

“UNPOETICAL” POETRY OF PETR HRUŠKA

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ABSTRACT

Petr Hruška (born 1964) is a poet and literary historian from Ostrava. This post-industrial city used to be famous for its black coal mines and steel factories. At the time of the industrial boom, Ostrava started to be a “melting pot” of nations living in this part of Central Europe – the Czechs, Poles, Germans from Silesia, Austrians, Jews, and Slovaks. No wonder, then, that the cultural life of this region differs from that in traditional centres of Czech culture like Prague or Brno. Nevertheless, Hruška’s collections of poems have been awarded the most prestigious Czech literary prizes and are more and more often translated into foreign languages.

The following essay is based on the book of Hruška’s selected poems, translated at the Harvard University and published in Britain (*Everything Indicates*, 2023). After the analyses of Hruška’s main themes and means of their verbal expression, attention must be paid to how he deals with the interplay between the history of individuals and families versus broader social and political contexts. Of course, describing this tension is quite common among artists and experts in social sciences. However, Hruška’s literary texts are in many aspects unconventional because his way of thinking and expression does not follow the typical stylistic norms of both classical and modernist poetry. The methodology of comparative literary studies must be used here because, without it, the international success of the author from a cultural periphery cannot be adequately understood. In his early poems, Hruška was a representative of so-called everyday poetry settled in a small universe of his family and friends. Nevertheless, in his newest collection, *I Caught Sight of My Face* (Spatřil jsem svou tvář, 2022), he takes part in Magellan’s voyage around the world, reflecting on the transient and the eternal aspects of human life. It seems that there is no significant difference between intimate and social history, and Hruška can express it in simple sentences with no complicated metaphors. In the chaos of the postmodern world, this kind of writing can be attractive even for readers who are not fond of traditional poetry.

Keywords: Petr Hruška, contemporary Czech poetry, postmodern poetry, poetry of visuality and description.

INTRODUCTION

Petr Hruška is a Czech poet living near the borders of Silesia, Moravia and Slovakia. In this part of Central Europe, national boundaries have been shifting since ancient times, and multiple nations, along with their languages and cultures, have attempted to coexist, often with significant difficulties. Hruška started publishing his poems in magazines in the late 1980s, but his first book was released only after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Shortly after finishing his studies in literary history and criticism at the University of Ostrava, he began working in Brno and later in Prague at the Institute of Czech Literature