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In matters of taste, there can be no disputes. Elements of Camp in Fráňa Šrámek's play *Léto*

One must have a heart of stone to read
the death of Little Nell without laughing¹.
Oscar Wilde

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Abstract

In this sketch I am going to focus on the presence of elements of Camp aesthetics in the Fráňa Šrámek's drama *Léto*, written and staged in 1915. Dandyism became popular at the turn of the 19th and 20th century in Czech culture and it would be the most crucial reference point to the Campy attitude. As a „local text” of the Czech decadentism, it took a place of bohemianism. In this sketch I understand Camp as a type of aesthetic avant-garde *sensu largo*, based on democratic tendency and on a fight against the given taste, analogues in many regards to the phenomenon it is against.

On the cover of 1994 issue of „Literatura na Świecie” dedicated to little then known in Poland Camp aesthetics there is the Czech artist Jan Saudek's photo. A woman in a laced shawl and pearls kisses a man's hand against the famous shabby wall.

By choosing this very cover the editor engaged in a subtle (maybe unconscious) polemic with Miss Camp that is Susan Sontag who in her *Notes on “Camp”* of 1964² writes:

¹ O. Wilde, *In conversation*, quote from: Sontag 2013, note 53.

² *Notes on “Camp”* were written in 1964 and firstly published in *The Partisan Review* XXXI, p. 515–530. Two years later the essay was published in New York as a part of the collection *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. The text can also be found here: <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/sontag-notesoncamp-1964.html>.

The relation between boredom and Camp taste cannot be overestimated. Camp taste is by its nature possible only in affluent societies, in societies or circles capable of experiencing the psychopathology of affluence (Sontag 2013, note 49).

Jan Saudek took his photo in 1991³ in Czechoslovakia – in this context it is rather difficult to talk about a psychopathology of prosperity and boredom of wealth. It means that either the Czech artist's photo is not Campy, or Susan Sontag was wrong (or both). It is similar with postmodernism which according to some theoreticians like Fredric Jameson and Douwe Fokkema could not appear in communist countries in the sixties and the seventies because they were closely tied to capitalism and a mass culture. In spite of all mental or economical odds it appeared then and there. To remain on the Czech ground: it is enough to remind works of Jiří Kratochvíl, Eva Kantůrková or – more rarely brought out in this context – 1978 Jiří Gruša's experimental novel *Dotazník aneb Modlitba za jedno mesto a jednoho přítele* (Gruša 1978) where his juggling with symbols of culture, intertextual combinations and associations reminds of palimpsest⁴.

³ A photo comes from Jan Saudek's book *Love, life, death and other such trifles* (Saudek 1991).

⁴ A thesis about connection between postmodernism and capitalism found many opponents between the Middle European literary theoreticians. Some essays referring to this question were published in the postconference book *Postmodernismus... 2002*. Polish, Czech, Slovak and Russian researchers date appearing of postmodernism influence in the literatures of their countries from the sixties of the 20th century. They agree though that in the eighties postmodernism changed due to changes in the European geopolitical situation. In such formulation, the names of ‘the first phase’ postmodernists on the Polish ground were among others: Wilhelm Mach (H. Janaszek-Ivaničková), Witold Gombrowicz, Witkacy, Sławomir Mrożek, Teodor Parnicki, Kazimierz Brandys and Jerzy Andrzejewski (B. Bakula); in Czechoslovakia: J. Kratochvíl (D. Vlašínová), Bohumil Hrabal, Eduard Bass (L. Štěpán), Eva Kantůrková (J. Urbanec); Dominik Tatarka, Vincent Šikula, Martin Šimečka and Dušan Dušek (the last four writers are from Slovakia); in Russia: V. Nekrasov, D. Prigov, V. Sorokin and J. Brodsky (I. Pospíšil and I. Skoropanova).

The existence of both postmodernism elements and Camp aesthetics in literature of Central and Eastern Europe confirms the fact that different cultural background can produce similar phenomena.

