

## FROM DECADENCE TO TEURGY

(Connections in Genesis of Czech and Russian Literature at the End of 19<sup>th</sup> and Beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> Century)

*Abstract.* The article focuses on comparative analysis of aesthetic philosophical concepts of Czech and Russian symbolism at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The attention is predominantly paid to interpretation of selected theoretical studies and essayistic work by Czech and Russian followers of decadent-symbolist and symbolist aesthetics. In this article we are showing inner connections in genesis of aesthetic-philosophical system, which, in context of East and West-Slavonic literatures, represents gradual heading from decadent-symbolic aesthetics to broader trans-cultural syntheses. Above all, we follow gradual and fluent evolution from the concept of autonomous model of beauty to the principal of theurgy, which understands art as a cosmogonic power. In the first decadent-symbolist phase, Czech and Russian literature were carried by overcoming the reality by refusing of materialistic existence and by the way to spiritual visions and dreaming. The world of art had become a defence of clear aesthetic values, transcendent desire and metaphysical dream with sense of secret of human life, found in extra-sensual sphere of spiritual world of human. In aesthetic theories of both, Czech and Russian followers of decadent-symbolist aesthetics, we can find gradual tendencies to overcome decadent approaches to the integral understanding of the work of art as a high phase of symbolism. However, that was fully defined later by next art generation who started understanding art creating in its broader meaning as theurgy, using the words of the Russian philosopher V. Solovjov. Work of art and essayistic work of followers of this phase of symbolism is represented by the idea of theurgy, idea of art which possesses mystic power, the idea of “all-human” art together with cognitive act. Art is seen mostly as a complex way of thinking and understanding of the world and the way of existence there. As the most important thing it was operated with finding of new perceptive ways and expressing and reaching the state of existence when the artistic images would not only evoke the impression of beauty but, at the same time they would work as the means of cognition.

*Keywords:* comparative literary studies; Russian symbolism; Czech symbolism; decadence; aesthetic-philosophical conceptions; theurgical symbolism; theurgy; Russian literature; Czech literature; comparative analysis.

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## ОТ ДЕКАДЕНТСТВА К ТЕУРГИИ

(генетические связи чешской и русской литератур конца 19 – начала 20 столетия)

*Аннотация.* На основе сравнительного анализа в статье рассматриваются эстетическо-философские концепции русского и чешского символизма конца 19 – начала 20 столетия. Автор статьи преимущественно занимается интерпретацией избранных теоретических работ и эссеистических произведений известных представителей чешского и русского символизма на отдельных этапах их развития (декадентско-символистское течение, теургический символизм). В настоящей статье уделяется внимание внутренним генетическим связям эстетико-философских систем, которые в контексте восточнославянских и западнославянских литератур этого периода представляют постепенный переход от декадентско-символистской эстетики к межкультурному синтезу. С этого момента можно проследить непрерывную эволюцию исследуемой проблемы, начиная от концепции автономной красоты до теургии; та в свою очередь трактует искусство как космогоническую силу. На первом, декадентско-символистском, этапе своего развития чешская и русская литературы с эстетической точки зрения ориентируются на преодоление реальности путем категорического отказа от материального бытия и стремлением к фантазийному миру. Искусство здесь становится на защиту чистых эстетических ценностей, трансцендентных и метафизических сновидений, скрывающих духовную тайну человеческого бытия. В эстетических теориях представителей декадентско-символистского течения можно обнаружить тенденции к преодолению чисто декадентских эстетических подходов к искусству; тогда как интегральное понимание искусства в смысле теургии (В. С. Соловьев) в своих теоретических работах и эссеистических произведениях полностью разделяют только представители младосимволизма, которые на первый план (согласно философской системе всеединства В. С. Соловьева) выдвигают представление об искусстве как о мистической энергии, соединяющей все сферы человеческого бытия, миропознания и миропонимания. В связи с выше представленным пониманием смысла художественной деятельности в контексте данного нового этапа развития чешского и русского символизма коренным образом меняется представление о смысле и познавательной функции художественного образа-символа, передающего и открывающего глубинный смысл реальности.

