist outside that discourse as "women" in any essential or determinate meaning of the term (...) Deconstruction would claim that there is no "true knowledge of women" in either of its (interestingly, systematically ambiguous) meaning" (Holland 1997: 6). That is, firstly, her systematic absence from phallogocentric discourse is a very condition of its functioning; this is a matter

of exclusion, oppression and misrepresentation. Secondly, she resists all attempts to be defined, having its "essence, true identity" unveiled, fixed, defined.

Derrida examines and summarises what the typology of Nietzsche's effectively, deliberately, consciously incongruous, contradicting statements about women could look like and in what sense Nietzsche could be labelled an ultimate "proto-post-feminist":

> Three types of statement, then, three fundamental propositions which are also three positions of value, each stemming from a different place. 1. Woman is condemned, debased, and despised as a figure or power of falsehood. The indictment is thus produced in the name of truth, of dogmatic metaphysics, of the credulous man who puts forward truth and the phallus as his own attributes. The – phallogocentric – texts written from this reactive perspective are very numerous. 2. Woman is condemned and despised as a figure or power of truth, as a philosophical and Christian being, whether because she identifies herself with the truth, or because, at a distance from truth, she continues to play with it as with a fetish, to manipulate it to her advantage. Without believing in it, she remains, through guile and naïveté, within the system and economy of the truth, within the phallogocentric space. (...) Up to this point, woman is twice castration: truth and nontruth. 3. Beyond this double negation, woman is recognized, affirmed as a power of affirmation, dissimulation, as an artist, a dionysiac. (...) In its turn, antifeminism is reversed since it condemned woman only insofar as she was, she answered to man from the two reactive positions (Derrida 1991b: 374).

Derrida contrasts here reactive feminism based on a sheer reversal of male dominance following the phallogocentric logic (which he so strongly disfavours and criticises) with the pro-reactive, affirmative (affirming plurality, heterogeneity, displacement of meaning and truth) approach creating multitude of positions, speaking polyphonically in multitude of languages. However, as Peggy Kamuf points out, it is not the summary itself, but "finally the irreducible plurality of Nietzsche's styles that interests Derrida. Only such a plurality can welcome the advent of an affirmative writing of the feminine, beyond the phallogocentric idea of 'truth'" (Kamuf 1991: 354). In sum, from the Derridean perspective women's writing is a space of constant deferral, displacement, plurality and inherent ambiguity of

meaning: "If style were the man, then writing would be woman" (Derrida 1991b: 361).

3. Destabilising a logocentric discourse: Motifs in writing of five Czech writers

In the preceding chapters, I have been trying to point out the features and aspects, which I find so challenging within the concept of women's writing. At this point, having delimited the space where women writing could be situated, we can now embark on a discussion of the ways the texts of certain Czech writers can contribute to the creation of a possible response to the problems and tasks highlighted in the preceding parts of this thesis. The writing of Milada Součková, Věra Linhartová, Sylvie Richterová, Daniela Hodrová and Bohumil Hrabal will be discussed here. In this part of the thesis, which engages directly with an analysis of the poetics and the writing of these five selected Czech authors, I have decided to proceed as follows. Although all the following chapters deal with the above-mentioned writers, the way information and analysis is distributed will differ. In the first seven shorter chapters I will first address the phenomena, the topics, and the features that all these authors have in common. All the authors will be therefore discussed together, since the problems under discussion are shared by all of them and they form the common denominator in the author's poetics and epistemological positions. Thus, the purpose of these seven shorter chapters is to draw a thematic axis serving as points of departure for determining what non-phallogocentric thinking and writing can be. The last five chapters of the thesis then deal with each individual author separately. (Also the biographical and bibliographical data concerning these authors is to be found there, within the last five chapters.)

First and foremost, however, I would like to tackle the question of the criteria used here for selecting these particular names. Before starting the discussion on the particular features of textual and epistemic procedures that set the selected authors against or outside the phallogocentric discourse, there is also the question of the East-West social and cultural dynamics, which I would like to touch upon briefly. An objection might be raised that the authors discussed here have been handpicked deliberately to fit the pre-given concepts as defined by Western feminist theories.

While clearly there has been a considerable time lag in the dynamics of the development of the social and economic domains in the Czech Republic when compared with such development in the West, a similar time-lag has not occurred within the artistic and literary scene. In this sphere, development has been parallel to the evolution of artistic tendencies and styles in the West.[11] That is why the crucial issues of the post-modern debate are present, although tacitly and indirectly, in the writing of the authors discussed. (We should note that the kind of reflections we find in literary texts are missing from the debate in the social domain.) I hold that the authors discussed here are perfectly fit to be read and analysed in the context of post-modernism without being forcibly adjusted to fit the parameters defining the post-modern debate.

The reason why I have chosen to write about these particular authors is twofold. Despite certain inner differences and distinctions between them (differences quite often overlooked by Czech literary criticism), these authors form a specific strand of writing, poetics and, arguably, a kind of similar (although in several respects differentiated) Weltanschauung. "Hodrová retraces the setting of her childhood and, like Richterová before her, searches for the *place perdue*. (...) They all share a quest for an introspective narrative and narrated subject" remarks Ambros (Ambros 2001: 216). Also what Büchler labels as "the inclination towards non-causal, collage-like narrative" (Büchler 1998: 16) is shared by all of them (particularly it stands out in the writing of Daniela Hodrová). Besides the artistic features and leanings, they also have certain biographical circumstances in common. They all share a profound interest and expertise in both the theory and history of European (and in the case of Součková and Linhartová even non-European) literatures, they are all well versed in contemporary philosophy and art, pursued successful academic careers and, last but not least, share (with the exception of Daniela Hodrová, who nonetheless studied Russian and French and travels abroad) an experience of living in exile, Součková in USA, Linhartová in France, Richterová

[11] Cf. for example the synchronous advent of the Modernist and avant-garde movements such as expressionism, cubism, futurism, surrealism, existentialism, theatre of absurd in the East and West. Speaking of parallels in artistic development, however, is not to put it in terms of the metaphor of "keeping the pace" with the West etc. Not only would such an assertion imply a disputable if not false dichotomy between a centre and a periphery, but would lead into a far too complex a debate on the issues of knowledge transfer, influence, mediation etc., a debate that is far beyond the scope of this thesis.

in Italy. (No need to mention that being immersed in a different language environment and experiencing one's mother tongue as something that is not self-evident, have enhanced and deepened certain aspects of their attitude towards language as a means of thinking and identity preserving.) There also exist more direct personal or academic links, e.g. both Richterová and Hodrová have analysed and interpreted Linhartová's writing (Richterová 1986, Hodrová 1992, among others), Hodrová's husband Karel Milota, a Czech novelist, was one of those rediscovering the nearly lost legacy of Milada Součková's oeuvre.

The prime motive for choosing these authors, however, lies elsewhere. In the previous chapters I have tried to present conceptions which dwell on the complicated nature of language-subjectivity relationship, and which hold that language as the very horizon of our consciousness, experience and comprehension of reality can by no means be crossed in some straightforward way. Any attempt to express oneself without a language and its semiotic and discursive categories would be inevitably futile. Thus, the question about literature's very capability to resist, contest and subvert the overall dominance of phallo-logo-centric discourse, the question about the potential transgressive nature of women's writing is a constantly present doubt running throughout this thesis. The major question directing our line of inquiry then is by what means the literary texts we are discussing here challenge the dominant phallogocentric discourse. The question as such raises a number of difficult doubts. I have already sketched them in the Introduction and in the preceding, theoretical parts of this thesis. Let me repeat at least couple of them in short here once more: Is there any space whatsoever provided within the tradition of phallocentric literary discourse? Would not entering into this sort of discourse mean an undesired and inevitable submission to the status quo? Does the sheer possibility of transcending the phallogocentric discourse exist? Are we not unavoidably "imprisoned" in such an articulation of reality that is allowed and demarcated by a particular discursive formation? The reason why I have chosen to analyse these particular authors is that their writing is of the sort, which – however implicitly and indirectly – reflects and responds to these issues and dilemmas.

Had we wished to take a reversed point of view and start with particular authors, our initial approach would have been to situate these authors in a multilayered field delineated by such terms as: discourse, gender, knowledge, literary

text, that is in the space outlined by all the theories and concepts presented in the previous parts of our exposition. My primary goal though is to concentrate not only on the narrowly defined artistic qualities or artistic achievements of our chosen authors, but on the specific textual features that predetermine their in/compatibility with the dominant discursive practice. Thus I will be primarily interested in the epistemological consequences brought about by the specific textual strategies employed in this particular type of writing.

Arguably, more "appropriate" candidates could be found to deal with in respect to gender and women's writing issues. To name just a few: Eva Kantůrková, Alexandra Berková, Eda Kriseová, Zuzana Brabcová, Iva Pekárková and others. However, I have opted quite deliberately for different authors who so far have not made any explicit comments on the matters of gender or feminism whatsoever (be it by means of plot, characters, topics, subject matter comments in essays or any other textual or para-textual fora). In my opinion, though, having focused on the aspects I find to lie at the heart of the matter, i.e. the questions of language, subject and identity, the writers discussed in this thesis (Součková, Linhartová, Richterová, Hodrová, Hrabal) represent a considerably more important contribution to the issues of gender, discourse and subjectivity than those who seek to attack the "target" in a rather straightforward way, presenting a seemingly more urgent agenda by means of more or less transparent literary allegories. There is one basic reason why I have decided not to include Berková, Kriseová, Brabcová, Pekárková or Procházková within the scope of this thesis. Quite paradoxically, as these authors tend to speak with their eyes fixed on the targets they are attacking, they – however dissenting they try to be – find themselves in ready-made ideological positions which are not only quite predictable (and thus, at the end of the day, ineffective), but which actually causes them to fall into the same pattern as their very opponents.[12] As a matter of fact, it is this discourse of direct confrontation that makes these texts and their authors such easy prey for the very structures they strive to undermine.[13] Maybe I am facing the danger of falling into the pitfall of a posteriori judgementalism on this

[12] I do not intend to imply here these authors have something in common as far as their ideological and political convictions are concerned, I think however their writing displays some tacit background presumptions about the possibilities and various (straightforward) ways of contesting the dominant ideological and discursive frameworks.

[13] This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.1.5 of the theoretical introduction of the thesis.

issue, however, when explaining why I have not included other Czech female authors, such as Berková, Brabcová, Pekárková or Kriseová in this thesis, one contextual remark has to be added here. When, in the 1990s in the Czech Republic, feminism was stigmatised and equated with "military" "ideological" fundamentalism, "hysterically over-reacting" to allegedly non-existing problems, the decision to try to deal openly with these questions was, in my view, a beneficial and courageous attitude. However, the criticism of the problems such as a stereotypical perception of gender roles and the issues of inequality and oppression was a little too direct, so that it actually hindered the potential of these authors properly to question the discursive patterns of the hegemonic culture. On the other hand, the authors discussed in this thesis associated themselves with no explicit social agenda, but the focus of their work on the issues of the limits of linguistic and discursive articulation of reality and the fragmented, multiple subjectivity have proven, in my view, to be a much more effective subversion of the as yet unquestioned certainties of the dominant phallogocentric culture. This "disinterested" stance actually enabled these authors to focus on different set of questions that ultimately have turned out to be more fundamentally subversive towards the patriarchal logic of phallogocentrism. Arguably the more unintended the consequences of their writing, the more profound they have been.

None of the authors I focus on in this thesis have preoccupied themselves with the feminist agenda, and all – apart from Součková, who as a significant author has been recognised only recently – have been consistently read and assessed mainly within the context of experimental and existential fiction of the 1960's and 1970's.[14] They themselves were influenced primarily by the "new" novel (Alain Robbe-Grillet, Natalie Sarraut, Michel Butor; this applies most of all to Věra Linhartová), modern semiotics (Umberto Eco, Yury Lotman, Mikhail Bakhtin; which is mostly Daniela Hodrová's case) and structuralism and linguistics (Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jan Mukařovský, with whom Sylvie Richterová has affinities). What I find particularly appealing and promising is thus the nature of their writing as well as a sort of epistemological stance. Their intellectual precision, sobriety and a profound

[14] Although all Daniela Hodrová's works of fiction were published only after 1989, they had been written during the late 70's and early 80's and thus belong to that context rather than to the literary context of 90's.

knowledge of the European literary tradition and canon – to which they assume an ambivalent, partly very fond, partly very subversive, non-canonical stance – contrasts with their deeply ingrained scepticism about the possibility of rational, organised, systematic usage of language in exploring, managing and controlling conditions of a post-liberal, post-humanist and post-modern reality.

The principal task I would like to undertake here is to demonstrate that it is equally conceivable and fruitful to scrutinise their writing in the context of the post-modernist paradigm, locating it amid these complex and intricate keywords of discourse, gender, body, power, knowledge, narration and textuality. In this regard the concept of women's writing as understood here does not work with the idea of expression or signification through different bodily, libidinal economy, as it has been suggested by Cixous.[15] I do not see women's writing as an easy way out of the enclosure presented by the phallogocentric discourse. For firstly, Cixous' concept of women's writing as put forward in *The Laugh of Medusa*_seems to me to be far too prone to relapse into the metaphysics of the presence and the essentialist approach she tries to avoid, and secondly, the role of the inevitable discursive mediation between the semiotic and the symbolic, the real and the imaginary, is omitted here. Besides, Cixous' unreserved reliance on the realm of the imaginary seems to me dubious when compared to Lacan's or Kristeva's views on the inevitable relationship and tension between the real and the imaginary or the symbolic and the semiotic. Writing (through) your libidinal economy and desire seems to disagree with the Lacanian concept of desire, which in itself is formed by the very process of constant displacement. Instead of this approach of writing the body, I see the strength in its potential to disrupt, unbalance and question the seemingly natural, smooth, homogeneous surface of a logocentric discourse. Women's writing reveals the speaking subject as always speaking from a certain epistemic position, as always located within a particular narrative form, genre and tradition. Women's writing makes the linguistic mediation and structuring visible. The effort to escape language, the effort to escape the Symbolic, which enables one to articulate his or her perception of reality, is doomed. In Linhartová's *Prostor k rozlišení* we read: "It is true, that it is language that is my instrument, but it is not quite clear, whether it is me

[15] See Chapter 2.1 for a discussion on Cixous' concept of writing (through) the body.

who is in control of the language, or whether it is the language that controls me. For this is the privilege of omnipotence to inculcate in its subjects the fallacious illusion of having an indivisible share of power and control, which in fact they are completely subjected to. [Je pravda, že mým nástrojem je řeč, ale není tak zcela jisto, vedu-li řeč já, nebo ona vede mne. Protože taková je výsada všemohoucnosti, že vnuká podřízeným klamné zdání, jako by oni sami měli nedílnou účast na moci a vládě, které ve skutečnosti neomezeně podléhají]" (Linhartová 1965: 165, quoted from Kosková 1987: 194).[16]

One cannot escape language; one can, however, reveal and make visible its formative, structuring functions with their hegemonic claim to communicate one's experience within pre-given, sanctioned concepts, categories, genres. This attitude also accounts for the intertextual procedures and games with various ironically opposed narrative masks and voices in the writing of all the authors discussed here.

3.1 The interplay of signifiers and the instability of the signifying processes

As I have already mentioned above, in my view it would be misleading to seek to uncover some essential women's writing qualities within women's writing. I do not see an actual alternative to the phallogocentric discourse in merely relying on an alleged essential Difference revived in women's writing, nor in embarking on overt and explicit attacks on injustices within a patriarchal society. What represents a much more grave and profound subversive threat to phallogocentrism, I think, is the questioning of the very basic conceptual categories of the phallogocentric discourse. Such a questioning can take various forms. It can reside in the unstoppable interplay of signifiers, in the flight from a definite identity, from fixed, rigid meanings and disciplined, authoritative discursive practice, in the sort of writing that systematically lacks a homogenous, cohesive, straight-forward, point-driven logic of phallogocentric narratives.[17] Thus, instead of penetrating some supposedly deeply

[16] Translation Jan Matonoha.

