

Reading the Body: Corporeal Imagery, Language, and Identity in Ivan Blatný's *Pomocná škola Bixley*¹

José Vergara — Slavic Languages and Literature,
University of Wisconsin-Madison



According to the official records, Ivan Blatný died twice. The poet's first demise was announced on Czechoslovak radio in 1948, only months after he had traveled to England as a cultural ambassador, condemned the Communist regime on the BBC, and appealed for political asylum. After a brief stay in a mental hospital that same year, authorities in his home country interpreted his psychiatric instability as a sign of his non-relevance to the world and claimed that he died. Though he never stopped writing, Blatný would enter another hospital six years later and spend the rest of his life institutionalized. In these conditions he witnessed both mind and body deteriorate until his second, and actual, death in 1990.

The relatively little criticism on Blatný's later poetry that exists has generally taken either intertextuality (see Hansen 2002 or Simonek 1993, pp. 72-75) or multilingualism (see Petruželka 2007 or Redding 1997) as its subject. In the present study, I adopt a somewhat different approach by interpreting on a structural level a series of key images that frequently appear in Blatný's final collection of verse, *Pomocná škola Bixley*, in order to examine how he develops three interrelated themes: identity, language, and the human body. An exilic life simultaneously offered Blatný the opportunity to play with self-identification and bore the cost of encapsulating his being in often contradictory terms: free writer, dissident, prisoner, patient. Perhaps as a result, his poetic persona splinters, finding disordered representation in macaronic and surreal language. I argue that as Blatný grappled with declining health, these themes merged. The concept of fractured identity becomes thematized primarily in terms of understanding the physical body and language. The use of corporeal imagery — blood, bones, hands — intermingles with reflections on the perplexing nature of writing, represented by books, poetry, and words, among other items. There are likewise tensions between the joy that language brings him and a helplessness to comprehend it, as well as between an inner poetic space and the outer material one. Throughout this process, Blatný divides his lyrical "I" in several ways including self-deprecating third-person addresses. By equating the failure to comprehend the human body with a perceived failure to manipulate language competently, Blatný

¹ I would like to thank Jonathan Bolton for his insightful suggestions. I am also grateful to Andrew Reynolds and David Danaher for their help. All translations from Czech, both poetry and criticism, are my own. Any errors that remain are entirely my own as well.

transforms these twin issues into the struggle to define the person(s) he has become. After providing a series of close readings of key poems that exemplify these patterns, I will consider their sum. This expanded thematic unity provides at least one channel by which we may understand *Pomocná škola Bixley* as a more cohesive collection, rather than the disorganized mass it may appear to be. My analysis of Blatný's hyper-awareness regarding the limitations of his knowledge suggests that an interconnected system of metaphors and imagery actually exists in his seemingly illogical verse.

The poem *Prosím Michauxa aby mi vysvětlil své knihy* serves as a vivid example of this process:

<p><i>Prosím Michauxa aby mi vysvětlil své knihy ačkoli vím že se nedají vysvětlit přesto nevím kde jsou arterie nevidím lidské tělo nevidím a nikdy nebudu vidět jsem šťasten špatné počasí trvá a nemůže se vysvětlit</i></p>	<p><i>I ask Michaux to explain his books to me although I know that they ultimately cannot be explained and yet I still don't know where arteries are I don't see a human body I cannot see and will never see I am happy the bad weather continues and it can't explain itself</i></p>
<p><i>I am very angry I am the most inferior man on earth poesie se nedá vysvětlovat je srozumitelná jako kalendář zakouřím si</i></p>	<p><i>I am very angry I am the most inferior man on earth poetry does not lend itself to explanation it's comprehensible like a calendar I'll have a smoke</i></p>
<p><i>album bude bílé rád bych vysvětloval svoji poesii nevím jak to je míním ovošče je n'ai pas d'espace moje dílo se nedá nijak vysvětlit ráno teď vždycky zase začíná špatně co je abdomen něčemu nepříjemnému se budu automaticky vyhýbat</i></p>	<p><i>the album will be white I would gladly try to explain my poetry I do not know how it is I mean vegetables je n'ai pas d'espace my work cannot be explained by any means the morning now always again begins poorly what is the abdomen I will always automatically try to avoid something unpleasant</i></p>
<p><i>Do Warren House nemohu jít, protože tam nemohu psát nebudu se dívat na to co jsem lichotit mi co znamená L'espace du dedans jsem šťasten whether to get an ashtray or not Michaux psal peut-être rien peut-être quelque chose</i></p>	<p><i>To Warren House I can't go, because there I cannot write I won't look at what I am flatter me what does L'espace du dedans mean I am happy whether to get an ashtray or not Michaux wrote peut-être rien peut-être quelque chose</i></p>

