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The Late Films of Jiří Menzel: The Broken Spell of Nostalgia and Melancholy Heroes in *I Served the English King* (*Obsluhoval jsem anglického krále*, 2006) and *Skirt Chasers* (*Donšajni*, 2013)

Abstract: The melancholic hero in a nostalgic world forms the dominant element of artistry in Jiří Menzel's films from the beginning of his work in the 1960s to the present time. The theme of this study is the analysis of melancholic elements, focusing on the director's last two films, in which he utilises similar stylistic and narrative practises as in his earlier work, but also a significant change in style occurs in the construction of the nostalgic world and the protagonist's character. The melancholy hero abandons the security of the alternative nostalgia and is confronted with the dangerous outside world ultimately to come across self-reflection. These changes profoundly disrupt the functionality of the director's artistry; the films were panned by both critics and viewers.

The conclusion of the study will be based on the analysis of chosen elements that generate melancholic and nostalgic emotion (construction of a melancholic character, structure of an idyllic chronotope, the style of the film) to capture the allegorical function of melancholy in the structure of an artwork which symptomatically portrays social and existential states.

Keywords: melancholy, nostalgia, modernism, adaptation, Jiří Menzel, historical film.

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Melancholy and nostalgia

In the structure of an artwork, I understand melancholy (and nostalgia) in the cognitive approach formulated by Greg M. Smith as a specific mode of audience reception and a collection of emotive markers, which in the artwork cause emotions linked with melancholy (Greg M. Smith, 2008).

I understand the function of melancholy in the context of interpreting modern art, as proposed by Sanja Bahun (Bahun, 2014), which warns of its allegorical function: "As modernists may well have intuited, the melancholic symptom lays particular claims to vigorous social functioning. Structured as it is around the sensation of an actual or symbolic (epistemological, ontological, political) void/loss, which cannot be adequately articulated, melancholia powerfully testifies to the unappropriability of certain objects. (Bahun 2014, 38). Bahun introduces the term "countermourning" for the specific emotion of melancholy brought on by modern artwork, and focuses on the analysis and interpretation of its meanings with the authors Andrej Bělij, Franz Kafka, and Virginia Woolf. Among Czech art from the 1960s, Franz Kafka's novels resonated the most. The influence of the above mentioned artists is the most remarkable in the films of Pavel Juráček, Evald Schorm, Antonín Máša, Drahomíra Vihanová, and Věra Chytilová among the creators of the Czech New Film Wave.

Bahun (note 1) understands melancholy in a dual sense, as a symptomatic cluster that allegorically shows the crisis of a society, as well as practicalities that aid in averting the crisis through metabolising history, which is created through characters, chronotopes, and language (Bahun 2014, 198-199).

Similarly to Bahun, Květoslav Chvatík (Chvatík 1992) and Petr Málek (Málek 2008) write about melancholy in Czech culture. In a collection of essays about Czech literature of the 20th century called *Melancholy and Defiance (Melancholie a vzdor)*, Chvatík utilises the approach of the Prague linguistic club (but does not theoretically define melancholy). In the book *Melancholy of the Modern Times: Allegory, Narrator, Death (Melancholie moderny: Alegorie, vypravěc, smrt)*, Petr Málek takes the concept of melancholy from the European modern art, derived from the approaches of Walter Benjamin and Peter Bürger: „For Bürger, the melancholy of the avant-garde is the result of collapse of the social, collective perception of reality, and with it is linked the loss of hope to find a universal function of art in society. The world as an avant-garde shows itself as broken, filled with fragments, pieces of isolated experiences (Málek 2006, 46). Unlike Bahun, Málek neglects the other function of melancholy.

Boym separates two types of nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia focuses on the collective interpretation of national past and future, and considers home and country as an essential category. Its conservative time and space construction is considered objective and binding (Boym 2001, p. 46). Reflective nostalgia focuses on perceiving history and the passage of time through individual and cultural memory. Nostalgia is examined on several levels of consciousness, observing the reliability and objectivity of memory, noting its distorting emotional component, using ironic distancing,

and portraying the past as a game and an alternative. These reflective distancing components however do not disturb the basic nostalgic mode.

