Notions of Identity in the Work of Egon Hostovský

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of personal identity in the work of the Czech writer Egon Hostovsky (1908–73), a major exponent of the twentieth-century psychological ‘analytical’ novel in Czech. Traditional readings of his oeuvre have been marred by the failure to separate his biography from his fiction. In the pre-Second World War period he has often been labelled as a ‘Jewish’ writer because of his Jewish background; the post-war reception of Hostovsky has tended either to sentimentalize him or treat his work politically because of his exile from Czechoslovakia both during and after the Second World War. This thesis aims to challenge many of these readings by a disinterested evaluation of his work.

This thesis also attempts to demonstrate the consistency of Hostovsky’s thematic concerns across his oeuvre both by studying unified blocks of his work chronologically and by discrete studies of important themes. Chapters include Hostovsky’s treatment of Jewish identity against the background of Jewish consciousness in Central Europe; Hostovsky’s use of the double within the parameters of conventional literary treatments of this device; and Hostovsky’s examination of power. Those chapters organized according to a chronological principle break down Hostovsky’s work into three periods: the early work (up to the Second World War, although a distinction is drawn between his work prior to the 1930s and thereafter); his wartime and immediate post-war work; and the work of his ‘second exile’ from the 1950s onwards. The main concerns of this study are Hostovsky’s treatment of the Romantic outsider; of social and personal disintegration; and of the individual’s struggle for authenticity.

This thesis includes criticism of Hostovsky’s earliest work published in journals, which has been entirely ignored in the critical reception of his work, and important personal correspondence from the archives of the Museum of National Literature in Prague.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>Jewish Identity and the Relationship between Jewishness and Outsiderdom</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>Hostovský’s Early Work: The Prison of the Self</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>The Double in Hostovský’s Fiction</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>The Relationship between Power and Identity</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>Days of Judgement: Hostovský’s Exile, 1939–47</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>The Last Refuge of the Self: Hostovský’s Post-War Work</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

Hostovský’s works (other than those published in journals) are referenced in the main body of the thesis in brackets rather than in footnotes. Anyone seeking publication details of Hostovský’s novels and collections of short stories is referred to the bibliography. I have adopted the most obvious abbreviations of the titles of Hostovský’s works: Ztracený stín, for example, is referenced as ZS, Dům bez pána as DBP, Listy z vyhnání as LZV. No two titles contract to the same abbreviation.

I have in nearly all instances referred to the third person as ‘he’, partly because Hostovský is mainly concerned with male protagonists, but also not to encumber the text unduly with ‘he/she’.
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Professor Robert Pynsent for acting as my supervisor for this thesis, and for his efforts in reading Hostovský’s work and mine. I would also like to thank Dr David Chirico for supporting me through many anxious moments throughout my academic life, and I must mention Graham Amer for giving me the time I needed to complete this work. Most of all, I would like to thank John Andrew for his total support and encouragement of me, and his assistance in reading and commenting on my work: without my thesis, I would never have met John, and correspondingly, without John, I would never have finished my thesis.
Introduction

Hostovský is a moral, even didactic, writer. His oeuvre constitutes a portrait of phenomenal social and personal disintegration deriving from the loss of a quasi-mystical metaphysical unity. It is unlikely that any other Czech writer has demonstrated across such a large body of work so consistent a study of self-consciousness and concentration on philosophical-ethical problems concerning selfhood, such as guilt and self-deception. Put simply, Hostovský’s work concerns the individual’s struggle to develop an authentic existence in the world.

As early as the 1930s, prominent critics championed Hostovský as a major exponent, and modernizer, of the Czech psychological ‘analytical’ prose novel. Karel Sezima, for example, deemed Hostovský the ‘heir’ of the psychological ‘analytical’ novel,¹ and Pavel Fraenkl considered him to be the continuer and inheritor of a nineteenth-century tradition of analytical prose and of the interior monologue.² Hostovský’s exploration of the (often murky) interior of the self was the characteristic which had first drawn the attention of critics such as F.X. Šalda, Karel Sezima, František Götz, A.M. Piša and Václav Černý to the author’s works of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Indeed critics recognized Hostovský’s developing talent as a serious novelist long before he attained any popularity with his reading public.

The critical reception of Hostovský’s work has too often interwoven the author’s identity with analyses of his texts. Even in the 1920s and 1930s, a highpoint of Hostovský criticism in so far as his work was extensively reviewed (with acuity) by the leading critics of the time, his Jewish identity led critics astray from disinterested evaluations (one thinks particularly of Sezima in this regard). Hostovský’s occasional use of Jewish protagonists and his Czech-Jewish background meant that he was erroneously considered to be a mouthpiece for Jewish problems: as late as 1963, René Wellek misrepresents

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¹ See Karel Sezima, ‘Z nové tvorby románové’ in Lumír, 64, 1937–38, p. 160.
² Pavel Fraenkl, K problematice sebecitu v díle Egona Hostovského, Prague, 1936, p. 4. Fraenkl’s work on Hostovský was also published in the fifty-sixth volume of the Kalendář. For reviews of this edition, see ‘amp.’ [A.M. Piša] in Právo lidu, 45, no. 167, 19 July 1936, p. 7 and ‘m.n.’ [Miloslav Novotný] in Lidové noviny, 40, no. 410, 14 August 1932, p. 9.
Hostovsky as ‘a specialist in the Jewish problem’ who has written ‘novels of horror and crime’. Since the 1920s and 1930s Hostovsky’s subsequent status as an exile — from 1939 and until his death in 1973 — has muddied assessments of his work. His position as persona non grata under the Czechoslovak Communist regime, which he alleges derived as much from his publication of the novel Nezvěstný as from his exile, meant that critics were forbidden from writing about him and were unable to obtain access to his work through conventional means (libraries stored his works in the archives for forbidden books, though his pre-war works were available in second-hand bookshops), and publishers were unable to publish his work within Czechoslovakia; naturally this led to a serious dearth of critical scholarship on Hostovsky — although one might suggest that Miloš Pohorský was a notable exception. The first attempt to publish Hostovsky’s work in post-war Czechoslovakia was made in 1959, with the novel Půlnocní pacient, but in the final stages of publication the novel was prevented by the Communist authorities from being distributed.

What criticism there has been from within Czechoslovakia, and then the Czech Republic, has sometimes been marred by the sentimentalization of Hostovsky’s various ‘returns’ to Czech literature, namely in 1945, 1967–69 (when the relaxation of censorship meant that Hostovsky was suddenly hailed as a representative of Czech literature in the world), and since 1989. Consequently, the thematic progression in Hostovsky’s work has been neglected and his work in general inadequately assessed. The Changes of 1989 have resulted in a remedying of this situation in so far as two short monographs

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4 František Kautman, in an interview with Jiří Peňaší, asserts that Nezvěstný was originally translated into English and published in America as a propaganda tool for soldiers because it was mistakenly understood as a ‘tendenční, agitační, protikomunistický román’ (‘Hostovsky na cestě domů. S Františkem Kautmanem o velkém autorovi’ in *Lidová demokracie*, 49, no. 133, 10 June 1993, p. 6). In Kautman’s view, this politicized reception of the novel assisted Hostovsky in finding a readership in America.
6 See Věra Karišková, ‘Egon Hostovsky v české literatuře’, *Literární listy*, 1, no. 9, 25 April 1968, p. 9. In this period the collection of novels *Cizinci hledají byt* (Prague, 1967) was published, and *Jihra* republished; an exhibition devoted to Jan Cep and Egon Hostovsky was held in May and June of 1969 (see the pamphlet of the exhibition, *Návraty: Jan Cep a Egon Hostovsky*, Prague–Strahov, May–June 1969; and Josef Tráger selected and published extracts of Hostovsky’s work in *Divadelní noviny* in 1968. Hostovsky also considered visiting Czechoslovakia in this period.
assessing most of Hostovsky’s work have appeared, but these are not without their shortcomings for the student who seeks to understand his achievement. The first, František Kautman’s 1994 study, is little more than a compendium of the themes and motifs in Hostovsky’s oeuvre, and by means of diligent plodding compensates in small measure for what it lacks in critical acuity, with bursts of common sense making the reader more forgiving of such flashes of purple prose as ‘Egon Hostovský zemřel, v hlubinách se zachvěla země, jako vždy, když odchází veliký tvůrce’.

Moreover, the fact that the work was actually written (and circulated in samizdat) in 1973, during the years of Normalization, means that little account is taken of post-war scholarship (which was minimal, because of the ban on Hostovský, but the period of Normalization may have inhibited Kautman from referring to the sudden glut of interest in Hostovský in the 1960s). By contrast, Vladimír Papoušek’s short monograph of 1996, Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru, is the most intelligent and penetrating analysis of Rostovsky’s work to date, although the fact that it barely refers to any other literature, primary or secondary, mars its completeness and does not do justice to the work of some other critics in this area, from pre-war Šalda to post-war Pohorský, on whose ideas it may draw.

Apart from reawakening or facilitating the critical reassessment of Hostovský, the Changes of 1989 have also ignited a minor explosion of public interest in the writer: Hronov, conventionally known by Czechs as the birthplace of the historical novelist Alois Jirásek and of Josef Čapek, has added Hostovsky to its roll-call by renaming one of the main streets and a library after him, although the irony of a town which allegedly did nothing to preserve its Jewish population during the German Occupation suddenly reclaiming a Czech-Jewish writer was remarked upon by one critic in the local press. Public interest in Hostovský has no doubt been kindled by the selective republication of some of his oeuvre (which has also been accompanied by a spate of individual book reviews in the literary press) and serializations of his work in various literary

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8 Vladimír Novotný is even more dismissive on this point than I am, arguing that the conceptual basis of Papoušek’s work — the model of the closed space — so bewitched the critic ‘že podobně koncipoval i svůj monografický výklad’; Novotný finds not a single reference to Czech literature of the twentieth century, let alone inter-war or post-war literature (see Tvar, 5, no. 20, 8 September 1994, p. 10).

9 As reported in Mladá fronta Dnes, 4, no. 124, 31 May 1993, p. 11.
newspapers, not to mention the first English-language translation of a pre-war Hostovský novel, *The Arsonist (Žhář)*, but this general interest probably peaked in 1993–94 (when a large conference was also held in Hostovský's birthplace, Hronov and *Nezvěstný* was republished).

In order to evaluate Hostovský's contribution to Czech literature, it is perhaps prudent to endeavour first to understand the genesis and concerns of the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century psychological 'analytical' novel. I would like to begin with the statement that the psychological 'analytical' novel has its genealogy in the nineteenth-century Realist movement, but that it is partly a generic hybrid, subsuming elements of Romanticism, the Gothic and Decadence. Although Realism is a hazy term, and some writers who were characterized as Realists repudiated the term, there was a conscious movement in the nineteenth century, emanating from France in around the 1830s and gathering pace by the 1850s, which we identify as Realist in intention. In his manifesto *Le Réalisme*, published in the same year (1857) as Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, the French novelist Champfleury, setting out a position markedly different from that of the Romantics with their advocacy of 'liberty', stressed instead the need for 'sincerity' (that is, presumably, fidelity to life) in literature and the need to eschew such literary excesses as poetic diction or melodrama. Champfleury argued for a precise, almost sociological, documentation of the details of everyday life, with the ordinary man as hero.

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10 *Epidémie* was serialized weekly in the supplement section of *Telegraf*, 2, 1993, 17 April–26 June; Hostovský's memoirs were published in *Literární noviny*, 4, 1993, nos. 3–13 (21 January–1 April 1993), p. 16 in each edition; an extract from his memoirs appeared in the weekend supplement of *Lidové noviny*, 5, no. 98, 25 April 1992, p. 16; an extract from *Nezvěstný* appeared in weekend supplement of *Lidové noviny*, 6, no. 42, 20 February 1993, p. 16.

11 Published by Twisted Spoon Press, an independent publisher based in Prague, funded by organizations such as Unesco (and, in this case, also by the Czech Ministry of Culture): the Press has a remit to translate, and make available to an English-speaking readership, classics of modern Czech literature.


13 One cannot help wondering whether it was a cynically political act to choose to reissue this particular novel first, given that it deals with the Communist takeover of 1948 and might therefore attract a readership keen to absorb information about the Communists.
One might propose therefore that the Realist novel is concerned with a certain transparency of representation, that, for example, the reader, led by the narrator’s depiction of a table, sees just that table. Indeed it is the hermetic nature of the world that arouses conflict in the Realist novel: the rebellious protagonist resists pre-conceived notions of how the world, and more specifically his/her role in the world, should be (one thinks, for example, of *Anna Karenina* or *The Doll’s House*); transgressions inexorably proceed either to punishment or to redemption, thus negating the individual’s fulfilment in order to substantiate the wider moral order. Dobrava Moldanová is probably right in her assertion that one starting point for the twentieth-century psychological ‘analytical’ novel is the novel of lost illusions, received in the 1880s and 1890s from French and Russian and adapted for a Czech context. The ‘Realist’ pattern of rebellion followed by punishment or redemption (which also underlies the Gothic novel) continues into the twentieth-century psychological ‘analytical’ novel, as do other characteristic outlines of Realist prose such as the emphasis on the contrast between town (that is, alienation, moral destruction) and country setting (that is, purity, originality, moral nobility) which Moldanová identifies.

The question of what marks the distinction between the Realist and the psychological novel may just be a question of how different the twentieth-century is from the nineteenth-century novel, or the Modernist from the nineteenth-century Realist novel, but it is useful in any case to consider that distinction. Remembering the philosophical distinction between realism and anti-realism, which addresses the relationship between the individual mind and the outside world, with one foregrounding the independence of the world

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14 Patrick Reilly argues that the theme of the nineteenth-century novel is rescue or redemption, particularly by love, and that ‘However harsh the narrative, the end is always a reconciliation’ (*The Literature of Guilt: From Gulliver to Golding*, Iowa City, 1988, p. 5), and Patricia Meyer Spacks finds in nineteenth-century novels dealing with adolescence that ‘the nineteenth-century warnings against ambition acknowledge it while denouncing it. Desire supplies energy, generates conflict, makes action — the stuff of novels. It also raises questions of value. The *Bildungsroman* structure nominally evades such questions by implying that growing up constitutes a goal as well as a process. The generations follow each other in orderly succession; the desires of the young provide, at most, temporary interruptions in the reassuring sequence’ (see *The Adolescent Idea: Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination*, London, 1982, p. 293).

outside the mind, the other insisting on the pre-eminence of the mind, the shift from the Realist novel to the psychological one necessitates a shift of focus from the world to the self. Narrative moves away from detailing the constituents of the external world to detailing only those which are significant to a particularized point-of-view, and we experience a consequent alteration in how the world is perceived. In the Realist novel the self is one element in the external world; in the psychological 'analytical' novel the world appears to be nothing but the self.

The movement 'inwards' naturally has profound implications for the make-up of any text (narration, space, time, characterization). The treatment of time in the psychological 'analytical' novel necessarily reflects the new appreciation of consciousness — and personality — since the late nineteenth century; one thinks, for example, of William James's understanding of consciousness as an amalgam of the individual's experiences, Freud's theory of repression in which retrieval of past experience is integral, Henri-Louis Bergson's concept of la durée (or duration, that is, time as experienced by consciousness and the notion of consciousness as 'the continuation of an indefinite past in a living present'), and the literary phenomenon of Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27) in which the past, apparently irretrievable, is demonstrated to be eternally alive in the unconscious. The psychological 'analytical' novel incorporates, and is sometimes shaped by, the subject's irregular experience of time, so that the reader is forced to hold to different variants of time, on the one hand mechanical and chronological time, on the other, the continuity and meandering nature of time, and sometimes the stasis of time. Thus one finds in Hostovský's work, as in that of Joyce and Woolf, time constantly being measured, with clocks ticking and calendar leaves turning, while the disjointed chronological sequence of narration represents an attempt by the author to render the simultaneity of time in the protagonist's consciousness, as past and present seep continuously into one another. The influence of Dostoevskii on Hostovský in terms of the architectonics of the novel should not, however, be underestimated. Dostoevskii appears to mark the beginning of the modern psychological 'analytical' novel, for no author before him had been as innovative and complex in commanding narrative devices and modes of narration in the service of capturing the 'atmosphere of the mind', which Leon
Edel describes as unique to the work of writers such as Joyce and Woolf. William Leatherbarrow writes of *Crime and Punishment*, one of the intertexts for Hostovský's first novel, that 'The reader is drawn immediately into a world that is displaced and warped by the consciousness of the hero dominating it. [...] Even the basic parameters of the novel, those of time and space, are rendered uncertain by this narrative device. The reader experiences time as Raskol’nikov experiences it; infinitely drawn out in places, precipitate in others. Space, too, becomes a function of consciousness as we lose, along with Raskol’nikov, all sense of the relationship between things.' Václav Černý, writing in 1935 on the treatment of space in the novel,\(^{16}\) considers Dostoevskii to be the great innovator in the modern depiction of space in the novel. Černý scorns those who have interpreted Dostoevskii as a great Realist, arguing that he is far more interested in the metaphysical criminal than the empirical one, and that most of the human dramas he describes begin and end somewhere outside the material world. One could easily apply these statements to Hostovský. Dostoevskii’s depiction of space exists on several levels, the first an anecdotal one, the second psychological, the third metaphysical, and the fourth mystical. I will consider how Hostovský moves towards this complex use of space in the novel when I discuss the themes and structure of his works of the 1930s.

Because of the shift in perspective to a subjectivized point of view, critics often describe the twentieth-century novel as a product, or concomitant effect of the same cultural atmosphere that produced the thinking, of William James, Freud and, to a lesser degree perhaps, Bergson. Leon Edel, for example, states that 'the modern psychological novel is “modern” in that it reflects the deeper and more searching *inwardness* of our century', and cites these three authorities as a huge influence on early twentieth-century culture, while Moldanová argues that Bergsonian philosophy, ‘zdůrazňující intuici, citovost a otevřenost’, and the work of Freud, Jung and Adler in unveiling the irrational components of personality further influenced the development of the psychological ‘analytical’ novel.\(^{17}\) These perceptions are partial, for they encourage the erroneous idea that the self became a source of study only after

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\(^{16}\) See Václav Černý, ‘O románovém prostoru’ in *Literárni noviny*, 8, no. 6, 29 November 1935, pp. 5 and 7.

\(^{17}\) Moldanová, ‘Pojetí zla v českém psychologickém románu’ (see note 16), p. 30.
Freud and that what was beneath the ‘surface’ of the self was explored first by psychoanalysis. The modern ‘emotional’ preoccupation with the expression of personality, with the subjectivity of experience, must be traced back to the eighteenth century, when Romanticism flourishes and the precursors of the modern novel begin. Lyons describes it as a time in which ‘things had become topsy-turvy. It began with the proper study of man being Man; it ended with the proper study of man being himself’ and notes that, although other philosophers (Descartes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume) had been moving epistemology in this direction, it was Kant in the 1780s who set forth the notion that all knowledge begins with the sensations. Buckley similarly suggests that the invention of the self dates from the 1760s onwards, when ‘In an increasingly secular world, “self” has become a euphemism or substitute for “soul”’. If, however, the soul offers some notion of constancy and security, the boundaries of the self are more uncertain; the externalized, intransigent morality of a god is replaced by the internalized, and sometimes confused or opaque, morality of conscience. The demise of the soul and the rise of the self more generally reorientate literature away from an ordered and coherent universe, and — where the subject-matter is confession or introspection — away from instruction through the paradigm of a life, to a record of sensations, fraught searches for meaning, profound doubts about social and political structures, all features which can be found in Hostovsky’s work.

While, however, the Romantics had foregrounded the self, overwhelmingly as something natural — sometimes primitive — and authentic, creative and spontaneous, arguably, they never questioned the nature of that self, seeking only to indulge it. Before James and Freud, however, one has only to turn to Dostoevskii in literature, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in philosophy, and, in the Czech literary context, to the Decadents to find radical precedents for this ‘searching inwardness’. All have in common the fact that they are purveyors of crisis, catastrophists of different kinds, and that they nevertheless believe in

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18 In contrast to, for example, the analytical Enlightenment dissection of the self.
19 The reference is to Pope’s 1732–34 An Essay on Man, which had exhorted its audience to ‘Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; The proper study of mankind is man’ (II.1).
some means of the individual ‘overcoming’ the common (miserable) lot (which one might interpret as an attempt to move beyond instincts) — whether Dostoevskii’s conception of a realm of love and absolute freedom, Schopenhauer’s paradigms of the artist and the saint who can attain a quietus from striving, Nietzsche’s Übermensch, or the Decadent dandy. A primary focus for them all is man’s enslavement by his empirical existence, and this theme is a central concern in Hostovsky’s work.

Hostovsky’s interest in the unknown or buried self must, nevertheless, be placed against the background of the emergence of modern psychology/psychiatry at the end of the nineteenth and in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Judith Ryan defines late nineteenth-century empiricism — particularly the philosophizing strand in psychology as represented by Franz Brentano (Psychology from an Empiricist Point of View, 1874), Ernst Mach (Analysis of Sensations, 1886) and William James (Principles of Psychology, 1890) — as meaning that the only way that the existence of something could be verified was through our senses, so that in effect consciousness was presented as the only reality. For the empiricists, there was no metaphysical reality behind or beyond the senses, nor a demarcation between what constituted a subject and what constituted an object, since these distinctions disappeared in the light of believing that everything which existed resided in consciousness alone.22 These ideas may have informed Hostovsky’s earliest works, but from the 1930s onwards his conception of reality is increasingly metaphysical. One cannot ignore, however, the influence of Freud, the propagator of the notion of the psychopathology of everyday life, which is consistently a focus of Hostovsky’s work.

Any critic attempting to offer a new interpretation of Hostovsky’s oeuvre has the labour of wading through the swamp of typological ‘ism’s, labels and complexes — specifically, Expressionism, Naturalism, Existentialism, but also Impressionism, psychoanalysis, and the notion of the inferiority complex — which critics have bandied around heedless of the need to wrestle with the indeterminacy of such descriptions or attempt to define exactly what they understand by them. This varied critical typology of Hostovsky’s work is itself

a statement about his work, reflecting the quality his texts have of evading rigid categorization, particularly as his main objective appears to be ethical, that is, the search for some underlying truth about everyday life, about human beings and their relationships. This ethical pursuit is also a quasi-mystical one, for the personal search for truth, and the struggle to find one's identity in the world, becomes, as his work progresses, a quest for the true nature of the universe. Hostovsky’s work is all about the mysteries concealed behind and beyond our empirical existence. Concealment of the self from the self, of the self from others, and of the world or the universe from the self, dominates his oeuvre, both thematically and narratively.
Chapter 1

Jewish Identity and the Relationship between Jewishness and Outsiderdom

Hostovský is a Czech writer who has only sometimes concentrated on Jewish themes: six of his works — ostensibly at least — deal explicitly with problems of Jewish identity through Jewish protagonists;\(^1\) furthermore, Jewish characters as token outsiders (usually linked to commercial transactions or avarice)\(^2\) or as minor figures occur in most of his works. Žhár, for example, contains a reference to the blood libel,\(^3\) and the short story ‘Záhada’ to the Hilsner affair.\(^4\)

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2. There are many examples, but one will suffice. In Černá tlupa, against the background of wartime famine, people complain ‘o zlých a proradných židech, kterí všechno zavinili’ (p. 113). (Blaming the Jews for the First World War was a basic tenet of the propaganda of the Nazis and the German Right who saw the War as a ‘stock exchange’ revolution serving Jewish financial interests and also allowing the Allies thereby to enslave the Germans: see Robert S. Wistrich, Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred, London, 1991 [hereafter Antisemitism], p. 70.)
3. There is some parody of the ideal barman in the figure of Šimon, who believes no one and accepts everyone; he has his pub boycotted for a month by the community for housing a Jew accused of blood libel (the antisemitic accusation, widespread since the Middle Ages, that Jews killed Christians in order to use their blood in the making of matzo, an accusation which the Nazis also used as part of their anti-Jewish propaganda). The reference to the blood libel may be an indirect reference, in Czech consciousness, to the Hilsner affair. The mayor here is an antisémite, and considers the Jews, whom he implies have money, happiness and big mouths for the country’s woes (Ž, p. 53). The persisting popular belief in ritual murder is also mentioned in Božena Benešová’s Člověk, 2 vols, Prague, 1919–20, Part I, p. 204 (1 quote from the second, 1934, edition). Antisemitic rumours are circulated by the young man Martin about the Jew Silbermann, ‘že děvče ukradl a kdo vl, jesli je již nazabil, krev mu nezachytil a mrtvé do Dunaje nehodil’ (Part II, p. 108).
4. In the incident cited here, the writer Tomek gives an account ‘o tom podivném profesoru, který se zastal židů, když vypukla ta ošklivá Hilsnerova aféra, a který je teď ve Francii nebo v America nebo snad v Anglii a s pomocí Wilsona a toho Francouze s nemožným a nevyslovitelným jménem [...] chce svrhnut rakouského císaře a dosadit na český trůn nějakého krále nebo dokonce vyhlásit republiku’ (OB, p. 57). The reference is clearly to Tomáš Masaryk, although his role in the affair was to campaign against superstition.

Leopold Hilsner was a Jewish shoemaker’s assistant condemned for the ‘ritual murder’ of a Christian girl at Polná, Moravia, in 1899. He was sentenced to death, then retried and given life-imprisonment, eventually being amnestied towards the end of the First World War (see František Červinka, ‘The Hilsner Affair’, Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook, 13, 1968, pp. 142–57). The Hilsner ritual murder case, which unleashed a new wave of violence against Jews, was the culmination of a series of anti-Jewish incidents throughout the 1890s spurred by university and labour unrest: from the early 1890s antisemitism had become a force in Czech and German student politics. For example,
In my introduction, I mentioned briefly the susceptibility on the part of critics, in the reviews of Hostovsky’s early work, to typecast Hostovsky as a ‘Jewish writer’. There has been a corresponding failure to treat fully either Hostovsky’s statements about his own identity or the representation of Jews in his fiction.

What is meant by ‘a sense of Jewish identity’ or ‘Jewishness’ requires more precise definition: it can refer to religious, racial or ‘national’ affiliation, and one might argue that Jewishness is also a category imposed by others in spite of the individual’s self-ascribed identity as Czech or German, for example. That Hostovsky is so frequently compared to Kafka, despite the dissimilarity in their prose-styles, and despite the different experiences of being a Czech-speaking, and a German-speaking, Jew, may demonstrate a predisposition on the part of critics to be swayed by racial, and not literary, parallels. ‘A sense of Jewish identity’ has frequently been extrapolated both by antisemites and Jews to infer metaphysical characteristics concomitant with a racial interpretation of Jewishness, such as the myth of the Jewish mind. These different hermeneutic strands are evident in Hostovsky criticism, particularly in the large body of pre-war reviews but also in the two most recent substantial studies of his work (Kautman’s and Papoušek’s), and are used by critics unquestioningly. Religious interpretations, like the metaphysical nonsense stimulated by racial interpretations, show themselves in Hostovsky criticism to be no more positivist; their metaphorical/analogical bent makes of every outsider a Wandering Jew, and then of every Wandering Jew an immanent Hostovsky. Indeed the distinction between Jewishness as a racial and as a religious

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5 J.B. Čapek, for example, introduces his review of Danajský dar by acknowledging Hostovsky’s achievement in Ghetto v nich where ‘s vášnivou úporností si řešil problém židovství a to intensivně (vztah židovských dětí k rodičům) i extensivně (poměr k světu nežidovskému)’ (J.B.Č. [Čapek], Naše doba, 37, 1929–30, p. 502). A year later, Čapek opens his review of Ztracený stín by describing Hostovsky as a writer who concentrates in his work on the problem of Jewishness (Naše doba, 38, 1930–31, p. 568), which smacks of a critic attempting prematurely to pigeonhole a writer.
category is frequently blurred, or lazily glossed over, by critics. Moreover, the
collection of much twentieth-century literature with themes of
outsiderdom, disintegration and loss (the traumatic effect on society of the First
World War, for example) seems outside of the purview of those critics who
wish to interpret Hostovský from within the confines of Judaism.

Novák, for example, suggests that Hostovský is so acutely conscious of his
Jewishness, particularly the ‘kmenové roztrousení a ahasverův svůj rasy’, that
he translates that sense to his fictional characters and creates a modern
Ahasuerus in the Czech novel.6 Pistorius acclaims the troika of Hostovský,
Vančura and Čep as the up-and-coming innovators in Czech prose of the
1920s; he claims that their different religious backgrounds (Jewish, Protestant
and Catholic, respectively) shape their different conceptions of the individual.
Hostovský — the author of Ghetto v nich, Pistorius reminds us — ‘chtě nechtě
nosítel judaistického duchovního komplexu, o to více dramaticky podtrženého
právě oním vykořeněním hledajícím zakotvení ve vůli asimilaci’.7 Pistorius
seems to insinuate that the author is identified with the work he has written,
despite the fact that the title (v nich) explicitly directs the reader away from the
author; and Pistorius neither defines the Jewish mental complex nor questions
the veracity of its existence.

Another source of erroneous criticism lies in depicting Hostovský as the
conveyor of a Hebrew religious tradition. Jan Čep, for example, considers the
foundation of Hostovský’s prose to be metaphysical and religious,8 while Else
Westh-Neuhardová finds Hostovský difficult to translate because of the
conflicting elements in his nature, ‘která čerpá nejen z české kulturní půdy, ale
e i z bohatých židovských tradicí’.9 Pistorius sees religion acting on the prose of
his appointed troika in a concrete, linguistic way; admitting that his statement
may appear hyperbolic, he claims that Hostovský ‘nikterak není a nikdy nebyl
necitlivý před poesií hebrejského náboženského životního pocitu. Jest
okouzlován jeho sensibilitou, jest přístupen jejímu svěbytnému filosofickému

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6 ‘N.k.’ [B. Novák], reviewing Případ profesora Kornera in Rozpravy Aventina, 7, 1931–
32, p. 312.
7 Jiří Pistorius (ed.), Padesáti let Egona Hostovského 1958, New York, 1958 (hereafter
Padesát let), p. 12.
8 Ibid., p. 18.
9 Ibid., p. 51.
světu'. Papoušek seems to draw a link between the Old Testament notion of a world unified under the rule of one God, who remains intangible and incomprehensible, always at a distance to man, and Expressionism and Existentialism: 'A právě těmito třemi body lze vymezit dílo spisovatele Egonova Hostovského, který vystoupil do literatury jako expresionista, byl jedním z předchůdců existencialismu, a hebrejská tradice stála nejen v pozadí jeho původu, ale především prolínala v podobě specifické symboliky celým jeho dílem.'

What all these critics fail to deal with, however, is a corroboration of their arguments through textual analysis; in the absence of this analysis, these propositions serve as sentimental musings rather than literary criticism. To find resonances of a Hebrew, and not a Judaeo-Christian, tradition in Hostovsky's work is arbitrarily to weight the scales in one direction. An examination of his fiction proffers little to support the 'religious' camp. Dobročinný večírek, for example, has a motto from the Talmud:


The intertext is an 'appendage' rather than woven into the fictive fabric of the novel. Nevertheless, Pistorius finds the use of this Talmudic motto as demonstration of the validity of his thesis: 'Z Talmud, a to právě z místa, v němž se protkuly oba ony rysy tak příznacné pro tuto životní optiku Israele: apokalyptická vise a dialektika', and declares that the last sentence about God crying with His flock would not be found in a Protestant or Catholic writer.

In 'Poslání' (Osamělí buřiči) a man is saved from murdering a child by hearing through the wall a reading of the Book of Esther, but again, the intertext is

10 Ibid., p. 12.
12 Pistorius (ed.), Padesát let, p. 12.
13 Ibid., p. 13.
14 Clearly the people in the adjacent room are celebrating purim, a feast in the Jewish calendar for remembering the defence of the Jews by Esther and her uncle Mordecai. See the Book of Esther.
deployed in such a way that it is consciously interpolated, or alluded to, rather than in some way informing Hostovský's style or subject-matter.

Given the paucity of biblical Jewish texts in Hostovský's work, one assumes that it is his treatment of exile, and its analogue with Jewish experience (the Babylonian Captivity, Exodus, the Wandering Jew) that fosters these interpretations. Hostovský's self-consciousness in making this analogy explicit suggests that biblical Jewish experience does not 'naturally' percolate into his work as a given of his Jewish background. Perhaps it would be wiser to approach Hostovský as a writer consciously engaged in a form of mythopoeia. Hostovský's self-centred inclination to universalize his experience of life is evident in his discussion of Olbracht's 1937 Golet v údolí, in which twentieth-century man's — read Hostovský's — experience of exile, homelessness, alienation and desire for salvation is an allegorical re-enactment of the biblical Jewish experience:


In his contribution to a scholarly work on Jews, published by the Jewish Publication Society of America and the American-based Society for the History of the Czechoslovak Jews, Hostovský mentions Joachim Prinz's Dilemma of the Modern Jew; he identifies Prinz's presentation of the dilemma of the modern Jew as neither wishing to merge with the world around him nor willing to live in the land of his father. In Hostovský's view, such a dilemma arises from the modern Jew's (and Prinz's) lack of belief in the metaphysical

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¹⁵ 'Poslední rozhovor', an interview with Antonín Liehm in Egon Hostovský: Vzpomínky, studie a dokumenty o jeho dile a osudu, comp. Rudolf Šturm, Toronto, 1974 (hereafter Egon Hostovský), pp. 160-91 (181). This interview was also translated into English and published as 'Egon Hostovský — A Last Conversation' in Canadian Slavonic Papers, 16, 1974, 4, pp. 539–67. Hostovský actually echoes the words of one of his characters, Wolf, in Dům bez pánů: 'Pro žida je všude góles, vyhnanství, zde si to ovšem uvědomují silněji. Ale i ve vyhnanství si můžeme nalézt pevné místo' (DBP, p. 117).
content of Judaism — which the Czech-Jewish movement had — 'such as the mystery of the law of the eternal alienation in Jewish history between dispersal and ingathering'.^{16} If the Jew does not believe in this, Hostovsky argues, he can find no way out of the Jewish dilemma.

Hostovsky may have been self-conscious about his Jewishness. Steven Beller, dealing with the influence of Jewish intellectuals in fin-de-siècle Vienna, makes the point that 'any position taken on the Jewish question, either positive or negative, is evidence that it was still a conscious factor in the minds of these people'.^{17} Even Papoušek, writing as recently as 1996, fails to understand the 'consciousness' problem in all its complexity. Papoušek assumes that being an assimilated Jew — like Hostovsky, or his friend František Langer — involves belonging to a group of people who have detailed on their official documents that their religion is Israel, but who neither outwardly or inwardly bear any witness to this fact and feel moreover that they are Czech.\textsuperscript{18} Hostovsky's averred sense of 'odlišnost' is, however, absent from Papoušek's discussion. As for Hostovsky sharing a similar experience of Jewishness to František Langer, one might conjecture from the latter's memoir essay about his brother, Jiří Langer, the student of Hassidism, that František represents a paradigm of the assimilated Jew who is self-conscious about his Jewish identity. The family embarrassment at Jiří's full Hassidic apparel and changed habits, on his return from Belz in Galicia in 1913, albeit a natural response to a member of one's family attracting derisive public attention, also testifies to the assimilated Jew's desire neither to be visibly reminded of his Jewishness by the appearance of an 'unreconstructed', 'embodied' Jew nor for this association to be suggested to others: 'Celá rodina, jako celá tehdejší židovská společnost, se naprosto asimilovala k všem vnějším znakům a zvyklostem svého okolí — neusvědčoval zjev Jiřího teď všecky z přetvářky a z pokrytectví? [...] Tady mezi námi obcházelo strašidlo minulosti nebo někdo,
kdo vstal z mrtvých a byl výstrahou. Jíří’s description of his family’s anxiety communicates their fear that his brother’s deportment might be considered a provocation in some way and arouse a slumbering antisemitism. František Langer may indeed not make a point of his Jewishness, but he must nevertheless be acutely aware of it.

According to Hostovsky’s statements about his own life, his family were assimilated Jews and were Jewish more out of inertia than conviction, and yet his comments suggest a discomfort about his Jewish identity, ‘Hostovští byli zemani odkudsi od Pardubic, Židé se z nich stali až kdysi v osmnácém století, ale marná sláva, Žid jsem a Žid jsem byl už dvě stě let.’ Hostovsky’s assertion that his family did not convert to Judaism until the eighteenth century is a disavowal of a racial affiliation to Jewishness, which, on its own, need not be indicative of shame in being Jewish, but the juxtaposition of ‘ale marná sláva’ exhibits a ‘negative consciousness’. The negative consciousness is, however, hyperbolic: ‘Žid jsem byl už dvě stě let’ makes Hostovsky sound like someone masochistically carrying the burden of the past on his back, as if he believes that he is in part racially programmed (in terms of his genetic inheritance) to be a Jew, despite his acknowledgement of his forebears’ conversion to Judaism.

Hostovsky is entangled by the same sentimental trap which ensnares many of his critics, namely, transmuting a religious affiliation (which he has gone out of his way to stress) into a metaphysical racial one. Hostovsky dates his self-consciousness about his identity back to the age of seventeen, when the reading of Fischer’s 1923 collection of poems Hlasy appears to have had a profound effect upon him:

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19 František Langer, Byli a bylo, Prague, 1963, p. 191, but see generally pp. 188–91. František Langer is reminded of Kafka’s Die Verwandlung and his interpretation of the work is telling in so far as he locates his sympathies with those of the family in the story rather than with the Ich-narrator.
20 František Langer makes a similar point in his collection of memoir essays: ‘Většina židovských rodin ve střední Evropě žila kolem roku 1900 již zcela vlažným náboženským životem. Vlastně způsob života, v kterém náboženství ještě hrálo velikou úlohu, se ukončí v našich dědečků’ (ibid., p. 184).
22 See Beller: ‘the statement about not being regarded as Jewish is actually an admission of pride in not being taken for a Jew. This is a classic case of “negative consciousness”, the wish, or the belief, that you had escaped your Jewishness’ (Vienna and the Jews, p. 75).
23 Otokar Fischer, Hlasy, Prague, 1923.
Často jsem býval smutný, deprimovaný a nevěděl jsem proč. [...] [Rabbi Gustav Sicher] Byl však znamenitý psycholog, vytušil, co mě trápí. Když už jsem byl na vyšším gymnasiu a nechodil na náboženství, stýkal jsem se s ním dále; a tehdy mi půjčil [...] HLASY. Neměl jsem ponětí, že Otokar Fischer byl Žid. [...] Sbirka Hlasy mi jaksi otevřela mé vlastní problémy. [...] Začalo mě zajímat, co je židovství vlastně za černokřešťanské.24

In fact the reading of Fischer’s poems set into motion a train of events in which Hostovský was spurred by his curiosity: he joined the Czech-Jewish organization Kapper,25 befriended the Czech-Jewish philosopher (particularly of assimilation theory) Jindřich Kohn (to whom Případ profesora Körnera is dedicated), and went to Subcarpathian Ukraine and Poland with Jiří Langer.26

In the same period Hostovský exchanged Hassidic legends with Olbracht.27

Hostovský avers that he felt different from his friends at around the age of seventeen, and, while recognizing that all people feel themselves to be different from others, ‘Ta má “odlišnost” měla zvláštní znak: nostalgii, jež neměla obsah. Toužil jsem po čemsi, co jsem nedovedl pojmenovat [...] Židovství je

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25 Sigfried Kapper (1821–69) was the son of a Jewish glazier from Prague who campaigned for the adoption of the Czech language by Jews through his activities as a translator (he translated the Jewish Prayer Book into Czech, for example). In The Jews of Czechoslovakia, Hostovský reports on some of the activities of the Kapper Club: Jiří Langer was enlisted as an adviser; Augustin Stein was invited to write for their monthly on the foundations of Jewish religion; a Czech edition of an anthology of the works of Yiddish writers was published, as well as a posthumous edition of the works of Jindřich Kohn (p. 153).
27 In Případ profesora Körnera, Körner recounts to Holšik and Marta (PPK, p. 113) the story of a small shepherd boy who visits a large Jewish festival in the town. He has never before been inside a synagogue, and is overwhelmed by the shining light, the beautiful singing, and by being in the midst of religious-minded people and ceremonies he has never dreamt of. As he does not know how to read, nor does he know Hebrew or any prayers, in order to show his joy and to participate he whistles, and is expelled from the synagogue. The man reading the Torah points out, however, that the boy’s participation in their religious worship denotes a cause for celebration. This story bears remarkable similarities to the story of inner piety contained in the 1538 Sefer Chasidim (Hebrew for ‘Book of the Pious’) about an ignorant cowherd who does not know how to pray: he used to say to God that if He had cattle he would look after them for nothing. A sage came across him and told him that he must use only formal prayers. That night the sage is told in a dream that God is angry with him for having deprived Him of the cowherd’s spontaneous prayer, and the sage is asked to return to the cowherd and request that he prays again. See The Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend, comp. Alan Unterman, London, 1991, p. 48: the Sefer Hasidim held a dominant position in the culture of the Ashkenazim, shaping their customs and folklore throughout the Middle Ages and thereafter.
věcí naší paměti a češství naší vůle. — Ani paměť, ani vůli nelze vymazat."^28

Nostalgia expresses both the sentimental yearning, or wistful memory, of an earlier time, but also the notion of homesickness. Hostovský’s sentimental nostalgia is, then, atavistic, a genetic inheritance of loss, a characteristic which he confers on his Jewish characters. Thus, in Případ profesora Körnera, Körner objects to being called a Jew by the people around him and yet seems to assign his mental and spiritual make-up to his Jewishness, ‘zprovevřil, assimiloval jsem se — mé židovství jest pouze v mém nervosním hledání a potom už jen ve vzpomínkách, v zkušenostech, v paměti’ (PPK, p. 127). In Dům bez pana,^29 the debate about Czechness and Jewishness may be surfacing through Hostovský’s treatment of the father, Adler. The coexistence of an identity one has inherited, which is predetermined and cannot be erased, and an identity one has chosen may explain the cluster of contradictions which surround the father’s identity. Despite having consciously rejected the religion of his rabbi father, arguing for the individual as moral agent rather than for the genealogical law and order enshrined in his family name (Kohen), Adler recites Hebrew^30 on his death-bed; similarly, in Dobročinný večírek the Jewish art-patron Feigl, frightened by a knock at the door, starts to whisper a Hebrew prayer he had not remembered for decades. Both characters demonstrate the alleged innateness of their Jewish identity.

While wishing to stress his Jewish inheritance, Hostovský’s statement that he is not a nationally indifferent Jew is a political act. His statement that Czechness is a matter of will connotes support for Czech national consciousness, and indeed the way that he frames his comparison of

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29 The novel is a didactic text, expounding to its audience the significance of various Jewish symbols and customs, such as mezuzah, purim or melamed, which suggests that Hostovsky was addressing a non-Jewish audience.
30 František Langer also uses knowledge of Hebrew as a distinguishing factor between nineteenth-century provincial Jewish life, as epitomized by his grandfather, and the increasingly liberalized, lukewarm practices of the early twentieth-century Jews of his father’s generation: ‘Vídal jsem ho [his grandfather] ráno, jak si vázal obřadní řemínky, a při modlení jístě hebrejškým modlitbám ještě rozuměl, uměl dokonce hebrejšky psát’ (Byli a bylo, p. 184); he remembers in his childhood seeing his father tying straps round his arms, then less regularly, then rarely, ‘Čital při tom nahnul hebrejské modlitby, jenže už jim nerozuměl’ (ibid., p. 185).

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Czechness with Jewishness demonstrates a remarkable correspondence with the self-confident pronouncements of the Czech-Jewish movement on the eve of the First World War, by such individuals as Viktor Teytz, editor of Rozvoj and Kalendár česko-židovský from 1907 to 1914, Jindřich Kohn, Evžen Stern and Alfred Fuchs. In that period, the quandary of the ‘Jewish question’ was no longer located in the issue of assimilation, but rather in reconciling the demands of Zionism and the Czech-Jewish movement. Viktor Teytz attempted to resolve the problem by distinguishing between assimilation and acculturation: ‘In [our] lives and culture, we are Czech; in memory, Jews. We have completely merged with the Czech present, and the Jewish past gives us value. We feel that the Czech past, too, belongs to us, to the extent that the present has grown out if it; but we would never leave the impression that we lived it through our ancestors, and we cannot fully identify with it. We can truthfully say, “our Palacky,” “our Havlíček, Neruda, and Vrchlický.” But we would never call ourselves the descendants of the Hussites. That Hostovsky must have been familiar with these statements is clear by his over-simplistic chapter, entitled ‘The Czech-Jewish Movement’, in an encyclopaedic volume on Czechoslovak Jews: ‘The end of World War I seemed to bring fulfillment to the dreams of the thinkers who had stood at the cradle of the Czech-Jewish movement. Not only were the Jews in the new Czechoslovak Republic adopting those elements of the Czech nation that were healthy, ethical and creative, but the Czech nation, too, was beginning to accept many of the contributions of the spirit of Judaism. Hostovsky, however, along with contemporaries such as Jiří Orten, chose to dissociate himself from the rhetoric of this earlier phase of the Czech-Jewish movement, which he claimed had

31 For Otto Tureček, Hostovsky’s work is representative of a change in Czech intellectual life between the wars in precisely this relationship between Czechness and Jewishness (Pistorius [ed.], Padesát let, p. 58).


33 Hostovsky [sic], ‘The Czech-Jewish Movement’ in The Jews of Czechoslovakia, p. 151. Gary Cohen makes a point in a footnote in his article on Jews in German society that Hostovsky’s account of the Czech-Jewish movement is inadequate (Gary B. Cohen, ‘Jews in German Society: Prague 1860–1914’, Central European History, 10, 1977, pp. 28–54 [36, n. 26]). He adds that the poorer Jews, fearful of retribution for pro-German sentiments, increasingly aligned themselves with the Czechs after the mid-1880s, and that the Czech-Jewish movement was strong among the poorer Jews of the old Prague ghetto and the suburbs, and among university students.
seen assimilation as a final goal for Czech Jewry. His remark that the reactionary swing had been instigated by young people who had been educated in Czechoslovakia and educated in Czech schools, and who were ‘concerned with the study of Judaism and not with its liquidation’, is again a political balancing of Czechness and Jewishness.\(^{34}\)

The late 1920s and early 1930s were perhaps a critical phase in Hostovsky’s development from being indifferent to his Jewishness — although it might be prudent to treat with caution statements such as his never having witnessed any antisemitic remarks or acts (where he is perhaps playing to a Czech national consciousness again) — to becoming a \textit{bewusster Jude} and joining Kapper, and editing the \textit{Kalendář}. Hostovsky was, then, part of a Jewish generation seeking to reject the outer garb, the \textit{Eigenschaften}, of Judaism associated with the generation before them, thereby becoming themselves indistinguishable from good Czechs, yet seeking to create through their intellectual activities some kind of positive content to their sense of Jewish identity. Evžen Stern in the \textit{Kalendář}, in the first year of the war, also stresses generational difference: ‘We did not live through the separate Jewish schools; our visits to the synagogue with the family and the [few] hours with our rabbis [in the public schools] belong to the wasteland of our youth. The Hilsner and Dreyfus affairs went back to our earliest childhood; they did not inhibit us at the time, as they did some of our fathers. We are happily born children of the Czech national spirit. Our relationship to Czech-Jewish culture is clearly understandable; it has not been an emotional crisis for us.’\(^{35}\) Kieval suggests that the problem for adolescents of Stern’s generation did not centre on choosing whether or not to be Czech but in understanding why their parents wished for them to remain Jews; this led to the younger generation joining various cultural organizations in order to understand the Jewish component of their culture.\(^{36}\)

Memoir literature of the period conveys a strong impression of a vacuum, created by the falling-away of religious practices and the arrival of a secularized generation of Jews who were confident only of what they were rejecting and had yet to decide how to fill the vacuum. Robertson asserts that


\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 156.
Jewish neighbourhoods were not held together by a common culture, except for half-hearted religious observances which the younger generation rejected: ‘Kafka’s father, with his lukewarm visits to the synagogue four times a year, was typical of his generation, and Kafka (who regarded a Jewish wedding ceremony as “merely the imitation of a fairy-tale”)\textsuperscript{37} spoke for many of his contemporaries. Increasingly, therefore, Jewishness was an identity without a content.’\textsuperscript{38} Gilman makes a similar point, commenting on the position of the Jewish father in that society:

Their fathers had moved far from the organized religious belief of their grandparents. Religion had lost is centrality in their life, and their own children came to see the power of all patriarchy as weak. [...] How big and powerful can a father really be when he is frightened by the anti-Semitic bullies on the street, uncertain of his role and place in society because of his marginal economic position, unsteady in his religious beliefs and practices?\textsuperscript{39}

In \textit{The Interpretation of Dreams}, Freud recalls a story his father told him when he was ten or twelve [that is, c. 1866–68] to illustrate how society had improved since his own youth:

‘When I was a young man’, he said, ‘I went well dressed, and had a new fur cap on my head. A Christian came up to me and with a single blow knocked off my cap into the mud and shouted: “Jew! get off the pavement!” ‘And What did you do?’ I asked. ‘I went into the roadway and picked up my cap’, was his quiet reply. This struck me as unheroic

\textsuperscript{37} Both Friedrich Adler and Freud also dreaded the prospect of a traditional Jewish wedding. See Beller, \textit{Vienna and the Jews}, p. 132: ‘There remained a fear in the assimilated community that the old, reactionary tendencies within Judaism would yet revive and spoil the progress of humanity, or at least their part in it.’

\textsuperscript{38} Robertson in Robert Wistrich (ed.), \textit{Austrians and Jews in the Twentieth Century From Franz Joseph to Waldheim}, Basingstoke, London and New York, 1992 (hereafter \textit{Austrians and Jews}), p. 87. Robertson clearly uses Kafka’s ‘Brief an den Vater’ as a source for this information. Kafka berates his father’s superficial piety which offered Kafka no escape in Judaism, alleging that it was impossible for him to understand ‘that the few flimsy gestures you performed in the name of Judaism, and with an indifference in keeping with their flimsiness, could have any higher meaning. For you they had their meaning as little souvenirs of earlier times, and that was why you wanted to pass them on to me, but this, since after all even for you they no longer had any value in themselves, was something you could do only be means of persuasion or threats; [...] The whole thing is of course not an isolated phenomenon. It was much the same with a large section of this transitional generation of Jews, which had migrated from the still comparatively devout countryside to the towns.’ ‘Letter to His Father’ in \textit{Franz Kafka: Complete and Unabridged}, trans. Ernest Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins, London, 1976, pp. 574–75.

conduct on the part of the big, strong man who was holding the little boy by the hand.40

We might, therefore, conceive of Hostovsky as a Czech writer consciously experimenting with a Jewish identity which was not firmly grounded in a religious affiliation, but rather in a kind of sentimentality.

An examination of Hostovsky’s fiction supports the argument that Hostovsky subscribes to a racial (as opposed to religious) categorization of Jewish identity. Jewishness is represented without a position outside a racial identity: there are only extremes, with, for example, Galician Jewish identity at one end (the most ‘outside’ of outsiders)41 and assimilationist at the other (the most ‘inside’ of outsiders). Hostovsky’s depiction of Jewish characters corresponds to stock literary treatments of Jews. Pavel represents the stereotype of the hypersensitive Jew (Ghetto v nich) who is excessively introspective (‘vše, co se odehrálo, odehrálo se ve mně, uvnitř’ [GVN, p.6]); likewise Körner; and Emil (who has consumption, the disease of the spirit) is the spiritual heir of his father’s characteristics in his sensitivity in Dům bez pána. ‘Návrat’ and Nezvěstný, however, perhaps because the narration is in the third person, move away from this stereotype. Hostovsky’s characters also assert that self-pity, eccentricity and cowardice are typical Jewish characteristics. Much popular and medical writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries concerning Jewish physiology and pathology depicted a Jewish propensity to certain mental conditions, such as neurasthenia and hysteria: as Gilman writes, there is barely any distinction ‘between the body of

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41 Marsha L. Rozenblit writes of the Ostjuden that ‘In Germany, recent scholarship on the Wilhelminian and the Weimar periods reveals a native Jewish community which shared general German prejudices against East European Jews, regarding them as dirty, uncouth, too Jewish [...]. In Vienna, with about 25 per cent of its Jewish population of Galician origin, the “Polish” Jews and the “German” Jews tended to avoid each other’ (see Wistrich [ed.], Austrians and Jews, p. 12) while the Zionists and Orthodox Jews romanticized these Jews as ‘true’ Jews. Timms makes the point that ‘In Vienna there was a complex hierarchy of assimilation, of which Jews themselves were acutely aware. The Eastern Jews at one extreme tended to be regarded as the most uncouth and unwelcome of migrants. Jews of Hungarian origin were one step up the social scale, both envied for their commercial acumen and resented for their brashness. Far more prestige was enjoyed by Jewish migrants from Bohemia, who were noted for their intellectual gifts and cultural achievements. But Jews actually born in Vienna could claim to be most securely at home, especially if they could trace their lineage through several generations’ (ibid., p. 194).
the Jew and the Jew’s character’. In blood resided a form of historical determinism: according to Houston Stewart Chamberlain it was the ‘law of the blood’ that the Jew must finally become what he truly was. Thus in Otokar Fischer’s poem ‘Letní noc’, sexual passion with a Jewish woman is stifling because it produces feelings of guilt and shame as the blood is reminded of its Jewishness; only non-Jewish or exotic love can remove the sadness and sense of incest, ‘Ted’, krvesmilné noči prchnuv, rasy/já slyším krev, jíž nelze uprchnout’.

Hostovský’s earliest works with Jewish protagonists, ‘Dva židé’ and the novel Ghetto v nich, are an exploration of the predominance of race over culture and environment in the shaping of character. The permanence of a Jewish identity in the eyes of others is the crux in Ghetto v nich when Jana taunts Pavel with the word ‘ZIDE!’: ‘Jediné slovo. Ctyři písmena. Na těch čtyřech písmenech byl jsem ukřižován’: the indirect allusion to ‘INRI’ (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews) may suggest that the Jew is condemned in the Christian mind forever as a deicide. Pavel can escape his home environment, but he cannot escape his blood. Both works also examine the security of the assimilated Jew in society, ‘Dva židé’ from ‘below’, from the assimilator’s relationship with an Ostjude, Ghetto v nich from ‘above’, from the assimilator’s relationship with a Gentile woman.

‘Dva židé’ was published in Sever a východ in the same year of publication, 1928, as Ghetto v nich and has been overlooked or neglected in Hostovský criticism — perhaps because of its brevity and its stylistic crudity (one suspects that it was written before Ghetto v nich). The action focuses on the encounter between an assimilated Jew, Ervin Gerward, and an Ostjude fleeing penury and pogroms in the Ukraine; they see each other daily in the cemetery gardens without speaking, and later become neighbours, for a couple of days only, in the same rented accommodation. The text is a study in the power relationship between the two Jews: even in the preliminary phase of their acquaintance, when they know each other only at a distance, the apparent mastery of one by the other is firmly established in Gerwald’s condescension and the young Jew’s

42 Gilman, Franz Kafka. The Jewish Patient, p. 60.
44 Fischer, Hlasy, p. 16.
humility: ‘Gerwald se vzpamatoval. Úsměv se mu nezdařil — a mladý žid
zmateně zamžikal očima a potom je sklopil k zemi’ (‘DZ’, p. 192). The fact
that the Ostjude is always seen with a book in his hand in the gardens, and that
he is a student of law, may indicate assimilative aspirations on his part. Much
of the text is focalized through Gerwald’s contempt for the Ostjude, as, for
example, in Gerwald’s initial sighting of him, ‘zarostlý, rozchucháný a s
červenými skvrnami v obličeji. Idiotský, devotní úsměv blbce utíkal z koutků
jeho rtů do důlku brady a tancil v prohlubních jeho tváře. Zřejmě východní žid’
(ibid.). The association of the Ostjude with mysticism occurs several times in
the text, which may suggest the Oriental otherness of the Jew. When the gaze
of one Jew is met by the other, the meeting is ‘mystical’ (ibid.) and the
Ostjude’s smile is other-worldly, ‘s dalekým úsměvem jakoby vypuštěným z
hvězd’ (p. 194). Despite, however, the difference in status between the two
Jews, they are intended by Hostovsky to be drawn together by their common
race. Their hands, for example, speak of ‘spolu božsky sbratřenými tepy krve’
(p. 192), and they both accept their stigmatized (Jewish) role as children of
suffering. What binds them most strongly, however, is their understanding of
each other’s moral baseness, as exemplified by one’s concupiscence and
coveting of money, and the other’s thieving, begging and apparent willingness
to prostitute his wife. This moral baseness reaches its nadir with Gerwald
waver ing between his lascivious intentions and his desire to redeem the money
he had finally dispensed with in order to have sexual intercourse with the

45 See Beller, Vienna and the Jews, p. 129: ‘It was natural that Jews should accomplish their
entry into western society through the book, through the acquiring of Bildung. [...]’
Behind many assimilated families in Vienna lay the figure of the student who, through
experience of enlightened thought, had escaped from ghetto culture.’

46 Cf. Danajský dar and Dům bez pána. In the former, when the Jew Gerwald first arrives in
the classroom as a new pupil, we follow Ludvík’s reaction to him: ‘V poslední lavici
seděl hubený obr — s usměvavým obličejem, černými vlasy a velikým nosem. Zřejmě
žid’ (DD, p. 93). In the latter, Wolf is also described with a large nose, and ‘násilný
pichlavý smích’ (DBP, p. 116). The forced laugh/smile may be intended by Hostovsky to
suggest the Jew’s scheming and perfidious nature, or the Jew’s ingratiating humility.

47 In Dům bez pána, the aunt’s sad stories, ‘podle níž jsme byli zavržené děti královské’
(DBP, p. 18), tell the same story of Jewish affliction.

