

Story has a peculiar power. It is said that truth clothed in a story will enter every door. This is evident also in the renown of Comenius' work *Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*. About a half century before Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Comenius wrote a narrative allegory about a pilgrim who wanders through a labyrinth-like world and seeks the way out, salvation. The story is simple, the allegory is lucid, and the plot is straightforward, but the didactic effect has been great. The fact is that Comenius wrote a number of good works, but none of them enjoyed such popularity and didactic power as the *Labyrinth*. The question is, what is the magic of a narrative form? In what lies its formative power? What makes a story (an allegorical story in this case) so functional from the educational perspective?

This book attempts to present answers to these questions. It is not an exhaustive treatise about narrative as a literary phenomenon but rather an interdisciplinary case study which analyses a literary text (Comenius' *Labyrinth*) from a didactic point of view. Pedagogy usually knows that stories "work" but seldom asks why. This study wants to connect these two questions. In other words, its goal is to contribute to the pedagogical discussion about the effectiveness of a story as didactic tool by means of literary observations.



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ISSN 1430-9068
ISBN 978-3-86269-090-9



Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft
(Culture and Science Publ.)
Dr. Thomas Schirmacher

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Pädagogik in Europa in Geschichte und Zukunft / Pedagogy in Europe: The Past and The Future 8

Jan Hábl Teaching and learning through story

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**Pädagogik in Europa in Geschichte und Gegenwart –
Pedagogy in Europe: The Past and The Future**

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Jan Hábl

**Teaching and Learning Through Story
Comenius' Labyrinth and the Educational Po-
tential of Narrative Allegory**

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This book has been supported by the Internal Grant Agency of
Jan E. Purkyne University in Usti nad Labem, Czech Republic.

Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft
Culture and Science Publ.
Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher
Bonn 2014

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

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Jan Hábl and
Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft
(Culture and Science Publ.)
Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmacher
Friedrichstraße 38, D-53111 Bonn
Fax +49 / 228 / 9650389
www.vkwonline.de / info@vkwonline.de

ISSN 1430-9068
ISBN 978-3-86269-090-9

Printed in Germany
coverdesign and manufacturing:
BoD Verlagsservice Beese, Friedensallee 44, 22765 Hamburg
www.rvbeese.de / info@rvbeese.de

Publishing Distribution Center:
IC-Medienhaus
D-71087 Holzgerlingen, Tel. 07031/7414-177 Fax -119
www.icmedienhaus.de
catalog for book stores:
www.vkwonline.de/gesamtprospekt

Private costumers: in any book store or at www.vkwonline.com

To my parents with gratitude.

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Foreword

It is a joy to bring another text in the Comenius/Hábl line to the international reading public. Of course, some of the many books by Jan Amos Comenius are available in English, but there are not yet enough materials written by people who are deeply immersed in the intense Czech discussion of the philosophy of Comenius available to a wider public. And that is part of the role of Jan Hábl. He is a Czech philosopher of education who not only has studied Comenius at length; he has appropriated much of the Czech-language discussion of Comenius so that he can be a spokesman for Comenius in the English language. And what a fascinating world of discussion he has brought to us! And how Hábl uses Comenius to disclose the human condition to our own eyes so that we get to know ourselves and our world in a different way!

I sometimes use the term “specific irony” to describe the human tendency to proclaim as a great priority what may really be that person’s or that group’s greatest weakness. The term focuses our attention on the self-contradictory character of human nature as it is. Until reading this book, I did not see the full extent to which Comenius was a brilliant observer of a truly vast range of human ironies and self-contradictions. I thought “ouch!” as he describes students and teachers. How lovely and biting are his descriptions of different groups of people! Who will not feel pilloried in the soul? And yet the deep descriptions of human self-contradictions are not connected with nihilism or despair, at least not in the hands of Comenius and Hábl. We find notes of hope, and that at least on two levels. On the one hand, there is hope of some improvements by means of moral education, especially that type of moral education, often by means of telling stories, which describes our world and our place or meaning in the world. The critique of humanity and culture is not intended to destroy but to provide the needed background in order to build and contribute toward something more truly humane. This is already the expression of temporal hope. And on a deeper, ultimate level, there is Christian, eschatological hope that stands behind and beneath the temporal hope we find here. And this ultimate hope, really faith, becomes love for the very people who are guilty of such terrible ironies and self-contradictions, ordinary people such as our neighbors and ourselves.

I should also say that Hábl has a rare philosophical gift: he sees connections. What links exist among the lack of motivation in our schools and universities, moral education, and our place in a still unfolding cul-

tural history? To answer this question is truly worthwhile, but one must notice that answering this question is extremely difficult in our time, because the educations we have received may have disabled us to address such questions. We are trained to gather information or to use particular skills learned from a particular academic discipline. Larger questions escape us.

The large suggestion here is that we can learn something from the relatively unknown encounter between Comenius and Rene Descartes in the mid-seventeenth century. They met in person in 1642 in the Netherlands, where they both lived, and they both quickly saw that they represented radically different worldviews. Descartes, though personally a Christian, represented the autonomous rationalism that starts from the supposedly independent thinking self that attempts to understand the world and God as objects of knowledge. In this way Descartes embodied one of the most important intellectual steps of Enlightenment modernism. In rather stark contrast, the starting point for Comenius's worldview and philosophy of education was what he referred to as the "three books," the book of the cosmos (nature), the book of the micro-cosmos (human nature), and the book of Scripture (revelation), all of which are seen as complementary, God-given sources of the wisdom needed for life and education. And unlike some of the modern caricatures of premodern Christian thought, Comenius did not experience his own worldview as being held in the clutches of bondage or intellectual immaturity from which he needed to be liberated by rational enlightenment. Comenius perceived the Enlightenment as reductionistic, as an impoverishment of the intellectual and spiritual life of the Europe he loved and which needed a much more holistic worldview to address the terrible problems symptomized in the Thirty Years War.

With this starting point, represented by Comenius and Hábl, there is almost no line between social criticism and philosophy of education. There is almost no line between describing our fallen human condition and proposals for what we should do, almost no line between the satirizing of human folly and the search for true wisdom. The philosophy of culture describes the human predicament, for which the answer is ultimately theological. And as described by Hábl, this means that education in a postmodern world has to revert to story-telling, even telling stories that might be meta-narratives, in order to find our way out of the reduction of education that has resulted from the modern rationalism represented by Descartes. The human mind needs stories, even a big redemptive story, in order to be truly interested in or to find meaning in the information learned by rational or empirical means. Wow! What an alternative to the

dehumanizing of education that easily makes school boring! And what an alternative to both modernity and postmodernity!

Let me suggest we need a new adjective to describe the either very new or very old philosophy of life and education represented here. Obviously it is premodern, with clear roots in both Christianity and classical antiquity (seen in the way Comenius used themes from the non-nihilistic perspectives in Greek and Latin philosophy, themes which Hábl repeatedly mentions). At the same time, already in the 1640s, the great claims of modernity are perceived as both naively optimistic about human nature and also dehumanizing. Humanity, under the perceptions instigated by Descartes, is merely a thinking entity that exists because it thinks, reducing our perceptions of our own humanity. With specific irony, Cartesian modernity and postmodernity did not free us from immaturity or from the clutches of tradition and authority. They cost us a dimension of our humanity, the ability to perceive both our own fallenness and our dignity. The new adjective I think we need for a better philosophy of life and education after modernity and after postmodernity is *post-naïve*. Hábl presents to us a philosophy of life and education that takes specific account of the early interactions between modernity and Christian premodernity, in light of the time we call postmodernity, to offer an alternative. It is truly post-naïve. Now we also need a noun to be described by this new adjective.

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I Introduction: Story and Pedagogy

Stories have special power. It is said that truth clothed in story can enter any door. This is made evident in the fame of Jan Amos Comenius' work *The Labyrinth of the World and The Paradise of the Heart*. Comenius wrote many quality works, but none reached the level of recognition and popularity which *The Labyrinth* reached in both the lay and professional communities. This is attested to not only by the number of reprintings but also by the unprecedented abundance of references to it in the poetry which expressed the sentiments of the nationalist revival. For illustration I present some samples from various Czech and Slovak authors: —

What is present suffering after all? Refining only strengthens.
What happiness is there in the world? Dreams are only a scintillation.
What is the world? Only a labyrinth; and heaven is the goal
Until we cease our worldly wandering.¹

*

And so you strut through the great labyrinth of the world
In the footsteps of nature, in the simplicity of happy dreams,
And with you and with paradise in their hearts the novices
enter by the gate of language into the castle of all arts...²

*

Nothing have we taken with us
Everything is lost—
We have but our Bible—
In the Labyrinth of the world.³

*

Oh let us escape from the whirl of life, from the labyrinth of the land
Let us also enter as you did—to the paradise of our hearts!⁴

¹ Excerpt of a poem from a play written for the jubilee celebrating 300 years since Comenius' birth (1892) called *J. A. Komenský*, by Jan Pelíška. See S. Souček: "Komenského Labyrint u nás a v cizině," *Archiv pro bádání o životě a spisech J. A. Komenského*, (1924) 7.

² Excerpt from the poem "Památce J. A. Komenského" by A. Hejduka. See Souček, 7.

³ Verse from a poem by Jan Kollár. First published in 1832, now in the Prague Museum of Czech Periodicals.

⁴ From the poem by P. O. Hviezdoslav called "Ján Amos Komenský." See Souček.

Likewise from the ranks of the experts in every possible profession resound the same superlatives: “one of the best books in all of Czech literature,”⁵ “Discerning view of the world, massive and fascinating flight of imagination [...] deep and honest emotion.”⁶ Similarly, in Antonín Škarčka’s judgment the *Labyrinth* “surpasses every other work of our older literature.” Jan Patočka even says that the *Labyrinth* is a work which has no “precedent in Czech literature.”⁷

It’s evident, then, that in the *Labyrinth* Comenius succeeded in, on the one hand doing justice to a theme which spoke (and still speaks) to the Czech soul, and on the other hand choosing a very effective format. I believe it is precisely in this that its magic lies. In contrast to others of Comenius’ works the *Labyrinth* is a story, and a didactic one at that (although it’s not solely didactic), which is very important for the theme of this work. The notion of “didactic” isn’t used here in the modern sense of the word, that is, as a theory that pertains to the systematic aspects of teaching, but in the wider sense, in the same way Comenius uses the word in his later *Didactics*. It rather indicates a philosophic approach to education, or to the educative purpose, which is carried throughout the work.

Comenius lays his didactic cards on the table in the introductory chapter, called “To the Reader,” where he reveals the work would be nothing less than a search for the “highest good” (*summum bonum*) in human life. In this he reveals the breadth of his educational aim. He intends to lead the reader into the area of practical philosophy, that is, ethics—which Josef Jungmann pointed out in his *History of Czech Literature* where he ranks the *Labyrinth* among the “moral writings.”⁸ But it will also be a lesson in apologetics, for the author will defend the “true” good and the “real” truth against all depravity.⁹ Comenius admits that it’s not an

⁵ Jugman’s quotation is from F. Bílý, “Úvod,” in *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce* (Praha: Česká grafická unie, 1939).

⁶ Ibid. 9.

⁷ J. Patočka, “Jan Amos Komenský. Nástin životopisu,” in *Komeniologické studie III* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 2003) 400.

⁸ Compare Bílý; L. Nový, “Dialektika vnějšího a vnitřního v Labyrintu světa,” *Studia Comeniana et historica*, Vol 13, No. 26 (1983) 95.

⁹ In Comenius’ *Labyrinth*, however, it is not yet possible to speak of rationalistic apologetics typical of the period of modernity. With regard to the narrative method he uses, his defense is rather closer to the concept of *non-reductive apologia* as discussed in the study by I. Dolejšová (Noble): *Accounts of Hope. A Problem of Method in Postmodern Apologia* (Bern—Berlin—Bruxelles: Peter Lang), European University Studies, Series XXIII, Theology, Vol. 726 (2001).

easy task, but it isn't impossible. He believes that in the same way Solomon himself looked for "true peace of mind" but couldn't find it anywhere until his eyes were opened to "catch a glimpse of the multifaceted futility and miserable illusion that is hidden everywhere under an outer glow and glory that at first glance is so attractive—and then he learned that the peace and safety of the mind is to be found elsewhere."¹⁰

Comenius further informs the reader that when he was thinking about how to "more clearly present" these things, both to himself and to others, the idea of "story" occurred to him, (which is the way Makovička translated the word "treatise" in the 1663 edition). However in the dedication to Charles the older from Žerotín, Comenius complicates the genre classification of the *Labyrinth* when he says it's also a "drama." A. Škarka responds that the label "drama" is okay here because of its "lively story lines, quickly changing scenes and acts and abundance of monologues and dialogues..." According to Škarka, Comenius here crossed over the border of traditional educational treatises and created a work of "fiction," which was unprecedented till that time.¹¹ Makovička's translation is therefore internally consistent.

The author reveals the contents in the subtitle, using his well-known dualist style—first we see the "vagueness and confusion, whirling and grinding, illusion and deceit, poverty and want..." of the world, and then the "true and full intellect, satisfaction and joy" to which it's possible to attain in your own heart.

This goal could theoretically have been reached using the traditional treatise form, as was the custom in Comenius' time, which was to describe the problem, analyze it and respond with the appropriate argument. Comenius himself also employed that method in many of his other works from that time and later—for example, *Hlubina bezpečnosti* (*The Depths of Safety*), *Pres boží* (*God's Press*), and his thorough analysis of "human affairs" in the introductory chapters of the *Velká i Česká didaktika* (*Great Didactic and Czech Didactic*) and "public affairs" in *Obecná porada* (*General Consultation*).¹² In *The Labyrinth*, however, he chooses a different form. Instead of a theoretical essay he displays narrative scenery, creates

¹⁰ Citation from the translation of Lukáš Makovička in 2010. For purely aesthetic reasons I will in most cases cite the Amsterdam edition of 1663 which was released under the review of Antonín Škarka in 1974. Citations from other translations will always be noted.

¹¹ A. Škarka, *Slovesné umění J. A. Komenského*, in *Vybrané spisy Jana Amose Komenského* 7 (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1974) 35f.

¹² "Panegersia," in J. A. Komenský: *Obecná porada o nápravě věcí lidských*, Vol I, Section V, par. 28 (Praha: Nakladatelství Svoboda, 1992) 89.

a plot, lets allegorical figures do the talking and raises questions like: “Did you ever hear about the Cretan Labyrinth?” Didactically, psychologically, and aesthetically the effect is powerful.

Good educators and teachers intuitively know this power of story and have used it literally from time immemorial. In pedagogical terminology: they communicate their curriculum in a narrative form. Remember, for example, the stories of Moses, Homer, Plato and Jesus, whose “teachings” still have a significant cultural influence today. Joseph Hillis Miller noted that we don’t know of “any human society [...], that hasn’t had its stories and narrative customs, its myths, [...] tribal legends and stories about its heroes.”¹³ Nor has the commencement of the rationalistic paradigm of modernity managed to eliminate narrative poetics from educational areas (even though it has almost happened in the university sector of the school system).¹⁴ This raises the key question, what is so magical about the narrative form? Where is its formative strength? What gives the story (in our case, allegorical) such didactic functionality?

This book has two main goals. First, it wants to be a modest attempt to formulate and demonstrate some answers to the aforementioned questions. It will not be an exhaustive treatise on narrative as a literary phenomenon, but rather an interdisciplinary case study in which I will read some form of literature (specifically, Comenius’ *Labyrinth*) while wearing didactic glasses. Pedagogy knows that stories work, but usually pedagogy does not ask why. Nicole Speer and her research group are an exception, approaching this theme from a neuro-psychological perspective. With the help of Magnetic Resonance Imaging, the scientists attempted to discover which areas of the brain are activated during reading. They came to the following conclusions: 1. Readers activate specific visual, motor, and conceptual areas of the brain when actually reading or similarly interacting with texts. 2. The areas of the brain involved in the process of targeting social activity are activated the moment readers meet them in narrative texts. 3. The brains of readers simulate the actions that correspond to those of the individual’s story, objectives, space, and time. The activity in the brain is the same as when the readers are actually performing the actions themselves.¹⁵ Such findings encourage further inter-

¹³ J. H. Miller, “Narrativ,” in *Aluze* Vol. 12, No. 1, (2007) 30.

¹⁴ I am writing from my own teaching experience. University classes are almost exclusively “lectures.” Likewise, written addresses are exclusively scientific, never narrative.

¹⁵ N. Speer et al., “Reading stories activates neural representations of visual and motor experiences,” *Psychological Science*, Vol. 20, No. 8 (2009) 989ff.

disciplinary exploration of the potential of narrative forms. Therefore, I want to connect the literary questions with the pedagogical questions, to contribute insights to the pedagogical debate about the effectiveness of story as an educational resource.

The proficient reader of Comeniological (or other) literature might wonder why I specifically chose the *Labyrinth* for this purpose, a work already so completely analyzed that it has been dissected from every possible interpretive angle. Why clog up the book market with further explanations? I have two reasons. The first is subjective and aesthetic. I love *The Labyrinth*; it's beautiful. The second comes out of my personal teaching experience. I find that, despite the best efforts of the Czech school system to make its students literate, almost nobody knows Comenius' *Labyrinth*. They know about it—it is covered in the so-called compulsory readings (a well-known teaching strategy)—and they quote from it, but few have actually read it. Therefore I venture to make this attempt to popularize the work.¹⁶

My second goal is to introduce the concept of *educational narrativization*, which I define as the process of turning educational materials into stories. This proposal follows from the previous one. If story is useful for teaching, then not only its didactic analysis but its maximum use is desirable. Whatever (in terms of subject matter) it is possible to put into a narrative form should be transposed into this form. The current “no-narrative” pedagogical discourse will be analyzed by the argument in favor of narrativization procedures. I will ask about the metanarrative reasons for and connections to the use or non-use of the narrative method in the didactic process. Why has the narrative form been so unwelcome in the modern paradigm? How has the loss of the metanarrative framework influenced education?

In addition to some biographical and editorial notes, in the appendices I intend to present a specific application of the principle of didactic narrativization in the form of an allegorical story, or more precisely, an experimental text—inspired, of course, by Comenius' *Labyrinth*. In terms of form and content, it is an example of material intended primarily for younger school-age children. I anticipate it will be especially useful in the area of ethics education.

¹⁶ It is also possible that *Labyrinth* has suffered the same fate as other “classics,” according to Souček, which is typified by the one who “is bored by it at school, where it is read before the student is ready for it, and brushed aside later.”

2 The Didactic Magic of Narrative Allegory

Pedagogy is well aware of the multiple layers of human personality. It knows that a person is a rational being, but is also emotional, moral, artistic, relational (socially), physical, spiritual, and so on. Our emphasis in describing humanity depends on which direction we look at the human being from. Biologists may notice certain components of humanity, psychologists others, maybe sociologists others, and professional cultural anthropologists notice still others. Good pedagogy as a humanistic and synthetic discipline tries to take into account the results of research from other sciences inasmuch as it strives, as far as possible, after what brings the most complete development of the human, meaning nurture of a person. The individual layers of human personality respond to specific teaching strategies which are aimed at developing that particular layer or component. Cognitive skills are usually learned by methods other than those used to learn, say, social or moral skills. From the perspective of psychological effectiveness the story, or its telling, tends to be ranked in teaching manuals among the motivating strategies.¹⁷ This is very relevant to the theme of this work. That stories can activate, motivate, draw in, engage, etc., is well known. The question is, “How?” How does a story captivate its readers? By what means does it touch or affect the various layers of human personality? In the following eight chapters I present partial answers from my analysis of Comenius’ *Labyrinth*.

The Birth of a Model Reader

A story requires a lot from its reader or listener. First, it invites the person to enter into a complex interpretative game which always requires interaction. Consider, for example, what the author (or story) asks of a reader when it begins with the words:

While I was thus musing, we suddenly found ourselves (I know not how) upon an exceedingly high tower, so that I seemed to touch the clouds. Looking down from this tower, I saw a city, beautiful in appearance, shining, and prodigiously wide-spread, but not so great that I could not discern its limits and boundaries all around. The city formed a circle, and was sur-

¹⁷ Compare J. Skalková, *Obecná didaktika* (Praha: ISV nakladatelství, 1999); D. Hanesová, “Aktivizující metody,” *Evanjelikální teologický časopis*, No. 2 (1999); and Z. Kalhous et al, *Školní didaktika* (Praha: Portál, 2002).

rounded with walls and ramparts, but instead of moats there yawned a gloomy abyss, to all appearances boundless and bottomless. Light shone only above the city, while beyond the walls it was pitch dark. (chapter 5).

Upon entering this world the reader must first enter into an agreement with the author, that she will accept the rules of the game. In this way emerges an intimate, rather mysterious and often latent tie between the so-called model author and model reader. First the reader hears the voice of the storyteller (not Comenius, but the empirical author), gradually presenting a set of instructions and messages—which are obeyed if she has decided to become that model reader. The reader is invited into a specific initiative, to make “a guess about the intention of the text.”¹⁸ In terms of intellectual engagement it’s the foundational step of the reader. The reader is literally “born together with the text, which is the driving force behind interpretive strategies.”¹⁹ Still elsewhere Umberto Eco notes that many texts (and I think this text by Comenius is among them) aspire to suggest two reader models—the first on the level of understanding what the text says, and the second on the critical level of appreciating the way the text says it.²⁰

In the case of *The Labyrinth*, the reader first has to accept that it’s about an imaginary world. She knows that such a city does not actually exist, nor was that author ever in a high tower “under the clouds,” but accepting the author’s imaginings she also pretends to believe them. Only then can the reader receive what the author has prepared—not only aesthetically but also morally and otherwise. Therefore the reader is not surprised to meet Searchall Ubiquitous (one of the main characters) or the “bridle of inquisitiveness,” or to walk to Fortune Castle. However the rules of the fictional world are neither arbitrary nor random.²¹ If Comenius’ traveler met Little Red Riding Hood or Beowulf in the labyrinth it would be both disturbing and improper, as if Red Riding Hood met Robin Hood on the path. At best the reader would be merely confused, at worst he would be outraged by the author’s violation of the agreement, which illustrates the practical power of stories.

¹⁸ U. Eco, *Meze interpretace*, trans. L. Nagy (Praha: Karolinum, 2004) 68.

¹⁹ U. Eco, *Šest procházek literárními lesy*, trans. B. Grygová (Olomouc: Votobia, 1997) 26.

²⁰ Eco, *Meze interpretace*, 64.

²¹ On the subject of the narrative “framework” of fictional worlds see the work of L. Doležel, *Narativní způsoby v české próze* (Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1993).

A story requires still more work from the reader, work which engages her whether she wants it to or not. Clive Staples Lewis (with reference to Samuel Alexander) noticed a certain epistemological law: the perceiving or discerning “I” can never enjoy the given state of mind and at the same time observe it from a contemplative distance.²² However possible it is to go from one mode of knowing to another, it’s not possible to experience both at the same time. To *experience*, for example, some emotion or thing of beauty is quite another thing than to *reflect* on it. The process of reading a story—whether on the model or empirical level—is the kind of epistemic action through which a reader *experiences*, that is, her mind is fixed, linked, or absorbed by the imagined reality. She experiences something that is impossible to experience through purely rational discourse.²³

The reader must also complete those details that have been left incomplete, which every narrative necessarily contains. Umberto Eco notes in this regard, that “every narration is inevitably and inescapably brief” because, if it has to build a world full of events and characters, it cannot explain everything. “A story only suggests,” continues Eco, “and then asks the reader to fill in the blanks.” In other words, a text is “a lazy instrument that requires the reader to do part of its work.”²⁴ When, for example, Comenius says in chapter 8, “My companions then led me to a street where, they said, the married people lived,” he doesn’t have to clarify that the street was paved with stones or that the way from the square (in the previous chapter) to this street takes half an hour, or that a married couple consists of a man and a woman. If the text calls forth the need to complete some detail or link, it’s the reader’s work to do it. Roman Ingarden comments on this: “Because of the limited number of words and sentences allowed in the structure of a work, it isn’t possible to express clearly and exhaustively the infinite number of characteristics and situations presented by individual subjects.”²⁵ The reader has to imagine, predict, evaluate, infer, relate, believe, compare, classify, project and so on.²⁶ That is, “to think narratively,” as Jiří Trávniček says.²⁷ This

²² C. S. Lewis acknowledged this reference to Alexander in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*. For more on this topic see P. Hošek, *C. S. Lewis, mýtus, imaginace a pravda* (Praha: Návrat, 2003).

²³ Compare P. Hošek, *Mýtus*.

²⁴ U. Eco, *Šest procházek*.