Polemizing with Fokkema's thesis Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková states postmodernism in communist countries was based on the objection against totalitarianism (*Postmodernismus...* 2002, p. 76). A Russian researcher Maya Turovska analysing Campy Roman Viktiuk's stagings writes about a „psychopathology of poverty”: experiencing it creates in the realms of art analogues result as excess of wealth. „If the same reasons can produce different results so the same outcomes may emerge from various, even opposite reasons” – Turovska declares. – „Young people who in the fifties were called here „stilags”, in the US – „beatniks”, in Germany – „halbskarten”, in Italy – „discoli” etc., spread around the world despite differences not only in living standards but also systems and even cultures” (Turovska 1994, s. 323; translation – A.F.).

They were Czech admirers of *beat generation* – Bohumil Hrabal, Jiří Kolář – who in the fifties prepared ground for a local postmodernism (“local” because that trend was not homogenous and had its local variants).

A reference to postmodernism is not accidental because in its boundaries some scholars place Camp⁵ and by this they limit its existence from the second half of the 20th century until now. There are though voices among culture experts who question this limit and move the beginning of this phenomenon to the past – such terminological dispute encompasses also a postmodernism itself which is treated by some philosophers (Habermas, Strasser, Marquard⁶) as a variation or deformation of style, which have been appearing from

⁵ Compare: Gołębiewska 2003, p. 155, 160. Some complications connected to the understanding and locating of Camp on the background of the cultural streams reports also in Gawarecka 2012, p. 333 (footnote no. 147).

⁶ The discussion around the term postmodernism reports among others Krystyna Wilkoszewska 2008 (p. 7–19).

time to time in the history of European culture since a long time ago, even since the antiquity (Lyotard).

Scholars researching Camp history quote Susan Sontag who saw beginning of this aesthetics in the end of 18th and beginning of 19th centuries:

There the origins of Camp taste are to be found (Gothic novels, Chinoiserie, caricature, artificial ruins, and so forth) (Sontag 2013, note 13).

The proof for the assumption about a „pastness” of this aesthetics would be a research of William White who found the first documented use of the word Camp to be in 1909. He also quotes Eric Partridge, the editor of *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, and adds it was used to describe behavior characterized by “an exaggerated emphasis” (White 1966), Susan Sontag who starts her *Notes* with a solemn declaration that Camp is a taste and at the same time she avoids the necessity of reconstruction of an aesthetic, social or cultural background that brought it into existence.

Her explanations are tautology:

[...] that period's extraordinary feeling for artifice, for surface, for symmetry; its taste for the picturesque and the thrilling, its elegant conventions for representing instant feeling and the total presence of character — the epigram and the rhymed couplet (in words), the flourish (in gesture and in music) (Sontag 2013, note 14).

To make long story short: according to Sontag Camp existed in late 18th and beginning of the 19th century because it did exist then. Such an approach is a consequence of seeing Camp as a type of sensitivity, a taste, which beginning cannot be traced back (Sontag opens possibility to observe its signs in the earliest cultural epochs) and which must be perceived as a phenomenon independent of currents, trends and epochs. Camp is not an idea and many researchers, Sontag included, connect it with a dandy attitude for example, it cannot be proclaimed at a specific time. As much as in the context of this work the sense of pondering on the conditioning of such aesthetics can be questioned, the elements that it consists of should not be overlooked.

An idea of taste and its part in creating of canon of masterpieces is neglected by current researchers who focus on underlying scientific (more “rational”) prerequisites to hierarchize works.

From time to time the very culture makers question the maxim *de gustibus non est disputandum*. The idea of a good taste is closely connected to aristocracy and it is typical for those epochs or circles for which exclusivism is especially important. A taste is a kind of a badge of identity, a pass to the society of initiated ones, to whom the sense of danger from the masses is not unknown. Such society, proud of their good taste – literary, musical, arts – is generally conservative and feeling affection for tradition, unwilling to modify the canon inherited from the predecessors. Referring to well established in cultural studies apportionment it can be said it represents the Apollonian trend especially that pretence to good taste were closely related to a social privilege.

Cuius regio, eius gustus. Aristocrats of spirit from time to time have to surrender to Dionysians: democratic tendencies in the field of culture shake the foundations of the society of good taste. Excluding factors like belonging to a specific social stratum, type of education, tradition, canon, or appropriate view of a good taste – they are challenged and questioned by „barbarians”⁷. Rejection of canon, ostentation, denial of any determinants of a good taste became a method of fight. Artistic kitsch, mannerism, Camp are all manifestations of a „bad” taste, attempts to break a traditional exclusivism of culture participants/contributors. What discriminate Camp from kitsch⁸ or Art

⁷ That’s why the Camp is also connected to the homosexual society (Susan Sontag also concerns it few times in her *Notes*), which, as ‘excluded’, started campaign against the dominating discourse.