48 On the offer of the Ostjude’s wife for sexual intercourse, Gerwald’s facial movements
betray his debased nature, ‘-Začal pohybovat rty a zuby, jakoby chtěl svou vášen
rozkousat’ (‘DZ’, p. 196). Intimation of the Jew’s concupiscence by lingering
descriptions of his lips or mouth is a literary cliché. Martin’s wood-sculpture of
Silbermann in Benešová’s Člověk is a crude, antisemitic representation of the Jew,
motivated by Martin’s revenge, ‘Měla masité laloky, ohavný nos a rty tlusté jako
vypasené hlisty nad krocaní bradou’ (Part II, p. 111).
Ostjude's 'wife' (she is introduced to Gerwald by the Ostjude as his sister). His resolution to the immoral dilemma is to request the Ostjude's arrest by the police so that he can have both woman and money, and vengeance for the theft. The intended irony of the story is that one Jew's immorality is legally sanctioned, the other's not. Hostovský's depiction of the Jew here as innately devious, prone to sexual predilection (but loveless) and obsessed with money is a standard (one might argue, antisemitic) treatment (such as one might find in Benešová's Člověk or Libuše Hanušová's 1929 novel Anarchie srdcí, for example), and suggests that Hostovský is uninterested in analysing anything complex about Jewish identity. Instead the relationship, and the complacency of the assimilated Jew in his status, is the psychological locus of the text; Hostovský may be using two recognizable types as a form of shorthand to establish quickly an imbalance of power between two people.

Ghetto v nich raises the same question about how far Hostovský is attempting to comment seriously on Jewish identity. Critics have received it primarily as a text documenting the problems of Jewish assimilation into Czech society. Yet none, to my knowledge, comments on the anachronistic formulation of this debate in Ghetto v nich, and in 'Dva židé', or indeed on retrospection as a distinctive feature of Hostovský’s prose-writing. Jews began to move out of the old Jewish quarter in Prague after 1859, with the period 1859–60 marking the removal of the last restrictions of Jewish occupations and residence in urban areas.

Furthermore, a slum clearance project removed the poor in the old Jewish quarter after 1900. The contextual setting for Ghetto v nich is therefore historical. Similarly, the migration of Eastern Jews into Central European cities was mainly at the end of the century, with a massive influx, driven by economic hardship and Russian antisemitism,

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49 Retrospection is increasingly exaggerated in Hostovský's later work, sometimes to the detriment of the narrative, as résumés of characters' histories are yoked by the author into dialogues. This 'backward glance' is not confined to characterization, but extends to Hostovský's contextualization of action. Critical reception has overwhelmingly concentrated on Hostovský's role as an interpreter of contemporary society (this, predominantly with regard to his early work; see, for example, the reviews of Danajský dar) or as a prophet of European disintegration (here, especially, concerning his wartime and post-war work).

50 See Cohen, 'Jews in German Society', p. 32.
51 Ibid., p. 36.
in 1910,\textsuperscript{52} which suggests that ‘Dva židé’ is also historically contextualized. The quotations or paraphrases which Hostovský exploits as self-ironic intertexts are also drawn from turn-of-the-century commentators on race:

Dva židovští vědění učenci měli by z nás dvou radost: Theodor Herzl proto, že by viděl ono mražná rasové pojítko — a dr. Zikmund Freud proto, že by mohl konstatovat existenci vědeležitých zážitků — nejen individuálních — nýbrž i kolektivních a dějinných. (‘DŽ’, p. 197)

O, Stewart Chamberlain měl pravdu, když řekl, že židovská rasa je bastardní rasou, která si svou bastardní povahu uchovala. (GVN, p. 6)

O čem asi uvažoval nebožtík Voltaire, když řekl, že židé jsou důkazem o pravdě křesťanství? (GVN, p. 39)

Wistrich describes Voltaire as being among the secularized antisemites (like Wagner) who assumed Christianity to be a superior religion to Judaism and drew on Christian teachings to reinforce their own perspectives, ‘They inherited the pervasiveness of the Christian antagonism to Jewry while no longer believing in its scheme of salvation, which had still retained an overriding commitment to the conversion of the Jews.’\textsuperscript{53} Hostovský’s familiarity with the ideas of the Zionist leader Theodor Herzl (a German-speaking, assimilated Jew from Budapest) may suggest a link between Hostovský’s *Ghetto v nich* and some of Herzl’s writings, such as his 1896 *The Jewish State*, which mentions the persisting isolation of the assimilated Jew: ‘We know that, with the exception of the wealthiest, Jews have almost no social relations with Gentiles. In some countries those Jews who do not support a few dinner-table parasites, spongers and flunkies have no Gentile acquaintances whatever. The ghetto continues to exist within.’\textsuperscript{54} Herzl believed that the Jews had been physically and mentally malformed by the ghetto, with external intolerance and inbreeding restricting them from improvement of the race.\textsuperscript{55} Rozenblit discusses how Freud, although an assimilated intellectual,


\textsuperscript{53} Wistrich, *Antisemitism* (see note 2), p. xxii.


associated primarily with other Jews because he felt he shared with them the same psychological structure and consciousness of identity.  

Hostovský’s selection of intertexts indicate that he is delving back into the arguments circulating around the time, and in the aftermath, of the emancipation of the Jews, a period in which many Jews and Gentiles seemed to agree ‘that centuries of being oppressed, confined to the ghetto and to the unsavoury occupations of moneydealing and trade had made the Jews moral and cultural cripples’. Certainly the notion of the Jew’s degenerate nature is central to ‘Dva židé’ and lurks in Ghetto v nich, and the debate about the effect of the ghetto on Jewish mentality is critical to both: ‘Ghetto, v němž žili naší otcové, není mrtvé, nýbrz je vryto do naších mozků a srdeč’ (‘DŽ’, p. 197). One might posit that Hostovský’s main concern is treating the subject’s sense of being excluded from another world and the subject’s internalization of the prejudices of that other world, notions embodied in the stereotype of the ‘crippled’ Jew. Sander Gilman makes the point that outsiders’ acceptance of an image of themselves generated by their reference group (the social group who they believe define them) as real leads to the phenomenon of the self-hating individual. One might go further and argue that the individual, in accepting his socially posited reality and moulding himself to the demands of the reference group, risks losing his own identity. Both Frankl and Pavel in Ghetto v nich deny their ethnic identity and so deny themselves. Frankl, when he is physically threatened, says ‘Já ... nejsem ... nejsem ... žid!’ , ‘Ne ... nejsem Frankl ... nejsem ... žid!’ (CKP, p. 155). The response of Gentiles to Jews in these works reinforces the Jews’ own perception of themselves as ‘tainted’ and therefore incapable of forming normal human relationships: Jana declares that ‘Žid pro mne zůstane vždy židem’ (CKP, p. 124); when Osvald learns from Marta that Körner knows of their affair he calculatingly rehearses what to say to Körner in order to humble him, ‘Máš veskrz špatnou židovskou povahu,

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57 Beller in Wistrich (ed.), Austrians and Jews, p. 49.
58 Sander L. Gilman, Jewish Self-hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews, Baltimore and London, 1986, p. 2. Gilman describes the double-bind of the assimilative group, on the one hand, ‘Become like us — abandon your difference — and you may be one with us’, on the other, ‘The more you are like me, the more I know the true value of my power, which you wish to share, and the more I am aware that you are but a shoddy counterfeit, an outsider’ (ibid.).
ano, musím ti to říci, v níčem, v níčem nezapřeš žida, abys věděl: i ta tvá cukrovka je jaksi židovská nemoc. Nedorostli jste ... hm ... k normální lidské sdílnosti, dovedete se k lidem jen přibližit, ale nedovedete se s nimi setkat ... ’ (PPK, p. 54).

Hostovský later considered his 1920s works to be juvenile, granting only *Ghetto v nich* his recognition. His extensive revisions of the 1934 published version (in the collection *Cesty k pokladám*) suggest that Hostovský’s dissatisfaction with *Ghetto v nich* went deeper than a maturing writer wincing at the rudimentary nature of his early work. While one might expect that he would iron out inelegancies of style and syntax in the later published version, his expurgation of key passages in the 1928 text points to an attempt to tone down controversial aspects of the subject-matter. There has been little comment in Hostovský criticism on these expurgations: Polan has offered a critique of Hostovský’s stylistic changes, but Kautman is the only critic to have commented on Hostovský’s excision of the Stewart Chamberlain intertext, which Kautman interprets as an attempt, in the year after Hitler’s ascent to power and on the eve of the Nuremberg Laws (1935), not to play into the hands of ‘Fascists’. His interpretation of the quotation, however, as an expression of existential anxiety symptomatic of Kafka and his work, and therefore linked to Hostovský’s Jewish nature, argues him into the unfortunate position of actually agreeing with Stewart Chamberlain: ‘Ale psychologicky nebyla nezdûvodnëna. Vime, že i Franz Kakfa v urcitych svych zivotních obdobích byl ochoten

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59 J.B. Čapek, for example, reviewing *Cesty k pokladám*, describes *Ghetto v nich* as ‘autorovou prvotinu (ke které se hlási)’, *Naše doba*, 42, 1934–35, p. 183; František Kautman describes the same novel as ‘jako jedinou ze svých prvotin uznával později’, Kautman, *Polarita našeho věku v díle Egona Hostovského*, Prague, 1993 (hereafter *Polarita našeho věku*), p. 59. The lack of success of Hostovský’s earlier two works, *Stezka podél cesty* and *Zavřené dveře*, may have led some critics to assume that *Ghetto v nich* was, in fact, Hostovský’s first published work: Majerová, for example, termed it ‘Drobná první knižka Egona Hostovského’, *Čin*, 1, 1929–390, p. 676, and Polan ‘jako jeho knižní prvotina’, *Čin*, 7, 1935, p. 55.

60 Polan’s is the only detailed analysis of the linguistic changes in the revised edition of *Ghetto v nich*, which he views as a significant alteration of the tenor of the Expressionistically influenced original. In Polan’s view, the original suffered from a theatricality which showed itself in hypertrophic pauses and punctuation marks, breaking up the syntax of the sentence and the flow of the paragraph; Hostovský was trying too hard to use a form of shorthand to express a painful agitation, but ended up infecting the work with that same quality (Bohumil Polan, ‘Dvě knihy Egona Hostovského’, *Čin*, 1935, 7, p. 355).

prokhlinat svůj židovský původ." One assumes that, in the 1930s, writers and critics had developed an understandable sensitivity to the likelihood of their work being politically received. Pavel Fraenkl’s 1938 review (published just prior to the 1938 Munich Agreement and the 1939 German Occupation) of Hostovský’s 1937 Dům bez pána, for example, mentions once that the Adler family is Jewish and concentrates solely on the problems of the family.

Hostovský expurgates some passages in Ghetto v nich because he desires not to draw attention to Judaism as a faith or to the potentially damaging consequences of a Jewish upbringing; a whole section, for example, concerning Pavel’s Jewish school is excised, and the incriminating detail of one of his fellow pupils hanging himself (in response to the harsh environment of the school) is removed from the subsequent paragraph. The link between Jews and their status as an accursed people is personalized to eliminate the notion of race. In his early work, Hostovský deals not only with the antisemitism of Gentiles, but also of Jews: the assimilated Gerwald, for example, looks down on and has inalienable prejudices about the Ostjude in ‘Dva židé’, just as, in Ghetto v nich, the assimilated Frankl torments Pavel, the ghetto Jew. The representation of Frankl, however, is significantly altered in the 1934 text: gone is Frankl’s, and his family’s, mockery of Pavel’s religious practices, and Frankl’s role in the pogrom is neutralized. The outcry ‘Banda! Teď má i životy dětí na svědomí. Darebáci, paliči!’ (GVN, p. 71), initially attributed to Frankl, now issues from ‘císí ústa’. Frankl’s direct incrimination

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62 Ibid.
65 ‘Vím jen, že jsem si nezískal sympatii ani učitelových ani spolužáků. Byla to doba, v níž jsem žilni po laskání a také vž, že se jeden kamarád ve svých deseti letech oběsil ve škole na záchodě. Ovoce této výchovy vyzralo tepře na střední škole’ (ibid., p. 9).
66 When the Jewish street, in which the narrator’s father lives, is ablaze, the 1928 text reads: ‘Ale přečte my židé už dávno vy ... vyhořeli!’ (GVN, p. 69), the 1934 text, ‘Ale vůdctvá’ my oba už vyhořeli!’
of Pavel and his father in the fire is removed, as is Pavel’s suggestion that Frankl is acting in revenge, ‘Tohle byla tedy Arthurova odveta za mou ranu’ (ibid.). Frankl is then ‘absolved’ in the 1934 text, reduced to the role only of victim and not perpetrator in the pogrom. Some of Hostovský’s textual changes to the 1934 text may suggest a writer wary not only of fuelling Nazi propaganda, but also more sensitive to portraying Jews unsympathetically. It is not unreasonable to posit that Hostovský’s increased involvement in Jewish organizations in the 1930s may have made him more sensitive to the depiction of Jews in his work during this period. In the same year, 1934, in which Cesty k pokladům was published, Hostovský was engaged, for example, in delivering speeches at Kapper and other Czech-Jewish organizations in honour of Jindřich Kohn’s sixtieth birthday.68

That Ghetto v nich could withstand these expurgations suggests that to read it as a text solely about the problem of Jewish assimilation, as most critics did, is to neglect other aspects of it which are arguably as strong. Although ostensibly about the ghettoized Jew desiring assimilation, Ghetto v nich chiefly concerns class difference, generation conflict, self-deception and power. The failure of (male) authority might, for example, be read as the theme which dominates both Ghetto v nich and Danajský dar. One damning review of the former inadvertently supports this notion: criticizing the novel’s forced dynamism of action, its stiff metaphors and ‘cramped’ writing, the critic argues that Hostovský attempts unsuccessfully to resolve the Jewish question, ‘židovství od hrajících postav lze si i odmyslití není jejich koženým znakem, spíše jen průvodním rysem.’69 The divide between the Jewish ghetto and Gentile society is also a paradigm of Hostovský’s interest in two different worlds70 with competing values (in Černá tlupa, for example, the divide is between the adult world and the children’s world), and Hostovský’s inclusion of Ghetto v nich in the volume Cesty k pokladům71 suggests that he was using

68 Kautman, Polarita našeho věku, p. 3.
70 One critic argues that the main problem of Danajsky dar is not the war, but the ‘propast mezi dvěma světy, mezi dvěma tábory lidí, jak byly vytvořeny kulturou a civilisaci’; in the camp on one side are children full of the desire to love, in the camp on the other a group of grown-up thugs of whom Schlesinger is a representative (Čin, 1, 1929–30, p. 503).
71 Reviewing Cesty k pokladům, one critic interpreted the three stories to be about people attempting to escape grim reality and start on a new foundation which is imagined; the
the assimilation debates as a means of exploring an imagined world (Pavel deludes himself that he is accepted by Gentile society). One interpretation of the text, then, would be to link it with Hostovsky’s depiction of imagined worlds.

If ‘Dva židé’, Ghetto v nich and Danajský dar are taken as a continuum, one can see Hostovsky exploring power relationships (for example, Ostjude–Gerwald, Pavel–Frankl, Ludvík–Andráš) which develop into an almost ‘modular’ feature of his later work. In Hostovsky’s pre-war work, these power relationships are based almost exclusively on economic thralldom or a sense of stigma arising from the individual’s social status. The short story ‘Návrat’ illustrates directly Hostovsky’s interest in the notion of stigma: two friends, Braun and Mikuláš, discuss the latter’s idea for a short story and diverge into a discussion of a notional dancer who has a small green wart on the end of his nose which prevents him from wishing to dance, ‘Nemá téměř každý z nás svou zelenou bradavici? A nezpůsobuje, že se motáme, místo abychom tančili’ (OB, p. 146). Analogically, the function of Jewishness in Ghetto v nich is to provide an emblematic stigma for Pavel, which he perceives as the obstacle between him and social acceptance. In many respects Danajský dar reads as a variation of Ghetto v nich with the Jewish filter removed: the central problem delineated in both novels is how to escape the prison of weakness, a prison which is both self-imposed (by the individual’s conviction that he is weak) and socially engineered (by economic conditions).

Czech antisemitism is made explicit in the treatment of Jews throughout Hostovsky’s work, although in his pre-war fiction it is more overt, and frequently takes a practical and physical form. In Hostovsky’s post-war
novels antisemitism operates in a more covert and subtle fashion: antisemites reveal themselves through nuances of speech, which probably reflects society’s apparent intolerance of antisemitism after the persecution of Jews in the Second World War. There is no direct representation of this persecution in Hostovský’s work, although he uses the devices of memory and flashback to convey isolated incidents of violence or humiliation experienced by Jews. In Nezvěstný, he also demonstrates an awareness of the similarity in Nazi and Communist thought with respect to their perception of the Jews. The Communist head of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior Matějka complains to the hospitalized journalist Borek that he had his work cut out ‘s tím podělaným židem Brunnerem’ (pp. 252–53); when questioned by Borek as to whether he dislikes Jews he answers:


His initial use of the first-person plural suggests that he is cautious of compromising the official Communist line on Jews. He intimates, however, a sympathy for the persecution of the Jews during the Occupation (there are still too many Jews left), considers them to be racially/nationally separate from

seeking an escape from Germany, ibid., p. 129). A society rent with tension and disillusion — which is the context for the narratives of Černá ilu, Žhář and Dům bez pánů — finds its scapegoats in Jews (in the first we are told that the refugees, Gypsies and Galician Jews do not stay in the region for long). Jindřich reports that in the third year of the First World War there were anti-Jewish riots, ‘Rikalo se, že židé mají plné sklepy a půdy zásob, že se přežírají, zatím co ostatní štípa jí hlady’ (DBP, p. 129). The success of Adler’s assimilation led to the family not having the windows of their house broken, and thus being ostracized by the local Jewish community.

In fact the same allegation is made in Anna Maria Tilschová’s nationalist remonstration against ‘300 years of servitude to Vienna’, the novel Halda (Prague, 1932), where the ‘capitalist’ Jews are depicted by the narrator as helping Austria ‘proti chudému lidu na celém Ostravsku’ (p. 342) against the background of the First World War. One scene depicts the workers, the women and the blubbering of their hungry children, as they go to the Jew, Azimus’s, storehouse to beg him for food (p. 416). They believe that the main reasons for their hunger, their poverty and the war ‘jsou ti pejzaži hebrejci z Haliče, kteří jim vykrádali vesnice’ (p. 434). One man beats Azimus to death with a rod for stealing from the people, and holds his rod aloft in a mockery of the Crucifixion.

Wistrich alleges that, by 1950, three-quarters of the residual Jewish community in Czechoslovakia had emigrated in the wake of the Communist coup (Wistrich, Antisemitism, p. 155).
Czechs, and subscribes to the myth of the Jewish mind (it is their mentality that he cannot bear). Matějka's association of the Jews with bourgeois cosmopolitanism echoes the portrayal of the Jews by Nazis and the conservative German Right, for whom 'Jews allegedly controlled big capital, international finance, the bourgeois parties, the organised labour movement, parliamentary democracy and all those sinister forces working to undermine the authority of the state and national independence'.

A new theme in Hostovsky's post-war work is the effect of concentration camp experience on the individual. The sense of being a victim is strong in Nezvěstný where Brunner's experience of Theresienstadt has led to a vindictiveness and self-pity which make him incapable of loving or being loved. The legacy of survival is also a feature of the short story 'Návrat', in which the Jewish civil servant Alex Braun is a protagonist of a type we have not encountered previously in Hostovsky — anti-sentimental, brusquely honest and perhaps staunchly resistant to the escapism of dream-worlds and to the hypocrisy of social pleasantries. For Braun, retreat into one's sufferings is too transparent a defence of one's survival. As the mission of Alex's trip is to discover whether his brother was in fact hidden by any of the local population during the occupation, the story may also pose the question, covertly, of what the Czechs did to help the Jews during this period. The question Alex poses, however, to the friends gathered in the pub is when they last saw his brother; the responses of Erik's former girlfriend, Anezka — 'Já mu nemohla pomoci! Neviděla jsem ho' (p. 162) — and his former client, Nyvlt — "'Měl odtud včas odjet"; řekl resolutně Nyvlt; rozhlédl se po všech a pokřel rameny' (ibid.) — are, however, rejoinders to a different question, their susceptibility to being incriminated suggesting that they feel guilty.

The conundrum which lies at the centre of 'Návrat' is the nature of Erik Braun's role during the Second World War, which introduces the taboo subject of Jewish collaboration with the Nazis in their deportation and persecution of Jews, and the execution of Nazi practices with the connivance of community organizations. Erik was employed by the Prague Jewish Congregation.

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75 Ibid., p. 70.
76 In Nezvěstný, Brunner's recollection of how he tried to avoid being summoned for deportation serves also as a testimony to the attempts made by Jews to escape being deported, 'Tenkrát, když už nepomohlo zhola nic, ani vlivné přímuvy na náboženské
initially to assist in the emigration of his co-religionists, and then later to
arrange the forced deportation of Jews; he was for the local population either a
saviour or a persecutor, with the accusation that he assisted the Gestapo in
order to gain favours ‘na zádech ostatních židů’ (p. 163).77 Given that Osamělí
buřiči was published in 1948 in Prague, Hostovský was tackling something of
a taboo subject: Jiří Weil’s Život s hvězdou, which also treats the role of the
Jewish Congregation under Occupation, did not appear until the following
year. The Congregation became the so-called self-governing administrative
body for Jews; in effect, however, it issued orders for the organization of
deportation trains and was charged with drawing up lists for them, and
therefore operated as an executive arm of the German state.

Hostovský’s interest in the act of betrayal and its consequences is constant
throughout his oeuvre, and the theme of intra-Jewish betrayal was explored in
the early works ‘Dva židé’ and Ghetto v nich. Frankl’s behaviour, for example,
in the latter novel, constitutes an attempt not only to gain superiority in society
by denigrating other Jews, but also to vouchsafe his own survival (one assumes
Erik has the same motives in ‘Návrat’) when the pogrom occurs. The chance
meeting between Alex and Erik in Lisbon, in 1940 (‘Návrat’), amplifies further
the ambiguities of Erik’s simultaneous involvement with the Prague Jews and
with the Nazis. Alex is recognized, but ignored, by his brother, who is
speaking German with two elegantly dressed men, ‘Ale v jeho tváři s novým,
přilepeným úsměvem, trochu bolestným a trochu vyjeveným, se nerozlišil úzas.
Ani na vteřinu se nezastavil’ (p. 163). The possible public betrayal of the
Jewish fraternity is rehearsed in miniature in this personal, fraternal disavowal.
Alienation through one brother’s preoccupation with a cause or mission also
replicates the psychological pattern of ‘Pan Lorenz’,78 which would suggest
that Erik’s messianism here is doomed to self-destruction, ‘ten hlas nepatřil jen
jemu, nepatřil mu vůbec, mluvil za někoho jiného, kdo tu nebyl, kdo byl

77 This is echoed in Weil: ‘kryjí svou kůži musili by tam jít sami a někoho musí poslat’
(Zivot s hvězdou [1949], I quote from the edition published together in one volume with
Na střeše je Mendelssohn, Prague, 1990, p. 15).
78 Alex, like Jindřich in ‘Pan Lorenz’, plans to escape to Mexico (OB, p. 165). Both stories
link up with the theme of the doppelgänger, since both protagonists shadow their
brothers’ fates.
daleko. Tak mluví lidé z narkosy, ze sna, z horečky' (p. 165). This is further supported by the acutely observed detail of the two Germans wiping their fingers on their hats after touching Erik's arms (p. 164): the co-operation is merely cosmetic, and does not eradicate the notion of the Jew as a source of contamination in Nazi thinking.

Kautman makes the point that, after Dům bez pána, specifically Jewish problems almost disappear in Hostovský's work, appearing only episodically thereafter, and finds this the more surprising because of the significance of the Second World War for Jews.79 There is no reason, however, why Hostovský should have appointed himself as a spokesman for Jewish suffering. Moreover, this false boundary between Hostovský's pre-war and post-war themes implicitly suggests that he was a 'Jewish' writer in the pre-war period. Some of the problems which concern Hostovský with respect to all human relationships and perceptions seem to have strong roots in his representations of Jewishness, and it may be that in his early fiction Hostovský was developing a prototype outsider and using his curiosity about Jewishness to explore outsiderdom through Jewish characters.

79 Kautman, Polarita našeho věku, p. 63.
Hostovský's Early Work: The Prison of the Self

Hostovský started publishing at the age of sixteen in the Studentský časopis; by the age of eighteen his work was appearing in the newspaper Národní osvobození. His earliest works are feuilletons and short stories where the action consists in conflicts between the 'illegitimate' protagonist and those who are rendered 'legitimate' by their authority or status. Thus the protagonists are outsiders, whose lives are determined by their environment or by hereditary factors, much in the manner of Naturalist prose and all its associations with scientific Darwinism, in which the writer as observer or recorder 'carefully places his subject in certain controlled conditions, as the experimental scientist does, and then alters those conditions to see what will happen'.

They are condemned to a social illegitimacy predominantly by the behaviour of the outside world and by the collision of their impoverished background and the petty-bourgeois or bourgeois mores of their educational environment and social circle. It would be wrong to infer, however, that Hostovský is a Naturalist: despite the Naturalist elements in his early work — these class-based conflicts, the dire living conditions from which people cannot escape, the suggestion of inherited sin — Hostovský is primarily interested in the individual who feels himself to be systematically excluded from society. The protagonist's experience of, and response to, humiliation is the dominant theme of Hostovský's work of the 1920s. A variety of external factors act upon his protagonists — the First World War, the bullying within and by educational establishments (in which one may detect the influence of Šrámek's 1910 novel, Stříbrný vítr), penury, generation conflict — but never adequately explain the protagonist's loathing of himself.

Hostovský first introduces this theme with a number of short stories, which one might term as exempla; they are moral tales which are founded on the antithesis of the Bildungsroman in their repudiation of the value of home and

educational institutions in building a man. In the short story ‘Žák’ (1927), for example, the protagonist Vrchlik appears to be a coarse country-boy who is disliked by the other pupils in the local grammar school (he sits alone in class), is the butt of some of the schoolmasters’ jokes and is the first to be suspected of wrongdoings within the school. When Vrchlik is caught by his headmaster walking out with an immodest young woman and sent home to his books, the narrator informs us that ‘Toto pokročení bylo Vrchlíkovi vmeteno nejen do mozku, ale i do duše. Byl pokořen, tolik pokořen — a plamen nenávisti nevyšlehl, nýbrž řáděl uvnitř! Od té doby se šeptaly o Vrchlíkovi podivné historky: Krade, lže, chodi pry do nevěstince atd. A profesori ještě více k němu zpřísněli — a čihali na okamžik, v němž by Vrchlíka dopadli při přestupu kázeňského řádu’. Vrchlík does what the teachers and pupils expect of him, and steals a watch from a fellow schoolboy but is protected from having his crime publicly exposed by a sympathetic mathematics master who alleges to the headmaster that he has searched Vrchlík’s pockets and found them empty. The tale ends on a sentimental description, twenty-five years on, of the former pupil, now holding a distinguished post, kissing the hand of his old and blind erstwhile schoolmaster.

The story is short on action, containing little more than a series of confrontations, but the psychology of the protagonist renders a straightforward text problematic. Vrchlík’s reaction is a hyperbolic one, for he feels psychologically destroyed by a (in no way extraordinary) reprimand from his headmaster, and this humiliation pierces him so absolutely that he is changed internally. Not only his mind, but his psyche is affected; we are told that his hatred goes on raging inside him. These may sound like clichéd descriptions of anger, but, on the evidence of Hostovsky’s other works, what is being suggested is that the protagonist is undergoing fundamental changes in his personality. The feelings which rage inside Vrchlík are beyond the control of his consciousness and have the potential to deprive him of his self-control. Moreover, Vrchlík conforms to the social perception of his identity by turning into a criminal, just as later in Žhár the barber will precipitate his own self-destruction through his sensitivity to local gossip. This extreme response to

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others’ opinions on one’s personality is important for two reasons, the first relating to the notion of guilt, the second to the composition of identity. The protagonist may believe in his guilt even when he has little to be guilty of, which might suggest that Hostovský believes in the individual’s innate sense of guilt. Secondly, in Hostovský’s early work what one is for others seems to be of more consequence than what one is for oneself. While it is true that an individual will believe s/he has a particular virtue or vice if enough people tell him/her that is the case, there is a difference between holding a belief and consciously taking action on account of that belief, between Vrchlik’s believing he is immoral and his actually doing something immoral. Perhaps we are to be convinced that his spontaneity of will and action is destroyed by the pressure of a collective will, that the individual is pitted against a whole system of prejudices that he may struggle against but can never break down. This interpretation would suggest that Vrchlik’s resort to criminality is effectively an escape from autonomy and a surrender to a kind of non-identity in so far as he gives up on expressing his true individuality and conforms to the role assigned to him by the outside world.

The tale was published when Hostovský was only nineteen years old and yet the psychological pattern of behaviour is replicated throughout his oeuvre. One finds him in these early years developing and experimenting with a prototypical protagonist, since the personality of a protagonist in one story is indistinguishable from another. Published only five months after ‘Žák’, the prose sketch ‘Zpověď’ is again the story of a boy or young man who dislikes going to school, is a weak student and feels himself to be different from the other pupils. ‘Zpověď’, however, constitutes a more complex and detailed text than ‘Žák’ and the shift from Er-narration to an Ich-form may suggest that Hostovský is searching for a mode of narration which will capture the tortured workings of consciousness. Hostovský will use the confessional form many times in his work, perhaps partly because of his interest in guilt, but also because, in his early work, the subject-matter of the gulf of understanding between the protagonist and the world around him can be projected into the mode of narration through the narrator’s plea for us to understand him. Now the first-person narrator has the added encumbrance of a stutter which is a

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target of fun for his schoolmates: with respect to the study of identity, Hostovský is beginning to consider the relationship between body and consciousness, between physical and mental disablement (the protagonist’s stutter may be a product of his mental anxiety rather than the source of it). The narrator describes the dirt and cramped space of his home and we are taken on a rapid journey through his childhood where his first memory of entering the big outside world ends with a slap from his mother for embarrassing her, ‘Tak jsem žil, boje se téměř dýchati, boje se mluviti, boje se rozhližeti, neboť všude čihaly rány či smích’ (the fact that he is as afraid of being laughed at as of being struck suggests that mental torture is as frightening as physical torment to him). The protagonist’s over-exaggerated sense of fear, which Hostovský first introduces here, becomes a behavioural trait of other protagonists in his work. In the title story of Zavřené dveře, for example, the experiences of the hunchback Frank in his youth lead to him feeling surrounded by incidents, ‘jež hrozila ve všech koutech, jež se protahovala dveřmi, zjevovala se na každém předmětu a syčela zraňujícími slovy z rozevřené tlamy velkoměsta’ (ZD, p. 30); in Stezka podél cesty Roman describes how his perception of the world changes after his bullying by Karas, ‘Jako bych kráčel ulicí, v níž na každém rohu mně hrozily nabroušené nože’ (SPC, p. 115), and in Případ profesora Körnera the eponymous hero lives in an unprovoked state of anticipation of being attacked, ‘jen zděšeně čekal, odkud opět dopadne rána na jeho ubohá bedra — a byl udíven a překvapen, když to posléze ustalo, když již nic zlého nepřicházelo’ (PPK, p. 11). Fear means that the protagonist conceives of the world as hostile, but the source of the threat is unknown to him.

The facts of being humiliated and of fearing the world usually lead to down-spiralling fortunes for the protagonist: this pattern is again initiated in ‘Zpověď’. The boy aims to become a teacher in order to beat pupils as he pleases (true to the stock portrayal of the coward who himself becomes a bully) and succeeds in qualifying as one but cannot find a job, so he turns to performing comic turns in pubs. His initial rewards of money or applause are, however, replaced by booing and he inexorably becomes a down-and-out since he cannot scrape a living. The only relief from the unremitting bleakness of his life is a woman whom he regularly sees in the public gardens. After not having seen the woman for some time, and on the occasion of a drunken evening with
his former friends from the teachers' training college, he is ejected (with his friends) from the pub, falls on the ground bloodying his face, stands up and consequently vomits twice over his own clothes, only to find his dream woman in evening dress, accompanied by a young man in a dinner jacket, touching his head with her gloved hand: 'spatřil jsem se zkrváceného, pozvraceného, roztrhaného a zabláceného, spatřil jsem v jediném okamžiku všechna svá minulá pokoření, jež nyní vymrštila mé tělo k útoku'. He shoots the woman and is sentenced to life imprisonment. Exactly the same psychological schema is worked out in 'Zavřené dveře' where the protagonist Frank avenges his outsiderdom through the murder of someone who is a representative of the 'other' world of luxury and sophistication from which he is excluded, although Frank’s murder is simultaneously a suicide (he gasps both himself and his flatmate to death). ‘Zpověď’ ends with the narrator lamenting the fact that people cannot understand ‘onen vnitřní zákon, že nevidí ten přičinný žebřík’ on account of which he developed from an innocent child into a criminal.

In treating the psychological consequences of the apparently ordinary, Hostovsky implies that the most trivial of incidents can have extreme consequences for the stability of the self, an idea in which he must have been influenced by Freud. The idea of a causal chain of events provoked inside an individual is evoked by the sophistic Roman in Hostovsky’s first novel, Stezka podél cesty: ‘Zážitek reaguje hned, tvoří si další články, tvoří přičinný žebřík, na jehož konci je efekt. Zážitky v člověku žijí, formují jej, hnětou, mají větší význam než dědičnost. Dnes ještě není jasno, že nevinně trpíme zážitky stejně jako dědičnost’ (SPC, pp. 76-77). This description of experiences fomenting inside an individual and forging a ‘causal chain’, like a ticking bomb waiting to explode, is part of Hostovsky’s conception of the deformation of personality, in which he seems also to have been influenced by his reading of Leonhard Frank’s work, particularly Die Ursache (which he appears slightly to plagiarize). In a short newspaper article of 1928 (the same year in which ‘Zpověď’ and Stezka are published), Hostovsky argues that psychoanalysis existed in literature before Freud. Hostovsky uses Frank as a paradigm of an author incorporating in his work a form of psychoanalysis which is different from Freudian thought. He describes the subject-matter of Frank’s work as humiliating experiences, particularly the experiences of proletarian children,
for whom the agents of repression are either family or teachers, and there is a correspondence between the language he uses here and in the texts I have just cited: ‘Zdůrazňuje zázitky dětských let jakožto kofeny, z nichž vykličí jednou nový tvor, hnětený právě po celý život kausálním řetězcem, jenž má svůj původ v dětském zázitku.’¹⁴ Hostovsky also interprets Frank’s work as a powerful attempt ‘obhajíti člověka vyděděného a vyvrženého ze společnosti — obhajíti jej objevem přičiny jeho morálního debaklu. Jsou tedy jeho motivy rádu ryze sociálního, jsou procházeny hlubokou mravností a mají jedinou tendenci: Dokázati, že všechno nenormální, atypické a vyloučné je ve skutečnosti strašlivě normální a zákonně typické.’¹⁵ This interpretation of Frank’s work is important for what it betrays of Hostovsky’s approach to his own prose: it cannot be coincidental that the words of Hostovsky’s critical evaluation of Frank are echoed in the opening of ‘Zpověď’:¹⁶

Ne, ne! Moje historie je strašně typická, normální a přirozená! Viděli jste někdy v horách zřítit se balvan? Půda se tehdy zákonně prohnula a sesula. Ano, zákonně! Také můj čin byl posledním úderem, posledním splněním téhož přirozeného zákona. Bojím se, že nechápnete. Ale nedvíte se mému strachu, vždyť po celý svůj dosavadní život jsem řval v páchnoucím pokoření o trochu porozumění — a nyní ani můj zločin a trest neměly by mne očistiti a vykoupiti?¹⁷

Similarly, Pavel, the first-person narrator of *Ghetto v nich*, feels that he must explain his childhood and his relationship with his environment, and with other people, ‘abyste jej nepovažoval za nenormální, výstřední a atypický’ (*GVN*, p. 5). It would appear that Hostovsky is intent on didactically redefining the reader’s perception of abnormality and, in his early work, is clearly grasping towards a conception of the protagonist’s ‘sickness’ — or mental crippledness — as an indictment of the skewed morality of society. He states, for example, that Frank views the causes of the immoral and evil society he presents as ‘zceleně v smrduvém vředu současné evropské pseudomravnosti’, and Hostovsky seems to concur with that view. Hostovsky’s attempts in the 1920s to create a ‘natural’ form of determinism shaping an individual’s fate

⁴ ‘Freudova psychoanalýza v literatuře’ in *Literární noviny*, 2, 1928, no. 4, p. 4. The article purports to be on the influence of Freud on literature but Hostovsky concentrates for the most part on offering some comments on Frank’s work.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ The catalogue of the Czech Academy’s Institute of Czech Literature places ‘Zpověď’ chronologically after Hostovsky’s article on Frank and Freud.
through experiences in which his autonomous identity is crushed did not meet with a sympathetic critical reception. The behaviour which the protagonists avowed as 'normal' was described by critics only as výlučný, and Václav Černý later suggested that Hostovsky's treatment of hysteric had let him to a false generalization of the exceptional as the norm and to a falsification of human nature.

Hostovsky's book-length publications of the 1920s demonstrate a development in the author's focalization of narration. The socio-political critique still continues, but is subsidiary to the subject's perception of himself and his world. Whereas in the exempla action focused on the protagonist's status as outcast, disinherited by society, now the protagonist's subjectivized configuration of the external world comes to the fore in works such as Zavřené dveře and Ghetto v nich. In sum, Hostovsky's early work (and by early I mean up to and including 1930) constitutes a study of the prison of the self. While subjectivity, and indeed consciousness, denotes de facto a form of delimitation (I cannot experience you as I experience myself, and vice versa), one would not normally characterize this ontological delimitation as constricting. The Hostovsky protagonist, however, encounters an identity crisis at every corner, whether walking into a café or bar (a frequent locus for action in the early work) or simply gazing in a mirror. The ontological insecurity inherent in everyday situations reminds one of the prose sketches of Kafka's collection of meditations, Betrachtung (1912), where, as Edward Timms suggests, 'the urban milieu assumes shapes which reflect the hero’s anxieties'.

Everything the subject comes into contact with, whether another human being or simply a window, is symbolically transmuted into another wall either buttressing or threatening the isolation chamber which is the prison of the self. The objective world, particularly in Hostovsky's early work, exists as mirror for the subject's consciousness, for it is a psychic rather than topographic delineation of space and meaning.

The title story of the 1926 collection of short stories, Zavřené dveře, makes for a typical example of the protagonist's self-incarceration as we view the world from the blinkered and distorted consciousness of the hunchback.

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schoolteacher Antonín Frank. Papoušek, hitherto the only critic to have written cogently about the Hostovský protagonist’s constricted consciousness and space, terms the prison of the self a closed circle; he suggests that the two most important symbols in the story are the mirror and the doors which separate Frank from his fellow-lodger Dr Larn, and that each object or figure that appears in the room ‘je k některému z těchto pólů, projektovaných jako symbolický objekt, přitahována’. The narrator, however, informs us that the two ‘walls’ on which Frank leans in order to prevent himself from falling into a bottomless abyss are the mirror and the bored face of Larn (p. 30). Although the doors have an important function in the short story, the face is the dominant symbol, for Hostovský is analysing a self-reflexive consciousness for whom people and objects constitute reflective surfaces. The doors are a barrier separating the face of Frank from the face of Larn, and therefore a threshold delimiting Frank’s prison and the world of space beyond it. Thus Frank gazes, like a small uncomprehending child, at his reflection and follows his own movements in the mirror, conscious of his deformity and of the wrinkles which have etched themselves into his face: the mirror reflects his self-hatred back at him. Larn’s face is another reflective surface for Frank, throwing his jealousy back at him, and Frank projects onto it the experiences he thinks are denied to him, the ‘happy’ world outside his imprisoned consciousness, ‘Jeho ústa vypouštěla chuchvalce zažitých příhod, a ty probouzely ve Frankově srdce potlačený vztek. Doktorův ohryzek se stal symbolem onoho života tam venku, kde bezvadní muží s bílou pletí a obnažené ženy s široce otevřenýma očima vrhají kutálející se smích do všech úhlov světa’ (p. 31). Larn’s face is also a mirror for Frank’s desires, for he reads in the face actions directing away from the self and a freedom of space (the outside, the women’s wide-open eyes, all the corners of the world), which are in direct contrast to his own self-reflexive actions and thoughts. Frank feels that ‘veškerou energii svých činů, všechny plány a myšlenky musí obětovat špinavému bahnu, jež se mu usadilo v nitru’ (p. 30). While Frank’s energies to move out into the world bounce back at him like a boomerang, he conceives of his hunched back as though it were a separate entity, which may suggest that he has a divided consciousness, for he

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sees it moving through the doors and filling the street, ‘byl všude, všude — a chechtající lidé naň ukazovali’ (p. 32).

In Frank’s encounters with other people, the face is again the central motif. The pupil Frank flings against a bench is not punished primarily for his impudence, but for his beautiful face, which Frank identifies with the complacency of those who can comfortably torment him, ‘měl dovádivý pohyb rtů a sametové zorničky. Frankovým mozkem proletela myšlenka: Jeden z těch, kteří po celý život beztrestně budou po tobě dupat a na tebe plivat!’ (pp. 32–33). One cannot but agree with Papoušek’s assertion that Frank’s mother is adjoined to the pole of the mirror and is judged responsible for his suffering; he is an example of doomed offspring, ‘Plod žen, jenž rodi mrzáky, je zatracen’ (p. 35), although the relationship between mother and son is a little more complex than Papoušek suggests. On her arrival, the mother offers her cheek to her son for a kiss and the narrator states that Frank feels as though he is sinking his lips into slime, which suggests that Frank not only blames his mother for his ugliness, but bestows on her the same repulsion he feels for himself — that is why she functions as a mirror.

Frank’s dialogue with the doctor is entirely self-obsessed, consisting of rhetorical questions and statements as though he were talking to himself: he asks the doctor whether or not he has considered the fact that he is stealing happiness from thousands with his beautiful face, ignores the doctor’s reply that he does not understand, and merely continues ranting. Similarly, in conversation with his mother, she must interrupt Frank’s self-pitying whining with the rhetorical question ‘Víš proč jsem přijela?’ (p. 34) in order artificially to create the verbal space to allow herself the opportunity to tell him of his sister’s engagement. Frank greets this news with a demand for 500 crowns, because what he knows about his sister has meaning for him only as a reminder of the world he is denied and spurs him in his desire to be part of it. The world of the short story is, then, determined by Frank’s awareness of his deformity and consists entirely of his ego.

The feeling that he is persistently humiliated usually pushes the Hostovský protagonist either into extreme action (suicide, murder, escape) or

10 Ibid.
11 Laughter is always an instrument of torment and contempt in Hostovský’s work, as it is in Dostoevskii’s.
into nervous breakdown. His isolation from others, his introspection and his extreme sensitivity make him vulnerable, for he appears either to have no outside assistance in the form of close family and friends to come to terms with these humiliations, or, when he does form relationships with others, considers himself singularly misunderstood (which may reflect the hubris of the introvert). William James suggests that a man’s social self is bound up with the recognition he receives from others, ‘No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof’, and that such a process would produce feelings of rage, impotence and despair. The fear of isolation, perhaps the impossibility of surviving alone, is a recurring motif in Hostovský’s early work.

Critics received Hostovský’s 1920s experiments with disparagement. They termed his approach — the protagonist’s hyperbolic subjectivized mapping of the world, the proximity of his subject-matter to psychiatric case-studies — schematic, accused him of theorizing rather than fictionalizing, and of rendering his works lifeless and incredible by the rigidity of this approach. Usually one finds that these allegations relate to the reception of Hostovský’s work as Expressionist or as influenced by psychoanalysis. A.M. Piša in particular believes that Hostovský — in his first short stories and novels — gives the impression of someone applying examples to a priori formulae. Reviewing Danajský dar, he rebukes Hostovský for pessimistic determinism of a kind that prevents his characters from attaining three-dimensionality: in

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13 See the review in Právo lidu, 39, no. 111, 11 May 1930, p. 7: ‘apriorní tese zůžuje autorův obzor a místo živoucích lidských organismů vytváří pouhé dokladové exempláře’. Piša thinks that Zracený stín has a livelier psychological imagery than Hostovský’s preceding work and that the reader is no longer troubled by ‘pouhými psychopatologickými schematy’, although he goes on to state that ‘ani zde není mu příběh ještě plným a organiciky rozvinutím lidského osudu, nýbrž spíše záminkou a podkladem k studiu psychologického případu’. He argues that Hostovský does actually go further, however, than merely applying a psychoanalytical model. See Právo lidu, 40, no. 116, 17 May 1931, p. 9.
14 A.M. Piša views the ‘Freudian-Pirandellesque’ monologue of the general in Černá tlupa as a typical example of Hostovský theorizing to his readers.
16 Sever a východ, 6, 1930, pp. 204–06.
Stezka podél cesty Horn is determined by his humiliation, Pavel by his inner ghetto in *Ghetto v nich*, and the cage of the war determines the fates of the protagonists in *Danajský dar*. Piša ascribes this flatness of characterization to the influence of German Expressionism, alleging that the real world is treated by Hostovský as a mere projection of subjective mental states, and that there is no distinguishable space between the person and reality. This impairs their credibility as characters, 'ony nemají vnitřního prostoru, jsou viděny v pláše, nebo se rozplývají v libovolí autorovy psychologie. Nemají vnitřního života, protikladného a organického, jsou to papírové výtvory a čím více je autor uvádí do třeskných dějů, tím truhlivější poskytuje pohled.' Hostovský’s work may well be schematic, but Piša underestimates the complexity of what Hostovský appears to be attempting: the protagonist’s unconscious determination of his own fate is a consequence of his irrational response to his existence as a social being.

Other reviewers have also characterized Hostovský’s early work as Expressionist. Josef Hora and J.B. Čapek, for example, hold the view that *Ghetto v nich* manifests the influence of German Expressionism. Čapek attributes Hostovský’s distinctive view of post-war chaos and depression, ‘the cult of disintegration with the calling for miracles, the psychoanalytical gloom, the expressionistic and graphic rudeness’, to the influence of German literature, arguing that Czech society after the First World War was not so wholly disconsolate and so definitively demolished. Other sources, both literary and critical, suggest a rather less rosy view of post-First World War Czech society. Božena Benešová’s short story ‘Zajatá’, for example, is a portrait of a community atomized as a result of the war. Miloš Hlávka expresses the view that, apart from the period of Decadence, ‘nebylo takové literatury duševní slabosti a životní malátnosti jako po válce’, and uses this as

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17 Ibid., p. 206.
19 Ibid.
20 Published in the following collection: Božena Benešová, *Oblouzení*, Prague, 1923, pp. 88–137.
21 See Miloš Hlávka, ‘Slovesnost a zítřek’ in *Studentský časopis*, 12, 1932–33, no. 1, 10 September 1932/33, p. 29.
a platform from which to attack contemporaneous young writers for their concentration on student life and lack of universally important figures or plots. (His complaints are typical of the recoil from individualism in the inter-war period and the demand for writers to deal with social realities: another critic, from a review of 1932, issues the request ‘aby naše próza byla aktuální, “živná”, jak se říká, aby se zabývala otázkami doby’.) Pavel Fraenkl analyses the problem of self-consciousness in Hostovský’s work up to 1936, and finds that the two basic requirements essential to the harmonious development of a person’s individuality are impaired, or at least distorted, in Hostovský’s *Lebenswelt*: the relationship with one’s self, and the relationship with others, with one’s surroundings, with society generally. Fraenkl seems to concur with Hostovský’s depiction of disintegration, arguing that all Hostovský’s protagonists, ‘narození v době společenské nespojitosti a právě tím atomizace, kde není hromadného sociálního koncensu a jednotící společenské víry, cítí společenství lidí, druznost, spolupráci na hromadném díle i myšlení jako sílu sobě nepřátelskou a je pouze ohrožující’. In Fraenkl’s opinion, the lack of ‘healthy’ relationships in Hostovský’s work exactly corresponds with the post-war period of the 1930s.

Hostovský’s concentration on intense psychological states, the alleged ‘hysterical’ or febrile style of his early prose, and the uncertainty of the borders between the protagonist’s dream world and the real world are all features of his prose-writing which have earned him the Expressionist label. That František Gótz in particular propounds an Expressionist approach in Hostovský supplies grist to the sceptic’s mill when one weighs up Gótz’s prominence (as theoretist) in the Brno Literární skupina, whose journal *Host* (1921–29) was the organ of Czech literary Expressionism. (Hostovský

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22 See ‘a.’ [J. Hora], reviewing *PPK* in *Literární noviny*, 6, 1932, no. 8, May, p. 4.
25 František Gótz in particular is an exponent of this viewpoint right into the late 1930s: Gótz states that Hostovský’s aesthetic project is Expressionist, with the world of illusions, visions and hallucinations more important than that of reality (‘G.’ in supplement section of *Národní osvobození*, 10, 1933, no. 224, 24 September 1933, p. 2), and he writes of Hostovský’s typical ballad expressionism in which the borders between dream and reality are destroyed, ‘každá realita u něho přesla přehřátou visi a nabyla její podoby’ (*Národní osvobození*, 15, no. 289, 8 November 1938, p. 6).
contributed to Host several times as a critic\textsuperscript{27} — though his activities as a critic were not extensive\textsuperscript{28} — but only once as a fiction-writer with ‘Konec románu’\textsuperscript{29} a supplementary epilogue to his 1930 novel of post-First World War disillusion and disintegration, Danajský dar.) The most recent adherent to the Expressionist line is Vladimír Papoušek, who boldly declares that Hostovský ‘vstoupil do literatury jako expresionista’\textsuperscript{30}

There must, however, be some clear blue water between finding Expressionist characteristics in Hostovský’s work and asserting, as Papoušek does, that Hostovský (in his works of the 1920s) is an Expressionist. Indeed Papoušek seems altogether too keen to straitjacket Hostovský within the bounds of certain artistic movements (the author, argues Papoušek, progresses from Expressionist to Existentialist) to the exclusion of any others. If one considers the nature of Expressionism and analyses the work Hostovský published in a number of literary journals before his first novels, one finds that the Expressionist label sticks rather less closely. It is as though critics equate the depiction of intensely subjective states with Expressionism, conveniently putting to one side late nineteenth-century (and early twentieth-century) literature’s general movement ‘inwards’. One remembers that a writer like Dostoevskii, who had been acclaimed by the Naturalists for his study of the injured and humiliated, and by the Decadents for his mysticism, was also celebrated by the Expressionists for his depictions of subjectivity: indeed Furness identifies a cult of Dostoevskii at the highpoint of German Expressionism.\textsuperscript{31}

Expressionism emerged from the creative diversity of movements at the turn of the century: dissatisfied with, on the one extreme, Naturalism and its

\begin{itemize}
  \item 27 Reviews of Weiskopf in Host, 7, 1927–28, pp. 155–56; of Die Klasse in ibid., p. 156; of Schnitzler in Host, 8, 1928–29, pp. 71–72; of Kropáč in ibid., p. 95; of Frank in ibid., p. 166.
  \item 28 He published an article on Leonard Frank in Literární noviny, 2, 1928, no. 4; a report on the French Institute in Literární noviny, 2, 1928, no. 12; a review of Bruno Brehm in Tvorba, 4, 1929, no. 15; a review of Krleža in Tvorba, 4, 1929, no. 20; an article on war novels in Lit. rozhledy, 14, 1929–30, no. 1; a review of Bôhnel in Literární noviny, 5, 1920–31, no. 17.
  \item 29 Host, 8, 1928–29, pp. 133–36.
  \item 30 Papoušek, Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru (see note 9), p. 6.
  \item 31 Furness makes the point that nearly half a million copies of Dostoevskii’s works were published and translated by the publisher Piper, with Moeller van den Bruck often editing or writing prefaces for these works (see R.S. Furness, Expressionism, London, 1973, p. 10).
\end{itemize}
immanent nature, and, on the other, Symbolism and its cossetted worlds, the Expressionists considered that 'a new passion was needed, a new pathos, the expression of a subjective vision regardless of mimesis'.\(^{32}\) The whole emphasis on a new generation, on ideas of transformation (Wandlung) and regeneration (Erneuerung) is reflected in Expressionist drama’s preoccupation with generational conflict, particularly between fathers and sons, and most especially with parricide.\(^ {33}\) It would be short-sighted, however, not to see some continuity here with the subject-matter, if not the treatment (in so far as how conflicts are resolved), of nineteenth-century Realist fiction (one thinks of Dostoevskii or Dickens, for example). Ulrich Weisstein seems to underplay the influence of Symbolism, and overplay Expressionism’s importance in European literature, when he states that Symbolism was a stage on the way to Expressionism.\(^ {34}\) At the same time, it is sensible to emphasize what the Symbolists (or Decadents) share as an aesthetic project, their ‘need to point beyond, or to indicate by the sensitive use of images and symbols that the ultimate meaning of the world might lie beyond its purely external appearance’.\(^ {35}\) Here one perhaps arrives at the crux of the problem with Hostovský, for Hostovský’s depiction of the protagonist’s sense of imprisonment by the phenomenal world (which is conditioned by the protagonist’s relationship with himself) is as much a trait of fin-de-siècle literature as of Expressionism.

Papoušek argues that Expressionism presents a tragic abyss between man and the world; this means that Expressionists lay emphasis on the power of

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32 Ibid., p. 3.
34 See Weisstein (ed.), Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon, p. 16. For both, language is also primarily a means of self-expression, although the Decadents unleash words from their semantic values with a playfulness and indulgence in aestheticism that the Expressionists lack. If language can acquire independence for the Decadents (see R. B. Pynsent, ‘Decadence, Decay and Innovation’ in Pynsent [ed.], Decadence and Innovation, p. 168), for the Expressionists the word is the subject’s vassal as the author’s metaphors or epithets replace the object designated by the word. While the function of language is likely to be under scrutiny in any artistic movement, both the Decadents’ and the Expressionists’ wrestling with words must be interpreted against the background of the fin-de-siècle crisis over language, as exemplified by such works as Hofmannsthal’s 1902 Ein Brief, Wittgenstein’s Tractatus or Musil’s Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless, and the work of Karl Kraus.
35 Furness, Expressionism, p. 20.
feelings to overcome that distance. Papoušek describes man’s relationship in
the world as centrifugal: enclosed in the circle of his own isolation, the
individual attempts to overcome his confinement by a grand gesture and so
join with other beings in the world in a newly created structure, hence the
conception of the world as a crystal which was spawned by the
Expressionists.\(^\text{36}\) The problem with Papoušek’s analysis here is that he does
not seem to acknowledge that the individual’s sense of distance from others
and from the world is also a trait of Romantic outsiderdom (although perhaps
Hostovský moves closer to a Romantic portrayal of outsiderdom in the 1930s).

Papoušek’s assessment of the Hostovský protagonist could easily be applied to
the Benešová protagonist, and one would have to struggle to describe
Benešová as an Expressionist. Papoušek also cites Hostovský’s use of
metaphorical expressions signifying an intense change of state, the
hyperbolical expression of movements and forceful expressions in diction, as
demonstration of Hostovský’s Expressionism.\(^\text{37}\) Hostovský’s ‘intensity of
expression’ in a novel like Ghetto v nich — the attempt to render emotional
pain in language, the use of ellipses, a Baroque-like grotesqueness — is
Expressionistic, but the treatment of the subject-matter is also close to
Naturalism, which was anathema to Expressionism. When Hostovský brought
out an edited version of Ghetto v nich in the 1934 collection Cesty k pokladům,
he expurgated these stylistic excesses. As for Hostovský’s metaphorical
expressions, he may have been as influenced by Anna Maria Tilschová as by
the German Expressionists. In the second novel in her family\(^\text{38}\) chronicle, the
1918 Synové, Tilschová analyses the responses of one of the siblings, Jiří, to
the meaningless affair between his sweetheart, the sluttish Nina, and his
brother Karel. Hostovský’s treatment of hypersensitive and egocentric outsiders
strongly resembles Tilschová’s portrait of Jiří’s disintegrating personality.

When Jiří stumbles on Nina and Karel together, the room becomes a projection
of his shock-induced vertigo and shaken stability, ‘zdalo se mu, že stěny se
pohybují, a všecko kolem tancuje’.\(^\text{39}\) Similarly, in Hostovský’s early work the

36 Papoušek, Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru, p. 7.
37 Ibid., p. 62.
38 I should add that Tilschová does not concentrate on the family alone, but rather uses the
collapse of the family as a means of investigating a shift in social class structures.
39 Anna Maria Tilschová, Stará rodina, Part Two: Synové [1918], Prague, 1948, p. 333.
protagonist’s immediate living space is a palpable extension of his emotional state, serving as a claustrophobic, urban paysage de l’âme: in Stezka podél cesty, when the student Karel Horn returns from the theatre and weeps in his room, ‘plakaly též stěny mého nevlidného pokoje’ (SPC, p. 39), and when he collapses after a meeting with the headmaster of his school he thinks that the walls of his room are billowing (SPC, p. 42).

