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University College London
School of Slavonic and East European Studies

Ideology and Narration.
The Works of Václav Řezáč

by
Betina Andersen

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2007

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Abstract

The aim of my thesis is to investigate the interplay between ideology and narration in the novels by the Czech writer Václav Řezáč (1901-1956). Řezáč is a controversial figure in Czech literary history because of his association with the Party after the Communists' take-over of power in February 1948. In the 1930s and during the German Occupation, Řezáč developed into one of the most highly regarded authors of Czech 'psychological analytical' fiction. In June 1945, Řezáč joined the Party and, subsequently, began to propagate Socialist Realist modes of writing. This fact appears to have made it difficult for academic critics to approach Řezáč at all objectively.

My thesis constitutes a new interpretation of Řezáč's novels which has the texts themselves as its primary focus. It represents a dialogue with previous literary criticism. I do, however, acknowledge that texts belong within a given context. I address this fact by defining the interpretive horizon of my analyses in terms of a semiotic definition of ideology, as ideologemes. In my view, ideology is to be understood as the text's production of significations which are simultaneously evaluated within a given process of narration. I define the ideologeme as a structuration of semes which has a nodal function between the text and its intertext; it is both intrinsic to the text and links up the text with its context. I assert that it is possible to identify the ideologemes on a textual level through an approach based on a theory of narration.

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I certify that the work presented in this thesis is all my own.

Betina Andersen

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Václav Řezáč (1901-56) is a controversial figure in Czech literary history. He published his novels during a tumultuous period in Czech history, from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s, and he became one of the major contributors to the development of the Czech 'psychological analytical' novel and to the beginnings of Czech Socialist Realism.

The changes in the political climate during the Slump, the Nazis' assumption of power in 1933 in Germany, the Munich Agreement in 1938 and the German Occupation of Bohemia and Moravia in 1939, the Soviet liberation of most of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of a Communist regime in 1948 naturally all had a great impact on the cultural climate. From the mid-1930s the majority of Czech writers left behind the ideas of the playful Avantgarde and took on a more or less organised political role. At the same time, during the 1930s, writers became increasingly preoccupied by the question of the potential disintegration of society, as a result of political conflicts. During the Occupation literature to a large extent became a means to preserve national identity, and in the post-war period literature played an important role in the attempt to define a new organisation of society. The change in the cultural politics, which took place concurrently with the Communists' gradually increasing power, began straight away in 1945, arguably even earlier. However, only after the Communists' take-over of power in 1948 was literature ascribed a primarily party-political function and did it officially form part of the propaganda machinery.

Václav Řezáč's works represent a variety of genres. In the late 1920s he published his first short story and, at the same time, he began to establish

himself as a theatre critic. From the 1930s, throughout his writing career, he published theatre criticism, short stories, feuilletons and reportage in various journals and newspapers. From the 1940s, he also wrote film scripts. The main body of Řezáč's work comprises seven novels for adults: *Větrná setba* (Sowing by the Wind, 1935), *Slepá ulička* (Blind Alley, 1938) and during the war, *Černé světlo* (Black Light, 1940), *Svědék* (The Witness, 1942) and *Rozhraní* (Borderline, 1944). After the war came the two Socialist Realist novels *Nástup* (Falling In, 1951) and *Bitva* (The Battle, 1954). At the same time as he was publishing his novels for adults Řezáč wrote three novels for children *Kluci, hurá za ním* (Tally-ho, after him, boys, 1934), *Poplach v Kovářské uličce* (Alarm in Smith Lane, 1934) and *Čarovné dědictví* (The Magic Heirloom, 1939), and a volume of feuilletons, *Stopy v písku* (Footprints in the Sand, 1944). In addition to this, a volume of short stories, *Tváří v tvář* (Face to Face, 1956), the fragment of a novel, *Píseň o věrnosti a zradě* (A Song of Fidelity and Betrayal, 1956) and a selection of Řezáč's criticism and theoretical articles, *O pravdě umění a pravdě života* (On the Truth of Art and Truth of Life, 1960), were published after his death.¹

In spite of Řezáč's crucial position in Czech fiction he has, apart from Party encomia in the 1950s and 1970s, not attracted much attention among Czech literary scholars, especially since the demise of Communism in 1989. The reason for this is, presumably, Řezáč's active involvement with the Party and cultural politics after the Communists' take-over of power in February 1948. Until 1940, Řezáč worked as a clerk at the National Statistics Office. Then he became an editor on the daily *Lidové noviny*, until he moved to the new trades-union daily *Práce* in 1945. From 1947-48 he was the leader of a film team at the Barrandov film studio in Prague. Finally, in 1948 he became the 'national manager', in 1949 the director, of the newly nationalised publishing houses Borový, ELK and Máj. These companies were, together with others, united in one publishing house, *Československý spisovatel* (The Czechoslovak Writer) which fell under the newly established *Svaz československých spisovatelů* (The

¹ A number of published and hitherto unpublished short stories later appeared as 'Rané prózy' in an edition of *Větrná setba*. See Václav Řezáč, *Větrná setba: Rané prózy*, ed. Dobrava Moldanová, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1989.

Union of Czechoslovak Writers).² In his *Ideologie a paměť* Bauer discusses how Řezáč actively contributed to the increasing politicisation and ideologisation of the literary environment after February 1948. (This process had in fact started much earlier). For example, he participated in the transformation of Syndikát českých spisovatelů (The Syndicate of Czech Writers) into Svaz československých spisovatelů, which constituted a purge. After the reorganisation only writers who either toed the Marxist-Leninist line or declared their allegiance to Socialist Realism could become members. In the new organisation Řezáč became responsible for ‘giving the secretariat directives in matters of ideas’.³ Řezáč had joined the Party in June 1945 when he became an adviser to the Minister of Information, Václav Kopecký. He spent time in the Sudetenland, observing and writing reports on the political situation there. This provided him with the inspiration for his two post-1948 so-called ‘construction novels’, *Nástup* (Falling In, 1951) and *Bitva* (The Battle, 1954) in which he explored Socialist Realist modes of writing. *Nástup* was considered by critics of the time to epitomise the new approach to literature.⁴ This fact appears to have made it difficult for academic critics to approach Řezáč at all objectively.

A great deal of criticism, published after Řezáč’s death, focuses on the question of continuity *versus* discontinuity in Řezáč’s literary development. It rests on the assumption of a (literary) historical and political division of literature into pre- and post-1948 literature. This division created an artificial break, since many of the cultural and political changes, as well as changes in modes of writing and choice of themes, had been anticipated far earlier.⁵

² Cf. Blahoslav Dokoupil, ‘Václav Řezáč’, in *Slovník českých spisovatelů od roku 1945 (Díl 2, M-Ž)*, Pavel Janoušek et al., Prague: Brána, 1998, p. 331.

³ See Michal Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť: Literatura a instituce na přelomu 40. a 50. let 20. století*, Jinočany, H&H, 2003, pp. 74-87, particularly p. 76. Another fact, which may negatively influence people’s view of Řezáč, is the despicable conduct of his son, Tomáš Řezáč. From the mid-1960s, Tomáš Řezáč, also a writer, although not of the same talent as his father, became an StB agent and informer. See Jiří Rulf, ‘Tomáš Řezáč’, *Reflex*, 20.7.2000, pp. 56-59.

⁴ In 1951, when *Nástup* was published, over twenty reviews and articles discuss it as the answer to the new Socialist criteria for literature. See, for example, -oh-, ‘Román V. Řezáče „Nástup“’, *Družstevní noviny*, 31.5.1951, 19, p.9; jb, ‘Nástup do nového života’, *Hlas revoluce*, 16.5.1951, 20, p. 6; iSt, ‘Velký český román ze současnosti’, *Lidová demokracie*, 19.4.1951, p. 4.

⁵ Bauer has discussed the changes taking place between 1945-48. See Michal Bauer, ‘1948: From Socialism to Socialism: Czech Literature and the Party’, in Robert B. Pynsent (ed.), *The Phoney Peace: Power and Culture in Central Europe 1945-49*, London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies UCL, SSEES Occasional Papers, no. 46, 2000, pp. 477-84.

Příbáňová points out that there could be even more divisions according to what historical circumstances the critic chose to consider as causing a break in literary history.⁶ Příbáňová's article is the latest to deal with the question of continuity *versus* discontinuity in Řezáč's work. She traces the similarities and differences between Řezáč's novels as regards his psychological analytical method, the number of characters portrayed in the novels and autobiographical elements. She links the occurrence of autobiographical elements with 'the psychological analytical method and the monographic character of his novels', although, she reaches the conclusion that even in the post-war Socialist Realist novels Řezáč remains connected to the psychological analytical method:⁷ 'However, if we focus on his novels and do not set up the "psychological" and the "social" parts of Řezáč's work as opposites, his development does not seem to be either surprising or inconsistent'.⁸ The party-line critics who praise Řezáč's post-war novels, *Nástup* and *Bitva*, generally condemn Řezáč's earlier novels for focusing solely on the isolated individual rather than on the individual within a larger social and political context.⁹ However, some critics see *Slepá ulička* (1938) with its representation of characters from antagonistic social classes as an exception to this; as an indication of the direction in which Řezáč's literary development might have gone had the war not made it impossible for him to deal with social and political conflicts directly.¹⁰ Other critics criticise *Nástup* and *Bitva* for not

⁶ See Alena Příbáňová, 'Transition in the Work of Václav Řezáč', in Robert B. Pynsent (ed.), *The Phoney Peace: Power and Culture in Central Europe 1945-49*, London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL, SSEES Occasional Papers, no. 46, 2000, p. 306.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 307. Other articles dealing with this question are Radko Pytlík, 'Historismus v Řezáčově *Nástupu*. K otázce poválečného literárního vývoje', in Pytlík, *Sedmkrát o próze*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1978, pp. 152-68; Miloslav Nosek, 'K otázkám typizace ve vývoji Řezáčovy prózy', *Česká literatura*, 4, 1956, 3, pp. 236-63, and Jiří Opelík, 'Proměny Řezáčovy metody. Od Rozhraní k *Nástupu*', *Česká literatura*, 10, 1962, 1, pp. 1-22.

⁹ See, for example, Jan Štern, 'Román o nástupu lidové demokracie', *Tvorba*, 20, 1951, 19, pp. 459-60, and Jiří Hájek, 'Nástup k novému životu naší země', *Rudé právo*, 24 June 1951, p. 5. Hájek states that in order to achieve *Nástup* Řezáč had to 'overcome the inheritance of the old unpropitious individual-psychological novel'.

¹⁰ See, for example, František Buriánek, 'Řezáčův *Nástup*', in Václav Řezáč, *Nástup*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1985, pp. 383-91. Opelík goes against the views of other critics in this question. He states that '*Nástup* is a different type of social novel from *Slepá ulička*', in that, on the one hand, it was an attempt at a programmatic Socialist Realist novel and, on the other hand, Řezáč could draw on the method he developed in his wartime psychological analytical novels. See Jiří Opelík, 'Proměny Řezáčovy metody. Od Rozhraní k *Nástupu*', *Česká literatura*, 10, 1962, 1, p. 22.

conforming sufficiently to the criteria of Socialist Realism because Řezáč employs the method of the psychological analytical novel in a way that distorts the balance between the ‘positive heroes’ and the characters in opposition.¹¹ Communist critics generally interpret Řezáč’s pre-1945 novels as preliminary writing, portraying the disintegration of bourgeois society, leading to his zenith in Socialist Realism.¹² Thus, as a consequence of the post-Second World War politicisation and ideologisation of the discourse on literature, the common denominator for a great part of the criticism on Řezáč’s works is to be found in the critics’ tendency to posit historical, political or cultural circumstances – that is, criteria external to the literary works – as the main determining factors for their interpretation. Such interpretations have resulted in Řezáč’s works being labelled ideologically as either ‘anti-Fascist’ or ‘Communist’, depending on the political orientation of the critics. In an interview from 1950 Řezáč had himself contributed to the discussion on continuity *versus* discontinuity by distancing himself from his earlier works.¹³ This must be seen in the light of the Communists’ need to emphasise a moment of discontinuity in order to legitimise their own literary criteria as being different from the previous ones. In connection with this, they asserted a difference between a ‘right’ and a ‘wrong’ way of writing, and, as a consequence of this, a categorisation of writers as either sanctioned or unsanctioned. The unsanctioned writers were those whose works concentrated on the individual rather than on the collective, not only those who were more or less overtly anti-Communist.

This thesis focuses on Řezáč’s five pre-1945 novels for adults. In these novels Řezáč employed the psychological analytical method in the presentation of characters, although he also generally places the individual in a social

¹¹ See, for example, František Buriánek, ‘Nad dílem Václava Řezáče’, *Literární noviny*, 25, 1957, [page number missing].

¹² See František Buriánek, ‘Cesta Václava Řezáče’ [1957], in František Buriánek, *O současné české literatuře: výběr z kritických statí 1945-1980*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1982, pp. 152-58; Miloslav Nosek, ‘K otázkám typisace ve vývoji Řezáčovy prózy’, *Česká literatura*, 4, 1956, 3, pp. 236-63 and Emil Charous, ‘Nad dílem Václava Řezáča’, *Předvoj*, 1961, 18, p. 9; Pavel Reiman, ‘Řezáčův Nástup’, *Kulturní neděle*, 10 June 1951, to mention just a few examples.

¹³ August Skýpala, ‘Beseda s Václavem Řezáčem’, *Panorama*, 25, 1950, 10, pp. 56-57. Here Řezáč describes his three wartime novels as ‘an interruption of a normal development’ because he could not publish a novel with explicit political content during the Occupation. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

context. This may be explicit, as in *Větrná setba*, where the episodes are set against the backdrop of the misery of First World War Prague, or as in *Slepá ulička* where the events take place in a recently industrialised provincial town during the Slump. In Řezáč's three wartime novels the social context is toned down, but is still present as an influence in the characters' individual lives. At the time of their publication contemporary critics saw these novels either in the context of the Czech psychological analytical novel, of which Řezáč was considered one of the prime exponents, together with Jaroslav Havlíček (1896-1943), Egon Hostovský (1908-1973) and Emil Vachek (1889-1964), or, in the case of *Slepá ulička*, in relation to the so-called 'social novel' and the early development of a Czech version of Socialist Realism.¹⁴ In the Conclusion, I look at Řezáč's earlier novels in the context of his post-1948 novels.

1.1 A semiotic definition of ideology

The aim of this thesis is to carry out a re-reading and new interpretation of Řezáč's novels which has the texts themselves as its primary focus. My emphasis on reading the novels as texts in their own right serves as a dialogue with previous Czech criticism whose authors have too often, although not always, been guided by extra-literary concerns in their interpretation to the extent that they have produced crude political judgments, as I have outlined in the previous section of this Introduction. At the same time I acknowledge that the novels cannot be read in complete isolation from a larger context. My approach is polemical in that I do not limit this context to an interpretation in terms of political ideologies such as Fascism and Communism, which has been the tendency.¹⁵

¹⁴ Řezáč was not directly associated with the group of writers, Blok (founded in 1935), who were working together with the theorist and critic Bedřich Václavěk (1897-1943) in developing the ideas of Socialist Realism in their fiction, for example, Marie Pujmanová (1893-1958). However, according to Jiří Opelík, that does not exclude their influence on Řezáč's writing. In Opelík's opinion Řezáč shared their 'perspective towards Socialism'. See Jiří Opelík, 'Románové dílo Václava Řezáče', unpublished PhD thesis, Brno: Masaryk University, 1961, pp. 86-88. As Opelík states, Václavěk's concept of Socialist Realism was quite broad; it was not a 'code of directions'. Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁵ I refer to Eagleton, who criticises the deconstructionists for being reductive in their approach to ideology: 'But to select Stalinism and fascism as prototypes of the ideological is drastically reductive and essentialistic. For it is simply false to believe that all ideologies, in some

In contrast, the view of ideology which informs this thesis is semiotic. Since its first definition in the late 18th century as ‘a science of ideas’¹⁶ the concept of ideology has covered various concerns which, according to Raymond Williams, fall into three common versions:

- (i) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group;
- (ii) a system of illusory beliefs – false ideas or false consciousness – which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge;
- (iii) the general process of the production of meanings and ideas.¹⁷

The notion of ideology that informs this thesis belongs to the third version. It sees ideology in terms of signs. In Voloshinov’s words: ‘The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Wherever a sign is present, ideology is present, too. Everything ideological possesses semiotic value.’¹⁸ As regards the literary text (in this case the novels) this view of ideology implies that any narration generates ideological significations.¹⁹ In the following sections I shall argue that these significations

structurally invariant manner, rely as profoundly upon apodictic truth, metaphysical groundedness, teleological vision and the violent erasure of difference as these brutally extreme models would suggest. Nor is it in the least the case that all ideology is ‘naturalizing’ – a dogmatic emphasis which the Yale school have inherited from Lukács – or that structures of ironic self-distantiation may not be embedded at its heart. The implicit model of ideology advanced by much deconstruction is, in fact, a straw target, and one which gravely underestimates the complexity and ‘textuality’ of ideology’s operations. No simple binary opposition can be established between ‘ideology’ – conceived as relentlessly closed and seamlessly self-identical – and *écriture*.’ See Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From The Spectator to Post-Structuralism* [1984], London and New York: Verso, 1991, pp. 101-02. Eagleton uses ‘Stalinism’ to cover both Stalinism itself and vulgar Marxism in general. His criticism may be extended to the critical reception of Řezáč’s novels where the critics have tended to read them either as epitomising bourgeois Communist ideology, or to have read a character in a simplistic way by having it epitomise Fascism, all depending on the ideological stance of the critic him/herself, or to have read the novel as directly reflecting historical reality.

¹⁶ By Destutt de Tracy.

¹⁷ Cf. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 55-56.

¹⁸ Cf. V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973, p. 10. V. N. Vološinov developed the first semiotic theory of ideology. See Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London and New York: Verso, 1998. For a discussion of various semiotic approaches to ideology, see Winfried Nöth, ‘Semiotics of ideology’, *Semiotica*, 148-1/4 (2004), pp. 11-21, <http://www.zbi.ee/~kalevi/148_11.pdf>; Jorge Larrain’s chapter ‘Ideology and structural analysis’ in Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology*, London, Hutchinson, 1979, pp. 130-71 and Terry Eagleton’s chapter ‘Discourse and Ideology’, in Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London and New York: Verso, 1998, pp. 193-220.

¹⁹ Terry Eagleton defines ideology as ‘the production of social significations’. See *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, London and New York: Verso, 1998, p. 101. I

belong to the semiotic level of the text and, hence, are only accessible through interpretation.

1.2 Introducing the ideologeme

The question of the ideological nature of the literary work is embedded in the problem of the relationship between the text and its referent or, put more correctly, the text and its context.²⁰ According to Terry Eagleton the nature of this relationship is fundamentally ideological in the way in which history and the literary work mutually determine and transform each other. The literary text cannot be seen as a reflection of its immediate historical context; history and text are mutually governed by ideology by which they are determined, and, at the same time, the literary text transforms this ideology that again enters into a relationship with history in an apparently circular, but in reality dialectical fashion.²¹ The ideological nature of the literary work thus comprises two aspects of the relationship between the literary text and its referent: the first concerns how ideology manifests itself on the textual level. This is what Eagleton has called 'the ideology of the text'.²² The term refers to the process of how the text 'works upon' ideology that pre-exists the text. The second concerns the relation of textual ideology with history. The concept of the ideologeme suggests a way of understanding how ideology works on a textual level, as well as how the textual ideological significations are related to the text's context.

1.3 A discussion of the ideologeme: two versions of the concept

The ideologeme as a concept of that name first appeared in the works of Bakhtin/Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928)²³ and

have broadened Eagleton's definition of ideology since I do not consider ideology only in terms of history and class struggle.

²⁰ See Fredric Jameson's 'Introduction', in Brian T. Fitch and Andrew Oliver (eds), *Texte. Revue de Critique et de Théorie Littéraire: Théories du Texte*, Toronto: Trintexte, 1986/87, 5/6, pp. 6-20.

²¹ Cf. Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, London and New York: Verso, 1998, pp. 74-75.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²³ M. M. Bakhtin and P. N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship. A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, translated from the Russian by Albert J. Wehrle, Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1978. The work originally came out solely under

Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1930).²⁴ These theorists introduced the concept in a very broad understanding as an ‘ideological product’²⁵ and, as van Schendel points out, one has to deduce from their works what exactly they could have meant by it.²⁶ After Bakhtin and Medvedev the concept did not reappear until Kristeva used it, drawing on the works of the Bakhtin Circle,²⁷ and then again in the work of American and Canadian theorists in the 1970s, F. Jameson, A. Wilden and M. Angenot who do not consider it in a strict semiotic sense.²⁸

The American critic, Fredric Jameson, deploys the concept of the ideologeme in his work *The Political Unconscious*.²⁹ Jameson understands the literary work as a ‘socially symbolic act’ which must be interpreted within the framework of a Marxist critical approach; he sees this as ‘an ultimate *semantic* precondition for the intelligibility of literary and cultural texts’.³⁰ Jameson operates with three phases of interpretation of the literary work. The first phase means to grasp the individual work (the ‘text’) as a symbolic act which he sees as ‘the imaginary “solution” to unresolvable social contradictions’.³¹ The ideologeme constitutes the object of Jameson’s second phase of interpretation. Within this horizon of interpretation the text is seen as ‘an individual *parole*’ of ‘the great collective and class discourses’. For Jameson the ideologeme is the expression of the text’s intertwining with these larger discourses; he defines it as

the name of Medvedev, but it has later been attributed to Bakhtin as well. For a discussion of authorship see the introduction to this edition.

²⁴ V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matějka and I. R. Titunik, New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973.

²⁵ See M. M. Bakhtin and P. N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship. A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, p. 8.

²⁶ Michel van Schendel, ‘L’idéologème est un quasi-argument’, in Fitch and Oliver (eds), *Texte. Revue de Critique et de Théorie Littéraire: Théories du Texte*, p. 53.

²⁷ See Julia Kristeva, *Le Texte du Roman: Approche sémiologique d’une structure discursive transformationnelle*, The Hague: Mouton, 1970.

²⁸ The references according to van Schendel are F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981; A. Wilden, *System and Structure*, second edition, London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1980; M. Angenot, *Critique de la raison sémiotique*, Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1985. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative As a Socially Symbolic Act*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

‘the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes.’³² The ideologeme has a mediating function:

[...] between conceptions of ideology as abstract opinion, class value, and the like, and the narrative materials with which we will be working here. The ideologeme is an amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristic may be described as its possibility to manifest itself either as a pseudoidea – a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice – or as a protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the ‘collective characters’ which are the classes in opposition. This duality means that the basic requirement for the full description of the ideologeme is already given in advance: as a construct it must be susceptible to both a conceptual description and a narrative manifestation all at once.³³

Thus Jameson also explicitly addresses the two aspects of the ideologeme that I have stated above. Jameson’s description of the ideologeme gives rise to the question of how the ideologeme can be considered a ‘narrative manifestation’, and how one moves in the interpretive process from the symbolic to the ideologeme. Jameson argues that a semiotic analysis that employs Greimas’s ‘semiotic rectangle’ fulfils this purpose since it works through the mapping of binary oppositions, creating ideological closure.³⁴ Thus it is able to make visible the underlying antinomies of social classes that, for Jameson, constitute the semantic level of the ideologeme. Again, from a Marxist point of view, Jameson considers it necessary to include a third interpretive horizon which is that of the historical in its largest sense as the changing modes of production.³⁵ In the re-writing of the literary text Jameson describes this horizon as one of ‘cultural revolution’ – ‘that moment in which the coexistence of various modes of production becomes visibly antagonistic, their contradictions moving to the very

³² Ibid., p. 61.

³³ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 68. The semiotic square describes a ‘visual structure of signification’. ‘According to Greimas, the (semantic) course of a narrative can be said to correspond to a movement along the semiotic square: the narrative deploys itself in terms of operations (transformations) leading from a given unit to its contrary (or contradictory)’. Cf. Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Revised Edition), Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003, p. 87.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

center of political, social and historical life'.³⁶ Within this horizon the 'text' is described as follows:

[...] a field of force in which the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended. These dynamics – the newly constituted 'text' of our third horizon – make up what can be termed *the ideology of form*, that is, the determinate messages emitted by the varied sign systems which coexist in a given artistic process as well as in its general social formation.³⁷

On this level of the interpretation Jameson, following Hjelmslev, understands form as a type of content:

The study of the ideology of form is no doubt grounded on a technical and formalistic analysis in the narrower sense, even though, unlike much traditional formal analysis, it seeks to reveal the active presence within the text of a number of discontinuous and heterogeneous formal processes. But at the level of analysis in question here, a dialectical reversal has taken place in which it has become possible to grasp such formal processes as sedimented content in their own right, as carrying ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works; [...].³⁸

According to Jameson, literary genre is an example of such formal processes which reveal sedimented ideological content.

In terms of sign systems Jameson's three horizons represent different ways of approaching the level of secondary signification of the text. Although he states that the ideologeme must have a 'narrative manifestation', this manifestation seems to be of a solely semantic character. Jameson does not specifically address how one moves from the purely formalistic analysis of the text, for example, how the text indicates which actants or significations must be selected in the application of Greimas's semiotic analysis. Greimas's model does, arguably, not take sufficiently into consideration how the processes of

³⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

transformation between the different functions perform in the narration.³⁹ In this sense the ideologeme becomes a kind of free-floating semiotic structure whose constituting significations the interpreter could possibly choose without regarding how the narrative itself evaluates (processes) the significations in question.

Michel van Schendel traces the history of the ideologeme from its first appearance in Bakhtin/Medvedev's text up to Kristeva and Jameson's use of the term in the late 1960s and early 1980s, respectively.⁴⁰ Van Schendel argues that the ideologeme as a concept has been somewhat neglected, although other, particularly Italian and South-American theorists such as F. Rossi-Landi, Umberto Eco and E. Veron, have continued to work with the ideological as a semiotic object.⁴¹ The purpose of van Schendel's critical account and development of the concept is to open up its semiotic potential.⁴²

Van Schendel views the ideologeme as a 'discursive unit' which has an organising function within the text. It has the function of connector between the text, the intertext⁴³ and what he describes as 'the social situation of the enunciation'. Thus the ideologeme has a nodal quality through which it connects textual ideology with pre-existing ideology. This nodal quality is embodied in the 'intertextual function' of the ideologeme. Van Schendel carries out a critical examination of Kristeva's definition of the ideologeme as a 'syncretic totality'⁴⁴ in which he deduces that the ideologeme is 'a vector for the inscription of the intertext into the text'⁴⁵ which conforms to the notion of the 'intertextual function' as introduced by Kristeva:

³⁹ See A.-J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer and Alan Velie, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

⁴⁰ See Michel van Schendel, 'L'idéologème est un quasi-argument', in Fitch and Oliver (eds), *Texte. Revue de Critique et de Théorie Littéraire: Théories du Texte*, pp. 21-132.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴³ Van Schendel's description of the intertext: 'Certes, l'intertexte est déjà là, il est historique, il est immense, indéfinissable en son entire babélien dans la pratique. Sa saisie ne peut être que ponctuelle, elle est effectuée dans un texte local. Et cette réalisation locale et singulière découvre les traits situationnels de l'intertexte, c'est-à-dire les formes de la sélection opérée sur lui, seule façon de delimitier une réalité transhistorique autrement intangible, inconnaissable.' *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

⁴⁴ This relates to J. Kristeva, *Séméotikè. Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Paris: Seuil, 1969, pp. 113-15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

Si l'idéologème est une fonction d'un intertexte qui ne peut plus alors être considéré comme une totalité inatteignable, s'il est aussi un fonction d'un texte local qui ne peut plus être considéré comme la simple doublure de l'intertexte, si dès lors l'idéologème n'est ni l'un ni l'autre tout en participant de l'un et de l'autre, il ne peut être qu'un *vecteur de l'inscription* de l'intertexte dans le texte. Plus précisément, il devient un vecteur de l'inscription de la *conjoncture*, où sont coalisés plusieurs ordres historiques de temporalité, dans la *situation* multiformatrice du texte local produit en *circonstance* par des inventeurs.⁴⁶

Hence the intertext (or the text) cannot be grasped as identical with the ideologeme. Van Schendel argues that the text is criss-crossed by a network of ideologemes that are disseminated through the text according to the criteria of recurrence, regularity, correspondence and 'integrativity' ('intégrativité').⁴⁷ The function of this network is, at the same time both internal and external; '[...] elle est une fonction de connexion de réseaux dans le texte, dans le discours, dans l'ensemble intersémiotique considéré.'⁴⁸ The ideologeme is not manifest in the text (enunciated), but must always be inferred as 'one of the elements of its [the text's] articulation'.⁴⁹ In van Schendel's view, the modes of intellectualising the ideologeme (corresponding conceptually to Jameson's 'interpretive horizons') are manifold. On this point he takes issue with Jameson, and he argues that the nodes of the mediation in the ideologematic network are too numerous to have the ideologeme coincide with the antagonistic discourses of social class of which Jameson sees the ideologeme as the 'smallest intelligible unit'.⁵⁰ Essentially, van Schendel views the ideologeme as a 'narrative argument', which induces a certain structure of meaning that invests the narrative with evaluation.

Common to the approaches to the ideologeme that I have outlined above is that the ideologeme cannot be identified on the basis of a mere surface reading

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 121.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 126-27.

of the text. It belongs to the level of secondary signification and, thus, it relies on interpretation.⁵¹ The ideologeme forms a kind of subtext, however, it may not be equated to a text's theme(s). The ideologeme's function in the text implies a judgment or an evaluation which is not present in the theme itself.⁵² The ideologeme is not an expression of context or theme but rather a way of organising the theme(s) in a larger structure of meaning that implies a value judgment.

In van Schendel's view the ideologeme is intrinsic to the text, but also connected to what lies outside the text (or what is not the text) through its intertextual function. Jameson argues that the symbolic act creates its own context⁵³ and, although he does not state explicitly that the ideologeme is an intrinsic function within the text, his view implies that the ideologeme has a textual basis. I have previously suggested that it may represent a problem that he does not suggest on what this basis depends. Both theorists develop theories of how the ideologeme structures signification in a conflicting, oppositional and, always, relational fashion.

As is apparent from the above account, the ideologeme is a somewhat problematic concept to employ, and even today, twenty years after van Schendel's study, it has, to my knowledge, not been theorised to any great extent.⁵⁴ This thesis asserts that if the ideologeme is considered intrinsic to the

⁵¹ This is so whether secondary signification is grasped in terms of the dyadic signifier/signified } signifier/signified or whether one conceptualises it by using Peirce, as van Schendel does.

⁵² This is comparable, although not completely identical, with Prince's distinction between 'thesis' and 'theme': a thesis 'promotes an answer instead of raising questions and asks to be agreed with rather than thought about'. See Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (revised edition), p. 99. However, I do not think that a work necessarily supports only one doctrine or can be seen in one ideological context as Prince's definitions imply. As the theory of the ideologeme suggests, a given work may be in a rather more complex relation to ideology, even if it seems to support one doctrine.

⁵³ See Jameson, p. 67.

⁵⁴ One exception, though, referred to by van Schendel, is a number of studies by M. Angenot dedicated to the question of the ideologeme. According to van Schendel, Angenot considers the ideologeme in terms of rhetoric whereas his own hypothesis is semiotic. In one respect, however, the suggestions of the two agree since Angenot has compared the ideologeme to an oxymoron, thus also implying the idea of conflict and contradiction, as well as it being a minimal unit. See van Schendel, pp. 130-31 and footnote no. 257. The latest version of the ideologeme of which I am aware is William Marling's attempt at reading metaphor as a potential ideologeme in which he combines Parson's sociology and the linguist Dorothy Mack's theory of metaphor to intellectualise the secondary level of signification. See William Marling, 'The Formal Ideologeme', in *Semiotica*, 1994, 98-3/4, pp. 277-99.

text, then it follows that it should be possible to identify it through a method of interpretation that takes into account the secondary level of signification, including the way in which the process of signification is played out in the text. I shall use a textual narratological analysis as the basis for an investigation of what structures of meaning inform Řezáč's novels. Řezáč's novels have, to my knowledge, not yet been the object of any narratological study. Hence, the ideologeme is not the sole purpose of the interpretation, but, following Jameson, I would rather see it as the horizon of the interpretation which will create the basis for a discussion of Řezáč's works, both among themselves and in a larger context. Thus I view the ideologeme as a heuristic device which carries the potential to open up the interpretation of the novels towards a larger frame of understanding.

1.4 Definition of the ideologeme

This thesis defines the ideologeme as a semiotic structuration that is intrinsic to the text and, simultaneously, carries within itself the traces of the ideological context of which it is part, and which it transforms in the process of the narrative discourse of the text. With 'structuration' I wish to emphasise the dynamic nature of the ideologeme; that it only becomes apparent through a textual analysis that involves both the synchronic and diachronic aspects of the narrative; that is, the creation of meaning (signification) locally in a given text segment in the form of semes ('signifieds of connotation')⁵⁵ and how these significations are put into play through the process of narration. The narrative context and the theme(s) determine which seme out of a given sememe⁵⁶ must be selected for the interpretation. The semes produced locally are put into play in the unfolding of the narrative discourse. They are ascribed value (worked upon) through the macrostructure of the narrative; that is, through plot-structure,

⁵⁵ Definition of 'seme': 'signified of connotation'. See Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, 2nd edn, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 44. This definition is Roland Barthes's from *S/Z* (1975). However, Belsey states that in the English translation '*signifié*' is consistently mistranslated as 'signifier'. This is the case, as well, in the 2002 edition. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, p. 17.

⁵⁶ I use 'sememe' in the Greimasian sense as 'a particular acceptation of a given word'. See Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (revised edition), p. 87.

the point of view (focalisation) of the narration and the ending of the novel. Semes accrue ideological signification when they enter into relations with other semes, forming a secondary level of signification. These relations constitute the ideologeme. They may take the form of isotopies (Greimas)⁵⁷, semic complexes (Jameson), contradictions or antinomies (Jameson), or relations having the character of ‘narrative arguments’ (van Schendel). The interaction of the semic structurations in the narration is what engenders an ideological evaluation on the level of interpretation.

My definition of the ideologeme is consistent with van Schendel’s in that I see it as a structuration that is intrinsic to the text and, at the same time, connects it with what is outside the text, that is, ideology. The ideologeme has a nodal function between the text, its intertext and the historical situation in which it was written. The latter is what van Schendel names as the conjuncture (‘conjuncture’).⁵⁸ The historicity of a text will always be of an ideological nature: on the textual level, the version of history presented is fictionalised and, thus, always judged to a more or less explicit degree.

1.5 The narratological approach as access to the ideologeme

My definition of the ideologeme suggests that the key to the naming and analysis of the ideologemes that operate within a given narrative text can be found in the relationship between the act of narration and the constitution of themes in a given narrative since the latter determines the selection of semes as I described above. The ideologeme captures the tension between the ‘synchronic’ and the ‘diachronic’ aspect of the production of meaning in narration. By the ‘synchronic’ aspect I mean the significations foregrounded by the narration in a given segment of text in combination with how these significations are put into

⁵⁷ Definition of ‘isotopy’: ‘Greimas’s semantics (or at least his linguistic semantics) is based on the seme, which is part of a signified. The repetition of a seme creates an isotopy. On the textual level (or discursive level, as opposed to the word and sentence levels), isotopies, like the semes upon which they are based, may be classified as figurative, thematic or axiological.’ See Louis Hébert (2006), “Figurative, Thematic and Axiological Analysis”, in Louis Hébert (dir.), *Signo* [on-line], Rimouski (Quebec), < <http://www.signosemio.com> > [Accessed February 2007]

⁵⁸ The conjuncture is described as ‘l’amplitude des aspects sociaux, politiques, économiques et culturels investis ensemble dans l’*intercourse*, et la conjonction de leurs temporalités distinctes.’ Van Schendel, p. 49.

play through the process of narration, which is the ‘diachronic’ aspect. The key to these aspects is the narration. Genette has emphasised the importance of enunciating for the analysis of narrative discourse.⁵⁹ In the theory of narration the term ‘enunciating’ refers to the generating instance of the narrative discourse which has the parallel term ‘narrating’.⁶⁰ By ‘generating instance’ Genette means all the circumstances that surround the act of narration; that is, who the narrator is, the moment of narration, the occasion of the narration and who listens to the story. According to Genette the narrating instance can be analysed through ‘the traces it is considered to have left in the narrative discourse it is considered to have produced’ and it ‘does not necessarily remain identical and invariable in the course of a single narrative work’.⁶¹ Genette develops his analysis of the narrating instance through the analysis of narrating situations within which he subsumes the categories of the time of the narrating, narrative level and person (the relations between the narrator, his or their narratee[s], and the story he tells).⁶²

In my approach I shall see the analysis of the narrative discourse⁶³ as a mode of gaining access to the workings of ideology in the novel.⁶⁴ For this purpose, I shall employ Genette’s concept of narrating situations defined by the type and function of the narrator, the relations between the narrator and the characters (focalisation, that is, the relationship between ‘who sees’ and ‘who narrates’), time of the narrating (when this takes on significance)⁶⁵, as well as the relations between the different narrating situations. My view of the narrative

⁵⁹ See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, pp. 212-62.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 215. Genette’s description of the narrating situation basically corresponds to Stanzel’s ‘Erzählsituation’ as developed in Franz K. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* [1976], Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995.

⁶³ Genette defines narrative discourse as a discourse uttered by someone who tells a story. The ‘story’ is ‘the signified or narrative content’; the ‘narrative’ is ‘the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself’. The action which produces the narrative he calls ‘narrating’ – a definition that also encompasses ‘the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place’. See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 26-29.

⁶⁴ For how narration can be used as ‘access’ I refer to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *A Glance Beyond Doubt: Narration, Representation, Subjectivity*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996, p. 2.

⁶⁵ This category is more important for the analysis of *Černé světlo* where we have an *Ich*-narrator who is also the main character in his own story.

text is thus chiefly based on Genette's *Narrative Discourse* and *Narrative Discourse Revisited*,⁶⁶ but I will refer to other theorists' concepts, for example those of Stanzel, Cohn, Chatman and Schmid, whenever I find them appropriate for describing a particular narrative problem.⁶⁷

There are two aspects of narration that determine how a text works on ideology: focalisation (also 'point of view' or 'perspective')⁶⁸ and plot.⁶⁹ Focalisation, as defined by Genette, involves a differentiation between 'who sees' and 'who narrates'. In the narrative discourse this relation manifests itself in the narrator's relationship with the characters (or, as the case may be, also him/herself, as, for example, in the type of first-person narration in which the narrator is also the main character in his/her own story) as well as with the narrated events.⁷⁰ The relationship between the narrator and the characters matters to an analysis of ideology because it governs the way in which the reader interprets the characters. A given character's discourse may support or be in conflict with the ideology that the narrator's discourse expresses or supports and may, consequently, either reveal an inherent ideological conflict within the text or further support the opinion of the narrator. Here I draw on Doležel's view that 'the fundamental form of narrative discourses can be described on the following axis: narrator's discourse (DN) – character's discourse (DC)'. This regards both the 'deep' structure and the 'surface' structure of the narrative text.⁷¹ As Dorrit Cohn has formulated it, the narrative presentation of

⁶⁶ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, and Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990.

⁶⁷ Dorrit Cohn [1978], *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*; Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1980; Wolf Schmid, 'Erzählperspektive', [W_Schmid_Erzaehlperspektive.pdf](http://www.narrport.uni-hamburg.de/e-Port/NarrPort/FGN03.nsf/FrameByKey/MKEE-54S275-DE-p), <<http://www.narrport.uni-hamburg.de/e-Port/NarrPort/FGN03.nsf/FrameByKey/MKEE-54S275-DE-p>> [accessed 26 March 2005]. I shall define a term in a footnote the first time I use it.

⁶⁸ Wolf Schmid has given a useful account of the differences in the definitions of what the concept covers in the various theories of narration. See Schmid, 'Erzählperspektive', pp. 1-13.

⁶⁹ I define 'plot' as the narrative organisation of events (the narrative content). I call the series of events that pertain to a specific character in a given text a 'sub-plot' of the narrative.

⁷⁰ See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 185-89.

⁷¹ See Lubomír Doležel, *Narrative Modes in Czech Literature*, Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1973, p. 4. Doležel bases his typological model of narrative modes on the combinations and variations in the relationship between the narrator's and the character's discourse. *Ibid.* pp. 3-13.

consciousness can move in the spectrum between the narrator's discourse and the character's discourse, with 'psycho-narration' pertaining to the narrator's discourse, 'narrated monologue' representing a mixture of narrator and character's discourse and 'quoted interior monologue' pertaining to the character's discourse. The chosen mode for presenting consciousness in a given narrative is important because it reflects the relationship between narrator and character, and the shaping of the relationship between narrator and character can again have consequences for the governing of the processes of signification in the narrative.⁷² Thus the process of narration on the micro-level of the narrative (this may be down to a single word) also has consequences for the interpretation of the macrostructure of the narrative. The relationship between the narrator and the narrated events depends on whether the narrator is visible (audible) or invisible. The overall narrating situation, as well as the shifts between narrating situations through segments of the narrative discourse, all contribute to the process of signification in that different modes of narration foreground different aspects of the story and create different relationships between the narrator and the characters presented.

The narrative organisation of events (plot) concerns the macrostructure of the narrative. When Eagleton discusses the text as 'a "problem" to which a "solution" is to be found,' he is stating the importance of plot for how the narrative text works on ideology; that is how the narration plays out the structuration of semes and their evaluation.⁷³ In this the ultimate determining factor is the ending.⁷⁴

⁷² See Dorrit Cohn: *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* [1978], corrected paperback edn, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983.

⁷³ 'Problem and solution are synchronic in the sense that the text so works upon its materials as to cast them from the outset into "resolvable" (or *acceptably* unresolvable) form in the very act of trying to resolve them. It is therefore important to read the text, as it were, backwards – to examine the nature of its "problems" in the light of its "solutions". Given the initial elements of the work [that is the incipit or first episode], we can already construct from them a typology of ideologically permissible "solutions"; and this is one of the senses in which it can be said that the work "determines itself"'. See Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 88.

⁷⁴ Here I agree with Moretti, who in a comment on Barthes's 'effet du réel' and realism declares that 'the ideology and rhetoric of realism must be located in the macrostructures of plot, point of view and ending.' See Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* [1987], 2000, note 52, p. 263. However, Moretti overlooks the fact that point of view also forms part of the microstructure of a narrative.

Hence, I assert that through an analysis based on a semiotic definition of ideology combined with a theory of narration I shall be able to read Řezáč's novels in their complexity rather than simplifying the content by means of preconceived ideology. My definition of ideology (in the form of the ideologeme) sees the narrative as interwoven with different ideologies of which one may be predominant. However, the attribute of predominance can only be ascribed through textual evidence. By analysing the narration I attempt to 'anchor' my interpretation in the texts, implying that, although the interpretation depends on the individual reader's competences, any given interpretation may not be random or imposed on the text. It is a process of reading from the inside out, of reading meaning forwards. At the same time, the combination of narrative analysis with a discussion of ideology entails an opening up of the field of narratology into semiotics.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ John Pier has suggested this possibility in his article 'On the Semiotic Parameters of Narrative: A Critique of Story and Discourse', in Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller (eds), *What is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003, pp. 73-97.

Chapter 2

Větrná setba (1935)

With its sexual-awakening theme Vaclav Řezáč's first novel *Větrná setba* (Sowing by the Wind, 1934) can be categorised as a descendant of novels such as *Stříbrný vítr* (The Silver Wind, 1910) and *Tělo* (The Body, 1919) by Fráňa Šrámek, and outside Czech literature, of novels such as James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914), Herman Bang's *Haabløse slægter* (Hopeless Generations, 1880), Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless* (1906) or Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger* (1903). This type of novel is also known as the novel of adolescence.¹ The novel, which is set in Prague, focuses on the experience of the adolescent Petr during the last eighteen months of the Great War. It covers the last months of Petr's school life up to his matriculation and the beginning of his adult working life. It ends immediately after the end of the war and the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic. The war permeates the story in the way in which it influences the lives of Petr and his peers as a continuous presence.

Perhaps, it is no coincidence that Řezáč has chosen to link the war with the theme of adolescence. Both phenomena contain elements of crisis and transition. In a 1977 preface to *Haabløse slægter* Villy Sørensen comments that 'The transition from the romantic world of ideas to a more sober realism naturally becomes a task for the individual in adolescence. In times of crisis adolescence in particular becomes a time of crisis, [...]'.² The critics who first reviewed the

¹ 'The novel of adolescence' is a broad definition based on a given novel's theme. It does not necessarily imply an ideal of 'Bildung' as in the *Bildungsroman*. There is, however, no doubt that there are many affinities between the two types of novel since both have adolescents as their protagonists.

² See Herman Bang, *Haabløse slægter*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1977, p. 11-13. Bang's novel is set against the climate that followed the Danish defeat by Prussia in 1864; this is present as a state of mind.

novel saw it not only as a novel of adolescence, but read it as a novel about the war's effect on the maturation and the morality of the youngest war-time generation.³ For example, Arne Novák comments that although these boys did not go to the front 'prožili na křehkém a citlivém těle v pubertě a osudněji na mravním, teprve se ustavujícím svědomí všechny otřesy rozvrácené společnosti ve vyhladovělém a demoralisovaném zápolí'.⁴ Řezáč himself contributed to this interpretation, describing the novel as his attempt at defining what made his generation what it is: 'Jsme-li rozvráceni a jako pole prolité žíravinou neschopni dát život setbě jednotící idey, víme, proč jsme takoví'.⁵ The novel has most frequently been compared to Karel Konrád's *Rozchod!* (Dismiss!, 1934) and Ernst Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902* (1928) in that both have adolescents' experience of the Great War as their theme.⁶ These novels can be described as anti-war novels, but *Větrná setba* was not perceived to be particularly anti-war. One critic, (E.D.), criticises Řezáč for isolating the individual too much from the context of the war, and, in Němec's view, Řezáč has not fully exploited the potential of the characters portrayed to express 'a pacifist and humanitarian

³ See, for example, F. Němec, 'Román o mládí za válečnými frontami', *Rudé právo*, 4.5.1935, p. 4; Arne Novák, 'Nová prosa', *Lidové noviny*, 15.4.1935, p. 5; Božena Benešová, 'Větrná setba', *Panorama*, 1, 1935, p. 4; František Götz, 'Nový romanopisec', *Národní osvobození*, 28.3.1935, p. 8; Karel Sezima, 'Z nové tvorby románové. (Romány generační 3. – Surrealism.)', *Lumír*, 62, 1935/36, pp. 471-72; jmk, 'Román Václava Řezáče "Větrná setba"', *ÚRO*, 2, 48, 1946, p. 8; M. Hlávka, 'Václav Řezáč: Větrná setba', *Studentský časopis*, 14, 9 (10.5.1935), p. 256; Jan Šnobl, 'Několik mladých', *Čin*, 7, 12, 6.6.1935, pp. 182-84.

⁴ Arne Novák, 'Nová prosa', *Lidové noviny*, 15.4.1935, p. 5. Holas describes the protagonist Petr as 'členem té obětované generace', see Holas, 'Václav Řezáč, Větrná setba', *Rozhledy*, 4, 10, 1935, p. 84.

⁵ Václav Řezáč, 'Kolem mé knihy', *Panorama*, 1, 1935, p. 4.

⁶ Knap comes close to accusing Řezáč of plagiarism when he writes that '[...] *Větrná setba* silně připomíná německý román Ernsta Glaesera „Ročník 1902“ i celou jeho tvůrčí atmosféru, ne zrovna dost stravitelnou pro toho, kdo od románového díla požaduje kus čistoty obsahu a tvaru, [...]'. See Knap, 'Větrná setba', *Venkov*, 6.11.1935, p. 7. However, he finds Řezáč more naive than Glaeser. In my view there is one important difference between the two novels: Glaeser's is a first-person narration in which the main character, a boy of about thirteen, is also the narrator. The narration thus has a much more innocent tone than Řezáč's stylised account of Petr's thoughts. For example, the boy is, although curious, largely ignorant about sex and refers to it as 'the mystery'. Řezáč might have borrowed certain motifs from the novel, for example, the boys watching the copulation of animals, or the main character stealing money from his mother to pay a prostitute (Řezáč), or in Glaeser's novel, to pay so that someone else can have sexual intercourse with a prostitute while he watches – understood so he can discover what 'the mystery' is.

standpoint'.⁷ However, despite the premise implied by the criticism of the time, that *Větrná setba* represents Řezáč's testimony of a generation⁸ – a premise which is understandable considered the relatively fresh memory of the Great War – Řezáč's novel is still a highly stylised version of adolescence.

In the analysis of a novel with an adolescent protagonist the question of the genre of the *Bildungsroman* invariably lingers in the background. Franco Moretti has expressed the view that the *Bildungsroman* as a genre came to a close around the beginning of the Great War.⁹ Moretti discusses eight novels from the period 1898-1914 which he calls 'the late *Bildungsroman*'.¹⁰ He sees these novels as bringing the genre to a sudden close due to the impact of the Great War:

'No one shall come out of this war', wrote a German volunteer, 'if not as a different person.' And indeed, as Fussell and Leed have shown, the initial feeling of European youth was that of being on the verge of a collective immense initiation ritual. Rather than fulfilling the archetype, though, the war was to shatter it, because, unlike rites of passage, the war killed – and its only mystery didn't decree the renewal of individual existence, but its Insignificance.¹¹

Moretti argues that the war made the *Bildungsroman* impossible because it altered the experience of individuality; that is why the novel of youth had disappeared. He argues that social and political history may also play a destructive role in literary evolution. However, he then modifies this radical view to say that 'the war was the final act in a longer process' and claims that

⁷ See E. D., 'Václav Řezáč: Větrná setba', *Mladá garda*, 17.9.1935, p. 4, and F. Němec, 'Román o mládí za válečnými frontami', p. 4.

⁸ Mravcová also uses the label 'subjektivizovaná generační výpověď', in connexion with *Větrná setba*, thus highlighting the autobiographical character of the novel. See Marie Mravcová, 'Personalizace vyprávění', in Daniela Hodrová (ed.), *Proměny subjektu*, vo. 2, Pardubice: Mlejnek, 1994, p. 58.

⁹ See Franco Moretti, 'Appendix. "A Useless Longing for Myself": The Crisis of the European Bildungsroman, 1898-1914. In *The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European culture* (New edition), London, New York: Verso, 2000, pp. 229-45.

¹⁰ The eight novels are Joseph Conrad's *Youth* (1898), Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger* (1903), Robert Musil's *The Perplexities of Young Törless* (1906), Robert Walser's *Jakob von Gunten* (1909), Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (written between 1904 and 1914) and Franz Kafka's *Amerika* (or *The Lost One*) (written between 1911 and 1914). *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

‘at the turn of the century the genre was already doomed’.¹² Moretti finds that the heroes of the late *Bildungsroman* increasingly experience their relation to the world as a succession of small traumas, whether that be war or the ‘traumatic discoveries of sexual desires that are as a rule both socially illicit and psychically irresistible’.¹³ At the same time, the socialisation of the adolescents becomes merely functional because the institutions and authority figures are no longer able to legitimise their symbolic validity. The young men come to see themselves in opposition to authority. In contrast to the heroes of the earlier *Bildungsroman*, these are heroes who do not want to grow up.¹⁴ Moretti argues that the appearance of trauma in the *Bildungsroman* also affected its form and language:

The trauma introduced discontinuity within novelistic temporality, generating centrifugal tendencies toward the short story and the lyric; it disrupted the unity of the Ego, putting the language of self-consciousness out of work; it dismantled neutralized spaces, originating a regressive semiotic anxiety’.¹⁵

That Moretti, in terms of literary evolution, claims the end of the *Bildungsroman* does not change the fact that the narrative paradigm of the genre has continued to influence the representation of adolescence in fiction. The novel of adolescence (or youth) has far from disappeared. One just has to think of, for example J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1945-46). Moretti’s argument may seem radical and to be too abruptly killing off a whole sub-genre of the novel. However, in terms of the fictionalisation of youth, I agree with him in the general view that the cultural, historical and political climate of a given time must necessarily influence how authors choose to present their theme. Spacks has discussed the importance, not of characterising adolescence as such, but rather of investigating how adult fantasies about adolescence generally influence the representation of adolescents in fiction.¹⁶ According to her, ‘The ambiguities

¹² Ibid., pp. 229-30.

¹³ Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 230-32.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 244.

¹⁶ See Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Adolescent Idea. Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination*, London: Faber, 1982, pp. 11-13.

inherent in the adolescent state allow adults to project fears, hopes, and accurate or distorted memories onto their juniors. To the extent that such projections may be generalized, they help to clarify a culture's values and thus its literature.¹⁷ Contemporary critics of *Větrná setba*, as well as Řezáč himself, apparently saw the novel as providing an explanatory model for a whole generation. In the present chapter, I shall, in the light of Moretti's and Spacks's ideas, investigate how Řezáč has grasped the fictionalisation of adolescence, as well as what function the war may acquire in his novel.

2.1 General characterisation of the narrative situation

The main story of the novel can be summed up as Petr's pursuit of love; his, at the outset unrequited, love for Kama, as well as a series of relationships with other women. The love story is interwoven with a dramatic story that brings to mind the story of Oedipus: at the beginning of the novel, Petr's father is at the front. When he comes back on leave it becomes clear that Petr hates him and his presence causes bad childhood experiences to re-emerge. Petr's feelings towards his father are further complicated by the fact that Petr falls in love with Marta without knowing that she is already his father's mistress. The conflict culminates after a scene in which the father had, apparently, intended to kill Petr and his mother. He then indirectly has his father killed in the war by reporting him to the military police. The story ends with Petr's reunion with Kama.

