‘What have you been seeking in the world? Happiness?’ The Comforting Function of Comenius’ *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart*[1]

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Abstract
In this study, we will observe how Jan Amos Komenský (internationally known as Comenius, which I will use in the paper) implemented his comforting intention in the work *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart*. Of all the comforting writings that Comenius wrote, we will focus only on this one, and for good reason. Over time, the test proved that *Labyrinth* in a unique way exceeds the other works of Comenius, and not only of this period. The fame and popularity that *Labyrinth* has enjoyed for centuries – both among the lay public and experts – shows that Comenius succeeded in realising his comforting intention in this particular work. The question is, why *Labyrinth*? What is its comforting ‘charm’? Using a descriptive-analytical approach, I will try to show what the consolatory functionality of this work consists of.

Key words: consolation, allegory, Labyrinth, story

Introduction: ‘The Labyrinth Lives’

On 13th December 1623, Jan Amos Comenius dedicated his *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart* to Karl the Elder of Žerotín, his noble protector. So, in 2023 we are celebrating 400 years since the writing of this unique work, which has no precedent in ‘Czech literature’.[2] During his lifetime, Comenius wrote approximately 250 books of greater or lesser extent, however, none of his books gained such fame and popularity as *Labyrinth*. I believe that the reason is multi-layered, it lies in the complex artistic harmony of the work – Comenius managed to capture the key problems of the time with a popular genre (didactic allegory), draw the reader into the story, and engage him not only with a brilliant and humorous reflection of social ills, but also with a unique language form, stylistic means, etc. Of all these layers of *Labyrinth*, in this study I want to focus on only one, namely the very intention of the work, which is often referred to as consoling. The aim of the study is to

1 This study – although it presents an original insight into the issue of consolation literature – partly follows up and adopts some arguments (specifically about the functions of narrative) from the book Jan Hábl, *Teaching and learning through story. Comenius‘ Labyrinth and didactic possibilities of narrative allegory* (Bonn: Culture and Science Publ. 2014).

2 Jan Patočka, *Comeniological studies III.* (Prague: Oikoymenh, 2003), 400.

prove that this aspect is one of the key reasons for the literary effectiveness and success of the work. The historical context of the creation of the *Labyrinth* plays a key role in understanding the work. As a result of the well-known events following the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, the style and emphasis of Comenius' work changes.[3] The encyclopaedic-admiring form of Comenius' writing is overshadowed by the so-called critical-consolation work, which emerged from the author's pen in a relatively short period during the 1620s. Instead of the great things of created world, the author focuses on the more difficult face of reality. Not that the world does not still arouse pious wonder, but to Comenius it no longer appears only as a theatre of God's goodness,[4] but also as a chaotic tangle and a dangerous place to live. 'I regret this life. For I do not like anything under the sun, because everything is vanity and misery,' Comenius quotes the Old Testament book (Ecclesiastes 2:17) in the preface to *Labyrinth*. The reliable certainties of the present life have disintegrated, the truth has disappeared, man harms man and looks at reality somehow crookedly, deceptively. The turn that took place in Comenius' work is already evident from the titles of the works of this period: *Výhost světu* (*Renunciation of the World*), *Truchlivý* (*The Mournful*), *O sirobě* (*On Orphanhood*), *Pres boží* (*God's Press*), *Hlubina bezpečnosti* (*Centre of Safety*). The intention of these writings was to provide an almost therapeutic solace – both to the author and to the readers. Comenius expresses this intention in various words in letters to friends or directly in dedications to individual books: for example, he seeks how to arrive at 'the fullest consolation' (*Labyrinth*), or 'plenty of things conducive to the quiet of the mind' (from a letter to van der Berg).[5] However, the most eloquent is the formulation that we find in the dedication to *Přemyšlování o dokonalosti křesťanské* (*Reflections on Christian Perfection*). The addressee is obvious:

> My dear wife, my jewel dearest to God! Because by the will and permission of God he retreats from human fury, I had to leave you here and I cannot be physically present to you, from which I know that sorrow and longing, of which I am not empty, are frequent guests of your heart: ay, now I to you, little princess I am sending this instead of myself for your consolation.[6]