Critics held the opinion that Hostovsky’s early work was closely linked to the new modern ‘science’ of psychoanalysis; they also often allude to the direct or indirect influence of Freud. A.M. Píša, for example, credits Hostovsky with rehabilitating the genre of the psychological novel by using psychoanalysis to transform the novel into a portrayal of ‘podvědomých stavů a procesů jako vlastního klíče k lidským činům a osudům’. He suggests that this approach to the novel allows Hostovsky constantly to discover new subject-matter, ‘dobývá z něho nových motivů a nachází v něm nové typy lidské a osudové’. František Götz, reviewing Černá tlupa, praises Hostovsky for adapting the novel without relinquishing its dramatic action (one suspects that behind Götz’s praise is an implicit criticism of Hostovsky’s earlier work for being overly contrived and thus lacking animation): ‘Opravdu: zase je třeba Hostovského pojmouti jako novy případ realismu neprlème se vsim aparatem psychologického analytismu, se vši ilusivností a atomisací duše. I tak je to

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40 See ‘an’ [Josef Hora], ‘Mladi soudi válku’, a review of Danajský dar in Literární noviny, 2, 1928, no. 16, p. 5: comparing Hostovsky to Šrámek, Hora declares that ‘Hostovský, vyrůstající v době freudismu, zná daleko fysiologičtější klíče svých postav […] jsou spíše záznamy pudových stavů, přesné diagramy podvědomého proudu’. Freud is again mentioned, this time by ‘AMP.’ [A.M. Píša], in his review of Ghetto v nich in Právo lidu, 37, 1928, no. 297, 16 December 1928, p. 9, and his review of Danajský dar, where he compares the novel to Hostovsky’s preceding two works ‘vyprostil se zde Hostovsky z freudovského psychologisování’ (see Právo lidu, 39, no. 111, 11 May 1930, p. 7). Píša is probably indirectly alluding to Freud when he describes how in the psychology of Bašek (Zracený stín) ‘prostupuje se neustále proud vědomí s proudem podvědomí, bdělý stav s okamžikům volného bezvládí a halucinovaného vytržení, v němž se příznacně vracejí představy z dětství’ (see Právo lidu, 40, 1931, no. 116, 17 May 1931, p. 9). ‘Nk.’ [B. Novák] speaks of his ‘podivný život’ o psychoanalyse jako inspiračný zdrojí (see Rozpravy Aventina, 9, 1933–34, no. 4, p. 43. ‘jšk’ [Josef Š. Kvapil] alleges that Hostovsky made his mark on pre-Second World War literature with ‘svých postavách člověka tvora neznámého, určovánoho freudovskými komplexy’ (see Naše doba, 53, 1946–47, p. 43). Pavel Fraenkl argues that Hostovsky’s work is far more Adlerian than it is Freudian: ‘mnohem spíše individuální psychologové než tluomočníci videňského ozřejmovače sexuality a neuros směli by se dovolverovat díla bodováho analytika chorého lidského subjektivismu, jímž je Egon Hostovsky až dosud na prvním místě’ (see Fraenkl, K problematice sebecitu, pp. 3–4).

41 See A.M. Píša’s review of Černá tlupa in Rozhledy, 2, 1933, nos. 16–17, p. 114.
rozhodně zajímavý epik, jehož úporný zápas o osvobození a plné vnitřní roozevučení je napínavý a jehož umělecký vývoj má dramatické předpoklady." Götz perhaps oversteps the mark when he states that the exposition and conclusion of Černá tlupa are derived from Freudism, 'Co jiného je to oklamání dětského snu novou náhradní fikcí, padělkem snu, než právě freudovská sublimace a kompensace hysterických světů v duši dětské.' While it is true that the children's object of satisfaction (in this case the fairytale island and all its trappings) is being replaced by a more socially acceptable object of desire (the 'counterfeit' island) from the perspective of the adults, which will counter the children's frustrations (with the exception of those of Oldřich), Freud's notion of sublimation is founded on an explicitly sexual premiss for it is the libido which is denied satisfaction: when the object of satisfaction is withdrawn from the subject without replacement by an adequate substitute, one means of remaining healthy involves 'renouncing libidinal satisfaction, sublimating the dammed-up libido and turning it to the attainment of aims which are no longer erotic and which escape frustration'.

Hostovský himself takes up a critical position in the debate about the extent of the influence of Freudian concepts in literature in his short article of 1928, 'Freudova psychoanalýza v literatuře', where he argues that the application of the term psychoanalysis to literature needs to be broadened beyond merely Freud and his disciples, 'Potom by se nenarázely všechny moderní psychologické romány nemožně na totéž kopyto, a nestrkaly by se násilně do téže krabice.' Hostovský argues that the rough outlines of psychoanalysis are manifested in literature long before Freud, citing as examples Dostoevskii's Crime and Punishment and Przybyszewski's Homo sapiens, and suggests that this literature already contains elements of the unconscious, and attempts at resolving what Freud termed the Oedipus complex. Clearly Hostovský must have believed he was drawing on the ideas of psychoanalysis in his early work, for he writes in a letter of 1927 to Josef Knap that he is struggling to come up

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42 See 'G.' [František Götz] in supplement section of Národní osvobození, 10, 1933, no. 224, 24 September 1933, p. 2.
43 Ibid.
45 Literární noviny, 2, 1928, no. 4, p. 4.
46 Ibid.
with new ideas for his work, 'I v oboru, pro který jsem měl dříve nejšťastnější ruku — i v psychoanálese.'\(^{47}\) Hostovský's approach to psychoanalysis is not strictly Freudian, however, as his article suggests — he is uninterested in forgotten experiences (at least in his early work), or the libido, for example. His main source of interest is the subconscious, and here he is influenced by nineteenth-century fiction's depiction of different states of consciousness (as one finds in Dostoevskii, Andreev, the Czech Decadents), and may even be closer to Schopenhauer than he is to Freud. Hostovský shares with Schopenhauer the belief that it is an illusion for the individual to think of himself as a rational thinker; Hostovský studies processes of change in response to a crisis within an individual which the intellect cannot govern.

Another criticism levelled at Hostovský, and related to the allegation that his prose was too schematic, was that his secondary characters were lightweight, two-dimensional supporting roles for the protagonist. This criticism appears ill-judged when weighed against the particularized (usually first-person) point-of-view the reader is asked to share. If the protagonist cannot communicate with other people, if he is incapable of entertaining the notion that another is also a conscious being subject to various needs and desires, if his consciousness distorts how he interprets the world around him, then part of the author's aim must be to deploy secondary characters as ciphers for aspects of the protagonist's consciousness: much in the way that Dostoevskii did, as a means of dramatizing internal division. Not Hostovský, but the protagonist fails to breathe life into other people and embraces them only in so far as they are agents of causation in his world. Many critics — but here I cite Herdman — have made the point that Dostoevskii uses other characters in a complex complementarity to the central, controlling consciousness: 'there is the shadowy doubling of one character by another quite separate one, in whom are evoked and embodied latent or hidden or half-developed elements of the psyche of the first character, or even elements which the novelist has excluded purposely from the character'.\(^{48}\) Leatherbarrow is pursuing the same line of thought when he describes the

\(^{47}\) Památník národního písemnictví [Museum of National Literature], Prague (hereafter PNP), Letter from Egon Hostovský to Josef Knap, 21 April 1927.

secondary characters in *Crime and Punishment* as losing ‘all qualities of objective “otherness” as they are drawn into his [Raskol’nikov’s] gravitational field and endowed with the burden of his expectations. The libertine Svidrigailov becomes an embodiment of the amoral will to power; the timid Sonia stands as an emblem of the submissive multitude; the drunken Marmeladov travesties Raskol’nikov’s capacity for self-hurt and self-abasement; and the strange detective Porfiri Petrovich seems to satisfy his desire for pursuit and capture.\(^{49}\) Similarly, James Woodward describes the work of Leonid Andreev — who is mentioned as the subject of a study by one of the protagonists in *Sedmkrát* — as ‘dominated by the figure of the protagonist; the other characters exist only to project light on his inner world’.\(^ {50}\) To some extent this is a trait of Realism, using a character as symbolic objective correlative for aspects of the protagonist’s consciousness. Moldanová makes the point that in Čapek-Chod’s *Antonín Vondráj*, as in Benešová’s *Clavèk*, a number of episodic figures often have the role of alter ego to the main protagonist. She views this as part of a tendency in Czech prose in the 1910s to move towards a panoramic or polyphonic novel where (rather than adhering to the unities of time, place and narrating subject) a number of alternative figures and alternative resolutions of conflicts are offered which problematize questions of morality, good and evil, ‘nepodléhající apriornímu vzorci řešení, ale zodpověditelnou pouze v konkrétní situaci konkrétním činem’.\(^ {51}\) One might go further and suggest that interpretations which ignore the schematic nature of psychological novels fail to penetrate the problems these texts address: the central theme of Olbracht’s 1916 *Máj*-inspired novel *Žalář nejtemnější*, for example, has been identified by critics as the bureaucrat Mach’s mental imprisonment, which corresponds with his physical blindness, by his jealousy for his wife. The wife, however, is not much more than a schematic device. Knowledge is power and represents a means of control for Mach, down to the most trivial of things such as always

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using the same ball in the same grasp at the bowling alley. What Mach cannot control consistently poses a threat to his stability, and so his wife — who, like any other living thing, cannot be wholly known (although Mach does what he can, in so far as his mother makes enquiries about Jarmila and her family at a private detective agency, raising questions about Mach’s relationship with his mother) — becomes the embodiment of all that he cannot control. The wife is intended then to expose a kind of split personality, for the novel is chiefly the study of a man torn between his rational, assured self-control and his irrational instincts, of Mach’s fear of himself and of what lurks beneath his dispassionate, moral probity, and perhaps of a Schopenhauerian contest between Will and intellect, ‘Boji se svých zlých myšlenek, oddaluje je a zatlacuje kamsi do kouta, ale ví o nich, že přijdou, [...] A to jest velmi zlé, že se boji něčeho, co přijít musí.’ Another common theme is the contrast between how the protagonist considers himself to be perceived by others and how he considers himself. The ambitious Mach likes to behave as a strict disciplinarian, proudly and ambitiously fulfilling his duty to the state, and unconcerned that he is liked little by ordinary people. The reader is alerted to this problem by the way the novel begins, with Mach disinterestedly judging a thief on the basis of his crime and refusing to be influenced by the thief’s dire living circumstances and the fact that the thief once helped Mach’s wife. Mach’s ensuing dream, in which, on a train journey, he fails to inform a platform vendor that he has been given too much change, exposes his anxiety that it is only his strong will which protects him from immorality; thus we approach the novel with the expectation that a contest between Mach’s will and his irruptive instincts will somehow determine the action.

Moldanová considers Olbracht’s work to be the first Czech novel informed by the discoveries of psychoanalysis, and makes the point that Fischer’s study of the significance of psychoanalysis for literature, *Otázky literární psychologie* (Prague, 1917), emerged at around the same time. Moldanová suggests that the movement towards a more open-ended conception of morality is accompanied also by a change in the mentality of the period, with the role of irrational fate (rather than that of a Naturalistic pre-determination) being more strongly asserted, and thus impinging on the whole conception of values and

morality: 'Co je dobro a co je zlo, když se ukazuje, že prověřeno životem jen málo tradičních vzorců jednání obstojí, když klasická kritéria, zejména pod vlivem války, selhávají.'\(^{53}\) One might view Hostovsky’s preoccupation in the 1920s with the protagonist’s inner ‘causal chain’ as part of this wider literary reorientation of good and evil.

Hostovsky introduces new themes and structures into his work in the 1930s, and this process begins with the important 1931 novel *Ztracený stín*. A.M. Piša, writing at the time, notes perceptively that the novel demonstrates the development of Hostovsky’s artistic methods; he declares that Hostovsky has now directly and concretely mastered the irrational ‘reality’ of man and life.\(^{54}\) No critic, however, has traced the resemblance between the novel and a short story, ‘Odjezd’, which Hostovsky published in *Plán*:\(^{55}\) much of the text of ‘Odjezd’ is replicated almost identically in *Ztracený stín*,\(^{56}\) though there are important differences: ‘Odjezd’ is narrated in the third person (the novel in the first person); the protagonist’s name is Emil Vemer (in the novel he is Josef Bašek); the double theme is absent from the short story. The short story is almost devoid of action; what action there is turns on Vemer’s chance meeting in the street with his former fellow student, the young lawyer Ervín Frýbl, whom he has not seen since an invitation to Frýbl’s home for dinner several years previously. Hostovsky uses their dialogue as a means of transmitting information to the reader about Vemer. We learn that he has been employed at the firm Globus for five years, that he is short of money (he has only enough for his accommodation and food), and that his whining self-pity seems to induce contempt in Frýbl. When Frýbl realizes that Vemer is about to request a loan from him, he manages to sound sufficiently hostile to deter Vemer, who finally asks only to borrow a book to read. In *Ztracený stín* Hostovsky stays

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54 See A.M. Piša’s review of Černá tlupa in *Rozhledy*, 2, 1933, nos. 16–17, p. 114.
56 The living quarters of the protagonist are virtually identical in both texts: a deep quiet prevails in the room (‘Ticho se převalovalo od stěny k stěně’ [*O*, p. 416]; ‘Hluboké ticho se převalovalo od stěny k stěně’ [*ZS*, p. 13]), broken only by the song of a canary (in ‘Odjezd’ the canary is Vemer’s own, in *ZS* the canary belongs to the neighbouring flat); the air in the flat is suffocating; the protagonist’s surroundings are ‘nudně známé’ (ibid.); the nearby flats are surrounded by scaffolding and situated alongside a garden; from his window Bašek sees ‘úzký dvorek s bednami a železem’, Vemer ‘Dvůr s železem a bednami’ (ibid.).
faithful to this psychological sequence of events in that Bašek, like Vemer, feels himself to be caught in a financial, social and psychological trap, and by chance (he overhears the name of the Frýbls’ street) conceives of a plan to ask Olga Frýblová and her husband to assist him to attain a better life (just as Vemer is hoping to ask the successful Frýbl to give him money), only eventually to find that he is incapable of putting his plan into action. Vemer’s despair and desire to escape the world after his encounter with Frýbl parallels Bašek’s feelings after he has finally been exposed as a fraud. In both texts the protagonist finds himself at the railway station, dreaming of departure, as he holds his head in his hands and sits on an iron bench (although the chronological order of the following extracts differs slightly in each):


The dialogue with the young woman who sits beside Verner/Bašek and is about to travel to her grandfather’s estate in the country (heightening Verner/Bašek’s sense of isolation and condemnation to inhumane, unnatural city-living) is also virtually identical in both texts. Similarly, a scene in which Vemer overhears the conversation of two students passing by (who sound as if they were discussing Kant or Schopenhauer) is replicated in Ztracený stín (just before Bašek requests to be returned to his job), “Jak bych ti to jen vysvětil — víš, všechno je zdání. Čas a prostor — to není žádná skutečnost, pouhé vjemy! Chápeš?” Odházel. Prodlužoval [ZS: Prodlužoval jsem] v myšlenkách ozvěnu jejich slov, snaže se uhodnout, o čem se bavili’ (‘O’, pp. 417–18; ZS, pp. 152–53). The superfluity of this scene in the novel suggests that it remained perhaps out of a reluctance on Hostovský’s part to relinquish the text.
of the short story; in fact, it is partly through ‘Odjezd’ that one begins to make sense of its significance.

‘Odjezd’ focuses more intensely — which one might expect from a short story — than Ztracený stín on the protagonist’s feeling that he is caught in a trap from which there is no escape and that his future is meaningless because there is no possibility of his life changing in any way. Vemer pores over the illustrated supplement of the newspaper, with its pictures of the sea and two people holding hands on the beach, and he gazes at the illustrated magazines in a bookshop, ‘Vzduch, vodu, lesy a lidi s takovými úsměvy, jakým jeho tváře dávno odvykly’ (‘O’, p. 419). (One might suggest that the young couple Máša and Petr in the sub-plot of Ztracený stín were conceived in Hostovský’s imagination by the happy young couple in the magazine.) The motif of escape which Hostovský introduces in ‘Odjezd’ will dominate his oeuvre, but is perhaps a trope of many psychological ‘analytical’ novels. This raises questions about what it is that people need to escape from, the means through which they escape and what it is that they hope to obtain or attain through escaping. On the one hand, escape is driven by the desire to depart from mechanical or humdrum living: it is a Romantic bid for ‘liberty’ from the life of an automaton, and in ‘Odjezd’ — as in, for example, Dům bez pana where Emil looks forward to his journey home as an escape from mechanical living — one finds Hostovský drawing on the trope of the contrast between town and country which characterizes the novel of lost illusions. Escape can also signify an attempt to break down the walls of private experience, a way out of isolation and into the ‘outside’ world, where re-integration into society might be a possibility. Both of these meanings apply to Verner, and his fate foreshadows that of many a Hostovsky protagonist. Verner comes to the conclusion that he can reach his dream destination by foot, hoping that he may encounter a friend to assist him on the way, but he ends up collapsing into the dust in the town’s suburbs. When he recovers consciousness he finds himself in his own room, attended by a doctor to whom he recounts (the doctor thinks him incoherent) the conversation he overheard between the two students: ‘Nic, co se odehrává v čase a prostoru, není tedy fakt — že? Rád bych na to aplikoval svůj případ ... Vám se asi zdá, že blázním, ale já jsem úplně normální ... Nuže, zázračným způsobem jsem byl na několik hodin mimo čas a prostor,
takže jsem spatřil skutečnost, svou skutečnost. A zděsil jsem se jí tak, že jsem před ní chtěl odjet, utéci. Chtěl jsem se zase vrátit do svého času a prostoru — chacha! Veliké štěstí, že lidé za normálních okolností nevidí svou skutečnost ... Ano, pane doktore, příliš jsem o sobě přemýšlel!’ (pp. 419–20). The doctor advises Vemer to lie down quietly in order not to return ‘tam, odkud jste před chvílkou stěží vyvázl’ (p. 420) and leaves the room to indicate to the housekeeper that he thinks Vemer has gone mad. The tale is left open-ended, delicately poised between the doctor’s supposition that Vemer is mad and Vemer’s belief that he is sane. Whether he is sane or not, Vemer’s attempt to escape, far from freeing him or integrating him into society, has only compounded his isolation from the world — as is the case for other Hostovský protagonists (one thinks of ‘Pan Lorenz’ or Dům bez pána, for example, where the pursuit of fantasy reinforces the protagonist’s outsiderdom).

With this denouement to ‘Odjezd’ the title accrues significance: the departure is no longer confined to Vemer’s desire to get away, but may refer either to his possible insanity or to his sense of having been outside real space and time for several hours. This ambiguity will become a key feature of Hostovský’s work, for he continually balances the reader on a tightrope between the possibility of the protagonist’s delusional psyche (the case for Verner being mad) and the possibility of the incursion of irrational elements into reality (that is, the case that our conventional depiction of reality insufficiently incorporates the metaphysical dimension of our being, and only by this multi-dimensional perspective on reality can we find truth): this sense of an ‘unreal’ reality, which Piša also noted, distinguishes Hostovský’s work from that of contemporaneous exponents of Czech psychological ‘analytical’ prose, such as Havlíček, Řezáč or Poláček, who adhere more closely to a mimetic approach. The notion of an ‘unreal’ reality also offers a key to understanding Hostovský’s work for it suggests that we shall encounter his protagonists in situations in which their conventional empirical existence is suspended or in limbo; they frequently comment on how unreal their experiences seem to them because, in one sense, they are unreal in so far as they transcend the phenomenal realm of experience and cross over into a semi-mystical one. And yet it is by means of his experience of unreality that Vemer can arrive at a vision of his reality, as though he had somehow split away from
his empirical self. Hostovský casts his protagonists into a hinterland outside of what is familiar to them, as though they are being tested: it is a fictional game world where the rules are awry — and inherent in the art of playing a game is one’s removal from one’s everyday identity — and where time is collapsed so that they confront intermittently the past (what they once were), the present (what they have become) and the future (what they are likely to become, but also their conditional future, what they might have become). Frequently, Hostovský’s mode of narration is retrospective, and, where the narrator is also the protagonist, the narration consists in a modulation between two time frames, the ‘then’ of the ‘dreaming’ ecstatic self and the ‘now’ of the sober empirical one. The result is that the narration is itself symbolic of the search for unity, in its movement to reconcile the two different projections of the narrator. While time is let loose in this strange hinterland, the action unfolds unrealistically in limited confines. Most of the action takes place in or around a single confined space (usually the protagonist’s dwelling) — whether the underground cellar of the narrator of Úkryt, or the surgery and flat of Malik in Půlnocní pacient, or the hotel in which the charity ball is held in Dobročinný večírek. Partly the centralization of action around the protagonists allows for a sustained ambiguity: we meet clusters of secondary characters only through the mediation of the protagonist and therefore cannot be wholly sure of the authenticity of these encounters (which is different in a writer like Řezáč). And yet it seems that the whole world is suspended within these particular four walls: in Půlnocní pacient, for example, a barely credible Cold War drama unfolds itself in Malik’s surgery. It appears that the protagonist is integral to the drama played out in that space (he would not be inundated by ‘the world’ were it not for some hidden or repressed facet of his personality).

In a letter of May 1930 to Václav Černý, Hostovský requests that Černý review in the journal Plán the novel he is working on; he is confident that his work is something new in modern Czech prose. The novel is as yet untitled, but Hostovský reveals that Černý’s review of a work by Weiss has suggested a suitable title to him, Muž, který ztratil svůj stín. Hostovský must have used this as a working title for at least several months, for a newspaper report of August

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1930 lists it as the title for Hostovský’s forthcoming novel to be published in the winter.\textsuperscript{58} Hostovský describes the novel to Černý as a tale about inner division, as a contest between a man and his increasingly independent and powerful shadow, which is narrated by means of drawing on all kinds of stories relating to mirrors and so on. He describes his approach to the text in the following way:

exposice, v níž seznamuji čtenáře s hrdiny a prostředím je psána jako filmové libretů, charakteristicky a náznaky. Potom se přenáší děj do nitra, ale v psychologisaci, myslím že důkladně, zachovávám stále tutéž formu filmovou. Týž spád a střídání obrazů záměrně zkloubených. Vybavuji si všechny vzpomínky na své dětství, na nemocí a horečné sny atd., kdy člověk vnímá lidi, věci i stavy duši odlišně od zdravého mozku a přece plasticky a věrojatně.\textsuperscript{59}

Several points arise from these comments. First, by way of a factual aside, the subsequent novel was adapted for the cinema as the 1937 film \textit{Vyděrač}, although reviews of the film suggest that the novel’s psychological foundation (which Hostovský is so enthusiastic about here) disappeared in the screenplay, a fact one might have surmised from the film’s title. Secondly, Hostovský’s interest in memories, illness, and dreams as a means of perceiving people, things and states of consciousness ‘odlišně od zdravého mozku a přece plasticky a věrojatně’ sounds like the Decadent belief in intermediate states of consciousness as vehicles to a higher reality. Finally, Hostovský’s new mode of narration in the novel is important because the opening up of the novelistic space through a ‘filmic’ panoramic eye is a movement away from the hermetic structures — and the hermetic psychology, in which the world continually refers back to the self — of his preceding texts. Whether the new perspective suggested a new theme or whether the new theme suggested a new perspective is unimportant: the opening up of the space of the novel goes hand in hand with some exit for the protagonist from his isolation chamber.

The opening of the novel — an observation of people performing mechanized work rather than some kind of information about the personality of the protagonist — intimates a new relationship between the protagonist and the world in his attempt to relate and compare his own behaviour to that of

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 3.
others. We begin with the group of workers and clerks whom Bašek fears resembling and move towards the bourgeois circle (the Frýbls and Dr Piroh) he desires to infiltrate; his studied attention to their behaviour (the insincere greetings between Olga and Dr Piroh, for example) is a form of preparation for his imitation of them. Bašek is particularly aware of the disparity between their speech and their gestures and facial expressions: the account of the evening at the Frýbls sometimes reads like a series of instructions from a theatre director: ‘všímal si kolem sedícich. Doktor vypoustel oblaka kouře, funěl, hekal, klel, chechtal se, Frýbl držel v jedné ruce karty, hlavu měl hluboko sehnutou, dolní ret se přemítavě pohyboval z koutku do koutku. Druhá ruka hledala něžně Olzino rameno. Zvedl jsem zvedavě hlavu, neboť mi neuslo, že si Olga odsedla’ (pp. 34–35). While Bašek is acutely conscious of the way that other people relate to one another (and that is significant in so far as it represents a new characteristic for a Hostovský protagonist), he remains egocentric since, in recognizing a broad web of relationships, he is predominantly concerned with his role as a focus for those relationships: thus, as his self-confidence increases, he is aware ‘že se v mých rukou sbíhají nitky osudu několika lidi’ and that he represents ‘pro celou řadu mozků důležitým elementem’ (p. 91).

Set against this circle radiating from the protagonist’s self-consciousness is a wider circle of action, involving incidental deaths, which frames the novel and to which Bašek is a passive witness. Bašek attributes his change of fortunes (seeking out Olga, the financial fraud) to the ‘trivial’ incident of overhearing a crowd discussing the murder of three people; his attention is drawn by the name of the street in which the deaths occurred. At the end of the novel, Bašek is standing outside a building when he hears the horrifying shriek of a man repairing window-frames falling to his death from the sixth floor of a block of flats (p. 154). The event of this death creates a pattern of responses like the drop of a stone in a large pool of water: Bašek observes first a small group of people around the body, then fifty metres away people gawping at the first group, and then a further fifty metres away townspeople continuing to go about their business, looking round without returning or stopping. Bašek is involved then in distinguishing a whole sequence of effects radiating out from the corpse. The people on the street, diverted to different degrees by the spectacle of the dead man, and the small bustle around him, are nevertheless
connected by the mere fact of their response. In a reference to the incidental deaths at the beginning of the novel, and as an expression of how he has changed, Bašek wonders whether among the crowd there is also someone who is interested only in the name of the street and not in the dead man; ‘Tudy právě prošla smrt, dotkla se mne, dýchla na mne’ (p. 155). Death rather than the dead man has suddenly affected Bašek, perhaps because he realizes that his mortality is a condition that he shares with others (and one thinks back to the epigraph to the novel, ‘Jsem prý synem ženy a muže../Podivné! Myslí jsem, že jsem víc’). As Papoušek states, mortality is identified here as an existential point of connection between people. Death is incorporated in the hero’s view of existence.\(^60\)

The interconnectedness of life which Hostovský introduces as a theme in *Ztracený stín* is developed further in *Případ profesora Körnera* as Körner, gazing out of his window, glimpses snatches of people’s lives through those windows which are lit up and can form impressions, for example, of how wealthy or poor they are, ‘všechno to v jediné slitině zdiva, všechno to různé a přece semknuté jakýmsi zřejmým řádem, jakousí vyšší jednotou. Nikdy se odtud takhle nedíval. S tak až závratným úžasem nad velikým životem sta malých životů’ (ibid.) That Körner can perceive some kind of order governing the world without his window suggests another development in Hostovský’s representation of the relationship between the self and the world in his work. He sees ‘deset, dvacet, padesát oken, temných i ozářených, deset, dvacet, padesát spících i žijících světů zavadilo náhle o jeho oči’ (p. 19). Just as Bašek apprehended a ring of effects radiating out from the corpse, so here the repetition of ‘deset, dvacet, padesát’ suggests a layered depth of connections between people. It is as though Hostovský begins here where he left off in his previous novel. Körner shares Bašek’s experience of an *ekstasis* or epiphany, standing outside of his own life to observe Life unfolding before him: his senses are assailed by the smells, noises and colours he beholds, ‘takže stál jakoby vytržen ze svého života, ze svého světa a přehlížel lidské mraveniště, v němž až dosud byl slepý’ (ibid.). Bašek and Körner represent a significant modification of Hostovský’s earlier protagonists. The world no longer constitutes solely an external configuration of the protagonist’s consciousness:

\(^{60}\) Papoušek, *Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru* (see note 9), p. 61.
Körner’s vision of alternating light and dark in the windows before him connotes an array of consciousnesses blinking back at him. He is part of an expanse of humanity and, as part of that interlocking expanse, will have to address the question of his influence over others and their influence over him, hence the refrain of ‘Co jsem ti udělal?’ which punctuates the text as Körner tries to arrive at an understanding of his responsibility for and towards Marta, Holšík and Osvald. Consequently, the protagonist’s new conceptualization of the world as a pattern of interconnected or common fates introduces a new series of moral problems for the protagonist — namely responsibility and guilt — which will engross Hostovsky hereafter.

In *Případ profesora Körnera* it is not space (as in *Ztracený stín*), so much as time, which makes for a central focus in the novel. Two different conceptions of Time emerge: one is a ‘subjective’ grasp of time which Hostovsky develops through Körner’s awareness of the transience of the phenomenal world in which Körner himself is also an object, the other an ‘objective’ consciousness of time as relentlessly, even cruelly, surging forward. Körner observes snatches of human life disappearing into darkness: when he recognizes his fifth-form pupil Holšík out with a prostitute, Körner lingers behind them only to find them disappear into the dark, ‘Nyní již oba pospíchali, splývali s tmou, vynořovali se — až se posléze úplně ztratili’ (p. 14). When Körner gazes out of his window onto the other houses backing on to the courtyard he undergoes the same experience of watching the darkness consume fragments of life, ‘Vždy, když začal chytat vlákna nějakého děje tam před sebou — hovor, práci, pohyb, přípravu k spánku — světlo zhaslo a názvky zajímavého, individuálního života pohltilo tajemství tmy. Snažil se jí proniknout, leč marně. Tu si vzpomněl na Holšíka — také ho spolkla tma, ostatně Holšík stále byl a je ve tmě, z níž se vždy vynoří jen na okamžik. [...] Jen několik magických vteřin a potom tma, tma ...’ (pp. 19–20). Time and the all-consuming darkness are allied in Körner’s dream of a caterpillar, which appears to be a metamorphosed image of himself, swallowed up (Hostovsky uses the verb *pohltit* again) by the whirligig of time (p. 21). Thus the darkness which Körner fears (once he knows that he is to die, he fears the nights because of their complete darkness) becomes a symbol for both the unrelenting flow of time and the extinguishment of consciousness or the nothingness of non-existence, a
terrifying ‘nic’. The thought that the self becomes nothingness haunts Körner continually: as Körner realizes that the wall-clock — which with its measured ticking represents Körner’s heartbeat — has stopped and that in fact it is the rain outside the window which is beating time, Körner anticipates his own death, ‘Stroj je mrtvý! Ale kolem se nic nezměnilo, jen pokoj je temnější, plný dlouhých a příšerných stínů, venku dešť’, mlha, mraky, zima ... Nic se nehýbe ... už neexistují kruhy, ani čas ... nic ... nic’ (p. 96). Körner’s horror at the prospect of this ‘nic’ is revived when the event of a shooting expedition prompts him to recall a childhood outing with his parents and nanny at which a partridge was shot, ‘Náhle konec! Nic!’ (p. 111).

The snatches of life swallowed up by the dark are analogous to time’s action in erasing consciousness. The darkness also, however, connotes mystery: it is the action of the creeping dark which prevents Körner from fully comprehending the lives that he observes, so that the darkness becomes almost an objective correlate for the ineffability of identity. Darkness constitutes a leitmotiv also in Žhár, where it is used (but not exclusively) by Hostovský as a symbol of non-existence. When Kamil overhears Dora’s proclamation of his ugliness, he suddenly feels threatened by the darkness, ‘Na krok nebylo vidět věcí skutečného, okno se propadlo a hvězdy zmizely v temnotách bez hranic’ (p. 39); he feels that the whole world has transformed into one great darkness, and combats his fear by thinking hard on ‘co k čemu a kdo ke komu patří’ (ibid.), reassuring himself through the painstaking process of locating his connections (both synchronic and diachronic) to a whole world outside him — he is in his bed, in his room, in the house of his father and grandfather, and so on.

The notion of death (and there is a play on the theme of departure throughout the novel) brings into collision the two different conceptions of time. Through Körner, Hostovský addresses the self’s paradoxical relationship with death, that is, the knowledge that we are mortal and yet the incomprehensibility — both to ourselves and to others — of our ceasing to

61 When he suffers from insomnia after another encounter with Dora, he is tormented again, ‘Muče ho otázka noci: kdo ke komu a co k čemu patří?’ (p. 53). The fact that it is a question that besieges him at night suggests again the link between the darkness leitmotif and the identity theme.
exist. Roger Scruton makes the point that the fear of death is less a fear (for death does not harm us) than an anxiety:

For it marks the insurgence into consciousness of the thought of our contingency. Death shows us that we will not be, and therefore that we might not have been. Our existence has no ultimate foundation; it is a brute fact for which we can find no reason, since all our reasons are generated within life, not from the point of view outside life to which we can never attain. The anxiety towards death is ‘ontological’; it spreads over the face of existence itself, and undermines the ‘ground of being’.

Körner is constantly balancing his own finitude against the infinite nature of time, and he uses those objects which measure time as comparators for his own fate. When Körner learns that he is to die he recalls how children tell the time, drawing circles as clocks and the circle becomes now a kind of temporal (rather than solely psychological) hermetic prison, ‘Žije tedy v kruhu, v kružích, v tisících kružích ... tik-tak-tik-tak-tik-tak ... Stále jich bude méně a méně, není jich nekonečné množství ... čas ubývá, je ohraničený, pro něho je aspoň ohraničený’ (p. 95). While Körner’s own ‘personalized’ time is waning, absolute Time continues: when no more pages on the calendar remain, it will merely be replaced by another, ‘znovu budou strhovat týdny, lhostejně, samozřejmě — a nikdo nic nepochopi’ (p. 126).

What remains of the self after death is a question which the novel addresses both through Marta and through Körner. When Körner, in anger, sends his walking-stick flying through the air possibly in an attempt to injure Osvald (the stick in fact circles Osvald’s head and falls on the table), Körner’s unsteady stance (his legs shake and he is forced to sit down again) and eventual loss of consciousness as he falls into a diabetic coma is analogically linked to Marta’s experience of vertigo on their honeymoon in Milan. Marta first reflects on what it means for Körner to be without consciousness, unable to find in the catalogue of images in her mind an image of her husband as unconscious, and she is reminded of the incongruity of being presented with a black urn containing her father’s ashes and being told that ‘Vidiš, v tom je tvůj tatínk’

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63 Papoušek overstates this point when he argues that all the objects which Körner notices around him change into symbols of time, for clocks and calendars, for example, are already symbols of time without the attentions of Körner’s mind (see Papoušek, *Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru*, p. 77).
(p. 66), drawing thus an explicit link between the loss of consciousness and death as the extreme form of that loss. Marta has to wrestle with the fact that the unconscious Körner is both Körner and not Körner, just as the ashes of her father are both her father and not her father. Both the unconscious Körner and the black urn containing Marta’s dead father again suggest a form of darkness which consumes consciousness but which also obfuscates the identity of Körner and the father respectively, posing the question of what remains of the individual when their empirical self, the one that participates in the world, has disappeared; Hostovský seems to be addressing the dichotomy between what a person is materially, their ‘embodiment’, and what a person is for others (thus touching on notions of immortality and memory pertaining to identity).

Marta’s speculations about Körner’s unconscious state are complemented by Körner’s own concern with the extinguishing of his consciousness in death as he ponders whether all that is encompassed by the ‘I’ dwindles away, reasoning with himself that somehow it must prevail: ‘kam se jen může vytratit to žhavé, co proudí v krvi a buší v prsou, to neumlčitelné a neuhasitelné, stále proměnné, tvořivé, plývající a přece zázračně jednotné a příznačné, formující v zmateném chaosu jedno svérázné já? To přece nemůže zaniknout [...] Někde a v něčem to zůstává a trvá, ale v čem, v čem?’ (p. 145). Again, at this moment, the phenomenal world is devoured by darkness as suddenly the houses, the street and the night all disappear, ‘ošklivá tlama modročerné tmy všechno polykala’ (p. 145). Körner feels that he loses consciousness for a few moments, and yet he is aware of a thought whispering to him that everything carries on existing, which is followed by his vision of a small red ball moving along a sloping plank which is revolving in emptiness. The red ball is perhaps another metamorphosed image or stylization of Körner, symbolizing, with its movement along the plank, his inexorable descent into a formless, boundless space like a captive walking the plank to death. Alongside the plank are an array of familiar faces who in a few magical seconds are suddenly no longer themselves but carrying Körner’s form and thoughts; Körner begins to understand that the self ‘nezanikne, nikdy nezajde’ (p. 145). Körner returns to this train of thought just before he is run over; he realizes that his role in shaping the fates of Marta, Osvald and Holšik means that he is forever a part of them. The answer to the question of how one exists after death lies then in
others: one’s identity survives in another’s consciousness. Hostovský appears to be subscribing to a metaphysical conception of identity: just as life is interconnected synchronically in space — a theme which he begins to explore in *Ztracený stín* — so there is a corresponding diachronic web of relationships in the connection between the living and the dead which transcends time. Here Hostovský is edging towards a theme which will become important in his later work, that of the relationship between memory and identity.

Whereas in *Ztracený stín* and *Případ profesora Körnera* the protagonists had tried to fathom how they belonged in the world, where they fitted into the patterns of life they discerned, now the notion of interlocking fates becomes the structural principle and dominates the mode of narration of *Černá tlupa*, *Žhár* and *Dům bez pánů*. From the beginning, the narrators make explicit the fact that their stories are paradigms of universal phenomena (thus the individual fates they treat are linked to those of all people), and that this is not just a synchronic correspondence (although that is there too), but also a diachronic one (that is, these are permanent truths about human existence). The opening to *Černá tlupa* sounds like the introduction to an epic narrative, although the intimation that the age-old confrontation between warriors and their arch-enemies is played out by children and adults is simultaneously a deflation of our expectations of the heroic — Hostovský will evoke an epic lyricism while ironizing the ideals of the ‘heroic’ throughout the novel: ‘Chci vám dnes vyprávět o odbojné tlupě Jiřího Kameta, jež se vzbudila proti světu dospělých a jeho věčným bojům, při nichž tak těžko rozjeznané říčení zbraní od říčení marnosti’ (*ČT*, p. 9). The use of the present tense and the first-person plural in this sentence suggests that the difficulty to distinguish ‘říčení zbraní od říčení marnosti’ has been a constant problem of human existence and that the text will in some way address the futility of war (and concealed beneath that idea, if one interprets war as a battle for freedom, may also be the notion that freedom is an unattainable aim). Furthermore, the fact that the narrator alerts us to the rebellion of Jiří Karnet’s gang against adults, while he himself is pessimistic, or at least uncertain, about what is gained through battle, introduces a tension between the narration and the action, a tension arising from the disjunction between the narrator’s knowledge or experience and the protagonist, Jiří Karnet’s, innocence and faith. The mode of
narration itself then reflects the oppositional adult–child perspectives on the world. One might interpret the novel as typifying the twentieth-century novel of adolescence which, Spacks argues, increasingly ‘provides not only a device for criticizing the existing state of society (a function it has served from the beginning) but also a record of adult guilt. All grown-ups offer the young is knowingness.’

The narrator’s occasional, interjectional comments on the action — Jíří’s shock at being lied to by Nosek is, for example, greeted by the narrator with a resigned weariness, ‘Člověk patrně stárnou zklamáním’ (p. 59) — are those of a disillusioned, and perhaps guiltily apologetic, adult.

In Žhář the narrator is again keen to direct the reader towards a parabolic reading of events. In the opening paragraph the narrator stresses that Zbečnov is an Everytown: there is barely anything of note in its past which would distinguish it from anywhere else in the world and nothing to have merited the unpleasant events he will describe. The narrator advises us instead to search in the great events of our times for some explanation of the misfortune which befalls the town: ‘Žhář se objevil na scéně ve čtvrtém, kdy se k nám opět vrátila věrná bída, jež už má tolik jmen, kolik nenasytných tlam. A veliký, důstojný svět se ani o vlásek nelíší od směšně titrëněho Zbečnova v tom, jak se snaží odhalit bídou a zlo v jejich pravé podobě, v příčinách a následcích’ (Z, p. 11).

Like the settings for both Černá tlupa and Dům bez pánů, Zbečnov appears cut off from the world around it: although in all three novels we are made aware of events taking place in the world outside of the action (though distantly, like muffled sounds and whispers behind the stage of a theatre), the towns are microcosms (like Kopta’s world in Dies irae). The notion that the everyday, the trivial (represented by Zbečnov) is analogous to the grand and lofty (the world), which again one might interpret as a simultaneous evocation and ironization of epic, is perhaps not as banal as it may appear, for Hostovský is trying to establish a metaphysical plane of significance: the town’s or the individual’s search for the meaning behind phenomena is also part of the age-old quest for universal truths.

Hostovský appears to have originally conceived of a parabolical introduction to Dům bez pánů. Before the novel was published in 1937,

Hostovský published sections of the work in various literary journals. While most of these are excerpts (in so far as ‘excerpt’ connotes the existence of a completed text), and are virtually identical with passages in the published novel, the first, ‘Cestou’, is subtitled ‘Fragment’ — which may suggest a different status to those which followed. The published text is again faithful to the fragment (‘Cestou’ constitutes both the subject-matter and title of the first chapter of the novel) but for some important differences. First, the figure of the mother in the fragment is replaced in the novel by the guardian Aunt Bedřiška (and this is a methodical exchange, substituting only one’s name for the other’s without altering the rest of the text save for the insertion into the novel of an explanatory sentence concerning the mother’s death). This explains the prominence of the dead father and the unimportance of the dead mother in the novel (as well as making Hostovský’s emendation puzzling), for the mother was originally intended to occupy a key role in the ideational scheme of the novel, a role which would comport with the representation of the mother in other works by Hostovský. Secondly, there is no mention of the protagonist’s marriage problems. Thirdly, and most important to the argument I am pursuing here, the fragment suggests that the novel originally opened with some prefatory remarks by the narrator concerning the wider application of the events which follow. The fragment begins with an apology by the narrator for telling a personal story in such days, ‘kdy co chvilí vykřikují pod našimi okny kameloti zprávy o neslychaných katastrofách, výstražných znameních nové bližící se potopy světa’ (‘C’, p. 186), and one assumes that he is referring to the political crises of the time (the Spanish Civil War, the rise of Hitler). He remains, however, troubled by the question of whether truly personal stories can actually be found, ‘Padesát naprosto rozdílných životů splývá v jeden jediný život, v jeden jediný úsek dějin ponurého činžáku, v němž bydlím, miliony rozdílných životů splývají v život mého národa’ (ibid.). The use of the number fifty invites an intertextual link both to Ztracený stín, to Bašek’s observance of passers-by being affected by the presence of a corpse on the

66 ‘Cestou [Fragment]’ in Listy pro umění a kritiku, 4, 1936, no. 8, pp. 186–93.
street fifty metres away from them, and to Případ profesora Körnera, to Körner’s surveillance of the courtyard outside his window, the ‘deset, dvacet, padesát’ lives flashing before his window and his amazement at the ‘velikým životem sta malých životu’, suggesting that we are again being directed towards the theme of the interconnectedness of fates and to the parabolic nature of the text.

With his broader conception of space in the novel in these works of the 1930s Hostovský perhaps attempts to realize structurally a new set of themes in his work, which I shall attempt to demonstrate. The development of space may also reflect the effort of a writer to find a new approach which would not be subject to the same broadsides from critics, who, while flattering his potential as a fiction-writer, had somewhat slated the hermetic and modular structures of his earlier work. Of course it is impossible to know the precise effect these criticisms had on Hostovský’s evaluation of his own work, but speculation on this matter is not entirely fruitless. From correspondence and the testimony of contemporaries, one constructs the portrait of a man who experienced periodic crises concerning his ability as a writer. As early as 1927, in response to some unspecified criticism from Josef Knap concerning work on which Hostovský had solicited an opinion from him, Hostovský writes in haste to prevent Knap from considering his silence as a manifestation of vanity, but also to thank him for his candid opinion, ‘Ale přece mně způsobil bolest. A to proto, že mne utvrzuje v mé konstatování, kterému z nedostatku autokritiky jsem se bál uvěřití: Pozorují na sobě stále větší a větší impotenci tvůrci. [...] A toto konstatování je něco tak bolestného, že to ani nelze vypsati.’ These are precocious words for a nineteen-year-old to express. One suspects that Hostovský’s sensitivity to criticism must have been remarked on by his contemporaries, for it is so public a fact as to be included in a study-guide for schoolchildren on Hostovský which was published in 1992. Moreover, Hostovský’s rejection of his own works prior to Ghetto v nich (his desire that these not be published was incorporated in his will, a wish which his daughter, to the dismay of students of literature, has honoured) suggests a writer who was excessively embarrassed by his work; notwithstanding the fact that these

67 PNP, Letter from Egon Hostovský (Hronov) to Josef Knap, 27 April 1927.
works are of some literary merit, if jejune and derivative, he could, after all, have laughed them off as the output of a callow youth and left others to decide their status. Still, these are biographical speculations, and one is not oblivious to the fact that Hostovský may also have been aware of contemporary literary debates on the state of the novel. Revealing perhaps the literary atmosphere of the times, Václav Černý writes in an article of 1935 that the novel is in a state of intense change and is subject to experimentation, ‘Hledá se pro něj nová forma, nová struktura, nové metody’ and that a revival of the genre is best directed not towards its subject-matter (he argues this is the mistaken route of the Socialist Realist novel) but ‘v proměně oka, které svět vnímá, a ne ve změnách světa. V subjektu tvůrčím, a ne v objektivní realitě.’ Černý cites approvingly two Czech writers, Karel Čapek (in his Hordubal trilogy) and Hostovský (in Žár), who in their conception of space are innovating the form of the novel.

While in Ztracený stín and Případ profesora Körnera the protagonists considered the relationship between the individual and other human beings, both in space and time, the protagonists of Hostovský’s works of the 1930s begin to search for patterns of relationships beyond their empirical existence and struggle to decipher a mysterious order or truth in a universe where signs are severed from their meanings: in the sequence of novels Černá tlupa, Žár and Dům bez pána the black gang, the arson attacks and the absent father (Adler), together with the relic of his personality, the house, become the focus for a coalescence of themes concerning some kind of transgression of the metaphysical order of the universe. Hostovský will later (in Všeobecné spiknutí) use the double as a symbolic projection of lack — the double embodies the protagonist’s conscience rebelling against the spiritual emptiness of society. In these novels he uses the gang, the ‘arsonist’ and Adler/the house as ways of questioning people’s failure to give meaning to their lives and to construct sympathetic relationships with one another. The mysterious events which each novel treats would not occur were it not for some spiritual and communicative vacuum at the heart of society. In Žár, for example, the members of the Šimon family, with the exception of Josef Šimon, are aware

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69 Václav Černý, ‘O románovém prostoru’ in Literární noviny, 8, 1935–36, no. 6, 29 November 1935, p. 5 (the whole article is printed on pages 5 and 7).
that something vital is missing in the family: 'odhalujíce náhodou ono živé ovzduší, jaké utvárí lidské vztahy a jaké je podstatou každé sdílnosti a pospolitosti, odkryli — prázdné, ticho, tmu, nic. Nic — místo očekávaného výrazu tváře, nic — místo hledaného smyslu slov, nic — místo spasné srozumitelnosti myšlenek', (p. 33) and each of them harbours a guilty secret. Similarly the members of the Adler family are conscious that they share a common malady in their isolation from one another: ‘Co se s námi stalo, co nám jenom chybí, nač všichni stůneme’ frets Emil (p. 132). They are also aware that their home is a tangible ghost not only of their father but also of their guilt; ‘Ano, v něm kdesi je ukryta vina, v něm a v nás všech’ (p. 134). In Černá tlupa children resist the spiritual vacuity of the adult world, with its cynicism and materialism, by constructing their own imagined worlds — loosely based on adventure novels, such as Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe or Jules Verne’s Deux ans de vacances — and their own Black Gang in which the miraculous or mysterious is close to hand. Hostovský’s depiction of the children’s retreat into another world is itself perhaps influenced by Henri Alain-Fournier’s 1913 novel, Le Grand Meaulnes, with its enchanted world of the ‘domaine mystérieux’, the insignificance of adults and the central theme of irretrievable innocence.

The Gang, the arsonist and Adler/the house each represent the protagonists’ frustration with the existing state of the world; these emblems also embody a mysterious universe which is almost perceptible and yet indecipherable. The notion of mysterious, unknown forces is treated differently in each novel. In Černá tlupa the children conceive of the mysterious world, which is concealed from them by adults, as beautiful, and the creation of the Black Gang answers to Jiří’s desire to incorporate this beauty into everyday life. The Gang becomes a vessel for the children’s imagination.

The gestures of Jiří’s hands are a central motif in the novel. Hostovský uses them as a metaphorical expression of this world of beauty and mystery which Jiří apprehends and yet which eludes him. On old Karnet’s first visit to his grandson’s bedside, he observes how the small boy lacks the strength to sit up and ‘jak se třepotavé prstíky namáhají uchopit něco, co tu nebylo nebo co usýchalo před tápajícími pažemi’ (p. 11). When Jiří ventures outside his

70 The opening pages of Verne’s novel are faithfully reproduced in Černá tlupa.
bedroom for the first time, his expectation of Nature as two-dimensional — conditioned by his cloistered view from the window — is shaken, first, by the sensory invasion of his body by the world around him, and secondly, by his attempts to touch what he sees before him, ‘Pohlednice! Ano, pohlednice, ale jaká podivná, nelze ji prsty uchopit, ani pomačkat, ani počmárat’ (p. 18). Jiří’s ‘second birth’ is correctly described by Papoušek as having a sacral character — in falling to his knees in awe, Jiří replicates the conventional gesture of worship and humility. The second birth constitutes an initiation ceremony marking not only his passage into the world, but also the beginning of his faith in a mysterious world that promises miracles, ‘Víra v zázraky zůstala Jiřimu Karnetovi z jeho druhého zrození. [...] Ano, Jiří nezlomně věřil, že život je pln tajů a překvapení, že nemá nic společného s plány a vůlí’ (p. 28). What is important, however, to the development of action in the novel is Jiří’s refusal to allow the three-dimensionality of the world and the depth of perspective newly revealed to him to shake his conviction that the beauty of the world is literally at his fingertips, ‘na zkfizených pazích kolébal slunicko, pak hladil hory a trhal oblohu’ (p. 19). When Oldřich informs him that they would never reach the faraway mountains to which Jiří would like immediately to go, Jiří does not bother to contradict him but rests content with mentally (and for Jiří the mental is real) proving him wrong, ‘Jen znovu sáhl po slunci a po horách a byl přesvědčen, že jeho ukazováček k nim hravě dospěl’ (ibid.). The motions of Jiří’s hands are again important as he confides in his grandfather how he would like to run away in an enormous balloon across the sea to a desert island, ‘Blouznivě hleděl na své pohyblivé a roztažené prsty, jako by mu mezi nimi něco unikalo, co nebylo možno zachytit. Pomalu kreslil prstem ve vzduchu záhadné obrazce, téměř šeptal, zdlohavě protahuje slova, jakoby v rytmu kreslící ruky’ (p. 50).

The organ-grinder’s song forms another motif in the novel. At the moment of Oldřich’s disillusionment with the Black Gang (his fellow lodgers laughed when he told them of the gang’s plans) and Jiří’s subsequent feeling that he has been betrayed by Oldřich, Jiří’s unvoiced thoughts — ‘Ale zázraky jsou přece na dosah ruky! Pohlédni z okna a spatříš je tam!’ (p. 170) — are magically concretized. While Jiří may be referring only to his initiation into the world

71 Papoušek, Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru, pp. 79–80.
when he first stepped outside his room and extended his arms over the landscape, what the children find when they look out of the window at his behest is a man standing in the snow with a barrel-organ, who appears to have materialized from nowhere like a mysterious phantom. (One remembers that Jiří heard the hushed tones of a song in the distance on the occasion of his 'second birth', and that music is also associated with the mysterious domain in Alain-Fournier's novel.) The man does not answer the children’s questions but instead plays an organ song about a war-hero returning home; the song ends with the unanswered question 'pověz, zač jsi bojoval?' (p.171). While the snow falls ever more heavily, the man again does not answer one of their questions (rationally, he is probably waiting for a payment, although metaphysically his silence comports with the tradition of sacred narratives) and eventually disappears. Jiří is initially silenced by the vision, 'jen jeho prsty sebou cukaly, pokoušejíce se uchopit něco, čeho tu nebylo' (p. 172), then grief-stricken as he runs off into the snow which crumbles under his feet. The miraculous appearance of the man in the midst of the stultifying, bleak snow, as though answering Jiří’s prayers, results in pain at his disappearance. This strengthens Jiří’s fear (and echoes his grandfather’s words) that the earth permits only transitory glimpses of beauty.

The song of the barrel-organ is heard once more by the servants Karla and Nošek, after they have escaped across the fields and hills to pursue their dreams of a better life and find themselves at the boundaries of a manor. The song has the basic characteristics and structure of a ballad with its simple language, action narrated through dialogue, use of refrains and incremental repetition and quatrains with four-stress lines and a traditional abab rhyme scheme. The participants in the dialogue are the war returnee and the crowd who welcome his return but pose questions concerning his reasons for going to battle. The scene itself, however, is also structured — through the use of the song — as a dialogue with the snow scene for the question of why the soldier fought is now answered, 'Za štěstí' (p. 216) and:

Šel jsem v boj pro všechny krásy kraje, jenž vám není znám,
pro žár slunce, hvězdné jasy,
aby zazářily vám. (p. 217)
Clearly we are being invited to identify the soldier’s battle for beauty with Jiří Kamet’s attempts to reach the beauty and mystery he thinks lie at his fingertips. In keeping with the expectations raised by the form, the ballad ends in disillusion as the soldier asks of himself:

Proč jsem do boje se vrhal?
Zdvihl růži. ‘Nevím sám.’
Pročpak jsem tu růži trhal,
kdýž ji zvadlou v ruce mám?’ (ibid.)

Suddenly one finds the two motifs, the organ-grinder’s song and Jiří’s hand-gestures, fusing together as the ballad distils the action of the novel. Jiří is directly identified with the war hero: the rose which fades in the soldier’s hand is linked textually to old Kamet’s visit to his bed-ridden grandson, ‘jak se třepotavé prstíky namáhají uchopit něco, co tu nebylo nebo co usýchalo před tápajícími pažemi’ (p. 11). Both Jiří and the soldier have been engaged in a spiritual battle which has proved futile.

In contrast to Černá tlupa, the mysterious poses a threat to the community in Žhář. Šalda identifies, but without detailed analysis, a pattern of concentricity in the novel: ‘Jakýsi nevůtřivý symbolism, ne slovný, nýbrž myslitelský, vře a kolotá v tomto románě a působí, že se ti pohranické městečku české rozstupuje v dějiště mnohem širší, tak skoro v celý zemědíl ... víc: v dějiště trpící lidské duše.’^72 One hopes that Šalda is not just being sentimental in suggesting a correspondence between ‘zemědíl’ and ‘duše’: if he is not, then he is making the serious point (which had not been made by any other critic of Hostovský at that time) that the self and the world are interdependent and, consequently, that Hostovský’s conception of the universe is wholly metaphysical. Papoušek also suggests that in the novel we find ‘jak se události individuálního příběhu spojují s osudem blízkého i vzdálenějšího okolí, jak individuum nese odpovědnost za osud celku a jak se celek odráží v osudu individua’.^73 Ideas which Hostovský had begun to develop in Ztracený stín, Případ profesora Körnera and Černá tlupa achieve fruition and integration in Žhář. The inn, the town and the world are analogically linked by Hostovský as interrelated circles of action. A mysterious evil besets all of them, but the threat from without acts as a means of revealing the inherent

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73 Papoušek, Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru, p. 81.
instability and fragile cohesion of the structures it invades. In all of these circles the evil can be named, and yet the name is merely a label attached to the ‘unknown’. For the inn, which is synonymous with the Šimon family, the agent of the unknown is Dora. When the family argue about Dora coming to stay, Šimon feels that the order of his home is threatened by a ‘neviditelný výtržník’ (p. 25), and when she arrives the narrator informs us that the family are torn from their spectral realization by a ‘Neznámý host’. The evil besetting Zbečnov is the arsonist, but the community fail to formulate an accepted understanding of what he is: ‘Zbečnov se strachoval před neznámým. A šlo o to polapit neznámé do políčených nástrach četníků nebo aspoň formulek. Na neštěstí byl však celý případ příliš nelogický, neskutečný, nepravděpodobný’ (p. 83). The misery the world endures, as businesses, banks and factories collapse, is caused by an evil which the narrator describes in encoded terms: ‘Ale toto světové zlo našlo společného jmenovatele o pěti písmenech, dvouslabičnou formulkou, analysovánou, vykládanou, zdůvodňovanou, spočtenou a zváženou’ (p. 83), which one assumes is a reference to the Germans (Němci). The same pattern of corresponding circles of action prevails also in Dům bez pána, radiating outwards from the personality of Emil (and the temporary breakdown of his marriage) to the house (and the collapse of the old order there) and to the local community, where half of the local businesses have recently failed. Just as Emil and his siblings cannot understand one another, so a wider circle of Jewry is cast into some kind of incommunication, as the children cannot understand the father’s legacy, their father and grandfather cannot communicate, and there are divisions between Emil and Jakub Wolf and Jakub Wolf and the Orthodox Jews.

Černý states correctly that other critics have neglected the complex structure of action in Žhár. In his analysis the spatial apportioning of the novel is like the stage of a theatre (an idea which may have been suggested to him by the text for the narrator informs us that events have their ‘ústřední dějiště’ in Šimon’s inn) in which three different spaces are separated by a system of two curtains. In front of the first curtain, front-stage, is Zbečnov where ‘přímo před našimi zraky se odehrává románová anekdota’, that is, the story of Kamil, the people around him and the mysterious affair of the arsonist. But in the background, ‘udržovaném v příšeří, za oponou’ is the real drama of the boy’s
psychological processes, of which the action is merely the outer expression. Neither understands his relationship with the other in the mysterious circumstances which arise. Behind the scenes of the stage is some kind of unknown, some kind of third space, divided from the remainder by a further curtain, 'která dává uhodnouti z toho, co kryje, sotva stín'. The consequence of this confusion of powers unknown to one another makes itself felt in the Šimon family in the inn, thus returning us from the third space of the action to the proscenium, and closing the circle.

The way people respond to the unknown or the irrational is the central theme in the novel, and the narrator is deployed by Hostovský as a device to ironize the failure of reason to account adequately for the action in the novel. The narrator poses as a detective, summarizing and mulling over the action, surmising what is probable or possible, and using the kind of language one might expect of a barrister arguing his case, for example 'Z podezřelých okolností můžeme uvést', or 'Vraťme se ještě k motivům' (pp. 99–100). But the logical progression through the facts, particularly after the second fire when the narrator considers the sequence of events step by step and speculates on motives and suspects, is somewhat undermined by his statement that we know more than is contained in his account; we know that a young man exists 'jenž tvrdí o vzdáleném, krásném děvčeti, že je oheň, aniž dobře rozumí těmto slovům' (p. 100). Of course the reader has long suspected that Kamil is somehow implicated in the arson attacks, and on the level of a detective story the narrator is merely fanning this suspicion. Hostovský, however, is using the narrator and his detective-like methodology to introduce a complex point about the relationship between the self and the world. The narrator's account of the action up until that point represents a description of phenomena, the gestures and actions which are visible to the observer; by contrast, the information about Kamil belongs to a strange psychological dream-world which Kamil himself barely understands, and yet it is within this murky dream-world that some form of truth will be located. The confusion in Kamil's mind, his inability to decipher his own statement that Dora is fire, corresponds to the indecipherable nature of events in the broader circle of action: the grey light and ash-coloured clouds which pervade Zbečnov in the daytime, the smoke
and the fire are not just superstitious portents of ill-fortune, but symbols of obfuscation.