Blatný begins with references to Henri Michaux and the frustrated desire to understand his books even with the author's help. The impossibility of "explaining" Michaux's work is then sublimated into Blatný's inability to comprehend the human body, in particular the location of arteries. Despite his age he "still" ("přesto") cannot identify them. This adds emphasis to his disappointment, as if after all this time he should know better. The use of the perfect verb *vysvětlit* here, as opposed to the imperfect *vysvětlovat* elsewhere in the poem, likewise stresses the hopelessness of his efforts. It is a battle without resolution.

Blatný then writes that he does not and will never see "a human body". Soon after he repeats his belief that poetry, even his own, cannot be explained by any means. The incapacity to comprehend the human form connects to the unexplainable books. The body is therefore "read" by Blatný in the same way as a literary text, a technique that he deploys in several poems. Being unable to read either a poem or a body successfully becomes for Blatný a marker of limited perception. He abruptly asks, "what is the abdomen". He understands neither the minute details nor larger portions of the body. The arteries at the start of the poem are by proximity and through metaphor made into a substitute for literature; they embody the conduits through which meaning, whether corporeal or poetic, travels. This doubt sparks incisive self-scrutiny in the poet regarding his work as he comes to consider the totality of the human form as a reflection of his writing. Thus, straightaway in *Prosím Michauxa...*, Blatný joins together two concepts — physicality and poetry — in order to emphasize the inexplicability of his own language and body as well as the struggle with identity that emerges from those dual issues.

Elsewhere in *Pomocná škola Bixley* Blatný refers to poetry as a "panacea for all illnesses" (ibid., p. 16) and simply "fun" (ibid., p. 223), something which cheers his spirits. Such appreciation notwithstanding, Blatný can comprehend neither art, nor the human body completely. In fact, in the second stanza of *Prosím Michauxa...* he states, "I cannot write / I won't look at what I am". The helplessness to produce writing at Warren House immediately brings his physical being to the poet's mind. Why this is so is not immediately clear, but the theme and imagery are consistent. Without being able to master language, that is, poetry, or his body, he turns away from them: "I will always automatically avoid something unpleasant". He finds that which cannot be understood somehow repellant. This distaste for the human body blends with an interrogation of his poetic practice. Feeling a tension, Blatný experiences the healing factor that writing provides him, but without being able to elucidate its full potential, he cannot help but suffer some discomfort as well. This clash forces self-referentiality and critical introspection to arise in the self-proclaimed "most inferior man on earth". In short, the two themes — body and language — are treated in the same manner. A loss of artistic control, defined in terms of recognizing the human body and its constituent parts, prevents him from feeling comfortable with both his corporeal and poetic selves as the struggle to write moreover points to an incomplete understanding of his identity.

The blood imagery introduced via the arteries in *Prosím Michauxa...* appears in other poems. *Misspelled*, a haunting short verse, begins with a meditation on the spelling of the word "restoration" and its similarity to the Czech "restaurace":

So restoration is not spelled au
 I spelled it so thinking of the czech word restaurace
 to restore
 and go with a lady to the Room
 like a unicorn in the mirror
 all naked in the mirrors
 so that I could see the blood trickling.