⁸ A difference between Camp and kitsch was accurately described by Andrzej Sefarin in his essay dedicated to a history of this phenomenon: „Some wrongly make Camp and kitsch equal. [...] Although both names are often used to describe the same things, they should not be equated. Kitsch is not aware of its kitschiness, Camp is fully self-aware of itself. The key to understand Camp is irony and crafty detachment from itself and the world” (Serafin 2008, p. 15).

Nouveau is a certain superiority of this sensitivity over earlier mentioned ones and its ambivalent connection with aristocratic demeanors (dandyism included).

I understand Camp as a type of avant-garde *sensu largo* based on democratic tendency and on a fight against the given taste analogues in many regards to the phenomenon it is against (which is typical of any revolution). Camp in the sphere of taste is similar to libertinism in the sphere of morality.

In this sketch I am going to focus on the presence of elements of Camp aesthetics in the former Czech culture – incentive to pondering is given in one of the dramas by Fráňa Šrámek of the beginning of the 20th century. The subject of Camp in the Czech Republic has been almost unapproached but it does not mean some signs of it had not been observed. Susan Sontag’s *Notes* were translated by Martin Pokorný in 2000, that is nearly 40 years after the Polish translation and have not created much reaction. As for now there has not been published any work devoted to the earlier mentioned aesthetics⁹. Some remarks alluding in more or less direct way to Camp can be found in Michal Schonberg’s (Schonberg 1988) and Petr Král’s (Král 1993) sketches. It is mentioned also in Anna Gawarecka’s book dedicated to the presence of popular culture forms in the Czech literature (Gawarecka 2012, p. 333) of the twenties and Joanna Królak writes about it in her essay on the Czech *ostalgy* (Królak 2000, p. 63).

In the meantime it was in the Czech Republic and not in Poland where dandyism became popular at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In the period we are interested in it would be the most crucial reference point to the Campy attitude. As a „local text”¹⁰ of the Czech decadentism it took a place of bohemia – which was a formation typical of the Polish variety of this trend („There was no bohemia in

⁹ A comprehensive collection of the essays devoted to the matter were published in Poland in 2008: *CAMPania...* 2008.

¹⁰ Translation of Teresa Walas’ term, used also by Anna Gawarecka in her description of dandyism. Compare: Walas 1986 and Gawarecka 2007.

Prague” – Zdzisław Niedziela stated in the article on the artists circle “Moderní revue”). Founded according to Charles Baudelaire on the escape from boredom – let’s remind the boredom¹¹ is according to Susan Sontag also a motivation for Camp – it had its theoretician Arthur Breisky among the Czech decadents.

Characterizing a dandy attitude, the essayist underlined such features like: detachment, self-control and treating of emotions as malleable material; idea of primacy of art above life, culture above nature; tendency to mystification and to manipulation of surroundings; individualism and aristocracy of spirit, elegance and taste. Dandies, Breisky writes (Breisky 1992, p. 117–118), „nejsou schopní vášně a lásky. Vášně karikuje a láska je prostituci” (the quote from: Gawarecka 2007, p. 154).

Characteristic of a dandy in many aspects really reminds of Sontag’s comments on Camp style: “Being-as-Playing-a-Role”(note 10), marked with “spirit of extravagance” (note 25), for which characteristic are “a comic vision of the world”, “detachment” (note 44), immoralism and aestheticism (note 37).

The researcher herself points to a fundamental difference: The dandy was overbred. His posture was disdain, or else ennui. He sought rare sensations, undefiled by mass appreciation. (Models: Des Esseintes in Huysmans’ *Ŕ Rebour*s, Marius the Epicurean, Valéry’s Monsieur Teste.) He was dedicated to “good taste” (Sontag 2013, note 46).

The connoisseur of Camp has found more ingenious pleasures. Not in Latin poetry and rare wines and velvet jackets, but in the coarsest, commonest pleasures, in the arts of the masses. Mere use does not defile the objects of his pleasure, since he learns to possess them in a rare way.