We do not know if the comforting texts served their purpose for Comenius' wife, because she died. However, we have many documents about how Comenius' comforting texts were perceived by a wide readership. I present two examples from the pen of poets who, in a difficult time for Bohemian emigrants, cannot suppress their nostalgic sentiments:

> We didn't take it with usanything, our fate is
> only the Bible Kralicka,
> and Labyrinth of the world.[7]

3 For the sake of completeness, I will remind the reader that the consequences of the Battle of White Mountain caught up with Comenius and his family in Fulnek, where he was a parish priest at the time. As a minister of the Brethren Church, he had to leave his wife and children and go into hiding, with one child yet to be born. For several years, the city was sacked by Habsburg troops, which, in addition to looting and other hardships, usually brought with them plagues and other epidemics. The events of this period culminated in 1623, when Comenius lost essentially everything in a short period of time: his library was publicly burned by the Jesuits in Fulneck Square, his congregation was dispersed, the prayer hall demolished, and his wife and two children died as a result of the disease.

4 Comenius probably had already started working on his magnificently conceived 'theatres' during his studies, or encyclopedias *Thesaurus linguae Bohemicae, Theatrum univesitatis rerum,* later supplemented with *Amphitheatrum universitatis rerum*. Their intention was to show readers (especially Czech readers) the magnificence of God's work of creation. The world is *the theater* of God's providence and goodness, it is enough to be attentive to the created reality, it itself will teach a person what true wisdom consists of.

5 Ryba Bohumil, *Sto listů Jana Amose Komenského* (Praha: Jan Laichter, 1942), 250.

6 Jan Amos Comenius, *Přemyšlování o dokonalosti křesťanské* (*Reflections on Christian Perfection*), http://texty.citanka.cz/komensky/pdk1-0b.html.

7 Stanza from Jan Kollár's poem, first published in 1832 in the Prague Journal of the Czech Museum, and adapted from: Stanislav Souček,

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Oh escape from the vortex, from the 'labyrinth' of the world!
Let me enter like you – into the heart of your paradise![8]

Literary critics, historians and philosophers also gave a clear assessment: 'one of the most beautiful books in all of Czech literature' (Jungmann),[9] 'a refined world view, a powerful and captivating take-off of imagery […] a deep and sincere feeling' (Bílý).[10] Similarly, Antonín Škarka judges that Labyrinth 'exceeds all other works of our older literature'.[11] I have already mentioned Jan Patočka's judgment – that *Labyrinth* is a work that has no precedent in 'Czech literature' – in the Introduction. Elsewhere, Patočka exclaims: 'Comenius' Labyrinth lives and will live...'[12] It is therefore evident that in the *Labyrinth* Comenius managed to capture something that spoke (and still speaks) to Czech people from the soul. How did Comenius achieve this?

'Who are you?' Reader engagement

The consolation intention of *Labyrinth* is immediately apparent in the opening chapter, entitled 'To the Reader', where the author reveals that it will be nothing less than the search for the 'highest good' (*summum bonum*) in human life. Comenius admits that it is not an easy task, but at the same time he believes that it is not unattainable. He admits that, following Solomon's example, he himself sought 'true peace of mind', but he could not find it anywhere, until once his eyes were opened to 'see the many-faced vanity and miserable delusion hidden everywhere under the external glow and glory of this world so beautiful at first sight and *learned* to seek peace and security of mind elsewhere.'[13]
Comenius goes on to tell the reader that when he was thinking about how to 'present these things more clearly in front of his eyes' and also 'reveal them to others', a 'story' occurred to him.[14] The content of the story in its well-known duality is already revealed by the author in the subtitle of the title – first we will see the 'confusion and entanglement, spinning and rolling, trickery and mischief, misery and longing...' of this world, and then 'a true and full mind of peace and joy' to which it is possible to get through the encounter with Christ the Saviour in one's own heart. A key passage in the book is worth quoting in full:

Where have you been, my son? Where did you tarry so long? Where have you been wandering? What have you been seeking in the world? Happiness? Where should you have sought God but in

Comenius' Labyrinth here and abroad. Archive for research on the life and writings of J. A. Comenius, 1924, No. 7, 22.

