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Ideology and Narration.
The Works of Václav Řezáč

by

Betina Andersen

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

2007
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), *Svědek* (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, *Tváři 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 pravde umění a pravde 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

Union of Czechoslovak Writers). 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’. 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. 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.

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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.

Přibáňová 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. Přibáňová’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: ‘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’. 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. 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. Other critics criticise Nástup and Bitva for not

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7 Ibid., p. 309.
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 Burianek, ‘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. 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. 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. 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].


13 August Skypala, ‘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

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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 Václavek (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, Václavek’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’ 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.

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.’ As regards the literary text (in this case the novels) this view of ideology implies that any narration generates ideological significations. 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-distanciation 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. See Destutt de Tracy.

16 By Destutt de Tracy.


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


\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 80.

Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1930). These theorists introduced the concept in a very broad understanding as an ‘ideological product’ and, as van Schendel points out, one has to deduce from their works what exactly they could have meant by it. After Bakhtin and Medvedev the concept did not reappear until Kristeva used it, drawing on the works of the Bakhtin Circle, 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.

The American critic, Fredric Jameson, deploys the concept of the ideologeme in his work *The Political Unconscious*. 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’. 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’. 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

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30 Ibid., p. 60.
31 Ibid., p. 64.
'the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes.' 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.

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. 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. In the rewriting 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

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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.
center of political, social and historical life'.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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; [...].\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 81.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 84.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 84.
transformation between the different functions perform in the narration. 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. 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. The purpose of van Schendel’s critical account and development of the concept is to open up its semiotic potential.

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 intertext 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’ in which he deducts that the ideologeme is ‘a vector for the inscription of the intertext into the text’ which conforms to the notion of the ‘intertextual function’ as introduced by Kristeva:

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 entière 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 selection opérée sur lui, seule façon de delimitier une réalité transhistorique autrement intangible, inconnaisssable.’ Ibid., pp. 111-12.
45 Ibid., p. 112.
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'). 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.' 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'. 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’. 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.

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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. 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. 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 context 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. This thesis asserts that if the ideologeme is considered intrinsic to the text. It belongs to the level of secondary signification and, thus, it relies on interpretation. 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. 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.

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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 Rezac’s novels. Rezac’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 Rezac’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 (‘signifiers of connotation’) 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 sememe 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,


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), 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’). 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. In the theory of narration the term 'enunciating' refers to the generating instance of the narrative discourse which has the parallel term 'narrating'. 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'. 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).

In my approach I shall see the analysis of the narrative discourse as a mode of gaining access to the workings of ideology in the novel. 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), as well as the relations between the different narrating situations. My view of the narrative discourse.

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60 Ibid., p. 213.
61 Ibid., p. 214.
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*, 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.

There are two aspects of narration that determine how a text works on ideology: focalisation (also ‘point of view’ or ‘perspective’) and plot. 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. 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.

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63 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.
64 See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 185-89.
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. 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. In this the ultimate determining factor is the ending.

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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

Chapter 2

Větrná setba (1935)

With its sexual-awakening theme Václav Řezáč’s first novel Větrná setba (Sowing by the Wind, 1934) can be categorised as a descendant of novels such as Stříbrný vitr (The Silvern 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

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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. For example, Arne Novak comments that although these boys did not go to the front ‘prožili na křehkém a citlivém těle v pubertě a osudněji na mravním, tepře se ustavujícím svědomí všecky otřesy rozvrácené společnosti ve vyhladovělém a demoralisovaném zápolí’. 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 jednotici idey, víme, proč jsme takoví’. 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. 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

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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 straviteňnou pro toho, kdo od románové 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'. 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

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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'. 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'. 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 Bildungroman, these are heroes who do not want to grow up. 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'.

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. According to her, 'The ambiguities

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12 Ibid., pp. 229-30.
13 Ibid., p. 236.
14 Ibid., pp. 230-32.
15 Ibid., p. 244.
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.  

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.  

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

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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). 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, vyrýly nesčetné dolíky do půdy náměstíčka. Nemizejí odtud po celý rok: kolik jich tam vyhloubil on sám!

Dnes tam výskají chlapci, kteří se batolili u sukní maminěk tenkrát, když náměstíčko patřilo jemu a jeho kamarádům. Nevrátí se tam nikdy, aby si hrál. Už nikdy nebude Mompráckemským Tygrem ani Vinetouem, už nikdy se nebude skryvat 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.

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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. 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 brášnu jako lup a hledal v sobě zbožnost svých dětských let, sílu modliteb opakovanych s takovou důvěrou, víru, která se vytratila z jeho srdece v nepřipamatovatelných chvílích, nevěděl jak. Snad proto, že se tolikrát nesplnilo, oč prosil, snad proto, že druží 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:

Strážníkova 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 zavřílo chlapcovou duší. Nemohou odejít, nemohou je tu nechat s ním samotné. Zdalo 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. 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

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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 hrane pateticky a špatně’ (p. 201). The narrator typically uses psycho-analogies\(^\text{22}\) to encompass a given mood or state of mind; for example, ‘V květnu vzpiral 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’.\(^\text{23}\) 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.\(^\text{24}\) 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’.

\(^\text{22}\) 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.

\(^\text{23}\) See Mravcová, ‘Personalizace vyprávění’, p. 58.

\(^\text{24}\) 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. At the beginning of the novel this plot is conceptualised as the rivalry between Petr and his friend Vit. However, both Kama and Vit leave Prague (Kama to stay with her family in the country – Vit 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. 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 dálo 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 ji zachovat věrnost. Sestavoval si dlouhé řeči, kterými ji přesvědčoval a získával pro sebe. (p. 20)

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.

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’.

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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 chvíli 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 přečce dostanou do rukou té, již 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. Rozřídil pečlivě dopisy, jež jí kdysi
psával, ale neodesílal. Vybral z nich všechny, kde se zpovidal ze svého ponížení a křivolakého bloudění své touhy, a ostatní ji přinesl. Čtla je a plakala' (pp. 207-08). 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 vůbec působit na srdce dívky, zjevně kolisající, než básníci? Ústa básníků ať mluví za něho, který se bál vyslovit jedinou sentimentalní větu. Ať zpívají Toman, Baudelaire, ať váží 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:


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

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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 provzdy (Vit byl jen zkušenost, již se učíme) a byla přesvědčena, že to dokáže. Ano, za jejimi 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:


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 povídačkami! Raději žít lépe než hůř. Co je mu po tom, jakým způsobem hodlalá 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 Rozhrami. 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: ‘Così mocnějšího 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 žadosti. Setrvával 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 citil příliv jistoty, sily 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, bilou plet’ zružovělou jeho polibky, záhyby zjemněné modrými stíně, klid živého masa, jež se vlnilo dechem a slabě vonělo’ (p. 145). 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: ‘Bit, ó, moci tak bit 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: 'Citil se očišťen před Kamou touto němou zpovědí, a přece ji něček 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.  

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 speluněku, 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. Kama personifies the idea of love as saviour. 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 nedostížitelným přeludem a zde měl skončit. [...] Opojení, v němž došel až sem, vyprchalo, a cěvu za cěvou začala se v něm rozlévat studena hrůza. Byl přesvědčen, že miřil k cíli vlastního odhodlání. Nyní ho napadlo, že byl veden

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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 Rezáč's novels: Lída in Svědek, Jarmila in Rozhrani, 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 savior, 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 špinou, 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. 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, míjely 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)). 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

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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, miláku, že ano”’. The thought that follows those words expresses a violent reaction to his own feeling of inferiority in the situation: ‘Bit, ó, moci tak bit 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 Torless. 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 Kaspar 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 bourgeoise, Marta, introduces a positive change in his experience of his own sexuality:

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 všecky 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. Marta also justifies to him his surrender of his earlier romantic ideal of love. 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: 'Všehno, co bylo dobré a krásné, je pryč, na světě zůstali jen Bertíci a Marty, a válka trvá, jako by nechtěla nikdy skončit' (p. 142).

