SOCIAL CRITICISM IN CZECH LITERATURE OF 1970s AND 1980s CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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I

At the beginning of the 1970s things looked bad for Czech literature. Two hundred odd writers, most of them minor and some of them dead, were on a black-list. Only two writers who had the general respect of the reading public survived, Vladimír Páral and Ladislav Fuks. Literature was in the hands of functionaries whose names were linked with the 1950s. In 1973 Czechoslovakia was declared normalized; the literary consequence of that was that in 1975 three leading writers of the 1960s, Miroslav Holub, Bohumil Hrabal and Jiří Šotola, recanted. By the 1980s, however, other formerly banned writers began publishing again (for example, Hamšík, Kříž, Mikulášek, Skácel). In the 1970s and early 1980s there was only one literary monthly, the "Literární měsíčník", a periodical which toes a functionary line. Eventually the Party weekly, "Tvorba", began producing a literary supplement, "Kmen", which is slightly more liberal than "Literární měsíčník". In the spring of 1985 (dated February, in fact May) a new literary periodical based in Brno, "Rok", was launched, but its pilot number promised little.

There was little room for social or political criticism in Czech literature from 1970 to 1973, though it was not utterly impossible. Czech readers no doubt feared the worst when in 1970 the elderly die-hard Jan Hostáň [1] published in 100 000 copies his fairy-tale biography of Lenin, "Jak Voloďa přemohl krutého cara" (How dear Vladimír vanquished the cruel Tsar). Their fears were unfounded. From the mid-1970s both criticism of the state of Czech society and grim forebodings of where present social and economic policies are leading have increased. At the third congress of the Association of Czech Writers (1982) that criticism was given Party blessing by the Central Committee secretary Josef Havlín, who called on writers to fight '*Schlamperei*, poor morale at work, opportunism, indifference and the petty bourgeois mentality' [2]. Political criticism, on the other hand, is minimal. The leading role of the Communist Party and Czechoslovak defence and foreign

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[1] Hostáň, Jan (1898—1982) later published a collection of verse: Uvězněná touha [Imprisoned desire]. Prague 1978, an eightieth-birthday selection of insipid, *parteitreu* jingles written between 1915 and 1976.

[2] Protokol III. sjezdu Svazu českých spisovatelů [Proceedings of the third congress of the Association of Czech Writers]. s. l., s. a. [i. e. Prague 1982], 29—30.

policy clearly may not be questioned. Few Czech readers would be interested in such criticism. The Czechs pride themselves in being 'realists'.

Much of the social criticism contained in new Czech literature could be applied as easily to a Western society as to Czechoslovak society. The semantic content of such criticism is, however, different in Czech from what it is in, say, English literature. The Czechs had been promised an ideal, just society, indeed had learned about the justness of their society for years and years at school. Novels of social criticism range from critical views of the whole system to didactic pictures of residual bourgeois values or of the baneful influence of the West. The most trenchant critic of modern consumerism in the 1960s had been Páral and his first novel of the 1970s, "Profesionální žena" (A professional woman, 1971), still depicts Czech society as dominated by sex, food, drink — and canasta. Here, however, Páral has, for the first time, something like a 'positive heroine', who is freed from a series of emblematic prisons of consumerism to become in the end a hard-working ideal socialist manager. The novel is both a fairy-tale and a parody of a fairy-tale. In his first collection of verse since his recantation, "Naopak" (On the contrary, 1982), Holub depicts a debased human society of careerism and petty exploitation; Holub's Minotaur declares that what counts as normality in that society is simply 'a moderate form of feeblemindedness' [3]. In his "Gilotina" (Guillotine, 1979) Jaromír Pelc describes the anxiety of ownership as the essence of adult Czech society. Marie Štemberková provides the following baleful assessment of the modern selfish, materialist Czech, who lacks all idealism:

> He used to tilt at windmills
> but now he toes the line
> He's flogged his faithful Rosinante to the slaughter-house
> divorced doña Dulcinea
> and now he's fighting with her in court over the car and the dacha
> He's sold his chivalrous romances for a song
> to the second-hand bookshop [4]

Pavel Francouz's short-story, "Strniště" ("Takové ticho", Such silence, 1974), also depicts an arid society where aesthetic values have been replaced by property fetishism. Gärtnerová expresses the same idea by stating that in the new man's mind thoughts of money had replaced thoughts of poetry [5]. In his novel, "Den, kdy slunečnice hořely" (The day the sunflowers burned, 1982), Frais describes the present age as 'an age of owners' [6], in which man pursues no happiness, but 'success, property and beer' [7]. At one point in that novel the chauffeur hero's employer, an

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[3] Holub, Miroslav: Úspěšný mladý muž v labyrintu. In: Naopak [On the contrary]. Prague 1982, 48.