8 From a poem by P. O. Hviezdoslav called *Ján Amos Komenský.* Adapted from: Stanislav Souček, *Comenius' Labyrinth*, 45.

9 Jungmann's quote is taken from: František Bílý, *Introduction.* In: *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* (Prague: Czech Graphic Union, 1939), 9.

10 František Bílý, *Introduction*, 9.

11 Antonín Škarka, 'Afterword', in John Amos Comenius, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* (Prague: Our Army, 1958), 193.

12 Jan Patočka, *Comeniological studies* I (Prague: Oikoymenh, 1997), 98.

13 Quoted from the translation by Lukáš Makovička from 2010. For purely aesthetic reasons, in most cases I will quote from the so-called Amsterdam edition from 1663, which was published under the professional revision of Antonín Škarka in 1974. Citations from other translations will always be noted.

14 For the sake of order, it should be noted that this is Makovičk's translation of the term 'treatise' in the edition from 1663. However, in the dedication of Karl the older of Žerotín, Comenius complicates the genre classification of *Labyrinth* when he says that it is also a 'drama'. A. Škarka notes that the label 'book drama' is appropriate for its 'busy plot, rapid alternation of scenes and scenes, and for the predominance of the dialogic or monologue form...' According to Škarka, Komenský thus crossed the boundaries of a traditional educational treatise and created a work of 'fiction', which had no parallel in its time or in older literature (cf. Antonín Škarka, 'Afterword' in Jan Amos Komenský, *The Labyrinth*, 35f). Makovička's translation therefore appears to be internally consistent.

> His temple? and where is the temple of the living God but the living temple which He has prepared for Himself, your own heart? I have watched you, my son, while you were straying, but I did not wish to see you stray any longer, and have brought you to me by leading you into yourself.[15]

In other words, in his comforting writings, Comenius strives not only to overcome his own pain, but at the same time empathetically perceives the fates of his compatriots and wants to help them deal with the difficulties that the post-White Mountain situation brought. In this context, J. B. Čapek also highlights the social and moral aspect of Comenius' consoling lessons – it is about 'learning to correctly look at the reverse side of the power, wealth and glory of those who control the world'.[16]

This intention could be implemented in the traditional form of a treatise, as was customary in Comenius' time, i.e., theoretically describe the problem, analyse it, and respond with an appropriate argument. This is also what Comenius did in his many other writings of this period and later ones – see, for example, the already mentioned *Hluina bezpečnosti* or the *Press boží*, and see also the thorough analysis of the state of 'human affairs' in the opening chapters of both the *Great* and the *Czech Didactic* or 'public affairs' in the *Obecná porada* (*General consultation,* Panegersia, ch. V: par. 28). In *Labyrinth,* however, he chooses a different form. Instead of a theoretical treatise, he begins to tell an otherworldly story about a pilgrim who is looking for 'true peace of mind'. He lays out the narrative scenery, presents the plot, and lets the allegorical characters speak and raise questions like 'And who are you?'[17] The psychological and aesthetic effect is powerful.

The story engages, even if it is simple, perhaps too allegorically or too didactically like the one in *Labyrinth*. It requires a lot of work and effort from the reader. First, it invites one to enter into a complex game of interpretation that always requires personal interaction. Consider, for example, what the author (story) asks of the reader when he begins the narrative with the words:

> That's when I think, as if we (I don't know how) will find ourselves on some extremely high tower, so I imagined myself to be under the clouds; from which I look down, and I see a kind of city on the ground, beautiful to look at and solid and very wide [...] And it was exposed in a circular fashion, provided with walls and ramparts, and instead of a ditch a kind of dark depth, having neither banks nor bottom, as it seemed to me. Or there was only light above the city, and beyond the enclosure pure darkness.[18]

When entering such a world, the reader must first make a specific agreement with the author that he will accept the rules of his game. This creates an intimate, somewhat mysterious, and often latent bond between the so-called model author and model reader. On the one hand, the voice of the narrator (not Comenius, i.e., the empirical author) is heard, containing a set of instructions and messages that are gradually presented to the reader, and which he listens to if he decides to act as a model reader. The reader is called upon to take a special initiative to make 'guessings about the intent of the text', observes U. Eco.[19] From the point of view of mental engagement, this is a fundamental reading activity. The reader is literally 'born together with the text, he is the driving

