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# AXIOLOGICAL SCOPE OF DOMINIK TATARKA'S TEXTS (‘PHILOSOPHY’ OF LOVE)

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## Abstract

This paper deals with the axiological scope of texts of Dominik Tatarka, namely ‘philosophy’ of love. Ontological need for a person at different levels (partner’s, friendly, parent’s, etc.) forms central dominating feature of texts of the author, and so we apply this determining basis when speaking about axiological potential of his texts. We select three masterpieces from the portfolio of his works; short story-novel debut *V úzkostihľadania* (In the Anxiety of Searching), fictional novel *Prútenékreslá* (Wicker Armchairs) and literary document *Pisačky* (Scribbles) which belong to different time zones of the author’s life (youth, adulthood, old age) and which compactly indicate development, creation and declivity of the author’s philosophy of love.

*Keywords:* phenomenological reduction, existentialism, dyadic dimension, possessive dimension, love

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## 1. Introduction

This paper concentrates its attention on a medium - book. Just at the time of modern technologies, fast exchange of information, at the time determined by demand and offer we would like to point out to this classical ‘medium’, so we can underline its importance in this tangle of novelty and ‘trend tendency’. Of course, each book is different (like everything else) and it is affected by trends of the time period, cultural policy and financial capacities. Book market has a wide range from re-editions of timeless artefacts, the authenticity and value ability of which is verified by the time (*Anna Karenina*, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, *Romeo and Juliet*), through original works that are poetologically and aesthetically strong, up to publishing of ‘light’ primary-naive literature. We focus on original Slovak literature in this paper and we select texts of Dominik Tatarka from its diapason. Dominik Tatarka is a writer with un-substitutable place in the history of Slovak literature. Undoubtedly, his works deserve attention because of their poetological originality and semantic comprehension. We will look at his works through a sight of its axiological potential, specifically through interpersonal

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correlation ('philosophy' of love) at all levels, because a problem of reciprocity and ontological interpersonal need (love, compassion, kindness) is a phenomenon which can be observed in all masterpieces of the writer and belongs among its key dominant features.

Uncommonness of the work of Dominik Tatarka and the richness of semantic space and meta-space of the text underline also the fact that the work of the author is inspired by many philosophical authors [1]. Moreover, his meditative-philosophical potential helped him to write down the works which are in communication harmony with the works of G. Marcel, J.P. Sartre, etc., and the timelessness of which goes beyond the time period when the author lived and worked. Despite the fact that reading his texts is not always sophisticated and 'shiny', as we have already mentioned, his originality and semantic richness deserve attention. We select three masterpieces from the portfolio of works of Dominik Tatarka, namely *V úzkostihľadania*, *Prútenékreslá* and *Písачky pre milovanú Lutáciu* (In the Anxiety of Searching, Wicker Armchairs, Scribbles for loving Lutacia). We will try to depict the 'philosophy' of love through these works (as we have already specified above), which communicates with the philosophy of the French existentialism author G. Marcel.

Opening of axiological world of Tatarka's texts means entering a space, where a need to feel, perceive, taste, experience, live, and love a man can be seen in all values, it means in ontological perspective; as the author says "the greatest cultural master piece of the mankind is love, the focus of mind on a beloved person, on beloved people, joy and happiness, the never-ending deepening of understanding of each other" [2]. And so, logically, when speaking about the axiological world, we would like to present this basis. Naturally, the phenomenon of love has many positions and many forms in Tatarka's works, and its natural development is connected with a special empiricism and maturation. This is the reason why we choose the above specified works. It is also because these works have a character of intellectual breaks and determining changes. They depict the genesis of 'philosophy' of love of Dominik Tatarka and they 'draw' its final, stable 'image'.

## **2. Interpersonal distance - debut *V úzkosti hľadania* (In the Anxiety of Searching)**

The first of these artefacts is the short story-novel debut *V úzkostihľadania* (1942). In this work the characters feel the ontological need for another person which is typical for Dominik Tatarka, and which is also declared by G. Marcel ("existence means the fact of coexistence" [3]). Despite this fact the man created by Tatarka "sets upon another man to find out a support..." [4]; the answer is more or less still the same in each text: "There are too many people. I remember all of you, you are familiar to me, but you are inaccessible for me, although there is a bond between us." [4, p. 97]