²⁵ R. Ingarden, *O poznávání literárního díla*, trans. H. Jechová (Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1967) 46.

²⁶ Compare “the mental structure of the parable,” as Mark Turner outlines it with the help of the story *A Thousand and One Nights*. Please note, I am not citing *The*

creates the necessary emotional and aesthetic reading of the page that brings into the mix the hopes, fears, and excitement which flow out of the reader's identification with the characters or the story itself. From the perspective of didactic usefulness, it's a mental exercise that's worth its weight in gold because it engages the reader in a very comprehensive way. With reference to Chris Crawford, Trávníček notes: "Thinking narratively we move around in a situation, while thinking only logically we have to rely on concepts, that is, abstract themes. Therein lies the [...] appeal and virtue of narrative thinking." In terms of the ontogenesis of the human psyche it's sort of like the peak or highest state of human thought, which includes three lower forms, as Trávníček continues: "Storytelling is not only a special area within language (spoken thought), it is also the time-causal sequence of situations in which the individual actors are engaged (social thought), and is identified by its place (spatial thought)."²⁸ From this comes the magic of story.

Mythos, or Plot

Aristotle noted in his *Poetics* that one of the most important aspects of a good story is the plot.²⁹ In his terminology mythos, which is translated variously—outline, structure of events, plot, *děj* (Czech), *syžet* (Rus.)—together with *fabule*, create the core of every story.³⁰ The beginning, development and climax are normal parts of every story. In other words, in order to be a "well-told" story it must contain: 1. an initial situation—Joseph K. awakes in his bed, Neo is awakened by his computer, a person is created by God, a pilgrim finds himself in a labyrinth; 2. some fundamental change (complication, twist, conflict)—Joseph K. is absurdly accused, Neo swallows the pill of truth, the created one revolts against his Creator, the pilgrim gets glasses of deception; 3. its resolution—Joseph K. insists on a fair trial, Neo wakes up in "true" reality, the created one is saved,

Thousand and One Nights but M. Turner, *Literární mysl. O původu myšlení a jazyka*, Trans. O. Trávníčková. (Brno: Host, 2005) 19ff.

²⁷ J. Trávníček, *Vyprávěj mi něco. Jak si děti osvojují příběhy* (Praha, Litomyšl: Paseka, 2007) 18.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 18.

²⁹ In this book I am using the Rezek translation of Aristotle's work. See Aristoteles: *Rétorika, poetika* (Praha: Petr Rezek, 1999). On the question of plot see pp. 350ff.

³⁰ W. Schmid clarifies the terminology with his reference to B. Tomaševský, "the plot is what actually happened, the storyline is what tells the reader about it;" see W. Schmid, *Narativní transformace*, trans. P. Málek (Brno: Ústav pro českou literaturu, 2004) 13.

the pilgrim finds the paradise of the heart. Everything else, such as linguistic devices, timeframes, locations, characters etc., are, according to Aristotle, secondary and supplementary. The quality of *mythos* is crucial.

Comenius' outline is, in this regard, impressively straightforward. As an early Renaissance text, *The Labyrinth* doesn't have complex plot strategies, but follows a well-established framework: beginning, middle, end—entry, plot, climax. The reader is simply put into the situation:

Having reached the age when human intelligence begins to distinguish between good and evil [...] it seemed to me highly desirable to consider well which of these groups of folks I should join, and which profession I should choose for my life work. [...] Thereupon I set out by myself and began to consider where and how I should begin (chapter 1, 2).

Then comes the central plot, brought about by the fact, which the reader understands, that the allegorical guides of the hero/pilgrim are trying for the whole journey to deceive (and control) him, but “luckily” (his own word) he gets a secret chance to escape their snares. The “glasses of deception” that they forced him to wear did not fit him properly, so when the pilgrim “raised his head and lowered his eyes” (leaned back his head and looked out of the corner of his eye), he was able to see things “purely naturally,” that is, such as they truly are. The plot is then more or less rhythmically lengthened as the pilgrim goes through the town and has a look at his “labyrinth-world” in each of its spheres, until the denouement when he finds the way out, or rather, he is found and taken out, of the labyrinth. The resolution has its own rhythm and length because it is more or less a mirror image of all that went before.³¹

Clearly this is not a very sophisticated storyline or suspenseful plot. Comenius doesn't use all the opportunities the epic genre offers, or at least those which we know today are offered by this genre. The individual episodes are somewhat repetitive and follow a predictable framework. The pilgrim comes to one of the streets in the labyrinth, sees it the way his guides want, through the glasses of deception, and then again with his own eyes as it really is, and in the end leaves in disappointment to look further. It goes on like this throughout the first part, until he finds paradise. Moreover the way the storyline led Comenius the second part

³¹ The traditional division of the work into two opposing parts is questioned by L. Doležel, “Kompozice, Labyrintu světa a ráje srdce‘ J. A. Komenského,” *Česká literatura*, No. 17 (1969). Instead of two parts in *The Labyrinth* Doležel sees three, and he determines the type of narrator by the criteria for division. I will return to this problem in the chapter on narrative perspective.

was turned into an almost monotonous monologue, only occasionally punctuated by entrances of the Savior—which greatly diminishes the epic nature and drama of the story, making it instead more like a descriptive-explanatory treatise.

Nevertheless *The Labyrinth* still has basic plot contours. The reader can participate in the structure of the narrative. From the psychological perspective it isn't important whether the climax will be a surprise to the reader, but that she will participate in the storyline. Jiří Trávníček notes that this is one of the elementary ways in which a person (first in childhood) acquires stories. Before curiosity, the perception of causality, time, and other phenomenon of narratives can enter the game. "Participation in the structure" is crucial for the reader (and more originally the listener), as every parent who tells their child fairytales from their earliest childhood knows. Although they have heard the story (fairy tale) many times, they want to hear it again and again, without any changes and exactly as it was before. But even adults tend to enjoy this. They return to their favorite book or film that they have already read or seen many times. The pleasure from joining in the storyline and final resolution is worth it. The Magnificent Seven finally disperse, Sherlock convicts the murderer, Harry overcomes Voldemort, the pilgrim finds the paradise of the heart. They are all variations of the same structure. It seems that Vladimir Propp, a classic writer of Russian formalism, had it right. In his particularly influential work *The Morphology of Fairytales* he demonstrates that the structure of the outline of this type of narrative is transferable from one story to another, even though the individual scenes in the stories might be different. Propp shows that Russian fairytales are all variations of the same structural form.³² Thus the reader's motivation isn't necessarily knowledge, the point isn't to know how it will turn out—the reader already knows that—but to a far greater degree she yearns to be part of the story, to participate in it and to "be there." So it becomes a kind of ritual, an almost sacred moment, when the reader (or listener), the storyteller, and the text "harmonize according to established rules."³³

It is precisely this "storyness" that raises Comenius' *Labyrinth* above the other literature of his time, which were all treatises, and brings about

³² V. J. Propp, *Morfologie pohádky a jiné studie*, Trans. M. Červenka, M. Pittermannová and H. Šmalelová (Praha: Nakladatelství H & H, 1999). For a deeper discussion on this theme see for example the historical overview of Z. Mitoseková, *Teorie literatury. Historický přehled*, Trans. M. Havránková (Brno: Host, 2010).

³³ Compare Trávníček, *Vyprávěj mi něco*, 13–14.

something “natural and universal,”³⁴ which is typical of all stories—the plot “draws in” the reader. In educational terminology: it motivates. And therein lies the magic of story.

Allegory

That the book will contain allegory, Comenius announces up front in the dedication, where he writes that the first part “depicts figuratively [both] the sins and the futility of this world” and the second “partly hidden, partly disclosed” part describes the true and lasting happiness of those who find their way out of the labyrinth. With this the author gives the reader insight into how the text should be read. Again this is not trickery. The text isn’t trying to trip up the reader. He simply has to decode the allegorical level of the text in order to find its real and intended level. The interpretation of allegorical language—as well as any other kind of language—is of course notoriously controversial. However there is something Umberto Eco calls “the rights of the text,” which is based on its relationship to its author, the referent (that to which the meaning refers), the circumstances of its origin, and so forth. In other words, the meaning of a text can be understood variously, but not arbitrarily.³⁵

For his project Comenius uses a series of allegorical and related linguistic devices—from denotative abstract allegory through connotative allegory, to only partially allegorical parody, characterization, irony, with various kinds of personifications and metaphors. Many of them are freely mingled together.³⁶ A few examples for illustration: we often encounter objects, characters or storylines whose aesthetic imagery is explicitly (denotatively) verbalized—for example a bridle made from “a strap of Curiosity” and the “iron of Tenacity,” “glasses of deception” made from the “glass of Assumption” and “frames of Habit.” In another chapter the pilgrim meets with the character Fate, who sorts people by means of labels with words like “Rule!,” “Hoel!,” “Write!,” “Dig!,” “Judge!,” etc. And similarly with “talking names,” or denotatively expressed characters—whether positive or negative: Kindness, Obsequiousness, Pleasure, Mammon, Justice, Wisdom and so on. The characters Delusion and

³⁴ Miller, 30.

³⁵ Compare Eco, *Meze interpretace*, 7ff.

³⁶ Compare J. Kolár and V. Petráčková, “Komentář,” in *Truchlivý I, II, Labyrint světa a ráj srdce* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1998); H. Mirvaldová: “Alegoričnost v Labyrintu světa a ráji srdce J. A. Komenskeho,” *Slovo a slovesnost*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (1970) 353–364.

Searchall Ubiquitous have special roles, as we shall see. Hypocrisy is exemplified by a denotatively allegorical storyline when the pilgrim is taken to the “marketplace of the world” where, when people meet each other they simply change their masks as needed.

Comenius also widely uses connotative allegory. In this extensive quotation from chapter 8 is a description of the activities of engaged couples:

And behold! there stood a gate which, according to the guide, was called Engagement. Before it was spread a spacious square full of both sexes who were walking about and peering into each other’s eyes and examining each other’s ears, nose, teeth, tongue, hands, feet, and other limbs. They likewise measured how tall, broad, stout or slender each was. [...] Especially were they curious (as I have seen most frequently) about each other’s purses, money-bags, and pocketbooks, measuring and weighing how long and wide, full, stretched tight or loosely relaxed they were. [...] At times one drove away his rival, only to be himself chased away in turn; another, routing a group of rivals, himself thereupon ran away also. Some lost no time in examining, but seized the nearest he could grasp. Thereupon, the couple led each other hand in hand toward the gate.

Sometimes the denotative and connotative allegories are mixed. See this description of his submersion into his own heart after the pilgrim is summoned by a mysterious voice, and his subsequent representation of allegorical human nature (chapter 37):

Collecting my thoughts as well as I could, and shutting my eyes, ears, mouth, and nostrils, and all other outward passages. I entered into the inner recesses of my heart, and lo! it was dark. But after peering into it, and looking about a little, I perceived after a while a very faint light streaming in through some cracks, by which I was able to distinguish above in the vault of this, my chamber, a large, round glass window. But it was so dirty and so thickly smeared with filth that no light could penetrate it.

Looking about me in this dim light, I discerned various pictures on the walls which, as it appeared to me, possessed once upon a time considerable beauty; but now the colors were faded and some limbs of the figures were severed or broken off. I approached closer and noticed their names: Prudence, Humility, Justice, Purity, Temperance, and so forth. In the middle of the room were scattered some damaged and broken ladders; also broken pulleys and pieces of ropes.

The way the author communicates the didactic content of his “curriculum” is worth noting. In the turning point of the whole narrative, when

the pilgrim finds his way out of the labyrinth, the reader should learn something fundamental about human nature. The pilgrim's connotative submersion into the depth of his heart isn't an escape from the evil world but insight, the discovery that even his own heart is not in order, not completely clean or perfect. Admittedly there are some valuable—denotatively named—artifacts like Humility, Justice, Temperance, etc., but all are broken in some way and dirty. Likewise ladders, pulleys, and wings, with whose help it would have been easy to climb upward, are “plucked and scattered.” In other words, the reader is led with the help of allegory to reflect on her human nature, to recognize both “talents” and “sins,” her positive and negative potential. Human beings long for the true, the beautiful and the good, but at the same time they are capable of evil. One's nature is neither wholly alright nor wholly lost. There is a problem, but there is also a way out. Later Comenius expresses his educational anthropology without allegory in his *Didactics (Great and Czech)* and in other corrective works: a human is the “most magnificent” and at the same time the “most detestable” being in all creation. If one isn't to “fall into non-humanness,”³⁷ one must be educated, led away, from everything inhuman and taught how properly to live. People need the “forging place of humanity.”

The very composition of the work also has its allegorical nature which is evident both in the basic contrast between the two main parts and in the almost encyclopedic layout. Comenius calls his fictional world a labyrinth, but in reality this world is very orderly and clear. The city is a closed circular formation rising out of the darkness. A beam of light illuminating the area of the city from below evokes the idea of a theater stage, which is an image Comenius often resorted to in his later works. Individual scenes—streets, gates, squares and so on—are placed on the stage, and as we saw with Pilgrim's experience in the tower of the city,

³⁷ Comenius used the phrase “to fall into nonhumanness” often. See for example *Pampaedia*: II, 8 in Komenský, *Obecná porada*, 18. See also the introductory *Appeal* in the *Didactics*, where Comenius first thoroughly discusses the problematic nature of man to show why the kind of education he then presents is necessary. Even in his later writings his anthropology remains essentially the same. When in *Obecná porada* he is thinking how to remedy the situation in “public affairs,” i.e., politics, he can't help noting that “wolves, bears, tigers, snakes and other wild creatures live in harmony with others of their kind [...] But we rational creatures [...] behave worse than animals; we either constantly force our way into government, or the opposite, everyone avoids authority and thus we introduce a situation of chaos and entangle ourselves in endless trouble.” Komenský, *Obecná porada*, 89-91 (Panegersia).

it's possible to examine them comfortably with the naked eye. Aleš Haman notes that this panoramic visibility is reminiscent of the “encyclopedic” pictures of the Dutch painters.³⁸ The confusion or “maze-likeness” of the city then does not lie in its form, but in the befuddled state of its inhabitants. Chaos is brought about by the deceit, hypocrisy, and absurdity of human behavior. It's this that the author wants to unmask, disclose. And so with almost encyclopedic clarity he subjects the entire hierarchy of the society of his day to allegory. Thus he gives us the opportunity to analyze, along with the pilgrim, the state of married couples, tradesmen, knights, philosophers, ministers, the nobility and soldiers, which is to say almost all “human affairs.” This universality—the Kožmíns³⁹ remind us—foreshadows all of Comenius' later understanding of the world, and his corrective measures. The only social class the author does not analyze is the peasantry. I will discuss the reasons later.

Of particular note is the allegory in which Comenius' didactic spirit awakens. In chapter 8 the pilgrim can't stop himself from saying something when he sees the helplessness of parents and their spoiled children. First he notices “with what pain, tears and risk of life” children are brought into the world, then how hard the “twofold” task is as the little ones grow up—the parents have to both curb their excessive enthusiasm and at the same time spur them on to do the things they should. But the children often don't accept either the bridle or the spur and raise such a fuss that the parents are driven to utter “weariness” and “tears.” Many parents are too lax with their children and when the children tear themselves away it causes the parents shame and sometimes even death. The pilgrim begins to admonish both parents and children: the parents against overly sentimental love and excessive indulgence, the children for their rowdiness and disrespect, but with little success. The beginning teacher meets displeasure from both children and parents—they “glare at him, make caustic remarks” and some even “threaten him with death.” Remember that this was written in 1623 by an author who had had only a few years of teaching experience in Přerov and Fulnek. From the perspective of today's reader, the author's inclusion of this allegory could have a surprising side effect. Many educators might be encouraged and comforted that even the “Teacher of Nations” couldn't avoid some of these specific examples of teacher frustration (even if he was still young).

³⁸ A. Haman, “Estetický rozměr světa v Komenského Labyrintu,” *Tvar*, Vol. 16, No. 21 (2005) 8.

³⁹ Z. Kožmín and D. Kožmínová, *Zvětšeniny z Komenského* (Brno: Host, 2007) 47.

Particularly helpful for the theme of this great work is chapter 10, where Comenius allegorizes the educational system, or “state of education” of his time. In essence it is a specific kind of meta-didactic discourse, which is an instructive text on education as such. First the pilgrim is lured by his guides’ vision of the “easier, more peaceful and useful life” of an intellectual. Apparently he will no longer need to be bothered with “unprofitable manual labor,” but can instead devote himself wholly to “noble things,” which will in the end make him “like God” with an abundance of knowledge. The pilgrim can’t resist. “What are we waiting for?” he urges his guides, eager to be among the learned.

When they arrive at the “Street of the Learned” the pilgrim observes the entrance examinations of the young people registering for study. The following passage is famous:

The first of the examinations, required of all, aimed at ascertaining what kind of purse, posterior, head, brain (which they judged by the nasal mucus), and skin each of the candidates brought. If the head were of steel, the brain of quicksilver, the posterior of lead, the skin of iron, and the purse of gold, they praised him and willingly conducted him farther.

Those who pass the test are taken by “guards,” also called “reformers.” Their work is to prepare the students for study by “re-forming” their “hands, tongue, eyes, ears, brain and every internal and external sense,” in order to be “of a different order than the ignorant masses.” Of course it can’t happen without “toil and pain,” and the pilgrim sees how the poor souls were beaten with “fists, pointers, canes and sticks on their cheeks, head, back and seat until the blood ran and they were full of bruises and scars, weals and callouses.” Many candidates are discouraged, tear themselves out of their reformer’s hands and simply run away. But our pilgrim, who still longs for that profession, “with difficulty and bitterness” suffers all of it in order to continue further. He subsequently arrives at a crossroads where he has to choose between “philosophy, medicine, law and theology,” that is, between the four schools in the universities of Comenius’ day. They continue further to some square where there is gathered a “crowd of students, masters, doctors, ministers, both youths and grey-beards.” But many of them—to the pilgrim’s surprise—“had eyes but no tongue; others had a tongue but no eyes; some had only ears and no eyes or tongue, and so forth.” Each was missing something.

There follows a tour of the library, where the pilgrim observes how the students stuff themselves with the “best and wittiest” pieces, “slowly chewing and digesting them.” Some of them really benefit from this, but

he sees that for others, “whatever they crammed in passed out at both ends undigested.” Some of them in the end “became dizzy or lost their minds,” still others “grew pallid, pined away and died.” Some students learned from this and instead of allegorically consuming the books only carried them “to their rooms, [...] storing them on their shelves, taking them down again, looking at them; then again putting up and taking down the books, approaching or retreating, pointing out to each other or to strangers the excellent appearance of them.”

“What are these folks playing at?” wonders the pilgrim and receives the answer from Delusion that if a person wants to be counted “among the learned” it isn’t necessary to actually read the books, it’s enough to have a nice library. To this the pilgrim reacts with the words (my paraphrase): As if a blacksmith was a blacksmith only because he had a hammer and pincers. But he only “thinks it to himself and says nothing to his guides,” conspiratorially telling us, the readers, and by this creating “just between us” a special bond because we know something “they” don’t. Thus a charming narrative tension is established here, with the author slyly winking at the reader. We are drawn in.

Then comes an especially current description of something we might call today *publication dilution*. Comenius speaks of “disorder in the writing of books,” and borrows an illustration from the apothecary, where medicine was prepared for general use. This is what he sees: There were “one or two [...] who collected fragrant roots and plants, cut them up, shook, cooked and distilled them, preparing delightful gins, potions, syrups and other medicines which are useful to the life of man.” And opposite them were hundreds of those who “only picked out things from the pots of others and transferred them into their own.” Still others, “who seized the pots of others to fill up their own, diluting the contents as much as they could, using even dishwater; and others condensing the mixture by adding all sorts of hodge-podge, even dust and sweepings.” It greatly angers the pilgrim, but he is assured that “it is also an art.” That doesn’t appease him though, and he continues—this time aloud—fussing at the quackery, although that only earns him hatred. So in the end he resigns himself, but he can’t help remarking again that he is bearing these misdeeds only with great displeasure. But there wasn’t anyone “to set matters right.”⁴⁰

Then follows a description of the “quarrels, strife, scuffles and tumult” in “the Market-place of the Learned,” which again upsets the pilgrim because his guide promised him that here he would find the “most

⁴⁰ Self-critically I’m afraid this text also suffers from a certain publicational “dilution” as it analyzes what has already been analyzed many times.

peaceful profession.” He has a glimmer of hope when some people appear who are calling for peace and the settling of every dispute. There even appears the possibility to organize some kind of conference in which the reconciling can take place. It is an obvious reference to the irenic trends Comenius had met in his own studies. He is met with the same outstanding personalities. The pilgrim catches sight of “Aristotle with Plato, Cicero with Sallustius, Scot with Aquinus, Bartoly with Bald, Erasmus with the men of the Sorbonne, Rama and Campanella with the peripatetics, Copernicus with Ptolomy, Theophrastus with Galen.” A number of pairs, each known for their controversies, are presented in dialogue. When they can’t agree they are asked to make the briefest outline of their argument. But when these are presented there are so many they couldn’t all be read in “six thousand years” (that is, all of history, according to the dating of the time). Consequently everyone scattered to their quarrels and our pilgrim was “grieved to tears.” This strict rejection of the ancient philosophical tradition isn’t aimed at philosophy as such, which Comenius not only knew very well but used liberally in his later works. According to Eduard Petru⁴¹ he was criticizing the philosophical methods that are based only on a rational interpretation of the world and ignore other sources of knowledge—especially sensory and spiritual (Scripture). Philosophy that doesn’t make use of every available source of knowledge must necessarily become reductionist, its view of the world incomplete and therefore deserving of criticism.

The conciseness, pertinence and talent for observation demonstrated by Comenius is outstanding. And he clearly has the ability to anticipate the reader’s allegorical literacy—some allegories he leaves without clarifying comments, but where he expects the picture won’t be understood, he provides an explanation (of course, using allegorical code). Thus for example he lets the guide explain that “If one doesn’t have a head of steel it will split open; if the mind isn’t made of quicksilver it can’t be made into a mirror; if the skin isn’t iron it won’t survive the formative process; not possessing a lead bottom one could not endure the sedentary life of the student; and without a purse of gold, where would he find the necessary leisure or teachers, either living or dead?”

Why the head would split or why the mind should become a mirror, etc. the author doesn’t explain. He expects the reader’s experience as well as the story’s context will make the picture understandable. Both wittily and engagingly, Comenius creates the opportunity to work out a

⁴¹ E. Petru, “Parodie u Erasma Rotterdamského a Jana Amose Komenského,” *Studia Comeniana et historica*, Vol. 18, No. 35 (1988).

solid critique of the allegorized phenomenon, and in doing so reveals much of his early ethics as well as his philosophy of education. I set forth his allegorical ideas concerning education one by one (following his pattern) in the form of question and dictum:

- 1) What is the proper motive for seeking an education? Education is not and must not be a purely pragmatic means of obtaining an easier life.
- 2) Is it possible to find a didactic approach that wouldn't be one-sidedly loaded with cognitive components (so as not to split the head)? How can specific material be truly understood and not merely mirrored? What approach could be taken that is without the abomination of violence? With what approach can the student remain actively engaged (not needing a "posterior of lead")?
- 3) What are the necessary preconditions for a student being able to study? Money should never be one of them (the "purse of gold").
- 4) How to prevent fragmentary knowledge ("they had eyes and no tongue"); how to provide a solid, holistic education? Work out everything, from every side, in its entirety (omnia, omnes, omne), says Comenius later.
- 5) In what way should the study materials (books) be handled, so as to allow the student to get the most from them? What about the student who doesn't read (who "studies without studying")?
- 6) How to tackle didactically the huge wealth of knowledge in a way that the student doesn't faint or become overwhelmed?
- 7) What makes a scholar a scholar? Outward appearances? A good library? Titles?
- 8) What is the true meaning and reason for writing a book or publishing a work? Why is there so much watering down, recycling and even stealing from what has already been written many times? Shouldn't one write with an almost sacred respect for truth?
- 9) Shouldn't the mission of the university be to find unity in diversity (uni-versitas)? Isn't that type of humility which preserves the dignity even of those who have a different opinion part of academic excellence? Isn't virtue one aspect of scholarship? Or the ability to overcome personal interests, vanity, pride or other character defects so as to not hinder the meaningful and peaceful dialogue with another?

Given that this was written in the pre-didactic, pre-pansophic period of Comenius' work, the pertinence of his insights is fascinating. Long before the emergence of education as a separate discipline he was able to understand, name (and later also treat systematically) the key issues of the subject which are still relevant.