15 Ch. XXXVIII.
16 Jan Blahoslav Čapek, *Several views of Comenius* (Prague: Karolinum, 2004), 78.
17 Ch. II.
18 Ch. V.
19 Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Prague: Karolinum, 2004), 68.

force of the text's interpretation strategy'.[20] Elsewhere, Eco notes that many texts (and I think that of Comenius is one of them) try to propose actually two model readers – on the first level it is about understanding what the text says semantically, and on the second critical level it is about appreciating the form of what the text says.[21]

In the case of *Labyrinth,* the reader must first accept that it is an imaginary world. He knows that such a city does not exist in reality and that the author has never been to the high tower 'under the clouds', but he accepts the author's pretence and himself also pretends to believe the author. Only then can he receive the benefit prepared by the author from the narrative – not only consoling, but also aesthetic, moral, and other. He will not be surprised by a meeting with the Ubiquitos, a walk in Fortuna's castle, or 'the bridle of nosiness'. However, the rules of fictional worlds are not arbitrary.[22] If Comenius' pilgrim met Robin Hood or Šemík in the labyrinth, it would be disturbing and inappropriate. At best the reader would be confused, at worst outraged by the author's breach of agreement.

Comenius' *Labyrinth*, as a narrative-allegorical structure, requires further work from the reader, which willy-nilly engages him. C. S. Lewis (with reference to S. Alexander) noticed a certain epistemic regularity: the perceiving or knowing 'I' can never experience (*enjoy*) a given state of mind and at the same time contemplate it from a reflective distance.[23] Although it is possible to move from one mode of cognition to another, it is not possible to experience both at the same time. *Experiencing*, for example, emotions or beauty, is quite a different kind of activity than *reflecting on them*. The process of reading a story – whether on a model or empirical level – is the kind of epistemic activity during which the reader *experiences*, i.e., his mind is fixed, connected, or absorbed by a fictional reality – the labyrinthine conquests of Seduction, the danger of Death's arrows, the fickleness of Fortune, etc. The reader's 'immersion' provides a different kind of experience than rational discourse, which is crucial to the comforting intent of the text.

Comenius' chosen otherworldly form of narration compels the reader to engage also by leading to the completion of the unfinished. In this context, Eco notes that 'every narration is inevitably and fatally quick', because if it is to build a world full of events and characters, it cannot tell everything about that world. 'Narrative only suggests', Eco continues, 'and then asks the reader to fill in a series of blanks himself'. In other words, the text is 'a lazy tool that requires the reader to do some of the work for it'.[24] When, for example, Comenius in chapter VIII says 'And they lead me and bring me to the street in which they called the Marriage', he does not need to explain his intention that the street was paved with stone, or that the journey from the square (in the previous chapter) to this street took half an hour, etc. If the text evokes the need to complete any detail or connection, it is the reader's job. This had been already noticed by R. Ingarden: 'Given the limited number of sentences, or words entering the structure of the work, it is not possible to express unambiguously and exhaustively the infinite number of properties and situations of individual represented objects.' [25] The reader must imagine, predict, evaluate, deduce, relate, believe, compare, sort, project,

20 Umberto Eco, *Six walks through literary forests* (Olomouc: Votobia, 1997), 26.
21 Eco, *The Limits*, 64.
22 On the topic of narrative 'construction' of fictional worlds, see Lubomír Doležel, *Narrative methods in Czech prose* (Prague: Czechoslovak writer, 1993).
23 Lewis refers to Alexander's legacy in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*. Closer to this topic is Pavel Hošek, 'The Transforming Power of the Story', *Church History* 3, no. 5, 2010: 87–96.
24 Eco, *Six Walks*, 9.
25 Roman Ingarden, *On the Cognition of a Literary Work* (Prague: Czechoslovak writer, 1967), 46.

etc.:[26] that is, to 'think narratively', as Jiří Trávníček says.[27] This creates a necessary emotional and aesthetic aspect of reading, which brings hope, fear, or tension into play, and which flows from the reader's identification with the fates of the characters or with the narrative itself.