*Ключевые слова:* литературная компаративистика; русский символизм; чешский символизм; декадентство; эстетико-философские концепции; теургический символизм; теургия; русская литература; чешская литература; сравнительный анализ.

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The aim of this article is to show inner connections in genesis of Czech and Russian literature at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Our interest will be focused mainly on metamorphoses of aesthetic-philosophical approaches of the most important representatives whose work presents gradual heading for modern art, from decadent – symbolist focus.

The interest will be fixed on metamorphoses of modern art, from decadent-symbolist one to evolutionary and at the same time high phase of symbolism, which can be called theurgic, using the words of the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovjov. At the very beginning, Czech and Russian decadence are firmly fixed onto autonomous aestheticism. Thus, beauty in art is perceived in accordance with Kantian aesthetics as “disinterested sympathy” In context of literary evolution the author of the article is trying to point out the hints of overcoming the Kantian model towards Hegelian approach of beauty in art – as revelation of the absolute idea.

From the literary-historical viewpoint it is not possible to find much evidence of direct mutual contacts between Czech and Russian representatives of this stream. In fact, it was rather on the basis of distant mutual acquainting with literary traditions of both cultural entities. Nevertheless, at the very beginning of their development, the inner relation of these art groups was conditioned by sticking to the same philosophical and aesthetic bases and to European literatures where the turn to the modern art streams – that overcame the realistic-naturalistic school – had already been done.

In the first decadent-symbolist phase of its development, both Czech and Russian literature were carried by an effort to overcome the reality by the way to spiritual places of visions and dream, by refusal of materialistic existence. In the new art there stood two worlds in fatal discretion – the world of concrete and abstract, material and spiritual, outer and inner, objective and subjective; the worlds out of the individual, and worlds existing only in the soul of an individual.

Thus, the world of art had become a passionate defence of clear artistic values, noble culture, transcendent desire and metaphysical dream with its sharpened sense of secret of human life, found in extra-sensual sphere; there was proceeding a fight for spiritual world of human: «Umění je samo pro sebe, prostředkem a cílem zároveň. Nezná a nezamýšlí nic mimo sebe. Jeho hodnota je v jeho tvůrčí intenzitě více a senzibility. Proto je vždy individuálním. Proto není hromadného umění. [...] Umění samo není ovšem pro každého, pro všecku chudinu duchem. Jako produkovati je nemnohým požehnaným je dáno, také není každému uštědřeno chápati, milovati, prožívatí je znova» [Procházka 1913: 49].

It can be reached through the ways of dream and imagination as the essential sources of art. At the beginning of the evolution of Czech and Russian symbolism there stood a radical refusal of realistic-naturalistic model of art. Therefore, the representatives of arising Czech and Russian art generation (Arnošt Procházka, Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, D. S. Merezhkovsky, V. Brjusov F. Sologub and others) rejected the linking of art with democratic mass and aesthetization of issues with low importance, collectiveness and banality. In opposition aesthetization gained absolutely different connotations. Art that must not lead to satisfying of vital needs becomes for them totally autonomous world with its laws, and its constant creative force and immortality are hidden exactly in the fact that “it is life in life, world in world and cosmos in cosmos”: « – но искусство никогда не воспроизводило, а всегда преображало действительность: даже на картинах да Винчи, даже у самых ярых

реалистов-писателей, вроде Бальзака, нашего Гоголя, Золя. Нет искусства, которое повторяло бы действительность. Во внешнем мире не существует ничего соответствующего архитектуре и музыке. Ни Кельнский собор, ни симфонии Бетховена не воспроизводят окружающего нас. [...] Предоставим воспроизведение действительности фотографии, фонографу, – изобретательности техников. *Искусство относится к действительности, как вино к винограду*, сказал Грильпарцер» [Брюсов 1904].