Melancholic and nostalgic elements generate different emotions in the recipient. In nostalgia, they arise from a desire for an idyllic (non-existent) home that hides into a romanticised unproblematic past. Melancholy is not limited to a specific source, hence its carrier is linked with mystery and is also ostracized by the society as strange or eccentric. Nostalgia links through society (in defence and in sharing of the nostalgic world), on the other hand, melancholy isolates difference and secrecy of the protagonist. Menzel's films generate, among emotions linked with melancholy and nostalgia, laughter, which in art fulfils its usual function to distance the recipient. The effect of all these is interconnected. The most unique emotive marker of Menzel's films is formed by the melancholic protagonists and their comic "unpractical" relationship with the outside world, which hides an unspecified secret. The melancholic hero dwells in the alternative nostalgic world, which social structure and relation is distinctive to an idyllic chronotope as defined by Michail Bakhtin.

Films of Jiří Menzel

Jiří Menzel (1938) belongs among the contributors of the Czech New Film Wave of the 1960s. Peter Hames places Menzel's work in the context of the New Wave into the category of Literature, portrait creation, and experimentation, and differentiates it from the poetry of Miloš Forman. Hames especially highlights the careful preparation of the script, work with professional actors, and talks about the influence of surrealism (Hames 2008, 174).

Over time, the director adapted six literary works of writer Bohumil Hrabal, whom he understands through similarly interpreted nostalgic worlds: *The Death of Mr Balthazar / Smrt pana Baltazara* (a short story from *Pearls of the Deep / Perličky na dně*, 1965), *Closely Watched Trains / Ostře sledované vlaky* (1966), *Larks on a String / Skřivánci na niti* (1969), *Cutting it Short / Postřížiny* (1980), *The Snowdrop Festival / Slavnosti sněženek* (1983), *I Served the English King / Obsluhoval jsem anglického krále* (2006).

Menzel's nostalgia-melancholic style can be identified also in adaptations of historical novels of the same name by Vladislav Vančura: *Capricious Summer / Rozmarné léto* (1967), *The End of Old Times / Konec starých časů* (1989), adaptations of detective stories by Josef Škvorecký *Crime at the Girls School / Zločin v dívčí škole* (Ladislav Rychman, Ivo Novák, 1965) and *Crime in a Music Hall / Zločin v šantánu* (1968) as well as the adaptation of a Václav Havel play, *The Beggar's Opera / Žebrácká opera* (1991). The only time he adapted a foreign work was in 1993, when he filmed the book of Vladimír Vojnovič, *Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin / Život a neobyčejná dobrodružství vojáka Ivana Čonkina*. Menzel also uses the nostalgic world inhabited by a melancholic hero trope in films based on original screenplays. The film *Those Wonderful Movie Cranks / Báječní muži s klikou* (1978) is cinematographically nostalgic, presenting the beginnings of cinematography in Prague from before the First World

War. The film most acclaimed by viewers from the contemporary is *My Sweet Little Village / Vesničko má středisková* (1985), which describes an idealised world of a socialist village and places it in contrast with life in a city.

His films are marked by a linear narration, a seemingly simple and conservative style, naïve perspective and acting, an absence of naturalism, and nostalgia, which is shown in both his adaptations of literary works, as well as his historical and contemporary films.

Menzel's work is, unlike most of his New Wave colleagues, marked by a distinct apolitical nature; paradoxically, his adaptation of Hrabal's *Larks on a String* belonged among forbidden locked-off films during the normalisation period, the film's premiere was postponed until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. Menzel's apolitical nature is not an expression of the director's agreement with the regime, but arises from his construction of a nostalgic world and a protagonist whose melancholic nature keeps him from taking a committed approach to society.

Melancholy as an outward lifestyle and artistic approach

The transformation of lifestyle approaches of the creator into the artwork occurs individually and cannot be singularly interpreted. Across these limits, it's possible to state that there are visible connections in Menzel's films between (self)presentation and melancholy. In Menzel's work, melancholy and nostalgia act, apart from his personal approach to life in artistic intention, as a protection from the enemy world.