It should be noted that in the described approach - connoisseur of Camp as a “post-dandy” who leaves his Ivory Tower and joins, in an internalized exterritorial manner, masses – element of perception

¹¹ A. Gawarecka writes more about it in Gawarecka 2007, s. 150–151.

appears as the most important. The key issue becomes the way of interpretation of reality. The border line between an aware Camp connoisseur and an ordinary representative of kitsch taste runs only in the mind; it is based on a distance and nonchalance in the sphere of taste. A representative of Camp, *nolens volens*, is an aristocrat even though he seems to be as far as possible from that demeanor. An attitude of Camp towards dandyism is described the most precisely by category of ambivalence.

Susan Sontag’s disambiguation is useful in the context of deliberations on the attitude of some anarchists from „Novy kult” circle, especially Fráňa Šrámek. Flavored with dandy traits bohemia of destroyers led them towards Camp aesthetics which elements can be seen in literary works.

Both formations – decadent and anarchistic called in the Czech Republic *anarchističti buřiči* (what can be translated as “anarchistic destroyers”) – at first (at the end of the 19th century) were connected. „Moderní revue” presented Antonin Pravoslav Kalina’s *Manifest anarchistů českých* in 1896.

Founder of anarchistic „Novy kult” Stanislav Kostka Neumann was a decadent and, until the conflict with Arnošt Procházka, who was the editor of „Moderní revue”, closely collaborated with this paper. Other anarchists (for example Viktor Dyk, Karel Toman and Fráňa Šrámek himself as the author of *Rozbolestněný ženami*¹²) also had decadent experience or at least such inspirations can be seen in their output. First of all both formations¹³ had a common philosophical demeanor. Nietzscheanism (although its slightly different aspects), rejection of a middle-class morality, contempt of convenances and individualism were common ideas that were only displayed in

¹² This volume remained as the only one from the author’s juveniles (the writer destroyed most of his early works) and was published in 1964.

¹³ Apart from S. K. Neumann and F. Šrámek, the anarchist were also among others František Gellner, Viktor Dyk, Jiří Mahen, Karel Toman, Josef Mach and Marie Majerová.

a different form. As it was said decadents' dandyism replaced a life style of anarchists that had been close to bohemianism, though with dandy hint what finds its reflexion in their output marking it with Campy accent. Anarchists were keen on spending time in bars, night clubs and cabarets, indulging in „coarsest, commonest pleasures” as Sontag describes them. Their permanent headquarter (a kind of squat) was a villa in Olšany in Prague inherited by Neumann. Fráňa Šrámek as a student also lived there and took part in anti-military protests for which he had to pay with imprisonment and prolongation of a military service. After returning from World War I he was almost never leaving his apartment the only exception were summer trips to countryside. In his reclusive life Milka Hrdličková was the only companion who spent a whole life and whom he never got married to – faithful his anarchistic ideas of free love and feminism. The writer's contacts with authors circle (after breaking apart of anarchist group closer to Čapek's circle and vitalism) were very limited then. In 1937 Čapek wrote about it with some amusement:

Je velmi mnoho lidí, kteří nikdy nepotkali básníka Fráňu Šrámka, ačkoli by o to tuze stáli. Je to částečně jeho vina, neboť se lidem vyhýbá plaše a tvrdohlave. [...]. Není lehké se k němu dostat; než se otevřou dveře, vyhlédne špehýrkou nedůvěřivé modré oko: co tu chceš, člověče? Jdi spánembohem svou cestou, nikdo tu není, nikdo tu nikdy nebydlel (Čapek 1972, p. 309–310).

During the World War II he never left his apartment – it was “resistance movement”¹⁴ typical of him. Remarks about lives of decadents and destroyers are necessary because both dandyism and Camp are characterized by similar aesthetic „totalitarianism” – according to Oscar Wilde's ideas life must emulate art, be the subject of artistic creation. Fráňa Šrámek's oscillation between anarchistic bohemian *squat* and dandy's Ivory Tower finds reflexion in his drama: a taste

¹⁴ Similar 'stay-at-home' poet was Vladimír Holan. His voluntarily restraining in the flat on Kampa in Prague from 1968 to 1980, when he died, was also interpreted as a political gesture (resistance against the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies and so called 'normalisation').

