

# Contemplating Literature with Jan Patočka: Phenomenology as an Inspiration for Literary Studies

Jan Tlustý

---

## ABSTRACT

The study details Jan Patočka's contribution to literary studies and aesthetics. In the first part, the author examines links between Patočka's aesthetic views and his concept of three movements of human existence, namely the third movement of breakthrough or truth. According to Patočka, art reveals the meaning of existence and it also has the ability to remind us of the phenomenal nature of our lifeworld. In regarding art as a place where truth happens (truth in the meaning of Heidegger's *ἀλήθεια*), Patočka also foreshadows Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic concept of "productive reference". In the second part, the author analyses Patočka's influence on other Czech literary scholars, namely Milan Jankovič and Zdeněk Kožmín. While exploring the issue of meaning in a literary work, Jankovič was inspired by Patočka's aesthetic views and his concept of freedom in *Negative Platonism*. Like Patočka, he stresses the temporal aspect of meaning, its ontological openness and the category of freedom. Kožmín takes into account the wider context of Patočka's philosophical views. He regards the aesthetic experience as an existential event, which puts meaning to the forefront, together with modalities of the human experience of space and time.

## ABSTRAKT

Přemýšlet o literatuře s Janem Patočkou: fenomenologie jako inspirace pro literární vědu

Studie ukazuje přínos filozofa Jana Patočky pro literární vědu a estetiku. V první části jsou popsány souvislosti Patočkových estetických úvah s jeho koncepcí třech pohybů lidské existence, konkrétně se třetím pohybem průlomu či pravdy. V Patočkově pojetí je umění odhalovatelem životního smyslu a má schopnost připomenout fenomenální podobu našeho životního světa. Chápáním

umění jako místa, kde se děje pravda (ve smyslu Heideggerova pojetí pravdy jako ἀλήθεια), Patočka zároveň předjímá hermeneutickou koncepci produktivní reference či mimetického působení P. Ricoeura. V druhé části je sledován přínos Patočkova myšlení pro české literární vědce Milana Jankoviče a Zdeňka Kožmína. Jankovič se inspiroval Patočkovými estetickými úvahami a koncepcí svobody v *Negativním platonismu* při promýšlení otázek smyslu literárního díla, podobně jako Patočka zdůrazňuje časovost smyslu, respektive jeho ontologickou otevřenost a vztah ke svobodě. Kožmín zohledňuje širší kontext Patočkova filozofického myšlení a nahlíží na estetickou zkušenost jako na existenciální událost, během níž se dostává do popředí smysl jako takový a s ním i spojené modality lidského zakoušení prostoru a času.

## KEYWORDS

Jan Patočka, Paul Ricoeur, Milan Jankovič, Zdeněk Kožmín, phenomenology, aesthetic experience, lifeworld, movements of human existence.

## KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Jan Patočka, Paul Ricoeur, Milan Jankovič, Zdeněk Kožmín, fenomenologie, estetická zkušenost, životní svět, pohyby lidské existence.

It is a curious paradox; Patočka's aesthetic and philosophical works had a major influence on Czech literary studies as early as the 1960s. Inspired by his studies, literary scholars took a different approach to literature, contemplating the issues of interpretation and aesthetic experience. This vivid dialogue between Patočka's thought and literary studies was unfortunately interrupted by the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the subsequent period of "normalization", and resumed only after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Barred from the public domain, it took place in private. I am talking about a paradox, but also about a significant loss, because many of the themes that Czech literary scholars studied against the background of Patočka's philosophy in the 1960s became significant on the world scene a decade later in the works of philosophers and literary scholars such as Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Robert Jauss, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida or Gilles Deleuze.

In my paper, I would like to view Patočka's thought from the perspective of literary studies, and my aim is to examine the significance of his philosophy in this field. In the first part, I am going to explore some of Patočka's reflections on art and show how they are related to other approaches, namely that of Paul Ricoeur. It is interesting that while Ricoeur wasn't aware of Patočka's texts about art (they hadn't been translated then), he took a similar approach to literature and art already at the beginning of the 1970s. However, these parallel strains

of thought may have come from the same sources, most importantly the works of Martin Heidegger. In the second part of my paper, I would like to show how Patočka's ideas influenced Czech literary studies, namely Milan Jankovič and Zdeněk Kožmín. For both scholars, Patočka's ideas were a significant impulse in developing their concept of the meaning of a literary work and the aesthetic experience as an existential event.