The director's memories of childhood and growing up described in an extensive memoir *Rozmarná léta/Capricious Summer* (Menzel 2013) correspond with the nostalgic and melancholic nature of protagonists in his film. Across several pages, he remembers the war, which according to him he knew mainly from magazine photos. (Menzel 2013, 18) As a child that lived a significant part of his life in war, he considered the war situation normal: "A lack of food, actually a lack of everything, I considered to be something normal, because I didn't know what was enough. I was malnourished, thin. I suffered from nausea, so the lack of food didn't bother me." (Menzel 2013, 19).

He considers his adult years in a similar naïve-positive approach. In his professional career, he already stylised himself in his studies in FAMU as an outsider, who doesn't know how it works in the film industry. According to him, he got into the school thanks to chance and never thought he'd direct feature films, he began filming them again by "chance" on someone's recommendation. He acted to his classmates (especially Věra Chytilová and Evald Schorm) as an older sibling, he considered his professor Otakar Vávra from the Prague FAMU as an untouchable model, and he called the writer Bohumil Hrabal, whose books he adapted, "uncle". He links the exaggeration of being unpractical and an outsider to his positive naïve outlook on the world, which he declared through eccentric behaviour, but also with humility and a shy smile. His lifestyle and artistic approach is captured in a sentence by uncle Pepin from Bohumil Hrabal's books, which was used as an introductory motto in his

memoir: “This world is beautiful to madness! No, not that it is, but that’s how I see it.” (Menzel 2013, 1)

His described lifestyle merges into his approach to history and society which was summarised already in the 1960s by Jaroslav Boček: “Menzel’s inner paradox is probably this: Menzel feels that reality doesn’t have joy and playfulness and so he narrates about it to add to the reality, to add what is missing, and simultaneously he’s realising that to be play and daydream in this era is not quite possible, it has to be done privately on your own, aside from the greater passage of history. (Boček 1968, 227) Similarly, Květoslav Chvatík characterises the related work of Bohumil Hrabal: “Carnivalization and friendship is a form of escape and defence of those who cannot be themselves in the present time, and who therefore escape and cross the narrow borders at least in their fantasy.” (Chvatík 1992, 194). This distance from history, as described by Boček and Chvatík, creates a melancholic metabolism of history, as mentioned by Bahun.

In his films, Menzel acted in total six times, mainly in episodic roles, only in *Capricious Summer* he takes on the melancholic approach in juggler Arnoštek; on the other hand, the doctor in *Closely Watched Trains* gives pragmatic advice to the melancholic protagonist. Menzel was often casted by his colleagues of the New Wave. Usually, it was only supporting or episodic roles. He appeared as a lead in the films *The Apple Game / Hra o jablko* (Věra Chytilová, 1976) and *Ferat Vampire / Upír z Feratu* (Juraj Herz, 1981).

Melancholy in Czech Art

Melancholy in Czech modern art is contextually part of European art; Czech artists studied and lived especially in Vienna, Berlin, and Paris. Writers and scholars read and translated European prose and poetry. A natural part of Czech culture were Germans and Jews, up until the occupation in World War 2.

In Czech visual and literary art, the motif of melancholy and nostalgia has a tradition already from the period of nation rebirth (the last third of the 18th and 19th century); Czech painters were inspired by foreign motifs (mainly the iconic paintings of Albrecht Dürer (*Melencolia I*, 1514) and Lucas Cranach (*Melancholy*, 1532)). At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, Czech symbolism and decadent art, these inspirations were even more emphasised. For example, a renown Czech symbolist Antonín Sova wrote a poem called *Melancolia* (Sova 1922, 62–63).

According to Málek, the melancholic inspiration, especially its altered allegorical reach, peaked with the Czech modernists. In the works of modernists, melancholy is allegorically portrayed as the position of the artist and art in a changing society (Málek 2008, 47). Málek considers the relation between melancholy and modernists similarly to Bahun: he marks melancholy as a euphemism of the being the “outsider” in the modern times, portrayed with a distinct type of strangeness. From the 1930s, these melancholic moods cease to be a symbol of “strangeness” according to Málek,

and become a symbol of the time's existential worries, shown through e.g. Štýr's painting (*Melancholia*, 1937) or the same-name collage by Teige (1938) (Málek).