(and a gesture) of Camp are best presented in a theatre. *Léto*¹⁵ was created in 1915 at the beginning of World War I which was a break through not only in the history of world culture, in the writer's life¹⁶ but in the theatre history as well.

Since the end of the 19th century many Western style initiatives have been being undertaken in the Czech language theaters, especially in leading National Theatre in Prague. One of the reformers was Jaroslav Kvapil (author of play *Obláky* which was often compared with a work of Šrámek) a promoter and director of *Léto*. Kvapil's theater (comp.: Císář 2006, p. 175–178) harked back to European tendencies: it accented play's content status, modified director's role, provoked changes in actors' play – an actor was, as theaterologist František Černý summarized, „analytik člověka z rozhraní století” (Černý 1983, p. 73). It placed itself between a traditional middle-class theatre with its cultural and patriotic role and a modern E. G. Craig's and A. Appia's projects¹⁷. Kvapil was choosing plays for his stage very cautiously. He wanted them to express his conceptions as much as possible. Staging *Léto* almost right after it was written (in a war time 1915) and efforts to relay the work to Hermann Bahr (comp.:

¹⁵ In this work I used Czech edition of 1972 included in *Podivný nepokoj* (Šrámek 1972).

¹⁶ Šrámek recalled he had started work twice: the war was an obstacle. At the same time writing became a kind of escape from wartime reality: „zajel jsem si s roze-psaným *Létem* k rodičům do Německého Brodu, trochu dále od válečného mlýna [...] Volil jsem si to závetří dobře: *Léto* se mi tu rozjelo jak s kopečka a války jako by nebylo. Podnes ohlídím se vdečne zpět na ty dva únorové týdny jako na blažený ostrůvek uprostřed válečné sloty. Když jsem tehdy končil třetí akt, bylo mi až nejak líto, že to šlo tak rychle a že už je konec” (*Habent sua fata libelli*; Šrámek 1972, p. 241).

¹⁷ Jan Císář writes about the 'frontier' Kvapil's theatre this way: „Tak je možné videt, chápat a vykládat Kvapilovo usilování o jazyk inscenačního divadla jako průsečík různých vlivů, postojů i principů, které tento Reiss navzájem smiřuje, aby z nich nakonec vytvářel jedinečný celek s novými kazbami komponentů scénického Hvaru a jejich funkcemi. Na jedné strane tkví tyto komponenty v některých konvencích minulosti, jež v podobě pravidel 'dobře udelané hry' i hereckých oborů

Hermann Bahr... 2007, p. 34) in Salzburg tell of the fact it had to fit to his modern vision. Researcher who have been describing Šrámek's play usually pay attention to its lyricism and a specific mood that brings back association with later Vladislav Vančura's prose titled alike: *Rozmarné léto* (1926).

The sources of that mood are usually seen in vitalism and pragmatism, trends which started to attract the writer after the collapse of the anarchistic group (about 1910) and in the wartime reality from which the writer escaped in the memories of a rural, a little bit boring idyll.

Eponymous summer is a protagonist of the drama. It describes and provokes all characters' behavior, stirs up their heads, encourages insanity, brings up the secret yearnings. A married couple of writers going through the marital crisis come in a village for vacation. The place is not chosen by chance – it is Perout's „a childhood country” which bores his spouse quite quickly :

Mohla jsem tušit, že tu každý pátý člověk jmenuje se Perout...? že jeden po druhém poleze za námi (*zahraje hlasem*):

„Já jsem taky, paničko, Perout, já prosím pamatuju...” (*Léto*; Šrámek 1972, p. 248).

Soon Mrs. Perout, longing for romance, a poor novelist, is going to feel a shiver of an emotion: her husband's cousin, a young and omni talented artist, Jan Skalník, who calls her “auntie” falls head over heels in love with her. To complicate things further her lover, poet Chvojka, arrives in the village too. Among the three men a hidden aversion is simmering not always successfully moderated by a priest Hora, a holy man with wisdom of Solomon. Eventually Mrs. Perout runs away to Prague with her lover, Skalník finds consolation in the

vytvořily velkou éru měšťanského divadla 19. století. Jejich uspořádání v nový celek by nebylo možné, kdyby se na druhé straně tyto konvence už nerozpadávaly, stejně jako se rozpadával jednotný, všeobecně uznávaný řád hodnot i pohled na svět, který [...] umožňoval udržovat v české společnosti touhu po plném uplatnění postojů, myšlenek a pocitů, ze kterých se živilo české národní obrození” (Císař

arms of Stáza, a village girl who has fallen in love with him and a betrayed husband seeks solace in an idyllic nature of his “homeland” and in conversations on philosophy with a wise priest.