The narrator is also a device Hostovsky uses to ironize both the local speculation about, and responses to, the fires — sometimes the narration consists of a reporting of the indirect speech of the Zbečnov population’s rumour-mongering — and the reader’s expectations of a sequential detective story; these are addressed through a dialogic mode of narration, apostrophizing and the liberal use of the first-person plural. In one passage in particular the discrepancy between the narrator’s false camaraderie with the reader and his status as an autostylization of Hostovsky is made more explicit:

Neusmíváme se pohrdlivě nad autorem, jenž nemá vyhraněného (tak se to říká, ne?) stanoviska k době skutečnosti? Neukazujeme posměšně prstem na čteníky, kteří nemají vyhraněného stanoviska k skutkové podstatě žáhávští? Chcete-li, budu se s vámi přít, pane! Právě proto, že na mém místě byste nyní vysvětloval život ze života a příběh z příběhů, pomílčel byste o nejdůležitějším. Ano, právě vaše chladná, přesvědčivá jistota, pane, že všechny pozemské události jsou jasné a pochopitelné, protože jsou determinovány a protože jejich složky do sebe zapadají v příčinném řetězci s logickou přesností, naplnuje mě úzase z tajemství magické harmonie. Nebot se máme snází pochopit symboly koule i oblaků. A co jiného než múři nohy koule a oblaků jsou drobné, vágní, rozříšené děje, z nichž je nám umožněno sestavovat Děj? (p. 99).

In even mentioning the author, the narrator seems implicitly to suggest that he is also the author of this novel, and in allying the methods of the author with those of the detective Hostovsky reveals something of his own artistic project. The narrator's distinction between explaining 'život ze života' and 'příběh z příběhů', which he alleges his addressee (were he a narrator) would do and in so doing miss mentioning what was most important, suggests that the narrator-author holds the view that 'life' and the 'story' must be connected.

HOSTOVSKÝ USES THE STRUCTURE OF DETECTIVE NOVELS TO MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ENDS, AND THIS APPROACH — IN WHICH DOSTOEVSKII (AND EVEN ČAPEK) MUST HAVE BEEN AN INFLUENCE — IS, AS I AM DEMONSTRATING HERE, EVIDENT IN HIS PRE-WAR WORK. IT SEEMS TO ME ERRONEOUS, THEREFORE, TO SUGGEST THAT GRAHAM GREENE INTRODUCED THIS ELEMENT TO HOSTOVSKÝ’S WORK, WHICH IS AN ASSERTION FREQUENTLY MADE BY CRITICS. PETR MATOUŠEK, FOR EXAMPLE, DEMONSTRATES HIS IGNORANCE OF HOSTOVSKÝ’S OEUVRE WHEN HE ARGUES THAT GREENE WAS THE ORIGINATOR OF THE ARCHITECTONICS OF THE DETECTIVE NOVEL IN HOSTOVSKÝ’S WORK, BESTOWING ON HOSTOVSKÝ ‘DAR EPIKY A HLBOKÉ SPOLEČENSKÉ I PSYCHOLOGICKÉ ANALÝZY, UMĚNÍ DISKU LU I VNITŘNÍHO MONOLOGU. HOSTOVSKÉHO SCHOPNOST VYTVORIT RAFINOVANOU SATIRICKOU FORMU S MYSTICKÝMI A ALEGORICKÝMI ODBOČKAMI JEŠTE PŘÍPOMÍNÁ DALŠÍ OSOBNOST ANGLICKÉHO ŠPIONÁŽÍNOHÓ THRILLERU — JOHN LE CARRÉHO’ (MATOUŠEK’S REVIEW OF NEZVĚSITÝ IN MLADÝ SVĚT, 36, NO. 22, 26 MAY 1994, PP. 48–49 [48]).
What Hostovský intends the reader to understand by ‘life’ and by ‘story’ is ambiguous, but one assumes that the reader is being directed towards accepting a fusion between the ‘real’ and the ‘fictional’ in which the real is as artificial as the fictional and the fictional as authentic as the real. Perhaps we are being invited to search for truth in a realm beyond the purely phenomenal. This conjecture is further strengthened by the narrator’s conception of the world as something that cannot be wholly or clearly understood by the laws of causation and reason; truth will not be found in the action, and the narrator’s efforts appear to be concentrated instead in vainly trying to understand ‘symboly kouře i oblaků’. With reference to the arson attacks we are invited to study, the narrator is also intent on pointing out that ‘jem nikdy netvrdil, že je ve svém jádře výjimečný’ (p. 100), which suggests that whatever conclusions we draw about the case have a wider significance in the way that we look at life in general.

After Kamil has confessed his role in the arson attacks to his mother, he tries to offer by way of explanation both his attachment to Dora and the fact that ‘Tady u nás něco chybí — nevím co. Proto se všechno stalo’ (p. 117). At this point the narrator intrudes to address the reader: ‘Znáte ty chvíle rozčarování, kdy hledáte slovo, jež by spasilo svět? Je nablizku, dešť [sic] je vytokává na okno, vítř je šeptá haluzím, křídla tesknoty se k němu rozevírají, na rtech však — běda! — roztává [...] Kolem vaší hlavy krouží vykupitelské slovo, křechčí tmy, plašší vánku, lehčí dešťové kapky’ (p. 117). Again one finds Nature full of pregnant meanings that man cannot decode. The word man may grasp to save himself is almost intangible; it is fragile, timid and light. Eliška’s return from her elopement follows this narratorial intrusion, and she announces her return by throwing pebbles at the window. Hostovský describes her actions in such a way as to allow a conflation of the phenomenal world of action and the metaphysical world of significances, ‘Do okna uhodil kamének. Za chvíli druhý. Pak celá hrst pisku. Co to je? Znamení?’ (pp. 117–18). The fact that, initially, no agent is named for the action of the pebble striking the window suggests that the action may belong to the mysterious world of elemental attempts at communication (the rain tapping on the window, the whispering wind) identified by the narrator and that the outside world is offering itself to the protagonists. If the window is a symbol in Hostovský’s
work for enclosure in self, then Nature is attempting to rupture the barrier that separates the protagonists from the world. Once we learn that it is Eliška who is releasing the pebbles the metaphysical plane of significance is transposed into the physical and ‘actual’ as mother and daughter hug and kiss (on the lips) for the first time in their lives and shatter the metaphorical barrier of incommunication between them, and between all the members of the Šimon family. The narrator is quick to alert the reader to the collapse of the ‘old order’ in the house and to the return of emotional expressiveness to the people in it, ‘Průvan to přinesl, vítr, z dálek, z nedozních dálek’ (p. 118), events which will be accompanied by the disappearance of the arsonist.

For the first time in Žhař Hostovský articulates a conception of the universe as an integral unit in which nothing is lost, an idea which will accrue significance as Hostovský’s work develops after this point. In another key passage in the text the narrator describes an eternal cycle of life:

Slyšíš vítr? Vrací se. Vidíš na okně růžovou předzvěst jitra? Vrací se. I čas se vrací k zemi, i slova dávno odumřelá se vracejí na rty. Hle, ozvěna! Ozvěna času, slov a skutků spojuje všechny příběhy. I ty, jež jednoho dne vyšly od Stříbrného holuba, beztváře jako pára, křehké jako dech, a zakrátko se vrátily s ohlušivým lomozem a rudou záplavou, proměněny k nepoznání.

Vše v nové podobě se vrací k zemi mezi nás. Čas, vítr i oblaka. A slovo, a hrozba, a úsměv, a polibek. (p. 119)

Several points arise from this excerpt. If time returns in some form, then a person’s past may return to haunt him. If words and deeds are not lost, then a person may be responsible for far more than the immediate effects of what they say or do; if the almost imperceptible words and deeds which left the inn ‘beztvaré jako pára, křehké jako dech’ returned as a red deluge, then the individual is implicated in, and must bear guilt for, events in the world beyond him. The fact that adolescent fantasy, in the form of Kamil’s conjecture that Dora is fire, is inextricably bound up with a series of arson attacks that terrorize the local population implies some transcendental order. One is reminded again of Šalda’s identification of a new relationship between subject and object emerging in Hostovský’s work, as the three arsonists realize the adolescent’s fantastic thoughts: ‘Předmět je vztahován do soucitění s podmětem, je jako by s ním srozuměn; je mezi nimi nějaká hlubší symbios,
která tento román staví do blízkosti unanimismu. Hostovský demonstrates, however, a propensity to ironize his own seriousness: on a profane level, the fact that the flames of desire in a pubertal boy can be transformed into actual conflagration must represent a delightful joke. On a metaphysical level, the transformation of fantasy or desire into substance and widespread chaos has serious moral consequences, for it suggests that the individual must be cautious how he frames his desires, that an almost fairytale morality prevails in the world so that the individual may be granted his wishes but finds them fulfilled in ways he would never have expected as he unleashes forces beyond his control. The substantiation of desire, and the corresponding release of mysterious, uncontrollable power develops as a theme in Hostovský's work of the 1930s, and continues in his works thereafter. Protagonists' wishes often are granted to disastrous effect.

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Chapter 3

The Double in Hostovský’s Fiction

The sacred associations of the duplication or division\(^1\) of personality have a progeny going back to early man’s perception of his own identity. The phenomena associated with personality and consciousness which were so central to the Romantics (and particularly the German Romantics) and which, through psychology and psychiatry, continue to inform twentieth-century culture, have their ‘magical’ antecedents in folklore’s concern with the soul, and perhaps also with the conscience. This chapter will focus on literature of the double (dating from predominantly the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) which has formed the lexis and treatment of the double in this century (the coinage of the term *doppelgänger*, for example, by Jean Paul Richter in *Siebenkäs* of 1796), and I will attempt to explore — with reference also to other Czech inter-war exponents of psychological ‘analytical’ prose — how Hostovský incorporates the motif of the double in his fiction.

The taboo nature of division in early belief and thought suggests that the double has always been a vehicle for moral and religious concerns. Drawing on the work of ‘Aleister’ Crowley, Otto Rank and Sir George Frazer, Ralph Tymms suggests that:

Obscure speculation on duplication and division of personality alike is awakened in the mind of primitive man when he sees, or believes he sees, his own self moving independently before him; this usually occurs in dreams or hallucinations based on the visual memory of his reflection or shadow. His apprehensiveness at seeing himself in this way betrays an underlying belief in reflection and shadow-taboos, which are doubtless based on the idea that the reflection or shadow is man’s spiritual double, and forms an extension, and vital part of him. If anyone should strike it,

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\(^1\) Early thought seems to have singled out the number ‘two’ as sacred: in Anglo-Saxon, for example, the word for ‘second’ used to be *other*; for Pythagoras ‘two’ represented diversity and disorder and therefore the principle of all evil; for the Romans ‘two’ was the most fatal of all the numbers (the second month was dedicated to Pluto, ruler of the infernal regions).
the injury would be passed on to him; from this, it would seem to represent the soul, whose separation from the body will cause death.\(^2\)

Like the taboo — that which should remain hidden — of other representations of early belief, such as the shadow and reflection, and like a wraith, the double is a portent that the subject is threatened by death, for the loss of subjectivity inherent in death is foreshadowed by the battle for subjectivity between the subject and his agonist.\(^3\) The creativity of another — the birth of a second self (Bašek describes the division of his personality in \textit{Ztracený stín} as a \textit{přeroda}) — connotes, paradoxically, death. In Richard Weiner’s short story ‘Dvojníci’, the physical resemblance of Spajdan, the \textit{Ich}-narrator, and Sankory is emphasized as the story opens and, as their relationship develops, Spajdan feels that they become so increasingly alike that gazing at Sankory is rather like seeing one’s own reflection in a mirror: ‘toť lehká závrat’, jímající člověka, jenž po delší dobu naplatě hledí na svůj obraz v zrcadle’.\(^4\) Spajdan remembers being warned by his nurse that the Devil appeared to those who looked into mirrors at night-time. This popular superstition is remarked upon by Otokar Fischer in his 1929 essay on doubles, where he links the notion of the reflected image in the mirror — and, by extension, \textit{doppelgängers} — with a threat to the self and intimations of death: ‘zmatek vyvolaný neočekávaným objevem, úzkost před člověkem, který vyhlíží jako ten, kdo se naň dívá, žárlivá snaha uhájit svou osobnost’.\(^5\)

Masao Miyoshi elucidates the paradox of the subject’s attraction to, and fear of, his second self: ‘Common, too, to both duplication and division are the conflicting and often simultaneous impulses in the victim — the craving for and the fear of the encounter with the second self — each of which has its archetype in a traditional version of the double: the Platonic, epipsychean, longing for unification of the severed halves of man, and the folkloristic fear of


\(^3\) This is a point made also by John Herdman (\textit{The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction}, Basingstoke and London, 1990, p. 153); and by Andrew J. Webber (\textit{The doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature}, Oxford, 1996 [hereafter \textit{The Doppelgänger}] with particular reference to the \textit{Doppelgänger}, ‘On the one hand, the specular replication of the subject may seem to guarantee or to double subjective autonomy; on the other, the “secret sharer” may be seen to halve or even annul the identity in which it shares’ (p. 5).


the double as an omen of death. This Platonic longing for unification is expressed by both Weiner's Sankory, who was convinced that he would one day meet Spajdan, and, in Hostovský's *Sedmkrát v hlavní úloze*, by the decadent Kavalský, who writes to his soon-to-be adherent Ondřej that 'Očekával jsem už dlouho, že mi napišete' (*SHU*, p. 55). The notion that they are the two severed halves of one person — which incidentally may represent a homosexual undercurrent in the texts, given that the Platonic model is that of a man and a woman — is reciprocated by Ondřej, when he comes to realize retrospectively that Kavalský had not changed his (Ondřej's) character but rather that he had unveiled it: 'Na dně duše jsem se podobal Kavalskému už dávno před tím, než jsem k němu přilnul a dal se jeho cestou' (*SHU*, pp. 37–38).

Shadows, mirrors and dreams all provide a secondary image of the self, the figuration of another self; they also represent an evaporation of selfhood in so far as these phenomena are two-dimensional images and therefore forms of unattainable selfhood. The recurrent motif in Hostovský’s work of the mirror or reflection is one of a double existence, seeing oneself as the world sees one. Fischer makes the point that the act of looking into the mirror is such an ordinary experience that it does not occur to us that our outward appearance has been artificially divided. The mirror also invests our everyday actions and movements with an air of mystery as the body is observed from unanticipated different angles, and the self is reflected in different aspects simultaneously, conjuring up notions of a multiplicity of selves, ‘nebot’ vykoná-li bezděky nepatrný pohyb, ani o něm nevěda, a vidí-li jej ihned proveden v tolikerém počtu, přichází o vědomí své samostatnosti, zdá se mu, že už není pánem svých

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7 The term ‘stin’ is also used by Hostovský in vague terms as a form of shorthand for the socially observed self, which he appears to distinguish from the subject’s perception of his ‘real’ self. This distinction implies, on the one hand, the ineffability of the self, or indeed of the soul, and, on the other, characters’ refuge in imagined worlds in which they negotiate with their cosy and unthreatening representations of others in a form of shadow-play rather than dealing with corporeal people. ‘Neznal, nechtěl znát a počítat s lidmi, jácí byli, nýbrž se zabýval jen jejich stínů, vrženými na svou fantasi’ (*PPK*, p. 30); ‘To ostatní náleží Körnerovu dvojnímu, Martině představě, které se skutečný Körner snad jen podobá, ale jež je naprosto jiná než jeho opravdová duševní tvář. Pomyšlil si: já ona zná a mluví pouze můj stín — a nenávidí toho, jemuž stín patří!’ (*PPK*, p. 156). Knowledge is self-serving in Hostovský’s fiction, for his characters are uninterested in knowing other people.
rozhodnutí, že pouze napodobuje, i vzmáhá se v něm nenávist proti mlčícím stvůrám za stěnami ze skla. The mirror may also then suggest to the subject that he is unauthentic. Hostovský’s characters usually look into mirrors at times of extreme self-doubt; they feel horrified both by the reflection of their shortcomings (manifest as ugliness) and by the fact that this is their outer form socially. When Bašek goes to the theatre he looks at himself in the mirror and is horrified by his reflected image, ‘Hlava sražena k ramenům, úžasně dlouhý nos, ošklivé, tlusté rty. [...] Bože, jak jsem ohyzdny, jak nestvůrně ohyzdny! Tohle je má pravá podoba, takového mne vidí. Všechno, co jsem kdy pěkného udělal, řekl, cítil, připadalo mi teď nemožně směšné, ohavné’ (ZS, p. 66). When his double insults him he again looks in the mirror and feels even uglier. The mirror becomes then a reflector of mental rather than physical states, and Bašek’s evaluation of his physical exterior, which conforms to the stereotypical representation of the Jewish physiognomy (in Czech literature at least), may suggest that Hostovský — himself a Czech Jew — is either consciously exploiting, or unconsciously internalizing, the antisemitic sentiment that nothing could be more hideous than to resemble a Jew.

According to other early theories, the soul was a more exact replication of the self than the shadow or reflection, roaming independently of the subject while he was asleep, sick or dead (the origin of vampires and tales of revenants). The dissociated soul was also embodied in the notion of the guardian angel, and in tales of enchantment man’s form was stolen or copied by wizards and goblins, or by angelic usurpers or amorous gods, while in tales of magic, dealing with rejuvenation, ‘man becomes his own double in a retrospective fashion, by renewing his youth and living over his life a second time, as a sort of revenant’. Man also creates his double artificially through necromancy (Shelley’s *Frankenstein*), automata (Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*)

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8 Duše a slovo, pp. 170–71.
9 See Tymms, Doubles, p. 18: ‘The double-by-enchantment can be the result of any one of three possible processes of “shape-lifting”; in the first, the magician or wraith impersonates a man by adopting his form; in the second he simultaneously exchanges his own; and in the third, he calls to life a counterfeit man, an ephemeral golem or mandrake, but without changing his own appearance, or that of the person he is imitating.’
10 The classical example here is the myth of Amphitryon, whose form Zeus adopted in order to seduce Amphitryon’s wife, Alcmena, a myth which was later reworked by, for example, Dryden, Molière and Heinrich von Kleist.
11 Tymms, Doubles, p. 22.
and portraiture (Wilde’s *Portrait of Dorian Gray*), naturally through kinsfolk (Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*), and sympathetically through friendship (the focus of Jean Paul Richter’s fiction). Hostovský’s ‘Příběh básníka Zdeňka Ondříka’ demonstrates a Decadent influence in its treatment of the theme of necromancy associated with doubles, perhaps drawing on Poe’s ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’, in which Roderick Usher, like Alexandr, is sick and needs company ‘The writer [Roderick Usher] spoke of acute bodily illness — of a mental disorder which oppressed him — and of an earnest desire to see me, as his best and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady’.

Zdeněk’s cousin Alexandr is corpse-like and emerges like a herald of death from an atmosphere of dark mist, ‘Dlan nocního hosta byla studene vlhka jako nevlídný, mlhavý prostor, z něhož přišel’ (*TS*, p. 120). In Alexandr’s house talk of death is forbidden and each night allows the occupants to engage anew in recreating themselves, ‘co v ní kdo urve pro sebe, je jeho jen do râna, nebot’ příštího večera začínáme žít znovu’ (*TS*, p. 131), echoing the revelry-making in the face of death in Poe’s ‘The Masque of the Red Death’. Dr Lín, one of the house guests, does not function like a normal doctor but more like a

12 Shakespeare’s treatment of doubling through kinsfolk is usually comic. Hostovský’s treatment of the same theme is a sinister one: in ‘Pan Lorenz’, Vílém Kolafík psychologically steps into the shoes of his dead brother Jindřich by continuing the bluff (with Bech) of being related to Hardt and seeking him out. It begins with his occupation of his brother’s flat, at the insistence of his mother, ‘Ležel jsem na pohovce, kde jestě před několika hodinami spočívala Jindřichova mrtvola’ (*CKP*, p. 43). The following morning Vílém begins to reinterpret and, increasingly, justify his brother’s behaviour. When he later reads his brother’s diary he feels that he is gazing at his own fate, and subsequently decides that he too wants to go to Mexico. Vílém effectively becomes the shadow of his dead brother.

13 *The Complete Poems and Tales of Edgar Poe*, London, 1965 (hereafter Poe), p. 232. Both stories draw on the atmosphere of decay surrounding the houses and environment, ‘an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn — a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued’ (ibid., p. 233).

14 In Poe’s ‘The Masque of the Red Death’ Prince Prospero enjoys seclusion from contagion by shutting himself away with his friends in one of his abbeys, ‘The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. [...] All these and security were within. Without was the “Red Death”’ (ibid., p. 260). Here the revelries begin again each hour, rather than each night, after the chiming of the clock — which produces consternation, silence and stillness — has ceased.

15 Lín and Alexandr’s death in putrescence also recalls Poe’s story ‘The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar’.
Frankenstein, knowing medicines which bring about the circulation of blood already run cold, and had indeed once resurrected Alexandr from death.

The development of the double was advanced in the eighteenth century by a resurgence of interest in older theories of subjectivity, such as the occultist doctrines of ‘like souls’ (spiritual doubles) and of the astral body, and by a growth of new theories, such as Mesmer’s theory of the magnetic union of souls, which was perhaps the most significant and influential of these theories because it affirmed man’s dual consciousness. G.H. Schubert, in his *Die Symbolik des Traumes* (1814), popularized the ‘idea of the shadow-self, a dark and hidden counterpart of, or supplement to, the daytime consciousness’ which arose from Mesmerist theories of ‘animal magnetism’ and of the magnetic trance, in which a second personality emerged from the dark side of the mind, and this work had a huge influence on German Romanticism, particularly on Hoffman, who in turn influenced Dostoevskii’s narratives of psychological realism. It is to this lineage of psychological realism, which began with Hoffman and the early German Romantics and spread to Scotland and Russia, that Hostovsky belongs.

Hostovsky’s treatment of subjectivity and of the double harnesses the moral import of the nineteenth-century supernatural double and the science of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century psychiatry (which it perhaps also satirizes). Todorov argues, contentiously, that the Western tradition of the fantastic has been superseded by psychoanalysis because society’s relationship with particular taboos has changed:

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16 Tymms makes the point that the Mesmerists’ interest in the mind was as a vehicle to higher truths and ‘the cosmic mysteries underlying all sciences’ rather than as an end in itself (*Doubles*, p. 27).
18 The direct influence of Mesmeric theories on literature declines after Hoffman’s death, although Tymms argues that they continue to influence indirectly the literature of psychological realism through the popularity of Hoffman’s tales and through the influence of Mesmer’s ideas on French specialists in hysteria and hypnosis in the mid-nineteenth century (Azam, Charcot, Bernheim, Janet) — whose research later led to the development of Viennese and Zurich schools of psychotherapy (*Doubles*, p. 72).
19 The double did not flourish in English literature although the Gothic romance provided a rich source of themes (a moral reversal arising from hubris, for example) for exploitation by writers treating the double. Herdman argues, for example, that Lewis’s *The Monk* was crucial to Hoffman’s development of the double in *The Devil’s Elixirs* (*The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, p. 16).
On n’a pas besoin aujourd’hui d’avoir recours au diable pour parler d’un désir sexuel excessif, ni aux vampires pour désigner l’attirance exercée par les cadavres: la psychanalyse, et la littérature qui, directement ou indirectement, s’en inspire, en traitent en termes non déguisés. Les thèmes de la littérature fantastique sont devenus, littéralement, ceux-là même des recherches psychologiques des cinquante dernières années.

I will argue, however, that Hostovsky’s borrowing of devices of the fantastic to illustrate mental breakdown is intended to expose a rent in the body politic, and that Hostovsky uses the fantastic to undermine our notion of realism. The ‘outsiderdom’ from reality in terms of the subject’s psychological disintegration is simultaneously a repudiation of that reality.

Hostovsky’s own comments on the nature of personality suggest a conception of the self which is ‘polyphonic’ and not unitary, in so far as it consists of a counterpoint of different voices, each representing an inner form of the self: ‘Jak se každé přemýšlení v nás manifestuje? Jakou má podobu? Inu, je to přece vždy dialog, nebo dokonce diskuse víc než dvou hlasů, třeba tří nebo pěti. A každý ten hlas je nás a hovoří za jednu z našich niterných podob.’

His texts, however, suggest that either this statement is disingenuous, or that Hostovsky, intent on establishing a distinction between his own work and Dostoevskii’s, is refraining from elaborating further his understanding of personality. On one level, Hostovsky’s statement might be deemed by the reader to be accurate: his characters are frequently depicted talking to, or debating with, themselves, or indeed overhearing a debate taking place from within them.

While one ‘voice’ might be said to dominate a personality at a particular time suppressing the expression of other voices, his work indicates that Hostovský does not attach equal symbolic weight to these voices, that he does believe in a natural substratum of self: there is, after all, a decision-making, host ‘I’ which seems to act as independent witness to these voices. Moreover, the recurring attestation by other characters in Hostovsky’s texts that the protagonist is suddenly alien (cizí) in some way implies the privation of what

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22 Bašek, for example, experiences the sensation of a battle taking place within him of two worlds in which he is not a participant, and in which his soul has been offered as a battlefield against his will (ibid., p. 97).
is known or natural to the subject, and seems to refute Hostovský's assertion that 'každý ten hlas je náš'. I would argue that Hostovský's texts frequently reveal a disjunction between the prevailing voice and the subject, that some of 'our' voices are therefore alien to us, and reflect a perversion of subjectivity or repression of personality.

Although Hostovský's fiction does not deal directly with doppelgängers — by which I understand a second, sensibly apprehensible personality who bears a striking visual similarity to the subject — his treatment of doubles and of divided or split personalities does draw on conventional tropes associated with literature of the doppelgänger. Ztracený stín, a compendious textbook treatment of the divided self, is most derivative of nineteenth-century fiction, of Stevenson, Maupassant and perhaps Wilde, but particularly of the world of Gogol's and Dostoevskii's early work, 'the world of seedy, depressed, tyrannized government clerks and minor civil servants looked down upon as insects by the lofty superiors to whose altitude they hopelessly aspire'.

Hostovský's apparent disavowal of Dostoevskii's influence on his treatment of the double may reflect his general sensitivity to being compared with other writers (he avers that he did not read Kafka until much later in life); one wonders also whether these expostulations arise from a sense of inadequacy, a fear that perhaps he lacks originality:

Hledání je spor, který vede člověk v sobě samém, pře se sám se sebou. Když však spisovatel takový spor vynese na světlo boží a popiše ve svém díle, hned dostane od kritika punc, že je nadobro pod vlivem dvojnikovství Dostojevského a že jeho hlavní problematikou je rozštěpení osobnosti.

On a textual level, there are several links between Dostoevskii's The Double and Hostovský's Ztracený stín. Both Dostoevskii's Goliadkin and Hostovský's Bašek fear their dispensability to their employers, and their defence of themselves — in which they show themselves paranoically intent on replacing

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23 Herdman, The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, p. 100.
24 Kautman points out that Hostovský does not dispute the significant role occupied in his work by the problem of the double and the divided personality, 'Spíše pokazuje na to, nač pokazoval sám Dostojevskij jak o na přirozený atribut některých, zpravidla intelektuálně vyspělých povah, u nichž dochází k určitému vnitřnímu rozdvojení, které je vzdálenou analogii patologické schizofrénie, jež v něm ostatně může být potenciálně obsažena' (František Kautman, Polarita našeho věku v díle Egona Hostovského, Prague, 1993, p. 5).
25 Literární dobrodružství, p. 16.
themselves by effectively surrendering personal responsibility — will prove to be their undoing. Bašek’s double first appears when he considers the monotony of his life at home, ‘Zavěšená dvojice do mne strčila’ (ZS, p. 19), and the unprompted fear of being continually at home is compounded by his sudden recollection of a conversation about the possibility of a man being dismissed from his job, so that the double seems to be the product both of Bašek’s fear and of his desire to act. Like Goliadkin, Bašek virtually conjures his double into being. Riding in a carriage, Goliadkin passes the head of his department and, as he is unaccustomed to being riding in a carriage, feels embarrassed to be seen by his superior in this position, ‘shall I pretend it’s not me, but someone extraordinarily like me, and just look as if nothing had happened? It really isn’t me, it isn’t, and that’s all there is to it’. Similarly, Bašek, going up the stairs to visit the Frýbls, from whom he would like to borrow money, persuades himself that he is a spectator, ‘Namlouval jsem si, že to nejsem já ...’ (ibid.), thus allowing an extraneous self nonchalantly to shoulder the responsibility he fears, ‘a tak v pravém slova smyslu jsem se dal svým nezúčastněným dvojníkem vléci po schodech’ (ibid.). The double is, then, paradoxically both a vicarious agent of the subject, a surrogate appearing in order to fulfil the subject’s desires, and a challenger to the subject’s power (Bašek calls his an intruder, p. 93), increasingly assuming mastery and exposing the shortcomings, the pusillanimity, of the subject.

The recurrence of the motif of the staircase in Ztracený stín may constitute another intertextual link between Hostovský’s and Dostoevskii’s texts. Goliadkin’s first directly visual encounter of his double occurs as he returns to his flat from the Fontanka embankment with a stranger in tow:

The staircase was dark, dank and dirty, and every landing was blocked with mountains of junk belonging to tenants. Any stranger journeying up it after dark would run the risk of breaking a leg, and would be forced to

26 The narration of this episode is ambiguous: the pronouncement of a man to his work colleagues is suddenly interpolated into the text with the consequence that the reader is uncertain as to whether the episode is generated from within Bašek (as a recollection) or from without (as a conversation overheard on the street).


28 Webber argues that the double is never neatly a ‘prohibitive’ or ‘transgressive’ symbol: ‘when the Doppelgänger is at its most compelling, it does not simply figure one agency within the psychic economy, but is a slippery double-agent, carrying out the dialectical transactions of the divided whole’ (The Doppelgänger, pp. 7–8).
take about half an hour, cursing the staircase together with his friends for having settled in such a place. But Mr Golyadkin's companion was darting lightly up the stairs, encountering no difficulties, and showing perfect knowledge of the ground. Mr Golyadkin nearly caught him up. Several times the hem of the stranger's coat brushed his nose. Suddenly his heart sank. The mysterious man had stopped and knocked at the door of Mr Golyadkin's flat.  

Sitting on the bed, Goliadkin discovers his double. On the feverish night when Bašek's process of self-division is completed, his dream incorporates the image of a staircase and a continuous exchange of roles between him and his double, with his psyche moving backwards and forwards in aggressive osmosis from one to the other, 'Vyměnili si své úlohy. A tak se to opakovalo: pronásledovaný byl vždy po několika okamžicích pronásledujícím. Jeden honil druhého, brzy dolů, brzy nahoru' (ZS, p. 98). This dream is recalled later in the novel when Bašek bribes the caretaker to allow him into the young student, Máša's, apartment block and proceeds to wander maniacally up and down the staircase, 'Náhle jsem si to uvědomil a zastavil se: nestoupal jsem vzhůru, nýbrž pobíhal nahoru a dolů, o pět schodů jsem vystoupil výše, v zápětí jsem zase o tři schody sestoupil' (ZS, p. 143). The motif of the staircase is, however, endowed with a different psychological symbolism in the two texts under consideration. In Dostoevskii it is used to convey the horror of the usurping double, drawing on the grotesque example of Gogol's 'The Nose'. There may, however, be an ironic intertextual reference to Freud's dream of inhibition in Hostovsky's case: 'I was incompletely dressed and was going upstairs from a flat on the ground floor to a higher storey. I was going up three steps at a time and was delighted at my agility. Suddenly I saw a maid-servant coming down the stairs — coming towards me, that is. I felt ashamed and tried to hurry, and at this point the feeling of being inhibited set in: I was glued to the steps and unable to budge from the spot.' Freud uses this dream, with his own charmingly bizarre methodology, as a symbol of repressed childhood memories. In Ztracený stín, however, Bašek's battle for motility (the battle to

Dostoyevsky, The Double, pp. 70–71. Dostoevskii's staircase scene itself constitutes an allusion to Gogol's The Nose, in which the nose has an independent existence and functions as a grotesque double, first appearing rushing up the stairs: 'Suddenly he [Kovalyov] stopped dead in his tracks at the doors of one of the houses. Right before his very eyes a most inexplicable occurrence had just taken place: a gentleman had jumped out, stooping over, and had run up the stairs. Now what was the horror and, at the same time, astonishment of Kovalyov when he recognized that this was his very own nose.'
move up and down the stairs) is a physical symbol of the mental competition for subjectivity and may be a metaphorical representation of the collapse of the states of flight and pursuit in the case of the doppelgänger or split personality. Webber, following Freud, terms this reflexiveness the Retourkutsche, 'a response, that is, which doubles an attempt at defence back on itself', and identifies it with Otto Rank's observation 'that the repressed returns through the process of repression'.

Consequently, one might suggest that it is the subject's inability to recognize the characteristics of his repressed self which ensures the survival of his split or duplicated personality. Release can only be attained by repentance or recognition. Herdman suggests that the 'anti-heroes of duality' are 'obsessed by the idea of an inscrutable fate against whose operations they are ultimately powerless', and that they react to this consciousness 'in ways which ensure that their predicaments will be self-fulfilling'. Just as Goliadkin and Kafka's Gregor ('Die Verwandlung') fear a conspiracy against them, so too do Hostovský's Bareš and Věra.

The two texts, Ztracený stín and Všeobecné spiknutí, in which Hostovský depicts the subject's second self as an oxymoronic 'inner shadow' (oxymoronic because the shadow is an externally projected image or appendage), offer different interpretations of the function of this second self (of course there is no reason why the interpretations should be uniform: Stevenson experiments with an evil second self in the tale of Jekyll and Hyde, and then with an allegorical better self in 'Markheim'). In the latter the shadow belongs to Bareš (reflected in the fact that it cannot advise, only answer, him) and functions as a guardian of subjectivity and conscience. The shadow rejects the notion that it is in any way associated with mental illness, 'Má existence a náš dialog patří k zjevům nejvšednějším. Jsem tvé přemítání, tvé rozčilení, tvé usínání, tvé vůlí. Teprve kdybych byl mlčen, teprve kdyby ses mě nemohl dovolat, hrozilo by ti šílenství' (p. 195). The shadow's claim to be the most banal or familiar phenomenon may be considered in connection with Hostovský's statement concerning Dostoevskii's influence on his work, 'Hledání je spor, který vede člověk v sobě samém, pře se sám se sebou', for Hostovský appears to be attempting to move the shadow out of the realm of the

30 Webber, The Doppelgänger, p. 45.
31 Herdman, The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, p. 98.
fantastic into a realm of ‘super-realism’, or the ‘irrational’, in which man’s
dialogue with his conscience can be represented. By contrast, Bašek’s ‘inner
shadow’ resembles more a Gothic villain than conscience, arising from his
unconscious like the Mesmerists’ shadow self, or the repressed amoral id, ‘the
dark inaccessible part of our personality’, of the Freudian unconscious, ‘dlouho
jsem nepozoroval, že mé myšlenky jsou zaměstnány ještě něčím jiným. Jakoby
z veliké dálky doléhal ke mně z mého nitra dialog, na němž největší plocha
mého mozku nebyla vůbec účastna a který náhle vystoupil z šera podvědomí’
(ZS, p. 93). As with Stevenson’s Hyde and Maupassant’s ‘Le Horla’, Bašek’s
second self is a parasite, to whom the subject plays host, and a tyrannical
appropriator of subjectivity. The contest for subjectivity, a theme central to
texts depicting doubles, is represented by Hostovský in a number of ways.

The first manifestation of alterity in Ztracený stín focuses on utterance. After Bašek has decided on revenge against his former employers, he tries to
impress a couple in a canteen, ‘podivil jsem se tónu svého hlasu, jako by někdo
jiný za mne mluvil’ (ZS, p. 56), and when he visits his employers’ office to
threaten blackmail, he is accused of adopting a theatrical tone (p. 61). These
are the first indications to the reader that the subject has become unauthentic.
Once Bašek has convinced himself of his own importance through his
increasing semblance of power over others, he becomes convinced also of his
inner transformation or rebirth, a thought which hints at the conception of a
second self. The competition for utterance eventually develops into a
counterpoint of subjectivity and objectivity: enjoying, for a moment, his
transformation, Bašek asks, ‘Jakpak pojmenuji svého maličkého? Chachacha!’,
only to receive the reflexive retort ‘Osle!’ (p. 95) from his double. The fact that
the double considers the smaller, weaker and duller component of the ‘I’ to be
Bašek reflects the fact that possession of subjectivity is at issue. The reflexivity
of the double’s retorts is also another manifestation of the Retourkutsche,
turning the subject’s repression of a facet of his personality back on himself.

The second manifestation of alterity focuses on the visualized self. Webber
makes the point that the doppelgänger is always a figure of visual compulsion,
‘In the visual field the autoscopic, or self-seeing, subject beholds its other self
as another, as visual object, or alternatively is beheld as object by its other
self."³² In the case of Ztracený stín, Bašek is ‘beheld as other’ by his inner shadow. As this other self is mocking, scathing, a corrective to the subject’s cowardice and inactivity, and is a vessel through which desire and ambition dare be voiced, unsurprisingly it takes a dim view of Bašek’s visual appearance. Thus Bašek, on a visit to the theatre, beholds himself in the mirror, remarks on how ugly he appears, and feels that ‘do zrcadla nahlédl mýma očima někdo cizí’ (ZS, p. 92). Returning home, Bašek gazes into the mirror for reassurance only to discover that he appears even uglier than he had earlier, and that the horror of his subjectivity seeping away continues: ‘A musel jsem na sebe hledět, nebot to se mně smál on, byl už zase na svém místě, měl zase svůj vztekly, posupně se chechtající obličej’ (p. 95).

The control for motility is a further battleground for subjectivity, and introduces the notion of the divided will (the definitive expositor of which is St Augustine in his Confessions, ‘How was it that, though he wanted to make this act, and so in a sense willed it, his will did not obey him? It could only be that his willing was not “wholehearted”’). In Ztracený stín, the subject’s attempts at action are nullified so that his will is divorced from his activity and his body becomes the focus of his alterity, ‘já jsem vydan na pospas nějaké prsfe, která se divá mýma očima, směje se mými ústy, může cokoliv dělat mými pažemi, proti mé vůli […] a já se nemohu vzepřít!’ (p. 95). When Bašek tries to lift his arm, ‘dále nemohla, dále ji nepustil’ (p. 97), it may be that Hostovský is echoing Maupassant’s ‘Le Horla’, in which the narrator similarly experiences possession by another: ‘Je suis perdu! Quelqu’un possède mon âme et la gouverne! quelqu’un possède mon âme et la gouverne! quelqu’un ordonne tous mes actes, tous mes mouvements, toutes mes pensées. Je ne suis plus rien en moi, rien qu’un spectateur esclave et terrifié de toutes les choses que j’accomplis. Je désire sortir. Je ne peux pas. Il ne veut pas.’³³ In Všeobecné spiknutí Hostovský treats the alienation of body from psyche or mind from the point of view of action performed by the body without the mind’s cognisance:³⁴ at his birthday party Bareš is unconscious of having emptied his

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³² Webber, The Doppelgänger, p. 3.
³⁴ Miller suggests that the split self may be successive, and even amnesiac (Karl Miller, Doubles: Studies in Literary History, Oxford, 1985, p. 38), and Miyoshi points out how Jekyll’s remorse over Hyde’s actions is short-lived, ‘recalling the amnesiac reaction of
glass; several days later, when he attempts to sign his name on a cheque at the bank, he is shocked to discover that he now writes in the hand of his schooltime bully Beck, who has returned to haunt him.

Miller, drawing a link between the depiction of the orphan and of the double in Romantic literature, asserts that, ‘In the literature of duality, strangeness steals. Strangeness, which does not belong, is seen to take what does not belong to it. Not to belong is, in this setting, to mean harm’. Miller writes that the orphan arouses the fear of dispossession and possession, which may explain why both the subject of texts about doubles (as in Dostoevskii’s orphan prince Stavrogin, in The Devils, or Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, ‘an orphan who orphans the orphan he has made’) and more commonly the double or doppelgänger (as in Kleist’s ‘Der Findling’) seems often to be of uncertain parentage. Just as Weiner’s Sankory is a bastard, so Kavalsky’s parentage is vague and impossible to trace, and just as Wilson’s doppelgänger in Poe’s tale shares his birth-date, so the year of Ondřej’s birth, 1901 (a detail which the reader deduces from other facts given in the text), coincides with the year in which Kavalsky’s new life, dating from his discovery in a railway compartment with his sister and dead father, began. Stories circulate about the real identity of Jan Veselý in Olbracht’s 1919 novel Podivné přátelství herce Jesenia — that he is really a Jew, for example, or a political criminal, while Veselý himself alleges that he came from a region in which intermarriage was common (‘what a hellish chaos of blood seethes in me’) — but it is impossible for anyone to discern the truth about him. It is not just the double who fails to belong, however, for the individual, by failing to belong to himself, becomes his own enemy. Hostovský develops this aspect of the double further in Všeobecné spíknutí when Bareš encounters his inner shadow and is granted three wishes by his other self. In answer to each of Bareš’s three questions — who poisoned him on his birthday? who is his chief
countless Gothic villains after indulging their sadism’ (The Divided Self [see note 6], p. 300). Hostovský may be attempting to hint from the onset of action that Bareš is an unreliable narrator, through his occasional lapses of memory, ‘Když jsem domluvil, připadalo mi, že jsem pročítal ze sna — a už v příštích okamžících se mi vůbec nechtělo věřit, že jsem to byl já sám, kdo zde dvě hodiny vyprávěl o mladí Jana Bareše z Náchoda’ (VS, p. 80).

35 Miller, Doubles: Studies in Literary History, p. 47.
36 Ibid., p. 39.
37 Ibid., p. 127.
enemy? who can save him? — the shadow answers ‘Ty sám’ (pp. 196–97). In another variation on the *Retour kutsche*, Bares then hurls coffee at his shadow only to find himself wiping coffee from his own face, a scene which may echo Ivan’s pathological hallucination of his ‘Devil’ in Dostoevskii’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, where Ivan hurls a cup at his double only to find that it remains intact on the table when Aliosha enters the room.

Webber, citing the different versions of the Amphitryon story and Kleist’s ‘Der Findling’ as examples (but one might add other examples such as that of Leda and the swan), suggests that, ‘The Doppelgänger represents, but also appropriates and diverts, subjective desire’ and that it exposes ‘the locking up of desire within the domestic scene’. Potency is also a feature of the double in the cases of Goliadkin, Gogol’s short story ‘The Nose’, Hans Christian Andersen’s tale about the shadow, and Hostovsky’s *Ztracený stín*, where the subject must impotently observe his double’s social, and often sexual, success. Bašek’s double, for example, asserts that Bašek is ‘nemohoucí’ (p. 93). Like Andersen’s Shadow and Dostoevskii’s *The Double*, in which ‘the double sets out to steal the identity of the original and degrade him to the status of his (the shadow’s) shadow’, as Bašek feels his inner shadow grow he concurrently experiences his own gradual transformation into a shadow. Bašek asserts that

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40 Hostovsky’s depiction of the transferral of power between subject and object is derivative of Stevenson’s Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Stevenson’s story appears to be an allegorical rendition of good in the form of Dr Jekyll and evil in the form of Mr Hyde, ‘Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter, and younger than Henry Jekyll. Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other’ (Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’, 1886; the edition used here is *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Stories*, London, 1992, p. 64). This transferral of energy between two different sides of the body represents a moral struggle between the forces of good and evil, ‘whereas, in the beginning, the difficulty had been to throw off the body of Jekyll, it had of late gradually but decidedly transferred itself to the other side. All things therefore seemed to point to that: that I was slowly losing hold of my original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse’ (ibid., p. 69). Similarly, in *Sedmkrát*, Ondřej witnesses Kavalšký’s metamorphosis into his other self: ‘před mými smysly přecházel člověk z jedné své bytostní schránky do druhé. [...] Ne, nebyl z něho jiný člověk, nepřipsal mu ani neubyl žádny rys, jen se v něm císl přesouvalo’ (*SHU*, p. 121); and in *Všeobecné spiknutí*, Jiří Beck’s physiognomy changes when he is angry, ‘jako když se dr. Jekyll měnil v pana Hydea’ (*VS*, p. 43). Hyde, however, is the side of Jekyll’s personality which has been repressed, and the ‘release’ of Hyde does not free Jekyll to become wholly good, ‘evil and weakness still persist in Jekyll, and Hyde, freed from Jekyll’s countervailing good qualities, can exploit the weakness to gain the upper hand. This is the acutest psychological point which the tale makes, the feature which gives it its
he is no longer himself, but someone else, although — in a play on the battle for subjectivity which has been concluded — he cannot substantiate this fact, ‘Tento fakt totiž konstatovaly již jeho smysly’ (p. 98).

As Bašek is the first-person narrator, the authenticity of narration is now also undermined: ‘A vypravuji-li nyní dále příběh v první osobě, vím, že vypravuji vlastně historii někoho cizího, jenž převzal mou roli’ (p. 98). After this juncture, because subjectivity is controlled by Bašek’s usurping second self, the subject views himself always as handsome in the mirror, and looks in the mirror with increased regularity. His former employer Merhaut notices also that he has, of late, ‘neuvěřitelně změnil’ (p. 126). There is a marked change in ‘Bašek’’s belief in his sexual potency, as it is implied that he has sexual intercourse with Máša (perhaps even rapes her) and he also believes that he can, if he wishes, steal Olga Fryšlová from her husband. In Všeobecné spiknutí, in the account of Bareš’s school-days, the corporeal Beck similarly serves the role of a usurping, successful double. Bareš, once the centre of attention, is intimidated and undermined by Beck so that he is eventually reduced to being Beck’s shadow. Just as the eponymous hero of Poe’s ‘William Wilson’ finds that his double ‘comes between him and the fulfilment of his ambition’ 41 — his namesake ‘presumed to compete with me […] to refuse implicit belief in my assertions, and submission to my will’ 42 — so Beck shadows Bareš’s every step — at school, as a fledgling writer, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs — continually inhibiting Bareš from either attaining or enjoying any success. Just as the double exposes the subject’s impotence, so here Bareš, mindful of Beck’s low opinion of him, cannot be successful in love with his sweetheart: because he believes himself unworthy of her, Bareš cannot even bring himself to kiss her, ‘stín Jiřího Becka se vkradl mezi nás a já znovu pocitil v týle svou hanbu’ (p. 52).

originality and fidelity to experience. It is the dissociation and autonomy of the complex that is Hyde which allow it to dominate, and eventually to arrogate, the personality of Jekyll’ (Herdman, The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, p. 135). Part of Jekyll may want to be Hyde, but Hyde wants only to be Hyde: by increasingly abandoning Jekyll’s form, however, Hyde no longer has an available defence mechanism or alibi for his wrongdoings.

42 Poe, p. 629.
In Hostovský’s characters the splitting of personality is usually the consequence of a pivotal moment in their fate in which they allowed one part of their personality to be arrogated by another. Řezáč addresses the event of such a split of personality in an explicitly Freudian way in his 1940 novel Černé světlo, which begins with a dream relating one of the Ich-narrator, Karel’s, earliest memories of a rat, with which he identified, being killed by the butcher whom he loved. Hostovský treats these turning-points only in retrospect; the reader encounters character in the narrative in its altered state, in the state of repression or perversion of its ‘natural’ self. For the tailor Václav Hurdt (Tři starci), life turns on his refusing the opportunity to run away with a cabaret-singer at the age of twenty-three (an opportunity his brother takes up and for which Václav subsequently hates him); for the Jew Brunner in Nezvěstný, the experience of a concentration camp has corrupted his basic decency with the desire for revenge; for the psychiatrist Malik it is the moment in which he discovers that his wife is not only a member of the Hitler Youth movement but that she deceived him into believing that she was a virgin on their wedding night; and for Bareš in Všeobecné spiknutí, dissociation begins when the Nazi Sturm, his former school-fellow and a bully, collapses dead in his arms, and when later he observes the horror of France collapsing in 1940. Because these crisis points result in a burial of ‘natural’ subjectivity, Hostovský treats them as symbolic deaths for the subject: in Všeobecné spiknutí, for example, Bareš recalls Sturm’s sudden death as a moment of personal disintegration in which he could think only of his own death, ‘Každá střepina té chvíle zabíjí se mi do těla a lomívá tohoto okamžiku (lomívá tak děsivě zásivě) nedává mi myslet na nic jiného než na náraz kladiva do hřebíku mé vlastní rakve’ (p. 78).

The predominant characteristics of these characters are emotional cowardice and the inability to love someone: their lives, since the moment of peripeteia (and perhaps before it), consist in escape. Václav Hurdt’s unhappy marriage is clearly a consequence of his marrying into money, and his brother is of the opinion that Václav lacks daring in life, and in love, ‘Prý on, Václav, by tehdy byl také od všeho utekl, kdyby uměl milovat někoho víc, než peníze a kdyby se nebál skočit do tmy’ (TS, p. 81). Brunner is accused by his wife of never

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43 Václav Řezáč, Černé světlo, Prague, 1940, p. 10.
having loved anyone. His wife identifies his personal crisis as his having been destroyed by the concentration camp, and having entered the Communist Party out of revenge, ‘Nedovedeš za nic bojovat. Ani za pořádný byt. Ani za trošku osobní volnosti, dočista za nic’ (N, p. 43). Malik, although he toys with marrying his girlfriend Helena, has long ceased to be her lover, and his mother tells him that his life consists in escape, just as Bareš has long ceased to have a sexual relationship with his girlfriend Milada, and the phantom Beck disappears with the parting shot that he and Bareš were both incapable of loving anyone because they were too much in love with their own ideas or dreams, ‘A přitom někde v koutku duše oba tušíme, že milovat bez brylí mámení znamená prozřít, uhodnout, nalézt’ (VS, p. 173). The subject’s relationship to his conscience is at the centre of these texts. All these conscience-stricken characters engage in a form of psychological dissociation, seeking to hide their failure, fear or guilt from others by attaining some level of public success, while paradoxically living in a state of alienation from the rest of the world, and from themselves because of the assiduousness with which one voice acts as censor to another. The opposition between these voices exposes the subject’s ‘double-life’.

Václav Hurdť’s public success takes the form of being a millionaire by the age of thirty, and he ostentatiously ensures that people are aware of his (unrequested) financial subsidies of his brother, Karel; he takes pride in the knowledge that he is universally considered ‘přísný k sobě i k jiným’ (p. 77), but there is a division between his carefully concealed emotions and what automatically trips off his tongue. Alone in his room he can give vent to his suppressed other and his jealousy and hatred of Karel, ‘Ten druhý mohl zatím

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44 One might say that conscience is at the centre of many texts treating the duplication or division of personality — Dostoevskii’s The Brothers Karamazov, Stevenson’s ‘Markheim’, Poe’s ‘William Wilson’, and so on. Indeed, many of Poe’s short stories address duality through the image of the avenging conscience (Herdman, The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, p. 89). In his ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’, the narrator is haunted by the sound of the beating heart of the old man he has just callously murdered. Convinced that the officers investigating the crime can hear it also, and that they are mocking his torment by their relaxed manner, he confesses to the crime. Similarly, in ‘The Black Cat’, the narrator hangs first his cat, then attempts to murder a second cat which evokes memories of the first (its fluffy white chest grows into the shape of a gallows) and is prevented from doing so by his wife, whom he then murders instead. The corpse of his second wife is walled up in the cellar, and his crime is revealed to the investigating officers when the cat’s wailing shriek is heard from behind the wall.
žvanit podle libosti, co na srdci, to na jazyku, nemusil říkat “bratr”, když chtěl říci “neřítel”, nemusil říkat “mám čisté svědomí”, chtěl-li říci “jsm nešťasten” (TS, p. 83). The fact that he seeks reassurance through constantly reminding himself, and others, of his ‘clear conscience’ (a phrase which serves as a refrain of the story) serves to underline his insecurity and sense of guilt. In Nezvěstný, Brunner has similarly dislocated his personal feelings from his public (in this case political) assertion of identity. His enlistment into the Communist Party after the war stands in stark contrast to, and may be an attempt to reject, his pre-war life in which he wrote poetry, music and theatre reviews and translated novels. Brunner’s character is dominated, on the one hand, by weak, dreamy sentimentality and, on the other, by a ruthless and scornful pragmatism which finds expression in his membership of the Communist Party. His Communist alter ego — a form of political conscience — is manifested through an inner voice, characterized as varovný (p. 13), strážný (p. 24), bdělý (p. 83) vřešťicí (p. 86) and nevrłý (ibid.), that acts as a censor on any thoughts and feelings which do not serve the Party cause. Working against this authoritative voice are a flow of impulsive feelings which drive Brunner to action, as, for example, when he decides for no apparently conscious reason to get out of the tram one day at the next stop, ‘Stále vzrůstající zvědavost i překvapení z vlastních pocitů narovnaly Erika a pohnuly jím jako loutku k východu’ (N, p. 13). The voice of sobriety is simultaneously cautioning him against his sentimentality and warning him that he will be late for his work at the Ministry and that the porter may report the incident to the Works Council. When he passes the spot where he first met his now wife Olga and daydreams about their first meeting he suddenly arrests his thoughts with a form of self-censorship, ‘Varovný hlas v Erikovi vztekle vykřikl: Už dost! A Erik se polekaně rozhlédl a potom vykročil tak spěšně, že málem utikal. Teprve po chvíli vyhrál z kapsy šátek a otočil si slzu, jež mu vytryskla z oka dočista nevhodně, nepříjatojné a vlastně zákeřně’ (pp. 13–14): the adverbs nevhodně, nepříjatojné, zákeřně are the judgements of his censorious self. Shortly afterwards, he is addressed by Jan Masaryk by his first name and, again, his spontaneous feeling is immediately admonished by his inner voice, ‘A zase naivní radost z familiárního oslovení, a zase vzápětí okřiknutí bdělým vnitřním hlasem’ (p. 14). Hostovský suggests, however, that
Brunner's inner voice is a form of false conscience, a conscience drilled into him by Party propaganda which seems directed at creating automata responsive to its behest; he is amused by his own practised mind, 'v níž opakovaná slova, obehraná řečení a pravdy přítomných okamžiků porážely každý nový postřeh a nový pocit' (N, p. 12); the alignment of this false conscience to the Party also explains the redundancy of Brunner’s inner voice in the presence of Matějka, the head of the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior and allegedly the most ruthless man in the Czechoslovak Communist Party. In pointing out the discrepancy between his instinctive responses and his learned, dutiful responses, and admonishing him for this discrepancy, Brunner’s inner voice is also a device which Hostovský exploits to unveil the hypocrisy of the Party: when Brunner is called to Matějka’s office, for example, his inner voice seems to be cautioning him against noting the similarity of being summoned by the police during the German Occupation and being summoned by Matějka, suggesting thus that the Communists are no better than the Nazis.

Parts of the action of the four works by Hostovský I concentrate on in this chapter focus on the resurrection of the past through a character who serves for the subject the role of revenant, someone whom they have metaphorically buried in attempting to escape from the peripeteia and to ‘dispose’ of their previous selves (only Beck is a real revenant because he is already dead by the time he enters the action of the novel). This character is then the ghost of the subject’s past and perhaps the embodiment of his fighting conscience. Since all of Hostovský’s post-war novels, with the exception of Nezvěstný, are set in America, the subject may believe that his or her passage to America marks a severance with his or her past, but, as Helena declares in Půlnocní pacient, ‘Já za to nemohu, že každý z vás Evropanů přivlekl do Ameriky kus své temné minulosti i se strasidlem?’ (p. 117). The idea of the character/revenant also incorporates Webber’s notion of the doppelgänger ‘as an interloper, an unwanted guest, out of place in the texts it visits’ and as ‘a figure of the displacement which inheres in the environments it disrupts’, this assessment in turn draws on Freud’s notion of the uncanny.

45 Webber, The Doppelgänger, p. 8.
How the subject deals with the character/revenant will determine his ability to regain an integral and undivided self thereafter. Although in the case of Václav Hurdt, Václav's brother is not his double, Karel Hurdt functions in the story as a quasi-double, the expression of some of Václav's latent desires: Karel had seized the opportunity, which Václav had refused, to run away with a cabaret performer. After Karel's marriage to an actress, the brothers do not meet for eight years until Václav receives a despairing letter from his brother, confessing that his marriage is in ruins. While Karel (who may be conscious that he is dying at this point) clearly hopes that the meeting will enable them to speak openly with one another, Václav construes the meeting as an opportunity for revenge and wilfully talks at cross-purposes because he has neither the desire nor the courage to confront his past. The fact that Václav answers Karel's gaze into his eyes with self-deception, 'Václav snáší ten výmluvný pohled, má čisté svědomí, účty v pořádku, každý by ho ted' mohl slyšet' (p. 89), may be intended by Hostovský to suggest the corruption of Václav's soul. In Nezvěstný, Král constitutes the symbolic revenant for Brunner. Král is Brunner's foil: just as Václav Hurdt must fictionalize his brother into a money-grabbing parasite to consolidate his own sense of self for, without this belief in place, the whole edifice of his self-deception begins to collapse, so Brunner conceives of Král as a selfish, lying womanizer, a man who plays with others' fates, and on whom he would like revenge, despite the fact that Král likes him and is in fact willing to assist indirectly in his escape over the border. Brunner fails to confront the discrepancy between his image of Král and the legacy of Král's identity expressed through the opinions of his friends, a discrepancy which highlights Brunner's evasion of self-criticism. Václav Hurdt and Brunner are united by their failure both to seek to understand other people and to seek to be understood; both characters are so consumed by revenge that they risk allowing the opportunity for reconciliation and redemption to slip away from them. The consequence for Hurdt is that his psychological disintegration intensifies as he develops a delusory reality, imagining that he still runs a business and has meetings to attend.