In *Větrná setba* Řezáč uses a psychological method of narrative presentation in that he focuses on the consciousness of the main character Petr. Mravcová has used the word 'subjectivised' to describe the novel because it is narrated from the point of view of the main character.¹⁸ However, *Větrná setba* is not a 'subjective' novel in the narratological sense of the word; that is, a novel in which the narration proceeds, seemingly, without the presence of a narrator, in which the narrator identifies himself completely with the character's point of view, or in which the narrated seems to emanate directly from the mind of a character as in the stream-of-consciousness novel. The narrative presentation of

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁸ I refer again to Marie Mravcová, 'Personalizace vyprávění', p. 58.

Petr evidently bears the mark of the presence of a third-person omniscient narrator and this narrator's function contributes to the evaluation of the narrated events within the narrative.

The opening scene of *Větrná setba* immediately places the main character Petr in the realm of adolescence. He is described as 'mlád' and 'smutný' and 'Jeho tělo vzpouzelo se pohybu' (all p. 7).¹⁹ Thus the narrative's leitmotiv of Petr's adolescent crisis is indicated right from the beginning. As the narrative progresses Petr finds himself in the grip of conflicting emotional states: fear, feelings of inferiority, sexual desire, alienation, longing for freedom, passivity. These are presented in the narrator's descriptions and analyses of Petr, alternating with the reproduction of Petr's thoughts, dramatic episodes in dialogue that have the function of showing aspects of Petr's psychological development. The narrator's discourse implies a development in that he repeatedly refers to Petr's crisis as part of going through the stage between childhood and adulthood. This occurs, for example, in the following description of Petr: 'Opakoval tuto hru a byl současně hochem, který si hraje, i jinochem bolestně přemítajícím (p. 41) or after the episode in which he considered suicide: '[...], pryč s posledním zbytkem dětství, jež spíná ruce a přijímá rány' (p. 181). The motif also occurs in Petr's thoughts as in the long passage in which Petr is longing for his childhood as if for a lost paradise. He wanders along one of the streets of his childhood, finding comfort in the familiarity of the scene, until he comes to a little square:

Podpatky chlapců, hrajících v kuličky, vyryly nesčetné dolíky do půdy náměstíčka. Nemizejí odtud po celý rok: **kolik jich tam vyhloubil on sám! Dnes tam vyskají chlapi, kteří se batolili u sukni maminek tenkrát, když náměstíčko patřilo jemu a jeho kamarádům. Nevrátí se tam nikdy, aby si hrál. Už nikdy nebude Mompracemským Tygrem ani Vinetouem, už nikdy se nebude skrývat za rohy a vraty domů, plížit se pomyslnými travinami a křovím k plynové lampě, jež byla taborovým ohněm, s dřevěným nožem v zubech, stříleje z kapslíkové pistolky. K**

¹⁹ Václav Řezáč, *Větrná setba* [1935], Prague: Mladá fronta, 1961. Further references to the novel will be given in parentheses directly after quotations or references.

čemu byl odsouzen? Nebyl již chlapcem, který si hraje, nebyl dosud ani mužem, který jedná. Nepoznal radosti, která by oblažovala tato léta. (p. 72)

In this long passage, of which I quote only a part, the narration is focalised through Petr, but Petr's experience is presented in the narrator's discourse, except in the narrated monologue (which I have emphasised) that reproduces Petr's thoughts.²⁰ In the narrated monologue the narrator presents the thoughts as if they were thought by Petr, but they are clearly cast in the narrator's language which can be seen from the syntactic structure of the sentences. However, the use of narrated monologue creates a seemingly blurred border between what are Petr's thoughts and what is the narrator's statement which keeps the focus on Petr's experience while letting the narrator have his say.

The passages in which the narrator expresses the strongest degree of empathy with Petr are focalised through Petr in combination with the narrator's use of 'hoch' or 'chlapec' in the description of him. These function rather like endearments, at the same time as they mark the narrator's analytical distance from the situation. The first example of this is in the scene in which Petr has sought refuge in a church. However, his experience of the place only contributes to his sense of disillusion with the faith of his childhood:

A **hoch** tu stál, svíral brašnu jako lup a hledal v sobě zbožnost svých dětských let, sílu modliteb opakovaných s takovou důvěrou, víru, která se vytratila z jeho srdce v nepřipamatovatelných chvílích, nevěděl jak. Snad proto, že se tolikrát nesplnilo, oč prosil, snad proto, že druzí řekli: Ty ještě věříš? a smáli se a zůstávali nepotrestáni, snad proto, že jeho rozum, tak pyšný na svou sílu v těch ohnivých letech objevování sebe a světa, nacházel trhliny, jež se mu stály propastmi. Snad pro to vše a pro mnohé jiné, co vábilo více než radost věřit.
(pp. 86-87)

²⁰ Here I use Dorrit Cohn's terminology for the narrative presentation of consciousness. The definition of a narrated monologue is that it reproduces a character's thought, but cast in the language of the narrator. What characterises the narrated monologue is therefore that it can be transformed into an interior monologue by changing the subject in grammatical third person into the first person. See Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, Princeton NJ and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 100.

One must notice that the narrator here at least adopts a rhetorical ignorance in the attempt at identifying with Petr, marked by the adverbial 'snad'. A similar identification takes place in the scene where Petr betrays his father to the military police:

Strážníková ramena se zdvihla rozpaky. Dělo se, co předvídal. Hněvivé zavrčení se mu ozvalo v hrdle, když se ohlédl po Petrovi. A jak se otáčel, na jediný okamžik, otec a syn se setkali očima. Prudčeji než předtím, šílenství strachu a nenávisti zavířilo **chlapcovou** duší. Nemohou odejít, nemohou je tu nechat s ním samotné. Zdálo se mu, že smrt po něm sáhla z těch zuřivých modrých očí, čekala na ně, jako tam za vraty čekala ta zrzavá děvka. Nikdy později si nedovedl odpovědět na otázku, co více, zda strach nebo představa té čekající ženy, mu vyhnalo z úst ta slova. (p. 106)

The slide from focalised narration into narrated monologue dramatises Petr's fear of the moment, but the narrator immediately takes over the narration with his conclusory comment on the moment. Insertions, or sometimes longer passages, of narrated monologue are often employed in the characterisation of Petr as a means of dramatising what goes on in his mind at a given moment. One example of this is the 'Nemohou odejít, nemohou je tu nechat s ním samotné' (p. 106), from the passage quoted above. The slide between passages in focalised narration, narrated monologue and dissonant psycho-narration is typical of the narrative presentation of Petr.²¹ It signifies that while the narrator identifies himself with Petr's point of view (through focalised narration and narrated monologue), he never relinquishes the privilege of having the final say in the interpretation of Petr's thoughts and feelings. The narrator appears as an authority on what goes on in Petr's mind, both in the past and in the future, as in the last sentence quoted above. Another example of this typical mode of narratorial summary is the following comment on Petr's perception of his

²¹ Psycho-narration is defined as the narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness. Grammatically the narration is in the third person and the grammatical tense is the tense of the narration. Ibid., pp. 11-12. Psycho-narration occurs as two different types: dissonant and consonant. Dissonant psycho-narration is characterised by distance between the narrator and the consciousness that he narrates. Consonant psycho-narration is characterised by the narrator identifying himself with the consciousness he narrates. As a consequence of this, the narrator's consciousness is limited to that of the character. Ibid., p. 275, note 10.

mother when she tells him about his father's death: 'Kdykoli později si vzpomněl na tento výjev, připadal mu jako divadlo hrané pateticky a špatně' (p. 201). The narrator typically uses psycho-analogies²² to encompass a given mood or state of mind; for example, 'V květnu vzpíral svou samotu jako balvan, který mu hrozil rozdrtit srdce' (p. 21), or 'V jeho těle se vzbouřily smysly a lomcovaly jako zuřiví vězňové slabými stěnami svého vězení' (p. 39). Mravcová has pointed out this and similar occurrences of 'expressive exaggeration in the narrator's discourse which does not correspond to the age of the character'.²³ She suggests that such exaggerations are derived from 'a certain autobiographical nature of the story' and, as a result of this, an emotional connection between the author and the protagonist's experience.²⁴ One could interpret these rather as a means of lending pathos to otherwise trivial adolescent emotional experiences, or as the adult narrator having the capacity to verbalise Petr's subliminal thoughts of which he could only have been aware inexplicitly. The dramatisation of Petr's thoughts in narrated monologues together with the expressive imagery of the narrator's characterisations certainly create the impression of an overwrought, highly-strung consciousness.

2.2 The fictionalisation of adolescence in the narrative presentation of Petr

The narrative of *Větrná setba* conceptualises Petr's awakening sexuality and his relationships with women as a constant conflict in him between ideal love and sexual desire. The narrative discourse puts this semantic opposition in motion through the Kama-plot (ideal love) and the sub-plots involving Petr's relationships with other women (sexual desire) respectively. On the semantic level of the narrative this conflict manifests itself as the ideologeme created by the conflicting semes 'purity' and, what is physical, carnal, 'impurity'.

²² This term is Dorrit Cohn's. It defines a simile which is 'used to describe a mental instant'. Although Cohn does not state this explicitly, these analogies may also encompass emotions experienced over an extended period of time. See *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, p. 37.

²³ See Mravcová, 'Personalizace vyprávění', p. 58.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

2.2.1 The Kama-plot: ideal love

The Kama-plot creates the framework of the narrative macrostructure. She appears only in the first two and the last three chapters. Using Chatman's terms 'kernels' and 'satellites' (originally Barthes' concepts), the narrative presentation of Petr's relationship with Kama can be conceptualised as the main 'kernel' of the narrative, although it is not fully realised as a kernel until the end of the narrative. The kernel is elaborated in the form of satellites throughout the novel, that is the passages that narrate Petr's dreaming of her.²⁵ At the beginning of the novel this plot is conceptualised as the rivalry between Petr and his friend Vít. However, both Kama and Vít leave Prague (Kama to stay with her family in the country – Vít to go to the front) so that the Kama-plot is suspended until Petr discovers that she has returned. His discovery of Kama's return is the result of the epiphany scene in which he is led to her house, as if by a greater force, and sees a light in the window that he thinks is hers.

The concept of ideal love finds its expression in the narrative's development of Petr's relationship with Kama.²⁶ The first chapter of the novel presents his unrequited interest in her as the cause of his adolescent misery. When Kama leaves Prague, she becomes a lost object of desire for him:

Sedal doma, slepý a hluchý ke všemu, co se dalo mimo něj, a ošetřoval svůj žal. A hrozil se, kdykoli jeho myšlenky, unavené stálým kroužením kolem jednoho předmětu, se vydávaly jiným směrem. **Což ji dost nemiloval? I když pro něj byla ztracena, musí jí zachovat věrnost.** Sestavoval si dlouhé řeči, kterými ji přesvědčoval a získával pro sebe. (p. 20)

²⁵ Chatman defines 'kernels' as 'narrative moments that give rise to cruxes in the direction taken by events. They are nodes or hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one (or more) possible paths'. He defines a 'satellite' as 'a minor plot event', and 'Satellites entail no choice, but are solely the workings-out of the choices made at the kernels. They necessarily imply the existence of kernels, but not vice versa. Their function is that of filling in, elaborating, completing the kernel; they form the flesh on the skeleton. [...]. Satellites need not occur in the immediate proximity of kernels, again because discourse is not equivalent to story. They may precede or follow the kernels, even at a distance.' See Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 53-54. In the case of the Kama-plot the continuous choice is whether Kama will want Petr or not.

²⁶ The plot structure that relates to Kama resembles that of a journey that the hero of a chivalric romance has to carry out in order to win the princess in the end. The hero has to undergo a number of trials before he makes himself worthy of her favour. Except that in Petr's case it is rather a matter of making himself 'unworthy'.

In stating that Petr ‘nurses his grief’, the narrator emphasises that Petr relishes his own unhappiness. The rhetorical question and answer in narrated monologue (emphasised in quotation) serves to demonstrate how Petr dramatises his emotional conflict to himself; a behaviour typical of adolescence. The narrator’s descriptions of Petr do not seem to seek to undermine Petr’s self-dramatisation with irony, but rather use it to emphasise the seriousness with which Petr experiences the situation.

Apart from the first chapter, Kama does not appear again in person before chapter seventeen (the third to last chapter). Kama as an idea does, however, appear in Petr’s thoughts throughout the narrative, either as a ‘positive’ daydream in which he idealises her beauty or as a ‘negative’ daydream in which he stylises himself into the role of the rejected lover who lets the anger of his own humiliation out on the lost object of desire. Kama symbolises what he wants, but cannot get. On the one hand, she becomes the unachievable ideal and, on the other, the perpetual source of his sense of inferiority and humiliation. An example of the latter is a daydream in which he imagines that Kama is introducing him to her betrothed, an officer. Petr dramatises to himself a way of insulting this man, but does not really succeed (p. 45). Petr’s awareness of the ridiculousness of his own fantasy evokes a surge of spite in him that he acts out by calling the bourgeois paní Házová a sow, not to her face, but hidden by the gallery (p. 46) – an act that shows the weakness of his spite: ‘Ve chvílce ticha Petrovo srdce bilo divokou, mstivou, sprostou radostí’ (p. 46). The narrator does not comment on Petr’s pettiness in this episode, but leaves it to speak for itself.

After Kama has left Prague Petr channels all his longing into love letters to her. The narrator states as a fact that Petr knows that he is never going to send the letters, but this is contradicted by Petr’s thought about them: ‘Jednou snad se přece dostanou do rukou té, jíž byly určeny, a pak budou svědectvím výmluvnějším všech přísah’ (p. 21). Later, however, the letters acquire a function in the plot. After Petr has met Kama again, the narrator uses Petr’s letters to show how Petr, in the course of the narrative, has rid himself of romantic dreaming and has learned to manipulate: ‘Byl něžný, vpravdě milenecký a někdy oklamán sám sebou. Roztřídil pečlivě dopisy, jež jí kdysi

psával, ale neodesílal. Vybral z nich všechny, kde se zpovídal ze svého ponížení a křivolakého bloudění své touhy, a ostatní jí přinesl. Čtla je a plakala' (pp. 207-08).²⁷ Before this point, he has carefully thought out his strategy to win her love: 'Usoudil, že Kama je z těch dívek, na něž je třeba jít pomalu a jež nutno přesvědčovat' (p. 204). In addition to his own letters, he also uses literature to woo her. It is apparent from Petr's reflection on this manipulation that he has renounced his previous sentimental relationship with literature and replaced it with a materialistic view of love:

V tuto dobu, tak podobnou jaru, co mohlo víc působit na srdce dívky, zjevně kolísající, než básníci? Ústa básníků ať mluví za něho, který se bál vyslovit jedinou sentimentální větu. Ať zpívají Toman, Baudelaire, ať vábí Hamsun. Když v něm dovedli probudit hlad po kráse a po životě, ať mu opatří daň, po které vždycky toužil. (p. 205)

The passage also shows how Petr's belief that life owes him something has not changed. However, in spite of previously stressing Petr's egoistic materialism, the narrative shows him playing out all the clichés of seduction in a sentimentalised scene. This scene, in which Petr holds Kama's hand, would be comic if it were not for the seriousness with which the narrator treats it (p. 206).

The narrative presentation of Petr's relationship with Kama predominantly focuses on Petr's view of her. However, the turning point in his courtship for her is marked by a change in the narration: the narrator interferes with a long explanatory comment which summarises Kama's experience of Petr. Here, I only quote part of it:

Ano, bylo na básnicích, aby za ně vyslovili to, co oni dva by se nikdy neodhodlali říci. Kamu již unavoval ten divoký běh za uskutečňováním představ. Nenacházela kamarádů, o jakých snila. Naopak – zamlčela to ovšem Petrovi – v několika případech se z předstíraného kamarádství proklubalo namlouvání. Přemýšlela stále častěji o Petrovi. (p. 205-06)

Until this moment of the story the reader has not been given much insight into the psychology of Kama. The impression created has been that she is an

²⁷ I shall discuss the development of Petr's detached attitude in the section titled "Sexual desire" in the characterisation of Petr'.

independent and emancipated young woman. However, from this point onwards Kama's generally emancipated and independent attitude has been exchanged for a romantic dream of love – so the narrator informs the reader:²⁸ 'Chtěla být milována jednou provždy (Vít byl jen zkušenost, jíž se učíme) a byla přesvědčena, že to dokáže. Ano, za jejími poletujícími sny kráčelo pevné odhodlání' (p. 207). Even in this intimate matter Kama's resoluteness dominates her thinking. The narrator presents Kama as a positive example to Petr; where Petr dreams and pities himself, Kama acts:

Petr dostával díl všeho, co Bertík uchvátil. Byl krutý rozdíl v konání jeho a Kamině. Kama si vydělávala své živobytí způsobem nejpočestnějším a obětovávala své odpůldne práci pro ty, jež bída a hlad postihovaly nejvíce. Avšak Kamina práce ve Studentské stravovací akci byla Petrovi příliš pomalá, nenápadná, piplavá, vpravdě ženská; její výsledky nebylo nikde vidět. Horlivost jeho ducha byla žádostivá vzrušení, činů okázalých a hlomozných. Co by v tom našel odlišného od svého kancelářského zaměstnání? (p. 203)

Apart from showing how misogynous Petr is, the passage also provides Kama with the moral high ground. Kama's work actually makes a difference whereas Petr's earnings working for Bertík are based on profiteering. Petr has renounced any hope of moral purity as part of his materialistic attitude: 'Nikdy nic v jeho životě nebude úplně čisté. Ostatně pryč s takovými povídkami! Raději žít lépe než hůř. Co je mu po tom, jakým způsobem hodlá Bertík nabýt své bohatství?' (p. 197)

Whether achieved or not, the idea of purity is the abstract standard against which Petr measures everything he does, feels and thinks. It is associated with his ideal of beauty (he longs for the 'purest beauty' (p. 48)) and his idea of what is morally right is described as purity (as in the last quoted excerpt). Most of all, however, it is linked with his idealised love for Kama. After one of the meetings

²⁸ One cannot help thinking that this is a bit too convenient for the narrator. The Kama character could be the background for Řezáč's later creation of Jarmila in *Rozhraní*. They share the unhappy love story before they find love in the novel's protagonist. More important, they both have the role of a kind of saviour in the protagonist's life, someone who helps him to better himself.

with the maid Frída in the cellar he succumbs to moral scruples: 'To nebyl on, to nebyl on. Jen kdyby se Kama vrátila, vše by se opět změnilo a bylo čisté jako dřív' (p. 52). Kama embodies an ideal of love that is distinct from Petr's experience of physical desire. For Petr the idea of purity represents a refuge from his sexual desire, which he perceives as an alien force: 'Cosi mocnějšiho než jeho chtění vedlo jeho skutky, at' se vzpouzel nebo poddával. Nenáviděl to něco, jež ho vždy zavleklo pod bičíky hanby a pokoření' (p. 66) – here in connection with the waitress Žička, with whom Bertík has a relationship. Likewise, after he has been sick the illness has purged him of his physical desire and he can return to safe dreaming about Kama: 'Nemoc, jež ho zeslabila, jako by ho byla i očistila a zbavila vši žádosti. Setrval u nejraději u snu o Kamě' (p. 142). His purged state of mind does not last long, though. In a state of daydreaming he finds himself on the way to Marta: 'A návrat k Martě mu připadal jako úmyslná vzpoura proti všemu, co předstíralo, že je lepší, a přitom lhalo a zrazovalo' (p. 145). This time he turns his negative feelings into sheer egoism: 'Petr cítil příliv jistoty, síly a lhostejnosti ke všemu, co nebyl on sám' (p. 145). From this moment Petr's relationship with Marta also changes: 'Probouzela se v něm nová, čistší rozkoš' (p. 145). The idea of purity, as expressed here, is of an aesthetic nature in that Petr finds pleasure in admiring the beauty of her body. It is a pleasure detached from the woman that only relates to the body, and which is therefore, perhaps, less threatening: 'Když nemluvila, ani se nedívala, miloval její tělo tak dokonale utvářené, bílou plet' zružovělou jeho polibky, záhyby zjemněné modrými stíny, klid živého masa, jež se vlnilo dechem a slabě vonělo' (p.145).²⁹ This aesthetic view of physicality supports the assumption that Petr looks at women as objects rather than human beings.

Kama acquires the function of bringing a purging into Petr's life which is indicated when Petr compares kissing her to previously kissing Frída: 'Ale tato tma a tyto polibky byly přece jiné. Snad ho omývalo jako vlny čistých pramenů ze všeho, co bylo' (p. 208). The 'snad' of the thought raises ambiguity about the

²⁹ There is a contrast here with the images of violent fantasies that appear elsewhere in the novel. For example, where Petr visits the prostitute: 'Bít, ó, moci tak bít do toho bílého a lhostejného těla' (p. 69).

statement and could indicate that it is here the narrator rather than Petr who suggests the role that Kama performs in Petr's thoughts. However, it could also be an expression of Petr's wish for being purged. The motif of purging appears fully developed in the scene where Petr kneels with his head on Kama's knees. Petr's thoughts take the form of a confession of his repentance for his alleged impurity; what the narrator describes as 'pýcha zkušenosti a hříchu, předčasné zralosti a podlého chlapství' (p. 211). In this confession, however, the narrator interprets Petr's feelings and thoughts; it is not an interior monologue, as one might have expected. At the end of it, the description of Petr postulates that a change has taken place within him: 'Cítil se očištěn před Kamou touto němou zpovědí, a přece jí neřekl ani slova. [...]. Ale je to pochováno od této chvíle a nikdy se už k tomu nevrátí' (p. 211). The ending of the novel signifies a new beginning for Petr who acts confidently and ends the novel smiling (quite a contrast to the rest of the novel). He also decides to go to university to study law. This ambition is nurtured by his desire to equal Kama in terms of social status.³⁰

The end of the narrative suggests, parallel with the end of the war, that Petr is ready for a new beginning: 'Je čas, Kamo, abych opustil Bertíkovu špeluňku, je čas začít znovu a z jiného čepu' (pp. 212-13). Kama is the inspiration for Petr's change whereby her positive function in the narrative is underlined.³¹ Kama personifies the idea of love as saviour.³² The narrative presents Petr's reunion with her as a consequence of the epiphany scene following his schoolmate Ottoni's suicide: wandering around the streets of Prague, preoccupied by thoughts of ending his own life, he suddenly finds himself in front of Kama's house: 'Běžel v kruhu. Zde začal jeho bláznivý běh za nedostizitelným preludem a zde měl skončit. [...] Opojení, v němž došel až sem, vyprchalo, a cévu za cévou začala se v něm rozlévat studená hrůza. Byl přesvědčen, že mířil k cíli vlastního odhodlání. Nyní ho napadlo, že byl veden

³⁰ In doing so he also conforms with his mother's ambition for him.

³¹ Kama's final expression of concern that Petr is going to leave her because she is older than him seems completely out of place, most of all because her age had previously been said to be the same as Petr's: 'Kama byla stejně stará s Petrem' (p. 9).

³² She is the first of a series of female saviours in Řezáč's novels: Lída in *Svědék*, Jarmila in *Rozhraní*, even Bagar's wife has such a role in *Nástup*.

rukou mocnější, než byla jeho vůle' (pp. 178-79). He then sees a light in one of the windows in Kama's house and discovers that he is not able to realise his intention of committing suicide. The following day his explanation to himself of what happened interprets the incident as an almost miraculous event: 'Objevil si právě život a byla to silná, radostná věc. Včera mu jej darovala Kama' (p. 181). The idea of a higher power, expressed above, certainly carries connotations of Fate, if not an idea of God. The epiphany episode thus supports the interpretation of Kama as saviour, and in a sense Petr's reunion with her is only an elaboration on this theme. In this way the narrative confirms on the macro-level of plot the function that Kama has in Petr's idealised image of her.

2.2.2 'Sexual desire' in the characterisation of Petr

The second part of the semantic opposition 'purity'/'impurity' is disseminated in the plots that involve Petr's relationships with women before his reunion with Kama. In these the focus of the narrative presentation is on his awakening sexuality. His classmate Bertík's talk about his adventures with women excites Petr's imagination and drives him to forsake the idea of Kama (p. 28). The narrator presents Bertík's talk of his adventures with attributes such as 'uncouth' ('surové podání') and 'coarse' ('sprostý obraz půvabů neznámé ženy', both p. 28). In his description of Bertík the narrator identifies himself with Petr's perception which occurs in his reaction to Bertík's suggestion of finding a girl: 'Bylo to hnusné, ale Petr nechtěl být zahanben' (p. 28). Petr perceives the physicality of sex as filthy – this is a notion that seems to colour all his endeavours with women. (The narrative does not explain where this perception comes from other than that it could be traced to his mother's influence.) The descriptions of Petr's experience of sexual desire reflect this perception. The cellar in which he has his rendezvous with the maid Frída is described as a damp, smelly place, full of rats (pp. 46-47). This space represents his awareness of the baseness of what he is doing – 'vědomím nízkosti' (p. 58). Once, the narrator states directly that fear of the cellar contributes to his pangs of conscience: 'Z každé té schůzky si odnášel pevné rozhodnutí, že se už nikdy

sem nevrátí. Sklep se svou špínou, vlhkem a krápníky zaprašených pavučin ho děsil a upevňoval v něm přesvědčení, že jedná špatně' (p. 52).

The narrative presentation of Petr's awakening desire contains the ambivalence typical of the adolescent's first experiences of sex ('Cítil se střídavě chlapecký a hrozně ošklivý [...]') (p. 58)). Although his physical desire fills him with anxiety and guilt Petr is also obsessed with the thought of copulating with Frída. He fantasies about raping her, inspired by a newspaper article about a rape case. These fantasies stress the ambiguity of his experience of his own potential capacity for violence. He is at the same time frightened and excited by the idea of rape (p. 48). The narratorial analysis of Petr's desire gives the reader a glimpse into a darker aspect of Petr's psychology which occurs in situations that evoke his sense of inferiority.³³ His thoughts of violence could possibly be interpreted as an expression of a desire for power. In Frída's case, Petr uses her to make up for his humiliation by paní Házová, Frída's employer. With Frída, he can feel superior. When she does not give in to his physical desire he, in return, humiliates her by rejecting her.

The thought of his own sexual inexperience torments him and drives him to visit a prostitute: 'Dívky kráčely kolem něho v lehkých šatech a volným krokem, mýjely ho lhostejně, aniž která z nich si všimla jeho pohledů. Ne, nikdy mu nebude dopřáno... Napadlo ho, že by mohl zemřít, aniž by poznal. Musí tomu zabránit stůj co stůj' (p. 67). The stories of his school mates have already prepared him for this ('Ostatně nebude první ani poslední ze třídy. Slyšel o tom už dost, aby věděl, kudy do toho' (p. 67)).³⁴ However, Petr's experience at the prostitute's only produces disillusion, self-loathing and a sense that he has corrupted his own values. After all the money with which he paid the prostitute, was money that he had intended to return to his mother (p. 69). The narrative

³³ Another example of this is his reaction after visiting a prostitute. What has remained in his memory is the prostitute's comment "'On je tady poprvé, milánku, že ano'". The thought that follows those words expresses a violent reaction to his own feeling of inferiority in the situation: 'Bít, ó, moci tak bít do toho bílého a lhostejného těla' (p. 69). His perception of her body as 'indifferent' also indicates a sense of disappointment with his expectations.

³⁴ Petr's visit to the prostitute is a commonplace in the portrayal of male adolescence, for example in Musil's *Törless*. It is also a commonplace in the novelistic portrayal of Prague – the motif of the old streets of Prague inhabited by prostitutes occurs, for example, in Čapek-Chod's *Kašpar Lén mstitel*.

presentation of Petr's thoughts on his way from the prostitute (in narrated monologue) shows how, in his mind, sex is, at this moment, associated with something filthy and abominable, something that fills him with disgust.

Petr's relationship with the bourgeoisie, Marta, introduces a positive change in his experience of his own sexuality:

Přicházel k ní denně a stále si nebyl jist, čím je k ní váben a poután. Láska to bylo posmívané slovo v ústech jeho spolužáků. Proč by měl milovat právě on, když jeho poměr byl ze všech nejméně čistý? Dovolával se stále znovu své pýchy nad tím, že má milenkou. Začal přivykat rozkoši, kterou mu poskytovala, a dychtil po ní. V zápolení se stínem otcovým vyvolával v sobě nenávist tak silnou, že pociťoval uspokojení nad tím, co se stalo. Tak se jeho poměr k Martě ustaloval a pevněl. (p. 125)

In the beginning of their relationship Petr is haunted by moral scruples about the nature of their affair, but gradually he lets the benefits that his connection with Marta gives him outweigh his doubts: Marta teaches him physical love, and her material contributions to his life in the form of new clothes and other luxuries raise his self-confidence among the other boys at school. Eventually, his call-up presents him with an excuse for continuing seeing her: 'Odvod mu usnadnil odhodit všechny dobré úmysly. Stala se mu prostředkem, který mu měl pomoci od vojny, a nacházel veliké uspokojení v tom, že ji mohl takto snížit sám před sebou. Nemiloval ji přece nikdy, mstil se jen a nyní jeho pomsta vrcholila' (p. 154). This passage shows again how his fantasy of power plays a part in his relation with women. When Petr realises that Marta has found a new lover, it reveals to him the true nature of their relationship: 'Chtěl se jí zbavit a nyní viděl, že si s ním hrála jako s malým chlapcem' (p. 162). He returns to her flat to talk to her, but as a final humiliation she does not let him in. He then behaves like a little boy by spitting on her doorstep. Petr's love affair with Marta signifies a development in sexual maturity, although not in a corresponding emotional maturity. More important, however, its function later justifies how

Petr's repeated defeats in his relationship with women have made him cynical.³⁵ Marta also justifies to him his surrender of his earlier romantic ideal of love.³⁶ Marta embodies the opposition to almost everything that is pure and thus also represents the opposite of Petr's ideal of romantic love, Kama. The narrator exposes how Petr in his thoughts places her on a par with the Bertíks of this world: 'Všechno, co bylo dobré a krásné, je pryč, na světě zůstali jen Bertíci a Marty, a válka trvá, jako by nechtěla nikdy skončit' (p. 142).³⁷

It is in the point of the body that Petr's personal history converges with that of the other boys and with the greater history of the war. The narrative links the theme of awakening sexuality with the war. The explicit linking of Thanatos with Eros occurs in Vít's explanation of why he tried to rape Kama before he went off to the front: 'Zachtělo se mi něco urvat, něco mít, než nebude nic. Protože co je to čest, slušnost, ohledy nebo třeba láska, chceš-li z hlediska člověka, který umírá? A já třeba umírám' (p. 18). Faced with death physical desire replaces ideal love; it reduces man to his physical needs. The gratification of desire becomes a proof of his remaining alive. The narrator lets Petr's friend Vít be the spokesman for this new cynicism that has grown out of his experiences at the front: 'Poznáš, že tvé tělo je všechno, co máš, že je to velký pán, o kterého je třeba se bát a kterému je sladko sloužit, že bez něho není nic' (p. 34).

The narrator indirectly places part of the reason for Petr's adolescent crisis in the context of the war: 'Život byl uvolněný svah a sesouval se naň. Kameny domácích nesvárů, štěrk války o drť bídy, dusivý jíl předčasně probuzené smyslnosti' (pp. 148-49) and 'Nedovedl si říci, že všechno jeho dychtění je předčasné; cítil se oloupen (p. 67). The narrator here describes Petr's awakening

³⁵ 'Přivykal cynismu a skrýval cit, jemuž se bál uvěřit' (p. 149) the narrator states in one of his analyses of Petr.

³⁶ Another passage that shows this is the following description of Petr's relationship with Kama: 'Byly dny, kdy práce ve Studentské akci zdržela Kamu až do noci, a byly jiné, kdy přímo odmítala se s ním sejít, neboť, jak říkala, chtěla mít trochu času i sama pro sebe. Tehdy jím zuřivost zrovna zmítala. Všechno jeho úsilí bylo marné, ztrácel jen zbytečně čas. A snil o tom, jak by se jí pomstil, jak by ji ponižil a dokázal si, že o ni nedbá. [...] Navykl u Marty tělesné lásce; jeho nynější odříkání trvalo příliš dlouho a všechny hezké ženy, jež potkával, se mu začínaly zdát svůdnější a snadněji dosažitelné než Kama. Byl hlupák, že u ní tak tvrdošíjně setrval' (p. 198).

³⁷ The passage is part of a longer narrated monologue.

sexual desire as 'before its time'. This description links up with his portrayal elsewhere of the attenuation of sexual morality that the war had caused. For example, the narrator's discourse describes how the teachers and parents tacitly accept this fact (p. 154). Vít proclaims, telling Petr that Kama is getting married: 'Takové holky jako ona budou pomalu přežitkem. Uvidíš, jak tahle válka obrátí všechno na ruby' (pp. 36-37). Elsewhere the narrator describes a woman in the street who smiles enticingly at Petr:

Díval se na její veselou tvář, jak ho mýjela, nadotčená bídou, jasná v šedi ulice, na její divoká ňadra, jež chůze kolébala a oddělovala každým krokem. Zachytila jeho pohled, otočila se a usmála. Jít za ní. Jaké dobrodružství! Kam by ho vedla? Dnešek je plný možností. Ženy ztratily stud ve vášni, jež zůstávala nenasycena. (p. 71)

Apart from Petr's mother and Frída, the portrayal of the novel's female characters follows the Madonna *versus* whore construction. The narrator describes them as seductive temptresses who have lost their inhibitions in the realisation of their newly won freedom now that the war has broken down previous social and moral barriers. The paradox of the narrator's prevalently condemnatory and, at times, almost outraged view of the female characters is that he actually also shows how these women have managed to create a life of their own and achieved a kind of independence.³⁸ However, the narrator presents the women's lack of sexual morality as part of a general transformation towards a more materialistic approach to life. Through his portrayal of the female characters the narrator puts the blame for the 'premature maturity' of the boys on social conditions that are not inherent in the process of adolescent self-discovery.

2.3 The ideologeme of inferiority *versus* power

Class determines the way in which the play of significations is structured in the psychological characterisation of Petr. The narrator uses Petr's class to explain

³⁸ Until she, stereotypically, conformed to Petr's expectation of her, as presented in the narrator's discourse, Kama was portrayed as an emancipated young woman whose personal development the war had actually fostered.

part of his psychological make-up. From the outset the narrator formulates Petr's discontent with his life in terms of class. Petr's friend Vít, like Kama, comes from a bourgeois family and therefore, as Petr perceives it, has all the privileges that belong to that class. The first indication of their unequal relationship occurs when Vít's loans to Petr are mentioned; subsequently, it is indicated by Petr's perception of Kama's opinion about the two of them, a perception based on envy: 'Bývaly však chvíle jako tato, kdy ji Petr podezíral z hlubšího zájmu o Víta. Tak ve všem byl život štedřejší k Vítovi' (p. 9). In the context of the previous description of Petr's opinion of Vít, the last sentence of my quotation implies how Petr's relationship with Vít contains something like class envy. This is later confirmed in the narrator's discourse, in a passage which explains that Petr's envy has its roots in his sense of social inferiority:

Jako v lásce, tak i v tomto přátelství byl navrchu ten, pro něhož tolik neznamenal. Vít spojoval v sobě vše, čeho se Petrovi nedostávalo. Byl ze staré měšťanské rodiny, dítě zrozené v souladu a hojnosti. Jeho budoucnost byla zabezpečena. Cesta, po níž měl jít, byla vykácena jeho dědem a vydlážděna jeho otcem. Jednoho dne převezme rodinný závod a bude jej vést v pokorné posloupnosti. Tak Petrova láska k němu se rozhořivala z plamínku závidi a rostla z hořkosti srovnávání. (p. 10)

Vít is presented as someone who has all the opportunities that he could ever desire, and, even more important, his privileged background lends him a natural self-confidence: 'V Petrovi probouzela [krása] neustálé chvění, zmatené tužby, byl jí rván a nesen jako vichřicí; Vít ji vnímal klidněji, cíť, že z darů světa si vybral ty nejlepší' (pp. 11-12). Thus the narrator's discourse establishes the key psychological element in Petr to be envy.

In the opening scene with Petr, Vít and Kama in a café after a performance at the National Theatre, the dialogue between the three of them is broken up by the narrator's analysis of Petr and Vít's friendship. Petr plays the role of the jealous gooseberry who feels left out of the company. His physical reactions manifest the tension within him; for example, when Kama, shows her fear of Vít's being sent off to the front: 'V jejím hlase byla úzkost tak opravdová, že Petr sevřel pod stolem pěsti' (p. 8). Further on, a long passage explains Petr's

perception of Kama and Vít's relationship. In this the narration alternates between narrated monologue that reproduces Petr's thoughts and dissonant psycho-narration in which the narrator summarises Petr's pondering (I have put the inserts of psycho-narration in bold):

Nezničí skutečnost zavřením očí. Aniž se vzájemně dohodli (neměli k tomu dosud příležitosti), jistě uvažují Kama i Vít, jak by se ho nejlépe zbavili. Nechtějí mu ublížit. **Připomínal si Kamino chování, každý její pohled, postoj, posunek, každé slovo.** Nebylo pochyby. Ať dělala a mluvila cokoli, všecko bylo určeno Vítovi. K němu, Petrovi, se obracela jen ze slušnosti. **A ujišťoval se, že tomu tak bylo od prvního dne jejich společné známosti.** Ti dva si byli určeni. Bylo mezi nimi tolik pojítek, která nikdy nemohla vzniknout mezi ním a Kamou. Co mohl mezi nimi chtít on, který neměl nic a který, kdoví, snad všechen svůj zájem o umění předstíral jen proto, aby se mohl přátelit s Vítem. **A ze všeho nejvíc ho pokořovala myšlenka, že jeho přítomnost na jejich schůzkách je placena Vítem, tím Vítem, který by ho patrně viděl nejraději za horami, ale nedokáže mu to říci.** Proč si vůbec kdy vzpomněli chodit s tou dívkou? Bylo jim lépe bez ní. On však už déle nebude hrát úlohu z milosti trpěného. (pp. 12-13)

This passage puts even stronger emphasis on Petr's sense of inferiority than my previous excerpt. The sentences in narrated monologue show how he sentimentalises himself as the victim of the couple's conspiracy to get rid of him. The fact that Petr assumes that Kama and Vít are meant for each other because they possess the same social status shows that Petr's sense of social inferiority transposes itself into his conception of intimate human relationships; because of his sense of social inferiority he also experiences a sense of inferiority in matters erotic. In the last sentence of psycho-narration the narrator's presentation of Petr's thinking serves to emphasise the degree of Petr's sense of humiliation. The narratorial analysis in the reproduction of Petr's thoughts forms a detached contrast to the created impression of inner drama. This makes Petr's attitude to Vít and Kama seem exaggerated, even childish. The narrator generally does not intrude in the narrative discourse with direct comments. A single example of intrusion, which is so brief that one could

overlook it, is in the passage where he describes Petr's coat: 'Ten kabát, *nezapomínejme*, dostal obnošený od Víta' (p. 9, my italics). Here he rhetorically addresses the narratee, it seems with the purpose of creating sympathy for Petr's poor material status in relation to Vít's.

The origin of Petr's sense of inferiority becomes evident in the narrative presentation of Petr's relationship with his parents. His mother works as a servant to their landlord. Her position demands that at one point when Petr falls ill she, instead of attending to her own son, has to fetch the doctor for the son of the landlord. Petr's mother embodies the prototype of the working class woman who has to accept her station in life. However, she wants Petr to attend grammar school so that he will not have to serve other people as she has all her life. She expects him to be grateful that she has worked for his future, but this evokes only a sense of guilt and anger in him: 'Kolikrát na to myslil, kolikrát se cítil vinen matčíným údělem a kolikrát snil, jak vše bude jednou napraveno! Slyšel-li však táž obvinění z jejich úst, vzpíral se je uznat. Tón sebelitování, který postřehl v matčíných výčitkách, ho zatvrdil' (p. 42). The excerpt constitutes an example of how social ambition has been engraved into Petr's mind as a remedy for his poor background. The excerpt also reveals that Petr is unable to feel any real sympathy with his mother and instead turns his feeling of powerlessness against her. This feeling of powerlessness shows itself in Petr's thoughts when he is waiting for his mother to return in the evening:

Proč matka nejde? Proč ji tam zdržují tak dlouho, proč ona sama nemá tolik odvahy, aby řekla: Je už noc, páni, musím domů. Nyní tam stojí nad neckami prádla v mlhovém oparu, který se sráží na oknech a stéká dolů v slzách. Konečky jejích prstů jsou rýhovány jako valcha, na které vypírá špínu z košil, spodků a prostěradel svého panstva. Živitelé. Nezapomeň, Petře, políbit ruku milostpaní, až půjde dolů. Ale Petr nikdy nepotká milostpaní, když jde dolů. (p. 93)

His thoughts are narrated in narrated monologue and thus the narrator implicitly shares Petr's indignation that his mother has to serve people apparently devoid of feelings. The imagery of this passage lends a note of sympathy to the portrait

of the mother which otherwise seems to be lacking in Petr's self-centred criticism of her.

Envy as an expression of social inferiority also manifests itself in the characterisation of Petr's concierge father, although the father's envy takes the form of snobbery. Petr's father resents the fact that he belongs to the working class and that his wife works as a servant. Petr's thoughts about his father when he is dreading the father's returning home at night presents a man who feels that life has treated him badly, and that he is without fault in this:

Až sestoupí z výšin pochlebenství, kterým ho častují v putykách, oslovující ho „pane inženýre“, shledá v tomto přízemním kutlochu, že je pouhým domovníkem, jehož manželka se vrací z posluhy shrbená únavou, rozzuří se znovu. Čeho mohl dosáhnout při svých schopnostech, kdyby ho byl život nepodvedl? Se svou postavou a chůzí, se svým chováním! Ne nadarmo se k němu chovají mazavkové s akademickými tituly jako rovný k rovnému. Nebyl a nebude nikdy domovníkem, a má-li komu sloužit jeho žena, ať slouží jemu. (p. 93)

The narrator's sarcastic choice of words 'z výšin pochlebenství' implies a certain amount of criticism of the father that expands into mockery with 'Se svou postavou a chůzí, se svým chováním.' Petr is aware of his father's delusions, but the fact that he thinks of their home as 'přízemní kutloch' shows that Petr shares his father's contempt for their living conditions. The description 'mazavkové s akademickými tituly' expresses the father's envy of those with something unattainable for himself which he therefore takes pleasure in despising. The war has only aggravated his discontent because it has created a new social hierarchy of army ranks: 'Toužil být opět tím, kým býval, než ho válka uvrhla v podřadnost a tupé poslušenství chlapíkům, kteří mohli být v míru jeho společníky a od nichž ho nyní dělilo stříbro hvězd a zlato prýmků' (p. 77). The army has forced him to become the underdog in a different setting.

A similar snobbery guides Petr's experiences with women. Initially, Petr plunges into his lie about having a sexual relationship with paní Házová because he wants to surpass his friend Bertík's stories of his adventures with women: "„Služky, to není nic pro mne. To dovede každý,“ odpověděl vztekle' (p. 28).

The narrator explains Petr's lie as provoked by his shame at being inexperienced with women (p. 29), but in the context of the general characterisation of Petr it is no coincidence that Petr chooses to use social status to impress his friend. Following this episode, the narrator indirectly explains the other reason for Petr's choice of paní Házová as the object of his sexual fantasy. The narrator's characterisation of paní Házová expresses his (the narrator's) condemnation of her as a woman of easy virtue. Since her husband left for the front she has been living with a sequence of lovers. The narrator's characterisation of her and her, in the narrator's opinion, debauched life (in this he agrees with Petr's mother) emphasises the contrast between the insecure world of Petr and his mother and paní Házová's middle-class sense of security: 'Tvářic se pohrdavě, čekala, až jí udělají místo, aby mohla projít. [...] Matka zdravila pokorně. Dva kroky za paní Házovou stála její nová služka' (p. 41). The narrator setting the scene for paní Házová's subsequent humiliation of Petr captures the essence of how the narrator's discourse uses social status to define the characters' relationship with each other.

The presentation of the relation between Petr and paní Házová's maid, Frída, likewise shows how Petr's sense of social inferiority influences his sexual desire. The narrator's characterisation of the relationship between Frída and Petr emphasises the imbalance of their relationship: 'Široká, statná Frída a vysoký, drobný Petr' (p. 51). However, the characterisation 'Od toho dne, kdy od ní přijal láhve malaga, probudila se v ní odvěká štědrost služek k milencům' (p. 57) expresses the narrator's stereotypical view of women just as much as it characterises Frída. The narrator's emphasis on the mercenary aspect of their relationship in his description of Frída bringing Petr food from her mistress's supplies – 'Petrův mladistvý hlad a mlsnost přemohly jeho odpor proti tomu, aby si nechával takto platit své schůzky s ní' (p. 57) – shows how Petr is aware of the meretricious aspect of their relationship. In the end Petr's awareness of the nature of his relationship with Frída does not result in more than his wallowing in the sentiment of being the injured party: 'V blesku jasnozření jako by zahlédl celou svou budoucnost: snad nikdy nebude mít síly, aby utekl od něčeho, co začal s jinými. Život běží dvěma cestami, nikdy se nesetká to, co by

chtěl, s tím, co žije' (p. 61). Petr's disdain of Frída reaches its peak when he humiliates her by ignoring her when she dresses up for going out. Petr's perception of her ('Bylo to vyjevené děvče z vesnické pouti, které tam stálo, hledíc naň zanícenýma očima v pokorné tváři' (p. 63)) exposes his lack of compassion for her. The description of Frída following Petr with Bertík and Žička only further emphasises this: 'Frída šla za nimi stále, smutná a těžká jako tažný kůň' (p. 63). The narrator's final summary of Frída: 'Stála tam nehybně ve svých pestrých šatech vesničanky, hleděla za odjíždějícím parníčkem, cizí a hranatá, nesrozumitelná a smutná' (p. 64) does not ridicule her, but appeals to the sympathy of the implied reader. Against this background Petr's egoism seems even more profound. His rejection of Frída confirms that the opposite side of his sense of inferiority is a desire for power; a power which mostly finds its expression in fantasies, as my discussion of Petr's relationship with women has shown.

The class phenomenon is less explicit, however important, in the narrator's presentation of Petr's relationship with Marta. Class is, however, significant in the way in which the narrative evaluates Marta through its description of her milieu. The narrator sets the scene for Petr's first visit to Marta's flat with a detailed description of the interior of the main room:

Hnědý nábytek vydechoval těžké ticho a zašlá červeň plyšových povlaků křesel byla šarlatově temná. Na masivním příborníku, podobném zavřenému oltáři poutních kostelíků, ztuhlo v hlubokých závitech řezby víření prachu. Nad mísou s umělým ovocem se vznášel falešný tón touhy po blahobytu a vylhaného rodinného štěstí. Pokoj byl jako konzerva zapomenutých ctností, těžko stravitelné jídlo se zárodky mrtvice a jaterních nemocí. Vládl v něm pořádek a horký vzduch byl prosycen vůní látek, dřeva a lakovaných listů umělé palmy, jež pod svými vějíři hostily orient maškarních plesů a odalisek z předměstí. (p. 119)

With its sarcastic references to the 'Orient of masked balls and odalisques from the slums' the description suggests erotic depravity. At the same time it evokes an atmosphere of decay and falseness that implies a critique of the bourgeoisie

to which Marta belongs. The description thus foreshadows a critical evaluation of Marta that the narrator later confirms. At Petr's second visit the narrator exposes Petr to Marta's seductiveness. She tells him the story of her life and Petr again finds nothing false in her. The narrator's informed comments emphasise Petr's naivety:

Věděl toho opravdu velmi málo, neboť její zpověď se podobala zpovědi nevěstky, která ospravedlňuje svůj pád. Byl-li tu rozdíl, tedy jen ten, že si nevymýšlela příběh svého života, nýbrž dávala mu jen barvu a tón, které by nejvíc dojaly tohoto posluchače, toužícího skrytě, aby nikde nebylo ani vlásky úhony, ani stínu hanby. (pp. 122-23)

The narrator explains several times how Petr wants to believe that Marta has done nothing wrong, really how his ideal of purity prevents him from seeing through her story. Petr identifies himself with Marta's explanation of her longing for freedom – 'Až válka ji vysvobodila' (p. 123) – and therefore he wants to trust her: 'Petr byl dojat. V její povídce bylo mnoho, co mu připomínalo jeho vlastní mládí. Nesvoboda a touha po volnosti. Rozuměl tomu, jako by to sám prožíval' (p. 123). In these words the narrator again allows Petr's youth to be an excuse for his behaviour by not passing any judgement on him. However, he does show how Petr's vanity and desire to surpass his peers let him accept the clothes that Marta gives him: 'Petrův vzdor nebyl tak pevný, jak by si přál. Šaty z anglické látky, tkané z hnědých a bílých nití. Takové závidíval synovi domácích. Předčil by v nich všechny mládence ve třídě' (p. 126), and 'Oblékl jimi nejen své tělo, nýbrž i sebevědomí. Předstihl mnohé, který až dosud záviděl, a vyrovnal se několika ojedinělým ze třídy' (p. 127). These excerpts signify how Marta becomes a means to Petr for satisfying his envy and snobbery. The narrator also points out, however, that Marta, the experienced seductress, is only playing with Petr. This becomes wholly clear when she abandons him for a German-speaking officer. In the semantic context of the narrative's positive evaluation of patriotism, Marta's association with a German-speaking officer may contribute to the negative evaluation of her.

The characterisation of Petr thus evolves through the dissemination of the contrasting senses inferiority and power in the narrative. Inferiority occurs as

one aspect of envy, finding its expression alternately in snobbery, contempt or social ambition, or in the form of sexual inferiority, giving rise to violent fantasies. Petr's relation to power is characterised chiefly by its absence, which makes him act it out in fantasy or indirectly, as in the incident with paní Házová. Ultimately, giving up his father to the military police is a manifestation of power. Finally, Petr's perception of power also occurs while he watches the soldier running the conscription procedure: 'Byl jedním z bičků moci, která je dohnala až sem a požene je dále. Snad za chvíli s ní splynou, budou ovládnáni a užívání k ovládnání' (p. 158). A moment later, after Petr has avoided the front, he thinks: 'Bylo výhodné být slabochem, když silákům hrozila zkáza' (p. 159).³⁹ Petr's mixed fear of power and desire for power thus plays into his egoism and opportunism, and determine how he relates to others.

2.4 The evaluative function of the war motif in the novel

The descriptions of wartime Prague form the background for the portrayal of Petr's crisis of adolescence. In addition to its function as setting, the narrator links the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and disintegration of sexual morality with the portrayal of adolescence in a way that also gives the war an evaluative function.

The narrator's discourse evokes the impact of the war by having details of wartime reality merge into the depiction of situations or characters. For example, as Petr, Vít and Kama enter one of the little rooms in the café they encounter a soldier with his girlfriend: 'Mladý voják s prýmky jednoročního dobrovolníka je uvítal zamračením a děvče otočilo rychle hlavu k oknu, aby ukrylo slzy' (p. 8). Vít's room faces the main street 'stále plnou lidí a ruchu, kde jezdily červené tramvaje a čas od času pochodovaly mlčící řady vojáků na cestě k nádraží' (p. 10). It is also characteristic of the narration that the narrator uses war motifs to set the scene for what follows in the narration: 'Školní rok skončil únavou a bez radostí z úspěchu. Válka a bída uzavřely zelená vrata prázdnin' (p. 56). Many of the descriptions evoke the general subdued atmosphere of the war:

³⁹ This thought echoes some of Karel's reflections on power in *Černé světlo*. As I shall discuss in the chapter on *Černé světlo*, Karel's view of power likewise has its origin in his experience of inferiority.

‘Čas i v olověných dnech nevlídné zimy hořel rychle a únor kdysi veselých zabijaček a maškarních rejů byl jím pohlcen hladový a vyzáblý, tak jako jindy tučný a bakchantský’ (p. 14). In places the parallels made between the images of war and the descriptions of Petr’s emotional life seem disproportionate. This happens, for example, in one description of Petr wandering around the city:

Potkal vojáka, stíženého nervovým otrěsem. Jeho nohy byly vymršťovány do výše děsivou silou mezi dvěma holemi, o něž se nešťastník opíral; skákal přes tajemnou překážku, přeskakoval smrt, která jím prolétala jako ničivá vichřice zotvíraným domem. Když se zastavil, třásl se jako chabé dveře, jimiž lomcuje šílenec, a kroutil hlavou v úděsném záporu. Petr se odvrátil a obešel ho půlkruhem. Ale zjev trval na sítnicích očí a sestupoval do něho; i v něm jako by se něco zmítalo v neovládnutých skocích. (p. 71)

A little earlier in the text Petr’s state of mind (after delivering his dismissive note to Frída) was described in physical terms: ‘Trapný pocit štvál jeho myšlenky v kole bezradnosti; napínal se v něm a bolel tak, že toužil po nějaké muce tělesné, zatínal zuby do rtů a lámal si prsty do vymknutí’ (p. 70). The contrast between Petr’s longing for ‘some physical suffering’ to ease his mental pain and the concrete physical suffering of the crippled soldier emphasises his self-absorbed way of thinking. Although the comparison between Petr and the soldier expresses Petr’s exaggerated perception, it does seem inappropriate in the context, since adolescent misery can hardly be of similar gravity to the sufferings caused by the traumatic experience of war.