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 lásku, 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. Kamery domácích nesváří, stěrk války o drt' bidy, důsivý jí předčasné 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 uveřit’ (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 přišlo odmitála se s ním sejít, neboť, jak říkala, chtěla mít trochu času i sama pro sebe. Tehdy jím zúřivost zrovna zmitala. Všechno jeho úsilí bylo marné, ztracel jen zbytečně čas. A sníl o tom, jak by se jí pomstil, jak by ji ponižil a dokázal si, že o ní neďá. [...] Navýkl u Marty tělesné lásky; jeho vyněšší oddělání trvalo příliš dlouho a všechny hezké ženy, jež potkal, se mu začínaly zdává svůdnější a snadněji dosažitelné než Kama. Byl hlupák, že u ní tak tvrdší neztrávával' (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). Vit proclaims, telling Petr that Kama is getting married: ‘Takove holky jako ona budou pomalu prezitkem. Uvidis, jak tahle válka obrati všechno na ruby’ (pp. 36-37). Elsewhere the narrator describes a woman in the street who smiles enticingly at Petr:


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. 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 Vítu. Tak ve všem byl život štědřejší k Vitovi’ (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 láse, tak i v tomto přátelství byl navrchu ten, pro něhož tolik neznamenalo. 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 vykázena jeho dědem a vylážděna jeho otcem. Jednoho dne převezme rodinný závod a bude jej vést v pokorné posloupnosti. Tak Petrova lásku k němu se rozhůřívala z plamínu závisti 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] neustále chvéni, zmatené tužby, byl jí rván a nesen jako vichřicí; Vít ji vnímal klidněji, citě, 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 pěstí’ (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):


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, nezapominejme, 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 ctil vinen matčiným údelem 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 matčiných 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:


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 putyákách, oslovující ho „pane inženýře“, shledá v tomto přízemním kutlochu, že je pouhým domovníkem, jehož manželka se vrací z posluhy shrbená unavou, rozzuří se znovu. Čeho mohl dosahnut 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, at’ 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 pani 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 vzkřikle’ (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: ‘Tváře 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 m 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
Petr’s disdain of Frida 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 Frida following Petr with Bertík and Žíčka only further emphasises this: ‘Frida šla za nimi stále, smutná a těžká jako tažný kůň’ (p. 63). The narrator’s final summary of Frida: ‘Stála tam nehybně ve svých pestrých šatech vesničanky, hleděla za odjíždějícími parníčkem, cizí a hranátá, 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 Frida 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 příborku, podobném zavřeného oltáři poutních kostelíků, ztuhlo v hlubokých závitech rezby víření prachu. Nad misou s umělým ovocem se vznášel falešný tón touhy po blahobytu a vylhaného rodinného štěstí. Pokoj byl jako konserva zapomenutých ctností, těžko strativitelné 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 ospravedlnuje 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 toho posluchače, toužícího skryté, aby nikde nebylo ani vlásky uhony, 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 připominalo 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 všecky mládence ve třídě’ (p. 126), and ‘Oblekl 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 semes 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 pani 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 bičíků moci, která je dohnala až sem a požene je dále. Snad za chvili s ní splynou, budou ovládáni a užívání k ovládání’ (p. 158). A moment later, after Petr has avoided the front, he thinks: ‘Bylo výhodné být slaboch, když silákům hrozila zkáza’ (p. 159). 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, Vit and Kama enter one of the little rooms in the café they encounter a soldier with his girlfriend: ‘Mlady voják s prýmky jednoročního dobrovolníka je uvítal zamračením a děvče otočilo rychle hlavu k oknu, aby ukrylo slzy’ (p. 8). Vit’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: ‘Skolní rok skončil unavou a bez radosti 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 vyzábly, 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, stičeného nervovým otřesem. 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 nici vichřice zotváraným domem. Když se zastavil, třásl se jako chabé dveře, jimž lomuje šílenec, a kroutil hlavou v úděsném záporu. Petr se odvrátil a obešel ho půlkruhem. Ale zjev trval na síticích očí a sestupoval do něho; i v něm jako by se něco zmítalo v neovladnutých skocích. (p. 71)

A little earlier in the text Petr’s state of mind (after delivering his dismissive note to Frida) was described in physical terms: ‘Trapný pocit stvál jeho myšlenky v kole bezradnosti; napinal se v něm a bolel tak, že toužil po nějaké můce tělesné, zatínal zuby do rtu 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 hloupou postmi, jako je cit. Dnes je tedy zde a za několik dní bude opět
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. 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 pozbyvat ceny, měl-li člověk ztratit svůj sotva začatý život. Ne Kamou a láskou, nýbrž Vítěm, otcem a všemi, kdo byli vydání stejnému nebezpečí, měly se obírat jeho myšlenky’ (p. 26). The narrator shows how Petr develops an awareness of the war, although his initial comment

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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 řítil 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 nápěvky 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 knižkám’ (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: ‘Vzpirali se vidět černě. Ať jakkoli hrozna, válka měla pro ně i své světlé stránky. Vycitili 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, previta. 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 srdeci’ (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 lidi udelají. 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. Přikrčí 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 bidy’ (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 psy 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: ‘Udelají-li tohle z Vita, 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 sítí’ (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: ‘Srovnávaje se s ním, nemá už Petr ani té opory, již míval v dobách, kdy chodil s Vitem. Jeho ničemnost je snad větší než Bertíkova, boji se však otevřeně k ní doznat, udělat si z ní životní zákon a postavit se na pevné nohy pohrdám’ (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 Vit, 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. The contrast between the two friends makes Petr’s cynicism seem false.

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, vydávánoživoučišností, jako by nebylo války a na žádného z nich nedolehla její strast’ (p. 115), with descriptions that emphasise the dehumanisation of people whose life has been reduced to mere subsistence, to a mass existence (or death):

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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 zabijet, co má v sobě nejlepšího. Chtěl si přisahat, že už nikdy. Ale zasmál se. Už se nebude přelíhávat. 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 Vit’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, nebudete’ (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 skřipěla pila závisti. Záviděl všem, ale nenacházel účasti na nicem, 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 černou houfec lidí a táhlou vzdech, bzučení občasného neklidu a šoupání nohou je připodobňovaly spícímu stádu’ (p. 76).
Lidé zbavení domovů žili ve stádech. Daleko v zákopech a doma v dlouhých řádách před vyjedenými krámy. Chléb a říše se rozpadaly. Tupá lhostejnost a zoufalé naděje se střídaly v mysli. Chléb plný dřeva a říše plná nepravosti splývaly vjedno v ubitém vědomí. Vyčerpaná těla a země neodpočatá a mrazy neuzavřená zroduly chorobu. V dlouhých frontách lidé ji dýchali jeden na druhého. Vraceli se domů s prázdnými brašnami, s ochablou mysli, s očima, v nichž planuly záhrobni ohně horeček. Umírali houfně, snad proto, že duše byly tak měkké, 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 Vit, 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 stary 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 rozehrival. Zapomněl, že chtěl mluvit po tichu, na vyhublých líčích mu vyškocila červen. 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 neurčité, 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. 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 hoří 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 chvili melancholie mrtvého pod nimi. Ano, sedět sám nad svou vlastní mrzvou 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: ‘Vášnívá víra byla v srdci Kamině a Petr býval trochu skeptický. Věřil jako ona v blízíci se osvobození, ale ptal se, co přinesе. Její vlastenectví mu připadalo trochu planě a zbytečně nadšeně. Chudáci zůstanou asi chudáky, říkal, a jakápak je to svoboda’ (p. 208). 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.

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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 myšliv ve své snaze po náhle 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. Piša criticises Řezáč for concentrating too much on Petr's erotic development and using the war as a mere backdrop. Piša 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.\(^\text{49}\) 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

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’. 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.

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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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{52} Novák interprets Kama as the hope of the novel, ‘statečná a čistá žena uprostřed porušených slabošských mužů’.\textsuperscript{53} Sezima, likewise, ascribes a moral function to the Kama character as the saviour of Petr:

\textsuperscript{51} This is in accordance with the narrator’s judgmental attitude to paní Hážová.
\textsuperscript{52} F. Němec, ‘Román o mládí za válečnými frontami’, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{53} Arne Novák, ‘Nová prosa’, p. 5.
‘[…] vráti mravní odpovědnost a zjasní jeho pohled na svět’. 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.