In Czech cinematography before Menzel, melancholic elements first appear mostly in biographical films and adaptations of solitaire Václav Krška (*Ohnivě léto / Fiery Summer*, 1939; *Řeka čaruje / River's Magic*, 1945; *Housle a sen / Violin and Dream*, 1947; *Stříbrný vítr / Silver Wind*, 1954; *Poslední růže od Casanovy / Last Rose of Casanova*, 1966). Krška's style (see more Hain, 2016) is marked by *naïveté*, strongly expressive acting, a melancholic hero, who rebels against society, often being an artist or someone with artistic talent. A recurring motif in Krška's work is the river, which references a favourite motif of symbolic painters in the 19th century. I believe that Menzel's apparent simple stylistic choices are, as opposed to Václav Krška's work, a result of conscious decisions. Krška's style is more so simplistic due to insufficient artistic competence.

Apart from Menzel's films, the melancholic hero in a nostalgic world appears among his peers' work from the New Wave only in horror-poetic fantasy *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders / Valérie a týden divů* (Jaromil Jireš, 1870) and in the absurd existential detective film *Hotel for Strangers / Hotel pro cizince* (Antonín Máša, 1966) – both films are placed into the period of Art Nouveau (costumes, architecture).

The Melancholic Hero

Menzel links melancholy mostly with the main characters, but they are not exceptional people or romantic intellectuals, rather normal people of the everyday. The melancholy arises from their personality and societal position, which is grounded in a nostalgically constructed world. *Naïveté* often combines with being unpractical, characters often live on partial inheritances, as they are not capable or rather do not want to place themselves into the norm of society.

The prototype of Menzel's melancholic hero with an uncomplicated psychological profile already appeared in the feature film debut *Closely Watched Trains*, which is a young man from a small town who comes from an orderly railway family. After completing a railway course, he is employed in a small railway station. Sexual problems lead him to an unsuccessful suicide, and after finding a solution, he dies during a sabotage. His explicitly shown motivations and simple psychological profile empathises his eccentric behaviour and sets the story into a war-like state that does not correspond with an idyllic chronotope. The protagonist, showing no sign of embarrassment or shyness, talks about his sexual problems on first encounters, and asks people nearby whether they could help him. This occurs even during a disciplinary interview with a superior, and in a dialogue with the wife of the stationary chief.

The personalities of characters in Menzel's other films (naïve, clean, with an inability to adapt) comes from their origin "of another world" (in paintings of Durer and Cranach symbolised through angel wings) which is shown through

being inappropriate. One of the characters in *The Snowdrop Festival* drives goats to a pasture in a Mercedes, another collects old unusable objects, the third suffers from a disorganised consumption of food. The chief of a brewery (*Cutting it Short*) shows weakness for obscure technical machinery, his wife and brother climb up the factory chimney and wake up the entire city, his wife cuts her long hair that's admired by the entire town. The protagonists often (like the angels in paintings) stare into the distance and do not follow the action close by.

The dispatcher (*Closely Watched Trains*) after being arrested by German soldiers and is threatened with death as a hostage watches the pre-spring nature through which passes a train. In other films, the melancholic heroes travel with various transport (bike, motorcycle, car, tractor, wheelchair, sometimes by airplane) through nature and revel in its beauty, not paying attention to the road. This results in an undriveable motorcycle dragged home by oxen (*Cutting it Short*), repeatedly crashed cars (*My Sweet Little Village*), an uncontrollable journey down a hill on a wheelchair (*Seclusion near a Forest*). The distracted mechanic (*My Sweet Little Village*) is run over by a tractor and falls into deep mud. The farmer immediately exposes his statue cast out of mud. Even the reactions of other characters, who often fall, bump into things, and break objects around them is not a showcase of their clumsiness, but rather comes out of their melancholic nature.