[17] This is not to say that women's writing would stand against rational, logical and coherent thinking, promoting some irrationality. (It often displays patterns of elaborate and strict rational reasoning, which however is ultimately aimed at subverting the pretence of a perfectly organised whole; this is often present in Linhartová's and Richterová's writings.) The point is that women's writing does not directly engage with the rational/irrational, situating itself apart from the very dichotomy. It questions the sort of thinking and writing that is driven by the urge to force the elements of reality into neatly

hidden, innermost core of a female identity, or a loud proclamation of an ideological, political and personal agenda, in the texts discussed here we are confronted with something far less conspicuous, but in my opinion ultimately more profound. Namely, we are confronted with the phenomenon of a constant deferral of meaning, with an ongoing, complex play of signifiers on the surfaces, with a never-ending process of narration, with an unfinished, permanently unaccomplished interpretations. On the level of the plot, this manifests itself in the absence of any distinct point or message or particular conclusion; the plot is always unfinished.[18] This is not to say that the departure from a linear narrative as displayed in these texts simply promotes the poetics of experimental writing as opposed to the poetics of realistic fiction. The point is that – in contrast to the unifying and homogenising drives of phallogocentric discourse – these texts are not willing to silence and erase a particular heterogeneity or any tensions that occur both on the level of our encounters with reality and on the level of our (narrative) accounts of that reality. On the first level, this tension resides in a constant and continual clashing between unpredictable, crude reality and any discursive patterns one might impose upon it (thus erasing its inherent complexity) so as to make it intelligible and manageable. Nietzsche's quip from his *Twilight of Idols* (section "Maxims and Arrows") could be cited in this context: "I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity" (Nietzsche 1968: 25). Nietzsche appears to be criticising here a kind of epistemological violence one exercises on a dynamic, messy and undifferentiated reality by imposing upon it rigid, clear-cut categories. On the second level (that of narration), correspondingly, there is an inherent tension between the tendency to a unified, coherent, "legible" structure of a text, and the forces disrupting an overall semantic intention unifying the text. These forces are of various origins, stemming

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organised categories while effacing their randomness and contradictions. The feminist critique belongs to the wider intellectual movement that has fundamentally questioned the seemingly self-evident grounds of European rationality and objectivity (Thomas Kuhn, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard). Women's writing emphasises the fact that our rational intellect is not self-sufficient, autonomous, all controlling, unconditioned and self-governing. It reveals there are plenty of other instances influencing and conditioning our allegedly sovereign intellectual capacities, such as an always already incoherent and selective memory (essential for welding together our personal identity), the subconscious and the dream, the collective memory. The women's writing examined here explores the "bodily level" of our intellect.

[18] To the idea of a deferral of an ultimate meaning and the play of eluding signifiers on the surface confer also Nietzsche's assessment of an idea of a surface and Joan Riviere's idea of femininity as a

partly from the unconsciousness, from a confrontation with the raw, unmanageable material of reality and the inherent drives and tendencies operating within the text itself. "According to Irigaray (*The Sex Which Is Not One*, 1977), we cannot leap outside phallogocentrism, nor are we outside by virtue of being 'women'. But we can practice difference. (...) The practice of difference occurs in écriture féminine: symbolic codes, punning, multiple meanings, lacking closure, and linear structure" (Dallery 1989: 63). Moi says that "that in her own textual practice, Woolf exposes the way in which language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning. Echoing Derrida's writing, Moi points out that experience and reality are accessible only through a language, in which, however, there is "no final element, no fundamental unit, no transcendental signified that is meaningful in itself and thus escapes the ceaseless interplay of linguistic deferral and difference. The free play of signifiers will never yield a final, unified meaning that in turn might ground and explain all the others" (Moi 1985: 9). The nature of language as a constant play of signifiers and the way discourse conceals, erases, silences its own erosion, instability, decomposition and arbitrariness are best revealed in the writing of Součková, Linhartová, Richterová and these two principles could be labelled as the major driving force of their narrative's poetics.

The plurality of meaning, the flow of text uncontrolled and not organised by some pivotal axis or fixed point, can be derived from a psychoanalytical account of female subjectivity, or rather from a critical reassessment of such an account. Let us be reminded again of Irigaray's proclamation: "'Woman has sex organs just about everywhere'. Woman's sexuality is not one, but two, or even plural, the multiplicity of sexualized zones spread across the body: 'She is neither one nor two, she cannot strictly speaking be determined as one person or two. She renders any definition inadequate. Moreover, she has no proper name' (...) 'one can say that the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle than is imagined'" (Irigaray *The Sex Which Is Not One*, quoted from Dallery 1989: 55). Relying on psychoanalytic models, feminist theory argues

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masquerade – there is no true inner core, but rather a multitude of various assumed positions and roles.

that "women may have more access to a pre-Oedipal mother-child fusion that manifests itself in repetitive, rhythmic, untraditional discourse (Kristeva); or that woman's 'diversified' and complex sexual experience operates in an anti-logical way, which can be reflected in a language that might seem "incoherent" by conventional standards (Irigaray)" (Conboy 1997: 54). The idea of the language functioning as a dynamic play of displaced meanings could be further completed by Lacanian theory of unconsciousness and desire. "Lacan's famous statement 'The unconscious is structured like a language' contains an important insight into the nature of desire: for Lacan, desire 'behaves' in precisely the same way as language: it moves ceaselessly on from object to object or from signifier to signifier, and will never find full and present satisfaction just as meaning can never be seized as full presence. (...) There can be no final satisfaction of our desire since there is no final signifier or object that can be that which has been lost forever (the imaginary harmony with the mother and the world)" (Moi 1985: 101). I shall return to this Lacanian model of desire later when discussing Richterová's autobiographical novel *Slabikář otcovského jazyka* (The Primer of the Father Tongue). (Needless to say the Lacanian idea of the Law of the Father will be also pertinent for interpreting this particular text by Richterová.)

When speaking of the plurality of meaning produced within the discourse of women's writing, perhaps one should not even use the term "plurality", as there is the idea of measurable quantity implied within this notion. Yet given the idea of a radically different nature of the female bodily and libidinal economy as an expenditure without spending and a loss (as well as without a claim for a return and gain), maybe one should rather talk of inherent abundance, multitude of possible meanings and lines of interpretation. Cf. here the Kristevan notion of jouissance, which – as Dallery says quoting Jane Gallop – "does not come in quantifiable units: 'You can have one or multiple orgasms. They are quantifiable, delimitable. You cannot have one jouissance and there is no plural (Gallop "Irigaray's Body Politic." *Romantic Review* 74, quoted from Dallery 1989: 56).

When examining the strategies by which the literary texts examined here disclose the artificial nature of narratives, unmask the act of imposing conceptual and narrative schemes onto an essentially fused, chaotic, undistinguished reality and foreground the awareness of textuality, we find out they tend to proceed basically in

two ways – one of them being a deconstruction of a traditional narrative (Linhartová, Richterová), the other one leaning towards an ironic, textual game with traditional narratives (Součková, Hodrová).

3.2 Speaking through silences of discourse

Moi points out that Cixous'

> mythical and biblical allusions are often accompanied by – or interspersed with – oceanic water imagery, evoking the endless pleasures of the polymorphously perverse child. (...) For Cixous, as for countless mythologies, water is the feminine par excellence; the closure of the mythical world contains and reflects the comforting security of the mother's womb. It is within this space that Cixous's speaking subject is free to move from one subject position to another, or to merge oceanically with world. Her vision of female writing is in this sense firmly located within the closure of the Lacanian Imaginary: a space in which all difference has been abolished (Moi 1985: 117).

I am mentioning here this Cixous' idea of oceanic imagery basically to illustrate why I consider thinking to be a rather ambivalent impetus for the concept of women's writing which I am trying to put forward here. For instance, as opposed to Cixous' extolling of generous, oceanic, pre-symbolic, and bodily nature of women's expression, the texts of Linhartová and Richterová are populated with numerous tensions, with strenuous struggles with a symbolic order. In contrast to Cixous' optimistic assessment of woman's language and imagery, the authors analysed here display rather a strong distrust of language, which is perceived in its inherent intertextual dimension, inevitably burdened with sediments of both cultural memory and ideology. The texts of Milada Součková and Věra Linhartová assume a highly suspicious, sceptical, ironic and detached attitude to the narrative possibilities presented by the established, conventional, linear and metonymic literary discourse. As Veronika Ambros comments, "Hodrová, (...) Richterová and Linhartová each represents a different type of new palimpsest, that is, a correlation of old and new texts which undermine literary conventions" (Ambros 2001: 217).

In the context of Derrida's philosophy, Nancy Holland comments on the fundamental feature of hegemonic phallogocentric discourse: "traditional (...) texts (...) use hierarchical oppositions to subordinate or exclude – indeterminacy in all its

forms, mystery, randomness, chaos, Nature, the body, emotion, absolute difference, infinite deferral and constant substitution – in two words, difference and Woman" (Holland 1997: 6). If we all are always already located within the phallogocentric discourse that is defined by the resistance to the instabilities of constantly differing meaning and the incalculable image of Woman, is not the only thinkable and acceptable option for women to remain silent? The question might be posed then, what are the ways these texts remain silent, i.e. inaccessible, unreadable within the framework of a phallogocentric discourse? Kristeva and Irigaray could offer here valuable suggestions. Since – as Kristeva argues in her model of language and identity constitution – the semiotic can never take over the symbolic, the question is how the semiotic can manifest itself. Kristeva's answer to this is that the semiotic makes itself perceptible inevitably in or through the means of the symbolic, namely through a disruption of the symbolic order. "In textual terms, the semiotic translates itself as a negativity masking the death-drive, which Kristeva sees as perhaps the most fundamental semiotic pulsion. The poem's negativity is then analysable as a series of ruptures, absences and breaks in the symbolic language" (Moi 1985: 170). The means by which women's writing can manifest themselves and could be subversive to the hegemonic discourse thus do not reside in some positive qualities that could be pointed to as being some sort of essentials. On the contrary, they arise from the negativity, from the cracks and fissures in the phallogocentric discourse, from the indirect processes of disrupting and destabilising the symbolic order.

Commenting on Irigaray's *Speculum of the other woman* (1974) Moi suggests that "one way of disrupting patriarchal logic in this way is through mimeticism, or the mimicry of male discourse" (Moi 1985: 140). Moi assesses Irigaray's usage of the academic apparatus of a doctoral thesis as an ironic gesture and argues that Irigaray's "impeccably theoretical discourse is displaced and relocated as a witty parody of patriarchal modes of argument. (...) if her [woman's] discourse is to be perceived as anything other than incomprehensible chatter, she must copy male discourse. The feminine can thus only be read in the blank spaces left between the signs and lines of her own mimicry" (Moi 1985: 140). Femininity can only be accessed through absence, negative presence, through the unsaid, the blank space between the fragments of the male discourse that women's writing ironically and wittily mimes and parodies. This very much applies to the writing of Milada

Součková, particularly in terms of the established, recognised genres she uses and ironically plays with, as well as to Věra Linhartová, whose highly demanding, intellectual, abstract contemplation underlined by precise, exact, sober syntax runs up against the very frontier of language and thinking, collapsing under its own weight.

3.3 The bodies beyond the skin; the unstable interfaces

The texts analysed in the thesis call the problem of the body into consideration. Naturally they by no means present us with the idea of some archetypal wisdom inherent in the female body or with a necessity to write in some supposedly deep, dark, archetypal, mythic, impenetrable bodily language. Such an understanding of women's writing, relying ultimately upon stereotypical essentialist positions would be fundamentally misleading. The topic of the body manifests itself in these texts in a profoundly different way. These texts challenge the idea of a unified, self-governing Self in favour of a model of the Self as a space delineated, defined and structured by discursive parameters projected onto its outer surface, which having folded has itself become what we perceive as the very inner core of the Self. They point out the decisive role of discourse for the way we organise our thinking and discipline our behaviour. They reveal discourse as " the body of our thinking",

the paradoxical reversal when an outside has become an inside, i.e. the social rules, narratives, rituals, processes of interpellation have been internalised to the extent we can no longer recognise its discursive origin and nature. In this sense the notion of body can be claimed to have a textual dimension.[19] As Arleen Dallery concisely puts it, "woman's body is always mediated by language; the human body is a text, a sign, not just a piece of fleshy matter" (Dallery 1989: 54).

Speaking of the body as a text (or in similarly metaphorical terms) is not to say however that the body is simply a cultural, immaterial construct. The difficult question of the body presents us with an essentially tensed and unstable relation between the Self on the one hand, and societal rules and codes projected onto it on the other. A struggle between the irreducible Otherness of an individual and the social forces, narratives, codes that are projected onto it, results in various conflicts.

[19] For a detailed discussion on the Foucauldian concept of discursive formation of the body and the Self see the first chapter of this thesis.

These conflicts play themselves out either "outside" (in societal interaction), "inside" (within the psychic universe of the individual), or – most importantly – on the frontier, the interface between the two, i.e. on the level of a body that is both lived as a personal entity and governed, appropriated by the outer, discursive and disciplining forces of society. This unavoidable tension does not prompt us to an attempt to liberate the body and the Self from the oppressive forces of society, but to reflect upon the indiscernible complex of unique individuality intertwined with disciplinary codes and discursive regularities. In this context we can read Linhartová's *The Room*, a story of a profound clash between an individual Self and societal expectations and the roles imposed upon the Self. The female protagonist of the story ends being "erased" from our reality for not having fitted into our discursive framework (represented here by the character of a doctor). Generally speaking, the female identity and her bodily existence are not taken as a given point of departure in the texts of the authors analysed here. On the contrary, identity is being sought, bodily experience is questioned, disclosed as uncertain and only conditional. The concept of the body is treated and operates in manifold, varying and often paradoxical ways in the texts of the authors under discussion. Součková presents us with a subtle play on floating sexual identities in *Amor a Psyche*. In this novel Součková destabilises and blurs the idea of sexual identity and nature, frontiers and patterns of a heterosexual / homosexual relationship. The topic of the body appears rather as a very intricate, subtle and implicit negotiation of gender identities evolving against the backdrop of disconcertingly unclear, uncertain and opaque story of a liminal lesbian relationship between a teacher and her pupil. Richterová's writing is in itself a difficult and continually failing quest for a restored identity, for a wholeness of past and present. In Linhartová, we either find the issue of the subject's Otherness misappropriated by a majority society and its understanding of „normality", or her texts seem to escape the dualistic nature of gender categories altogether. In Hodrová we have an idea of a collective memory transgressing the constraints of the individual corporeality and consciousness. Hodrová's fiction creates a fascinating universe where we are exposed to constant permeability of past and present, where individual bodies are inextricably intertwined with stories and places, which themselves have a specific cultural memory of their own.