(*ibid.*, p. 78)

The latter half of the poem features a bizarre, hypersexual scene involving a “Room,” a unicorn, mirrors, and blood. The poem’s sudden thematic turns can be disorienting, and yet there is some logic to this progression if we consider the text in light of Blatný’s use of body and language imagery. Beyond the phonetic chain of meaning, there is once more a sense of the uncontrollability of language here. Blatný begins *in medias res* as if the poem is a continuation of some runaway thought: “So restoration is not spelled *au*”.² This notion strikes him as a curiosity. English lies slightly beyond his grasp and may always do so. Having understood that Czech has impeded his English, he bemusedly examines his linguistic “mistake”. But through language Blatný arrives at the human body and innovation. The poem spills forth, merging ruminations on spelling and similarities between foreign words into a graphic scene. A continual struggle with language allows for the production of this poem. Julie Hansen writes, “the creative process as described in Blatný’s verse is an ongoing process of discovery of new meanings in words, new layers in language, and new views of the world generated by striking parallels, juxtapositions, false etymologies, and even misspellings” (Hansen 2003, p. 55). Blatný’s visceral imagery in turn grounds all of these elements.

The mirrors act as a meta-commentary on the broader themes of *Pomocná škola Bixley*: each poem is a mirror reflecting the poet’s state of mind back to himself and the reader, exposing all the harsh realities related to his warped body and language. In *Misspelled* Blatný presents the most literal version of this exercise. Moreover, he sees himself not as a typical man, but “like” a unicorn. He depicts himself as a creature that possesses healing abilities, while inverting the traditional mythology with a bloody horn, which has presumably gored the “lady”. The phallic overtones are significant, but in adopting yet another flawed identity, composed of linguistic and physical misunderstandings, Blatný further complicates his sense of self. His faulty spelling, the mythical vision with which the poem closes, and the bodily all come together, while neither body, nor language is completely “restored” in the poem.

Generally speaking, Blatný’s poetic “I” is much more self-aware and self-deprecating throughout *Pomocná škola Bixley* than in his early, more lyrical verse. Blatný replaces the grave nostalgia found in his first books with an attitude, in Petruželka’s terms, “formally more colorful and more relaxed” (Petruželka 2007, p. 194). No idyllic image

2 The presence of the Czech interjection “*au*” (ouch) in the first line, too, implies the sudden shock or unpleasantness Blatný feels at this moment in his poem.

of the poet exists. Its culmination in *Pomocná škola Bixley* is a radically divided poetic self. Still, he remains in control to a degree. His self-referentiality is the means by which he explores an exilic and ailing identity. In *Mám všecko vyřešeno*, for example, Blatný takes this process to an extreme:

Mám všecko vyřešeno	I have everything resolved
jídlo mě vzpruží	food buoys me
it is a terrible world	it is a terrible world
terre I. Bl.	terre I. Bl.
nemohu to vysvětlvat v semináři	I can never explain it in the seminar
surrealisté porozumí.	the surrealists will understand.

(Blatný 2011, p. 48)

Blatný here forces his name, a linguistic substitute for his body, into fragments that function within a “terrible world”.³ This is also a fruitful example of Blatný’s playfulness. “Terre”, French for “land”, then literally means “land of I. Bl.”. Antonín Brousek proposes two other Latin sources for this line: *terra incognita* and *terrae filius* (Blatný 2011, p. 345, n. 148). The former stresses the notion of the unknown that so fascinates Blatný. This land, though it may consist of his own body and name, remains to some extent unexplored, uncertain to him. The latter, *terrae filius*, an archaic phrase meaning “a person of low birth”, emphasizes his self-effacing nature. The manner in which Blatný divides up his name here recalls how he surveys the human body in an (often futile) attempt to understand it better.