In Dürer's painting, there is a constant state between the melancholic character and the richly structured background, which allegorically notes to the encrypted secrets of the world that hide around us, the background plan in the up left corner shows a portrayal of the approaching Apocalypse. The outward politically motivated heritage (Apocalypse) is shown only in the historical film *Closely Watched Trains* (Czechs during the German occupation of WW2) and *Larks on a String* (a character ostracised by the communist regime). The enigma of the setting (symbolised in the painting through the table with numbers) is missing in Menzel's films. What dominates is an individual impropriety linked with a varied level of incapacity in social integration. A horse lover finds himself in a motorcycle race (*The Death of Mr Balthazar*), nomadic variety artists arrive to a conservative small town (*Capricious Summer*), pioneers of Czech cinematography film in the middle of a pragmatic city society (*Those Wonderful Movie Cranks*), a young man rejects consumerism of his girlfriend's small town family (*Who Looks for Gold?*). The naïveté of Otík (*My Sweet Little Village*) is explained by his lower intellect. Others make fun of Jan Dítě (*I Served the English King*) because of his small frame and physique (because of which he gets to serve for the Abyssinian king).

In the whirlwind of an uprooted city society would these socially-designed characters fall into isolation, or would be rejected by the society as unwanted or unneeded. While in Menzel's films the melancholic heroes live on the edges of society, the edge is still considered a natural part of societal patterns according to an idyllic chronotope.

Chronotope

The construction of social relations and the structure of an inhabited space relates in Menzel's films to the concept of an idyllic chronotope, which Mikhail Bakhtin describes in relation to the countryside novel of the 19th century: 'Life and its events is ideally organically linked to a place – the nation and all its corners, its mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and ice, a father's home. Idyllic life and its events are grown with a concrete place, where fathers and grandfathers used to live, where children and grandchildren can live. This small world, this limited and self-sufficient place is not particularly linked with other places, with other worlds'. Bakhtin 1982, 225). Already at the beginning of Menzel's artistic journey (the 1960s) the idyllic chronotope was perceived as anachronic. In historical adaptations, Menzel uses it for the construction of the history of the nostalgic world. In films situated in the present times, he partially adjusts the social structure of an idyllic chronotope to the new outside conditions, in this new model for example the chairman of the agriculture cooperative (*My Sweet Little Village*) or the member of public security (*The Snowdrop Festival*) fulfil the role of the local authority, reserved for priests and teachers in idyllic novels. He also keeps the social relations between individual characters like in the 19th century novel to warn of the differences between the nostalgic world and the contemporary (especially women roles copied by their literary basis from the 19th century).

In *Closely Watched Trains*, Menzel limited the war by making the setting only a countryside railway station belonging to a small town (as opposed to Hrabal's novel, he does not mention Prague or any other city, the viewer has the impression that the entire story occurs in one place). In *Capricious Summer* (end of the 19th century) the idyllic life of a rural small town is disrupted by the arrival of a nomad comedic couple. The industrial Kladno (early 1950s) in *Larks on a String* synecdochally represents steelworks and workers' dormitory; the social relations between characters are still constructed the same way as in Menzel's historical films. In the retro-nostalgic film of *Those Wonderful Movie Cranks*, the city society is reduced to a small community of artists. In contemporary comedies situated in a socialist countryside, the capital Prague is a contradiction as a warning. The common phenomenon of cottages in Czech is described by the comedy *Seclusion near a Forest*. A Prague family travels to an old cottage in the countryside during the weekend, to satisfy their nostalgic desires for an idyllic life in the rural lands and escape the fad and alienating life in the city. They don't mind that this way of life means a partial loss of comfort common in civilisation. In another contemporary comedy, *My Sweet Little Village*, an episode from Prague demonstrates the contract of an empty and socially-alienated life in the city and the idyllic nature of the countryside.

Closing the melancholic hero into a small space of the idyllic chronotope admits the oddity of the protagonist's melancholy, which is understood as a natural part of the nostalgic world. But this set melancholy cannot be a result of a collapse of a social, collective experience of reality, as it is presented in modern art (see Málek 2008). The

melancholic heroes in films from problematic times (*Closely Watched Trains, Larks on a String*) ignore the period and life on in their own worlds. While the heroes do feel the influence of their surroundings, they do not adapt to it, their personalities do not change even under the pressure of history. They appear in the private timelessness of an idyllic chronotope, which is in opposition to actual historical events. The disparity between the real and nostalgic world is portrayed through ironic exaggeration and inappropriate viewpoints.