The phenomenon of allegory as a literary-stylistic form works only as long as the author is able to create a consistent network of relationships between the external text and the internal (allegorical) meaning. Some of Comenius' illustrations have a problem with this. For example in chapter 4 the reader is informed about the taming of the pilgrim by the previously mentioned Searchall Ubiquitous and Falsehood, with the result that the pilgrim can't search the world freely but is forcefully dragged by his guides, who are the personification of the tendencies of his own mind. Later the reader finds that the author doesn't stick to this imagery because very often the pilgrim acts and speaks as if he had no bridle—"let's go" he orders when he feels like it, and his guides pick up and go. However other times it seems that the reins are really in the hand of Ubiquitous, as they should be according to the first rules given in the allegory—see for example the end of chapter 18, where Ubiquitous says: "Let's go, we'll look further"; and taking him by the hand, he leads."

Later in the central allegory there is a similar problem with the glasses of deception. As has been said, in chapter 4 the reader is conspiratorially informed that the glasses of deception were set crookedly on the pilgrim's nose, and therefore if he inclined his head he could see true reality out of the corner of his eye. But in the rest of the story it's as if the author forgot this imagery; he lets the pilgrim explore every deception and abuse in the world as if he wasn't wearing the glasses at all—with one exception: in one tense situation in chapter 19 the pilgrim says that he "straightened" the glasses in order to "look more closely."⁴² What sense does that make? He adjusted the glasses so he could see better? If yes, then he should have seen the alluringly deceptive version of reality, but our pilgrim sees reality as it truly is, he sees "the depraved state of the nobility."

If I read correctly, that was the only reference to the glasses until chapter 36, which is the end of the first part of *The Labyrinth*. This brings up a certain complication. First it seems that the pilgrim, bound by Searchall's bridle, can in no way manipulate the glasses, and if he wants to see the world as it is he has to "incline his head." Until chapter 19,

⁴² In Makovička's translation the sentence reads: "So I stop talking, straighten my glasses, watch them carefully, and catch sight of something I wasn't expecting..."

then, it seems that the pilgrim is walking the whole time with his head tilted back. According to the logic of the image it must be that way, because wherever he goes he immediately sees how things are, and at times it moves him to tears, other times he is horrified or disgusted. However in the incriminating chapter 19, this logic is broken. If the pilgrim can freely manipulate the glasses, why does the author force him in the previous chapters to tilt his head and squint out of the corner of his eye? And the picture is further complicated at the end of the first part, when the pilgrim is left to look at “the fate of the dead” (chapter 36). Here the pilgrim gives an eyewitness account of a dramatic scene:

[...] I saw a sorry spectacle, for every one gave up his spirit with terror, lamentations, fear and trembling, not knowing what would become of him afterwards nor where he would find himself after leaving the world. I likewise feared it, but nevertheless desiring to understand it a little better, I walked between the rows of biers until I reached the end of the world and of light; there the friends of the deceased closed their eyes and blindly hurled their dead into the abyss.

The problematic part is still to come. Even though others close their eyes when faced with such horror, our main hero does a surprising thing (from the perspective of allegorical consistency):

[...] Casting off the glasses of delusion and rubbing my eyes, I leaned out as far as I could. There I saw nothing but frightful darkness and gloom of which neither the bottom nor the end could be fathomed by the human mind, and in which nothing but worms, frogs, serpents, scorpions, pus and stench were found; besides, a smell of brimstone and pitch, overpowering the body and the soul, issued thence, in a word, horror unspeakable!

The question is how the pilgrim’s epistemology changed after he threw away the glasses (and rubbed his eyes). The problem—for the cohesiveness of Comenius’ allegory—is that throwing the glasses away didn’t change anything. But the glasses should cause him to see the exact opposite of reality, because they made “the distant things seem near and the near seem distant; the small things large and the large small; ugly things beautiful and the beautiful ugly; black things white and the white black, etc.” (chapter 4). Nor does the situation get better in the case of the alternative “spiritual” glasses that the pilgrim gets in the “paradise of the heart” (in chapter 41). In summary: when he is wearing the glasses—whether delusional or not—he sees just as well as without them. How to approach such a discrepancy? It is possible to narrow the interpretive

eye and overlook these irregularities, which is to say, to not deal with the details, but with the general intentions of a particular allegory. For example Jan Patočka⁴³ does this when, in the drama of *The Labyrinth*, he sees the act of opening the human spirit as enabling a meaningful relationship with the surrounding world. The pilgrim's shedding of the glasses of deception is interpreted as the determination of a person "to look into the eyes of human finitude as it is concentrated in death," which opens the way to a fundamental change in the human spirit.⁴⁴

Jan Blahoslav Čapek notes another level of problem—sometimes in his allegories Comenius falls into a mere characatural naming, other times he simply transfers the spiritual acts or characteristics to the physical acts (the schoolboys gorging themselves on books) or the identification of an allegory with a real picture ("Seneca sitting among tons of gold extolling poverty"), and still elsewhere Comenius' allegories fall into "pseudo-visual ideograms," as in statements like "Plato chased ideas in the air." Čapek takes it that this "disunity and inconsistency" was caused by working in too much of a rush, given the circumstances of 1623.⁴⁵ The indulgence with which Professor Čapek approaches Comenius' inconsistencies is charitable research, but the question remains whether it was haste that caused the inconsistencies. Comenius returned more than once in his life to *The Labyrinth* and made corrections. If he was aware of any defects in the beauty of his allegorical method he had ample opportunity to remove them.

It's necessary to emphasize that from the perspective of the overall purpose/design of the work these are only insignificant side issues. Many critics give a thoroughly positive evaluation of Comenius' allegory in *The Labyrinth*. Although he failed to find a "perfectly balanced allegorical method,"⁴⁶ his allegories did not sink into "schematization and abstraction," as did those of many of Comenius' contemporaries. On the contrary his allegories tended to be valued for "not being cold and monotonous,"

⁴³ J. Patočka, "Filosofické základy Komenského pedagogiky," in *Komeniologické studie I* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 1997) 48.

⁴⁴ In a similar spirit other Comeniologists, who refer in some way to Patočka's interpretation, also hold the same view. Compare K. Schaller, "Komenský a otevřená duše—Patočkův výklad Komenského," *Filosofický časopis* (1992) Vol. 40, No. 1; A. Nastoupilová, *Pojetí odpovědnosti v díle bratra Lukáše a J. A. Komenského* (Hradec Králové: Gaudeamus, 2002); and D. Krámský, "Komenského svět jako labyrint ve fenomenologické interpretaci," *Studia Comeniana et historica* (2005) Vol. 35, Nos. 73–74.

⁴⁵ J. B. Čapek, *Několik pohledů na Komenského* (Praha: Karolinum, 2004) 81.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 79.

inasmuch as they reflect the author's own memories and experiences,⁴⁷ and "they search out real life by means of an allegorical garment."⁴⁸ Other allegorical works of Comenius' time⁴⁹ are more or less forgotten "not only because they were written in Latin, but also for their abstractly allegorical character," notes Jan Patočka, and he continues: "Comenius' *Labyrinth* lives and will live by the heart's blood that the author gave to it."⁵⁰

Remember that the author's intention was primarily didactic, as he suggests in his introductory chapter "To the Reader." In his own words, therefore, he writes so that his knowledge and discoveries would be on the one hand portrayed "more clearly both to myself and to others."⁵¹ And on the other hand, Comenius' *Labyrinth* addresses his own pain while simultaneously teaching others how to deal with the difficulties that the post-White Mountain situation brought.⁵² Jan Blahoslav Čapek⁵³ reminds us in this connection of the socio-consoling function of *The Labyrinth*—it shows the underside of the power, wealth, and fame of those who rule the world, in order to comfort his fellow countrymen and loved ones who had lost everything. It also addresses the moral questions: How can one succeed as a human being in the face of evil, violence, injustice, deception, etc.? How can one distinguish good from evil, the essential from the inessential, the true from the false?

For a treatise on this kind of question the allegorical method is more than merely suitable. Allegory—a tool for hiding—paradoxically exposes reality. The process of uncovering what is veiled (by the allegory) produces a specific distance between the fictitious and real dimensions of the text, which offers the reader a tremendous heuristic potential: through its coding the allegory forces the reader to pay attention to reality. This is very valuable didactically, because reality isn't trivial. In addi-

⁴⁷ Compare E. Denis, *Čechy po Bílé hoře*, Vol. I., (Praha: F. Šimáček, 1911) 206.

⁴⁸ Compare J. Jakubec, *Dějiny literatury české*, Vol. I. (Praha: Jan Laichter, 1929) 828. The citations from Denis and Jakubec were taken from Čapek, 79.

⁴⁹ Patočka, "Filosofické základy" 98. Here he refers primarily to Andreae's *Peregrini in patria errores* and *Civis Christianopolitanus*, but also to Campanella's *Sluneční stát* and N. Vodňanský's *Theatrum mundi minoris*, among others.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ A paraphrase from the translation of Lukáš Makovička.

⁵² The Battle of White Mountain, November 8, 1620, occurred about 13 km (8 miles) west of Prague. Many people from Comenius' circles began to flee as refugees. It was seen as a symbol of the death and destruction of the entire Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), in which, according to good estimates, over half the population of some regions of central Europe died, often from disease or starvation following battles. Ed.

⁵³ Čapek, 78.

tion, the stimulation on the semantic level of self-irony, parody, personification, and caricature awakens the reader's imagination, enabling him to look at things in a new, often truer, light. As an example consider the allegory mentioned above, whose goal is to expose the ills of education. Comenius might have appealed to pedagogy to lead the students towards active engagement, he might have written a treatise or a whole book in which he criticized the fact that children in school tend to be too passive. But instead he simply says that one requirement for study is a "posterior of lead." No further explanation is necessary. The reader's imagination completes the work. It is "an instrument of the senses" or the "sense organ of meaning,"⁵⁴ and thus enables the reader not only to understand reality in a new way, but to actually enter into that reality. With the help of his imagination the reader penetrates the fictional world, experiencing its "fragrance," submitting to its rules, feeling the feelings of the characters, adopting their perspectives, identifying with or qualifying, experimenting with being this new "me" and so on. This visit to a fictional world—in our case an allegorical one—changes one's perception of the real world; the reader is "enchanted."⁵⁵ It is a kind of self-transcendence, for it "widens, enriches and transforms not only the reader's vision of reality, but also his very being."⁵⁶ The reader might even, as a result of this literary experience with the imaginary world "convert" to a different, deeper understanding of both the world and himself. He can laugh at himself or his own situation, or cry; he can see through it, get angry, be insulted or embarrassed, perhaps even find himself. In every case he is engaged—cognitively, emotionally, aesthetically, even, in the case of Comenius' allegories, morally, because the ultimate goal is to uncover the *summum bonum* of human life.⁵⁷ In this is the magic of narrative allegory.

Humor and Satire

Humor and laughter is heard often and extensively in Comenius' stories, so I want to devote a whole sub-chapter to it. For the most part it is inseparable from the allegory, as I mentioned above, but again, for the author the point or function is more important than the form. Thus Come-

⁵⁴ C. S. Lewis, "Bluspels and Flalansferers," in *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 265.

⁵⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, "O pohádkách," in *Netvoři a kritikové*, Trans. J. Čermák (Praha: Argo, 2006) 161.

⁵⁶ P. Hošek, "Proměňující moc příběhu," *Církevní dějiny* (2010, Vol. 3, No. 5) 91.

⁵⁷ Kožmín and Kožmínová, 44.

nius says in the Introduction that it “doesn’t matter” how wittily he painted his “tour of the world;” the crucial thing is that God would use it to benefit him and his fellow-men (see “To the Reader”). In reality, though, he paid a lot of attention to humor. It could almost be said that for Comenius, humor was a serious thing. In *The Labyrinth* satirical criticism is not an end in itself, but the main tool for revealing the “perversities” of the world. In addition to consolation, this also fulfills a socio-ideological function. The things that need to be changed in society are exposed through parody. Almost every chapter in (the first part of) *The Labyrinth* contains this element. We hear laughter which is sometimes compassionate, sometimes playful, almost situational, sometimes bitter: but always ironic or spoofing. All phenomena the author deals with are subjected to this irony—including himself.

We can sense a certain bitterness, although mixed with sweetness—according to the author’s own words (see chapter 8)—in all the irony, by which the author comes to terms with his personal pain, especially the loss of his loved ones. One of many examples: in this chapter portraying the state of marriage, the pilgrim is persuaded by his guides that he should try it too. He is initially reluctant, because he is not sure whether the “shackles” of marriage are worth the pleasure that these bonds offer. But in the end he allows himself to be persuaded and gives himself up to be “tied” to three other people (Comenius’ wife and two children, whom he lost in Fulnek during the plague). Here they are nameless. Immediately afterwards they are struck by “a gale with lightening, thunder and a frightful hailstorm,” forcing everyone to flee to find shelter, when suddenly a “chevron of death” kills “his three” and he remains “woefully lonely” and in “a horrible daze.” To that his two guides pragmatically advise him that he can be glad because at least it will be easier to run. Given that we know from chapter 4 that Delusion and Searchall are positioned as revealers of the storyteller’s thoughts, this is almost black humor. “Is he trying to quell the pain of his recent loss with these words?” wonders Jan Blahoslav Čapek. I believe instead this is an allegorical shortcut, in which the realistic story predominates. Comenius simply describes what happened to him, how he felt, and how stupid and inappropriate it is to advise a sufferer to find something good in something so horrible.

We can see specific self-irony when Comenius delves into the various professions of which he himself is a member—teacher, philosopher, Christian, clergyman. He himself is an intellectual, laughing at the “learned ones” who have the previously mentioned heads of steel, minds of quicksilver, lead bottoms, etc. He laughs at the method of “drilling into the head” and “pouring something in,” making fun of the meaningless

feuds and disputations about things like “snow, is it white or black; and about fire, is it hot or cold.” He himself is a philosopher and he laughs at the “philosophers.” The offer to visit the philosophers he enthusiastically welcomed: “God grant that here I shall at last learn something certain.” After all, philosophers are surely those who “know the truth of everything; without their knowledge neither the heaven manifests anything nor the abyss conceal anything; they guide human life nobly to virtue, they enlighten communities and countries. They have God for a friend and by their wisdom penetrate his mysteries.” But in the end he discovers they are “like peasants in a tavern,” each one howling louder than the next, and “each differently.” He himself is a Christian and laughs at the Christians whose “sermons are extremely eloquent and full of piety,” pleasing themselves, but immediately after “get drunk and vomit, quarrel and fight, rob and pillage one another both by cunning and by violence, exuberantly shout and skip, jump and whistle, indulge in adultery and fornication” more than others. Himself a minister, with a special sharpness he makes fun of the priests and bishops:

“Why then do these not restrain those of inferior rank?” And because I wanted to understand the cause, I followed one of them into his room, then a second, a third, a fourth, and so on, and I saw that they were so busy they had no time to watch the others. Except for some things they had in common with the others, they seemed to be occupied with counting their revenues and their church treasures—as they called them. To that I said: “It’s a mistake to call them spiritual fathers, rather they should be called fathers who collect revenues.”⁵⁸

But we feel a compassionate satire in the chapters picturing the life of the lower class, as for example the profession of craftsman:

I saw that all these worldly trades are only labor and vain striving, and that each has its discomfort and danger. I saw that those who dealt with fire were sunburned and sooty like Moors; the clattering of hammers was always sounding in their ears and making them half deaf, the gleam of the fires ever sparkled in their eyes and their skin was blistered and cracked.

It’s similar to laughter, but it isn’t mockery; we can also feel it in his descriptions of the common (usually difficult) experiences of life that touch everyone. Consider disease. In a scene from chapter 14 many readers,

⁵⁸ Citation from Lukáš Makovička’s translation. The last sentence contains an untranslatable pun. In Czech *duchovní* means “spiritual” and *důchodní* signifies one who collects rents or revenues.

both contemporary and current, can see themselves. The conciliatory tone is worth noting—doctors are doing their best; some more, some less, sometimes neglecting something, but even when they are practicing their profession as honestly as they can (“trying their best”) it is hard work and the patients still “die in their hands.” See this in context:

Then I saw a number of wounded, both externally and internally, with putrid and rotting limbs, brought or conducted to the physicians; they approached them, examined the putrefactions, smelling the stench emitted from them, and scrutinized the evacuations proceeding from both above and below, until the sight was disgusting; this they called diagnosis. Then they cooked, steamed, roasted, broiled, cauterized, cooled, burned, hacked, sawed, stabbed, sewed again, bound, anointed, hardened, softened, wrapped, or moistened, and I know not what more they did in order to effect the cure. In the meantime, their patients were expiring under their hands, not a few of them lamenting the doctors’ ignorance or carelessness as the causes of their death. In a word, I saw that although the art of these fine salve-mongers brought them a certain gain, it also involved them, on the other hand (if they wished to do justice to their calling), in a great deal of very strenuous and partly even disgusting labor.

On the other hand, Comenius doesn’t spare the sharp flashes of irony whenever he is exposing what he considers to be sensitive social questions. See for example the description of the “happy wealthy” in chapter 24, or the “exalted of the world” in chapter 26:

Others had coffers full of lumps of earth and stones which they constantly rearranged, opening and shutting the lids, and neither wishing nor seeking to go anywhere for fear of losing their treasures. Some did not trust even the coffers and bound and tied so many of those things upon their persons that they could neither walk nor stand, but were obliged to lie, panting and groaning. Observing this, I remarked: “But, in the name of all the saints, are these people to be considered happy?”

The author is similarly relentless when criticizing public administration, where it should be expected that the people would hold responsible those in the positions of judges, procurators, clergy and nobility. If they are to be in leadership they must first govern themselves, as Comenius repeats many times in various of his later didactic and pansophic works. Instead, in chapter 19 we see:

I tarried and observed very diligently the procedure in the senatorial court, and learned that the names of the judges were as follows: Atheist,

Lovestrife, Hearsayjudge, Partisan, Personrespector, Lovegold, Bribetake, Tyro, Knowliddle, Dontcare, Hasty, and Anyhow; the President and the Supreme Justice, or Primate, was my Lord Icommandit.

The encyclopedic outline of *The Labyrinth* allowed Comenius to satirize every social condition, and thereby criticize them. It isn't necessary to go through them all here. With regard to humor as a didactic-literary tool it is worth noting two more things. In his satire Comenius completely ignores the broad social class of the peasant. It seems that this also has a didactic purpose. Jan Blahoslav Čapek notices this and speculates on various possibilities. It doesn't appear that Comenius simply forgot such a significant (numerically) group. Nor is Čapek satisfied with the explanation that the peasants are missing because the *The Labyrinth* is depicted as a city. He asks the question whether it has to do with Comenius' conservative outlook from the Brethren tradition. The early Moravian church (Unity of Brethren, hereafter UB) forbade many jobs, such as holding official power, joining in armed combat, taking an oath or being involved in commerce. Agricultural work, however, was approved. At the time of Comenius the UB had undergone many changes in its two hundred years of existence. Comenius himself was a relatively unorthodox thinker, but the question is whether his silence about peasants expresses his quiet identification with some aspects of the original UB orthodoxy. Surely it was possible to find even among the peasants a subject for criticism or amusement. But it's also possible that in Comenius' system of values there were subjects about which he didn't joke.

This is connected to my second and final note on the question of humor. All the "fun" ends when the pilgrim leaves the labyrinth. It's made clear on the one hand by a change in genre, but I think there is also a semantic aspect. The minute the author begins to deal with sacred matters, he stops joking. Thus we can't read any of the paradise of the heart as a source of humorous hyperbole; it has to be read with the understanding that it will never be possible to fully attain such perfection of human character and society as are described in the Paradise of the Heart. It seems that Comenius wasn't against such a reading, because in the introductory chapter he advises the reader that what concerns the portrayal "of the happy life of hearts devoted to God [...] is sketched as the ideal" (that is, as an example). Comenius knows that such "perfected spirits" will never be met, but he wants everyone who reads about the paradise of the heart to desire that perfection.

There's no doubt that a man living on the border between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age for the most part desired different things and

laughed at different things than people today do. Comenius' laughter is specific and often historically contingent. In every age and culture each individual must struggle again and again to answer the question: To what extent do I participate in my culture so as to be its critic but never its enemy? Even though Comenius spoke about "banishment" from the world at the beginning of the post-White Mountain period, it seems that in *The Labyrinth* he found his answer. His critical "laughter" is neither destructive nor an end in itself. It doesn't run away from the world, and it is not merely a mockery of the world or a particular literary genre—as was the case with other authors.⁵⁹ His purpose was to expose all types of falsehood with the goal of change. In every parody, hyperbole, and caricature Comenius denounces the contemporary value systems and human activities that create them (wealth, fame, power, etc.), exposing them as "colors" that "obscure the true nature of life."⁶⁰ In this he both prepares and identifies the way to change. Paul Lehmann, who thoroughly devoted himself to parody and satire in Medieval literature, alerts us about this function. These tools serve, according to Lehmann, to call into question the value system of a given society and thereby prepare the way for deep ideological and social change.⁶¹ It seems that this phenomenon is both timeless and universal. Just as the time of Comenius needed change, so also change is needed in our time. And therefore Comenius is still relevant today. Much of human depravity and baseness tends to be comical (if not tragic). In *The Labyrinth* Comenius presents us with a story that not only gives us the power to have fun and laugh at our own humanity, but also reveals there is something wrong that is funny, but that needs to change. In this is the magic of *The Labyrinth*.

Language and Other Literary Devices

"The search for appropriate language to express what I want to picture is part of authentic storytelling," says Ingo Balderman, and continues: "a narration gains authority primarily from this effort expended in the search for appropriate speech: speech that is able to open me and my au-

⁵⁹ In his "Parodie," Petru notes that Comenius uses so-called "direct" or "life" parodies in contrast to Erasmus, who rather resorts to "literary" or "genre" parodies; that is, he uses parody in a certain genre to "make a caricature of contemporary ideology."

⁶⁰ Compare *ibid.*

⁶¹ Lehmann's observations are taken from Petru "Parodie."

dience to our own perception of new experiences.”⁶² Comenius’ feeling for, and his work with, language is universally renowned. *The Labyrinth* is a showcase of literary devices shaped to complement the whole aesthetic effect of the story. I will try to outline some of these devices here.

We have already noted the contrast in language between the first and second parts. When we are in the labyrinth we come across many Moravianisms,⁶³ popular sayings, proverbs, colloquialisms and expressive details, but then we find the Paradise to be full of biblical sayings, quotes, and lofty rhetorical sentences.⁶⁴

Another aspect of Comenius’ verbal artistry is his work with composition. It has already been mentioned in connection with his allegorical techniques. Now I want to emphasize the stylistic and aesthetic level of the text. Comenius’ finesse is evident not only in his choice of words, but also in the way he makes use of linguistic resources with regard to the narrative as a whole. On the one hand the pilgrim’s journey is rendered linearly—a continuous addition of one scene after another on the same theme—and on the other hand most of the chapters are built as an obvious gradation of individual actions and their effects, a characteristic which adds to the drama of the story. An example is the account of how the contenders for a dubious honor boast about their crimes:

one, that he had spilled as much human blood as possible; another, that he had invented a new blasphemy wherewith to revile God; another, that he had sentenced God to death; another, that he had pulled the sun from the sky and had plunged it into an abyss; another that he had organized a new band of incendiaries and murderers for the purging of the human race, etc.

The following description of the secret paradise of joy from chapter 49 serves as a semantic counterpart:

For how otherwise than happy and joyous can a man be who is conscious of, and perceives within himself, such light of God, such noble inner harmony caused by the Holy Spirit, such freedom from the world and its slav-

⁶² I. Baldermann, *Úvod do biblické didaktiky*, Trans. L. Beneš et al. (Jihlava: Mlýn, 2004) 94.

⁶³ Comenius was from Moravia, which is now the eastern part of the Czech Republic.

⁶⁴ For a more detailed study on this theme see K. Kučera, “Lidová rčení v Labyrintu světa a ráji srdce J. A. Komenského,” *Studia Comeniana et historica* (1972, Vol. 2, No. 30); K. Kučera, “Charakteristika slovní zásoby v Labyrintu J. A. Komenského,” *Česká literatura* (1972, Vol. 20); or E. Michálek, “Tradiční rysy v slovní zásobě Komenského Labyrintu,” *Acta Comeniana* (1970, No. 26).

ery, such sure and abundant care of God for himself, such protection against enemies and accidents, and finally such constant peace, as has already been demonstrated?

A stylistic variation of this graduating accumulation of facts is the use of word strings, occasionally completed with ordinal numbers:

And all about us we observed various halls, workshops, forges, benches, stores, and booths full of quaint-looking implements. Men plied these tools in a curious manner, with clattering, striking, squeaking, squealing, whistling, piping, blowing, blasting, jingling, and rattling (chapter 9).