In their opinion, art cannot have anything in common with ethic, social and national norms and suppositions: Thus a real artist must strive for presenting the ideal of beauty and the work of art must extract everything from reality, as its most precious form, what is in direct relation to artist's individuality or soul: «Umění je k tomu, by obohacovalo život, a není k tomu, by jej ochuzovalo, ukazujíc jej v chladném světle střízlivého poznání: má život činiti zázračnější očím lidí, vidouc v jeho pozemských tvarech jen pouhý odkaz na jiný, krásnější, imaginární svět. Umělec nemá ochuzovati své senzibility, zbavovati svět jeho půvabných, duhových barev, poněvadž střízlivost je považuje za klam: má zesilovati a zvroučňovati svou osobnost a stejně silně žiti všechny své pošetilosti jako bolesti. Neboť jen jeho prožití v díle má zůstati, zatímco všechno to, co náleží jeho životu ve skutečnosti, prchá v temnotu, jež ničeho nevrací. Fikce je věčná, realita hyne. Vymyšlené tvary žijí, skutečné mizejí» [Karásek ze Lvovic 1991: 10].

Therefore, the character of modern art that was affected by a strong flashover of spiritualism influences also its relationship to the real world, which is gradually becoming directly dependent on inside states of human soul.

Nevertheless, in aesthetic theories of both, Czech and Russian followers of decadent-symbolist aesthetics, we can find marks of efforts to overcome clearly decadent approaches to the integral understanding of the problem. However, that was fully defined later by next art generation who started understanding art creating in its broader meaning as theurgy. Arnošt Procházka spoke about the art that steps the farthest from the branches of human knowledge as it is gifted by deep intuition, enabling it to unveil and infer the “centres of spiritual lands, hidden in reality”. Creating artists find unlimited richness of transcendent reality, of metaphysical relevance and relations to eternity and infiniteness: «Jako ve snu za spánku pracuje lidská duše výhradně živly, dodanými realitou i v umělecké oblasti více se chopila prvků nejprostší skutečnosti, by je zmocnila a povýšila, by z nich uhnětla vyšší a dokonalejší, obšírnější a intenzivnější realitu, než jakou přinesly a přinášejí hodiny denního bytí. Takové duchové umění, dychtící dosáhnout absolutna, neodvrací se od života vůbec jako jeho nepřítel a špatnosti, ale jen od života běžné chvíle, jeho zmatku a kalného kvasu: krystalizuje ve své výhni z kypící a vroucí hmoty, plné strusek a nečistot, čirý a zvučný, ryzí a zářný kov» [Procházka 1916: 104].

Also, Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic applied similar approach. He was convinced that by means of words-symbols it is possible to transcend reality and view it in its purest spiritual form, in out-of-time empire of ideas, which can enable connecting of “present moment with fluent line of eternity”: «Myslím tím básnickou schopnost, promítati nitro své v tok chvíle, všechno věčné v duši v tok přítomnosti, všech-

no nebeské v nitru v tok pozemskosti a vyslovovati obrazy a symboly pozemskými to, co je v duši věčné, lidsky věčné. [...] ...dýcháte už někde jinde, ne sice někde v nadzemském světě, ale přece jen na výšinách, kde je čistší vzduch» [Karásek ze Lvovic 1927: 93, 164]. Thus the modern artists change into thinkers whose work becomes an absolute aesthetization of an idea; they can fix the purest ideas and synthesize everything in “the only one, essential, original”.