The personality of melancholic heroes is alienating as opposed to the usual viewpoint with comedic elements. The apparent paradox linking melancholy and comedy does not arise only from inappropriate behaviour and oddity, but has two more logical explanations. Comedy and irony emphasises the uprooted social standing of the protagonist, and also distances the creator and audience from the idyllic world and its transformation into the difficult times of World War 2, and the communist terror or socialist present, is hardly believable.

Style

Towards modern art, Menzel expresses himself in a reserve way, and his style is already from his feature film debut (*Closely Watched Trains, 1966*) marked by anachronic “anti-modern” approaches. This is confirmed by texts in which Menzel comments on the present day and also discusses modern art: “What I confess about myself – rather quietly – is that I don’t understand modern art, because I even don’t like ugly things.” (Menzel 2011, 19). This declaration, repeated in media, should not hide the director’s hidden inspiration from modernism. At least in the 1960s, the director was in touch with the progressive worldly trends and the films of his experimental colleagues.

Part of his typical filming style was clearly established by constant colleagues, cameraman Jaromír Šofr (1939) and music composer Jiří Šust (1919–1994) (note 2). Both artists could adapt to Menzel’s style. Šofr, with the exception of films *Crime in a Music Hall, The Snowdrop Festival* and the German production shot comedy *Die Schokoladenschnüffler / Čokoládoví čmuchalové / Chocolate Sniffers*, worked on all the director’s films. Šust wrote the music to twelve of the director’s films until the year 1994. Already in *Closely Watched Trains*, he worked with contemporary hits, or with self-compositions derived from the period’s music. Miloš Zapletal points to the detailed (ironic and nostalgic) placement of music into the structure of the film in his study about the meaning of music in a film’s poetic, and considers it one of the key strangeness approaches in the New Wave (Zapletal 2014, 113).

Šofr created the composition and colouring concept of Menzel’s films. With the colour, light, and composition conception, Šofr’s concept of the camera is close to Czech symbolists. To achieve the specific colouring (especially in the film *Those Wonderful Movie Cranks*), the cameraman uses correctional filters of “faded” colours to evoke history and refer to the beginning of film. In Menzel’s films, Šofr avoids

using obvious distinctive rides, zooms, pans, and handheld cameras. The films are usually shot using neutral objectives with middle depth field. As opposed to symbolic colourfulness, these elements present the idyll in an unfavourable way.

Šofr liked the academic format (1.37:1), which he used since his school years. This format allowed him to work with a linear shot. For example, in *Closely Watched Trains*, the dominant lines were often intentionally parallel to the edges of the image, which according to Šofr in an interview with Tomáš Hála (Hála 2014, 177) was to impress the naïveté of the image and its simplicity. Similar compositions were used in his other films.

The visual form of the idyllic chronotope is created through a careful selection of location. In terms of the countryside landscape, the focus is on picturesque, hilly, partially wooded rural areas, which are not marked by intensive industrial construction, or by the time's socialist architecture style (family homes and prefabs based on a few architecture templates did not suit the area). The camera aids the idealisation of the countryside, in static shots or slower flowing panoramas, it is shot from up above to take in the nature. But the conventional editing style, length of shots and framework of the action limits the lyrical function, as the countryside acts as a background addition to the stories of humans (in rural films of Vojtěch Jasný, the countryside is as important as the characters).

Šofr's cameraman style was influenced by his study in FAMU and by the films of his classmates – directors of the Czech New Wave (e.g. *The Party and The Guests / O slavnosti a hostech*, Jan Němec, 1966; *End of a Priest / Farářův Konec*, Evald Schorm, 1968) use a markedly different style than his constant one in Menzel's films. The biggest change in style was in the use of a manual jerky movement camera in the social tale *Prefab Story / Panelstory aneb jak se rodí sídliště* (Věra Chytilová, 1979), where the movement of the camera links to the neurotic state of the characters. In the short black and white recital of Marta Kubišová, *Náhrdelník melancholie* (Jan Němec, 1968, camera by Jaromír Šofr, 22 minutes), he builds the melancholic atmosphere with long rides, slow pans, two or more focal shots and lower contrast. The film was shot in winter, in parts of the frames it snows or the countryside is covered in snow (Menzel leaves out winter in his films; most often, he shoots in spring and autumn).