## 1. Patočka's ideas about literature and the aesthetic experience

Patočka wrote many studies about art and literature during his lifetime. Nevertheless, he did not produce a systematic treatise on the aesthetic experience or the interpretation of literature. Having previously published several articles on art, Patočka authors most of his key studies on the topic during the second half of the 1960s, such as "Treatise on the Past Character of Art" (Učení o minulém rázu umění), "Art and Time" (Umění a čas), or "The Writer's Concern" (Spisovatel a jeho věc) (PATOČKA 2004b; 2015, 2004a; 2019, 2006b). Patočka's reflections on art and literature were guided by Hegel's *Aesthetics* (which he was translating at the time) but also by his desire to dive deeper into the issue of the natural world; it is evident from his series of lectures entitled "The issue of the natural world" from the spring semester of 1969 or from his study "What is existence?" from the same year (PATOČKA 1992; 2010).<sup>1</sup> His study "The Writer's Concern" was published as part of a book called *For the Meaning of Today* (O smysl dneška) in 1969.<sup>2</sup> Even though the book was printed, it was banned from bookstores across the country. However, it found its way to the readers through unofficial channels – the printing house employees gave away most of the copies before they were destroyed (CHVATÍK, PALEK 2006: 432). This study was influenced by a particular historical context; Patočka examines the social role of literature, which was a popular theme in debates across the country in 1967 and 1968, particularly in speeches by the prominent writers Pavel Kohout, Milan Kundera, Ivan Klíma

1) Part of the study "What is existence?" was included in Patočka's text "The natural world in its author's meditation 33 years later", which was attached to the second edition of *The Natural World* from 1970.

2) The study "The Writer's Concern" is a rewritten, Czech version of an earlier German lecture entitled "Die Funktion der Literatur in der Gesellschaft", which Patočka delivered in Hofgeismar in September 1968. The lecture was published in a Czech translation, as "Společenská funkce literatury" many decades later, in PATOČKA 2006a. For more detail, see Patočka's bibliography: <http://www.ajp.cuni.cz/index.php/Bibliografie>.

and others at the 4th Convention of Czech Writers, and it became even more relevant after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968. In other chapters of Patočka's book *For the Meaning of Today* he reflects on the role of intellectuals, scientists, writers and artists in society of that time (PATOČKA 2006c).

## Arts, literature and the third movement of human existence

From the perspective of Patočka's philosophy, his thoughts on art and literature constitute a vital element in his questioning of meaning, the natural world (or lifeworld) and freedom. These thoughts are also reflected in his concept of three "movements of human existence" or, more precisely, the third movement of "breakthrough" or of "truth". To a lesser extent, Patočka dealt with the issues of art and literature in his crucial philosophical texts such as *Negative Platonism* from the early 1950s, in the aforementioned study "What is existence?", in his private lectures *Plato and Europe* from the early 1970s, or in his *Heretical Essays*. In these texts, Patočka brings literature and arts close to philosophy, or – in some of them – to the idea of the "third movement of human existence", which is a movement of "truth" or "breakthrough".

In *Heretical Essays*, Patočka writes that philosophy and also history were born by "shaking" or "loosening" meaning, which was usually shared and experienced by people in pre-historical civilisations. This pre-historic meaning was non-problematic, universally accepted. However, with the birth of philosophy, people found themselves in a new position. As long as there is no meaning, which would be guaranteed by an external authority, philosophical reflection places us in a position of questioning or "openness" towards being. And thus, when reflecting the world philosophically, a person transcends their bonds with concrete beings, and relates themselves to the world as a whole. This process of transcending from concrete beings to the whole happens in the arts the same way it happens in philosophy – an observation Patočka had already hinted at in his *Negative platonism* (PATOČKA 1989: 198–199, 1996b: 328). Art shakes up our everyday, accepted meanings, it brings us to the state of openness towards being, it reminds us that the world reveals itself to us, as a place where meaning happens. Therefore, in *Heretical Essays*, Patočka brands both art and philosophy as a movement of truth (PATOČKA 1996a: 33; 2002: 45–46). I am now going to look at Patočka's concept of art and the aesthetic experience in greater depth,

and as this paper is primarily concerned with literature, let us begin with his study “The Writer’s Concern”.<sup>3</sup>

Patočka attempted to provide a rough sketch of the ontology of a literary work – in a different way than Ingarden. He progresses from an elementary analysis of language and finishes with a meditation on the aesthetic effect. On all levels of his reasoning, the concept of the world takes the foreground. Patočka observes that speech itself immerses us in the world – through speech, the world is offered to us in different perspectives (for instance, there is the dialectic nature of the pronouns “me” and “you” – during a dialogue, “me” is also experienced as “you” and the other way round). Speaking of perspective, though, Patočka claims that it is not given to us as a theme – we experience it, but we do not realize it at first. It is similar with the world – we experience it as a framework of specific references that at first do not stand before us as an object.

It was the emergence of writing and literature, Patočka says, that constituted a major turning point – literature allowed for the world to be presented as a meaningful whole, and thus the world became a theme. The world that literature then refers to is, according to Patočka, a phenomenal world, lifeworld – that is, Husserl’s *Lebenswelt* (PATOČKA 2019: 48–50; 2006b: 289–292). „[...] in reality the point is – and herein lies the *knowledge-based* character of the writer’s work – to *capture the world* in its living form, the world of a specific life, using every possible figment of imagination, linguistic and conceptual structure, character, and plot scheme” (PATOČKA 2019: 49; 2006b: 290).