These shifts are probably the most noticeable in decadent-symbolist aesthetics of authors who were connected with “Moderní revue” magazine, they can be traced in essayistic and art work of Miloš Marten. Particularly in his aesthetic approaches we can search and find new ways to the symbolism, seen as the art that creates the organic creative order and that integrates our understanding and learning about the world. *Miloš Marten strives for a new synthesis when art, going beyond the reality, broadens the understanding of the sense of world and existence. For Marten, art is emanation of “unified power” that is the essence of life itself*: «Neboť všichni ti stylizující umělci jsou interprety myšlenky, prohloubeného poznání, zvláštní prolínavé vize života. [...] Snad je v tom všechna suverenita umění, že snese děs mystéria, aniž mu podlehne? A že přitom ještě pracuje o svém pyšném a marném díle? Člověk nejenže žije bolest, nejenže poznává všudypřítomnost propasti, on se jich zmocňuje a promění je ve stimulans života» [Marten 1983: 50, 51–52]. «Umění jde k obnově stylové jednoty, k živému a plastickému principu tvorby. Jako umění a života mají také všechna jednotlivá umění splývati, růsti z kořenů stejně spletených jako kořeny lesa. Spojeny jedním stylem mají vyznívati jednou hudbou...» [Marten 1983: 61].

In Russian context of literary history, similar tendencies can be seen in the art work of D. S. Merezhkovsky. For him, art became a philosophic-mystic way to completeness and psychological fullness of human and civilization, where he realized “Solovjovian” idea of synthesis. His work of art makes a complex system, reflecting the concept of mystic-religious genesis of world and humankind: «Отнимите у жизни красоты, знание, справедливость – что останется? Отнимите жизнь у искусства – и это будет, по евангельскому выражению, соль, переставшая быть соленой. Непраздные художники никогда не спорили о таких вопросах – они всегда друг друга понимали с первого слова, всегда друг с другом были согласны, в каких бы разных, даже противоположных областях ни работали» [Мережковский 2010].

Unlike Merezhovsky V. J. Brjusov was not so strongly oriented on interconnection of art with mystic and religious truths. He had never accepted the idea of heading of art towards a mystical and religious unity. Nevertheless, in his artistic development, he often deflected from extreme subjectivism of his early poetic and essayistic works. Even in his famous essay «Ключи тайн», he sharply opposed the theory of “pure art”. Therefore, in art there is hidden totally different energy that makes it immortal and stable; a work of art becomes beautiful because art gave it the life: «Искусство – то, что в других областях мы называем откровением. Создания искусства – это приотворенные двери в Вечность. [...] Пусть же современные художники сознательно куют свои создания в виде ключей тайн, в виде мистических ключей, растворяющих человечеству двери из его голубой тюрьмы к вечной свободе» [Брюсов 1904].

Similar shifts can be found in the works of F. Sologub. In his understanding, symbol had become an exact representation of an object or phenomenon, it was to be built in clear definition of relations with other objects and anchored in a suitable place in the complex picture of the world: «Живая жизнь души протекает не только в наблюдении предметов и в приурочивании им имён, но и в постоянном стремлении понять их живую связь и поставить всё, являющееся нашему сознанию, в некоторый всеобщий всемирный чертёж». [...] «...по существу же искусство всегда является выразителем наиболее глубоких и общих дум современности, дум, направленных к мирозданию человеком в обществе» [Сологуб 1914]. Thus the work of art was to be an organic connection of reality reflections, dream and noetic dimensions. Sologub understood symbolism as an art stream where there co-existed its three evolutionary stages: 1) cosmic symbolism – heading for understanding the sense of all cosmic actions that is determined by the existence of “united global will”; 2) individualistic that is taken as the way to self-reflection, freeing; the most important question is defining of people and their relation to the “united global will”; 3) democratic – it connects both of the above mentioned ones; it is dominated by the “Solovjovian” idea of “god-manhood” – synthesis of the material and the spiritual that leads to love and respect to life; actually it represents the connection of individualism with “united global will” which had been a source for religious-philosophical strivings of the youngest symbolist generation.