One howled, another roared, or crowed, barked, whistled, chirped, or twittered, accompanying their performance with grotesque gestures. [...] Then several gourmands from behind the tables caught sight of me and one began to drink my health: another winked at me, inviting me to sit down with him; a third began to question me as to who I was and what was my business there, while a fourth demanded rudely why I did not wish them a “God bless you!” (chapter 25).

An especially strong gradation of the central motif of futility is recorded in chapter 28, which is a philosophically fundamental yet expressive chapter. Here “the pilgrim begins to despair.”

Oh, woe is me! Shall I ever find satisfaction in this miserable world? [...] But which of these do I possess? None. What have I learned? Nothing. Where am I? I myself know not. [...] I saw, observed, and learned that neither I nor anyone else is anything, knows anything, or possesses anything, but that we all but imagine ourselves to know something. We grasp at a shadow while the truth escapes us. Woe is us!”

The first part ends with an increasing, almost existential intensity. After that the pilgrim is forced to affirm Solomon’s “vanity of vanities” of everything under the sun, and he longs to leave this world: “‘I choose rather to die a thousand times,’ I answered, ‘than to remain here where such things occur and to look upon wrong, fraud, lie, guile, cruelty.’” He wants to be consistent to the end, so he goes to see “the lot of the dead.” The “unspeakable horror” he sees as he stares the futility of death in the face culminates here with a unique literary intensity:

This, then, is your last glory! This the conclusion of your many splendid deeds! This the goal of your learning and manifold wisdom over which you are so puffed up! This the peace and rest that you crave after your countless labors and struggles! This the immortality for which you ever hope!

Oh, that I had never been born, never passed through the gate of life! For after the many vanities of the world, nothing but darkness and horror are my part! O God, God, God! God, if Thou exist, O God, have mercy on me, a wretched man!

Equipped with statistical methodology, Josef Hrabák,⁶⁵ notes that the gradation in *The Labyrinth* is organized not only semantically but also stylistically; that is, “the exigencies of the central motif are emphasized by the repetition of words continually expressing these images.” Moreover, Comenius manages to do this “artfully,” that is skillfully bringing together and combining words with the same sounds, thus forming new semantic ties. See for example the prevalence of the sounds “s” and “r” in the words associated with the picture of death: *ostrá kosa, hrozná postava, strojili šípy, kterého trefiti měla, chroptícího* [sharp sickle, terrible figure, set the arrow, hit the target, wheeze]. According to Hrabák the point isn’t the puns but the “sound metaphors,” which contribute to the “semantic effect” of the text.

A compositional break in the work—that key turning point when the pilgrim at last finds paradise—comes just in time. The pilgrim’s suffering could hardly be endured any longer. The author lets it continue to the very edge, but from an aesthetic and emotional perspective this is perfectly fine. As Aristotle noted, a long adventure has to include both catastrophe and catharsis.⁶⁶ The reader, in identifying with the main hero, experiences with him the tensions which gradually strengthen to the point of becoming unbearable. So when in chapter 37 the reader finally hears, along with the pilgrim, the mysterious call to return that leads him away from his wandering, it is a unique moment that becomes a catharsis for the reader too. This narratively important event was set up by a long series of escalating pain, adversity, and ruin at whose end the reader experiences a sense of relief that could not have been so great if the suffering hadn’t lasted so long. If the waiting had been shorter, his emotional trepidation wouldn’t have been so strong or the psychological effect so powerful. And strong emotions are very helpful for didactic purposes, because they help to integrate the information connected with those emotions into the cognitive structure.⁶⁷

Chapters in the paradise part of the work contain the same kind of polarizing composition as those in the first part. Not only is it “attractive (in

⁶⁵ J. Hrabák, “K stylistické výstavbě Komenského ‘Labyrintu’” *Listy filologické* (1970, No. 93) 284ff.

⁶⁶ Aristotle, 355ff.

⁶⁷ Compare U. Eco, *Šest procházek*, 89.

a literary way) because of the heightening of opposing types,” as the Kožmín comment,⁶⁸ but also because it deals with the fundamental controversy between a human life having a purpose or being in ruins, which reflects “the whole philosophic concept of the author” as stated by the character Delusion: “you yourself are to blame, because you are asking about great and extraordinary things which nobody has.” However, as long as the pilgrim is still a human being he cannot help himself, he cannot be satisfied with delusion and destruction. The desire for truth and meaning in life is an existential part of his humanity. His desire is fulfilled, an exit from the labyrinth exists, hope endures. Comenius’ practical philosophy is thus once again put into words.

The contrasting parallels in both parts are consistently maintained, even when the storyline is considerably weakened in the ways mentioned above. This creates a “structural integrity,” in the words of Lubomír Doležel, based on the principal of “symmetry and parallelism.”⁶⁹ In the first part of *The Labyrinth* the fictional world is deliberately painted in aesthetically negative colors. It is portrayed by a chaotic monstrosity accentuating the absurdity and disorder of everything, which engenders a sense of revulsion. In other words, it is perfectly “de-aestheticized.”⁷⁰ In the end even nature, which should serve as the opposite pole to the pilgrim’s troubled spirit, doesn’t help. In Comenius’ “world,” as in “civilized” towns, it is never found. The only exception is the episode in which the pilgrim arrives at the sea. But even here the function ascribed to the sea is negative; it is an uncontrollable and dangerous element that impinges on human destiny in a thoroughly adverse way. In defense of Comenius’ relationship to the sea it’s necessary to say that this episode was added to the text only in the third edition in 1663, after Comenius had endured a dramatic voyage from Gdansk (Poland) to England in which he nearly died. It’s possible that if he hadn’t experienced that storm, that seafaring episode wouldn’t have been in *The Labyrinth* and his attitude towards the sea would have been quite different. Comenius picked up a more positive approach to nature in the next phase of development of his thinking. He discovered its potential along with the “happy restorers of philosophy,” Tommaso Campanella and Francis Bacon.⁷¹ But it appears

⁶⁸ Kožmín and Kožmínová, 50.

⁶⁹ L. Doležel, “Kompozice,” 53.

⁷⁰ A. Haman, 8.

⁷¹ We learn about the influence of Campanella and Bacon in a letter from Rafael Leszcynský in 1630. Here Comenius lists every author who inspired him while he was working on his *Didactic*. After the list of authors whose specialization was didactic, he adds the now well-known postscript: “addo Campanellam et Veru-

that, from the aesthetic perspective, Comenius stayed near the “medieval mentality,” which was characterized by “resistance to a sense of being,” says Aleš Haman.⁷²

The “world” in the paradise part of *The Labyrinth* is a contrast in its aesthetically positive nature. Here it is necessary to first undergo a “severe test” to become detached from things and purify one’s heart. But then aesthetically every image mediates a sense of freedom, safety, and harmony. In contrast to the noise and pomp of the world, the paradise of the heart is quiet. In place of darkness, light; in place of disarray, order; in place of strife, peace; in place of worry, joy; in place of want, bounty; in place of slavery, freedom; in place of fearful happenings, safety. In place of the reins of over-inquisitiveness the pilgrim receives the reins of obedience to Christ in the biblical allusion to the “yoke that is light.” In place of the glasses of delusion he gets glasses whose frame is the Word of God and whose lenses are the Holy Spirit. With this equipment he is again sent into the world, this time to see “things that [he] could never have perceived without such gifts” (chapter 41). The pilgrim again goes to the various roads of the world to see what real, true humanity looks like. In marriage he doesn’t see “steel handcuffs,” but “a joyful union of bodies and hearts.” The authorities, governing with true Christian ethics, treat their subjects as loving parents treat their children. Scholars are friendly and welcoming, and they look for ways they can be helpful to their neighbor and contribute to the common good. There is also a picture of the ideal preacher in the UB church:

[...] fervent spirit but disciplined body, lovers of heavenly things but careless of earthly, diligent over their flock but forgetful of themselves, drunk with the Spirit but not with wine, of few words but of abundant needs, each striving to be the first in work but the last in boasting: in a word, intending the spiritual upbuilding of all in their every act, word, and thought.

It’s clear that for Comenius the paradise of the heart is not an escape from the difficulties and complexities of the world, but rather a transcendence of his own depressed version. Comenius is looking for and

lamium, felices philosophiae instauratores” (I am adding Campanella and Verulamius, happy renewers of philosophy). I discuss this topic more elsewhere; see J. Hábl, *Lessons in Humanity: From the Life and Thought of Jan Amos Comenius* (Bonn: Culture and Science Publications, 2011).

⁷² Haman, “Estetický rozměr světa v Komenského Labyrintu,” 9. On the subject of “negation of the world” see A. Kostlán: “K ‚negaci světa‘ v raných dílech J. A. Komenského,” *Studia Comeniana et historica* (1985, Vol. 15, No. 29).

formulating “a concept that could project true reality back onto the world.”⁷³ As the grotesquely deformed world was criticized, so the sought-after paradise is often idealized in the loftiest ethical maxims that the author (as a UB theologian and philosopher) had at his disposal—so that every reader would “desire this same degree of perfection for himself.”

All of the layers of literarily dynamic text mentioned above—verbal, semantic, stylistic, compositional, etc.—are effective as a whole. Their distinguishing functions are complementary and intertwined, so that in their entirety they form the particular character or readability of the work. In addition to the quality of the content, a story has its formal beauty, gradation, contrast, tension, and so on. In this is its magic.

The Narrative Perspective

Most of *The Labyrinth* is told in the first person, which is a distinctive feature of the close union between the author and the narrator.⁷⁴ Statements like “I saw” and “I watched” are constantly repeated in an almost journalistic manner. Most of the situations described are not static, but as if they are just happening now. Again and again the pilgrim is absorbed in the events and dialogue, always having some task to perform, always having his actions and thinking confronted. Antonín Škarka notes that if it’s possible to speak of the particular form of this novel, then it can only be with the adjective “subjective.” With the narrator’s preoccupation with his own heart and constant attention to himself *The Labyrinth* approaches, according to Škarka, “the form of a psychological and philosophic novel, though not yet highly developed.”⁷⁵

This narrative perspective creates the space for specific literary elements. The pilgrim’s subjectivized view of the world is deliberately naïve, as if he is seeing the world for the first time. In every new situation he is allowed to wonder almost as a child would, why things are as they are. Why are the trades so rife with “drudgery and moaning?” Where does the nobility that rules us come from? Why do wagoners have to carry their various burdens and costs? Through these naïve questions the author first invites an examination of the fundamental problems of the present world, and then develops an unconventional vision of reality in order to

⁷³ Kožmín and Kožmínová, 54.

⁷⁴ Doležel, “Kompozice,” 39.

⁷⁵ Škarka, *Slovesné umění*, 39.

describe things as yet unseen and unknown.⁷⁶ In the forefront are the descriptions of the phenomena which the author believes deserve critical examination. According to Jaroslav Kolár and Věra Petráčková,⁷⁷ Comenius thus created an effective and powerful tool for interpreting his critical view of the world and also “outlining his own ideas about how to correct it.”⁷⁸

The narrative perspective, to a large extent, determines the structure of the work. This is noted by Lubomir Doležel,⁷⁹ who sees three narrative types in *The Labyrinth*, corresponding to the three narrative sections of the work. The first thirty chapters preserve a distance between the observer and the things observed. In the following five chapters, where the pilgrim endures the catastrophic climax of his labyrinth experiences, that distance recedes into the background and the storyteller becomes the main figure in the narrative. And from chapter 36, in the paradise section, the distance disappears altogether—the pilgrim/observer is an active participant in the dialogue.⁸⁰

The first-person form of dialogue also determines the momentum of the storyline, because the dialogue takes place at essentially the same time as the story itself. In *The Labyrinth* there is no stopping to take a breath, the actions follow one right after the other, and in every situation everything is at stake. The concept of “drama” by which Comenius identifies *The Labyrinth* in the Dedication is therefore proper, and not only for its scenic character.

⁷⁶ Kožmín and Kožmínová, 43.

⁷⁷ Kolár and Petráčková, 320.

⁷⁸ The term “to correct” is appropriate, even though it isn’t yet in the emendational spirit of Comenius’ later work. At this stage of his development of thought he had not thus far conceived his emendational projects in the true sense of the word. He rather spoke of the “expulsion” of the world. His emendational plans came later, based on the integration of some philosophical, theological and pedagogical initiatives. The satirical-critical wording of *The Labyrinth* prepared the way for the future “remedy.” I deal with this more elsewhere; see Hábl, *Lessons*. See also Patočka’s observation: In *The Labyrinth* the question is not how to “fix” the world, but “What to do about it,” in J. Patočka: “Jan Amos Komenský. Nástin životopisu,” in *Komeniologické studie III* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 2003) 45.

⁷⁹ Doležel: “Kompozice.”

⁸⁰ The traditional division of *The Labyrinth* into two parts need not be in conflict with that of Doležel. It depends on the criteria for differentiation. Most interpreters (Škarka, Čapek etc.) choose as their criteria the outward forms expressing the negative symmetry of the whole work. Doležel’s criteria (the type of narrator) helps reveal new dimensions in its composition.

The pace of the narrative slows down with the change of perspective in the paradise part. The narrative “I” is preserved, in the end we even hear the voice of God as if it’s in the pilgrim’s ears, but it’s mingled with other voices and quite a new perspective. In chapter 44, for example, the pilgrim looks at how everyday life functions in “true” (the adjective is important here) Christians. In addition to unanimity, compassion, trust, and other qualities he notices that these are not based on material possessions, houses full of furniture, clothing, food, gold or silver, but on the contrary they willingly shared their property with those in need. At that point comes some important (from the standpoint of perspective) statements: “Seeing this, I felt ashamed that with us it is often the opposite...” Who is this “us?” For whom is he speaking? It can’t be the pilgrim/narrator, for he is not an “us.” So who is speaking? The answer is obvious. It is the author speaking firsthand—Comenius himself. It is as if he couldn’t contain himself and his voice drowns out that of his narrators. The plurals “we,” “us” and “our” throw us into the actual, metatextual reality in which Comenius is confronted with false or fake, people and Christianity. These often “belch” with satiety, while others “yawn” with hunger. This is an embarrassment to Comenius and he cannot help but comment on it. I will lay aside these comments for now, though, because I am focusing on the literary aspects of Comenius’ observations, not the social.

We meet the same phenomena in many other places in the second part of the book. For example in chapter 48 the distracting plural resounds again: “thus the ridicule, hatred, injury and harm meted out to us by the world shall be turned to our profit,” or in another place: “It is true that the world is going from bad to worse, but will our fretting improve it?”⁸¹ Sometimes, even, the empirical author—as a speaker and preacher—can’t resist abandoning the allegorical mode altogether and turning directly to the empirical readers with a rhetorical address. For example in chapter 47 we read: “Understand, you true servants of Christ, that we have a most watchful guardian and protector—the Almighty God Himself. Blessed are we!” And similarly in chapter 45: “Oh Christian, whoever you are [...] discover, experience and learn that the obstacles which your mind imagines are too small to be able to obstruct your will, provided only that you will be sincere!” It seems that Comenius resorts to this kind of authorial self-disclosure whenever he wants to say something urgent and important. It is as if he suspends the narration of the story, enters the scene himself and says: Dear readers, pay attention; let us put aside our

⁸¹ For clarity I am using Makovička’s translation here.

allegorical games for a while and speak clearly, because everything is at stake now. And then when his speech is finished he returns again to the role of narrator. For example, he uses the phrase “and I saw” to make it clear that it is once again the pilgrim speaking.

In the *Paradise of the Heart* we are thus witnesses of changing perceptual and conceptual perspectives (in the terminology of Seymour Chatman), as well as psychological and ideological ones (in the words of Boris Andrejevič Uspenský).⁸² We could regard it as a narrative lapse, when the empirical author seems to have forgotten that he created the narrator and “jumps into his speech.” But it is also possible to interpret this phenomenon as a particular strength of the narrative which, although perhaps not intentionally so on the part the author, gives the readers the possibility for both subjective identification and objective distance. On the one hand the reader can be immersed in the experiences of the narrator, on the other hand the reader can be led to the realization that there is also the real world, a real author, and a real reader, from whose points of view the narrative is inspected and evaluated. If the reader decides to listen to the instruction of the text, it is an invitation to specific epistemic walks—one is inside the reality of the text, the other is outside, leading to a questioning of extra-text reality.⁸³ This narrative dynamic is another factor contributing to what I call the magic of story.

Narrative and Identity

The telling of a story is a form of (self-) understanding. *The Labyrinth* is no exception. From the outset of his story Comenius warns us that it will be an almost therapeutic experience. Comenius himself describes the therapeutic content of his writing in a letter to the Dutch publisher Petr Montanov:

When the darkness of calamity deepened in 1623 and it appeared that there was no hope of human help or advice, tossed about by anxieties and temptations without end, I called in the deep of the night to God with unusual fervor; I jumped out of bed, grabbed my Bible and prayed [...] I opened

⁸² See their classic works: S. Chatman: *Příběh a diskurs. Narativní struktura v literatuře a filmu*, Trans. M. Orálek (Brno: Host, 2008); B. A. Uspenskij: *Poetika kompozice*, Trans. B. Solařík (Brno: Host, 2008). In addition to these perspectives we can also identify spatial, temporal, linguistic, etc. perspectives. The terminology varies with different authors. For this see for example Schmid, *Narativní transformace*.

⁸³ Compare T. Kubíček: *Vyprávět příběh. Naratologické kapitoly k románům Milana Kundery* (Brno: Host, 2001) 138.

randomly to the book of Isaiah, reading on and on with grief, and the moment I felt that my distress was dispelled I grabbed my pen and started to write—whether for my own future benefit if that terror should return again, or for others.⁸⁴

In *The Labyrinth* then we are not reading some figment of the author's imagination (a "poem"), but a real episode that he experienced himself in "the few years of his life." And (I remind the reader again), the reason for his narrative is to get everything "more clearly in front of his eyes," in order to clarify things so he could better understand the world, the things that happened to him, and himself. Humans are beings who need to understand. One is, as Heidegger put it—a being stricken with care about the meaning of his existence. Or in still other words—he is "a being that cares about his own existence."⁸⁵

Without wanting to psychoanalyze Comenius too much, the fact is that his goal approaches what contemporary psychology refers to as "narrative therapy." Stories help diagnose and heal. Narrative metaphors often function as catalysts for change of a client's self-understanding. The inherent power of reflection and verbalization is highly desirable. The client is led to questions of responsibility, of his own influence on (the authorship of) his life and also his ability to handle difficult (existential) situations and various life dilemmas.⁸⁶ According to Michael White and David Epston⁸⁷ the point of narrative therapy is a shift away from the problem-saturated story, towards an alternative story which both better reflects the lived experience and makes sense.⁸⁸

Questions of meaning, however, never appear in a vacuum. They take place within the background of the specific cultural tradition into which the questioner was born and in which she was raised—and a fundamental part of every culture is again, story. It is a large and important meta-story, around which the community is united, and which is shared,

⁸⁴ Translation by Julie Nováková, *Čvrt století nad Komenským* (Praha: Studijní texty Komenského evangelické bohoslovecké fakulty v Praze, 1990).

⁸⁵ M. Heidegger, *Bytí a čas* (Praha: Oikumeneh, 1996) 220f.

⁸⁶ Compare D. Polkinghorne: "Narrative Therapy and Postmodernism," in L. Angus—J. McLeod: *The Handbook of Narrative and Psychotherapy* (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

⁸⁷ M. White and D. Epston: *Narrative means to therapeutic ends* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990).

⁸⁸ For more on this theme see J. Friedman and G. Combs, *Narativní psychoterapie*, Trans. J. Hesoun (Praha: Portál, 2009).

guarded and bequeathed to the next generation. Milan Machovec⁸⁹ notes that humanity always, one way or another, retains a vital relationship to something that is above the individual, which goes beyond it. This constitutes one of the fundamental needs of a human being—the need for transcendence. In narrative terminology, it's a meaningful plot to one's life that goes beyond the horizon of the individual. Great stories (with a wide repertoire of sub-stories) have always been the intermediary for meeting this need. Narrative serves as a means of cultural identification. All of the elements, structures, concepts, values, and institutions (including pedagogy) find their legitimacy precisely in their relationship to these universally shared meta-narratives (more on this later). In ancient cultures it was usual to codify exemplary models of human behavior in myths. In later traditions we find pictures of reality in narrative form, providing people with the basic reference points, incentives and appeals for forming one's self-image.⁹⁰

Why stories? The story is the only kind of discourse which, in the way it selectively presents, arranges, develops, and connects individual events, gives them special importance and makes sense of them. Stories, with their structure and wholeness, most resemble real life. Unlike scientific protocol, factual records, and other exacting genres, a story is set in a specific situation and time, it is organized, it has the twists and turns and dynamics of a plot, a denouement—and most of all, a beginning and an end. In this context Jiří Trávníček notes that, in addition to the possibility of identifying with the hero, a story also offers the possibility of an even deeper identification “with the story itself and its time, which in the story has a beginning and end that are not only the two endpoints but in particular function as its completion.”⁹¹

All in all a story mirrors real life, and thus also even the life of the reader who can recognize himself in the story. This feature of story is, in terms of shaping the identity of the individual, irreplaceable. A story that is about me, in which I can see myself, interests me. I'm willing to listen to a story where I can play the central role. A story in which others listen to me through their imagination, calls forth that kind of empathy which is so desirable for gaining the reader's attention. In the story the characters through which we confront our own existence live, act, think, and are manifested with all their qualities and abilities. We compare and try

⁸⁹ M. Machovec, *Filozofie tváří v tvář zániku* (Brno: Nakladatelství Zvláštní vydání, 1998).

⁹⁰ Compare Hošek, “Proměňující” 88.

⁹¹ Trávníček, *Vyprávějí*, 52.

to make sense of our lives. Thus engaged, the reader is prepared to allow her own life perspective to be changed by the perspective of the story, a key element in the process of self-understanding.⁹²

In addition to this empathetic function stories provide their readers with even more possibilities. Consider, for example, imitation. Stories contain models of behavior which present a real option to imitate. “Stories give us the option of entering within ourselves and seeing ourselves objectively,” says Jiří Trávníček.⁹³ The reader is thus invited to examine the many modes of his own actions. Through the configuration of the quantity of variables in an individual narrative a story can become to the reader a vision or revelation which serves as an incentive to imitate and eventually reconfigure or re-tell her own story. Some authors even speak of the heuristic potential of story.⁹⁴

This is closely related to another function of stories—organizing. It is a very important yet not “innocent” function of every narrative, as Joseph Hillis Miller says. The events in any story are usually not told as they actually happened. The narrative’s organization of the events serves to “confirm or reinforce, or even to create the most basic cultural assumptions about human existence, time, fate, one’s own being, where we come from, what we are here on this earth to do and where we are going—about the whole story of human life.”⁹⁵

If someone asks me who I am, there arises in my mind a whole assortment of memories, passions, aspirations, beliefs, psychological states, and other particulars which have undergone significant changes over time. And because I don’t have, in the words of David Novitz, a “wide-

⁹² In view of the closeness to psychological themes, I am adding an observation from the pen of a psychologist who reflects Comenius’s purposes well. In his dissertation Skorunka notes “that to find one’s place in society it is necessary to form an adequately satisfactory connection between individual experiences and stories in a given culture and society. As long as one is unable to create such a connection, she is lacking something important and can feel isolated and lonely, especially if she cannot participate in the cultural narrative or the cultural stories that are dominant and in comparison to which the individual’s experience is marginalized.” See D. Skorunka: *Narativní přístup v psychoterapii. Pohled psychoterapeuta a klienta*, Diss. (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, Fakulta sociálních studií, 2008) 46; available at <http://is.muni.cz/th/71263/fss_d/DISERTACE.pdf> (2. 8. 2012).

⁹³ Trávníček, *Vyprávěj*, 52.

⁹⁴ In a reference to P. Ricoeur, Hošek, “Proměňující,” 89. Compare P. Ricoeur: *Reflection and Imagination*, ed. M. Valdes (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) 135.

⁹⁵ Miller, 34.

screen” perspective of myself, it is very difficult to answer the question.⁹⁶ A narrative, however, provides a unique organizational potential. If I am to understand who I really am, I have to organize the facts I know about myself into a meaningful storyline. “We understand events in terms of the events we already understand,” says Roger C. Schank.⁹⁷ A story organizes the unstructured material of life experience into understandable frameworks, components, and patterns, or it functions as an organizing grid of fragmented experiences in the same way grammar coordinates meaning. According to the narrative structures we can reorganize, and often even transform, our life experiences to make sense; to find what we consider to be their true meaning. We emphasize some, criticize others, and at the same time put it all together into an meaningful whole. The way we tell the stories of our lives uniquely affects ourselves because there is a close connection between the way we view ourselves and how we will probably act.