[4] Štemberková, Marie: Don Quijote. In: Sestřenka ironie [Cousin irony]. Prague 1982, 31.

[5] Gärtnerová, Marta: Malá. In: Autogenesis. Aussig 1982, 58.

[6] Frais, Josef: Den, kdy slunečnice hořely [The day the sunflowers burned]. Prague 1982, 45.

[7] Frais: Den 71.

old-fashioned hard-working factory boss, seems to suggest that what is needed is a new workers' revolution, a mass Defenestration of Prague in which all the time-serving, feckless white-collar workers will be tossed onto the dung-heap by the manual workers [8]. In Danielle Dušková's schematic, prize-winning *Erziehungsroman*, "Bobby" (1975), modern consumerism is explicitly seen to be the product of the Dubček era. The novel's eponymous hero will, however, be all right in the end, since his Jaguar-lusting ex-Dubčekite father, his foreign-currency dealing mother and his corrupt car-mechanic brother are all killed in a heavily symbolic car crash and he is off to study in Moscow. In the 1960s all town-dwelling Czechs strove to have a dacha. At that time it was called a *chata*, and the term could denote anything from an allotment hut to a disused watermill. The affluent 1970s replaced *chata* mania with *chalupa* (cottage) mania. The Establishment Roman Ráž satirizes this mania thus: 'well, we've got a cottage in Býkovec; we've come up in the world; we're cottage-owners, people with no peace on Saturdays and Sundays, people who once a week move a quarter of their larders there and back, people who transport themselves and their belongings from the town to the country and back. Most of all they transport their tiredness, and particularly dogged cottage-owners do succeed, at least for a while, in camouflaging that tiredness in jolly enthusiasm' [9].

Although drink and drunkenness have been objects of social criticism and satire in Czech literature since the 14th century, new Czech literature's depictions of alcoholism, particularly amongst the young, are usually explicitly connected with modern affluence and consumerism. To be sure, we do have the odd picture of old-fashioned dypsomania, like that of the old Moravian peasants in Navrátil's "Koštýř" (Taster, 1978). So too we have middle-aged specimens like the overworking, oversmoking, overeating, overdrinking managerial Leoš in Páral's "Generální zázrak" (General miracle, 1977), who is cured of his alcoholism when he is demoted to manual labourer. And in Frais's "Strom na konci cesty" (Tree at the end of the way, 1985) we have a distinguished actor hitting the bottle when he learns of the repulsive wheeling-dealing which has changed the atmosphere of the theatre to which he belongs. Most of the alcoholics in new Czech literature are, however, in their teens and twenties. Again in "Generální zazrak" we have the charming, greasy, hippy-slang using lover of Leoš's wife, Anek Raušer. He is eventually brutally murdered by Leoš's wife in a literally apocalyptic scene which symbolizes her abandonment of consumerism. In the same author's parody Socialist-Realist novel "Radost až do rána" (Joy till morn, 1975), the *déclassée* Viola will also be cured of alcoholism by old-fashioned work and old-fashioned love. As a type Viola is not dissimilar to the frumpish alcoholic teenage groupie, Petřička, in Radek John's "Džínový svět" (Jeans world, 1980). In Bartůněk's "Milión bláznivých chutí" (A million mad desires, 1982) we have the brilliant young saxophonist, Toník, who drinks himself unconscious every night while playing in a local restaurant. The born-loser hero of Dušek's "Lovec štěstí" (The happiness hunter,

[8] Frais: Den 106 f.
[9] Ráž, Roman: Vrabčí hnízdo [Sparrows' nest]. Prague 1983, 124.

1980) comes out of prison determined to find happiness and not to drink. In this racy determinist thriller, the hero is dragged by something like Classical Fate deeper and deeper into the society of his former gangster associates. His attempts to avoid their society are as fruitless as his attempts to give up the drink. His past and alcohol join forces to drive him unwitting into crime again. At the end of the novel, when the kind, intelligent hero is defeated by the big-time gangster, it just happens that, for the first time, the hero had not been drinking. The main female character in Jiří Křenek's "Tomáš a Markéta" (T. and M., 1984) is a young alcoholic journalist. She dies after she is cured of her alcoholism by love. The most important aspect of her lot is that she is the spoilt daughter of a technocrat, a *nouveau* scientist, who had been too interested in success to learn anything about his daughter. Markéta does not realise she is alienated from society mainly because of her father and step-mother's new-class morality, but the main character of Bedřich Hlinka's far more powerful "Už není návratu" (No way back, 1981) does. The initial reason for the fourteen-year old Lucie's hitting the bottle lies in her mother's lack of concern at the state she is in after having been raped by a middle-aged driver who had offered her a lift. She frequently contemplates suicide, but is actually killed when she is run over by a bus as she is leaving a restaurant drunk. Hlinka's novel depicts how consumerism and the careerism linked with it has led to social disintegration. Its utter pessimism is comparable with Dušek's in "Lovec štěstí".