In Půlnocní pacient, Alfons functions similarly to a revenant for Malik because he serves to remind Malik of his lack, the death of a side of himself
which he repressed twenty years before,\(^\text{46}\) 'Hleděl jsem na něho šťastně a
zvědav a vdečně, již pevně přesvědčen, že jsem se setkal s vlastním dvojníkem
z let své mladosti' (\(PP\), p. 87). This likeness is stimulated first in Malik by
Alfons’s use of an expression which is Malik’s own favourite, and then by the
similarity of Alfons’s violent, insane laughter to Malik’s own; their
complementarity is stressed further by the fact that both are convinced of a
universal conspiracy (Malik through his experience with his wife, Alfons
through his experience with espionage — he is also a double-agent); while
Alfons is paid for his deeds, Malik is paid for his ideas (it may be intended by
Hostovský as a play on their characters that Malik attempts to kill a fly, sleeps,
awakens and finds that Alfons has succeeded in killing several); while Alfons
seeks only to escape the intelligence services, Malik hopes to penetrate them
and destroy them. The indefiniteness and enigma of Alfons’s identity serves to
strengthen the impression of an insubstantial character: only a few biographical
details are offered in the narrative (that he had a wife, a sister) and the reader
knows neither his provenance nor his age (information which Hostovský
would usually relate in his texts). Even his name is just a code-word, and
Malik is instructed by his employer not to look at Alfons’s face\(^\text{47}\) (Alfons
wears dark glasses on his first visit to Malik’s flat). The fact that Alfons
always wears gloves to touch any objects in the hotel in which he resides is yet
another trait which reflects both the realistic plane of the narrative — the
protection of identity in the detective or espionage novel — and the fantastic
plane of the ambiguity of Alfons’s independent, ‘tangible’ existence. Alfons
visits Malik only after midnight, always within the confines of the latter’s flat,
and there is no direct reporting in the narrative of Alfons meeting with other
characters. As Herdman says of the \textit{doppelgänger}, ‘the psychological power of
the device lies in its ambiguity, in the projection of the subject’s subjectivity
upon a being whose reality the structure of the novel or story obliges the reader
to accept’.\(^\text{48}\)

\(^{46}\) Another aspect of Hostovsky’s dualism is the parallelism of fate which he treats, with
characters convinced that they encounter in another person either a version of their
younger self or a series of circumstances they experienced once in the past.

\(^{47}\) In Poe’s ‘William Wilson’, the eponymous hero’s double follows Wilson always with his
face hidden.

Beck appears as a revenant in *Všeobecné spiknutí*, resurrecting, on the one hand, Bareš’s past and, on the other, his conscience. While the real Beck fed off Bareš’s guilt and functioned as an externalization of that guilt, the ‘phantom’ Beck’s arrival is heralded by a falling star, suggesting that he is both the guardian angel of folklore and the astral body of the occultists and Decadents:


As in Poe’s ‘William Wilson’, Stevenson’s ‘Markheim’ and Weiner’s story, here the double allegorically functions as the subject’s voice of conscience and the figure who understands and bears the sins and suffering of both characters. All the subjects of these three texts greet their double initially as a prospective devil. Just as Wilson’s *doppelgänger* knows the intimate deceptions of Wilson’s soul, so Sankory knows facts so specific and personal to Spajdan that only the latter could possibly know them; Spajdan begins to arrive at a realization that Sankory is not so much a demon as another side of himself, ‘to byl někdo, kdo k vůli mému nezaslouženému štěstí vzal na bedra svoje všechnu krivdu mou. A přece jen jsem tohoto dvojníka, který mě už neděsil a děsiti nebude, přece jen jsem ho neměl rád. Ač jsem dobře věděl: Můj vykupitel.’ Wilson, however, fails to recognize the import of his double. When he eventually kills his double with a sword, he is confronted by an apparition of his bloodied double in a large mirror, the presence of which he had not noticed in the room before: ‘It was Wilson; but he spoke no longer in a

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49 Bareš’s first encounter with the phantom Beck takes place at Bareš’s birthday party, where Bareš conceives of him as an avenging devil. I interpret this episode, however, as hallucinatory, for later events in the novel confirm that Dr Stevens was present at the party and suggest that Bareš had mistaken Stevens for Beck. Like Dr Rutenspitz in Dostoevskii’s *The Double*, who develops into a representation of Lucifer, carrying off Goliadkin in his carriage to an asylum, Dr Stevens is gradually characterized in *Všeobecné spiknutí* as a figure of darkness: only the corner table-lamp, for example, is lit in his dark office, as though he fears the light (p. 188). Thus Bareš’s first supernatural encounter with Beck takes place when he appears as a falling star, which would explain Bareš’s surprise at Beck’s having aged so much, and why, in contrast to the mocking, hostile figure of Beck/Stevens at the party, the Beck who appears on a New York street exudes compassion, ‘Hleděl na mne, jak jsem si vždycky přál, aby na mne pohližel: vážně, smutně a výmluvně za tolik dobrých slov, jež jsme si nikdy nepověděl’ (VS, p. 170).

whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said: 
“You have conquered, and I yield. Yet henceforward art thou also dead —
dead to the World, to Heaven, and to Hope! In me didst thou exist — and, in
my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast
murdered thyself.” Thus Wilson, by murdering his double, and therefore his
conscience, consigns himself to damnation because he destroys his own soul.
By contrast, Bareš seems to understand that, in order to save his soul, he needs
to resurrect the figure of Beck, and to confront their miserable past together.
Thus Bareš, whose feeling of discomfort after the birthday party was not a
physical but a spiritual illness — ‘Mně nic nechybí, kromě víle chodit, sedět či
stát a mluvit. Něco s mou vůli není v pořádku’ (VS, p. 99, emphasis in the
original) — is advised by Beck to fight for his free will and have courage in
asserting his independent opinions which will lead to others’ hatred of him.

Hostovský’s depictions of split personalities are set against the background
of an alienated and atomized society. While Hostovský’s works treat loners
and outsiders, he implicitly indicts society for its lack of interest in the
individual. In the mechanized world of Ztracený stín, Bašek tries to initiate
conversations with his fellow-workers in the textile company concerning their
lives outside their mechanical work, but they always answer brusquely and
reluctantly. He often sits on park-benches in the hope that a passer-by will
address him. In Půlnocní pacient, Malik chooses not to communicate with
others, preferring to dream of his girlfriend Helena and to listen to his mother’s
memories rather than talk to either of them; he notes, however, that his friends
soon forget him if he does not seek them out, which suggests that his insularity
reflects a broader social decay. Brunner’s divided self, in Nezvěstný, is
emblematic of the schismatic society in which he lives. The two newspapers he
buys, the Communist Rudé pravo and the liberal Svobodné hlasy, while
reflecting perhaps the two vying aspects of his personality, demonstrate this
polarization of society into two camps; the disinterested individual, such as the
journalist Borek, is treated with suspicion. Brunner’s attempt to divorce the
personal from the impersonal also reflects a wider confusion of interests in a
novel where the personal and the political are constantly pitted against one
another. The opposing sides both of the domestic political schism, the

51 Poe, p. 641.
democrats and the Communists, and of the international one, the American intelligence services and the Communist Ministry of the Interior (linked to Moscow), express interest in personal matters only in so far as they serve political ends.

At his birthday party in Všeobecné spiknutí, Bareš cannot see a sympathizer in the group of friends (whom he describes as spendthrifts) gathered there for the festivities, except for his girlfriend Milada, the swindler Robert, and the two phantom figures (Beck and the blonde). The fact that a priest, doctor, lawyer and publisher are present may be intended by Hostovský to suggest that the group represents a cross-section of the intellectual élite. Each of the other so-called friends egocentrically assumes that Bareš’s story about his childhood and the meeting with Sturm is addressed to him or her. Thus one finds, as in Hostovský’s other fiction, that the sense of a community, and the function of communication, are in collapse: ‘Každý z nás se hlasitě přesvědčoval, že vidí do druhého i do sebe, a výsledkem byla jakási mnohohlasá řeč bez slov. Nic nestmelilo naše volání z plujících ostrůvků samoty, hnaných v před týmž proudem, ale oddělených od sebe nepřekročitelným živlem’ (pp. 96–97).

Consequently, one might contest that sickness, in the form of the split or disintegrating personality, is a healthy attribute in Hostovský’s Lebenswelt, that the subject’s sickness is not driven by repression alone, but by a gradual realization of his incompatibility with the norms of the social environment he inhabits. His sickness is a manifestation of his rebelling conscience. In Nezvěstný, for example, Borek’s period of muteness in hospital arises from disgust at the uses to which words are put. Thus, although the subject’s sense of a personal conspiracy against him is often misplaced, his suspicions of a conspiracy against humanity appear to be endorsed by Hostovský. Man’s ‘lack’, which the treatment of doubles addresses, also attests to his

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52 In the Czechoslovak government coalition of 1945–48 key ministries were controlled by the Communist Party, including the Ministries of Information and of the Interior, which allowed the Party control of the police — an issue which eventually led to the resignation of the non-Communist Ministers in the government (see Sharon L. Wolchik, Czechoslovakia in Transition: Politics, Economics and Society, London, 1991, pp. 18–19).

53 Hurdt, Borek and Bareš are restored to being participants in society by the agency of little children whose innocence, sentimentally, pierces these characters’ cynicism.
consciousness of an absence from within and/or without. These themes will become increasingly important in Hostovsky's wartime and post-war work.
Chapter 4

The Relationship between Power and Identity

Depictions of power, and of its antitheses, weakness, cowardice and insecurity, constitute the mainstay of all Hostovský's fiction. In the spiritual desert of his *Lebenswelt*, one of disintegration, sometimes anomy, man is *in extremis*, catapulted back and forth — like Goethe's Faust, Byron's Cain and Manfred, Stendhal's Sorel, Dostoevskii's Raskol'nikov — not by external agents, but by his own solipsism, between hubris and despair, between conviction in the supremacy of his own being and fear of the nothingness of his existence. The desire for power is consistently a theme of psychological prose, to the extent that one might categorize the works of this sub-genre as studies in obsession and myopia: the vision of these heroes, these sensual extremists, is so determinedly fixed on a chimeric distant point that they fail to connect to, or recognize their role as agents in, the concrete life around them. Consequently, the narrative structures of many psychological prose works relate a form of dual reality, counterposing the hermetic, symbolic preoccupations of the hero against the 'objective' perception of events by those around him.

Hostovský's treatment of this dual reality concentrates on the imagined world in which the hero either unconsciously participates or consciously creates, on his illusions and, in some cases, delusions; his works probe various forms of deception. Motifs of darkness (*tma*), emptiness (*prázdno*), nothingness (*nic*) and quiet (*ticho*), which point to a fear of death or oblivion, a fear of being left alone with one's self, are frequently aligned by Hostovský with a group of motifs connotating motion and/or colour, the *barevný vír*, the *kolotoč*. This latter group are defined by their circularity (a vortex has at its axis a closed circle, a whirlpool is a circular eddy), suggesting Wheels of Fortune or Fate; they denote life in the realm of the absurd, in which the self is engaged in a game without understanding either the rules of this game or the self's role in it (although the hero often mistakenly believes that he controls the game). They always signal a hedonistic form of living, a refuge in an illusory life in an attempt to defy mortality, or simply ordinary humanity. This
disjunction between the shell and reality of things draws on Czech literature of the *Fin de siècle* and has its roots in the European Romantic outsider; it is also a feature of Dostoevskii’s work. The narrative plane proceeds as a movement away from fictions to reality; everything that leads these characters away from the world or from reality is finally unveiled as a form of deception, with the loss of illusions resulting in either the adoption of a practical posture or a retreat from the world to seclusion (death is the ultimate seclusion) because the world has become synonymous with imprisonment or exile. The narrative direction of these early works seems most closely to correspond to Hodrová’s proposed sub-genre, the novel of lost illusions, a term developed from Balzac’s *Illusions perdues* (1837–43):

> Hrdina deziluzivního románu se na počátku opájí iluzemi o světě (hlavním městě) a o sobě (o vlastní umělecké slávě či společenském úspěchu) a poté na základě drsných zkušeností v soukolí světa ztrácí iluze všeho druhu — společenské, umělecké, erotické, morální [...] hrdina deziluzivního románu reaguje na tuto ztrátu tím, že opravuje své původní představy, zaújímá ke světu i k sobě postoj, který by se dal zjednodušeně označit jako ‘prakticistní’.¹

In Hostovský, however, power extends beyond representing the desideratum of his megalomaniac subjects. The desire for power infiltrates every level of social and political intercourse. The frequency of these expressions of power arises both from Hostovský’s apprehension of identity-formation and from his Modernist vision of twentieth-century life.

*The Will and the Means to Power*

Hostovský’s anti-heroes are outsiders, stigmatized by a sense of inferiority, who, through various mechanisms, endow themselves with a false sense of superiority. Hostovský’s treatment of ontological insecurity draws on the work of contemporaneous psychological theories of the self, particularly those of Freud and Adler (with whom Hostovský was closely acquainted). Adler, and the school of Individual Psychologists that followed him, propagated the theory that every adult has as a child a deep feeling of inferiority, and that all human beings are therefore engaged in striving for superiority or perfection: ‘Thus it

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becomes clear that to be a human being means to possess a feeling of inferiority which constantly presses towards its own conquest. [...] The greater the feeling of inferiority that has been experienced, the more powerful is the urge to conquest and the more violent the emotional agitation. The criterion which Adler developed in the 1920s and the 1930s to distinguish the neurotic from the normally adjusted adult was that of ‘sense of community’ (Gemeinschaftsgefühl), namely the individual’s ability to cope with social situations. Whilst the ideally normal individual enjoys an ideal level of the ‘sense of community’, the neurotic is more concerned with his own self-esteem and the personal goal of superiority.

The will to power is a persistent theme in Hostovský’s work and possibly derives from a fusion of the Adlerian model of the drive from inferiority to superiority with literary (Faustus) and philosophical (Nietzsche) depictions of the figure of the dissatisfied seeker and of the normal bounds he is willing to transgress. Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power means, for example, that action is discriminated on the basis of the strength or weakness of will which it entails, rather than by any reference to notions of good and evil:

This world [...] my Dionysian world of eternal self-creation and eternal self-destruction, this mystery world of twofold voluptuous delight, my ‘beyond good and evil’, without goal unless the joy of the circle is a goal, without will unless it is the circle’s good will toward itself — do you want a name for this world? A solution of all its riddles? A light for you too, you who are the best concealed, the strongest, the most intrepid, the most midnightly of men? This world is the will to power and nothing else besides. And you too are that will to power, and nothing else besides.

In Hostovský’s interpretation of the will to power, as the self’s importance is aggrandized so other social commitments are reneged; ethical ideals (notions of responsibility, the concept of right and wrong) are sacrificed to aesthetic ideals (the perfect fulfilment of oneself), and people and things serve only as rungs leading up the ladder to one’s goal. Betrayal of others is often a feature of the aspirant’s drive to power, as the aspirant can only be loyal to himself and to his ambition (Nietzschean authenticity). The logical consequence of

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3 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power [1908], New York, 1968, no. 1067.
Nietzsche’s world as a product of the will seems to be solipsism. Nietzsche’s principle of authenticity — his belief in the unconditional value of Self-fulfilment and ‘becoming’ — is perhaps a tenet upheld by all Supermen. The epigraph to Ztracený stín is taken from Lautréamont’s ingeniously witty Les Chants de Maldoror (from Book 1, chapter 8) and constitutes an ironization by the implied author of the narrator’s hypertrophic imagination: ‘Jsem prý synem ženy a muže.../Podivné! Myslil jsem, že jsem víc.’ Lautréamont’s Maldoror is a remorseless opponent of God and man, rejecting all moral constraints with no trace of repentance; indeed, the reader’s sophistication is constantly challenged by the author, with dandyesque posturing, in an ironic reversal of the conventional author’s mock modesty topos: ‘It is not right that everyone should read the pages which follow; only a few will be able to savour this bitter fruit with impunity. Consequently, shrinking soul, turn on your heels and go back before penetrating further into such uncharted, perilous wastelands.’

The first measure in attaining power involves, then, demarcating a line between the self and other ‘shrinking soul(s)’, as exemplified by Dostoevskii’s Raskol'nikov, for whom the world is divided between lice and men. One might differentiate here between elevation of the individual which arises from paranoia about his social status or his sense of his absurdity in the world, and an election he believes conferred on him by virtue of his superior talents, as the former is driven by anxiety about one’s inferiority (one thinks of Gogol’s, Dostoevskii’s and Kafka’s clerks, and Hostovský’s Bašek), the latter by the fear of not realizing, or lacking the courage to realize, one’s superiority (the

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5 Both Bašek and Raskol’nikov feel oppressed by their surroundings. ‘At last he began to feel suffocated and claustrophobic in this little yellow room that was more like a cupboard or trunk. His eyes and his brain craved space’ (Crime and Punishment, trans. David McDuff, London, 1991, p. 73). ‘Nemohl jsem nikdy dlouho vydřez přet děř toto děře, kde byl velmi špatný vzduch a kde vše kolem dokola již po několika hodinách bylo nudně známé’ (ZS, p. 13). This feeling of being trapped acts as a metaphor for a hemmed-in consciousness.
6 As in Dostoevskii, the motif of the protagonist overhearing a conversation which acts as a spur to action because of the protagonist’s identification with the subject being discussed (sometimes the conversation is directly about him or her) is also used by Hostovský: see, for example, ‘Pan Lorenz’ and Ztracený stín (the protagonists overhear conversations which they relate to their jobs being threatened), Žďár (Kamil overhears his sister and her friend discussing how ugly he is), or Tři noci (Věra overhears a conversation in a bookshop between an arrogant man, whom she identifies as her alter ego, and Dr Freund, whom she befriends as a result of this encounter).
anxiety of the intellectual). The latter also draws on aspects of the
Künstlerroman, for the artist, at least for the Romantics and thereafter, is the
bearer of spiritual life, and in Hostovský the talented artistic figure is prone to
Messianism or titanism. Goodheart writes of the Romantics that they are
possessed of a superstitious belief that at the bottom of the abyss a miracle
awaits them, a miracle that will transform them, make them whole and
powerful; they just need courage to take the plunge, ‘And the moment of truth
belongs to a hidden self remote from the normal workaday self of which one’s
character is made.’ This aspect of Romantic sensibility surfaces in
Hostovský’s work as an expression of hubris. In Všeobecné spiknutí, for
example, when Jan Bareš has to meet with his former schoolfriend Sturm (now
in the direct service of Hitler), his personality undergoes a radical change so
that the man who emerges to meet Sturm is ‘ten, kdo ve mně léta čekal na
oprávodovou příležitost k neodvolatelnému proslouvu a k osudnému gestu’ (VS,
p. 69). Bareš’s incipient megalomania leads him to fantasize that the
Czechoslovak President, at whose request the meeting is held, is now the
supreme manager of heaven and earth.

Generally, Hostovský’s pre-war works depict characters distinguishing
themselves through escape from their social status:* Ervín Gerwald in ‘Dva
židé’ and Pavel in Ghetto v nich persuade themselves they are more ‘civilized’
(that is, less Jewish) than other Jews; for Bašek, an act of vengeance is a means
of distinguishing himself from the mechanized clerks with whom Ztracený stín
begins; Körner, who lives parasitically on fantasies about important people,

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7 Eugene Goodheart, The Cult of the Ego: The Self in Modern Literature, Chicago and
8 The desire for power can be motivated by revenge and, although the revenge may be
directed at a specific person or institution (as, for example, in ‘Pan Lorenz’ and Ztracený
stín), it seems to be fuelled by an obsessive wish to get even with the whole world. In
Václav Řezáč’s Černé světlo (Prague, 1940), the cowardly narrator Karel is the object of
an April-fool joke at school and assumes that the children’s laughter derives from a
contempt for him, ‘Nebudu plakat a nebudu, ale jednou se vyrovnám s vami se všemi’ (p.
62); the plural ‘you’ he wants to avenge is not just the group of people in the classroom,
but the world in which he has been made to feel humiliated.
9 The desire for power in Hostovský’s work may also represent a rejection of passivity
(another Nietzschean bête noire) and of any form of predetermined fate. His works are
full of similes and metaphors suggesting that human beings are passive. In Ztracený stín,
the clerks are called ‘živé loutky’ (p. 13), Mása is ‘jakou loutku’ (p. 101), Bašek feels that
he becomes a ‘živá loutka’ (p. 153); in Případ profesora Körnera, Osvald thinks Marta is
a ‘živá loutka’ (p. 163); old Karnet cuddles Jiří ‘jakou s loutkou’ (p. 203); in ‘Pan Lorenz’
the Excelsior café is described as a ‘mumraj lidi’ (CKP, p. 67); Alexandr’s ‘chůze i
when exalted by the knowledge that he is going to die increasingly believes that he is privy to a higher wisdom; for Kamil in Žhář his indirect implication in arson is a means of distracting attention from his ugliness. From Dům bez pána onwards, however, Hostovský’s works focus more on the failure — or the fear of failure — and the conceit of the talented individual. In Sedmkrát, for example, Ondřej seems to echo Nietzsche in his belief that he is above the common herd like a poetic Übermensch: ‘přátelství s Kavalským mi častěji a častěji připomene mou izolovanost od lidského stáda. [...] Býti básníkem nebo jít s básníkem znamená pokoušet se o nadlidskou moc a sílu, znamená to chvíle titánského velikášství, odpadlictví a rouhání’ (p. 119). In his blasphemy, Ondřej is also striking a Faustian bargain in his friendship with the Mephistophelean figure of Kavalský. One of Sedmkrát’s Nazis is concealed under the guise of a lavatory attendant: his lexis is Nietzschean, suggesting power and cunning (in place of the term ‘madman’, for example, he prefers to use ‘creative talent’), and he regularly translates words as they are ordinarily understood by their value in his own scheme of desires, ‘Řikávám nežádoucí místo zakázaný, protože konec konců všechno je dovoleno lidem zdatným’ (SHU, p. 95). In Cizinec hledá být, when Julius Wagner is asked by his son (who suspects his father of having been a Nazi) what was spoken about with his pupils at home in Vienna, Wagner’s response is to allege a poor memory, although what he does reveal has strong Nietzschean overtones, ‘Snad o tom, jak třeba cvičit vůli, přemáhat lidskou slabost, držet na uzdu vůně, jak splývat s lidem a vystupovat nad lidi’ (p. 60). Similarly, in the work of other exponents

pohyby připomínalou loutky’ (TS, p. 117); and in Dům bez pána, Emil, on arriving home, feels ‘že se měním z mechanické loutky v živoucího, osvobozeného člověka’ (pp. 12–13), while in his marriage with Klára he and she are like ‘živé mumiie’ (p. 164). The reason for the frequency of these similes may reside partly in the Romantic depiction of the urban environment as the external embodiment of a petrified space of the self and the emblem of alienation, with its mechanized living — the rhythmic clanking of cars and trams, surging crowds and the din of traffic — and yet spiritual lifelessness. In contrast to the lyricization of the countryside in Černá tlapa, its air, its colour, its vistas, and, metaphorically, a space in which one may be reborn, the city represents death in Ztracený stín, ‘Město se podobalo hrobce, nebesa do ní pohřbívala zmesný den. V ulicích zazářily světlný jako svěčky kolem rakve’ (p. 23). It is the existential space in which the self wanders, going round in circles in suspended time. These similes also suggest, however, that people are existing only in a mechanical, passive way — or, at least, this is the focalization through the narrator: he must face either being as ‘dead’ as the people he sees around him or trying to become a mover of these inanimate ‘pieces’ and so assert free-will over his own fate. Hostovský develops this notion into a battle between individuality and conformity in his post-war work.
of the psychological ‘analytical’ novel in Czech, representations abound of the conceited individual believing in his superiority over others: one thinks, for example, of Řezáč’s Karel (Černé světlo), who occupies the attic space in his uncle’s house, a metaphorical representation of his ‘elevated’ status since he feels that only the heavens are above him and all mankind beneath him, ‘Noc a hvězdy jsou nebezpeční společníci, všechno je pod nimi tak malíčké, krom tebe sama. Ty narůstáš. Vládu nad věcmi a lidmi’,10 or the protagonist of Havlíček’s 1937 novel Neviditelný, who believes that cruel Fate alone has deprived him of his rewards, ‘Není lidské moci, která by mě mohla udržet v zajetí, kdybych sám nechtěl zůstat’.11 The reader, however, is encouraged by the implied author to treat with suspicion the boundary between the elevated self and debased others. That hubris will inexorably be followed by nemesis is a moral tenet which characterizes many psychological ‘analytical’ prose works.

In Hostovský’s work power creates an appetite for more power: the reasons for seeking power (revenge, self-protection, the defence of others) are brushed aside by the sheer enjoyment, sometimes surprise, of executing power and by a fantasy of one’s own omnipotence. Power seems always to have almost narcotic properties, to stupefy and to create addicts of its possessors. In ‘Příběh dobrodruha Šimona Korčína’, the eponymous ‘hero’, forgetting that he is in the service of God and has been specifically counselled by God’s messengers against excessive pride in assisting to topple the local dictator, Renpir, begins to think himself the most powerful man in Liossa as he explodes Renpir’s powder-kegs, ‘to celé divadlo zmaru posedlo Korcina opilou radostì’ (p. 56). He begins to dance on the spot like a madman, ‘Zapomněl na sedm hostitelů, zapomněl na své poslání, jen zkázou a svou mocí se opájel’ (ibid.). Just as drugs alter a person’s perception of himself and the world — apparently changing his personality — so Hostovský suggests that power creates a loss, and not a reinforcement, of the self because of its illusoriness. Hodrová makes the point also that, in the novel of lost illusions, while the hero may think that his journey into the ‘world’ will result in a wider development and fulfilment

10 Václav Řezáč, Černé světlo, Prague, 1940, p. 108.
of his personality, 'vývoj hrdiny [...] paradoxně nespočívá v hledání identity, ale naopak v cestě k její ztrátě a rozptýlení'.

_Lying and Illusion_

Hostovský’s preoccupation with power is closely related to the phenomenon of lying in these works. Characters usually lie out of revenge or shame. In the first case, lying becomes an exertion of power because it is usually based on being privy to knowledge of someone’s secret. In the second case, lying constitutes part of constructing a fictive identity, as in the case of the Czech barman Fred in _Všeobecné spiknutí_, who, when he came to America, ceased corresponding with his friends and relations, changed his name, fabricated a new past for himself and told everyone that he came from Hungary. His powerful Uncle Petr, who visited Europe once every five years, had told Fred that America was not a place for weaklings and that the future belonged only to the powerful, ‘když člověk v Americe chce být silný, jít jen se silnými a rozšípívat, co mu stojí v cestě, musí zapomenout, odkud přišel a kym byl’ (p. 221). The exposure of Fred’s deceit leads to his suicide because he cannot cope with the fact that people know that he is ‘odníkud’ and has nothing to live for, ‘každý má svou lež, která je mu vše drahá. Každý z nás je trochu tím Fredem od “Admirála”’ (VS, p. 299). In _Sedmkrát Ondřej_, depressed at the dullness of his life, begins by going into bars and imagining different identities for himself, ‘lež navěšoval na lež a budoval z nich kolem sebe vymyslený život’ (SHU, p. 40); his lying arises out of self-disgust, out of the realization that he hates his job, his boss, his colleagues and friends, ‘sebou samým, že se štítí své beznadějnosti, své zmrzačené ruky, své zbabělosti — a že beznadějně miluji jiný život, který jen chvástavě předstírám, ale který nikdy nedokáži stvořit’ (SHU, p. 41). Lying develops as a flirtation with individuality, a way of raising one’s head above a parapet of mediocrity or inferiority. Pynsent, writing on the

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12 Hodrová, _Hledání románu_, p. 209.
13 Hostovský is also treating the shame of being a refugee in America. Quoting Mickiewicz, Masaryk (who correctly sees Dostoevskii’s work as abounding in lies and liars, and has a section in his _The Spirit of Russia_ on this subject, ‘Lying and Hypocrisy’ [pp. 82–87]) interprets people as lying out of fear, lying when they lack religious, political and social freedom, ‘the slave’s only defence is betrayal’ (Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, _The Spirit of Russia_, Vol. 3, ed. George Gibian, London, 1967, p. 85). The liar always lives in fear and bolsters one lie with another (ibid., p. 86).
Decadent self, interprets the lie as a means of maintaining the ‘Self’ of the Decadent:

First, the Decadent [...] regards truth as a banal bourgeois imposition. Second, because one is necessarily enserfed by any truth one accepts, truth threatens one’s individuality. Third, one cannot possess but only share truth, whereas one can possess a lie, exert power through a lie, be completely individual in a lie.  

Lying, because it often appears to be an impregnable defence of the self, is the refuge of the cowardly. In Ghetto v nich, Pavel, for example, recognizes that he is a coward when he lies to Valeš about his motive in betraying his father to Jana, alleging that he had lied to protect Jana’s illusions about her father, ‘Chápete, jaká to byla ohavná lež, hnsná už proto že mi je nikdo nikdy nemohl prokázat? A touto lží chtěl jsem napřímit svou sehnutou páteř’ (GVN, pp. 61–62). In Černá tlupa, when old Karnet lies to his grandson about General Faltýn hitting him, he is conscious of the fact that no one there can refute his version of events, although he nervously seems to expect to be struck by a retributive thunderbolt at any moment, ‘Umlkl a bázlivě se rozhlédl. Nepootevřely se dveře, neposlouchá ho někdo, nechce mu někdo vyrvat tak dlouho a marně hledanou pravdu? Ne, všude je ticho’ (ČT, p. 109). These confessions of cowardice (and, in particular, old Karnet’s anxiety) suggest that none of these liars — while mindful that his mendacity is safe from exposure — believes that his lying is of no moral consequence nor poses any threat to him.

The liar is primarily required to be an adept psychologist as his comprehension of other people constitutes his weapon against them. Like Shakespeare’s Iago, he must fashion his lies according to the personality of his listener. Schlesinger, for example, is proud of his chameleon ability to play different roles, ‘Jsem skvělý psycholog. Dovedu ohmatat půdu, vim, jak s jedním každým jednat — híhíhi’ (DD, p. 146). He is paradoxically reliant on reason, but reason is also his Achilles heel because love and faith, for example, are beyond the realm of reason. Thus the schemer fails to accommodate in his well-laid plans the contingency of emotion. In Řezáč’s Černé světlo, for example, Karel tries to persuade the musician Klenka that his sweetheart is a

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young girl who does not know her own mind and that Klenka can save her further suffering by avoiding contact with her. Klenka retorts, 'Nemáš právo takhle o ní mluvit. Nemůže být taková, jak jsi říkal. Cítím to, vím to.' Lying is also the manifestation of a contempt for others since it assumes that they do not have the wit to discriminate appearance from reality.

Characters hide behind social masks because of their own sense of inadequacy and their need for social approval; however, the process of wearing this mask becomes increasingly a form of adaptation to social identity and a denial or repression of personal identity, so that if the mask is removed what is left is a self which has become so divorced from its means of expression that the self effectively functions like two different people. In 'Příběh krejčího Václava Hurdtá' the tailor's words begin to take on a life of their own and an almost Gothic horror is unleashed in these creations' destroying their creator (Hurdt begins to go mad) because he has tampered with his own nature: 'Nezbláznil se, jenom slova se proti němu vzbouřila: A to proto, že téměř celý život padělal svou řeč. Padělal ji tak dlouho, až se vytrhla z otěží myšlenek a přecházela automaticky přes rty, neslyšena uchem svého pána, nehledána jeho rozumem, nekontrolována jeho vůli' (TS, p. 98). So consumed has Hurdt been by his social mask, his vain cultivation of an image of propriety and generosity, that he becomes a puppet to his social identity like a personaggio from Pirandello. Hurdt experiences himself as other. It may be a Freudian feature of Hostovský's prose-writing that the persistent repression of conscience, of what the subject feels to be his 'natural' response in a given situation, inexorably leads to a breakdown of personality, which the subject experiences as a cataclysmic irruption of reality. Like Hurdt, Jan Bareš feels that his professional success (he is an author of television and film scripts) has been achieved by the sacrifice or perversion of his 'natural' self (the decay of the man and writer Jan Bareš is symbolized by his inability to sign his own name). He considers himself a salesman of ideas, counterfeiting life in order to make a living, rather than a writer: 'Ale od té chvíle, kdy jsem začal psát výhradně o tom, co život není, zradil jsem svůj poměr ke skutečnosti. A tahle zrada, k níž jsem asi dlouho dospíval, se mi nevyplatila. Skutečnost nakonec zradila mne' (VS, p. 270).

15 Řezáč, Černé světlo, p. 234.
Related to Hostovský’s exploration of lying and of imagined worlds is his treatment of self-deception, for self-deception is the lie made true by the self, the realization of the imagined world. To deceive him- or herself the individual must engage in a process of forgetting; s/he must no longer remember that what s/he now believes to be true s/he once thought as false. Such a suppression or selective emendation of memory is exemplified by the mother in ‘Pan Lorenz’ who, unable to acknowledge her poverty, assumes an air of wealth, asking taxi-drivers how much they would charge for a trip to Vienna: ‘Tváří se, jako by neuznávala skutečnost, nikdy se nepodívá pravdé v tvář. Byla kdysi bohatá a dosud se nesnířila s chudobou. Neuznává ji. Neuznává sto věcí’ (CKP, p. 39). Even her dead son’s attempts at a swindle are translated by her into a righteous pursuit of the truth: ‘Vžila se do bratrovy lží natolik, až jí uvěřila. Už ani nehledala důvody, jimiž by své krajně pochybné domněnky podepřela. Sekční šéf Hardt byl náhle naším příbuzným’ (p. 47). For Hostovský, self-deception attests to the most fundamental form of escapism and infantilism, as he demonstrates in the analogous cases of Körner and old Karnet in Případ profesora Körnera and Černá tlupa: ‘Pak si začne hrát se vzpomínkami jako dítě se stavebníci, boří, staví, poopravuje, celou minulost si pozmění. Jen proto, aby nemusil uvažovat, aby utekl skutečnosti’ (ČT, p. 70). Because Karnet’s peace of mind relies on the satisfaction that his children are happy, their unhappy letters are selectively edited in his mind, ‘chtýtil se dvou, tři slov — a hra se stavebníci útěchy začala znovu’ (ibid.). After assisting his one-time friend Faltýn to clear his debts, Karnet encounters Faltýn, now a general, in the street (a street-scene reminiscent of Gogol’ or Dostoevskii’s Double), and is met by indifference and rejection. Karnet responds by burning his correspondence with Faltýn and running away if people ever mention Faltýn’s name, ‘Nechtěl o něm vědět, nechtěl na něho myslet, vyškrtil ho ze svých plánů i ze své minulosti’ (p. 75). In Případ profesora Körnera escape takes the form of an internal theatre: Körner is more preoccupied by the images he has fashioned of people than he is by their real existence. So remote is he from the physical world that even his fantasy picture of Osvald necessitates disembodiment, the reduction of Osvald to his words and thoughts. Osvald’s cuckoldling him is lent additional irony because it emphasizes Osvald’s corporeal existence, and thus betrays Körner’s incorporeal conception. His
reaction to the discovery of his wife’s adultery is that of a child whose game has been spoiled: ‘Opředl se svými kreténskými vidinami o lidech, neznal je, znal jen jejich stíny, a oni ho okrádali, podváděli!’ (PPK, p. 34). The characters of old Karnet and Körner are perhaps descendants of Dostoevskii’s archetypal Underground Man who can find no middle ground between his dreams, in which he can fantasize the most perfect plots, and reality, which is beset by the chaos of contingency.

The notion that life is no longer concrete in its foundations, but rather contrived and benefiting those who are tricksters and can trade in a counterfeit reality, constitutes a major theme of Hostovský’s work. In the absence of moral prohibitions, the will to power is served not only by force but by deception — he who dares wins, a view propounded by Jindřich in ‘Pan Lorenz’: ‘Teď prohrávají v životě jen lidé průměrní, těch je většina, a nadprůměrní jsou ti, kteří umějí předstírat něco, co není’ (p. 27). The interplay between a nihilistic vision of life in which ‘everything is permitted’ and the vitalism of ‘lived life’ is perhaps Hostovský’s strongest point of connection with Dostoevskii. For Hostovský, man becomes a two-dimensional parody of himself, a shadow, just as language becomes sloganized and devoid of its original meaning, a notion expressed in Sedmkrát by Ondřej’s planned essay on contemporary society as depicted by modern literature, Předstíraný život: ‘Dokáže, že dnešní člověk chodí většinou po půdě, která neexistuje, že platí pomyslnými hodnotami, obchodoje s vymyšleným zbožím a mluví slovy, z nichž původní smysl vyprchal’ (p. 99). Whilst I do not wish to suggest that Hostovský is a relativist, his work demonstrates an awareness and fear of a world becoming increasingly Modernist in its foundations: certainty about one’s role or purpose in life seems unattainable; truth is indeterminate; language is an assembly of words that communicate nothing. Hostovský’s concern for the state of the world emerges from his depiction of disintegration, of atomized societies and anxious loners, and there is little offered in Hostovský’s Lebenswelt to consolidate life, to endow it with a unifying meaning. Pascal’s dictum that without Christian belief we shall become to ourselves what Nature and history will become to us, monsters and chaos, finds resonance in Hostovský’s work. Although Hostovský may proffer love as an ideal, it remains an abstraction in almost all his work. His general interest in psychology and psychiatry links up
to this theme of counterfeit realities, as well as to the execution of power and his nostalgia for a fairytale, chivalric, adventurous past. The age of romantic, swashbuckling heroes has gone, perhaps signalling the death of the man of action; the battles to be fought are not physical but psychological and one’s most dangerous assailant is oneself.

In Hostovský’s conception psychology is the new form of armoury, the means to power, and again he treats this armoury as a commonality extending from the relationships between ‘friends’ — ‘ale jsou to opravdu přátelé?’ — in which psychological intimidation and humiliation is such a prevalent feature, to the relationship between superpowers in which the application of fear has demonstrated success. In Půlnocní pacient, for example, while the Communists deploy fear as a means of exploiting the masses, the American intelligence services have a Psychological Warfare Institute. The papers previously submitted to the Institute by the psychologist Malik, on the mentality of Communist youth, on Stalin’s background and on the psychology of Party discipline, will assist the Americans in their plan to use radio broadcasts to bring about mass insanity behind the Iron Curtain. Colonel Howard, who works at the Institute, believes that it is not depraved to turn people’s own weaknesses against them, but normal and natural behaviour. Hostovský’s vision of the twentieth century is — like Dostoevskii’s of the nineteenth — nihilistic, perhaps because man lacks both the faith and the courage with which to counter his fear.

Relationships of Control and Humiliation

Hostovský’s predilection for portraying relationships in which a powerful person and a weak one are bound together, usually through exploitation of one by the other, may be tangentially linked to the preponderance of doubles and split personalities in his work. The powerful person functions like an alter ego for the weak person (often the narrator), exploiting his or her intimate knowledge of the other’s weaknesses, playing on the other’s insecurities, much in the same way that Dostoevskii’s Goliadkin Sr torments Goliadkin Jr. In Všeobecné spiknutí, for example, Jan Bareš’s first autobiographical novel,

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16 Miloš Pohorský, Afterword to Egon Hostovský’s Všeobecné spiknutí, Prague, 1969, p. 344, referring specifically to the group of friends gathered around Jan Bareš in the novel.
written while he is studying at Prague University, *Cestou podél stezky* (a play on Hostovský’s own *Stezka podél cesty*), is greeted with critical success and wins second prize in a competition in the spring. Bareš is unhappy, however, because he fears being exposed as a fraud, feeling unworthy of the acclaim; then in the autumn a vituperative article appears in the literary journal of the young generation, attacking the decadent bourgeois tastes of Czech literary criticism of which the pre-eminent example is Bareš’s debut. The author is Bareš’s tormentor, Beck, who attacks the novel in political terms (Beck considers himself part of the working-class intelligentsia). Beck succeeds in killing the writer in Bareš because he knows how to exploit Bareš’s weaknesses. Although the treatment of this interdependency is more psychologically complex in *Všeobecné spiknutí*, the relationship between Bareš and Beck has its forerunners in Hostovský’s previous works in the relationships between Ludvík and András in *Danajský dar*, Pavel and Frankl, and Pavel’s father and Karen in *Ghetto v nich*, Bašek and Merhaut in *Ztracený stín*, old Kornet and General Faltýn in *Černá tlupa*, Jindřich and Beck in ‘Pan Lorenz’, Barbara Greenová and Edita Phillipsova in *Dobročinný večírek*. The powerful person is also often the figure before whom the weak person most hopes to maintain a façade of their own strength precisely because the powerful person is for them the typification of power and strength: if the powerful person can accept the weak person as strong, then the latter assumes that he can bask in this reflected glory and garner the respect of others. The difference in social status between the weak and powerful often fosters these mutually dependent relationships: with the exception of *Körner* and *Černá tlupa*, money is at the centre of the action in all Hostovský’s pre-war novels. Economic thraldom also yokes the weak and the powerful together: in *Ghetto v nich*, economic necessity forces Pavel’s father into business with Karen, who exploits the ghetto for financial gain. In *Danajský dar*, Schlesinger similarly exploits others’ weakness for financial gain.

The converse aspect of these relationships is the powerful person’s need for weak people around him, perhaps to conceal his own weakness through exaggerating his strength. If he is to impress others by his power, the powerful person shows contempt for kindness because it suggests weakness and sentimentality, the antithesis of cunning reason and the will to power. In
Všeobecné spíknutí Bareš recalls how he realized in childhood that to be a leader, and to win the loyalty and respect of the street-gangs, it was necessary to find a hate-figure, so he had chosen the boy, Stanislaw Bílak, who worshipped him most. Although Bareš sometimes cried in secret for Bílak’s torment, he felt that he could not change his lot, ‘vždyť to by bylo tolik jako zničit vše, zač jsem já a má tlupa “bojovali”’ (VS, p. 31).

Humiliation before the powerful person denotes the failure of the weak person’s aspirations and the collapse of his illusions about himself. Thus in Ztracený stín, Bašek is shamed when Merhaut reveals that he knows Bašek had been lying when he said he was a managing clerk: ‘Kdyby kdokoliv jiný odkryl mé ubožáctví, nečítil bych se tak zahanben’ (ZS, p. 81). The unease which these relationships stimulate emanates from the total exposure of the self, the sudden sense that nothing about the self can be hidden; this heightens the subject’s perception that s/he is absurd in everyone’s eyes. These are the people before whom they have most tried to put on airs, but also before whom they have, in some cases, behaved in the most servile manner, believing that by ingratiating themselves they can be liked or respected by the other, ‘Proč právě on, on — před nímž jsem se prve tolik vypínal, odkryl mé … mé plebejství, nízké, žalostné, komické’ (ibid.).

Absurdity in others’ eyes usually leads, in Hostovský’s work, to a collapse of self. When Bareš shows Beck his sarcastic letters from Sturm, Beck’s outburst is directed at Bareš, whom he criticizes for his childishness, his insincerity, his uneducated upbringing, sentimentality, delusions of grandeur, cowardice, thick-headedness, ‘A místo abych vzplanul, začal jsem se v sobě hrostit. Jiří Beck mluvil asi půl hodiny a já neměl tušení, co mi vytýká, ale v zmatku svých citů dominoval strach z toho, že co slyším o svých vlastnostech, je pravda pravdoucí, o to horší pro mne, že jí nedovedu postřehnout’ (p. 43). By being undermined, the weak person is then at the powerful one’s bidding. Hostovský perhaps concurs with Lévi-Strauss’s point that ‘Le moi n’a pas de place entre un nous et un rien’.17

This has implications for Hostovský’s understanding of identity (suggesting that Hostovský believes a personal identity has no meaning, cannot survive, outside a social context). Psychological intimidation by others and the self’s

(often groundless) sense of guilt converge to destroy the self. In *Všeobecné spiknutí*, when Bareš writes a poem about one-sided friendship as a means of liberating himself from Beck’s grasp, he particularly likes the poem since he believes that it shows no influence from other poets. The poem describes the relationship between Bareš and Beck, the friendships in which one is fond of someone else who then takes advantage of one’s feelings, turning the first person into a clown and the second into a blackmailer. Beck suggests, however, that it has already been written by the German poet Hans Serab (in fact, a reverse reading of Bareš’s name). Bareš’s sense of shame and the desire to overcome Beck’s contempt mean that Bareš, undermined by his misplaced guilt, continues to help Beck. Beck’s undermining of Bareš’s work by attacking its supposed derivative nature also highlights the prevalent fear in the Hostovský protagonist that he is in some way unauthentic, that he may somehow be robbed of his precarious individuality at a stroke.

This form of psychological attrition is subtle because it deflects responsibility from the intimidators, who are never directly identifiable as the agents of someone’s collapse; they exercise their power over others, and the other’s low opinion of himself, to precipitate events. In *Ghetto v nich*, after Karen spreads rumours that the fire in the yard of Pavel’s father was an insurance swindle, public suspicion of Pavel’s father leads to his psychological disintegration: in a variation of the theme of self-deception, Pavel’s father begins to believe that he is guilty of a crime he had not committed, ‘Věřil, že si nutno Karená nadcházeti jako člověka, jenž nás má v hrsti, poněvadž je zasvěcen do nějakého našeho zločinu. A otec počal věřit, že se skutečně zločinu dopustil’ (*GVN*, pp. 15–16). Similarly, in *Žhár*, the barber Průša’s increasing anxiety that he is the prime suspect for two fires which have occurred in the community leads him to destroy his own property and to self-destruction. In *Cizinec hledá být*, the landlady Nosková is so adept at persecution that she can make one of her residents feel guilty for the wind slamming the door. The fact that guilt is pivotal to these relationships of control and humiliation may reflect one person’s morality and another’s amorality. Good people are rendered weak by their sense of decency; amoral people are not constricted by propriety — any means to an end is justified by
its efficacy.\footnote{Lautréamont’s Maldoror is an advocate of man behaving immorally to gain advantage: ‘Virtuous and well-meaning methods lead nowhere. You must bring into play more powerful levers, more cunningly contrived traps. [...] The end excuses the means.’}

The good person is instinctively generous; the power-seeker uses apparent generosity as a means of exploiting others’ sense of guilt: Hostovský points out that the expectation of gratitude, for example, is no more than egotism. Though old Karnet has been humiliated by General Faltyn (ČT), he never seeks to remind Faltýn of how he had assisted him in the past. By contrast, the uncles in Danajský dar and ‘Pan Lorenz’, with their reproachful reminders of their good deeds, seek to coerce others through their ‘generosity’. Anyone from whom one needs help has power over one. In Cizinec hledá být, Marek cannot find the quiet room he craves, since any offers to assist him are soon revealed to have strings attached,\footnote{Kautman argues — in slightly emotive terms and also on the basis of hearsay — that Hostovský’s critical account of America, and especially of the behaviour of New York landlords and landladies, led to the novel’s rejection by American publishers (František Kautman, \textit{Polarita našeho věku v díle Egonu Hostovského}, Prague, 1993, p. 130).} as in the cases of the volatile landlady Franková who desires company or Wagner who desires someone to relieve his anxiety and to deal with his emotionally turbulent son. The lovesick Woolfová is disturbed by the fact that Marek wants nothing from her since that means she cannot have power over him. The autocratic, ‘socialist’ Nosková, who cannot trust people if she does not know their secrets, and has such power over her residents that they really believe themselves to be social outcasts saved by her good grace, is constantly probing for Marek’s Achilles’ heel.

\footnote{Indifference to life may be the consequence of the coward’s belief that he is an outsider in society, and indifference to social conventions leads the immoralist to conceive of life as a game: if the outsider feels that his position in life is not particularly advantageous in the first place, he may feel he has nothing to lose by elaborate bluffs. Hostovský frequently uses chess and card-games as metaphors for this kind of power play: Bašek, when his self-confidence is at its most inflated, reflects ‘že hráji s žalostně špatnými hráči partii šachu’ (ZS, p. 75); he remembers the estate of Olga’s parents and feels that he is ready to steal her from Frybl, ‘vitězný tah s dýchající figurou na živě šachovnici uzrál již v mé mozku. Nyní jen stačí táhnout a ...’ (ibid., p. 120); Osvald sees himself playing a game of chance with Marta, feels that he has ‘prohrál’ and that he had ‘Vsadil všechno na poslední kartu’ (PPK, p. 83); in ‘Příběh básníka Zdeňka Ondříka’, Zdeněk is intoxicated by his sense of invincibility, ‘že má talisman, jenž z něho činí nepřemozitelného hráče. Nestarál se, kam postupuje se svými vítěznými figurkami a nevěděl, jaké jméno má to, co miluje. Barevný vír to byl a tančil mu ve dne v noci před očima’ (TS, pp. 108–09).}
Hostovský’s protagonists sometimes confront the strength of the bully with violence, suggesting that strength can be combatted only by strength (rather than by reason, for example): in Dobročínny večírek, Wunderlich twists Julius’s hand with force to make him listen to him (DV, p. 101); analogously, in Nezvěstný, Borek crushes Matějka’s knuckles to stop him leaving his hospital bed. Hostovský’s bullies respect those who are violent against them (because they are stronger): it is also the lack of pity (or sentimentality) inherent in violence which stirs the admiration of the immoralist. In Nezvěstný, when Borek strikes the bully Kapoun with a revolver, ‘Obličej Kapounův kromě krve byl zohyzděn výrazem nenávistné úcty, jež za malou slovní almužnu se změní v psovsku oddanost, ale při nejmenším projevu soucitné slabosti přejde v útočné, drzé a štítívé pohrdání’ (p. 140). Any compassion on Borek’s part arouses Kapoun’s contempt. The immoralist also celebrates the moralist’s transgression, the manifestation of energy and cruelty which is anathema to the latter: Batailles, writing on Sade, suggests that ‘That which destroys a being, also releases him: besides, release is always the ruin of a being who has set limitations on his propriety’. The moralist’s sense of shock is also precipitated by the alterity of his own body and the loss of himself: it is no longer the other person he fears, but his own disembodiment. Although Borek is ashamed after beating Kapoun, when it happens he is overwhelmed by a ‘monstrous’ calm, in which he is aware that if he applies more pressure with his knees or hands he can murder Kapoun, ‘Jeho klid byl az nestvûmû, jako by se zmënil v stroj. Nebo jako by mechanicky kladivkem zatloukal hřebíky cí štípal dříví’ (p. 138). Batailles writes of ‘the incompatibility between violence, which is blind, and the lucidity of consciousness’, which intimates a temporary ecstasis. In the short story ‘Eliza’ — where Rudolf Gruber hits a German he suspects of spying on him — the narrator associates the blindness of violence with a suspended state of shock, ‘Nedovedete si představit, jak podivný pocit se váž zmocní, tlučete-li po prvě v životě někoho do hlavy. Nesmírně se leknete první mlaskavé rány. Leknutí vás tak posedne, že pak musíte tlouci slepě, křečovitě a zděsile, čím dál silnější a silnější, nic než tlouci a

22 Ibid.
The onset of the victim’s bleeding stops the violence (Bareš, for example, stops hitting Beck when he sees his blood), as though the visual consequence of the moralist’s actions returns him suddenly to himself.

The Outsider as ‘Insider’

Although Hostovský is no ideologue, he is a social idealist and, like Dostoevskii, he shows an awareness of the psychologically crippling effects of poverty and social status. Both Ztracený stín and ‘Pan Lorenz’ treat, first, the vulnerability and desperation of people who feel their livelihoods threatened, and, second, the mentality of people who take enormous risks because they feel they have nothing to lose. Both Pavel in Ghetto v nich and Bašek in Ztracený stín find themselves outsiders because of their ignorance of the demands of bourgeois society. Pavel is inappropriately dressed, refused entry to a ball (and does not know how to dance). Bašek, because of his lack of education, is unable to join the stratum — one of theatre boxes, tennis, balls and whist — to which he attaches himself: he remains an outsider because of his social status, but also because of his consciousness of this ‘inferiority’ and the extraordinary lengths to which he consequently goes to compensate for it. At the dinner party at which all the main characters of the novel are present, Bašek’s behaviour consists in mimicry, based on remembered images of self-confidence (in this case that of an ‘important’ person who may have been a poet or a politician): ‘Nyní jsem ho bezděky napodoboval v jeho sebevědomém rozhližení. Experimentoval jsem dokonce: zvýšil jsem hlas — a hned hovor ztichl. Rozhodil jsem řečnický obě paže a každá ruka ulovila dva páry očí’ (ZS, p. 120). Bašek is not alone, however, in his longing for power; the world of Ztracený stín is altogether one of ruthless competition for dominance. The weak Frybl voices a longing for power which stresses its source in the indispensability of the self and the compulsive need for power over others, ‘Myslite si: má tovární, dělníky, jmění — že ano? Ach, to je vnější, to je mimo mne! Dokud vás není někomu třeba tak nutně jako vzduchu — pak jste zbytečný darmošlap’ (pp. 38–39). The apotheosis of power is not then material, but psychological: power connotes the ability to influence other people to action or, more sinisterly, to control the way in which they receive and perceive the world. Bašek’s visit to the lawyer Piroh’s office elaborates this notion.
further with a whole hierarchical chain of domination: Piroh’s two workers are described as automata who resemble their superior and hang on his every word, ‘Bylo v něm otrocké ponížení, očekávání rozkazu, odhodlání k bezmyšlenkovitému následování každého pokynu’ (p. 86). A descending pyramid of weakness is revealed: Bašek, who has just been humiliated by Merhaut, slaps Piroh in order to reassert his authority, and Piroh feigns friendship with Bašek in front of his automata to reassert his authority over them. Bašek’s lie that he is a managing clerk is induced also by a desire for superiority: when he notices Olga’s condescension towards the maid with whom he identifies, he feels the need to elevate his status above hers, ‘nebot’ se mi zdálo, že jsou naše postavení silně podobná’ (ZS, p.28).

This desire for egocentric relationships may become a transference of one’s image onto others who are needed to reflect the subject’s sense of importance back to himself. The narcissist looks round and sees himself; in fact, everything of the world — or as he sees it, in a microcosm — consists only of himself: ‘Cítí jsem, jak v tomto uzavřeném prostoru, v tomto ohraničeném čase, v pohledech, v hovoru i v gestech — jsem obsazen. Chápal jsem svou nevšední důležitost pro těchto pět mozků, větřil jsem svou přítomnost v myšlenkách všech kolemšedících — a to mně lahodilo’ (ZS, pp. 119–20). The need for the specificity (in that closed space, in that demarcated time) of existence suggests a consciousness whose grip on reality is so flimsy that it fears that it might become lost. These parasitical personalities use relationships with others primarily as paths to self-gratification, allowing the self to suck in events around itself and shape them according to its desire. Körner’s imagination is guarded with an almost jealous exclusivity, for he is both titillated and frustrated by the private lives of others. Körner is offended, for example, because Holšík has not shown him his poems. The private lives of others constitute a threat to the egocentric, as they undermine or confine his sense of power over other people. Körner’s motive for divulging Holšík’s night-time activities is revenge for the fact that Holšík is unknown to him, ‘Ted’, ted’ bude demaskován, ted’ ho pozná, ted’” (p. 26), and yet his informing on Holšík also becomes an appropriation of Holšík’s image, for Körner fabricates his drunkenness. Körner’s experience of the world refers continually back to himself. The real and the imagined worlds are fatally conjoined for
him: there is little between Körner's anticipation of the world and his experience of it — both produce the same emotional effects. A whole circularity of logic is exemplified, for example, in Körner's psychology, in which fear seems to be the dominant emotion: 'Trochu se zpotil strachem, aby se nerozšínil. Ale byl-li rozrušen, tedy jenom z tohoto strachu' (p. 20). This psychological make-up seems to correspond to the psychology of Goethe's Werther, as Garber understands it, a mind which is self-sufficient in its own cycle of regeneration:

What Werther did was to create a self-perpetuating process of self-consumption. [...] The bitterness that comes from the recognition of enforced suffering is added to the sum of one's suffering, making one even more miserable and giving one even more reason to feel bitter. The hero feeds on his own substance and that feeding makes him grow; and the more he grows the more substance he has to feed on. The entire process, based on the perpetual replenishment of unhappiness, is circular and self-sustaining. As a result it establishes an independent mode of the self which needs little from outside except a cause for frustration.  

Furthermore, Goodheart's comments on Werther's conviction of his spiritual uniqueness could as easily be applied to Körner, 'The self (the I) is the ultimate referent of all of Werther's feelings and actions. His acts of sympathy are forms of self-indulgence: his compassion is the obverse of his egoism.'

For Bašek and Körner the external world has a crushing weight which seems capable of destroying them. The fear of phenomena escaping one's control evokes an unstable mind which projects itself onto its environment and yet fears being engulfed by this environment because the personalization of the relationship between the self and the outside world makes everything in the outside world a threat to the self. Körner's consciousness tries to anchor itself in others lest it be condemned to oblivion. Laing writes of the role of self-consciousness in the ontologically insecure person that:

Being aware of himself and knowing that other people are aware of him are a means of assuring himself that he exists, and also that they exist. [...] The need to gain a conviction of his own aliveness and the realness of things is, therefore, the basic issue in his existence. His way of seeking to gain such conviction is by feeling himself to be an object in the real

world; but, since his world is unreal, he must be an object in the world of someone else, for objects to other people seem to be real [...].