3.4 Figures of dispersion and deferral: meaning, identity, subject

Patricia Waugh remarks that both postmodernism and feminism share a rejection and critique of a unified, allegedly autonomous, rational, contained, liberal Self of conventional humanism, which is happily oblivious to a fundamental split in the Subject, both in terms of the linguistic structuring of the conscious and psychoanalytical transition from an Imaginary to a Symbolic order. In respect to the discursive formation of identities and embeddedness in particular ideological frameworks, she comments: "'Inside' and 'outside' ceased to be discrete; subjectivity was recognized as a relative and shifting positionality. In these terms there are striking similarities between the 'subjects' of feminism and those of postmodernism" (Waugh 1989: 15). All the texts analysed here indeed strongly incline towards the dispersal and dissolution of a unified subject. Feminism and postmodernism, however, follow different trajectories in their departure from this conventional humanist concept of the Self. Whereas postmodernism (being informed primarily by the thinking of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Gramsci, Althusser, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Barthes etc.) stresses the dispersal of the subject, feminism is preoccupied with finding a subject constituted outside the patriarchal discourse representing women as others and defining its identity by suppressing this Otherness. Within feminism, the modes of critique and seeking after concepts alternative to that of the conventional liberal Self vary. Virginia Woolf, for instance, "seeks to become aware of the paralysing and alienating determinations of the myth of Woman" (that is she distances herself from the ideal of "angelic", domestic femininity as forged by traditional cultural norms), "but equally to avoid embracing an identity articulated through an ideal of contained, coherent, 'proportioned' subjectivity which for her expressed the dominant cultural norm of masculinity" (Waugh 1989: 10). Much women's writing, that of Woolf included, "can, in fact, be seen not as an attempt to define an isolated individual ego but to discover a collective concept of subjectivity which foregrounds the construction of identity *in relationship*" (ibid.). Compare here Hodrová's foregrounding of blurred borders between time, places, and identities. In her novels, all characters are intertwined, mutually dependent, their identities with no fixed "bodily" frontiers overlap and merge in time and space. The living and the

dead, parents and children, historical and contemporary figures live side by side in Hodrová's universe, where the idea of linear time and Euclidean space have been abolished.

Other women, in turn, responded to being denied a subject position of their own by images of madness, schizophrenia, paranoia.[20] In this context, see Linhartová's stories recurrently returning to motifs of schizophrenia and its inescapable double binds or lucid, yet absurd psychiatric diagnoses produced by masculine logocentric discourse. Symptomatically, these motifs and stories of insanity are rendered in a very precise, dry, sober, hyper-logical and analytical language resembling that of Franz Kafka.

Especially in Richterová, in her story of a return to the places of her childhood (*Návraty a jiné ztráty*), and Hodrová, in her novels' plots revolving around the theme of unattainable and ambivalent metamorphosis, there is a quest for the original unity and completeness which had been lost at the instant of the subject's split on its entering the symbolic order. "Richterová is on a quest for the identity of the narrative subject (...) Hodrová presents a soliloquy, a monologue which turns everything and everyone in the outside world into a subject of the fictional, personal world," Ambros says (Ambros 2001: 217). At the same time, however, in the very textuality of their novels, in their narrative procedures, there is imbedded the essential impossibility of accomplishing such a quest. The quest ultimately assumes the form of a constant deferral (thus being the very manifestation of Desire as Lacan understands it). The attempt to restore and grasp some homogenous, coherent identity recurrently fails and results in a very fragmented, circular, self-reflexive narrative. However, this stubborn search for the initiation, for the return however never lets itself to get discouraged by the prospect of failure, although it is fully aware of the inevitability of such a failure. In this regard, it is the very process, the very structure of such an experience of constantly attempted undertakings, deferrals and failures that becomes more meaningful than the moment of (im)possible reunion with the undivided Self un-marked by a Lacanian sense of lack.

[20] Luce Irigaray has shown in her *Speculum of the Other Woman* that this deprivation of the subject position follows from the specular logic of masculinity that reduces women to the representation of otherness, into which sphere all the qualities denied and suppressed by masculinity are projected. On

Not only in terms of the ways subjectivity is approached, but in terms of aesthetic propensities too, feminism and postmodernism share common ground. Patricia Waugh holds that "feminism and postmodernism clearly do share many concerns as they each develop from 1960s onwards. (...) Both examine the cultural consequences of the decline of a consensus aesthetics, of an effective 'literary' voice, or the absence of a strong sense of stable subjectivity. (...) In each case too, there is a close relationship between theory and practice leading to an unprecedented aesthetic self-consciousness and awareness of the problematic situation of the contemporary writer in relation to historical actuality and fictional tradition" (Waugh 1989: 6). The radical reassessment of and departure from traditional narrative patterns is striking in the texts of the authors discussed here. In terms of textual strategies, what we see is the decentralisation of a narrative voice, intersections of various codes and texts. Kristeva's point that each text as such is an intertext strikes a chord very much not only with the poetics, but also with epistemology of the texts of Součková, Richterová, Hodrová. The idea that identity, as well as the processes of interpretation are dependent on other texts, textual strategies, registers and genres is crucial for all the writers surveyed here. The stress on intertextuality also marks a departure from the idea of the author's personality standing as a guaranteed source of meanings, as a pivotal point overlooking and controlling the textual field of the novel. All the authors are very much aware of being situated within language, of being located within the field of textual and the narrative procedures and traditions to which they assume a reflective and critical attitude. In Součková, we can see a subversive parody of the realistic novels concerned of the domestic setting, novels depicting the history of one bourgeois family. Against the backdrop of the familiar motifs of a family saga and the polylogue of dispersed voices, the overall novel's narrative structure becomes decentred and destabilised with a gentle and sophisticated irony. In the case of Hodrová – apart from numerous allusions to the tradition of European literature (namely Dante's *Divine Comedy*) –, there is a rich textual topology of legends, narratives and myths that animates particular places in Prague and enriches them by adding dimensions of cultural and personal memory. Hrabal plays with collages, bundles of disparate, heterogeneous textual fragments. In Richterová's novel

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this specular negative image masculinity builds up its identity, status and supremacy, effectivelly depriving women of any autonomus subject position.

Slabikář otcovského jazyka too, there can be identified no single, central strand of narration, despite the fact that the text is intended to be, or pretends to be an autobiography, ironically mimicking its narrative techniques and topoi. In the novel there are textual strands of childhood's recollections interspersed and contrasted with sober comments on the present situation of the speaking subject, combined with philosophical reflections. All this together creates an amalgam of mutually debunking statements on the issues of identity as it evolves with the passage of time. Also Hrabal's texts, namely his novel *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* and a textual montage entitled *This City is in the Joint Care of its Inhabitants* are characterised by a dispersed, de-centred stream of speech and the juxtaposition of incoherent textual fragments that defy the phallogocentric logic of an purposeful, point-driven narrative organised by an all-controlling author's intention.

3.5 The double binds and the irreducible tensions in women's writing

As discussed above, Kristeva's project of *Revolution in Poetic Language* presents the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic as an irreducible, constant tension. Thus, trying to speak outside the hegemonic discursive practice – reaching out beyond the realm of the symbolic towards the semiotic – borders on testing the very limits of language. Women's writing simply makes the tension more apparent, indicating that there is no easy, straightforward access to the pre-symbolic. The semiotic can only be approached indirectly, negatively, through the ruptures, silences and contradictions in the symbolic order. This also implicates the contradictory enterprise of articulating and theorising a semiotic (the Chora). It is always the case that we approach the semiotic by means of the symbolic, thus negating and erasing the very object of our enquiry. Kristeva's treatment of the symbolic-semiotic couple resembles the structure of some double binds of modern science (cf. for instance Heisenberg's uncertainty principle). As the semiotic (the chora) undoubtedly (though indirectly) exerts influence on our conscious and rational undertakings, we are prompted to analyse it and familiarise ourselves with it. However, at the very time we set out to examine it, it becomes inaccessible in its original state and nature, since the very means of your inquiry (symbolic order of language) inevitably distort it.

And on the top of that, if we even tried to analyse semiotic by "non-invasive" means that would be closer to its nature (by means of a semiotic "code" itself), this would only take you into deep psychosis generated by the complete immersion to the semiotic. In the literature discussed here (notably Linhartová, Richterová), this double bind is made very much apparent. The core of Richterová's novel is the inaccessibility of one's past, the inevitably failing yet recurring attempts to grasp one's identity. In Linhartová we see the endeavour to stabilise the ever elapsing meaning of what has been said. This is, however, being done by means of language, which as such constitutes the very location of production of the constant shifts and instabilities being produced. The contradictions, disruptions and fissures are not merely a rhetorical device in these texts. They penetrate the smooth surface of language to indicate the de-centred state of an individual and to manifest the points of instability in the symbolic order.

3.6 Otherness: Unintelligibility and beyond

When commenting on Luce Irigaray's critique of a specular logic of male discourse, Moi writes:

> The woman, for Freud as for other Western philosophers, becomes a mirror for his own masculinity. Irigaray concludes that in our society representation, and therefore also social and cultural structures, are products of what she sees as a fundamental hom(m)osexualité. The pun in French is on homo (same) and homme (man): the male desire for the same. The pleasure of self-representation, of her desire for the same, is denied woman: she cuts off from any kind of pleasure that might be specific to her. Caught in the specular logic of patriarchy, woman can choose either to remain silent, producing incomprehensible babble (any utterance that falls outside the logic of the same will by definition be incomprehensible to the male master discourse), or to enact the specular representation of herself as a lesser male (Moi 1985: 135).

These observations are very pertinent with regard to Součková's novel *Amor a Psyché* and Linhartová's short story *The Room.* In both these texts the female characters remain completely incomprehensible vis-à-vis the prevailing masculine discourses, be they discourses on art, common sense experience or science. Both characters prove these phallogocentric discourses to be self-centred, blinded and insensitive towards any sort of Otherness, reducing such Otherness to a banality or pathology. In Součková we have the intricate, unstable and blurred depiction of the

universe which the young girl students inhabit, a universe which is hard to confine within conventional, one-dimensional, clear-cut categories of sexual desire and intellectual or personal dependence. In Linhartová there is the figure of a woman stranded in the confined existential space of her room, who gets labelled insane simply on account of her not fitting the expectations voiced within the discursive categories relating to "common sense" and mainstream medical science.

3.7 The situated perspective and "undiscriminating attention"

The indispensable feature of the poetics of the texts discussed in this thesis is that they symptomatically draw attention to the idea of our "situatedness", our awareness of the body, the reflection of a particular position, the insertion of a person into a specific epistemic perspective and mode. They pay close attention to the concrete, particular details of everyday reality. This awareness entails an emphasis on a concrete, singular and unpredictable events that have not yet been colonised by abstract and systematising discourses. This should not be mistaken for a tendency towards the poetics of civility, soberness, every day life etc. The motivation for working on the level of concrete detail is grounded in the fundamental distrust and suspicion of the ideology of grand narratives (Lyotard)[21] imposed on the multifarious and unpredictable, complex nature of reality. These texts remain fragmented, unwilling to participate in the constant dissemination of these homogeneous master narratives which governing our understanding of reality. With the term of "undiscriminating awareness" – coined by Bohumil Hrabal, in whose writing it is strongly present – I am refering here to the kind of attitude that abandons any pretence to establish hierarchies in the raw, murky and chaotic material of reality. Such type of writing does not restrict its focus to what usually counts as relevant enough to be worth of a literary text's attention.

This staying in the close vicinity of everyday, "trivial" reality, which is given priority over ideological concepts, grand narratives or grand gestures, is strongly present in Součková's novels. In this regard Václav Černý's otherwise rather mistaken review of Součková's novel *Zakladatelé* made a witty point when it

[21] All uses of the expression"grand narratives" in this thesis refer to the notion coined by J. F. Lyotard in his work *La condition postmoderne,* Paris: Editions de Minuit1979, English translation Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press).

labelled her fiction a view from a bourgeois kitchen (Černý 1941). In her Woolfian depiction of the bourgeois family saga, Součková, herself a member of an avant-garde movement, an emancipated, university-educated daughter of a well-off Prague building contractor, pays most attention to everyday, banal details, snatches of ordinary casual conversations. The only perspective that is not ironically unmasked as ultimately superficial, ego-driven, bathetic and ideological is the perspective of the chit-chat between one of the central female characters and a serving girl taking place in a rather improbable literary topos of avant-garde novels – the kitchen. This topos expands into a worm's eye view, offering an anti-ideological, oblique perspective, observing and commenting ironically on the masculine, patrilinear and phallic world of a bourgeois household. A very similar observation could be made regarding Hodrová's novels. They present a complex tapestry, a patchwork of micro-stories, minute accounts of manifold ordinary plots, events told in a very sober, inconspicuous, from time to time repetitive yet magical and somewhat discomforting, uncanny language, with subtle black humour. A crucial role is played there by specific topoi, a micro-cosmos of a tenement house mysteriously occupied by the stories and predicaments of its former and current tenants, where everyday events merge into stories of an archetypal, mythical quality. In Hodrová's trilogy *Trýznivé město* (Tormenting City) – namely in its first part –, the most mysterious place of personal identity's transgression, pregnant with animated memories of inhabitant's ancestors, doppelgangers or even complete strangers, is nothing but an ordinary Vinohrady tenement house's closet with its (admittedly, vertical oriented) air shaft. In her novel *The Primer of the Father Tongue*, Sylvie Richterová uses recollections and meanings attached to various details from her household to reconstruct her own past, to establish a relationship with herself and her life story. Ordinary, everyday items, such as pieces of furniture (a cupboard for that matter) gain an importance in a major task of establishing one's very identity (in exile).

In this chapter (and its respective subchapters) I have tried to point out those features of women's writing which differ distinctly from the logic and patterns of the phallogocentric discourse. The features are of diverse a nature, ranging from particular motifs, textual practices and narrative techniques to the ways in which

subjectivity is represented and understood in these texts. Their common denominator is a deeply ingrained suspicion towards the ideology of a representation based on mimesis and towards an understanding of language as a mere instrumental device in our thinking and communication. They also tend to be very sceptical about the type of thinking that (mis)takes itself for something universal, for something elevated from the context of lived reality, as well as about the understanding of subjectivity that is perceived as stable, autonomous and granted a priori.

4. Five Czech authors

Having listed some of the characteristics of women's writing as they can be traced in the poetics of Součková, Linhartová, Richterová, Hodrová and Hrabal, I would like to discuss the work of each of these authors individually now. Although biographies of these authors are not important in respect to their literary texts (and I think this is a valid assertion despite the often semi-autobiographical nature of their novels), I shall first provide same basic biographical facts and figures, mentioning however only those which are relevant to the nature of their writing.

4.1 Fragmentation and disintegration of the narrative: an ironic gaze from "the bourgeois kitchen": Milada Součková

As Vladimír Papoušek puts it, Milada Součková (1899-1983) can be considered as a founding figure of an intellectual, experimental, self-reflective type of modern Czech novel. Although re-discovered only recently, in many aspects her personality foreshadows the intellectual career, leanings, poetics and ultimately the very personal predicament (exile) of the other Czech women novelists discussed in this thesis.[22]

[22] Součková had indeed an intriguing life story: herself a daughter of a well-off building contractor, graduated from the Faculty of Natural Sciences, Charles University, defending her thesis on "A Psychic Life of Plants", went on to study briefly in Geneva; having been encouraged by her husband, an avant-garde painter and graphic artist Zdeněk Rykr (1900-1940), she started writing prose; she befriended Czech writer Vladislav Vančura, as well as members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, Roman Jakobson among of them; she had a career as a cultural attaché in the USA (New York) after World War II, decided to settle there after the Communist coup; lectured in Czech and Slavonic Literatures at Harvard (where she gathered a significant collection of Czech and Slovak literary documents), Chicago and Berkeley; wrote several volumes of poetry, published on literary history both in Czech and English (focusing on the significant and Czech specific, yet neglected parts and periods of Czech literature, e.g. the Baroque era, Romanticism) and died at the age of eighty four. The

With its ironic, playful and subversive attitude to the conventions of the narrative in a novel, Součková's writing can be claimed to belong to the pedigree and tradition of Lawrence Sterne.[23] With its dispersal of character, an interest in capturing the intricate issues of passing time and unconventionally sophisticated uses of narrative modes, her writing could be easily associated with that of Virginia Woolf or James Joyce. Vladimír Papoušek comments: "Součková's prose disdains a stable, coherent construction of the plot, as well as time organisation and sequences. The narrator combines an ultra-realistic description of everyday banality with symbolic references to ready-made literary texts, a reflection of her own narrative gesture with personalisation, the character's inner monologues that often become transformed into a stream of consciousness" (Papoušek 1998).[24] As Lenka Jungmannová observes (Jungmannová 1997), often only the individual speech style tells us which character is speaking in the novel; there are no other indicators provided by the narrator. The narrative flow and the way the plot evolves are very discontinuous. "One theme is inserted into another, only to meet again and merge a little further on" (Jungmannová 1997: 73).[25]

Both Součková and Hodrová represent a slightly different type of writing from Linhartová and Richterová. Their experiments contain elements of the traditional narrative of the novel, the narrating subject and the characters are not so dispersed, plot is not entirely dispensed with. However, the effect is no less subversive and disturbing. The writing of Součková and Linhartová has not so much the form of an essay or a contemplation on the question of language, memory and subjectivity, as is the case with Linhartová and Richterová. It rather displays leanings

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fate of her oeuvre is symptomatic of the discontinuous nature of Czech cultural history punctuated by the interventions of various political regimes. Despite the fact that the first volume of her poetry and her first novel (published in 1934 and 1937 respectively) were immediately met with reviewers'acclaim, her work was silenced after 1948 in Czechoslovakia and had to wait until 1990 to be rediscovered for a Czech audience. It was mainly thanks to scholarly and editorial activities of Karel Milota and Kristián Suda that Součková re-entered the literary discourse (for a period of forty years her name was absent from literary history), thus re-drawing the map of the Czech tradition of the novel.