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Václav Řezáč’s second novel *Slepá ulička* (1939) has been widely perceived as a ‘social’ novel, although at the time of its publication it was also described as a ‘novel of the family,’ a ‘psychological’ novel, a ‘generation novel’ or a ‘novel of marriage.’ 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 Řezáč employs in the novel and

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2 See, for example, František 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 ‘socialni roman’ together with Jaroslav Havlíček’s *Ta tretí* (1939) and Karel Nový’s *Tretí větev* (1939). In other issues of the same journal novels reviewed under this headline are, for example, Benjamin Klička’s trilogy *Generace*, Václav Prokůpek’s *Ztracená země* (1938) and František Erik Šaman’s *Můj kamarád pánům* (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 Václavek 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 Řezáč: 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.

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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. On the one hand, there are the conflicts within the
Gromus family: between old Gromus and the 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

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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 semes ‘old’ and ‘young’. Michal embodies all the epithets of youthful energy: ‘Ale v Michalovi se napína 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:

Přejevil si dlaní ústa v nenápadném posunku, aby zachytil její vůni. Ne, ne.
Stáří nevonné. 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,

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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. Opelik thinks that Řezáč changed the structure of the novel due to pressure from Bedřich Václavek, to whom Řezáč sent a first draft, as well as being inspired by Pujmanová’s Lidé na křížovatce 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.
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 vzněšený 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 klídu přírody, kterým byl obklopen, a tepající stroje odpovídá podivuhodně pohodě jeho těla a myslí. Tělo si hovělo a myšlenky uhaněly. 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, líbí se ti. Kam to povede? ptali se oslové minulé generace, přežyvující bodlák své opatrnické a astmatické

Nebot' to jediné chceme, nebot' 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 (‘zarodek 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’. 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, stojte na svém místě spěj stále vpřed, tá-ta, tá-ta, předpažit, připážit, předpažit, připážit’ (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 lidské hřebeny - odtud pocházejí. Dívají se na ně, zda byste uveřili, že jedny z nich jsou vlastně močovinou a druhé bývaly třeba tvarohem. Smekáme klobouk před silou lidského důmyslu, ale nepokoření 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:

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 obličeji 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 křížovatce* (1937) and earlier in Hostovsky’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 pokoušejte 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:


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 nepříšel uvitat, dům byl tichý, jenom z přízemí, kde byla kuchyně, zaléhaly sem pravidelně, trochu dunivé údery, jak kuchařka naklepávala maso.

Zlatotepec, zlato, zlato. Michal se usmál široce na otce, který před ním stál zamlkle 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 preoccupation 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 nicem 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 viceméně 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 seme ‘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 továrná 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 mival 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 vzduch 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 rodi. Vyrostl mezi tím, ale už na to zapomněl. Jednoho dne se s nimi utká, tomu se asi nevyhně; 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 metonomy between his perception of their houses and how he sees their inhabitants: ‘Uniformní, stejné, bezvýrazné. Připomínají dav, až to mrazi (p. 30). The passage also reveals Michal’s way of thinking about power:

Michal je měl s pocity tísňi i vdečnosti, že není jedním z jejich obyvatelů. Po převrátu z nich šla tak trochu hůra, rozpírali se, povzbuzování vysoko šlehající září ruského ohně, cítili se už soudci a pán. Nesmysl. Jsou stvoření k tomu, aby byli ovládáni. Příroda neplýtvá svými silami, a vytvoří-li 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 zůstane jedni nahoře a druží dole, na jedné straně kvalita a na druhé množství, a mezi nimi se mele, zmiť 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)\(^\text{13}\)

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}\text{The passage continues: ‘Točil hůlkou, starou španělkou s kulatou hlavou ze slonoviny, pozůstatkem otcova mladíčkého švíháctví, 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 Rezáč’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:

“To je v rodě,” odpovedel Michal. “Nebožtik 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 nafoukane, řekl bych, že tvoříme blahobyt a s ním všechny hodnoty, pro které život stojí vůbec za to, aby byl žit.” (p. 141)

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: ‘Zuril nad překázkami, třebaže je zmáhal trpělivě a nedával se jimi znechutit.

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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.
Proc nebylo možno vzít kladivo a rozdrtit je, proc nebylo možno ovládnout vůlí 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 ji 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 kdykoliv a cokoliv, 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’.

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

Naopak pocitil náhle silnou duvěru ve své jednostranné, přímočaré myšlení. Musí to přece člověku dodávat síly, jestliže si myslí o věcech buď to, nebo ono a nikdy dvoji nebo trojí najednou, jestliže nikdy není na pochybách, jestliže si nepohrává se svou inteligenci, 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. 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 boji, aby toho přece jen nebylo příliš mnoho, protože to staré, začazené a loudivé 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

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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:


(p. 160)

Michal’s first subconscious impression is later confirmed by his step-brother Robert’s comment on Vilma: ‘..Je hezká, to ano. Je chytrá, chytrější, 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 otcí. 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, nacepřené 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

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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 roztrhávala se chechtotem. Vilma se nemusela bát hodit mu dil těto noci jako kost. Hryzl ji marně. Zůstala mu jen neuhlasitelná žízeň, jakoby se napil mořské vody nebo nalízel sněhu. Měl to být jeho úděl? Seděl a chvílemi drkotal zuby, aniž o tom věděl. (pp. 195-96)

The master – slave relationship is directly thematised in the narrative presentation of Michal’s thoughts during the public auction of Rolin’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:


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 snatek, toto spojení dvou počtařských hlav, nebytí toho, že jedna z nich byla oblouzena

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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.
vášní 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 konjunktuře, 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 odeprít? Má mu být vzato, co příroda přiznala všemu, co žije: právo udržovat svůj rod? Bylo by tak lehké stisknout to hrdlo a svirat je tak dlouho, až by začalo chladnout, až by vystydlo tak, jak studená je duse 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 bidu? (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 mní preváděla jak vlna mdloby. Neměl síly, aby si poručil a vstal. Chvílkami škubla mu tělem nervová křeč jako vzlyk. Něco mu vyplouvalo před očí. Snad

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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 stalo cokoli, alespoň v takovéto chvíli má být žena po boku svého může. [...] 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 Gromusu ani v jejich zákoniku, aby pouštěli, co jednou uchvátili, 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 me, 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:


(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 násili’ (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 šíři 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 Slepa 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 Poura. 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 omdléval v náručí a v jehož očích nacházela svít úžasného zbožnění, podobný onomu, který vídala v
očích 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; divala-li se na něho, hučely ji současně v hlavě věty otcova pobouření, neboť Josef Balada byl socialista chlapsky drsný a písmácký zarytí. Výkořistovatelé! V jejích 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:

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 chvilích člověku připadá, jako by nebyl sám, jako by v něm bylo nejméně pět lidí. A každý chce něco jiného a něco jiného cíti’ (p. 38). 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:


Růžena believes in fate as a matter of free will: ‘Jakýpak osud, blázinku, proč by ses nesvezla, můžeš-li, to ještě k ničemu nezavazuje, jakýpak osud, držiš-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

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25 By the way, this quotation appears almost in identical form in the description of Lída in Svědek. 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 neuhavitelné 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 pretense: ‘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 úschočné a nedočkavé, hladové a bez rozvahy tihnoucí k určitému cíli, co
čihalo v jejím těle, to vězněné, zapírané a zakřičované našlo svou chvíli a
rozbilo mříže až neuvěřitelně slabé. Oči se chytaly kolotajících hvězd a tělo
se proměnilo, proplouvající péréjemi nesmyslné bolesti. Našla jen slova
chudé holky, kterou ani chvíle opojení nezvází vidiny budoucnosti,
vztahující vychrtlou ruku, aby vybral 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. 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 pánické, které nedělají nic
jiného, než utrácí se peníze svých mužů, právě tak vydržovány? Ne, to by jí
nedělalo nejméně 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 ni ležel jako stálá a neochabující výčitka. A kdo z nás má rád výčitky? Nenáviděla domov za jeho prostou počestnost, za chudobu cit netraticí, 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, jakí 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 rozdělí 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 láška, byla v jeho ostří, byla v cítu 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 přítom pocit podivného upokojení, 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 hvizdala 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 Pour jsou snoubenci, ačkoliv 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: 'Citíla, 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 Půr as her lover, a relationship in which she has the power because he is hopelessly in love with her. 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.