That there is a narcotics problem in today's Czechoslovakia is generally known, but it is rarely reflected in literature. Many of the teenagers in John's "Džínový svět" indulge in glue-sniffing and in the would-be humorous Establishment František Stavinoha's would-be novel, "Hvězdy nad Syslím údolím" (Stars over Suslik Valley, 1981), the author suggests that the pervasion of glue-sniffing derives directly from the importing of trashy Western films. The fact that Dušek's "Dny pro kočku" (Dog days, 1979) is set in 1962 again suggests that the narcotics problem has nothing to do with 'normalized' Czechoslovakia, for here we have a particularly nauseous blackmailing alcoholic junkie called Doner. Nevertheless the fact that one could talk about the problem as existing even before the Thaw had got properly underway is significant enough. In Křenek's "Tomáš a Markéta" we have a scene in which it is implied that all Czech long-haired youths are drug-pushers who spend their time off pushing listening to multi-decibell music [10]. I find it refreshing when, in his "Místa" (Places), Schildberger considers the ritual consumption of piles of Czech dumplings just as narcotomanic as the consumption of heroin [11].

Where criticism of consumerism was evident in the 1960s, criticism of industrial pollution is very much a product of the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed that criticism is becoming so widespread that it will soon be a weightless *cliché*. Still, the achieve-

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[10] Compare Křenek, Jiří: Tomáš a Markéta [Tomáš and Markéta]. Prague 1984, 95. — One of the aims of the tolerant Zuzana Kočová's: Tychonova hvězda [Tycho's star]. Prague 1977 — is to dispel Establishment perjudices towards bearded weirdies.

[11] Schildberger, František: Místo pro staré dobré zbraně a pro neznámé ctnosti. In: Místa [Places]. Königgrätz 1983, 50.

ments of socialist industry are no longer just positive. In Šerberová's "Vítr v síti" (Wind in the net) a night motorist is surprised by the moonlight because he had become so used to the 'smog and smoke'[12] of Prague and in John's second novel (which he wrote together with Ivo Pelant), "Začátek letopočtu" (Start of an age, 1984), apart from smog and smoke we hear of the foul exhaust fumes of lorries and the permanent stench of Prague streets. Prague is automatically smog-bound in Josef Šimon's "Ať člověk .." (Let man ..., 1982), Truneček's "Blažená alma mater uprostřed týdne" (The happy alma mater mid week, 1984) and in Aleš Presler's "Beatles se stejně rozpadli" (The Beatles broke up anyway, 1982); in Presler smog is merely a component of the violence of modern Czech society. In Petr Prouza's "Krámek s kráskami" (Beauty booth, 1981) Prague smog serves as a physical additive to the main character's sense of mental oppression. Industrial Moravia is smog-bound in Křenek's "Tomáš a Markéta" and Zdeněk Zapletal's "Poslední knížka o dětství" (A last book about childhood, 1982) and Northern Bohemia in Jiří Švejda's "Havárie" (Crash, 1975) and Gärtnerová's "Autogenesis". Stavinoha speaks of the chronic bronchitis in young children caused by smog in "Hvězdy nad Syslím údolím". In 'Edova teorie o rybách' (Písek v zubech, Sand in your teeth, 1978) Lubomír Macháček gives us a science-fiction account of a possible evolutionary effect of the pollution of all fresh water; here a man turns into a fish. In his "Adam a Eva" (Adam and Eve, 1982), the president of the federal Writers' Association, Jan Kozák, complains about the pollution of both the Elbe and the Moldau and about the way industrial development has ruined the Bohemian countryside. (Very little is said about river pollution in Czech literature, perhaps because it has become a touchy international political problem.) The battle between Nature and the cement and gravel world produced by the 'scientific and technological revolution' forms the theme of several poems in Šimon's "Český den" (A Czech day, 1979). Probably the nastiest part of the world is the tower-block estate. Outside literature these estates still (in 1985) constitute a great achievement of socialist building, as is borne out by press photographs and even picture postcards for tourists. In "Bobby" Dušková tries to get the best of both worlds by gently criticizing their hideosity, but simultaneously suggesting the small family houses they surround represent petty bourgeois inertia: 'Now the houses vegetate in the shadow of the monstrous cubes of the prefabricated tower-blocks which surround them.'[13] Michal Černík in his "daleko stín daleko sad" (Far the shade, far the trees, 1979) describes his native Čelákovice as now hemmed in by ever increasing circles of tower blocks ('Kde bydlím'). In his "Strom na konci cesty" Frais attacks the dehumanizing visual uniformity of this particular effluent of socialist postindustrial society: 'There was a time when every town had its own beauty and individuality, when every town had the gift of becoming a home to which it was of unqualified importance to return. Today you are walking along

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[12] Šerberová, Alžběta: Noc automobilistů. In: Vítr v síti [Wind in the net]. Prague 1982, 125.