Interpersonal relationship is depicted at different levels, but no level covers the essential human need for interaction and harmony (love) with other person. Characters fail at partnership, family and friend's level. Irena from the novel *Madness* is losing Žigo; Marta from the masterpiece *In the Anxiety of Searching* not only lives in absurd marriage with Pavol, but also her asexual relationship with Jakub brings her loneliness and disappointment. For Magda (*Predzrkadlom* - In front of the Mirror), who is bound by conventions, her spiritually close cousin is only a memory that can not be reached. In the novel *Smell* the lieutenant Dušan 'plays' a special game with his wife - they are together physically, but never mentally (spiritually). Neither the story *Posolprichádza* (A Messenger is coming), the basic axis of which is Žofia - a mother waiting for her son Pavol, does not bring a release in interpersonal relations. It means that mutual empathy and understanding do not even rise from such basis as blood relationship and phenomenon of maternity.

The third type of interpersonal relationships includes a literary text *Ludiazapriečkou* (People behind a Partition), where the need for other person is carried out on a friendly platform. The hero Gustáv Časnocha meets his friend after years. However, the enthusiasm from the meeting, the ontological desire for a man, the need for mutual communication, the vision of festive atmosphere of mutual 'dealing' is again not fulfilled: "By blandishment and speaking about himself (the friend of Gustáv Časnocha, note of M.A.), he quickly pleased his self-admiration (...). But friendly communicativeness ceased when they came to familiar issues (...). They could be happy for the fellowship with people and things as in the past, but they were sad for being so distant from each other." [4, p. 103]

As we have already mentioned and as it is evident from these examples, the interpersonal relationship is full of distance, abalienation and loneliness in the debut - despite the ontological need for a man. It is full of "distant cousins, loving likened to a cold operation" [4, p.167 -168], full of motives of a space divided by different barriers and "there is an unknown person in each shell" [4, p. 70, 110, 141]. A general knowledge from the masterpiece is a fact: "that destinies of our lovers, everyday friends, people who seem to be close to us are inadmissible; that destinies of people are as distant as stars and they never converge" [4, p. 50], because: "There is no peace next to a person despite you love him/her. You have reached it hardly, but it disappears at the same time..." [4, p. 106]

### **3. Transcendental dimension of love in Prútené kreslá (Wicker Armchairs)**

In the novel *Prútenékreslá* (Wicker Armchairs, 1963) a genesis of love of Dominik Tatarka moves along an imaginary axis from maximum resignation to a full-value interpersonal relation. Similarly as in case of the debut, in the novel there is also an urgent need for another person, an ontological need for love, but in this case the love is crowned (although not in a way as expected) - in a clean transcendent form. As stated by M. Hamada, in this literary text it is love which

is phenomenologically reduced, corresponding with Christian existentialism [5]. And as also confirmed by Z. Prušková, it is a human ability “to be here for the other person without the right to manipulation and without the risk of self-manipulation” [6].

The basis of the story (as already stated) is the metaphysical need for a person, because people are in general a matter what “we breath like an air, a matter in which we swim like a fish in the sea” [5, p. 40]. In compliance with this statement the main character Bartolomej Slzička overcomes initial strangeness of Paris by his focusing on Daniela: “I came here yesterday - beaten and sad. And now, with every step, every clatter (the author means clattering of Daniela’s court shoes, note of M.A.) something is fulfilled. (...) what else could a stranger wish? Companionship.” [5, p. 30]

If we want to speak about phenomenologically reduced love and about Christian existentialist love, it means about love as such (highlighted by Hamada), it is necessary to look at the nature of relationship between young people closer. As the phenomenological reduction undertakes (simply said) to ‘put into brackets’ (to force out) everything unoriginal and expose phenomenon of love in its authenticity, also the Christian existentialism (namely abovementioned G. Marcel [7]) highlights the variety of authentic and unauthentic interpersonal correlation. It is possible to love in two ways, or to be more exact - to love someone really means to love dyadically, without any reason, purely and without possession, while to love unjustly means to act ‘possessively’ in connection with a person, to behave to a person as to an object of desires and to get hold of a person because of ‘ego’ needs.