Unlike with Vančura, sudden change in lives of personages is not left without a consequence. While in *Rozmarné léto* everything goes back to the previous state as if a surface of water closed after a stone that had been thrown into it (changes are deeper, internal), in Šrámek's play the madness of summer makes secret longings to surface and demands to make decision. Everything that happens to characters was obvious from the very beginning: Mrs. Perout from the very beginning tries to tell her husband she has been cheating on him; Mr. Perout avoids his wife not wanting to face what is unavoidable and seeks oblivion in loveliness of nature and pleasant surroundings; Jan struggles between artistic exultation and predilections of his rural and youthful nature Šrámek is interested in personalities not in the course of action¹⁸. The final solution seems to be indefinite, temporary, quenching only the internal shivering of the characters.

So there is a simple story: ageing woman who wants to test if she can arise a passion and three men (in idyllic surroundings). The story – in a Campy style – is taken not literally but in the form of *buffo* style. Almost each of personages' questions – the only exception being a priest Hora and his housekeeper Růžena – is a baroque character, infused with humor and poetic exultation. Irony – understood as a difference between intention and what is spoken – is a basic category on which Šrámek builds his play and at the same time the most important characteristic of Camp which (different from Susan Sontag wants¹⁹) must be self-aware. Characters' dialogues are basically an

¹⁸ Exploring characters and - in the same time - lack of interest in the action development is one of the characteristic elements in the Camp style. In the note no. 33 S. Sontag writes: „What Camp taste responds to is ‘instant character’ (this is, of course, very 18th century); and, conversely, what it is not stirred by is the sense of the development of character. Character is understood as a state of continual incandescence – a person being one, very intense thing”.

exchange of unspoken questions; contact between characters takes place parallelly on two surfaces: intentional and external, marked with pretence.

The author created Campy „contrast between content and form” (Sontag’s term) placing four exalted artists in – overdrawn – rural environment with its simple needs, different language and uncivil manners. Downright caricature-like sophistication of the main characters counterpoints (with comical effects) equally odd „naturalness”, ease and calm of villagers. When the feelings come into play though exaltation takes over the rural characters: Stáza shatters dishes upon hearing Jan’s name, Jan is ready to confront the husband of his loved „auntie”.

PEROUT (*ze zlostným humorem, opakuje po nem*): Muž proti muži! Urazil jsem vaši tetičku! (*Smeje se.*) Situace je ovšem ponekud komplikována tím, že vaše tetička je mou ženou.

SKALNÍK: To není pravda!

PEROUT (*steží se již přemáhaje*): Trochu silné, človíčku!

SKALNÍK (*dýchá rychle, exaltován*): Kdybyste byl jejím mužem... šel byste utrhnouti pro ni vodní růži, kterou utrhnout se nikdo neodvážil, ... (*stále vzrušenější*) kdybyste byl jejím mužem... (*Léto; Šrámek 1972, s. 263*).

Skalník’s exaltation, his „androgynuity”, lack of restraint and propensity for hysterical gestures are in line with typical features of a Camp style. The viewers who had seen a premiere view of *Léto* in National Theatre held in memory Jeník and Mařenka characters of *The Bartered Bride* by Smetana or eponymous *Rusalka* from Dvořák’s opera (nota bene libretto was written by Jaroslav Kvapil). Šrámek’s Skalník under many respects holding to convention had to appear to them in a way „suspicious” because of his instability, sudden changes of his mood as if he was switching costumes. His dialogues with Stáza

¹⁹ Controversial is the thesis of Sontag, who writes in the note 18: „Pure Camp is always naïve. Camp which knows itself to be Camp (‘camping’) is usually less satisfying”. The researcher opens the distinction between the high (self-aware) Camp and the lower (naïve) Camp. The second meaning seems to be unnecessary because it doesn’t differ from kitsch.