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

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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, 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, ze

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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 hnal, vždyť se mi toho všechno 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 where 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: ‘At’ řeknu, co řeknu, musím už u toho zůstat na celý život, ach bože, a musím to říci rychle, protože hlady už sotva na níhou 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

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\(^{31}\) 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).\footnote{Another example of such a quirk of plot is Jindra’s discovery of Růžena’s affair with Michal.}

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.\footnote{Růžena’s pregnancy is also used as an explanation of her newfound stability: ‘Jeji bricho se začínalo zvedat a zaokrouhlovat pokračujícím těhotenstvím a Růžena v sobě cítila ten neznámý, nepředstavitelný klíček, doručující její tělo z přestředně, jako kotvu, která jí připomínala navždy k pevnému tohoto životu a dávala jí jistotu, že se už nikdy neodtrhne jako blázni tvořící loďka, která chce jen plout a plout a třeba do záhuby’ (p. 234).} 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 přemluvání. Zamrazilo ji.

Byla to tvář podle, 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 ji zbavil. Jeho krev také se v ní bála bída, kterou jí vyrovnouval. (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 věra, ač jí nikdy neměl mnoho. Pro sebe nevidí ostatní. Nevymyslil si to špatně, že šel na tebe. Počítal s tím, že se zalekneš bida a přemluviš mě, abych udělal, co na něm chtěji’ (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 plead to Růžena when he proposed to her: ‘„Růženo, jestli tu zůstaneš se mnou, všecko bude jiné. Dám se zas do toho jako

\footnote{Another example of such a quirk of plot is Jindra’s discovery of Růžena’s affair with Michal.}

\footnote{Růžena’s pregnancy is also used as an explanation of her newfound stability: ‘Jeji bricho se začínalo zvedat a zaokrouhlovat pokračujícím těhotenstvím a Růžena v sobě cítila ten neznámý, nepředstavitelný klíček, doručující její tělo z přestředně, jako kotvu, která jí připomínala navždy k pevnému tohoto životu a dávala jí jistotu, že se už nikdy neodtrhne jako blázni tvořící loďka, která chce jen plout a plout a třeba do záhuby’ (p. 234).}
kdysi. Za sebe, za tebe, za tvého tátu a tvou mámu, za všecky 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 naši 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 viš, 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 třeba 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 všecko jí naslihoval. Ale teď je zase naše. Mě mámě ušila šaty, něco prima, člověče, a nic od toho nevzala. A naši Mařeně co se už našila hadrů, a o placení ani slyšel. Zkrátka cejti s člověkem, to se pozná, a ví, jak jsme teď na tom. A Jindra, jářku, to mysřil vždycky poctivě s naší
veci a nechce se dat krmit za jidasske penize. Nahližejí do svých svědomí a ptají se: Kdopak z nás by něco takového dokázal? Na polích se už nepracuje, brambory jsou dobyty 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 uz nemůže pochybovat o poctivosti jejího smyslení’ and ‘Nahližejí 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 seme ‘solidarity’. In its entirety Růžena’s narrative signifies her struggle (on the personal level) between egoism and solidarity. 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 seme ‘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’: 

"Takovi by meli byt vsichni. Pambu nas chran pred dobrackymi zamestnavateli, ktere si ziskavaji lasku svych delniku. Potrebujeme prave tech druhych. Patri k podminkam revoluce. Musime dostavat denně své porce prikoři a bezpraví, jinak bychom se nikdy nerozkvalili” (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 Rezác’s novels that I have called the ‘female saviour’. This includes Kama in Větrná setba, to some degree Markétkova from Černé světo and Lída from Svědek, Jarmila in Rozhrami, and to some degree Bagar’s wife in Nástup.


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. 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 začasté nenáviděl soudruhy právě tak jako jejich odpůrce, shledávaje je příliš trpěnými a pohodlnými ve službě ideje, 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 napaměť. Když mu tak naslouchali s ústy div ne otevřenými, měl 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 lito, byli jen štěrkem, kterým si budoucnost dělázdila cestu. Nechápali zákonností vývoje, nechtěli by asi ani slyšet o tom, že jejich osud je nutný, že jich musí přibýt ještě mnoho a jejich počet vzrůst do milionů po celém světě, aby se naplnilo, co nejlepší lidské mozky bezpečně předvídály: že mořík pozře sám sebe a nesmyslná budova kapitalismu se zhroutí. (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 (‘Neseslo ovsem na nem [...]’) 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: ‘Chudácí se musí rodit, čím více se jich narodí, tím dřív bude bída 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 indentifies with Jindra’s thought:

Řekl tu ve zkratce vše, čemu věřil a več doufá, mluvil s temnou nadějí, že mu bude porozuměno a že z tohoto socialismického kréda bude zaslechnut i hlas jeho srdce. A večer zatím vytáhl své rudé prapory. Byl to barbotisk v divokých tónech a v ničem nebylo šetřeno jejich sytostí. Šarlátová naděje zírčů, 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 něst 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 neziskávaji 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. Further on the narrator states this conflict between life and ideas directly: ‘A prorok lepších zitřků 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 naději 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), 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 promokly a dostal ránu palicí, harcovník sociální revoluce, ubohý jako hromádka neštěstí. At’ mu někdo povi, co má dělat. Obrazotvornost mu sehrála menší melodramatickou scénu’ (p. 106). The narrator’s discourse is full of descriptions that reveal this conflict. Another

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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 zuživostí 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 všecko, 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 zohýбан. 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 všecko, 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 skladnikův a ptá se po smyslu a výsledku jeho obětí. 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:


(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 prohryvly hráze, jsou to hlasy, volají ho, příboj hlasů řvoucích v opojení a dunění, rytmické dopady tisíců párů pochodu jejích

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 Pout – 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, vychrtilý, skoro okázale proletářský, s černavé zlýma očima’. He partly conforms to the stereotype of the intellectual proletarian. In this Rezáč 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:


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’s 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:


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 byvali 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

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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. Oči se mezi dvěma kameny a byl rozdrcen. Je mi ho líto, ale řekl bych, že vína neleží na nikom z nás, nýbrž někde dál, v době, která s námi pohrál víc, než je nám všem milo. Nutil jsem ho, aby pracoval, i když továrná stála, neboť jsem nemohl být bez skladníka, a jeho kamarádi ho obviňovali ze zrady. Zní to dicevo 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 sense 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. Rolin’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

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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
d dismissals). To Růžena they are an object of derision, to Jindra they represent an
object for political and economic forces\(^\text{46}\) 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 hnev 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 ji
potlačit. Rozběhlí se ke svým důvěrníkům. Musí se jim přece pomoci, nač je
tu organizace, do níž taková léta platili příspěvky, žehrajíc na tyto
zbůhdaře vyhazované peníze. [...]. Ale ty časy už minuly, holencu, kdy si
mohl zaměstnavatel dělat se svými dělníky, co mu napadlo. Josef se do nich
dá, Josef jim to vytmává. A co Jindra? To je vosk? Nechtěl byt 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 dival 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 seme ‘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
lidě, svírající pěsti na stolní desce. Otrok, pes. A ještě méně. Otoka i psa musí

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\(^{46}\) 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 žrat’ (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 ji zbavil. Jeho krev také se v ní bála bidy, kterou ji 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: přesnídavka, oběd a večeře. Neboť zatímco zdržoval na svém patře chuť jídlá právě požitého a prodlužoval svou rozkoš jako zkušený milenc, jeho obrazotvornost, tak naprosto a blázene tělesná, ji začínala prolinat předchuti jídlá 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 otřásat, 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 (‘já se hltat svůj oběd’, p. 33), more concerned with how much there is of it: ‘Josef Balada polykal sousta takřka bez žůvkání jako silák, jemuž nesejde tolik na chuti jídlá 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-

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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 stavku, jestliže nebude dosaženo nápravy, neboť dělnická solidarita musí být projevena 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 cití, že mu nezáleží na žádné proměně světa, která by neprinesla štěstí jeho dceři. Ať mi vynadá měšťáku, 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 potít, ačkoli větr 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 mrtný v ní oživá jako vzor ušlechtilce, jehož jedinou starostí a láskou byl delink 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 vyčitavá a lichotná slova, tu stáli jako stádo zarytých a paličatých beranů. Divali se do země, jako by se báli svých pohledů, a bylo jim trapné. Hněv se mezi nimi procházel a poštchuoval je.