The narrative presentation of the war plays on the contrast between the ‘small’ history of Petr and his classmates, that is, the impact the war has on people’s lives, and the great History of the Monarchy. The theme crops up in Petr’s thoughts (in narrated monologue) while he is sitting in a wine bar with Vít who is on leave from the front:

Jak je to divné, že celý život a snad celé dějiny lidstva lze složit z takových nicotných příhod. Jak poznáš, že tato příhoda je důležitá a tato opět ne? Žiješ všechny stejně. Teď sedí Vít zde, je to voják na dovolené, který se chce bavit, je to chlapec, který chce přesvědčit sebe i jiné, jak zmužněl a jak pohrdá hloupostmi, jako je cit. Dnes je tedy zde a za několik dní bude opět

tam, kde se válčí a kde se tvoří dějiny. A pro něj to zase bude jen řada příhod, drobných událostí, které jen svým množstvím a svými následky jsou důležité. Kdo ví, snad dnešku je určeno, aby pro něj nebo pro Víta byl významnější než největší bitva. (p. 38)⁴⁰

With its highly stylised rhetorical questions the narrated monologue reflects the ambiguity that informs Petr's attitude to the war: on the one hand, he realises its effect on Vít, but, on the other, he remains indifferent to it because it has not yet had any direct effect on his own life; he is an observer. It becomes clearer later in the novel how this reflective detachment is a very convenient way for Petr to mask his fundamentally egoistic approach to things.

The contrast between Petr's adolescent crisis and the reality of war is further exposed in Petr's encounter with the Magyar soldier who comes begging at his door.⁴¹ The portrayal of the soldier emphasises the dehumanisation of the individual in its description of a human being reduced to a starving animal (pp. 26-27). Before this episode the narrator's summary of Petr's state of mind has informed the reader that Petr's awareness of the war is growing because of his loss of Kama and Vít, whereas before he had been grateful because the war had removed his father (p. 24). Seeing the Magyar soldier makes Petr aware of the human consequences of war because it reminds him of the destiny of his father: 'Snad i on tam někde obchází nyní cizí dveře a prosí oškubaný, sešlý, na pokraji zhroucení. Vlna lítosti jím prochvěla' (p. 26). The war puts his adolescent crisis into perspective and he begins to understand Vít's behaviour towards Kama: 'Opravdu, všechno se zdálo pozbývat ceny, měl-li člověk ztratit svůj sotva začatý život. Ne Kamou a láskou, nýbrž Vítem, otcem a všemi, kdo byli vydáni stejnému nebezpečí, měly se obírat jeho myšlenky' (p. 26). The narrator shows how Petr develops an awareness of the war, although his initial comment

⁴⁰ Later it appears again when Petr is doing history homework: 'Nic však nebylo vzdálenější jeho mysli než tyto děje dávno mrtvé, letopočty, milníky minulosti, kolem nichž se řítí čas k dnešku. Nebyl-li dnešek sám dějinami? Celý svět byl v ohni' (p. 43).

⁴¹ The episode in which the soldier grabs Petr's violin that is lying on the table and attempts to play a czardas lacks credibility in the context of the previous description of Petr. Here it says about Petr's violin: 'Na stole ležely housle, na nichž Petr v poslední době tak často hrával nápěvy vlastní ražby, jež měly vyjádřit nevyslovitelné z toho, co se v něm dělo' (p. 26). Earlier the narrator has informed the reader that '[...] Vít tihl spíše k hudbě, Petr ke knížkám' (p. 11). The fact that Petr actually plays the violin does not ring true in this context.

indicates that the effect created by Petr's encounter with the soldier does not last.

Petr's newly acquired consciousness of the war sets him apart from his classmates who see the war as an opportunity: 'Vzpírali se vidět černě. Ať jakkoli hrozná, válka měla pro ně i své světlé stránky. Vycítili je a chtěli jich využít (pp. 26-27). Although, this is actually, in part, a positive comment – these adolescents have a will to live that Petr does not possess – the opportunism of Petr's classmate Bertík is judged in negative terms by the narrative. In the conversation he has with Petr after the latter has given the Magyar soldier something to eat, Bertík comments: 'Člověče, já se ti divím. Co je ti do Maďara? Kopnouts ho mel, prevíta. Máš slyšet naše vojáky, co o nich povídají. Horších bestií nenajdeš' (p. 27) and further on 'Válka je válka, člověče. Bereš si to moc k srdci' (p. 27) express the prejudice that informs his opportunistic attitude to the war. Bertík represents the opposite to Petr's moral consciousness ('Jde o to, co z lidí udělají. A už je to jedno, jestli z Maďarů nebo z našich' (p. 27)) and therefore he becomes a target for Petr's disdain and envy: 'Bertíci to mají nejlepší. Příkrčí se a proklouznou' (p. 27). The narrator uses the episode with the Magyar soldier to attribute a moral consciousness to Petr. However, this episode is alone in stating this and does not accord with other descriptions of Petr. From others it emerges that Petr actually does not experience much of the suffering that the war creates: 'Petr až dosud nepoznal mnoho z té bídy' (p. 57). On the contrary, Petr's experience of the war is of a self-preoccupied nature: 'V jaké době se to narodil, v jaké psí době! Ostatně bylo by to pro něho nejlepší, nebýt války? Nevěděl' (p. 37).⁴²

Petr's attitude towards Bertík changes in the course of the novel, which reflects the fact that Petr is fundamentally just as opportunistic. In the beginning Petr dislikes Bertík, but turns to him because he does not have anybody else: 'A tehdy, nevěda už, co by si počal sám sebou, vzpomněl si na Bertíka, na toho Bertíka, jehož neměl rád, ale který byl přece jen lepší než nikdo' (pp. 58-59). Later, when he needs money so that he does not have to feel humiliated before

⁴² Petr's experience of the war is in some places characterised by pure self-interest. Seeing the ragged soldiers on the street he thinks about Kama: 'Udělají-li tohle z Víta, bude ho mít ještě ráda? Oškubaného páchnoucího? Podle knih jistě' (p. 19).

Kama, he again turns to Bertík for help: ‘Vzpomněl si na Bertíka. Jak to, že právě na toho klacka, jehož vždy nenáviděl a jímž pohrdal? Ale Bertík měl styky, znal se s kdekým a nebylo, obrazně řečeno, vod, do nichž by nespustil své síti’ (p. 196). Bertík has, in the meantime, built up a thriving business trading in ersatz products. The war has made it possible for him to overcome his social pre-determination: ‘Chodil si jako švihák a leskl se blahobytem’ (p. 114). In a passage that reflects Petr’s opinion of Bertík the narrator depicts Petr’s realisation that he has himself become an opportunist: ‘Srovnává se s ním, nemá už Petr ani té opory, již míval v dobách, kdy chodil s Vítem. Jeho ničemnost je snad větší než Bertíkova, bojí se však otevřeně k ní doznat, udělat si z ní životní zákon a postavit se na pevné nohy pohrdání’ (pp. 169-70).

The overall characterisation of Petr indicates that he becomes a cynical opportunist because his sense of social inferiority and envy has prepared him for such corruption. Unlike Vít, whose moral integrity has been corrupted by his experience at the front, Petr’s opportunism seems rather a result of his continuous reluctance to accept responsibility for what he does.⁴³ The contrast between the two friends makes Petr’s cynicism seem false.⁴⁴

The descriptions of the misery of war highlight the egoism of Petr and his peers. The narrator’s discourse contrasts the vitality of the adolescents, ‘Všichni překypovali svou mladou, vydrážděnou živočišností, jako by nebylo války a na žádného z nich nedolehla její strast’ (p. 115),⁴⁵ with descriptions that emphasise the dehumanisation of people whose life has been reduced to mere subsistence, to a mass existence (or death):⁴⁶

⁴³ For example when he, although he is wooing Kama, sleeps with the office girl he has met at Bertík’s flat: ‘Probouzeje se ráno vedle ní, ještě spící, měl pocit, že vždycky bude zabíjet, co má v sobě nejlepšího. Chtěl si přísahat, že už nikdy. Ale zasmál se. Už se nebude přelhávat. Jak znělo heslo? Vezmi, co chceš a můžeš’ (p. 201).

⁴⁴ Petr’s excuse to himself after sleeping with Majda, the office girl (see excerpt in previous footnote), echoes Vít’s proclamation when he returned from the front: ‘Válka ukázala takovým jelenům, jako jsme byli my, nejenže je smrt a strach, ale že je taky život a že se má brát, dokud je. Docela podle dnešního vtipu: kupte si, nebude’ (p. 37).

⁴⁵ Petr cannot identify with the others’ enthusiasm, though: ‘Petr přecházel od skupiny ke skupině, smál se a naslouchal s ostatními, zatím co v něm skřípěla pila závidi. Záviděl všem, ale nenacházel účasti na ničem, co se tu dělo, záviděl i Samkovi jeho poctivý žal’ (p. 115).

⁴⁶ Another example of this is the scene in front of the butcher’s shop where people are queuing for food: ‘Plynová lampa, jejíž světlo se chystalo zemřít s tmou, modelovala černě houfec lidí a táhlé vzdechy, bzučení občasného neklidu a šoupání nohou je připodobňovaly spícímu stádu’ (p. 76).

Lidé zbaveni domovů žili ve stádech. Daleko v zákopech a doma v dlouhých řadách před vyjedenými krámy. Chléb a říše se rozpadaly. Tupá lhostejnost a zoufalé naděje se střídaly v myslích. Chléb plný dřeva a říše plná nepravostí splývaly v jedno v ubitém vědomí. Vyčerpaná těla a země neodpočatá a mrazy neuzavřená zrodily chorobu. V dlouhých frontách lidé ji dýchali jeden na druhého. Vraceli se domů s prázdnými brašnami, s ochablou myslí, s očima, v nichž planuly záhrobní ohně horeček. Umírali houfně, snad proto, že duše byly tak mdlé, snad proto, že už nevěděli proč žít. (p. 140)

The narrator's discourse here makes a link between the social injustice of the Monarchy and the poor quality of the bread (a signifier of 'scarcity') which serves as a pretext for the narrator's indirect expression of sympathy for the patriotism that has gained new life from the hope in the approaching end of the war. This is visible in the scene where Vít, who has just returned from the front, meets the boys' headmaster. The narrator's portrayal of the headmaster contains a note of ridicule through which he mocks the representative of the old order (in this matter the narrator's sympathy is with the youngsters): 'A starý obávaný dravec se popotahoval za vousy, zářil blahosklonností a nabádal Víta k vlastenectví ve smyslu říše, chvalořeče jeho hrdinství' (p. 32). On the contrary, the form master, whom the pupils like, is a patriot who teaches them about the Revivalist Havlíček: 'Měli ho rádi a krotili před ním svou jankovitost. Přednášel o Havlíčkovi a zvolna se rozehříval. Zapomněl, že chtěl mluvit po tichu, na vyhublých lících mu vyskočila červeň. A minulost, již oživoval, se podivuhodně podobala přítomnosti' (p. 147).

The narrator's discourse shows, though, how the adolescents' patriotic longing for independence for the country really expresses their longing for individual freedom: 'Svobodná vlast, to znělo příliš neurčitě, ale volný já, tomu rozuměli všichni podle svých představ' (p. 148). Seen in this context the opportunism caused by the war conditions may be interpreted as an extreme form of adolescent egoism. The narrator's juxtaposition of the war with

adolescence legitimises this attitude or at least makes it comprehensible.⁴⁷ The same process of legitimisation occurs in the narrator's description of Petr's identification with the general hopes of the time:

Nedovedl to pochopit. Nedovedl pochopit, že v jeho mladickém hoři a nadějích není místa pro nikoho a pro nic jiného než pro něj samého. Vše ostatní bylo jen maškaráda citů, tak opravdová, jako jsou všechny lži osmnácti let: do krve. Aniž o tom věděl, ve všech těch velikých dějích, o nichž snil jako ostatní, nacházel jen sebe, sebe na vrcholu vítězných barikád anebo ve chvíli melancholie mrtvého pod nimi. Ano, sedět sám nad svou vlastní mrtvolou a říkat: Jak statečný hoch byl ten Petr, a odcházet za novým dobrodružstvím. (p. 149)

The narrator explains Petr's egoism as an expression of adolescent egoism that interprets everything in terms of hyperbolic self-stylisation. Although the narrator ironises this self-stylisation, his analysis 'Aniž o tom věděl' also produces an alibi for the egoism that has elsewhere been emphasised in the portrayal of Petr.

In contrast with Petr's lack of engagement, the characterisation of Kama's patriotism represents a positive force. Originally, it compelled her to move to Prague and find independence: 'Vášnivá víra byla v srdci Kamině a Petr býval trochu skeptický. Věřil jako ona v blížící se osvobození, ale ptal se, co přinese. Její vlastenectví mu připadalo trochu plané a zbytečně nadšené. Chudáci zůstanou asi chudáky, říkal, a jakápak je to svoboda' (p. 208).⁴⁸ The narrative's positive evaluation of patriotism creates doubts about Petr's scepticism towards her enthusiasm and thus presents her as an example to Petr. The end of the novel links the founding of the republic with hope for a better future. It is, however, not explained on what this hope is based, apart from the general euphoria evoked by the end of the war.

⁴⁷ It is what history does to these adolescents. For example, the condemnation of what happened to Ottoni is limited to the form master's mild reprimand (see p. 192). The number of casualties in the war diminishes the significance of Ottoni's death: 'Co znamenala smrt jednoho chlapce v době, kdy kolem dokola umíraly miliony?' (p. 192).

⁴⁸ I do not agree with Götz when he writes of Řezáč: 'Nedá se mýlit ve své snaze po nahé pravdě ani nacionální horečkou 1918' quoting the same passage as above. Götz sees Petr's scepticism as something positive, whereas I would ascribe it to his general lack of interest in his surroundings. In František Götz, *Václav Řezáč*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1957, p. 45.

In his review of *Větrná setba* A. M. Píša criticises Řezáč for concentrating too much on Petr's erotic development and using the war as a mere backdrop. Píša points to an essential feature of *Větrná setba*, to the fact that the story of Petr's sexual and emotional maturation might as well have taken place in a period with no war.⁴⁹ It is true that the war features in the novel as a backdrop, but in addition to that the war also has an evaluative function: the war is used to explain the behaviour of the adolescents, especially of Petr. It serves as a pretext for legitimising Petr's egoism. In doing so the narrative displays a fascination with the adolescents' romantic, dreaming, egoistic attitude to life and makes an emotional drama of the wartime reality.

2.5 Conclusion

My analysis has established that the narrative presentation of Petr (both through plot and the presentation of his consciousness) is informed by the ideologemes of purity *versus* impurity and inferiority *versus* power. These ideologemes constitute the structures of meaning that run through the narrative. On the one hand, Petr's adolescent state is dominated by a basic psychological conflict (inferiority *versus* power) which manifests itself in his tendency towards envy and egoism. On the other, the characterisation of Petr's awakening sexuality is played out within the ideological conflict (ethical) between purity and impurity which is manifest in the apparent contrast between ideal love and sexual desire.

The narrator's discourse knowingly exposes Petr's conflicts with himself by, at times, identifying with his point of view (the function of the numerous narrated monologues) and formulating mental experiences of which Petr can hardly be entirely conscious himself. The narrator generally seems to sympathise with Petr and his analyses of Petr's actions explain these as a result of the adolescence he is going through.

However, the narrative displays an inherent conflict between the narrator's attitude towards Petr and the impression of Petr that his thoughts and actions create in the implied reader. The narrator's discourse presents Petr's behaviour

⁴⁹ See A.M.P., 'Román válečného mládí', in *Právo lidu*, 117, 19.5.1935, p. 9.

and thoughts as typical of adolescence, whereas what can be inferred about Petr's psychology from the characterisation of his relationship with women, friends and parents, shows him rather as a product of his social background and family history; that is, as an individual rather than a stereotypical adolescent. These two aspects of the characterisation of Petr are not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, in the context of the semantic framework of the narrative, the ambiguities in the evaluation of Petr represent a problem.

As the analysis of Petr's relationship with women has established, the macrostructure of the narrative is governed by the concept of ideal love, that disseminates the seme 'purity', whereas the events in the course of the narrative focus on sexual desire that produces the opposite seme 'impurity' (both in the sexual and moral sense). Petr's experience of sexual desire changes in the course of the narrative from something which he perceives as an uncontrollable force to a source of pleasure. At the same time, however, he is haunted by his dream of ideal love as personified by Kama. The paradox is that at the point in the narrative when he has learned to accept his sexual desire without guilt, the narrator's discourse imposes the concept of ideal love on him once again through Kama's engagement in their love affair. The plot development supports this movement by means of the epiphanic scene in which Petr decides not to commit suicide. It is possible to interpret what Petr experiences as being guided by a greater power (the subconscious urge to seek out Kama's house) rather as the 'inevitability of plot'.⁵⁰ The narrative poses Kama's engagement as the alternative to Petr's egoistic, envious and detached behaviour. The narrator's discourse presents Kama as a model to Petr, as well as placing her in the role of teacher (saviour). Petr's mere contact with Kama sets in motion a process of purging. The analysis showed that it is the narrator who mediates Petr's awareness of this process. The narrator's discourse postulates that Petr has changed; that is not shown in Petr's thoughts. On the contrary, the narrative presentation of Petr's thoughts shows that he has not changed very much at all. Petr continues to be a passive sceptic whose desires are based on envy.

⁵⁰ See Terry Eagleton: *Criticism and Ideology*, London/New York: Verso, 1998, pp. 87-88. See also Franco Moretti: *The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European culture* (New edition), p. 263, note 52.

Through its plot-structure the narrative poses the solution of ideal love to Petr's emotional conflicts. The narrator's discourse evaluates negatively the liberated surge of sexual desire that it asserts is a consequence of the war. At the same time it, in its positive evaluation of Kama, tends to promote the concept of ideal love.⁵¹ The use of the war motif in the narrative functions as a model of explanation for the corruption of ideal love in that the narrator presents the war as the cause of the adolescents' precocious sexual desire, as well as of the general attenuation of sexual morality.

In the light of this analysis it is possible to see the narrator's endorsement of the concept of ideal love as an ideological construct that imposes an ideal of love as *Bildung* on the protagonist Petr. The problem is, however, that the narrator comes to have the function of mouthpiece for an ideal that is undermined by the characterisation of the very protagonist who is supposed to subscribe to it. The psychological analysis of Petr makes him too complex a character for him to represent an ideal, whereas the Kama character becomes increasingly focused on romantic love as the narrative progresses. The opposition of Kama and Petr, with their key attributes of love and envy, relates to a more fundamental ideological conflict between Christian love (defined in the Bible as the antithesis of envy) and envy, the prime sin in medieval writing about the Devil. Kama's love is not only focused on her personal gain, or on Petr. In her activities, she is portrayed as embodying a social conscience, working for the good of other human beings. In comparison with her, Petr is something of an anti-hero with whom it is difficult to feel sympathy, although the narrator would like us to feel it. None of the critics, neither contemporary or later, have commented on the darker aspects of Petr. They seem to take the victimisation of Petr through the war at face value, thus accepting the novel's positive message of ideal love. Němec, for example, uses the word 'obroda' to describe a new perspective for Petr.⁵² Novák interprets Kama as the hope of the novel, 'statečná a čistá žena uprostřed porušených slabošských mužů'.⁵³ Sezima, likewise, ascribes a moral function to the Kama character as the saviour of Petr:

⁵¹ This is in accordance with the narrator's judgmental attitude to paní Házová.

⁵² F. Němec, 'Román o mládí za válečnými frontami', p. 4.

⁵³ Arne Novák, 'Nová prosa', p. 5.

‘[...] vrátí mravní odpovědnost a zjasní jeho pohled na svět’.⁵⁴ Thus the critics, unanimously, tend to focus on only one side of the ideologeme of purity *versus* impurity. Řezáč’s Petr does presumably grow up in the end since he chooses to study law. In this choice he, at least on an outer level, conforms to a conservative ideal of *Bildung* as it was understood within the Monarchy.

⁵⁴ Karel Sezima, ‘Z nové tvorby románové. (Romány generační 3. – Surrealism.)’, p. 472.

Chapter 3

Slepá ulička (1939)

Václav Řežáč's second novel *Slepá ulička* (1939)¹ has been widely perceived as a 'social' novel², although at the time of its publication it was also described as a 'novel of the family',³ a 'psychological' novel,⁴ a 'generation novel'⁵ or a 'novel of marriage'.⁶ These various attempts at labelling the novel focus on individual aspects and thereby fail to acknowledge that each aspect contributes to the overall complexity of the narrative. 'Psychological,' for example, may refer both to the method of narrative presentation that Řežáč employs in the novel and

¹ According to Jiří Opelík *Slepá ulička*, in spite of the fact that 1938 is generally given as the year of publication, was not published until 1939. Its first edition (Borový) came out at the beginning of February 1939 (Opelík refers to *Lidové noviny*, 3.2.1939, p. 7). Apart from that it came out in instalments in the library of *Lidové noviny* from 4 January until the middle of February 1939 (Opelík refers to *Lidové noviny*, 16.12.1938, p.7 and 11.2.1939, p. 11). See Jiří Opelík, 'Románové dílo Václava Řežáče', unpublished PhD thesis, Brno: Masaryk University, 1961.

² See, for example, Frant[išek] Křelina, 'Román společenský', *Venkov*, 1.4.1939, p. 7; [Anonymous], *Lumír*, 1939/40, 31.1.1940, pp. 207-08; -Rja-, *Česká osvěta*, 35, April 1939, 8. The review was placed under the headline 'sociální román' together with Jaroslav Havlíček's *Ta třetí* (1939) and Karel Nový's *Třetí větev* (1939). In other issues of the same journal novels reviewed under this headline are, for example, Benjamin Klička's trilogy *Generace*, Václav Prokúpek's *Ztracená země* (1938) and František Erik Šaman's *Můj kamarád pánbůh* (1937). The notion of a 'social' novel is important in the sense that it implies that the novel characterised as such has a political content and it has been linked to the development of a Czech version of Socialist Realism. Bedřich Václavěk developed this concept within the Czech literary theoretical context. Of novels belonging to the same decade, *Slepá ulička* has most often been compared with *Lidé na křižovatce* by Marie Pujmanová. See, for example, A.N., 'Román přísně objektivní', *Lidové noviny*, 26.2.1939, p. 9, or J.B.Č., 'Václav Řežáč: Slepá ulička', *Naše doba*, 47, 1939/40, pp. 120-21. I find, however, that there are significant differences as regards the type of narrator and the narrative organisation and presentation of events. This suggests that the comparisons are related to the ideological content of the novels.

³ See J.B.Č., 'Václav Řežáč: Slepá ulička', *Naše doba*, 47, 1939/40, pp. 120-21.

⁴ See Josef Šup: 'Václav Řežáč: Slepá ulička', *Kritický měsíčník*, 2, April 1939, pp. 183-85. Šup rejects the label 'social novel' because he does not see the 'social reality' as basic in the novel and the problems of the novel do not arise from this. He says the novel lacks the 'socialist thought or idea'. He categorises it as 'psychological' because, according to him, the novel is mainly about 'money and the desire to rule', that is 'the driving forces of Michal Gromus'.

⁵ See review [Anonymous], *Lumír*, 1939/40, 31.1.1940, pp. 207-08.

⁶ See v.b.k., 'Román mnoha osudů', *Národní práce*, 78, 19.3.1939, p. 15. The author describes the novel according to its themes of which marriage is just one.

to the content of the novel, whereas ‘novel of marriage’ refers to just one of the motifs of the novel and thus to the content plane, the story.

3.1 General characterisation of the narrative

The narrative of *Slepá ulička* can best be described as narrative drama. The drama is played out within the conceptual framework of class conflict between the Gromus family, who are bourgeois factory owners, and the local workers. The narrative consists of the interlinked stories of several characters. On the story level the organising principle of the dramatic episodes is that of conflict between the characters. The conflicts put into play a number of oppositions inherent in the choice of characters, i.e. young/old, parent/child, man/woman and factory owner/worker.⁷ On the one hand, there are the conflicts within the Gromus family: between old Gromus and his son Michal who returns from his studies in Prague to help with the running of the factory, between old Gromus and his wife Anna and Michal about the future of the factory after Gromus’s death (the will) and later between Michal and his architect wife Vilma. On the other, there is the conflict between the Communist worker Jindra Pour and the other workers, Růžena’s conflict with her family and Balada’s conflict with the rest of the workers’ community. The conflict between the Gromus family and the workers is narrativised as the amorous rivalry over Růžena between the young Michal Gromus and the Communist worker Jindra Pour and in the conflict between Michal Gromus and Balada, Růžena’s father. The driving force of the individual conflicts can be summed up as the pursuit of desire – be that desire for money, power, love, political ideal, or status and social advancement.

Correspondingly, the narrative discourse develops as a series of dramatic episodes in dialogue that are linked together in the discourse of the omniscient third-person narrator. The narrating situation alternates between narration focalised through one of the characters, passages in dialogue interwoven with the narrative presentation of the character’s consciousness (thoughts) and the

⁷ It is characteristic of the notary Purkl’s role that he stands outside these oppositions, apart from that of man/woman by the sole fact that he is a male character.

narrator's descriptions and summaries. It is characteristic of the time structure of the discourse that the reader learns about the time within the individual episodes through characters' speech and thoughts⁸ and about the time span between them through the narrator's summaries or indirectly through descriptions. For example, the period of time covered indirectly emerges through the descriptions of the developments at the factory.

3.2 Ideological significations in the narrative presentation of the bourgeois characters

The opening episodes of the narrative deal with the relationship between the old factory owner Gromus and his son Michal.⁹ Gromus arrives in Prague with the purpose of making Michal return with him to Libnice so that he can help with running the factory. After their return Michal virtually takes over his father's work whilst the old Gromus retires because of his heart problems. The narrative presentation of the relationship between father and son revolves around the opposition between the sexes 'old' and 'young'. Michal embodies all the epithets of youthful energy: 'Ale v Michalovi se napíná mladý mozek a mladá odvaha' (p. 20),¹⁰ whereas old Gromus withdraws into a feeling of increasing physical frailty and bodily decay, as is shown in one passage presenting his thoughts following his son's successful business venture:

Přejel si dlaní ústa v nenápadném posunku, aby zachytil její vůni. Ne, ne. Stáří nevoní. A zadíval se žíznivě na skloněnou hlavu svého syna. Michal už opět pracoval, pramen hebkých vlasů, jež bylo těžko učesat, mu spadl přes spánek a visel do tváře. Ti mladí snad nemají žádný cit. Člověk by řekl, že bude pobíhat a vykřikovat, nevěda, čeho by se radostí dříve chytil. Nu,

⁸ That is, when the narration is focalised through one of the characters the orientation of time in the narrative is that of the character. Thus such a presentation of time is an indicator of focalisation.

⁹ The very first word of the novel is Michal Gromus. Originally Řezáč wrote the novel with only one main character who may well have been Michal Gromus. Opelík thinks that Řezáč changed the structure of the novel due to pressure from Bedřich Václavěk, to whom Řezáč sent a first draft, as well as being inspired by Pujmanová's *Lidé na křižovatce* that came out in 1937. See Jiří Opelík, 'Románové dílo Václava Řezáče', Brno: Masaryk University, 1961, pp. 90-91.

¹⁰ Václav Řezáč, *Slepá ulička* [1938], Prague: Mladá fronta, 1972. Further references to the novel will be given in parentheses directly after quotations or references.

nerozumím mu a on patrně nerozumí mně. A přece v něm žiji, to je to
jediné, co ze mne zůstane. (p. 21)

The narrator's psychological analysis of the relationship between father and son associates Michal's youth with his striving for power: 'Co sejde na životě, myslí si ten mladý člověk, který je nabit zdravím, a zdá se mu, že ve svém odhodlání a ve své síle je vznešený jako idea sama. A nerozumí tomu starci, který si třese o každý tep srdce, jenž mu zbývá. Nevšímá si ani toho, jak chytrácky skryl za nadšením pro věc svůj vlastní zájem' (p. 22). At the same time the narrator also reveals how Michal is driven by egoism. This analysis therefore adds to the other negative descriptions of Michal and ultimately contributes to the ideological evaluation of the narrative.

The conflict between father and son comes to epitomise a generational conflict which is, at its core, also an ideological conflict between two interpretations of capitalism. Fundamentally, the conflict between Michal and Gromus, as presented by the narrative, arises because they represent two different approaches to the mode of production. Michal epitomises a new breed of businessman who ruthlessly pursues money and power at the cost of human relationships. This type of businessman is a result of a new type of man which the time has brought forward, a man who lives life fast with constant changes – a type of man whose emergence the narrative links to the new role of machines in society. The narrator's description of Michal as he sits in his car waiting for Růžena sums up this 'contemporary man':

Ten protiklad zádumčivého klidu přírody, kterým byl obklopen, a tepající stroje odpovídal podivuhodně pohodě jeho těla a mysli. Tělo si hovělo a myšlenky uháněly. Tak to mělo být: ten chvat, ten ustavičný vzruch, to bylo jediné, čeho ses nemohl stále nasytit. Sotva jsi byl hotov s jednou věcí, vrhal ses na jinou a svět ti odpovídal, štval tě k novým a novým výkonům, chci něco nového, něco jiného, říčel ústy zástupců a obchodních dopisů, tohle už tu bylo, ach, to je staré, dejte nám něco nového. Něco nového. Zajisté tento pokřik, otřásající celým světem, byl správný, vyjadřoval cítění a touhu současného člověka, a na mou věru, líbil se ti. Kam to povede? ptali se oslové minulé generace, přežvykující bodlák své opatnické a astmatické

moudrosti. [...]. Jediná úzkost tě jímá. Aby život byl dosti dlouhý na všechno, co bys chtěl. Ženeme se rychleji, bylo by tudíž spravedlivé, aby i naše závodní dráha byla prodloužena. Nové a nové. Je to správné? Ano. Neboť to jediné chceme, neboť to jediné nám odpovídá. (p. 58)

In this passage the narrator expresses Michal's thoughts and experience, which can be seen from the personalised mode of narration in which the narrator uses the second person singular as a sign of identification with the character's point of view. The use of the second person plural is a sign of identification with the time, with a new perception of things, of which Michal is only one representative.

That the narrator does not share the fascination with speed and newness of the 'contemporary man' can be seen in his initial presentation of Libnice and the factory, on Michal and old Gromus's return, that conceptualises the conflict between the 'old' and the 'new' (pp. 14-15). The narrator's description evokes the contrast between the traditional rural features of the town that still exist along with the changes imposed on the town by post-war industrialisation. The narrator presents industrialisation as a disturbance of the previous harmony (a natural rhythm of life characterised as the pulse of the town) by the speed and noises of machines (the hooting of cars, the factory sirens and the diesel engines). The narrator's presentation invests the industrialisation with negative connotations: a germ of disease ('zárodek choroby') and the town has been 'attacked' by the 'rush'. The description of the petty bourgeois girls contains a twist of irony in the adverbial 'zoufale' about how the girls try to imitate the fashion of the city. By means of this irony the narrator positions himself as someone who does not belong to the environment of Libnice, who is superior to the workings of the small-town environment. (In that he, curiously enough, positions himself on a par with Michal who has adopted a blasé approach to life as he has experienced it in Prague.)

The narrator further expresses his dislike of the modern mode of production in the description of Gromus's factory at the beginning of Chapter 3. The narrator is primarily critical of the dehumanisation of the workers and the

mechanisation of the labour process in which everything depends on time because ‘time is money and money equals power’:¹¹ The description emphasises the daily relentless routine under time pressure and the monotony of the work process: ‘[...], nezastavuj se, člověče, tvůj čas je rozpočten a tvoje pohyby svázány s obrátkami stroje, neohlížej se a nemysli na nic, stoje na svém místě spěj stále vpřed, tá-ta, tá-ta, předpažit, připažit, předpažit, připažit’ (p. 19).

The narrator’s sceptical treatment of industrial progress culminates in his description of the peculiar stench that belongs to the factory. The evocation of the stench points to the fact that the factory’s production is based on substitute materials of animal origin which replace real raw material such as horn:

I tyto desky, jež nahrazují pravou rohovinu - neboť už dávno není na světě dosti rohů a kopyt, aby postačily zásobit lidstvo hřebeny - odtud pocházejí. Dívající se na ně, zda byste uvěřili, že jedny z nich jsou vlastně močovinou a druhé bývaly třeba tvarohem. Smekáme klobouk před silou lidského důmyslu, ale nepokořeni pravíme: Úžasné, ale jak to přispělo k našemu štěstí? (p. 19)

The scepticism towards progress, which the last rhetorical question expresses, suggests a rather more conservative stance than Michal Gromus’s. The narrator’s descriptions of Libnice and the factory serve as a pretext for his subsequent presentation of Michal Gromus. The narrator establishes an evaluative framework within which the reader can only come to a negative judgment of Michal. The narrator’s direct comment on Michal further enforces this judgment:¹²

Ach, tady trčí v malém, zapomenutém, městečku nějaký mladík, hodně bezvýrazný, ani barva jeho vlasů se mi nelíbí, nejsou ani plavé, ani kaštanové, jako bys do nich popelu nasypal, v širokém, zbytečně růžovém obličejí mu sedí vystouplé oči, jako by mu lezly z hlavy nepochopitelným

¹¹ Similar descriptions of the dehumanisation of the work process and the mechanisation of human beings can be found in Pujmanová’s *Lidé na křižovatce* (1937) and earlier in Hostovský’s *Ztracený stín* (1931). In the latter, however, the narrative presentation focuses more on the effect of this on the psychology of the main character, rather than placing the phenomenon in a larger social context of class struggle.

¹² This is an example of how the relation between narrator and a character can contribute to the ideological shaping of a narrative.

údivem, ale svými dopisy jako všetečnými a všudypřítomnými tykadly ohmatává celý kontinent, [...]. (p. 20)

This direct expression of his dislike for Michal Gromus is the only place in the novel where the narrator makes a direct comment (becomes audible) in the first person. The narrator's description of Michal's eyes comes close to caricature. He mentions them once again in the scene where Michal is with Růžena: 'A tu se k ní naklonil, a poule své oči, beztak dosti vystouplé, a pokoušeje se o úsměv, který mu nepodařeně nadmul tváře, řekl' (p. 35). In the last extract the purpose of the description is to show how Michal is not capable of expressing true emotions.

Michal embodies a belief in progress and cost-effectiveness, but, in addition to this, the narrative presentation emphasises the desire for money as a prominent feature in the characterisation of him. Indeed, money is what he is thinking about when the reader first encounters him at the very beginning of the novel. The narration is focalised through Michal as he stands and looks out through the window of his room:

Nebylo nic na protější střeše a o málo víc dole na ulici. Bílý oblak za jedním z komínů. Nemění se, civí na jednom místě. [...]. Dům se chvěje pravidelným dunivým dusotem, jak palice rytmicky dopadají na kožené pásy prostřené na kovadlině. V podzemí je zlatotepecká dílna. Zlatotepec, zlatotepec. Zlato, zlato. (p. 5)

With the repeated 'gold-beater, gold-beater' the narrator symbolically sums up the importance of Michal's relationship with money. The words resound again like a refrain when Michal first returns to the family home:

Otec a syn vstoupili mlčky do domu a odložili v rozlehlé předsíni. Nikdo je nepřišel uvítat, dům byl tichý, jenom z přízemí, kde byla kuchyně, zaléhaly sem pravidelné, trochu dunivé údery, jak kuchařka naklepávala maso. Zlatotepec, zlato, zlato. Michal se usmál široce na otce, který před ním stál zamklé a rozpačitě. (p. 15)

Whether the words actually resound in the mind of Michal or whether they belong to the narrator's discourse is impossible to decide with certainty within

the given context. However, they do signify that money is not only the pre-occupation of Michal; it also anticipates the theme that becomes predominant in the conflicts of the Gromus family; that is, the question of who inherits the factory after old Gromus's death.

Michal's focus on cost-effectiveness constitutes a new business mentality which is different from that of his father's generation. The narrative presentation of Michal's thoughts in interior monologue reveals how Michal defines himself in opposition to the older generation by writing his father off as 'romantic': 'Opět ten romantik, který v ničem neuznává výhrad, a chce-li něco, chce to celé a beze zbytku. Jak tenhle člověk mohl být obchodníkem a jak se mohl dodělat úspěchu tak značného? Snad jenom proto, že ti, s nimiž měl co dělat, mu byli víceméně podobní' (pp. 92-93). The difference in business mentality between father and son is more than a generational matter. As presented in the narrative it signifies an ideological change in the factory owners' attitude towards the workers. The narrative thematises the paradigm shift in the relation between factory owners and the workers that has gradually taken place during the post-war years and is now culminating in the period of the general economic crisis. This shift has been brought on by intensified labour saving modes of production; in the discourse of the novel this is present in the same 'speed' that appears in all the (narrator's) descriptions of the running of Gromus's factory (for example on p. 19). The narrative foregrounds the consequences of the changes in the modes of production and the economic crisis in the different attitudes of Gromus and Michal to the workers. Gromus represents an era when the factory owner could still afford to look at the workers as individuals: 'Věci se prostě nedají lámat přes koleno a továrna nejsou jen stroje, jsou to také živí lidé' (p. 84) he thinks after Michal has sacked six workers. Despite the fact that the narrator has earlier revealed that Gromus's feeling of responsibility towards the workers is based on vanity: 'Nesešlo mu tak na těch šesti, ale míval vždycky pověst lidského zaměstnavatele' (p. 72), the relationship between them does include a degree of humaneness. Contrary to his father, Michal perceives the workers as an oppositional force, as an element that has to be ruled. The narration

foregrounds this view in the presentation of Michal's thoughts right when he first meets the workers on his return to Libnice:

[...] Michal, jak tu stál, vnímal tento vzdor každým nervem. Hled' me, jak je to v nich zakořeněno, jak to v nich sedí. Možná že to mají už v krvi, že se s tím rodí. Vyrostl mezi tím, ale už na to zapomněl. Jednoho dne se s nimi utká, tomu se asi nevyhne; každý, kdo je zaměstnává, musí se s nimi jednou střetnout. Jak na ně? (p. 13)

Michal's view of the workers as a mass is expressed in the presentation of his thoughts as he walks through the workers' colony. The description creates a metonymy between his perception of their houses and how he sees their inhabitants: 'Uniformní, stejné, bezvýrazné. Připomínají dav, až to mrazí (p. 30). The passage also reveals Michal's way of thinking about power:

Michal je míjel s pocity tísně i vděčnosti, že není jedním z jejich obyvatelů. Po převratu z nich šla tak trochu hrůza, rozpínali se, povzbuzování vysoko šlehající září ruského ohně, cítili se už soudci a pány. Nesmysl. Jsou stvořeni k tomu, aby byli ovládáni. Příroda neplýtvá svými silami, a vytvořili několik mozků lepších než hromady ostatních, je to proto, že jim přisoudila zvláštní úlohu. Někdo musí vést ta zmatená stáda, jež by se jinak utopila v bídě a bezradnosti. Socialismus a kapitalismus. Vcelku to není nic jiného než spor o způsob a ruský příklad to jen potvrzuje. Nakonec zůstanou jedni nahoře a druzí dole, na jedné straně kvalita a na druhé množství, a mezi nimi se mele, zmítá a svíjí beztvaré cosi, střední stav, administrativa, úředník – touha nahoru a ploskonohé myšlenky a na nich neseškrabatelné bláto plebejského původu a určení. Spokojen místem, které mu, jak si právě vyložil, náleželo ve světě právem zrození i nadání, mladý Gromus si vykračoval stále pevněji. (pp. 30-31)¹³

Michal sees himself as one of the rulers of the world and, although the narrator does not contradict this view openly, he clearly distances himself from Michal's

¹³ The passage continues: 'Točil hůlkou, starou španělkou s kulatou hlavou ze slonoviny, pozůstatkem otcova mladického šviháctví, kterou vyhrabal kdesi ve skříní a již si od svého návratu zvykl nosit na svých procházkách' (p. 31). The walking stick is important because in Řezáč's novels it functions as a typical bourgeois emblem. In *Černé světlo* the notion of power associated with the walking stick is even further enhanced by the fact that the head of it is moulded into a small bust of Napoleon.

opinion of himself by directly referring to Michal's thought process in his subsequent description of Michal's state of mind.

Together with the desire for money Michal's desire for power lies at the core of the narrative presentation of him. It governs his relationship with women (first with Růžena and later his marriage with Vilma) as well as his general world view. The motif of power is directly thematised in Michal's conversation with the notary Purkl after the old Gromus's death and the reading of the will. The notary refers to the Gromuses as 'Napoleoni' (p. 141) which provokes Michal's analysis of his family's relationship with power and the need for leaders:¹⁴

"To je v rodě," odpověděl Michal. "Nebožtík dědeček musil mít alespoň psa, kterého vůbec nepotřeboval, jen aby mohl někomu poroučet. Bez lidí, jako byl můj otec, by svět upadl do anarchie, bezvládí by pohltilo jedny i druhé a požírali se navzájem jako smečky vlků. Bez vůle k moci by nebylo pořádku. Kdybych chtěl mluvit nafoukaně, řekl bych, že tvoříme blahobyť a s ním všechny hodnoty, pro které život stojí vůbec za to, aby byl žit." (p. 141)¹⁵

Michal closely associates his idea of power with the idea of progress which he perceives as a struggle with nature and with the development of the human species. Michal's idea of progress and natural selection echoes an idea of nineteenth-century Social Darwinism. His thoughts about his work (he perceives selling combs, toys and other such trifles as almost a secular version of the crusades) echoes this conflict between nature and culture where what he regards as culture is invariably associated with the progress of civilisation. His thoughts express a condescending view of the potential buyers of his goods – an attitude which is enforced by their being outside the range of his self-assumed power: 'Zuřil nad překážkami, třebaže je zmáhal trpělivě a nedával se jimi znechutit.

¹⁴ The Napoleon topos links *Slepá ulička* with *Černé světlo* (see footnote above). The topos also occurs in Pujmanová's *Lidé na křižovatce* in Růžena's thoughts about paní Häuslerová: 'Ubohá paní! Všichni mužští jsou stejné potvory. Co dělat, svět je takový. Silnější vítězí, a již agenti v kamaších mluvivali s oblibou o Napoleonovi. Co chcete, toť život'. Marie Pujmanová, *Lidé na křižovatce* [1937], Prague: Borový, 1948, p. 401.

¹⁵ The plot of the novel – Michal's lack of success in his personal life – markedly ironises this view of his. Michal is deemed to repeat the mistake of his father's in choosing the wrong wife – a choice he makes exactly because of his pursuit of power and wealth.

Proč nebylo možno vzít kladivo a rozdrtit je, proč nebylo možno ovládnout vůli tu smečku, která se jmenuje zákaznictvo?’ (p. 146). The narration repeatedly returns to his ideas of power and the necessity of leaders.¹⁶ However, these are consistently ironised in the narrator’s discourse, for example, in the above case: ‘Byl by se musel smát svým myšlenkám, kdyby vše co podnikal, nebral až ponuře vážně’ (p. 146). The narratorial irony undermines Michal’s grand thoughts about his position in life. His desire for money, his idea of ‘the will to power’ and his idea of progress that resembles the Darwinian survival of the fittest all converge in the same ‘egoism’ since they ultimately express the desire to advance oneself at the expense of others and the praxis of using others as means to an end.¹⁷

The narrative presentation of Michal’s relationship with women, first with Růžena, then with his wife Vilma, shows that his desire for power and the need to rule others is not confined to the sphere of business, but also transposes itself to his perception of intimate affairs (love and marriage). Here I shall save the analysis of his relationship with Růžena for my analysis of the function of Růžena’s narrative and only focus on the story-line of his marriage to Vilma.

Michal and Vilma’s relationship develops as a power struggle. Michal’s desire for her is awakened by the fact that he cannot fathom her depths (p. 146), that he somehow senses that she is intellectually superior to him.¹⁸ The description of Michal’s perception of her when she is about to leave his house indicates that what evokes his desire is her independency which challenges his desire for power: ‘Moci se jí tak zmocnit, podrobit sobě, učinit ji na sobě závislou. Byl to nesmysl, nikdy by se nepodrobila. Byl by to věčný souboj dvou inteligencí’ (p. 150).

The presentation of Michal’s thoughts about Vilma shows how he defines himself in opposition to her in order to confirm the rightness of his own view of himself. His perception of her is stereotypical in that he dismisses her way of

¹⁶ See, for example, a little further on in the same passage, p. 146.

¹⁷ ‘Získávat kdykoli a cokoli, to je snad jeho pravý smysl’ he thinks about life (p. 130).

¹⁸ In the case of Růžena, it is her belonging to the working class that makes him curious – ‘to know what they are really like’.

thinking as typically female, as opposed to his own self-confident (implied masculine) way of thinking:

Naopak pocítil náhle silnou důvěru ve své jednostranné, přímočaré myšlení. Musí to přece člověku dodávat síly, jestliže si myslí o věcech buď to, nebo ono a nikdy dvojí nebo trojí najednou, jestliže nikdy není na pochybách, jestliže si nepohrává se svou inteligencí, ale hledí ji prostě vytěžit. Musí mu to dodávat síly a převahy nad ostatními. Všechno jiné je intelektuálština vhodná pro nedělní kratochvíli, zábava pro ženy vždycky trochu nakloněné rozvratu. (pp. 150-51)

Vilma embodies the modern, emancipated bourgeois woman.¹⁹ She is aware of the conflict of competing values between the 'old' and the 'new' as her remark about the streetlights shows:

„Vím, že je to hanebné osvětlení, dokonalé maloměstské škrtilství a starousedlický šlendrián, a přece říkám krása. Jsou ve vás taky někdy dva lidé? Jednomu z nich připadá, že toho pokroku není stále dost, vleče se to pro lidskou hloupost k zoufání pomalu, a druhý se bojí, aby toho přece jen nebylo příliš mnoho, protože to staré, začazené a loudavé má půvab, který se už nikdy nevrátí do našeho života.“ (p. 150)

Her comment expresses an ambivalent attitude towards progress, similar to the one that the narrator's discourse expresses. Thus Vilma's comment highlights the ideologeme generated in the narratives' consistent distribution of the semes old *versus* new. This ideologeme structures the Gromuses' relationship and also the narrator's presentation of the contrast between tradition and industrialisation of the rural town. Since the narrator's discourse gives a negative evaluation of Michal Gromus, who is the representative for the new, the narrative expresses a certain degree of conservatism in relation to the new.

The narrative presentation of Vilma places her in opposition to Růžena, not only as a rival, but also in the sense that Růžena represents the traditional, uneducated working class woman. Růžena's reverence for Michal's position of power places her within this category, although she at other times attempts to

¹⁹ The notary Purkl also displays obviously conservative views as regards women; cf. his judgment of Vilma.

break free from it. On the other hand, the presentation of Michal's thoughts about Vilma and Růžena, respectively, reveals him as a conservative misogynist, despite his postulated belief in progress (see p. 147 and 154 for examples).

The narration anticipates the nature of Michal and Vilma's relationship in a number of more or less direct allusions to his father's relationship with his second wife, Anna; for example, in the narrator's analysis of the feelings that Vilma evokes in Michal:

Svírala ho úzkost. Tucha nějakého dějství, již znal a jež mu nahánívala hrůzu, v něm bloudila. Nemohl přimět svou paměť, aby mu je osvětlila dosti jasně. Vědel jenom, že chce toto děvče, že je musí dostat, že se ho musí beze zbytku zmocnit, aby vše, co dosud dělal, nabylo pravého smyslu.
(p. 160)

Michal's first subconscious impression²⁰ is later confirmed by his step-brother Robert's comment on Vilma: '„Je hezká, to ano. Je chytrá, chytřejší, než na kolik já stačím. Ale je v ní něco, jak bych to řekl, zkrátka připadá mi, že je v ní něco z mé matky“' (p. 162). At this moment Michal rejects the comparison of Vilma with Anna, although he allows some doubt to enter his mind: '[...], i kdyby to bylo pravda, je v něm, Michalovi, desetkrát více vůle, než bylo v jeho otci. Nesmysl' (p. 162). The narrative presentation of Michal's consciousness reveals again and again how Michal's determination blocks out everything that does not agree with his decision to win over Vilma (p. 173). The narrator's discourse has in another description linked this sense of determination to the Gromuses' desire where it is explained in terms of biological inheritance: 'Michalovi slabě hvízdalo v hrdle, bylo to srdce, načepýřené gromusovské srdce, hltavý, nenasytný duch zděděné krve' (p. 161).

The nature of Vilma and Michal's relationship reverses his idea of power and puts him in the position of slave. Of the two Vilma is the calculating party. She makes it clear from the beginning that she uses Michal as a means to save her father's (Rolín's) factory from bankruptcy. The narrator ironises how

²⁰ It is characteristic that this is presented in psycho-narration since the narrator expresses thoughts that Michal is not as yet able to verbalise.

Michal has become a slave of his desire for Vilma, and therefore a slave of her as well. This occurs after Vilma has finally surrendered herself to him:

Naslouchal větru a slyšel, co nikdy předtím neslychal. Tma zněla smíchem. Obří noc se lámala v pase a roztrásala se chechtotem. Vilma se nemusela bát hodit mu díl této noci jako kost. Hryzl ji marně. Zůstala mu jen neuhasitelná žízeň, jakoby se napil mořské vody nebo nalízal sněhu. Měl to být jeho úděl? Seděl a chvílemi drkotal zuby, aniž o tom věděl. (pp. 195-96)²¹

The master – slave relationship is directly thematised in the narrative presentation of Michal's thoughts during the public auction of Rolín's factory. What is at stake here is that Michal has made a deal with Vilma to buy the factory as a precondition for her marrying him unless the price exceeds a certain limit. Michal's thoughts take the form of an interior monologue addressed to Vilma:

A dost. Necht' minuty plynou a nejistota zmítá lidmi. Nejde ovšem o to, co zmítá lidmi, ale co se děje ve vás. To bych rád věděl. Přišel jsem sice proto, abych dražil, ale dejme tomu, že nebudu. Pohrejme si s touto myšlenkou, dokud je čas. Otrocká myšlenka. Mohl bych zabít, kdybych chtěl, praví otrok a představuji si ho, jak stojí s nožem v ruce nad svým pánem, který pokojně spí. Ale pán vzdychne ze sna, otrok se začne chvět a pustí nůž. Neboť je to jen otrok a bojí se i spícího pána. Nebudu dražit, abych si prokázal, že nejsem otrok, který pouští nůž, když pán vzdychne. (p. 213)

Michal conceptualises his conflict by identifying himself with the slave who is afraid of liberating himself through murdering his master. The whole auction episode signifies how he once again tries to consolidate his position of power, although his attempt to uphold the image of himself as the master becomes increasingly forced. However, the narrator's subsequent ironic comment on their marriage makes evident that Vilma is the master of their relationship because of her lack of desire for him: 'A dalo by se říci, že to byl vlastně znamenitý sňatek, toto spojení dvou počtářských hlav, nebýti toho, že jedna z nich byla oblouzena

²¹ This passage is also an example of how Řezáč uses descriptions of the wind to create an atmosphere that either mocks or supports how a character experiences a situation. These descriptions predominantly occur in relation to Michal Gromus.

vášni a druhá zůstávala trvale chladná. Michal měl brzy ocenit, pro koho z nich dvou byl výhodnější' (pp. 218-19).

The development of their relationship shows how Michal's idea of marriage constantly collides with Vilma's indifference. The power balance is further pushed in favour of Vilma due to the economic crisis: 'Jsem v konjunktře, kdežto vy se svými hřebeny nevíte kudy kam' (p. 241)²², she comments to Michal. Their conflict culminates when Michal during one of their few intimate moments confronts Vilma with his desire to have a child. This desire has been strengthened by the pregnant Růžena who he saw sitting with Jindra when he was out on a walk.²³ Vilma's refusal represents a blow to Michal's understanding of his natural rights, not only in terms of marriage, but in the broader sense of class as well:

Uplatnit svou vůli tak, jako ji uplatňuje sedlák nebo stepní kočovník. Copak je možné, aby mu směla něco takového odepřít? Má mu být vzato, co příroda přiznala všemu, co žije: právo udržovat svůj rod? Bylo by tak lehké stisknout to hrdlo a svírat je tak dlouho, až by začalo chladnout, až by vystydlo tak, jak studená je duše v tomto těle. Ale čeho by se tím dosáhlo? Růženin život se tyčí v šeru stále neprůhlednějším jako hora v modravé dálce. Máme snad vymírat, nemajíce, komu bychom předali výsledky své práce, kdežto oni se budou množit bez ohledu na svou bídu? (p. 243)

His last thought once again establishes the class struggle as the referent for his way of seeing human relationships, but at the same time it emphasises his view of the workers as an inferior mass.²⁴ Michal subsequently tries to impose a pregnancy on Vilma during intercourse, the only result being that she pushes him to the floor at the crucial moment. The narrator deals Michal the final blow in the description of his state after Vilma has run away: 'Ležel a tma se nad ním převalovala jak vlna mdloby. Neměl síly, aby si poručil a vstal. Chvilkami šklubla mu tělem nervová křeč jako vzlyk. Něco mu vyplouvalo před oči. Snad

²² For the influence of the economic crisis on the Gromus business, see pp. 221-23.

²³ This is one of the episodes which the narrative discourse repeats from two different perspectives: first from Růžena and Jindra's and later we learn about Michal's reaction to the situation (see p. 240).