Patočka’s idea that in a literary work, a reader can experience the “echoing” (*ozvěnovitost*) of the phenomenal world (PATOČKA 2019: 48, 2006b: 290), is related to his earlier thoughts on the meaning of art, which he developed in Hegelian studies in mid-1960s. In his study “Art and Time”, Patočka says, that modern art (i.e. the art of the so-called “aesthetic epoch”) no longer refers to entities or ideas outside of itself (for example religious ideas, Ingardenian metaphysical qualities etc.); rather than that, it focuses on the very concept of meaning and its revealing (PATOČKA 2019: 103–106, 109, 112; 2004a: 308–310, 314, 316–317).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in his conclusion to “A Treatise on the Past Character of Art”, he likens art to an absolute play:

3) Thorough analysis of Patočka’s views regarding art and aesthetics were provided by ŠEVČÍK 2014 (the issue of meaning) and JOSL 2018 (Patočka’s concept of “caring for the soul”).

4) Patočka further deals with the concept of meaning explicitly in his interpretation of Ivan Vyskočil’s plays and short stories (PATOČKA 2004c: 184–185).

[A]rt is an absolute play which does not presuppose an a priori, pre-existing being; it is a play of being itself. A play of being, where that being acts, plays the role of itself, is, however, an act of revealing, phenomenalisation and manifestation. Art is an absolute play where beings reveal themselves. In the aesthetic position, beings are revealed in their revelation. They become a medium and an opportunity for us to reveal the very nature of revealing (PATOČKA 2004b: 343).

As I will show later, Patočka's ideas which related art and the aesthetic experience to ontology (or, in other words, endowed art with the ability to recognize the phenomenal nature of being and meaning in itself), became the main source of inspiration for the concept of "a work of art as a process of meaning", developed by Milan Jankovič towards the end of the 1960s. This approach constituted an entirely new way of understanding literary work and interpretation in the field of literary studies.

### **Patočka's echoing (*ozvěnovitost*) of lifeworld and Paul Ricoeur's productive reference**

Patočka's idea that art mirrors the phenomenal character of being and allows us to hear an echo of our lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) is inspiring in yet another way. Indeed, the same conclusions were formulated by Paul Ricoeur in the early 1970s, although from a different starting point. Ricoeur's idea about a literary text referring to our *Lebenswelt* came into being in the midst of his critique of French structuralism. He later included the idea in his hermeneutic theory of text, which he partly derived from Gadamer's hermeneutics. Ricoeur says that in the act of reception of a literary work, when we are face to face with the text, we may get a glimpse of our lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) – or a world understood as Heidegger's "In-der-Welt-Sein".

My thesis here is that the abolition of a first order reference, an abolition effected by fiction and poetry, is the condition of possibility for the freeing of a second order reference, which reaches the world not only at the level of manipulable objects, but at the level that Husserl designates by the expression *Lebenswelt* [life-world] and Heidegger by the expression "being-in-the-world" [...] For what must be interpreted in a text is a *proposed world* which I could inhabit and wherein I could project one of my ownmost possibilities. That is what I call the world of the text, the world proper to *this* unique text (RICOEUR 1995b: 141–142).

In my view, Ricoeur's ideas about the aesthetic experience have a lot in common with Patočka's reflections on the third movement of human existence, especially due to the emphasis on openness and the possibilities of meaning in our lifeworld. Like Patočka, Ricoeur emphasizes "movement" which occurs in our encounter with art and talks about the so called "productive" reference to lifeworld. He also developed productive reference into concrete form further on, in *The Rule of Metaphor* (RICOEUR 2003: 291–302; 359–371) and later in his three-volume book *Time and Narrative*. In the latter publication, it is explored as part of his mimetic theory, where he demonstrates – using examples from *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust, *Miss Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf and *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann – that literature is capable of modelling different ways human beings may experience or comprehend time.<sup>5</sup> Ricoeur speaks of so-called "imaginative variations on time" (RICOEUR 1988: 127–141) and the related "fictive experience of time" (RICOEUR 1985: 100–152).<sup>6</sup> The act of reading (mimesis 3) allows the reader to encounter the world of the text and this encounter may be able to re-structure the lifeworld of the reader (RICOEUR 1988: 157–179), open new possibilities of meaning to them. In the case of narratives, it is the temporal dimension of a reader's lifeworld that comes to the forefront and may be re-structured.

It is worth noting that in his theory of productive reference, Ricoeur uses both Husserl's phenomenology (his reference to lifeworld) and hermeneutics developed by Heidegger and Gadamer, which thematizes the being of a work of art (Heidegger's concept of the truth of a work of art, Gadamer's theory of application). However, these sources of inspiration are apparent in Patočka as well, as Ševčík aptly describes, noting that in Patočka's theory of "echoing", Husserl's term "Lebenswelt" is referenced explicitly, but Heidegger's concept of a work of art as the "happening of truth" (from *The Origin of the Work of Art*) is also present in the background (ŠEVČÍK 2011: 29–30). Traces of Heidegger's thought are also found elsewhere in Patočka's work; however, they are most prominent in his theory of the third movement of human existence, which relates to art as well.

Both Patočka and Ricoeur appreciate the unique ability of literature to affect our human world, to reveal its phenomenal nature, to present the world as a place that wants to be understood, one that has meaning for us. Even though

5) According to Ricoeur, plot formation serves as a poetic solution to a paradox, which may not be solved on the theoretical level – the contrast between the time of the soul and the time of the world (RICOEUR 1988: 11–22).