There is another feature of the story, which we can call performative. The question is, how is the story that I read or tell related to reality? Does the story shape reality, or only reveal it? I believe that the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The uncovering of reality is based on the assumption that reality (the world) has a pre-existing order which the story (or art in general), in one way or another, follows, imitates, or represents. On the other hand the forming of reality presupposes that reality is open to further organization or even a further creating—that there exists a kind of “pre-arranged harmony”⁹⁸ between reality and human imagination which enables the human spirit to create. And the purpose of this creation is, to repeat oneself, understanding; as Katarína Mišíková notes, “Art transforms reality to reveal its inner meaning.”⁹⁹ From the psychological perspective it is “performative”—as the theorists of speech acts say.¹⁰⁰ In this sense a story is a way of changing or influencing reality through words. It makes something happen in the real world.¹⁰¹ Or in the

⁹⁶ D. Novitz, “Umění, narativ a lidská povaha,” *Aluze* online (2009, Vol. 13, No. 3) 28; available at <www.aluze.cz/2009_03/04_studie_novitz.php> (21. 7. 2012).

⁹⁷ R. S. Schank, *Tell Me a Story. Narrative and Intelligence* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000) 15.

⁹⁸ This is a concept of C. S. Lewis, *Pilgrim’s Regress* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans Pub. Co., 1996) 169. Compare Hošek, *C. S. Lewis*.

⁹⁹ K. Mišíková, *Mysl a příběh ve filmové fikci* (Praha: Nakladatelství Akademie múzických umění, 2009) 153.

¹⁰⁰ See the classic works of Austin (*How to do things with words*), Searle (*Speech Acts*), and Alston (*Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*).

¹⁰¹ Compare J. Koteš, *Jak se dělá fikce slovy* (Brno: Host, 2013).

words of Balderman, “the way a narrative presents the world determines its quality.”¹⁰²

Rami Shapiro expresses it concisely: “Attentive listening [...] to stories pulls us out of our own story and reveals an alternative drama that can offer us a greater understanding than any story we ourselves can tell. [...] And that is what makes great stories: they show us a different understanding of reality. Nothing has changed but our minds, and that of course changes everything.”¹⁰³

Summary: The Magic of *The Labyrinth*

I have sketched a few selections of “magic” that came out of my reading of Comenius’ work *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*—some literary strategies that have the power to so captivate the reader that he or she is drawn in, engaged, and motivated. It is clear that the uniqueness of *The Labyrinth* is not in its originality. In terms of genre, literary devices, and the central motif (a pilgrim’s journey and search for the true meaning of things), it is in keeping with the literary trends of his time. Suffice it to recall the utopian allegories of Johan Valentin Andreae, Tommaso Campanella, Thomas Moore and, in the English speaking world, the famous *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan.¹⁰⁴

However, whenever Comenius took an idea from an older or contemporary work he used his own creativity to transform it. There emerged a very simple story, historically contingent, perhaps too allegorical, too didactic, or too moralizing, but still a story that has its own importance and magic. Analyzing magic usually means the death of it, so I have tried to tread carefully, preserving a methodical respect and rigorous desire to

¹⁰² Baldermann, 88.

¹⁰³ R. Shapiro, *Chasidské povídky*, Trans. R. Hanzl (Praha: Volvox Globator, 2006) 16–18.

¹⁰⁴ From the literary-historical perspective it is an interesting fact that one copy of Andreae’s work *Peregrini in patria errors*, stored in the Nuremberg Museum, is mistakenly attributed to Comenius. Jan Skutil says that “even though we have to admit the possible influence of the above work on Comenius’ *Labyrinth*, we also have to declare that the work is completely original, not only in its treatment of themes..., but also in its masterly adaptation of the contemporary Czech morality and conditions.” See J. Skutil, “Comenius’ *Labyrinth of the World as the Culmination of the Pedagogical, Didactic and Patriotic Ideas of Žerotín’s Apologia*,” in *Symposium Comenianum 1982* (Uherský Brod, 1984) 126. Compare also J. V. Novák, *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce J. A. Komenského a jeho vzory* (Praha: ČČM, 1895) 56–70; M. Kopecký, *Komenský jako umělec slova* (Brno: MU, 1992); Čapek, 71–89.

understand.¹⁰⁵ In doing this I have tried to show how the story gives birth to the reader and compels her to collaborate, feel, experience, think, and identify with it. We saw how Comenius' own story draws out the storyline, tantalizes the reader, and inspires her emotions—as he paints pictures and awakens the imagination, discloses through allegories and laughs at what is displayed, plays verbal games of language and words, speaks and evaluates through various narrative angles, and finally offers a way to (re)construct the reader's identity.

I don't think I have finished the narrative scrutiny on the *Labyrinth*. I believe with this analysis I have only just begun the research into story. I'm sure that each future step along the narrative path will reveal new dimensions of its magic and give glimpses of new realities. The many dismantled layers of the story are preparatory to breaking down others for didactic purposes. If we ask what makes a good story good, it isn't enough to analyze the stated storyline, composition, perspective, etc. We know that their effect is based on their interconnectivity, compactness, and harmony. The fine web of a good narrative into which the reader is caught is the result of the polyphonic harmony (or disharmony in a bad story) of all its parts. The "organic unity" of the narrative, as Tomáš Kubíček says,¹⁰⁶ is thus difficult to understand and analyze, but that is precisely where its magic lies. When viewed from the didactic perspective, the activating power of the story does not lie only in the quality of its component layers, but is primarily in the quality of its interconnectivity as a harmonious whole. The specificity of the narrative genre thus corresponds to the specific nature of humanity. So just as a person isn't only a rational being but also emotional and physical, etc., neither does a story work in isolation, only in the mind, or only in the emotions, etc. A person exposed to the power of story is a being who goes through a holistic experience in which she thinks, feels, believes, endures, identifies with, receives information, and evaluates. A good story is a unique form of human art which can impact a person in her entirety and change her. Not every form of narrative succeeds in this, but it works in *The Labyrinth*. And in this lies its magic.

¹⁰⁵ Jaroslav Vlček, *Dějiny české literatury* (Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1951) 550, was aware of the need for a sensitive approach to the interpretation of Comenius' *Labyrinth*. He warns that if the reader is to understand it, "she cannot judge the book by the opinions of modern taste," because modern [and post-modern—my addition] tastes and thinking are subject to completely different goals and actualizations than those of Comenius.

¹⁰⁶ T. Kubíček, *Vypravěč. Kategorie narativní analýzy* (Brno: Host, 2007) 29.

3 The Story-desolate Landscape: A Metanarrative Excursion

Jiří Trávniček states in his study of modern prose that modernity is, in terms of literary history, an era “deprived of story.”¹⁰⁷ The literary crisis of story is understandably somewhat different than that of pedagogy, but there are some parallels. With reference to Christian Schärf, Trávniček shows that the existence of a crisis of confidence in the narrative form didn’t mean that the telling of stories would completely disappear. Rather that their space was “usurped” first by films and then by television. Of course that’s the problem. Stories “are not only methodological” (that is, poetics in the narrow sense of the word), but they are also “a means of our understanding.” As such it is important how they are communicated and perceived. It follows that reading and writing cannot simply devolve into watching, which everyone who has had the opportunity to compare a book with a film based on it intuitively understands. In other words:

In the twentieth century, reason has called story to battle, wanting to destroy story, discredit it epistemologically and cause it to be distrusted aesthetically. Thus knowledge, in the form of reason, has found itself in the most fertile periods of the realistic novel, being turned into reflexive self-awareness: into the fiendish circle of consciousness that knows, that it knows, that it knows [...] Storytelling went from being the servant of reason to becoming its opponent; thus it lost its ability to compose a meaningful plot. To tell a story, something had to be known to the storyteller—in the period of realism. But after that time, once something was known it was no longer possible to tell it as a story.¹⁰⁸

It seems that pedagogy has met a similar fate. Modern schools abound with lectures and expositions or discussions, but have few narratives. This is especially so in higher education, which is rife with scientific articles, scripts, and specialized texts (of which this is proof), but is lacking in stories. What has happened? I think that the typical modernist “story asceticism” is related to deeper changes in the philosophic paradigm, by which I mean the acceptance of reductive-rationalistic discourse and its resulting self-diminishing credibility, which in turn brings about a loss of

¹⁰⁷ J. Trávniček, *Příběh je mrtev? Schizmata a dilemata moderní prózy* (Brno: Host, 2003) 11.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 68–69.

confidence in any kind of “great story,”¹⁰⁹ as discussed by Jean-François Lyotard¹¹⁰ and many other commentators (and forecasters) of postmodernity. Therefore, before submitting my proposal for the rehabilitation of narrative in didactics, I present a brief philosophical excursion to clarify our current (meta)narrative-less—or, in Trávníček’s words—“story-desolate” situation.

The “Great Story” of Comenius

Comenius’ consolation, teaching, and later reformation efforts took place within the background of the traditional Christian meta-narrative. The early *Labyrinth* as well as the later *General Consultation concerning the Improvement of Human Affairs* proceeded from an assumption of a transcendently rooted history of salvation. When, in 1642, Comenius had a diplomatic-academic disagreement with René Descartes, it was an epochal break with the mainstream philosophical thought that swept the Western world for several centuries. According to credible sources, Descartes is said to have ended the epistemological debate about reliable sources of knowledge with Comenius with the words: “I deal with but part of what is for you inseparable.”¹¹¹ Descartes’ systematic doubt was for Comenius unthinkable. It distanced a person from the world (as an indivisible whole), and reduced human knowledge to mere reason.¹¹² Why such reductionism when human beings have been given other sources of knowledge, asked Comenius. He specifically named three “books” in which a person can read everything necessary for a good life: the cosmos (the world), micro-cosmos (humankind), and revelation (Scripture). Each book tells

¹⁰⁹ For clarity in terminology where literature, philosophy, and pedagogy intersect, it is necessary to add that by *metanarrative* here I am not thinking of the intertextual relationships between the individual stories of a given author, as for example Kubíček discusses (*Vyprávět příběh.*), but the grand cultural-philosophical story that spans each particular narrative, as has been discussed above. It is the idea (often an ideology), that on the one hand clarifies and on the other hand legitimizes the forms, segments, and institutions of an individual culture.

¹¹⁰ J-F. Lyotard, “Postmoderní situace,” in *O postmodernismu*, Trans. J. Pechar (Praha: Filozofický ústav Akademie věd, 1993).

¹¹¹ Comenius remembers the conversation with Descartes in his apologetic autobiography, written late in life. For more details see A. Molnár and N. J. A. Rejchrtová, *Komenský o sobě* (Praha: Odeon, 1987) 155–156.

¹¹² On the issue of Cartesian epistemology and its offshoots see for example R. Audi, *Epistemology. A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, Tylor and Francis group, 2003); or Dolejšová (Noble), 726.

about the same thing from its own perspective, and they are mutually complementary. What matters is the idea of holistic harmony, which Comenius understood not as a random addition to the nature of being, but as a “transcendental attribute, without which no being can be a being.”¹¹³ If one begins with the assumption that the entire universe is a harmonious whole resting on uniform principles, then it follows that things which cannot be known directly (through reason or induction), can be derived from other sources. This is exactly what Comenius does in his universal education (*pampaedia*), as well as his universal wisdom (*pansophia*). He parallels, interrelates sources, and harmonizes the worlds. When one finds educative or emendatory potential in one world (nature), she transmits it by analogy to the human world. For “what nature writes in capital letters, is written in human beings in small letters.”¹¹⁴

From this natural philosophy of Comenius flows his pedagogy, which he called art, *ars* (but not in the aesthetic sense of the word). It’s the specific skill of bringing things into harmony with their natural character, not warping them, not doing violence to their essence, but on the contrary allowing their nature to speak to the nature of humans, thus forming their humanity. This is where Comenius gets his motto: *Omnia sponte fluent, absit violentia rebus* (Let everything flow naturally, without violence).¹¹⁵

The goal of this art is wisdom, universal wisdom (*pansophy*) in fact, characterized by an existential openness to things, people, and God. It’s a life- or spiritual-attitude which intentionally cares about the mutual cooperation, integrity, and harmony not only of the human race but of all of creation. After all “we are all on the same stage of the great world, and whatever happens touches everyone.”¹¹⁶ It is not a small goal. Quite the contrary, it has the highest ambitions for its soteriological focus—the correction of human affairs. In this is the unique greatness of Comenius’

¹¹³ R. Palouš, *Komenského Boží Svět* (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1992) 24.

¹¹⁴ J. Darling and S. E. Nordembo, “Progressivism,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Education* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2003) 291.

¹¹⁵ “Let everything flow naturally and without any violent influence.” This motto is written on the first page of Comenius’ *Opera Didactica Omnia*. See also his *Didaktika analytická* (Praha: Samcovo knihkupectví, 1946) 42.

¹¹⁶ This is a paraphrase from *Unum necessarium*: “We are all sitting in the great theater of the world: whatever happens here touches everyone.” Taken from Molnár and Rejchrtová, 294.

story—the size of his didactic goals and tools correspond with the size of the story he narrates.

The Rise and Fall of the Modern Metanarrative

From the start, the modern meta-story set out on a different—Cartesian—path. When it was in its infancy the philosophers of the Enlightenment proclaimed *sapere aude*: “Trust your reason.” It was a reaction against the medieval tradition of reliance on external authority. The Enlightenment understood itself as being the adolescence of humanity, as the great moment in history when humankind finally got the courage to liberate itself from the clutches of ignorance. The newly discovered human reason became the tool of emancipation, by which it was hoped that “the natural order of all things [would be] revealed, described and explained,” autonomously.¹¹⁷

In addition to a belief in the near-omnipotence of reason, the modern story was also based on a belief in the moral progress of humanity. Stanley Grenz puts it well:

The modern scientist regards as axiomatic, that which knowledge determines is always true. This assumption of the innate goodness of knowledge has made the Enlightenment view of the world optimistic. It has led to the belief that progress is inevitable and that science, together with the power of education, will in the end rid us of all vulnerability to nature as well as all social slavery.¹¹⁸

Intoxicated by the development in the field of knowledge, modern humanity began to also believe that there would be similar progress in the field of morality, for one who knows rightly will also act rightly. The idea of joining *scientia* and *conscientia* wasn't of itself in any way new,¹¹⁹ but the assumption that science and education would be automatically humanizing factors in the upgrading of humanity got its doctrinal form only with the advent of the modern story. The modernists believed that the progress of humankind towards a better future was sure, and that it was only a question of time until, thanks to the unstoppable expansion of

¹¹⁷ A. Wright, *Religion, Education and Post-modernity* (London—New York: Routledge-Falmer, 2004) 1.

¹¹⁸ S. J. Grenz, *Úvod do postmodernismu*, Trans. A. Koželuhová (Praha: Návrat, 1997) 14.

¹¹⁹ Compare P. Menck, “The formation of conscience. A lost topic of Didaktik,” *Curriculum studies* (2001, Vol. 33, No. 3).

knowledge, we would be able to control the natural world—even to “command the wind and rain,”¹²⁰ and finally achieve the coveted paradise on earth. Somewhere in that period pedagogy as art was replaced by pedagogy as science, and storytelling gave way to lecturing.

In the story of the twentieth century, however, the modern hope began to slowly fall apart. It became evident that even though science had brought unprecedented technical possibilities, it could not, by itself, safeguard humanity or bring moral refinement. It is surely true that the one who knows has power, as Francis Bacon noted.¹²¹ It is also indisputable that one must be led to knowledge, that is, educated. However the experience of history has made it clear that knowledge and education can be used for evil as well as for good. When we recall the monstrosities of the twentieth century in which science was actively involved, modernity’s assumption of automatic humanizing appears ridiculous and perhaps even criminally naïve. Today no one is filled with gratitude for how wonderfully the scientists have cared for us; they are more inclined to look at the scientists surreptitiously, with increasing suspicion and apprehension. Who knows how their techno-scientific achievements could be abused again.¹²² Moreover the extraordinary development of technology and science, which offers Western society unprecedented power and prosperity, has also produced an abundance of problems which have grown to global proportions, and for which no solution is evident. The culture of overabundance and prosperity sharply contrasts with the reality of the poverty of millions of starving, destitute, illiterate, or marginalized individuals and whole nations which the “civilized” world can’t help because it has too many of its own problems. As Eric Fromm might say, despite the techno-scientific glut humanity is “undernourished.” Its advanced technocracy has generated a series of antihuman phenomena such as individualization, alienation, and the depersonalizing of interpersonal relationships. Instead of the coveted paradise on earth, the sociologists warn of the reality of a dramatic decrease in moral literacy (the basic ability to distinguish right from wrong), declining social capital (people don’t trust one another), the threat of global self-destruction, the

¹²⁰ This statement was a traditional slogan used in Communist propaganda.

¹²¹ The idea that *scientia potentia est* Bacon often repeated in his—at the time—revolutionary reflections, which in a certain way also inspired Comenius. See for example F. Bacon, *Nové organon*, Trans. M. Zůna (Svoboda: Praha, 1974) 89 and 186.

¹²² Compare Z. Bauman, *Individualizovaná společnost*, Trans. M. Ritter (Praha: Mladá fronta, 2004) 159.

clash of civilizations, various forms of extremism, and so on. The human being is even considered to be an “endangered species.”¹²³

Another problem that has contributed to the decay of the modern metanarrative is the inclination toward totalization; that is, the tendency to make an exclusive interpretation of reality and turn it into a tool of power. Michael Foucault said it well¹²⁴ when he noted that modern scientific discourse has been used as a means of all-pervasive domination and surveillance. The form of the totalitarian regime may vary, but its essence remains. Thus more than one crime of totalitarianism has been legitimized under the auspices of a grand story—whether by the colonialists in the West or the Communists in the East. Alain Finkielkraut observes that, in terms of Western so-called civilization, this has meant:

[...] making their current conditions the model, considering their own peculiar customs as all-purpose skills, making their own value system the absolute criteria for judgment and seeing the European as lord and master of nature, the most interesting being in creation. [...] Because Europe epitomized progress towards another human society, it seemed that colonization was the fastest and most noble means of bringing the stragglers onto the track of civilization. It seemed to be the calling of an advanced nation: to hasten the path of the non-Europeans towards education and prosperity. It was necessary, for the good of the primitive nations, to absorb their differences—that is, their backwardness—in Western universality.¹²⁵

The practical consequences of the totalitarian discourse mastered by the so-called Eastern Block are well known to everyone who lived under the Communist regime. Even that had its great story of class struggle which—let me remind the reader—had its eschatological result in the promised paradise on earth in the form of a classless society.

The collapse of these metanarrative bulwarks caused the disappearance of all the simple landmarks and patterns that had made the modern world solid and facilitated the choices of life strategies. The upcoming generation, weaned on the milk of postmodernism, no longer sees reality as a cohesive, coherent whole in which there exists the possibility of finding a rational system or logic, but rather as a confusion of random,

¹²³ J. Sokol, *Filosofická antropologie. Člověk jako osoba* (Praha: Portál, 2002) 15.

¹²⁴ M. Foucault, *Dohlížet a trestat. Kniha o zrodu vězení*, Trans. Č. Pelikán (Praha: Dauphin, 2000).

¹²⁵ A. Finkielkraut, *Destrukce myšlení*, Trans. V. Jochmann (Brno: Atlantis, 1993) 42.

variable events.¹²⁶ Truth is an empty concept which anyone can define however they want. Objective knowledge is irrelevant. Law and justice have been given over to the mercy of the demon of interpretation, as can be observed in the number of conflicting interpretations of the law employed by the legal experts in resolving lawsuits. As far as the prospects for the future are concerned, in comparison with their parents the postmodern generation doesn't believe there is any kind of scientific or economic, let alone political, solution that can guarantee a better existence. The idea of the progress of humanity is, for the postmodern person, merely a romantic illusion that has been utterly lost. Especially in the Eastern European setting, where for decades the great truths have been bent, twisted, and stretched to the limit, and noble ideas vulgarized by the lower passions, and where one great story after another has appeared without people ever seeing the promised paradise, it has strengthened in almost everyone a conditioned reflex of *a priori* distrust. Rather than be disappointed in the end again, I would rather be disappointed ahead of time. What implications does this change in the intellectual climate have for schools and teachers?

Education Without “Story”

Within the framework of the modern paradigm schools had an indispensable role. They were the key means of sharing the meta-story. All of the didactic tools, knowledge, facts, skills and values that it had at its disposal, and which it cultivated, developed, and conveyed, held their significance in the process of implementing the modern agenda. The end goal of all pedagogical efforts was “to prepare one for life,” which, deconstructed by the postmodern hermeneutic, meant to mold the individual to be able to accept and properly play their socially-determined role in the modern scenario. That it often was more or less latent indoctrination follows from the very nature of the story. The fact remains however, that it was a very functional indoctrination. For centuries it effectively produced and strengthened an almost religious belief in progress. In addition to the overarching metanarratives, academia itself belonged to the “sacred” things, because it was the key place in which the values of social integration were created and developed. The dignity of the teacher's

¹²⁶ Compare to the insights of J. Trávníček (with reference to A. Robbe-Grillet) in the area of literature: “A story is no match for reality, because it is inherently disjointed and consists of elements gratuitously placed side by side.” See Trávníček, *Vyprávěj*, 57.

gown, then, consisted in the legacy of historical continuity, inasmuch as the modern school, however distinguished from the premodern school, nevertheless continued in the same tradition of persistent and deliberate searching for, preserving and passing on the truths that were in their diversity gathered into one great unifying whole—as is suggested in the concept of *uni-versity*.

The end of trust in the metanarrative meant the end of the school's greatest asset. Figuratively speaking, it lost its soul. Along with the great story it lost that which legitimized its formative-educational role in society. The postmodern “client” isn't expecting major objective (world-) views, definitive statements, or universal values from the school, let alone some educational “machining” in the name of universal truth. All she wants and needs is the practical usefulness of the educational products. Don't educate me to be who you think I should be, just give me the facts, skills, and competencies, and I'll do with them what I want. I just need to be fit for the job market.¹²⁷ The school is thus reduced to being the servant or assistant of individual self-advancement. In the postmodern climate the school has become the depository, or—not to be pejorative—supermarket, where the consumer goes to make an eclectic selection from a broad assortment of more or less key products suitable for her pragmatic needs. It's a very specific situation in which two intellectual worlds meet, mingle, and clash. The school is modern, but its clientele are postmodern. As a product of another era it appears to the postmodern person as something strange, authoritarian, intolerant, non-user-friendly, even user-hostile. Here are the roots of the often-discussed crisis in pedagogy.¹²⁸

But that isn't all. In addition to the loss of educative-formative legitimacy the modern school must also face another challenge. A new player has entered the game, one who has been only too willing to take over the space vacated by the lost metanarratives: mass media. Sociologists speak about the current structure of society as a “media-crazy” in which Descartes' “I think, therefore I am” no longer applies, but rather “I am in the media, therefore I am.”¹²⁹ The rules of the game have completely

¹²⁷ In this context the client is usually a university student, but in the case of younger children the clients are often the parents.

¹²⁸ The current situation is aptly designated by R. Palouš, “Doba postedukační?” in *Rozhovory, které pokračují* (Praha: Eurolex Bohemia, 2007), where he discusses the so-called “post-educative period.”

¹²⁹ For more on this see the classic bestseller of Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death (Ubavit se k smrti. Veřejná komunikace ve věku zábavy*, Trans. I. Reifová [Praha: Mladá fronta, 1999]).

changed. The most valuable commodity of the media is the attention of the public. The immediate harvest is popularity. Anyone who joins the media game must play according to its rules, which in no way favor the intellectual activities that in the past brought the school its majesty. The great pains taken in the formation of character, the cultivation of qualitative values, and a basic regard for truth are all activities that are too slow and tedious for the media. They are not visually attractive, and therefore it is unlikely that they would gain the public's interest in the first place, let alone keep it. From the moment the media took over that space left by the metanarrative, educators have had to compete with celebrities, perverts, terrorists, bank robbers, pandemics, virtual reality, and other offerings of the media. They have no chance of winning.¹³⁰

With little exaggeration it is possible to compare the current situation of the school stripped of metanarratives with a theater without a play: the sets are built, the audience seated, the actors put in place. But there is nothing to perform. Not because the artists have nothing to do or say. Quite the opposite, the stage is overflowing with words, rejoinders, costumes, and decorations, but it is lacking *mythos*—there is no plot, no story, and no point. Many of the artists try to do their best (despite the amateur salary in the eastern part of Europe): one teaches with passion, another uses the latest technology, and still another interactively runs through the audience in an attempt to capture their interest. But the bored spectators don't react. They have been satiated by more interesting fare. And without a storyline the play makes little sense. Somehow, though, they manage to hang on until the end. At least the admission was (for now, in the Czech Republic) free.