**Power and Ideology**

Hostovský’s wartime and post-war works broaden his treatment of power beyond the dynamics which affect relationships. Because of his concern with what he views as a widespread moral malaise, Hostovský becomes preoccupied with the dominant political ideologies which have affected Europe in the twentieth century, namely Nazism, Communism, and the competing East–West propaganda of the Cold War. Nazism, for example, informs *Sedmkrát, Úkryt, Cizinec hledá byt, Všeobecné spiknutí*, Communism *Nezvěstný* and the Cold War *Půlnocní pacient*. Hostovský is less interested in them as ideologies per se than in how they infect ordinary relationships and pose a threat to the subject’s individuality. Hostovský’s Nazis, for example, are not abstract evil men. In what may be a political gesture on the writer’s part, tackling the taboo of intelligentsia participation in the Nazi movement, Nazis are personalized — if in crude terms — as former friends (as in *Úkryt* and *Všeobecné spiknutí*), or indeed relations: in *Půlnocní pacient*, for example, Malik’s wife, Elsa Hess, is revealed to be in the higher echelon of the student Hitler Youth movement. Hostovský makes no attempt to define what he understands by Communism, and Nazism is conveyed only in vague terms in his work as the antipathy of Nature or as the personification of cruelty and madness. Hostovský’s only play, the satirical *Osvoboditel se vrací* (which also satirizes journalism and psychiatry), is perhaps an expression of disillusion with politics altogether. Set in the context of a civil war in the Republic of Kalinie, ruled by President Bols, the wife, son and daughter of the insurgent Gord are incarcerated in a castle. The fact that the third act of the play, after the President’s suicide and Gord’s arrival on a Kalinian island as a prelude to his assumption of power, opens in exactly the same manner as the first, makes the point in dramatic terms that

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26 In *Cizinec*, Marek says that no one has defined Fascism, but that he discerned in his former teacher, Wagner’s, work ‘mnohem spíše odvahu a sílu k smrti než k životu’ (CHB, p. 50). In *Všeobecné spiknutí*, Bareš declares that he does not have a concrete understanding of what Nazism means, ‘Ještě tak nejlíže by mělo k slovu zločinnost, kdyby v obsahu tohoto výpomocného synonyma byly také vždy prvky nějakého znetvoření a šílenství’ (VS, p. 68).
political change is cosmetic. Similarly, in Sedmkrát, one deduces from Marcel’s story about the politician who steals cigars Hostovský’s general point that human nature changes very little except in extreme circumstances, ‘To znamená: kradl doutniky jako stoupenec krajiní levice, jako radikální socialista i jako katolík’ (SHU, p. 18). Thus the politician will retain his immorality however the label of his affiliation may change.

For Hostovský, consequently, the overturn of old regimes never leads to a new morality, only to a new rhetoric camouflaging the same practices. That the language of the ‘new man’ is simply a carapace concealing the reptilian thoughts of old is reflected in a simple scene in Cizinec hledá byt, when the former Nazi and philosopher, the vainglorious Wagner, metaphorically emerges from his external shell on his way home in the New York mayor’s car, ‘Je úhlavní nepřijemné, dovoluje vlastním smyslům a citům vlahou lázeň v myšlenkách nikterak nových a dokonce již ne objektivních nebo výbojních’ (CHB, pp. 24–25). Language is vulnerable to political relativism: one regime’s ‘outlaw’ is another’s ‘hero’, particularly as the new regime is always determined to define itself against the old. Hostovský first treats this in the short story ‘Záhada’, and then in Osvoboditel se vrací: the inspector of the secret police accuses the officer and gaoler, Kars, of being naive when he suggests that the talk of revolution makes them sound like traitors, ‘Co bylo před rokem zrada, může být dnes něco jiného, například opatrnost, za týden to může být proziravost a za měsíc hrdinný odboj’ (OSV, p. 7). The theme of the mutation of language, which is closely connected to Hostovský’s examination of the execution of power, dominates Osvoboditel se vrací. Hostovský parodies the language of politics, which carries symbolic value for people but is devoid of meaning: ‘liberation’, ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’, ‘revolution’. To read the play allegorically as a representation of Czechoslovak political changes is to diminish Hostovský’s broader concern with language and its semantic atrophy. The cognitive gap between the promise of language and the reality it delivers was a concern Hostovský began to consider in his early work, as for example in Danajský dar and Černá tlupa, where the enthusiastic shouts of ‘Mír! Svoboda!’ (DD, p. 76) marking the end of the First World War failed to accord with people’s experience of peace.
Hostovský supports the notion that real freedom begins with the individual's battle to think independently and to build relationships with those around him or her.

Hostovský's work attests to the corruption in politics, the whitewashing of political figures and national histories. Just as the barman Fred in *Všeobecné spiknutí* fashions himself a new personality and past on this arrival to America (and America constitutes a *tabula rasa* for the creation of identity), so Wagner in *Cizinec* represents the chameleon politician, changing his colours as the prevailing political ideologies shift, and successfully jettisoning — at least publicly — his Viennese past by moving to America in 1930. He is described by a newspaper as an anti-Fascist academic, for whom the Allies and the new Austrian government are preparing a special role in restoring Austrian cultural life; in Vienna in 1927, he had written a proto-Fascist work which led one of his pupils to Nazism and eventually to death by execution for treason. In the private sphere, however, Wagner cannot fool his son into thinking that his father is anything but a charlatan, 'Naletěl ti?' (p. 26). The whitewashing of Wagner by himself and by the Press has its analogue in the whitewashing of history by Czechoslovakia, which Hostovský treats in *Všeobecné spiknutí*. At a meeting of Czech diplomats (the counsellor Arnošt Marel, his younger colleague Hlavsa, the press attaché Berka and the narrator, Jan Bares) in Washington in spring 1943, Marel's advocacy of the editing of reality constitutes an apology for white propaganda: 'protestuji velmi důrazně proti předsudku, že nelze vymazat ze skutečnosti, co se jednou stalo. Každou událost — je nejen možné, nýbrž někdy nutné pod tlakem toho, oč usilujeme, jednou přebarvit, podruhé překreslit a jindy zase nadobro vygumovat' (p. 153). His paradigm for the rewriting of the past is the assassination of Heydrich, which historiography would record as an act of the Czech underground, since the State needed to show the resistance at work, but in fact the Nazi version of this event — that the parachutists had come from England — was true. Hostovský may be commenting indirectly on the Czech martyr complex in the shocked response of Hlavsa, who reveals that his parents and sister died in the aftermath along with thousands of other Czechs, 'My tady věříme a

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hlásáme do světa, že Heydrich byl odsouzen a popraven národem a že národ se rozhodl ho odstranit a pak mučednický podstoupit všechny důsledky’ (p. 154).

The disagreement between Marel and Hlavsa raises the question of how one counters political evil, whether or not moral ends justify immoral means. Hlavsa’s understanding of this problem is idealistic, that freedom cannot be achieved by expediency or duplicity; he wishes to protest against his own government, ‘Hlásat naši lež proti jejich lži, to je vaše strategie! Ale já mlčet nebudu! Já ještě nemám jed v krvi, ještě nejsem nacista v masce svobodného člověka’ (p. 155). Marel’s cynical counter-argument (playing the Nazis’ own game) contributes to the ‘new man’ theme in Hostovský’s work, ‘Ze všech pravdě jen jejich stok vítězně dospěje k cíli, nezdá se vám? Pochopit dobu a naplnit ji znamená dát se proniknout vším, co ona prináší. Proč se tak rozčilujete nad nacismem v nás? To se ví, že Hitlera nakonec potře síla, která je jím už nějak náčinová!’ (ibid.). Marel’s opposition to Nazism is based not on principle (he does not object to the Nazism ‘in us’), but on covetousness.

The fabrication of truth in Všeobecné spiknutí is complete when President Beneš, who the narrator sarcastically reminds us rules under the motto ‘Truth prevails’, comes to Washington to crow over the Allies’ forthcoming victory and blatantly lies when questioned by Hlavsa about Heydrich’s assassination (while the narrator remains conspicuously silent). The treatment of the Heydrich story is attended by the narrator’s admission that he had managed to forget all the events which had taken place in Washington that spring: the treatment both of the political events and the individual’s compliance in them demonstrates the consistency with which Hostovský treats themes on a number of levels, the concentricity of his fiction. The common centre of the waves rippling out from the Heydrich affair resides in the treatment of memory: political propaganda and the rewriting of history is a macrocosm, a global version, of the everyday ‘counterfeit’ reality the individual indulges in, erasing or refashioning events from his life. Hostovský’s treatment of the ‘amnesiac’ suggests that he understands identity as a composite of the experiences one has had: in a novel in which most of the ‘action’ consists in a remembrance of things past, Bares’s recovery of memory is the first step towards the

28 Although the novel is set in 1957, allusions and flashbacks refer to events concerning the following years: 1927–28 (chapter 2, Bares’s school-years); 1930 (chapter 2, studying at
consolidation of an integral identity. The journey into the past actually comprises a quest for truth, a journey to the anagnorisis of the protagonist. Analogously, just as the ‘free world’ preoccupies itself with the enemy from without, never soundly considering the principles and practices buttressing its own political structures, so Hostovský’s works repeatedly examine a type of individual who is convinced of an external threat to him and acts on this threat, without recognizing that his chief enemy is himself and that a spiritual battle must be fought out between his self-destruction and the resurrection of his conscience — then he can be free.

Collectivism always threatens individuality in Hostovský’s work. In Úkryt, Dr Aubin steers clear of joining the French underground (although he helps injured people brought to him at night out of his sense of vocation) because he fears that a group mentality corrupts the individual’s sense of his/her own limits, ‘Když člověk s někým nebo s něčím splyne tak dokonale, že roztaje jeho já, to už se zhola ničeho nebojí a hraje si se smrtí jako s batoletem’ (Ú, p. 85). In Tři noci, Hostovský examines collectivity from another facet, from the projected loss of individuality through someone being identified with a collectivity: the response of the German Věra’s Czech husband to her sexual molestation by her Czech gaolers is selfish, ‘že mu ve vězení zkurvili zenu’ (p. 83), and justifies the gaolers’ behaviour on the grounds that ordinary Germans must bear their share of collective guilt. This suggests that he believes his wife deserved what she got. Hostovský’s interview with Liehm reveals his antipathy to such hegemonistic interpretations of nationality: ‘Nedokážu zanevřít na žádný národ. Když Československo a celá Evropa nejvíce trpěly pod nacistickou hrůzovládou, nikdy jsem se nepřidal k těm, kteří hlásali teorii kolektivní německé viny.’29 Hostovský’s eschewing of mass ideologies may also be Masarykian in complexion: for Masaryk, Fascism and Nazism were mystical

Charles University); 1933 (chapter 2, the success of Bareš’s novel); 1934 (chapter 3, an unfulfilled romance); 1936 (chapters 1, 3 and 5, with his wife on Petřín); 1937 (chapter 2, joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and chapter 7, meeting Sturm); 1938 (chapter 2); 1940 (chapters 3, 7 and 13, Paris and Lisbon); 1941 (chapter 3, moving to America); 1943 (chapters 3 and 6, going to Washington); 1946 (chapter 10, meeting with Rousek); 1948 (chapter 3); 1949 (chapter 11); 1950 (chapter 6, Hlavsa). Thus the novel effectively reconstructs the preceding thirty years of Bareš’s life, particularly up to chapter 7 — in which Beck appears for the last time (encouraging Bareš to assert his will and find love in a person, rather than an idea) — so that the disappearance of Bareš’s alter ego coincides with his ability to begin living in the present.

29 ‘Poslední rozhovor’, p. 184.

140
mass movements based on immoral collectivism. Novák describes Masaryk as an individualist, and states ‘This individualism made him an enemy of all modern forms of collectivism, like bolshevism or fascism, as to him they seemed to degrade the individual to a mere means towards an inhuman end. Man, individual man, moral, free, was Masaryk’s ideal.’

The similarities Hostovský discerns among mass political movements arise from his interpretation of the role of power in ideology. The reader infers from his work both that political power corrupts the individual and that it is the corrupt individual who is attracted to politics.

Ti
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nism, Messiahism and the ‘Great Idea’
Erich Heller writes of Faust that ‘the hero of the play was to become the representative of a whole epoch of history, its lust for knowledge, for power over nature, its intellectual and emotional instability, its terrible failure in love, humility and patience’, and:

Both his eternal striving and his desire for peace are merely the extreme stations of his mind and heart in their never-ending voyage of self-exploration. His ‘tragedy’ is that he is incapable of tragedy. For tragedy presupposes the belief in an external order of things which is indeed incomplete without the conformity of the human soul, but would be still more defective without the soul’s freedom to violate it. Yet Faust’s dilemma is different. His ‘two souls’ are merely the one soul divided in itself because it knows of no independent external reality to which it is related as a free agent. [...] Faust [...] is therefore torn between the belief in a world to which, strive as he may, he has no access whatever, and the belief in himself as the creator of his own world. Thus the spiritual extremes of his existence are not guilt and atonement, but despair and titanism. It is a situation unresolvable in tragedy.

The titan Faustus archetype is one preoccupation of psychological ‘analytical’ prose. Perhaps one impetus to writers of psychological prose may spring from the desire to issue a warning to their age. For Hostovský, the modern crisis was the possibility of the destruction of European civilization — Kavalský in Sedmkrát represents the paradigm of corrupt Europe, ‘jeho tajemství je

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32 Ibid., p. 60.
tajemství Evropy’ (SHU, p. 11) — and Hostovský may have been influenced by Masaryk both in his general concern for society’s psychosis and, more particularly, in his perception of titanism. For Masaryk titanism was the antithesis of authentic humanism: Barnard describes Masaryk’s notion of titanism as ‘the assumption of tasks for which one is unable or unwilling to take personal responsibility, or the indulgence in schemes which have their sense in wishful thinking, delusions of grandeur, or an utter loss of measure and realisability’. Without religion, the inherited tradition of limits for the actions of human beings, man in his despair — and his hubris — creates and turns to titans, ‘Yet, in thus vicariously bolstering their faltering faith in themselves, they help destroy the moorings of their lives as ordinary men and women. By desperately attempting to rise above themselves, they turn themselves into less than themselves, if not to utter nothingness, and, with it, to abject nihilism. The gods they thought had failed make way to idols who use them and destroy them.’

Titanism, in Masaryk’s conception, was also a form of aristocratism. Hostovský seems to take up this view in Sedmkrát, in which Nazism is presented as the nadir of an indolent aristocratism and retreat from life. Josef Kavalský in Sedmkrát bears some similarities to Zeyer’s Rojko from Dům U tonoucí hvězdy’. Rojko is a distant figure, in this world and yet somehow not of it, a dreamer and a sufferer, an Orphic figure who has seen some other world. Indeed, Kavalský’s dedication to Ondřej in one of his books, which speaks of the ‘smrtnou krásu hvězdy před pádem’ (SHU, p. 164) perhaps alludes to Zeyer’s novel, and may therefore suggest a symbol for the imminent end of the world. Kavalský’s sister speaks of him as someone who, in his youth, brought life merely by the touch of his finger or his words; for her he is a poète maudit, a redeemer, a teacher of the beauty and mystery of life. One side of his character is the dreamer seeking beauty, and charismatically bewitching others to follow him, like the Pied Piper, ‘On, který nikam nepatří, stvořil mně a všem, kdož rozumějí jeho zpěvu, domov a vlast a úkryty’ (p. 110); ‘jeho hlas je plný kouzelnictví pohádkového pišťce’ (p. 51). In a scene

34 Ibid., p. 34.
reminiscent of Bulgakov’s *Master i Margarita*, the figure of the Piper is also alluded to in Ondřej’s hallucination of the Interpreter-Reporter (a metamorphosed version of Kavalírsky) who has the pipe of the Pied Piper, ‘Neptám se kam a neptám se proč. Jsem pištec, chci jen pískat a věst’ (p. 24). In true satanic fashion, the Interpreter-Reporter creates out of nothingness, ‘Nesním jako vy, bdím a chutnám, neptám se, odpovídám, netrpím, vládnu, nebořím, nýbrž tvořím, ze vzduchu i z prázdna tvořím’ (p. 26). The figure of the piper glimpsed here could be an intertextual reference to Dyk’s *Krysař*, a fairytale-cum-social satire on dreaming and hypersensitivity, and the use of this figure thus signals that the war is no time for illusion and intoxication or refuge in Art, but a time for practicality and life. The other side of Kavalírsky is, however, so transfixed by this power over people that he routinely uses and betrays them, encourages them to be dependent on him and yet feels no personal commitment to any of them. The title of the novel reflects Kavalírsky’s being all things to all men, and women, and the hollowness of his character, for relationships serve only as a form of theatre for him. The link between Kavalírsky’s titanism and his Russian soul (Kavalírsky is discovered in Czechoslovakia at the age of three in a locked train compartment with his dead father, speaking Russian, and the narrator informs us that he never lost his Russian soul) may also be derived from Masarykian thought. In *The Spirit of Russia*, Masaryk wrote of the Russian atheist, whom he characterized as bristling with hatred, revenge and passion, that he desired ‘to eradicate the Christian deity, the God-man and to put in his place the Man-god who will be able to bring order out of chaos’. According to Masaryk, the Russian atheist craves a new world order and rejects conventional moral codes, ‘nothing at all can be denied him’, an echo perhaps of Raskol’nikov’s ‘everything is permitted’.

One feature of the titan’s approach to life is a sensualist seizing of moments. Lurking behind the titan’s ethos of *carpe diem* is perhaps also a fear of death,

35 The title may also allude to Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, a play which deals with the illusoriness of life and the emotive power of art: indeed, Kavalírsky may be constructed as a *personaggio*, someone who has lived the reality and whose fate is fixed and can only repeat itself, and those around him as *personae* (masks), who can only simulate the inner feelings felt by the character.

36 Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, p. 11.

37 Ibid.
and a paradoxical response to dance in the face of it: when Sedmkrát’s Ondřej is pulled into a car with Kavalský and Irena, and her naked breasts touch Ondřej’s knees while Kavalský presses cognac to Ondřej’s lips, the debauchery reflects the titan’s hedonistic immersion in life, ‘budeš žít, brát, chutnat, dokud je čas’ (p. 135). Only the present matters, which has implications for the way in which personality is constructed — by being true to the moment, the individual can construct himself anew each time and need not be true to any residual historical self. The hedonist constitutes, then, an immoralist, a position which Nietzsche would uphold, as man can be no more than himself. For Nietzsche, and perhaps for Stirner, the moral view of man is false because it presupposes he has an essence which he is obliged to realize. His conception of power is psychological, it is not what man accomplishes or creates, but the feeling of power that attends his activities that is important. ‘Nietzsche endorses [...] antinomian morality: the belief that value lies not in the act, but in the graced condition of the doer, so that any action he performs is immediately justified by virtue of the grace that resides in him.’

The immoralist-titanist ethos is perhaps first explored by Hostovský in ‘Příběh básnika Zdeňka Ondříka’, in which the house represents the perpetuation of life without consequences. The inhabitants must withhold their experiences from one another and suppress any strong emotions; they are forbidden to ask questions of the past or to plan for the future, and each night constitutes a tabula rasa on which one can inscribe a different personality, since the events of one night have no bearing on those of the following. The company of men are joined by a single woman, Kateřina. They must compete for her exclusive attention on any given night. When Kateřina falls pregnant but does not know which of the men is the father, the implication is that actions — even if their agents take no responsibility for them — cannot but have consequences. The titan’s lack of regard for consequences is a condition of his solipsism: for Faust, if the world is no longer his when he dies, ‘The rest concerns me not: let come what will’. It is also a rejection of all that the Judaeo-Christian tradition represents: in Nezvěstný, when Borek asks what

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38 See Goodheart, Cult of the Ego, p. 123.
39 Ibid., p. 118.
kind of power will, in Kapoun’s view, triumph, Kapoun’s response is ‘To nevim, já se o konec nestarám’, to which Borek retorts: ‘Vidíte, v tom je právě rozdíl mezi námi, já zase myslím při všem na konec’ (N, p. 148). So enthralled is Kavalský by his Decadent existence, cultivating intense moments of experience, that he never once questions where this path will lead him. He cannot, for example, advise Ondřej on the conclusion to the book he intends to write because conclusions are unimportant to him, and Ondřej himself, under Kavalský’s influence, blithely decides that the problem conclusions pose is trivial: ‘závěr nemohu napsat, nevim sám, kam jdu. A co se závěry! Kdo by myslil na zadní kolečka?’ (p. 100). When Kavalský discovers that his path leads to Nazism and a meeting under the patronage of Adolf Hitler, he nearly suffers a nervous breakdown. Kavalský’s fate comports with Masaryk’s interpretation of Romanticism (which foreshadows Hodrová’s analysis of the novel of lost illusions) as the disease of a certain kind of individualism, ‘The romanticist denies the world, either philosophically by proclaiming it an illusion, morally by refusing any responsibility for his actions, or religiously by denying God and exalting himself to the stature of a god. The inevitable end is always skeptical, sorrow, depression, suicide, and even crime.’

Because the self-recreation of the titanist denies an essentialist self to whom one must be true, titanism constitutes a denial of the past; memory and tradition must fall into desuetude. For Hostovský, unveiling the past is often associated with resurrecting one’s conscience, just as for Masaryk the tradition of religious belief provides man with moral guidelines. In Sedmkrát, Kavalský congratulates Ondřej on sloughing his ‘natural’ self (authentic/natural is bad, artificial is good) in order to prepare to gain power, ‘Tys do nedávna ještě lpěl na rodné řeči a rodné půdě. Ale dnes, myslím, ztratil jsi již všechno, co bylo, jsi tedy schopen získat všechno, co bude’ (SHU, p. 143). Kavalský adduces Ondřej’s losing of the past as proof of the fact that he can be part of the future; for Hostovský, however — and for Masaryk before him — in rising above himself, Ondřej becomes less than himself.

Hostovský’s answer to the question of how one engages in virtuous, political action is to advocate small good deeds with identifiable, concrete ends, which may echo Masaryk’s advocacy of drobná práce. In Nezvěstný, for
example, Král writes in a letter to Borek that he knows his actions sometimes appear selfish to his friends, ‘Jde však o optický klam: nejsobeťešší jsou ti, kdož se titánsky pachtí za nedlidskými vidinami a skutky. Člověk se nevysvlékne ze své kůže a nezmnoží své síly. Jen drobné mince jsou z ryzího kovu tomto slzavém údolí’ (N, p. 137). Those who choose the megalomaniac path of seeking to save the whole of mankind only succeed in destroying Man.
Chapter 5

Days of Judgement: Hostovský’s Exile, 1939–1947

Hostovský was exiled from Czechoslovakia during the Second World War as a result of the German Occupation of Bohemia and Moravia shortly after his arrival on a lecture tour in Belgium, at the invitation of the Belgian PEN club, on 15 March 1939.\(^1\) He chose not to return home, fearing that, as a Jew, a grisly fate would await him; indeed, he alleges that he later learned that the Gestapo were looking for him as early as 16 March 1939.\(^2\) Hostovský’s own experience of this period, even before Occupation, was clearly one of immense fear, bordering on paranoia. His deep-rooted anxiety and fear of being persecuted led to a fascination with secret networks which begin to appear in his work with the 1938 collection \textit{Tři starci}. In a published speech about Hostovský, Josef Träger recalls how Hostovský approached him with a view to joining a Masonic Lodge in the 1930s; for Träger, the idea of partaking in a medieval ceremony, and the attendant theatrical customs of the masons, were laughable, but he sheds light on the earnestness with which Hostovský entertained such a proposition:

Ale Hostovský mi to vážně rozmlouval, poukazoval na to, že zednářské bratrství zavazuje k pomoci a že ve vážné době nejen doma, ale také za hranicemi je to záruka bezpečí, která nikdy neselže a která znamená spolehlivou záchranu. Ani nevím, zda se pak sám stal členem nějaké zednářské organizace. Potřeboval nutně vědomí jistoty při svém vnitřním neklidu, při svém stálém strachu z existenčního ohrožení, a hledal u každého úkryt před pocitem bezbrannosti.\(^3\)

\(^1\) According to Hostovský himself, he hesitated in accepting the offer since he blithely believed that nothing worse could happen to the Czechs after the Sudetenland. He finally made up his mind to go when an old childhood friend, a Catholic poet, came to visit him to instruct him to leave: ‘Jsem prý jeden z mála Židů, které stojí za to zachránit. Jinak Židy nenávidí, zavinili všechno nestěstí ... [...] Byl jsem z toho tak přišerně smutný, že jsem prostě musel pryč’ (interview with Antonín J. Liehm in Liehm, \textit{Generace}, Prague, 1988, p. 376).


\(^3\) Träger, ‘O Egonu Hostovském’, p. 23.
Träger explains how Hostovský was instilled with an enduring sense of fear of some kind of danger which troubled him and made him restless, although he adds — superstitiously — that he thought Hostovský possessed of a certain ability to discern impending unhappiness. A similar portrait of a fearful Hostovský emerges from the Czech poet Ivan Jelinek’s memoirs, in which he recalls meeting Hostovský in a state of panic in Prague: “Musím pryč, pryč!” opakoval, “Jsem žid, a co horší, český žid ... budu jeden z nich prvních, kterého zabijou”, and Jelinek remembers how ashamed he felt for Hostovský, ‘který sebou škubal při každém blížícím se kroku, šustotu papíru, unášeného větrem. Představoval si, pravda, že jsme sledováni; že nás někdo poslouchá.' After having spent periods of time in Belgium, then France, Spain and Portugal, Hostovský accepted the offer of work from the Czechoslovak consulate in America, and spent the remainder of the war there. During this period he published three works, *Listy z vyhnanství* (Chicago, 1941), *Sedmkrát v hlavní úloze* (New York, 1942) and *Úkryt* (Texas, 1943), which were received favourably, on the whole, by American and English critics, and which were later reissued by the Czech publisher Melantrich in 1946 for a domestic Czech reading public. The publishing of his novels in Czech in America did present Hostovský with a number of practical difficulties: he alleges that he often had to pay for the print-runs himself, as well as typing the manuscripts, with the consequence that the books were published in small print-runs with many typographical errors.

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4 Like other critics, Träger terms this feeling Ahasuerian and subscribes to the racial interpretation of Hostovsky’s behaviour as atavistic, so that Hostovsky’s fear and his keen apprehension of danger are programmed intuitions derived a priori by virtue of his Jewish blood.

5 Ivan Jelinek, *Jabíko se kouše*, Prague, 1994, p. 350 (unfortunately there is no record of the date of this meeting).

6 Ibid., p. 351.


8 The novel was published in English as *Seven Times the Leading Man*, trans. Fern Long, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1945, and L.B. Fischer, New York, 1945. Both this novel and *Úkryt* sold so well that second editions were published. *Sedmkrát* was also dramatized for radio, with Arnold Moss in the leading role. See ibid.

The experience of exile did not alter the fundamental concerns of Hostovský's work, but rather deepened and broadened them; he found in the form of the exile not only a new guise for his prototype outsider — the socially excluded, the Jew, the adolescent — but a form which seemed to supersede the others in encompassing the main concerns of Hostovský’s work to that point. Hostovský’s exile also, however, problematized the reception of his work; in his wartime work his choice of constructions — letters, notes — which apparently embody the ‘personal’ misled critics to identify narrative intimacy with the authentic, despite the narrator’s interrogation of his sense of the real. Critics’ conflation of two discrete genres, the personal/confessional and the autobiographical, bedevils a disinterested interpretation of all Hostovský’s wartime works.10

The notion of mysterious causes and happenings occurring outside our perception of phenomenal reality, which was a key to Žhár, is a central theme, and influences the structure, of Hostovský’s wartime novels. In all three works the narrators eschew a strictly mimetic approach to narration because of its inefficacy in yielding the truth. In ‘Záписки’, for example, (with mock modesty perhaps), Bedřich David introduces his testimony by an admission that he is a novice to writing, that he neither knows how, nor wishes, to write chronologically, and that ‘všechna vypravování v časové posloupnosti mohou zachytit jen zcela maličký kousek pravdy z našeho roztodivného života, který se ve své skryté podstatě nevyvíjí z minulosti přes přítomnosti k budoucnosti’ (‘Z’, p. 91). He believes instead that one can discover a core to a life, a single word to sum up that life, which should provide the focus of narration. In Sedmkrát, Jaroslav Ondřej imagines writing a letter to the Czechoslovak president and government-in-exile concerning the life and death of his friend Kavalský, because it is important for them to understand Kavalský’s mystery in order to secure the safety of others, ‘Ač souvisí s viditelnými politickými ději jen nepřímo, můžete skrze ně nahlédnout do pravých ohnisek včerejších i dnešních událostí’ (SHU, p. 12). Ondřej eventually surrenders the idea of a missive in favour of a novel.

10 One English review astonishingly misinterpreted The Hideout (Úkryt) as an autobiographical document testifying to Hostovský’s membership of the Parisian underground (see Book of the Month, March, 1945).
Listy consists of a collection of letters in which a single narrator attempts to portray situations that provoke a range of emotions intended to exemplify the mindset of an exile. The concluding segment of the collection departs from the epistolary form and consists of a short story, or short novel, narrated in the form of notes by an exile, Bedřich David, who appears not to be the author of the preceding letters. Hostovský began to keep notes for the collection in the first period of his exile (Belgium, 1939), and had written most of the letters by some time early in 1940 while he was still in France and before he left for the Pyrenees to recover from an illness; Hostovský commenced on the concluding story in Portugal (1940–41) and only completed the ‘Zápisky’ after his emigration to America in 1941.\(^{11}\) It appears that the concluding segment of the collection may have been an afterthought, since Hostovský discussed publishing the letters before he had written the short story: he showed the manuscript to Julius Firt when they were both in exile in Paris, and Firt promised to publish it as the first work in a series he intended to establish through the printing house of the Paris National Committee; their plans were aborted by Hitler’s invasion of France.\(^{12}\)

Critics have claimed that the work is autobiographically based,\(^{13}\) and in some cases this claim has resulted in an overly simplistic reception of the work: in these latter cases, one suspects that the stress on the personalized nature of Listy conceals the insinuation that it constitutes a regurgitation of experience rather than a tranquil recollection of it, and that the text is therefore rough-hewn, but that sympathy on the part of critics for Hostovský’s plight as an exile restrains those who find it unpolished (and inferior in comparison to his other works) from categorically stating their case. Kvapil, for example, is rather more interested in Hostovský’s state of mind than he is in the text when he describes the letters as ‘jakýmsi hledání thematiky, náčrtky v vykrystalisovanější práci, jakou je román Úkryt. Zřejmě v nich Hostovský hledal cestu k sobě, k svému umění. Zkoušel, zdali ho v těch zlých dobách

\(^{11}\) Interview by ‘mt’ [Michal Topoľský?], ‘Hovoříme se spisovatelem Egonem Hostovským’, where Hostovský describes (but does not date) his movements.


\(^{13}\) Václav Černý suggests that the short story concluding the collection is autobiographically based (‘Česká belletrie emigrační’ in *Kritický měsíčník*, 8, 1947, 1/2, pp. 8–21 [18]).
The reception of *Listy* as mere documentary reportage (by Polák, for example) and as a *feuilleton* (Kocourek, for example, finds the collection lifeless, having more the nature of a causerie or a very ‘cultivated’ *feuilleton* than fiction)\(^{15}\) represent other variations on this ‘autobiographical’ slant,\(^{16}\) since they insinuate an absence of fictionalization on Hostovsky’s part.

These criticisms fail to appreciate the distinction between the apparent jumbledness of the work, its unevenness of tone (for, if the letters have a common author, the style of narration can differ markedly from one letter to another) and a deeper structure of concerns which lend it cohesion; indeed, the distinction between the immanent, disparate relationship between things and a hidden stratum of connections makes for one of the central concerns of the collection — both in terms of a quest for meaning and for identity. Moreover, those critics who interpret *Listy* as autobiographical or as a form of reportage insufficiently acknowledge the author’s distance from his material. It is helpful to remember that the gestation period (that is, the time from conception to publication) of the collection was about two years (sufficient time for revision of the letters, one would think), and that Hostovsky made notes for the collection, which demonstrates at least that the process of writing was a little more complex than him just sitting and bashing out his observations onto paper.

The collection itself is organized in such a way that it appears meticulously specific (in comparison to Hostovsky’s earlier work) in terms of temporal indications and spatial locations — each of the letters is dated, there are a number of place names and personal names — which creates for the reader an impression of verisimilitude. Indeed, it would be misleading to suggest that Hostovsky is uninterested in presenting a form of verisimilitude: Karel Brušák, for example, has stated that Hostovsky was very keen to render faithfully the way that people spoke,\(^{17}\) which suggests that he was trying to capture the fabric of experience authentically; and Václav Běhounek points out that Czech

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14 ‘jsk’ [J.Š. Kvapil], reviewing *Listy z vyhnanství* and *Úkryt* in *Naše doba*, 53, 1946–47, p. 43.
17 As reported at one of the weekly seminars on Czech and Slovak literature at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1998.
writers rarely attempt to capture the kind of dialogue we are exposed to in *Listy*. Yet the reader never knows the name of the country inhabited by the narrator, as though Hostovský, through using an indefinite backdrop, were deliberately avoiding direct identification between author and narrator. Furthermore, as each of the letters is attributed a title as though it were a short story, this extraneous detail suggests that the implied author of the text, who fashions these titles, is accentuating his distance from the narrator of the letters.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is worth considering what critics mean when they describe the collection as autobiographical: if one is to interpret this description literally, then Hostovský as the narrator has been the recipient of all kinds of stories from friends who have beaten up German press attachés or come into contact with tricksters; one would be surprised if critics intended to infer such fanciful correspondences between his life and art. Indeed the artificial premiss on which the collection is founded would alone defy such a reading since it would have been inconceivable for Hostovský to send letters to his friends at home: as a Jewish exile, he would have compromised and endangered any recipients in Nazi-occupied territory. If instead critics mean that Hostovský may draw on, and embellish, his personal experiences in the collection, particularly his peregrinations across Europe which inform 'Zápisky', then one would have to add the rider that Hostovský is the kind of writer (like countless others) who continually melds aspects of his life into his fiction, and that *Listy* is not atypical in that respect. Finally, as I have suggested, the autobiographical label applied by some critics may be a covert way of diminishing the work's literary qualities and pigeonholing it as a kind of emotional reportage: I will address the themes and structures which unify the collection in a conscious attempt to dispel this basic misinterpretation of the work.

Some critics have been more careful than Kvařil by pointing towards elements (chiefly the depiction of the émigré mentality) which lend the work cohesion. Ludvík Páleníček, for example, finds the collection deceptive, since

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18 'vbk.' [Václav Běhounek], *Práce*, 2, no. 129, 2 June 1946, p. 6.
19 In an otherwise insubstantial contribution to the Hronov collection, Stanislav Máslo does at least remind us of this crucial fact: see 'Domov v paměti exulanta Egona Hostovského' in *Návrat Egona Hostovského: Mezinárodní vědecké sympozium o životě a díle Egona Hostovského, Hronov 21-23, květena 1993*, Prague, 1996, p. 39.
only at first sight does it appear as material written by Hostovský in the
wandering of the first few months of exile; the material is ordered by the
author’s projection of his experiences into an array of figures and events
through which he typifies some of the main universal émigré experiences.
Černý, who rates Listy the most highly of Hostovský’s wartime works,
describes the letters as sketches or short moments from situations in life, with
the protagonist, and often the style, changing from one to another, and the
letters being unified by Hostovský’s portrayal of the mentality of the émigré,
“Listy” se tedy doplňují, každý z nich isoluje pod mikroskop (spíše než
monumentalisuje) jednu složku, jedno pokřivení běženecké duše, po každé v
jiném člověku; a teprve rekonstrukci jednotlivých rysů vzniká úplný obraz
émigrantské psychy, chvílemi drtivý ve svém účinu. František Buriánek
initially describes the collection as poeticized reportage which is intended to
capture the mentality of the emigrants, especially the Czech emigration, rather
than events of the war and personal experiences; he does, however, concede
that it is a literary work, that the letters are in fact really short stories, prose
pieces and even, in some cases, approach the status of a novel (he is referring
to ‘Zápisky Bedřicha Davida o velké nevěře’, which he describes as the portrait
not only of a single life, but of a whole society and an epoch). Pohorsky
presents a balanced approach to Listy. He states from the outset that
Hostovský’s work represents an organic continuum, with each work taking up
themes which had been a focus in the preceding work, but proceeds to suggest
ways in which Listy differs from Hostovský’s other work: while Hostovský’s
approach to characterization, his attention to the psychological make-up of the
protagonist and his description of key scenes is consistent with other works by
him, Pohorsky finds the tone of the letters (or short stories, as he calls them)
‘znatelné citově vypjatější než jindy’ and the relationship between narrator and
subject-matter more intimate, devoid of irony, ‘že je prostě jakousi důvěrnou

20 Ludvík Páleníček, ‘Nad Hostovského knihami z emigrace’ in Kytice, 1, 1945/46, pp.
514–15.
22 František Buriánek, ‘Hostovského knihy z emigrace’ in Zemědělské noviny, 2, no. 157,
13 July 1946, p. 2.
Pohorsky considers aspects of *Listy* to be unique to Hostovský’s *oeuvre*: the expression of pathos, the narrator’s accentuation of points arising from the action, and a preponderance of isolated lyrical passages. The work is also important, argues Pohorsky, for introducing certain outlines to Hostovský’s work or else for crystallizing concerns important for the direction of Hostovský’s work after this point. Chief among these is the continuous sense of paradox which the work posits: according to Pohorsky, it is precisely that absurdity, which is always linked with the war, that brings about the illogical and senseless drawing together and interpenetration of conflicting and distant impressions, imaginings and thoughts; and it is precisely the devaluation of values which increases the lasting desire for them. Thus Hostovský frequently invokes paradox in order to give a true picture of the complicated position of his heroes in the world and in that time. Pohorsky identifies a series of paradoxes which underpin the work: in exile, on the run and lacking security, man’s desire for hope and faith is at its strongest; man, at his most forsaken, demonstrates a sensitive understanding for others and for their lot in life; man wanders far from his home, and yet Prague and Hostovský’s native regions are never as prominent in Hostovský’s prose as in *Listy*.

I would extend Pohorsky’s findings a little further and argue that the collection expresses the narrator’s paradoxical affinity with, and yet loathing of, the outcast. The outcast’s world is dank, filthy, seedy, and consists of wandering in perpetuity. In the opening letter, ‘Zapomenutá péšinka’, the narrator describes his one-time recurring nightmare of staggering at night-time through gambling dens, having forgotten where he lives: ‘přeťavte si noc bez světel, vlhkou, dotěrnou, dešťivou, hlavu jsem měl prázdnu a těžkou, byl jsem bez domova a strach mi seděl v týle. Strach z politických stolků, ze zápachu sklepnicích lokálů, z noci, jež jako by ve vánici zimomřivých temnot nemohla doplouti k hranici jitra’ (*LZV*, p. 8). This nightmare becomes ghoulish reality as a representation of the exile’s fear, restlessness and degradation, and self-disgust. In ‘Přízraky’ the (émigré) narrator visits Ervín’s, a bar frequented by

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24 Ibid., p. 415.
émigrés and prostitutes, which is dirty, has foul-smelling toilets, and is full of foul language; he is horrified as he perceives the guests there in a new light — he notes, for example, the man who wanders round telling everyone’s life stories, then bows and begs with a lisp for a cigarette. He believes the people in the bar so repulsive that he reasons that they must be loved by God alone. Overwhelmed by an almost visceral sense of loathing at this glimpse of émigré life, the narrator runs away from the bar, but collides with someone outside who shouts to him ‘Cizáci prašiví, prasata špinavá, táhněte odsud, vagabundi!’ (LZV, p. 55). Clearly the narrator is identified by the outside world as part of the ‘vulgar’ community he is escaping; his disgust at the other émigrés transpires to be a fear and loathing of what he himself has become. This pattern of behaviour in the narrator is typical of Hostovský’s earlier work: one thinks of Ghetto v nich, for example, where Pavel would like to believe that he is superior to or different from other Jews until his girlfriend Jana expresses her revulsion for him by calling him a Jew.

Evžen Jiříček offers perhaps the most acute interpretation of the collection. While the type of protagonist in Listy is familiar from Hostovský’s previous work — he is passive and has turned away from reality — he undergoes unexpected changes and becomes a full-blooded hero. He reaches a recognition of the true direction of his path, seeing reality without illusions and from a firm standpoint, and begins to participate actively in its formation to which he feels compelled ‘nikoli hrou immanentních náhod, nýbrž závažnosti poznání pravdy’. For Jiříček, the distinguishing characteristic of the work is the unifying look at reality: the real development of the work is situated in the interior of things, and the outer action and objects are a mere theatre compared with the real action, which controls and incorporates that outer reality. He terms this a ‘transcendence’ of themes. Since the individual is incorporated in a close coupling with reality, a whole mass of different fates have a common denominator, so that the individual cannot stand to one side and wash his hands of everything. Jiříček argues that this aspect of the work meant that it was received in America and England as an artistic exhortation to all those

26 Ibid., p. 36.
who were looking on the chaos and was of propagandistic import, while, in Czech literature, he proposes, it will evidence how propaganda or politics can be tactfully addressed through art.

One feature, which is new in *Listy* and which represents a shift in Hostovský’s work thereafter, is the threat to the individual’s existence posed by the world outside him. In Hostovský’s earlier work the individual’s persecution complex distorted his perception of the world, and the representation of the outside world as aggressive was merely an antinomic response by the protagonist to his own weakness. The protagonist’s sense of insecurity underlies *Listy*, and now we are aware that his insecurity derives from real threats to his everyday existence from the authorities (and his fear of enemy forces), who may without notice arrest or expel him, an expectation which induces in him a permanent state of nervousness, ‘Nevím, […] co v naší situaci čeká člověk od neznámého rukopisu, od každého zaznění zvonku, od každého zaklepaní na dveře’ (‘Záhadný posel’, p. 19). In this state of heightened sensitivity (which goes back to the psychology of Hostovský’s protagonists of the 1920s), the protagonist may, as in the case of the Czech refugee Gruber in ‘Eliza’, find himself unable to distinguish between a real threat and an imagined one: Gruber beats his fellow lodger, Herzinger, who turns out to be the German press attaché, because he believes Herzinger to be spying on him (whereas in fact the aggressive, adolescent eponymous girl of the household has been spying on Gruber because she is in love with him). The protagonist’s sense of insecurity in his dealings with strangers is part of a broader treatment of the discrepancy between appearance and reality in the collection. In so far as this theme concerns identity, the exiles find it difficult to determine whom they can trust for they have no means (occupation, other friends) by which to place the strangers they meet: the reader is introduced by the narrator to an array of characters who are morally ambiguous, from the well-meaning trickster of ‘Záhadný posel’, the decent German (or spy) of ‘Eliza’, the enigmatic one-handed Czech of ‘Přízraky’, the seemingly kind Italian nobleman of ‘Závrať’ who is prepared to collaborate with the Germans, as is the Frenchman Baron Loiseau in ‘Zápisky Bedřicha Davida o velké nevěře’, to the cynical stranger (who claims to be a Belgian) and his sister in
this last story. In 'Závrat', the narrator himself is mistaken for a man called Müller and is offered a crooked deal of some kind.

The exile’s world is also underpinned by pretence: he goes to great lengths to conceal his shame and degradation from others (as Pavel does in Ghetto v nich) and pretend that he has some purpose in life. Sometimes this counterfeit existence is supported by others’ efforts to pretend that nothing has changed. In the short story ‘Eliza’, for example, the Backer family (who play hosts to Gruber) may be well-meaning and attempting to save Gruber from embarrassment by his wretched existence — the wife maintains that he is hardworking and that her daughter is not to disturb him, the husband looks forward to them meeting in Prague again — but they are also deluding themselves as to the real state of world events: the fact that we are told by the narrator that the Professor reads only of cultural, and not political, affairs in the newspapers may indicate a family wilfully keeping their eyes shut to what is going on around them. The exile is also, however, himself a wilful conspirator in illusions, as exemplified in ‘Záhadný posel’, where the refugees wish to believe that the eccentric stranger Rindt is the benefactor he claims to be despite ample evidence to the contrary: when the narrator is invited to Rindt’s room for several bottles of whisky, it transpires that there is only one, which has already been opened, and when the refugees are invited to Rindt’s for hospitality they are greeted with some smelly cheese wrapped in a piece of newspaper.

In the world of the exile everything appears indeterminate — identity, time — hence the narrator’s search for some kind of enduring truths about existence. He attempts to establish the foundation of his own being by reverting to images of his home and of his past, but departs from realism into mythopoeia by sacralizing these real places, as though they were primal well-springs of innocence and peace, and perhaps the national character. One or two critics have detected Hostovský’s affinity with Čep here,27 but the more profound influence on Listy is Halas. This is now the mystic in Hostovský surfacing: chaos has issued from our loss or neglect of the natural foundation

27 See, for example, ‘B.F.’ [B. Fučík] in Lidová demokracie, 2, no. 120, 24 May 1946, p. 4 (the closeness to Čep is the only sensible point to be found in this review of the collection). Jan Čep’s 1927 Letnice collection is in any case an intertext for Úkryt.
of our identity (the forgotten footpath, the lost paradise) and we have to recover these points of origin in order to restore harmony. The opening letter, ‘Zapomenutá pěšinka’, constitutes a wistful recollection of a footpath near the narrator’s childhood home which he and his friend created and which has since become overgrown and forsaken. The narrator walked along there with his mother, with the woman who became his wife, and with his daughter: while the narrator is clearly underlining the survival of the ritual through several generations, it is perhaps significant that he seeks to express that continuum through female archetypes. The narrator’s retracing of his steps along the footpath grows into a mental journey into some kind of Czech rustic idyll, ‘Jdu pěšinkou do českých městeček svátečně vyšňořených jarmarečními boudami, kostelní zvony střásají k požehnané zemi díkůvzdání’ (LZV, p. 12). The narrator declares that thousands of his ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ have trod along the path, which sounds like a nationalist invocation of the Czech nation as a family. ‘Vité, proč před smrtí volají lidé matku? Chcete, aby je tak jako kdysi v šerověku jejich života znovu vedla pěšinkou ztraceného råje’ (p. 13). When the path is retrieved, the living and the dead will meet once more, and ‘žáby z rákosí budou vykřikovat k nebesům žalmy z legendy kraje, a tisíce pěšinek se vynoří na půdě zasutých domovů’ (p. 13). Hostovský is evoking both his own personal myth of origin and hymning a paean to Czech rusticity. While some may view Hostovský’s lyricization of the countryside as Čep-like, Hostovský’s depiction of rusticity is more anaesthetized and twee than anything one will find in Čep: for Čep, Nature may be glorious, but it is also difficult, violent, unpredictable, ready with death; for Hostovský, with his essentially Romantic imagination, Nature is the lost paradise, and man’s lot consists in a permanent expulsion from his first paradisiacal home.

Man appears to long for a transcendence of self which would lead to his union with others. In Všeobecné spiknutí, for example, Bareš longs for magic words which would form a sentence which would form a tale which would exorcise him and his friends of their ‘dědičné neštěstí’ (VS, p. 21), and imagines inspiring those around him with this spirit to create a new kinship, ‘jeho slovo bude jim dechem’ (ibid.). Hostovský’s notion of the outsider’s expulsion from his first home is also imbued with the Freudian symbolism of the surrender of the mother’s womb, since the narrator in ‘Zapomenutá
pěsinka’ poses the rhetorical question of why people (allegedly) call their mothers just before they die. The first home also represents a tradition of thought and belief older than the individual himself; this may explain why Hostovský uses woman’s strength to represent an alternative spirituality or set of mores which attempts either to redeem men or to reject the world they have constructed around them. Woman becomes some kind of guardian of culture outside the prevailing currents of the modern world. Thus in Dům bez pánů, Aunt Bedřiška, who adopts the role of surrogate mother to the family, is a guardian of love, intuitively rather than experientially guided by knowledge and wisdom, ‘tetiny oči se na nás divají pořád tak vědoucně, jako by stále ještě o nás věděla více než my sami’ (DBP, p. 52). She is set apart from the world outside the home: she cannot understand half the things she reads, has only been on a train three times in her life, never shops and cannot understand what price increases mean, but she has the capacity to see beyond the material world, ‘Moudrosti, jež vidí přes hranice okamžiků a přes obrysy věcí. Její rozjímání nejsou plana, zná stovky rabinských pravd’ (p. 49). The minor figure of the grandmother in Sedmkrát is similarly constructed. In an episode, recounted by Ondřej as part flashback and part dream, she is the only member of the family to kiss him when he returns to his childhood home; she also sees that his cowardice has driven him to leave and that his journeying consists in an attempt to escape himself, ‘Ne ty nám, ale my tobe zachránili krov. Ne my bez tebe, ale ty bez nás nemůžeš dýchat v pokoji ani umřít v pokoji. První noc spí venku na zemi a pod nebem. Abys přivykl trávě a kamenů, a abys poznal, že k hvězdám je stejně daleko i blízko ze všech zeměpásů’ (SHU, p. 33). Her speech patterns are rhythmical, exhibiting a syntactic and semantic counterpoint, which may comport with her distilled wisdom. Elsewhere in Hostovský’s work, the figure of the mother is linked to the image of living water, and it may be that in these iconic representations of the mother-figure

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28 Hostovský consistently portrays his protagonists calling for, or thinking of, their mothers when they are about to die. Thus in Dobročinný veštrek, after he has murdered his lover Anna and just prior to shooting himself, Julius hears in his mind his mother calling him from the window of their childhood home and instructing him to return home and tell her everything. He imagines the air smells of earth and longs to roll in grass, as though he is re-entering some primal, natural home. In Půlnocní pacient, when Malik collapses with a stroke, he calls out for his mother to come, and in Tři noci, unaware that she is dying, Věra reflects on how she has been missing her mother despite having had no fond memories of her for years, and starts searching for her mother’s whereabouts.
Hostovský was attempting to represent her as a Christian archetype. The fact that these women are often of peasant, or at least old-fashioned, stock, indicates a mythopoeic representation of female strength as perhaps the uncorrupted elemental force of the nation’s roots (indeed Hostovský is usually only interested in woman as a being of superior understanding and sensitivity, as wisdom, in contrast to foolish male rationality, and in woman as the illusory object of man’s desire).

In his wartime work, Hostovský’s advocacy of representatives of uncorrupted nationhood gradually strengthens into a conservative anti-intellectualism. In contrast to the fainthearts of the intelligentsia, peasant folk are the true Czechs on account of the strength they exercise to protect life. In the letter ‘Kdyby mêla hlad a bylo jí zima’, which is addressed to a diplomat friend about to return to Czechoslovakia, the narrator requests that his friend find Olga, the narrator’s four-year-old daughter (who bears the name of Hostovský’s real daughter), and take her back to his place of birth. The narrator wishes for her to be cared for not by the rich, but by the poor, for they are ‘našinci’ (LZV, p. 84). He recalls a tavern in the hills near the frontier where he and his friend fought off men from across the frontier who wished to dance with their womenfolk; the narrator describes this brawl not only as a defence of Olga’s mother, but also of his native language, ‘Pro tu řeč, pro tu řeč, v které má dcera před spaním vzývá strážného andělčíka, v které jí babička brouká ukolébavě, v které u nás zpívají ptáci, šumí topoly, crčí potoky a v které větřík konejší horké hlavy’ (p. 88). Again Hostovský is mythopoeicizing: the language of the lullabies crooned by his grandmother is also that of nature, as though human beings and the natural world were cojoined in a mystical communion.

The quest for these virtues provides a frame for Listy z vyhnanství, as the collection opens with the narrator’s nostalgic evocation of home, ‘Zapomenutá pěšinka’, and ends with a kind of meditation, ‘Kdyby mêla hlad a bylo jí zima’, and a short story, ‘Zápisky’ (and, in particular, the conclusory paean), which attempt to ally true Czechness, Nature and a mythicized homeland: these three sections contain the lyricized prose which critics have alluded to. The frame, however, raises questions about the identity of the narrator. On the one hand, although the collection is organized chronologically (so that even Bedřich
David’s notes begin in September 1940, after the date of the preceding ‘letter’, 9 April 1940), one assumes that David is not the narrator of the preceding letters for he has been in exile for three years and the narrator of the first ‘letter’ (dated 6 October 1939) appears not to have been in exile for more than a year (he declares that he cannot write now as he would have written a year ago). And yet the third, concluding, section of ‘Zápisky’ is indistinguishable in tone, other than in a more hyperbolic expression of pathos, than the first letter. Given the fact that we suppose that there are two different narrators, one has the impression that Hostovsky cannot contain himself from (perhaps clumsily) overcoming the distance between author and narrator in an attempt to synthesize the concerns of his work. It is within this narrow compass, if at all, that one may term his approach autobiographical.

The collection ends with an epiphany. The narrator has a vision of his wife, ‘the unfaithful one’, and she suddenly transforms into a thousand other women and children. Her plea for forgiveness prompts him to start kissing and embracing her, only to find himself suddenly kissing leaves and fondling moss as he awakes from his daydream. Hostovsky’s conclusory paean strongly echoes the sentiments and rhythms of Halas’s 1939 poème-en-prose ‘já se tam vrátím’ 29 which begins with a robust liveliness and distills into a balladic sparseness as the narrator imagines a time when he will be able to return home:

Až jednou na velikém sněmu ptačím v čase mezi skřivánkem a sovou bude jednolasně přištěbetáno jaro, já se tam vrátím! Zatím vábím a chytám na vějírky slov pěknost toho všeho tam u nás, at’ se chytí, co se chytí. Ty můj kraj! ty mé bezpečí, ty má zatvrzlosti, ty má věčnosti. Tvá hlína, mnuta v prstech, voní po zetlelých vlasech dávno pohřbených tkalcovských dědů a báď a je příšadou mé krve. Ty můj kraj! (p. 35)

Už aby bylo po tom pekelcování místy, kam nepatřím. [...] At’ si jen země leti do prázdná, at’ si jen leti, jen když zbude jistota jednoho místa, místa posledního, místa jen pro hrob. Chci ho mít tam, jen tam u nás. Kdyby mi jen oči pro pláč zbyly, já se tam vrátím, já se tam i poslepu vrátím. (p. 40)

Hostovsky’s narrator begins by invoking what we assume is a Czech homeland, ‘Ty, pro níž jméno vlast je slovo příliš zvětralé a jméno otcina je

29 Dílo Františka Halase, vol. 3: A co básník, Prague, 1983; ‘já se tam vrátím’ (1939), pp. 391-93. Halas himself dated the poem 1939, but there is speculation about whether it was possible for him to have written it at this stage; Halas’s son and the editors of his Collected Works suggest that it could not have been written until the summer of 1940.
slovo příliš kruché’ (LZV, p. 155). The invocation unravels, however, into a stream of images which are linked only cryptically under the appellation ‘you’ from which we must extract a unifying sense:

ty nepojmenovatelná, jež na nás hledí očima laní, obláčku nebo baštami hájů, pěšinku plaché zvěře, úkryte vlaštovek, úkryte milenců, ty moje trápění, ženo má, mámo má — tebe jsem nezapřel, tebe jsem nezradil![...] Vy moje hry, mé píšt’alky, praku můj, kácó a kuličky! Má noci závraků, noci pokladů, noci škátební! [...] pro závrat’ tvého rána i soumraku, pro živou vodu tvých studánků a pramenů, pro tvá batolata, pro tvé modlitby, pro tvou pohanu, pro tvou chudobu a pro tvou příšti slávu! Tobě a jenom tobě jsem věrný! (pp. 155–56)

On the one hand, this ‘you’ appears intangible and yet finds expression in the distant and the hidden; it is there, driving life on — the narrator’s childhood, wedding, the seasons, daybreak and twilight — in a cyclical process, like Dylan Thomas’s force ‘that through the green fuse drives the flower’ and ‘drives the water through the rocks’. The ‘you’ represents also a conception of home which both belongs specifically to Hostovsky’s memory (his sling, his whipping top) and yet represents a home for all mankind. Hostovsky may be trying to evoke the unity of Being from which man has been expelled: the mourning of loss and the search for enduring truths in Listy concludes in a climactic praise for the mystery of the absolute.

In Sedmkrát, Hostovsky politicizes and makes explicit the intellectual/abstract/betrayal/death and peasant/concrete/constancy/life antinomies which had been latent in Listy. Woman is again a symbol of strength and reintegration with Life. In a novel full of power struggles, Hostovsky posits the artifice of the deracinated (by birth and by choice) Kavalský against the simplicity of his wife. Having just discovered from the doctor that she is pregnant, Kavalská finds herself struggling home through a crowd of people attending a Sokol rally. At first she feels threatened by the mass of people, likening them to one enormous creature, but, as she collapses to the ground through feeling weak and faint, she is protected with tender concern by some elderly countryfolk; these peasant voices are characterized by their affinity with nature, ‘Ochraptel volání na koně, na mraky, na vrány, hlas, jimuse uprostřed polí rozumí člověk i pták i včela. Hlasu polí odpovídaly hlasy selských světnic, vonících žitných chlebem’ (p. 191). It is not just Kavalská’s awareness of new life through her pregnancy which restores her
with a long neglected sense of her own strength, but also her encounter with these countryfolk, who embody a vitality antithetical to her husband’s morbidity, ‘Místo smrti ji kolébâ život. [...] Jaký div, nebyla sama, ač nelze uprostřed známých věcí, nýbrž uprostřed cizích lidí! Chcěl ji pomoci, chtěl ji vést a nést’ (p. 192). As she is emboldened by her belief that she can be part of some vital community, she finds the courage (after a long period of silence) to reject her husband and to speak out against him ‘ve jménu záhadné síly’ (p. 195). Kavalská’s return to the country is described impersonally in the historic present tense through the image of a woman struggling with a heavy suitcase at a railway station, with the sound of anvils ringing in the distance, ‘Ještě ji vidím, ještě ji vidím, naši pani, naši lásku, naši ženu — matku a Naději’ (p. 218). She is no longer Kavalská, but the personification of stoic patience, the symbolic nationhood as female, the nation’s moral identity metaphorized as maternity. Reflecting again Hostovsky’s portrayal of intellectual/peasant antinomies, Kavalský’s sister, Lazalová, also returns to the countryside, inspired by her childhood gardener (again, perhaps, led by peasant strength) to join a righteous underground organization operating from caves and consisting of workers, maids and students.

In Úkryt, it is a woman who persuades the narrator to sacrifice his life in order to blow up a ship. Having lived in the dark for many months, at first he mistakes her voice for that of a priest’s; he thinks the voice sounds like music he once heard long ago, in the mountains or on the water (emphasizing woman’s connection to another world, a lost paradise). When she informs him of her true identity, he suddenly recognizes her voice:


The woman’s voice becomes the voice of all women, perhaps the voice of the one woman, the Virgin Mary as mother, a compassionate agent of intercession with a higher authority, and mother as the personification of self-abnegation embracing her prodigal son. The narrator’s proposed sacrifice (he intends to aid the resistance by blowing up a ship with himself aboard it) is paradoxically
a practical act which will restore him to life and redeem him, but only to a life
of the spirit.