Though occasionally buoyant and hopeful, Blatný tends toward this casual and ironic pessimism. He continues: “I can never explain it in the seminar / the surrealists will understand”. While the poem begins with a sense of confidence, this quickly disintegrates, much like Blatný’s name. While positing surrealism as the key, the final lines reiterate Blatný’s difficulty in explaining both his art and himself. He again merges a sense of failure to clarify his poetry with a vision of broken identity, body, and language. He views himself not only as a participant in a problematic world, but as the source of this disappointment as well; the terrible world, be it mental or physical, comes from within. This outlook in turn brings to mind two key lines from *Prosím Michauxa...*: “je n’ai pas d’espace” (I have no space) and “what does L’espace du dedans mean”. The title of a poetry collection by Michaux, the phrase “espace du dedans” also represents the deep-seated anxiety in the poet’s persona as he tries to make sense of his various inner selves. He lacks a cohesive “inner space” that would define him, and Blatný realizes that he cannot provide direct answers. Perhaps for this reason, Arthur Redding calls him “a demanding poet” who is “seldom commanding” (Redding 1997, p. 132).

Blatný enacts a more direct call for meaning in the playful *Mluviti stříbro*:

3 There are echoes of Blatný’s long poem *Terrestris* from *Tento večer* as well (see Hansen 2003, pp. 52–53).

<p>Honba za poklady pokračuje na všech ostrovech nechat alespoň mapu aby jej mohli najít po mé smrti nechat kotvu aby pirátská loď mohla bez pohnutí stát v zátocě zkřížené kosti a lebka na černém praporu Long John Silver that's me.</p>	<p>The search for treasure continues on all the islands to leave at least a map so that they may find it after my death to let fall the anchor so that the pirate ship may motionlessly stand in the bay cross bones and skull on the black flag Long John Silver that's me.</p>
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(Blatný 2011, p. 33)

Here, the poet transforms his work into buried treasure. He recognizes that people will seek out the peculiar meanings hidden among his poems and wonders whether he should help. The third concise line clanks down amid the first five: “nechat kotvu”. The suddenness of this single brief line among others three times its length brings the reader to a full stop as form echoes meaning. Should the author release the anchor, bringing the hunt to a sudden end, everything will be resolved and the provocative momentum induced by the poem’s obscurity unexpectedly halted. Blatný only teases, though, and the search continues, both for himself and the reader.

He then introduces body imagery through a pirate flag (cross bones and skull) before switching into English for the droll conclusion. It is significant that Blatný changes languages at this point, emphasizing a shift in identity as he references *Treasure Island*.⁴ Again, Blatný turns to this class of imagery in conjunction with the theme of literature to express a number of concerns. First, there is the tension of identity. He recognizes that in England he is not the man he once was, a rising Czech poet. Instead, he is a pirate of poetry, and like a seaman, Blatný resides in an uncertain state without real loyalty to any one person, time, or place. Languages clash in his texts and produce a dissonance that he cannot completely master.⁵ This results in a diffusion of linguistic *and* poetic identity. Additionally, he uses body imagery not only to fragment himself but also as means to probe his art; he questions its meaning and relevance. If he, the poet, cannot explain it, then what is it worth? More importantly, if others will miss a meaning Blatný hopes to convey, should he make an attempt to help? The fragmentation of self finds representation in these images of individual parts that do not add up to a satisfying whole. Finally, the cross bones introduce the associated theme of “X marks the spot”, which underlines Blatný’s fear of a dearth of meaning behind all the verbal acrobatics. The X implied by the bones signifies a null or an unintelligible variable at the heart of his work. Faced with this possibility, Blatný’s very identity as a poet is challenged.

4 In *Gramatika* Blatný also mentions an anchor and bone, referencing the latter’s declension pattern and making another connection between body and language (Blatný 2011, p. 79).

5 This dissonance extends to the reader’s experience, particularly one who is not familiar with all of the languages that Blatný shifts in and out of.

Analyzing Blatný's early poetry, Jiří Krejčí suggests that two "emerging trends in Blatný's verse" are "the effort to return and unify" (Krejčí 2007, p. 530).⁶ By the 70s Blatný's desire to "return" to the past has changed, and unification comes in many odd shapes. The present for him is not simply what is happening now, but a dazzling convergence of cultural allusions, snippets of reality, and even past memories that sustain a unique chronotope in his mind. Some of Blatný's most extreme self-estrangement results from these developments. Third-person self-addresses to his younger self, as in *André Breton*, highlight the poet's sharp turn away from unification:

<p><i>Z úrodné prsti nejasného vědomí rodí se silokřivky silokřivky železných pilin magnetických polí Duchamps</i></p>	<p><i>From the fertile soil of vague consciousness were born field lines field lines of iron filings of the magnetic fields of Duchamp</i></p>
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<p><i>Byl šachovým hráčem a dovolil mi vyhrát šustermatem vydáme se na cestu půjdeme ukázat tyto básně mladému Blatnému</i></p>	<p><i>He was a chess player, and he let me win with a Scholar's Mate let's go on a journey let's go show these poems to young Blatný</i></p>
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<p><i>Jsem pilina jste magnet.</i></p>	<p><i>I am the filing you are the magnet.</i></p>
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(Blatný 2011, p. 10)

In this poem there are indeed no direct references to the human body. The lexical, if not grammatical, similarity between *prst* (finger) and *prst* (soil), however, adds a further nuance with its insinuations of a "fertile *finger* of vague consciousness" as a metonymic link between corporeality and poetry. In addition, a hazy comprehension of art ("vague consciousness") and a dissection into parts ("I am the filing you are the magnet") serve as the dominant themes as in the other poems. Blatný feels himself not at all the master of language, that is, of art. He willingly allows himself to be led by his influences (Breton, Duchamp) who allow him to play along: "he let me win with a Scholar's mate", a simple four-move checkmate. Thus, he addresses linguistic-literary reductionism in the same manner as he does his body elsewhere. The whole fragments for the sake of something or someone greater. In this way he reduces his being to a small piece of a larger identity: the sum total of the surrealist tradition.

Blatný's self-addresses, however, are not limited to the past. Trávníček writes: "Blatný's [poetic] 'I' is distributed in the eddies of associations and in the manner of their union" (Trávníček 1996, p. 169).⁷ In other words, his sense of self tends toward disintegration among the relevant scene at hand, as in the following poem:

6 In original: "Dosud jsme sledovali dvě zřetelně se rýsující tendence Blatného poetiky — snahu po návratu a sjednocení".

7 In original: "Blatného 'já' je rozloženo ve vírech asociací a ve způsobech jejich spojování".

<p>Vysvětluji vrabcům jak to je s mým surrealismem mám příliš malé ruce než abych mohl navštívit Ivana Blatného</p>	<p><i>I explain to the sparrows how it is with my surrealism my hands are far too small for me to visit Ivan Blatný</i></p>
<p>Mohl bych být porodník jako Havlásek v žluté porodnici ale on byl v Uherském Hradišti měl péra na čepici jako šohaj</p>	<p><i>I would be an obstetrician like Havlásek in a yellow hospital but he was in Uherské Hradiště he had feathers in his cap like a swain</i></p>
<p>Kóma se rýmuje na doma</p>	<p><i>Coma rhymes with home</i></p>
<p>Probudit se z kómatu a mítí ranní euforii jak Michálek který byl popraven Kremlin is best next to gathering v Tennysonově arkádii viktoriánské společnosti <i>I am locked and gone</i> když bude bolšoj balet požádám o vstupenku <i>open the cabaret</i> lehké praskání smaženého špeku, slaniny ohlašuje lepší snídane v budoucnosti</p>	<p><i>To awake from a coma and have morning euphoria like Michálek who was executed Kremlin is best next to gathering in a Tennysonian Arcadia of Victorian society I am locked and gone⁸ when there is the Bolshoi Ballet I will ask for a ticket open the cabaret the slight crackling of fried lard, bacon heralds better breakfasts in the future</i></p>

(Blatný 2011, pp. 107–108)

Here Blatný candidly pokes fun at himself. Rather than spending time discussing literature with others, he speaks to birds. His attempts to clarify and command language fall on deaf ears. Furthermore, Blatný's phrasing makes it sound as if he is talking about an ailment: "I explain how it is with my surrealism". As previously noted, his art is not always a joy but something that can trouble him. He states that his "hands are far too small [...] to visit Ivan Blatný". This is a typical late Blatný statement: sudden, devoid of context, and quixotic. He once again acknowledges a perceived deficiency with his body. His hands, metonymically understood as the source of his writing, fall short. He believes that he cannot attain his goals, e.g. "visiting" a united Blatný, and his identity remains fractured. The rest of the poem concerns some further regrets and alternate realities such as life as an obstetrician and a brighter future involving bacon.⁹ Of particular relevance is the fact that the former implies the recurring tropes of (literally) bringing life into the world and a shift from an "espace du dedans" to an outer one. In other words, Blatný conceives of his struggle in terms of express-

