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Subversive “Realism”: Style, Latency, and Politics in the Novels of Ladislav Fuks

The Czech author Ladislav Fuks (1923–1994) made his literary debut in 1959 in a literary journal and published his first book in 1963. During the 1960s he became one of the most acclaimed Czech writers with an international reputation; in the 1970s and 1980s he belonged to prominent authors of the „normalization“ period in communist Czechoslovakia and even had the privilege to travel in the West and stay there for longer periods of time; after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 his popularity was overshadowed by this engagement. From the very beginning, his literary style in a remarkable way combines certain typical techniques of realist writing (esp. the construction of characters, time and space and the role of descriptions and details) with methods of repetition and genre hybridisation including detective story, horror, sci – fi, and dystopia. This results in a subversion of literary codes and can be read as an interesting variant of postmodernist literature, foregrounding the atmosphere and latency of meaning. The aim of my paper is twofold: first, to demonstrate how this sophisticated *écriture* evolved in relation to the official political interventions into the literary field, without completely losing its edge even in the most „heteronomous“ of Fuks’s works; second, to relate the style of Fuks’s novels to his public self – presentation, his literary posture, including the negotiation with the doctrine of socialist realism as well as his queerness.