Hostovský’s search for meanings beyond the phenomenal loss and chaos of
the war, his discovery of a metaphysical unity, must be balanced against his
concern with the individual’s role in precipitating disunity. In his earlier fiction
Hostovský was concerned with the causes which precipitated an individual to
behave anti-socially or immorally, and enunciated the notion of a causal chain
which went some way towards explaining this kind of behaviour. Hostovský
develops this notion in his wartime work into an examination of the collective
aberration of the war and the causes behind it. Instead of beginning with the
basic principle governing his early work, looking from the outside in — what
kind of transgression has been committed by the world against an individual —
Hostovský reverses this principle and looks from the inside out — at the nature
of the individual’s transgression against the world, a relationship which he had
begun to examine in his work of the 1930s. Guilt and the responsibility of the
individual are therefore at the centre of Hostovský’s wartime work. A number
of critics have commented on this shift in perspective. Papoušek, for example,
states that the first-person narration of Hostovský’s wartime novels constitutes
a different mode of narration to the first person of his earlier work, which he
attributes to the transformation of the narrator/protagonist from an unconscious
object of the world to a subject conscious of his connection with a
transcendental structure and his sense of responsibility to that structure.
Reviewing Listy and Úkryt, Götz suggests that Hostovský’s exile has supplied
him with the psychological conditions to allow a consummation of his artistic
conception, with his prose now assuming a balladic and apocalyptic fever.
Götz comments on the fact that English critics have compared Hostovský with
Kafka, and he discerns as the common element between them ‘zvláště
úzkostný pocit hluboké spojitosti individuálního osudu s osudem celého světa
a temná baladická atmosféra, v níž se stírají hranice času a prostoru a v níž

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30 Papoušek, Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru, p. 105.
31 The critic of Hide and Seek (Úkryt) discerns ‘Allegorical and Kaffka[sic]-like-influences’
(Times Literary Supplement, 12 May 1950); another suggests that Midnight Patient
(Půlnocní pacient) is reminiscent of Kafka’s Amerika (Times Literary Supplement, 5
August 1955).
fikce a halucinace jsou nejreálnější reality’.

Whereas earlier Hostovský’s work had dealt with the psychological crises of people who were falling apart, now they are intensely conscious that their own personal fates are part of an overarching structure which extends beyond man: in Úkryt the narrator assumes a new moral power.

In Hostovský’s wartime work personal responsibility is paramount: every deed has political implications. Betrayal in the personal sphere becomes tantamount to betrayal in the political. The war becomes a symbolic representation of the consequences of an amalgam of individuals’ guilt, ‘protože každý z nás miloval někoho a něco, co nebylo dovoleno milovat’ (Ú, p. 58). In the letter ‘Závrat’ (Listy z vyhnanství), the narrator recalls his encounter with an Austrian who scoffs at the notion that dictators or politicians should be blamed for the war; he believes that because he told his wife that he wanted to be rid of her (he wanted to marry a younger woman) he is being punished for his sin and is therefore responsible for the collapse of Europe, ‘já jsem vinen, a třeba má vina byl poslední článek v přičinném řetězci’ (p. 77). He even fantasized about killing his wife but explains that he knew that the world would have come to an end had he done so. His sense of responsibility has a messianic dimension, for he is convinced that the fate of the world depends on the sins or virtues of a small number of apparently ordinary, but chosen, people, but that it is impossible for other people to trace the connection between these chosen ones and world events. Of course this is a hyperbolic expression of responsibility by the Austrian, but throughout Listy Hostovský is pushing to almost fantastic extremes: his search for metaphysical (hidden) patterns behind apparently random disorder is central to his moral vision of the individual’s relationship with the world.

Hostovský’s treatment of responsibility also extends to people’s failure to act at given moments: they are equally responsible for their passivity as they are for their trespasses. The Austrian remembers the exact details of the scene (where his wife was sitting, how the furniture was arranged) when he returned home drunk and decided to tell her that he could no longer bear to live with her. As she went into the bathroom, proceeded to sob and bang her head

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32 ‘G’ [F. Götz], ‘Vzestup Egona Hostovského’ in Národní osvobození, 17, no. 117, 21 May 1946, p. 4.
against the wall, he remembers feeling that there was a moment in which he could redeem the situation, ‘cosi ve mně zoufale křičelo: ještě je čas, utíkej, strhni ji do náručí, pros za odpustění, ještě je čas! Ale já se nehnul’ (p. 80). Three years later the Austrian finds himself in the country to which the narrator is exiled (which we assume is Belgium), staying in the country house of his friend’s relatives, only to open a room and be confronted by his former home, with the contents arranged exactly as they were, save for the presence of his wife, when he rejected her. Suddenly he hears an announcement on the radio declaring that all the telephone connections are broken and that German soldiers are entering Vienna. Now it is the Austrian who goes to the bathroom, wails and beats his head against the wall. The narrator reflects on this tale and on how far he is from the people dearest to him, regretting all that has not been uttered between them, ‘Je tolik slov o lásce a krásě, jež jsme si dosud nesdílili. [...] Nesmíme, nesmíme zapomenout! Vždyť jsou to slova, jež jediná mohou spasit svět’ (p. 82). Thus the individual’s withdrawal from the people around him, his failure to seek to communicate with them, appears to have allowed the war to prosper. One might connect these ideas with Hostovský’s treatment of the double, as well as with his treatment of the family’s indifference to one another in Žlár, where the symbolic lack of unity at the core of relationships unleashes widespread discord, although the discord is of universal proportions in Hostovský’s wartime work.

In Sedmkrát, Hostovský studies in detail the individual’s culpability and his attempts to shirk responsibility in the figure of Professor Marcel, the Frenchman who appears to be the main target of Hostovský’s scorn for the intellectual’s egotistic indolence, weakness and moral prevarication. In a scene which borders on the fantastic, Marcel is pursued tenaciously by a dog whom he allows to enter his flat only to discover that the dog has a letter attached to his collar. The letter is written by a man about to depart with his regiment to fight in the war and consists of an account of his pursuit of an arsonist who

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33 Hostovský treats an analogous scene of the protagonist’s failure to communicate his concerns in Úkryt. He experiences a nightmare, doubtless triggered by the fact that war is about to begin, in which his family join together as though in one body against the threat of an inexplicable horror. The nightmare appears to symbolize the strength of the family against this threat, if only they allow themselves to be close to one another. When he awakens, however, he calls out to his wife in order to share his dream with her, but refrains from doing so at the last moment.
financially destroyed him. Three days after his home was burnt down, the man received an anonymous letter denouncing him as a good-for-nothing who had received his just deserts for deceiving people who thought him decent. Eight years after this event the man was about to confront the arsonist when a state of general mobilization was declared by the president; the sense of his own mortality induced in the man by the war leads him to the recognition that all that the arsonist had written was true, ‘Byl jsem nicema, ale jen před Bohem spravedlivým, nikoli před světem ani před svým svědomím’ (p. 255). The man describes his letter as the confession of someone who sought criminality in others, but never in himself. Whosever receives his letter, he writes, will have been singled out by Fate for a reason.

Shortly after Marcel’s experience with the dog, he receives a letter from one of his most talented students, Jiří Holas, advising Marcel to publish a new edition of his dictionary with the words ‘honneur’ and ‘courage’ omitted. While unsurprised by the retributive missive (he recognizes the growing antipathy to all things French in Prague), Marcel is concerned by his own suspicion that he is somehow personally responsible for some enormous anonymous collective. His world-view begins to waver as he realizes ‘že nejen kdesi vysoko nad zemí, nýbrž také na zemi — a snad především na ní — má člověk účast v skryté, černokněžnické hře, jíž se nelze vyhnout’ (SHU, p. 258). In fact the two missives form part of a series of experiences in which Marcel attempts to convince himself that he is, unfairly, the random recipient of strange happenings and that he is being singled out as responsible for events beyond his control. A routine excursion for cigarettes, for example, results in barbed remarks from a one-handed trader (who addresses Marcel in French and reveals that he lost his hand fighting with the French in the last war) that the French will lose far more than their limbs as a consequence of their actions, “‘Az je mi váš někdy líto za to, co jste na sobě udělali!’” (p. 262). Marcel’s encounter with a madwoman on the street, who is talking to herself and gesticulating, is equally disconcerting to him, “‘Počkej, jen tak se mi nevytočiš, nebyl jsi na zemi sám a nebyl jsi hluchoněmý! To, co jsi žval, nezmizelo, na světě se nic neztratí!’” (p. 263). Of course the reader understands that her words pose an indirect rebuke to Marcel’s denial of responsibility.
Hostovsky uses Marcel’s flight from Prague as a means of extrapolating concerns about the nature of identity and the meaning of escape. The madwoman’s muttering, ‘jen tak se mi nevytočis’, spurs Marcel to consider how a part of him will remain for as long as people remember him even after his corporeal self has fled, ‘A ten nehmotný a přece mluvící Marcel je dotvořen a je nezměnitelný’ (p. 263). One would assume then that an individual can never wholly escape a situation, for he can never escape the legacy of his metaphysical image which outlives his presence. This notion is of more substance than the banal point that individuals’ physical absence does not absolve them of moral responsibility for the complications left in their wake (although it is a point that also interests Hostovsky); it may imply that an individual’s actions or utterances are irrevocable in so far as, once released by an agent, they inhabit a metaphysical space and acquire a force which exceeds the individual’s original intentions. The mortal subject appears to have his own double in his immortalized identity, for his actions and words persist beyond his material presence: Marcel muses on how his incorporeal self will ‘nenaprvitelně mluvit a jednat tak, jak dosud jednal a mluvil jeho hmotný dvojník’ (pp. 263–64). The existence of a double, notional (lasting) self independent of Marcel justly troubles him, ‘Shlukuje se opravdu vše, co říkáme a konáme, v jinou naší podobu, tvrđejší a platnější, než je podoba hmotná?’ (p. 264). Hostovský appears to place the devices of the Gothic novel in a modern context: responsibility issues from Marcel, and his actions and words spawn a metaphysical monster he cannot eradicate.

Hostovský’s wartime works are then studies of betrayal; they reflect an almost censorious disposition towards the consequences of withdrawing from life and retreating into aestheticism and games, and a less indulgent examination by Hostovský of the figure of the dreamer. On the international scale, the collapse — or rather, according to Hostovský’s depiction, the capitulation, and therefore betrayal — of France in the face of the German threat is treated by him as arguably a more significant turning-point than the

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34 In an interview on the occasion of Hostovský’s first (and brief) return to Czechoslovakia after the war for a meeting of writers, Hostovský alleges that most of the Frenchmen whom he met in France did not even know where Czechoslovakia was located (see ‘Dnešní Amerika očima Pražana’ in Mladá fronta, 2 July 1946, p. 5).
Munich crisis.\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Listy}, for example, was described by one critic as a portrait of exiles waiting in vain for French \textit{force majeure},\textsuperscript{36} and it cannot be coincidental that the Book of Revelation constitutes one intertext for these works; indeed, one might view the whole of Hostovský’s post-war work as reverberating with the after-shock of this ‘apocalyptic’ event. Paris is always the destination of the betrayer, and the Frenchman often, although there are exceptions, the embodiment of betrayal. In the short story ‘Zápisky Bedřicha Davida o velké nevěře’, which monitors the progress of a small group of exiles from France to Portugal, a mysterious Belgian is suspected of being a German spy by the narrator and is accused by him of planning to betray the three Czechs, to which the Belgian responds: ‘Tisickrát jsme už byli podvedeni! Co bylo ve Francii? Nevěřní vojáci, nevěřní generálové, nevěřní ministři, nevěřní kněží. Patříme k sobě, jak bych vás mohl zradit, i kdybych chtěl? Vždyť už dávno jste zrazeni!’ (p. 110). When the exiles encounter a group of French soldiers in the countryside, they are shocked to discover that the Frenchmen have no intention of returning to fight, but have in fact deserted the army in order to while away their last few hours in the company of women. The narrator is arrested as a suspected enemy parachutist and is saved by an old friend, the Frenchman Baron Loiseau, but even the Baron turns out to be a willing collaborator with the Germans.

In \textit{Sedmkrát}, Hostovský metaphorizes Marcel as French nationhood. When Jaroslav Ondřej first encounters Kavalský’s coterie they are sitting round a table in a bar speaking French. When Professor Marcel brings French wine for him and Ondřej to drink together, Ondřej’s description of the taste of the wine serves as an intimation of the impending betrayal of Europe by France, ‘to víno s chuti milenčina dechu, s chuti výššíků v prosluněné volnosti, s chuti úrody, jež přezrála, s chuti sily, jež usnula, s chuti bohatství, jež není tvé’ (\textit{SHU}, p. 142). As a blackout envelops Prague, Kavalský arrives, and the three characters drink together ‘To víno Francie, to víno sladké zrady, to víno svobody, jež neodvádí daň, to víno umírání, jež voní životem’ (p. 143). This scene is a turning-point in the novel, for Kavalský announces that he is to attend a secret

\textsuperscript{35} Indeed Hostovský makes this point himself: ‘Krach Francie byl však pro mne ještě horší než Mnichov’ (Liehm, \textit{Generace}, p. 377).

meeting with Leon Kastner and intends to take Ondřej with him. Marcel greets this announcement with enthusiasm, for he declares himself bored with life and eager for his friends to bring back to the group 'nové víno, novou krev, nové řády' (p. 144). Professor Marcel is satirized (and the satire often tips over into sarcasm) by Hostovký as the epitome of French immorality and irresponsibility. Marcel’s world-view is grounded on selfish principles — man lives for himself alone and his only duty in life is to observe. He is initially positive about the prospects for France in its armistice with Germany. On his journey to Brussels, he keeps a notebook of his favourable impressions of the Germans, contenting himself with the thought that France and Germany as large nations are like grown-ups who do not need the consent of children (that is, Czechoslovakia) to come to a satisfactory agreement. He is subsequently embarrassed by his warm feelings towards Germany (he excises from his notebook the sentences concerning an agreement between Germany and France) after a chance meeting with the Nazi Leon Kastner at a party hosted by his ex-wife, where the German voices his hopes for France to be the German nation’s prostitute.

More generally, however, we identify betrayal in either one of two extremes: in an exclusively intimate sphere — betrayal of one’s spouse, one’s family, one’s friends, one’s self even — or in the public sphere in the individual’s relationship to the abstract entities of nation or state. In the short story ‘Přízraky’, essentially an exemplum concerning the individual’s negation of his own desires and his assumption of responsibility for the downtrodden, Hostovsky pits one form of betrayal against the other. Barely any significant action takes place: a man from Prague appears at the narrator’s flat; tells the narrator of his moral dilemma; they go to a bar frequented by émigrés; the narrator leaves in horror at the vision of people sinking inexorably into various states of degradation and immorality; the man pursues the narrator and reveals how he has finally resolved his dilemma as they part. The man’s dilemma is posed as a choice between betraying his lover — a Jewess who has had to flee to Switzerland and to destitution — and betraying his country — he

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37 V. Kocourek comments also on the lack of action in the stories, ‘které mají leckde spíš ráz causerie či velmi kultivovaného fejetonu’: ‘rek’ reviewing Listy in Rudé právo, no. 146, 25 June 1946, p. 4.
has been entrusted with an important message, indirectly perhaps from the government-in-exile, to take to Prague, but a coded telegram from home suggests that he will be killed on his return. The solution of the dilemma resides in its ambiguous dissolution, as the man states that: ‘Člověk pěce nemůže zradit bud’ národ, nebo jedinou lásku, neexistuje takové dilemma. Člověk nemůže zradit nikoho a nic, jen ... [...] jen Ježíše ... Krista!’ (LZV, p. 56).

Betrayal is also a theme, however, in the reception of one of these wartime works. *Sedmkrát* treats the intelligentsia’s collusion in the rise of Fascism through a study of the behaviour of a clique of seven hangers-on (six Czechs and one Frenchman) grouped around the Russian *poète maudit*, Josef Kavalský, who are drawn together by their common weakness and immorality during the period immediately preceding and following the Munich crisis. The novel provoked a scandal among the Czech *émigré* community in America when it was first published there, for certain writers and and critics — drawn to a literal interpretation of the text — seized on it with nationalist fervour as treacherously anti-Czech in its depiction of the Czech intelligentsia. One critic called for a people’s tribunal, and the Czech *émigré* press incriminated Hostovsky as a traitor of the people with veiled comments about the involvement of some kind of financial transaction.38 Roman Jakobson, who was internationally renowned for his founding of the Moscow and Prague Linguistic Circles and for his leading role in establishing Structuralism as a critical approach, was the chief instigator of the vilification campaign against Hostovsky.

In his published contribution to the 1993 Hronov conference, Brabec attempts to understand the background to these events.39 He begins by making the point that, at a time of crisis for a country, and indeed for humanity generally, it is impossible to support a position outside of politics: academic disciplines are no longer neutral matters of debate, but are transformed into either condemnation or adoration. Those who in the past may have acted in

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38 Památník národního písemnictví [Museum of National Literature], Prague (hereafter PNP), Letter from Egon Hostovský to Josef Tráger, 27 April 1946.
39 Jiří Brabec, ‘Konfliktní přijetí Hostovského románu Sedmkrát v hlavní úloze’ in Návrat Egonu Hostovského, pp. 7–12.
good faith apply an equal amount of effort in settling their scores with people they hold responsible for the total crisis of modern civilization.

Jakobson begins attacking Hostovský indirectly, however, even before the publication of Sedmkrát, behaviour which Brabec understands as an aversion to Hostovský’s poetics but which one might argue signals a deep disgust for Hostovský himself. In August 1942, while Jakobson was teaching at the Free French University in New York, he wrote an article for the émigré newspaper New-Yorské listy concerning the role of European emigrants in, and their impact on, both American and European culture, ‘O úkolech Evropských vědců v Americe’. The rather bland title of the article belies its venomous and polemical import. Jakobson outlines an especial role for European academics in America:

Jde o neustále a neúprosné odhalování nacistického kontrabandu v mezinárodním vědeckém usu. At' nam tato práce zavádí policejné, nesmíme se jí velkopánsky vyhýbat. Ponejvíce zakulčená nacistická infiltrace v současném vědeckém dění, v dnešním světovém ideologickém kvasu, patří k zbraním páté kolony. Tento pavědecký mikrob se nesmí podceňovat.

His inflammatory choice of language (which paradoxically echoes the kind of rhetoric the Nazis were using at the time) — infiltrace, mikrob — underlines his intention to exhort other academics to ideological warfare and a witch-hunt to root out any traitors or enemy sympathizers (the fifth column) in their midst: in sum, they must not think themselves above politics. Jakobson warns his readers that they may find Nazi watchwords where they least expect them and unfortunately chooses Hostovský, who is identified only as a well-known Czech novelist and not by his name, as his paradigm, citing from an article published two months before in the same newspaper:

‘Nezáleží na tom, co my chceme ... Připravujme se k velké pokóře před národom ... Ztraťme se v něm ... Zabme v sobě vše, co by branilo pokóře před národom.’ Je to typicky nacistická fraseologie, jakoby Frickovi z oka vypadla. Při tom vímme ovšem, že autor není nacistou, ale právě proto

40 Ibid., p. 7.
41 Roman Jakobson, Nedělní New-Yorské listy, 52, no. 32, 9 August 1942.
42 Ibid.
43 Taken from Hostovský’s obituary for Vančura, ‘Zavraždili Vladimíra Vančuru’, New-Yorské listy, 52, 7 June 1942.
Jakobson then goes on to complain that the person who commissioned him to write this article requested that he edit out the paragraph on the Czech writer, fearing repercussions, and explaining that although the writer was 'sice dekadentním literátem' and had written something foolish, he had meant nothing by it and had only intended to say that the true people were at home and those abroad should remain quiet. Jakobson finds his editor’s viewpoint deeply ‘reakční a rozkladné, je tu obnovovâni stříbrnáckého zlehcování zahraniční revoluce’: he bombastically fuels his argument by citing thinkers and artists who have found themselves emigrants in the past, namely Komenský, Methodius, Mickiewicz, Masaryk, Garibaldi and Lenin. He rhetorically ponders whether these individuals would have resorted to resignation at their fates, arguing that they suppressed their own desires. Jakobson’s venom is not reserved for those he considers merchants of Nazi ideology alone, but rather for all those involved in German academic research, and one might add for all Germans. He rejects any ‘criminal’ attempts to detach the German people and German ideology from the present German regime, and bombastically charges European (and especially Czech) intellectuals to demonstrate that the bloodthirsty Germans of today are no different from their forefathers.  

*Sedmkrát* was finally published in December 1942. According to Brabec, on 25 February 1943 Jakobson gave a lecture on Czech novels from abroad, in which he concentrated almost exclusively on Hostovský’s new work; furthermore, the contents of his lecture concurred in certain points with a review of Hostovský’s novel which had appeared a month earlier, 24 January 1943 — written by a close friend of Jakobson’s, Stanislav Budín.

In his review of *Sedmkrát*, Budín from the outset is sketching political parameters which will determine not only the way in which he reads Hostovský’s novel, but also how he intends a reader to receive his review. Budín’s emotive words appear to be directed at a domestic Czech audience.

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45 Ibid.
and, like a politician, he uses hyperbole in a clumsy attempt to cajole his reader into position: Hostovský has written a novel after two years 'v americkém klidu'; he has the advantage of writing freely unlike those writers 'žijící v nacistickém pekle'. Thus, according to Budín, it is incumbent upon Hostovský to deliver the goods, since he both represents the émigrés and can work freely without fear of censorship and the 'gestapácké sekery'. On turning to the novel itself, Budín accurately describes Kavalský and his coterie as liars and swindlers who are intent on counterfeiting the meaning of words, but then inaccurately proclaims that 'Taková je podle Hostovského česká inteligence' and that not a single full-blooded person exists as a counter-example. In Budín's view, Hostovský further compounds his crime by forging most of these characters as active traitors. With bludgeon-like dramatic effect, Budín quotes from the Nazi meeting convoked in the novel and interprets the speaker's words as though they were Hostovský's own, thus allowing Budín cause to vent his indignation:

Ale vždyť to vše prostě není pravda! Nebylo u nás 'geniálního spisovatele', který by byl agentem nacismu. Nebylo v českém divadle herce, který by se stal hlasatelem nacistické stanice 'Pravda vítězů'. Nebylo takových jednotlivců a nebylo ani takových sborových typů nebo zjevů. České spisovatelstvo — vždyť je to Karel Čapek, jemuž puklo srdeč zdvih nad národní katastrofou, vždyť je to Vladislav Vančura, který umřel mučednickou smrtí v předních bojových liních národa, vždyť to jsou naší spisovatelé, kteří dnes jsou mučeni v německých koncentrácích, které ani teror ani korupce nemohou zlomit! Vždyť zrovna v těchto dnech přišla zpráva, jak nacisté vypsali horentní odměny za quislingovské povídky a jak této soutěže se nezúčastnil ani jediný český spisovatel a jak proto nacisté musí vyhrožovat, že je navěky za tu odvahu umlčí! Česká inteligence — vždyť to jsou naší studenti, kteří první v celém světě se odvázili proti nacistům demonstrovat na ulicích, kteří proto postoupili strašná muka, právě ti studenti, kteří byli na české literatuře vychováni, kteří českou kulturu — onen podle Hostovského výplod nacistických pomahačů — ssáli s mlékem mateřským!

Budín's review appears to feed from its own rabid nationalism, rather than from a critique of Hostovský's novel.

In Hostovský's correspondence of 1945 and 1946 with his friend Josef Träger, the main editor of Melantrich who was responsible for the reissuing of Hostovský's wartime works in 1946, the author's anxiety concerning the
novel’s imminent reception is a recurring motif. Hostovský writes to Träger, as though to warn him in advance, that there was a great campaign against the novel in America, with public meetings organized against him by such critics as Roman Jakobson and Stanislav Budin. ‘Měl jsem být zničen morálně a politicky. Kampaně se zučastnili i vysocí hodnostáři z Londýna (vyslanec Šejnoha, plukovník Vlček). Jakobson a Budin šli tak daleko, že mě nafkli z národní zrady, ze stříbrnáctví a z pašování nacistické ideologie.’ Various prominent Czechs, such as Jiří Voskovec, Jan Werich and Otokar Odložilík, as well as the newspapers of the extreme left, defended Hostovský, but he complains that nobody from London contacted him and no one denounced the campaign, ‘Dnes se její původci za ni stydí. Já tenkrát byl nucen jít na “bezplátou dovolenou”. Vrátil jsem se z ní jen na naléhání Jana Masaryka.’ On 27 April 1946 Hostovský clearly forgets that he has already informed Träger of the public meetings organized against him, mentioning them again, with the added detail of his countrymen spitting in front of him. He also informs Träger of a threat issued to him that ‘naši doma’ would end up being executed.

The immediate post-war reception of Hostovský’s wartime work, apart from reflecting one facet of the culture of transition, is important also as a further commentary on this accusation of betrayal. While the Czech reception, in 1946, of Hostovský’s wartime work (and, most especially, Sedmkrát) was on

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47 Hostovský appears anxious about the reissue of the wartime works in Czechoslovakia: he writes to Träger on 30 November 1945 (PNP deposits) that, if Träger believes his work will be received with some resistance, he should not hurry with their publication. It is clear also that Hostovský feels under pressure to deliver Cizinec hledá byt to Träger (PNP, Letter of 15 September) and wonders if it is in some way to protect the publishing of Sedmkrát.

48 PNP, Letter from Egon Hostovský to Josef Träger, 16 October 1945.


50 Apart from the meetings and the press campaign, Hostovský was also denounced in his administrative work, by the Americans as a Bolshevik, and by the Soviets as a Fascist. According to Hostovský, the envoy/minister Šejnoha sent ‘secret’ material about Hostovský to his boss, Papánek, in London — the material seems to have been some kind of evidence proving Hostovský to be mad — with the response from Papánek that he could not yet publish the article because there was a strong feeling of sympathy for Hostovský in America at that time, but that he would save the material for a more advantageous opportunity. Hostovský terms these activities, with irony, as the ‘zahraniční odboj na západě’ (PNP, Letter from Egon Hostovský to Josef Träger, 27 April 1946).

51 PNP, Letter from Egon Hostovský to Josef Träger, 16 October 1945.

52 Ibid.
the whole positive, there are some notable exceptions. I will cite briefly a few examples as representatives of the spectrum of this critical reception, and as indicators of the political atmosphere in Czechoslovakia during that time. Among those critics who appear critically objective and genuine are Grossman and Götz. Jan Grossman describes *Sedmkrát* as one of the most interesting Czech treatments of contemporary European problems, ‘Je obízem myšlenkové krise tohoto století, v níž moderní člověk čím hlouběji a všestranněji poznává a analýzuje skutečnost a odhaluje její mnohotožnou, proměnlivost a relativitu, tím více ztrácí schopnost zaujmout v ní pevný postoj, pevné stanovisko, zúčastnit se jí jakkoliv činem.’ Götz attempts a serious interpretation of the novel, arguing that Hostovsky was transposing his vision of pre-war France onto Czechoslovakia, which in the light of Hostovsky’s preoccupation with Marcel may be an astute observation. Běhounek welcomes Hostovsky’s work as an unencumbered view from outside on the war, and appears to defend Hostovsky from the allegations of treachery against him. One strand, which denigrates Hostovsky’s work for its lack of realism, may be motivated by the fashionable rejection of the psychological approach to the novel. Another is politically orientated in understanding Hostovsky’s advocacy of action as the hallmark of a ‘new’ society. František Jakubův, however, exemplifies the

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54 See ‘G’ [F. Götz], ‘Románová apokalypsa Egona Hostovského’ in *Národní osvobození*, 17, no. 271, 26 November 1946, p. 5. Götz argues that it was precisely against the intelligentsia in Czechoslovakia that the occupiers targeted their hatred, and that the situation was the same elsewhere in Europe; he also suggests that a particular chemistry took place by which the people were united with the intelligentsia.
55 ‘vbk.’ [Václav Běhounek], for example, welcomes *Listy* as a work which will be different from the domestic novels on the war, which have had to withstand the pressure of the censors weighing every word and sometimes altering the direction of writers (in *Práce*, 2, no. 129, 2 June 1946, p. 6).
56 See ‘vbk.’ [Václav Běhounek], ‘Český román evropské kolaborace’ in *Práce*, 2, no. 259, 10 November 1946, p. 4: ‘Ale nelze právě dokázat lásku k zemi, k jejímu lidu a k jejich slavným dějům tím, že si v jejich středu posvítíme na odporné slabochy a vyvrhneme je z něho?’
57 ‘Z.S.’ [Z. Šmíd] adjudges *Cizinec*, for example, to be cast too vaguely and unable to compete with novels which concern themselves with ‘a description of the real tragedy of the Second World War’, with the style of the sentences ‘never broken from hard rock’ but rather characterized by a smooth coalescence and diffused imprecision. See ‘Hostovského pokus o román metafyzický’ in *Lidová demokracie*, 3, no. 180, 5 August 1947, p. 4.
58 Michal Sedloň, for example, thinks the novel is a parable in which Hostovsky is unveiling already the signs of the new humanity: see *Rudé právo*, no. 156, 10 July 1946, p. 4. František Götz is also inclined in this direction: he interprets the wartime works as a portrait of people who are broken by the times growing to a moral power. See ‘G’ [F.
Czechocentricity, and the slightly more pernicious approach, of some reviewers: he approaches Úkryt with the conviction that readers will be curious to know if Hostovský’s ‘stay abroad’ has had any effect on his mode of thinking, but is relieved to discover that Hostovský’s roots are firmly established in ‘native soil’. Jakubův goes so far as to interpret the novel as a representation of the situation in which Czech man finds himself: he has been led down a blind alley, and, alone, without foreign help, must contemplate the path to the source of humanity. Remembering the facts that the protagonist has, by his own confession, led himself down this blind alley, and that his existence depends on foreign help (he is, after all, being concealed and fed by a Frenchman), what the review may intimate is a lingering sense of betrayal of the Czechs by the West in the Munich Agreement; moreover, there may be some intimation in the concern for Hostovský’s orientation of the East–West cultural tug-of-war that the critic is trying to ascertain whether Hostovský has indeed remained faithful to his Czechness.

The reclamation of Hostovský as Czech must also be placed against the broader context of the post-war reconstruction of national identity: the desire to return to a ‘normal’ state of affairs and to restore some sense of national identity depended in some part on the symbolic recovery of integrity through the physical return of those individuals who had been in exile. Hostovský says, for example, that Halas wrote to him, averring that the war would not end until he embraced him. That notional integrity was, however, irrevocably shattered, and in the case of Hostovský, what has generally been accepted by critics as a second exile after the Communist takeover in 1948 was in fact a
continuation of Hostovský’s first exile, and Hostovský’s so-called return was never wholehearted. Hostovský experienced the wartime period as a barrage of attack from all sides. As a Jew, he was the subject of a German campaign against his ‘Jewish-masonic’ books in occupied Bohemia, and he surmised from his sister that it was someone who had once been a guest in their house who had spearheaded the campaign. He was accused by the Americans of being a Bolshevik and by the Soviets of being a Fascist. After the end of the war Hostovský had sent a friendly letter to his former friend, the writer Vladimír Neff, only to discover from someone else that Neff had broken all contact with Hostovský and considered him a ‘padouch, který zradil vlastní rodinu’. It is not surprising that after experiencing a series of accusations and counter-accusations, Hostovský did not return to Czechoslovakia immediately in 1945. It may also be true that it suited the Czech government to allow Hostovský to remain in America for propagandistic reasons. Acting on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the state secretary Clementis wrote to Hostovský on 24 July 1945 requesting that he remain at the Consul in New York:

Milý priateľu! Presadil som zásadu, že všetí čo boli počas celého odboja von na našich zastupiteľských urádoch, sa musia vrátiť na čas domov. Viem však, že i v tomto musia byť výnimky. Zjásté je na mieste, aby si bol jednou z nich. Sledoval som Tvoju aktivitu počas odboja a uvedomujem si, že to má význam, aby si ostal v Americe, takže Tvoje preloženie zatiaľ nie je aktuálne.

62 Václav Černý writes of Hostovský’s return to Prague in 1946 that he came back to Czechoslovakia only to secure himself a post in Norway, ‘byl človek v gruntu nepoliticky, ale z Beneše emigračního si přinášel dojem odporu smíšeného s nedvěřivým strachem, sdešoval ti jej soukromě a tiše, z úst do ucha’: Václav Černý, Paměti III: 1945–1972, Brno, 1992, p. 179. Černý also reports how Hostovský was assisted in gaining his post as cultural attaché in Scandinavia by Jan Masaryk and Clementis (ibid., p. 198).

63 In a letter to Träger Hostovský mentions correspondence with his sister from the period 1941–42 in which she informed him of these facts (PNP, Letter from Egon Hostovský to Josef Träger, 30 November 1945).

64 PNP, Letter from Egon Hostovský to Josef Träger, 27 April 1946.

65 PNP, Letter from Egon Hostovský to Josef Träger, 3 January 1946.

66 Extract of letter from Miloš Pohorský’s epilogue to Dobročiný večírek, p. 163. Apparently, Clementis asserted that every employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who had spent the war abroad must return home for at least a short time, ‘Ale mně napsal, že na můj návrh nenaléhá, že můj pobyt v USA má kulturní význam’ (Hostovský in Liehm, Generace, p. 377).
In any case, Hostovský’s lingering concern with his public reputation is the subtext of much of his correspondence of this period: in a letter to Träger of 22 May 1946 he writes: ‘Ovšem nevim, jak se na mne dívá dnes a zda vyhoví. Mám v Praze všelijaké přítelíky, kteří se pohotově starají o mé ostouzení. Neff v tom vyniká tak, že už jsem byl v pokušení hned po návratu podat na něho žalobu pro nactiutrhlání. Ale myslím si — vem ho čert!’ Clear also, however, from Hostovský’s correspondence of this period is his sense of being emotionally blackmailed by his friends to return to Czechoslovakia, and even perhaps his fear that his absence was being attributed to political reasons. He writes to Träger, on 6 November 1945, that


Dnes je po válce. Mám tedy právo myslet také trochu na sebe. Jsem v cizině, ne už v exilu, a domov už není nyní, nýbrž především lidé. Ti lidé mají jiné starosti než bývalé emigranty. Ale jestliže některým přátelům záleží z prostého kamarádství na tom, abych byl brzy mezi nimi, neměli...
by mi ztěžovat návrat (mezi ty, k nimž vzhližím s dojetím, laskou a úctou) nejapnými výčitkami a pochybovačstvím.

Hostovský’s perhaps hypersensitive self-justification and explicit statements of patriotism in this letter are, most likely, a response to the climate of incrimination which continued into the post-war period. The letter also demonstrates, however, Hostovský’s acute awareness of a gulf between him and his friends, and one might suggest that this sense of separation and his wartime experiences were to intensify Hostovský’s fictional portrayal of disintegration from this point onwards.

Hostovský had already written his next novel, Cizinec hledá byt, before he eventually returned to Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1947 (the novel was published in 1947). In a letter to Träger of April 1946, he mentions a new novel he is working on, set in America; on 29 August he declares that he will finally complete the novel that week, and that he is toying with the title Kupci času. One intuits from Hostovský’s correspondence that he feels under pressure from Träger to complete the novel, and that he reads into Träger’s behaviour (perhaps unfairly, although understandably given the Jakobson campaign against Hostovský) a reluctance from the publisher to press ahead with publishing Sedmkrát v hlavní úloze before his new work. There is no mention of the novel again until a couple of months later, when one ascertains, from Hostovský’s solicitude, that Träger must finally have received and read the novel: ‘Nezdá se Ti, že je hodně jiná než dřívější práce a že tam je dost humorné? Třeba ty nepokládáš za srandu, o čem si já myslíš, že je k smíchu.’ Hostovský’s evaluation of his own novel as humorous is surprising since it appears laden with a deep pessimism. One can only assume that Hostovský is referring to his parodying of a sacred plane of narrative, which is apparent through the connotations of his first intended title for the work. On the one hand, to be a buyer of time suggests the individual’s attempt to defer the inevitable, in this instance Marek’s attempts to delay dying. The buying of time has a wider application, however, in Hostovský’s depiction of soulless

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70 Hostovský came for a three-week stay in 1946 and mentioned in an interview with Svobodné slovo (2, no. 141, 20 June 1946, p. 7) that the novel was due to come out.
71 PNP, Letter from Egon Hostovský to Josef Träger, n.d. but the envelope has the postmark 24 April 1946.
72 PNP, Letter from Egon Hostovský to Josef Träger, 15 September 1946, in which Hostovský writes that he is still editing the novel.
Americans, who fail to mark time with any meaningful appreciation of their existence and to live in the knowledge of their mortality, but rather buy time with money and narrow reasoning; they are concerned only with their empirical existence. Hostovský parodies these concerns through Marek’s encounter with the organization ‘Stráž’, whose aim is to support artists and allow them to pursue their work in peace. Marek approaches them for financial assistance to allow him to complete his work. In return he is expected to broadcast in Czech to his countrymen on the subject of peace, and to obtain financial support for the organization from the Czechoslovak government. The organization will use the money to ‘buy time’ on the radio.

The disintegration of society as a consequence of war was a theme Hostovský had already treated in the 1920s, but his works after the Second World War are more sharply parabolic, counterpoising anomie with a quasi-spiritual search for an irredeemable unity. Cizinec hledá byt signals a movement into a more complex and ambiguous binary plane of narration through the figure of the bloud (ingénu). The critic and novelist Daniela Hodrová has described the novel of the bloud as an ancient theme which persists from knightly romances through to the twentieth century. She identifies among the characteristics of this sub-genre the nomadic protagonist’s ‘difference’, manifest as madness or foreignness; his displacement from another time or place or even world, so that he may sometimes act as conveyor of a chthonic motif in the text; his immanent difference from others; his habitation of attics or hotel rooms; his witnessing of intimate events — sometimes his instrumental role in action as a kind of agent provocateur; and his existence on the boundary between two worlds, whether this world and another or the human and the animal. Hodrová argues that, in some cases, the figure embodies the fragmented world, as well as often being the representative of a degenerated mythic consciousness: the ingénu comes from outside with the desire to restore the expelled myth inside and together with that restore

73 Hostovský has a little joke with the sitting members of the committee, John Frank, Max Mumford, Robert Wilson (CHB, p. 137), clearly references to his friends, the writers Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford and Edmund Wilson.
75 Just before he dies, Marek looks at his friend Novák with feverish eyes, ‘jako zvíře, chtějící stůj co stůj porozumět pošetile řeči svého pána’ (CHB, p. 159).
himself, and to vault over the ravine between Nature and city, art and life, the esoteric and the empirical.\textsuperscript{76} The Myshkin-like Marek embodies all of these characteristics: he is described by one character as different from Americans, but different also from other refugees, and by another as different from other mortals — paní Carson describes him as ‘posel z jiného světa’ (p. 103); he is described as being outside earthly time because he knows that he is dying; the action concerns his search for a room in which to work; he carries a heavy black case with him, which one might consider a chthonic motif (the case as coffin); he talks to himself and occasionally greets questions with silence (Hodrová identifies a deep tradition of silence or of inability to speak as one form of mythic or sacred speech); he is associated with the animal world through his being befriended by a dog; and he involuntarily causes disruption in every household he enters. Moreover, Marek is often the witness of intimate events, and his role as an observer frequently overlaps with the third-person narration so that what we receive is sometimes Marek’s reading of a situation. When, for example, Marek meets his first prospective landlady, the capricious paní Franková, the narration consists mostly of their dialogue, and the remainder a combination of the narrator’s description of action and Marek’s acute observations of Franková’s behaviour, ‘Bytná probodává nájemníka až k morku. V jejich očích se opět něco hroutí. Co vypluje z trosek? Klid nebo nová bouř? Vyplulo ticho před bouří. Ošklivé ticho, utahující límec doktora Marka k zalnutí’ (CHB, p. 21). Hostovský’s inclusion of Marek’s perspective in the narration has the effect of emphasizing his difference, for he appears as an alien concentratedly trying to learn the rules of terrestrial behaviour, of exposing the lack of real communication between characters. Hostovský may also intend Marek to be a non-character in so far as his primary function is to reflect the nature of other characters back at them; certainly Hostovský plays with the notion of him as an omniscient god who knows the secrets of others’ consciences (and one might then view his suitcase as a Pandora’s Box).

Hostovský’s text at every point simultaneously evokes and parodies the sacred. The reader is led by the narrator to believe that Marek is one of God’s messengers on earth (he bears the name of an evangelist) entrusted to discover if people are capable of attaining real peace; the woman by whom he is being

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p. 32.
enticed, the narrator seduces the reader into believing, is Death (again the chthonic motif and Marek’s role as a bridge between two worlds); and yet Death communicates with Marek by means of a telephone, and the woman could be interpreted as either Marek’s mistress or the mother of his son. He describes his work as a fight against disease, which, on the sacred plane of narrative, represents his role as God’s envoy, and, on the prosaic plane, his search for a cure for high blood pressure.

Marek’s attempt to vault over the ravine between the esoteric and the empirical is, however, predictably doomed to failure: ‘Posel nevyřkl hledanou poučku ani zaklinadlo. Vyslovil hádanku’ (p. 162). The fact that no one but Marek can reach this other world — both Novák and Carson are frustrated by the fact that they do not know the telephone number of the mysterious woman — is another variation on the fracture of the two worlds. Hostovský’s binary approach to his subject-matter in Cizinec hledá byt leads him to a new structural composition in his post-war work in his treatment of the sacred and the profane. Furthermore, Marek’s realization that the individual cannot find peace and freedom without withdrawing from the world marks the beginning of Hostovský’s conception of exile as the only viable alternative through which the protagonist can retain his individuality and identity.

77 In his review of the novel, Gôtz, for example, offers a wholly literal interpretation of the function of the woman in the novel: he describes Marek as being afraid of his private happiness in love with a woman, with whom he has a close relationship, and afraid of being swallowed up by the private sphere entirely. See ‘G.’ [F. Gôtz] on Cizinec hledá byt in the review ‘Románová psychologie churavého lidství’ in Národní osvobození, 18, no. 119, 22 May 1947, p. 5.
Chapter 6

The Last Refuge of the Self: Hostovsky’s Post-War World

Hostovsky returned to Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1947. One imagines that he was no less isolated than he had been in America. Most of his close family, and some of his friends, had been killed during the Nazi Occupation. Home felt alien to him, the pre-war cultural habits of the intelligentsia had changed: whereas before he had enjoyed going to a wine-bar or café nearly every day to discuss literature with his friends (a common pastime for the Czech inter-war literati), during the Occupation people had been driven out from such venues. One remembers how anxious Hostovsky had felt in America about growing apart from his friends, and his description of the culture of recrimination he found on his return to Prague must have appeared to him as a nevertheless shocking realization of his forebodings: ‘Všude bylo příliš mnoho náloží trpětí vůči bližním pro vytrpěná příkoří a utrpení. ... A příliš mnoho marných pokusů nalézat společného jmenovatele pro všechna zla, jež nás potkala.’ In the light of Hostovsky’s concern in his wartime work with the paramountcy of individual responsibility, the ‘collectivization’ of guilt which Hostovsky comments upon here, and which was doubtless the product of an increasingly socialist Czechoslovakia, can only have fuelled further his sense of a social crisis. Hostovsky was not alone in his disillusionment, perhaps typifying the unease of the returnee: the Czech dramatist and actor Jiří

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1 Josef Träger, ‘O Egonu Hostovském’ in Glosy ze Strahova, 9–10, 1969, p. 23. The memoirs of writers, critics and journalists frequently mention meetings in wine bars and cafes: Julius Firt describes how at the end of the 1920s a group of littérateurs, led by F.X. Šalda and including Josef Hora, Vladislav Vančura, Ivan Olbracht, S.K. Neumann, Helena Maliřová and, from the younger writers, Hostovsky, used to meet in the wine bar ‘U Šupů’ (Knihy a osudy, Brno, 1991, p. 287).

2 Antonín J. Liehm, Generace, Prague, 1988, p. 380. For someone like Hostovsky, who depended excessively on his friends to make him feel secure and self-confident, the altered social habits in Prague must have provoked a little panic. See Träger (‘O Egonu Hostovském’, p. 23) for an unsentimental depiction of Hostovsky’s relationships with his friends: ‘Jakoby v svých přátel hledal ochranu před stálé citěnou osamělosti, jakoby v nich nalézal oporu pro svou slabost a sílu čelit svým vnitřním mučivým stavům, jakoby se uchýloval do jejich náručí z pocitu nedospělosti.’
Voskovec, for example, states that he was disturbed by his return to Prague in the autumn of 1946 because he felt that he could not understand or get close to people, and that young people, especially, appeared to be devoid of spontaneity (he describes the horror of watching them dance like robots with frozen expressions on their faces), 'Čišel z toho protektorát, kocovina, nepřirozená zdrženlivost, snaha nedat na sobě nic znát.'

Alienation develops as an important theme in Hostovsky's post-war work. In the 1948 collection of short stories Osamělí buřiči, the disjunction between the worries of 'people at home' and those of 'former émigrés', and the exploitation of guilt in this relationship, form the basis of the short story 'Návrát', a compact study of insularity and guilt. The Jewish protagonist, the civil servant Alex Braun, refuses to recount his wartime experiences to his old schoolfriend when he returns to Czechoslovakia to look for his brother because he would prefer to avoid what happens with most 'half-foreigners' in these situations, 'přešla s domácími lidmi o to, kdo ví zkušené, nebo se jim také někdy omlouváme za to, že jsme ráčili zůstat na živu' (OB, p. 140). The outsider’s perspective of the returnee serves as a device to expound the social changes precipitated by the war. Not only is there social breakdown in the form of the atomization of the Skalicka community — Alex and Mikuláš encounter no one on their walk to find a pub because people have got used to sitting at home — but instances of personal collapse (Mikuláš's wife seems to have suffered from a nervous breakdown) and, more predominantly, communicative breakdown, in so far as most of the characters are driven by the need to talk, not listen, to be understood, not to understand (and one would link this with Hostovsky's broader concern for semantic atrophy). The uneasy tension of 'Návrát' is located in the forced amiability of the characters and the manner in which they attempt to conceal their alienation from one another.

Hostovsky's return also coincided with the strengthening, and stifling, hold of the Communist Party on domestic politics. Critics often say of Hostovsky that he never aligned himself with any political parties and surmise that he was therefore apolitical. Černý, for example, describes Hostovsky in his memoirs as

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3 Liehm, Generace, p. 426.
4 Published by Knihovna Lidových novin, Brno, 1948.

185
‘člověk z gruntu nepoliticky’. Yet it appears that Hostovský loathed politics (he speaks in one interview of his old aversion to politics and politicians), which one might consider demonstrated in Hostovský’s case (quite apart from any biographical evidence) through his post-war fictional attack on politics and politicians. The critic Antonín Měšťan states that immediately preceding, during and after the war Hostovský did not take up a ‘clear-cut’ political position, with the result that, following the Communist coup of 1948, Clementis, the Communist Foreign Minister, had no grounds on which to expel Hostovský from his diplomatic post. It is unclear whether Měšťan is insinuating that Hostovský was deliberately vague about his views in order to secure his own future, or whether his security was merely a fortuitous result of his silence. Měšťan points out that Hostovský did not come out against the post-February regime, and that in the spring of 1948 some writers thought him a ‘fellow-traveller’ of the Communists.

It is important to clarify categorically that Hostovský was never a Communist: he states baldly twice in his private correspondence with Träger that he is not a Communist. We can discern, however, from the same archival evidence that Hostovský looked on the post-war coalition government favourably, and perhaps was especially reluctant to criticize the Communists. In a letter to Träger of 16 October 1945, he writes that the present government is behaving far better towards him than had any government of the inter-war republic; he believes that there are people in the government who know what they want and who have already achieved some good results. Hostovský was also seeking, however, to keep his distance from any political activities. In a letter of 27 September 1946, he declares himself unafraid of a political fight, if his friends think it necessary, but he disagrees with them that negative events at home are caused by the influence and power of the biggest party. The source of

6 Antonín Měšťan, ‘Egon Hostovský jako politicky emigrant za války a po roce 1948’ (hereafter ‘Egon Hostovský jako politicky emigrant’) in Návrat Egyhos Hostovského: Mezinárodní vědecké sympozium o životě a díle Egyhos Hostovského, Hronov 21–23 května 1993, Prague, 1996 (hereafter Návrat Egyhos Hostovského), p. 41. Vladimír Clementis was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from 1945 until 1948, and then Foreign Minister from 1948 to 1950; he was executed in 1952.
7 Památník národního písemnictví [Museum of National Literature], Prague (hereafter PNP), Letter from Egon Hostovský (New York) to Josef Träger, 16 October 1945; Letter from Egon Hostovský (Pittsfield) to Josef Träger, 3 March 1947.
the country’s problems is not in his view political, ‘nýbrž jako na důsledek narušené morálky, které je všeobecné a pochopitelné’, a view which he explores in his post-war work through identifying conspiracies against normal decent behaviour. Although ostensibly the progeny of Cold War competition between the East and West, the conspiracies are implicitly representative of a prevailing malaise in modern society (which has one source in how the Communists and the West defeated Nazism). The subordination of all values to political (sometimes financial) exigency, described by successive protagonists as a ‘plot’ against humanity, corrupts the way that people think.

One assumes that the image of Hostovsky as a Communist sympathiser was in part generated by his role at the meeting of seventy-seven young Czech writers and other guests at the castle in Dobříš between 13 and 17 March 1948. According to Černý’s memoirs, the congress of young Czech writers was originally organized for the purpose of creating an agreement between the writers around the circle ‘Kulturní rada’ and the writers of ‘Kulturní obec’, but because of the February events was transformed into a political attraction in which the Communist writers were the political masters and the other writers merely their guests. Bauer also describes the meeting as irrefutably socialist in orientation. The attendees were greeted, moreover, by telegrams from Klement Gottwald and the ideologue Zdeněk Nejedlý, the language of which (‘uncompromising propagators of socialist culture’, ‘cultural workers’) must have left no one in doubt that the function of the gathering was political rather than academic. Indeed, the politicization of an essentially academic enterprise typified the Communist Party’s wider drive to inculcate new social and political models constructed along Stalinist lines, a drive which had begun immediately after the Second World War but which gathered a hasty momentum after the February takeover.

Those present agreed on establishing a Club of Young Writers with its own journal; its committee would meet for the first time at the beginning of April. Their preparations were interrupted by the news that the poet Ivan Blatný, in London with a writers’ delegation, had defected from Czechoslovakia to

8 PNP, Letter from Egon Hostovsky (New York) to Josef Träger, 16 October 1945.
9 Michal Bauer has published an extensive account of the proceedings based on his archival research in the Museum of National Literature, fond: Syndikát českých spisovatelů. See Tvar, 1998, no. 14 (3 September), passim.
England, ‘I desavouvalo ho hlúčne “Prohlášení Klubu mladých spisovatelů” v řadě denních listů (31. března), stylizované Hostovským, jenž přitom chystal už svůj vlastní odchod do ciziny’. Given what we know of Hostovský, his distaste for politicking and how he suffered himself as the target of Jakobson’s nationally inspired campaign against him, not to mention the fact that Blatný had been one of Hostovský’s friends in the inter-war period, the fact of his participation in the denunciation of Blatný is one of the most surprising to emerge from his biography. According to Veselá-Nyklová, Hostovsky felt that he was acting on a matter of principle, since he allegedly said at the time: ‘Já sice nejsem komunista, ale myslím si, že když Ivan Blatný byl členem strany, měl se chovat jinak. Co udělal, je zrada.’ One might also imagine, however, that having been accused of treachery himself during the war, Hostovský may have been taking extreme measures to demonstrate his loyalty to the nation and state — certainly he felt under enormous pressure to be sporting political colours of some kind. His actions must also be understood, however, against the background of the Communist Party’s increasing domination of political life during the coalition period and immediately thereafter, when all kinds of propaganda campaigns aimed at discrediting non-Communists and leaders of other parties had been implemented. By the spring of 1948, approximately one out of five adults in the country was a member of the Communist Party.

Měšťan refrains from interpreting this specific incident, although he does offer a view on Hostovský’s decision to escape abroad and yet remain in the diplomatic service: Hostovský was already aware of the improbability of making a living from writing fiction whether in Czechoslovakia or abroad. He must have been calculating that, as a chargé d’affaires in Norway, he would be able to establish a springboard for gainful employment outside the quickly ‘Bolshevizing machinery’ of the Clementis ministry. When he returned

12 In his interview with Liehm, Hostovský comments of his return to Prague that ‘Bylo mi úzko, stále víc na mne tlačili, abych byl nějak politicky aktivní’ (Generace, p. 378).
briefly to Prague from Norway, he realized that he could not contemplate returning immediately: he reasoned that, even if he tried to overcome his objections to joining the Communist Party, he would never be genuinely accepted by them and would be made to feel guilty by those who suspected his motives.

In 1949 Hostovsky resigned from his diplomatic post in Norway and opted to emigrate to America, dismayed by the fact that his books were officially banned and by his expulsion from the Union of Writers. It is around this time that Hostovsky began work on his new novel, Nezvěstný, which his daughter alleges was written in 1949–50; the novel appeared first in Danish translation in 1951, then in English (Missing) in America and England in 1952 and 1953 respectively, and finally in Czech in 1956. The work was not published in Prague until 1994, providing for those Czechs born in post-war Czechoslovakia (and not engaged in literary research) a likely first acquaintance (and perhaps a misleading one) with the work of Hostovsky. Nezvěstný consists partly in a depiction of the hostile political atmosphere leading up to and during the Communist takeover of 1948, and critics have concentrated on its political content to the detriment of metaphysical concerns it raises. Written in the third person, the action is focalized through the perspectives of three individuals of different political backgrounds: the Jewish Communist Erik Brunner, an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the American democrat Margaret Pollingerová, an employee of the American Embassy, and the liberal journalist Oldřich Borek, who are all connected through a ‘missing’ intermediary, the journalist Pavel Král. Hostovsky’s choice of the Er-Erzählung, and his use of it to allow for the constant juxtaposition of

15 Translated by E. Westh Neuhardová as Eftersagt, Copenhagen, 1951.
17 With Nový domov, Toronto, 1956.
18 I hold the view that the choice of Nezvěstný as the first of the ERM publications to appear (and to appear in a form devoid of a scholarly or general introduction or epilogue) is representative of the general mismanagement of the republication of Hostovsky’s work. While I acknowledge the limitations and scientific inexactitude of anecdotal accounts, they can nevertheless be important for establishing the popular reception of a writer. Young Czechs who had read the novel and whom I encountered in Prague in the autumn of 1997 interpreted the work as a purely political one and, moreover, as a faithful account of the takeover of 1948 (one woman said that she would make her children read it as a means of understanding the bad-old Communist days).
competing viewpoints or ideologies, leads one to believe that Hostovský was concerned to capture a generation (rather than an individual) in crisis and that we should read the novel as an anatomy of post-war society. Hostovský appears uninterested in the polemics of the events of February 1948, although he does allude to real historical figures, such as Gottwald and, more importantly, Jan Masaryk, whom he depicts as a political and moral outsider: for Hostovský, the events of 1948 are merely the manifestation of a deeper moral crisis he is attempting to expose, and he uses Masaryk as one vessel through which to channel this disillusion.

Hostovský published two further novels in the 1950s (the Czech editions of these two novels appeared only in New York and were not republished for a Czech domestic audience until 1997 and 1990 respectively). The first, Půlnocnî pacient, appeared first in English translation in New York in 1954 (and in London in 1955) as The Midnight Patient, later in Czech in 1959; and was used as a source for the film Les Espions, directed by Henri-Georges Clouzot, who had a background in making French thrillers and was renowned for his 'black' vision of the world. Unfortunately the film was a huge flop. Set against the background of the Cold War, the novel charts the involvement of the Czech psychiatrist Malik in the chicanery of the American and Communist secret services through his treatment of the mysterious double agent who operates under the false name Alfons. The atmosphere of anxiety which pervaded America in the early 1950s, with the testing of the H-bomb in


20 Translated by Philip H. Smith Jr; the same translation was used for both the American and British editions, Appleton-Century, New York, 1954, and William Heinemann, Melbourne, London and Toronto, 1955.


22 His films include L'Assassin habite au 21 (The Murderer Lives at No. 21, 1942), Le Corbeau (The Raven, 1943), Quai des Orfèvres (1947), Le Salaire de la Peur (The Wages of Fear, 1953), and Les Diaboliques (Diabolique/The Fiends, 1954).

23 Although Hostovský's contribution to it did secure his future for a couple of years and gave him the freedom to work concentratedly on his magnum opus, Všeobecné spiknutí.
1952 and the hysteria of McCarthyism (the anti-Communist witch-hunt instigated by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy in the period 1950–54), must have strengthened Hostovský’s feeling — already palpable in Nezvěstný — of a world in crisis. Perhaps the most pessimistic of Hostovský’s novels, Půlnocní pacient approaches elements of the grotesque in its depiction of a world of puppets and automata and in the fusion of incongruous elements.