Přešlapovali a svírali pěsti. Někdo by měl skočit a zaplat tomu vrtákoví hubu. Není 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 sitiny a třáslaviska, nemohl se z ní vymotat a každým dalším slovem se boří 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 odevzdy přesnější než slova, ktera te unáseji. Chceš-li ubit myšlenku, mluv, člověče, a ona zanikne ve tvém huhlání jako volání odsouzenové v rachotu bubnů’ (p. 125).

108
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 prázdnotě, 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. Pojdě 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 chtěl, co měl dělat, aby jim nepáchl jako boty pohodného psům? Měl snad tehdny, když mu bylo nabídnuto toto místo, odmítne, dát výpověď a chcít 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 nepřetáhnete’ (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 pokoroval, proč bys dále hrál níčemu, 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, tatínečku?“ řekla tiše‘ (p. 235), again underlines the necessity of what he ought to do. 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 ostřejší bude cítit jejich pravdu, tím neústupnější bude trvat na své. Nenajde úlevy, neboť balvany, jež se pohnuly k pádu, docházejí zastavení až na dně propasti. (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 právě takové, jak řikaly’ (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 zahnán nebo do níž sám vběhl, ale jeho mysli 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: ‘Nebytí tohoto děvčete a jeho nepochoptelné 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’. 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 vlnobité plamenů, jež zaplnilo prostoru pod ním a vzpíná se k němu. Po bříšce se budou plazit, po bříšce. Ale v okamžiku, kdy dělá krok s bedný do prázdná pod sebou, vidí pár výsmešných 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 theme 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 vynáši? Vzpamatuj se, Josefe, vzpamatuj se. Ukážeš jím, 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 ukazujou přestem, že před tebou utíkají. Po bříšce k tobě polezou, po bříšce, 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.\textsuperscript{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’,\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{54} Gőtz explains this fear of scarcity mainly as a residue of peasant mentality of the now partly industrialised rural community. See František Gőtz, \textit{Václav Rezáč}, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1957, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{55} Elsewhere I have named this ‘desire for possession’ in the narrative of Vilma.
\textsuperscript{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 Rolin’s factory, in both of which Michal competes with his stepmother Anna for material wealth, likewise foreground the semes of ‘materialism’ and ‘desire for power’ in the presentation of the bourgeois characters.

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. 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 buržajství, která se proti náporu proletariátu brání vůli 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 ideologeme of old versus new. 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’.

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

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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 Růzena’s son produces the semes ‘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. As I have shown in the individual analyses, in the case of Slepa ulicka 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’. 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

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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 děsi, 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, píším 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 utkan 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: Borovy, 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 tichy, 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 shromažďily stranou a jenom se divají, milčky a upřeně. Vša miláčkové! Dojde na vás na všechny. Rozhodl-li jsem se být sám sobě soudcem, musím určit váhu vaši důležitosti. Nedám se svému 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 nenávistí, ačkoliv v jeho pěsti se zrodila ta část mé povahy, jež měla ovládnout celý můj další život. Myslím jenom na ironické záliby té nepojmenovatelné moci, již někdy řikáme osud. Zlo, neboť bylo to zlo a je zbytečné hledat pro to jakékoliv jiné jméno, se zrodilo v pěsti dobráka [...] Od té doby však mne síla začala děsit a naučil jsem se ji nenávidět, at’ jsem se s ním setkal kdekoli a v jakékoliv podobě, pudilo mě to jít proti ní. Proč? Odpověď hledám. (pp. 39-40)

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 itinerary 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. Vidi život jen v rovině své moci a zapomíná skloniti se a naslouchati, co se děje pod ní. Tupnou jistotou bezpečnosti a nezranitelnosti. Silní se valí nedbajice, kam dopadá

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\(^5\) 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 Rezác 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.
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 František Munzar whose friendship Karel buys with his packed lunches. Karel manipulates him into fight after fight without any sense of compassion for František’s sufferings. On the contrary, Karel manipulates František, time after time, into confirming his theory of strength that punishes strength. To the narrator František is the embodiment of dense strength (without intelligence).  

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. 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 zadnou zenu 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

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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 ukryvá v sobě ohrožení budoucího charakteru, ať už byla sama jich svědkem, nebo ať si jí na ně stěžoval někdo jiný, kárávala vždy velmi ledabyle’ (pp. 36-37). 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, měl-li jsem ho rád nebo ne, ale byl jsem tehdy ve věku, kdy dítě se rodi po druhé, a to svými cesty z citů matčiných. Otec byl někdo, o kom maminka říkavala: – Musíš mít rád tatínka, miláčku, stará se o tebe a žíví 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. 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.

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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. Přišel se a Bůh mu požehnal. Nebyl nic a stal se velkým páni. 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 mamincé. 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.

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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 písem dnešních firem, složených z břeven, 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, vnuhka 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, obýlené a obaretěné podoby geniů. Neboť měšťan, jdoucí koupit nějaký ten klavírní kousek své dceří, vychovávané říšulinkami, postaven před lví hlavu Beethovenovu může pocítit nepříjemné zamrazení při představě, že by tento chlapík usedl za jeho stůl, a začít uvažovat, zda je vhodně, aby jeho výtvary 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 díábel, začarovaný v tóny, vystřílí 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:
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.\footnote{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).} 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 \textit{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...
signifier of his outsider position: 'Podkrovi, 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 druzit’ (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 Markěťka’s letter to Klenka, express: ‘Můj Bože, jak ty si se mnou pohraváš! Snad bych byl lepší, kdyby mě ona milovala. Den by se ve mně rozsvítil a viděl bych, jako vidi 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: ‘Spilají [the musicians], ale přicházejí opět, vědě, že beze mne by nic
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: vídí, 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 Rezáč was writing, Adler was read by the Czechs, although one cannot say for certain whether Rezáč did. The Napoleon symbol also links Černé světlo with Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment and the theme of guilt.

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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 akoktám a Marketka 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 láška 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 slabostí a pokoření, jimiž jsem trpěl. A hle, co se mnou dělá! Proměňuje mne v rozřízněného panáka, v strašáka a zajíce zaroven. Loudí se mi do ní pocit, že se jí musím pomstít za to, jak si se mnou pohráva. Znal jsem na světě jedinou ženu dobře, svou matku. Markétka s ní nemá nic společného, chtěl bych, aby se ji 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 regress to earlier modes of reaction). These monologues are typically stylised as Karel talking to himself in questions and answers:

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. 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 Markéťka because she represents the means for him to achieve what he desires. His thoughts on seeing Markéťka’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 mne 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, Markéťko, snil jsem o tobě, mé sny se propletyly, Markéťka a závod, láská a touha být nade všemi páne i ostatní i s tebou u mých nohou, pěkné klubko hadů se vyhřivalo na palčivém slunci mé samoty. Ještě jsem se tě nevzdal, Markéťko, ale kdo říká, že tě ještě miluji? Tím více musím ještě střežit každé slovo, pohled i čin. Teď se zasměj, níčemo, 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

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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).
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. Opírají 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.  