The school has reacted to the post-story situation basically in two ways. The first accepts the rules of the new game, which in practice means that it conforms to the criteria of the market. It measures its social usefulness by the marketability of its products. It fights for its place on the crowded shelves of the market, and its quality is judged only by success in sales. What was once perceived as a threat, many of the current dignitaries in education treat as an attractive opportunity. Let education—like every other industry—become a commodity, a profit-making business. Let the influx of money into the education sector be once and for all directly proportional to the ability of the school to compete in this

¹³⁰ Compare Bauman, 158ff.

contest and satisfy the demands of the market. Those who can't sell have to get out.¹³¹

The second approach goes in the opposite direction. Rather than taking the offense, it goes on the defense.¹³² Since the battle in the area of media hype is lost before it even starts, the academy retreats to a fortress of social irrelevance. The tall ivory towers, utterly remote from the wider public, offer a safe, self-sufficient, self-nourishing, even “incestuous” —in the words of Zygmunt Bauman—environment for the production and consumption of publicly irrelevant products. The non-marketability of such products is, to be sure, a certain handicap, but relatively bearable inasmuch as it is at least partially offset by money from grants. And the feeling of frustration that many academicians experience in the face of post-educational reality can be effectively compensated for by scientific hyperactivity (for the building up of pseudo-prestige).¹³³

Both strategies, each in their own way, represent a surrendering of the traditional role that the school played in the modern period. In the first case the school accepts an inferior position in the hierarchy that is determined by educationally heterogeneous market forces. In the latter case, the school puts up with cultural and social insignificance, to which it has been condemned by the same unquestioned market principles. The shift from modernity to postmodernity thus represents for education the proverbial leap from the frying pan into the fire: from a bad metanarrative to no metanarrative. This presents a fundamental problem, because without the metanarrative there is no narrative. Without the functioning of the whole there can be no functioning of the parts. Without a meaningful story there is nothing to say.

¹³¹ On the issue of financing the tertiary education sector see the study by H. Vomáčková, M. Žambochová and K. Tišlerová, *Současné ekonomické křižovatky českých vysokých škol* (Ústí nad Labem: Acta Universitatis Purkynianae, 2011). See also the article by V. Bělohradský with the provocative title “Is Education on the Way to Becoming a Good?” (“Je vzdělání na cestě stát se zbožím?” *Právo*, 1. 9. 2003).

¹³² This approach usually applies to those fields that are inherently difficult to market, such as the humanities.

¹³³ The epithet “pseudo” is not directed against the quality or expertise of their research, but rather against the publication efforts which are too often motivated only by economic—i.e., inauthentic, from the perspective of the mission of traditional research—factors. In other words, the critical question is: “Do I publish in professional journals *because* I have prestige, or *so that I will* have prestige?” Or in still another way, with reference to Comenius’ published insights on his day: “Why all this dilution, recycling and even stealing from what has already been said many times?”

Is there another path for today's schools and education? A more hopeful alternative? I believe there is. In the following and final chapter I offer for discussion my modest proposal.

4 Conclusion: Didactic Narrativization

The central purpose of my analysis in this work is to propose the rehabilitation of narrative discourse in pedagogy, or more precisely, to lay out the concept of *educational* or *didactic narrativization*. It's a systematic principle on two levels, which signifies two uses of stories in pedagogical practice:

1. Psychological: If story is so effective in terms of the activation of complex mental processes, as I have been trying to show, then it is in order to think about how to take full advantage of this “tool” in actual teaching practice. The principle is: *Whatever can be told as a story, let it be made into a story. All material that can be put into a narrative form, let it be narrativized.* Of course I don't mean that all other traditional teaching methods should be replaced. Not only would that be impossible, it wouldn't be desirable either. Rather I want to encourage educators to take into account the narrative as a complementary didactic tool when preparing for teaching. The goal of this study is not to present a methodological procedure for a specific teaching unit, but rather to sketch out a starting point for using story forms in the educational process in general. When a teacher knows the “magic” of stories, she can look for ways to use them in her field. That is, she can create characters, plots, narrative plans, and so on, for her subject area. Whether it's algebra, the past perfect, or the government of the Jagellonians, a story has the potential to illustrate, motivate and engage.

2. Philosophical: There is no such thing as a narrative without a metanarrative. Every small story is told in the context of a larger story. This is even true of the postmodern story, which tells of a disbelief in any meta-narrative; it is in itself a meta-narrative. With a humor of their own, this unacknowledged preconception of postmodernity is nicely captured by J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh:

If among the variety of offerings we find Western modernist soup, Marxist rice, Christian stew and Muslim bread (so to speak), is there also a Postmodern dish of some sort? Do Postmodernists consider their own worldview as simply one option among many? Not at all. Postmodernity, as a master discourse [...] doesn't appear on the table. It is the table on which all other dishes are served.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ J. R. Middleton and B. J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1995) 76–77.

In pedagogical terms, there is no curricula without a meta-curricula. The school does not impart only “neutral” facts, but also their interpretive framework. Partial information and events belong to a larger subject, which determines their meaning—not only hermeneutically, but also ethically. A curriculum is a kind of narrative that testifies to a broader connection to the world and human life. Depending on which meta-narrative (pre)conception underlies the teaching, for example, Joan of Arc will be presented either as a saint, or a heretic; Columbus as a courageous hero and discoverer of the New World, or an adventurer and conqueror, driven by a desire for fame and fortune, responsible for the deaths of many sailors and the end of harmony among the inhabitants of the new continent; techno-scientific progress will be presented as a tool of civilization and a means of improving the quality of life, or an instrument of environmental ruin and global self-destruction (for example, through sophisticated military technology). It’s not necessary to give a stack of examples. It is obvious that the meta-narrative framework implicitly contained in every curriculum influences the way in which fundamental human values and an understanding of the world are pedagogically presented.

Therefore I am presenting the rehabilitation of the metanarrative discourse as part of my proposal. I believe that one of the key tasks currently facing education is the search for a meta-narrative which would authenticate and legitimize all didactic sub-stories. Just as there exist good and bad stories, there also exist good and bad meta-stories. Whether they want to or not, teachers must look for quality. It isn’t possible in this work to present a complete philosophy of education. But I want to present a partial initiative, to suggest a direction, options, and starting points for a pedagogy that can adequately reflect the story-desolate situation of (post)modernity. Whatever the great story turns out to be, if it is to be functional, it will have the following features. In my plea for a great meta-story I intentionally borrow some metaphors which I think fit Comenius’ educational intention and terminology.

1. Repentance. A turn-around, a conversion from the thinking which understands pedagogy as a functional tool of power—whether old or new, collectivistic or individualistic, market or non-market. It is an admission of the sin of the alleged meta-narrative neutrality. Modernism and Post-modernism have vehemently (and often correctly) condemned the great doctrines of the preceding era, but without reflecting on their own meta-narrative framework. A repentant pedagogy will be aware of its past “sins” of unacknowledged doctrines, dogmas, and preconceived notions; it will be open to acknowledging and examining their authenticity and

dialogical relationships to others. Only in this way will it be able to prevent such fearful indoctrinations, understanding them as unwanted tools of power.¹³⁵

2. Courage: one of the cardinal virtues of teaching, which enables one to resist the temptation to idolize the pseudo-educative substitutes and remain faithful to the original calling, namely, leading of humanity out, or away from, everything inhuman.¹³⁶ Educational authoritarianism in various totalitarian forms was and always will be dehumanizing, but the resignation of education as such (usually in the name of liberal arbitrariness) isn't the solution. It would be the proverbial throwing out of the baby with the bathwater. A courageous pedagogy will look for new, non-dogmatic but reliable ways of educating within (even despite) the post-modern situation. Ways that can handle this situation in which people are preparing for survival in an environment where the criteria for survival are changing faster than survival itself, where there is no consistent value system, where the ambivalence and inconsistency in the diverse opinions, ideas, frameworks, interests, and truth merge into one great cacophony, allowing infinitely many interpretations, and thus making it impossible to predict what knowledge or skills will be needed tomorrow. Courageous pedagogy will go even further. It won't strive after mere survival in the given environment, but will seek to overcome, exceed, transcend, and cultivate. For when an environment has destructive tendencies it is precisely a responsible education that will have the courage to challenge it, even though it won't win immediate applause.

3. Faith. The last metaphor refers to an attitude which makes the pedagogical (as well as, in fact, any other kind of) effort meaningful. The subject of faith is difficult to grasp, yet it is not irrational because all human activity intuitively resists meaninglessness. Faith doesn't stand alone, but must relate to an instance which has the potential to ensure meaningfulness. This applies to pedagogy, a specific product of human endeavor. In stark contrast to postmodernity, which freed humanity of totalitarian ideas and beliefs but left it hungry for an authentic meaning for being, the teacher's faith becomes her finest asset and key competency. It is not simply pedagogical optimism, but an attitude of honest, humble, and persistent searching for the solid starting point, the fundamental pre-

¹³⁵ On the problem of indoctrination see the singular text of J. Thiessen, *Teaching for Commitment, Liberal Education, Indoctrination and Christian Nurture* (Montreal—Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

¹³⁶ Compare R. Palouš, *Čas výchovy* (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1991) 63.

condition or foundation, on which to build the pedagogical house. In narrative terminology, it is faith which, despite the wreckage of postmodern deconstruction, seeks the reconstruction of a story which the educator's telling could make meaningful, effective, and hopeful.

5 Appendices

A1. Biographical: “Evil on Every Side”

The reader can understand *The Labyrinth* better if she first gets familiar with the personal story of Comenius. The story of his life is in itself such a strong story that many authors have been attracted to its fictional and filmable potential—see for example the works of Miroslav Hanuš, Leontýn Mašínová or the semi-fictional account of Pavel Floss.¹³⁷ The common denominator in all of the versions of Comenius’ life is the desire to “reveal the complete picture of our great ancestor.”¹³⁸ My goal in this chapter is not to present a detailed account of Comenius’ life, merely to sketch some of the spiritual and biographical facts, internal motivations, and the external historical context in which *The Labyrinth* was conceived.

The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart was written in the second (consolation) period of Comenius’ work, when he had to cope with the tragic events following the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. The encyclopedic period (in which he started writing two big encyclopedias) was followed by the consolation period, then the education period, and still later, the period of emendation or universal remedy. The time of transition from the first to the second periods is most relevant to the theme of this book, so that is where I will focus.

The whole of *The Labyrinth* echoes with a spirituality shaped by the environment of the Unity of Brethren (UB), into which Comenius was born. The *Unitas fratrum* (as it was called in Latin) was a specific offshoot of the Czech Reformation movement, founded in 1457 on the principles of radical religious piety and simplicity, inspired by Peter Chelčický (1390-1468). As a denomination they had formally separated from the Husites, but morally and doctrinally they continued to hold to the original Husite beliefs. The traditional Reformation emphases expressed by the phrases *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *sola scriptura*, and so on, gradually became part of the identity of the UB. However the original motivation for reform and separation from the established church was more moral than theological

¹³⁷ See the two novels of M. Hanuš, *Osud národa* (Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1957) and *Poutník v Amsterodamu* (Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1960); the three-part novel by Leontýna Mašínová, *Nesmrtelní poutník* (Praha: Melantrich, 1969); and P. Floss, *Labyrint srdce a ráj světa. Obrazy doby, života a díla Jana Amose* (Praha: Fénix, 1992).

¹³⁸ Floss, 7.

in nature. The UB weren't satisfied with the moral state of the church, especially with its representatives. They had a soteriological concern whether a bad priest could "sanctify" or properly administer the *media salutis* (instruments of salvation). In addition, with Chelčický they held a pacifist rejection of using violence in matters of faith and conscience. They never adopted the widespread political principle *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose realm, his religion), because its application always carries with it elements of violence.¹³⁹ This separatism was the main cause of the persecution the UB suffered throughout their existence. Besides pacifism, another characteristic of the UB was a desire for spiritual purity, which in their early years was manifested in their rejection of official authority, the taking of oaths, and participation in wars. They also avoided secular education because it was evident that education isn't a guarantor of piety—they'd had lots of experience with clergy who were educated but immoral. They further refused some types of employment such as trade, which they considered to be the sinful enrichment of self to the detriment of others and an obstacle to a holy life before God.

During the first two centuries of their existence these emphases of the UB underwent some changes. Contact with the surrounding theological, philosophical, and political currents induced the UB thinkers to cultivate and refine their own theology. They often had to defend themselves against accusations of various heresies and for that they needed erudite apologists. Other times they discovered new spiritual allies or facts—for example from Calvinist or Lutheran circles. In particular, the emphasis on saving faith stemming from a personal relationship with Christ was critical for Comenius (and not only from the perspective of *The Labyrinth*). When he was born into a UB family at the end of the sixteenth century, it was already a markedly different environment than it had been at the beginning. The UB had changed as much in their practice as in their theology. Even though the emphasis on spiritual purity was still strong, the deepening of the UB theology allowed a more conciliatory relationship with the "world." The original deliberate primitivism of education had virtually ceased to exist, mainly due to the influence of Jan Blahoslav, who helped the UB to rediscover the old truth that just as education doesn't guarantee good character, neither does ignorance automatically guarantee it. This is evident, for example, in some of the famous sayings from *Filipika proti misomusům* (A Disputation Against Opponents of Learning): "But perhaps someone has already said that I

¹³⁹ Compare J. Smolík, "Teologické a ekumenické motivy v Komenského všenápravném díle," *Křestanská Revue* (1992, Vol. 59, No. 7).

commend learning and the learned. Yes, it's true, I esteem both, also teaching and the arts: but I do not praise those who use teaching and art for evil [...] we especially disapprove of the evil use of God's good gifts, *abusus non tollit rem.*"¹⁴⁰

A tangible result of these changes, which were crucial for Comenius as we shall see, was that the UB began to send their children to school. Nor was the practice of the wealthy and the nobility adopting church members a problem, as long as their lives showed signs of ethical purity. It is estimated that in this time the UB had about 150 churches in Bohemia and Moravia, which represented two or three percent of the population. Church members were mostly middle class artisans, farmers, and intellectuals.¹⁴¹ The Comenius family was also among these; they were among the esteemed and relatively affluent families in Uherský Brod due to their village mayor roots and guild classification.

However this ideal family background was only available to Comenius for a short time. In 1604, when Jan was twelve years old, both of his parents and two younger sisters died, probably from some epidemic. It is possible that some part of this event was a basis for chapter 4 of *The Labyrinth*. Here we read of the pilgrim's sad meeting with medicine, in which, despite all their efforts the doctors were unable to help the patients: "Then I saw a number of wounded, both externally and internally, with putrid and rotting limbs, brought or conducted to the physicians; they approached them, examined the putrefactions, smelling the stench emitted from them [...] and this they called diagnosis. Then they cooked, steamed, roasted, broiled, cauterized, cooled, burned, hacked, sawed [...] In the meantime, their patients had been expiring under their hands."

A family from his father's side, well-known in Nivnice, became guardians of the orphan, but he was actually brought up in the family of Zuzana Nohálová, Jan's aunt from Strážnice. Here he spent about two years. He was consigned to difficult work in a mill and attended a lower quality school that wasn't able to adequately develop his potential—he apparently addressed some pointed, critical remarks to this type of school in his *Great Didactics* (see for example chapter 11). However these school years didn't last long. They were halted by war; in light of Comenius' own story its religio-political context seems paradoxical. In 1604 the dispute between the (Catholic) Emperor Rudolf II and the (Protestant) Principality

¹⁴⁰ Quote taken from the electronic library of selected samples of older works from Czech literature. It is available at: http://www.phil.muni.cz/clit/ekscl/jan_blahoslav.pdf (11. 9. 2012).

¹⁴¹ Compare S. Králík et al., *Otázky současné komeniologie* (Praha: Academia, 1981).

of Transylvania developed into an uprising led by a certain Štěpán Bočkaj. He undertook a campaign against the Emperor to gain the Hungarian crown and provoke an anti-Habsburg revolt. But then the predatory behavior of his unruly mercenaries (armed farmers and shepherds) compromised Bočkaj's Protestant slogans about freedom of religion and so on. In fact it brought opposition from both Moravia and Bohemia. In 1606, despite their religious and political differences, the Czechs and Moravians joined together to force Bočkaj out of the country.

Comenius was personally touched by the devastation of the war when, on May 5, 1605, the town of Strážnice was burned by Bočkaj's men during one of their raids. "Wherever they came, they wiped out everything and turned it into eternal devastation," he writes in *Laments from the Land of Moravia*.¹⁴² Comenius lost not only his inherited property but also his foster family. He was forced to return to the care of his guardians in Nivnice and apparently was moved around among the families of his sisters.

Comenius gives us insight into this period with his extremely valuable reflections, written in his autobiographical notes after a space of some years. He remembered that the war had taken away almost all the years of his boyhood, but he also had to recognize the positive aspects of orphanhood. An orphan is much more intensively aware of how precious some things are, especially a proper education.¹⁴³

A change for the better occurred at the turn of the year from 1607 to 1608 when the young Jan was sent by his church to the Brethren high school in Přerov. It was of good quality and had a good reputation. Bishop Jan Lánecký, at that time the principal of the high school, soon recognized the talents and native ability of the new student. He took such a liking to the orphan that he virtually adopted him as his own. He also gave him the biblical name Amos, creating many positive associations.¹⁴⁴ He even promised Jan his daughter in the future (but as we know Jan didn't choose her). Through the bishop the young student won the favor of the

¹⁴² Taken from J. Kumper, *Jan Amos Komenský* (Ostrava: Amosium Servis & Nakladatelství Svoboda, 1992) 18.

¹⁴³ See Molnár and Rejchrtová, 32 and 34.

¹⁴⁴ The name can refer either to its Latin meaning, "loveable" or "sweetheart," or to the biblical prophet, who must have been a reminder or example to Comenius of devotion and piety. For more on the debate over Comenius' nickname "Amos" see J. Kvačala, *Jan Amos Komenský, jeho osobnost a soustava věd pedagogických* (Praha: Dědictví Komenského, 1920).

principal patron of the UB—Karel Starší from Žerotín, who most likely financed Comenius' university studies.

The fate of the young student was determined not only by his talents, but also by the need for the church to ensure the quality of its scholars and ministers. In his nineteenth year therefore, Comenius was sent, along with some other young men, to study in the Reformed setting of the university in Herborn (Nassau). The orientation of the UB towards Calvinistic theology meant that in that period they did not send their ministers-in-training to Prague. On the one hand the level of the university there wasn't high and on the other hand the UB considered it too liberal.¹⁴⁵ Within a very short time in Herborn (two years), Comenius managed to get a proper university education. John Edward Sadler attributes this happy outcome to Comenius' "intense sense of purpose and excellent teachers."¹⁴⁶ He attended the courses of such prominent people as, for example, Johann Heinrich Alsted, Heinrich Guberleth and Johann F. Piscator. At the beginning of 1613 Comenius went on a three-month journey through Germany and the Netherlands, at that time the usual culmination of study abroad. The details of his trip aren't known, but we do know that he ultimately stayed on for another year of study in Heidelberg. Among the most significant stimuli that shaped Comenius and which more or less explicitly appear in *The Labyrinth*, are Alsted's encyclopedism, Wolfgang Ratke's attempts at educational reform, the chiliastic expectations of Piscator-Fischer, the Calvinistic spirituality, and last but not least, the irenic (from the Greek *eirené* meaning "peace") perspectives of scholars such as Johannes Althusius and David Pareus. In Heidelberg he had, among other things, the possibility of observing the repercussions of religious oppression in the attempts to reconcile the divided Protestant parties in Germany.

It appears that Comenius was not a lax student who would "study without learning" or go to the library only to admire the books, as he writes in chapter 10 of *The Labyrinth* in his criticism of the state of academics. An episode from the end of his studies is very telling in this regard. At that time an old professor of General and Eastern Studies, Jakub Christmann, was the administrator of the famous Palatine Library in Heidelberg. When the professor died, Comenius bought from his widow the original manuscript of Copernicus' famous and controversial work *De rev-*

¹⁴⁵ Compare J. Patočka: "Jan Amos Komenský. Nástin životopisu," in *Komeniologické studie III* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 2003) 396f.

¹⁴⁶ J. E. Sadler: *J. A. Comenius and the Concept of Universal Education*. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966) 15.

olutionibus orbium caelestium (On the Rotation of Celestial Bodies). The dispute over the geocentric view of the world was then a hot topic in academic circles. Comenius himself, lacking a deeper education in astronomy and mathematics, never accepted the theory. But the fact that he would make the effort to get the very expensive original instead of an ordinary copy says a lot about his approach to research, that is, his desire to know the truth. The original manuscript contained Copernicus' own introduction, summarizing the essence of the book. This introduction was, in its directness, so revolutionary and controversial that the publisher decided to replace it with a preface by a certain A. S. Hosmann, who modified and softened the most problematic parts. Comenius knew that, and it is the reason he purchased the expensive original even though it meant great sacrifice—he spent almost all his money on it and as a result had to walk home. This is supported by a surviving letter addressed to his friend Kristián Vladislav Nigrin: “In the fourteenth year of this century I traveled the road from Heidelberg to Prague completely alone and on foot, protected by a parade of guardian angels and good health. The reason for going by foot was that not much was left in my travel fund...”¹⁴⁷

When Comenius returned home from his studies in the Spring of 1614 he carried with him, in addition to Copernicus' work, his own well-developed concept of the grandly conceived encyclopedias *Thesaurus linguae Bohemicae* (*Thesaurus of the Czech Language*) and *Theatrum universitatis rerum* (*Theater of the Universe*), supplemented later with the *Amphitheatrum universitatis rerum* (*Amphitheater of the Universe*). Following his return to Přerov Comenius enthusiastically launched into his work of teaching and writing. In addition to the linguistic and ethnographic projects, he began processing the genealogy of the Žerotín family. Despite his youth he was, as a recent graduate, appointed director of the Unity of Brethren school and began working on an “enjoyable method for educating children.” In 1616, along with twenty-six other men, he was ordained as a minister in the UB, which increased his responsibilities.

In 1617 all the Protestants in the country anxiously watched the “gathering clouds of persecution,” as the trend towards re-catholization strengthened. With the exception of some political “victories” in the Czech Parliament, the UB observed behavior such as that of the Prague Archbishop Jan Lohelius. He ordered the closing of the Evangelical church in Broumov, and in the same year he pointedly destroyed a newly built church in Hrob u Duchova in northern Bohemia, which represented an outright attack on the privileges of the Imperial Charter guaranteeing

¹⁴⁷ Taken from Kumpera, 34.

freedom of religion. In the same year Comenius wrote a work that was apparently a reaction to those events. *A Discourse Against the Antichrist and His Temptations* is a statement of the Reformist efforts, which desired a renewal of the church as a spiritual effort according to the principles of Christ. The Papal system however, according to Comenius, had intentions of world rule, which was considered to be the main mark of the Antichrist. He believed the way to rescue the church from the Antichrist was through the uniting of all Protestants and the provision of a quality education for the upcoming generation.

The year 1618 brought many revolutionary events to Comenius. He was called to pastoral service in Fulnek, in northern Moravia, and at the same time was entrusted with the care of the UB school. He was evidently chosen to work in that part of the country because of his knowledge of German and his conciliatory nature, which the denominationally mixed area needed. In the summer of that same year, shortly before moving to Fulnek, Comenius was married. Some years before, Bishop Lánecký had promised his daughter Johanka to Comenius, but he chose Magdalena Vizovská, “the dearest jewel after the Lord God,” as he later called her.

We have only a little information about the following, relatively quiet period. Other than a few biographic notes from Comenius’ own records, we know from the Fulnek chronicles¹⁴⁸ that the young minister was popular in the community for his kindness, and it was said that he never got angry; therefore it appeared that “the pastor of the sheep has no bile.” He lived in peace and mutual respect, even with his Catholic neighbors. He was occupied with an orchard, beekeeping, and other agricultural activities. At the same time he diligently applied himself to the church and the school. He often held classes in the open air, in a grove above the school where the children apparently learned to read from “the book of nature.”¹⁴⁹ His young wife soon gave birth to their first child, a son. But the joy in his personal life and relative prosperity in no way lessened Comenius’ awareness of the social and political problems of his day, as is clear for example in his work *Letters to Heaven*.