²⁴ It also expresses Michal's prejudiced view that the 'lower classes' behave like animals; it is implied that, contrary to this behaviour, the bourgeoisie are civilised.

to byl Růženin život vzedmutí těhotenstvím, světélkující modře jako hora podobenství' (p. 244). That the last sentence is the narrator's comment can be seen from its abstract character in the form of a simile. The moral of the narrator's simile is that Michal could have had what he wanted had he chosen Růžena. However, Michal's view of marriage, which is guided by his idea of power, prevents him from learning any lesson from what happened with Vilma, as his thoughts about her after the factory's stores have burnt down reveal: 'At se mezi nimi stálo cokoli, alespoň v takovouto chvíli má být žena po boku svého muže. [...] Takové je manželství: v něm více než kde jinde si jeden musí podmanit druhého' (p. 272).

The narrator emphasises Michal's powerless position in relation to Vilma with descriptions of how he comes to look more and more like the old Gromus (see p. 272). The narrative presentation of the last conflict between Michal and Vilma, in which she announces that she is leaving him, shows how he is so engulfed in his own triumph that the fire has saved him from bankruptcy that he does not notice the signs of her intention. Instead he arrogantly brags about his business luck caused by Balada's suicide (p. 275). Vilma's decision to leave him takes him by surprise and he refuses to acknowledge her rejection, again recalling to himself his Gromus tenacity: 'Nebylo v povaze Gromusů ani v jejich zákoníku, aby pouštěli, co jednou uchvátí, třeba jim to spalovalo prsty až do kostí' (p. 277). He insists that she at least gives up Rolín's factory and when she refuses he finally snaps and tries to assault her. The episode ends with the image of Vilma's light coat in the streetlight as she runs away (p. 279). The image, that to him symbolised the essence of her independence when they first met, is now used to ironise him.

The narrative of Michal's and Vilma's relationship runs like one extended mockery of all Michal's ideas. She surpasses him with her willpower and determination to get what she wants, although, contrary to Michal, she is capable of showing compassion: 'Napadlo mě, jak na ni bude působit, co se stalo s jejím otcem. Ale to je vedlejší pro vás a snad i pro mne' (p. 275), she comments on meeting Růžena in the street. Actually, this piece of information is not really correct since Vilma saw Růžena in the street before she knew about

the fire and Balada's suicide. This indicates that the narrator wants the reader to think that Vilma is not quite as cruel and despicable in her calculations as Michal. Vilma escapes with a certain amount of integrity because the narrative discourse shows how she consciously reflects on her own actions. In a long mixed narrated and interior monologue she scrutinises her own motives for marrying Michal after Purkl has accused her of deception:

Lhala jste svým sňatkem. Lhala jsem opravdu? Nechci lež, je to zbraň ženské slabosti, je to něco, ke čemu nás vychovávali. [...]. Někdo se neodbytně prochází jejím svědomím. Ach ne, s tím si na mne nepřijdeš. Ještě tyhle dveře otevři. Chci vědět, co je za nimi. Vilma se dopálí a otvírá i tyto poslední dveře. Má svou hrdost, nikdo jí nesmí říci, že před něčím couvla, že se něčeho bála. A přece to byl podvod. Vzala jsem si ho a má to své přirozené důsledky.

(pp. 268-69)

In the preceding narrative presentation of Vilma's visit to notary Purkl's office the reader has learned about Vilma's difficult childhood, losing her mother at an early age. Purkl's reflection on her blames the modern times for what she has become (although even as a child she was different from the other girls and wanted to play in her father's workshop): '[...] tvrdý, bezohledný muž v žádoucím a krásném ženském těle. Tady byl výsledek emancipace, koedukace a jak ještě se ta moderní bláznovství jmenují a technické výchovy, žena, která se styděla za své ženství a cítila nejjasnější a nespravedlnější zákon přírody jako křivdu a násilí' (p. 266). This passage expresses Purkl's misogynous conservative view of women's emancipation. Through other descriptions of Vilma it is evident that the narrator does not share this view. Fundamentally, the narration of Vilma's background explains her as a victim of her upbringing and class. This explains why she does not want to rid herself of her desire for possessions and why she lives for work instead of for human relationships. The narrator's presentation of Vilma's feeling when she sees the young female machinists run past implies a slight critique of women's lot within marriage: 'Nesly v sobě mládí s dušičkami, jež nebyly schopny pojmout šíří smutku svého údělu, poháněla je srdce, jež nedovedlo nic odradit od bláznivých snů. Vilma se

za nimi dívala s tvrdou závistí' (p. 269). This critical view of marriage is supported by the description of the life of the married working class women (see p. 269). However, it also serves the purpose of showing Vilma's privileged position in this respect. She has the education and therefore the means to leave her husband if she chooses to do so. Vilma is an ambiguous character in the novel. On the one hand, her relationship with Michal contributes to showing the futility and sterility connected with the bourgeois life that is governed by the desire for money and power. (It is one of the great ironies of the plot that the man who sees himself as one of the rulers becomes a slave of his own desire which the plot then shows to be futile.) On the other hand, she, in her own right, does not completely conform to this stereotype. The narration has also shown positive elements of her character or rather, a possibility for her of breaking with the stereotypical bourgeois life.

3.3 The ideological function of Růžena's narrative

The function of Růžena's narrative has gone widely unnoticed in previous criticism of *Slepá ulička* in which critics mostly focus on the amorous intrigues that surround this character. On the story level Růžena unites the two opposing worlds of the bourgeoisie and the working class, represented by Michal and Jindra respectively, by having an affair first with Michal and later simultaneously with Jindra. However, because Růžena's 'project' explicitly is about escaping her class background, it takes on other (ideological) significations that are put into play in the development of that part of the plot that involves Růžena, but which also have implications for the interpretation of the whole narrative.

Růžena's narrative links the two antagonistic narratives of Michal Gromus and Jindra Paura. It is modelled on the narrative paradigm of the story of the prodigal son (here the fallen woman) who finds his way back home again. Although Růžena does not at first return to her father, the characterisation of Jindra reveals that there is some kind of paternal element in her attraction to him: 'Začínala milovat toho vychrtlíka, který jí takřka omdlával v náručí a v jehož očích nacházela svit úžasného zbožnění, podobný onomu, který vídala v

očíh svého otce, jenomže trýskající z jiného zdroje' (p. 165). Růžena's narrative can be divided into four parts: Růžena leaves her working-class background behind and goes through various difficulties (mainly caused by the Gromus brothers) until she has to become a prostitute in order to save herself. After her return to Libnice Jindra Poura marries her both because he sees it as his duty to bring her back to her working class roots, as a lost sheep to the fold, and because he has never stopped loving her.

Růžena is central to the narrative presentation of class in two ways. First, in the characterisation of Růžena her perception of class appears to be the defining feature of her character which governs her aspirations and actions. Second, Růžena's narrative raises the issues of class conflict that lie immanent in the narratives of Michal Gromus and Jindra Poura. On the level of plot, this conflict is narrativised in the form of Jindra's amorous rivalry with Michal of which, however, only Růžena and Jindra are aware.

The narrative shows in more ways how Růžena is caught up in a double movement between her hatred of the bourgeoisie and at the same time her disdain for her working class background that feeds her desire to escape from her own class. The paradox at the heart of the characterisation of Růžena is that although Růžena has been brought up on the basis of working class values, her father being a Socialist, her parents have through their adoration of her beauty, at the same time, nurtured her sense of being different from them, for example by exempting her from housework so that she can protect her hands (see p. 38). Růžena's class hatred thus arises from her experience of lacking. It is a substitute for what she cannot get, as the presentation of her thoughts (in narrated monologue) followed by the narrator's analysis of her makes clear at her first incidental encounter with Michal:

Ten mladík se jednou stane zaměstnavatelem jejího otce, měla by tedy být k němu slušná. Ostatně proč? Učila se nenávidět lidi jeho postavení; dívala-li se na něho, hučely jí současně v hlavě věty otcova pobouření, neboť Josef Balada byl socialista chlapsky drsný a písmácky zarytý. Výkořisťovatelé! V jejich představách žili nerozlučně spojení s touhami, jejichž splnění se nikdy

nedočká. Nebylo těžko je nenávidět, svět se tím zjednodušoval a nenávist sama byla sladká, nahrazujíc vše, čeho se životu nedostávalo. (p. 34)

For Růžena Michal represents the materialisation of her dream of escaping from her background. The narrator's analysis of Růžena's disillusionment with the ideas that have been ingrained in her through listening to her father's discussions with the comrades from the workers' union both emphasises the discrepancy between their ideas and reality and shows how their perception, seen from Růžena's perspective, may be interpreted as futile:

[...] Růžena, tichá i pozorná, vnímala jejich slova a její obrazotvornost je ihned doplňovala a rozehrávala ve dvě pásma obrazů, tak nesourodá na první pohled, a přece pramenící z jednoho zdroje, na sobě závislá, do sebe vzrůstající. [...] Dvou hlasů spor, dvou melodií svár: ta nenávist utlačence, který je odsouzen žít z práce pro jiné, ta touha vyšinout se tam, jíst medové koláče zahálky a snít o vlastní kráse. Josef Balada se svými soudruhy tonuli v bezbřehosti vidin, den, kdy se dostane spravedlnosti a rovného dílu všem, byl jim na dosah ruky, podle nich kapitalismus scípal, rozkládal se sám, požíral se jako hydra, jejíž hlad nemůže být ukojen ničím než vlastním masem. **Všude jsi mohl vidět doklady toho. Nebude třeba ani příliš silné rány, aby byl doražen.** Ale Růžena, která již tolik let naslouchala těmto řečem a stále neviděla přicházet jejich naplnění, přestávala věřit, že se vůbec kdy dočká toho velkého dne. A dočká-li se, bude už příliš stará, aby se z něho mohla radovat. V sobectví své krásy spojovala jej se svým mládím a se svými touhami. Jediné v jejich naplnění mohl míti cenu. Bylo tak lehké nenávidět ty na druhém břehu, zejména proto, že ses tam sama nemohla nikdy dostat. Ale jak by to bylo, kdyby ses tam opravdu dostala? (p. 36)

I quote this passage at length because in it the narrator sets out the paradigm for his future evaluation of Růžena and judgments of her action. By ironising how the workers deceive themselves, through the use of 'quoted speech' (in bold) to mark that he reproduces their opinion, he creates sympathy for Růžena's escapism and youthful egoism. (He does not say that their self-deception is not justified by their situation, though). The passage comprises what goes on in Růžena's mind during the period in which she thinks about whether to accept

Michal's invitation to go dancing. It is characteristic that most of it is narrated in the narrator's idiom and does not, apart from a couple of thoughts presented in narrated monologue, express any explicit level of consciousness on Růžena's behalf. The narrator summarises her doubts in the gnomic 'V takových chvílích člověku připadá, jako by nebyl sám, jako by v něm bylo nejméně pět lidí. A každý chce něco jiného a něco jiného cítí' (p. 38).²⁵ The discrepancy between Růžena's thoughts about herself and the narrator's analysis of her relationship with Michal reveals the idealism and naivety that characterise her actions. To herself Růžena explains her actions as her natural right of choice:

Uděláš-li, co chceš udělat, budeš vlastně nevěstka. Nesmysl. Co světem byl, ženy vždycky prodávaly svou krásu. Některé hloupě, jiné chytřeji. Bylo to jejich vlastnictví, bylo to jejich právo. Proč by jsi musela vzít třeba vychrtlého Jindru, který bude vždycky mít rád více než ji svůj ještě vychrtlější přelud revoluce? Její život i její krása patřily přece jen jí. (p. 65)

Růžena believes in fate as a matter of free will: 'Jakýpak osud, blázínku, proč by ses nesvezla, můžeš-li, to ještě k ničemu nezavazuje, jakýpak osud, držíš-li jej sama ve svých rukou' (p. 61). However, the narrative questions this view by showing that it is not possible for her to escape her social pre-determination, her working-class roots, since she has internalised it.

The narrator captures the fundamental difference between Růžena and Michal's experience of their surroundings which also implicitly casts Růžena in the role of the victim because she is the less calculating of the two; she is susceptible to the beauty of the place, while he only thinks about whether it is a suitable place to seduce her (p. 66).

Contrary to her view of herself, the narrator presents Růžena as a victim of her own desires (in this victimisation he judges her on the basis of the general morality accepted by society). The scene in which she receives the golden powder-compact from Michal symbolically illustrates how she has been corrupted by her own desire for beautiful things. At first she resists her inclination to receive the present, but as Michal threatens to throw it in the

²⁵ By the way, this quotation appears almost in identical form in the description of Lída in *Svědék*. There it refers to why she wants to become an actress; she has more people within her whom she can express through acting.

water, she grabs it from him: 'Vytrhla mu krabičku z dlaně a zasmála se pronikavě z překonaného úleku i z neuhasitelné touhy po té pěkné věci' (p. 69). While describing Růžena as a naive romantic, the narrator repeatedly emphasises Michal's calculation. He comments on how he pretends to throw the powder-compact into the water with the exclamation: 'Ach, toto gesto, tak patetické a omšelé!' and openly states Michal's pretence: 'A Michalovo osvědčené herectví odpovědělo' (p. 68). When Růžena finally allows herself to be seduced by Michal the narrator's description first reveals how Růžena surrenders to her own desire, but subsequently his description reverts to a sentimentality that links sexual desire with social injustice:

To úskočné a nedočkavé, hladové a bez rozvahy tíhnoucí k určitému cíli, co číhalo v jejím těle, to vězněné, zapírané a zakřikované našlo svou chvíli a rozbilo mříže až neuvěřitelně slabé. Oči se chytaly kolotajících hvězd a tělo se proměnilo, proplovajíc přejemi nesmyslné bolesti. Našla jen slova chudé holky, kterou ani chvíle opojení nezbaví vidiny budoucnosti, vztahující vychrtlou ruku, aby vybrala svou daň a zaprosila, aby jí nebylo ublíženo. (p. 70)

The roles into which Růžena and Michal are cast at this beginning of their affair matter because the narrator's evaluation sets out the semantic framework for the interpretation of the subsequent development of their relationship.²⁶ However, Růžena's thoughts reveal how she sees their relationship in strictly mercenary terms; it buys her comfort and she can live out her dream of being a lady: 'Vydržovaná holka. Ale nejsou-li všechny měšťácké paničky, které nedělají nic jiného, než utrácení peníze svých mužů, právě tak vydržovány? Ne, to by jí nedělalo nejmenších rozpaků. Chtěla pryč z Libnic a něco za to musí zaplatit' (p. 99). Růžena's changed position (she now looks at the workers as if from a different world) makes her assume the way of thinking of the adversary. Her writing off the workers' viewpoint when she overhears them talking about Michal after he has sacked a number of workers shows this: 'Nechtěla naděje poletující po střechách domů, jež dosud ani nestály. Slyšela otce, který se hájil,

²⁶ In some descriptions the narrator seems quite captivated by Růžena; he seems particularly fascinated by that part of her who just lives out her dreams, although he doesn't cease to remind the reader that they are only dreams.

neboť roztrpčení propuštěců se obracelo na něho, ale cítila se tak vzdálena jeho strasti, jako by v ní nekolovala jediná kapka jeho krve' (p. 76).

The narrator plays the role of Růžena's conscience as the presentation focuses on how she distances herself from her home. Here when she talks to Michal about moving to the bedsit that he has rented for their meetings:

Domov na ní ležel jako stálá a neochabující výčitka. A kdo z nás má rád výčitky? Nenáviděla domov za jeho prostou počestnost, za chudobu cit netratící, která si dělá čest z hlupácké, nic nevynášející dřiny a která by první po ní plivla pro její touhu po úniku. [...]. Jsou počestní a házejí na ni kamenem už tím, že jsou takoví, jací jsou, a to je neodpustitelné. Neboť ona chce stůj co stůj věřit, že má pravdu, a bojí se, ach ne, ví příliš dobře, že pravdu mají oni. (pp. 102-03)

The narrator here exposes his know-all attitude; he generally knows more about the characters' real motives than they do themselves. In the case of Růžena her escapism is presented rather like a wasted defiance, at times almost as refractoriness, in the sense that 'she will grow up one day'. (That is why the reader never really manages to feel outraged by Růžena's behaviour; the narrator has already let it shine through that Růžena will come to her senses.) This point is important for the evaluative process of the narrative. The narrator more or less subtly guides the generation of meaning by exposing the characters' self-deception.

Růžena's relationship with the Socialist agitator Jindra Pour signifies Růžena's ambivalent position with regard to her background. The first two scenes involving Růžena and Jindra contribute to the impression that the narrator has created elsewhere that Růžena acts as she does because of her desire for wealth and possessions, because she is egoistic in a youthful naive way. On the first occasion when Jindra approaches her she rejects him outright. On the second occasion the situation is different. He confesses to her that he has discovered her secret affair with Michal and that he has informed her parents about it. The reason he gives her is that he wanted revenge because she has betrayed her class. He tries to persuade her of her obligation towards her class:

„Copak to necítíte, že vaše místo je mezi námi, že svět se rozdělil a každý z nás že musí jasně říci své ano nebo ne?“ Viděla jen nejasně jeho bledý obličej. Byl úzký jako nůž, prořezával tmu a mířil k jejímu srdci. Byla-li někde láska, byla v jeho ostří, byla v citu toho kolektivisty, který chtěl rozmetat svět, protože mu byla marným snem. (p. 111)

The narrator here introduces the idea of love into Růžena's thoughts. However, the description of Růžena's subsequent seduction of Jindra shows how she uses him to revenge herself on Michal (class hatred) and how her relationship with either of them is fundamentally about power in reverse:

Strhla ho na sebe aniž dbala, že země je mokrá odpoledním deštěm a tráva znovu zmáčená noční rosou a vzdala se mu divoce a bezohledně, užaslá rozkoší, která ji zaplavila tak jako nikdy v objetí mladého Gromuse. A měla přitom pocit podivného uspokojení, že plivá na toho bohatce a že je obírá o něco, o čem si asi myslel, že na to má sám svrchované a zaplacené právo. A ještě jiná myšlenka, cynická a veselá jí hvízdala v hlavě: jak lehko je klamat muže a získávat od nich, čeho se člověku zachce. (p. 113)

This quotation introduces the idea that love and sexual desire are linked to class-consciousness. It is implied that Růžena is able to experience sexual desire because the object of desire belongs to her own class. In contrast, her sexual encounter with Michal was present rather like an act of submission, a power relationship (p. 70). Thus it creates positive connotations for the reader's perception of the working class. (This is particularly true because within the whole narrative this makes a contrast to the frigidity of Michal's wife Vilma.) Růžena's seduction of Jindra marks the end of the first part of Růžena's narrative. The narrator's summary explains how Růžena has deceived both Jindra and her parents into thinking that they are engaged, while it was only a way for her to plan her escape: 'A celý týden poté věřili Baladovi, že Růžena a Jindra jsou snoubenci, ačkoli se z toho příliš neradovali. A celá dělnická kolonie tomu věřila s nimi. Na konci toho týdne Růžena zmizela z Libnic a už se do nich nevrátila' (p. 113).²⁷

²⁷ The reader never learns what happened during that week, but can only assume that Růžena never intended to marry Jindra.

Růžena's narrative differs from that of the other characters in that she leaves Libnice. Reading the novel for the first time one would think at this point that this is the end of Růžena's narrative. However, she reappears at old Gromus's funeral as an enigmatic figure. The narrator limits his description of her to her appearance and speculates about her motive for turning up at the funeral: 'Cítila, že by měla být v tuto chvíli po boku svého milence, nebo se jí zachtělo provokovat rodnou louži?' (pp. 124-25).

The narrator's comment about Růžena has the function of informing the reader about the fact that Michal is still Růžena's lover, which reduces the episode with Jindra to a mere intermezzo. It also establishes her new role as the 'fallen woman' who is the talk of the town. This marks the beginning of the second part of Růžena's narrative in which she has been installed in a bedsit in another town, living like a kept woman off Michal's money. This part of the narrative dramatises the growing conflict within Růžena between her new status and her proletarian background. On the one hand Růžena is the dependent party in her relationship with Michal. The narrator's description of her shows how she changes her attitude towards Michal, implying that she wants him to marry her (see p. 152 for example). In contrast the narrative presentation of Michal's thought reveals how he is caught in the dilemma between marrying her (it would prove his social power in that he doesn't have to care about anyone's opinion, see p. 154) and getting rid of her. The latter becomes more prominent after he meets Vilma Rolín, the daughter of another factory owner. On the other hand, Růžena has taken the worker Jindra Pour as her lover, a relationship in which she has the power because he is hopelessly in love with her.²⁸ The narrator reveals the fact that Růžena has another lover in a summary that shows that he is completely in control of the development of the narrative. He knows what has been going on behind the scenes.²⁹

The narrator's account of how Růžena takes Jindra as her lover both serves the purpose of showing how Jindra is in a relationship of power with her and how their relationship embodies the class struggle on an intimate level. It also

²⁸ This has been made clear in earlier descriptions of Jindra.

²⁹ Perhaps it is also a matter of Schadenfreude towards Michal Gromus.

emphasises Růžena's inner conflict between her conflicting need for freedom and her need for belonging within the working class with whom she shares the same predicament (pp. 164-65). The narrator's analysis of Růžena's dilemma presents Růžena's belonging to the working class as something deeply embedded at the emotional level. In the analysis he identifies himself with Růžena's experience of her background. The idea presented of the working class as an organic whole seems somewhat idealistic and is idealised on the emotional level. At the same time the presentation of Růžena's thoughts (echoing Jindra's socialist idioms) foregrounds how her working class background makes her see her double affair in terms of class struggle; she feels entitled to cheat on Michal because he belongs to the class who exploit the workers (p. 165).

The narrator's presentation of Růžena persistently emphasises how she lets her actions be ruled by her desires,³⁰ and at the same time points out her naivety in doing so. This is, for example, the case when Michal plans to throw Růžena into the arms of Robert. The whole episode demonstrates how her desire for adventure completely rules her conduct, despite a moment of fear (pp. 177-81). However, the narrator openly takes sides with Růžena by condemning Michal's behaviour: 'Pěkná úloha pro mladého průmyslníka, který se chce stát magnátem. Co znamená lidský osud v jeho velké hře?' (p. 177).

It is no coincidence (within the ideological framework of the narrative) that Růžena's relationship with Robert contributes to her final downfall. Robert has previously been presented as epitomising the ruthless bon vivant of the bourgeoisie, living off other people's money through deception. Růžena goes with Robert to Southern France where they live the high life until he runs off to England, leaving her to manage on her own. Růžena returns to Libnice having lost everything, even her sense of herself: 'Bylo v ní mrtvo, ani setkání s Michalem na prvním kroku z nádraží ji nevzrušilo. Padneme-li tak hluboko, že

³⁰ 'Člověk nemůže mít všechno, ale člověk také někdy neví, co všechno může mít. Divoká, lehkomyšlná víra ji zaplavila. Vždycky se jí dostane všeho, po čem zaprahe' (p. 166). And in the situation in which Michal leaves her alone with Robert: 'Přepadla jí slabost a úzkost. Věděla, co se v ní děje, a bála se toho. Jindra byl pokus umlčet věčně hlodající výčitku. Tohle nebylo nic jiného než vábení bezuzdnosti, není zákonů, není hranic, není nic, co by nebylo dovoleno neuhasínající žízni. Vyšla za Michalem na chodbu' (p. 176).

už sami sebe přestaneme vidět jako člověka, zlostejníme ke všemu' (p. 225).

The description of Růžena after her return introduces an idea of purging:

Snažila se necítit své tělo, být jen částičkou toho tvrdého, jasného a závratně čistého vzduchu, který ji omýval vlnami lehkých, větrných závanů a který vdechovala s takovou prudkou dychtivostí, jako by věřila, že ji může propláchnout, ach, propláchnout tak, jako proud vody promývá láhev, až není než jiskřícím tvarem průsvitné hmoty. (p. 225)

It is as if Růžena has had to be purged of her desires through the absolute degradation of having to sell her own body. From the description of her subsequent walk to the dam it is implied that the decision she had to make was whether to commit suicide or whether to return to her parents and beg them to let her stay. Both options are presented as impossible to her. The idea of suicide goes against her deep-rooted thirst for life as her thoughts as she stands by the dam show: 'Kdybych mohla alespoň říci: Nevím, o tom, to jsem nebyla já. Ale vždyť jsem se do toho sama hnala, vždyť se mi toho všeho chtělo a zdálo se mi, že zajdu, nebudu-li to mít. Do všeho, jenom ne do té Marseilles, to jsem musela, panebože, ty víš, že jsem musela, nemohla jsem tam přece zajít jak pes' (p. 226). This is one of the few places in the novel where Růžena's thoughts are narrated as if they were her own.³¹ The use of this mode of narrative presentation at this crucial point in Růžena's narrative emphasises that she is conscious of her own responsibility for what has happened to her. This increased awareness of hers becomes a determining factor in her decision to accept Jindra's offer of marriage: 'Ať řeknu, co řeknu, musím už u toho zůstat na celý život, ach bože, a musím to říci rychle, protože hlady už sotva na nohou stojím' (p. 229). Růžena's reunion with Jindra belongs to one of those quirks of plot of which the narrative offers more examples. Here Jindra tells Růžena that he has returned to Balada's house because the very same day Balada came to him to ask him to write to the consulate in Marseille so that they could find her

³¹ I think only later also in the passages where she considers whether to marry Jindra (see p. 229) – just as crucial a moment for her development.

and help her to travel home. At the time Jindra refused, but subsequently goes to seek out Balada because he has changed his mind (see p. 228).³²

Růžena's return to Libnice and her marriage to Jindra mark the beginning of the fourth and final part of her narrative which also sees the culmination of the transformation that begins with her awareness of her responsibility for her own downfall.³³ The evidence of Růžena's changed attitude towards her background comes when her father asks her to ask Jindra to persuade the workers not to strike in order to keep their job:

Pohlédla na otce, na jeho čelo orosené námahou přemlouvání. Zamrazilo ji. Byla to tvář podlce, který se děsí, že se mu nepodařilo zastřít rub svých slov. Nepochybovala už o tom, že tato otcova krev v ní způsobila, že Michal měl tak málo práce, aby ji získal i aby se jí zbavil. Jeho krev také se v ní bála bídy, kterou jí vyhrožoval. (p. 235)

The narrator reveals how Balada refuses to recognise on what side his solidarity ought to lie in the conflict between the workers and Gromus. Because Růžena is on the 'right' side of the conflict ideologically – a view that the narrator endorses through the description quoted above of her new awareness – she becomes morally superior to her father, in spite of the fact that the other workers see her as a 'fallen woman'. In this sense the socialist case means more than social norms. The narrator's analysis of Balada is further supported by Jindra's comment, when Růžena tells him about her father's problem: 'Selhala v něm víra, ač jí nikdy neměl mnoho. Pro sebe nevidí ostatní. Nevymyslí si to špatně, že šel na tebe. Počítal s tím, že se zalekneš bídy a přemluvíš mě, abych udělal, co na něm chtějí' (p. 236).

Růžena's marriage with Jindra signifies a transition of the conflict between Jindra and Michal from the personal to the ideological level. This change was already foreshadowed in Jindra's plea to Růžena when he proposed to her: '„Růženo, jestli tu zůstaneš se mnou, všechno bude jiné. Dám se zas do toho jako

³² Another example of such a quirk of plot is Jindra's discovery of Růžena's affair with Michal.

³³ Růžena's pregnancy is also used as an explanation of her newfound stability: 'Její břicho se začínalo zvedat a zaokrouhlovat pokračujícím těhotenstvím a Růžena v sobě cítila ten neznámý, nepředstavitelný klíček, deroucí se ze tmy k světlu, jako kotvu, která ji připoutávala navždy k pevnině tohoto života a dávala jí jistotu, že se už nikdy neodtrhne jako bláznivá loďka, která chce jen plout a třeba do záhuby' (p. 234).

kdysi. Za sebe, za tebe, za tvého tátu a tvou mámu, za všechny ostatní““ (p. 229). Jindra's identification with the class struggle culminates in his thoughts, in interior monologue, in the scene when Růžena and he sit on a bench in the park and Michal approaches them: 'Vystav svůj život, vypni jej víc, je to pomník mého vítězství. Už není sporu mezi ním a mnou, nýbrž mezi *nimi* a *námi*. A čas je na naší straně. Ne my, nýbrž oni nám připravují podmínky' (p. 237).

Růžena's alliance with Jindra transforms her previous egoism into a sense of responsibility for other people. Her final conversion comes when she decides to sell the powder-compact that Michal gave her at the beginning of their affair. Symbolically this signifies a letting go of her past desires and a commitment to her present life as a working class woman (see p. 249). She supports Jindra in his conflict with her father when he criticises him for lack of solidarity. Their decision to leave implies more than just leaving her family since Růžena also renounces her right to inherit the house from her parents. The question of material possession *versus* ideological conviction is posed in Jindra's thoughts. For him there is no question about what to choose, but Růžena's thoughts show how she considers the matter in more material terms – a view which is reinforced by the thought of the child she is carrying.

Růžena to nemá tak jednoduché jako on. Jí majetek stále ještě více voní než páchne. V tu chvíli právě dítě se pohne, jako by se dovolávalo svého budoucího práva. To víš, ty drobečku, taky jednou budeš natahovat ručičky a mezi tvými prvními slovy bude: já chci, dej mi, to je moje. Ale nedá se nic dělat, musíme za tátou, a kdyby se dal třebaš do pekla, musíme za ním. Ostatně, kdo ví, ono to s tím vyděděním nebude tak horké. (p. 251)

However, their decision to leave Balada's house endows their position within the workers' community with a new sense of integrity:

Nikdo už nemůže pochybovat o poctivosti jejího smýšlení. Zbláznila se, holka, byla mladá, nedivte se jí, že jí vlezlo do hlavy, když se jí ten Gromus dvořil. Kdo ví, co všechno jí nasliboval. Ale teď je zase naše. Mé mámě ušila šaty, něco prima, člověče, a nic od toho nevezala. A naší Mařeně co se už našila hadrů, a o placení ani slyšet. Zkrátka cejtí s člověkem, to se pozná, a ví, jak jsme teď na tom. A Jindra, jářku, to myslil vždycky poctivě s naší

věcí a nechce se dát krmit za jidášské peníze. Nahlízejí do svých svědomí a ptají se: Kdopak z nás by něco takového dokázal? Na polích se už nepracuje, brambory jsou dobytý a zima tluče kostnatým pařátem na dveře. Zkus to, člověče, utéci od plné mísy jen tak proto, abys dokázal svou solidaritu s ostatními. Tohle je příklad; nenažereš se toho, ani se tím v plotně nezatopíš, a přece tě to nějak hřeje a sílí. A ti dva chodí najednou zabalení do lidské sympatie jako do měkkého pláště a Jindra shledává, že jeho slova jsou poslouchána pozorně a bez posměšku. (pp. 251-52)

This passage captures in its essence the symbolic meaning of Růžena's narrative. The narration reproduces the speech of the workers, expressing their opinion of Růžena and Jindra. Again the reproduction of this direct speech is guided by the narrator's analysis: 'Nikdo už nemůže pochybovat o poctivosti jejího smýšlení' and 'Nahlízejí do svých svědomí a ptají se'. The quoted passage reproduces how the workers' community has accepted Růžena and Jindra as their own, thus the basic signification of the passage can be encompassed in the same 'solidarity'. In its entirety Růžena's narrative signifies her struggle (on the personal level) between egoism and solidarity.³⁴ Because of the narrator's continuous evaluation of the character Růžena it can be seen as a story of learning: Růžena develops through her experience of her attempts to transcend her own class that end in a kind of nihilism of fate; she suffers under her conviction that she can do whatever she wants to do although she has to pay the price. When she decides to marry Jindra, she reconciles herself with her working class background – as an affirmative act she decides to part with the golden powder-compact and thus renounces her aspirations. Once she has gone through a certain amount of suffering she finds solace by conforming to the working class values and virtues that she used to resent. The fact that the narrator in his psychological analysis of Růžena's development shows the rightness of her return to her background (it implies that one cannot escape

³⁴ The same 'egoism' is disseminated through the narrative mainly in the narrative presentation of Michal Gromus and later of his wife Vilma.

one's social predetermination) endows the narrative presentation of the working class and its struggle to preserve life with positive connotations.

Růžena's function in the plot of the whole narrative is ideological in more than one sense. As I have shown in the above analysis her narrative is informed by the ideologeme of solidarity *versus* egoism. In addition to this, Růžena's narrative further contributes to the evaluation of the meanings generated in Jindra's narrative: in a less obvious sense Jindra goes through a learning process parallel to that of Růžena's for which she has the function of catalyst.³⁵ From the beginning Jindra is presented as an outsider. When he is first introduced in the narrative his words come before the narrator's description of him, before the reader even knows his name. Jindra Pour's first words create an impression of political radicalism that constitutes the hallmark in the subsequent narrative presentation of him – here his words concern the difference between the old and the young Gromus, the latter of which Balada has just described as a 'mrcha':
'„Takoví by měli být všichni. Pámbu nás chraň před dobráckými zaměstnavateli, kteří si získávají lásku svých dělníků. Potřebujeme právě těch druhých. Patří k podmínkám revoluce. Musíme dostávat denně své porce příkoří a bezpráví, jinak bychom se nikdy nerozkývali“' (p. 39). This political radicalism separates Jindra from the rest of the workers' community, particularly from Balada.³⁶ However, the narrator's analysis of Jindra's character explains why Jindra is perceived as an outsider, even sees himself as an outsider. It emphasises Jindra's 'sense of fairness' and his 'consciousness of solidarity' as the central features of his character. The narrator presents him as a 'true' revolutionary in the sense that he has remained loyal to his cause to the

³⁵ The role assigned to Růžena in the plot of the novel places her in the category of female characters in Řezáč's novels that I have called the 'female saviour'. This includes Kama in *Větrná setba*, to some degree Markétka from *Černé světlo* and Lída from *Svědék*, Jarmila in *Rozhraní*, and to some degree Bagar's wife in *Nástup*.

³⁶ 'I Josef Balada se ho trochu bojí. Chlap je jako živá výčitka. Ale když člověk zestárnul v poctivé službě dělnické věci tak jako skladník Balada, nechce být obtěžován výčitkami. Hrome! Odbyl svůj první kriminál, když se tehle holobrádek ještě držel máminých sukni. Revoluce! Nu ovšem. Jakmile však člověk zestárne a má ženu, dítě, domek a pár grošů v obyčejné kapitalistické záložně, aby zabezpečil své stáří, není si už tak docela jist, že by s ní bylo nachvat' (pp. 39-40).

Balada's political relativism as opposed to Jindra's radicalism equals the two interpretations of capitalism that the Gromuses represent.

detriment of his own material position, in other words an idealist.³⁷ However, he has also isolated himself in his commitment to the Communist case: ‘I stalo se mu, jako se často stává lidem zavřeným v jednu jedinou myšlenku, že žil ve vakuu, bez přátelství, a že začasťe nenáviděl soudruhy právě tak jako jejich odpůrce, shledávaje je příliš trpnými a pohodlnými ve službě ideji, jež je měla osvobodit’ (p. 40). Because of his radicalism Jindra is excluded from the ‘natural’ solidarity of the workers’ community that is defined by their general fear of scarcity, by their struggle to be able to feed their families and themselves. The difference in the way of thinking between Jindra and the other workers is exposed through the question of possible strike action that is the topic of the workers’ debates when crisis looms and Gromus begins to sack workers at his factory. The narrative presentation of Jindra’s role within the workers’ community repeatedly emphasises how he perceives things in terms of political theory:

Lenin, Marx, Bucharin a Liebknecht promlouvali Pourovými slovy. Oháněl se citáty jako kněz při nedělním kázání a uváděl i stránky, vyvolávaje u svých posluchačů dojem, že se snad učil celým knihám nazpaměť. Když mu tak naslouchali s ústy div ne otevřenými, míval příjemný pocit, že si poctivě zasloužil obdiv, který sklízí. [...]. Hle, tito ustrašenci, kteří se chvěli o žvanec, jenž jim byl odměřen jen tak, aby neumřeli hladem, a kteří křičeli hrůzou, když jim byl vzat. Nebylo mu jich líto, byli jen štěrkem, kterým si budoucnost dláždila cestu. Necháпали zákonitosti vývoje, nechtěli by asi ani slyšet o tom, že jejich osud je nutný, že jich musí přibýt ještě mnoho a jejich počet vzrůst do miliónů po celém světě, aby se naplnilo, co nejlepší lidské mozky bezpečně předvídaly: že moloch pozře sám sebe a nesmyslná budova kapitalismu se zhrouť. (p. 77)

The narrator’s presentation of Jindra ironically points out how his political belief is at the same time also a vehicle for his feeling of superiority that is fundamentally egoistic. The narrator ironises his vanity (‘Nesešlo ovšem na něm [...]’) and feeling of self-importance (‘obdivem k úloze, kterou na sebe vzal’)

³⁷ The negative evaluation implied in the narrator’s derogatory ‘tlampačem idejí, organizační děvkou a profesionálem revoluce’ is interesting to compare with Řezáč’s own position in the post-45 development of Czech literature and literary organisations.

and so questions the motive for Jindra's personal identification with the political cause of socialism. The narrative presentation likewise reveals the conflict inherent in Jindra's attitude to life. On the one hand his radicalism supports a certain kind of cynicism in the way in which his political views influence his personal life: 'Chudáci se musí rodit, čím více se jich narodí, tím dřív bude bídě konec. I to je jeden z činitelů proměny. Ale já je nechci plodit. Já ne. Hnusí se mi to' (p. 41), Jindra says to Balada, when he first talks to him about marrying Růžena. His denial of his own role in the process of history, as he sees it, reveals a fear of taking part in the physical aspect of life. Jindra's discourse, here as elsewhere, shows how he consistently translates his own desires and intimate feelings into the idiom of political theory (class struggle). On the other hand, his cynicism goes hand in hand with a romantic idealism that finds its expression in his desire to conquer Růžena. He first tries to court her with a speech that, like his thoughts, is riddled with political theory. The narrator's comments, which appear similar to stage directions in parentheses, repeatedly stress how he gets carried away by his own words. The narrator's subsequent description of the surroundings reflects the intensity of his hope, which is further emphasised by the last sentence in narrated monologue in which the narrator identifies with Jindra's thought:

Řekl tu ve zkratce vše, čemu věřil a več doufal, mluvil s temnou nadějí, že mu bude porozuměno a že z tohoto socialistického kréda bude zaslechnut i hlas jeho srdce. A večer zatím vytáhl své rudé prapory. Byl to barvotisk v divokých tónech a v ničem nebylo šetřeno jejich sytostí. Šarlatová naděje zítřků, splývající záplava i rozervané cáry jakoby očouzené bitvami nad černou přítomností, již v tomto případě představovaly lesy. A zcela před ním, na dosah ruky to děvče, jež se opíralo o peň stromu, ruce za sebou a život povypjatý. Být ve dvou, moci nést spolu tu naději, jež je někdy těžší než zoufalství. (pp. 80-81)

The narrator's use of political imagery combined with colour in the description of the contrast between the imagined future and the bleak present, in which Růžena represents the only glimmer of hope to Jindra, makes him appear as a somewhat tragic-sentimental hero. The narrator's discourse sets the scene with a

background that emphasises the dramatic passion in Jindra's emotions, an element that changes to sentimental pity in passages where the narrator reveals the discrepancy between Jindra's fantasy and reality:

Stál tu a usmíval se matně. Bylo to spíše sešklebení tváře než usměv, a kdyby se mohl vidět, jistě by se byl polekal. Takovým usměvem se nezískávají dívky. Ale ona mu nerozuměla, tak jako by mu nebyla porozuměla ani většina ostatních, mezi nimiž žil. Chtěl by ji získat, ach, alespoň ji by chtěl získat a pak by se mu žilo snadněji. (p. 80)

What emerges here in the narrator's discourse in the presentation of Jindra is not the glorified righteousness of the revolutionary hero (such as Jindra would like to see himself), but the human condition exposed in its prison of personal desires and vanity.³⁸ Further on the narrator states this conflict between life and ideas directly: 'A prorok lepších zítřků tu stál, cítě mrazení až v srdci, aby se dívčí rty neotevřely a neřekly slovo, jež by navždy zabilo naději, která neměla nic společného s nadějí třídní' (p. 82).

The narrator's characterisation of Jindra shows how this discrepancy between life and ideas is stifling and creates a social vacuum around him. This is supported by the description of his voice, that sounds repressed, as well as in the description of his appearance. In addition to this Jindra gradually becomes aware of the fact that he is ill with tuberculosis, his body is in decay. It is as if this waning physicality underlines that as a character he is all words and mind, which is the impression that the narrative presentation of his thoughts and speech creates. The narrator ironises Jindra's political idealism (as above),³⁹ but also shows compassion in the presentation of the effects that the clash between life and ideal have on Jindra (here in the situation when he has just seen Růžena together with Michal): 'Byl promoklý a dostal ránu palicí, harcovník sociální revoluce, ubohý jako hromádka neštěstí. Ať mu někdo poví, co má dělat. Obrazotvornost mu sehrála menší melodramatickou scénu' (p. 106). The narrator's discourse is full of descriptions that reveal this conflict. Another

³⁸ The latter is true for the presentation of the other characters, although the narrator's revelation is based on different contrasts pertaining to other character features.

³⁹ The reproduction of Jindra's thoughts repeating a planned speech for a meeting as he cycles home is another example of this (see pp. 104-05).

example is: 'Přemáhal ji [bolest] se zaťatými zuby a vracel se na neosobní pole své víry se zuřivostí středověkého fanatika' (p. 107). Jindra represents the opposite of Růžena in whose characterisation the narration has foregrounded her physicality and her desire for life, as I have shown earlier. Růžena has got Jindra in her power because she lives out her desires without thinking of the consequences, whereas he longs to possess her (see pp. 112-13, the scene in which she first seduces him).

Jindra's relationship with Růžena is presented as one long suffering. He seeks her out and she takes him into her room as an act of mercy. Their relationship continues in a mutual dependency – for her because he is her connection with her past (as I have written earlier), for him because of his obsession with her. The narrator presents her dependency as an expression of the fact that she cannot escape her background, and he is the reminder to her of her social conscience. As long as she does not realise her responsibility towards him (see p. 166, top) he is deemed to suffer. Jindra's suffering culminates in the episode when he has decided to take justice into his own hands and throw a hand grenade at Michal's car as he returns from seeing Růžena. This decision has been provoked by his anger because of Růžena letting him wait outside her house all day because Michal does not leave. The idea was put into his mind when listening to the unemployed worker whom he feeds in the restaurant. The irony of the situation is that the hand grenade does not explode, not even when he wants to kill himself afterwards:

Jaký může mít smysl jeho život od této chvíle? Zradil všechno, co dosud byl. Ty bestie, ty bestie. Buší granátem divoce do dubového kmene. Tak bouchni, bouchni přece, neřáde, a zab alespoň mne. Kůra odskakuje a železný plech obalu je zohýbán. Ale smrt, divoká, rvoucí a spalující smrt, jež je v něm stěsnána, se nedá probudit. (p. 174)

Jindra does not appear in front of Růžena's house again after this (see her thought about him (p. 180)). The reader must therefore assume that his position does not change until Růžena returns. Her agreement to marry him rescues him from despair; it is a chance for him to involve himself in the cause with renewed enthusiasm because this time he does it for someone else, not only for himself

(see previous quotation). As I have written earlier in connection with Růžena, their conflict with Balada lends a new legitimacy to their position among the other workers. They become part of the general solidarity. It also consolidates their relationship with each other: '[...] z tohoto okamžiku teprve rosteme společně' (p. 248). Jindra subsequently tells Růžena why he has become ill, that is allegedly because of the day when she left him standing outside in the cold for hours.

Through Růžena Jindra embraces a different form of solidarity; it is no longer only theoretical, he does not need his theory as a crutch any longer (see p. 252 for example). It is as if through her and their expected child he has been connected with the 'natural' solidarity of the working class community. However, the narrative expresses how his hopes for the future are marred both by his illness and by the other workers' resistance to any revolutionary action: 'Sesouvá to v něm den po dni. Začíná poznávat příčinu té obecné skleslosti, která zachvátila dělnictvo. Tak je to, člověče, třeba se to zdá sebeneuvěřitelnější. Jako by všechno, čemu se učil a věřil celý život, v něm bylo podhrabáváno a hroutilo se (p. 254).

As a result of his search for work Jindra's illness has progressed so far that he has to lie in bed terminally ill. The narrative presentation of his thoughts takes the form of his settling of accounts with his past. His thoughts about Balada's suicide express the necessity of solidarity as opposed to the futility of individual action:

Proč, Josefe, proč? ptá se Jindra, a jak u něho ani být nemůže, zapomíná na lidský úděl skladníkův a ptá se po smyslu a výsledku jeho oběti. Trhliny pochybností v jeho víře se opět zacelily za tu dobu, co tu ležel sám a přemýšlel. On sám byl den po dni nemocnější a slabší, ale jeho víra se zhojila. Nehnul jsi světem, Josefe, nikdo z nás jím nemůže hnout sám. Taky jsem se o to kdysi pokusil, přál jsem si alespoň uvést lavinu do pohybu svým výkřikem. Marné, Josefe, marné. (pp. 279-80)

Jindra's renewed hope is closely related with the imminent birth of the child, who has helped restore his faith. The narrator's characterisation of Jindra's faith underlines the fact that he is about to die. Jindra's interior monologue while

lying on his deathbed (partly formed as his address to the dead Balada) also functions as the conclusionary comment on Michal Gromus's narrative. Through Jindra's thoughts the reader learns what happened to Gromus after Vilma left him:

Vlka jsi nerdousil, ty starý, bláhový berane. Shrábl pojistné, zbavil se neprodejných skladů a jede dál a daří se mu jako nikdy předtím. Nic jsi z toho nedělej, Josefe. I na Gromusové dojde. My jsme na to nestačili, ale přijdou po nás jiní. Nemůžeme prohrát. Je nás víc, vždycky nás bude víc, a čas pracuje pro nás. Gromusové hníjí. Tomuhle utekla žena. Slyšíš, Josefe, utekla mu a soudí se s ním. Tahají se o Rolínovu fabriku jako psi o kost. Muž a žena. Slyšels to, Josefe? Ale tobě by to možná ani nebylo k smíchu.
(p. 280)

This passage is important in more ways. First, it provides the reader with information about events that would otherwise have seemed missing, leaving one part of the narrative unresolved. Second, the idea that there will always be others to continue the battle ideologically links the birth of Jindra and Růžena's son with the class struggle. Furthermore, in Jindra's thoughts the ideal of solidarity is contrasted with his negative evaluation of the Gromus family, characterised by their primitive fight ('jako psi o kost') over the factory; an evaluation that encompasses the egoism that has been linked with the Gromus family in other parts of the narrative discourse, particularly in the narrator's characterisation of Michal. Because Jindra's view does not represent an isolated moment in the narrative discourse, his evaluation accrues increased significance for the interpretation of the ideological significations at play in the narrative.

The narrative presentation of Jindra's death poses the idea of solidarity as the imaginary solution not only to his personal suffering, but also to the workers' struggle. Jindra's final fever fantasy in which he imagines the coming revolution indicates that the meaning of Jindra's narrative has to be found on the symbolic level:

Slyší šum, jako by mu nad hlavou táhlo nekonečné hejno ptáků, hukot se valí, někde záplavy vod prothly hráze, jsou to hlasy, volají ho, příboj hlasů řvoucích v opojení a dunění, rytmické dopady tisíců párů pochodujících

nohou, soudruzi, soudruzi, křičí Jindra, nenechávejte mne tady! Jdou, Jdou, rudá, rudá, rudá bubnuje jejich krok. Už je to tady! Tenounký kvílivý hlásek se vznese nad tuto bouři a pronikne k jeho sluchu. Jindra se usmívá. Pojd' můj maličký, čekal jsem jenom na tebe. Soudruzi, soudruzi, počkejte na nás! Jdeme s vámi. Hlasy umlkly, jenom ten tenký hlásek křičí a kroky duní pomaleji a stále vzdáleněji. Strašlivá úzkost sevře Jindrovo srdce a vzápětí něco sladce dusivého se mu vzedme v prsou a stoupne k hrdlu. Krev se mu vyvalí z úst. Jindra se položí na tvář. Přijde den! Soudruzi, vždyť my jsme to vyhráli. Krev rudá jako prapor jeho víry stéká po schodech vstříc dítěti, které jinou krvavou branou vstoupilo právě do života. (p. 282)

The description of Jindra's last mental sensations with the image of marching revolutionaries that merges with the screaming of his newborn son suggests that the child represents a symbolic solution to the conflict between the ideas and life that has characterised Jindra. Jindra's last thought 'Přijde den! Soudruzi, vždyť my jsme to vyhráli' may be interpreted as referring to the hope that although he dies, there is someone who will continue the struggle.⁴⁰ The context of both Růžena and Jindra's narratives suggests, through their emphasis on solidarity, that this last thought means the cause of socialism will survive the man. The final colour imagery links the revolutionary struggle with birth; that is with a new beginning.

The relationship between the narrator and Jindra Pour – the narrator's attitude of ironic pity that gradually changes to sympathy after Jindra marries Růžena – consolidates the framework for Jindra's learning story. In the beginning Jindra has the function of a mock-hero who is more proletarian than the proletarian – a feature that the narrator repeatedly stresses in the characterisation of his appearance – despite his intellectualism.⁴¹ The union with Růžena endows Jindra with credibility in the eyes of the narrator, as well as in the eyes of the other workers because he becomes one of them and suffers like

⁴⁰ Růžena and Jindra could perhaps be interpreted as the 'body and mind of Socialism' with the child being the synthesis of the two.

⁴¹ At one place the narrator describes him as '[...] Jindra, vychrtlý, skoro okázale proletářský, s černavě zlýma očima'. He partly conforms to the stereotype of the intellectual proletarian. In this *Řezáč* might have been inspired by Russian socialist realism.

them. He is no longer isolated in his intellectualism. In the description of Jindra's death there is no irony on the part of the narrator. The narration alternates between narration focalised through Jindra and the narrator's presentation of Jindra's thoughts in narrated monologue or in interior monologue (partly addressed to Josef Balada). Parts of the interior monologue appear in a fragmented form that both expresses the urgency of his thoughts at this moment when he knows that he is going to die and the incoherence of his fever fantasy:

Růženo! Chce ji posílit alespoň tím, že si šeptá její jméno. Náhle se ho zmocní zuřivost. Sílu, dejte mi sílu! Vraťte mi ji! Ukradli mi ji, rošťáci, a teď nechají chcípnout mou ženu i mé dítě. Kdo je má žít, kdo se o ně má starat? Život, chci život! Vzepne se na loktech, ale slabost ho přimáčkne zpátky do propocených podušek. Horečka mu skočí do mozku. Něco na nocleh kamaráde. Pojd' se mnou, Hejle, povím ti o pelíšku, kde se to měkce chrní. (p. 281)

Jindra's fever fantasy continues until we learn from Baladová's exclamation that he has fainted. The fact that the narrator presents Jindra's final thoughts without distancing himself from them, and that his last exclamatory thought with its political content is left unquestioned, lends emphasis to Jindra's conviction (p. 282).

In the context of the whole narrative the narrator's positive evaluation of Růžena and Jindra creates positive connotations for the ideological struggle of the workers, posing (class) solidarity as the solution to their problem. The narrative discourse transforms the paradigm of class struggle immanent in the choice of characters into an ideological conflict that manifests itself in the narrative in the form of the ideologeme of egoism *versus* solidarity.

3.4 The ideological significations created around the seme 'class conflict'

The theme of the economic crisis runs like a thread through the narrative discourse like a hidden force that creates fear among the bourgeois factory

owners and the workers alike. It is directly foregrounded in Michal's⁴² conversation with the waiter in the borderland restaurant that he visits with Růžena. The waiter's comment provides the diagnosis of the background for the economic crisis:

„Je to krize, pane,“ řekl shovívavě vysvětlujícím tónem. „Dnes došlo na nás, zítra dojde na jiné. Jsme teprve na začátku a bude to stále horší. Co říkáte textile na severu? Zavírá továrnu za továrnou. Příliš malá země a příliš mnoho průmyslu. Bylo snadné zničit říši, ale čím ji nahradíte? Odbývaly jsme kdysi padesát procent své výroby na jejím území a za to jsme nedovedli najít náhradu. A vláda (jizva se zkřivila a prohloubila) o nás nedbá a je hluchá k našim nářkům. V těchto chalupách, pane (ukázal oknem na stavení, rozptýlená po svahu), nebýval nikdy blahobyt. Dnes je tam hlad.“ (p. 63)

His comment reproduces the ideologeme of old *versus* new that in this particular passage relates to the historical transition from empire to republic. This ideologeme is likewise evoked in old Gromus's thoughts about the changed relationship between the factory owners and the workers:

Dříve bývali jaksi tvou širší rodinou. Chodívali se s tebou radit, když chtěli koupit domek nebo dát kluka na studie. Nebo ti přiváděli své syny a ti po čase zaujímali u tebe místa svých tatíků. Tehdy se ještě sami smávali socialismu, nazývali jej židovským výmyslem a okřikovali ty, kteří o něm mluvili příliš hlasitě. [...] Ale dnes mluví o třídním boji, věší tě na lucernu, kdykoliv si na tebe vzpomenou, mají pojištění nemocenské i starobní a ty abys jim na ně platil. (p. 72)

The changed preconditions for the relationship between the factory owners and workers that have been brought about by the new form of government signify a move in the perception of solidarity: a relationship of mutual solidarity has

⁴² Michal several times uses 'the time' as the excuse for the workers' difficult situation. For example after Balada's death: 'Msta to byla snad také, ale v širším smyslu, než se domníváte. Octl se mezi dvěma kameny a byl rozdrcen. Je mi ho líto, ale řekl bych, že vina neleží na nikom z nás, nýbrž někde dál, v době, která si s námi pohrává víc, než je nám všem milo. Nutil jsem ho, aby pracoval, i když továrna stála, neboť jsem nemohl být bez skladníka, a jeho kamarádi ho obviňovali ze zrady. Zní to divoce a neuvěřitelně, ale nedovedl z toho najít jiného východiska než právě toto' (pp. 273-75).

changed into a class conflict in which the individual worker's solidarity is put in the service of the workers' organisations. However, the individual narratives of Jindra, Růžena and Balada question this paradigm shift (from old Gromus's perspective a horror vision) and so does the general description of the workers.⁴³

The narrative of the workers (as a 'collective character') is interwoven with the other narratives in that the narrative deals with two areas of conflict: the class conflict between Michal Gromus and the workers and also the conflicts inherent within the workers' community as represented in the narratives of Jindra, Růžena and Balada.