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 Marketka has entrusted him to deliver to Klenka, the real object of Marketka’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 skorupku. 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 štěrbinky, jíž by se dnilo. Staň se mi jedem, co mi mohlo být lékem, jsem vyprahlý a musím pit 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 Víť’s relationship in Větrná setba, another protagonist of Řezáč’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. 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 nacpán k prasknutí jeho rameny, zády, pažemi a hrudí’ (p. 166). The narrator describes his encounter with Klenka’s playing as if he was completely captured by the power of the music. In this description captures the passion of the music, a

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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 vyhýbat 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 pohně rozvalinou. Viděl jsem se, to bylo nejhorší ze všeho, a nenacházel jsem na sobě nic, v čem bych mohl dojítí zalíbení. Ta Chopinova Polonaisa se dala ještě vydržet a snést, peklo se otevřelo zplna až při Beethovenově Appasionate 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 zmitán záchvatem zuživostí, 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 ryží 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 Markéta'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 lidi, 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 Markéta 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 Markéta. 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 Markéta. Karel plays his role of manipulator, and his successful attempt at destroying Klenka's hope of ever seeing Markéta 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 Markéta 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),
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 Markéta 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 Markéta 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 ponechan 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 sníti a obírat se svou budoucností sotva za mnou zapadly 
dveře. Nedobré sny ke mně přicházely, neboť samota a pocit odstrčenosti 
nejsem stvořený, aby plodily zdravé dítěky. Dnes mi připadá podivné, že mne 
aní tehdy, ani kdy později nenapadlo, abych se ohlédlo po jiné zaměstnání. 
Bývalo by to bylo přece mé právo a nikdo by se byl nad tím zvlášť'

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. Cítis, jak to všechno patří k sobě? Ten ozářený Hrad, majestát sily, 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 křehoucí, křehké a přece silné naději, šum křidel zbožnosti, vzlétlých ze zpěvu a nesoucích všechna srdečk a 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 zdalo, 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). These discrepancies let the implied author appear through the narration. 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 Nepritel v těle (1937), and Miroslav Hanuš’s Měněcennost (1942), even the much earlier novel by Ivan Olbracht, Žalář nejtemnější (1916). This thematic preoccupation with the

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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. 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.

Chapter 5

Svědek (1942)

Svědek 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’. Götz sees the novel’s central character Kvis as an incarnation of fascism. Daniela Hodrova 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 Svědek, 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’. Both Götz and Hodrova’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

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

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1 František Götz, Václav Řezáč, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1957, p. 88. This is the only monograph on Řezáč’s work.
2 Ibid., p. 90.
Night) and the last chapter ‘Druhá měsíčná 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. 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. 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. 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

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1 Because Byteň serves as a microcosm, Svědek 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 Moldanova, ‘Variace na téma zla’, in Václav Rezáč, Černé světlo. Svědek, Díla, vol. 3, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1988, p. 526. As the title of Milotová’s review implies, Svědek differs from Městečko na dlani in its mode of narrative presentation of the characters. In Svědek 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 Rezác: Svědek. (V Praze, F. Borový 1946.)’, Vyšehrad, 32, p. 16.

2 These are the mayor Nolč, his wife Kateřina Nolčová, the policeman Tlachac, the dean Brůzek, 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.

3 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. 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 Tlachac 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. Tlachac’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 Byteń, an image which the Byteń 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 burglar 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 Byteń. However, his awareness of what he is himself capable of makes him retreat behind the ‘inner intransgressible boundary’.

Nolć, the mayor of Byteń, 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 Byteń. His annual garden party is one example of this (see p. 115). 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, pani 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).

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8 Václav Řezáč, Svědek [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’. 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. Křidlovka stoupá na špičky a základ vysoke, až se jí tón roztřepí přepjatou slastí, štěbenec dumlá svou melodii jako kluk cukrovou tyčinku a když to nejmiň očekávaš, uchycíme se výsměšně, viola se vemlová jako milenc v podvečer, pikolka bublá i cvrliká, zmizí a opět se vznese, basa jsem 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, ta-tá-ra-ra-... (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

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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 dcérou potkají, přivě děvče víčka tak prudce, jako by pohlédlo do bílého žáru a chvili 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 dotáčeji, 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.

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 poradku 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 Tlacháč is watching the mayor’s house after the mayor has disappeared into the building:

Tlacháč čekal marně, ani jediné z oken se nerozsvětilo. Strachá se tam potmě jako zloděj, to snad má strach, aby jí nevzbudil. Strážník vzpomínal na starostovu ženu. Má ji opravdu tak rád, nebo to jen tak hraje? Tlacháč tím opakoval přesně otázku, jak ji v konečné podobě vyslovoval veřejně 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 perspective 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 dodržet se tiše v náději, že jeho boj se stínem nebyl zpozorován. Musí se ostatně přesvedčit, kdo se to tu v noci potoulí, třeba jen proto, aby si opatřil lék. Město je mu přece svěřeno a on si už dávno navýkl dovidat se

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)
Tlachac’s very name is the epithet of his desire to know: ‘tlachat’ means ‘to
gossip’. Tlachac’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 nepronesl, nenapsal, ba ani
nehvízdal nebo nevyříkával přesty na stůl, že i nevysozena prosakuje zdmi a
poletuje od hlav 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. 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
Ozářená měsícem Byteň spí v otevřené krajině. Bílá věž děkanského chrámu střeží její sen, prostá, čtyřhranná věž, jen tak zhruba omítaná a krytá římskou střechou. A jako by přejímala odraz té věže, noc sama se zdá všecka bílá, taková jasná noc, prosvešťena do všech koutů, rozechvělá a vábivá, jen stěží skryvající trosky svého tajemství ve vřetených stíních. 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. In the conversation between Tlacháč and Brůzek the latter directly makes the first connection between the light-darkness dichotomy and evil. He asks Tlacháč: ‘Proč si vsichni myslíme, že zlo se může skryvat jenom v temnotě?’ (p. 41). Tlacháč answers logically that nobody can hide in the light (see p. 41). However, the light to which Brůzek refers is not the light that in the narrative carries positive connotations – in Tlacháč’s discourse the light that is associated with good activities, the familiar light. Brůzek refers to the moonlight that Tlacháč 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? Vteře už, proc jste šel k vážněmu domku pln obav, třebaže rozum vám řikal, že zlo si nevybírá noci tak jasně 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 Tlacháč tries to hit his own shadow on the head and later, the narrator’s address to Tlacháč from which one can infer that the shadow could be the ‘suspicious stranger’ within himself. See Svedek, p. 28.  
14 ‘Pohled na to ozářená okna vrátil strážníka rázem jeho obvykle míšte. Veselý větrík se zatočí v úzké uličce jeho myšlení a vyfoukne dusný zmatek. Toť světlo ze zdroje, který znač, světlo, při němž se lidé druží, pracují a čtou, světlo nažlutlé, prosté a lahdně jako sklenice piva, světlo, jež s tebou nesevraje žádný proradný kousek’ (p. 30). The narrator again speaks in the second person singular as if Tlacháč 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 Tlacháč’s idiom.
není věž, kterou oba známe? Citím, že bych měl na ni vstoupit a modlit se tak dlouho, dokud tma nepohltí toto světlo, pokojná vlídá tma, jaká sluší spánu a odpočinku. Zdá se mi, že si dovedu představit každé zlo, jež se plíží v tmách, ale selhávám, když myslim 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. Jdete, přiteli, a bděte. Dobrou noc’ (p. 50). 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 Bilá’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

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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 Tlacháč about the false impression of things that the moonlight creates). This uncertainty is also evoked in the presentation of the characters’ perception of themselves. Tlacháč’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 slynulo 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, dýchána do dlani, 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 Bytěn, 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 Devil 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 Tlachác 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 stinu’ (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
consciouness 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 nesmi ho najít na místě, kde díáblu se může kdykoli
zachránit přesně 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).