At the beginning of the new century we can notice significant changes in aesthetic-philosophical concept of symbolism. Its further development continued in the frame of shift from subjective-individualistic understanding of the world to objective-idealistic concepts. As final result of this change, we can see understanding of artistic image as unity of spiritual essence and material existence. We can also notice deepening of the idea of synthesis and the focus turned to theurgic essence of art work, having been transforming original mode of existence of world and human. In art creating there was, by unnumbered means, searched for its ability to communicate between the profane and sacred world, and – using its higher creative energy – to change qualitatively the essence of everything existing. The art of this period – rich with many creative experiments – started to be seen as mystic-religious art work going back to the deepest bases of human culture. Therefore, in the frame of these efforts to revitalize the complex human viewing of the world, there arose tendencies to synthesis of art forms. The evolution of these aesthetic-philosophical concepts was influenced by philosophical systems of the turn of the century, together with the philosophy of A. Schopenhauer and F. Nietzsche, which had had its impact also on the previous art generation. From philosophers of the turn of the century we should mention mostly V. Solovjov, P. Florensky and anthroposophy of R. Steiner that obviously touched the art work of O. Březina and A. Bely.

Their art and essayistic work are connected by the idea of art which possesses mystic power, the idea of “all-human” art together with cognitive act. Art is seen mostly as a complex way of thinking and understanding of the world (modus cogitandi) and the way of existence there (modus vivendi): «Символистическое течение современности,

если оно жаждет развития и углубления, не может остаться замкнутой школой искусства; оно должно связать себя с более общими проблемами культуры; переоценка эстетических ценностей есть лишь частный случай более общей работы – переоценка философских, этических, религиозных ценностей...» [Белый 1910: 8]. As the most important thing it was operated with finding of new perceptive ways and expressing and reaching the state of existence when the artistic images would not only evoke the impression of beauty but, at the same time they would work as the means of cognition: «Nové rozlohy života vynořují se na pobřežích. V nekonečno šíří se zářící perspektivy analogií. Smysly rozpukávají jeden za druhým jako poupata v květ poznání, otevřený slunci. Věci zdají se zde být zrcadly symbolů, odrážejícími do viditelného tajemný pohyb událostí neviditelných» [Březina 1996: 163].

Thus, for people, they would develop the ability to see the “theurgic sense” of demonstrations of life.

In direct connection with the above mentioned, the *theurgy* was introduced into the world of art – i.e. synergy of aesthetic and religious spheres as conviction that artistic creation can take part in re-forming of the world. Březina and Belyj reached the conclusions speaking about the metamorphosis of art into an activity understood as creative unveiling and re-shaping of basic life forms, by means of aesthetic forms and deepened aesthetic principals: «Působiti vůli na vůli, a tím na vytvoření reality je vlastním účelem duchové práce. Poslání umělecké v nejvyšším svém vzletu je posláním náboženským. Ale náboženským ve smyslu, jaký tomu slovu dá jednou budoucnost» [Březina 2004: 581–582]. «...в искусстве есть живой огонь религиозного творчества; ...то, что начинается в искусстве, заканчивается в религии. Искусство, образуя с религией и этикой однородную группу ценностей, все же ближе к религии, чем к этике, поэтому в глубине целей, выдвигаемых искусством, таятся религиозные цели: эти цели – преобразование человечества, создание новых форм» [Белый 1994: 125, 115]. Thus the idea of spiritual, psychical, physiological and physical re-forming of contemporary human who would become the first step on the way to the „Solovjovian god-manhood“ became the aim and essence of theurgy. Then the art could head for correlation of earthly dimensions with the cosmic ones. The poets as the artists of life would reveal the hidden beauty of the world, they were led by the beauty and imagination that could set free and unite everything around in the deep intuition of spiritual essence.

Aesthetic-philosophical concepts of “young generation symbolists” were based on the conviction that art was made to understand the “secret spiritual value” of phenomenal world and understand the immediate anchoring of human in the Absolute which is the source of spiritual energy: «Ale tvorba krásy není omezena jen na díla zachovaná v knihách, obrazech, sochách a stavbách. Leží v celém plánu života; je všudypřítomnou citlivostí k magnetickým pólům duchové země, a uměleckým dílem je stejně vytvoření jazyka jako založení říše. V každém člověku je ustavičně činný skrytý umělec; v jiskření okamžiků jako pod blesky tvůrčího dláta pracuje na jednotě osobnosti. Život hrdiny a svěťce vyrůstá jako každé umělecké dílo z inspirace, která znamená rozhodnutí ve vyšší sféře života, kde se smrti se už nepočítá, a z tvrdé cesty vůle, hypnotizované zářením cíle [...] Každý

silný cit je vždy a všude umělecky tvůrčím a dává nám v nitru našem tušiti kraje nepostižené dosud nádhery» [Březina 1996: 79].