The apparent naïveté and simplicity of the visual style is completed by the choice and direction of actors. The personality of a melancholic hero is marked by the physiognomy of the actors. In *Closely Watched Trains*, the popular singer Václav Neckář was cast, as his asthenicity and daydreaming gaze (often gazing out of the frame) adds mystery to the character. Acting stylisation also adds to the melancholy. While Neckář does not explicitly copy the position of the forwardly bent torso and the hand supporting the face, like on Dürer's engraving, the biased posture of the body, which differs from normal attitudes (turned, bending to the side, unnatural sitting on the chair, limbs stuck out from the body) fulfil the function of a melancholic attitude. Similarly he holds a pencil several times, like the angel in Dürer's work holds

a quill. Menzel casted Neckář with a similar intention into the film *Larks on a String*. Typographically, actors from other films are similar to Neckář. Menzel casted himself into the role of juggler Arnoštek (*Capricious Summer*), Jan Hrušínský the younger played in the socialist film *Who looks for Gold?*. In two cases, the difference of a hero is marked by casting “unknown” foreign actors. János Bán introduced himself in the role of Otík in the film *My Sweet Little Village* and Ivan Barnev was casted into the leading role of *I Served the English King*. In *Cutting it Short*, the role of the melancholic uncle Pepin was played by Czech professional actor Jaromír Hanzlík whose acting work specialises in loud screaming.

To focus on the melancholy of the hero, Menzel uses a specific variation of montage codes POV (for more details see Branigan 1984) in his editing. Because of the gaze beyond the camera’s scope, the picture leaves the narration without a full explanation in Menzel’s films. In many cases, the director doesn’t use the entire triad of POV and prolongs an objective shot fully or partially so that the viewer will register the protagonist’s gaze into the distance (the length of the frame replaces cutting to a more detailed look, and the director of the hero, who in a classical POV represents a second shot of a character shot in detail or half-detail). The third shot, which occurs during editing over an axis (180 °) is never utilised. This reduction of a classical POV emphasises the melancholic gaze and with it, the unrevealed secret. What the character looks towards is a mystery, which corresponds with the interpretation of Dürer’s painting.

Late Films

In both of his late films, the director follows the type of heroes, themes, and style of his previous work. Simultaneously, there is a significant change, because the protective bubble of the nostalgic world is burst and the protagonists change under the influence of the outside world. In the film *I Served the English King*, the idyllic chronotope is replaced by the chronotope of journey, similarly to the literary version. The protagonist meets not only new people on his life’s journey, but allegorically also meets history. The visited places (a small town, Prague, a luxurious hotel near Prague, jail, countryside near the borders) document the rise and fall of his career and the growth of his character. In the end, the protagonist does not return back to his starting point (an unnamed small town), but finds his home in woodland solitary of the uninhabited Sudetenland, from which the German population was evicted after the war. His stay in places marked by history allegorically implies a cleansing, because at the beginning, the hero utilises tragic historical events to further his career and wealth.

The protagonist Jan Dítě (the name has a symbolic meaning in Czech, dítě = child) works his way up from a retail worker at a railway station to an hotelier. After the communist coup, he is imprisoned as a millionaire and after his release, he lives as a traveller in uninhabited Sudeten mountains. Despite his social growth,

the millionaires who he used to serve at luxurious restaurants, do not consider him as one of them in prison. He finds peace and acceptance with life only after being released in his solitary life in the mountains as a traveller. History changes the places themselves, the luxury hotel of the First Republic of Czechoslovakia is converted into a Lebensborn program centre during the occupation, and at the end of the war is changed into a rehabilitation centre for German soldiers with amputations (shots of the past hotel are taken in the same way both times, which appears ironic and also captures the frozen nature of the protagonist who keeps seeing the world the same way). For his greed, the character is punished twice, he loses his wife that tries to rescue valuable stamps during a house fire, and he is put in prison as an enemy of the working class. Only after his release (Oldřich Kaiser replaces Ivan Barner in the role) he finds peace after self-reflection, and the child finally grows into an adult.