6) Ricoeur defines the term "fictive experience of time" in the spirit of Heidegger's philosophy: "What I am calling here the fictive experience of time is the temporal aspect of this virtual experience being-in-the world proposed by the text" (RICOEUR 1985: 100).

Patočka merely hints at this idea, what is important is that however different his starting position is, he nevertheless follows a direction similar to hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches in literary studies and he grants the aesthetic experience ontological status.

## 2. Jan Patočka and Czech literary studies

In the second part of my paper, I would like to approach Patočka's philosophy from the point of view of literary studies. Patočka's thoughts had a great impact on Czech literary scholars in Czechoslovakia, especially on Milan Jankovič and Zdeněk Kožmín, but there were also other literary scholars who were influenced by phenomenology and especially by Patočka's works, for instance Zdeněk Mathauser (MATHAUSER: 2009, 2005: 14–19, 52), Přemysl Blažíček (BLAŽÍČEK 2002a: 313–314, 2002b: 338) or Květoslav Chvatík (CHVATÍK 1992: 97–104, 2001: 180–181).

As far as literary studies are concerned, Patočka's ideas about art, literature and the aesthetic experience enter a very specific context: Milan Jankovič and Zdeněk Kožmín derive their views primarily from the tradition of Czech structuralism, represented by Jan Mukařovský. Structuralism and its "text-oriented" approach left an undeniable mark on both scholars; however, they were also inspired by certain philosophical approaches, namely phenomenology and hermeneutics. The phenomenological method allows scholars to view the meaning of a literary work as a process, as an ever-changing category. Also, it endows art with the ability to influence the reader and his or her existence. In the language of Gadamer's or Ricoeur's hermeneutics: both Jankovič and Kožmín respect the "being" of a literary work, in its ability to enter the reader's world and change his or her self-understanding. This movement, which occurs during the process of aesthetic experience, can also be understood, from Patočka's perspective, as a third existential movement of "truth". Both scholars view a literary text as an entity that may be analysed; however, they are aware that this kind of structuralist analysis has its limits. The "being" of a text primarily occurs in an incessant struggle for meaning, which begins once the text becomes an aesthetic object. That meaning in itself is always open; it may never be fully analysed or exploited, for it is connected with the temporality of the interpreters.

By repeatedly stressing the crucial role of the being of a literary work in its aesthetic experience Jankovič and Kožmín point to a problem similar to the one



sketched out already by the late Husserl and further developed by Patočka in his study called *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* (PATOČKA 2016). Literary studies have indeed found themselves in a similar situation to the one Patočka describes – the scientific, analytical approach may have overshadowed the original, phenomenological-aesthetic dimension of a literary work. A paradigm that stresses analytical, rational methods might then, quite paradoxically, get further from the text itself. Both Kožmín and Jankovič try to avoid this reductionist approach, which disregards the reader, and enrich their interpretation of text with an existential dimension. Paul Ricoeur dealt with a similar problem when criticizing the one-sidedness of French structuralism. He came up with a complex, hermeneutic theory of a text, which does not alienate the “objectivist” approach (explanation) from the “subjective” or aesthetic understanding of a text; rather than that, it fuses them into a complex process of interpretation (RICOEUR 1995a: 145–164). As Ricoeur notes succinctly: “to explain more is to understand better” (RICOEUR 1984: X). This seems to be the domain where Kožmín’s and Jankovič’s ideas take root. Let us now look at the particular meeting points between Patočka’s world and the worlds of the two aforementioned scholars.

## Openness and the process of meaning – Milan Jankovič

Milan Jankovič (1929–2019) was Jan Mukařovský’s pupil and went on to write seminal studies about the world-famous Czech writers Jaroslav Hašek and Bohumil Hrabal. Throughout his life, the focus of Jankovič’s research has also been on the issues of aesthetic experience and meaning. In the 1960s, he developed the theory of “a work of art as a process of meaning”, where he elaborated on certain themes of Mukařovský’s aesthetics and complemented them with philosophical ideas, mainly in the spheres of phenomenology and hermeneutics.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, his landmark study, *A Work of Art As a Process of Meaning* (Dílo jako dění smyslu), was banned from publication in 1968, even though some chapters found their way into magazines earlier in the decade. The text came out as a whole in 1992.

7) Jankovič’s major sources of inspiration were, apart from Patočka’s work, also Gadamer’s opus magnum *Truth and Method*, Heidegger’s studies on art and poetry (*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*), Merleau-Ponty’s later works (*Eye and Mind*), as well as the works of the Czech philosophers Karel Kosík and Ladislav Hejdiánek.

It is especially Patočka's ideas that had a massive influence on Jankovič: he lists him amongst his influences in the very introduction to his book *A Work of Art as a Process of Meaning*, where he talks about the impact phenomenology had on his work (JANKOVIČ 1992: 6)<sup>8</sup> and he keeps mentioning him in numerous later studies as well (JANKOVIČ 1997: 4, 2005: 23–26). Jankovič became acquainted with Patočka's philosophy in the 1960s. Some of Patočka's work got published during that decade and Jankovič also attended Patočka's renewed lectures at the Faculty of Arts. In the 1970s, Jankovič was also an occasional visitor at Patočka's home lectures, taking a number of portrait photographs of him.