'I began to feel my sadness melt away': the Therapeutic Nature of the Work

Story-reading is a kind of (self)understanding.[28] It is often a latent process, and in the case of the *Labyrinth* it is a fully conscious intention. Right at the beginning of his narration, Comenius warns the reader that it will be essentially a 'therapeutic' matter – we will not read a 'fiction' ('poem'), but 'real incidents' that the author experienced in the 'few years of his life'. At the same time (I remind again) the reason for his allegory is to 'present everything more clearly before his eyes'. To clarify things, to better understand the world, the events that befell him, and himself. Man is a being who needs to understand. In Heideggerian terms, he is a being 'afflicted' by concern about the meaning of his existence.

Comenius also describes the 'therapeutic' nature of his writing in a letter to his Dutch friend and publisher Petr Montan:

> When the calamity was growing dark, and as it seemed there was no hope of human help or advice, I was tormented by indescribable anxieties and temptations, in the middle of the night (which I had already spent without sleep after several previous ones) I was seized with an unusual fever, I cried to God, jumped out of bed, grabbed the Bible... I began to feel how with reading my sorrow melts away And I grabbed a pen and began to record – for myself, if the horrors returned, or for others...[29]

In the *Dedication of the Labyrinth*, Comenius also prepares the reader for the fact that the 'tricks and vanities of this world' will be depicted 'partly allegorically, partly openly'. In this way, the author sets the optics of the ideal or model reader, or rather tells how to read the text. This is not a tricky task. The text does not play tricks on the reader. He is simply supposed to decode the otherworldly plane of the text to find its real and intended plane. The interpretation of allegorical language, but also any other, is understandably notoriously controversial. However, there is something that U. Eco calls the 'right of the text', which is based on the relationship to its originator, referent, circumstances of creation, etc. In other words, the meaning of a text can be diverse, but not arbitrary.[30]

Comenius realises the other-worldly modus using a number of allegorical (and related linguistic) means – from abstract allegories of the denotative type, through connotative allegories to only partially allegorising parodies, caricatures, ironies, various kinds of personifications and metaphors, many of which often intermingle with each other.[31] A few examples for illustration: we often encounter objects, characters or events, whose aesthetic imagery is explicitly (denotatively)

26 Compare 'the mental structure of the parable' as outlined by Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind. On the Origin of Thought and Language* (Brno: Host, 2005), 19f.

27 Jiří Trávníček, *Tell me something. How children absorb stories* (Prague – Litomyšl: Paseka, 2007), 18.

28 Cf. Hošek, 'The Transforming Power', 87–96.

29 See the entire letter to Peter Montan in *Hundred Letters of Jan Amos Comenius* (Prague: Jan Laichter, 1942), 246f.

30 Eco, *The Limits*, 7f.

31 Jaroslav Kolár and Věra Petráčková, 'Commentary', in *Mourning I, II, The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* (Lidové noviny Publishing House, 1998), 177–245.

verbalised – for example, a bridle made of the 'belt of Omnipresence' and the 'iron of Ferocity', 'spectacles of delusion' formed of 'glasses of Assumption' and 'within the scope of Custom'. In another chapter, the pilgrim meets the figure of Fate, who distributes signs to people with inscriptions such as 'rule', 'horse', 'drink', 'spear', 'judge', etc. The same is true of 'speaking names', i.e., denotative expressed characters – whether positive or negative: Amiability, Lust, Delight, Mammon, Justice, Wisdom, etc.

Allegory is a very convenient tool from the point of view of the author's intention. It both hides and reveals reality. The process of uncovering the hidden produces a specific distance between the fictional and real dimensions of the text, which offers the reader a tremendous heuristic potential: by its encoding, the allegory forces the reader to pay attention to reality. This alone is very valuable in terms of consolation since reality is not trivial. Moreover, by stimulating the semantic level of all self/ironies, parodies, personifications, caricatures, and images, the reader's imagination is awakened, allowing one to see things in a new, often true light. See, for example, the allegory which aims to expose the disorders of the aristocracy. Comenius could write a treatise or a whole book criticising the arbitrariness, indolence, incompetence, and many other evils of the authorities. Instead, he says:

> Some had no ears with which to hear the complaints of their subjects; others no eyes, with which they would mark disorder in front of them; others no nose with which to sniff out the schemes of miscreants against the law, others no tongue with which to speak for the mute oppressed; other no hands, by which they might execute the judgments of justice; many did not even have the heart to be allowed to do what justice preaches.[32]

Nothing else needs to be explained. The reader's imagination will 'get the job done'. It is an 'instrument of meaning' or also a 'sensor of meaning',[33] and thus enables not only a new understanding of reality, but even entry into it. Using imagination, the reader penetrates into the mysterious world of fiction, experiences its 'smell', submits to its rules, experiences the feelings of the characters, takes their perspectives, identifies or defines himself, experiments with his possible 'I', etc. This visit to a secondary world – in our case a fictional-allegorical one – changes the perception of the primordial world, the reader is 'enchanted'. It is a kind of self-transcendence, because it 'expands, enriches and transforms' not only the reader's vision of reality, but also his 'being'.[34] A reader can even 'convert' to a different, deeper understanding of the world and himself as a result of a literary experience with an imaginary world. He can laugh at himself or his own situation, or, on the contrary, cry; he can make discoveries, become angry, be offended, ashamed, find himself... In any case, he is engaged – cognitively, emotionally, aesthetically, or in the case of Comenius' allegories also morally, because the last goal is to 'demystify' *the summum bonum* of human life.[35]

With no intention to psychologise Comenius, the fact is that his intention is close to what contemporary psychology refers to as 'narrative therapy'. The story helps diagnose as well as cure. Narrative metaphors often function as catalysts for changes in the client's self-understanding. The very ability to reflect and verbalise is highly desirable. The client is thus led to questions of responsibility, questions of own influence (authorship) on his life, as well as the ability to manage

32 Ch. XIX.

33 Clive Staples Lewis, 'Bluspels and Flalanspheres: A Semantic Nightmare', in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Hooper, W. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 251–65.

34 Hošek, 'The Transforming Power', 91.

35 Cf. Zdenek Kožmín and Dana Kožmínová, *Enlargements from Comenius* (Brno: Guest, 2007), 44.

difficult (existential) situations and various life dilemmas.[36] According to M. White and D. Epston, the purpose of narrative therapy is to shift from a story dominated by a problem (problem-saturated story) to an alternative story that better corresponds to the lived experience and gives it meaning.[37] However, asking for meaning never happens in a vacuum. It takes place against the background of a certain cultural tradition that the questioner is born into and grows up in, with story being an essential part of every culture. A great and important meta-narrative exists around which the community is bound, shared, guarded, and passed on to the next generation. Stanley Grenz reminds us that humanity always maintains, in one way or another, an essential relationship to something supra-individual.[38] This is one of the fundamental needs of humanity – the need for transcendence. In narrative terms, it is a meaningful plot of life that transcends the horizon of the individual. From time immemorial, grand stories (with a wide repertoire of sub-stories) have mediated the fulfilment of this need. The narrative served cultural identification. All components, structures, concepts, values, and institutions (including pedagogy) gained their legitimacy precisely in relation to this consensually shared metanarrative. In archaic cultures, these were usually mythical narratives encoding exemplary models of human behaviour. In later traditions we find narrative images of reality, providing a person with fundamental orientation points, stimuli, and challenges for the formation of one's own self-image.[39]

Why stories? A story is the only kind of discourse that, by the way it selectively presents, ranks, develops, and connects individual events gives them a special meaning and makes sense of them. The story is most similar to life in its structure and integrity. Unlike a scientific protocol, factual record, or other exact genre, a story takes place in situations and time, is laid out, has plots, vicissitudes, dynamics, denouement, and above all a beginning and an end. In this respect, Comenius' plot is very straightforward. As an early renaissance text, *Labyrinth* does not have complicated strategies, but maintains a proven framework. The reader is simply introduced to the situation: 'Having reached the age when human mind begins to distinguish between good and evil, (…) it seemed to me highly desirable to consider well which of these groups of folk I should join and which profession I should choose for my life work' (these are the famous opening words of the Labyrinth). Then comes the central plot, induced by the fact that the reader knows that the pilgrim's allegorical guides will want to deceive him throughout the pilgrimage, but he, according to his own words, 'fortunately' has a secret chance to escape their plans. The 'magic glasses' that were forcibly put on his eyes did not fit completely on his eyes, so the pilgrim, when he 'raises his head and raises his sight' is able to see reality 'purely naturally', i.e., as it really is. This plot is then more or less rhythmically extended as the pilgrim passes through the city and observes its 'labyrinthness' in all spheres, until the key denouement when he finds a way out, or rather he is found and taken out of the labyrinth. Paradise is unravelled again as it has its own rhythm and length, as it is a more or less an exact mirror inversion of everything that came before.[40]