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 statkářovýma se roztrhne a z ní zasvítí veliké, oslnivé 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 obecnětvo. 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, příval 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. He attempts to interfere in other people’s lives through manipulation 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

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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. Opelik has carried out a useful comparison of Karel and Kvis. See Jiří Opelik, ‘Románové dílo Václava Řezáče’, unpublished PhD thesis, Brno: Masaryk University, 1961, p. 145.
for Bożka, 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. While Nejtek is lying sleepless in bed he watches Bożka illumined by moonlight:

‘[...] a v tom bílém, přebilém světle, jež se ještě více rozsvítí odrážem její pleti, udeří tě do očí její noha, obrazená 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 lidi se staví proti tobě, sotva sis usmyslel, že je uchopil a setrváš u nich. Krása se drobi nebo ti uniká, je vždycky někde jinde, než jí hledáš. Což nebyla krásná tvá žena, když ses na ni po prvé zahleděl, a co je z ni dnes? Je te to v 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, věcná 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. 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 Bożka 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 Bożka is morally wrong:

‘ale zároveň se mu zdá [Brůžek’s outstretched hand] vznášet jako spar nad jeho

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21 ‘Vzpomeň si jenom na tu noc, bylo to v červnu nebo kdy, jak se tentokráte rozšétkali psi po celé Bytní. Taková dusná noc to byla, samá vůně a neklid, a měsic svítí tak bíle, že se zdál skorem den. Stál v úplnku zrovna proti chudobinci a tekl jim do světice, jako když mléko z putny vyleváš, svítící, zářivé mléko, nažloutlé přebytky smetany’ (pp. 218-19).

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

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 mrávý synek a kdy tvé myšlení začalo čerstvět představou: život za život, jako akt msty na osudu a nepříčetném hospodaření přírody. Je to tak nepřirozené, čeho se chceš dopustit, je to tak zlé? Copak neumíráme všíchní jen proto, abychom učinili místo jiným? Odvážiš-li se toho, přestane za tebou chodit stín smrti a zhasnit 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, Tlacháč'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 Tlacháč 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. 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 Nolče’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. Nejtěk’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’. 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’, 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:


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 svět obraznosti 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].

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

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 jezevčíci, neslídí a nečeníchají jenom po tváři, nýbrž hrabou si nory v očích druhého, chtějí dovinřít, až na dno, kde sedí kořist, schoulena a vřicí smrtelným strachem’ (p. 144).
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 prázdnou troškami náhodně posbíranými, zaplnila by se celá, byl by zabydlén jako svět a protože by v sebe pojal i jeho strůjce, mohl by ředit 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 reflection 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 statkár 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 zitra 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 říkneme-li do nich trochu, jen podaří-li se nám pohnout tím, co v sobě skrývají a dusí. Vysvětuje to případ Emanuela Kvise? 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 zavinil? (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 Nolě’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 rozvrácí 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 šepty pestřejší a přizdobenější o barvy každého, kdo je podává dál, ji napíná téměř nesnesitelně. Povrchnivé 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, bat se nebo se proměnit v zuřivé lítice, štvané podvědomým strachem o mláďata. Ty z nich, jejichž život je zabydlen od noci Kvisova příjezdu, křižují se potají setkavše se s jeho pohledem a odplivují si, aby zabránily uříznutí svého plodu, druhé pak žasnou, proč právě v tu chvíli se pochnula v jejich myšlích ta neb ona myšlenka, z níž se už ani nezpovidají, 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
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’. 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. 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. To Faust’s question ‘Nun gut, wer bist du denn?’ Mephistopheles answers: ‘Ein Teil von jener Kraft, / Die stets das Bose

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32 'Psi se už této noci neutíši; jejich štěkot vybuchuje přes tu chvíli, jako by noví a noví cizinci vstupovali do Bytně, a neustane, dokud měsíc nezmizí pod obzorem a krátká předjítrná tma neponoří svět v milosrdné bezvědomí' (p. 64).
33 A. M. Piša points this out in his article on Svědek. See A. M. Piša, ‘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 nejtkovsky zalm se natolik podoba vlcimu vyti kvisovskemu, ze uz nevime, vypravime o jednom nebo o druhem. Bytost bez života touži po životě a když se ji podaří připnout se na jiný, rostoucí z vlastních koženů, shledává, že ssaje jen jinou touhou, ještě bolestnější a neukojetelnější’ (p. 387).
34 A. M. Piša makes the comparison between Kvis and Mephistopheles in Goethe’s Faust. See A. M. Piša, ‘Zlo ve světle’, p. 253. Because of this aspect of the plot Piša reads the novel as Řezáč’s ‘declaration of his faith in life and humanity’. Ibid., p. 253.
will, und stets das Gute schafft’. 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.

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, Lida Dastychová, whose greatest dream is to become an actress. 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 příchystaná pro fotografický snímek, takový obraz miru 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,

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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’ (‘lidu milá’).
The narrator sounds as if he were in love with Lída, although elsewhere he also mocks her, but in a very good-natured way. For Lída acting involves a life-giving transformation of the part she is playing: ‘Připadá mi, že nejsem jedna věte, že je ve mně mnoho lidi 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. 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 vzdycky divadlem, které mi sehrávali druzí’ (p. 378). By contrast, Lída plays herself by giving life to other people; that is why she lives. 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 Kvis in that he points out how Kvis does not perceive the things that characterise the good in life: ‘Léto sem vniká s nimi.

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38 The opposition between Lída and Kvis crops up in Kateřina Nolčová’s thoughts during her conversation with Lída: ‘Pani Kateřina se zachvátila zamrazením. V rozhovoru s toh prohlašuje, že není hledající obdob. Nevzpomněla si snad na svého člověka, který také mluvil o lidech v sobě? Jenomže ten je netoužil vysvobodit a dat jim život, jako tady ta rozdychnutá dívka’ (p. 277).


40 This is yet another version of the woman-as-saviour topos.
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 Tlachac’s thoughts about the need to protect Nolč from evil: ‘Pane, jsem s vami, dej se co dej. Je to ovšem nesmysl, protože copak může hrozit takovému bohaci v jeho pevném domě, ale konec konců je to 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).  

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
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 Bilá (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 teď, Rudo, jdi a rozhrň ty hrozné černé záclony a zítra je dej strhnout. Tady teď 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 vypalil 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 alchymii 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 Byten experiences a kind of collective epiphany that brings about a change in the general atmosphere of the town: the sun lights up Byten ‘that the previous night’s storm and wind has washed and swept’ (p. 433). With Kvis’s death it is as if Byten has been cleansed of evil. Byten 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 Byten 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 zavadiť 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: ‘Povidám, 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 pelechu 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 raflo’ (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 pisišvor, takové malé pivo bez pěny, jak mu řikali, a jestli někdo řídi 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 homodiegetic 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

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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 obchůzka se ještě neskončila a pitomý měsíc, nařvaný a nadutý jako selský krásavec, si nesní dovolit, aby zasahoval do úředního výkonu. Nestůj tady, Tlachači, a nemudřuj, s myšlením ti to vždycky vyšlo nakrátko a o této noci nebude vydána úřední vyhláška, z níž bys vyčtěl, proč a jak, a nikdo ti nedá v tuto chvíli rozkaz, co dělat. Je to nepochybně nepříznaost, proměně-li se strážníkové ulice, jimiž prochází po trčet let, v cizí město a potká v nich sebe sama jako podezřelého cizince. Ale kdo je za ní odpověden? Kdo zavinil, že radniční věž, k níž vzhledem je dávno, 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 dělal, 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 dýchavíčný, abys dosáhl dna a vynesl odtud byť jen hruť písku, který uniká mezi zaťatými prsty. Máš mozek vyluchovaný rozkazy, i kráčej po této podešvi drže se čary, narýsované povinnosti, která tě nikdy nezklame a nedá ti zbloudít.

(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, 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 Byten 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 Svědek, 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 divá se na mouchu, soudce Dastych si představuje, že někdo jiný tak někde s rukama v klíně pozoruje naše víření a čeká, najdeme-

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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.
5.7 Conclusion

As I have shown, Svědek 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.

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45 See for example p. 240 about the judge.
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'. 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.

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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 zanru)*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1987, p. 172. However, in a comparison of the two novels, Opelik concludes that there are only 'vague connections' between them, chiefly because both novels are a 'novel about the writing of a novel'. See Jiří Opelík, 'Ke genezi Řezáčova Rozhraní', *Shorník 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 Vilemovi a našlo se nakladatelství, jež ji vydá’. 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. It is therefore questionable whether Rozhrani is a meta-narrative in the strict meaning of the word.

6.1 General characterisation of the narrative situation

The frame narrative situation of Rozhrani 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).