8 Blatný may be ironically contrasting the idea of a paradise with that of Victorian attitudes to mentally ill individuals, who were literally "locked and gone" from the public eye.

9 Throughout *Pomocná škola Bixley* there is also a recurring fascination with food and consumption that is featured in many of the poems analyzed in the present study.

ing some meaning contained within himself but which is somehow misunderstood or paradoxically absent. He cannot be the obstetrician-poet, as his inadequacies are both physical and mental. His proclamation that he is “locked and gone” is representative of such dual tensions: Blatný was physically kept in hospitals as well as tucked away from the active literary world.

The sparrows reappear in *Proč?*. They, however, now speak back to the poetic persona, raising similar anxieties. They announce that they “have [his] foliage”, his “papers [...] strewn about like leaves in autumn”, in order to make their nest (Blatný 2011, p. 290). Notably, Blatný refers to himself in the third-person in this poem, which also includes the poignant line, “Quietly to be hurt”. The poet’s pain and the fluttering poems are linked together in the second stanza. The papers, tossed about like leaves, remind him of his divided self, which is further emphasized when he refers to the young Blatný who joined the literary group Skupina 42. Language, embodied by the scattered sheets, remains intractable for the poet, who cannot bring it under control, unlike the sparrows.

Tracing the culmination of Blatný’s poetic development, Kožmín and Trávníček have written that his “verse from the eighties already has a different character than *Stará bydliště* [Blatný’s penultimate book]. The texts now emerged rather like automatic writing [...] The poetic ability of self-control was weakened or even completely disabled” (Kožmín — Trávníček 1998, p. 165).¹⁰ This might suggest that Blatný’s method of composition was devoid of discipline or purpose and that his tremendous production rate since the 70s and the wild variety of his subjects were emblematic of such a change. Hospital staff took an even more radical view: after writing for an entire day, Blatný would relinquish his production to staff for its disposal. They would not believe he was a famous poet until a nurse, Frances Meacham, convinced them otherwise. Meacham miraculously met a former acquaintance of Blatný in Czechoslovakia and eventually began to collect his poems. She acquired masses of papers and stored them in her garage (Kyncl 1986, p. 28). In this history and in the surrealist content, it might be tempting to suggest a sort of ineptitude in these poems written over a span of more than ten years. Such an approach to *Pomocná škola Bixley*, I believe, can be too reductive. Blatný’s mind was continually in the process of artistic production. Writing until the day of his “second” death, he developed a perpetually moving poetics that absorbed just as much as it fractured. His final book can instead be understood as a linguistic space in which ideas, not least of which is the poetic “I”, are constantly taken up, split apart, and explored from multiple often-estranged perspectives.

The presence of interrelated imagery suggests that Blatný retained, at the very least, some control over his poetics. It is not without a certain irony that much of this ability is refracted through poems in which Blatný bemoans his *inability* to manage and explain his language. Nonetheless, his battles with language and corporeality are manifested through such metaphoric categories. This struggle can be an excruciating one for the poet. *Méněcennost*, for example, begins with the line “Pálí mě záda” (a physical pain) and closes with “Smějí se mi / že nikdy nebudu umět tak psát” (a lit-

10 In original: “Blatného verše z 80. let mají už jiný charakter než *Stará bydliště*. Texty nyní vznikaly spíše jakými automatickým psaním [...] Básníkova možnost sebekontroly byla oslabena nebo už zcela znemožněna”.

erary sadness) (Blatný 2011, p. 113). These patterns imply a deeper connection within Blatný's poetics. The shame of being unable to write or be understood as he would like is often generated by considerations of physical defects. While it remains painful to the poet to consider all these matters, Blatný crafts a series of interlocking motifs in order to express his concerns regarding his physical, mental, and literary identities. Moreover, he does so to bring a unity to his final collection of verse that, while not absolute and certainly not present in every poem, establishes a core set of themes that touch on many important elements of the book. Blatný's poetic exertions shape the ensuing mode and thematics of his texts. The effort to unite and to understand are more important than any ensuing failures (or successes) as it provides a coherency to numerous poems in *Pomocná škola Bixley*, one possible avenue by which to appreciate the volume as a more cohesive whole.