The seme of 'class conflict' has been introduced at the beginning of Michal's narrative in his thoughts about the workers on his return home to Libnice: 'Jednoho dne se s nimi utká, tomu se asi nevyhne; každý, kdo je zaměstnává, musí se s nimi jednou střetnout' (p. 13).⁴⁴ In his mind the prospect of 'revolution' looms on the horizon: 'Po převratu z nich šla tak trochu hrůza, rozpínali se, povzbuzování vysoko šlehající září ruského ohně, cítili se už soudci a páni' (p. 30). However, his Social Darwinism does not allow for the possible reversal of the master-slave relationship that a revolution would imply: 'Jsou stvořeni k tomu, aby byli ovládáni' (p. 30).⁴⁵ In the description of the bourgeois factory owners this desire to be master is presented as a basic need. Rolín's thought when Anna Gromusová offers him a deal to save his factory is an example of this: 'Místo celého otroctví bylo mu nabízeno otroctví o něco menší. Ale bude zároveň pánem, pánem na jednu třetinu, ale přece jen pánem' (p. 207).

The theme of the workers' narrative is the impact of the economic crisis in the form of dismissals and their relationship with Michal Gromus. The first six dismissals are the topic of discussion between Michal and old Gromus. Later, the reader learns from the reproduction of Jindra's thoughts that eight more have been sacked and, finally, further dismissals are the topic of Michal's thoughts about his business (p. 146). The narrative predominantly presents the workers as

⁴³ The changed relationship between workers and factory owners is also behind Michal's initial reluctance to begin an affair with Růžena because Balada is chairman of the workers committee (see p. 59).

⁴⁴ I have already quoted this passage once in the analysis of Michal Gromus.

⁴⁵ Cf. Michal's interpretation of the situation in Russia in conversation with Růžena, p. 64.

a passive object of the thoughts and speech of the other characters (apart from the scene in which they come to speak to Balada and Jindra after the first dismissals). To Růžena they are an object of derision, to Jindra they represent an object for political and economic forces⁴⁶ and to the Gromuses they are an object of power. This reflects their own reluctance to act in terms of striking. As a group they are given a voice in the reproduction of their speech in the narrator's discourse in the form of direct or indirect speech or in the narrator's analysis of their thoughts and feelings:

Bylo jim, jako by na ně ukázal boží prst a označil je k záhubě. Žádný z nich nenacházel útěchu v tom, že není sám. Naopak jejich hněv byl rozdělen a obracel se nejenom proti Gromusovi, nýbrž i proti kamarádům, kteří nebyli postiženi, třebaže k této druhé složce se nechtěli znát a pokoušeli se jí potlačit. Rozběhli se ke svým důvěrníkům. Musí se jim přece pomoci, nač je tu organizace, do níž taková léta platili příspěvky, zehrajíce na tyto zbůhdarma vyhazované peníze. [...]. Ale ty časy už minuly, holenku, kdy si mohl zaměstnavatel dělat se svými dělníky, co mu napadlo. Josef se do nich dá, Josef jim to vytmaví. A co Jindra? To je vosk? Nechtěl bych být na místě Gromusů, až jim to Jindra začne sázet. (p. 73)

The variation in the mode of narrative presentation lets the workers voices be heard. It creates sympathy for their experience of injustice mixed with hope and despair. However, the narrator's description of their meeting with Balada and Jindra (focalised through the workers) foreshadows how their hopes will be proved unjustified: 'Ale Josef Balada měl takový pohled, který se díval na všechny a na žádného z nich, a Jindra Pour tu seděl, nohy nataženy, div že mu ta kuchyně postačila, a foukal do stropu kouř' (p. 74). The narrative presentation of the workers repeatedly reveals the same 'scarcity' in their manner of thinking and perception of themselves. Their main concern is that of survival, of whether they are able to feed themselves and their families: 'Co je dělník? ptávali se ti lidé, svírajíce pěsti na stolní desce. Otroka, pes. A ještě méně. Otroka i psa musí

⁴⁶ One other exception is the worker Hejl who was one of the first sacked workers. When Jindra meets Hejl, who is begging, what is to him basically only an object for political forces suddenly acquires a human face. It is not until Jindra experiences the same fate as the unemployed workers that he really feels solidarity with them.

pán živit, ale tebe vyhodí, kdy je napadne, a nikdo se nezeptá, co budeš žrát' (p. 36). The narrative presentation of Růžena's thoughts in the moment of confrontation with her father implies an idea of biological predetermination in her way of explaining her fear of scarcity to herself: 'Nepochybovala už o tom, že tato otcova krev v ní způsobila, že Michal měl tak málo práce, aby ji získal i aby se jí zbavil. Jeho krev také se v ní bála bídy, kterou jí vyhrožoval' (p. 235). So the fear of scarcity runs in the families of the workers just as the desire for power runs in the families of the bourgeoisie.

The narrative discourse opposes the seme 'scarcity' in the presentation of the workers with that of 'abundance' in the descriptions of old Gromus, and later of Michal's hedonistic eating habits.⁴⁷ Old Gromus's love of good food develops into his main purpose for living:

Jeho den pak probíhal radostně mezi těmi rozkošnými zastávkami, jejichž jména byla: přesnídávka, oběd a večeře. Neboť zatímco zdržoval na svém patře chuť jídla právě požitého a prodlužoval svou rozkoš jako zkušený milenec, jeho obrazotvornost, tak naprosto a blaženě tělesná, ji začínala prolínat předchutí jídla budoucího. (p. 86)

In the Gromus family's house they always eat schnitzel – a food that symbolises their wealth because the workers would not be able to afford it: 'Zdi se přestaly otrásat, bušení v kuchyni ustalo. Nyní dává kuchařka řízek na pánev' (p. 56). Even after the fire in which Balada has died Michal's feeling of superiority is emphasised by the fact that he orders the cook to do him a schnitzel, just like his father might have done. The cook's thought about him expresses the likeness with his late father (see p. 272). Contrary to the Gromuses' pleasure in eating, the description of Balada's way of eating emphasises how he gobbles up his food ('jal se hltat svůj oběd', p. 33), more concerned with how much there is of it: 'Josef Balada polykal sousta takřka bez žvýkání jako silák, jemuž nesejde tolik na chuti jídla jako na jeho množství, [...]' (p. 33).

The narrative discourse presents the conflict within the workers' community as fundamentally that of the ideologeme of solidarity *versus* egoism (self-

⁴⁷ Much of the imagery used in the characterisation of old Gromus is taken from the consumption of food.

interest). Michal Gromus's first sacking of the workers brings to the fore the question of strike action. However, the narrator's characterisation of the workers' mentality shows how concrete action remains an anathema because of their ingrained fear of scarcity (p. 78). The workers' attitude is contrasted with Jindra Pour's political radicalism: 'Byl pro stávkou, jestliže nebude dosaženo nápravy, neboť dělnická solidarita musí být projevna vždy a za každých okolností' (p. 77). As I have shown in the analysis of Jindra Pour's narrative, the characterisation of Jindra at first mocks his opinions as selfish idealism that is rooted in political theory. His views do not gain credibility until he becomes a fully accepted member of the workers' community in the sense that he suddenly has something to lose having given up his position as an intellectual outsider. His narrative therefore also plays out the conflict between 'egoism' and 'solidarity'.

In another way the narrative of Josef Balada revolves around the same conflict between 'solidarity' and 'egoism'. Balada holds a somewhat privileged position among the workers. He works as a stores manager at Gromus's factory and is chairman of the workers committee, as well as being foreman at the factory. However, already from the beginning the narrator's characterisation of him reveals a certain political relativism in his way of thinking that is governed by his personal interests: 'Jakmile však člověk zestárne a má ženu, dítě, domek a pár grošů v obyčejné kapitalistické záložně, aby zabezpečil své stáří, není si už tak docela jist, že by s ní [revolution] bylo nachvat' (p. 40).⁴⁸ Balada feels superior to Pour because he is older and deserves respect. In this sense, their relationship mirrors that of Michal Gromus and old Gromus.

Balada's thoughts about old Gromus, while standing next to his coffin at the funeral about to give his speech, place Gromus and Balada on the same side of the semantic opposition between 'old' and 'new'. They both represent the old world when there was still a degree of respect between employer and workers (p. 125). In Balada's thoughts Michal Gromus represents the 'new' that has plunged him into a position of insecurity. Michal Gromus embodies the new

⁴⁸ Another example of this: 'Josef Balada cítí, že mu nezáleží na žádné proměně světa, která by nepřinesla štěstí jeho dceři. Ať mi vynadá měšťáků, ale my nejsme Rusko. Jsou také jiné cesty' (p. 42).

approach to production which has destabilised the previous relationship of mutual solidarity between factory owner and worker. Balada's thoughts reveal the information that Michal Gromus has promoted him which, considering Růžena's relationship with Michal, makes him look like a traitor in the eyes of the other workers. His speech only contributes to strengthening this impression. The narrator's analysis of Balada shows how he gets himself into a pickle because of the mental strain he is suffering:

Úsilí, jež musel vynaložit, aby ovládl rozpolcení svých myšlenek, působilo, že se začínal potit, ačkoli vítr vál stále chladněji. Upínal svůj pohled na rakev, aby neviděl nikoho z těch, kdo stáli kolem, odmlčoval se a vzdychal stále častěji, a jak vzdoroval přívalu skutečného citu, druhý, vyvolaný na obranu a umělý, ho začal ovládati tak, že jeho řeč se stále více proměňovala ve lkaní nad nenahraditelnou ztrátou a mrtvý v ní ožíval jako vzor ušlechtilce, jehož jedinou starostí a láskou byl dělník a jeho blaho. (p. 126)

The narrator describes Balada's trouble with sympathy but he also shows the anger and frustration that Balada's praise of the opponent causes the workers:

Avšak ti, jimž byla určena tato vyčítavá a lichotná slova, tu stáli jako stádo zarytých a paličatých beranů. Dívali se do země, jako by se báli svých pohledů, a bylo jim trapně. Hněv se mezi nimi procházel a pošťuchoval je. Přešlapovali a svírali pěsti. Někdo by měl skočit a zacpat tomu vrtákovi hubu. Nemí dost na tom, že se na kus žvance zostudil sám, musí do toho tahat veřejně i všechny ostatní? (p. 126)

Balada's speech at the funeral already signifies the conflict between 'egoism' and 'solidarity' that sets in motion the events which eventually catch up with him and cause him to commit suicide. The narrator's analysis shows the irony of the situation, in that Balada's speech was not intended to have the given effect, but was a result of his inner conflict: 'Ubohý skladník Balada, řeč mu strojila úklady, byla jako sítiny a třaslaviska, nemohl se z ní vymotat a každým dalším slovem se bořil hlouběji do svého zmatku' (p. 128).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Just before Balada's speech the narrator has already given some kind of warning in one of his gnomic comments: 'Myšlenky jsou odevždy přesnější než slova, která tě unášejí. Chceš-li ubít myšlenku, mluv, člověče, a ona zanikne ve tvém huhlání jako volání odsouzencovo v rachotu bubnů' (p. 125).

As a result of Balada's speech at the funeral the other workers deselect him as chairman of the local union. The narrator's characterisations of Balada focus on his increasingly untenable position among the workers:

Mluví sám se sebou a s mnoha jinými, nosí v sobě rušný svět. Byl patnáct roků předsedou odborové organizace, lidé čekali na jeho rozvážná slova a stavěli na nich svá rozhodnutí. Před čtrnácti dny řekli: Ne, Josef Balada už nebude naším předsedou. Chodí v prázdnostech, zdivo jeho života se sesulo a fičí ledově do prostoru jeho srdce. Nepřeje si, aby se na něho mluvilo, hovoří sám se sebou a s mnoha jinými, pokouší se objasnit, co hoří, a přece zůstává v temnotě. Pojd' se mnou, Josefe, mám práci pro tvé ruce. (p. 172)

The last sentence echoes Jindra's thought when earlier, on the way to throw a hand grenade at Michal Gromus, he saw Balada stand by the window as a dark shadow. At this point Jindra has not yet written off Balada completely.

However, the workers' community remains hostile towards Balada, even when Růžena returns and marries Jindra: 'Ztratil své místo v tom malém vesmíru, kterým byla dělnická kolonie, a kroužil jako samotářská hvězda odsouzená k zániku' (p. 229). The narrator's simile signifies an implied morality that without solidarity one is doomed. This again functions as a foreboding of Balada's unhappy ending. The narrative presentation of Balada repeatedly foregrounds the dilemma he is facing between showing solidarity with the other workers and egoism, here in narrated monologue that emphasises his conversations with himself: 'Co na něm chtěli, co měl dělat, aby jim nepáchl jako boty pohodného psům? Měl snad tehdy, když mu bylo nabídnuto toto místo, odmítnout, dát výpověď a chcípat hlady? Nebo to měl udělat ještě teď? Něco takového přece po něm nemohli chtít' (p. 230).

The narrative focuses on how Balada's position becomes increasingly difficult because he is caught between the two sides of the conflict. On the one hand, Michal Gromus requests from Balada that he, through Jindra, dissuade the workers from striking when he plans to lower the wages, otherwise he threatens to stop the running of the factory. The narrative presentation of their conversation reveals how this is a game of power in which Balada is powerless because of his unwillingness to resign his position. Michal Gromus has figured

him out, as his thoughts about Balada reveal: ‘Řekl bys, že tenhle dědek je posedlý po penězích, že není, čeho bys za ně u něho nedosáhl, a najednou je tu hranice, přes kterou ho nepřetáhneš’ (p. 232). On the other hand, as Michal’s thoughts also indicate, Balada has reached the point where he does not want to play the game any longer. He finally makes the decision to oppose Gromus: ‘Ale jednou to musíš skoncovat, člověče. Tvá dcera je vdána, proč ty by ses dále pokořoval, proč bys dále hrál ničemu, jehož čest tančí a poskakuje za korunu jako obecní blázen. „Dojde-li k tomu,“ řekl konečně, „budu solidární s ostatními“’ (p. 233). The tragic irony of Balada’s narrative is that this gesture of solidarity remains unknown to the other workers because of his isolated position within the workers’ community. It is characteristic that in Balada’s case the narrator does not make any judgments. He shows Balada’s stubbornness of mind, but also his knowledge of the other workers that prevents him from giving in (pp. 233-34).

The nature of Balada’s moral dilemma is foregrounded in the scene in which he, as a final option, turns to Růžena to ask her to talk to Jindra about Gromus’s request. Růžena’s rejection, ‘„Nestydíte se, tatínku? řekla tiše“’ (p. 235), again underlines the necessity of what he ought to do.⁵⁰ The conflict between Balada and his own family culminates in a row with Jindra which has been provoked by the content of the family’s dinner (p. 245). The description of the family’s dinner signifies an abundance that, seen against the background of the workers’ situation, equals that of the Gromus family. Within the semantic opposition abundance/scarcity, which governs the description of the bourgeoisie and working class respectively, such abundance is clearly inadmissible to the other workers and only contributes to emphasising Balada’s privileged position. The argument between Balada and Jindra results in Jindra and Růžena moving away from her parents. The narrator’s characterisation of Balada following this episode again refrains from passing any direct judgment on his lack of action, although it foreshadows Balada’s fall:

⁵⁰ Jindra’s subsequent diagnosis of Balada, ‘Selhala v něm víra, ač jí nikdy neměl mnoho’ (p. 236), underlines the point that Balada is an agnostic within the church of Socialism that the narrative propagates through Jindra and Růžena’s narratives.

Skladník vyšel na silnici. Bude chodit dlouho do noci a setřásat ze svých plecí hněv jako krutého jezdce, který mu rozdírá srdce i mozek ostruhami, bude se znovu a znovu hádat s Růženou, s Jindrou, se svou ženou, se všemi ostatními, a čím ostřeji bude cítit jejich pravdu, tím neústupněji bude trvat na své. Nenajde úlevy, neboť balvany, jež se pohnuly k pádu, docházejí zastavení až na dně propastí. (p. 248)

Balada's isolation becomes complete when his own wife turns against him after the women in the shop have scorned her: 'Ačkoli každé to slovo se jí propalovalo až do srdce, souhlasila s nimi se všemi. Měly pravdu ty ženské, bylo to právě takové, jak říkaly' (p. 256). In addition to this the boys in the street call him Judas and throw stones at him. The narration of Balada's last night is held in the dramatic present tense that describes his emotions and thoughts in the situation, mixed with the narrator's summary of his state of mind. The narrator's characterisation alludes to the title of the novel: 'Seděl a hledal myšlenky, nějakou cestu z té slepé uličky, do níž byl zahrán nebo do níž sám vběhl, ale jeho mysl byla plna výkřiků a obrazů' (p. 258). It is in this dream-like series of thoughts that he gets the idea to set fire to Gromus's stores and sets out in the early morning to take direct action. His thoughts during this early morning walk reveal that Růžena represents the key to his own interpretation of what has happened to him: 'Nebýt toho děvčete a jeho nepochopitelné krásy, nebyl by dnes tam, kde je. Když jsem ji plodil, plodil jsem svůj osud. Ale snad ani ona za to nemohla, snad každý z nás více musí, než chce' (p. 260). Balada interprets his life in terms of fate in the form of Růžena, by means of which he explains away to himself his own part in the events. However, his reflection 'snad každý z nás více musí, než chce' that reconciles him with his fate, refers to another kind of fate that I shall call 'narrative fate'.⁵¹ From the beginning of Balada's narrative the narrator's discourse has provided sign after sign that Balada is doomed. His final direct action in which he commits suicide only represents the fulfilment of a narrative inevitability that culminates in the great irony of Balada's last vision:

⁵¹ 'Narrative fate' is related to the macrostructure of the narrative. It concerns how the development of plot contributes to the evaluation a given character within the semantic framework of the narrative.

Josef Balada stojí na vrcholu bednového valu se smyčkou na krku a dívá se oslněn na vlnobití plamenů, jež zaplnilo prostoru pod ním a vzpíná se k němu. Po bříše se budou plazit, po bříše. Ale v okamžiku, kdy dělá krok s bedny do prázdna pod sebou, vidí pár výsměšných očí Michala Gromuse, a dříve než se splav krve převalí přes jeho vědomí, jako by mu někdo vykřikl do uší otázku, na kterou už neuslyší odpovědi: Pro koho jsem to udělal? (p. 265)⁵²

Balada's 'narrative fate' coheres with the conflict between 'solidarity' and 'egoism' that his narrative enacts. In the context of the positive semantic connotations that have been ascribed to 'solidarity' through the narratives of Růžena and Jindra, a working class character who fails to adhere to this imperative has to be shown to be defeated somehow. Thus, in the context of the whole narrative, Balada's narrative accrues the function of foil for the promotion of an ideal of working class solidarity that the narrative ultimately signifies symbolically as that of socialism.

3.5 Conclusion

In *Slepá ulička* Řezáč has put the aesthetic conventions of psychological realism to work upon a social theme, manifest as the seme of class conflict. He has done so by means of the concept of theatre, that is, by structuring the narrative discourse in scenes/dramatic episodes. The psychological model of explanation in the presentation of characters is combined with an ideology of character which is governed by naturalist pre-determination.⁵³ As I have shown, Michal's desire for power is explained as running in the family, it is in the blood, just as

⁵² In the moment when he stands with the rope in his hands he justifies his action to himself as a way of rectifying himself against the accusations made by the workers' community: 'Ji-dá-ši, Ji-dá-ši, kolik ti to vynáší? Vzpamatuj se, Josefe, vzpamatuj se. Ukážeš jim, kdo byl Josef Balada. Až tenhle chamrad', kterou praskají sklady, bude pryč, až začnou zase dělat. Co budou křičet pak? Už, maminko, nebudeš plakat, že si na tebe ukazují prstem, že před tebou utíkají. Po bříše k tobě polezou, po bříše, aby tě odprosili. Jako svatá mezi nimi budeš, jako svatá, povídám' (p. 264).

⁵³ On the construction of character, see Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p. 237.

Růžena's belonging to the working class (her fear of scarcity) is in the blood.⁵⁴ This is used to explain why she cannot escape her own class.

The previous analyses have shown how the oppositions on the level of character (story), factory owner/ worker, man/woman, parent/child (these already come with certain 'ideological baggage'), are used, through the development of several interconnected plots in the narrative discourse, to create a new series of oppositions that constitute the semantic axes of the narrative: abundance/scarcity, egoism/solidarity, master/slave, power/weakness, femininity/masculinity, tradition/progress, old/new, sterility/fertility, individual/collective.

The analyses have shown how the narrative discourse ascribes particular semes to certain characters and how these particular semes are given either positive or negative connotations through the narrator's discourse or through the development of plot (ultimately the ending).

The semes distributed through the plot lines involving Michal Gromus ('egoism', 'progress', 'materialism',⁵⁵ 'natural selection', 'will to power', 'sterility', 'ruthlessness', 'anti-nature') are provided with negative connotations in the narrator's discourse that consistently deconstructs Michal's opinion of himself as self-deceit. The development of plot furthermore shows the futility of his approach to life – symbolised by the fact that although he succeeds in business (more or less by chance) he does not get the child he wants. The dramatic irony of his story is that it happens, as the narrative shows, because he fails to recognise how he repeats his father's mistake of choosing the wrong wife.⁵⁶ The plot involving Vilma points out why his choice of wife was wrong: the semes distributed in Vilma's narrative ('materialism', 'emancipation', 'frigidity', 'sterility', 'desire for power') are ascribed negative connotations either in the notary Purkl's discourse or the narrator's discourse. The plots

⁵⁴ Götz explains this fear of scarcity mainly as a residue of peasant mentality of the now partly industrialised rural community. See František Götz, *Václav Řezáč*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1957, p. 58.

⁵⁵ Elsewhere I have named this 'desire for possession' in the narrative of Vilma.

⁵⁶ There is a difference between the two, though, in that Ferdinand Gromus' choice was governed by his 'romanticism' (according to Michal's analysis) whereas Michal's choice is based on his desire for power.

concerning the will, as well as the public auction of Rolín's factory, in both of which Michal competes with his stepmother Anna for material wealth,⁵⁷ likewise foreground the semes of 'materialism' and 'desire for power' in the presentation of the bourgeois characters.⁵⁸

The plot line of the conflict between Michal and old Gromus puts into play significations around the semantic oppositions young/old and tradition/progress. The semantic oppositions relate to the ideologeme of old *versus* new which is manifest as the conflict between tradition and progress; that is, modernisation of the previous mode of production (industrialisation). The semes distributed in the narrator's description of Libnice parallel those distributed in the narrative presentation of the Gromus conflict. However, the narrator's discourse questions the validity of the new mode of production and implies an ideological critique of the perception of human beings (seeing people as machines) on which it is based. In the narrative presentation of Michal Gromus the seme of 'progress' is linked to the seme of 'desire for power'. It represents one part of the opposition in the ideologeme of the master and slave that the narrative plays out in the plot of Michal and Vilma. This ideologeme again creates connotations that link the characterisation of Michal with the ideology of Nietzsche's superman combined with Social Darwinism.⁵⁹ In showing the futility of Michal's pursuit of power and material wealth the narrative provides an implicit critique of these ideologies.

In the narrative presentation of the workers, Růžena's plot governs the process of signification in a movement from the semes 'egoism', 'materialism' and 'class envy' towards the seme of 'class solidarity'. Růžena's plot has a didactic function in the way in which it constitutes a learning story. The plot

⁵⁷ In my analysis of Michal's narrative I have shown how the public auction scene also as a whole signifies Michal's desire for power and his materialism (in the sense that he basically thinks to himself that he is buying a wife).

⁵⁸ The narrative of Robert (Michal's stepbrother) shows a character whose only desire is that of having a good time. He is not driven like the rest of the bourgeois characters, which, in the context of the 'values' propagated in their narratives, lends him an air of decadent depravity. He may be compared to the decadent uncle Rudolf in *Černé světlo* whose function is to illustrate 'Napoleonism' gone wrong.

⁵⁹ Götz interprets Michal's narrative as showing the 'road towards fascism': 'Jde tu o objektivní proces začínajícího rozvratu buržoasie, která se proti náporu proletariátu brání vůlí k moci a nastupuje tak cestu k fašismu'. In František Götz, *Václav Řezáč*, p. 68.

shows how she fails in following her materialist aspirations that are shown to be problematic (signified through the development of her relationship with Michal Gromus). At the same time it provides her with an alternative in the form of Jindra who gives her a chance for a new beginning. In doing so it both shows the wrongness (impossibility) of wanting to transcend one's own class, but also uses her failure to imbue the working class values (work and solidarity) with positive connotations and showing the rightness of her return to her background. In different ways both Balada and Jindra's plots foreground the same ideological conflict between egoism and class solidarity. Balada's plot shows how he has to pay for his egoism/lack of solidarity. He is punished because he commits a crime against the solidarity of the community. However, the narrator's discourse also characterises him as a victim of the ideological paradigm shift in the relationship between the factory owners and workers (due to the changed mode of production), which again is related to the ideologue of old *versus* new.⁶⁰ Jindra's plot resembles a didactic learning story in the same sense as Růžena's. It shows a movement from 'individualism' in the form of alienated intellectualism and political radicalism that converge in 'theoretical solidarity' towards a different kind of 'collective' class solidarity that one could call 'organic' or 'natural' solidarity. This type of solidarity has been ascribed positive connotations in Růžena's narrative, in which the narrator has posited this kind of solidarity as an ideal of biological belonging. Therefore it might be most precise to name this phenomenon 'organic solidarity'.⁶¹

The analysis of the semantic oppositions in the narrative shows how the narrative discourse transforms the basic sense of 'class conflict' into an ideological conflict between 'egoism' and 'solidarity'. The various plots and sub-plots of the novel support the narrator's evaluation of the characters, thereby pushing the ideological movement of the signifying processes towards a rejection of what the narrative presents as bourgeois values, and in particular the

⁶⁰ Critics have generally described this paradigm shift as the conflict between two modes of Capitalism; an 'old' type and a 'new' type, illustrated by old Gromus and Michal Gromus respectively.

⁶¹ One of my dictionary's definitions of 'organic' reads 'consisting of different parts that are all connected to each other'. In the sense in which the narrator's discourse postulates this, the connectedness is based on an idea of biological pre-determination.

values ascribed to the younger generation of the bourgeoisie. At the same time it places an ideal of organic solidarity of the working class as its positive opposition. This ideal of organic solidarity accrues political connotations through the ending of the novel, where the narrative presentation of Jindra's death colliding with the birth of his and Růžena's son produces the senses 'class struggle' and 'solidarity'. The child represents a new member of the collective and its birth signifies that the struggle will continue in spite of Jindra's death. Thus it is possible to say that the ending poses socialism as a possible solution to the problem of class struggle. The problem of class struggle has emerged not only through the ideological significations implied in the initial choice of characters, but mainly through the way in which the narrative discourse puts these significations into play in dramatic conflicts.

In the analysis of Balada's narrative I have suggested the concept of 'narrative fate' to express the fact that within a given narrative there are certain solutions that may be seen as more right than others, in terms of the semantic parameters which the narrative discourse sets out from the beginning.⁶² As I have shown in the individual analyses, in the case of *Slepá ulička* the narrator's discourse has a controlling function that guides the processes of signification in a certain direction that is supported by the narrative organisation of events. In the light of this it is difficult to assign credibility to the view that the narrative 'objectively portrays the social conflicts at the time of the economic crisis'.⁶³ On the contrary, the analyses have shown that the way in which the narrative produces conflicting ideologies is far from innocent. The narrator's discourse creates a semantic framework that is expressed in the ideologeme of old *versus* new. This ideologeme emits connotations of nostalgia for the past and scepticism towards the new capitalism, as presented in the narrative, imbuing the narrative with an undertone of conservative ideology. The narrative presents the workers as victims of the general ideology of capitalism and places the only solution to their situation symbolically in the future, in socialism. The ideology

⁶² See Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, pp. 87-88.

⁶³ Arne Novák gave his article about *Slepá ulička* the headline 'Román přísně objektivní'. See A.N., 'Román přísně objektivní', *Lidové noviny*, 26.2.1939, p. 9.

at work in the narrative is thus created in the tensions between a conservative ideology and an ideology of the future.

Chapter 4

Černé světlo (1940)

Václav Řezáč's third novel, *Černé světlo*, deals with the problem of evil. The novel's title is the oxymoron with which the first-person narrator and main character Karel describes the evil within himself. His narration of memories and past events that have contributed to shaping his life reveals a fundamental ideological conflict between good and evil of which the second part of the opposition is the focus of the narration. However, this fundamental ideologeme only becomes fully graspable through a number of other ideologemes that work together and conflict in the structures of narration. This reading of *Černé světlo* seeks to open up these structures of narration in order to convey the relations between the ideologies that interweave in the narrative.

4.1 General characterisation of the narrative

Černé světlo can be characterised as an autobiographical narrative.¹ Karel's story is set in Prague at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The novel is divided into two parts consisting of nine and fifteen chapters respectively. The last four pages of the novel take the form of an epilogue in which the narrator reflects upon his own story. The first part of the

¹ This type of *Ich*-narrative poses certain problems in the discussion of ideology, because fundamentally, the *Ich*-form constitutes a personal ideology of the narrator. It is possible to problematise this through a discussion of the immanent contradictions that the characterisation of the narrator reveals; that is, his idiosyncrasies, his psychology and his relationship with his younger self (in technical terms the 'experiencing' self). This is opposite to the 'pseudo-objectivity' that characterises the third-person narrative. The discrepancies inherent within the narrator's discourse may indicate the 'presence' of the implied author. According to Genette everything that one cannot attribute to the narrator must belong to the author. Genette rejects the concept of the implied author except in the definition 'everything the text lets us know about the author'. See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 147-48.

novel covers, episodically, the period of time between the narrator's fourth and eleventh year. The second part of the novel covers one and a half years of the narrator's life when he is twenty-one. There is thus a temporal gap of about ten years between the novel's two parts. The first chapter of the second part contains a flashback in which the narrator summarises some events in his life (his parents' death and the loss of all the family's money) which have led to the fact that Karel, when the second part begins, must stay at his uncle's house. It is not clear from the story how wide the gap is between the time of narration and the narrator's suicide attempt that ends his story. However, the narrator's comments indicate a large temporal distance: 'Znám jenom procházky, jež vedou v jejich stopách, jen Haštalské ulici se vyhýbám, kde dávno už zbořili rodný dům můj i toho zla, jež jsem přinesl jiným' (p. 321).²

From the first sentence of the novel the reader finds himself as if in the mind of the narrator: 'Dnes v noci vrátil mi sen jednu z mých nejstarších vzpomínek' (p. 7). The narrator presents his story as an attempt at investigating how the incident in early childhood that created this memory came to influence his life in a crucial way:

Nebudu vyprávět sen, jeho alchymie mne děsí, obrátím se ke vzpomínce. I ji bude těžké zbavit nánosu času. Možná, že tvář té příhody bude dnes jiná, než jak se mi jevila tehdy. Ale na tom příliš nesejde. Nevyhrabávám ji proto, abych se jí těšil nebo trýznil, pídím se po souvislostech. Viním ji, že jako tajemný hlubinný výbuch vynesla na povrch mé povahy určité vlastnosti a jiné zasula. Nemohu tvrdit, že do mne vnesla něco, co ve mně vůbec nebylo, ale jistě zapůsobila na mé vnímání a city, i na to, jak jsem se později choval ke všemu, co mě potkávalo. Dalo by se říci, že byla vsunuta jako vzorek do stavu, na němž měl být utkán můj život. (p. 8)

The narration of the first part of the novel is characterised by a general tension between then and now ('tehdy' and 'ted') which marks the temporal distance between the adult Karel and his younger self. The tension, at the same time, expresses a difference in the level of consciousness, since Karel – the narrator –

² Václav Řezáč, *Černé světlo* [1940], Prague: Borový, 1943. Further references to the novel will be given in parentheses directly after quotations or references.

in the retrospective process constantly interprets previous situations with regard to how they have influenced his later development: 'Až mnohem později jsem pochopil, že rodiče o mně sváděli tichý, ale ustavičný boj. Pudově však, myslím, jsem z toho těžil už mnohem dříve' (p. 36). The narrator constantly draws the reader's attention to himself by means of phrases like 'Představuji si', 'Vzpomínám si', and 'Domnívám se'. His reflections show how the process of narration is dependent on the process of remembrance:

Největší potíže při mém vyprávění mi působí udržet své vzpomínky na uzdě. Rozhrábl jsem mraveniště a nyní se to hemží. Obklopují mne a domáhají se slyšení jedna přes druhou: lísají se mazlivě, dotírají drze, odhánějící ostatní s cesty, ale přece jen jsou nejnaléhavější ty, které se shromáždily stranou a jenom se dívají, mlčky a upřeně. Vša miláčkové! Dojde na vás na všechny. Rozhodl-li jsem se být sám sobě soudcem, musím určit váhu vaší důležitosti. Nedám se svést od svého úmyslu ani křikem, ani pohledy. Budete uspořádány podle stáří a podle závažnosti. V řádném vyučování i pořadí položek hraje svou roli. I bude vám určeno místo, hlasové obsazení i doba nástupu a z některých z vás bude utvořen sbor, zpívající v pozadí. (p. 41)

The passage can also be interpreted as a statement of the narrator's strategy of narration. He dramatises the events of the past and has his younger self play the main part. In this sense the evocation of the past is not only memory, but fundamentally a creative act in which the narrator has to use his imagination. Because of the distance in time between him and the narrated events he cannot know for certain what actually happened and how. The narrator's frequent use of the adverbial deixis 'patrně', 'snad', 'možná' and 'asi' emphasises this uncertainty in the narrator's knowledge. At the same time it also suggests a sense of his possible unreliability.³

³ In his *Narrative Discourse* Genette discusses these 'modalizing locutions' that 'allow the narrator to say hypothetically what he could not assert without stepping outside internal focalization'. They can function as 'the alibis of the novelist (quoting Marcel Muller) imposing his truth under a somewhat hypocritical cover, beyond all the uncertainties of the hero and perhaps also of the narrator. For here again the narrator to some extent shares the hero's ignorance; or, more exactly, the ambiguity of the text does not allow us to decide whether the

4.2 The narrator's model of self-explanation: the ideologeme of inferiority *versus* power

In the first part of the narrative the narrator's discourse develops a psychological model of explanation of how he became the person he is. This explanation is shaped by the ideologeme of inferiority *versus* power and informed by the idea of the Oedipal conflict.

The ideologeme of inferiority *versus* power dominates the narrator's presentation of his childhood. According to the narrator the traumatic experience of seeing the butcher pan Horda squeeze a rat to death with his naked fist, without the then four-year-old Karel being able to save it, had an impact on him which was to shape his relationship with strength and power in the future. The narrator does not consider the episode the cause of his problem, but it brought already existing feelings of inferiority and loneliness to the fore. The butcher Horda, who little Karel used to consider his friend, is the person whose behaviour functions as catalyst for Karel's hatred of power and strength:

Nevzpomínám na něho s nenávisťou, ačkoli v jeho pěsti se zrodila ta část mé povahy, jež měla ovládnout celý můj další život. Myslím jenom na ironické záliby té nepojmenovatelné moci, jíž někdy říkáme osud. Zlo, neboť bylo to zlo a je zbytečné hledat pro to jakékoli jiné jméno, se zrodilo v pěsti dobráka [...] Od té doby však mne síla začala děsit a naučil jsem se ji nenávidět, ať jsem se s ním setkal kdekoli a v jakékoli podobě, pudilo mě to jít proti ní. Proč? Odpověď hledám. (pp. 39-40)⁴

In his retrospective analysis the narrator gives a psychological explanation for his problematic relationship with strength which he then goes on to define as 'evil'. In this place the narrator does not give a more specific account of the evil

perhaps is an effect of indirect style – and, thus, whether the hesitation it denotes is the hero's alone' (p. 203).

⁴ The narrator never in the process of narration realises or acknowledges that his relationship with power has envy as its basic element whether it be 'psychological' envy – the desire to be like the others and 'material' envy (class envy). He may criticise the bourgeois society, but he also thinks of it as the paradise lost of his childhood. Envy is at the root of his uncontrollable 'will to power', together with fear of poverty. According to Henri F. Ellenberger, Adler distinguishes between two types of envy: 'the feeling of envy as being a natural consequence of social inequality, as opposed to pathological envy resulting from aggressive drives.' In *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, USA: BasicBooks, 1970, p. 611.

to which he refers. However, his remark establishes the semantic opposition between evil and good that informs the narrator's way of interpreting his own actions; an opposition that structures the whole narrative as the ideologeme of good *versus* evil. Within the semantic context of the narrative (the narrator's presentation) this opposition is inseparably connected as this particular episode exemplifies – 'Zlo [...] se zrodilo v pěsti dobráka' (p. 40).⁵ Furthermore, the narrator attributes this interconnectedness to an irony of fate.

The boy Karel's experience of strength finds its expression in the image of the midget against the giant (or the biblical David against Goliath).⁶ Pan Horda represents the giant in the scene with the rat; later the teacher Zimák and the itinerant fish vendor Prach have a similar function in the episodes that illustrate Karel's relationship with strength. The common feature of all the situations in which Karel encounters strength is his desire to surpass his feeling of inferiority through revenge. He makes his mother read the story of David and Goliath to him again and again and he finds delight in David striking Goliath to the ground with the stone. The ideas that 'strength punishes strength' (there are several examples of this) and that the powerful are always corrupted by their own strength permeate the way in which the narrator presents Karel's relationship with strength:

Řekl bych, že síla silných je zárodkem jejich zkázy. Vidí život jen v rovině své moci a zapomínají skloniti se a naslouchati, co se děje pod ní. Tupnou jistotou bezpečnosti a nezranitelnosti. Silní se valí nedbajíce, kam dopadá

⁵ The motif of 'good' that unintentionally causes 'evil' occurs again in the situation in which Karel's aunt reveals the truth to Klenka, thereby causing even more misery.

⁶ In his account of Adler's work Henri F. Ellenberger discusses how the term 'feeling of inferiority' is used by Adler, it 'actually has two different meanings. One is related to a natural inferiority, such as that of the size of a child when compared to that of an adult, or a factual inferiority resulting from disease. But individual psychologists mostly use the term in the sense of a value judgment, which is implicit in the German word – *Minderwertigkeitsgefühl* – which includes the radicals *minder*, "lesser," and *Wert*, "value." It thus means a judgment of "lesser value" pronounced by an individual upon himself.' *Ibid.*, p. 612. It seems to me that Řezáč manages to play on these different meanings, both in his choice of imagery and in the characterisation of Karel. Further on, in his comparison of Adler's and Freud's ideas Ellenberger sums up the oppositions between them. One of them is 'FREUD, The infant has a feeling of omnipotence (hallucinatory wish fulfillment)' *versus* 'ADLER, The child has a feeling of inferiority (relation of midget to giant)', *Ibid.*, p. 627.

váha jejich kroků. Tak obranou slabých, nechtějí-li být rozdraceni, zůstává větší pohyblivost, bystrost a houževnatost. (p. 48)

Karel develops his defence against the powerful through a strategy of manipulation which he later employs with aptitude in his adult life. He uses other people as means to gain power and revenge himself. The first character to have that function in Karel's life is the school bully Frantík Munzar whose friendship Karel buys with his packed lunches. Karel manipulates him into fight after fight without any sense of compassion for Frantík's sufferings. On the contrary, Karel manipulates Frantík, time after time, into confirming his theory of strength that punishes strength. To the narrator Frantík is the embodiment of dense strength (without intelligence).⁷

The narrator's interpretation of his relationship with his parents resonates the idea of the Oedipal conflict. The boy is the object of tacit rivalry between his parents (see earlier quotation), but according to the narrator, they both end up having a detrimental effect on the psychological behaviour of Karel.⁸ The portrait that the narrator creates of his mother shows her as an, on the one hand, unattainable and, as regards her attention for Karel, unstable character who suffers from migraine and prefers aloneness. (She only bothers with him during the holidays). On the other hand, she embodies an idealised mother figure. The narrator's characterisation of the little Karel's feelings for his mother reveals that he still at the time of narrating idealises his love for her: 'Miloval jsem ji tak, jako jsem nikdy potom už žádnou ženu nemiloval' (p. 22). This is the older Karel speaking from his perspective of trying to capture his past feelings. It shows that Karel in his adult life still holds the ideal of unconditional and uncritical love as an ideal for romantic love which is in fact just another expression of self-love. The mother overprotects him and in order to prevent the trauma caused by the experience with the rat from reappearing she isolates him from other children. As a result the little Karel is totally unprepared to deal with

⁷ One has to remember that in the first chapter the narrator's consciousness and knowledge govern the interpretation of events. A four- or eleven-year-old boy would not be able to verbalise such a degree of psychological analysis or description.

⁸ In Freudian terms Karel suffers under an unresolved Oedipal conflict that means that he is always crushed again and again like the rat.

other children when he has to start school. The mother's idea of upbringing consists in asserting an ideal of 'social behaviour' (p. 36) in the manner of 'what people will think about him' (p. 37). She refuses to acknowledge the fact that Karel does wrong and refrains from disciplining him: 'Vážné dětské zlomyslnosti, jichž zanedbání ukrývá v sobě ohrožení budoucího charakteru, at' už byla sama jich svědkem, nebo at' si jí na ně stěžoval někdo jiný, kárávala vždy velmi ledabyle' (pp. 36-37).⁹ The narrator's portrayal of his father shows why Karel as a child never managed to separate from his mother. Karel's father has a distant presence in Karel's life. As a consequence he becomes excluded from Karel's symbiotic relationship with his mother: 'Nedovedu dnes říci, měli jsem ho rád nebo ne, ale byl jsem tehdy ve věku, kdy dítě se rodí po druhé, a to svými city z citů matčiny. Otec byl někdo, o kom maminka říkávala: – Musíš mít rád tatínka, miláčku, stará se o tebe a živí tě' (p. 25). He has a function similar to that of the God Karel is required to love without understanding why. Like God his father represents a figure of power: 'Podobně jako Bohem i tatínkem se mi hrozilo, jestliže jsem dostatečně neposlouchal, podobně jako Bůh i tatínek byl bytostí trestající v poslední instanci' (p. 26). However, because of his poor background he feels inferior to Karel's mother into whose bourgeois family he has married. This feeling of inferiority hinders him in asserting himself in relation to Karel. So, when he could have forced Karel to go to school, he instead follows the same principles in his relationship with his son as he does in business. He figures Karel out and bribes him to persuade him to go even though he is scared of it. Thus the father shows Karel how people can be bought.¹⁰ The narrator reveals how he even then understood his father's weakness in relation to the mother. Later Karel's mother rescues him from punishment by lying to the father. In this way both parents set an example of manipulation which Karel is to follow later in life.

⁹ An example of the little Karel's bullying behaviour once he is in a position of power is that he beats the caretaker's little girl because she does not want to wipe her nose and tries to catch the snot with her tongue (p. 34). However disgusting this may be it is a peculiar detail for the narrator to include. Perhaps it has the function of showing Karel's hypersensitivity; a character feature that he may have from his mother.

¹⁰ The description of the father indirectly criticises him for letting his business mentality influence his personal relationships – a feature which the narrator later spots as his uncle's weakness and accordingly uses in order to manipulate him.

The narrator's presentation of how his parents have contributed to forming his relationship with other people contains a critique of their bourgeois morality. His father's upbringing differs from that of Karel's in that he was allowed to have his freedom. It is implied that this was so because he comes from a petty-bourgeois family: 'Narodil se na Žižkově jako syn malého obchodníka smíšeným zbožím a žil více na ulici mezi kamarády než doma u maminciny sukně' (p. 35). The narrator describes the values of his father in positive terms:

Obchod mu nebyl prostředkem k obohacení, nýbrž řádnou prací jako každá jiná. Nic mu nebylo v životě darováno, všeho, i své ženy se domohl jen tím, že byl takový, jaký vskutku byl, bystrý, rychle se rozhodující chlapík, čestný, přímý a do úpadu pracovitý. Takový hoch, jemuž se poštěstilo. Přečinil se a Bůh mu požehnal. Nebyl nic a stal se velkým pánem. To byla jistě jeho pýcha, jíž se však těšil jen ve skrytu své duše, neboť nebylo v jeho povaze, aby se nad někým vypínal, a to také byl zdroj slabosti v jeho vztahu k mamince. Tu nepřestával být chudým chlapcem, který se oženil s princeznou ze zámku. (pp. 37-38)

Thus, the father's positive values never were passed on to Karel because of his inferiority complex in relation to his wife. As regards his mother, the narrator indicates that with hindsight her actions have not only been based on motherly love, but have also been influenced by social prejudice: 'Ale kdoví, možná, že právě tak silně a smíšen k nerozeznání s tím druhým [mother love] promluvil v tobě i hlas předsudku' (p. 91). Thus the narrator's analysis of his relationship with his parents reveals that their experience of class had a crucial, although indirect, influence on his perception of relationships between people. Social prejudice was at the heart of the power struggle of their relationship which had important consequences for Karel's experience of strength/power. The narrator's implicit conclusion is that the evil that came to dominate his mind was allowed to develop because of his parents' permissiveness that had class prejudice as one of its reasons. The idea of the Oedipal conflict is crucial for understanding why the narrator came to perceive everything through the strength-weakness opposition contained within the ideologeme of inferiority *versus* power.

In the process of the narration the psychological explanatory model functions as a legitimising ideology or alibi for the narrator's tendency to perpetrate the evil that dominates his mind. In the second part of the novel the narrator recurrently refers to the psychological profile that he has created of himself in the first part of the novel; he lets one episode or recognition in the life of the young Karel evoke the memory of a similar moment of his childhood. In terms of plot the psychological model of explanation thus has a mirror function. For example, the way in which the young Karel fantasises about power is similar to his way of fantasising as a child; both are characterised by the same illusion of omnipotence.

4.3 The ideologeme of the decay of the bourgeoisie

At the beginning of the second part's first chapter the narrator's discourse establishes a semantic contrast between the time during which the events of his story happened, the end of the nineteenth century, and his present ('today'), the temporal dimension of the 'then' and 'now' of the narration. Apart from the brief comment with which the narrator emphasises the difference from 'today' ('Nemělo nic společného se ztrnule pochodujícím písmem dnešních firem, složených z břevien, trámů a studnařských skruží' (p. 99)), the narrator's focus is on the time of the events. 'Then', the favourite colours were purple, black and gold, because 'they' associated them with 'vznešenost'. The 'they' to whom the narrator refers is the bourgeoisie, the 'patriciát'. Purple and gold were used in the houses, whilst the businesses associated themselves with black and gold. According to the narrator these colours signified pride as well as the 'bytnost' of the businesses. However, the narrator's sarcastic comparison 'V té době náhrobky a firmy se sobě podobaly' (p.99) implies the view that the pompous shop fronts only serve the purpose of hiding the decay beneath them. So it implicitly questions the subsequent description of the writing above the shop fronts in that it produces connotations of dissimulation and falseness. These connotations keep reverberating in the background of the subsequent presentation of the narrator's uncle's music shop. In this the narrator satirises

the bourgeois claim to respectability and position as guarantor of general morality:

Mohutná firma zabírající celé průčelí domu tak jako strýcův krám, vedle něhož zbývalo už jen místo pro domovní vchod, vnukala vám vážnost a přesvědčovala vás, že zboží ve výkladcích pod ní jest skutečně seriósní, kdybyste snad byli jati pochybnostmi při pohledu na barevné obálky sešitů a všelijak vlasaté, vousaté, parukaté, obrylené a obaretěné podoby geniů. Neboť měšťan, jdoucí koupit nějaký ten klavírní kousek své dceři, vychované uršulinkami, postaven před lví hlavu Beethovenovu může pocítit nepříjemné zamrazení při představě, že by tento chlapík usedl za jeho stůl, a začít uvažovat, zda je vhodné, aby jeho výtvoř se dostaly do rukou dívky, jejíž současná dívčí a budoucí manželská ctnost jsou budovány s takovými náklady a úzkostlivostí. Ale firma Metoděj Kukla, důstojná, vážná, zlatá a zdobná zdá se mu být dostatečnou zárukou, že snad přece jen může koupit to 'Für Elise', bez obav, že nějaký ďábel, začarovaný v tóny, vystrčí své drápy z kláves, aby pokoušel nevinnost květu jím zplozeného. (p. 100)

The narrator's analysis of his uncle's music shop simultaneously makes it signify the quintessence of bourgeois values and mocks the bourgeois attitude appertaining to these same values; that is, obsession with appearance and decorum, fear of passion, seriousness and fear of sexuality.

The narrator's critical presentation of his uncle's shop serves as a pretext for his description of his own position within his uncle's family. At the time when the twenty-one-year-old Karel comes to stay in his uncle's home he has lost first his father, then his mother. Furthermore, previous to his mother's death his decadent uncle Rudolf, who took over the business after Karel's father, lost all the family's money. Karel is thus completely without any financial support. The narrator presents this older version of his younger self in the third person so as to emphasise his changed social status. In using the third person he presents himself as a fictional character, thereby creating a greater distance from his younger self. He has him judged by the norms of the bourgeoisie (cf. the last two sentences) and so sets the scene for his stay in his uncle's family:

Vyzábly mladík, ozdobený knírkem a krotkými licousky, vstoupil do obchodu svého strýce, bylo mu jedenadvacet let. Neměl už nikoho na světě a neměl v kapse takřka ani vindry, nehledě k tomu, také nic neuměl. Byl přijat z milosti. Tehdy ještě měšťanstvo bylo vzpíráno na své výši dvěma silnými nosníky: rodinnou soudržností a rodovou pýchou. Zchudlý příbuzný, který se toulá světem neschopen postarat se sám o sebe, je vždycky nebezpečím pro vaši dobrou pověst. Mějme ho raději na očích. (pp. 100-101)

The narrator presents his inclusion in the uncle's family as an act of mercy, but one which is a result of the family's need to preserve their good reputation, as an attempt to keep up appearances.¹¹ The quoted passage once again implies a deterioration in the state of the bourgeoisie which is indicated by the temporal adverbial 'Tehdy ještě'. At the same time, however, the narrator's explanation also reflects upon himself, showing how he is a product of the same way of thinking as that which he ascribes to his family. Through his portrayal of the bourgeoisie the narrator (as older man) establishes the values (the ideals) that he has destroyed through his evil deeds. These were values that were part of his own background as the son in a bourgeois family. The narrator's need to tell his story might suggest that he still suffers from nostalgia for what is past.

4.4 The perspective of the outsider: the ideologeme of isolation versus community

The narrator's description of the bourgeoisie and the uncle as a member of this social class establishes his own social position as that of the outsider. Karel's position within his uncle's family as well as in the shop hierarchy (pp. 114-15) further enhances his feeling of exclusion. For example, he describes himself as 'zděděný kus nábytku' (p. 112). His isolated attic room functions as the spatial

¹¹ The motif of mercy occurs again, in the epilogue, in the narrator's explanation of why he was given the job as municipal clerk. This was because he was the son of 'a Prague bourgeois' (see further p. 320). Also here the motif of mercy is linked with the bourgeois idea of respectability. However, the narrator's later description of his uncle and aunt indicates that he is probably not right in assuming that he was accepted only as an act of mercy. His characterisation of his aunt, for example, shows that she is fundamentally someone who wants to do good (whatever the reason).

signifier of his outsider position: 'Podkroví, toť místo, jež více než jiné je schopno stupňovat ve svém obyvateli pocit osamělosti a představy, že ostatní svět by měl ležet u jeho nohou' (p. 111). The narrator's account of the time spent in his attic room explains how he identified himself with the isolated location of the room, explaining his dreaming then as a product of his loneliness (see p. 112). However, the outsider position is also a catalyst for another way of viewing things, in a literal sense as well as figuratively. According to the narrator, Karel's isolated position within the shop provides the perfect climate for his dreams of power.

The narrator's presentation of his isolation constitutes the opposite of the positive connotations associated with 'community' elsewhere in the narrator's discourse, for example; 'Lidé mají potřebu se družít' (p. 239) – about Zdejsa and the verger. An idea of community also emanates indirectly through the narrator's account of what he is lacking; he wants to be like other people as his thoughts, holding Markétka's letter to Klenka, express: 'Můj Bože, jak ty si se mnou pohráváš! Snad bych byl lepší, kdyby mě ona milovala. Den by se ve mně rozsvítil a viděl bych, jako vidí jiní lidé. Cožpak se mi nechce mezi ně, cožpak jsem od úsvitu rozumu toužil po něčem jiném, než podobat se jim ve všem, být jako oni, být jedním z nich?' (pp. 234-35). The quotation also shows how envy is a key factor in his relationship with other people.

