

Abstract

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Title: Speaking with a Forked Tongue: Double Reading Strategies in *Romány tři mágů* by Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic

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This thesis explores problems of narratology and reception theory pertaining to the rhetoric of fiction. It departs from the ambiguity of the role of the reader in the texts of the Czech author Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic (1871-1951). The study examines, using the example of the trilogy *Romány tři mágů*, how this ambiguity allows the generating of double reading strategies aimed at releasing a straight and a queer reader role. Thereby the study tries to problematize the traditional interpretation of Karásek's work as an expression of programmatic decadence. At the same time, the analysis sheds light on theoretical issues related to the inscribing of strategies of reading into textual strategies.

Applying Umberto Eco's semiotic approach, the study analyses the construction of the trilogy's model reader and its ability to produce two different reader roles. The analysis demonstrates the crucial significance of competences, both textually produced and presupposed. They represent two techniques containing an inner conflict. Competence produced by textual means aims at making the two reader roles fuse. In contrast, presupposed competences seek to maintain them through a difference between general and specific competence. The first generates a reader role based on literary conventions and obvious meaning. The second creates another reader role exploiting the subversive power of decadent aesthetics and encrypted meaning.

The investigation of the trilogy's reception, based on Prague School perspectives, shows that a majority of the critics traced double reading strategies in the texts. However, the reception exposes two different approaches to the trilogy. The contemporary official reception represents a major norm with readings marked by an institutionalized view of literature. The later unofficial reception departs from a minority status and is characterized by an anti-institutionalized approach to literature. Both the official and the unofficial reception perceived reading as an aesthetic experience but within the unofficial reception reading caused a significant additional effect: it confirmed a queer identity.

The study demonstrates that the model reader strategies in *Romány tři mágů* produce two different reader roles. These double reading strategies are reflected in the reception and lay bare a difference between an interpretation built on programmatic decadence and another revealing an alternative, subversive meaning. Thus, the study elucidates the complex interplay of a major and minor dimension in a rhetoric of writing and reading within the same textual process.

Keywords: Czech literature; Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, decadence; novel; trilogy; Umberto Eco; Prague School; queer theory; book history; reception theory; semiotics; narratology; model reader; structural addressee; reader role; reading strategies; ambiguity; paratexts; self-stylization; fictive author; artefact; reception; literary norm; personality; concretization; Gilles Deleuze; Félix Guattari; minor literature.