In examining the progression of a few common metaphoric and thematic categories throughout the collection, I have suggested that Blatný repeatedly turned to them in order to convey a more unified vision of conflicted and amorphous identity. Essentially, Blatný's disunity of poetic identity brings the collection together. The scrutiny under which the human form and language are placed establishes a groundwork by which Blatný's peculiar poetry becomes more comprehensible. Despite the various ailments that troubled the poet at the end of his life, this method of composition, surrealist or otherwise, should be considered more than purely automatic writings and the whims of association. Through spare, loose physical parts and fragments of languages, Blatný constructs a body of work that reflects his anxieties as well as his vast creativity.

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RESUMÉ / RÉSUMÉ

Čtení těla: obrazy těla, jazyk a identita v Blatného *Pomocné škole Bixley*

Článek se věnuje otázce, jakým způsobem přistupuje Ivan Blatný k trojici navzájem propojených témat — identitě, jazyku a lidskému tělu — ve své poslední sbírce *Pomocná škola Bixley*. Při zápase s úpadkem duševních a tělesných sil se Blatnému tato témata v jeho psaní spojila. Kritickým čtením předvádím Blatného pojetí básnických schopností a roztržštěné identity prizmatem vlády nad rozbitým jazykem a tělem. Básník různými způsoby štěpí své lyrické já, čímž zvyšuje sebereflexivitu a sebeironii básní, jež navíc vykazují napětí mezi radostí, již mu jazyk přináší, a jeho neschopností jazyku porozumět. Tato korelace je opakovaně zdůrazněna využitím obrazů tělesnosti (cév, kostí atd.), jež se prolétají s úvahami o matoucí povaze psaní. Ztotožněním nepochopitelnosti lidského těla s nevysvětlitelností vlastního jazyka Blatný oba problémy proměňuje v zápas o pochopení té osoby či osob, jimiž se stal. Tato rozšířená básnická jednota rýsuje přístup, který nám umožňuje vnímat *Pomocnou školu Bixley* jako soudržnou sbírku s vnitřně propojeným systémem metafor a obrazů a nikoli jako dezorganizovanou masu, jak se při prvním čtení může jevit.

Reading the Body: Corporeal Imagery, Language, and Identity in Ivan Blatný's *Pomocná škola Bixley*

The present study examines the manner in which Ivan Blatný approaches three interrelated themes — identity, language, and the human body — throughout *Pomocná škola Bixley*, his last verse collection. I argue that as Blatný grappled with the decline of his mental and physical strength, these themes merged in his writing. Through a series of critical readings I demonstrate the way Blatný treats poetic ability and fractured identity in terms of mastery over broken language and body. The poet splits his lyrical “I” in numerous ways, making his poems more self-aware and self-deprecating than before. There is also a tension between the joy that language brings him and his being powerless to comprehend it. The use of body imagery (arteries, bones, etc.) repeatedly accentuates this correlation, intermingling as it does with reflections on the perplexing nature of writing. By equating the failure to comprehend the human body with the incapacity to explain his own language, Blatný transforms these twin issues into a struggle to understand the person(s) he has become. This expanded thematic unity provides an approach which allows us to understand *Pomocná škola Bixley* as a cohesive collection, complete with an interconnected system of metaphors and imagery, rather than the disorganized mass it may appear to be at first reading.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA / KEY WORDS

Ivan Blatný; poezie; jazyk; tělo; identita; metafora; obraznost / Ivan Blatný; poetry; language; body; identity; metaphor; imagery