4.5 The ideologeme of inferiority *versus* power: Karel's relation with power

Karel's growing insight into his uncle's business methods inspires him to find the ultimate goal of his power dreams; that is to become the ruler of the uncle's universe – the music shop (see p. 117). The uncle's music shop represents the complete commodification of art. The musicians who come to sell their compositions have given the uncle the nickname 'žralok' because his view of music is entirely based on its sales value. His business credentials allow him to treat the musicians themselves from a position of superiority (see pp. 116-17) – he plays God in the universe of the business, which his remark to Karel illustrates: 'Spílají [the musicians], ale přicházejí opět, vědí, že beze mne by nic

nebyli. Většinu jich jsem stvořil, ano, stvořil' (p. 115). Karel also discovers another dimension of power; the immortal power of art, which Karel assesses according to its business value:

Chápu to, člověče, chápu to. Tady se prodává to nejdrahocennější zboží: lidské mozky a víc, jejich nejvnitřnější obsah, to nejprchavější z nich, myšlenky, jež se po druhé nevracejí, myšlenky, jež se rozplývají jako dým v soumraku, a hle, tady jsou, tady zůstaly ukuty v tvrdost tvrdší a nezmarnější oceli. Mozky už nebudou a mnohé se již skutečně rozpadly v prach, ale jejich obsah nevychladlý, teplý, žhavý, tepající máme na skladě v kolika jen exemplářích si račte přát. Ach, to je zbožíčko, to se mi líbí, někde se namáhala a vzpínala síla, nepostihnutelná, nehmatatelná a přece tak mohutná, že udolala svého nositele, a tady, vážení zákazníci, leží to nejlepší, co ukořistila. Pěkná vemínka jste po sobě nechali, vznešení geniové, tryská z nich zlatý čůrek. To by se mi líbilo, ždímat plody vaší síly. Nerozumím příliš hudbě, odehrávala se vždy někde nad mým obzorem, ale tenhle obchůdek mě láká, cenil bych si jej nad obchod s démanty. (p. 132)

The excerpt shows how Karel's relationship with power has become ever more conscious and focused. The final thought also emphasises his lack of appreciation of the true value of music, as well as crudely revealing his lack of respect for excellence – a feature that indicates his own intellectual mediocrity. On the contrary, the true value of music is embodied in the character Klenka who is a real artist.

The narrative presentation of the second part of the novel alternates between passages of interior monologue – moments in which Karel sits alone, planning his manipulations in order to gain power – and dramatic episodes in which Karel carries out these manipulations.

The interior monologues tell the story of how Karel's desire for power also destroys him, how they are based on a fantasy of omnipotence. The narrator's presentation of Karel's power fantasies eventually evolves into long interior monologues that support the interpretation that Karel is trying to be a superman in a Nietzschean way. However, before the ending the narrator has indicated that this is a complete delusion. Through the symbol of the walking stick that

used to belong to Karel's uncle the narration already hints at Karel's possible Fate. Uncle Rudolf committed suicide. The Napoleonic symbol of the walking stick reveals what caused Rudolf's despair. It was a misapplication of the will to power (also associated with Napoleon in Nietzsche).¹²

In the dramatic episodes the narrator uses manipulation as a narrative strategy. Karel's position alternates between that of an actor and that of an observer: 'Jsem v tuto chvíli málo pozorným divákem děje, jehož jsem jindy zaujatým hercem' (p. 135). A good example of manipulation as narrative strategy is the scene in which Karel manipulates the uncle into dismissing the bookkeeper. In his games of manipulation Karel takes advantage of his position as outsider. In the way in which the narrator presents this position, it gives him a kind of second sight or an enhanced awareness of other people:

Postavte člověka do kouta a on se z něho nikdy nevyhrabe. Má to být můj osud, stát vždycky stranou, bezmocně se mračit a přihlížet, jak se druzí radují a berou si ze života, čeho se jim zachce? Ach, ne, člověk v koutě má svou výhodu: vidí, zatím co ti druzí se motají, oslepeni sami sebou a zmatkem, který působí. (p. 123)

The narrator's presentation of his actions then consistently focuses on how he tried to 'read' other people in order to manipulate them.

4.6 The idea of Romantic love and the idealisation of art

On the semantic level the narrated events that take place while Karel is living with his uncle's family create conflicts that establish the values to which Karel is a complete antithesis and whose destruction Karel brings about.

The dramatic episodes of the second part have at their centre Karel's pursuit of Markétka, the uncle's daughter, who has just returned from her Austrian convent school. (In this her life represents the stereotype of the bourgeois girl at the time of the narrated events). In Markétka Karel finds the means to achieve

¹² The influence of Nietzsche's ideas on the characterisation of Karel could be discussed further. Some of it might be due to the fact that Adler was greatly inspired by Nietzsche. At the time when Řezáč was writing, Adler was read by the Czechs, although one cannot say for certain whether Řezáč did. The Napoleon symbol also links *Černé světlo* with Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and the theme of guilt.

his goal of acquiring his uncle's shop. The narrator's analysis of Karel's relationship with her shows how he in his fantasy about her projects onto her his mother's function in his life. At the same time, Markétka does not conform to this ideal, which creates in him the same reaction to power as he experienced as a boy:

Většinou nevím, co bych mluvil, potí se mi dlaně, rudnu a koktám a Markétka se baví mým trápením. Neměla by to dělat, neví, s čím si zahrává, není dobře tropit si žerty z lidí, kteří vyrostli tak, jako já. Jsem do ní zamilován, nepochybuji o tom, ale jak vypadá láska lidí mně podobných? Hledám v ní cestu k své vlastní síle a jistotě, chtěl bych do ní usednout jako do lodi, která mě má bezpečně dopravit k uskutečnění mých plánů, má se mi stát odčiněním slabosti a pokoření, jimiž jsem trpěl. A hle, co se mnou dělá! Proměňuje mne v roztřeseného panáka, v strašáka a zajíce zároveň. Loudí se mi do ní pocit, že se jí musím pomstít za to, jak si se mnou pohrává. Znal jsem na světě jedinou ženu dobře, svou matku. Markétka s ní nemá nic společného, chtěl bych, aby se jí podobala, spoléhám na tebe, vezmi mě za ruku a ved' mne. A zatím mě trýzní její smích. (p. 121)

As a typical feature of the narrative presentation of Karel, the episode with Markétka (when she teases Karel) is followed by one of Karel's interior monologues in which he ponders what is happening and prepares himself for the part he is going to play while being with other people (there is nothing sincere about Karel's behaviour, except when he regresses to earlier modes of reaction). These monologues are typically stylised as Karel talking to himself in questions and answers:

Přemýšlím o tom u svého vikýře. Hlupáku, říkám si a biju se pěstmi do hlavy, takhle se jí přece nemůžeš zalíbit. A ty musíš, slyšíš, musíš. Je to tvá jediná naděje. Znechutíš se jí, odpudíš si ji docela. Co jí poví tvé mlčení a krhavé oči hladovce? Tím jí můžeš nahnat jenom strach. Musíš být veselý, když chce být veselá, a rozjímavý, je-li naložena smutně; musíš umět žertovat a usmívat se na ni. Ale jak se má žertovat s dívkami jako je Markétka, co se jim vůbec má povídat? Jak se mám usmívat? Usmívám-li

se, mám pocit, že cením zuby jako zuřivý pes. Kdypak jsem se já usmíval, kdypak jsem se smál? Lépe nevzpomínat. (p. 122)¹³

These monologues nearly all occur while Karel is sitting by his dormer window and they support the narrator's previous comment about the location of his room nurturing bad thoughts. Their function is to legitimise the narrator's analysis of himself. The present tense of the narration signals that here the narrator identifies himself with his younger self and without commenting he recreates his thoughts as they might then have gone through his mind. However, the inquit phrase 'říkám si' shows that this is a recreation of past thoughts, rather than a recording of them in the moment they occurred.¹⁴ The fact that the narration preceding the monologue is in the present tense also adds to the inner drama of the situation.

The narrator shows how Karel has invented a fantasy about his love for Markétka because she represents the means for him to achieve what he desires. His thoughts on seeing Markétka's reaction to his proclamation of love for her show how the ideas of love and power are closely connected in his mind:

Něco ve mně mávne pohrdavě rukou. Chtělo by se mi mučit ji, až bych viděl, jak pláče nad sebou a pro mne, ale nač to? Láska neláska, kohopak jsem já kdy krom matky miloval? Zatoužil jsem po tobě, Markétko, snil jsem o tobě, mé sny se proplétaly, Markétka a závod, láska a touha být nade všemi pán a ti ostatní i s tebou u mých nohou, pěkné klubko hadů se vyhřívalo na palčivém slunci mé samoty. Ještě jsem se tě nevzdal, Markétko, ale kdo říká, že tě ještě miluji? Tím více musím ještě střežit každé slovo, pohled i čin. Teď se zasměj, ničemo, hezky zvesela a dobrácky jako nad povedeným žertem. (p. 189)

The narrator dramatises Karel's interior monologue in the moment. It is not entirely obvious whether the last self-address belongs to the narrator's present, as a stage direction to his younger self in his dramatisation of the past, or

¹³ From his previous thought it appears that his experience with women is limited to flirting with the barmaids while out drinking with his bought friends (see p. 122, above).

¹⁴ Dorrit Cohn has defined this type of monologue within first-person narration as 'self-quoted monologue'. See Dorrit Cohn: *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 161-65.

whether it refers to his thought of himself in the moment. However, addressing himself as 'ničemo' seems most likely to come from the narrator, expressing a judgment of his former self. The narrator's thoughts about Markétka also reveal that his desire for her is based on the idea that her love for him would help him to redeem himself: 'Taková byla Markétka; byl v ní klid, síla a rozhodnost, šla za svým cílem, nedbala překážek, měla vše, čeho se mi nedostávalo. Opíraje se o ni stal bych se teprve mužem, mohl bych žít a upevnit se její silou' (p. 205). This idea suggests Markétka's function in the narrative as that of 'the female saviour' who represents an ideal woman. The quotation shows that Karel's idea of love is fundamentally parasitism. The narrator's characterisation of Markétka as 'měla vše, čeho se mi nedostávalo' epitomises Karel's general attitude; he always desires what other people have, be that strength, power, love or secure social standing. The characterisation thus captures the feeling of envy that is an aspect of his sense of inferiority – the nature of the driving force behind Karel's actions.¹⁵

The idea of love as redeemer occurs again in a central passage that plays on the imagery of the title of the novel. The passage concerns Karel's thoughts about the letter with which Markétka has entrusted him to deliver to Klenka, the real object of Markétka's love:

Proč na něm místo J. B. Klenka nestojí mé jméno? Rázem by bylo vše jasné. Neboť, hle, adresát nezmizel neznámo kam, vždyť sídlí zde a celý život čeká na takový dopis, jehož jádro by propalovalo svou skořápku. Kdyby na něm stálo mé jméno, liják bílého světla by se spustil, až bych jej otevřel, a spálil a smyl by ve mne vše, co potřebuje spálit a smýt. Ach, nebude bílé světlo. Tma ve mně vzplane a černé světlo se rozlévá, jdu opět svou cestou, dlouhou tmavou chodbou nikde ani štěrbinu, jíž by se dnilo. Staň se mi jedem, co mi mohlo být lékem, jsem vyprahlý a musím pít i za cenu nové smrtelné žízně. (p. 235)

¹⁵ The statement 'měla vše, čeho se mi nedostávalo' word for word echoes the narrator's description of Petr and Vít's relationship in *Větrná setba*, another protagonist of Rezáč's who is characterised by envy.

In this passage the redemption has the form of a purging by white light – the opposite of the black light that dominates Karel’s mind.¹⁶ However much, however, Karel tries to persuade himself that he is in love with Markétka, one can only judge, on the basis of the narrator’s general presentation of Karel, that he does not know what love is.

The narrative presents the alternative to Karel’s idea of love in the love that develops between the uncle’s daughter Markétka and the young, talented musician Klenka. The story of Klenka and Markétka evokes the idea of Romantic love as true love, the supremacy of love over all other loyalties, as well as an idealisation of art and a loyalty to one’s art. The narrative dramatisation of the narrator’s perception of these ideas is structured by the ideologeme of inferiority *versus* power. It is envy and power that shape Karel’s actions in what is fundamentally a conflict between truth and lie (falseness), which the narrator interprets as the conflict between good and evil.

The triangular drama between Markétka, Klenka and Karel sets this conflict into play through a series of semantic oppositions (antinomies) that shape the narration. These are lie / truth, falseness (dissimulation) / sincerity, business / art, insensitivity / passion, evil / good, ‘non-love’ / love, impurity / purity, weakness / strength. Karel is constructed as an antithesis to the values that eventually break down (symbolised by the destruction of the other characters’ lives). Karel mocks and destroys these out of envy (caused by his feeling of inferiority), but at the same time they regain validity, in that they have the function of a *Paradise Lost* to Karel.

Unlike Karel, Klenka is the embodiment of strength which the narrator’s description, fascinated, points out: ‘Veliký, silný mladík; zdá se, že frak je nácpan k prasknutí jeho rameny, zády, pažemi a hrudí’ (p. 166).¹⁷ The narrator describes his encounter with Klenka’s playing as if he was completely captured by the power of the music.¹⁸ His description captures the passion of the music, a

¹⁶ The motif of purging is familiar from *Větrná setba* in which Petr is purged through Kama’s love.

¹⁷ And further on: ‘Nevěřil bys, že něco takového může vyjít z těch těžkých mužských paží’ (p. 168).

¹⁸ In this description of Klenka’s piano playing (see p. 168) the narrator reveals a knowledge of music which one would not ascribe to him, considering his various remarks about not

passion that is alien to Karel himself, and, at the same time, records the effect that the music has on him:

Bylo to mé první setkání s hudbou v této podobě a propadal jsem její moci s temným vztekem a vzdorem. Chobotnice musí být milosrdnější. Ale to, co vycházelo z kláves zpod Klenkových rukou, strhovalo mě a vsakovalo do sebe jako vír, svítilo to jako strašlivé slunce do všech koutů mé mysli, až všechno v ní se dalo do pohybu, zapomenutý a neviditelný život procitl a hemžil se jako když pohneš rozvalinou. Viděl jsem se, to bylo nejhorší ze všeho, a nenacházel jsem na sobě nic, v čem bych mohl dojít zalíbení. Ta Chopinova Polonaisa se dala ještě vydržet a snést, peklo se otevřelo zplna až při Beethovenově Appassionatě a chňapalo po mně svými plameny. Ani z nebeského Andante con moto nesprchlo na mne očistně a nedýchlo vykoupením. Křičelo a dupalo to ve mně, jako bych byl zmítán záchvatem zuřivosti, když mi dočtla příběh o Davidu a Goliáši: Ty jsi tím vinna, nemělas mi to číst! (p. 169)

The association that music is like a ‘frightful sun’ that shines ‘into all corners of his mind’ supports the interpretation that, within the semantic framework of the narrative, light symbolises consciousness; here Karel’s awareness of his own irretrievable defiled state. The narrator suggests that music could have a purging function; however, with Karel it is not the case. Instead, he reverts to his childhood pattern of reaction. What was then the spontaneous reaction of a four-year-old has been internalised because it was not responded to appropriately. The narrator acknowledges music as something that has a power of its own and he evaluates it, just as does Markétka, according to its ability to transport him away, to influence him – music is associated with feeling: ‘V Klenkových skladbách [...] bylo mnoho nového a nezvyklého, ale byl v nich také duch ryzí hudby, neboť i mne, který byl proti nim už napřed zaujat, chvílemi strhoval a unášel tak, že jsem zapomínal na svůj odpor k umělci, zrozený z Markétčina

understanding music. This is one of the inconsistencies of the characterisation of the narrator that make him seem either completely unreliable, devious or rather a vehicle for the (implied) author’s perception. The other possibility is that one might think that he had spent the years between his suicide attempt and the time of narrating educating himself. His encounter with Klenka’s music could have instigated a desire to learn about music.

obdivu' (p. 174). According to the narrator's interpretation of Klenka's playing the power of his music lies in its purity – the narrator idealises music by ascribing to it this almost spiritual character. Klenka's ability to connect with this kind of power (true art), and Markétka's affection for him because of this, immediately attracts Karel's feeling of envy. The narrator's analysis of Klenka elsewhere also indicates that Klenka possesses strength because he, unlike Karel, is true to himself (for example, in his behaviour in front of the concert audience). He does not need to act out a role. Also, unlike Karel, Klenka seems reconciled with his past: 'Byl asi z lidí, kteří dovedou opouštět své minulosti [...]' (p. 176). Klenka, just like the Horda of Karel's childhood, represents the good power in the novel.

With his strength Klenka unawares turns Karel's urge to destroy the powerful towards himself. Karel's interference with Markétka and Klenka's relationship only represents a new enactment of the ideologeme of inferiority *versus* power. This becomes most clear in the scene where Karel seeks out Klenka at his hiding place, carrying the letter from Markétka. Karel's conversation with Klenka reveals the fundamental difference between the characters of the two men. Klenka appears as the idealist who lives for his art (see p. 251) and who also applies this idealism to the rest of his life (p. 253). He also cares for other people, though, and it was his kindness towards Božena that created the situation in which he has apparently lost Markétka. Karel plays his role of manipulator, and his successful attempt at destroying Klenka's hope of ever seeing Markétka again reveals his complete lack of sincerity and compassion. On the contrary, he revels in Klenka's pain at the situation (see pp. 250-51) and uses it for his intention of severing the bond between Klenka and Markétka for good. The contrast between Klenka and Karel signifies another fundamental ideological conflict, that between truth and lie (sincerity/falseness). The narrative plays out this conflict in the sense of whether the characters live in truth, although this is different for each of them and sometimes destructive for them. The question of truth appears in the aunt's way of living her religious

conviction (which can be likened to religious Decadence),¹⁹ the uncle's business mentality that governs everything he does, Klenka's passion for his art and Božena's passion for Klenka. In the context of the narrative Markétka by definition lives in truth because of what she represents to the narrator: innocence, purity and ideal love.

The narrative of Karel's destructiveness in his pursuit of power creates an image of an order of things which is not sustainable (is in decay). Bourgeois society is deteriorating from the inside. All the characters appear as somehow perverted or amoral. The only exceptions are Klenka and Markétka who represent the love which is unattainable for the narrator. These are the only characters who do not play games, are honest, although in the end all the characters become victims of the narrator's manipulation.

4.7 The idea of Fate

In the epilogue the narrator returns to the temporal setting of the narrating. His comments reveal that his motive for telling his story was not the wish to discover what had really happened and why, but a wish to revive the shadows of the past and the notion of good, which they still embody for him: 'Ale nikoho by už nezajímaly ty staré historie, i věřím, že jsem byl ponechán na živu, abych, sám nic nemohoucí, živil ty stíny, v nichž bylo tolik nekonečně krásnějšího a lepšího života. Nepokouším jim uklouznout, patřím jim (p. 322).

The idea of Fate is crucial to the narrator's understanding of his own narrative. He repeatedly refers to Fate as if to a higher power that determined his actions:

Tady jsem mohl snít a obírat se svou budoucností sotva za mnou zapadly dveře. Nedobré sny ke mně přicházely, neboť samota a pocit odstrčenosti nejsou stvořeny, aby plodily zdravé děti. Dnes mi připadá podivné, že mne ani tehdy, ani kdy později nenapadlo, abych se ohlédl po jiné zaměstnání. Bývalo by to bylo přece mé právo a nikdo by se byl nad tím zvlášť

¹⁹ It is one of the ironies of the narrative that the aunt in her quest for truth about Karel's intrigues causes more unhappiness, rather than helping anybody.

nepodivil. Ale od počátku jako bych byl cítil, že mě sem postavil osud a že pro mne není jiného místa na světě. (p. 112)

The above passage, like my previous quotations, shows how the idea of Fate shapes the narration teleologically. The narrated events are things that are meant to happen because the narrator/ character cannot act otherwise. The narrator's use of the concept of Fate can only be justified by his superior knowledge of what had happened then. He knows how the story ends. The danger of his method is that, just as the psychological explanation might mask a certain kind of alibism, so the idea of Fate might allow the reader to find the narrator less guilty. The narrator's numerous addresses to the narratee suggest that he is trying to awaken sympathy and understanding for his actions.

The question is, do we want to believe him? The novel could be interpreted in two ways: it can be seen as an essay in self-delusion, of explaining away the evil that he has committed, or it can be part of the characterisation of the narrator/Karel as an irredeemable trickster. The narrator's increasing lack of distance from his younger self in the process of narration would support such an interpretation. Because the narrator knows what had happened to him, it is possible to interpret the allusions to Fate in the narration as a game he is playing with the reader. He is still the same manipulating self as he was at the time of the story. Through telling his story he has once again carried out an act of manipulation, this time in relation to the implied reader. Fate also has the function of the punishing power. In this it creates the great irony of the narrative: that is, the fact that Karel, the son of a respectable bourgeois family, receives his punishment and ends his life as a cripple and a municipal clerk, a job that puts him in a position of power in relation to those lower in the hierarchy, but not the power that he had striven for. Karel, in a way, repeats the uncle's Fate, except that he survives his suicide attempt and thus lives to tell his tale.

4.8 The ideologeme of good *versus* evil

With its final epiphonema ('Lidičky, pozor! Život jde kolem vašich dětí a z jeho hrsti prší zrno nepřečištěné' – the novel's last sentence) the narrative presents

itself as a moral fable. This final comment of the narrator's seeks to determine the way in which the preceding story should be interpreted and by its simplicity reduces the ideological tensions of the story to the fundamental conflict between good and evil. The title of the novel supports this because it indicates the symbolic code by means of which the narrator interprets his actions of the past. The light / darkness dichotomy is his way of making sense of what drove him in his destructiveness. So the recurring image of 'the light at the end of the dark tunnel' could also symbolise the process of achieving consciousness through narrating past events.²⁰ In his analysis of himself the narrator gives a psychological explanation of the evil that he perpetrated in the form of his inferiority complex and his social isolation/ exclusion.²¹ The criteria against which the evil that the narrator perpetrated is to be judged are not fully developed in the narrative events. However, a notion of good power does appear in the novel in the characters of the teacher Zimák or pan Horda (or Klenka, as already mentioned). The narrator posits an alternative to Karel's approach to life (the position of the outsider) as that of being part of a community. The narrator's discourse contains several references to the positive evaluation of community, for example, 'Ale člověk patří mezi lidi' (p. 176). The narrator presents his most detailed vision of what this 'community' means in an epiphanic address to his younger self – in the scene when Karel waits for Zdejsa outside the church:

Kostelní vrata jsou otevřena, zvuk varhan a zpěv doléhá až ke mně a dole pode mnou hučí divoká jarní řeka, trochu rozvodněná. Cítíš, jak to všechno patří k sobě? Ten ozářený Hrad, majestát síly, vyrostlý z kořenů víry, vládnout lze, kamaráde, jen silou, zrozenou z lásky a důvěry, ten dravý proud, i život má své jarní záplavy, ale tobě by se chtělo z nich jen kořistit, to jaro na větvích křehnoucí, křehké a přece silné nadějí, šum křídel zbožnosti, vzletlých ze zpěvu a nesoucích všechna srdce k jednomu

²⁰ This is the Freudian way of the 'talking cure'.

²¹ The aunt's opinion of Karel represents a biblical interpretation of evil. She sees Karel as the punishment brought onto the family because of the uncle's ruthless exploitation of other people's talents.

ohnisku. Pročpak jsem vlastně nevešel do kostela? Snad se mi zdálo, že bych tam byl komusi příliš na očích a nebylo oč stát. (pp. 237-38)

The language of this passage is so unlike Karel that it is tempting to interpret it as a comment from the implied author.

4.9 Conclusion

The narration contains incoherent aspects. The narrative reveals a great degree of difference between the narrator and his younger self: the narrator is compassionate – Karel is not. The narrator possesses knowledge of psychology and music (perhaps other things as well).²² These discrepancies let the implied author appear through the narration.²³ What consequences does this have for the interpretation of the novel? Could the narrator have acquired all that knowledge in the time that has passed from the end of the narrative until the time of writing? The language of the narration, its imagery and lyricism indicate that it is the implied author to whom we can ascribe the nostalgia for the Romantic ideal of love, for the passion for art, for the traditional values and for the positive evaluation of community. Karel's narrative could be a way of mourning the decay of the old bourgeois society around the turn of the nineteenth century. The psychological explanatory models resonate the ideas of Nietzsche, Freud, Adler and Jung. With its theme of evil and power the novel relates to the aesthetic ideology of the pathological individual that was predominant among authors of the psychological analytical novel between the 1930s and the 1940s. Namely, Jaroslav Havlíček's *Neviditelný* (1937) and Egon Hostovský's *Ztracený stín* (1931), but also Emil Vachek's *Nepřítel v těle* (1937), and Miroslav Hanuš's *Méněcennost* (1942), even the much earlier novel by Ivan Olbracht, *Žalář nejtemnější* (1916). This thematic preoccupation with the

²² The narrator's psychological knowledge (Karel's ability to 'read' other people) becomes apparent in his description of Karel's manipulation of the other characters. These reveal a sensitivity to other people that one would not infer from the narrator's descriptions of himself. In this the mode of narration contradicts the statements of the characterisation.

²³ According to Genette: everything that one cannot attribute to the narrator must belong to the author (implied author); that is everything that one can say about the author on the basis of the narrative. Cf. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, p. 148.

pathological individual does however date back to the turn of the century as well.

In previous criticism the evil in the novel has mainly been interpreted as the expression of a Fascist type of individual. That may be because of the time of the novel's publication (during the German occupation), but no less because of Václav Řezáč's own description of the novel in an article from 1950.²⁴ Here he characterised *Černé světlo* as 'a reaction to Hitlerism' in which he 'unmasked the monstrosity and *cul-de-sac* of bourgeois morality'. Such a uniform interpretation of the novel is, however, based on a vulgar interpretation of Nietzsche, one of which Řezáč may also be guilty, and, furthermore, it dismisses the ideological tensions of the novel that the present analysis of the ideologemes has drawn attention to.

²⁴ See August Skýpala, 'Beseda s Václavem Řezáčem', *Panorama*, 25, 1950, 10.

Chapter 5

Svědék (1942)

Svědék is the second of Václav Řezáč's novels published during the Second World War. It has been interpreted as Řezáč's response to Fascism, as representing the victory of good over evil. František Götz, for example, writes of how at this time 'Fascism peaked after having been cultivated by the capitalist-bourgeois world through decades as an effective tool against Communism'.¹ Götz sees the novel's central character Kvis as an incarnation of fascism.² Daniela Hodrová interprets Kvis in the context of war and pre-war novels that have the aberrant type as their main character. The theme of these novels, among which she classifies *Svědék*, is to 'unmask the aberrant type as a false saviour' and to 'reveal the ideology and moral degeneracy for which the aberrant type is an open or hidden spokesman'.³ Both Götz and Hodrová's interpretations reduce the meaning of the novel to a narrow ideological message. In this chapter I shall argue that, although it might be possible to interpret Kvis with reference mainly to the historical and political situation at the time of writing (and publication), the novel with its positing of timeless moral conflicts calls for a broader interpretation.

5.1 General characterisation of the narrative

Svědék consists of nine chapters. The titles of the chapters indicate the circular structure of the narrative: the first chapter is entitled 'Měsíčná noc' (Moonlit

¹ František Götz, *Václav Řezáč*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1957, p. 88. This is the only monograph on Řezáč's work.

² Ibid., p. 90.

³ Daniela Hodrová, *Hledání románu*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1989, p. 228.

Night) and the last chapter 'Druhá měsíční noc' (Another Moonlit Night). The story is set in the small fictional town of Byteň. The characters form a representative section of Byteň's society, from the mayor, Nolč, down to the farmhand, Nejtek. The represented social order could be applied to any small town. Byteň is a microcosm.⁴ The novel has a number of secondary main characters; that is, the characters who, in the course of the novel, resolve an inner conflict that has dominated their life.⁵ In addition to this, the novel has a 'central' character, Emanuel Kvis. I have named him a 'central character' because 'central' expresses his pivotal function in the novel. His story contributes to the novel's circular structure in that he arrives in the first chapter and dies in the last. He is the only character who appears in every chapter. The sub-plots of the individual characters work on a structure that I shall call the ideologeme of the repressed.⁶ The narration shows how each of the main characters subconsciously grapples with an inner conflict. In each case the conflict concerns the given character's hidden desires, fears and dreams that, if they were acted upon, would damage either him/herself or others (or both). Until Kvis's arrival in Byteň this conflict has remained latent. However, Kvis's inquisitive behaviour stirs the apparently quiet surface of their lives and the characters' conversations with him become a catalyst for their confrontation with what in the novel is named 'the inner intransgressible boundary'; it refers

⁴ Because Byteň serves as a microcosm, *Svědék* has been compared to Jan Drda's novel *Městečko na dlani* (1940). See K. Milotová's review, '„Městečko na dlani“ zevnitř: V. Řezáč: Svědek. Borový, román, listopad 1942', *Venkov*, 29 November 1942, p. 8, and Dobrava Moldanová, 'Variace na téma zla', in Václav Řezáč, *Černé světlo. Svědek, Dila*, vol. 3, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1988, p. 526. As the title of Milotová's review implies, *Svědék* differs from *Městečko na dlani* in its mode of narrative presentation of the characters. In *Svědék* the focus of the narration is on the characters' consciousness, which can be seen from Řezáč's frequent employment of narrated monologue (a form of *erlebte Rede*) in the presentation of their thoughts. In contrast the narrative presentation of the characters in *Městečko na dlani* predominantly takes place by means of narratorial analysis and the narration of action. The psychological analytical approach is the reason why another reviewer, (k.m.), rejects the comparison with *Městečko na dlani*. See km, 'Václav Řezáč: Svědek. (V Praze, F. Borový 1946.)', *Vyšehrad*, 32, p. 16.

⁵ These are the mayor Nolč, his wife Kateřina Nolčová, the policeman Tlachač, the dean Brůžek, the farmer Josef Dastych, the judge Filip Dastych (Josef's brother), and the farmhand Nejtek. Apart from the main characters the novel has a number of characters whose function can be compared to the supporting cast in a play.

⁶ I shall give an account of how this works in a separate section devoted to the ideologeme of the repressed later in this chapter.

to the moment that separates desire (impulse) from action.⁷ The narration presents the characters gradually unravelling until their inner conflict culminates in an epiphanic incident for each given character. Here I shall give a brief summary of each of the conflicts:

The policeman Tlachač toys with the temptation to unlock the largest shop in the town (the affluent Harazim family's shop). He possesses the skill to do it because he once trained as a locksmith. Tlachač's temptation to commit burglary represents the opposite of everything he believes of himself. He regards himself as the embodiment of law and order in Byteň, an image which the Byteň people respect. Through Kvis's mediation his temptation gets the better of him and one night he actually unlocks the shutters and so makes it possible for someone else to burgle the Harazims' shop. He manages to prevent personal disaster by catching the burglar so that he can salvage his reputation. The fact that he is injured in fighting the burglar gives him hero status in Byteň. However, his awareness of what he is himself capable of makes him retreat behind the 'inner intransgressible boundary'.

Nolč, the mayor of Byteň, does not find any meaning in life. He feels guilty because of his increasing material wealth and alleviates his guilt by sharing his riches with the people of Byteň. His annual garden party is one example of this (see p. 115).⁸ He also secretly sponsors different projects in the town which he organises as a private joke by inventing a fictitious donor. At the same time his life is controlled by his concern for his wife, paní Kateřina, who cannot get over the loss of their first child – a stillborn son.

Kateřina Nolčová spends her life in a mental state in which it is difficult to recognise the boundary between dream and reality. For her their stillborn son still lives on in dreams and she longs to follow him into the dream world (that is death).⁹

⁷ A. M. Piša calls it the 'boundary between impulse and action'. See A. M. Piša, 'Zlo ve světle', in Piša, *Stopami prózy: Studie a stati*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1964, p. 251.

⁸ Václav Řezáč, *Svědék* [1942], Prague: Borový, 1943. Further references to the novel will be given in parentheses directly after quotations or references.

⁹ Note that her disappearance into her dream world takes place when the moon is full.

The farmhand Nejtek lives with a feeling of having wasted his life and with the consciousness of the fact that he has destroyed his wife. He searches for eternal beauty in the pieces of wood that he carves, but always ends up throwing his work into the fire. At the same time he is himself burning up inside from the forbidden desire for his stepdaughter Božka, who personifies the beauty he is searching for: that is, her resemblance to her mother when she was young.

The priest Brůžek excites confidence and calmness in those who confide in him. However, within him smoulders a latent conflict between two worlds: Brůžek's love for his garden and his joy in his work against his need to protect the Law of God, if necessary by using physical force (to play God on earth). Kvis's strange behaviour in the church ignites Brůžek's suspicion, and in a crucial scene Kvis reveals that Brůžek was almost succumbing to his impulse to hit him.

The farmer Josef Dastych is haunted by a fear of time. In the narration this is symbolised by the image of a time machine that is going to crash in his mind. At the same time he suffers from a sense of inferiority in relation to his late father who was a very successful farmer. He also battles with his desire to gamble and drink, which he allegedly has inherited from his grandfather. He transgresses his own inner boundary, because Kvis manipulates him into thinking that it is never too late to win the big game that his grandfather lost. He then throws himself into drinking and gambling and is thereby in danger of losing his farm.

The judge Filip Dastych dreams about absolute justice. He lives in silent conflict with his younger half-brother Josef because Josef inherited the farm whilst he himself was sent away to study. He lives waiting for this injustice to be avenged. He fails to advance his career because that would mean leaving Byteň, which would ultimately mean giving up his revenge. The question is how far he will take his passivity in not helping his brother when the latter experiences financial difficulties because of his gambling.

The narrative discourse foregrounds the nature of the characters' individual conflicts in a series of scenic episodes. The trick of the narration is to reveal the conflicts gradually by means of a variety of narrative perspectives. The episodes

are narrativised as scenes with dialogues that are interspersed with narratorial analyses and descriptions, and the presentation of a given character's thoughts. These episodes typically present the characters in dialogue with another character; however, the focus of the narration is on the characters' inner experience. Large parts of the narration deal with the presentation of these 'mental events'.¹⁰ These may take the form of a character's memory of an event so that a given episode is presented in the thoughts of a character and thus creates an analepsis within the narration. This happens, for example, during the narration of the garden party at the point where the priest Brůžek recalls his meeting with Kvis in the church.

This mode of narrative presentation creates a pervasive scenic impression. The shift to the present tense is a typical feature of the narration in the scenic episodes. In these passages the narrator's descriptions often take the form of setting the scene or stage directions that describe the characters' actions. The scenic element is used to its full potential in the narrative presentation of the mayor's annual garden party that constitutes the third chapter.

The narrator's initial description of this places the narratee (and the reader) in the midst of the atmosphere of the party. The description is mainly a setting of the mood, dominated by acoustic impressions created by the band playing:

Muzika vyhrává a slunce procezené korunami stromů padá na trávník.
Křídlovka stoupá na špičky a zalká vysoko, až se jí tón roztřepí přepjatou
slastí, štěbenec dumlá svou melodii jako kluk cukrovou tyčinku a když to
nejmíň očekáváš, uchychtne se výsměšně, viola se vemlouvá jako milenec v
podvečer, pikolka bublá i cvrliká, zmizí a opět se vznese, basa vás drží
pohromadě, vy smečko třeštidel a opilců, ale housle, ach, housličky, ty můj
smutku a opojení, ve vás zpíváme a pláčeme všichni. Es-tam-tam, es-tam-
tam, taá-rára-raá... (p. 113)

The narrator gets rather carried away by his own description and its playfulness sets the tone of the sound impressions that frame the characters' dialogues during the party. In such a setting the characters take on the role of

¹⁰ In the presentation of mental events the pace of the narration slows down because the discourse time is stretched in the moment of a character's reminiscing. See Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 73.

actors who meet on stage. The narrator is the stage director who describes the setting: for example, how the chairs and tables are placed, how the characters interact, and he also fills in information about the characters. Apart from the direct conveying of information, the description of the characters' actions and reactions to each other is used to convey inner psychological tension. A single little episode between the farmhand Nejtek, who serves as a waiter at the party, and his stepdaughter Božka, who is a waitress, foreshadows the tension between Nejtek's suppressed desire for her and her awareness of this, that will be explored later in the novel:

Když se otec s dcerou potkají, přivře děvče víčka tak prudce, jako by pohlédlo do bílého žáru a chvíli potom vidí všechno rozmazané: cukroví na podnose, cestu, vysypanou žlutým pískem, i hosty, k nimž míří. A Nejtek sotva dojde k nálevnímu stolu popadne sklenici, kterou mu stále dotácejí, a pije dlouze a hltavě. Zatracená žízeň, den po dni je palčivější. (pp. 113-14)

Nejtek and Božka's feelings can be deduced from the narrator's observation of their reaction, narrated through external focalisation. However, the momentary shift to the personal internal perspective – Božka's visual impression that can only 'be seen from within her mind' and the narrator adopting the exclamatory 'Zatracená žízeň' – as if thought aloud by Nejtek – underscores the intensity of their emotion. Such a fleeting personalisation of the narration is typical of the narrative presentation of the characters. It adds to the scenic impression, in that it refers to the character's moment of experience which is also foregrounded by the use of the present tense. At the same time the whole episode creates an enigma that remains to be solved.

The narration teems with such little enigmas. The narration of the characters' individual stories plays on the doubleness of knowing and not knowing. This happens on more than one level of the narrative. It manifests itself in the narrative tension between not knowing the reason for a character's action and the narrator's explanation. One example of this comes in the first chapter when Nolč, on his return from his nocturnal walk to the pharmacy to buy sleeping pills, begins to run up the stairs of his house as if struck by a

sudden panic. It is not until a little further on that the reader finds out that it is because he has forgotten to lock the door to the bedroom.

Starosta tedy běží rychle a tiše po schodech do druhého poschodí, běží o to tišeji, že už hned po svatbě dal pokrýt schody i chodby šedými plyšovými běhouny. Měsíc osvětluje tuto stranu domu a okenní rámy se promítají stínovými kříži na koberec, který se proměnil v stříbrný proud mezi černými stěnami. Kdoví, co starosta v té chodbě očekával, že vyrazil takový vzdech vida ji prázdnou. Zapomněl zamknout dveře u ložnice a vzpomněl si na to, až když otáčel klíčem v domovních vratech – to je, co ho tak polekalo.

(p.19)

However, the narrator's explanation only contributes to creating a new enigma: why would the mayor find it so important to lock the door to the bedroom? Again a little further on, once Nolč is reassured that everything is all right (the first part of the following quotation is a reflection of Nolč's thought in the narrator's discourse), the reader learns through the narratorial analysis that this night is a special night: 'Nuže, všechno je v pořádku a starostu jenom trápí, že zapomněl na svou opatrnost právě dnes' (p. 19). The narration acquires its enigmatic character because it shifts between the narration of the character's unexplained action and focalisation through the mind of the character. There is a continual shift in the narration between the narrator's descriptive and analytical and explanatory narration, focalisation through the character (the narrator narrates what the character perceives or feels) and the presentation of the character's thoughts.

An example of the quick shift between description, the character's thoughts and narrator's explanation occurs at the moment when the policeman Tlachač is watching the mayor's house after the mayor has disappeared into the building:

Tlachač čekal marně, ani jediné z oken se nerozsvětlo. Strachá se tam potmě jako zloděj, to snad má strach, aby ji nevbudil. Strážník vzpomínal na starostovu ženu. Má ji opravdu tak rád, nebo to jen tak hraje? Tlachač tím opakoval přesně otázku, jak ji v konečné podobě vyslovovalo veřejné byteňské mínění. (p. 18)

In this paragraph the focalisation shifts between external and internal focalisation: first, there is the narrator observing Tlachač, then a shift to Tlachač's thought in interior monologue (the present tense is a marker of this shift), followed by the narrator's explanation of Tlachač's thought and then another thought in interior monologue. The narrator's final comment marks a shift back to external focalisation before the scene changes with the beginning of the next paragraph, 'Starosta zamkl dům a nyní spěchá', in which the focus shifts to the mayor. The narrator's omniscience is made clear because the latter narrated event must necessarily happen simultaneously with Tlachač watching the house. Thus in this section about the mayor the knowing/not knowing is embodied in two narrative stances in the narration. When the narration follows the character's perceptive and spatial perspective¹¹ the reader only knows what the character knows in the moment as opposed to the narratorial perspective that guides the amount of information which is made available to the reader at any one point. It is always the narrator who knows. In this way the narrator's discourse becomes dominant for the overall generation of meaning in the narrative.

On the story level the knowing/not knowing drives the characters' thoughts and conversations about other characters. A great part of the information about the characters is conveyed in this manner so that the reader learns about the characters from different perspectives. It is present in one character's speculation about another character, of which the above quotation is also an example. Tlachač's curiosity about the mayor is only a symptom of his general desire to know everything that happens in Byteň, as the description of him shows in the first scene where he discovers that he is not alone in the night:

Tlachač váhá. Ale je příliš chlap, aby se rozhodl změnit směr cesty a odplížit se tiše v naději, že jeho boj se stínem nebyl zpozorován. Musí se ostatně přesvědčit, kdo se to tu v noci potlouká, třeba jen proto, aby si opatřil lék. Město je mu přece svěřeno a on si už dávno navykl dovídat se

¹¹ See Wolf Schmid, 'Erzählperspektive', Download: W_Schmid_Erzaehlperspektive.pdf, <<http://www.narrport.uni-hamburg.de/e-Port/NarrPort/FGN03.nsf/FrameByKey/MKEE-54S275-DE-p>> [accessed 26 March 2005].

všechno o jeho obyvatelích, a nejde-li to vždy přímo, i trochu slídit. Nezneužívá toho a nikdy nikomu nepovídá, co ví, vezme s sebou do hrobu všelijaká podařená tajemství, ale blaží ho vědomí, že má celé město jakoby v hrsti. (pp. 10-11)

Tlachač's very name is the epithet of his desire to know: 'tlachat' means 'to gossip'. Tlachač's job naturally provides him with the opportunity to be out and about in the town. It connects him with the public opinion of Byteň whose representatives are mainly the women who gather on the town square to exchange gossip. The narrator characterises small-town nosiness as a 'natural law': 'Nuže, snad je to takový tajemný přírodní zákon měst, jako je Byteň, že v nich neutajíš ani myšlenky, kterou jsi nikdy neproněs, nenapsal, ba ani nehvídál nebo nevyt'ukával prsty na stůl, že i nevyslovena prosakuje zdmi a poletuje od hlavy k hlavě snášejíc do nich svá kukaččí vejce (p. 373). However, Byteň's public opinion (to which the narrator refers several times) only represents one mode of knowing: that which we think we know. This recognition is present in the priest Brůžek's explanation of why people were hostile towards Libuše Bílá, the spinster who left her house to Kvis: 'Byla nám cizí proto, že věříme, že víme jeden o druhém, proč žijeme. A o ní jsme to nevěděli' (p. 48). This mode of knowing only concerns the appearance of things, the surface of everyday Byteň life.

5.2 The introduction of the ideologeme of good *versus* evil and the ideologeme of God *versus* the Devil

The first chapter sets out the parameters for the interpretation of the whole novel in that it links the ideologeme good *versus* evil with the symbolic imagery of the light/darkness dichotomy and the ideologeme God *versus* the Devil. It does so by means of the aesthetic and psychological ideology of the uncanny.¹² The first paragraph introduces Byteň in the dreamlike state of moonlight:

¹² By 'uncanny' I understand that which is ambiguous or uncertain to the faculties of the mind: that of which one cannot know the origin or the known that suddenly appears unknown. Freud touches upon these aspects of the uncanny ('das Unheimliche') in his essay of the same title. See Sigmund Freud: 'The Uncanny', in Freud, *The Uncanny*, London: Penguin, 2003, pp. 123-61.

Ozářená měsícem Byteň spí v otevřené krajině. Bílá věž děkanského chrámu střeží její sen, prostá, čtyřhranná věž, jen tak zhruba omítnutá a krytá šindelovou střechou. A jako by přejímala odraz té věže, noc sama se zdá všecka bílá, taková jasná noc, prosvětlená do všech koutů, rozechvělá a vábivá, jen stěží skrývající trosky svého tajemství ve vržených stínech. Červen se prochází po lukách a zahradami a když dechne, zavoní seno a fialy. (p. 9)

This description of Byteň already states the dichotomy of light *versus* darkness in the contrast between the white moonlit night and the shadows. The white light is associated with the protective quality of the church tower, metonymically invoking the presence of God, whereas the shadows are associated with the secrets of the night.¹³

In the conversation between Tlachač and Brůžek the latter directly makes the first connection between the light-darkness dichotomy and evil. He asks Tlachač: ‘Proč si všichni myslíme, že zlo se může skrývat jenom v temnotě?’ (p. 41). Tlachač answers logically that nobody can hide in the light (see p. 41). However, the light to which Brůžek refers is not the light that in the narrative carries positive connotations – in Tlachač’s discourse the light that is associated with good activities, the familiar light.¹⁴ Brůžek refers to the moonlight that Tlachač describes as ‘podvod’:

Ve tmě můžete hmatat, ale co chcete dělat v tomto světle, jež vám ukazuje věci, jaké nejsou a jaké by snad ani neměly být? Víte už, proč jste šel k vážnému domku pln obav, třebaže rozum vám říkal, že zlo si nevybírá noci tak jasné ke svým výpravám? Podívejte se na tu věž. Nezdá se vám, že to

The imagery also brings to mind the Fin-de-siècle topos of the moon that signifies the in-between state of things.

¹³ That the shadow also symbolises a psychological aspect is apparent in the description of how the policeman Tlachač tries to hit his own shadow on the head and later, the narrator’s address to Tlachač from which one can infer that the shadow could be the ‘suspicious stranger’ within himself. See *Svědék*, p. 28.

¹⁴ ‘Pohled na ta ozářená okna vrátí strážníka rázem jeho obvykle míře. Veselý větřík se zatočí v úzké uličce jeho myšlení a vyfoukne dusný zmatek. Toť světlo ze zdroje, který znáš, světlo, při němž se lidé druží, pracují a čtou, světlo nažloutlé, prosté a lahodné jako sklenice piva, světlo, jež s tebou nesehraje žádný proradný kousek’ (p. 30). The narrator again speaks in the second person singular as if Tlachač were talking to himself. However, the narrative context shows that it is the narrator’s discourse with an element of ‘personalisation’ (Stanzel’s term), in that he identifies himself with Tlachač’s idiom.

není věž, kterou oba známe? Cítím, že bych měl na ni vstoupit a modlit se tak dlouho, dokud tma nepohltní toto světlo, pokojná vlídná tma, jaká sluší spánku a odpočinku. Zdá se mi, že si dovedu představit každé zlo, jež se plíží v tmách, ale selhávám, když myslím na to, jež se může zrodit a skrývat v tomto světle. (pp. 41-42)

In this comment Brůžek indicates a greater evil that is somehow related to the moonlight. His idea that he ought to prevent this evil through praying hints at a biblical context, which is supported by the narrator's description of his reaction to Tlachač's comment: '– Rád bych viděl někoho, komu by se chtělo lézt přes plot nebo bourat zámek v tomhle světle' (p. 42). Brůžek does not reply, but in the given context he may be thinking of the Devil in the biblical or theological sense: 'Kněz otevře ústa a opět je sevře, aniž co řekl. Slova, jež se chystal pronést, mu v posledním okamžiku připadla otřelá a někde vyčtená nebo naučená' (p. 42). Later the hint at the presence of the Devil crops up again in Brůžek's conversation with Nolč at the garden party. Although Nolč does not say the name, it is clear that he is thinking of the Devil when he refers to the impression that Kvis has created among the inhabitants of Byteň: 'Za několik dní by si mohlo celé město šeptat, že náš nový občan je ... – Nic takového, přeruší ho kněz prudce. Člověk postačí úplně a kostelník bude mlčet' (p. 123). In the conversation with Tlachač the dean repeatedly alludes to the feeling that there is something against which people have to be on their guard, that they have to be vigilant: 'Jaké bdělosti je nám tedy třeba? Nevím. Vím jen, že máme bdít. Vy i já jsme strážci, třebaže každého z nás ustanovila jiná moc a na jiném místě. Jděte, přáteli, a bděte. Dobrou noc' (p. 50).¹⁵ This feeling has been strengthened by the experience of seeing the moonlight make the cross on the top of the church tower cast a shadow onto the front door of the late Libuše Bílá's house. The full significance of this only becomes apparent later when the reader learns that this is the house in which Kvis is to live; that is anticipated in Tlachač's comment that the shadow of the cross is an omen. At this moment in the narration the shadow of the cross on the door mainly has the function of

¹⁵ The priest's words echo the last words of *Černé světlo* where the narrator urges people to be vigilant about the evil inherent in their children.

contributing to the general impression of uncanniness that the description of the moonlit night evokes. The uncanniness mainly consists in the sense of uncertainty about the nature of things (compare Brůžek's comment to Tlachač about the false impression of things that the moonlight creates). This uncertainty is also evoked in the presentation of the characters' perception of themselves. Tlachač's experience is permeated by the sense of a sudden instability of things:¹⁶ 'A zatím od chvíle, co s ním jeho vlastní stín sehrál šalebnou hru, poslouchá řeči, jež jako by byly určeny, aby v něm vzbudily dojem, že zem po které kráčí, není stará dobrá země, nýbrž jakési žertovo kolo, jež mu každým okamžikem může utéci pod nohama. Chtěl by to rázně skoncovat' (p. 40).

The experience of the uncanny forms a contrast to the quiet sleepiness and sense of security that the narrator's descriptions otherwise associate with Byteň and its inhabitants. Byteň is a market town in which nothing much has changed over the past hundred years (p. 53-54) and the Byteň inhabitant is someone who knows 'co váží a představuje' (p. 52).

Uncanniness likewise characterises the presentation of Kvis's arrival at Byteň station. Kvis arrives on the midnight train from Prague. The attribute 'midnight' signifies the equivocal element that later becomes a fundamental feature in the characterisation of Kvis; it is as if he were both of and not of this world; it is the witching hour:

Nuže, toto je skutečně půlnoční vlak, jak si jen můžete přát, jeho kola brzdí na kolejnicích byteňského nádraží v těch několika vteřinách, jimiž končí jeden a začíná druhý den, v hodině dvacáté čtvrté i nulté zároveň, na onom časovém rozmezí, jež slyňulo vždy tajemstvím a jemuž byla přiznávána moc klíče, otvírající dveře mezi dvěma světy, jež k sobě jinak nemohou. (p. 55)

¹⁶ Another example is Teršík, the temporary station assistant, in whom the moonlight evokes an existential consideration of himself; almost a pastiche of Hamlet's 'to be or not to be': 'Takový měsíc a taková melodie, dýchaná do dlaní, vyplaví ledasco, nač nemáš přes den kdy. Co je to výpomocný zřízenec? Před lidmi se můžeš naparovat v té čepici s okřídleným kolem, ale my dva si nemáme co lhát. Dnes jsi tady a zítra nemusíš být. Jenomže ten, kdo jednou čichl ke kolejím, ten se jich nevzdá, radši by na ně položil hlavu' (see pp. 54-55).

The fact that Kvis arrives exactly at midnight at the station, which is drenched in moonlight, links his character to the uncanniness which this particular moonlit night has evoked in the characters who have had the experience of it. He arrives in the ambiguous time zone around midnight, just as he dies when the clock strikes midnight. In the novel, but also generally in popular mythology, midnight is a time that is associated with something supernatural and uncanny, and it is also the time when the devil may appear. The dogs barking in a chain reaction to something which their owners cannot figure out, just as Kvis arrives in Byteň, indicates that something is not well with him. Brůžek's discourse directly links the uncanniness of midnight with the idea of the Devil so that in the context of the early and medieval Christian ideologeme God *versus* the Devil, Kvis will unambiguously carry connotations of the Devil¹⁷ and through Brůžek's reference to 'the evil that hides in the light' (p. 42) also of evil. The narration develops the imagery of 'the evil that hides in the light' in a number of situations where Kvis poses under one form of light or another, for example at the garden party when he stands under the Chinese lanterns (p. 157) or when he encounters Tlachač on his nocturnal walk: 'Emanuel Kvis se postavil přímo pod lampu, takže světlo naň dopadá kolmo shora a okraj klobouku mu spouští přes tvář závoj černého stínu' (p. 264). By employing the light/darkness symbolism, the narration thus repeatedly enforces the link between Kvis and the idea of evil.

5.3 How the ideologeme of good *versus* evil is played out in the sub-plots of the individual characters: the ideologeme of the repressed

The characters' individual stories concern a different mode of knowledge; that is their knowledge of themselves. The presentation of the characters' growing consciousness of the nature of the inner conflict that troubles them reveals a structure of meaning that I have named the ideologeme of the repressed. By 'repressed' I understand the psychological conflicts that the characters live (almost an *idée fixe* that governs their lives), but of which they have not been

¹⁷ On Brůžek: 'Půlnoc už mu nepatří a nesmí ho najít na místě, kde d'áblu se může kdykoli zachtít přisednout k stolu' (p. 34).

aware or which they have not acknowledged until Kvis's arrival. Kvis makes things happen both within them and around them.