[13] Dušková, Danielle: Bobby. Mistr světa a já [Bobby. The world champion and I]. Prague 1975, 28.

a grim, grey prefabricated street planted with seven-year-old poplars and God knows where you are. It could be Klatovy or Bydžov, Senica or Vrútky. Sit down in the grass wherever you like, and you will find the same white, grey, black dust. The white, blue and green rivers have today finally achieved unity; fashion has clad them all in the same blotches of oil.' [14]

John and Pelant speak of Prague as 'clenched in the vice of high-rise estates' [15] and Zapletal describes flats in such blocks as 'prefab cages' [16]. The lack of privacy caused by the thin walls of these prefab cages is criticized by Macháček in his short-story, "Co bude zítra" ("Písek v zubech"). That aspect of towerblock living is best represented by Páral in "Radost až do rána" where hordes of *embourgeoisés* workers collectively cavort and copulate and where every Friday all the wives bath their husbands at the same time and through the walls one hears a socialist solidarity of squelches and screams. Jiří Žácek expresses, mainly between the lines, a longing for the sexual privacy denied him by modern living in the poem "Šanson" ("Mezi řečí", while talking, 1978). The main character of Jana Červenková's "Semestr života" (A term of life, dated 1981, not issued until 1982) experiences that high-rise lack of privacy in a small old house in a small frontier town. Then she finds there is no privacy anywhere in the town. By the end of the novel the reader realises that the town, Vraná, is intended as a microcosm and that one of the themes of the novel is the lack of privacy anywhere in socialist Czechoslovakia.

The themes of consumerism and pollution are combined in Páral's "Válka s mnohozvířetem" (War with multi-bestia, 1983). The novel's thesis that the pollution emitted from factories, exhaust pipes and cigarettes constitutes a physical emanation of the animal that has been in man ever since creation is coherently argued. The organic material produced by pollution first appears as a brown gundge called 'masit' which falls on the industrial world. It starts in Los Angeles but soon moves to England, then western Europe, then Czechoslovakia. When mankind is becoming good at destroying 'masit' gundge, the material begins to take on the shape of various animals, and man literally has to fight a war with these 'masit' monsters. When he wins that war, the material adopts a new form, the 'multibestia' of the title. This looks like a rash of moles; these moles can live on the skin or inside the body. Those worst affected by what comes to be known as the 'brown disease' are those who consume excessive quantities of alcohol and meat, especially fatty or spicy meat, who smoke excessively or who indulge in excessive sexual pleasures. Those who become infected lose their inhibitions; that allows Páral to exploit his gift for caricature. The most Gothic of these is his picture of one of the last characters to remain 'brown', the sadist Míja. In his depiction of her Páral may be interpreting or explaining away the sadomasochistic elements present in his novels since 1964. Míja works in a leather-ware shop and

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[14] Frais, Josef: Strom na konci cesty [Tree at the end of the way]. Prague 1985, 215.
[15] John, Radek / Pelant, Ivo: Začátek letopočtu [Start of an age]. Prague 1984, 55.
[16] Zapletal, Zdeněk: Poslední knížka o dětství [A last book about childhood]. Brünn 1982, 130.

enjoys lasciviously running her fingers over the goods she sells. We have several pictures of her tightening leather belts round men's throats and riding about naked on naked men's backs whipping them ferociously. When the infected are at war with the uninfected, she sprays any uninfected she sees with burning paraffin. The only brown left with her at the end of the novel is the police informer, Arsen. The scum of modern society, the foulest exponents of consumerism and the foulest pollutors, are, then, for Páral, the sadists and the informers.

He gives the consumer Utopia or dystopia he describes in the fantasy thriller, "Pokušení A-ZZ" (The A-ZZ of temptation, 1982), the name Agala. That is a minimally distorted anagrammatic echo of Gulag [17] and all who rebel against the commands of Agala headquarters are sent to a concentration camp. That novel was followed by a rather feeble work which explicitly describes a socialist dystopia, "Romeo & Julia 2300" (also 1982). By the year 2300 the whole world has a socialist régime. Almost everyone accepts the régime's dictates, but there is still a psychiatric concentration camp in the desert in Australia for the odd murderer and for those driven to despair by daring to fall in love with someone who the central marriage computer declares incompatible. Food all over the world is exactly the same; it is as if Macdonald's had at last achieved world supremacy. All these foods have the prefix 's-', so that one eats the same s-kangaroo steak in Prague as in Sydney. The prefix is never explained; it may stand for 'synthetic', but most commonly in modern Czech the letter 's', obviously enough, stands for 'socialist'. There is no more unemployment in the world, but most people have absolutely futile jobs, all of them more or less bureaucratic. There is permanent peace in the world, but psychiatric nurses are armed to the teeth. There is absolutely no privacy in this world. Everyone is on the central computer file and everyone can call up everyone else on their videophone whenever they like. The result is claustrophobia. The only other writer I have come across who approaches Páral's boldness in the depiction of a socialist dystopia is Ladislav Szalai, who also shares Páral's fear of consumerism. In his collection of short-stories, "Cesta do bláznovy zahrady" (Journey into the madman's garden, 1984), he demonstrates himself to be a good deal less sophisticated than Páral. In one story, 'Poslední záběry', he implies that there is no chance of universal peace until the whole world is socialist, has rid itself of 'archaic social systems' [18]. The story, "Hra" [19], however, describes