The second, Dobročinný večírek, came out in 1957 in English translation as The Charity Ball24 and then in 1958 in Czech.25 The novel broadly examines the role of Fate in people’s lives; set against the background of a charity evening for European émigrés, the action circles around the attempts of two newly found friends, the upright Barbara Greenová and the émigré dipsomaniac Austrian Wunderlich, to avert the ineluctance of a possible tragedy which appears to be unfolding before them. Hostovský attempts to render a simultaneity of fates unfolding by investigating the same moment in time from different perspectives and involving different sub-plots. It is tempting to speculate whether the novel was inspired by Hostovský’s attendance at a meeting of the PEN club26 in Canada, although I cannot substantiate this connection with the date of Hostovský’s trip to Canada. Hostovský was invited by the PEN club to encourage European writers to become members of its new, exile branch. He describes the gathering as a depressing affair: ‘Byl to smutný zájezd a odnesl jsem si odtud trapné dojmy. Kdyby to nebylo tak smutné, mohla by z toho být fraška. Fraška o exilovém literárním ghettu, kde smutní aktéři povážují dění v mikrokosmu za dění kosmické.’27 Elements of farce appear in Dobročinný večírek: the action and time are confined over the narrow compass of one evening in a hotel, events progress with a breathless rapidity, characterization is exaggerated, there are surprise disclosures and a complexity of entanglements between the characters. Hostovský’s disgust for a certain kind of émigré mentality also pervades the novel. Some of the refugees (the

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26 The acronym stands for ‘Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists, Novelists’, and the association’s principles are to promote freedom of expression and understanding between writers.
27 Liehm, Generace, p. 381.
Pole and the Romanian) appear as parasites, indolently willing to live off the charity of others, and the émigrés in general are a bunch of self-pitying, self-important egotists.

If Hostovský’s pre-war works focus on the individual’s search for assimilation into society, then his post-war works are paradoxically concerned with the individual’s need to step away from the world; society in no way affirms, but rather erodes, the protagonist’s identity. Hostovský poses the problem of an extreme form of objectivity, of how the protagonist can emerge from some kind of dehumanizing world and attain integrity and authenticity. Both Pohorsky and Papoušek underline a profound difference in Hostovský’s conception of the world between his wartime works and his novels of the 1950s. Pohorsky suggests that, in the former, Hostovský is concerned with the problem of how the individual can break out of a state of indifferent isolation and become active in society. Papoušek focuses on notions of guilt and responsibility and argues that in Hostovský’s wartime work the individual’s actions — no longer futile, as they are in his early work — have a strong impact on the composition of the world: ‘Odpovědnost je tu založena na poznání provázanosti struktury lidského spolubyti. Gesto individua už tu není jen mnábným pokusem vymknout se nesrozumitelnosti světa, ale pohybuje celým kosmem.’ Although Pohorsky is careful to emphasize the persistence of certain basic themes in Hostovský’s work, he finds new outlines in Nezvěstný, Půlnocní pacient and Dobročinný večírek, with the individual, poised against great powers, able only to find certainty in himself, and understands this new pessimism in Hostovský’s work as the sign of a deep crisis in the writer (Nezvěstný, for example, is described by Pohorsky as ‘knížka osobní krize’). Papoušek, without citing Pohorsky, basically concurs with and extends his argument, finding a new doubt about the nature of the universe emerging in Hostovský’s work, and an erosion of the hitherto solid belief in absolute values: ‘Co když tento svět není ani dobrý, ani zlý, jen prostě je, a v tomto nakupeném chaosu vztahů, tužeb, zloby, zrady nelze hledat jiný

31 Ibid., p. 658.
Papoušek makes an important point, which one might connect with Moldanová’s view of the Czech psychological ‘analytical’ novel from the 1930s/1940s as depicting protagonists who no longer (as in the nineteenth-century novel) attempt to belong to some kind of social order, but rather stand outside it, being themselves the measure and the judge of that social order.33

I will examine some common features of Hostovský’s post-war work, before returning to these hypotheses, including reference also to Hostovský’s 1960s works — most especially Všeobecné spiknutí (which I have discussed extensively in other chapters), first published in English in 1961 as The Plot34 and only appearing in Prague in 1969.35

Drugs, whether alcohol or sleeping pills, feature prominently in Rostovsky’s post-war work as a symptom of the protagonist’s anxiety (pills, for example, treat insomnia, which itself is the product of an uneasy consciousness or conscience). With the exception of Nezvěstný, all of Hostovský’s post-war novels open with an episode in which the protagonist gets drunk.36 Hostovský exploits the multivalency of this trope: for the external observer, the representative of the ‘rational’ world, the protagonist’s drinking denotes their endangered sanity — in Půlnocní pacient, for example, Malik’s mother and girlfriend frequently draw attention to his increasingly strange behaviour and the increased frequency of his drunkenness (Malik, who was once virtually a teetotaller, drinks throughout the action), a pattern which is replicated in Epidémie, where Josef Martin’s drinking and allegedly erratic behaviour do not escape the attentions of his wife and mother-in-law. The external observer thinks the protagonist disturbed. For the subject, however, drinking is allied to his altered perception of reality, to the seemingly ‘irrational’ world in which he suddenly finds himself, and connotes non-conformity as he breaks away from

32 Papoušek, Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru, pp. 108–09.
35 Melantrich, Prague, 1969.
36 In Půlnocní pacient, Colonel Howard gets Malik drunk to make him talk more freely; as Bares feels increasingly nauseous at his forty-sixth birthday party, which opens Všeobecné spiknutí, he gradually starts to drink more; in Tři noci, Pavel bumps into Felix Silvermail, who gets him drunk.
standard forms of behaviour. We know that the protagonist believes that he is behaving more sanely than he has for a long time. Hostovský adeptly juxtaposes these concomitant interpretations of the same event, the ‘rational’ and the ‘irrational’, so that we are forced to question both the reliability of the protagonist’s (often doubling up as narrator) perceptions and the adequacy of the truth yielded by a rational evaluation of the action, that is, that the protagonist’s drunken view of the world is in some way ‘truer’ than the sober view of those around him. In his post-war work Hostovský is in complete mastery of this tension of a dual perception, in which he was likely to have been influenced by Hoffmann and Dostoevskii. In Všeobecné spiknutí, for example, Bares is convinced that a blonde temptress attended his birthday party, yet he learns from overhearing a conversation that no such blonde was there. As he tries to think logically over the whole evening, he knows that something strange took place outside of him, evidenced by the fact that he has Beck’s telephone number and address on his body and yet nobody else corroborates his having met with Beck, ‘Tak tedy přece jenom i ve mně (a nejenom v pokoji) se odehrálo něco, co nedává smysl, ale co svou nelogičnosti či nevyšvětlitelností koresponduje s událostmi vnějšími’ (VS, pp. 104–05). If drinking opens up an irrational world, it also opens up a form of escape: given the humdrum existence of Hostovský’s post-war protagonists, any kind of escape appears welcome because routines are dismantled and the protagonist is paradoxically more alert to the real absurdity of so-called normality. Since drinking is allied to the protagonist’s new awakening to the world, it also connotes vitalism. In Nezvěstný, the Norwegian consul Olav Arnesen admits to being a committed drinker because he thinks that the passion to live and the passion to drink are strangely similar, ‘Čeho všeho je piják schopen pro jednu sklenku šálivé kofalky!’ (N, p. 170). The drinker’s world also resembles the dreamer’s in that it has a strange ‘subterranean’ logic about it: elements of the unexpected and the irregular concord seamlessly with the ordinary (in Všeobecné spiknutí, for example, despite the fact that Beck is dead, Bares is not shocked by his spectral presence at the birthday party).

Hostovský’s post-war work is also a study of emasculated protagonists. Often they are in ailing relationships on the verge of breakdown. In Nezvěstný, Brunner cannot consign to the past his wife’s relationship with her former
lover, Král, and even wants to discuss details of how they compare as lovers. Even the idealist, liberal Borek is renowned as a cuckold and feels himself incapable of being jealous of his wife’s affairs. In Půlnocní pacient, the only two people with whom Malik initially meets are his mother (he is not quite a ‘mummy’s boy’ but he does turn to her whenever besieged by crisis) and his girlfriend Helena (with whom he no longer has a sexual relationship). In one bitter exchange he rails ‘nejsi má milenka. Už dávno ne!’ to which she retorts, ‘Protože už dávno nejsi muž’ (PP, p. 114). Impotence, in the sense of the subject’s helplessness and inability to affect change and have control over his/her life, as well as to have a positive influence on the fates of others, is a major theme of Dobročinný večírek; the male characters feel that their masculinity has been eroded, whether by the outside world or directly by the actions of women: after being portrayed by the press as a wretched émigré fallen on hard times, Wunderlich’s independence is constrained through his ‘adoption’ by the Women’s League in Care of European Scholars and Artists; the millionaire art-patron Šimon Fiegel showers gifts on actresses and female artists but never lays a hand on them; Evžen Rindt is made to feel by his wife that he is a victim of his own masochism and lack of masculinity; and his brother Julius, humiliated by his experience of concentration camps, compensates for his impotence by fetishistically collecting revolvers to play with: ‘Revolver po léta byl pro něho symbolem moci a slávy’ (p. 124). In Všeobecné spiknutí, Bareš and Milada were once lovers, but their relationship has changed into a friendship. In Tři noci, Jan and Věra have ceased to have a sexual relationship because she once, out of boredom, criticized his inexperienced love-making. In Epidemie, Josef Martin feels threatened by the female coterie of his wife, mother-in-law and sister-in-law, and is convinced that an epidemic of premature deaths among young men, who all share in common the fact that they live with their spouses or female relations, is taking place in the suburban town of Petfield, to which his family have just relocated from Denmark.

Indeed, Hostovský has some fun in Epidemie by creating a parable of male redundancy and weakness in the world against the background of the female materialism and strength. Martin’s wife, daughter and female relations are not shocked by the news of his having been made redundant by his employers, and
are indeed pleased that he will receive his salary for a further seven months by way of a sweetener. The neighbour, Mavis Philipová’s, husband suddenly dies, but not before he has increased his life insurance policy threefold as a birthday gift for her. The narrator’s Páralesque aside that the occasion prompted the couple to engage in sexual intercourse three times alerts the reader to the likelihood that each increased investment in the policy was rewarded by a corresponding sexual payment in kind from the wife to her husband, thus sustaining the notions that man’s only useful role is as a material provider for women, that marriage is an acceptable form of prostitution for the women, and that their only interest in sexual intercourse with their husbands is in its utility as a bargaining counter. We know, for example, that Philipová (unbeknown to her husband) mechanically rearranges a crooked picture on the wall with her leg while having sexual intercourse with him, and that his excitement is increased by the action of her leg. Martin’s discovery that his wife has been secretly perusing pornographic magazines, which she has borrowed from her neighbour, intimates that the women seek their sexual gratification through other means than their spouses, but also testifies to their alarming (from the male point of view) self-sufficiency, since one assumes that these magazines are the subject of masturbatory fantasies also.

The emasculated male is also a typical subject of Hostovský’s pre-war work, but there the subject’s impotence derived almost exclusively from his self-perception as an outsider in terms of social class and his painful experiences of humiliation by others more well connected or educated than him. In Hostovský’s post-war work, the male is rendered impotent by his unwillingness to battle for anything and his acquiescence in the status quo: his acceptance of (moral, rather than financial) failure diminishes him as a man and yet offers him a stultifying security and stability. This pattern raises a question, however, about the nature of the outside world and the pressure it exerts on the individual to conform, and in essence to relinquish his individuality. Indeed, elements of Hostovský’s thinking here resemble Erich Fromm’s study of alienation, *The Fear of Freedom* (London, 1942), which Hostovský may have read while in exile in New York (Voskovec, who mixed in the same circle of friends as Hostovský, mentions that he himself grew
interested in Fromm during the war while living in New York.\textsuperscript{37} Fromm's thesis posits that twentieth-century man, while apparently free, is so isolated, afraid and insecure, and beleaguered by a sense of his own insignificance, that he tries to escape from his freedom into a new bondage and seeks protection from a higher power outside himself. As a consequence of this new bondage, his individuality is surrendered, for his conscience and ideals are no longer an active expression of his own personality but rather embody the internalization of external demands upon him (a description which might aptly describe the stranglehold of the Communist Party on Brunner's mental processes in \textit{Nevěstný} or the cipher-like existence of Martin as we first meet him in \textit{Epidémie}, where every experience is related back to its usefulness in assisting him in his career of selling vacuum-cleaners, so that he is little more than an expedient cog slavishly serving the demands of his employers). Hostovský's treatment of conformity probably penetrates further, however, than Fromm (although that need not discount an influence), since his attendant interest in the outlaw, the rebel, the trickster — who all flout the 'rules' and reveal hidden truths in their pursuit of goals which appear to have an ethical dimension outside the narrow purview of the status quo, which treats them profanely as fools or scapegoats — delves back to some of his earlier work. In Hostovský's world, if you dream of, or are attached to, virtues of some kind, you either become a Don Quixote or you allow yourself to be dragged down to the other pole of humanity. In all these works Hostovský depicts protagonists who have distanced themselves from a vital core of their own being: whereas earlier in his work Hostovský had treated extreme cases of self-conscious protagonists whose minds had occupied all the space around them, in his later work one has the impression of stepping through a looking-glass and finding the reverse, that the world has passed through and consumed the subject. Hostovský's depiction of alienation supplies grist to the existentialist mill: 'For the existentialist, alienation is understood chiefly in inward terms. It is the existent's alienation from his own deepest being. He is not himself but simply a cipher, in the mass-existence of the crowd or a cog in the industrial system or whatever he may be.'\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37} Liehm, \textit{Generace}, p. 431.
\textsuperscript{38} John Macquarrie, \textit{Existentialism}, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 204.
Epidemia parabolizes conformity and alienation in a Páralesque style. Petfield (a small suburban town, which may be a parody of Hostovský’s adopted home in America, Pittsfield) represents the nadir of Hostovský’s depiction of alienation. It is difficult to travel to other places from Petfield since it has poor transport links. We learn from a drinker in the local bar that nobody in the town has friends there. The name of the bar itself, ‘Ozdravovna’, appears to be satirical since those who frequent it appear to be suffering from a general torpor rather than recovering from illness: they are uninterested (save for marking the event with another drink) in the sudden death in their midst of the aforementioned drinker. Josef Martin lives a wholly unauthentic existence in so far as he has lost the ability to think for himself. He is so obedient to the company, Lumitex, for whom he works that he has never taken any holidays, has never opposed any of Lumitex’s immoral business decisions and has no passions beyond an interest in vacuum cleaners. His servility obstructs him from seeing through his boss Fitzpatrick’s unctuous manner to the ruthlessness beneath, so that, even when he is sacked, Fitzpatrick manages to make him feel that the company have acted in his interests. Hostovský draws attention to Martin’s lack of originality in the way that Martin assiduously stores in his mind empty slogans spouted by Fitzpatrick or banal aphorisms shared with him in ordinary conversation, his mimicking of other’s gestures without having the slightest idea of what they mean, and his generally derivative behaviour (in the bar he observes what the sergeant is drinking, and then orders the same). Martin’s home life is stultifyingly dull and mechanical. On Mondays and Wednesdays, his mother-in-law Brownová and his sister-in-law Barbara join Martin’s family for dinner, on Thursdays Barbara comes on her own, and on Tuesdays and Fridays Brownová comes on her own. Martin follows a strict routine in the way that he kisses them all, and together they all routinely ask questions but have no interest in any answers.

The artificial bird in perpetual motion over a glass of water, which Martin buys as a gift for his ungrateful daughter, emblemizes Martin’s own existential fate. The advertisement for the toy mechanism, ‘Perpetuum mobile? Hádejte, v čem je tajemství nepřetržitého pohybu toho chytrého a šťastného opeřence’ (E, p. 234), invites the observer to unravel the riddle of how this ‘bird’ keeps moving, although the hyperbolic language barely disguises the banality of the
‘bird’’s repetitive motions, suggesting Martin’s automaton existence. The epithets ‘chytrý’ and ‘šťastný’ incongruously describe the emotions of an inanimate object, and the reader is similarly aware that, transferred to Martin, these epithets are no more apposite and acquire a further irony through Martin’s insensible contentment once he has surrendered to his inauthentic existence. The fact that the bird is described an an *opeřenec* may intimate that it is naturally built to fly, although we know that its artificial form determines its state as earth-bound; similarly, Martin should be metaphorically capable of spreading his wings (in terms of thinking freely, spontaneously, willingly) but is imprisoned by his internalization of external constraints upon his ‘flight’ — he cannot muster the strength of thought to lift himself from the ground. In terms of Hostovský’s treatment of the death theme in *Epidémie*, the bird’s perpetual motion mimics alienated man’s journey through a life which consists in existing; existing is in itself meaningless, however, since Hostovský suggests that in order to be vital man has also to know that he is to die.

The post-war protagonist is also passive, indeed his impotence (in the broadest sense) is a symptom of that passivity. He frequently describes himself as a spectator of, rather than an actor in his life. *Půlnocní pacient* begins with Malik describing his degenerative fatigue: he has not suffered too much, for problems and worries have ceased to appear acutely urgent to him, and he is not so apathetic that he is insensitive to what goes on within and around him. He appears, however, to have surrendered control over his life: ‘Má tehdejší strnulost spočívala v tom, že jsem se stal ve svém vlastním životě z herce divákem, který nemá žádný vliv na zápletky a řešení dramatu’ (p. 11). The source of the protagonist’s passivity is partly personal and narcissistic: by burying guilt and humiliation which riddle his past, he would like to believe that he has done well for himself. The protagonist’s passivity is also, however, representative of a universal lassitude connected to the reductive politics of the ruling powers. *Nezvěstný* begins with a depiction of Brunner’s passivity as representative of a whole society’s willingness to give up on life: he looks around him on the tram and sees ‘jen tváře znavené, bytosti do sebe pohroužené, výrazy rezignace, únavy, nevyspalostí’ (p. 11), while people on the street march in two opposing currents around a half-empty shop-window, ‘beze spěchu, bez zájmu, bez cíle’ (pp. 11–12). The population awaken from
this torpor only into senseless action. When the majority of the democratic ministers in the government resign, the focalization of the narrative through the American Pollingerová allows Hostovský to create the illusion of a ‘neutral’ (she is decidedly against the political machinations of the Americans) observation and explanation of the action. As Pollingerová attempts to make sense of what is going on, she rationalizes that the Communists appear to wish for the President to accept the resignations and name a new, more resilient, coalition government, while the non-Communists would consider such actions as the beginning of dictatorship by Moscow and the end of an independent republic. She finds this explanation logical until she compares it to the reactions of the crowd of people on the streets — women with eyes red from crying, armed civilians, the people divided into two camps, ‘Ale bože, vždyť jedni i druzí jsou si tak podobní malomyslností v očích, zřejmou únavou i strojovými pohyby!’ (N, p. 163). People are unaware of the fundamental similarity, a sick lethargy, underlying their superficial political differences, ‘Z té výhně tisícklavého mumraje beze slov nejbolestnější zasahovalo sluch důnění velkého bubnu marnosti’ (N, p. 166). This automatist collective is more than the product of political wrangling: Hostovský views it as emblematic of the systematic annihilation of individuality through people’s internalization of the demands of political (universal) systems to enforce a monstrous uniformity.

Hostovský’s critique is not solely related to totalitarian systems, however; capitalism appears also to instrumentalize human beings, indeed Hostovský is grasping towards a notion of modern society as universally narcissistic: people complacently busy themselves to avoid feeling empty and sterile, as epitomized by Greenová’s charitable work in Dobročinný veřejek. Despite having a comfortable life in which she is respected and has self-esteem, she is nevertheless aware of a void, an emptiness of feeling, dissatisfaction and anxiety at the centre of her life. Hostovský satirizes the palliatives others advise for her ‘condition’ — her relatives suggest a holiday, her lawyer, a foray into the stock market, and her doctor counsels psychoanalysis.

Self-deception is a covert theme behind Hostovský’s study of passivity, covert because the protagonist’s lapses in memory (and attempt to reconstitute his memory and so recover himself) are the only means by which the reader begins to understand that the protagonist has consciously avoided spelling out
some aspect of his engagement in the world. Fingarette describes self-deception as an exercise in which 'we avoid becoming explicitly conscious of our engagement, and we avoid becoming explicitly conscious that we are avoiding it'. Fingarette moves the focus of self-deception away from the epistemic areas of what we know or believe (which traditionally incur the problem of how one cannot know what one knows or has known) to the area of consciousness, for consciousness involves us 'expressing our engagement explicitly in language-like form'. If a protagonist can avoid formulating to herself that she is avoiding being conscious of some engagement, then basically she disavows some aspect of her identity and avoids taking responsibility for it (Hostovský's distinction between spectating and acting may not hinge just on being an agent of action, but also on being a conscious formulator and speaker of thoughts). This may establish a connection between self-deception and self-forgetting, between the disavowal of responsibility and the subject's descent into an amorphous realm of anonymous ciphers, which is important in so far as it suggests that the Hostovský protagonist is a conspirator (albeit unconsciously) in the homogenizing tendencies of the world outside him, typified in the attempts of political systems (for example, Communism) or even communities (for example, Petfield) to foster the protagonist's forgetting of himself. In Hostovský's world the self-deceiver is actively helping the totalitarian state or consumerist society in obliterating his or her identity. If one approaches memory also as a narrative device, then one is aware that in two parabolic case-studies of conformity in Hostovský's work (Bašek in Ztracený stín and Martin in Epidémie) the author does not allow for us as readers to have a relationship with the past lives (other than in the scantiest detail) of these protagonists, perhaps to convey their own incapacity to relate to themselves and realize that they are derivative.

For Hostovský, memory is the preserve of individual identity. While Hostovský had explored the 'negative' aspects of this notion in his pre-war work, through his depiction of the individual's inability to forget what has

40 Ibid., p. 52.
41 Edel points out that we, as readers, have a relationship with a character's past through their memory: Leon Edel, The Psychological Novel, 1900–1950, New York and Philadelphia, 1955, p. 20.
happened to him in the past and not to relive his past in his present, in Hostovský's post-war work memory may be all that protects the individual from the destruction of his personality by a hostile outside world. In Papoušek's view, the protagonist's awakening from self-forgetting is influenced either by meeting with an anthropomorphized symbol of death, or by being threatened by one of the absolutist systems fighting for control of his or her individuality. This attractive proposition is not strictly true, however: Brunner in Nezvěstný, for example, is under no immediate threat when we first encounter him stepping off the tram and trying to remember what it is about a particular place that is so important to him, and Malik's dredging of his memory in Půlnocní pacient is spurred by his finding an alter ego he can open up to in Alfons.

If the protagonist's passivity and impotence is founded on a strategy of evading certain truths about himself, then his potential strength depends on knowing the truth about himself. He must question the basis on which his whole activity is built, his knowledge of what he wants; he can only become spontaneous and vital, and unified, through his search for a personal truth and his acceptance of all that his past encompasses. One might describe Hostovský as working out Existentialist concepts in his post-war work, but arriving at them not through a consciously philosophical route, but rather through the artistic probing of the search for the unity of a personal identity which is accepted as such by itself, which began in his earliest exempla. Hostovský's literary treatment of self-deception, of the disavowal of the self, has a philosophical analogue in Sartre's notion of 'mauvaise foi', which Sartre views not as an active decision by the subject to undertake such a project, but rather a spontaneous determination of their own being: 'One puts oneself in bad faith [mauvaise foi] as one goes to sleep and one is in bad faith as one dreams. Once this mode of being has been realized, it is as difficult to get out of it as to wake oneself up; bad faith is a type of being in the world, like waking or dreaming, which by itself tends to perpetuate itself'. He describes the first act of mauvaise foi as a flight from what cannot be fled, namely what one is, 'The

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42 Papoušek, Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru, p. 111.
very project of flight reveals to bad faith an inner disintegration in the heart of being. Given Sartre's conception of the self as a reflective consciousness, Fingarette suggests that we should understand this notion of 'inner disintegration' as the self failing fully to function as a reflective consciousness but instead dealing in impure reflections through being irresponsibly attached to a fixed conception. In order to regain the purity of the self, Sartre resorts to the Christian notion of the person who virtuously does good not out of obedience or discipline, but through spontaneously responding to a given situation. One might also refer to Kierkegaard's notion of the unified self (in Either/Or, for example), in which willing and choosing are paramount, and one must will the self as the unity of the entire individual acknowledged as self. Hostovsky's protagonists are in a sense engaged in the process of choosing the self in an attempt to recover unity.

Two things mitigate the protagonist's passivity, self-deception and collusion in self-forgetting: the unconscious (one may add those semi-conscious states induced by drinking or sleeping pills) and Fate/Chance. When one considers the number of extraordinary (in terms of credibility) meetings of friends, and strangers (who are lent familiarity by their resemblance to others) on which Hostovsky builds his plots, one is led to believe that he is uninterested in questions of strict verisimilitude but rather is attempting to unfold a metaphysical (almost fairytale) universe in which the individual is being tested in some way. Given the protagonist's conscious attempt to avoid something painful, the demurring unconscious is of the utmost importance as the prime agent in the protagonist's re-assertion of his free-will and recusance: dreams, visions (approximating mystical experiences) and scenes from the past.

44 Ibid., p. 70.
45 Fingarette, Self-Deception, p. 96.
46 One thinks for example of: Úkryt, where the protagonist, in hiding in a cellar in France, comes face-to-face with a childhood friend turned Nazi; Pánočn½ pacient, where Malik meets a secret agent, Alfons, who reminds him of his younger self twenty years before; Dobročinný vešítek, where Greenová meets a young Hungarian singer, Alžběta, who reminds her of her dead sister;
47 The fairytale motif in Hostovsky's work is very strong, most especially in Tři noci, where Věra thinks of herself as an exiled princess; Pavel describes their fear of the mysterious intruder as analogous to two children in a haunted castle; and in a moment of disembodiment when she appears to be observing her own body from a distance, Věra remembers a fairytale which cautions against the destruction of the vessel since its inhabitant cannot return and will turn into smoke.
are suddenly brought into consciousness. One might view this battle between the historical self (the unexpurgated unconscious) and the degenerate public role (the protagonist has conflated his individuality and his role), truth versus dissimulation, avowal versus disavowal of self, as a further variation of Hostovský's study of the divided personality. Indeed the world of Hostovský's post-war work is founded along the fault-lines of a number of divisions: the personal and the public, the metaphysical and the profane, absolute and relative truths, faith and cynicism, vitality and emptiness. Division defines Hostovský's compositional structure also.

I have already explored in earlier chapters Hostovský's treatment of interconnected fates in his work of the 1930s and the wartime period; Hostovský develops this theme yet further in his post-war work. In Nezvěstný, Půlnocní pacient, Dobročinný večírek and Všeobecné spiknutí, Hostovský deploys a complex compositional structure in which two worlds, one a diachronic and synchronic personal sphere of relationships, the other a synchronic, chaotic mesh of interrelated bit-parts (political networks or the émigré relations of the third), run in parallel, frequently coincide in unexpected ways (particularly as the diachronic personal intersects the synchronic public), and thus provoke us to consider the nature of the relationship between them. In all of these novels, with the exception of Dobročinný večírek, Hostovský uses a pivotal character as a mediator between the two worlds, a point of intersection between the protagonist's personal history and the absurdist social game surrounding him. Thus Král in Nezvěstný marks the point of intersection between Brunner's (and Borek's) personal history and the secret services' machinations, just as Alfons does (only here for Malík) in Půlnocní pacient, and Beck in Všeobecné spiknutí is both an emblem of Bareš's personal life and of debased politics. Each of these mediators is also the locus of mystery in these works, and as I shall explain below Hostovský engages in a process of mystification with the visibility of each mediator.

Since the question 'who is Král?' constitutes the central concern of Nezvěstný, the novel functions as a huge game of hide-and-seek played by adults who seek Král both in the literal, physical sense and in a hermeneutic one. The sought-after Král is not alone in being hidden or veiled: most of the characters are figuratively masked in their routine concealment of information
from one another (whether, for example, Brunnerová keeping from her husband the news that she has met with Král several times, or Matějka disguising his ignorance of learning new facts about the whereabouts of Kapoun from Brunner). Pavel Král’s name itself may reveal clues to his character. We may elicit comparison with Paul the Apostle, whose symbols are the sword (by which he was martyred) and the open book (Paul’s role in propagating the new law as the Apostle among the Gentiles), and thus expect Král to represent a redemptive motif in the novel. As ‘King’, his name denotes preeminence, sovereign or supreme power: on a sacred plane of narrative, his name reflects his status as a spiritual figurehood. Profanely, however, as the chesspiece which the opposing side have to checkmate to win, Král is merely an instrument in a competition between two opposing forces. Král’s name explicitly invokes comparison of the action of the novel with a game of chess, in which the players (the secret services and their agents) have to second-guess each other and where the significance of small moves on the chessboard may appear negligible to the opponents until it is too late and the mounting threat precipitates the end-game. One might add, however, that if the main chesspiece is missing, the game itself is meaningless. As a symbol, Král incorporates then both spiritual idealism and the instrumentalization of the individual in a reductive world.

The game of hide-and-seek involves the reader also, since we have no direct encounter with Král, only intermediaries, anecdotes, hearsay, reported speech. In fact, Hostovský plays with the focalization of narration to flirt with our awareness of Král’s absence: for example, Olga Brunnerová, who has turned up at the American Embassy to plead for Pollingerová’s help in securing her husband’s escape from Czechoslovakia, discovers unexpectedly that Král is there also. As Pollingerová opens the door into the room in which Král is seated, we witness the scene partially, cinematographically even, as Pollingerová’s eyes follow Olga’s reaction, ‘Viděla, jak se Olze pootvíralo semknuté rty k výkřiku naděje, jak to jejích očí vstupuje třpyt tichého štěstí, jak se požírala k objektu a celé tělo se chystá střemhlav spadnout do bezpečí, jenomž stanula tváří v tvář’ (N, p. 224). As Olga enters the room, she disappears from our field of vision, as it were, and we have no glimpse of Král. Hostovský’s narrative technique here is typical of the mystery (and detective)
novel, where some kind of mysterious figure constantly eludes the protagonist and the reader, although conventionally one would expect such a figure (or figures) to pose an explicit threat to the protagonist’s security: one thinks, for example, of Stevenson’s *The Pavilion on the Links* (1880), in which the menacing presence of the Italian secret society, the ‘Carbonari’, is intimated by a finger squeaking down the rain-soaked window, or Graham Greene’s *The Third Man*, in which someone resembling the apparently dead Harry Lime lingers in the shadows with his face obscured from full view. If one approaches Král as a symbol, as an image inviting interpretation, rather than an individual character — and Hostovský invites the reader to respond to Král in this way by depicting him only referentially — then the question of who Král is transmutes into an interrogation of what Král means. Hostovský’s structuring of the text around the symbol ‘Král’ connects *Nezvěstný* to Hostovský’s work of the 1930s: Král is as much a sign to be deciphered, a representation of the ‘unknown’ as the Black Gang, the ‘arsonist’, and Adler/the house.

In *Půlnocní pacient*, Alfons’s ‘invisibility’ (the indeterminacy of his visibility) works as a motif in the novel: he ought to wear glasses on meeting Malik; they meet always in the dead of night, away from the prying eyes of others in Malik’s flat (we never see Alfons outside this space); the fact that Alfons mumbles in his sleep an enciphered code about a binocular adjustment is yet another variation of this optical motif; Alfons commits suicide by blowing himself up, which is the extreme form of ensuring one’s literal disappearance from view; Malik vouchsafes the continuation of the dead Malik’s invisibility by intentionally failing to recognize the photograph (the visible image) of Alfons supplied by the secret services. Indeed, given that Alfons is unseen by any other character in any scene directly reported in the novel, he might almost be a figment of Malik’s imagination, a *deus ex machina* summoned by Malik’s unconscious to help in redeeming him. Of course we know that Alfons has been sent to Malik by a secret agent, but one can observe how Hostovský’s treatment of Alfons opens up a tension of dual perception, that Alfons is both an object of the phenomenal world and an object of Malik’s alcohol-infused ‘dream-world’, and how Beck (in *Všeobecné spiknutí*) grows out of the characterization of Alfons. It is as though Hostovský takes the next logical step in a progress (which started with Král) and makes the mediator
Beck truly invisible, and a creation of Bareš’s ‘dream-world’, save for the inexplicable details which suggest his substantiality (Beck’s telephone number, for example, or the warmth of his hand in Bareš’s hand).

The Profanation of Identity

One might interpret the questions raised by Hostovský’s compositional framework of two parallel worlds, the profane and the metaphysical/personal, as a deeper investigation of thematic concerns he had raised in his wartime novels: the nature of the individual’s responsibility for, or relationship with, some kind of widespread extraneous turmoil. Hostovský’s juxtaposition of a sphere of intimate relations and another of impersonal ones allows for a mirroring of concerns in these two worlds.

The first of these concerns I shall explore pertains to problems of identity. In Nezvěstný, for example, Hostovský dissects the problem of identity — who is Král — on two, intersecting, narrative planes, that of the metaphysical and that of the profane.

Hostovský depicts the profanation of identity in the search by the Communist and American secret services (typified by the characters of Matějka and Morgan, respectively) to discover Král’s political allegiances, the question of who he is, is reduced to discovering whether he is ‘with us’: Král’s individuality interests them only to the degree of how far he will conform to their plans. The Party apparatus is also posited against the notion that identity is ineffable in any way, since it works on the positivist premiss that everything can be known. This fact-finding mission, the probing into people’s personal affairs, is self-perpetuating: Matějka, for example, needs Brunner to uncover information about Král’s ‘secret’ intentions (of which there are none) so he deliberately mentions by way of an aside Brunnerová’s meetings with Král in an attempt to play on Brunner’s anxiety. Like Matějka, Morgan has no interest

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48 In Osvoboditel Hostovský demonstrates the profanation of identity [reductio ad absurdum. In the fictional island/republic of Kalinie the sphere of intimate relations has been entirely impersonalised. When Gordová, the wife of the eponymous liberator, Gord, is asked by her jailor Kars who her husband is, since (according to Kars) nobody really knows him, she retorts that he does not have the right to put political questions to her. In part her response is a defensive gesture, since she clearly despises her husband and wishes not to discuss him, but it is also an intimation that he has no character or relationship with her that is outside the political.
in Král or his fate or the truth, ‘nezajímal ho vlastně nic kromě možnosti objevit nové zdroje informací o komkoli a o čemkoli. [...] dovidat se víc a víc, a naprosto se neznepokojoval otázkou, k čemu vypátraný materiál poslouží’ (N, p. 127). Although Brunner is naive in the extreme, he soon arrives at the realization that his search is futile:

Brunner enounces the Jamesian notion that ‘a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind’. The secret services’ search for Král’s identity is meaningless, since the person’s objective existence through public action and his abstract existence in the minds of others is the only way in which he can be known in the world. In sum, his identity can only be verified by the existence of others. Analogously, in Tři noci, the secretary Shirley Warnerová reveals to her boss, the tax accountant Pavel Wagner, that she hired her uncle, a private detective, to investigate Wagner’s character in an attempt to discern what kind of man he was and what kind of employer he would be. The investigative process only reveals, however, where Pavel grew up, what he studied, what money he possesses. Wagner remains a source of mystery to Warnerová because she is no closer to understanding his strange decency, his trust in other people, or his marriage. Whatever it is that shapes individuality, Hostovský suggests, will not be located on pieces of paper. Thus the world which emerges from the gathering of information as an end in itself is merely an assembly of

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49 William James, *Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols, London, 1890, vol. 1, p. 294. James’s work was influential across Europe and in North America, and for the Czechs Karel Čapek in particular took up Jamesian ideas in his 1918 seminar paper championing Pragmatism, which he depicts as an optimistic and practical movement away from scepticism and away from the navel-gazing antics of ‘naší katastrofální Evropě’ (Karel Čapek, *Pragmatismus*, Prague, 1918, p. 65).
meaningless parts, a world that is fragmentary and relativistic, relativistic because no individual can ever see the whole picture.

The nature of Král’s character is also being questioned by his friends, especially by the journalist Borek. Borek himself is denounced, and eventually assassinated, by non-Communists (one assumes they are so-called democrats) for hiding (on Král’s instructions) Alois Kapoun, a former Czech collaborator with the Gestapo who seeks collaboration with the Czech Communists. The Communist Party propagandizes Borek’s actions to encourage the public to consider him a loyal servant of the Party. An impartial observer might take the view that, given the destruction of Borek’s standing in the public eye, it is not unreasonable of him to doubt Král for having indirectly embroiled him in a political scandal. This must also, however, be the crux that Hostovský is exploring, since it is easy to be a good friend when nothing is at risk, but how does the individual look at his or her friend in extremis, when he or she has everything to lose? Doubt impels Borek to seek out Father Dušan, another close friend of Král’s, to pose the question ‘kdo je vlastně Pavel Král?’ (p. 197). The manner and content of Father Dušan’s response surprise and irritate him: ‘A bez meškání odpovídal mu pokojný hlas, odrážející se od stěn a stropu jako zpěv tiché radosti: “Král je náš přítel, dobrý přítel”’ (p. 198). This seemingly innocuous exchange may be the most important snatch of dialogue in the novel in its distillation of several thematic concerns. Borek’s question is dramatically ironic in so far as he unconsciously mimics the question beguiling the secret services (the ‘profane’ plane of narrative); however Borek may think of himself, Hostovský may be indicating that he is beginning to behave like the kind of political animal he despises. A further level of irony exists in the composition of the question itself, since neither the secret services nor Borek seek to know who Král is, but rather whether he can be trusted (Borek is essentially concerned to discover whether he has falsely placed his faith in his friend). On a metaphysical plane of narrative, however, Hostovský is inviting us to consider seriously how we can answer such a question given the recondite, ineffable nature of our true identity.\footnote{One remembers Arnesen’s conversation with Pollingerová in his flat, in which he advises her that one may be indifferent, loving and hateful to those closest to one, ‘Ale poznat zúplná člověka je stejně těžké, ne-li nemožné, jako poznat Boha a dříbla’ (N, p. 174).} Father Dušan’s refuglent, and
instant, response is important not only as an expression of absolute faith in Král, but because it constitutes a theoretical solution to what we can know of someone: we cannot know them in absolute terms, but by their relationship to us. Father Dušan’s use of the possessive pronoun ‘náš’ rather than ‘váš’ may also reflect an attempt to extend the hand of friendship to Borek, to infer that through their friendship with Král they have a mutual bond: indeed, one might argue further that the subtext of Borek’s question is ‘who am I?’ and that Father Dušan’s response affirms that Borek (rather than Král) is a good friend.

The division between Father Dušan and Borek is also posited as a conflict between faith and the kind of reason which presumes that everything in the world is knowable. This narrow positivism leads only to ignorance, whereas the acknowledgement that one does not understand the world is the beginning of knowledge, ‘Každý je chromý, ohluchlý a osleply, chce-li jen vědět a nedokáže-li věřit. A naopak, když už níčemu člověk nerozumí, když už všechny viditelné události se mu jeví jako mumraj bláznovství, najednou skrze krapet víry začne poznávat i vědět’ (pp. 199–200). One assumes that Father Dušan, in saying ‘všechny viditelné události’, is intending more than just the need to recognize that the political order around them is madness: the adjective ‘viditelné’ has an especial importance in his aphoristic statement, since it appears to point man to search beyond the phenomenal manifestation of the world to find its true form.

The Interconnection of Fates

The second of Hostovský’s concerns relates to individuals’ responsibility for each other, to the shaping of each other’s fates. It is important to consider why, in Nezvěstný, apart from troping the mysterious, Hostovský constructed a plot in which the pivotal figure is missing. One reason, among many others, may be autobiographical: Král’s absence from the centre of action generates wide speculation on the nature of his character, and Hostovský may be treating indirectly his own sense of having been judged or supported in absentia, and filtering his experience of false accusations and incriminations during the

51 Vlasta Skalická makes the general point that behind the question ‘Kdo je Pavel Král?’ posed by an array of characters in the novel is also the question ‘Kdo jsem já?’: ‘Příběh o velkém mumrají, nezvěstném šachovém králi a hledaném kufru’ in Literární noviny, 5, no. 28, 14 July 1994, p. 6.
wartime and immediate post-war period. The relationship between Král and Masaryk, and the reciprocal sympathy between Brunner and Masaryk, mirror aspects of Hostovsky’s own relationship with Masaryk, which was strengthened during the course of the war (in Träger’s view because the robustness of Masaryk presented a safeguard of protection for the puerile Hostovsky).\(^{52}\) We learn from Matějka, for example, that Král met Jan Masaryk in Washington or New York towards the end of the war, and that they kept up a correspondence after 1945; from a number of Masaryk’s letters, the Communists learned that Král never intended to return to Czechoslovakia after the war, but that he was persuaded to do so by Masaryk. In his correspondence with Träger, Hostovsky writes in January 1946 that he is waiting for Masaryk’s visit to decide his future,\(^{53}\) then in November 1946 that he is to meet with Masaryk the next day, and that he must ‘v pravém slova smyslu žebrat o prachy’, explaining that he has no money for clothes or for the dentist or for his lodgings. He believes that he has never lived so wretchedly, even in the worst days of his exile, and feels insulted that he is not in a more senior position.\(^{54}\) Twelve days later,\(^{55}\) Hostovsky writes of his meeting with Masaryk in New York that: ‘Jsem o něco méně našťván, protože po mém lamentování dal Clementis příkaz, aby mi zálohově bylo vyplaceno, co mi zamíni dluží. Masarykoví jsem pověděl, že po návratu opustím státní službu, a on mi nedopřál ani tu radost, aby mi to vymloval, nýbrž s nadšením spustil, “A to máte Egone, naprostu pravdu. Co byste v tom zasraným ouřadě dělal.”’ A month later, he writes that he has seen Masaryk a lot and that they have developed a strong mutual understanding.\(^{56}\) Indeed, according to the novelist Graham Greene, who was staying in a hotel in Prague during the Communist coup, Hostovsky was particularly upset by Masaryk’s resignation from the government: ‘One day the novelist Egon Hostovsky [sic] who was employed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came and sat on my bed — I had obtained a room by this time — and told me how that afternoon Masaryk, the Minister,
had said good-bye to his staff. He wept as he told the story and between us we finished my whisky. A few days later Masaryk was dead.57

Nezvěstný is also then a study of friendship, with Král as the nexus from which a number of different relationships radiate and around which the activities of the secret services converge. Before Borek begins to mistrust Král, his view on the nature of friendship is founded on a positive belief in the benefits of one person affecting another’s fate. In an echo of Körner’s epiphanic realization in Hostovský’s 1934 novel, Borek posits that the subject’s immortality consists in his existence in the minds of others:

Byl by to vůbec ještě Borek, kdyby v něm nedýchal a nemluvil Pavel Král? Cožpak žijeme jenom svůj život, nebo také a především životy těch, které máme rádi? Ano, ovšem, prolníme se s nimi, jsme v nich a oni v nás. A proto jedinou sílou, která zmnožuje naší existenci, která nás činí mnohojednými, která zdobí naše konání a přiblížuje nás věčnosti — je přátelství. Velké Přátelství. (N, p. 137)

Borek’s statement is important for understanding the relationship between a person’s identity and their responsibility for others, since Hostovský connects the robust, independent self with a reciprocal dependency on others.

While nearly all the male characters (with the exception of the priest) in Nezvěstný compromise their moral or political integrity through the course of the action, it is the two main female characters — Pollingerová and Brunner’s wife, Olga Brunnerová — who remain consistently and unswervingly true to their beliefs (their loyalty to Král being one example) as circumstances around them change. Both women believe that their lives have been complicated by their involvement with Král, but neither regrets this involvement nor renounces him. Their strength derives from their ability to step back from, or rise above, the vortex of political intrigues and mindsets devouring the men, in which betrayal (conscious or otherwise) is standard, and posit an alternative perspective on life based on love, friendship, and faith (which as I will show below conforms with Hostovský’s treatment of women elsewhere in his work). To read the novel solely as a political treatment of 1948 is, then, grossly to misinterpret it, since Hostovský is trying to clear a path through the political chaos by searching for those lasting values which give life meaning. Indeed, the title of the novel provokes the reader to question who or what is missing, so

that one may interpret Nezvěstný as an indictment of a society in which core values or ideals are absent.\(^5\) Pollingerová and Brunnerová are non-conformists in so far as they reject the values and methods of the status quo, and it may be that Hostovský draws here on his knowledge of Benešová’s work, in which individuals struggle to hold to ideals despite the social pressures on them to conform. In a wartime article, Hostovský describes Benešová’s 1919–20 novel Člověk as an attempt to find an answer to the question of what life means. In Hostovský’s view, the protagonist Cyril eventually discovers that, in order to achieve ‘super-personal happiness’, it is necessary ‘to be a good man and to seek happiness only in moral certainty, in love and, finally, in sacrifice and self-denial’,\(^6\) which leads Hostovský to proclaim of the author that ‘Amidst the chaos of external changes she demonstrates the fundamental and unchanging things in our lives — the responsibility of man for man, without which life has no value.’\(^6\)

The interconnectedness of fates also has its profane realization in the tenticular proliferation of spy and political networks in Hostovský’s post-war work. The mystery of the spy world is, however, an illusion in so far as the mystery conceals nothing of value but reveals endless connections which, like the spiralling stairs of an Eschef painting, hold the promise of a destination but lead nowhere. The individual who thinks he can fight such a system risks only his own destruction, since there is no position in which one can command these endless connections: one either becomes part of the chaos or steps outside it. Malík’s political desire to shatter the spying rings, for example, is naive, fails miserably and results in his stroke. Milan Jungmann aptly describes Nezvěstný as evoking an atmosphere of anxiety in which people fear some unknown danger, as though they are coming into contact with the borders of the transcendent; the source of that atmosphere lies, however, in human failure, insufficient resoluteness of character, eccentricity, weakness and

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58 Papoušek argues that Král’s identity remains veiled because nobody can interpret his actions as humane, which suggests that ‘nezvěstný’ may refer also to the missing individual who can fully understand Král (Člověk v uzavřeném prostoru, p. 144).


60 Ibid., p. 90.
limited ideas. Just as individuals cannot understand their place in the mysterious order of things, so here they are frequently unaware of the repercussions of their actions. Hostovsky’s work treats consistently the semi-Gothic horror of unleashing forces beyond one’s control, and indeed one’s imagination, of not reckoning with the full scope of one’s responsibility. Particularly in Nezvěstný and Půlnoční pacient, the incongruity between the protagonist’s actions, even when well intended, and their effects is monstrous, which suggests a world in which the moral order of things is distorted. In Nezvěstný, for example, Brunner cannot comprehend that the murder of Kapoun and the attempted murder of Borek are related to any actions of his own (in particular, his conversations with Matějka and Morgan), ‘Kam uniknout z těch morových dřímot skutečnosti?’ (N, p. 218), and in Půlnoční pacient, Malik’s attempts to save the writer Kaminský by persuading him to give himself up to the police lead indirectly to Kaminský’s murder and Malik’s nervous collapse. Moreover, both novels depict an atmosphere in which any involvement in anybody else’s life arouses suspicion, which encourages people to act on the premiss that those around them are dissembling, so that ordinary communication between individuals is debased into a form of interrogation (Malik is unaware, for example, that the agents/patients who visit his surgery are in fact telling him the truth about their psychiatric problems).

If the individual conspires in the system by denying his own freedom through the self-imposition of a form of political and moral bondage, the first step towards freedom, towards nurturing the thoughts which are truly his own, is the protagonist’s recognition that his hitherto individuality is an illusion and that he must surrender himself to the insecurity of not knowing who he is and act spontaneously. Conformity exacts a loss of self. Non-conformity will result in the isolation of the self but has the potential, Hostovsky suggests, to bring the individual to a higher plane of unity with life. The solitariness of the new insecurity of self may be as illusory then as the freedom of the conformist self. One might say that the protagonist has to express faith in the concept of his own freedom and that that freedom, however troubling and precarious it may appear to him, will bring its own rewards. As the protagonist begins to break

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away from authorized codes of behaviour, from being ‘obedient’, he may be
unaware that he has begun the process of dismantling his ‘role’ in society and
trying to uncover the real nature of his own identity. Hostovský certainly draws
a distinction between the obedient, law-abiding individual and the one who
spontaneously does good through his own virtue: in Půlnocní pacient, for
example, after his stroke, Malik realizes that his obedience has served no end	her than to perpetuate a system intent on obliterating individuality, that he
has been a slave to this reductive ‘plotting’: ‘Do dnešního dne jsem se vědomě
nedopustil jediného činu, který by nebyl v souhlasu s oficiálním výkladem
zákonů. Ani v Evropě, ani v Americe. Byl jsem poslušný, i když škodolibě
poslušný. Teď už nebudu a snad právě proto uvidím zase lidi.’ (PP, pp. 135–
36).

The protagonist’s break from conformity triggers a hermeneutic journey into
the past. Pivotal experiences are not just remembered, but relived or re-
enacted, albeit self-consciously, since the protagonist is fully aware of the
outcome of what he or she is saying or doing. The protagonist appears to
transcend the self; indeed, the protagonist appears to attain, or be close to, a
consciousness of the identity of his or her own essence with all other things, so
that one might term these quasi-mystical experiences as noetic in character.

In Všeobecné spímnutí, Bareš examines the difference between dreaming, in
which real experiences are transformed into different forms and the atmosphere
is notably different from a waking state, and these visionary re-enactments, in
which all the details and events exactly correspond to those of real experiences
and the subject has the sense of being transported back in time. The difference
between the past lived life and the visionary re-enactment lies in the
individual’s acknowledgement the second time around of his guilt, his wish to
make amends, his desire to recover his integrity through the agency of another.
Bareš’s re-enactment concerns his wife’s confession of her infidelity; the Bareš
of the narrative’s ‘present’ tense is aware that he is seeing his wife for the last
time. The difference the second time around, however, is that Bareš suddenly
asks whether they can do anything to repair their marriage. Now the re-
enactment becomes dreamlike, as Králová offers hope for their future: “Však
vite, Bareši, že můžeme všechno napravit” řekla hlasem vlnobiti, zakletého v
lasturách. “Až jednou, až se zase v jiných najdeme a v jiných poznáme. Pak
promluvte, *pak* se zastavte, *pak* se teprve obrátíte čelem ke mně — a změněte osud. Teď jděte, teď musíte odejít podruhé.” Hostovský uses the re-enactment device to force the narrator to confront his own passivity and abnegation of responsibility (one thinks of Hamlet watching the Players). His ‘return’ offers him the chance of redemption.

In *Půlnocní pacient*, Malik’s marriage is central to, and acts as a frame for, the action of the novel. On a metaphysical plane of narrative, the novel charts Malik’s development from a man enervated by his nihilistic antipathy or indifference towards everything, to one who acknowledges guilt for having mistreated his wife and realizes his need both to offer and to receive forgiveness. It is no coincidence that his participation — both conscious and inadvertent — in the absurd activities of the Communist and American secret services begins with the arrival of his former wife Elsa in New York (of which he is not immediately aware) and ends with his decision to meet with her at his mother’s house (at which she is temporarily staying). Malik is himself aware that the two spheres of action, the political and the personal, may be mysteriously interrelated, since he states that:

The iteration of Elsa’s name evokes a series of associations and feelings — home, faith in others and oneself, hope — which suggest that she is of symbolic value for Malik as representative of a whole world he seems to have lost. This lost world parallels the present reductive one (in which people are shadows, life is just the instinct for self-preservation). The ‘other’ world
contains both vitalism (the elemental sea and wind) and a metaphysical dimension (things are more than matter) which one might associate with higher states of consciousness (and one is aware again of how woman is central as the key to this ‘other’ world).

This scene is linked to that of Malik’s collapse in Raymond’s flat (following Kaminsky’s murder) near the end of the novel: together they provide a metaphysical frame for concerns pertaining to the Cold War activities but extending beyond the realm of politics. Malik opens a package and is shocked to discover photographs of his honeymoon with Elsa in the Orlice mountains; the emptiness he feels around him is again transformed (as it was before with the mention of Elsa’s name), ‘Odvrátil jsem se od obrázku do prázdna, jež začalo žít nezřetelnými stíný, pohyby, barvami, šepotem a slovy’ (p. 223). The narrative tense shifts into the historic present as Malik begins to relive a scene from his honeymoon in which his wife and he, transparently in love, discuss aspects of their relationship. He tells her of his fantasy, which he has held since he first met her, to travel into the future and return after many years to ‘this’ moment and reveal to her what he saw in the future (a fantasy which acquires an irony through our awareness that Malik is indeed ‘returning’ from the future, and in circumstances wholly incomparable to those he must have imagined). They also discuss the case of a friend Robert who lived a lie in maintaining that he had been awarded his doctorate and whose wife supported his lie; Elsa argues that the wife acted out of love, ‘Z lásky, Arnošte, dokáže člověk věci nadlidské, a teď už na tom nezáleží, jestli to, co jsem právě řekla, zní banálně’ (p. 229). Malik begins to ask if his wife would do the same for him when she interrupts him to declare that ‘mně je najednou hrozně úzko’ (ibid.). Their conversation accrues a dramatic irony as Malik relives it, since he now knows that his wife was concealing from him the nature of her involvement with the Nazis; there is a double irony, however, in Malik’s (and our) inclination to believe that she really did love him and that she was ‘dishonest’ only in so far as she protected him from false suppositions about their relationship (if he had known that the Nazis desired them to marry, he would not have believed she loved him).

Suddenly the vision fades, although Malik continues to see before him the petrified form of his wife: ‘Dva kroky stojí ode mne a já nemohu nic změnit,
nemohu zachránit naše životy, není cesty zpět, a i kdyby jí bylo, neznám zaklínadlo, které by zastavilo chvíli a zabránilo explozi!” (p. 230). Malik has returned from the future to the past, but is tormented by the irrevocability of what follows this suspended moment of time. Importantly, however, he does not blame his wife for the horrors that follow, but shoulders the responsibility himself, indeed may accept a notion of universal responsibility. During this scene in Raymond’s flat, Malik hears twice a quotation from Pascal, ‘Take comfort; you would not seek me if you had not found me’62 (Nehledal bys mě, kdybys mě nebyl našel), taken from his meditation on the Passion, The Mystery of Jesus. Pascal’s text was probably written not long after his conversion or revelation (which came after a period of great unhappiness in his life) on the night of 23 November 1654, and consists of an intense and personalized study of Christ’s abandonment in the garden of Gethsemane while his friends effectively abandon him by falling asleep:

Jesus seeks companionship and solace from men.
It seems to me that this is unique in his whole life, but he finds none, for his disciples are asleep.
Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world. There must be no sleeping during that time.63

As Krailsjheimer writes, the implication of this passage is a warning about the consequences ‘if we fall asleep’.64 Pascal felt that he had overcome the intellectual pride and selfishness which prevented him from loving God.65 Whether Hostovský is attempting to create an analogue with Pascal’s conversion from despair in Malik’s epiphanic moment (Malik is overcoming his pride and accepting his guilt) is unclear, since we do not know if Hostovský had read Pascal, though it is not unreasonable (given Pascal’s influence on Rousseau, Bergson and the Existentialists) to expect Hostovský to have been familiar with the rudimentary outlines of Pascal’s thought. If we assume ignorance on the grounds that the quotation from Pascal is generally well-known, we can at least say that the phrase is significant in Hostovský’s text.

63 Ibid., p. 313.
65 Ibid., p. 9.
because it highlights the importance of searching: the act of searching presupposes an existing faith or hope or a wish that something be so. Krailsheimer describes Pascal as reacting against a purely dogmatic approach to life and addressing himself ‘to those who are willing to seek, who believe neither that they have already found adequate answers to the fundamental questions of life, however formulated, nor that seeking such answers is a waste of time’, and one might identify a concurrence in Hostovský’s aversion to dogmatism, ideology, narrow rationality and support of the protagonist’s muddling, and emotionally turbulent, quest for truths.

Hostovský depicts the protagonist’s rejection of conformity as a symbolic exile. Malik’s abjurance of slavery and choice of exile restores his vitality: ‘existuje život i mimo lidi. V samotě. Mezi nebem a zemí, kde místo vášně řádí přírodní živly’ (PP, p. 151). It is tempting to interpret from Hostovský’s advocacy of withdrawal from the world that he treats exile as the fundamental state of twentieth-century man, although one must be careful in defining what this exile means. One is mindful that Hostovský himself nurtures this impression in his interview with Liehm, which I discussed in my chapter on Jewishness, when he postulates that people’s experience of dispersal and exile constitutes some kind of universal law for modern man, ‘Nesmí, nemůže a snad ani nechce zakotvit’. The latter part of his statement is what interests me here, in so far as it suggests that man’s restlessness is not the product of outside pressures alone, but also of his own volition, which leads one to deduce that man’s insecurity is integral to Hostovský’s conception of identity, that man’s restless searching is also the source of his vitality. The term ‘exile’, loaded as it is with negative connotations (banishment, expulsion), perhaps misleadingly perpetuates the notion of Hostovský as a writer of gloomy, morbid sensibility. Herein lies a serious bone of contention with the theses put forward by Pohorský and Papoušek concerning Hostovský’s post-war pessimism: while I would be reckless to dismiss them, they somehow ignore a strange vitalism inherent in the subject’s sense of his own disintegration. The sudden instability of the subject resurrects him from mummification. What begins first is a process defined by Jonathan Glover as internal emigration: in societies where

66 Ibid., p. 78.
67 Liehm, Generace, p. 390.
uniformity is impressed upon people, 'some sense of individuality might be 
preserved by “internal emigration”: the inner life of thought might be the last 
refuge of the self'. As the subject awakens, however, he is increasingly aware 
that the world around him is dead and, after a period of myopic meddling in 
this dead world in the subject’s belief that he can destroy or resurrect it, he 
arrives at the epiphanic realization that he must move even further within 
himself to become and remain vital. One exposes thus a Benešová strain in 
Hostovský’s philosophy: reject the orthodoxy outside you, let go of your 
narcissism, assume guilt and responsibility, retreat, be true to your instincts, 
find love again. Hostovský does not treat the subject’s internal exile as a 
pessimistic gesture of resignation, but rather as an optimistic — if gentle — 
affirmation of faith and hope which counteracts the malevolence of the outside 
world.

Hostovský’s study of the individual’s search for integrity in his oeuvre 
begins and ends with isolation. In his earliest works the individual seeks escape 
from the prison of self and corroboration of his authenticity from a hostile 
external world. As Hostovský’s work progresses in the 1930s and during the 
war, the protagonist matures to a realization that he is part of a dense pattern of 
fates and that his individual actions can influence the composition not only of 
his world, but a world beyond him. In his post-war work, Hostovský treats the 
profanation of interconnected fates in the phenomenal world. The protagonist 
seeks now to escape the world: his or her individuality can be vouchsafed only 
beyond the empirical world through a semi-mystical communion with Life.

p. 173.
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223
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228