[23] Mentioning Lawrence Sterne here is not to suggest his name could be easily included into the context of feminist writing, but to point out the shared narrative tradition that challenges and debunks the logocentric nature of the European literary canon.

[24] In the thesis, the quotes from the *Slovník českých spisovatelů od roku 1945.* Praha: ÚČL AV – Brána, 1998 are referred to by the title of the individual entries in the dictionary, not by page numbers.

[25] Unless stated otherwise, all the passages quoted from the Czech secondary literature have been translated by the author of the thesis.

towards intertextual procedures, relying upon elements from the tradition of modern European novel writing, treating them ironically, re-writing them, deconstructing them, leaving them ultimately only as part of an ambiguous palimpsest. Indeed, one of the pivotal features of Součková's poetics is her frequent use of parodic, ironic intertextual procedures, or better to say procedures based on architextuality.[26] It means she does not allude to a particular hypo-text (i.e. a single particular passage from an earlier, original text), but exploits whole genres (e.g. family saga type novels, confessional novels etc.) with their established narrative conventions as a frame of reference for her writing. In the new context of Součková's novels, these genres become orchestrated with a different narrative voice and gradually become distorted and ultimately decomposed. According to Karel Milota (Milota 1992), Součková generally refuses to succumb to the requirements of a traditional realistic narrative and never turns an unhierarchised reality of life into an artificial world of a literary convention. The contrasting, yet complementary part of this overtly displayed distrust of smoothly constructed fiction fitting into conventional forms is the deploying of the well established, almost hackneyed genres, such as that of a teenage, student diary or a family novel (a saga of the bourgeois family). Součková departs from the framework of these overexploited genres to travesty them, exploit them for her sophisticated textual games and ultimately to deconstruct them. With her non-linear narrative full of frequent and dead-end digressions, she decomposes their structure; by an obscure identification of narrating subjects and changing viewpoints, she destabilises the fictional world presented. For instance, there are three different female narrators in the novel *Amor a Psyche* (first published 1937), Augustina, Alžběta, and Aglaja, all referred to only by their name's initial letter (A.). This becomes even more confusing, since the narrative plane of Alžběta, which originally was presented as the mature voice of Augustina's admired professor, is later revealed as a naive, dated, cliché-overburdened ideology of banal moral truth and life wisdom. Thus the reader is constantly alerted, kept aware and made cautious so as not to fall easy prey to the novel's omnipresent irony and overall self-debunking drive. If Russian formalism, primarily in the figure of Viktor Shklovsky,

[26] In contrast to intertextual allusions, alluding to the architext is not to refer to a single, particular text, but to the system of general rules specific to a whole literary genre, literary style or the type of

defined literature as an *alienated*, de-automated and thus refreshed *view of reality* which had become invisible for us because of our petrified ways of perception, Součková, moving to the meta-textual level, *alienates* and disjoints the *conventions of literary narrative*. As Karel Milota puts it, Součková is, as if were, sincerely astonished by all the literary conventions writers so often enjoy. These comfortable conventions of traditional narratives are precisely what Součková is out to subvert. She does it with witty, sober irony and a range of literary allusions, very much in the vein of a Sternian legacy. In *Amor a Psyche*, she comments ironically on the ways literary narratives work with characters: "The betrothed assume monotonous poses lasting long enough to enable the narrator to tell what he had in mind about their past. They do not stop gazing at each other until the writer explains their feelings." Through these frequent Sternian narrative "Verfremdungseffekts", she distances herself from the mimetic aspiration of a literary text. As Karel Milota points out (Milota 1992), Součková takes this anti-mimetic leaning of her texts to amusing extremes at times: "What could do a better service for developing the plot than the scene at an art merchant's shop? No one can master it as well as Balzac, though. I refer the reader therein," one can read in Součková's *Amor a Psyche* (quoted from Milota 1992: 36). Usually she carries out this distancing, however, in an inconspicuous way, and these illusion-breaking effects organically blend into the essentially playful, unstable and uncertain nature of the novel. Although Součková is a versatile wordsmith of great mastery and sovereignty, she never seems to consider herself to be in possession of the language she uses. Generally, the way she approaches language could be described as a kind of ironic, playful, detached and undecidable textual masquerade. She rather seems to use language as something that is, as if were, borrowed, surreptitiously misappropriated or stolen.

The parodic and architextual nature of her writing can be clearly seen in the novels *Zakladatelé* (The Founders) and *Odkaz* (Legacy, both published 1940). Their titles might suggest their subject is the well-established genre of the family novel, which, on the surface, indeed is the case: the two novels treat the theme of decay and disintegration of a bourgeois, patriarchal family. Součková's writing is actually one of the few examples in Czech literature which offers an insight into the daily

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literary discourse. See G. Genette *The Architext. An Introduction.* University of California Press,

routines, rituals and intimacies of the Prague bourgeoisie, providing a taster of smells and flavours from a tenement house owners' household. She clearly enjoys watching the bourgeois family and society from below, disclosing the often awkward, comic underbelly of their personalities and behaviour. All the expectations about the nature of the novel, incited by the genre's architextuality, are however soon shattered by the narrative procedures employed. Součková's diegetic, self-reflective, fragmented style of narration has a considerable subversive impact as it is combined with the conventional genre of realistic or psychological novel that had the "upper middle classes" environment as its setting.

This deconstructive exploitation of the conventional genre is further strengthened by the fact that she does not hesitate to dwell on the depictions of motifs, situations and dialogues which hinder considerably the narrative flow and prevent the story from making any progress. Součková apparently loves to indulge in playing with the details of everyday trivial reality. As Karel Milota points out (Milota 1992), all the events, which usually function as the pivotal points and the driving forces of the narration, are deliberately put aside, as though they were completely unimportant, artificial and superficial compared with the "flesh" of everyday, unpredictable, random and unorganised reality. At the same time, Součková does not exploit the themes which traditionally make up the corner stones and decisive, watersheds of the story, such as a wedding, a child's birth or a death, and which conventionally serve to alarm, impress or move the reader. Instead, all these are mentioned only incidentally, while attention is fully focused on inconspicuous, almost banal activities of daily life. These foregrounded casual, everyday details of reality often come from the sphere of various female activities, such as cooking, sewing, needle work etc. The overt depictions of this kind of work contrasts with the liberal and emancipative tenets of inter-war modernism and the avant-garde movement (of which Součková herself was a part). Součková, herself an emancipated woman (as pointed out above, she was raised in a well off bourgeois family that enabled her to pursue an academic career), ironically revaluates and lets resurface all manners of invisible, banal female activities, setting them provocatively against the usual requirements of an intriguing and engaging plot. The common

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1992.

denominator in these female activities is generally a subtle masquerade permeating the social functioning of (not only bourgeois) women in society. Paradoxically, these masquerades and the constant changing of masks are also ultimately the only true channel to communicate the dynamics of women's inner world and feelings.[27]

When speaking of the depiction of tastes and smells of the city dwellers' household, it should be noted that this down-to-earth perspective is also a feature that seems to be peculiar to an approach I equate here with the notion of women's writing. Such an approach does not hesitate to register all the banal, everyday details of household routines (although always with a hint of ironic distance). Symptomatically too, it is not blinded by the prospects of ideological speculations and grand narrative constructions. However remote a parallel this might be, such attention to casual, everyday, the "bodily" nature of social functioning appears to me to be consonant with the values and preferences raised elsewhere in feminist theories and epistemologies, namely within the idea of politics of location or situated knowledge as discussed and developed by, for instance, Adrienne Rich (1986) and Donna Haraway (1991) respectively. Women's writing consciously reflects on the fact of being situated in a particular environment. Equally, it is aware of the fact that the environment and the everyday circumstances in which a person lives not only influence but even merge with and create one's identity. Besides Součková, this is exemplified most of all by Daniela Hodrová's novels, where even things of daily use (such as a muff or a closet) are elevated to the level of animated, living organisms, almost as though actively intervening in the course of the life of the novel's characters. (See also above the passage on "undiscriminating attention".)

It is particularly Milada Součková's novel *Amor a Psyché* (first published 1937), which profoundly questions the binary model of a fixed, stable and definite identity, the model that eclipses other conceptualisations and possibilities. Conventionally the novel (or at least one of its dominant strands) could be labelled as the story of a denied or perhaps even unnoticeable lesbian relationship between the student and her secondary school teacher. The point is there is nothing in the relationship that could be characterised as unambiguously sexual. Nor are there any

27 Cf. also Derridean account of women's identity as différénce and the constant deferral (chapter 2.4 of this thesis, Derrida, 1991 and 1997), or Joan Riviere's famous article "Womanliness as a

characters that would display any coherent identity and could serve as a vehicles for such a distinct plot line. The "story" of Součková's novel *Amor a Psyche* is far from any coherent, fluent, manageable narrative. What we are confronted with instead is a blurred, discontinuous conglomeration of events with no clear and identifiable trajectory. There also is an important meta-narrative level, where the narrator often distances him/herself from the act of narrating, intervenes often in the process of narrating revealing ironically its fictional nature and the conventions of traditional, realistic and psychological fiction.

Součková's account of this liminal "lesbian sexual adventure" between the student and her professor is an excellent example of a narrative unwilling to confine itself to the traditional boundaries of clear-cut, ready-made, established and "legible" discursive categories of identity. Instead, she presents us with a complex nexus of threads binding three female characters in the novel, whose identity is essentially uncertain and dispersed. At this point let me quote a little more extensively Moi on Cixous' concept of sexual difference and gender identity. Moi points out that Cixous utilises the Derridean understanding of the process-like difference even in the notion of bisexuality. She rejects "'the classic conception of bisexuality', which 'squashed under the emblem of castration fear and along with the fantasy of a total being (though composed of two halves), would do away with the difference'" (Cixous, The Laugh of Medusa, 254/46, La Jeune Née, 155, quoted from Moi 1985: 109). "Opposing this view, Cixous produces what she calls the other bisexuality, which is multiple, variable and ever-changing, consisting as it does of the 'non-exclusion either of the difference or of one sex'. Among its other characteristics is the 'multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body, indeed, this other bisexuality doesn't annul differences, but stirs them up, pursues them, increases them'" (Moi 1985: 109). Against Western philosophical and literary thought caught up in an endless series of hierarchical binary oppositions that always in the end come back to the fundamental couple of male/female (activity/passivity, culture/nature, logos/pathos, passion/action etc.), Cixous sets a multiple, heterogeneous difference, in the sense informed very much

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Masquerade" on this topic (Riviere, 1929/1991).

by the Derridean concept of différance[28]. The characters in *Amor a Psyche* invite us to be read precisely in the vein of this process-like, differential delineation of gender identity. In the chapter entitled "Aporia of Gender" (from her book *Fictional Genders)*, Dorothy Kelly remarks that "the genderization of the human being is thus the process by which two different impulses, both present in bisexuality, are later polarized and separated, so that an individual is allowed to manifest only one or the other, even though traces of the effaced gender can and do reappear" (Kelly 1989: 3). This process of separation and effacement results in the binary model of difference, which "as enclosed or captured between the two opposite poles of masculinity and femininity blinds us to that which escapes this rigid matrix" (Moi 1985: 154). The unstable nature of the relationship between the three (or possibly four) characters in *Amor a Psyché*, confront us with the characters as subjects, whose fluid and ambiguous sexual orientation and gender identity have not yet been completely subjected to the discursive inscription of bodily parameters. The very idea that there exist something as distinct categories of personal relationships, that there is a point from which we can draw frontiers between types of individual "sexual" inclinations, is fundamentally debunked in Součková's novel. With the sophisticated, subtly ironical intertextuality, displacement of any ultimate meaning, as well as with the dispersion of the narrator's voice and the novel's characters, Součková challenges and subverts the smooth discursive functioning of the traditional novel writing, rooted in the logic of logocentrism.

4.2 Soliloquies and silences of the intellect, the limits of language and the dispersion of a subject: Věra Linhartová

Věra Linhartová (born 1938) is, alongside Součková, the prominent reference figure for later Czech women's writers and still is "considered the doyenne of Czech experimental writing and one of the most important writers of the post-war period" (Büchler 1998: 10). Born in Brno, she graduated in art history and aesthetics, worked in Alšova jihočeská galerie (South Bohemian Gallery of Mikoláš Aleš) in Hluboká, started publishing her fiction (which was instantly well received) in the 1960's,

[28] See the footnote n. 5 in this thesis for the account of this notion coined by J. Derrida in his *Margins of Philosophy.*

edited a volume of Richard Weiner's[29] works, and before leaving Czechoslovakia in 1968, prepared important exhibitions of the surrealist painters Jindřich Štyrský and Toyen (Marie Čermínová) in Brno (1966/67) and Prague (1967). Like Součková (and not unlike other Czech authors living in exile, Libuše Moníková or Milan Kundera, for instance), Linhartová switched to writing in a foreign language (French) after having settled in Paris in 1968. There she studied Japanese (also spent a year in Japan studying at the University of Waseda), defending in 1993 a doctoral thesis on Japanese classical (9th-19th century) art theories. Since 1990 she has been working at the Guimet, a Parisian museum of Oriental Arts. Apart from her thesis on art (among other things, she published a monograph on the important Czech, Paris-based painter Josef Šíma, whom she befriended in Paris; Šíma was a former member of Le Grand Jeu artistic group) and she has continued writing prose (in French).

Věra Linhartová's texts represent an anti-illusive, anti-mimetic type of writing that examines the possibilities and limits of perception and thought as located in language. In fact, the central character and theme of Linhartová's texts is the language itself, and a consistent and thorough self-reflective questioning of the nature of narrating as such. As Hodrová remarks, the very notions of plot or a central theme are irrelevant in Linhartová's writing; the major topic in Linhartová is, as Hodrová puts it, the "event of speech" (Hodrová 1992). Linhartová highlights the ambivalent role of language in structuring our perception of reality. In *The Space for Differentiation* [Prostor k rozlišení] Linhartová says:

> All we can say about this has to enter into words. The words step in between us and our vision, which has usually surrounded us, as a new, independent member in the game. The words arrive slowly and line up one next to each other, creating a transparent veil, of which it is impossible to say whether it links us with our original idea or whether it actually separates us from that idea. The words can form a bridge over which we approach our idea; they can however also be a wall that prevents us from seeing the original idea. [Všechno, co o tom můžeme říci, musí vejít do slov. Slova vstupují mezi nás a naši představu, která nás obvykle obklopovala, jak nový, nezávislý člen ve hře. Přicházejí zvolna a řadí se k sobě jedno vedle druhého, vytvářejíce průsvitnou oponu, o níž nelze říci, spojuje-li nás s naší představou nebo

[29] Richar Weiner, a Czech pre-war author, who lived in Paris. His poetics, imagery and style of writing appealed to Linhartová's own artistic and intellectual leanings.

nás od ní dělí. (...) Slova mohou tvořit most, po němž k představě vcházíme, mohou být také zdí, která nám brání ji spatřit] (Linhartová 1992: 13).