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[17] Páral playfully puts the reader off the scent by having the names of all Agala bosses end in -ag and of all ordinary Agalans begin with Ag-.

[18] S z a l a i, Ladislav: Cesta do bláznovy zahrady [Journey into the madman's garden]. Prague 1984, 178.

[19] The idea of game or playing is a major *motif* of 'normalized' Czech literature. As far as I know the beginning of the *motif* as a conscious idea is to be found in Dušková's inventive but ill-resolved thriller: Hra na lásku [Playing at love]. Prague 1972. — I have the beginning of an interpretation of the *motif* in 'Adolescence, Ideology and Society: The Young Hero in Contemporary Czech Fiction', Ian Wallace (Ed.): The Adolescent Hero, 'GDR Monitor'. Special Series No. 3, Dundee 1984. — When I was writting that article I did not know Dušková. Vladimír K l e v i s describes a game of death which turns sour in his: Abiturienti [The matric class] (Prague 1975) — and he describes the same bottle-spinning game as Páral, Petr Hájek and

something of what a socialist world might look like. The game depicted is a television game which reflects the final stage of the mass media's invasion of privacy. Six people who have been condemned to death by the universal socialist régime are given a flick-knife and a loaded six-shooter and, in front of the television camera, they have to try to kill each other. The narrator is a condemned man who has dared criticize the state: 'I no longer know exactly what annoyed me so much that I wrote that sarcastic essay about society. About the society everyone was so proud of! A society which had, apparently, brought happiness and contentment to everyone! Everyone had whatever they wanted; [...] everyone was bored stiff [...] I did not believe my ears when I learnt what I was accused of. The defence counsel allocated to me just sat there cowed and cringing; he did not even try to defend me; the bench deliberately ignored all my protests and at the end of the day I was condemned to death for espionage on behalf of an alien power, high treason and sedition.' [20]

The bogeyman of Czech 1970s and 1980s Czech literature is the member of the so-called new class, the technocrat or senior bureaucrat or person involved in foreign trade. Establishment, non-Establishment and anti-Establishment writers publishing in Czechoslovakia are united in their hatred of this type. This hatred all too frequently appears hypocritical. The type comprises the men and women who have achieved or are in the process of achieving those materialist goals the system has imposed on citizens by the introduction of the chain of hardcurrency shops, Tuzex, and by hyperbolical black propaganda. The system has encouraged a situation whereby managerial or intellectual achievement is judged by the individual's ability to amass Western goods. The new class, the class of socialist *nouveaux*, has become an aristocracy, for whom the law of the land is as applicable as it was for landed abbots at the beginning of the Church Reform movement in 14th-century Bohemia. Nevertheless, just as the voices for Church Reform came from people like John Hus, who had avowedly taken holy orders for the sake of material gain, so writers in the 1970s and 1980s, who had become writers out of *littérateur* narcissism or for the sake of material gain, criticize the class they aspire or had once aspired to. Again I have to start with Páral, and with his grotesque caricature of the new-class man in "Profesionální žena", Ziki Holý. Ziki is a millionaire technocrat who buys the instruments for his sadomasochistic pursuits in Woolworth's in Oxford Street and who is able, when things are getting hot, to get a freeby business air-ticket to allow him to emigrate. Poor old Leoš's wife, Ivanka, in "Generální zázrak" epitomizes this new class; she is a money-grubber scrubber. In the West most people will know this class from the 'dissident' Václav Havel's "Vernisáž" (Private view). The Establishment Bohumil Nohejl describes

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Hlinka in both: Toulavý čas [Wander time] (Prag 1974) and Alexandra (Prague 1979). In her "Bobby" Dušková sees chess as a game of manipulation and clownery; her hero, however, grows out of it. Ludvík Němec's: Hra na slepo [Playing blind]. Brünn 1982, remains by far the most important work on games and playing, and on chess. It could have been written partly as a response to Dušková's much-praised "Bobby".