What did Jankovič find inspiring about Patočka's philosophy? In *A Work of Art as a Process of Meaning*, Jankovič alludes to specific texts by Patočka, such as "Art and Time", "A Treatise on the Past Character of Art" (*A Lehre von der Vergangenheit der Kunst*)<sup>9</sup>, "Husserl's concept of opinion and the ancient phenomenon of language" (*Husserlův pojem názoru a prafenomén jazyka*) as well as the typewritten manuscript of *Negative Platonism*. In his own reactions Jankovič repeatedly describes art as leading us into the very process of forming meaning, while it also creates "new patterns of perceiving reality". It is this openness of art towards meaning and being that allows us to transcend the given state of affairs in each of our living encounters with a work of art. Actually, Patočka mentioned this very idea in his lecture "Art and Time", where he examines the relationship between meaning and time with relation to Hegel's aesthetics (PATOČKA 2015; 2004a). Jankovič expanded on this relationship: to him, meaning is an ever-changing entity, which is never complete. It is repeatedly threatened and doubted in each of our encounters with art, and therefore, it is threatened by the temporality of being itself.

Another idea that Jankovič took from Patočka is closely related to modern art. There is an intriguing play, which has become the basis of contemporary art, Patočka claims: modern art reveals the very act of revealing, it shows us the phenomenal nature of the world which demands that we make sense of it. This Patočka's concept of art where "truth occurs" is similar to Heidegger's famous study *On the Origin of Art*, where he examines the truth of a work of art, while understanding truth in the sense of the original Greek "alétheia" (ἀλήθεια), that is, the action of revealing or discovering being. Like Heidegger and Patočka,

8) Jankovič also mentions Patočka's influence in his commentary which was included in the second edition of the same book (JANKOVIČ 2005: 100).

9) For the Czech translation, see PATOČKA 2004b. Jankovič works with the German original ("Die Lehre von der Vergangenheit der Kunst"), which Patočka published in 1965 in the anthology *Beispiele. Festschrift für Eugen Fink zum 60. Geburtstag*.

Jankovič also endows art with the ability to reveal “truth”, or the phenomenal character of being.<sup>10</sup> Allow me to illustrate with a short quote:

Artistic action consists in discovering the Being of beings. Such discovery, however free, may not be taken for granted. It is hard-won, and as such, it may speak to us uniquely, as to people who, through this artistic action, gain new meanings and also a new meaning for the world, which is no longer merely the world of a work of art (JANKOVIČ 1992: 15).

Last but not least, Jankovič was inspired by Patočka’s understanding of the concept of freedom in *Negative Platonism*. Freedom which realizes itself in an act of rebellion against a given state of affairs, one which shows an openness towards being – this freedom is, according to Jankovič, realized in the artistic experience. It is this experience that puts us in a position of openness towards possible meanings; where every meaning created, as a form of unified understanding, is nothing but temporary. In the process of meaning in a work of art – the meaning that Jankovič sees as uncompleted and ever-changing – there is also an act of freedom; an openness which is tied, invariably, to the very being of the work of art.

As I have demonstrated, Patočka’s philosophy, as well as phenomenological thought in general, are great sources of inspiration for Jankovič, especially in his study of meaning, as a play that is played again and again, in each of our encounters with a work of art. Phenomenology allows Jankovič to transcend the boundaries of a text-centred approach and enables him to perceive art and literature in terms of their aesthetic effect. Most importantly, however, the aesthetic experience in Jankovič’s interpretation is not merely a matter of aesthetic pleasure. Aesthetic experience is closely tied to an inquiry about being. Jankovič’s interpretation of aesthetic experience can also be understood as a third existential movement of truth, if I use Patočka’s term. Let me repeat that “truth”, aesthetic experience and meaning are all, in Jankovič’s view, forms of “movement”. Thanks to Jankovič’s ideas in *A Work of Art as a Process of Meaning* we can also see Patočka’s philosophy from a fresh new perspective: Jankovič developed the concept of aesthetic experience in the second half of the 1960s and he was inspired mostly by Patočka’s aesthetic studies and by *Negative Platonism*. From this point of view Patočka’s concept of existence as movement, or, more

10) More specifically: Jankovič derives his conception from Patočka’s understanding of the aesthetic position in his study “A Treatise on the Past Character of Art” (Učení o minulém rázu umění, PATOČKA 2004b), where Patočka explains the being of a work of art through Hegel’s aesthetics.

specifically, the third movement of existence, where art and literature also play an important role, was already sketched out in Patočka's earlier studies, starting with *Negative Platonism* in the early 1950s.

Although Jankovič is best known as a structuralist scholar, his original contribution consisted in bringing phenomenology and hermeneutics into his research. In the late 1960s, this philosophical context served as an impulse for Jankovič to completely review his understanding of art; however, at the same time, he kept examining these great sources of inspiration against the background of Mukařovský's aesthetics.