And what is the case of Bartolomej and Daniela? The positions of love created by Dominik Tatarka clearly indicate a relationship which is not conditioned by any ‘first-planned’ need. It is not determined by any unstable external or instinctive determinants. Their relationship was even not started by any shallow emotionality or ‘spark’: “Do you think that it was a love at first sight? Not really. I do not believe that rational people would offer love to each other at first sight (...)” [5, p. 13] And it is even not a selfish pleasure in beauty: “I do not have to look at a woman being close to me, whether she is nice or not, nor I have to present her my facade ... I am sitting next to her, in her presence, I look in from of me as now at the sea, full moon, at the leaf (...). She is everywhere. She is the air I am breathing. I perceive her, I am swimming in her like a cork in delicious wine and (...) I listen to her.” [5, p. 51] The depicted relationship is not conditioned and motivated by a physical desirousness “(...) Simply, Daniela did not want to kiss; it was not serious enough for her (...); she did not want to be a lover to anybody, not even to me, when she could not think of being a wife to that man (...); I realized Daniela’s conditions, realized and accepted them without any words.” [5, p. 52]

What does it mean? In the basis of everything, a metaphysical need for a man is rooted in the human subject (already mentioned): “I needed a companionship” [5, p. 13]. Young people enjoy the fact that they exist. Their relationship is based on ‘wicker armchairs’ which radiate warmth, symbiosis,

peace, home, etc. It is about communication, about ability to respect, accept, hold esteem and honour. It is about ontological mutual (interpersonal) need, necessity in which a meaning of existence itself is fulfilled: "(...) Just as she moved away from me, I got the feeling that I am getting deaf and blind. Suddenly, I missed the essential what we breathe, I missed the place where we live like a fish in the water; I missed what is given to us by the others." [5, p. 40], openness itself: "(...) everything she touched was familiar, known to me, it was mine, it was me and it was Daniela..." [5, p. 48]. It is the ability to transfer my 'Me' for 'You' at maximum level of listening of the other person, because to listen: "(...) means to give (the other person, note: M. A.) a freedom to fly; it means to concentrate on the other person; it means to engrave a beloved person into the memory of all senses, so our fingers, eyes, ears, the whole body can remember the beloved person so much that it will not be covered, or dissolved by any event (...). Who really thinks of the other person can learn everything, can know and intuitively perceive everything, and what perceived can be confirmed by each step, each smile and mimic of a face." [5, p. 106]

And in case of such approach to a person, also all externally given determinants loose their sense. Daniela - the French and Bartolomej - the Czechoslovak understand each other even though they are strangers. A male character speaks about the feeling of being a 'stranger', but he loses this feeling when he is with Daniela: "(...) I always pointed out in my statements that I am a foreigner here. But these were just words (...); I had never felt like this when being with Daniela." [5, p. 55]

And Bartolomej feels exactly this rare feeling of 'self-transfer' and acceptance of a person as such not only when being with Daniela, but also when he visited Gregor family, where he was the victim of the following situation: "All these men of various nationalities were standing and drinking their Sunday aperitif, Poles, Czechs, Romanians, Gregor family, even the French; we all felt as compatriots. We all work in the underground, and we are compatriots once per week in the pub. We can not do much for each other, but as far as we are all here and work here, we can be pleasant and respectful to each other. We can feel like at home when we are together. And it meant for me that I did not miss my home and what is going on there." [5, p. 47]

This statement and everything mentioned above comes the very clear message of this masterpiece, namely that nothing of external determining factors (status, nationality, property) is a reason for carrying of authentic feelings. All of this is nothing when compared to what is personal and what is a part of human essence as such - the ontological need for love. And the novel is ended in the spirit of this high transcendence and in correspondence with the Christian existentialism of G. Marcel. As stated by the philosopher that "to love someone really dyadically means to persist in another person also in case of death" [3, p. 158]. Daniela persists in Bartolomej despite she is not physically present: "Feelings, anxiety and hopes from those days disappeared long time ago, but I still have a way of feeling and thinking - as a man without a hand who can feel exactly the amputated hand. When I spend my nights in the hotels, I listen to the

emptiness; I listen to it and can not wonder enough that such women exist. I still feel the love to station halls and airports, to their runways. I still have an attentive look for a woman. I still feel emptiness of reconciliation. I console myself from it; I sometimes read poems and pay compliments to women whom we are mutually attractive. I quietly try to convince them that yes, a great love exists. Daniela is also present in this hobby (...): to sit in a festive moment, as we do now, on the terrace in wicker armchairs, and to look in front of us.” [5, p. 105]