For Linhartová, all the traditional means of literary narration as psychological accuracy, clear-cut plot or typology of characters prove to be false and clumsy when measured against the difficult attempts to comment on the complexities of reality with the help of the unreliable instrument of language and its constantly elusive meanings. When Miroslav Topinka undertakes the tricky task of delineating the character of Linhartová's elusive writing, he speaks of "the presence and simultaneous absence of speech, absence that is very concrete, almost palpable ", as well as of the principle of a doubly refracted vision – that of reflectivity and self-reflectivity (Topinka 1995). "No matter how strenuous, the effort to define the clear-cut and stable contours of the reality we occupy ultimately proves to be futile" comments František Ryčl (Ryčl 1994: 224).

"In her uncompromising dedication to the task of writing as a way of posing essential ontological questions, Linhartová is often likened to that great spirit of literary Prague, Franz Kafka," remarks Alexandra Büchler (Büchler 1998: 10). Arguably the most pertinent similarity to Kafka's writing that could be traced in Linhartová's texts is that they often assume the form of indirect, "submerged" dialogue or disputes (stretching over large parts of her texts), where initial assertions are gradually and thoroughly questioned, doubted, even forsaken in favour of their exact opposites, ultimately leaving the reader in a state of complete uncertainty about any of the options put forward in the course of the text. In this respect too, the meta-textual (as well as the meta-meta-textual) functions are particularly conspicuous in Linhartová's texts. Not only are the notions of character or plot undermined, their textually constructed nature having been disclosed, but also the narrative (however abstract and anti-mimetic) as such is doubted by the meta-textual reflections and comments that are interspersed throughout the text in parenthesis, thus forming an entire autonomous and parallel textual strand. Helena Kosková notices that in Linhartová, "the same theme returns in manifold variations, often introduced by the keyword 'once again and in a different manner'. Each text is an effort to grant a literary form to the structure of consciousness, and the author constantly reminds us about her failures to succeed in that effort" (Kosková 1987: 193). Hodrová points out that a frequent feature of Linhartová's text is what could be referred to as a specific,

textual and compositional anacoluthon (a deviation from a grammatical relation in a sentence, by Linhartová however transposed onto the macro-textual level). As Hodrová stresses, this textual anacoluthon is not only a compositional device, but has also epistemological consequences, being as it is a statement about the relationship between the fictional nature of the text and the events it presents (Hodrová 1992). By creating this overtly manifested anti-illusive, anti-mimetic character of the text, Linhartová exhibits her unwillingness to comply with the conventions of "realistic" fiction which she – by this very gesture – claims to be of an even more fictional, artificially construed and unacknowledged nature. Linhartová makes one aware of the epistemic violence that impose phallogocentric, arbitrary concepts and master narratives onto a diffuse, chaotic and random reality.

> The events have occurred and surround us as a shapeless mass, without a beginning or an end. The mass does not suggest what to take as a point of departure. We can start anywhere, everything is equally important to us. We can grant the events any meaning if we suppress one and emphasise the other; if we force one circumstance to be the cause of another. [„Události se staly a leží kolem nás v souvislé, beztvaré mase, bez počátku a konce, která nám nenabízí, čeho bychom se mohli zachytit, abychom odtud vyšli. Můžeme začít kdekoli, všechno je pro nás stejně důležité. Můžeme událostem dát jakýkoli smysl, potlačíme-li jedny a jiné vyzvedneme, přimějeme-li jednu okolnost být příčinou další] (Linhartová 1992: 41).

Linhartová does not participate in the epistemological game which pretends that literary (or any other) texts merely reflect or disclose objects and causal relations in reality. In contrast to this surreptitious, "manipulative", ideological dimension found in realistic fiction, Linhartová does not hide the ways in which she moulds, deliberately and overtly manipulates the material of her writing. She does not hesitate to reveal the principles of the ideological functioning of her texts. Hodrová (Hodrová 1992) also observes that the rhetorical set-up of Linhartová's texts playfully mimics various genres, moving from the mask of a conventional story to posing as an expert treatise on language, this often happening even within a few paragraphs of a single text. The ambivalent, parodic "citing" of the conventions of the expert, analytical treatise is also strengthened by the syntactical structure of Linhartová's prose: in quite a symptomatic contrast to Hrabal's paratactic organisation of the text (additions and juxtapositions of further syntactic elements), in Linhartová there is a frequent

occurrence of hypotactic conjunctions and clauses, as well as of the conditional mood. The overall epistemic impact of these two strikingly different techniques of Linhartová on one hand and Hrabal on the other is however just the same: a profound debunking of the certainties of phallogocentric discursive practices.

Czech critics often remark that Linhartová's writing is of a masculine style (e.g. Ryčl 1994), or at least far removed from what could be stereotypically labelled as feminine ways of expression. In such statements, the conventional meanings of "masculine" and "feminine" "go unexamined and with them aspects of literature that they seem to explain but actually only name" Myra Jehlen observes (Jehlen 1995: 263). Accounts of this kind are logically circular, trying to grasp the quality of Linhartová's thinking by means of attributes ("feminine"/"masculine") that themselves are mere empty signifiers. Their denotative void is filled with by relying upon conventional, arbitrary use of stereotypical perceptions. Clearly the assumption about the stable meaning of such attributes ("masculine/feminine") is deeply and unreflectingly ideological one. The trouble with assessing Linhartová's writing is that there is very little that could help one to get a clear picture of the narrating voice's gender identity, not to speak of a presumed gender idiolect. It is rather this very indeterminacy in itself that is so conspicuous and attracts the reader's attention. Paradoxically enough (and not unlike in Kafka), this striking sobriety,
precision and accuracy within rather abstract, often terminological wording and complex syntax lead the reader into a world of profound uncertainties, paradoxes and insoluble contradictions.

Thus, although in terms of a gendered style, Linhartová's texts could be perceived as a sort of Barthesian "degree zero" writing, Linhartová does deal with topics of gender identity, albeit in no explicit and apparent way. In the collection of texts entitled *Prostor k rozlišení* (Space for Differentiation, 1964), which is generally characterised by a reduction or even total absence of plot, by insufficient context, by an unclear space-time setting, and by a Kafkesque, disruptive atmosphere, it is in particular the story called "Pokoj" (The Room) that engages with the issues of existence and the identity of a gendered subject. The interpretation of the story could be encapsulated by the key terms "discourse" and "death of the subject". Its "plot" can be decoded as a history of a dissolution of the subject in the determinants of discursive structures. This post-structuralist claim about the death of the subject,

however, does not mean we have done away with the problem of existence and subjectivity as such. It only means we have realised how naive the pretensions of humanistic discourse are. However, the difficult questions remain. What is particularly interesting here is the irreconcilable tension between discursive determinants on the one hand and irreducible uniqueness, singularity and the otherness of an individual on the other. The individual is both subjected to discursive practices, being deeply moulded by them, and resists them at the same time, producing responses unpredictable within the given order of discourse. It is in this context that I understand Linhartová's story "The Room", where a female subject fails to comply with the authoritative claims of normality, a normality which is being maintained and enforced by psychiatric discourse. Linhartová presents here an image of the enclosure, isolation, "passivity", "inertness" of an alternative, inner space, inaccessible and incomprehensible to others, to "normal" people. Intruded upon, misrepresented, misappropriated and ultimately denied both by the discourse of "common sense" and the discourse of expert medicine (psychiatry, with both these discourses sharing the same epistemic axioms and presumptions after all), the female protagonist of the story literally disappears, fades away from reality. The theme of Otherness transgressing established discursive frameworks occurs often in Linhartová's fiction. As Alexandra Büchler observes, the short text 'A Barbarian Woman in Captivity' (from the collection *Portraits carnivores*, 1982, written in French), with its "post-script which places it within the convention of a 'found manuscript' by an anonymous, lost – perhaps dead? – author, echoes similar concerns. The female narrator is the perfect post-modern "other", a barbarian to the civilized man she addresses, a passionate spirit to his reticent and almost immaterial persona" (Büchler 1998: 10).

The second volume of Linhartová's short stories is entitled *Meziprůzkum nejblíž uplynulého* (An Intersurvey of the Most Recent Past, 1964). As the title itself suggests, reflections upon the deferral of meaning and the "metaphysics of presence" often occur in the text. Hodrová comments on the inevitably futile striving of the speaking subject to grasp the present moment ever receding into the past (Hodrová 1992). Such deferral of a meaningful grasp of the present results in that the subject's identity always being abandoned and revealed as displaced, strange, unavailable to self-comprehension and, as if were, falsified. The process of signifying and grasping

a coherent subjectivity is further questioned and destabilised by continual shifts between the narrator's gender (from female to male and back) even over a few sentences. In these texts, the subject's identity is clearly never taken for granted. It is not a secured point of departure, but something yet to be found in the ongoing process of différance. In her prose "Co nejvíce šedé" (As much grey as possible), the plot is – as is the rule in most of Linhartová's texts – rather indistinct, and ultimately revealed as artificial and irrelevant. The actual subject matter of this text represents an attempt to think of subjectivity as a mere spot of a darker shade of grey that differentiates itself against the backdrop of its pale grey surroundings. The ultimate decentralisation of the subject in the streams of various voices occurs in the story with the telling title "A Polyphonic dispersion".

Linhartová's texts epitomise the case of women's writing as I understand it in this thesis, i.e. writing as a constant slippage or deferral of meaning. The heart of such a concept of non-phallogocentric writing could best be characterised by the quote, which Moi highlights in Irigaray's famous essay "The sex which is not one". In her language, Irigaray says, woman "goes off in all directions (...) Contradictory words seem a little crazy to the logic of reason, and inaudible for him who listens with ready-made grids, a code prepared in advance. (...) One must listen to her differently in order to hear an 'other meaning' which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words and yet casting them off to avoid becoming fixed, immobilized. For when 'she' says something, it is already no longer identical to what she means" (Moi 1985: 145).

4.3 Scattered topologies of memory, discontinuities of an identity and a narrative reconstruction of the Self: Sylvie Richterová

Sylvie Richterová (born 1945) is a literary scholar, prose and poetry writer and essayist. She received a graduate degree in French from Charles University in 1970, emigrated to Italy in 1971, where she studied with Italian Slavist Angelo Maria Ripellino at the University of Rome. Elena Sokol says, writing on Richterová's biography and bibliography: "She earned another graduate degree and began

teaching Czech literature. After working in Padua and Viterbo, she returned to Rome as a professor in 1997. Active as a literary scholar, she has published two collections of semiotic studies on Czech literature: *Slova a ticho* (Words and Silence, 1986), and *Ticho a smích* (Silence and Laughter, 1997). Originally published in exile, her first slim books of prose, *Návraty a jiné ztráty* (Returns and Other Losses, 1978, Toronto, 68 Publishers) and *Místopis* (Topography, 1983, Cologne, Index), subsequently appeared together with *Slabikář otcovského jazyka* (Primer of the Father Tongue, 1991)" (Sokol 2001). Apart from these texts, which I shall discuss in more detail, she has also published the works of fiction *Rozptýlené podoby* (Dispersed Images, 1993) and *Druhé loučení* (Second Parting, 1994). Recently another volume of her essays in literary criticism has appeared, entitled *Místo domova* (due to homonymy this is an ambiguous title that can be read both as 'A Place of Home' and 'Instead of Home'). She has also published two volumes of poetry *Neviditelné jistoty* (Invisible Certainties, 1988), and *Čas věčnost* (Time Eternity, 2003). Her works have been translated into French and Italian, she herself translates from Czech into Italian (Jan Skácel, Věra Linhartová, Jiří Kolář, Ludvík Vaculík). As in the case of the other authors discussed here, the themes of language and identity are the main focus of Richterová's attention. Richterová does not follow only Eco's ideas on the semiotic dimensions of human existence and his emphasis on language as a privileged, yet risky means of communication. Having defended her master's thesis on the issues involved in the translation of Foucault's *The Order of Things* (Les mots et les choses), she seems to be well aware of the role of language in structuring and delineating available categories, within which one's thinking, as well one's very individual identity, are situated.

Although Richterová does not deconstruct narrative in such a radical way as Linhartová does, her "autobiographical" novel *The Primer of the Father Tongue* (a volume consisting of three parts which originally were published separately) is by no means an autobiography in any traditional sense. Richterová examines the possibility of touching on the neuralgic problems of identity by means of narration. Passages describing particular and very concrete memories connecting her to her childhood experiences are interwoven with the rather abstract and detached reflections on the act of narration which is supposed to recover past time and the lost aspects of one's personal experience and identity (the situation of an exile). In the text we find

records of her childhood spent in Brno interspersed with penetrating meta-narrative passages which analyse the very process of autobiographical writing as such. In these passages, there is reflected the fact the constitution of identity through remembering is inevitably linked with forgetting and with loss. The way these contemplations constantly blend with banal things from the narrator's past, with the sensually precise memories of trivial, everyday, casual, yet emotionally and existentially loaded events, can remind us of the notion of situated perspective and the undiscriminating attention discussed in the chapter 3.7.

"Richterová (...) is primarily interested in writing as a product of individual consciousness and intertextual relationship. Like Linhartová, whose work she has written about and translated into Italian, she creates a fluid narrative persona, switching from first to third person in mid-sentence," comments Alexandra Büchler on Richterová's style and textual strategies, and goes on to remark that when constructing the "plot" of her novels, Richterová mostly proceeds "through a set of narrative fragments which in themselves mark the narrator's attempts to piece together her own independent identity" (Büchler 1998: 10-11). Büchler's observations could be complemented with Veronika Ambros' remark: "In Richterová's the first volume of prose *Návraty a jiné ztráty* (Returns and Other Losses) reminiscences of the past permeate the present, the country of her exile. (...) As the title suggests, return is transformed into another loss" (Ambros 2001: 212).

Arguably the most striking feature of Richterová's text is the way in which the attempts to reconstruct her past, in order to re-create her present identity, are persistently debunked by ruptures between language and memory, between what is being narrated and the process of narration. Richterová's attempt to write an autobiography is confronted with ambivalent, ambiguous, fragmented, unclear, and unintelligible nature of both the past in general and her particular present Self.

> Perhaps it was the *present* of the words what Proust had in mind when speaking of the concreteness of the words from childhood. I think and I am announcing this beforehand – although I do not know what is about to follow –, the key to everything is present. The present moment. It eludes me to such an extent that whatever I would wish to write now, in the present moment, I have to leave out (...) It is only the commentary to what eludes me that I somehow manage to record. [Snad měl Proust na mysli, když mluvil o konkrétnosti slov z dětství, jejich přítomnost. Myslím a

> předesílám, ačkoliv nevím, co bude následovat, klíčem ke všemu je přítomnost. Přítomný okamžik. Uniká mi natolik, že to, co bych chtěla nyní, v tuto chvíli napsat, musím vynechat (...) Jenom komentáře k tomu, co mi uniká, se mi daří jakž takž zachytit] (Richterová 1991: 45).