The narrative organisation of the individual stories follows a pattern typical of all the main characters: first, the narration foregrounds a given character's inner conflict through the narration of their reactions, actions, thoughts or dialogues with other characters. Then the character has an encounter with Kvis, whose prying and manipulative mode of speaking sets things in motion within the characters, one after another. The narrated events (these may also be mental events) subsequently explore how the character's inner conflict escalates until it culminates in an epiphanic incident.

Kvis puts the characters he encounters to the test because he is able to sense their inner conflicts. In the course of the narration Kvis functions both as a catalyst for the characters' growing awareness of what remains unresolved in their lives and, at the same time, he registers their experience. In this way he becomes an analyst for the characters or an 'analytical mirror'¹⁸ that provokes reflection within the minds of the characters with whom he converses. Kvis knows how to ask the right question since he is able to perceive what is hidden to the characters themselves. In this Kvis constitutes a central compositional device for conveying information about the other characters.

However, Kvis is no passive witness. He desires to know everything there is to know about others' secrets in order to use this knowledge for his manipulative purposes; it is an expression of his desire for power. One example of this is the scene in which he gradually manipulates the proprietor Josef Dastych into thinking that he can fulfil his grandfather's destiny through drinking and card playing. Kvis challenges Josef Dastych's abstinence in both matters with a suggestive comment that sows a seed in Dastych's mind: '– Možná, že mu [the grandfather] to nestačí. Vyhrál spor a pak přišel v kartách o všechno. Třeba by chtěl dokázat světu, že dovede víc. Udržet statek i hrát v karty a vyhrávat. Jeden život někdy nestačí na všechno, tak se na to musíme dívat' (p. 147).

¹⁸ I take this term from Jiří Trávniček, *Poezie poslední možnosti*, Prague: Torst, 1996, p. 32.

The dialogue between Kvis and Josef Dastych shows how Kvis completely destroys Dastych's view of his own situation and replaces it with the temptation to give in. His realisation of what Kvis is trying to make him understand comes in a brief moment of consciousness that the narrator ironises through his choice of imagery and at the same time uses to create a dramatic effect at the garden party:

Šedá převalující se mlha před očima statkářovými se roztrhne a z ní zasvítlí veliké, oslnivě bílé slunce, ale není strašné, naopak veselé, jako by na tebe náhle někdo vystrčil takový holý kyprý zadek. Lidem v zahradě přejede po zádech mráz. Kruci, co to je? Jen klid, vážené obecnstvo. To Pepek Dastychů se zasmál. Pro Krista, to je smích. Snad už to s ním prasklo. (pp. 148-49)

Subsequently Dastych begins to drink and the narration describes how he experiences the transgression of his inner boundary: 'Statkář vstane těžce, není opilý, nemůže být, to jenom tak podlehl svému dojmu; praskla v něm nějaká hráz, přival se žene a nese ho s sebou' (p. 155). This short quotation captures Dastych's experience in that moment. The language is the narrator's, but the perspective is Dastych's.

In Dastych's case, as in others', Kvis's role is that of tempter.¹⁹ He attempts to interfere in other people's lives through manipulation²⁰ and tempts them to transgress their inner boundary. Kvis has the ability and the power to manipulate the other characters' thoughts without them noticing. The turning point in the characters' plots happens in a sudden realisation of the nature of their inner conflict. It is played out in a confrontation with their 'inner intransgressible boundary'. This moment has an epiphanic quality that brings about a change for the better in the given character's life.

To illustrate the function of epiphanies in the individual plot-lines of the characters I shall use the example of Nejtek. From the first chapter the narration has presented numerous demonstrations of Nejtek's being consumed by desire

¹⁹ His black Inverness cloak is reminiscent of Mephistopheles's in Goethe's *Faust*.

²⁰ In this he is related to Karel from *Černé světlo*. Opelík has carried out a useful comparison of Karel and Kvis. See Jiří Opelík, 'Románové dílo Václava Řezáče', unpublished PhD thesis, Brno: Masaryk University, 1961, p. 145.

for Božka, his beautiful stepdaughter, who still lives with him and his wife. His forbidden but incessant desire is captured in the recurrent flashbacks in his thoughts to an episode that took place during the first moonlit night.²¹ While Nejtek is lying sleepless in bed he watches Božka illumined by moonlight: ‘[...] a v tom bílém, přebílém světle, jež se ještě více rozsvítí odrazem její pleti, udeří tě do očí její noha, obnažená po kyčli, ruka nahá až po rameno a jeden prs, který vyklouzl z výstřihu lehké košile’ (p. 219). This sight comes to epitomise the evanescent beauty that Nejtek searches for in his woodcarvings as a substitute for everything he did not have in life:

Červ hlodá na všem, nač Nejtek pohlédne. Věci i lidé se staví proti tobě, sotva sis usmyslel, že je uchopíš a setrváš u nich. Krása se drobí nebo ti uniká, je vždycky někde jinde, než ji hledáš. Což nebyla krásná tvá žena, když ses na ni po prvé zahleděl, a co je z ní dnes? Že je to tvá vina? A kdo tedy je vinen tím, co v sobě nosíš? Někde je tvá příležitost, jíž by se mohl tvůj život proměnit a ustálit, ale co když ji nikdy nepotkáš? Někde je krása, věčná a neproměnná, jenomže která cesta k ní vede?

This passage, apart from the first sentence, is narrated as if it were Nejtek addressing himself in an interior monologue. However, the narrator has already suggested that Nejtek is incapable of verbalising his emotional condition.²² This indicates that it is the narrator who addresses Nejtek, as if in his mind, and guides his experience.

Kvis pushes Nejtek towards giving in to his temptation by reminding Nejtek that Božka is not his real daughter. However, it is Brůžek who finally provokes Nejtek’s epiphanic moment by offering him his hand in sympathy because he has heard of his wife’s illness. His gesture makes Nejtek explode in anger because it reminds him of when Brůžek physically forced him to agree to stop beating his wife. It also reminds him that his desire for Božka is morally wrong: ‘ale zároveň se mu zdá [Brůžek’s outstretched hand] vznášet jako spár nad jeho

²¹ ‘Vzpomeň si jenom na tu noc, bylo to v červnu nebo kdy, jak se tentokrát rozštěkali psi po celé Bytni. Taková dusná noc to byla, samá vůně a neklid, a měsíc svítil tak bíle, že se zdál skorem den. Stál v úplňku zrovna proti chudobinci a tekl jim do světnice, jako když mléko z putny vyléváš, svítící, zářivé mléko, nažloutlé přebytkem smetany’ (pp. 218-19).

²² ‘Jaký by vlastně měl být život, po jakém Nejtek prahne? Jednou takový a po druhé jiný, nelze ho popsat slovy, která se stačí lihnout v Nejtkově mozku’ (p. 214).

pravici, kterou znovu a znovu v nekonečných obměnách svého sluncem rozžhaveného snu vztahoval po vidině plozené a pohlcované rudou výhní' (p. 396).

Subsequently, he runs off in terror into a coppice. In the meantime a storm has blown up and when the reader next encounters Nejtek he is taking shelter under a dead tree and is in a state of numbness (p. 400). In this setting Nejtek has a melodramatic vision of beauty when lightning strikes the dead tree; the climax of this vision strongly reminds the reader of the ending of 'Genenda' in *Posvátné ohně* by the Decadent Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic.

Klikaté nože blesků vylupují ztracenou krajinu ze slupek zátopy. Zjeví se na oslepující okamžik, cizí a nepoznatelná, jakoby nikdy před tím neviděná, a zmizí opět v propastech šera za burácivého ráchotu. Hrom bije. Každý záblesk uzavírá bortivá detonace. Teď Nejtkovi se zdá, že světelná jáma se rozevřela zrovna pod ním a že bez konce padá se zhrouceným kouskem světa, na němž stál. Ježí se na něm každý vlas, zalyká se vlastním dechem a cítí, jak nějaké hrozné napětí v jeho těle usiluje ho roztrhnout, jako by sám byl nábojem, naplněným třaskavinou. Blesk zasáhl mrtvou hrušeň. Ztrouchnivělé dřevo vzplane navzdory lijáku a promění se v ohnivý sloup. Rozpřažené paže, hlava zvrácená dozadu, touhou vypjatý luk bílého těla, to náručí se rozvírá po Nejtkovi. Nikdy ještě neuzřel svou vidinu tak dokonalou a krásnou jako v tomto planoucím vtělení. Ztuhlost jeho údů povolí, srdce se mu rozbuší. Pokročí vstříc své ohnivé milé. Udělá sotva krok, když hořící hrušeň se s praskotem zhroučí a zhasne s dračím sykotem v bažině rozmoklého úhoru a záplavě deště. (pp. 400-01)

The symbolic imagery in this passage indicates that Nejtek would not ever be able to verbalise his emotion. Nejtek's revelation signifies both the symbolic redemption of his desire and his physical release from it. He who has never cried in his life now howls 'as if attacked by an animal' (p. 401). The epiphanic moment reappears to him the following, moonlit, night when he is again tempted by his desire for Božka. This time the image of the burning pear-tree reminds him of the fact that his vision of beauty is unattainable: 'Hořkost

nezměnitelného osudu mu naplní srdce poznáním a resignací' (p. 425). As a result of this recognition he finally chases Božka out of the house.

The epiphanic moment is narrativised differently for each character: for Nolč it takes the form of an encounter with a tramp when he, rather like Nejtek, is out walking in the woods outside Byteň (pp. 173-84). While watching the tramp asleep on the ground Nolč is confronted with the desire to kill him. The narration of the mayor's thoughts during this scene forms a long narrated monologue in which he, sometimes more through the apostrophising narrator's voice, ponders on the meaning of his life compared to that of the tramp. His thoughts culminate in the recognition that he thinks he can revenge himself on life for his son's death by killing someone else:

[...] a ty vejdeš branou jeho smrti do světa, který jsi ztratil v den, kdy se ti narodil mrtvý synek a kdy tvé myšlení začalo červavět představou: život za život, jako akt msty na osudu a nepřičetném hospodaření přírody. Je to tak nepřirozené, čeho se chceš dopustit, je to tak zlé? Copak neumíráme všichni jen proto, abychom učinili místo jiným? Odvážíš-li se toho, přestane za tebou chodit stín smrti a zhasínat barvy života. (p. 178)

This passage shows how the resurfacing of the repressed gives rise to a fundamentally ethical conflict: is it right to use one's power to kill and can one be master of one's own destiny? After this episode the mayor rediscovers his joy in life. As for the other characters, Tlachač's awareness of what he himself was capable of brings him firmly back within the boundary of the law (p. 346); the Dastych brothers finally abandon their *idée fixe* about each other, Brůžek recognises his own power-lust and that in the end only God can judge whether he is right to use his power (p. 272) and Kateřina Nolčová is brought back to life by discovering that she is expecting another child.²³

On the story level the characters' conflicts are of a psychological nature, but the succumbing to the desire that lies at the core of the conflict has an ethical aspect: for the policeman Tlachač it would mean committing burglary, and Nolč would commit murder. Nejtek would commit incest with his stepdaughter; Josef Dastych would gamble away the farm or commit murder not to lose it.

²³ This epiphany has the form of a supernatural event.

Dastych's brother and Brůžek's dilemmas both involve matters of law and justice on a more speculative level: can one take the law into one's own hands, be that the Law of God or secular law? How may one use one's own power? Kateřina Nolčová's conflict manifests itself in her longing for death that carries associations with suicide.²⁴ Within the overall semantic structure of the novel it is possible to interpret the characters' inner conflicts allegorically as expressions of evil. The individual stories carry connotations through which this evil can be associated with the idea of the Seven Deadly Sins. All the sins appear in some form in the characters' conflicts: Pride characterises Tlachač's view of his own importance in Byteň, just as Nolč's contempt for other people contains an element of arrogance. Envy (jealousy) lies at the core of judge Dastych's desire for revenge on his brother Josef; the desire for revenge is in itself an element of Wrath and his desire for property may be understood as Avarice. Nejtek's desire for his stepdaughter represents Lust. Josef Dastych's gambling and drinking represents Gluttony, although in his case Gluttony constitutes an expression of his idea of fulfilling the destiny of his grandfather. Kateřina Nolčová's lack of desire for life, her taking refuge in the dream of her lost son, embodies the notion of Sloth (or Despair). Hence, on the allegorical level, the characters' confrontation with or transgression of the 'inner intransgressible boundary' (the psychological barrier that prevents that which is repressed from being acted out) stands for the fundamental conflict inherent in the human condition, the continuous need to choose between good and evil.

5.4 Kvis's function in the novel: the ideologeme of the saviour *versus* the tempter

The first piece of information that the narration gives about Kvis is a description of the tag on his luggage, which reads 'Emanuel Kvis – Byteň' (p. 56). In Hebrew 'Emmanuel' means 'God with us'. It occurs in Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23, where it is the name used in the prophecy of the coming of the Saviour.

²⁴ Within the semantic framework of the novel it is considered unethical not to want to live because of the narrative's positive evaluation of life. Here I think of the recurrent image of birth, manifest in the image of the pregnant women around town. I shall discuss this imagery later in this chapter when I discuss the plot of the whole novel.

Kvis corresponds to the Latin interrogative pronoun 'quis'; that is 'who'.²⁵ In the following I shall explore how Kvis becomes the point of convergence for the structure of meaning that I have named the ideologeme of the tempter *versus* the saviour.

The question 'Who is Kvis?' is paradigmatic for a number of meanings that the narrative poses as a possible answer. From beginning to end, the characterisation of Kvis ascribes to him an air of ambiguity and uncanniness. Kvis's position of stranger is foregrounded in the narration of his predilection for the fountain that is situated at the centre of Byteň, in the little park on the town square. The running water in the fountain, which the narrator ironically compares to the 'pulse, the labour of Byteň's heart',²⁶ represents the flow of time. The fountain thus assumes the representation of the inertness of small-town life of which Kvis stands outside, but in which he would like to participate and to which he therefore keeps returning. The very name Byteň recalls the meaning of the verb 'být' – 'to be' – and Kvis exactly is nothing in himself. He stands by the fountain and, figuratively speaking, lets the water flow through him – a situation that at one point brings about a change to his otherwise empty face:

[...], teď se k ní [his face] čas vrátil jako k zapomenutému dílu a dokončuje svou práci chvatnými, drsnými surovými vrypy, pracuje překotně a neurvale jako by se mstil, tvoří tvář starce – stařeny, naprosto bezpohlavní, ryzí neutrum, to stáří, dost, dál už nelze, dechnu ještě a rozpadne se to všechno v popel. Nikdo tu není svědkem té proměny. (p. 87)

The face that has become wrinkly returns to its peculiar blankness without the passing of time. In other words when Kvis is not standing by the fountain he is excluded from time, left to his own emptiness.

²⁵ The name may perhaps suggest the Norwegian fascist Vidkun Quisling. 'Emanuel' might, at a stretch, also refer to the 'Gott mit uns' that German soldiers had inscribed on their belt buckles. But these are elements too minor to persuade the reader that this is an anti-Nazi novel. After all, the one Jewish family we know of in Byteň, the shopkeepers Harazim, are stereotyped as avaricious Jews.

²⁶ 'Dáme-li se svést obrazností místního básníka, můžeme říci, že Emanuel Kvis, který se tu zastavil a naslouchá s hlavou ke straně nakloněnou šumu a zvonkům tekoucí vody, naslouchá ve skutečnosti tepotu a práci byteňského srdce' (p. 87).

Ambiguity also characterises the descriptions of Kvis's appearance when he is not by the fountain. It changes like that of an actor on stage: he is a chameleon. The motif of theatre permeates descriptions of Kvis. People think they must have seen him before somewhere, that he is some provincial-town actor. When he appears, it is as if he were stepping onto a stage. He looks as if he were wearing make-up with the two characteristic pink spots on his cheeks. His speech is accompanied by exaggerated gesticulation and he moves in a mechanical way. His strange dress strikes a sharp contrast to his empty face. The former makes him look like a bird or an obliging old man or an unapproachable stranger. Sometimes he looks alternately like a woman or a man and he suffers strange fits that frighten the other characters. Finally, he speaks in a mechanical, resonant voice that expresses his essence: that is his emptiness.²⁷

Kvis's empty expression becomes a space for the projection of the other characters' emotions. His face is like a mirror to the person with whom he speaks since his facial expression changes to reflect the other's thoughts and emotions. His eyes are the one remarkable feature of his face. When he is on the track of some secret in the other person they stick to the other person's face like cupping-glasses.²⁸ For the rest of the time they are empty. When his eyes meet those of another increased consciousness appears to arise. An example of that in the novel is the tense atmosphere between the mayor Nolč and Kvis as expressed by their eyes. One notes here that Kvis's eyes have a vampiric quality; altogether, they are the eyes of a zombie:

Kvis však nevydrží odporovat jeho naléhání [that of the mayor's gaze].

Žízeň prázdnoty v něm procitne, musí se napít z tohoto pramene i kdyby mu to mělo přinést okamžitou smrt. Pozdvihne oči a setká se s očima starostovými v krátkém střetnutí, jako když o sebe třesknou činelové

²⁷ Kvis's interior is compared to an empty attic, see p. 259. In his essay on the uncanny Freud refers to E. Jentsch's idea that 'waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata' as well as epileptic fits produce an uncanny effect 'because these arouse in the onlooker vague notions of automatic – mechanical processes that may lie hidden behind the familiar image of a living person'. See 'The Uncanny', in Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 135.

²⁸ Elsewhere the narrator compares his eyes to those of a dachshund on the track: 'Emanuel Kvis se nakloní dopředu, zamžiká očima a pak je široce otevře. Ach, ty jeho oči, takoví proradní jezevčáci, neslídí a nečenichají jenom po tváři, nýbrž hrabou si nory v očích druhého, chtějí dovnitř, až na dno, kde sedí kořist, schoulena a vrčíc smrtelným strachem' (p. 144).

puklice. Dost. Víc není třeba. Oba vědí právě tolik, kolik pro tu chvíli snesou. (p. 200)

The narration's focus on eyes whenever Kvis appears, generally 'to see, to observe', suggests that Kvis is a witness who senses and absorbs other people's thoughts and emotions in order to live himself. He is the vampiric, somewhat feebly vampiric, witness embodied in the novel's title. Only when he succeeds in finding out about someone else's innermost secret does he live fully with a complete register of emotions. Apart from that, the single emotion he knows is vanity. He daily stands in the empty church in order to absorb what might be left of the troubles and confessions of others. In contradiction to his own emptiness, the emptiness of the church seems inhabited to him. Kvis's being in the church contains his ultimate dream of power:

Co by to pro něj znamenalo, kdyby se mu podařilo, kdyby se zmocnil jeho i jich? [Kvis is thinking of God and people]. Už by nepotřeboval dolévat prázdnotu troškami náhodně posbíranými, zaplnila by se celá, byl by zabydlen jako svět a protože by v sebe pojal i jeho strůjce, mohl by řídit pohyby svých loutek, jak by se mu zachtělo. (p. 268)

Kvis's thoughts here reveal how the essence of Kvis is perhaps not emptiness, but rather his desire for power.²⁹ Kvis lives from usurping other people's minds and even he has to acknowledge that he has an inner boundary.³⁰ This becomes evident at the moment when he has succeeded in becoming all the persons he wants to be. From this moment it is as if all the processes that he has ignited in the other characters had turned against him. He is unable to protect himself from other people's hostile feelings towards him which he senses not only as he walks in the square, but also in his own house. It becomes impossible for him to separate his inner and outer world. It is significant that Kvis dies after realising that he does not have the strength to encompass the lives of everyone: 'Chtěl jsem životy všech. Neunesl jsem to' (p. 430). Trying to be God kills him.

²⁹ This is further emphasised in one of the descriptions of him as Napoleon-like: 'Emanuel Kvis se vypne ve svém haveloku a stojí tu jako Napoleon' (p. 260). This brings to mind Karel from *Černé světlo*.

³⁰ This happens in the fifth chapter which is structurally the middle of the narrative. See p. 225.

From the moment Kvis first arrives in Byteň he becomes the subject of Byteň's gossip. However, in the course of the novel people's fascination with Kvis is replaced by suspicion until, finally, the public opinion of Byteň turns against him. The narrator's reflexion on the essence of Kvis comprises Kvis's function of catalyst for the release of what is repressed. It anticipates the function of scapegoat that the Byteň people will later ascribe to him:

Emanuel Kvis uhodl na první pohled, proč si statkář zvolil právě toto místo a jeho žíznivé nitro se ihned otevře, aby vssálo tento případ a napojilo se jím. Co je to být sám sebou, mohu-li být dnes tím a zítra oním? Co to znamená, mít jeden život nevýznamný, prázdný a šedivý, mohu-li jich mít desítky? Ne desítky životů, jaké jsou, nýbrž takových, jaké by mohly být, jen t'ukneme-li do nich trochu, jen podaří-li se nám pohnout tím, co v sobě skrývají a dusí. Vysvětluje to případ Emanuela Kvis? Dychtil a prahl právě po tom, nemaje, z čeho by žil sám v sobě? Je to jen to a nebyl nic víc ten človíček, který pobyl tak krátko mezi námi a tak mnoho zavínil? (pp. 142-43)

In his last question the narrator sides with the public opinion of Byteň in attributing the blame for what happened in Byteň to Kvis. Using Jung one might interpret Kvis's function in the novel as the scapegoat onto which people project their shadow.³¹ Noleč's imaginary accusation against Kvis captures this relation:

³¹ According to Terence Dawson 'Jung used this term [shadow] to describe two related but nonetheless different phenomena: (1) the entirety of the unconscious: i.e. everything that we fail to recognize about ourselves; and (2) a specific personification of what a person "has no wish to be" (CW 16, para. 470), "the sum of all those unpleasant qualities" a person likes to hide: CW 7, p. 65n). The shadow is thus a personification of an aspect of one's personality *as it really is*. Because the ego tends to repress such aspects of its personality, the shadow often manifests itself compulsively.' See Terence Dawson, 'Jung, literature and literary criticism', in Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 260-61. The following words of Jung almost directly illustrate Kvis's function in the novel: 'The meeting with ourselves belongs to the more unpleasant things that may be avoided as long as we possess living symbol-figures in which all that is inner and unknown is projected. The figure of the devil, in particular, is a most valuable and acceptable psychic possession, for as long as he goes about outside in the form of a roaring lion, we know where evil lurks; namely, in that incarnate Old Harry where it has been in this or that form since primeval times. With the rise of consciousness since the Middle Ages, to be sure, he has been considerably reduced in stature. But to take his place there are human beings to whom we gratefully resign our shadows. With what pleasure, for instance, we read newspaper reports of crime! A true criminal becomes a popular figure because he unburdens in no small degree the consciences of his fellow men, for now they know once more where evil is to be

‘Viním jej z toho, že probouzí v lidech, co v nich má spát a že tak rozvrací boží i lidský pořádek’. Likewise, the inhabitants of Byteň collectively project all their fears onto him. The narration contains recurrent references to this, but suspicion of Kvis peaks after Josef Dastych’s accident. The Byteň people are searching for a reason why their town’s usually sleepy atmosphere has suddenly been disturbed:

Ženy u zelinářských stánků zmlknou a dívají se za ním s rukama složenýma na životech. Dráždil jejich zvědavost od samého počátku, co se objevil v městě, a nyní ovšem, co mezi nimi kolují šepy pestřejší a přizdobenější o barvy každého, kdo je podává dál, ji napíná téměř nesnesitelně. Pověřivé mrazení jim běží po páteři, ukazují si vzájemně husí kůži, jež jim vyskočila na pažích. Strašidelné zkazky se probouzejí v jejich paměti, jsou připraveny uvěřit každému nesmyslu, bát se nebo se proměnit v zuřivé lítice, štvané podvědomým strachem o mláďata. Ty z nich, jejichž život je zabydlen od noci Kvisova příjezdu, křížují se potají setkavše se s jeho pohledem a odplivují si, aby zabránily urknutí svého plodu, druhé pak žasnou, proč právě v tu chvíli se pohnula v jejich myslích ta neb ona myšlenka, z níž se už ani nezpovídají, protože ji považovaly za dávno odumřelou. (p. 373)

This passage shows how the gossiping women project their shadow onto Kvis and indicates how the shadow projection is associated with a premonition of something evil that may harm them. The idea of a collective evil of which Kvis could be the embodiment is inherent within Filip Dastych’s impulse during their first meeting to sentence Kvis to eternal damnation. His reason for this is: ‘Pro zlo. Pro zlo skryté v nás, rozptýlené mezi námi, pro zlo vůbec’ (p. 93). These words are important for the interpretation of the whole novel because they state that evil is not only related to Kvis and his arrival, but that it already exists in Byteň. Kvis simply brings this evil out in helping the repressed become conscious.

In connection with the description of midnight as the in-between state, at the time of Kvis’s arrival (p.55) it is possible to interpret Kvis as the carrier of the

found.’ Jolande Jacobi (ed.), *Psychological Reflections: An Anthology of the Writings of C. G. Jung*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953, p. 213.

key to the two worlds separated by this state; the two worlds that represent the conscious and the subconscious respectively. Kvis brings moonlight to shine into the darkness of the subconscious and makes the hitherto repressed appear. The end of the first chapter supports such an interpretation since here the moon is placed in opposition to 'the merciful unconsciousness of the darkness'.³² It is no coincidence either that the outcome of Kvis's manipulations is most successful with those characters that somehow have something in common with him; the characters who do not live their lives to the fullest because they are caught up in the past.³³ However, in bringing this evil out Kvis actually brings about a change for the better in the characters' lives. The moment when the characters become conscious of their own repressed emotions instigates a kind of mental rebirth. The idea that Kvis represents a collective evil has its counterpart in the projection of the Devil figure onto Kvis. As I stated my initial comments on the first chapter, Brůžek becomes the spokesman for this view of Kvis. It forms part of the ideologeme of God *versus* the Devil. Thus it is Brůžek who in the last chapter sees it as his mission to go out into the stormy night to fight that evil 'that one does not talk about' but whose presence is implied in his Christian *Weltanschauung*.

The possibility of Kvis as a saviour has been inscribed from his first appearance in the novel through the emphasis on his name: Emanuel. The fact that Kvis actually does not commit evil, but finally engenders good creates an intertext with Goethe's Faust.³⁴ To Faust's question 'Nun gut, wer bist du denn?' Mephistopheles answers: 'Ein Teil von jener Kraft, / Die stets das Böse

³² 'Psi se už této noci neutiší; jejich štěkot vybuchuje přes tu chvíli, jako by noví a noví cizinci vstupovali do Bytně, a neustane, dokud měsíc nezmizí pod obzorem a krátká předjitřní tma neponoří svět v milosrdné bezvědomí' (p. 64).

³³ A. M. Píša points this out in his article on *Svědék*. See A. M. Píša, 'Zlo ve světle', pp. 254-55. An example of this is the farmhand Nejtek who has brought himself to despair by destroying the beauty in his life, epitomised by his wife whom he used to beat before the dean put an end to it: 'Ten nejtkovský žal se natolik podobá vlčímu vytí kvisovskému, že už nevíme, vyprávíme o jednom nebo o druhém. Bytost bez života touží po životě a když se jí podaří připnout se na jiný, rostoucí z vlastních kořenů, shledává, že ssaje jen jinou touhou, ještě bolestnější a neukojitelnější' (p. 387).

³⁴ A. M. Píša makes the comparison between Kvis and Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*. See A. M. Píša, 'Zlo ve světle', p. 253. Because of this aspect of the plot Píša reads the novel as Řezáč's 'declaration of his faith in life and humanity'. Ibid., p. 253.

will, und stets das Gute schafft'.³⁵ This intertext demonstrates the ambiguous quality of Kvis as interchangeably a tempter or a saviour.

The role of Devil that the other characters attribute to Kvis is partly undermined by Kvis himself. The air of ambiguity and uncanniness that surrounds him is broken in the fifth, middle, chapter when Kvis tells Kateřina Nolčová the story of his childhood that made him what he is. He particularly stresses how his relationship with his apathetic mother, who did not show any interest in other people, has marked him. The Devil figure postulated by the narrative cannot endure such an openly human admission. Instead of incarnating the Devil Kvis comes to appear a poor Devil. Finally, it is questionable whether Kvis is a character at all. Because of the focus on his clothes, manners, voice – the theatrical element of his character – he rather becomes a type, more a cipher than a character.³⁶

5.5 The ideologeme of good *versus* evil: the version of good in the novel

My analysis of Kvis has hitherto shown how he becomes a structural as well as ideological focus point for the discussion of evil. The narrative presents the alternative to Kvis in the girl, Lída Dastychová, whose greatest dream is to become an actress.³⁷ The narrator's first description of Lída as she feeds the hens in the farmyard foregrounds the positive connotations of youth with which her plot is associated:

Na mou věru, je to skupina [Lída and the hens] jako přichystaná pro fotografický snímek, takový obraz míru a radosti, jaký může vykvést jen v červnovém dopoledním slunci v zemi krásy a hojnosti. To děvče tak svěží a rozhořelé krví, to děvče skoro drobné, ale vznosné v prsou a tak půvabné v tváři, až ti srdce trne něhou, to děvče s vlnami elektricky černých vlasů,

³⁵ Quoted from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Faust: Der Tragödie erster und zweiter Teil*, Munich, dtv, 1970, p. 43.

³⁶ This is supported by the narrative presentation of Kvis. Unlike the other (main) characters Kvis is predominantly presented from the outside in the discourse of the authorial narrator. Kvis's thoughts are only presented in moments when he lives through other people's thoughts; they are fundamentally not his. Only once is there a glimpse of an interior monologue in Kvis's discourse: in the passage where Kvis is standing by the fountain and, for a very brief moment, experiences himself a part of time, there is a first-person form 'dechnu' (p. 87).

³⁷ Lída's name also means 'dear to the people' ('lída milá').

stažených nad čelem bílou stužkou, to děvče v modré skládané sukni a v bílé bluzce, z jejíhož skrytého obsahu tě mrazí, takové děvče, že by mohlo být spíš dcerkou dnešního rána, než jakéhokoli lidského páru, můj Bože, takové děvče! (p. 74)

The narrator sounds as if he were in love with Lída, although elsewhere he also mocks her, but in a very goodnatureed way. For Lída acting involves a life-giving transformation of the part she is playing: 'Připadá mi, že nejsem jedna víte, že je ve mně mnoho lidí a všichni jako by byli němí, jako by byli chromí, dokud já jim nedám slovo a pohyb, jako by byli mrtví, dokud je neprobudím k životu' (pp. 276-77). This definition of acting represents the opposite of Kvis's vampiric habit. Hence the Kvis/Lída opposition represents naturally antagonistic approaches to life.³⁸ Kvis does not have the ability to become an actor in his own life, to play himself, because he is empty. He is only a spectator to other people's theatre: 'Spokojil jsem se vždycky divadlem, které mi sehrávali druzí' (p. 378). By contrast, Lída plays herself by giving life to other people; that is why she lives.³⁹ Together with the young Jew Jeník Harazim, Lída is the only character who is able to resist Kvis's manipulative power. The reason for this, according to Kvis, is their youth that does not know any boundaries: 'Je jenom jedna nepřekročitelná hranice v mládí, a tou je smrt' (p. 282). Lída possesses the same curiosity as Kvis; however, it originates from a different source: 'Narazil [Kvis] na stejnou žízeň zvědavosti, snad ještě silnější, než jeho vlastní, jenomže trýskající z jiného zdroje a mířící k jinému cíli. Neví si rady, zmocňuje se ho strach' (p. 377). The narrative does not state directly what this other source of curiosity is. It may be youth. The narrator's discourse gives yet another context for understanding why Lída defeats Kvis⁴⁰ in that he points out how Kvis does not perceive the things that characterise the good in life: 'Léto sem vniká s nimi,

³⁸ The opposition between Lída and Kvis crops up in Kateřina Nalčová's thoughts during her conversation with Lída: 'Paní Kateřina se zachvěje zamrazením. V rozhovoru s tou dívkou je mnoho zarážejících obdůb. Nevzpomněla si snad v tuto chvíli na jiného člověka, který také mluvil o lidech v sobě? Jenomže ten je netoužil vysvobodit a dát jim žít pro jiné, jako tady ta rozdychtěná dívka' (p. 277).

³⁹ In connection with the opposition between watching and living Jiří Trávniček ascribes an existential dimension to the interpretation of the 'svědek' topos: 'Společným rysem Řezáčova románu a [Orten's] Elegií je vědomí toho, kdo hraje, a toho, kdo vidí, pozoruje, [...]'. See Trávniček, *Poezie poslední možnosti*, Prague: Torst, 1996, p. 32.

⁴⁰ This is yet another version of the woman-as-saviour topos.

vůně slunce a dešťů, větrů a orosených sadů, hojivá, silná vůně, stvořená z nejsilnějších substancí života: lásky, plodnosti a práce, ale Kvis je nevnímá' (p. 387). The narrator here poses the alternative to Kvis's desire for power; that is love, fruitfulness (fertility) and work. In contrast to Lída's Kvis's life is sterile in the sense that his pursuits lack any creativity and only feed off other people. Lída eventually transgresses her inner boundary and leaves Byteň (in the same moment as Kvis dies). The narrator gives this piece of information at the end of the novel, together with a comment that captures the moral dimension of Lída's sub-plot: 'Ano, Lída jediná přestoupila nepřekročitelnou hranici své lásky a šla za životem, který obsáhne víc, než co může prožít jediný člověk. Probouzet spící osudy a dávat je druhým. Tak je to? Neboť nikdo nemůže žít sám a všichni toužíme jeden po druhém' (p. 434).

The opposition between Lída (good) and Kvis's (evil) approach is interpreted in the last sentence of this quotation as that between isolation and community (society). The ideologeme of isolation *versus* community (society) shapes the narrator's discourse about good, but it is also present in the characters' thoughts about themselves and each other. For example, in Tlachač's thoughts about the need to protect Nolč from evil: 'Pane, jsem s vámi, děj se co děj. Je to ovšem nesmysl, protože copak může hrozit takovému boháči v jeho pevném domě, ale konec konců je to take jen člověk, a lidé mají stát při druhém' (p. 409). It appears most expressively in the episode in which Nolč encounters the sleeping tramp. The narrator describes how this 'human carcass' has excluded himself from others, who therefore in turn avoid him. He seems to be impossible to categorise as a human being. The episode culminates with a view of human interconnectedness that cuts across any social order: 'A člověk přece někam musí patřit. To si jen tak někdy myslíme, že jsme sami mezi ostatními, nestačily by nám však prsty na rukou, kdybychom měli vypočítat, co nás s nimi pojí (p. 176).⁴¹

The novel contains other minor characters whose life-stories testify to what happens when people become isolated from others. This is true for the old man Balchán who is the 'village idiot'. The explanation implies that the isolation he

⁴¹ A similar view is expressed in paní Kateřina's thought on p. 275.

suffered during working hours eventually provoked him to act and end up in prison, which brought on his madness. Another example is the spinster Libuše Bílá (Kvis's cousin) who also lived her life in isolation. Kvis's explanation of her predicament again points out the danger of isolation: '– Nebyla zlá, ani hodná. Hledala cestu k lidem a tím se jim stávala podezřelá' (p. 233). Thus the narration in numerous ways foregrounds companionship (society) as central to human relationships, at the same time as it shows how isolation fundamentally means evil.

Kateřina Nolčová's epiphany directly links light with good in the meaning of life. Her recognition takes place after she has recovered from the dreamlike state in which she has the vision of the baby she lost, and finds out that she is pregnant again: '– A ted', Rudo, jdi a rozhrň ty hrozné černé záclony a zítra je dej strhnout. Tady ted' bude bydlet život, tady musí být světlo' (p. 433). This realisation of life as light is also connected with consciousness on the psychological level, in the sense that life means bringing what is repressed out into the light. The narrator's description of Kvis's failed effort makes the connection between light and awareness: 'Oživil zmírající pudy a vrátil jim sílu, a vyhrabal zasuté myšlenky a vyvedl je na světlo; a nakonec jen bezmocně přihlížel, jak se vymykají jeho záměrům a podléhají duchu, který je zrodil. Starosta, Tlacháč, oba Dastychové, ti všichni překročili hranici, ale vrátili se opět hlouběji než předtím' (p. 375-76).

It is also implied in this passage that where there is awareness, evil will be defeated.

The possibility of the victory of good over evil has been present from the beginning of novel and has been developed in the recurrent images of pregnant Byteň women. The description of the moon's erotic impact on the frightened women during the first moonlit night (first chapter) contains a foreshadowing of the novel's ending: 'Nakonec zaženou [the men] vrčící psy do bud a jdou uklidnit své ženy, v nichž strach a měsíční světlo se zatím podivnou alchymí proměnily v jiné pocity' (p. 64). This night was the origin of the pregnancies that characterise the last image of the Byteň women: 'Ženy v kabátech a šátcích, s rukama složenýma na životech, namnoze už nakrouhlých, rozprávějí

o uplynulé noci' (p. 433) – that is, the night in which Kvis died. The birth image is related to the fact that during the last moonlit stormy night Byteň experiences a kind of collective epiphany that brings about a change in the general atmosphere of the town: the sun lights up Byteň 'that the previous night's storm and wind has washed and swept' (p. 433). With Kvis's death it is as if Byteň has been cleansed of evil. Byteň has woken up from its bad dream. The plot of the whole novel thus in several ways corresponds to Kateřina Nolčová's sub-plot of death and the birth that is to follow the pregnancy. The use of the imagery of the moon adds yet another dimension of meaning in that in popular mythology the moon has been associated with birth and transformation. It would probably not be an overinterpretation to say that the whole novel is imbued with the idea of transformation (rebirth), on the psychological as well as the symbolic level.

5.6 The narrator's evaluative function

The narrator is an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator;⁴² that is, the narrative is a first-degree narrative (only one narrative level) of which the narrator is omniscient, but not a character in the novel. However, some ambiguity surrounds the narrator's position in relation to the narrated events (story) because the narrator occupies two positions at the same time.

He repeatedly places himself among the people of Byteň as if he were part of their world. For example, he knows what they gossip about at the time of the narrating (the narrator's present). This is evident in his description of Kvis's clothes in the first chapter, in which the narrator comments on his own narration: he does not have to describe Kvis in detail because the Byteň people remember all too well how Kvis was dressed and while he lived in Byteň they never saw him dressed differently (see p. 57). However, this description is not meant for the Byteň people, but is a manner of conveying information to the narratee (ultimately the reader) whom the narrator addresses repeatedly, for example: 'Stačí o to zavadit slovem a budou vám do omrzení vyprávět o jeho bílé měkké košili s našitým límcem' (p. 57).

⁴² See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 228-29 and p. 244.

The adverbial ‘ad nauseam’ in his comment reveals that, although the narrator is familiar with the ways and opinions of the Byteň people, he, at the same time, creates an ironic distance to their gossiping. He distances himself from the small world of Byteň. At other times the narrator himself adopts a confidential, gossipy tone before the narratee. For example, in the narration of how the dogs were barking in the night of Kvis’s arrival in Byteň: ‘Povídám, že to musel být štěkot, když vyhnal z postele Korce, který nebyl o nic čilejší než ti dva jeho mamlasové a pro svou lásku k pelech byl kdysi zbaven ponocenství’ (p. 63). The expressive tone in the description of the dogs, calling them ‘ti dva Korcovi halamové’ (p. 62) or ‘mamlasové’ (as above) and ‘co, to ta jejich psiska rafló’ (when the men get out of bed to see what is wrong) creates a sense of familiarity with these people, since the expressions are likely to be those that people would use themselves in referring to the dogs. Likewise the narrator sometimes adopts the Byteň people’s idiom when he presents a character as, for example, in his description of Teršík, the assistant station attendant: ‘Ale Teršík byl pišišvor, takové malé pivo bez pěny, jak mu říkali, a jestli někdo řídí běh věcí, měl rozum, že ho tak dlouho držel při zemi a zkrátka’ (p. 57). In this description one can see how the narrator ‘translates’ the meaning of a word to the narratee, assuming that he/she will not know since the narratee is not to be part of the Byteň world.

In one comment the narrator refers to Kvis as ‘ten človíček, který pobyl tak krátko mezi námi’ (pp. 142-43). This indicates that the narrator is an inhabitant of Byteň (or poses as one). This would explain and make plausible his knowledge of Byteň and its inhabitants. The narrator tells the story *as if* he were a homodiegetic⁴³ narrator who, at some unspecified time after the narrated events, relates what he has witnessed. It would not be plausible for the narrator to claim to have witnessed all the narrated events. This characterisation of the narrator will support the notion that the novel’s title refers not to Kvis, but to the narrator and his function of witness to what happened then in the little town called Byteň. By narrating the events the narrator is not only a witness, but also

⁴³ Genette’s definition of ‘homodiegetic’ is that the narrator is present as a character in the story he tells, either as the hero of his narrative (‘autodiegetic’) or in a secondary role as, for example, an observer or witness. See *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 244-45.

bears witness. He bears witness to the fundamental conflict between good and evil as it is played out among and within (in the minds of) the characters of the novel. However, the narrator is not a neutral observer. From his position of omniscience he analyses as a psychologist and judges the characters' actions and thoughts. He moralises in the sense that he knows how it is in life. All these elements are present in his address to Tlachač on the first moonlit night; therefore I quote the whole passage:

Tlachači konej svou povinnost. Tvá občůzka se ještě neskončila a pitomý měsíc, nařvaný a nadutý jako selský krasavec, si nesmí dovolit, aby zasahoval do úředního výkonu. Nestůj tady, Tlachači, a nemudruj, s myšlením ti to vždycky vyšlo nakrátko a o této noci nebude vydána úřední vyhláška, z níž bys vyčtl, proč a jak, a nikdo ti nedá v tuto chvíli rozkaz, co dělat. Je to nepochybně nepřístojnost, promění-li se strážníkovi ulice, jimiž prochází po třicet let, v cizí město a potká v nich sebe sama jako podezřelého cizince. Ale kdo je za ni odpověden? Kdo zavinil, že radniční věž, k níž vzhlížíš denně, je ti teď právě tak nepovědomá, jakobys ji viděl po prvé v životě? Proč jsi zápolil se svým stínem a proč tě starosta ohmatával jako řezník, kupující býka, určeného na porážku? Viděls vůbec, cos viděl, a dělals, cos dělal? Vždyť věci se dějí jen ve chvíli jim určenou a pak se vytrácejí jako hrstka tabáku, který páliš ve své dýmce. [...] Ach, ty potápěči ve vodách tajemství, jsi příliš dýchavičný, abys dosáhl dna a vynesl odtud byť jen hrst písku, který uniká mezi zaťatými prsty. Máš mozek vyluhovaný rozkazy, i krácej po této podešvi drže se čáry, narýsované povinností, která tě nikdy nezklame a nedá ti zbloudit.
(pp. 28-29)

This passage illustrates how the narrator with his mocking questions conveys what kind of character Tlachač is while he is at the same time summarising previous events. The narrator addresses Tlachač from a superior position that is characteristic of his way of dealing with the characters, whether he is being ironic or good-natured. In places it is difficult to know whether or not the address in the second person is the character addressing him/herself in an interior monologue, but mostly the language reveals that it is the narrator

speaking. The ambiguity is most evident in the narration of Nolč's thoughts. The reason for this could be that Nolč, with his ironic approach to life, is the character for whom the narrator has the most sympathy. It is thus characteristic of the narrative presentation of consciousness in the novel that it comes mostly from the outside and by means of imagery, rather than constituting a direct recording of the characters' thoughts in interior monologue. There are short insertions of interior monologue, but mostly the narrator's intrusive way with the characters' minds does not allow them to think for themselves. For the narrator, the characters' minds are objects of analysis and evaluation. He frequently hypothesises about the characters' thoughts and emotions,⁴⁴ which is again simply a way of presenting his own assumptions. In terms of the perspective of the narration, the narration to a very large degree follows the characters' spatial perceptive, which creates the scenic character of the narration. However, the introspection into the characters' minds is hardly ever narrated through the characters' inner perceptive perspective. The tendency towards this is most significant in the moments of a character's epiphany which underscores the importance of these moments in the narration. A consequence of the narrator's dominating approach to the characters is that it is he who guides the production of meaning in the narration. By means of his analytical and evaluating approach he gradually nudges the characters towards their epiphany. On the plot level this is supported by the narrative organisation of events. Within the semantic structure of the novel it would not be acceptable if, say, Nolč had killed the tramp or Byteň had been left devastated by Kvis.

The narrator behaves as God in relation to the characters. At the same time as he describes them and analyses them he also creates them. This is of course true, in a sense, for all narration. However, in *Svědék*, the narratorial perspective of God is directly foregrounded in the narration in the episode where judge Dastych is sitting, watching the fly by the window:

Jak tu tak sedí a dívá se na mouchu, soudce Dastych si představuje, že někdo jiný tak někde s rukama v klíně pozoruje naše víření a čeká, najdeme-

⁴⁴ Examples of this are numerous; see for instance p. 324, where the narrator speculates about Tlachač's doubts about how to offer greetings as he walks past the door of the church.

li sami okno, jež nám nechal otevřeno. Mohl by stát a ukázat nám cestu, nebo unaven a zoškliven naším žalostným bzukotem mohl by mávnout ruku a zmařit nás. [...] Někde zůstalo otevřené okno, soudče Dastychu. Proč je nevidíme a proč nás to vábí právě k tomu zavřenému? (p. 69)

The idea of the narrator as God also comports with the narrator's function of stage director. In *Svědék* the characters' lives are conceived of as theatre.⁴⁵

5.7 Conclusion

As I have shown, *Svědék* deals with several kinds of evil. The ideologeme of the repressed works on a psychological conception of evil, whereas the ideologeme of isolation *versus* community (society) also includes a notion of social evil. On yet another level, the novel comprises metaphysical evil in the ideologeme of God *versus* the Devil and the ideologeme of tempter *versus* saviour. There is no evidence in the narrative that Kvis is 'the incarnation of Fascism'. Although the characterisation of Kvis contains the lust for power and his name may, in part, allude to historical circumstances, Kvis cannot be reduced to a dictator type. Kvis, on the contrary, has a much more complex function in the novel which is as the point of convergence for the different levels of meaning in the narrative. First, the employment of the image of the moon, with which Kvis is connected, lends the narrative a mythic quality that carries connotations of transformation and fertility. On the psychological level, this inner transformation is found in the resolution of the characters' psychological conflict that signifies a rebirth. On the metaphysical level the notion of evil is linked through Kvis unequivocally to Christian ideology that centres on the dichotomy between God and the Devil. In terms of its semantic structure the novel supports the victory of good over evil.

⁴⁵ See for example p. 240 about the judge.

Chapter 6

Rozhraní (1944)

In Václav Řezáč's fifth novel, *Rozhraní* (Border-line), the first-person narrator, Jindřich Aust, a teacher at a commercial academy in Prague, tells the story of his struggle to write his first novel. He describes the process from the moment he first sees the actor Vilém Haba in a daydream. Subsequently, the two characters' stories become intertwined as Haba's story unfolds in Aust's imagination. Aust's story thematises the process of writing fiction and the relationship between life and art as it manifests itself in the relationship between Aust and his fictional character Haba, as well as between the events of Aust's novel and those simultaneously happening in his life. Because of the novel's theme, the process of writing a novel, critics have usually characterized *Rozhraní* as a 'novel within a novel'.¹ However, strictly speaking the actual 'novel within' only appears in the novel as the drafts that Aust gives to his girlfriend Jarmila to read. What the reader gets of Haba's story is what takes place in Aust's mind as he thinks out his story and comments on its various possibilities and solutions.

¹ The novel's presumed meta-fictional level is the reason why it has been compared with André Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1925). See, for example, Radko Pytlík, 'Rozhraní Václava Řezáče', in Václav Řezáč: *Rozhraní, Spisy*, vol. 4, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1986, p. 424; František Götz, 'Rozhraní', in Götz, *Václav Řezáč*, Prague, Československý spisovatel, 1957, p. 99, and Daniela Hodrová, 'Sebereflexivní román', in Hodrová et al.: *Poetika české meziválečné literatury (Proměny žánrů)*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1987, p. 172. However, in a comparison of the two novels, Opelík concludes that there are only 'vague connections' between them, chiefly because both novels are a 'novel about the writing of a novel'. See Jirí Opelík, 'Ke genezi Řezáčova Rozhraní', *Sborník Vysoké školy pedagogické v Olomouci. Jazyk a literatura*, 6, 1959, p. 108. In my view the comparison of *Rozhraní* with Gide's novel is contrived since the frame narrative of *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* is a third-person narration with segments of Edouard's journal inserted into it. In this sense it is not really a first-person novel.

When the novel ends Aust has not yet finished writing his novel about Haba, but the narrator reassures the reader that he did finish: ‘Dopsal jsem knihu o Vilémovi a našlo se nakladatelství, jež ji vydá’.² Thus the ‘novel within the novel’ has to be understood in a purely thematic sense since Haba’s story belongs to the same narrative level as that of Aust’s story.³ It is therefore questionable whether *Rozhraní* is a meta-narrative in the strict meaning of the word.⁴

6.1 General characterisation of the narrative situation

The frame narrative situation of *Rozhraní* proceeds in the first-person narration of the autodiegetic narrator Jindřich Aust. Hereafter, I shall, to avoid confusion, refer to this level as that of the frame-narrator. The object of his narration is himself during the specific time of his life when he started writing a novel. It follows that the frame-narrator’s present is different from Aust’s, but the actual time difference between the time of the narration and the narrated events of Aust’s past is not clear. Thus the narration displays two meta-levels: Aust, the frame-narrator’s comments on his previous self, and Aust, the writer’s comments on the story about Haba as they happened in the past. Haba’s story, though, constitutes a part of Aust’s story. There is no demarcation line between the two story-lines since Haba’s story is narrated as if it were unfolding in Aust’s mind when he is thinking out the plot of his novel. This is visible from the fact that Aust refers to himself in the present when he thinks about Haba: ‘Je mi úzko z postavení, do něhož jsem Viléma přivedl’ (p. 59). Aust is virtually

² Václav Řezáč, *Rozhraní* [1944], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966, p. 382. Further references to the novel will be given in parentheses directly after quotations or references.

³ This will be clear after my analysis of the narration in the next section of this chapter.

⁴ Prince defines meta-narrative as ‘a narrative referring to itself and to those elements by which it is constituted and communicated, a narrative discussing itself, a SELF-REFLEXIVE NARRATIVE’. See Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Revised Edition), Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003, p. 51. A better example of this type of narrative would be Milada Součková’s *Bel Canto* which came out in 1944, the same year as *Rozhraní*, or Olga Barényi’s *Román* from 1945. However, much earlier K. M. Čapek-Chod reflected on the writing of fiction in *Větrník: Román autoanalyticko-synthetický* (1923). Opelík sees *Rozhraní* as part of a trend that employs new literary devices in the writing of psychological analytical fiction. His examples are Vítězslav Nezval’s novels *Jak vejce vejci* (1933) and *Monaco* (1934), as well as Bohumil Nohejl’s *Zázrak s Julií* (1941). See Jiří Opelík, ‘Ke genezi Řezáčova *Rozhraní*’, *Sborník Vysoké školy pedagogické v Olomouci. Jazyk a literatura*, 6, 1959, pp. 100-01.

living Haba's story, experiencing the pertinent physical sensations as he imagines the events. Another example of this is the situation in which he, hidden behind the door, overhears an argument between his sister and her husband. He imagines so vividly what the characters of his daydream experience that he forgets himself and is discovered by the couple (pp. 34-35). However, the frame-narrator is the mediator in the shift from Aust's to Haba's story, which is evident from the temporal deixis of the frame-narrator's discourse: 'mé myšlenky, jež se toho dne, ať jsem byl zaujat čímkoli jiným, nepřestávaly zabývat Vilémem Habou a hledat pravou příčinu jeho přítomnosti na nočním nábřeží, byly zaskočeny hrou obrazotvornosti, jež jim nabízela přijatelné vysvětlení' (p. 33). Then follows Aust's reflections on the development of an argument taking place between Haba and the director of the play in which Haba plays the lead role. An effect of Aust's daydreaming is that his present moment is sometimes extended over several pages of the novel; a slowing-down of the narration is taking place at the same time as various dramatic events are played out in Haba's story.

The time distance between the two levels of first-person narration matters because, as the narration shows, the frame-narrator speaks from a position of knowing which is linked with his motivation for narrating his story.⁵ At the end of the novel Aust, the frame-narrator, tells us that the process of writing a novel has changed him from the man he used to be: 'Jsem jiný člověk, než jsem býval' (p. 382). This explains why the narrator from the outset seeks to create a distance from his previous self. For example, he comments on the drafts in his old notebook:

Když se dnes vracím k tomu zápisníku a listuji v něm s neochabujícím zahanbením, zdá se mi, že poskytuje věrný obraz toho, jak jsem v té době vypadal. Věčné plány a rozběhy nikdy dovedené ke konci. Blížil jsem se k čtyřicítce a zůstavil jsem za sebou jen rychle projeté stanice, z nichž nebude žádná na mne pamatovat ani vyraženým oknem. A přece pomýšlení, že jsem se minul svým cílem a že jsem budižkničemu, mne zneklidňovalo jen

⁵ Unlike, for example, the autodiegetic narrator of Egon Hostovský's *Ztracený stín* (1931) who narrates from a position of searching for answers.

zřídka. Stále ještě jsem chodil s hlavou vztyčenou, pohrdal jsem okolím a svými povoláními, jichž jsem vystřídal pěknou řádku až po toto učitelství na obchodní škole. Stále jsem ještě věřil, že jsem byl poslán na svět, abych tu vykonal něco zvláštního. (p. 7)

The mixture of self-pity and pride which shows in Aust's characterisation of his previous self is characteristic of his attitude to life and other people at the time of the narrated events. However, the emphasis on 'yet still' (stále ještě) also indicates that something will change in Aust's life. The frame-narrator's expressed shame at his previous self foreshadows the fact that, fundamentally, Aust's story is a story about transformation and the frame-narrator Aust's discourse sets the norms according to which his transformation into a better version of himself takes place. Thus the frame-narrator Aust also establishes his narrating position as one of moral integrity and maturity.