[Further text continues]
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, at jsem byl zaújat 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. 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 pomyslení, že jsem se minul svým cílem a že jsem budižkničemu, mne zneklidňovalo jen

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5 Unlike, for example, the autodiegetic narrator of Egon Hostovsky's Ztracený stín (1931) who narrates from a position of searching for answers.
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 Vílém 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

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Czech context, Egon Hostovsky 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). However, the double motif of *Rozhrani* has most frequently been linked with Ivan Olbracht’s novel *Podivné přátelství herce Jesenija* (The Actor Jesenius’s Odd Friendship, 1919). The novels have in common that they have acting as their theme – in *Rozhrani* 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. Opelik argues that there is a fundamental difference between the two pairs of doubles: in *Podivné přátelství herce Jesenija* Jesenius and his double Jan Veselý belong to the same narrative level, whereas in *Rozhrani* Aust’s story is the primary in which Haba’s is nested. 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 *Rozhrani* 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

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8 See Bohumil Novák, ‘Václav Řezáč: „Rozhrani“’. Román. Nákladem Fr. Borového, Praha 1945’, *Kritický měsíčník*, 6, 1945, 1, pp. 30-31; František Götz, ‘Rozhrani’, in Götz, *Václav Řezáč*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1957, p. 101; Jiří Opelík, ‘Ke genezi Řezáčova Rozhrani’, pp. 101-02. Opelík devotes part of his article to a discussion of the connections between *Rozhrani* and *Podivné přátelství herce Jesenija*. 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. Opelik 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 Rozhrani’, 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 mne probudila z dočasné dřímoty a začala skuhrát známé litanie. Byl jsem syn ztroskotance a můj vlastní život nebyl nikdy nic jiného než nepřetřžitá 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 řádů mé nové bytne’ (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, Vílem, that carries associations with the robber hero of Mácha’s narrative poem Mýj (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 vzdálení, milý Víleme Habo, okolnosti našich životů se k sobě blíží jen váhavými oklikami, a sotva se vzájemně dotkly, prudce se od sebe rozbíhají, jakoby poleknuty. Chtěl bych se proměnit v tebe, aby můj zmatený a beztvarý osud nabyl na závažnosti a výraznosti. Připadá mi nesmyslné, že tvé příběhy má vypravět člověk, který si vášeň snad někdy vymýšlel, ale nikdy neměl odvahu dát se jí unést, pan Nikdo, který nikdy neochutnal úspěchu a v bláťi 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 dřsného 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 nepoznavával nic ze své práce, tón, barvu, ani závěr, tu větu: – Vy jste, Hildo, vy jste mládí ?

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. 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:

> Očtě jsme se v místech, kde se ve Vílemovi střetl dvojjí cit, kde snad naposled v něm zápasil člověk, ale kde si také 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. Nebot' tam, kde se člověk probíjel jen po pidičích, kde svědomí a přirozený cit se mu věšely na paty olověnými koulemi, tam herce lehce stoupal a proklouzával bez úhony a

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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 *Svédek*.
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 otcí obdivuje a co ji 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 styly své role, ale sotva se jejich rty dotkly, pročítal 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 hvězdných 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 Vílem 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 nejmiň’ (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).\(^2\) 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 hráť’ (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:

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\text{[…]} \text{ nesmíme se dělat pány svých postav, Viléme, natolik, abychom na nich páchali násili. 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, rodi se z nás a nacházejí své domovy v druhých. Žijeme v sobě, jeden v druhém navzájem. Nejsme sami, Vilíku, jsme částmi bůhvičeho, a přeč se sami o sobě bůhvičím. Nejsme a nemůžeme být jeden bez druhého. (pp. 364-65)}
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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:

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\(^2\) 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, popsaných tím, co se děje pod nimi. Poznává se v nich, ve všech a v každé zvlášť. Jeho úkol je být jejich tlumočníkem, snímat z nich zakletí, jež je odděluje od ostatních, luštít tajné písmo jejich povah a osudů a vracet je tím, 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 mysln 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 jedliky, jak římí nad svými talíři se zpocenými čely a zátylkym. Tvářil jsem se znechuceně. Většině lidí, řikal
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 neumělé radosti’ (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 vlád po větru k slávě pracovního dne’ (p. 193). Then Aust succumbs to self-pity; the description of this underlines his changing view of work:

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' ('síť 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. 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). 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 Měsíček. 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 Rezáč's novels.
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 Rozhrani 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 vnučovat 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 Fridryn who has supported Aust (see p. 339 and p. 354). He entertains the idea that Baroch’s fictitious death has somehow instigated Fridryn’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). 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 zřetel pány svých skutků, ten druhý, větší jejich díl je nám vnučán 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 jakémis 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

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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 zpověďnice, v níž se všichni znovu obrozujeme vírou ve smysl svého života, v řád nám všem společný, žizní 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. Piša 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. Piša, ‘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 zdrčující 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 menila 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.\textsuperscript{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 světlý obloukových lamp nabývala divadelní budova proti ohvězděnému nebi nejvyšší mohutnosti, než jakou působí za dne. Vilém před ní stál a zapolil se vzrušením, jehož původ ani obsah si nedovedl v tu chvíli ujasnit. Bylo mu, jako by se potkal s nějakou živou bytostí, nabitou silou, již ho stroh霎la 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).\textsuperscript{18}

After the Communist assumption of power in 1948, and the ensuing changes in the political and cultural climate, the critics’ view of \textit{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

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\textsuperscript{17} Because of its views of literature and art \textit{Rozhraní} has often been interpreted as the expression of Řezáč’s personal creed. See, for example, [Piša, A. M.] p., ‘Román o románu’, \textit{Národní práce}, 29.4.1945, p. 2; -vz-, ‘Václav Řezáč: Rozhraní. Román o dvou dálech’, Argus, 21, May 1945, 5, pp. 75-76; Radko Pytlik, ‘Rozhraní Václava Řezáče’, in Václav Řezáč: \textit{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.

\textsuperscript{18} Smetana’s symphonic poems are based on motifs from Czech legends and history, particularly \textit{Libuše} and \textit{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’, \textit{The Musical Times}, vol. 125, no. 1694, April 1984, pp. 201-203-5.
second edition of the novel, Truhlář considers *Rozhrani* 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.  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 *Rozhrani* is a precursor. Later critics have latched onto this critical stance in their interpretations. Filipčíková, whose article is a textbook example of the 1970s Party-line approach to literature. In this she argues that *Rozhrani* 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’. Filipčíková sees the novel as ‘a key to how Řezáč solves the problem of good and evil’. 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’. 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’.

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22 In this question, Filipčíková is uncompromising: ‘Dobro a zlo. Tretí cesta v mravním životě člověka neexistuje.’ Ibid., p. 307.
23 Ibid., p. 307.
24 Ibid., p. 309.
Rozhrani 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. Filipčíková’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. However, Rozhrani, 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 Filipčíková would probably argue that this fact is due to the censorship of the Protectorate. Filipčíková, 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 roman, si žádala “zhuštěný” výraz, častě používání slov – znaků, které dovolují za vnější stránkou ukrýt druhý, hlubší a pravý smysl.’ 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 vyčep, kde by se sešla společnost tak trpělivá, tak přímočaré bodrá, jadra i bezelstné srdečná, jako je společnost Řezáčova!’ See Bohumil Novák, ‘Václav Řezáč: „Rozhrani“. Roman. Nákladem Fr. Borového, Praha 1945’, Kriticky 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.


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. 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. 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

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1 Régin 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 Régin 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 Překročený průh (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. 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. 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.

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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.

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 Rezaje’, Literární noviny, 6, 1955, p. 6-7.
7 In his article on Fučík’s Reportáz psaná na oprátcie, 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, Reportáz psaná na oprátcie (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. 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. 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 Slepa 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.

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. In my analyses of Slepa 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

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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).
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 ‘konstruování záměrnosti’. 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 Rozhrani, 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.

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. 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 novels, Jaroslav Havlíček, particularly in Neviditelný (The Invisible, 1937), Miroslav Hanuš’s Méněčenost (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, Markéta 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 *Slepa 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 ideologeme 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.

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.

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