Moreover, her contemplations reach the ultimate frontiers of what can be grasped by means of language. The intently and laboriously built autobiographical text turns into a study of the very capability of language to mediate our experience and the past. The narrative ultimately examines to what extent we can rely on the language fixation of our memory. What we can see here is the simultaneous process of reconstruction and decomposition, the disintegration of personal identity. Quite similarly to Cixous' claim of multiple identity that is non-identical with itself and occupies simultaneously several places, the narrating subject of Richterová's novels finds herself dispersed among several subject positions and identities. The coherent structure of a recollection or event is linguistically created in the narrative, only to be broken up and cancelled out. The narrative in its various attempts contests the possibilities and boundaries of language, distorts and fragments narration only to realise that it is impossible to write an autobiography as such. As I have already noted above, the British writer and theorist Blau du Plessis stressed the need to break the sentence, to fragment the hierarchies of discourse, which reproduce ideological formations. In this context, we can read these language procedures not only as an idiosyncratic experimenting with linguistic forms, but also as the means to disrupt the established and conventional ways in which meaning is structured and communicated. Finishing a sentence with a conjunction or a preposition, as Richterová often does, not only underlines the unavoidably open-ended nature of her text, but questions the idea of treating conceptual and discursive categories as enclosed, fixed units.

The problematic side of this process is that the status of fiction and of an authentic insight into the narrator's "true" inner world and life experience is essentially destabilised. Richterová's autobiographical novel thus ultimately turns out to be a deconstruction of the writing of memoirs as such. Since the tricky and wafer-thin seams and fissures between memories confirmed and memories debunked are interspersed throughout the entire narrative, it is better to speak of a regime of falsification than of mere particular points of fissure that would reveal the unreliable

nature of the process of remembering. All these uncertainties are reflected or mediated by the fact there is no definite narrating voice. The narrator apparently finds it perfectly usual and natural to switch from one grammatical gender to another within a single sentence. As Jan Wiendl comments, "the character's very identity is questioned, even the opposition between man and woman, the opposition between what constitutes "I" (the Self) and what is the other, third, he/she, are neutralised there" (Wiendl 1998: 308). Wiendl also points out that a blurring of frontiers between the comic and the tragic often takes place in Richterová's writing. Language play, paradox, irony, humour, which are, however, irreversibly imbued with the horror of uncertainty and emptiness, perform an important role in Richterová's narrative.

The tension between a traditional autobiographical narrative, which from the outset is getting complicated by the impossibility of mastering a diffuse reality, of ordering one's past and memories by means of a linear language, is reflected in the very titles of individual chapters. The three chapters of the novel's first part (*Návraty a jiné ztráty*) are entitled as follows. "Babička vzpomíná aneb Pohoda aneb Původní chaos" (The Grandma is reminiscing or Peace of Mind or the Original Chaos), "Maminka uvažuje aneb Rozloha aneb Nedostatek řádu" (Mum is pondering or Expanse or Lack of Order), and "Děvčátko je bez sebe aneb Výchozí situace aneb Konečný chaos" (The Little Girl is Out of Her Head or The Point of Departure or The Final Chaos). The (self)ironic and self-reflective reference to the conventional form of the chapter titles further stresses the contrived nature of the narrative. In terms of their length and nature, the individual texts in the novel are fairly varied and diverse, ranging from an aphoristic statement or observation to narratives of events and various family stories which are several pages long. As already mentioned, the overall structure of this distorted autobiographical memoir is far from conventional. "The narrator's reflection of the past does not have the form of a linear stream, proceeding in time as is the case in traditional memoir literature, but it creates a free spatial framework, an image that is becoming inhabited by characters, stories and reflections. In it, conventional chronology is replaced with an a-temporal amalgam of reality as perceived by the narrator's subject," says Vladimír Papoušek (Papoušek 1998).

Jiří Kratochvil (an active novelist himself) recalls the idea of a Möbius strip, geometrical and optical aporia, where the inner side of the looped strip continually and against the expected rule turns into the outer one. As in the case of the Möbius strip, the inner side is also paradoxically the outer one in Richterová. Or to put it differently, the inner self is constituted and can be made accessible (paradoxically) only as the one which is different from that which was originally sought. Although Kratochvil is not explicit about this, I assume that (similarly to Linhartová) the moment of aporia can be also detected in the following. On the one hand we have here the narrator's attempt to grasp and ensure the stability of a recollection, of a meaningful and intelligible image of herself in the past. On the other hand however this is contradicted by the awareness that such an attempt is about to be inevitably undermined by the very fact that the functioning of the language is based on constant displacement. The aporetic nature of Richterová's challenging attempt to recuperate identity and a meaningful image of the Self is revealed by statements scattered all over the narrative, such as: "For ages I have been striving to arrive at the point where everything exists simultaneously" or "The path by which I am receding is the same one by which I am approaching [myself]. Returning to where he had departed from meant for him to return elsewhere " (quoted from Kratochvil 1992: 28). The last sentence quoted also shows the way the usage of personal pronouns is changeable, thus underlining the novel's basic observation about identity as something profoundly unstable and fundamentally unattainable.

As both Kratochvil and Papoušek have suggested, spatial metaphors and the topographical nature of recollections are omnipresent in Richterová's texts (cf. the title "Topography" of the middle part of the volume). Time is presented in terms of topology, it is replaced with space. It seems as if she is seeking a kind of space that would enable her to survey her past as though "neben-einander". The story of her *Findings and Other Loses* and *Topography* shows the recollecting and the identity seeking as a journey that cannot be completed, a quest without accomplishment. The very process of trying to compact the unorganised, irregular material of one's experience and past into a well arranged space proves this striving to be futile. remind

Textual strategies in Richterová's novel *Slabikář otcovského jazyka* very much resonate with the idea of Miroslav Petříček who has defined women's writing

as a "pragmatic contradiction" (Petříček 2003). Petříček has used the notion „pragmatic contradiction" to describe the situation where what is being performed and staged on the textual level of communication is in fact an exact opposite of what is being put accross on the level of text's logical proposition (content): The one who speaks *does* an exact opposite of what he or she says; by speaking, which as such is a communicative action, he or she contradicts the propositions put forward in his or her utterance. The pragmatic contradiction is something that can be done unwittingly or accidently. However, it can also be something what is intentionally performed or staged and in such case, it has become a certain form of speaking in itself" (Petříček 2003: 14). In Richterová we see the kind of writing that achieves its goal precisely at the moment when it contradicts all possible messages that it could communicate through available and conventional discursive categories. „What was my comfort at the moments when I despaired: that one day I will manage to write two texts that will mutually contradict each other in every single word, in every single comma or full stop" [Čím jsem se utěšila, když jsem si zoufala: že jednou přece jenom napíšu dva texty, které se navzájem budou popírat v každém slově, v každé tečce a čárce] (Richterová 1991: 62). We can see here the reflection on the type of writing whose sense and purpose reside paradoxically in its textual traces and performative movement (pragmatic contradictions in Petříček's terms) and not in what it can name or refer to on the level of proposition: "So far, I have been very happy about the way I have suceeded in deconstructing my initial concept of my book. Nothing has been left of this initial concept but this very book" [Prozatím jsem spokojená s tím, jak se mi podařilo rozložit svoji původní představu o této knížce. Nic z ní nezbývá, než tato knížka] (Richterová 1991: 76).

For the sake of further deliberations on particularly significant features of Sylvie Richterová's *The Primer of the Father Tongue*, I would like to introduce here a slightly more extensive account of Lacan's theories on a subject, a language and a desire as summarised neatly by Toril Moi. In the context of Richterová's novel, it is useful to recapitulate Lacan's observations that

> the loss or lack suffered is the loss of the maternal body, and from now on the desire for the mother or the imaginary unity with her must be repressed. The first repression is what Lacan calls the primary repression and it is the primary repression that opens

up the unconscious. In the Imaginary there is no unconscious since there is no lack. (...) When the child learns to say 'I am' (...) this is equivalent to admitting that it has taken up its allotted place in the Symbolic Order and given up the claim to imaginary identity with all other possible positions. The speaking subject that says 'I am' is in fact saying 'I am he (she) who has lost something' – and the loss suffered is the loss of the imaginary identity with the mother and with the world. The sentence 'I am' could therefore best be translated as 'I am that which I am not', according to Lacan. (...) To enter into the Symbolic Order means to accept the phallus as the representation of the Law of the Father. All human culture and all life in society is dominated by the Symbolic Order, and thus by the phallus as a sign of lack. The subject may or may not like this order of things, but it has no choice; to remain in the Imaginary is equivalent to becoming psychotic and incapable of living in human society. (...) The principal function of the Mirror Stage is to endow the baby with unitary body image. This 'body ego', however, is a profoundly alienated entity. (...) The Mirror Stage (...) only allows for dual relationship. It is only through the triangulation of this structure, which (...) occurs when the father intervenes to break up the dyadic unity between mother and child, that the child can take up its place in the Symbolic Order, and thus come to define itself as separate from other. (...) The Other with capital O "represents language, the site of the signifier, the Symbolic Order or any third party in a triangular structure. (...) In yet another formulation, the Other is the differential structure of language and of social relations that constitute the subject in the first place and in which it (the subject) must take up its place (Moi 1985: 99-101).

When approached from the Lacanian perspective, we can see that Richterová's novel *Slabikář otcovského jazyka* (Primer of the Father Tongue) intentionally presents us with a double paradox. In the initial passage of the third part of the novel, Richterová explicitly elucidates the motivations of the novel's title. She says she strove to emancipate her language from what she perceives as the inborn, given, material, which is maternal, and wanted to move towards something more spiritual, creative, paternal. When her text, however, is about to reach the stage of symbolic language, the established codes, registers and genres of speaking and writing about one's identity clearly and deliberately demonstrate that there is no other way than the one of stark contradictions and blind alleys. The deliberate double paradox manifested in Richterová's novel might be briefly outlined as follows.

Firstly, the very process of searching for one's fully present identity is – as Richterová's text suggests – a quest that can never be completed. Within Lacanian logic, the impetus for such a quest for identity derives from an original unity – initially lost and subsequently forever sought after – within an Imaginary order, a unity which preceded the very constitution of a subject, a unity where no resolution and difference between the (yet non-articulated) "Self" and the world existed. Such a unity can never be found and recovered, since one's very existence as a subject is conditioned and established by its loss. The search for a full experience and comprehension of a present Self, which would not exist in deferral, is inherently futile, since the loss of this unity, the experience of lack and difference is the very condition of the Self's constitution. It is impossible to recover one's identity from the fragmented, partial state, to achieve the integrity of the Self, for there is always in place the Lacanian mechanism of lack and difference. In short, an identity that is experienced as fragmented, incomplete and unstable can never be completely restored, for there is available no such thing as an original, unified integrity of the Self in the first place.

Secondly, Richterová's text shows that the logocentric language that one might hope could serve the task of restoring one's identity, can distance the goal even further. The way Richterová employs language in her text proves that she is well aware that the material, which is meant to be ordered, hierarchised and made accessible by language, resists all attempts to be linguistically colonised and put into coherent form and definable categories. Richterová undertakes this quest in order to recover her lost, fragmented identity. By her writing she demonstrates however that precisely in respect to this purpose, the symbolic order of coherent, legible, logocentric, paternal discourse must fundamentally fail and capitulate when faced with the force of random, discontinuous undifferentiated nature of lived reality.

Thus the principal aim of grasping a coherent identity cannot be achieved on either of these grounds. Firstly because the very subject's identity is – firstly, structured by the principle of difference and deferral; secondly, because logocentric language cannot represent and retrieve the diversified and unmanageable material of lived reality. The collision between the unmanageable nature of the lived identity based on the principle of difference on the one hand, and the regularities of language

on the other, manifests itself precisely in an unpolished, untidy, non-linear narrative full of textual ruptures, cracks and contradictions. *The Primer of the Father Tongue*, as the disintegrating process of autobiographical writing demonstrates an inevitable failure of the quest to represent identity in a form of accessible presence. This however by no means is to say that the attempt as such was pointless. On the contrary, the process-like nature of the text, all the textual traces of this clash provide the very evidence of these irreducible tensions between the raw, unorganised material of our lived reality and the attempt to master, colonise and organise this reality into an intelligible whole. This is an attempt which is as inherently futile as it is inevitable.

The question might be posed whether Richterová's novel is meant to be read as a deconstruction of the textual attempt to grasp one's past and one's elusive, fragmented identity, or on the contrary, as a manifestation of a more authentic rendition of such a process that is closer and more adequate to the actual, "Bergsonian" experience of one's personality, which ever-present in a non-dividable time continuum. Whatever the case, the fact remains that she questions the naive, logocentric idea that it is possible to render authentically one's true identity and past, an idea which clearly conforms to the metaphysics of presence.

4.4 Palimpsest, polyphony and decentralisation within a text: Daniela Hodrová

Daniela Hodrová (born 1946) is a prose writer and a literary theorist. Just like other well-known practitioners of literary scholarship (Umberto Eco, David Lodge, Octavio Paz), she represents the type of writer-academics, whose theoretical and creative activities are tightly linked and mutually inform each other. Daughter of an actor, she was born in Prague, received a first degree in Russian and Czech literature at Charles University in 1969, did postgraduate work in French and comparative literature (until the subject was banned at the Arts Faculty and the department closed down). Elena Sokol summarises Hodrová's professional career as follows: "In 1973 her original dissertation on the novel of initiation was rejected; when published in an expanded version in 1992, it earned her the highest degree (...). After an editorship at Odeon publishers (1972-5), she began work at the Institute for Czech Literature (Academy of Sciences), where she is now a senior researcher, specializing in the

theory of the novel. (...) Her first published book *Hledání románu* (A Quest for the Novel, 1989) deals with the typological opposition between the novel as reality and as fiction, anticipating her own experiments in the genre. Although she began writing earlier, Hodrová published her first novel only after 1989" (Sokol 2001). Apart from the trilogy *Trýznivé město* (The Tormenting City), discussed here, the novels *Perunův den* (Perun's Day, 1994), *Ztracené děti* (Lost Children, 1997), the non-fiction literary and cultural topography of Prague *Město vidím* (I See the City, published first in French as 'Visite privée: Prague' in 1991), as well as the recently published novel *Komedie* (Comedy, 2003), an indirect Dantean "sequel" to *The Tormenting City* trilogy, rank among her major titles. Her fiction has been translated into several European languages (Bulgarian, French, German, Norwegian, Spanish). She has translated works by Mikhail Bakhtin into Czech, published and edited numerous works on literary theory, focusing primarily on the issues of the form, narrative strategies and traditions of novel writing, as well as on poetics of place and various modes of literary rendition of genius loci. Being inspired by the approach of the Tartu school of semiotics, she frequently uses the idea of the 'city as a text' in her works of both theory and fiction.

"Hodrová only started publishing after 1989, and her prose is informed by her theoretical research into the form of the novel and concerned with the processes of defining personal identity as a nexus between events in the life of the narrator, who is sometimes openly identified with the author, and the entire Western cultural heritage mediated through works of art and literature," (Büchler 1998: 10), Büchler assesses the core of Hodrová's writing. Veronika Ambros points out similar features when introducing Hodrová's novels: "Hodrová's trilogy reflects her awareness and keen interest in the novel as a genre. (...) Each book represents a different type of experiment with the form of the novel. The episodes are neither linked by a story line nor a protagonist. The time setting is rather unspecific. The subtitle of the second part, 'tableau vivant' (živé obrazy – living images), also refers to the division of the text into 126 chapters in which the characters (some of them already present in the first volume) act as puppets moved by the third person narrator" (Ambros 2001: 216).