[20] Szalai: Cesta 71 f. In this story the influence of Orwell is evident.

the creation of this class in the short-story, 'Kamarád Maxim' ("Adieu, mládí!", Goodbye to youth, 1977), where the eponymous hero does not have children with his fashion-conscious wife, because they have to get all their luxuries first. In the poem, 'milostná?', Šimon, a man well on the way to new-class privileges, expresses the ordinary Czech's fear of the new class and his own fear of becoming a member of the new class, of having 'straw stuffed in his guts' [21]. The thuggish, materialist Party or government official in Presler's "Beatles se stejně rozpadli" quickly sugars off from his father-in-law's cremation in his Tatra 613 limousine, because attending a funeral is non-productive. The new class does not consist only in Party members — that is stated explicitly in Křenek's "Tomáš a Markéta". In that novel we receive instruction on the etiquette of new-class life: 'Try not to be too concrete; as far as possible give your opinion on general truths with phrases like «we ought to concentrate more on efficiency and quality»; you can't go wrong with phrases like that [...] Never overestimate your own position; try instead to assess how much clout the man you are talking to has; be careful how you choose your friends. If you want to get anywhere in life, being friends with someone of no importance is a waste of time. Be tolerant towards the opinions of others, but never to the extent, where the others' opinions might constitute a threat to your own well-being. If you should ever sense that might be the case, use all the means at your disposal to shut the other man up. [...] Never show a bad mood. Always try to be a thoroughly sociable chap. As long as you're sure whoever you are with will understand, tell a joke or two. Do everything you can to discover the weaknesses of your superiors and inferiors. [...] Doubt everything [...] and everybody.' [22]

In Hlinka's "Už není návratu" Lucie's father, Robert (Robert is traditionally a villain's name in Czech literature), as a typical new-class man, blames his own failings on the celerity of modern living. In Lucie's own view Robert has been corrupted by the money he earns, by the position he holds, by the methods he has necessarily had to employ to retain that position, and by the perks of his position: women and drink. In the title story of Klevis's "Abiturienti" (The matric class) the new-class man, Loužil, had beaten up the proletarian narrator in February 1948 (i. e. when the Communist putsch had taken place in Czechoslovakia), but as an arch opportunist, has a great many public functions in the 1970s. Loužil is a conceited lump of slime, who even claims 22 % noble blood. Iva Hercíková's "Jak namalovat ptáčka" (How to paint a bird, 1984; in fact, 1985) supplies one of the crassest and most detailed descriptions of the new-class mentality in the picture of her heroine, Petra's, Mercedes-driving father. He can drink and drive whenever he likes, because he is a nob. He hauls Petra to Prague to live with him and his new wife, because he had bribed his new wife not to work by offering her Petra to look after. When he is offered a job in Sweden, Petra becomes an encumbrance and so is to be shipped off back to her mother. His daughter is a thing, not a human being. The main guideline of his life is never to do anything in a straightforward manner. One never

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[21] Šimon, Josef: "At' člověk ..." Melancholická kytara ["Let man ..." A melancholy guitar]. Prague 1982, 30.

[22] Křenek: Tomáš 342 f.

fills in forms. One never asks those in authority for anything. One can achieve everything through friends and bribery. When people visit they are treated in accordance with their usefulness: 'He kept Remy Martin for only his most important visitors. [. . .] Ordinary visitors got the ordinary French Grandial; connoisseurs on whom little depended got twenty-year-old Armenian brandy and those who were not connoisseurs, but on whom something depended, got Martell or Courvoisier.' [23]

As a new-class man he is, naturally, also an adulterer. Another example of this type is the modernisation mad doctor, Krejčí, in Ota Dub's equally rubbishy "Profesoři" (Professors of medicine, 1980). He achieves modernisation by shady deals with Czech entrepreneurs, but mainly with well-cologned, natty, oily, fast-working Westerners, who offer all sorts of bribes. He leaves his wife, of course — and anyway he had married her in the first place because she was the daughter of a rich dentist. The doctor quasi brother-in-law of the hero in Presler's "Beatles se stejně rozpadli" with his flashy Chrysler [24] is a similar type to Krejčí. The rich, well-connected young doctor, Tomáš, in Zapletal's "Poslední knížka o dětství" is an incipient Krejčí. The description of his friends' reactions on coming to visit him just after his wife, Zuzana, has given birth constitutes apt, if over-obvious, satire on new-class materialism: 'They praised Zuzana's baby and, while so doing, the women were thinking what a fabulously furnished bedroom they had and what wonderful Tuzex clothes Zuzana and her baby had, and the men were gazing at Zuzana and, as far as they had any imagination at all, were imagining her without the clothes their wives so much admired.' [25]