#### 4. Transcendental-realistic deal in *Písačky* (Scribbles)

This spiritual love anchored in the eternity and unknown time is logically followed by a human-realistic settlement. It is because a man is also a mass except of spirituality. It is possible to endeavour achieving a pure transcendence, but it is grounded by issues that belong to time, corporeality and defectiveness which are part of human essence exactly as the ability of transcendence. This settlement is depicted in the master piece *Písačky* (this master piece was published in exile by publishing houses for the first time during the 70's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We work with the available version which was published in 1999). Also in this case the author is absorbed by a man. However, a relationship based on a man-woman platform which forms a base of the whole book and which corresponds with the master piece *Prútenékreslá* in this line, gains here explicitly different dimensions. In case of the masterpiece *Písačky* the percipient is a witness of ecstasy and passion, where it is not enough ‘only’ to be in the vicinity of a beloved person and listen to him/her.

The background of the relationship presented in the masterpiece *Písačky* is based in primary, cheaply-sentimental emotionality, which is determined by a physical need and which ends in jealousy and disharmony. Moreover, this position is very ‘precisely’ and in details underlined by naturalistic miniatures at the stylistic level. And it evokes a question: Is the masterpiece *Písačky* really only naturalistic - unbalanced work or is it possible to notice here other different transcendental-spiritual dimension of love?

The fact of perceiving the ‘biological’ aspect by men in this masterpiece is interesting. In connection with this masterpiece M. Hamada stated: “I know that I make a mistake if I ask Dominik Tatarka to have the same love in the masterpiece *Písačky* as the love in the masterpiece *Prútenékreslá*. In fact I should interpret only what is written and not to ask for something what is not included in the masterpiece. Therefore, I will just state that the mentioned depression of the twenty-years was reflected on Dominik Tatarka only in such way that it drove Tatarka to a ‘narrow world’, where love has only depressing form.” [8] This feeling of disappointment from love depicted in *Písačky* has also a harder position which is pointed out by P. Zajac and due to which this masterpiece is perceived as pornographic [9]. And what is the reaction of a woman who was the girlfriend of Dominik Tatarka? A result of an intimate empiricism with him is the following: “He had to touch people by hands to feel

them physically, to know them, so to become closer to them. Physical aspect was as valuable for him as spiritual, he did not separate them (...). Dominik was also not innocent when describing the scenes, which the rude people call pornography.” [10]

We mention this ‘conflict’ of opinions because it very concisely depicts a fact recorded by us, namely that the masterpiece *Pisačky* is a work of two ‘faces’, which are inherently interconnected and joined in one phenomenon - namely in a human being.

In this book, on the waves of desire we want to transfer our ‘Me for You’, and an urgent need to love in the spirit of G. Marcel is clearly depicted in the fragments we read. It means to love dyadically, transcendently and to participate on transcendence by this love. As stated by Dominik Tatarka, we can also love in this way: “by space, by not remembering, by eternity and future of the world” [11], “not in the way of a married couple, but like partners, in existential, sensual, moral, loving and cosmic way” [11, p. 106 ], because passion can be also a passion for a man as such, a passion: “of merging with everything, with a soul, not only a physical momentary contact” [11, p. 171], because a female womb is also a celebration of human life among other things: „(...) life is mysterious, as well as the abdomen of a woman and her womb, from where by living in a goodness of maternal body, from a position and form of a rolled up cake we had to stretch and walk upright” [11, p. 12], because we starve for something bigger, deeper and more perfect than only for physiologically and biologically conditioned ‘intermezzo’: “You were sexual or erotic objects with men you had, with whom you had sexual intercourse (...), you accepted their stupid reflex: that a man and a woman must do something together.” [11, p. 180, 26]

We can daringly state that making love is depicted on the highest spiritual platform in this book. This fact is also indicated not only by quotations above, but also by the following reflection of Bartolomej: “In loving - non-verbal bottom speech, if verbal speech is the top one, the world from creation takes place, the genesis of world and its development happens and is lived; that our body includes the memory of the mankind, of creation. And nothing, nothing, not even death can cut this memory. We do not start from yesterday, not from our creation. We start with a mystery (...) when we stopped to listen to it, when we stopped to venerate it; our lives become banal, we will be lost in history.” [11, p. 99, 162]

According to Dominik Tatarka, in this aspect, the human existence starts with a secret, with the secret in love, when it goes over itself, and in acceptance, connecting and meeting with a beloved one and loving on, where it persists at the inter-subjective level and lives infinitely in the Infinite and eternally in the Eternal world.