### The issue of meaning and the existential dimension of interpretation – Zdeněk Kožmín

Zdeněk Kožmín (1925–2007) recognizes Patočka as his mentor in many of his texts (KOŽMÍN 1994: 10, 1995b: 529–530, 1995c: 550; 2001: 4). The two met after WWII, when Kožmín started to study philosophy and Czech language and literature. It is no surprise then that Kožmín attended Patočka's lectures more than any other courses at Charles University. Kožmín had been influenced by Patočka's thinking all his life. During the academic year 2000–2001, he organised a seminar called *Jan Patočka as an interpreter* at Masaryk university in Brno. Around the same time, he also published *Models of Interpretation. Patočka's insights* (Modely interpretace. Patočkovské průhledy, KOŽMÍN 2001), where he examines Patočka's lectures on Greek philosophy, his studies about Jan Ámos Komenský,<sup>11</sup> as well as his interpretations of literary texts by Karel Hynek Mácha, Jaroslav Durych or Josef Čapek. Kožmín's post-humous texts include, for instance, a number of hand-written notes and commentaries that he inscribed in his own copies of Patočka's books, be it *Negative Platonism*, *Heretical Essays*, *The Natural World As a Philosophical Problem*, as well as Patočka's correspondence with Czech art historian Václav Richter and other texts.

The first point of inspiration for Kožmín was undeniably Patočka's own way of thinking, one he became well acquainted with during his university studies. He was intrigued by the way Patočka used ancient Greek philosophers to talk about present-day philosophical questions. In his study "Patočka's Interpretation of Plato" (Patočkova interpretace Platóna) from 1998, Kožmín says: "In the inter-

11) Kožmín was also intrigued by Komenský, as you can see in his book *Blow-ups of Komenský* (Zvětšeniny z Komenského), which he published in collaboration with his wife (see Z. Kožmín – D. Kožmínová 2007).

pretation of Plato, probably all possible questions were asked. The intensity of Patočka's questioning was so grandiose that it shook up all philosophical horizons. It was not merely a study in ancient Greek philosophy – it was a philosophy of its own. Patočka's tireless questioning gave us, students, a clear example – we must not be hasty in the face of truth." (KOŽMÍN 1998: 398).

Kožmín also learnt something he would later on pay a lot of attention to while interpreting literary works – ideas and texts enter into dialogue with the interpreter. Whatever is important happens in the thought processes of the reader – an ever-changing domain where interpretation is always open and its indispensable function is to make an impact on the reader. This is why Kožmín repeatedly views art, through Patočka's eyes, as endless investigation, as a question whose horizon is always open. This process of interpretation, which is open, full of questioning and filled with uncertainty – is somewhat contradictory, or rather complimentary, to the structuralist method that Kožmín learnt from Mukařovský. However, it needs to be said that Mukařovský also admits a certain openness in terms of meaning and interpretation (especially when it comes to his later ideas about unconscious acts and semantic gestures – the very ideas that Jankovič takes from Mukařovský and puts them in relation with Patočka's philosophy).

Kožmín was also inspired by Patočka's omnipresent problem of meaning – an idea that runs like a red thread through all of Patočka's work. This idea was given some attention in Patočka's *The Natural World* and it was further developed in his lectures in ancient Greek philosophy. It took the foreground in his *Negative Platonism*. The meaning of the human world asks to be examined, quite paradoxically, at moments when the meaning of the world becomes empty, marginalized, questioned or, in the language of *Heretical Essays*, when it is "shaken". The idea that it is first and foremost meaning that is important in the human world as well in understanding literary works – meaning which is primarily without a central theme, meaning which is felt and only afterwards (usually at times of crisis) is it reflected and analysed – this shows itself in most of Kožmín's work. Not only that – he chooses to interpret literary texts where the meaning is opaque and difficult to grasp. This can be seen in his interpretations of Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, Milan Kundera, Jan Skácel or Vladimír Holan. In his struggle for meaning, however, there is always a measure of determination – meaning is never present in the text itself; it is always born in the interaction with the reader. Actually, in his lecture at the Sorbonne University called "Patočka and Holan in the French context" in 1994, Kožmín pointed out that

the idea of meaning provided a link between Patočka's philosophy and Holan's poetry (KOŽMÍN 1994: 10).

Patočka's views provide a background to Kožmín's own interpretative approach. According to Kožmín, a literary work becomes the model for an existential experience, a configuration of meaning for the human world, which the text maps out. There are similar tendencies in Patočka's work – Kožmín mentions his "ability to interpret texts as existential problems" (KOŽMÍN 1994: 10). However, the meaning of the human experience has another common denominator: the category of time.

