ABSTRACT

The Program of the Czech Decadent Movement and the Question of Intertextuality. The Work of Miloš Marten

This thesis explores the work of Miloš Marten (1883–1917) seeking to analyse its decadent narrative as a modern narrative that brings into play the unity between the pinnacle and the decline. It departs from the comparison between the style and interpretation of the two versions of Cyklus rozkoše a smrti (orig. The Cycle of delight and death; 1907 and 1917/1925) and the study of the realisations of this work. For this purpose the study contextually examines the conceptions of „intertextuality“ from fin de siècle authors-critics, meaning their conceptualisations of similarity and/or identity of literary works which frequently involve a confluence of degeneration theory, the argument of the non-ethical nature of plagiarism and theory of decadence. All were often used as instruments of disqualification as well as justifications for a modern aesthetics and style. Reconstitution of Marten’s theoretical reflection on artistic genres evidences his research of a harmonizing modern culture within an anti-syncretic tendency: mythology and revolt against myth Order being shifted to tragedy and parable, while the novel is designed as an analytical-critical synthesis. Applying contemporary approaches to intertextuality as a descriptive instrument and the theoretical basis that reflects the ontological status of the literary work of art („formal“ non-autonomy as the condition for ontological autonomy), Marten’s concept of style reveals itself as an ethical-an-aesthetic category which takes into consideration its addressees in an aesthetical, social and historical changing context. If the Cycle’s first version (1907) is based on a complex system of bounded allusions and the dynamics of ornamental words, the second version rests upon the allusions often deleted or explained by exegetical commentaries and upon the attenuation of emotional language. This new ethical-an-aesthetic project of 1917 then stands on a rationalized language, also „supra-individual“ (but in a different way from that exposed in the 1907 version), easy to reach by the non-elitist Czech reader and puts aside the „artificial“ nature of the work of art. Thus it follows an effect of wholeness that opens space for rationality and a new imagination and that makes possible the operationality of the text not only in aesthetical terms but also in a critical situation of war. The new style of Marten eventually becomes a means of renewal for individuals and society.