The trilogy entitled *Trýznivé město* (The Tormenting City), published in 1991, consists of texts written between 1977 and 1990. The trilogy comprises three

loosely connected novels *Podobojí* (In Both Kinds, written between 1978 and 1984), *Kukly* (Chrysalis, written 1983) and *Théta* (finished in 1990, after the Velvet Revolution). The narrative of the novel *Podobojí*, divided into 75 short chapters, oscillates between an unspecified present, arguably the 1980's, this being the time when the text was written, and the time of the Nazi occupation of Prague. Behind the novel's title and keyword of "podobojí" (in both kinds / communion of bread and wine), there could be detected several lines of motifs, such as a betrayal, lie, prosecution (both during the Nazi and the communist regimes), the ambivalent nature of innocence and guilt and of our existence as such, hypocrisy, denial of reality and truth (the character of Diviš Paskal), as well as living between life and death, remembrance and oblivion (Alice Davidovičová, Mr. Turek a Klečka, Karel Sabina). To summarise (however roughly), these dominant topics of the text none the less distort the effect of the narrative itself, for all these themes only become perceptible gradually, through a hazy veil of fantastic, dream-like scenes and various, mythology-imbued reminiscences and allusions. The crucial feature of the narrative which grants it its specific nature is that we learn only slowly, step by step, about all the parts of the plot in recurrent, playful hints and cross-references scattered as though randomly throughout the mass of other information. The outlines of the plot and characters themselves are not clearly defined; on the contrary, they gradually evolve from the blurred, misty shapes of a narrative which retains a great deal of uncertainty and ambiguity.

In the novel *Kukly*, the major part of the story, revolvinig around the key notion of "metamorphosis", is the history of Sofie Syslová's family, recounted by means of ambiguous, blurred recollections from childhood and no less blurred images from the narrator's adulthood. The final part of the trilogy, *Théta*, is in itself a process of unmasking narrative strategies and fictional constructions deployed in the two previous parts. The novel's title *Théta*, as we learn from the text, stands both for Thanatos (an ancient god of sleep and death) – the dying of the narrator's father is one of the central themes of the novel –, and for proof reader's editorial instruction *deleatur*, i.e. to be erased, deleted. The second meaning of this title seems to hint that the illusion of a text's fictional world and the very strategy of narration is about to be unmasked, undermined and ultimately torn down.

The practical examination of the genre's possibilities, the self-reflective nature of Hodrová's writing, even a tendency to the novel's self-denial and self-destruction do not stem only from the tradition of the French new novel and Hodrová's own scholarly background, which is rooted in Tartu and French semiotics. These qualities also link Hodrová's novels to a post-structuralist awareness of the principal function of language in structuring the individual consciousness and experience. The crucial role of language and the materiality of its traces within literary tradition is consciously acknowledged and made apparent throughout her writing.

As Ambros mentions, the type of connection between the individual books of the trilogy is rather loose and specific. It resides in the style, imagery, recurrent motifs and type of fictional universe which Hodrová creates, rather than in actual characters who tend to be parallel to each other and who merge into each other, bearing similar abstract traits. One could be draw a series of constantly transforming characters, who share similar functions in the narrative and stand for similar life experiences, who however cannot be reduced to one original figure. (This applies not only to the "central" characters of the three novels, Alice Davidovičová, Sofie Syslová and Eliška Beránková, but to various other characters populating the fictional universe of Hodrová's novels, c.f. the couple of hangman's assistents who become transformed into the two state police men throughout the trilogy – Bruna and Rubeš, Roháček and Boháček, Provazník a Pazourek, see Krupová 2005.) Unmistakably, female characters play a crucial role in the narrative. At the same time, however, they cannot be said to be central, since the very nature of the text is a-centric, or more accurately, polycentric, with a wide array of multitude narrative lines and numerous different characters (who at times are difficult to identify and locate into the overall plot and narrative structure of the text). This a-central, multiple structure is further strengthened by the formal ordering of the text flow, which is sectioned into very small, usually one page long, chapters or "images". This stands out particularly in the novel *Kukly* (Chrysalis), but a tendency towards this kind of structuring can be found in all the three parts of the trilogy. This conspicuously formal way of structuring the text only foregrounds the artificial, anti-mimetic nature of Hodrová's writing and poetics. The word "image" in the subtitle refers also to the idea of arranging events as though on the theatre stage. The fact that the chapters of

the book *Kukly* are labelled as "living images" however not only implies an idea of a puppeteer who steers the characters as puppets, as Ambros suggests. It also bear a half ironical reference to the cultural, nineteen century Czech National Revival convention of "living images", an odd genre of semi-theatrical event bordering on a visual art performance: petty bourgeois citizens dressed up in historical costumes and creating a stylised group re-enacting well known narratives or situations from the celebrated national past. All the bizarre poetics of these "living images" is playfully restored in the novel's text, which thereby gestures towards the idea that our life, behaviour, all striving, joy and despair, all the twists of fate, are mere grotesque poses and acts of pretence, situated within the ready made semiotic genres and narratives of social life. The poetics of the living images is yet another instance where the narrating subject distances itself ironically and playfully from the gravity of the "story" presented, without however weakening its dark and depressive undertones.

Although perhaps not apparent at first sight, Hodrová's style is a very distinct one, with a specific use of syntax, repetitions and inconspicuous narrator's comments. Her writing also shows a tendency towards a distinct textual flow, with a strongly open-ended, unfinished, circular character. Hodrová's non-linear, a-centric, rhizomatic way of weaving a text of recurrent and slowly shifting motifs and topoi runs in all directions, folding gradually into itself (once we get to the edge of one narrative, we are pulled back by another plot line). This openness and indeterminacy manifests itself not only by constant reoccurrence and repetition of particular words, sentences and motifs, which slowly shift in the changing contexts, but also in the fact that none of the trilogy's part displays any clear signs of completeness; the text does not come to rest upon any specific point or ending. The stories in Hodrová's novel can always be developed further, they form just a fragment of a wider text.

The linear, diachronic flow of time is here dispensed with or replaced by a universe where individual lives are permeated with the memory of those who are gone, with a cultural memory of the place, as well with the great narratives of European culture that serve as a possible framework for individual life stories. Hodrová's novel shows the ambivalence in history: it reminds us about neglected, half forgotten or wilfully suppressed stories in our life, but equally points out the inevitable instability, the changeable and fragile nature of both the individual and the

collective memory. The space of this living, continual cultural memory is the city of Prague, which is presented here as "a living, autonomous, organism, as a constant presence of history and a continuity of actions, characters and objects from which follows the subject's responsibility for all the past, present and future actions" (Jedličková 1995). Prague here is the place, where time does not flow, but piles up in multiple, permeable layers.[30] The fictional world in Hodrová's novel indeed appears to be an uninterrupted continuum of all past, present and future occurances, as they impinge on the mental life and conscience of the narrator. The unsettling treatment of the question of time resides in the ever-possible permeability of time horizons. The linear flow of time is dispensed with in favour of a circularity (which is further underlined by the identical opening and final chapters), nothing that has been done retains either its original or final, accomplished status. Everything returns, resurfacing at the same place, but in a different context. The persistent and prevailing impression in the novel is the impression of déjà vu, which again only strengthens the circular nature of the novel's space-time. Symptomatically, the novel, with its circular character of recurring motifs does not arrive at any particular point; the text does not aspire to impose any artificial mark of closure on reality.

One of the central features of Hodrová's writing is the way she posits the unusual, sceptical and subversive view of things against the attempts to reduce the heterogeneous nature of reality by means of conveniently fixed categories of a phallogocentric discourse. When speaking of one of *Podobojí* characters, Mr. Turek, who is "never optimistic, but never reconciled" (Chitnis 2005: 99), Rajendra Chitnis remarks that Hodrová "defends her own form of intellectual, as opposed to political, 'eternal dissidence', constantly resisting the imposition of a single, fixed model and asserting openness, multiplicity and fluidity, which in her fiction becomes the definition of the writer under any circumstances" (Chitnis 2005: 99). In this context too, Chitnis points out that "throughout her trilogy, Hodrová plays with the reader's desire to simplify or organize reality (...) through her disorientating depiction of several generations of families, which might inspire the reader to draw a family tree.

[30] No need to stress the rich Prague literary genius loci, the Prague cultural text made up by works such as Vilém Mrštík's *Santa Lucia*, Julius Zeyer's *Jan Maria Plojhar*, Jiří Karásek's *The Gothic Soul*, Gustav Meyrink's *The Golem*, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, Guillaume Appolinaire's *The Zone*, all of which Hodrová draws from, or Michal Ajvaz, Miloš Urban or Jáchym Topol's novels to mention some recent fiction.

The use of maps or family trees, however, merely further complicates the novels, highlighting Hodrová's rejection of the attempt to simplify through cognition" (Chitnis 2005: 99).

Like Richterová's, Hodrová's texts also host characters that have some reference to actual figures from the author's personal life. (Often appearing are the figures of relatives, a grandmother, an aunt and the author's father in the third part of the trilogy. There are the author's partners and the author's personality can be traced within the continuum of the fictional or semi-fictional characters of Alice Davidovičová – Sofie Syslová – Eliška Beránková.) But in general, Hodrová's trilogy differs from the poetics of the other authors discussed here by the wide range of numerous characters populating her stories. Whereas in Součková and Richterová we have only a few characters, who are either relatives or persons linked by other various relationships, and in Linhartová the characters are often of an overtly fictional, textual nature, to be abandoned half-way through at the narrator's whim, in Hodrová we find a motley crew, a vivid and improbable mixture of diverse characters. This applies particularly to the gallery of all the living dead from the Olšany cemetery, which is, unmistakably, a blend of comic, pitiful figures seen with a gentle irony, and of characters who are viewed with sympathy for the deeply ingrained despair of their life stories. The dividing line between these two groups (i.e. those gently ridiculed and those pitied) is by no means clear-cut. A number of the Czech National Revival's writers and poets, such František Ladislav Čelakovský and Karel Sabina, are included in the first group. A sound knowledge of both the sanctifying (or in the case of Sabina, condemning) narratives from the Czech National Revival and the actual biographies of these cultural figures is required in order for us to fully appreciate both the gentle, ironical detachment and the fondness with which Hodrová treats them. In the second, melancholic, tragic group, there can be found such figures as Mr. Klečka, who secretly took care of his Jewish friend, Mr. Turek, who hid at the cemetery during the Second World War. Alice Davidovičová, in a way a pivotal character in the book, also belongs in this group. She jumped into the opened arms of her long awaited beloved Pavel Santner, i.e. committed suicide by jumping out of a window of a tenement house near Olšany. (It is only very gradually we learn about her true story, being repeatedly reminded by the leitmotif recurrently appearing throughout the narrative.) The reunion with her vanished lover

happened only in her imagination. She is unwilling to acknowledge she will never meet her beloved again – besides, perhaps her love was not even reciprocated – and the lover had most probably died in a Nazi concentration camp. Her fall lasts for the entire novel, situating the character of Alice Davidovičová in the existential stage of "podobojí" (in both "kinds" / the double-sided state of art and existence), in between life and death, hope and despair, denial and acknowledgement of reality. Hodrová's trilogy can be read as an attempted survey of these existential domains located in the undefinable space of somewhere in-between.

Naturally we can see that the fact that the characters enjoy the very peculiar status of being alive after their death (which brings them no luck) distances Hodrová even further from all the usual conventions of realistic fiction. (And in a way this draws her nearer to the ways Linhartová treats the characters of her texts.) Hodrová obliterates the usual divisions, which we are accustomed to in our habitual perception of reality and ourselves, replacing them with objects and phenomena free of clear-cut frontiers and identities: "How foolish it is (...) to think there is some fundamental difference between a human being and a thing, between the living and the dead, between Man and the world. One verges into the other very continuously and the moment and the point of a transition are intangible. [Jak je (...) bláhové domnívat se, že existuje nějaký základní rozdíl mezi člověkem a věcí, mezi živým a mrtvým, člověkem a světem. Jedno přechází v druhé velmi plynule a okamžik a místo přechodu jsou nepostižitelné]" (Hodrová 1999: 44). The destabilising of frontiers which are conventionally perceived as solid and stable ones is also reflected in the way the very subjectivity is presented as essentially unstable, determined not by any essence, but by the on-going masquerade and displacement.[31] As Rajendra Chitnis observes, "Hodrová presents the formation of the self as an essentially carnivalistic process, in which identities are constantly acquired and shed, like the renewal of skin or the life cycle of insects" (Chitnis 2005: 105).

Hodrová's depiction of the everyday and the ordinary – although everyday here is often unique and singular – verges on the time-less, the mythical, the archetypal, and the archetypal reversibly manifests itself in trivial, commonplace aspects of reality. In her trilogy she creates a poignant, specific fictional world of

[31] In this context,cf. also Derrida's account of Nietzsche's metaphors of woman (see the chapter 2.4).

personal mytho-/topology consisting of common local places, which are permeated with cultural memory and enriched by the novel's intertextual reminiscences. In the trilogy there are mythical spaces enclosed in one another, "pockets of time" enveloped in hidden, seemingly magic chambers, which are however not secret or mysterious, they are profane spaces. This is the case with the closet and the air shaft in one ordinary Vinohrady tenement house. This profane mythology created by casual objects and places, which at the same time are places of convoluted time spirals which invade the present, can however be "speedily denied, forgotten or substituted with another alternative myth" (Papoušek 1994: 108).

Transposing or disclosing mythological spaces which lie at the heart of a trivial, ordinary, mundane reality are also apparent in yet another, essential aspect of the trilogy. A quest for initiation, for a transformation of one's personality, of one's relationship to reality, God, to her- or himself, or whatever the subject of initiation can be, represents the key to Hodrová's novels. However, Hodrová's approach differs from the concept of initiation as it is conventionally construed. For Hodrová, the initiation is a matter of an ongoing process without an ultimate end. It is an approach resembling closely the Lacanian constantly shifting *object a* or the Derridean slippage and deferral of meaning. Hodrová said in an interview (Hodrová 1991b) that this never-to-be-finished quest ends only at the very moment of death. But the point is that Hodrová's fictional universe is inhabited by a number of characters who have already passed away, who are dead (and seemingly safely buried in Olšany cemetery in the Vinohrady quarter) – yet they are still seeking, still trying to find love, to maintain fragile friendships, to justify or atone for their misconduct and sins. Thus in Hodrová's universe, not even death is an ultimate, all solving, celebrated point of a tragic or heroic end. The gallery of the dead "suffer" the very same disease of those who are alive, the disease of desiring and longing. The element of eternity is indeed present here, but as a return and repetition of the Same, and the desire is to be understood in Lacanian terms as a satisfaction that can never be ultimately reached.

4.5 Male authors, "women's writing"

As far as the notion of "women's writing" is concerned, the following question might be asked: if a male writer's texts displays all the qualities that we have ascribed to

women's writing, does this undermine the notion that non-phallogocentric writing is solely the preserve of women? The question is a very useful one, for the answer to it only underlines once again what has been pointed out before in the thesis (in chapter 1.3.3), namely that women's writing indeed has nothing to do with the category of sex or a sexual difference. The concept of women's writing as understood here refers to the position in the ideological and power structure, to certain forms of discursive practice and attitude to language use. There arguably are certain preconditions that make it easier to assume a dissenting stance against the hegemonic, phallogocentric structure of our culture. Among others, a perspective from the margins, the awareness of being located in a particular ideological end epistemological position, the relationship to the semiotic, the different economy of libidinal expenditure could be pointed out in this regard. Although these conditions could be probably found more frequently in females, they however cannot be said to be restricted to the female sex exclusively. Consequently, although there probably is a higher number of women than men capable of taking up this non-phallogocentric perspective, it does not follow that women's writing is grounded on the sexual difference. Thus the category of women's writing has nothing to do with femaleness, as a category of a "biological sex"[32]. Nor has it anything to do with femininity seen as a gender role and identity, for the category of femininity in itself is a patriarchal construct loaded with a set of cultural qualities, parameters and expectations, and as such it yields no room for a subversive stance. Women's writing has not so much to do with a difference (sexual, biological, social, cultural, discursive or otherwise), as with power (in a very broad sense). The patriarchal, phallogocentric discourse is the one which asserts itself against other, marginal ones. Women's writing then would be one of dissenting voices undermining the discursively maintained, privileged position of the phallogocentric and patriarchal culture.