J. Trávníček notes that, in addition to the possibility of identifying with the hero or heroes, the narrative genre also offers the possibility of a 'deeper' identification: 'with the narrative itself, time transformed into a story that has its beginning and end, while the beginning and end are not only

36 Cf. David Polkinghorn, 'Narrative Therapy and Postmodernism', in: Lynne Angus and John McLeod, *The Handbook of Narrative and Psychotherapy* (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

37 Michael White and David Epston, *Narrative means to therapeutic ends* (New York: WW Norton, 1990).

38 Stanley Grenz, *An Introduction to Postmodernism* (Prague: Návrat, 1997), 88.

39 Cf. Hošek, The Transforming Power', 88.

40 This traditional division of the work into two opposing parts is relativised by L. Doležel (Lubomír Doležel, 'Composition of the "Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart" by J. A. Comenius'. *Czech literature*, 1969, no. 17.). Instead of two parts, he sees three parts in *Labyrinth*, while Doležel established the type of narrator as the criterion of distinction.

his by two extreme time points, but above all by the functions of its completion.'[41]
And this is precisely how the story mirrors real life, i.e., the life of the reader, who is allowed to recognise himself in the story. This function of the story is irreplaceable from a comforting-therapeutic point of view. I'm interested in a story that is about me, that I am in. I am willing to listen to a story where I can play a central role. A story in which others listen to me through an imaginative mode evokes just the kind of empathy so desirable to capture the reader's attention. In the story we live, act, think, and manifest ourselves with all our qualities and character abilities with which we confront our own existence. We search and measure ourselves. Thus, drawn in, the reader is prepared to allow the story horizon to enter into a mutually transformative interaction with his own life horizon, a key element in the process of self-understanding.[42]
In addition to this 'empathetic' function, Comenius' allegorical story provides the reader with another function of fundamental importance in terms of comforting intent. First, there is the mimetic function. Stories contain models of action that represent a real possibility of imitation. 'Storytelling gives us the opportunity to step out of ourselves and look at ourselves as someone else', says J. Trávníček.[43] The reader is thus invited to examine the various modalities of his own action. Through the configuration of individual narrative variables, the story can become a 'revelation' – a 'revelation' for the reader, which serves as a stimulus for imitation and subsequent refiguration or retelling of one's own story. Some authors even talk about the 'heuristic potency' of the story.
This is closely related to another function of the story – organising. This is a very important and not 'innocent' function of any narrative, in the words of J. H. Miller. The events of any story are usually not told as they happened. The narrative organisation of events serves to 'confirm or strengthen, or even create the most basic cultural assumptions about human existence, time, destiny, our own being, about where we come from, what we should accomplish on this earth, and where we are going – about the entire course of human life.'[44] If someone asks me who I am, a jumble of memories, emotions, fears, aspirations, beliefs, mental states, and other details emerges in my mind, which, moreover, have undergone and are undergoing significant changes over time. And since I do not have any, in the words of D. Novitz, 'wide-angle introspection', it is very difficult to answer this question.[45] However, the story offers a unique organisational potential. If I am to understand who I really am, I must organise the facts I know about myself into a meaningful plot line. 'We understand events in terms of events we already understood', says Roger C. Schank.[46] A story can organise the unstructured material of life experience into comprehensible frameworks, units, and patterns. In other words, it functions as an organising grid of fragmented experience, much as grammar coordinates the meaning of words. According to the narrative structure, we reorganise and often transform our life events so that they make sense, to give them what we believe to be their true meaning. We will emphasise some, omit others, and at the same time combine them all into a meaningful whole. The way we tell our life stories uniquely affects

