A FICTIONAL LANGUAGE IN FICTION: THE CASE OF *YGGURŠTINA*

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*Lucemburská zahrada* (2011) by Michal Ajvaz is a philosophical novel disguised as a sci-fi. Adopting Plotinus’s concept of all-encompassing yet imperceptible primary substance called The One (ἕν), Ajvaz makes his central characters, Paul and Claire, aware of this substance, with different consequences. The novel suggests that, every now and then, life sends us a coded message about The One, and if we decode this message, at least in part, it may change our existence dramatically.

The One is symbolically represented by Yggur (*yggurština*), spoken by extraterrestrials in a novel by a fictitious American author, whose work Paul comes across by chance. The content of Yggur fragments can be translated by recourse to the incomplete notes on Yggur’s grammar and vocabulary. Yggur is a manifestation of the world’s invisible but omnipresent structure, termed ‘cosmic grammar’ (Ajvaz 2011: 51). The reader is invited to participate in the symbolic act of deciphering the Yggur passages, and thus dipping into The One.

Yggur therefore fulfills a dual function of 1) “cognitive estrangement” (Suvin 1979/2016), necessary to create a convincing picture of an unknown entity, and 2) a cognitive process of familiarizing oneself with this entity, in an attempt to “control <…> (or influence <…>) the uncontrollable” (to use Tolkien’s description of constructing a fictional language, see Tolkien 1931/1983: 198). However, *Lucemburská zahrada* can be appreciated even without learning Yggur. It is not coincidental that the first Yggur word we encounter, „okitubis“, is never explained. After all, certain things may well remain incomprehensible forever.

Ajvaz, Michal (2011). *Lucemburská zahrada*. Brno: Druhé město.

Suvin, Darko (1979/2016). *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Tolkien, JRR (1931/1983). ‘A Secret Vice’, in his *The Monsters and the Critics*. London: Allen&Unwin, 198-223.