In *Skirt Chasers*, Menzel builds social relations from an idyllic chronotope in an unnamed town (synecdochally represented by a theatre building, a town square, home of the director and a baroque building). While the opera belongs into cities, the social relations in the provincial ensemble fall into an idyllic chronotope, most characters are called only by the first names. The melancholy is portrayed by the protagonist – opera director Víték (note 3) – and the singer Jakub, who after a successful career in America returns home with feelings of nostalgia.

Víték is a naïve and torn character growing old with a tendency for narcissism. Víték and Jakub act like womanisers; they use their melancholic gestures to woo, while in reality their melancholic poses hide the emptiness of their lives. Víték stops understanding the outside world and tells himself that the opera is an old dying art form that only he understands and that will perish after his death. At the end of the film, the building is bought by a rich entrepreneur who wishes to reconstruct it into a bank. In the epilogue, the protagonist narrates the fates of the female opera singers. One ends up in a brass band, the second joins a punk band, and the third marries the aforementioned entrepreneur.

The allegorical level of the film is too literal; the apocalyptic vision is linked with the director's vision of the fall of art, which stylistically changed, while his social function stays the same, differing from the director's assumption. In previous Menzel's films, the melancholic hero did not care about his surrounding (publicly). He reacted only to his inner ethical code. In *Skirt Chasers*, he reluctantly submits to the opinions of the public.

Menzel's late films allegorically move the noted conflict of Cranach and Dürer's paintings (the idyll in the forefront capturing the passing army, a symbol of the apocalypse in the top left corner) into the future, similarly to the film *Melancholia* (2011) by Lars von Trier that shows the demise of Earth. An apocalypse embodied by war and communism (*I Served the English King*) and the present-day consumerist capitalism (*Skirt Chasers*) reach the protagonist. In both films, he is forced to react to the outer historical situation and to end his melancholic state. He becomes socially

active – his secret is lost. Waking up from a slightly narcissistic melancholy dreamlike state (his life) simultaneously causes the end of the nostalgic world.

Conclusion

The analyses confirm that the melancholic elements in Menzel's films are most constructed in the characters, chronotopes and film style. A comparison between the director's later and earlier work shows that despite the outwardly declared naïveté, his later films deal with a highly compact structure because in the disruption of one of the elements (an isolated nostalgic world akin to an idyllic chronotope) the work begins to fall apart as a whole. Until 1994, the director places into his films melancholic characters into restorative nostalgia that is isolated from the influences of the outside world because its special and social construction links to the idyllic chronotope; in his later films, he attempts to change the mode of nostalgia to reflective, and thus the role of the protagonist changes.

The otherness inside an idyllic world stamps a medal of the melancholic secret, which carries into the casual setting. On the other hand, in his two later films, the director lets the protagonists react predictably to historical or contemporary changes by placing them into society, and as such gets rid of their melancholic aura.

The collapse of the idyllic chronotope in the later films is not a portrayal of modernist fragmentation nor a symptom of an existential crisis, as described by Bahun and Málek. It is not even an attempt to heal the modernist fragmentation (the second function of melancholy in art according to Bahun). Menzel's later films are a result of the director's self-reflective/balancing attempts to react to the current world which entirely changes the style and miss their mark.

Endnotes

1. „My dual hypothesis is that melancholia, as both a symptom-cluster and a tool in the cultural practice of countermourning, may have a far more active social function than commonly perceived, and that modernists were acutely aware of this potential. Of course, to put forward an understanding of a modernist text as a melancholic, or, more generally, symptomatic text, means to engage with a set of disquieting questions—about the nature of the symptom, the relationship/ between individual and group symptoms, and, finally, about the relation of that symptom to aesthetic production—which I shall briefly outline here. Three vital elements of novelistic representation are particularly affected by this melancholic metabolizing of history: the character, the chronotope, and language.” (Bahun 2014, 198–199)
2. Šust has a modernist music education, he studied piano and composition in the Moscow conservatory, and continued his education in Prague under the teachings of modernists Alois Hába and Jaroslav Řídký.
3. Jan Hartl, who appeared in side roles in Menzel's films *My Sweet Little Village* and *The End of Old Times*, falls into the category of protagonists that began with Václav Neckář both typologically and in his acting performance.

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