41 Jiří Trávníček, *Tell me something. How children absorb stories* (Prague – Litomyšl: Paseka, 2007), 52.
42 Due to the closeness to the psychological topic, I add an observation from the pen of a psychologist, which well reflects Comenius' intention. In his dissertation, D. Skorunka observes that in order to find a place in society, it is necessary to create a sufficiently satisfactory connection between individual experience and the stories available in the given culture and society. If this connection fails to be made, one is missing something important, one can feel isolated, lonely, especially if one cannot participate in the cultural story or cultural stories that are dominant in the given form and next to which the different individual experience is marginalised. See David Skorunka, 'Narrative approach in psychotherapy: the perspective of the psychotherapist and the client' (dissertation, Masaryk University, Brno, Faculty of Social Studies, 2008), http://is.muni.cz/th/71263/fss_d/DISERTACE.pdf.
43 Jiří Trávníček, *Tell me something*, 52.
44 Joseph Hillis Miller, 'Narrative', *Allusions* 12, No. 1, 2008, http://www.aluze.cz/2008_01/05_studie_miller.php.
45 David Novitz, 'Art, Narrative and Human Nature', *Allusions* 13, No. 3, 2009: 27–37, http://www.aluze.cz/2009_03/04_studie_novitz.php.
46 Roger, C. Schank, *Tell Me a Story. Narrative and Intelligence* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 15.

us, as there is a close connection between how we view ourselves and how we are likely to behave. Another function of the story can be described as performative. The question is how the story I read or tell relates to reality. Does the story shape reality or merely reveal it? The answer is, of course, that it does both; the two processes need not be mutually exclusive. Revealing reality is based on the assumption that reality (the world) has its pre-ordination, an already existing order, which the story (or art in general) follows, imitates, or represents in one way or another. On the other hand, creating reality assumes that reality is open to further arrangement, or even creation, that there is a kind of 'pre-negotiated harmony' between reality and human imagination,[47] enabling creative activity on the part of the human spirit. And the meaning of this creation is again understanding, as K. Mišíková observes: 'Art transforms reality in order to reveal its inner meaning.'[48] From a psychological point of view, it is a 'performative' function – as speech act theorists say.[49] In this sense, a story is a way of transforming or influencing reality using words. It causes something to happen in the real world. Or in Baldermann's words: 'the way in which the narrative presents the world decides its quality'.[50]

R. Shapiro puts it succinctly: 'Attentive listening […] to stories pulls us out of our own story and reveals an alternative drama that can offer us more meaning than any of the stories we tell ourselves. […] And that's what great stories do: they show us a different way of perceiving reality. Nothing changes, but our mind, and that, of course, changes everything.'[51]

Conclusion

Can reading a book give the reader comfort? Peace of mind? Relief for the soul? Comenius' *Labyrinth* is proof of this. For several centuries, the Czech reader has been turning to him with astonishment and delight. The significance *of Labyrinth* is certainly due to the author's linguistic talent, sense of humour, psychological sensitivity, etc. However, the fact that *Labyrinth* is a story played a special role here in terms of comfort. Its epic nature is uncomplicatedly simple, and yet as a story it offers immeasurable potential. We have seen how it brings a model reader into the world and makes him cooperate, feel, identify, experience, and think. We have seen how the story draws in with its action, tension, and it arouses emotions, how it paints pictures and awakens the imagination, how it reveals secrets with the help of allegory, how it evaluates, criticises, sympathises... And all of this offers ways to (re)construct the reader's view of the world as well as one's own identity, which form the key components necessary for the desired consolation.

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47 This is the concept of Clive Sstaples Lewis, *Bluspels and Flalansferers,* 169.
48 Karolína Mišíková, *Mind and story in film fiction.* Prague: Publishing House of the Academy of Performing Arts, 2009, 153.
49 See the classic works of William P. Alston, *Illocutionary acts and sentence meaning* (Cornell university press, 2000).
50 Ingo, Baldermann, *An Introduction to Biblical Didactics* (Jihlava: Mlýn, 2004), 88.
51 Rami Shapiro, *Hasidic Short Stories* (Prague: Volvox Globator, 2006), 16–18.