Concerning the French "project" of women's writing, Arleen Dallery remarks that "politically, écriture féminine implies the transformation of a hom(m)osexual culture, the Empire of the Self-Same, based on sexual difference, on the alterity of a feminine libidinal economy – keeping in mind that this economy can be found in

[32] For the sake of argument, I am using the term "biological sex" here. Seen from the perspective of Judith Butler's approach, as put forward in her *Bodies That Matter*, this category, however, is in itself

men who do not repress their feminine side" (Dallery 1989: 62). I cannot quite say whether this could be applied to Bohumil Hrabal's personality and oeuvre, for there appear to be few reasons for keeping him apart from the context of gender sensitivity, and Hrabal is perhaps a somewhat improbable choice in this regard. (Certainly more suitable "candidates" could be found, for instance Richard Weiner, Jiří Kolář or – seemingly paradoxically – Jaroslav Hašek.) However, I have no doubt that for a number of reasons, an analysis of his novels is relevant to our topic.

There are a number of factors that rather disqualify Hrabal from being discussed in the context of feminism. The least questionable point is the rather scopophilic quality of his depiction of sexuality in most of his stories and novels (*Jarmilka, Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age, I Served the King of England, Too Loud a Solitude* etc.). Besides, the motif of the body and the rendition of sexuality are at times both intriguing and challenging in Hrabal. The question of experience and thinking as mediated by bodily perceptions, the body as a site of existential dimensions are the points that contradict the sceptical and critical assessment of this feature of Hrabal's writing. Another ambivalent and questionable aspect could be seen in the way the angle of perception is employed and exploited in Hrabal's autobiographical trilogy *Weddings in the House*. Despite the fact that the novel's narrating voice is that of Hrabal's wife Eliška, a.k.a Pipsi, we are told mostly stories which concern Hrabal himself, while about the inner life of the female narrator herself we learn comparatively little. As Bronislava Volková has observed in her thesis on the depiction of female figures in 20th century Czech fiction by male authors (Volková 1997), although there is a strong undertone of humility and self-irony, it could be claimed that it is this uncompromisingly critical rendition of Hrabal's life as seen through the eyes of his wife that grants him the ideal opportunity for indirect, and hence more efficient, self-aggrandisement. Hrabal's fiction suffers the same problems as do most texts written by Czech male authors, namely that the female characters of his texts rarely function as autonomous, complex, full-fledged voices in the same way as their male counterparts do. The female characters most of all serve as a kind of a supplementary vehicle for highlighting and accelerating the story of the male protagonist (this concerns mostly

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a discursively delimited entity, as Butler convincingly argues. (Hence the quotation marks used here in the text. See also Chapter 1.3.1 for a discussion of this question.)

the female characters in *I Served the King of England*). The females in Hrabal may become a screen where male problems can be projected (as is the case in *Closely Watched Trains*), or females may represent the Other, a mirror serving to establish the male's identity and the world (*Too Loud a Solitude*). There are texts in Hrabal that could arguably be claimed to represent an exception to this rule of the male-centred narratives of Czech fiction. As Bronislava Volková has pointed out (Volková 1997), the heroine in Hrabal's *Postřižiny* (Cutting It Short) might be seen a counter-example that stands out from the range of schematic, specularized (in Irigaray's sense) female characters in Czech fiction. This assessment however cannot be accepted unreservedly. True, the female protagonist of this novel is a strong, complex, autonomous personality whose blend of both a lyrical and a sound, robust mentality defies certain norms of the patriarchal order, as well as the one-dimensional, stereotypical image of women as often seen in Czech, male-written fiction in general. Nonetheless, she also eventually slips compliantly into the parameters of patriarchy, letting her husband play his assigned role of man, herself playing – albeit with a touch of ironic detachment – dutifully hers. This portrait of a witty, independent, strong-minded person as a woman who knowingly and voluntarily signs up for her appropriate position in society is in my opinion as problematic a gesture as the overtly patriarchal and sexist approaches of other Czech authors. (Certainly, however, Hrabal is still far less troublesome as far as unrecognised male chauvinism is concerned, when compared to other prominent figures of 20th century Czech literary canon, namely Ludvík Vaculík, Josef Škvorecký or Milan Kundera – although in the case of the last of these the situation is a little more complex and ambiguous.)

4.6 Fluidity of a non-linear narrative and "undiscriminating attention": Bohumil Hrabal

The thing which endows Hrabal's writing with a significant subversive edge, in my view, however, is that he sets up a counter-discourse to hegemonic phallogocentrism

on the very level of his discourse, in the way he uses language, narrative and literary representation.[33]

The first aspect to begin with is the question of intertext and heteroglossia in Hrabal's texts. This is most strikingly present in the texts *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* (Taneční hodiny pro starší a pokročilé, 1964) or *This City is in the Joint Care of its Inhabitants* (Toto město je ve společné péči obyvatel, 1967). Using a montage of several discourses and linguistic registers, Hrabal destabilises the text by numerous intersections of different and incompatible horizons, granting it a multiplicity of semantic levels, as well as a wide-ranging stylistic and ontological heterogeneity. (The discourses and registers to be found in these texts include naive art nouveau adverts, 19th century dream books, an obscure out-dated book on sexual diseases, uncle Pepin's reports of different sexual histories and tragedies mixed with philosophical allusions to Kant, Hegel, Lao-tze). As opposed to the univocal text whose integrity and homogeneity are guaranteed by the institution of the assumedly present author, in Hrabal's texts we find an uncontrolled, de-centred and diversified patchwork of discourses. Hrabal clearly draws his inspiration from both the poetics of Skupina 42 and Surrealism, but as Sylvie Richterová observes, in Hrabal's case we have Surrealism of a specific kind: "The mystery of Hrabal's unorthodox Surrealism resides in the fact that the subconscious which he strives to penetrate is

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[33] I shall not provide any biographical or other introductory information nor discuss Hrabal in detail, since, unlike in the case of women writers, a lot of research has been carried out on Hrabal's oeuvre. For basic facts and figures on biography, as well as for complex interpretations, refer to the Hrabal's entry in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* written by Václav Kadlec (Kadlec 2001), Robert Porter's chapter on Hrabal in his book *An Introduction to Ttwentieth-century Czech Fiction: Comedies of Defiance* (Porter 2001) or Radko Pytlík's *The Sad King of Czech Literature* (translated into English, originally written in Czech, Pytlík 2000) or the studies published in proceedings from the workshop on Hrabal organised by SSEES in London in 1997 (Short 2004). There of course is the large corpus of literature in other languages, namely the influential German monograph by Susanne Roth (Roth 1986), but also Swedish – written by Czech, Sweden based bohemist Helena Slavíčková, available also in Czech translation (Slavíčková 2004); or Italian, by Czech Romanist Jiří Pelán (Pelán, 2002), not to mention the slim, yet major and crucial Czech monograph by Milan Jankovič (Jankovič 1996), as well as several more elementary oriented books by Radko Pytlík (Pytlík 1990, 1997). Books by Monika Zgustová (Zgustová 1997) and Tomáš Mazal (Mazal 2004) can be consulted for biography. These works on Hrabal, as a canonical figure of Czech literature, are generally well known and available both in the Czech Republic and abroad. I am essentially, although indirectly leaning on all of them, using them as a natural fundament for few observations that follows, even when I am not referring to them explicitly here. I tried to provide a more detailed and complex account of certain features of Hrabal's writing in the paper entitled "De-centred Bildungsroman and the Discourse of a Juxtaposition. Reading Bohumil Hrabal's *Closely Watched Trains, I Served the King of England* and *Too Loud a Solitude*"that is about to appear in *Přednášky z XLVIV běhu Letní školy slovanských studií.* Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy (The Summer School of Slavonic Studies Proceedings, XLVIV, Prague: Arts Faculty, Charles University.)

the subconscious of a language" (Richterová 1986: 75). In his study "Towards a Typology of Hrabal's Intertextuality: Bohumil Hrabal and Giuseppe Ungaretti", David Chirico confronts two principles, "naming" vs. "rearranging" (Chirico 1997), linking Hrabal's prose to that of Ungaretti, which opposes the naive drive towards transcendental signifying and the metaphysical concept of the author, relying instead upon work with textual material. Chirico observes that the intertextual practices also play a crucial role in the way the metaphysical institution of authorship is deconstructed. The anxiety of influence (as described and analysed by Harold Bloom), in itself yet another distinct feature of a phallogocentric discourse, is played out and avoided by an open display of the intertextual nature of Hrabal's writing.

It might be indeed claimed of Hrabal's writing that the protagonist of his texts is not a person, a figure, not even an organising, authoritative voice of a narrator, but the uncontrollable, unmanageable free flowing stream of speech. Instead of fixed categories of characters, motifs, narrative turning points, in Hrabal's writing we see text as an ongoing process. We are exposed to a semiosis in progress, with the stream of speech deprived of any apparent closing point.

This specific language procedure brings us to the idea of a narrative based not on a syntactical, but an epistemological figure of juxtaposition. I hold this to be one of the decisive features of Hrabal's writing (most strikingly it is present in the novel *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age*). Hrabal's paratactic organisation of the text and the figure of juxtaposition, sheer addition, where most hypotactic conjunctions are almost completely eliminated, means that Hrabal abstains from drawing hierarchies and passing judgements. He refrains from constructing systematic, calculated narrative complexes. When discussing Cixous' libidinal economy of a gift, Moi remarks that "the masculine insistence on the proper – property – appropriate, on the proper return, leads to the masculine obsession with classification, systematisation and hierarchisation" (Moi 1985: 112). These are just the qualities consistently absent from the discourse of Hrabal's writing.

Whereas the traditional metonymy-driven narrative erases all contradictions, ambivalence, the rawness of reality, moulding it into a smooth shape and consequently providing us with a perfectly meaningful and comprehensible story, in

Hrabal we find a non-stratified stream of narration, which persistently abstains from discriminating between what is banal and serious, tragic and grotesque, profane and sacred, trivial and sublime. By doing so, Hrabal successfully avoids imposing divisions on either the narrative (even in terms of the syntactic articulation of the text) or the semiotic re-presentation of reality, assuming the position of a witness, the position of an undiscriminating attention and striking openness to whatever is brought up by the unpredictable, unmanageable randomness of reality and inherent forces operating with a text. Such an approach creates poetics of paradoxical confrontation, where sets of binary oppositions have been abolished. Completely incongruous qualities, high and low, miraculous and common, sentimental and cruel, beautiful and repelling, dignified and embarrassing are brought to the point where we cannot separate them, where they are no longer distinguishable, pointing out to the ambivalent, complex and ambiguous character of reality. This passionate gathering together of disparate and incongruous events and experiences brings to mind the phenomenon of "collecting" as a multilayered interpretative keyword for entire Hrabal's entire oeuvre, both in terms of collage techniques, collecting stories, as well as juxtaposing old junk with noble subtleties of culture, periphery with the centre etc. (Clearly the poetics of surrealism and Skupina 42 is resounding there.)

The final point of difference between the discourse of Hrabal's writing and the hegemonic, phallogocentric discourse of our culture and civilisation built on the doctrine of the knowing, rational subject is Hrabal's recurrent motif of Lao-tze's art of not knowing.

5. Conclusion

In concluding our debate on the issues of women's writing with the name of a male author, I wish to underline the fact that what is in question here is not so much the relationship between the sexes, as our relationship to language and its hegemonic discursive structures. By way of conclusion, however, I would like to point out the reasons why I maintain that wide opportunities to step outside the phallogocentric discourse has now been opened, opened specifically for women authors or authors who are situated in a similar position, perspective and power/knowledge nexus. In

addition, I would like to summarise once more the key topics around which the concept of women's writing evolves, namely the notions of subjectivity, language, discourse and text.

I hope that the above discussed theories of Irigaray, Kristeva and Derrida can help us to understand why, in the context of 20th century Czech literature, it has been women writers who – speaking from a marginal position – emphasised and foregrounded the question of language, our inevitable embeddedness in discourse and within its available conceptual categories. I think that the fact it has been these authors who have made the issues of language and identity the prominent subjects of their writing is due to their unspoken awareness of hegemonic discourses, which they perceived as something essentially not belonging to them. It appears to me these women authors perceive language as something that is inevitable, but that at the same time it is not "their own". They tend to approach language as an instrument which can be at best borrowed, temporarily leased, surreptitiously and strategically exploited, but never absolutely controlled or owned. The subversive potential of women's writing, as understood here, is thus not situated within a space conceived as a radical "beyond" or "outside", but is directed inwards, into the fissures of phallogocentric discourse itself. I hold that this is also is why they have succeeded in escaping the very founding mechanism of phallogocentric discourse, that is the metaphysics of presence. It could be said that the discourse of women's writing is speech without clearly delimited discursive boundaries, without a fixed, stable centre. It is a polylogue of various voices and disparate discourses. Women's writing situates itself outside the sphere of the phallogocentric discourse by the paradoxical gesture of surrendering any claim to have its unique, own, allegedly authentic voice. Instead of trying to resist one single, particular discourse, it succumbs to a whole variety of discourses. It establishes the possibility of speaking out by the very gesture of occupying plural places, by its infidelity to a single speaking position. Women's writing achieves its certainty by abandoning all the certainties guaranteed by the order and logic of phallogocentrism. It achieves a meaningful structure of its texts by ridding itself of the structures of phallogocentric hierarchies. It achieves its veracity by abandoning the idea of a singular truth.

The way women writers perceive the question of identity and subjectivity is tightly linked with what has just been said about their relationship to language and

discourse. By the nature of their writing they profoundly question the traditional, liberal-based concept of unified subjectivity, as well as the ideology of unmediated, naturally given and easily accessible experience. They challenge the assumption that identity could be made available in its full presence, undistorted and untouched by the medium of narrative and selective memory, language means and the discursive categories by which we approach it. They confront the conventional humanist concept of the unified subject of Women with the dynamic and changeable plurality of shifting positions and identities.

I see this relationship to language as the key element in the writing of the five authors discussed in this thesis. As already pointed out above, the nature of this relationship is specific, yet ambivalent. The writing of these authors does not aspire to liberate us from language as a means of oppression, for language is perceived as an indispensable and fundamental medium by which one can relate to one's consciousness and to one's body. It rather discloses the role of language, makes us aware of its limits, as well as its possibilities. The kind of writing and narrative procedures that these writers produce does not attempt to disguise its artificial, made-up, fictional nature. It foregrounds the signifying processes which take place in its textual material. Clearly, it is not a message that is central to the texts discussed here. For these authors, the text is not a container for meaning. Its function resides in the act of writing. It is rather the very process of writing, an experience of a struggle for a complex, non-reductionist, yet meaningful portrait of the world we live in. But this attempt, when undertaken seriously, results ultimately in the *experience of a textual failure in progress*, and that is I think what these novels indeed represent. But the experience of semantic and epistemic loss is not negative. On the contrary, it is by means of this loss that we can fix the frontiers can of our comprehension, as well as productive incomprehensibility and silence. The women's writing as discussed here presents itself mostly by means of negativity, by ruptures, fissures, and cracks in an effectively, yet artificially attained homogeneous surface of a logocentric discourse. The texts analysed here, instead of asserting themselves by a positive definition of what women's language is, prefer to play language games, unfaithfully succumbing to various intertextual meanings and assuming various subtly ironic narrative masks. The text functions here not as a straightforward means of subversion, but as a semiotic field of discursive tensions, negotiations and a struggle. In my view, it is

much more the testimony, the trace of this struggle, that points towards possible lines of flight from any logocentric discourse. All the writers discussed here focus on the liminal values of language, seeking to get as near as possible to its boundaries, to reach the point where the text becomes indistinguishable and verges on silence. Unmistakably, their writing reveals that such an effort can only adopt the form of an ongoing, never accomplished process, whose nature is that of a gesture, a trajectory rather than an ultimate, accomplished, finite achievement.

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