6.2 The motif of the double

Associations with the double are present from Aust's first encounter with Haba when Aust is invigilating an exam in Italian at the commercial academy. The reader's encountering Aust for the first time coincides with Aust seeing Vilém Haba for the first time. Instead of concentrating on what his pupils are doing, he falls into daydreaming about Haba: 'Prohlížel jsem si ho tak pozorně, jako by byl mým vlastním obrazem a jako bych se poprvé v životě viděl v zrcadle. Bylo mi ho až líto, jak tu tak stál, zcela mi vydán, bez ochrany, v mé moci. V té chvíli aspoň jsem si tím byl jist' (p. 6).

The notion of the double instantly introduces a number of intertextual possibilities into the semantic level of the novel. As a literary motif the double is associated with Romanticism and the fin-de-siècle as a representation of the demonic other within. As a psychological phenomenon the double transmits ideas of personality disorder, splitting and the dark side of a character.⁶ The latter brings to mind, for example, Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (1848). In the

⁶ Otto Rank discusses the double, as both a literary and psychological phenomenon. See See Otto Rank, 'Examples of the Double in Literature', in Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, ed. and trans. Harry Tucker, Jr., New York, London and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1979, pp. 8-33.

Czech context, Egon Hostovský has developed the motif in several works, among them *Ztracený stín* (The Lost Shadow, 1931) and *Sedmkrát v hlavní úloze* (Seven Times in the Leading Role, 1942).⁷ However, the double motif of *Rozhraní* has most frequently been linked with Ivan Olbracht's novel *Podivné přátelství herce Jesenia* (The Actor Jesenius's Odd Friendship, 1919).⁸ The novels have in common that they have acting as their theme – in *Rozhraní* chiefly in the story about Haba, but even Aust has a failed career as actor behind him and expresses his opinions on actors and acting. He also employs principles of acting when he considers how to structure his story about Haba. Opelík argues that there is a fundamental difference between the two pairs of doubles: in *Podivné přátelství herce Jesenia* Jesenius and his double Jan Veselý belong to the same narrative level, whereas in *Rozhraní* Aust's story is the primary in which Haba's is nested.⁹ As I pointed out earlier, I disagree with this in one aspect: Haba's story is nested within Aust's only on the thematic level. In terms of narration the two characters belong to the same level of the narrative discourse.

In *Rozhraní* the motif of the double accrues the function of structuring the layers of meaning on several levels of the narrative. This is reflected in the narration as the focus moves between Aust and Haba's stories and in the contrasting characterisation of the two characters. A great deal of Aust's fascination with Haba derives from the fact that Haba has succeeded in life and

⁷ See Marie Mravcová, 'Fenoméni dvojnicství v Hostovského rané próze *Ztracený stín*', in *Dokořán, Bulletin Obce spisovatelů*, 26, 2003, pp. 18-24. Another example is Weiner's short story 'Dvojníci' (The Doubles). In Richard Weiner, *Litice*, Prague: Aventinum, 1928, pp. 9-48.

⁸ See Bohumil Novák, 'Václav Řezáč: „Rozhraní“'. Román. Nákladem Fr. Borového, Praha 1945', *Kritický měsíčník*, 6, 1945, 1, pp. 30-31; František Götz, 'Rozhraní', in Götz, *Václav Řezáč*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1957, p. 101; Jiří Opelík, 'Ke genezi Řezáčova *Rozhraní*', pp. 101-02. Opelík devotes part of his article to a discussion of the connections between *Rozhraní* and *Podivné přátelství herce Jesenia*. One of the similarities that he points out is that both novels were written during a war; Olbracht's during the First World War and Řezáč's during the Second. Opelík sees the novels as an expression of the need to investigate anew the relationship between life and art during a difficult time. Similarly, Harry Tucker Jr. in his introduction to Rank's study of the double, draws attention to the fact that 'the interest of the reading (and listening) public seems especially to have been drawn to the theme of the double during or just after major upheavals of society'. He suggests that this is because 'extensive disturbances of society are among those occasions which cause man to ask himself fundamental questions about his identity – an identity which he finds existing on various levels or even in fragmentation.' See Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, pp. 19-20.

⁹ See Jiří Opelík, 'Ke genezi Řezáčova *Rozhraní*', p. 104.

has become a famous actor at Prague's National Theatre. Haba's apparent success contrasts with Aust's sense of inferiority. Aust refers several times to the fact that, approaching the age of forty, he has not yet achieved anything. The frame-narrator's descriptions of Aust (his previous self) consequently presents himself as a failure: 'Minulost se ve mně probudila z dočasné dřimoty a začala skuhrát známé litanie. Byl jsem syn ztroskotance a můj vlastní život nebyl nikdy nic jiného než nepřetržitá řada ztroskotání' (p. 50). The reason for Aust's sense of inferiority lies in his family background. His father lost his small porcelain works because of the industrial change from craftsmanship to factory production and the family had to live on the town's charity. The father losing his living was not in fact a matter of personal failure, although it later transformed itself into this in his son's mind. Aust suffers from a constant anxiety of being in debt to somebody; he feels haunted by life: 'Cožpak se bude můj život vždycky sestávat jen z drobných nepříjemností, jež mi budou stále přerůstat přes hlavu, protože si s nimi nikdy nebudu vědět rady?' (p. 143). Once he establishes a relationship with his girlfriend Jarmila, he is troubled by the idea that he can only ever be happy with a woman's love if he is able to offer her security and earn more than she does (see p. 235 and 375). In his feeling of social inferiority he is akin both to the main character Petr in Řezáč's first novel *Větrná setba* and to Karel in *Černé světlo*.

The motif of the double is also the subtext in the different nature of their two stories. Aust's life plays itself out in a trivial, sometimes comic, way (the narrator leading his previous self) in intrigues with horrible landladies or a publican's wife. The frame-narrator frequently ironises Aust's insecurity, for example, in the scene where he first meets a new landlady: 'A všechny pochybnosti a rozpaky, jimiž jsem byl v tu chvíli stíhán, pocházely jen z toho, jak jsem se snažil přimět své myšlenky, aby se zabývaly také něčím jiným než hodnocením ňader mé nové bytné' (p. 50). Haba's life, on the other hand, takes the form of dramatic events: Aust imagines him as a young man joining an itinerant theatre company, running away from a secure future in his parents' grocery shop, until he becomes an actor at the National Theatre in Prague. This journey involves a dramatic love triangle between Haba, the old theatre director,

Palas, and his young wife, Eva, who becomes Haba's mistress. The theatre director's death, presumably by falling from the top of a cliff into the river below, is a mystery that marks Haba with a sense of guilt. The character Haba is the antithesis to Aust, which is underlined by his first name, Vilém, that carries associations with the robber hero of Mácha's narrative poem *Máj* (May, 1836). It seems that in the creation of Haba, Aust is compensating for the lack of adventure in his own life, something he reflects on himself while sitting in the park:

Jsme si vždycky tak vzdáleni, milý Viléme Habo, okolnosti našich životů se k sobě blíží jen váhavými oklikami, a sotva se vzájemně dotkly, prudce se od sebe rozbíhají, jakoby polekány. Chtěl bych se proměnit v tebe, aby můj zmatený a beztvary osud nabyl na závažnosti a výraznosti. Připadá mi nesmyslné, že tvé příběhy má vyprávět člověk, který si vášeň snad někdy vymýšlel, ale nikdy neměl odvahu dát se jí unést, pan Nikdo, který nikdy neochutnal úspěchu a v blátě nezdaru nedokázal najít suchou pěšinu. (pp. 147-48)

However, despite the different nature of the two characters, Aust and Haba have in common that each of their stories describes a process of transformation. This transformation is connected with their perception of art and its function in their life, whether that be writing or acting. I shall argue that the narration produces meanings that form the ideologeme of isolation *versus* community (companionship) that structures the narrative's views of art and life.

6.3 The ideologeme of isolation *versus* community – Haba's transformation

From the moment Aust first encounters Haba he knows that this character will have a crucial influence on his life. In the first scene of the novel Aust is encouraged by this fantasy figure to resign from his teaching position. Before this the narrator had already indicated a sudden change in Aust's life: 'Mělo se mi záhy dostat drsného poučení, jaký význam má pro mne a pro mou budoucnost setkaná s Vilémem Habou' (p. 14). After this episode he becomes obsessed with Haba. Aust's preoccupation takes the form of a quest to discover

who Haba is and what has brought him into the state of despair in which Aust first finds him. By the end of the second chapter a sense is created of the state described by the novel's title; both Aust and Haba are on a border-line before which lies the unknown. Haba, Aust imagines, has just experienced a strange moment playing Solness in Ibsen's *The Master Builder*. Suddenly he was speaking in a voice unknown to himself:

Proč tolikrát, hledaje ve svém vlastním životě, jak bys dal najevo lásku, něžnost, vztek, pohrdání, družnost, výsměch, žárlivost a vůbec všechno, co hýbe každým z nás, nacházel jsi bezpečně a rychle hlas některého z nich, takže jsi ustavičně hrál i své osobní city, jako bys byl na scéně? Byl jsi to ty, všechny ty postavy, nebo ses mezi nimi tak beze zbytku ztratil? Kdo to tedy z tebe dnes promluvil, pronášeje způsobem, na němž jsi nepoznával nic ze své práce, tón, barvu, ani záchvěv, tu větu: – Vy jste, Hildo, vy jste mládí ? (p. 12)¹⁰

Finding the answer to the question of what led Haba first to lose and then to rediscover his own voice becomes the central question in Aust's creation of Haba. This early episode displays the crux of Haba's problem: acting has become his way of being to such a degree that he has lost any sense of himself and his own emotions. He has become isolated from other people, from life, concealed behind a multitude of masks.¹¹ According to Aust's analysis of events this process had begun at the moment when Haba refused to return to his native town to see his ill father:

Octli jsme se v místech, kde se ve Vilémovi střetl dvojitý cit, kde snad naposled v něm zápasil člověk, ale kde si take poprvé přivolal na pomoc herce. Tento pomocník měl být od té chvíle volán stále častěji, tak dlouho, až by zcela ovládl pole a jednal místo svého pána. Neboť tam, kde se člověk probíjel jen po pídích, kde svědomí a přirozený cit se mu věšely na paty olověnými koulemi, tam herec lehce stoupal a proklouzával bez úhony a

¹⁰ With its theme of psychological crisis Ibsen's *The Master Builder* (1892) resonates with Aust and Haba's stories.

¹¹ The description of Haba's face as a succession of changing masks (p. 296) brings to mind Kvis's changing facial expressions in *Svědék*.

výčitek, má na všechno vhodné slovo, přiměřený tón hlasu, správný posunek a okolnostem odpovídající výraz v tváři. (pp. 150-51)

Aust characterises this development in Haba as a strange loss of personality (p. 199). He sees it as an effect of Haba's determined rehearsal of his roles which he carries out in order to escape from reality (p. 199), but also as egoism in that Haba takes from others what he needs at their expense (p. 205); his acting ambitions allow him to love only himself (p. 273).

The crisis in Haba's life emerges when he starts a love affair with the young daughter of a powerful Prague millionaire, Anka. Aust portrays the fraught nature of their relationship from the beginning: although thinking of herself as a modern, emancipated woman, Anka has modelled her image of her ideal lover on her father (somewhat stereotypical psychology) and Haba, in a manipulative way, adapts himself to her ideal: 'Objevil záhy, čemu se Anka na svém otci obdivuje a co jí na něm vadí, a začal pro ni vytvářet hrdinu, který se schůzku za schůzkou více blížil jejímu snu' (p. 298). However, Anka's youth awakens his lost sense of himself which Aust stylises in a contrivedly sentimental description:

Objal a přitiskl ji k sobě ještě ve stylu své role, ale sotva se jejich rty dotkly, procítl v něm toužící chlapec ze vzrušivě krásných večerů v rodném městě. Dívčí vůně ho nesla, vůně hořící čisté krve, napojená z květů lip a fialek, rozemnutých trav a zraněné země, vůně kvetoucích hvězdnatých nocí a rosných rán. (pp. 305-06)

In Aust's narration the idea of youth as the receptacle of the true character of a human being is closely connected with the *topos* of the native town. Haba's crisis culminates at a time in his life when he plays Solness. At this point the young theatre director, Horák, has already voiced the content of Haba's inner conflict in an argument: 'Ale, pane, kdo je Vilém Haba podle toho, jak se podává? Člověk, který ví a umí, ale necítí. Který uznává a obdivuje sebe, a všichni ostatní jsou mu lhostejní. Jenomže tak to nejde, pane, tak se nesmí dělat žádný kumšt, a divadlo ze všech nejmíň' (p. 349). Horák's comment brings about a moment of madness for Haba, but also a moment of epiphany. At home in his study, surrounded by mirrors, he becomes aware of the parallel between

his own situation and that of Solness who has become a captive of his own ambition and egoism (p. 349). Gazing into the mirror he searches for his own face among the masks of the roles he has played. The impossibility of this task evokes the anger, caused by his growing insecurity, and in a cathartic rage he smashes all the mirrors (p. 350).¹² The episode manifests its effect that same evening at the opening night of *The Master Builder*. This is the night on which Aust first met Haba, the night when Haba, unexpectedly, experienced a different voice in his acting. Aust returns to this episode in his analysis of Haba to emphasise that the voice was that of Haba's youth, the voice that calls him back to who he once was: '[...], lákal ho někam, kam musel dojít, vábil ho za někým, koho musel najít, měl-li ještě vůbec žít a hrát' (p. 351). As a result that same evening Haba sets out on a journey back to his native town. Here he experiences another epiphanic moment when he is recognised by the old innkeeper, Dlask, because of his gait, which has retained its original character despite all the roles he has played (p. 364). Aust uses this point of Haba's story to enlighten him with his philosophy of acting, or writing:

[...] nesmíme se dělat pány svých postav, Viléme, natolik, abychom na nich páchali násilí. Nesmíme je znetvořovat a nesmíme jim podléhat. Jsou z nás, a my jsme z nich. Přicházejí k nám a bytují v nás jako ve svém rodišti, rodí se z nás a nacházejí své domovy v druhých. Žijeme v sobě, jeden v druhém navzájem. Nejsme sami, Vilíku, jsme částmi bůhvíčeho, a přece sami o sobě bůhvíčím. Nejsme a nemůžeme být jeden bez druhého. (pp. 364-65)

Eventually, Aust has Haba recognise that his mode of acting is misguided. His motive for acting is to satisfy his own vanity when he should have been sharing his gift for acting with others (p. 366). Haba's new awareness is the complete opposite to the selfishness that has characterised his life this far. The novel's title, 'border-line', denotes the division between Haba's isolation in his art and the view that, even in his acting, he is part of an interconnectedness of people to whom he is responsible:

¹² This episode brings to mind the final mirror scene in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). However, where Dorian Gray condemns the idea of beauty and youth that has destroyed his soul, Haba wishes to re-find the self of his youth.

Tváře a tváře, svět složený z tváří, popsanych tím, co se děje pod nimi. Poznává se v nich, ve všech a v každé zvlášť. Jeho úkol je být jejich tlumočnickem, snímat z nich zakletí, jež je odděluje od ostatních, luštit tajné písmo jejich povah a osudů a vracet je těm, jimž náležejí, vždy jednu každou z nich všem, jako by to byl jejich společný majetek. Býval pyšný na sebe, a zatím měl být pyšný za všechny, kdo čekají, že jim objasní jejich životy svým uměním. (p. 367)

The above quotations show how the view of acting towards which Aust has led Haba is founded on an idea of community, on an idea of responsibility towards other people. Haba's journey thus constitutes a transformation from isolation in egoism to a sense of belonging and interdependency, as postulated by Aust. However, the latter quotation also introduces the idea of the artist's (actor's) function within the community; that is, one of educator, someone who possesses an insight which it is his task to communicate.

6.4 The ideologeme of isolation *versus* community – Aust's transformation

The characterisation of Aust, the would-be writer, plays on the romantic stereotype of the poor, starving, isolated writer who goes unrecognised and unappreciated by the public. A comment made by paní Rosová, the publican's wife who offers to cook his meals, expresses this view of writers: 'Ještě jsem se nesetkala se žádným spisovatelem, vy jste první, ale už jsem o nich leccos čtla. A myslím si, že to bývají lidé, kteří hladovějí častěji, než je třeba, protože se nedovedou o sebe postarat a ostatní o ně dbají až po smrti' (p. 106).

Aust himself accepts this view, but the frame-narrator frequently ironises or exposes his previous self's tendency to self-pity. Aust stands isolated from other people through his pride and contempt for them which serves him as compensation for his sense of inferiority. One example is Aust's thoughts when he smells the food from open windows while other people are having the hot lunches he cannot afford:

Představoval jsem si všechny ty jedlíky, jak funí nad svými talíři se zpocenými čely a zátylky. Tvářil jsem se znechuceně. Většinu lidí, říkal

jsem si, představuje ošklivost, je život jen kusem žvance a shánkou po něm. Někdo by jim měl jednou přesvědčivě vyložit, že si tím obžerstvím ukracují věk, že pod horami žrádla v nich hyne, co je na člověku nejvznešenější: schopnost myslet a snít.

(p. 100)

Aust's sense of isolation slowly begins to change while he is working on his story about Haba. Aust sees him as a challenge to overcome all his unsuccessful attempts at finishing anything he has begun to write. (He has an old suitcase, his late father's, full of fragments of writing that he, in moments of honesty, refers to as 'the coffin', p. 13). So far Aust has lived under the influence of an ideal of work that he has never been able to realise: 'Vždyť smysl práce není v obživě, v práci se má člověk poznávat, má jí vtiskovat svou podobu a ona na oplátku jej má přetvářet k svému obrazu a zpívat v něm neumdlévající radostí' (p. 55). Aust is an intellectual who is jealous of the workers' (in his eyes) unproblematic relationship with their work and their sense of community. The descriptions that he gives of the workers in the street where he lives show this; for example, his characterisation of Franta Vápenka, the old worker who has managed to earn a fortune without letting it change him: '[...] nepřestal být nikdy ve svém chování ani do nejhlubších záhybů své povahy dělníkem' (p. 196). For Aust, Vápenka and the other ordinary people in the street embody 'poctivá práce'. Aust's description of the smoke from the local factory chimney where the workers go to work emphasises his sense of isolation. First, it is described as a tribute to the working day: '[...] komín se promění v stožár a kouř bude na něm vlát po větru k slávě pracovního dne' (p. 193). Then Aust succumbs to self-pity; the description of this underlines his changing view of work:

Jenom ten černý, pokojně se valící proud ve mně budil tíseň. Nechával mě stranou jako vzpurnou kapku, vyvrženou na zprahlý břeh. Kamarádi, říkal jsem si, hledě za nimi, jak nastupují ke svému každodennímu dílu, nesmíte se ve mně mýlit. Já jsem se nebouřil proti vám. Nemáte ponětí, jak bývá člověku trpko, když nemůže dělat v partě a je na svůj úkol sám. Dobrá. Sám, ale ne pro sebe. Doufám, přátelé, že pochopíte ten jemný rozdíl, protože v něm právě je místo pro nás všechny, pro vás i pro mne. (p. 194)

Aust's work on Haba's story and Haba's positive influence on him provide him with the determination he needs to work. Aust's work also improves as he senses the confidence that the people who surround him show him in believing that he really is a writer: 'Tolik lidí uvěřilo v mou práci a já ozdravěl jejich důvěrou jako chorý ve vysokých horských polohách' (p. 264). He refers to this feeling as the 'network of human trust' ('sít lidské důvěry', p. 253). His changed position among the people in the street where he lives constitutes their acceptance of him, as well as his acceptance of himself as a writer. The real turning-point in this process occurs when the local tobacconist invites Aust to the pub after someone has written graffiti on Aust's shop front (he lives in an old shop). At first Aust is suspicious of them and expects to be made fun of. However, the workers' genuine interest soon makes him talk about his planned novel about Haba. The whole scene is constructed as a dialogue between Aust explaining to them Haba's relationship with the young woman, Anka and their comments and questions. It has a comic slant that mocks Aust in the way in which it contrasts his self-important (and educated) literary approach to the creative process with the workers' focus on the action. Aust here makes a judgment in favour of his own novel as against the adventure stories that the tobacconist Pecha reads (p. 299). Eventually Aust passes out (after having drunk too much) while shouting condescendingly at the workers because he thinks they do not understand him. Despite this, the whole episode has consolidated his belonging among the local people.

Another influence that sparks Aust's move out of his isolation is his meeting Jarmila, the young woman who becomes his girlfriend and later wife.¹³ For Aust, Jarmila acquires the function of the ideal reader with whom he can discuss his writing. However, she does not only read his novel, he also has the feeling that she 'reads' him (just as his mother used to), which provides the encouragement that he needs (p. 263).¹⁴ Just as Haba discovers himself at the age of forty, Aust has a similar experience of discovering himself by means of his work: 'Připadalo mi, že dorůstám a dospívám, jako by mé dětství trvalo

¹³ The name Jarmila, just like Vilém, creates an intertext with Mácha's *Máj*. This potential is not developed in the narrative, although the name plays into Aust's romantic dreaming.

¹⁴ Jarmila is yet another example of the 'female saviour' in Řezáč's novels.

dlouhých čtyřicet let – čtyřicet let polosnu, z něhož teprve nyní procítám ke skutečnosti. Čtyřicet let jsem si hrál na něco, co teprve nyní začínám žít' (p. 316).

Aust's narration repeatedly stresses the importance of community and companionship in bringing about the change that has taken place in his life: his growing sense of belonging among other people has made it possible for him to write and, simultaneously, the writing has earned him a place within the community. Thus, similar to Haba's, his story marks a journey from isolation to belonging. Where Haba's isolation was caused by his egoism, Aust was imprisoned by his feelings of inferiority and his pride. Aust's transformation is connected with the function of writing in his life. As with Haba's acting, Aust's narration posits the social function of writing as the answer to his crisis. Thus, Aust and Haba's stories represent a journey by which they have become aware of their social responsibility; both writer and actor perform a social role.

6.5 Art as truth

In *Rozhraní* the social function of art and the artist's role within the community are linked to the dialogue about the relationship between life and art which is manifest in the way in which Aust and Haba's stories interconnect with each other, as well as in Aust's reflections on this.

Aust's creation of Haba places in the foreground the relationship between author and fictional character, as well as the relationship between life and art, in the form of the fictional world or acting. The fact that Haba's story is narrated as if taking place in Aust's thoughts creates a certain reciprocity between the two fictional worlds of the narrative. The intertwining of their story-lines, in parallel events in Haba's fictional world and Aust's life (as viewed by the frame-narrator's previous self), poses the question: what makes things happen, what is the driving force of a life or a story? In the process of working on his novel Aust discovers that life and art (literature) influence each other in ways that he had not previously imagined. From his initial sense of power over Haba (see p. 6), Aust suddenly finds himself taken over by him, as if they had merged: 'Žije v tobě kdosi, kdo ti bude vnucovat své pocity tak dlouho, dokud ho za sebe

nevyhostíš poslední tečkou za posledním slovem, jež o něm musíš povědět' (p. 198). Events in Aust's story about Haba begin to occur in parallel in his own life, for example, in the form of characters who resemble each other or have similar functions in both stories. Aust goes as far as suggesting that the events he invents in Haba's story actually create similar events in his own life. For example, Aust makes a connection between the death of the old theatre director Baroch who has helped Vilém, and the death of the editor Fridrýn who has supported Aust (see p. 339 and p. 354). He entertains the idea that Baroch's fictitious death has somehow instigated Fridrýn's death, in his own life.

Aust compares the process of inventing a story to the mind's creation of dreams, a process that brings to awareness the repressed (p. 133).¹⁵ This view tallies with the view of Fate that Aust's reflections also express: 'Není pravdivější, že každý z nás si nese svůj osud v sobě a jenom odvíjí z jeho cívky zápis už dávno napsaný?' (pp. 59-60). Aust seems to view Fate both as something inner, a psychological pre-determination, and as a higher power that is beyond man: 'Jsme sotva zčásti pány svých skutků, ten druhý, větší jejich díl je nám vnukán a řízen mocí, která je mimo naši vůli a dosah' (p. 24). In places, he explains Fate as the creative force of life (for example, p. 104). The idea of the individual's interconnectedness with other people is continued in a statement that every life is just a repetition of an old pattern: 'Konec konců je každý z nás jen novou obdobou starého motivu člověk a jeho život a většina našich osudů se hraje v jakémsi matném a nevýrazném unisonu' (p. 59). Aust's narration of Haba in itself thematises the role of the author as Fate; the author as the hidden power who pulls the puppet strings (p. 81).

The ideas of Fate and life as a creative force are connected with a demand for truth. Fate has the power to bring out that which is already written within the character or the human being: 'Je-li v člověku něco rozhodnuto a hotovo tak, jako v té době bylo ve Vilémovi, život si už najde svůj způsob, jímž by to přivedl na světlo' (p. 187). That is what Aust's reflection describes as the

¹⁵ Against the background of this explanation, one could interpret Haba as Aust's repressed shadow (in a Jungian sense) which harbours not only the negative aspects of a personality, but possibly also creative potential. This would provide one possible psychological explanation for Aust's experience of merging with Haba as the narration proceeds.

inherent truth of the character story. This applies both to life and to fiction, the fiction written or acted. Aust applies the demand for truth as a moral category: he criticises Haba for having confused life and acting, for using art as a device for making life easier for himself, by which he means a lack of honesty. Similarly, in order to write truthfully, the writer must adhere to the same demand for honesty; he must be true to himself:

Je nějaký rozdíl mezi pravdou umění a pravdou lidskosti? Nesmí a nemůže být, protože umění, to je veliká zpovědnice, v níž se všichni znovu obrozujeme vírou ve smysl svého života, v řád nám všem společný, žízni po čistotě, vtělené v dokonalý tvar, v krásu, jež je sama řád a sama pravda. Proto, kamaráde, nemůže zrazovat pravdu ten, kdo ji chce stvořit v této nejvyšší podobě. (p. 180)

The irony of Aust's narration is that, at the same time as stressing the importance of truth and honesty, he has deceived Jarmila because he has told her that a short story he had written has been accepted by a publisher when it has not. However, he does rectify this situation, indeed uses it as self-encouragement to write more. In the above quotation Aust equates the truth of art with the truth of human-ness (what makes one a human being or connects one with humanity). In Haba and Aust's stories the realisation of this connection constitutes their journey, whose meaning is governed by the ideologeme of isolation *versus* community. Isolation is ascribed negative connotations in the narrative discourse whereas community represents the only positive alternative. In Aust's case the narration slightly mocks Aust's romantic attitude to life and fiction, an attitude which results in his attitude of arrogance. Any irony, though, seems to be cancelled out by the novel's rather idyllic ending where Jarmila, returning with Aust on their two-day honeymoon to Aust's (and Haba's) native town, finds that he has presented everything truthfully.¹⁶ In his review of the novel, A. M. Píša comments that he finds the 'happy ending' 'mechanical'. I agree with him. However, within the semantic evaluative parameters set out at the beginning of the novel in the frame-narrator's discourse it is hard to imagine

¹⁶ See A. M. Píša, 'Román o románu', *Národní práce*, 29 April 1945, p. 2.

a different ending, since the frame-narrator writes from a position of knowing. This does, nevertheless, contribute to the didactic slant of the novel.

As the alternative to the writer's isolation, the narrative posits a view of writing as a craftsmanship towards which Aust develops. This view of writing connects the writer with ordinary people (who are represented in the positive description of the working-class street where Aust lives). The novel presents the creative act as a social activity, since Aust develops many of his hypotheses about Haba in conversation with other people. Aust plays with the possibility of art being more truthful than life in the way in which he has the roles that Haba plays represent the truth about him. This is the case with *The Master Builder*; at another point *Peer Gynt* has a similar function: 'Život a skutečnost se zdály stále směšnější a bezvýznamnější vedle strhující a zdrcující pravdy hry' (p. 323). However, it is only when Haba reconnects with life that his acting becomes true art, as Aust has Anka, Haba's wife, state after she has seen him play Solness: 'Zase jednou se mu hra změnila v život, ale jinak, docela jinak než dřív' (p. 373). Aust himself finds his truth in writing by reflecting himself in Haba's story.

6.6 Conclusion

The semantic and narrative structure of *Rozhraní* works on a didactic imposition of the ideologeme of isolation *versus* community. This imposition happens through the employment of a double-layered narrator function which governs the production of meaning on each narrative level. The frame-narrator, right from the beginning, possesses the answer to the question that the novel poses: what is the meaning and function of art? In the narration this is emphasised through the judging distance that the frame-narrator creates to his previous self. Aust, the struggling writer, performs this judgment in relation to Haba, which strengthens the didactic aspect of the narration. The motif of the double structures the intertwining of the two characters' plots. These, each in its way, play out the assertion that for art to be true, the artist must be interconnected with the community. The double motif functions on all narrative levels through the structures of meaning attached to the two character aspects that it represents.

Thus it structures the shift in both stories from the pole of isolation towards the pole of community.¹⁷

At the time of its publication in 1944, during the German occupation, the social role of the writer and the social dimension of art would have been associated with the idea of the writer's role as the guardian or conscience of the nation. The writer's task became to promote Czechness. This idea is embedded within the nineteenth-century National Revival when the writer was seen as a leader and teacher of the nation. Such an interpretation would have been further supported by the topos of the National Theatre which occurs in some of the descriptions of Haba, most evocatively described when Haba sees it for the first time after his arrival in Prague:

Ozářena zespodu světly obloukových lamp nabývala divadelní budova proti ohvězděnému nebi větší mohutnosti, než jakou působí za dne. Vilém před ní stál a zápolil se vzrušením, jehož původ ani obsah si nedovedl v tu chvíli ujasnit. Bylo mu, jako by se potkal s nějakou živou bytostí, nabitou silou, jíž ho strhovala k sobě, jako magnet přitahuje pilinu a plamen vábí jepici. (p. 205)

In the fiction of the time, the National Theatre was seen as a symbol of Czechness, or symbolising the resistance of Czech culture. Likewise, a contemporary reader would have noticed a hidden reference to the Czech Revivalist composer Bedřich Smetana in the symphonic poem played at the concert which Aust attends with Jarmila (p. 273).¹⁸

After the Communist assumption of power in 1948, and the ensuing changes in the political and cultural climate, the critics' view of *Rozhraní*, not surprisingly, came under the influence of the Party's view of literature and the general process of the politicisation of fiction. In May 1948, in a review of the

¹⁷ Because of its views of literature and art *Rozhraní* has often been interpreted as the expression of Řezáč's personal creed. See, for example, [Píša, A. M.] p., 'Román o románu', *Národní práce*, 29.4.1945, p. 2; -vz-, 'Václav Řezáč: Rozhraní. Román o dvou dílech', *Argus*, 21, May 1945, 5, pp. 75-76; Radko Pytlík, 'Rozhraní Václava Řezáče', in Václav Řezáč: *Rozhraní, Díla*, vol. 4, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1986, p. 423. Such a biographical reading is only possible if one sees the narrator as the author.

¹⁸ Smetana's symphonic poems are based on motifs from Czech legends and history, particularly *Libuše* and *Má vlast*, and thus carries strong nationalist connotations. Smetana himself fought on the barricades of Prague in 1848. See John Clapham, 'Smetana: a century after', *The Musical Times*, vol. 125, no. 1694, April 1984, pp. 201+203-5.

second edition of the novel, Truhlář considers *Rozhraní* in the context of what has been published by ‘progressive authors’ after the ‘social revolution’. He likes the novel because it, in his view, shows the ‘psychological and physical countenance of today’s life’. However, he indicates that Řezáč ought to write ‘a more modern work’ next time, meaning more Socialist Realist.¹⁹ Whether it can be ascribed to him or not, the headline of his review, ‘The turning-point of our fiction’, implies the idea that Czech literature is facing a new type of writing for which *Rozhraní* is a precursor. Later critics have latched onto this critical stance in their interpretations.²⁰ One example of this is Filipčiková, whose article is a textbook example of the 1970s Party-line approach to literature. In this she argues that *Rozhraní* represents a turning-point in Řezáč’s writing. In the context of the Protectorate she interprets it as showing ‘the struggle against individualistic subjectivism in art’ and the struggle for the ‘Czech intelligentsia’s souls’.²¹ Filipčiková sees the novel as ‘a key to how Řezáč solves the problem of good and evil’.²² According to her, Haba is a traitor because ‘he has not arrived at the transition from the individual “I” to the collective “we”’. She interprets Haba’s journey as a choice between good and evil, where he chooses evil. For her, evil means Haba’s choice to marry the daughter of a millionaire through which he acquires ‘not only real wealth, but at the same time widespread contact with business and social circles’.²³ He is shown to be ‘amoral’. Aust, in contrast, embodies the ideal of the future writer because he has found ‘the right path to the people’.²⁴ Filipčiková argues that by

¹⁹ See Břetislav Truhlář, ‘Rozhraní naší prózy’, *Směr*, 1, 17, 27.5.1948, p. 14.

²⁰ See, for example, Radko Pytlík, ‘Rozhraní Václava Řezáče’, in Václav Řezáč: *Rozhraní, Díla*, vol. 4, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1986, pp. 420-27. Pytlík argues that *Rozhraní* ‘signals a significant turn’ away from ‘the vicious circle of the psychological method’. *Ibid.*, p. 427. Along similar lines Jaromíra Nejedlá designates *Rozhraní* as representing the second phase of Řezáč’s writing before the 1950s novels. She praises the truthfulness in Řezáč’s ‘odvratu od bytostí rozpolcených, nihilistických a usurpatorských k záblesku světla v temnotách, k hledání světlých rysů v lidském charakteru’. See Jaromíra Nejedlá, ‘Mistr psychologické prózy. K nedožitým osmdesátinám národního umělce VÁCLAVA ŘEZÁČE’, *Tvorba*, 6.5.1981, 18, p. 13.

²¹ R. Filipčiková, ‘Poslání umění jako téma umělecké literatury’, *Česká literatura*, 24, 1976, 4, p. 306.

²² In this question, Filipčiková is uncompromising: ‘Dobro a zlo. Třetí cesta v mravním životě člověka neexistuje.’ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

Rozhraní Řezáč is adhering to the concept of 'lidovost', which was one of the criteria that the Party applied to literature. She finds evidence of this in Řezáč's choice of the characters who help Aust become aware of literature's connection with the people.²⁵ Filipčiková's argument is problematic because to consolidate her argument she refers to an article by Řezáč himself, published in June 1945. Here he reflects on the, according to him, changed role of the writer after the end of the war. He argues that the writer's task is both to serve the people and to learn from them.²⁶ However, *Rozhraní*, was written over a year earlier and, although its narrative foregrounds the writer's connection with other people, it describes this connection in terms of 'lidskost', meaning that which is common to all human beings. The idea of the people or the common people is not expressed in any political way, although Filipčiková would probably argue that this fact is due to the censorship of the Protectorate. Filipčiková, perhaps unduly influenced by the time in which she herself was writing, subscribes to the view that the war necessarily meant that the writers had to express themselves in coded language: 'Doba, v níž vznikl román, si žádala "zhuštěný" výraz, časté používání slov – znaků, které dovolují za vnější stránkou ukrýt druhý, hlubší a pravý smysl.'²⁷ This is a very convenient view when one, as she does, claims to know the 'true meaning'. Particularly, in the context of the idealisation of work, which Aust's discourse represents, it would also be possible to interpret Řezáč's argument for literature and art's connection with the people as 'lidový' (of the people) in a Masarykian sense.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 308. She sees the pub scene, in which Aust talks to the locals about his novel, as crucial in this respect. In 1945 another critic, Bohumil Novák, expressed a less favourable view of the same scene. He criticises Řezáč's writing for its 'žánrovitost, jednoduchost a strojená lidovost' and comments ironically: 'Pochybujeme, že by se na světě našel výčep, kde by se sešla společnost tak trpělivá, tak přímočaře bodrá, jadrná i bezelstně srdečná, jako je společnost Řezáčova!' See Bohumil Novák, 'Václav Řezáč: „Rozhraní“'. Román. Nákladem Fr. Borového, Praha 1945', *Kritický měsíčník*, 6, 1945, 1, p. 30. I tend to agree with Novák in that this scene is close to caricature. However, it does support the didactic slant of the novel as I have shown above.

²⁶ Václav Řezáč, 'Umělci hledají cestu k lidu', *Rudé právo*, 8 June 1945, p. 3. Reference quoted after Václav Řezáč, *O pravdě umění a pravdě života*, ed. Jiří Opelík, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1960, pp. 65-66+120.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 309.

Chapter 7.

Conclusion

Nástup (1951) and *Bitva* (1954) represent Řezáč's attempt at writing according to the criteria of Soviet Socialist Realism. It has not been the purpose of this thesis to discuss to what degree Řezáč's novels conform to Socialist Realist aesthetics.¹ First, I wish, very briefly, to consider them in the light of my previous analyses of the earlier novels, paying particular attention to the evaluative function of the narrative discourse, as well as plot development. Then I shall proceed to a discussion of the ideologemes in the context of all Řezáč's novels.

7.1 *Nástup* and *Bitva* from the perspective of the analyses of earlier novels by Řezáč

Nástup and *Bitva* inscribe themselves among a group of novels written between 1945 and 1952 that have as their theme the historical events in the Sudetenland almost immediately after the Second World War.² The story of *Nástup* focuses on the establishment of a local Communist Party organisation and its contribution to redeveloping the area on Socialist principles. The narrative

¹ Régine Robin has argued that, despite the monologic tendency of so-called Socialist Realist novels to express one single viewpoint, thus conforming to the reader's stereotypical expectation of a novel labelled as such, it is still important to read these simply as novels; that is to see what they actually consist in at the level of story and narration. She argues that Socialist Realist novels display differing degrees of conforming. See Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. Catherine Porter, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1992. For other treatments of Socialist Realism, see, for example, Katarina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd edition, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000, or C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973.

² These are, for example, Anna Sedlmayerová's *Dům na zeleném svahu* (1947) and *Překročeny práh* (1949), and Bohumil Říha's *Země dokořán* (1950).

presents the expulsion of the Germans as a necessary precondition for achieving a successful organisation of the new society.³ The novel finishes at the end of 1945 with the departure of the Red Army. The political, cultural and personal conflicts arising between the Germans and the new settlers, as well as the conflicts within the two groups are the novel's central themes. These conflicts are played out in a large number of scenes spread over thirty-eight chapters. Likewise the narrative involves a large number of characters who represent the people already living in the border area, as well as the newcomers. The central character of the novel is the loyal Communist leader Jiří Bagár. He represents the Communist ideal against which the other characters are measured. *Bitva* constitutes a loose continuation of *Nástup*. The novel's events similarly follow a large number of characters, some of them from *Nástup*, but also some new ones. Bagár is still the central Communist character. The organisation of events in *Bitva* resembles that of an adventure novel, which involves love intrigues, fraud and murders. The two main plot-lines are constructed around a struggle over a cattle-breeding co-operative and a similar struggle over the nationalisation of a factory.⁴ The narrative presents these conflicts as the struggle between the Communists and the, alleged, reactionaries who attempt to sabotage the running of the cattle-breeding co-operative by siphoning off the good cattle or to sabotage the running of the textile factory by not providing the materials needed for the production – again the capitalist administrator of the factory profits from secretly selling off the fabrics. Another element of the struggle over the factory is the local capitalists' attempt to stop the nationalisation process by having the factory returned to the nephew of the previous owner. The novel ends just after Gottwald's speech on 25 February 1948 when he announced the resignation of the government and that president Beneš had accepted his suggestions for who must constitute the new one.

³ The *topoi* of Czechisation of the Sudetenland, the expulsion of the Germans, the establishment of a local Communist Party organisation and its role in the political reorganisation of society are common *topoi* in the Socialist Realist fiction of the time.

⁴ Hodrová has analysed the structural features and questions of genre in the Czech 'construction' novel. See 'Václav Řezáč. Nástup', in *Česká literatura 1945-1970. Interpretace vybraných děl*, Prague: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1992, pp. 70-79.

Under the constraints of the new Communist-Party-led order, Řezáč's attempt to portray the historical, political and social processes of the border area within the framework of one narrative demands a different approach to the presentation of characters from that employed in the psychological analytical novels. In *Nástup* and *Bitva* the characters tend to lose their psychological individuality. They acquire the function of actants who carry the ideas of the novel according to their place in the socio-political order. This is most evident in the case of Bagár whose psychological development is completely identified with his struggle to live up to the ideal of the perfect Communist and to master his political function. Many of the presentations of his thoughts, in either narrated monologue or interior monologue, take the form of Bagár's self-analysis with respect to the ideal according to which he lives.⁵ The characters' past provides them with ideological credibility within the evaluative framework of the narrative, or, in contrast, serves to discredit them. For example, Bagár has the ideal past for a Communist: he fought in the Spanish Civil War, worked for the Czech Resistance during the war and spent time in a concentration camp. The political reasoning contained within these monologues creates a peculiar stultified impression of Bagár as a human being.⁶ Although the narrative contains such presentation of characters' thoughts, the focus of the narration tends to be on exterior attributes and gestures which contribute to the impression of the characters as carriers of ideas, or types. Bagár and other Communist Party officials are typically provided with the epithet of youth. Likewise, the presentation, typically in dialogues, stresses the necessity of work in the Communists' understanding of their function in the socio-political process.⁷ Generally, large parts of the presentation occur in dialogues, either at larger

⁵ In a 1955 article Mukařovský discusses how Řezáč used the technique of the interior monologue in *Bitva*. See Jan Mukařovský, 'K novému románu Václava Řezáče', *Literární noviny*, 6, 1955, p. 6-7.

⁶ Although he generally considers *Nástup* 'the greatest post-war novel', the Party-line critic Petrmichl has also commented on this, noting that Bagár appears 'little human' ('málo lidský'). See Jan Petrmichl, *Patnáct let české literatury 1945-1960*, 3rd amended edn, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1962.

⁷ In his article on Fučík's *Reportáž psaná na oprátce*, Macura has demonstrated how Fučík's text already 'constructs the emblematic character of post-February culture' for which 'work' and 'youth' (among other things) are crucial in indicating the goal of the glorious future. See Vladimír Macura, 'Motáky jako literární dílo', in Julius Fučík, *Reportáž psaná na oprátce (První úplné, kritické a komentované vydání)*, Prague: Torst, 1995, p. 295.

meetings or in smaller groups. Naturally, the collective element of the novels depends on extended employment of dialogues. The distribution of characters falls predominantly into two groups: those who are with us, and those who are against us; 'us' being the Communists. However, it is possible for the characters to move between the two positions, but only in an affirmative direction; that is, becoming one of 'us'. In both *Nástup* and *Bitva* the polarisation involves the capitalists *versus* the Communists, the capitalists being portrayed as reactionaries who wish to stop the development toward Soviet-style socialism. One example is the high court judge, Zima, in *Bitva*. In his capacity of judge, Zima assists the capitalists in the process of having their property returned to them after the war. Zima has friends in high places, namely the Minister of Justice, who is also the brother-in-law of Rosmus, another capitalist character. Zima is discredited in the narration by the mentioning of his having collaborated with the Protectorate government during the war. Because he is allowed to carry on his functions, the narrative thus alleges that the present legal system is corrupt. This view is further supported by the narrative's critical stance toward the Minister of Justice, who promotes a judge who has apparently been involved in the sabotage related to the cattle-breeding co-operative. This criticism of the Minister of Justice, at the time Prokop Drtina, is an example of how authentic real-life characters are drawn into the narrative to support its didactic message. This is a new feature in relation to Řezáč's earlier novels. Similarly, the description of Gottwald's speech is used to reinforce the message of how popular the Communist party was among the population.

The function of the narrator's discourse, in both *Nástup* and *Bitva*, is to summarise the political agenda of the time from the Communists' perspective, and to create the links between the novels' dramatic plot-elements. In this the narrator's discourse acquires a decisive evaluative function in that it affirms the judgements made by the Communist characters.

The narrative evaluation of events and characters is structured by three predominant ideologemes: the ideologeme of the old *versus* the new, the ideologeme of egoism *versus* solidarity and the ideologeme of the individual

versus the collective.⁸ In each of the last two oppositions, the second is judged as the 'right' position which is played out through the distribution of characters. By this I mean that the narrative in all its elements confirms this position; that is in dialogues, characters' thoughts, narrator's discourse, plot-solutions: the collective provides the condition for the new, idealised future, whose arrival is presented as part of a necessary dialectical development. This is what Susan Suleiman, following Barthes, has named 'semantic redundancy'; the narrative discourse creates a surplus of meaning, a kind of overdetermination, which ensures that the narrative is read in the way that it wishes to be read. This implies a strong didactic element.⁹ For example, the narrative consistently emphasises the egoism, and greed, of the capitalist characters as opposed to the Communists' sense of solidarity. In this dichotomy both *Nástup* and *Bitva* share an ideologeme with *Slepá ulička*'s portrayal of the egoistic, power-lusting Michal Gromus. This is directly foregrounded in the aforementioned judge Zima's identification of 'strong individuals' with the bourgeoisie.¹⁰

Although Řezáč's pre-1945 novels cannot be labelled didactic in the same way, my analyses have demonstrated that they share certain didactic features with *Nástup* and *Bitva*. This is most apparent in the fact that all the novels display a conscious use of plot which affects and, to some extent, constitutes the evaluation of the narrated events and characters.¹¹ In my analyses of *Slepá ulička* and *Rozhraní*, I have suggested that some of the characters' plots resemble that of a learning-process story. This is so in terms of Růžena's plot – she learns to value the solidarity of her working class background. To some

⁸ These are typical ideologemes manifested in the Socialist Realist novels of the time, for example, Anna Sedlmayerová's *Překročený práh* (1949) or Bohumil Říha's *Země dokořán* (1950).

⁹ See Susan R. Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel As a Literary Genre*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

¹⁰ His full comment goes: 'Mám na mysli nás všechny, které bolševici označují slovem buržoasie. Onu skvělou společenskou třídou, která vznikla tím, že silným jedincům bylo dovoleno, aby v neomezené míře uplatňovali své schopnosti'. Cf. Václav Řezáč, *Bitva*, Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury a umění, 1954, p. 174.

¹¹ Although critics have noticed this, they have not to my knowledge, analysed what implications this may have for the interpretation of the novels. For example, Dokoupil describes this feature of Řezáč's writing as 'konstrukční záměrnost'. See Blahoslav Dokoupil, 'Václav Řezáč', in *Slovník českých spisovatelů od roku 1945 (Díl 2, M-Ž)*, Pavel Janoušek et al., Prague: Brána, 1998, p. 332.

degree this applies to Jindra's case as well; he learns that true solidarity is to be found among the workers and not in his intellectual, non-compromising and fundamentally egoistic approach to the building of Socialism. Likewise, Aust and Haba progress through a process of learning, expanding their awareness of the function of art in their life and the wider community. All these characters have in common that they move from a position of isolation towards an increased sense of their connection with other people and society as a whole. In a less definitive way, this is also true for Petr in *Větrná setba*; his future socialisation is at least present as a potentiality, suggested by his relationship with the entirely socialised Kama. Similarly, some of the characters in *Nástup* and *Bitva* undergo a process of education in the Socialist view on life. One example is the postmaster Brendl, a typical Masarykian intellectual, who experiences a transformation in political conviction that resembles a religious conversion.

Other didactic elements in the development of plot, evident already in the pre-1950s novels, involve the use of communal scenes in the novels that perform a didactic function. An example of this is the pub scene in *Rozhraní*, which I discussed in that chapter. Some of the novels' situations resemble epiphanies in which the character gains a sudden awareness. These may similarly have a didactic function in terms of the resolution of the plot. Generally, Řezáč's novels deploy a narrator function that performs the overall evaluation within the semantic framework of the given narrative; these evaluations are sometimes of a didactic nature.¹²

Řezáč's pre-1950s novels display a fascination with the pathological or, at least, darker psychological aspects of character that emanate from the earlier narratives' treatments of power, inferiority, envy and egoism.¹³ The narratives tend to explain these aspects, at least partly, as founded in isolation, whether that be of a social or psychological nature; the sense of inferiority that is typical of

¹² This is particularly the case with Řezáč's novels for children. The ideologemes of good *versus* evil and of individual *versus* collective are central to these novels as well.

¹³ He shares this fascination with other writers of the time, for example, Egon Hostovský's 1930s novels, Jaroslav Havlíček, particularly in *Neviditelný* (The Invisible, 1937), Miroslav Hanuš's *Méněcennost* (Inferiority, 1942) and Emil Vachek's *Nepřítel v těle* (The Enemy in the Body, 1936).

Řezáč's male characters makes them isolated prisoners of their own minds. In contrast, the main female characters represent ideas that the narrative imbues with positive connotations. Řezáč's female characters are less psychologically complex because they are often idealised. They appear as the Fin-de-siècle *Salut-par-la-femme* motif in all Řezáč's pre-1950s novels, what I have called the female saviour-type. Unlike the earlier novels, the polarised distribution of characters in *Nástup* and *Bitva* mainly resists complexity. The 'positive' characters only tend to question themselves in matters of allegiance to the Party, whereas the characters who are evaluated negatively only attract psychological characterisation with the purpose of presenting their badness.¹⁴

7.2 The ideologemes

My analyses have demonstrated that the ideologemes that run through the novels interact in different ways, both within the novels and between them. For example, the ideologeme of power *versus* inferiority combines with the ideologeme of isolation *versus* community/collectivism. The characters who are caught within the ideologeme of power *versus* inferiority tend to find themselves isolated from the collective. In *Nástup* and *Bitva* the narrative evaluation moves towards idealisation. Collectivism as Soviet-style socialism displays an idealism of an almost religious nature. This idealisation was present already in *Větrná setba* through Kama: she represents ideal love, not only in the individual sense, but as *caritas*, working for the general good. Similarly, Markétka in *Černé světlo* is idealised by the narrator; he would like her to save him from himself. However, he, as the knowing narrator of past events of his life, already knows that this will not happen.

The ideologeme of good *versus* evil informs Řezáč's novels in such a way that it creates an impression of a Manichaean fictional universe, even when the good and evil are represented in the form of an evaluation through other ideologemes. For example, what is judged as 'evil' in *Rozhraní* is isolation – one of the oppositions in the ideologeme isolation *versus* community.

¹⁴ An exception is the daughter of judge Zima, Alena, in *Bitva*. She is allowed, up to a certain point, to question her place in the hierarchy of characters. However, she is killed off towards the end of the novel.

Subsequently, in *Nástup* and *Bitva*, the notion of isolation is transmuted into 'isolation from the political collective; that is, the Party'. The characters who do not identify with the Party collective attach to themselves a negative evaluation in the narrative presentation of events and characters.

As the above comparison of ideologemes suggests, Řezáč's fictional universe has been informed by recurrent ideological structures already from the beginning. These have been played out and dramatised in various forms, whether that be third- or first-person narratives, and in different themes. One cannot, with this in mind, talk of a truly sharp discontinuity among Řezáč's novels. However, Řezáč's politics of narration changes. In the 1950s novels the narrative evaluative function is put in the service of Soviet-style socialist ideas. Literature acquires a legitimising function in the interpretation of historical events; not only of past events, but also of contemporary.¹⁵ This enhances the didactic character of the novels.

The ideologemes that structure the novels tend to be rooted in nineteenth-century ideas. Řezáč's novels play with ideas of Decadence, as in *Černé světlo*, or with the Nietzschean superman or Napoleon-types. These feature strongly in the characterisation of Michal Gromus's desire for power in *Slepá ulička*, or in Karel's megalomania in *Černé světlo*. The same applies to Řezáč's Romantic idealisation of art and the passionate artist, for example, the pianist Klenka in *Černé světlo*, as well as the use of the double motif, which carries strong Romantic connotations. The idea of solidarity, part of the recurrent ideologue of egoism *versus* solidarity, can also be traced back to nineteenth-century socialism. In the time span of Řezáč's writing, these ideas became related to the shifts in the political and historical situation. From the mid-1930s, with the anti-Czech propaganda coming out of Germany, evil particularly referred to the German threat. Later, from 1945 onwards, evil became the bourgeois threat in the political discourse of the time.

¹⁵ Thus *Nástup* was described as 'historický román o současnosti'. See Jiří Opelík, 'Historický román o současnosti', *Host do domu*, February, 1962, pp. 74-79. See also Radko Pytlík, 'Historismus v Řezáčově Nástupu. K otázce poválečného literárního vývoje' [1972], in Pytlík, *Sedmkrát o próze*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1978, pp. 152-68.

It is in a way meaningless to talk about continuity *versus* discontinuity. Modes of narration and ideologies appear and reverberate in different aspects of the works depending on Řezáč's choice of theme. One could, arguably, link the ideologemes to the function of the implied author, not as a person, but as a purely textual function, a function which expresses the evaluative process of the narration.¹⁶ There is no reason to deny that Řezáč's development to Socialist Realism was immanent in his earlier novels. Nonetheless the censoriousness of his Socialist Realist works in no way diminishes the value of his earlier novels.

¹⁶ See Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, *The Implied Author. Concept and Controversy*, Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2006, for a discussion of the different definitions of the implied author function.

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