I believe that the category of time is the major point of contact between Patočka's and Kožmín's views, and the main source of inspiration that Kožmín draws upon when analysing particular literary texts. It is here that Patočka's philosophy (or, more generally speaking, his phenomenological view of the world) meets structuralist methodology, where the latter provides a valuable analytical tool for the interpretation of literary texts. In Kožmín's theory, time (together with space) is a semantic-existential category, which may be analysed both from the structural viewpoint (that is, how textual elements are used to create fictional time) and the existential viewpoint (that is, the ways the text shows how time and our existence are related). Kožmín examines the temporal aspects of various works of poetry in his studies on Czech poets Halas, Orten, Hrubín, Skácel and others.<sup>12</sup> The different forms of understanding and experiencing time (and space), as mapped out by these texts, are seen by Kožmín as unique exploratory journeys into the depths of human existence. Therefore, his understanding of temporality coincides with the phenomenological interpretation of time, as a category, which is felt, experienced and which provides a key framework for our lives. From Kožmín's perspective, literature has a playful attitude towards time, which may in turn signify different ways human beings experience this category.<sup>13</sup> After all, Paul Ricoeur came with a similar idea, and in his late interviews, he even said that poetry may be more revealing than prose, when it comes to the issues of time and temporality (RICOEUR 1998: 93).

It was during Patočka's lectures that Kožmín first got acquainted with a philosophical interpretation of time. Patočka's thoughts on ancient Greek schol-

12) For more detail, see KOŽMÍN 1995a: 431–503 and TLUSTÝ 2016: 67–70.

13) Jan Josl clearly showed that in many of his studies Patočka also considered the ability of art to reveal time and space as the basic modalities of our experience of the world – Josl speaks of the so-called "fantastic reflection" of time and space as the basic structures of the world (JOSL 2018: 77–86). Patočka's and Kožmín's positions are particularly close to in the article "Issues in Václav Richter's philosophy of art history" (Problematica filosofie dějin umění u Václava Richtera), where Patočka relates both categories to the *human world* (PATOČKA 2004d: 81).

ars often revolve around this category – as he says in the introduction to his lectures on pre-Socratic philosophers: “[...] Greek philosophy came into being only to reflect upon the ancient phenomenon of time.” (PATOČKA 1996c: 7). Kožmín also views time as a question, an open sphere of questioning, through which we may observe both literature and our own lives.

## Conclusions

Patočka’s philosophy has been a great source of inspiration for both literary studies and aesthetics, especially in the way it deals with the meaning of art and its relationship with the lifeworld. In Patočka’s view, art liberates us from the constraints of practical relationships, it transcends our fixation on concrete beings and guides us to the truth of being, to the world as a whole. The truth of being manifests itself in the process of revealing. Literature, painting and other art forms lay in front of us diverse landscapes of meaning; some are bright, others dark and gloomy, such as in V. Holan’s poetry or S. Beckett’s novels. However, even in the darkest moments, when all meaning falls apart and the world seems incomprehensible and empty, reality forces itself upon our attention. I will conclude my paper with the opening lines of Beckett’s last novel, *The Unnamable*: “Where now? Who now? When now?” (BECKETT 2010: 1). We do not know, but we keep walking anyway.

### PRIMARY SOURCES:

BECKETT, Samuel

2010 [1953] *The Unnamable* (London: Faber & Faber)

JANKOVIČ, Milan

1992 [manuscript 1968] *Dílo jako dění smyslu* (Prague: Pražská imaginace)

1997 “Návraty ke smyslu”, *Tvar* 8, no. 18, pp. 1, 4

2005 *Cesty za smyslem literárního díla* (Prague: Karolinum)

2015 *Cesty za smyslem literárního díla II* (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR)

KOŽMÍN, Zdeněk

1994 “Patočka a Holan ve francouzském kontextu”, *Tvar* 5, no. 19, p. 10

1995a *Studie a kritiky* (Prague: Torst)

1995b [1991] “Mukařovského poetika a situace interpretace”, in Zdeněk Kožmín: *Studie a kritiky* (Prague: Torst), pp. 529–533

- 1995c “Co zbylo z anděla”, in Zdeněk Kožmín: *Studie a kritiky* (Prague: Torst), pp. 550–554  
 1998 “Patočkova interpretace Platóna”, in Petr Hruška (ed.): *Rok 1947* (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR), pp. 386–390  
 2001 *Modely interpretace. Patočkovské průhledy* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita)

KOŽMÍN, Zdeněk – KOŽMÍNOVÁ, Drahomíra

- 2007 *Zvětšeniny z Komenského* (Brno: Host)