In Švejda's "Havárie" members of the new-class are necessarily crooks, and I suppose that to the outside world the gangster leader, Grizzly, in Dušek's "Lovec štěstí" with his country house and swimming pool would look like a member of the new class. The drop-out student of psychology, Robert, in Dušková's "Hra na lásku" (Playing at love, rev. ed. 1982), with his interest in the occult, his yacht, his Don Juan complex and his illicit second-hand car business is a new-class lad of new-class parentage. In "Bobby" one of the main character's sayings about his materialist brother is, 'No true sex without Tuzex' [26]. Alice in Frais's "Den, kdy slunečnice hořely" is a female equivalent of Dušková's Robert; she is promiscuous, lives in high-tech luxury, is callous and beautiful. The second language of the young new-class Czechs in English and their hi-fi apparatus constantly belches out English and American pop music. In Zapletal's "Poslední knížka o dětství" we have a convincing picture of the new-class Tomáš as a teenager: 'I'll never be a snob like my parents, he said to himself, put on jeans, having first scrubbed them down well with a scrubbing brush, rejected parental help and company, but, at the same time accepted the latest English records his father managed to get hold of for him, a

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[23] Hercíková, Iva: Jak namalovat ptáčka [How to paint a bird]. Prague 1984 [i. e. 1985], 101.

[24] At least in literature Chryslers seem to mark the corrupt wheeler-dealer in Czech society.

[25] Zapletal: Poslední knížka 128.

[26] Dušková: Bobby 159.

new gramophone, a tape-recorder, a motorbike which he smashed up the second time he rode it. [...] At school and at discos he chose the prettiest girls and he constantly insulted his friends, all of whom were nonentities anyway.' [27]

The adult Tomáš like the father in Dušková's "Bobby" drives his car with the go-getter aggression consonant with new-classness. In John's "Džínový svět" we have a character who is that bit seedier a version of the Tomáš type, the preening trendy would-be Kafka, Majkl (*sic*), who can lead his pseud existence because his father works in Kuwait and so he does a successful trade in Tuzex vouchers. Parallel to him the big-wig's son, Blecha, a budding criminal, whom all the girls go for, because he has so much Western money. His mother always has DM 2 000 hidden under the carpet. In Kočová's "Tychonova hvězda" (Tycho's star) we have a female equivalent of John's Blecha, the diplomat's daughter, Líza, who works as a waitress in the Alcron Hotel, and wears only Tuzex clothes. Her character is shown not only in her belief that money can buy everything but also in the way she gets a ginger tom-cat drunk. When she attempts an exhibitionist suicide her father is in the process of divorcing his second wife. One of the new-class people in Páral's "Generální zázrak" is Táňa, who has a white Mercedes, a husband who is always away on business trips, a greenhouse with palms and lime-trees, and plenty of time for lovers. A new elitist type within the new class is pointed out by Kozák in "Adam a Eva": the freelance office cleaner. Beautiful young blondes buzz about on mopeds cleaning whole series of offices outside office-hours and earn enough money to spend three months a year not working. Kozák's particular example, Marcela, has a predictable penchant for older men with snazzy Western cars. In the same novel Kozák depicts a typical sleezy, wheeling-dealing member of the Czech managerial class. In Hlinka's "Už není návratu" we see how the managers of the so-called classless society despise the ordinary manual workers. Finally Křenek gives us two satirical snap-shots of the Czech managerial class on business trips. When an engineer comes back from a trip on which he had been meant to inspect a malfunction in some piece of machinery, he declares: 'No, I couldn't do anything about it, but on the other hand I managed to run down some *Jägerwurst*.' [28] The other example concerns a trip to Paris: 'If they'd at least brought back some catalogues! All they did was rush about shops looking for scent; one of them was even caught shoplifting in a department store. A typical specialist trip *à la tchèque*!' [29]

II

Protektion [30] is very much part of the new-class scene. *Protektion* has been satirized in Czech literature at least since the 1890s; all but a few educated Czechs,

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[27] Zapletal: Poslední knížka 27.
[28] Křenek: Tomáš 260.
[29] Křenek: Tomáš 141.
[30] My colleague, László Péter, translates the term as 'the patronage system' when he is speaking about the Habsburg Monarchy. *Protektion* (Cz: *protekce*, Hung: *protekció*) covers string-pulling, nepotism, the old school tie, the back door, jobs for the boys and something very like old-fashioned patronage.

however, consider it to be very much part of the socialist system. Therefore, for this essay, I must consider it thus. The new-class boss of the furniture warehouse in which Frais's satirical "Narozeniny světa" (Birthday of the world, 1981) is set gets his job through nepotism. A typical telephone conversation of this boss is reported thus by one of the workers: 'If you get me the paving stones the fellow who's repairing my car needs, I'll get the leather arm-chairs your dentist needs.' [31] In "Pokušení A - ZZ" Páral satirizes new-class *Protektion* in the scenes leading up to the frowsy Juna's being voted queen of the ball. When Zuzana (Zapletal, "Poslední knížka o dětství") expresses the extraordinary non-new-class desire to have a Christmas tree, the new-class Tomáš cannot imagine just going out to buy one: 'Tom told his father and his father told a friend who told another friend, and so the whole family were able to come together round a perfectly shaped little fir-tree and open their presents.' [32] When the clumsily Establishment Dušková speaks about *Protektion*, she condemns it as an 'abuse which affects all societies' [33]. Stuchlý in his "Měsíc jde nahoru" (Moon on the up, 1980) plugs the central theme of Establishment writing about youth; the young must find their own path, not rely on *Protektion*. The main character, Ctibor's mother, whose repellency is described with great stylistic gaucherie, is a great one for *Protektion*: 'My mother, even though she was far from fond of Aunt Bláža, was always charming to her, indeed sometimes servile. My aunt's husband was some sort of bigwig in local government, and my mother was always terribly interested in who is what, who has such and such a position, such and such connexions, who is in some way influential. She was positively obsessed with such values.' [34]