In this frame the symbolists touched connection of principals that formed western and eastern civilization in a harmonic complex. We can speak about new reconciliation of intuition of spiritual cosmos, deep understanding for illusive essence of things with clear and powerful activity, reconciliation of science and religion, freedom and law, sacredness and beauty which is the only aim of all arts and sciences. O. Březina and A. Bely were considering that point the most intensively of all. They both strove for overcoming of the two extreme demonstrations of human psychical life that isolate people from real complex consciousness. They defined both the extremes as: 1) the extreme of inner (“brain”, rational) life of an individual 2) life of subconscious physicality. To sum up, the art creation should head for creative connection of rationalism and contemplation in a harmonic complex which forms higher entity symbolizing perfect complexity and fullness.

As the followers of modern psychology, also the „young symbolist generation“ considered the problems of human consciousness. As a rule the art must originate from the same depths where the understanding of secret of all things is realized: «Stavy, které probíhaly až dosud pod naším vědomím, odstíny viděné, ale nepozorované, tóny vnímané, ale neslyšené, vystoupnou, aby nám učinily obraz světa složitějším a pravdivějším» [Březina 1933: 18]. Therefore, equally to S. Freud and C. G. Jung, they were convinced about the existence of collective psychological crucial base, collective source, human spiritual being which leads to understanding of life as a complex and spiritual powers hidden there; these powers are needed for transformation and renewal of human and humankind as whole that remains unchanged and independent on the time and space; we can find discover and understand there “secret beginning of life” itself.

Finally, all these aesthetic-philosophical concepts were projected in the sphere of artistic idiom. This fact became the focus of many aesthetic-philosophical essays O. Březina, A. Bely. The way to renewal of culture was focusing on the phenomenon of word representing the base of life unity: «V dílech velkých milujících, jasnovidců a mistrů nabývá slovo národa magické moci: láme zakletí oddělující duchy, v jednotu rozechvívá srdce zjevením krásy, v oslnění věčnosti dává viděti pozemské věci» [Březina 1996: 127]. The important thing was to give the words back their esoteric meaning and to create a word as a symbol going beyond its borders: «В слове дано первородное творчество; слово связывает бессловесный, незримый мир, который роится в подсознательной глубине моего личного сознания с бессловесным, бессмысленным миром, который роится вне моей личности. Слово создает новый третий мир – мир звуковых символов... мир внешний проливается в мою душу, мир внутренний проливается из меня в зори, в шум деревьев; в слове, и только в слове воссоздаю я для себя окружающее меня извне и изнутри, ибо я – слово и только слово» [Белый 1994: 131].

They all saw the symbol as interaction of its three components forming a symbolic image of the observed reality as a living complex in the mind: 1) symbol as an image of visible reality calling out a certain emotion in our mind,

2) symbol as an allegory expressing ideological meaning of the image (philosophical, religious, and social meaning) and 3) symbol as an appeal to the creation of real life.

According to aesthetic theories of Březina and Bely, the real symbolist art is based on reading and understanding the words, images and symbols so that it could overcome the antinomy of “cosmic reality” and “seemingly real world”. The necessary thing was to understand the es-

sence of words as a unity of sound, existence and bearer of sense. The word-symbol made it possible to estimate hidden powers of universe, to recognize the richness of the world, to see the most minor event as a “gesture of eternity” and to discover “the secret of spiritual growth and unity”. Thanks to that the art stepped into new relationships with universe and the art imagery became one of methods of cognition.

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