or Růžena are different from the ones with Mrs. Perout: they are witty, dialectal banter. *Léto* read as a parody of opera is a manneristic work or – in a broader sense – postmodern one: through deformation of convention it signals its moral decay. It must be mentioned though the Czech opera even if Josef Krasoslav Chmelenský and František Škroup²⁰, are to be named, in times of Šrámek was a new thing. It was not a time of its decline. The playwright exploits a potential of secundarism and caricature of convention. A personage of Jan is for sure a challenge for an actor and Šrámek wrote about it in his letter to Kvapil: „Vaším obavám o obsazení Skalníkovy role rozumím. Nebezpečí leží právě v pubertní přemetnosti hrdinově, v náhlých, ostře vyšrafovaných přechodech z pokorné, exaltované oddanosti k odboji, z chlapecké prostomyslnosti k mužskosti, v zmateném mísení snu a reality – tento hoch je v ustavičném vnitřním pohybu ve směrech nahoru nebo dolů, jde to u něho stále všechno ráz na ráz, jsou tu vždy jen nejzákladnější črty tohoto vnitřního dění” (*Vzájemná... 1976–1977, p. 165*). Jan’s internal shivering is made of his artistic nature, predilection for higher social spheres, rural mentality and – *last but not least* – problems in puberty. Changing from low to high pitch, constant emotional tension, gives the character a Campy hint. In a similar manner a character of Mrs. Perout is shaped. Her coolness of a mature and somewhat jaded woman is mixed with the feeling of disorientation and upbursts of passion. Confrontation of the two perspectives – Šrámek’s universal method – allows to look at the character from a distance; we can see her as a romantic heroin, who is followed by enamoured Skalník and at the same time – from Prout’s point of view – as an unsuccessful, a bit overly emotional writer who henpecks her husband. Then a poet and lover Chvojka is thrown off his pedestal by Jan’s sober judgement to whom (apart from jealousy of his ladlove) a well balanced, rural nature becomes prominent.

²⁰ The group of artists connected to Chmelenský and Škroup created the foundation of the Czech opera – showing the work *Dráteník* in 1826 in Stavovské divadlo in Prague but they didn’t find any continuators at the beginning.

SKALNÍK (*kývá hlavou, pak rychle, jako by to odřikával*): Jiří Chvojka, Zbloudilé hvezdy. (*Prostomyslne.*) To musí být takový velmi dlouhý člověk... rovný... pomalý...

PEROUTOVÁ (*ohledne se, udivena*): Jak to myslíte?

SKALNÍK: Nu tak... a když se má sklonit, jde to tak ztěžka... snad se i bojí, že mu kalhoty prasknou... (*Zarazí se a klade si rozpačité ruku na ústa.*) (*Léto*, Šrámek 1972, s. 255).

All three of them – Mrs. Perout, Skalník and Chvojka – create their feeling in an artistic way letting sometimes art to speak for them.

Jan confesses love to „auntie“ by sculpting and playing the violine. Chvojka speaks poetry. When Mrs. Perout leaves Skalník wants to create himself an idealised picture of his love, to bring to life a new person, better than the real one (as Oskar Wilde used to say „In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing.“) He needs reality only as a pretext, as a material of his own artistic creation:

JAN (*striktne, rozhodne*) Budete mi vypravovati o paní tetičce.

PEROUT (*je udiven, mlčí, pak nejste*): Pochybují.

JAN: Budeme. Budeme o ní hovořiti.

PEROUT: Nanejvýš o jejích novelách.

JAN: O čem?

PEROUT (*usedá*): O jejích novelách. Z literárních hledisek ovšem. Jsou špatné!

JAN: Budeme o nich hovořiti, jako by byly krásné. Bude-li třeba, vymyslíme si jiné, krásnější (*Léto*, Šrámek 1972, s. 289).

If facts don't meet expectations than down with facts – a dandy and Camp representative would say alike. Processing of reality, escape from an „orinary life“ rules were common to both

Detachment, awareness of convention are the key ideas for the assumption of *Léto* being Campy. Detachment written in twofold way: in the work itself (characters questions, their performance, intentions, stage directions) and in the context of the whole Fráňa Šrámek's anarchistic-vitalistic outoput.

Writer died 60 years ago in 1952. It is high time to notice in his postanarchistic works something more than usually underlined lyricism and fascination of nature.

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