However the most well-known works from that period are the previously-mentioned encyclopedias. Their work was to teach people wisdom; that is, the size, beauty and power of God’s providence as displayed in the workmanship of creation. Comenius worked on it for forty-six years, un-

¹⁴⁸ It was, however, written from a two-hundred-year distance by J. V. Jaschke. The authenticity of its data is therefore debatable.

¹⁴⁹ Compare Kumpera, 40.

til 1656, when it was burned up in the fire of Lešno.¹⁵⁰ Only a few fragments were preserved for us, but they are very valuable and relevant because they show evidence of Comenius' philosophy of education, which preceded that of *The Labyrinth*. The following excerpt is from a fragment of *The Theater*.¹⁵¹

Not without reason is the world called, in the Greek language, the COSMOS, that is, beautiful; and in Latin, *mundus*, which means clean. For everything in it is beautiful, clean, delightful and charming, and the beauty of the invisible God is made visible by it. If one cannot see beauty in the world, he cannot see much. [...] Oh, what must be the beauty of the God of our wonder and passion, from whom all beauty and variety arise and flow! For we understand that whatever is noble among created things is not created in one collective well, but is found higher.

The world is a *theatrum*, the wonderful theater of God's work and worthy of attention. The human being is a "spectator of the world of things," as Comenius says in the preface to his work called *To the Scholars of our Nation*, originating most probably in 1614. It is enough just to watch and wonder, reality itself will teach people about God's plan and wise governance through its grandeur, fullness, and beauty. In the surviving preface to *The Theater* Comenius reveals that his intention was to complement the *Theater of All Things* with the later *Theater of Scripture*. The reader should be familiar with all that is known, all that is provided by both the natural and the supernatural worlds, for both worlds harmoniously point beyond themselves to their common source and ultimate foundation. It is worth noting that by this time Comenius was already aware of the problematic

¹⁵⁰ For more context on the loss of these files: in 1655 the new Swedish king, Charles X. Gustav launched a successful campaign against Catholic Poland. All of the Protestant nobility, including Bohuslav Leszcynský, the lord of Lešno, welcomed him as their new king. Comenius himself expressed his pro-Swedish attitude in his *Panegyricus Gustavo Adolfo*, irrevocably making him and the UB supporters of the Swedish cause. Most of the Polish Catholics considered that to be treason, which proved to be fatal not only for Lešno, but also for the UB in exile including Comenius. When Denmark, the traditional enemy of Sweden, joined the conflict, King Charles suffered a series of setbacks and had to withdraw from Poland. Lešno ceased to be protected by the Swedes and retaliation on the part of the Catholic Poles was inevitable. On April 29, 1656 the Poles fell on Lešno and burned the city. Comenius and his family were barely able to save their lives but lost everything they owned, including precious documents.

¹⁵¹ J. A. Komenský, *Theatrum universitatis rerum*, in: *Dílo Jana Amose Komenského, I* (Praha: Academia, 1969) 146.

nature of human activity in contrast with the harmony of all of creation. It is known that human beings stick out in an irritating manner from the cosmic order. God's originally perfect creation has been damaged by human sin, which not only defiled the created world but is also the cause of its finitude.¹⁵² In contrast to *The Labyrinth*, where this reality becomes the central problem that must be resolved, in *The Theater* Comenius is still satisfied with mere observation.

The period of peace with a focus on writing and pastoral work did not last long. Wartime events caused by the Estates Uprising and the subsequent consequences of White Mountain fell upon Fulnek in 1621, when the "Spaniards" (Habsburg guards) arrived. Because Comenius had attended the coronation of the Protestant king, Fridrich Falcký (Frederick of Palatine), he and other non-Catholic clergy were expelled from the country by the decree of October 28, 1621, which essentially was an arrest warrant. For the safety of himself and his family Comenius decided to hide. He left his family in Přerov, which at the time was under the protection of Žerotín, and hid himself in various places in Northern Moravia, probably in the area of the Žerotín Estate. For several years the region was sacked by soldiers, who in addition to looting and killing, usually also brought the plague and other diseases. In one of his hiding places Comenius guessed that the heart of his wife must be full of "sorrow and grief," so he wrote a brief treatise for her and his other loved ones, called *Thoughts on Christian Perfection*, in which he made clear that the full perfection of a person tested by adversity consists in complete submission to God, which is a conclusion not unlike that of the Paradise section of *The Labyrinth*. The booklet accompanied a personal letter dated February 18, 1622, which begins with the famous salutation: "My dear wife Magdalena, my jewel, dearest to me after God ..." In the letter we learn that she was expecting their second child—he hopes that she will "happily survive" the coming birth. However his wife never read either the letter or the booklet. She and the two children, including the one Comenius had never seen, died in the plague. The family tragedy was further compounded. The library that Comenius had been carefully building since his student days was publically burned by the Jesuits in Fulnek Square, the church building of the UB was demolished, and the community dispersed. Comenius thus lost literally everything he had. In his own country he was an outlaw, all of his social and personal security collapsed. It is not surprising therefore, that in 1623 he put the following words into the mouth of *Truchlivý* (Mournful):

¹⁵² Ibid, 163.

Evil on every side, a cruel, bloody sword is destroying my beloved homeland, conquering chateaus, castles, and cities; towns, villages, beautiful homes, and churches plundered and burning, property looted, livestock captured and slain, the wretched poor afflicted, suffering, in places captured and murdered. [...] And what is most painful is that the truth of God is being suppressed, the pure divine service has been stopped, ministers banished or put in prison. [...] There is no one under heaven who would take in the innocent or help the suffering. All hope, even that which we had in God until now, is falling away: we call to Him, and He doesn't listen nor does He want to help; we are abandoned right and left, there is nothing left but to die. Oh, may death come and obliterate!¹⁵³

But death didn't come. Comenius survived the test of his life, but his perception of the world underwent fundamental changes, as is clear in his literary work. The wonderfully encyclopedic form was replaced with a satirical-critical form. Hidden somewhere near Brandýs nad Orlicí, perhaps in a log cabin “under Klopota” as he indicates in the dedication to the Count of Žerotín, he conceived the idea of writing his grief into a great allegory of the world as a labyrinth. Instead of the magnificent things of the created world, the author takes notice of the more difficult sides of reality. Not that the world no longer aroused wonder, but the world no longer appeared to Comenius only as a theater of God's goodness, it was also like an elaborate labyrinth, a dangerous place to live. The reliable security of everyday life had fallen apart, truth had been lost, people mistreated one another, and life appeared somehow crooked, deceptive. It was necessary to look for a place of refuge, an unconquerable fortress, a fixed point, a *centrum securitatis*.¹⁵⁴ This is what Comenius looked for and found in his reliance on God, his faith in Christ—wholly transcendental, beyond this world.

It is hard to say how Comenius' literary work would have developed without the post-White Mountain disaster. One thing that is clear, however, is that his personal crisis did not result in a creative crisis—quite the contrary. Persecution, suffering, and the trials of life prompted Comenius to rethink the existential questions and their subsequent outworking. The story that appears in *The Labyrinth* is a unique testimony which speaks about how to cope with the most severe and difficult questions of human life.

¹⁵³ Cited in Molnár and Rejchrtová, 61–62.

¹⁵⁴ The title of one of Comenius' books of the consolation period.

A2. Editorial: The Labyrinth Lives

Just as *The Labyrinth* had its “story behind the story,” so the publishing of the book had its own development, which says a lot about the reception of the work in the story of history. December 23, 1623, the day on which Comenius dedicated *The Labyrinth* to Karel Žerotín, was not the last day the author spent working on the book. In the very dedication itself Comenius writes that the text provides superabundant material fitted for sharpening wits as well as the tongue, so that this work “could be augmented by infinitely more creative inventions.” The first, so-called Wroclaw, manuscript is not signed and thus wasn’t written by Comenius’ own hand. The author made only minor corrections and annotations in the margins. From Comenius’ pen, however, later came the famous picture of the labyrinth as a circular town. The manuscript was located in the university library in Wroclaw until 1957, when Poland donated it to what was then Czechoslovakia.

Comenius lived to see two editions of *The Labyrinth* published. The first was in 1631 in Pern. It is not known why it took eight years between writing and publishing, but in any case the time lag caused what Comenius had anticipated. The contents of *The Labyrinth* lured him into further deliberation and finalizing. Thus in the first printing there were already some changes. In the title he originally used *lusthauz* (house of delight) instead of “paradise.” In addition to minor corrections and expansions in chapters 18 (§ 9–11), 25 (§ 5), 36 (§ 1) and 42 (§ 4), he included an extensive addition which Stanislav Souček calls “intellectually substantial.”¹⁵⁵ It appears in chapters 18–35, in the description of the events in the Palace of Wisdom, the indictment of the pilgrim before the queen of the world, the portrayal of the deceptive practices in government, its discovery by Solomon, his outwitting them, and the subsequent liquidation of all his journeyman and other troublemakers. This addition seems to be fitting not only philosophically but also stylistically. After major disappointments with individual humans, the pilgrim still hopes that maybe a wise government could bring well-being to all. But since the pilgrim is disappointed here too, then Solomon’s “vanity of vanities” applies. And indeed it happens, so that the description of Solomon’s outwitting and definitively scattering his retinue as a last hope, on the one hand logically completes or brings to a head the first part, and on the other hand enlivens a relatively boring story with little drama.

¹⁵⁵ Souček, 2.

The second printing was carried out in Amsterdam in 1663, seven years before Comenius' death. This time the author again made several corrections. In chapter 9, describing the trades, he added the picture of the life of sailors and longshoreman. It was evidently inspired by his own dramatic trip by ship to England in 1641 (from Gdansk to London). To make the picture complete let me remind the reader that, immediately upon embarking on his first journey by sea they met a storm that was so powerful it damaged the ship and drove it back from the Norwegian coast to the waters of the Baltic Sea (some "one hundred miles" according to Comenius). When Comenius made up his mind to make a second attempt it wasn't without concern, as is clear from his letter to friends in Lešno dated October 18, 1641: "[...] I committed myself again to the sea and its ruler, that it would carry me where he wanted, or sink me to the bottom."¹⁵⁶

The first and second editions also underwent a number of changes to the text in the areas of syntax, word order, lexicology and so on. According to Czech linguists most of the changes were motivated by the author's attention to flow, rhythm, and lucidity. His desire to approximate his language to the customs of the time is often evident. For example in the manuscript there were some enclitics which he removed in the first and second printings. Since all the changes and adjustments are in old Czech, there is no need to list them here. Other authors have thoroughly dealt with them; see for example the studies of Josef Hubáček,¹⁵⁷ Julie Nováková, Emanuel Michálek and Karel Kučera.¹⁵⁸

After the death of Comenius *The Labyrinth* was published very often, which testifies to its popularity. I will mention only those releases that have some historical-cultural significance.¹⁵⁹ In 1757, after almost a cen-

¹⁵⁶ For the whole letter see B. Ryba, *Sto listů Jana Amose Komenského* (Praha: Jan Laichter, 1942) 47ff.

¹⁵⁷ J. Hubáček, "Substantivizovaná adjektiva v českých spisech J. A. Komenského," *Studia Comeniana et historica* (1982, Vol. 24, No. 12); "Postavení a lexikální stránka adjektivních přívlasků v českých spisech J. A. Komenského," *Listy filologické* (1984, Vol. 107); and "Nad trojím zněním Komenského Labyrintu," *Listy filologické* (1986, Vol. 109, No. 1).

¹⁵⁸ See Nováková, Michálek, and K. Kučera, *Jazyk českých spisů J. A. Komenského* (Praha: Universita Karlova, 1980).

¹⁵⁹ For more details on this topic see the previously mentioned work of Jan V. Novák, who published *The Labyrinth* along with the complete works of Comenius and Stanislav Souček. See also the listing of Antonín Škarka, "Slovesné umění," who published *The Labyrinth* along with selected works of Comenius. Unless otherwise noted, all future quotes will be taken from Souček's study "Komenského Labyrint u nás a v cizině."

tury, the so-called Berlin edition (the third), was published by V. Toužil. It was at the request of the dispersed “Brethren of the Czech Church,” who wanted to give it to the diaspora of the UB “for their lack of examples,” along with *Kšaftem* and *Smutným hlasem* (*Testament* and *A Sad Voice*). Professedly “not sparing our own cost [...] so that, what our ancestor (a lover of truth and the pious life) wrote in this book towards the putting off of worldly vanity and the encouragement of a true heart desire for a steady inner pleasure and rest in Christ, would be given again to you as a people, wherever you are dispersed in this world.” Around this time there was also in circulation the complimentary critique of the Jesuit thinker Bohuslav Balbín, who writes in his *Učené Čechy* (*Scholarly Bohemia*, first published in 1777): “How excellent was the man [...] who exposed with an abundance of flawless expressions, apt vocabulary, depth of thought; for his statement of the groundlessness of the world and his very rare and deep scholarship he deserves the highest praise, and it is the most worthy of reading.”

Antonín Koniáš, also a Jesuit, saw Comenius’ work otherwise. Equipped with his famous *Klíče kacířské bludy k rozeznávání otvírající, k vykořenění zamykající* (*Keys of the Heretical Delusion to the Opening of Discernment, to the Locking Up of Extermination*; 1729), he found *The Labyrinth* “worthy of destruction.” Similarly the strength of the metanarrative pre-understanding becomes apparent in the judgment of the regional Catholic chronicler František Jan Vavák. An otherwise excellent self-taught farmer, in his *Paměty* (*Memories*) he discusses *The Labyrinth* as something “strange,” from “Jan Comenius a fiction in which he wants to proudly show off his execrable wit.”

In contrast to Vavák, a non-dogmatic perspective was taken by J. Samm, also a Catholic, who in 1782 arranged for the publication of the fourth, so-called Prague edition of *The Labyrinth*. It is the first post-Toleration Act printing.¹⁶⁰ In his Preface he responds to František Jan Vavák’s comments: “The beauty and value of the famous books of Comenius [...] remain a mystery to Vavák, as is shown by his acrimonious and unfair judgment.” The ambivalence of the relationship of Catholic thinkers to *The Labyrinth* literally calls for a deeper examination—whether in

¹⁶⁰ In 1781 Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II of Austria issued the Patent of Toleration which gave partial freedom of religion to Lutherans, Calvinists, and Greek Orthodox Christians in the Habsburg realm. A following edict in 1782 gave more limited freedoms to Jews. Ed.

terms of psychology, religious studies, history, or otherwise. Such an investigation is however beyond the scope of this study.¹⁶¹

The Patent of Toleration of 1781 also opened the way to the publication of others of Comenius' works. In a relatively short period there came forth several of them: *Smutný hlas* (The Sad Voice, 1782), *Hlubina bezpečnosti* (The Depth of Safety) and *Boj Michala s drakem* (The Fight of Michael and the Dragon, both in 1785), *Praxis pietatis* (The Practice of Piety, 1786), *Dvojí kázání* (Two Sermons, 1790) and others. However the Metternich Censorship soon put an end to the relative heyday of publishing.¹⁶² Admittedly there was another printing of *The Labyrinth* in 1809, but it wasn't without problems. "For the excellence of the Czech and delightful variety of content"—was how Jan Nejedlý justified his publishing plan. But his first request in 1808 was denied by the Prague censors, and later accepted only with reservations.

The Bishop of Hradec Králové again warned of the "negative" influence of *The Labyrinth* in 1823 when, in his report on sects in the Hradec diocese, he complained that many "have read and circulated J. A. Comenius' *The Labyrinth*" and that it was a "satire of every situation, disturbing all spiritual and secular order, criticizing the church, its servants and its endeavors." He continued that "it is completely incomprehensible" that the work was again published in 1809 in Prague. "Short-sighted publishers"—the bishop warned to his theme—"who go after purity in the Czech language yet tear down faith in the morality of their fellow citizens." The complaint of the Bishop is accompanied by a message from František Müller, a local priest from Radhošť, who confirms the pernicious influence of this book. Müller laments that earlier the sectarians had been held back, but now (dated October 20, 1822) they are said to be raising

¹⁶¹ An appropriate example of such an examination might be the memoir of P. Hošek, *Cesta ke kořenům. Odkaz šlechtického rodu Milnerů z Milhausenu a jeho nositelé* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2010). This is a study dealing with the fate of the once famous knightly Milner family from Milhausen. Their ancestors escaped execution in Old Town in 1621. Their descendants—both Protestants and Catholics—were seeking their identity in the midst of complex historical events. It is evident from Hošek's study how crucial was the way in which the family story was told in individual historical eras. In other words, *narrative* is here the key to self-understanding.

¹⁶² The partial freedom of religion of 1781 was further restricted by press censorship within the Habsburg empire, especially after the death of Joseph II in 1790. This censorship was fully formulated in the Carlsbad Decrees of 1819 under the leadership of Austrian Prince Klemens von Metternich, though the policy of censorship was already enacted earlier. Ed.

their heads and hoping for “universal freedom.” The whole situation was worsened by the fact that the work “The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart” was being circulated with official authorization and was widely read among the sectarians. So apparently the authorities were undermining the “strenuous work” which he—František Müller—was performing by trying to bring back the lost sheep into the fold of the church. Müller further provided that it would be more easily tolerated if the work were published “in the language of the intellectuals,” that is, in Latin, which few understood, but in Czech it would only strengthen the obstinacy of the Czech farmers. In reaction, at the Bishop’s request, in 1823 *The Labyrinth* was again censored, and after prolonged negotiations further publication was totally banned—by a ministerial decree dated October 16, 1825.¹⁶³

The revolutionary year of 1848 brought a certain freedom to publish, and with that the next—coincidentally, the “Hradec” edition—of *The Labyrinth* was published. Jan Hostivít Pospíšil provided for it in Hradec Králové. But then came the absolutism of Bach.¹⁶⁴ Therefore no further editions came until the end of 1862—in Litomyšl and in Prague. The “National Awareness-raising” efforts that followed quickly on its heels brought a sharp increase in publishing. Within a relatively short period of sixty years came no fewer than eighteen further editions. At the initiative of “wise and experienced educators,” who in 1886 met together in the first Congress of Czech Professors, came the first edition designed specifically for educational purposes. In the adaptation by František Bílý, then a professor at Přerov High School, based on the 1887 edition of *The Labyrinth*, he left out everything “that could in any way be a stumbling block or that isn’t appropriate for schools.” From the historical and didactic perspective all these omissions are research-provoking; they apply to the following parts: chapter 8 on marriage, chapter 13 on Rosecrucianism, chapter 18 on the Christian religion, chapter 25, section 7 on sexual pleasure, and chapter 32, sections 15-16 on the complaints of both sexes. Bílý also left out a significant portion of text in chapters 39-49, which he considered to be “mystical-pietistic chapters,” in which the pilgrim is transfigured, conversing with Christ, and seeing the true nature of things. It is important to note that Bílý’s truncated version was both fa-

¹⁶³ Compare M. Švankmajer, “K zákazu Labyrintu světa r. 1825,” *Archiv pro bádání o životě a spisech J. A. Komenského* (1958, No. 18).

¹⁶⁴ The reference is to the policies of Baron Alexander von Bach (1813-1893) who was Interior Minister for the Habsburg Empire from 1849 to 1859. Under his leadership the entire empire restricted freedom of the press. Ed.

vorably received by some and heavily criticized by other experts of the day.¹⁶⁵

The highlight of the Revivalist¹⁶⁶ efforts is the edition by Jan Václav Novák, who in 1910, as part of an extensive project to publish all works of J. A. Comenius, prepared a critical edition of *The Labyrinth* including variant readings of the first two editions from 1631 and 1663. In addition to many others, the edition of Josef Brambora in 1941 deserves special mention, with its excellent epilogue by Jan Blahoslav Čapek, as well as the editions by Vladimír Šmilauer in 1940 and 1958, and by Antonín Škarka in 1950 and 1970, which excel in the quality of footnotes and detailed commentary. A major publishing achievement in recent years is the 2010 edition of *The Labyrinth* by the Poutníková četba publishing house, which offers Czech readers a “translation” of the text into the language of the twenty-first century by Lukáš Makovička.

“Our native sons,” in the words of Stanislav Souček, are responsible for most of the foreign language editions; that is, emigrants who sought “to introduce readers unfamiliar with Czech to the works of the revered teacher of nations.”¹⁶⁷ Thus Jan Gaius’s Dutch translation appeared even earlier than 1661. However a translation by a relative of Comenius’ third wife was never published.

Another descendent of an exiled Czech family was Johannes Petrosolinus Corvinus, an evangelical pastor in Gdansk, whose translation of *The Labyrinth* into Polish (*Labirynt swiata y dom pociechy*) was published in 1695. But it was not “a special success.” Souček explains that it was due on the one hand to modifications the translator made to the text, and on the other hand to the political situation at that time in Poland, where the subject matter of *The Labyrinth* was unable to “find favor” in the dominant Counter-Reformation Catholicism.¹⁶⁸ Other Polish translations were produced later, of varying quality.

The motivation for the first German translation (*Übergang aus dem Labyrinth der Welt in das Paradis des Hertzens*), by Ondřej Macher in 1738, was so that Christian souls would be “encouraged to serious attention to what would in time come from all manner of wickedness and futility in the world, and through Christ seek true peace in God.”¹⁶⁹ But his very free

¹⁶⁵ Compare Souček, 36.

¹⁶⁶ “Revivalist” refers to the Czech nationalist movement which redeveloped the Czech language along with a strong sense of Czech cultural identity. Ed.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 49.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 50.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 51.

translation bore signs of significant “distortion,” in Stanislav Souček’s judgment. Later came many other German translations, of which the most successful seems to be that of Zdeněk Baudník in 1906.

The first Hungarian translation was published in 1805 by István Rimány. Exactly one hundred years later, in 1905, László Stromp published another Hungarian translation, but although it was in up-to-date language, it was abridged. At about the same time two Russian translations appeared; the first in 1896 by F. V. Říha, and the second, better in Souček’s opinion, in 1904 by N. P. Stepanov. The first French translation was done by Comenius admirer Eduard-Henri Robert (1833–1891), but his work, carefully annotated and with excerpts from other works by Comenius, remained as a manuscript. Thus the French reader was unable to become familiar with *The Labyrinth* until 1906, when Marguerite de Crayencour translated the text from the English version by Count Francis Lützow. That Austrian diplomat and politician was an ardent scholar of Bohemia, who among other subjects devoted himself to Czech history. His English translation was published three times in a row within a short period of time: in London in 1901, in New York in 1901, and again in London in 1905.

When talking about the English version of *The Labyrinth*, one cannot omit John Bunyan’s genre-related work, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, which appeared roughly half a century after Comenius. Although (according to literary scholars) this work is literarily much weaker than *The Labyrinth*,¹⁷⁰ in the first ten years of its existence there were roughly one hundred thousand copies printed. In addition, once it was published in America there were countless further editions as well as translations into other languages. This is understandable considering the language in which it was written, but there is also something to Stanislav Souček’s observation that “due to the Counter-Reformation” *The Labyrinth* came “outside of its time... In the whole second half of the century, when it could have shaped the national character and gradually moved it to the next level of development, it was valued only by exiles dying abroad for their country, and ruffians needing their treasure here in their homeland.” On the other hand Souček recognizes that without the White Mountain disaster, there never would have been *The Labyrinth* at all.¹⁷¹ It

¹⁷⁰ Compare L. Balcar, “Theologické srovnání Komenského ‘Labyrintu světa’ s Bunyanovou knihou ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’” *Archiv pro bádání o životě a spisech J. A. Komenského* (1937, No. 14).

¹⁷¹ Compare Souček, 48 and 53.

remains therefore only to agree with Patočka that “Comenius’ *Labyrinth* lives and will continue to live...”¹⁷²

A3. Experimental: “Something Happened. Something’s Up With My World”

The following text is an experiment. It is a sample narrative allegory, a free rendering of Comenius’ *Labyrinth*. From a larger whole I have chosen a chapter which is closest in intent to this study. It is the story of an adventurous journey by a young schoolboy named Amos, beginning with his wondrous awakening in a strange world, a labyrinth. With the help of his guide, Ubiquitous, whose character isn’t clear in the beginning, he tries to find his way home, the way out. During his journey he meets allegorical figures and experiences allegorical events.

Most of the text is in manuscript form, not yet published. It is intended for younger school-age readers, or their parents. I expect it could be useful as a supplement, especially in the area of practical philosophy or moral education.

Schooling

We proceeded further into the gate where I observed that each guard, choosing one or more of the candidates, led them on, blew something into their ears, wiped their eyes, steamed their nose and nostrils, drew out and trimmed their tongue, taught them to clasp or extend their hands and fingers, and coached them in I do not know how many more ways. Some guards even attempted to bore a hole in their pupils’ heads and pour something into them. My interpreter, seeing me frightened thereat, said “Be not amazed; the learned must possess hands, tongue, eyes, ears, brain, and all other external and internal organs of a different order from those of the ignorant masses of mankind; for that purpose they are here reformed, and that cannot be accomplished without toil and pain.”