On the other hand, this spiritual, supernatural, mystical and transcendental dimension of love is ‘disturbed’ by the other position of love depicted in a too ‘worldly’ manner, for which we can think about the masterpiece as about pornographic, biological and naturalistic. Naturally and instinctively depicted

parts underline the fact that we also love each other in this naturalistic, animal manner determined by 'lower instincts', because it is natural for one part of our essence: "I have never had such hard, flame, bend, confident, and enormous phallus before; you hold it in your palms and let it penetrate into you gradually, into your tight, short wet chink, you painfully bumped and sloughed; if you have seen a copulating mare, deeply contracting vagina splashing yellow cream." [11, p. 186] We love each other also in this egoistic way, without the ability to create a harmony, with a feeling that we lose something of ourselves: "Love enslaves, love is a crime. A disgusting male expects that you not only stick on it, but you also open your soul to him." [11, p. 238] We love each other also in this 'self-destructive', jealous, unbalanced manner, losing our own peace, own freedom and authenticity, feeling dependency and constructiveness from each other: "You are the best, the best, please forgive me to telling it, but you are really the best, the last; I think it is the pathological, metaphysical jealousy; but not jealousy for what you are doing, for the fact that you love, loved and will love, not for the way you are, for the fact that you are the best for everyone, but it is a jealousy for the fact that you live, because if you do not live, I, Bartolomej Slzička, will not suffer in this way ..." [11, p. 167]

In this aspect love is a burden, a sexual and psychological dependency and an eternal struggle of two human beings the spaces of who are separated from each other, and a desire to conquer the freedom of the other person; it results in discomfort, anxiety and uncertainty [12].

And so this is the way how we love each other, we are all different. From the spiritual perspective we desire for unearthly, harmonic, balanced, free and peaceful in a perceived human subject, so we can feel the 'edges' of our imperfection from the attribute of sensuality. This oscillation between love 'limited by brackets' (it means love as such) and love 'which is not limited by brackets' (love which is captured by a human being) happens by the nature of life; it happens by the potential of a human subject going forward in the dimension 'phenomenon (to perceive things as they appear at the first sight) versus reality (what they are in reality)'.

An important shift which this masterpiece brings when compared with the debut is based in the fact that a desire for a man and for a love as such and the empiricism of discomfort, uncertainty, inability to get closer to other human subject on the other hand are not reasons for resignation. They are not reasons for resigning to a man, and to a life as such, as it was in the debut *V úzkostihľadania*. Despite the fact that the humanity and the fabled warmth is offered in a too imperfect way (we give and take it from each other), Tatarka - Bartolomej expresses his essential and urgent need for another person in the masterpiece *Pisačky*. As proved by the following extract, another person is really meaningful 'kindness of life' for him: "As far as I stay here for so many years after you (his mother, note M.A.), I still find something. I get something more, what I still have not deserved, but I hope that I will deserve it one day. Roger Caillois gave me a book *L'homme et le sacré*, and his Czech wife embraced me in Helsinki. And then You, Leticia (Natalia). I have not deserved you, nor have I

endured you like in tales. And now, now I get these Czech friends. You, you are given to me. Sitting with you at one table is inspiring for me. (...) With you Kosík, Bartoška, with your French Suzanne, with you, a woman, with you professor Václav Černý. Your companionship is inspiring.” [11, p. 253]

This statement also extends pertracted male-female platform of the relationship to a general ontological need for a man as such, which is the reason for life of each human being [13]. All this leads us to a statement that after the scepticism presented in the debut and humanly not fully presented transcendence in the masterpiece *Prútenékreslá*, the masterpiece *Písačky* put extremes into balance and depicts love in spiritual-material and harmonic-unbalanced, it means realistic-human level. Constant performance, searching and achievement of transcendental model of love made the love to be a meaning of human life, a reason of life even at the cost of a failure which is natural for a human being. This failure which caused scepticism and anxiety of the heroes in the debut and which leads to motives of murders, suicides, interpersonal cold and scepticism against living as such in the debut is considered as a part of life exactly as a constant need to touch ‘transcendental’. To humbly accept imperfection of myself, while trying to overcome it, to use poetry of the book itself: “to reflect myself somewhere in front of me” [11, p. 253], it is a basic value of the book.

In this form, the masterpiece *Písačky* is given a special form of mature philosophy of life and total reconciliation with life. This masterpiece is penetrated with a purifying humility and it says yes to life, yes - with everything what the life brings.

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