PATOČKA, Jan

- 1989 [1953] “Negative Platonism”, in Jan Patočka: *Philosophy and Selected Writings*, ed. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 175–206  
 1992 [1983] “Problém přirozeného světa”, in Jan Patočka: *Tělo, společenství, jazyk, svět* (Prague: Oikoymenh), pp. 127–202  
 1996a [1975] *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court)  
 1996b [1953] “Negativní platonismus”, in Jan Patočka: *Péče o duši I. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 1*, eds. Ivan Chvatík, Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikoymenh), pp. 303–336  
 1996c [1945] *Nejstarší řecká filozofie* (Prague: Vyšehrad)  
 2002 [1975] “Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin”, in Jan Patočka: *Péče o duši III. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 3*, eds. Ivan Chvatík, Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikoymenh), pp. 11–144  
 2004a [1966] “Umění a čas”, in Jan Patočka: *Umění a čas I. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 4.*, eds. Daniel Vojtěch, Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoymenh – Filosofía), pp. 303–318  
 2004b [1965] “Učení o minulém rázu umění”, in Jan Patočka: *Umění a čas I. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 4.*, eds. Daniel Vojtěch, Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoymenh – Filosofía), pp. 319–345  
 2004c [1963] “Svět Ivana Vyskočila”, in Jan Patočka: *Umění a čas I. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 4.*, eds. Daniel Vojtěch, Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoymenh – Filosofía), pp. 183–189  
 2004d [1977] “Problematika filosofie dějin umění u Václava Richtera”, in Jan Patočka: *Umění a čas II. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 5*, eds. Daniel Vojtěch, Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoymenh – Filosofía), pp. 72–104  
 2006a [1968] “Společenská funkce literatury”, trans. Martin Ritter, in Jan Patočka: *Češi I. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 12*, eds. Karel Palek, Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoymenh – Filosofía), pp. 175–187  
 2006b [1969] “Spisovatel a jeho věc”, in Jan Patočka: *Češi I. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 12*, ed. Karel Palek, Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoymenh – Filosofía), pp. 280–292  
 2006c [1969] “O smysl dneška”, in Jan Patočka: *Češi I. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 12*, ed. Karel Palek, Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoymenh – Filosofía), pp. 231–338  
 2010 [1969] “Co je existence?”, in Jan Patočka: *Fenomenologické spisy II. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 7*, eds. Pavel Kouba, Ondřej Švec (Prague: Oikoymenh – Filosofía), pp. 335–366  
 2015 [1966] “Art and Time”, transl. Derek and Marzia Paton, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 52, No. 1, pp. 99–113  
 2016 [1936] *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*, trans. Erika Abrams (Northwestern University Press)  
 2019 [1969] “The Writer’s Concern”, in Jan Patočka: *Care for the Soul. Three Essays by Jan Patočka* (booklet), trans. Alex Zucker (Edinburgh: Indigo Press), pp. 39–50



RICOEUR, Paul

1984 [1983] *Time and Narrative, vol. 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press)

1985 [1984] *Time and Narrative, vol. 2*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press)

1988 [1985] *Time and Narrative, vol. 3*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press)

1995a [1970] "What is a text? Explanation and understanding", trans. John B. Thompson, in Paul Ricoeur: *Hermeneutics and the human sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 145–164

1995b [1975] "The hermeneutical function of distanciation", trans. John B. Thompson, in Paul Ricoeur: *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 131–144

1998 [1995] *Critique and Conviction*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press)

2003 [1975] *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny et al. (London-New York: Routledge Classics)

∞  
⊕  
—  
⊖  
∩  
+  
∞

## SECONDARY SOURCES:

BLAŽÍČEK, Přemysl

2002a [1992] "Mezi literární vědou a filosofií", in Přemysl Blažíček: *Kritika a interpretace* (Prague: Triáda), pp. 308–316

2002b [1996] "Text interpreta zavazuje", in Přemysl Blažíček: *Kritika a interpretace* (Prague: Triáda), pp. 334–341

CHVATÍK, Ivan – PALEK, Karel

2006 "Ediční komentář", in Jan Patočka: *Češi II. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky. Vol. 13*, eds. Karel Palek, Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoymenh – Filosofía) (Prague: Oikoymenh), pp. 421–481

CHVATÍK, Květoslav

1992 *Melancholie a vzdor* (Prague: Československý spisovatel)

2001 [1994] *Strukturální estetika* (Brno: Host)

JOSL, Jan

2018 *Umění a péče o duši u Jana Patočky* (Prague: Karolinum)

MATHAUSER, Zdeněk

2005 "Literární dílo a skutečnost", in Miroslav Červenka et al: *Na cestě ke smyslu* (Prague: Torst), pp. 9–177

2009 "Vzpomínka na Jana Patočku", *Aluze*, no. 2, pp. 93–98

ŠEVČÍK, Miloš

2011 "Patočka's Reflections on Literature and Meaning", in Mădălina Diaconu, Miloš Ševčík (eds.): *Aesthetics Revisited* (Berlin, Münster: LIT Verlag), pp. 25–34

2014 *Umění jako vyjádření smyslu* (Prague: Pavel Mervart)

TLUSTÝ, Jan

2004 "Patočkova filozofie umění", *Česká literatura* 52, no. 5, pp. 680–685

2007 "Patočkovo myšlení jako inspirace pro literární teorii", in Ivo Navrátil – Tomáš Hermann (eds.): *Jan Patočka, české dějiny a Evropa* (Semily: Státní okresní archiv), pp. 273–277

2016 "Zdeněk Kožmín a umění interpretace", *Bohemica Litteraria* 19, no. 2, pp. 55–73

### INTERNET SOURCES:

The Jan Patočka Archive

<http://www.ajp.cuni.cz/biblio.html> (accessed Nov 3rd, 2019)

*Mgr. Jan Tlustý, Ph.D., [tlusty@phil.muni.cz](mailto:tlusty@phil.muni.cz), Department of Czech Literature, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic / Ústav české literatury, Filozofická fakulta, Masarykova univerzita, Brno, Česká republika*



This work can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International license terms and conditions (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>). This does not apply to works or elements (such as image or photographs) that are used in the work under a contractual license or exception or limitation to relevant rights.