The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart (chapter 10)

Ahead of us was another infinitely long road with many forks. My feet hurt. If only I knew where we were going, I thought. At that moment Ubiquitous stopped, pulled out a map, studied it a moment and then stuck a finger into it.

¹⁷² Patočka, *Filosofické základy*, 98.

“Let’s go here. To School Street. It’s the shortest way.”

When we finally arrived at School Street, I understood how it got its name. All kinds of school buildings were squeezed in together, some new and displaying bright colors and bold designs, others dignified but dilapidated, dingy, and covered with gray plaster, or merrily optimistic with cheerful pictures at each window. Each school proudly carried a shield with its name. The very first one, the smallest, was called Kindergarten; I also saw an Elementary School, a Middle School, a High School, and more. I was intrigued that all the buildings had been divided into two parts and each part had its own separate entrance.

While we were going past the Kindergarten I heard the sound of a flute coming from one window. To my surprise someone was playing the same song Ubiquitous had played. We stopped to listen. Again I tried, in vain, to remember where I knew that melody from. It occurred to me that I would like to be able to play like that. And I wanted to look inside that little school.

“Go inside, Amos.”

“Can I?”

“Sure you can. I’ll wait for you.”

I hesitated for a moment, but not long. The song was beautiful and I wanted to know who was playing it. I entered the school. Sweet strains of music drifted along the corridor. There wasn’t only one flute; there were definitely more. Faint sounds were joined together into one strong tone. Boldly I went up to the door of the room the music was coming from, knocked loudly, and marched in. I stopped at the threshold of the classroom, my eyes widened in surprise. Facing me were perhaps one hundred children seated on small chairs and holding small flutes. They stopped playing and curiously scrutinized me. In front of them stood their teacher, with a large flute. I wasn’t expecting so many children, nor did I expect their male teacher. In fact I don’t remember ever seeing a male teacher when I was in school. But I had no time to reflect on it because the teacher smiled and said:

“Hello. What do you want, young man?”

“Good morning,” I answered quickly, because I realized I had forgotten to say hello.

As soon as I spoke my greeting all the children arose at once, bowed slightly towards me, and shouted in unison:

“Good morning, sir.”

And sat back down, waiting quietly to see what would happen next.

I was so startled I completely lost my voice. Why exactly *did* I come? I stood and stared, and the children looked at me and were so... I can’t find

the words. They were so... quiet and nice and attentive. I had never seen such unusually lovely children. My musings were interrupted by the friendly voice of the teacher.

“Can we help you in some way?”

“I just... I just wanted to ask how you do it? How do you play such beautiful music? And could I learn it too?”

“Of course, anyone can learn it.”

“And I also wanted to ask, what is that song you were playing?”

“Beautiful, isn’t it? Its name is...”

I never heard the name. The classroom was rocked by an explosion from somewhere outside. It rattled the glass in the windows and a vase with flowers fell off a shelf. I crouched down. Boom! There was another crash. Behind the window rolled acrid smoke. The teacher quickly went to the window, slammed it shut, and while running for the door firmly commanded:

“Children, continue practicing the song, I’ll go call the fire department and come right back. And you,” he turned towards me, “go find out if the school next door is still standing. They must be doing experiments again.”

I ran to the entrance of the second half of the kindergarten. Black smoke poured out of an open door. Over the door above the stairs rocked a sign hanging from one nail: *First Experimental Kindergarten*. I hurriedly flung open the doors and just barely dodged the sign that fell to the sidewalk, metal clanging. I wanted to contemplate the meaning of the word “experimental,” but there was no time. I heard a child scream. And also a noise—like a hammer or something from iron. Maybe someone was trying to escape from somewhere. I just hoped no one was hurt. I flew up the stairs, taking them two at a time. I clearly heard the crackle of flames. Oh, that I wouldn’t be too late! I burst into the room where there was the most noise and shouting, and froze. There weren’t many children there, maybe ten, but a huge mess after the explosion. In the slowly dissipating smoke I saw toys strewn across the whole room. Overturned tables and chairs, some of them broken. Water from the washroom was flowing across the floor, and I heard a terrible scream. Under the open window to the balcony a fire was burning. But that isn’t what had me transfixed when I entered the room. With open mouth I watched a little boy trying to chop up an overturned wardrobe with an axe. With joyous whoops two other boys were gathering the flying splinters and jubilantly adding them to the fire. The scream from the washroom wasn’t a desperate cry for help but the joyful shouts of children pouring water over themselves from a bucket. Two girls were sitting in lounge chairs in a corner, and

one was very intently cutting the hair of the other. With the same concentration a third girl, next to them, was cutting off the hand of a doll with a sharp knife. In the center of the room stood a boy with his feet wide apart and a hammer in his hands, smashing a crane with precisely targeted blows. On the overturned table two children were dividing up a melon with a saw and screwdriver, and then carefully putting the pieces onto prepared plates. Probably a snack, I thought.

Then I realized I didn't see a teacher anywhere. I was looking for him when the little fellow with the hammer ran to the balcony with a piece of the crane.

"Look, Teacher, I broke it up already!"

"Excellent, Tony, keep going."

Aha! Here is the teacher. I carefully made my way to the balcony. I tried to step between the toys that were everywhere, but sometimes something crunched under my foot. I came to the door and stood on tip-toes to see onto the terrace. There wasn't just one teacher, but three. They were standing around a table and drinking coffee. Just then one of them raised her head and her eyes met mine.

"Headmaster, we have a visitor."

I had never even noticed the man on the balcony, maybe because he was the only one sitting down. The headmaster put his cigar in the ash-tray and stood up. He came into the classroom. The girls who had been using the scissors a short time before, were now inching a huge wardrobe across the floor, with great screeching and scraping, towards the fire under the window. The stokers had exchanged shoveling wood for playing football with an orange. The girls with the bucket in the washroom were enthusiastically encouraging them. The children who had been cutting up the melon were now painting the walls of the room with it, creating interesting patterns. Tony was pounding his hammer on the desk.

"Silence!" roared the headmaster.

The windows rattled, the flames flickered. Otherwise nobody reacted.

The headmaster stepped closer to me and shouted into my ear:

"Who are you? And what are you doing here?"

"I... that is... we heard an explosion."

"Yes, and so what?" said the headmaster sternly.

"And then the kids were screaming terribly, and the fire..."

"And what does that have to do with you, young man! We're having an hour of creative activity. The children are developing their individuality, independence, and talents. And how did you even get in here? Leave immediately and don't interrupt our lesson!"

Ubiquitous was waiting outside the school, as he promised. He handed me my backpack and we continued on our way.

We still had the school in our sights when there was another explosion. The fire engines sped around us with a loud honking.

We didn't get much farther. When we passed the building with the Elementary School sign, I heard something that made me stop. In one of the classrooms on the ground floor was an open window, so I could see and hear what was happening inside. It was the sound of a drill that interested me. It sounded like at the dentist. The teacher was standing by a desk and drilling a hole in the head of one of the boys with a small, pedal-powered drill that had a stand. We were so close we could even see the label on the drill: Naex EVP 13 G-2H3. The pupil was twisting, frowning, grimacing and twitching every which way, but he held on. When the teacher finished drilling, she plugged up the hole with a cork and moved on to the next desk and the next pupil. She eventually drilled holes in all the pupils—thirty eight, if I counted right. The teacher did her work quickly and it was clear that she was experienced. When she finished the drilling she clapped, and two boys jumped up from the first desk by the window. The black-haired one ran to the drill and pushed the moveable stand into the corner of the classroom, where he carefully covered it with a piece of black cloth. Then from the same corner he very cautiously maneuvered a large container on wheels, from which splashed some kind of liquid. He moved it to the desks. Meanwhile, from a huge wardrobe in the other corner of the room the blonde boy pulled out a box with yellow, blue, and green funnels, which he quickly placed on each desk. The pupils tugged at the colored funnels; every once in a while one would roll off the desk onto the floor with a crash. The sound of muffled voices carried through the classroom.

“Quiet, please! Put on the funnels, we're starting math!”

There was a squeaking sound as they pulled out the corks, and again the funnels fell on the floor. The teacher impatiently drummed her fingers on the table. When the class quieted down she looked over the heads of the pupils to check the funnels. Then she pulled over the wagon with the container. She went to the first pupil. She measured out exactly four liters of a thick, dark liquid. She began pouring. The pupils fidgeted again, clenching their teeth, pressing their lips together, rolling their eyes, and inflating their cheeks. Some of the liquid poured out of both ears, some of the funnels were poorly set so instead of the liquid going into their heads, it went down their faces and onto the desks. With that the teacher got angry.

“What a pity!” she lamented. “I don’t need this! You don’t appreciate anything! Do you know how much this costs?”

After she finished pouring, the teacher took a small hammer out of her pocket and with it tapped the students on their heads. It made different sounds on different heads. With some she was dissatisfied and shook her head, and then added a little more liquid.

I turned to Ubiquitous to see what he had to say about it. He lifted his hand as if in surrender, moved a little ways away, sat down on the bench that was in front of the school and said:

“Don’t look at me, I’m only the guide.”

I sat next to him.

“You know, I have a confession to make, Mr. Ubiquitous. But you can’t tell anyone.”

“Who would I tell?”

“Hmm..., it’s true, nobody here really knows me. Well...,” I lowered my voice and looked around, “I... absolutely loved going to school.”

“Seriously?”

“We had such a nice teacher. She never yelled at all, she often told us different stories and she loved us. Many times I have thought that I would like to be a teacher.”

“But you would have to learn a lot, Amos. You would have to learn how to be observant and listen well, and then think a lot about everything. Not just anyone can be a teacher.”

“It is exactly what I want. To observe, study, and think...”

“If that’s the case, go and look inside that school. I’m not in a hurry,” said Ubiquitous, and he pulled a snack out of the backpack.

He offered some to me. With relish I took a bite of the sandwich. He offered me a pickle and matches.

“What are the matches for?” I shook the box because it seemed very light to me. There was only one match in it.

“They can come in handy,” Ubiquitous winked at me.

This school was also divided into two parts with two separate entrances. The sign above the first said Traditional-Alternative Elementary School, and above the second, Alternative-Traditional Elementary School. I hesitated a moment and then said to myself, I already saw the drill, I’ll go look at something new; and I went into the second entrance.

When I entered the building, teaching had just gotten underway. The corridors were deserted. Then from behind the door to the classroom came the familiar sounds of school—the shuffling of feet, creaking, squeaking, scratching, voices correcting, explaining, whispering, answering, and so on, somewhere a shout, somewhere a blow, elsewhere singing,

and then I heard a drill. Surely not! The drills were next door. I followed the sound up to the next floor. I came to the open door of a classroom and peaked inside. Some boys were holding their teacher on the table and one was drilling a hole into her head. Next to them stood a small girl with a pitcher, on which was written *Teaching Experience*. The other students were just hanging around. Even teachers must learn, I thought to myself, and I went on.

I wandered through the corridors, nothing capturing my interest. I realized that my feet were taking me towards a pleasing fragrance. I sniffed and unerringly headed for the wide door at the end of the hallway. Yes, it was the school cafeteria. I looked inside. Four cooks were sitting at a table. In front of them they had bowls of soup and something they selected with pincers. They weren't talking. Their hands darted quickly, sometimes one of them peeked inside some kind of paper that was lying next to the bowls. They were very focused. Curiosity forced me to go inside the cafeteria. I greeted them.

"Excuse me, I don't want to disturb you, I just happened to be outside and I saw you. Can you please tell me what you are doing with those pincers? Are you eating your soup with them?"

"Did you hear that, girls? He wants to know what we're doing! We're not eating. We respect the individual needs of our students. It's a new regulation from our headmistress. That's what we're doing here!"

I didn't understand. One of the cooks—obviously the head chef—raised her head in my direction, stared at me for maybe a second and then said:

"You're not from around here, are you?"

"No, I'm not."

"Then we can talk to you. Today we're having Alphabet Soup. But the young ladies from the second class, Proud, Lovely, Attractive, and Lively evidently aren't eating certain letters—wait," she lowered her head towards the paper next to her plate and read: "F, M, U, W, X, Y and Z. So we have to pick those letters out of their soup."

I didn't know what to say, and the lady was no longer paying any attention to me. I quietly retreated from the cafeteria. I was standing above a stairway that apparently led to the cellar. A label with an arrow indicated that down there was the *Storeroom of Teaching Tools*. Since I didn't know what 'teaching tools' were, I was even more interested. The arrows led me right to the cellar. I saw three doors. On the first was the sign *Traditional Tools*. I opened it. The room was large, but nearly empty and a bit musty. On the shelves in the middle of the room were twenty-eight thick, dusty volumes of some kind of dictionary or encyclopedia, and on the

floor a rolled up whip, otherwise, nothing. Behind the second door, labeled *Alternative Tools*, was hidden a cubbyhole, small, but overflowing. Everywhere possible on the shelves, tables, and even along the floor lay various things of different sizes and shapes, the likes of which I had never seen in my life. There were all sorts of gizmos, contraptions, small appliances, and preparations. I couldn't recognize a single one, nor could I figure out how to use them. Luckily each tool was carefully labeled, so I could at least read their names. They were really strange, for example: Subjectivizer, Whatiwant, Individualizer, Backer-upper, Autonomat, Relativizer, Primitivizer, De-qualitizer, Un-Discipliner, Emptymeter, Obstinatizer, Pedocentrometer, Ego-enhancer, Ridiculer, Prodder, Ape-er, and many others. There were also tools whose names I understood even less: Self-realizer, Self-fulfiller, Self-asserter, Self-developer, and the like. Some of the tools were bigger than the rest, but in the middle was the very biggest – and it also had the longest name: Self-enforcer-in-the-job-market. It glittered and sparkled from frequent use.

Curious, I went to the third door with the name *Old-fashioned Tools*. To my disappointment it was secured with a huge hasp, chain, and gigantic lock. Too bad, I thought, but then I noticed that the lock wasn't completely closed; maybe someone had been there before me and forgotten to lock it. I almost couldn't move the door: I had to lean into it with all my strength before it opened with a loud creak. It was dark inside. I reached out my hand and fumbled around on the wall trying to find a light switch, but I didn't find anything. However when I was groping along the wall I must have dislodged a stone or something; I heard it fall to the floor under me and then bounce down a long staircase. From the sound I guessed that the room had to be huge—like some kind of cathedral. From the darkness something mysterious breathed on me. I was a little afraid, but then I remembered the little box with one match. I found it in my pocket and lit it. And just then something unbelievable happened.

The whole space was lit by a bright light. I couldn't tell where the walls or ceiling ended. All I could see was the staircase, which led down to the depths. But it wasn't dark down there. There was a flickering, warm light emanating from it. There were some large nails hammered above the stairway, and on each one hung something that gave off a warm glow. On the first nail was hung Truth, on the second Goodness, on the next Beauty, then Virtue, Self-control, Respect, Bravery, Courage, Rigor, Perseverance, Dedication, Authority, Desire for Learning, Narrating, Tradition... As if from a distance I heard the soft melody of that familiar song. Wonderful, I have to go there... I started to take a step forward.

And then my match went out. It burned the ends of my fingers a little. The darkness seemed like a black blanket to me. I don't know how long I stood staring into the darkness. It didn't want to let me go. Don't ask me how I knew what was hanging there. I'm still racking my brains over it.

I also don't know how I got outside the building. Ubiquitous realized immediately that something had happened to me. I was walking as one in a trance. I was trying to figure it out.

"You were in the cellar," observed Ubiquitous.

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I know something about it. That used to be my school. Do you still want to be a teacher?"

"I don't know... I'm thinking about it. I'd like to, but... yes, as long as I could be an old-fashioned teacher."

"I understand. In that case you should become familiar with our entire educational system. So far you have only seen a little of the Kindergarten and Elementary Schools. Go look at the Middle School and High School. I'm truly not in a hurry, I will wait. Or I can accompany you."

"Thank you, you are very kind, but I would like to get home. Could we look for the exit?"

"Of course," answered Ubiquitous, and he started putting his things in his backpack.

We set off at a fast pace. But we didn't get far, even though I was determined not to be detained any longer by the schools of this labyrinth. The scene we encountered forced me to stop again. I looked at the next building, which also had two identical parts. The one on the right was literally crammed with students. They were crowded everywhere. Some stood on benches, some on cabinets or other furniture, others sat in—or hung out of—the windows. Students were walking one after the other, climbing over and under each other, some were hanging from the ceiling. They were squeezing past each other, pushing others aside with their hands. They were gasping, panting, berating, and swearing. And a crowd of other students were pushing against the main entrance. Even in the hallways nobody could move. When some of them managed to squeeze through the door into a classroom, some other students fell out of the window with a great commotion and shout. Hobbled and limping every which way, they hurried back to the main entrance.

The second half of the building was quiet and empty. We looked into the windows, but nobody was there. Finally in one classroom we found an old teacher in a blue cape, grinding something with one student and explaining something to him. There was only one student there.

"Do you understand what's going on?" I turned to Ubiquitous.

“I understand,” he answered and pointed his finger at the sign with the name of the school.

On the facade of the first half was the sign: Diploma High School. And on the second: Non-diploma High School.

“What does it mean?”

“The diplomas are given to people who have become mature. As you can see, everyone wants to be mature here.”

I still didn't understand, but I never got to ask any more questions. Some man was flying around us, it's a wonder he didn't knock us over. He was really flying. He whizzed along through the air a few meters, feet outstretched in front, and then flopped onto the grass. He had a giant head, and when he rose it swayed like an oversized pumpkin on thin sticks. His legs buckled under the weight and he reeled, rubbed his back-side—but then he straightened the pumpkin on his neck and with great jubilation he rushed to a nearby building. The signs indicated it was some kind of college. We followed the student and with great interest I watched an unusual phenomenon. As the student ran ahead of us his head got smaller and smaller until, when he reached his goal his head was a normal size. I had already noticed that this building had two entrances, so I read their names. On the right was a public college and on the left was a private one. In front of the public school was quite a large fenced-in area, in which something was happening. There were students lined up in long rows, clapping, shouting and jumping excitedly, and loudly chanting something. As we got nearer to the fence I could make out the words.

“Hold on! Hold on.”

Maybe a race. Or some kind of competition. It looked interesting. There was a large stone by the fence. I climbed up onto it to see better. But just at that instant the students began to jump, dance a jig, clap each other on the shoulder, laugh and hug, and all I could see was a tangle of heads, hands and happy faces.

“We had better go inside; there's a doorman,” advised Ubiquitous.

The building by the gate was a little house with a small, set-in window. The window opened and out leaned a head wearing a flat cap.

“Where are you going?” asked the head.

“This is my guest, Mr. Kudrna, we only want to have a look.”

“Okay, okay, but you have to sign in here and pay the fee, the gate-house isn't just any hut, gentlemen.”

As he nodded his head while he spoke I noticed that along the edge of his cap was written in capital letters: DOCENT DOCTOR JAROSLAV KUDRNA, COLLEGE OF DOORMAN SCIENCE.

“And when you leave you have to come back to sign out and fill out a form on the visit!”

In the open space in front of the college an unprecedented spectacle presented itself. Behind a long white table sat three dignified commissioners with very large heads and very serious expressions on their faces. In front of the table was some kind of pump with a rather unusual shape, connected to a well. Maybe it wasn't a well. The pump looked like a smooth, bent pipe with a large lever. I bent my head to read the label on the pump. Science Conduit. The handle was controlled by Professor Eugen Oversupplied, Doctor of Science, School of Science-conducting Sciences. I also read it on his cap. The other two worthy gentlemen stood by and held in their hands something that reminded me of a tape measure. Surely some kind of competition then. Suddenly one of the commissioners from the white table called the name of a student. The one named turned white, then green, then red and then came forward. In a trembling voice he greeted those at the white table, shook hands with Professor Oversupplied and slowly turned to face the pump. He took a deep breath, leaned forward, grasped the pump with both hands, opened his mouth as wide as he could, and put the Science Conduit down his throat. I saw how his arms and legs shook. He nodded his head slightly at Professor Oversupplied, who turned to the commissioners at the white table and the chairman (the one in the middle) called out:

“You can begin!”

Professor Oversupplied energetically opened the valve. It started to hum. First the student's head started to fill up and swell, then his whole body puffed up and suddenly he bounced like a ball and for a second was airborne. His eyes rolled and a trickle of sweat rolled down his great head. He held onto the pipe with all his strength. Just then his legs started flapping in the air; the other students were chanting, shouting, and cheering, the noise level rose, and the student got bigger and bigger until it seemed he would burst. When the pipe suddenly slipped out of his sweaty hands he shot away like a punctured balloon. He crisscrossed the air for a little while and then smacked himself on the ground. Immediately the man with the tape measure ran over.

“Thirty-nine point six!”

With a happy expression on his face the young man passed the rest of the students, who were still cheering, as he went to the white table. It was hard for him to walk because he still had a very large, and evidently very heavy, head. It dragged him from side to side, pulled him towards the ground and sometimes caused him to fall or even do a somersault. When he finally had staggered and somersaulted his way to the white ta-

ble the commissioners rose and shook the student's hand. The chairman said:

“Congratulations! You see, it pays to hold on. Here is your Master's Diploma.”

The student body applauded, whooping and clapping the new graduate on the back. The chairman of the commission called the next name. And so it went round and round. Some students flew far, some nearer. They received their degrees according to the distance they flew—Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate or other. Sometimes it happened that a student burst and didn't fly anywhere. Disappointed and with a small head, he would walk away. But there were also those who left angrily, banging their fists on the white table and threatening the commissioners that they would come again and show everyone. Others didn't say anything; they simply gathered themselves together and headed straight for the private school next door.

There didn't seem to be anything else new to see. We walked back to the doorman. As soon as Ubiquitous filled out and signed the form for him, some man ran over to us with a wheelbarrow full of papers covered with writing, books and magazines. From a jog he called out:

“Mister Kudrna, register me, I'm going to publish, I'll be right back.”

He returned in a moment, the wheelbarrow empty, and hurried inside. Before Ubiquitous could finish filling out the form the man ran back and forth at least three times. I watched from the gate to see where he was taking the things. Right next to the gatehouse stood a large recycling bin.

“What does it mean, ‘to publish’?” I asked Ubiquitous.

“It's a local custom,” Ubiquitous told me. “When someone in college writes something and gives it to people to read, it's called publishing. In the past people read. They don't anymore, but they are still in the habit of publishing.”

I had the feeling that my head was also beginning to swell because of everything around me, therefore I was glad we were leaving. The private part of the college I no longer wanted to see. Ubiquitous assured me we wouldn't miss anything. It's pretty much the same there, only the entrance is a little more expensive. And so we set off. According to the map we had a river crossing ahead of us.

More stories of Amos' wanderings are coming soon.

6 About the Author

Jan Hábl (born in 1975) is a husband, father, teacher, Comeniologist and pastor in the Evangelical Brethren church in the Czech Republic. After studying philosophy of education at the University of Wales he taught at the University of Hradec Králové. Currently he lectures in areas at the borders of pedagogy, anthropology, ethics and the philosophy of education at the University of Jan E. Purkyně in Ústí nad Labem. Among his publications, some of which are only in Czech so far, are the monographs *Ultimate Human Goals in Comenius and Modern Pedagogy* (2011) and *Lessons of Humanity from the Life and Work of John Amos Comenius* (2011). He is also the author of many smaller studies such as *Teaching Essentials through Parables* (2007), *Educational and Non-educational Ethics. Questions of Pedagogical Prevention of Socially Undesirable Phenomena* (2010) and *Moral and Immoral Education. The Relationship between Knowledge and Virtue in Comenius' Pedagogy* (2011).

7 Summary

Educating Through Story:

Comenius' Labyrinth and the Didactic Potential of Narrative Allegory

Stories have an unusual power. It is said that truth clothed in a story enters every door. This is evident in the renown of Comenius' work *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*. Comenius wrote a number of great works, but none of them enjoyed such popularity and didactic effectiveness as this narrative allegory. The question is, what is the magic of a narrative form? In what does its formative power lie? What makes a story (an allegorical story in this case) so functional from an educational perspective? This book attempts to present answers to these questions. It is not an exhaustive treatise about narrative as a literary phenomenon, but rather an interdisciplinary case study which analyzes a literary text (Comenius' *Labyrinth*) from a didactic point of view. Pedagogy knows that stories "work" but does not usually ask why. This study endeavors to connect these questions. In other words, its goal is to contribute to the pedagogical discussion about the effectiveness of story as a didactic tool by means of literary observations and insights.

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