In his "Hluboko nakoře" (Deep up, 1982) Josef Souchop uses the term 'moor' to apply to new-class wheeler-dealers and *Protektion*-seekers in general. His descriptions of such moors have considerable bite for the contemporary Czech reader: 'It's quite possible, the moor with whom you're sitting had been cold-shouldering you for a full year, but now that you've published a distich in the local paper, he is jolly, indeed even kind, when you're talking.' A page later he describes the moors with defter sarcasm: '«My friends, I'll give you good examples of what vulgar materialism is», he [the moor] says and elegantly takes off his trousers and turns to his audience with puckering underpants. Even the ladies, who would, if the speaker had not been a moor, have turned away in disgust, clap their appreciation. The invincible, uncatchable, immaculable moor straightens up, overpensively hitches up his trousers, gives a cough and, instead of apologizing, begins to sing with horrifyingly sincere glee.' [35]

Moors will also ignore one, if they are in more important company. In Ráž's "Vrabčí hnízdo" (Sparrows' nest) we see how flats apportioned to a certain firm are given to those in favour rather than to those in need. In Švejda's "Havárie"

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[31] Frais, Josef: Narozeniny světa [Birthday of the world]. Prague 1981, 214.
[32] Zapletal: Poslední knížka 93.
[33] Dušková, Danielle: Hra na lásku [Playing at love]. Second revised and updated edition. Prague 1982, 75.
[34] Stuchlý, Vít: Měsíc jde nahoru [Moon on the up]. Prague 1980, 9.
[35] Souchop, Josef: Hluboko nahoře [Deep up]. Brünn 1982, 63, 64.

we hear how icehockey players automatically get flats, just as in Dušková we hear how 'anyone who can run the hundred metres in 11.5 seconds has the automatic right to a flat'.[36] The only reason a certain play is being performed in the fictional Bronov of Frais's "Strom na konci cesty" is that its author is the son of the director-manager's butcher. Ráž's "Vrabčí hnízdo" constitutes a 'psychological' picaresque novel which takes the reader through the mazes of *Protektion* and corruption in the worlds of publishing, radio, television and film. The main character, Vrtílek (i. e. squirmer), gets a rocket from his boss because he had let through a third-rate novel by an author, who is no longer important, since he had now separated from his influential wife. (Actually the novel had been written by that wife.) At one point Vrtílek's daughter comes to him to ask whether she should appear nude in a film. He hates the idea, but tells her that she can, of course, appear nude, for that is the fashion of the times. He tells her that because he needs the *Protektion* of her director. *Protektion* leads to prostitution. The fact that the opportunist runt, Vrtílek, a man who does not have a single idea of his own, ends up the boss of a publishing house, constitutes the most damning social criticism in this novel. One's whole life can be determined by one's parents' use of *Protektion*. In John's "Dzínový svět" we hear how the dullest of children get grammar-school places as a result of parental string-pulling. In Stuchlý we learn that membership of the Komsomol (SSM) is used by children mainly to help them to get to university or to be allowed to go on holiday to Jugoslavia[37]. The way *Protektion* is accepted as a social institution can lead to the recognition of crooks as socially useful human beings. The fixer has become an essential ingredient of socialist society. Souchop describes the archetypal fixer as follows: 'He has a smooth complexion and an O. T. beard. His hands know exactly when they can encuddle a girl's shoulder or a woman's waist. The tone of his voice is cleverly set at a pitch which suggests profundity or friendship or fatherliness and he knows just how to say, «I'd do anything in the world for you» or «That can be organized», and those words sound so plausible and his eyes look so sincere that everyone believes him.'[38]

Just such a fellow is Kadlec in John and Pelant's "Začátek letopočtu". On the face of it he works in foreign trade, but, in fact, he is a man who spends his life wangling things for people; he knows everyone worth knowing in the black economy and, actually, he is rather a decent chap. In his "Krámek s kráskami" Prouza has his Víťa Turek. Officially employed at the Barrandov film studios, all he actually does is fix things for useful people: 'The dozens of reference cards in Víťa Turek's brain made it possible for him to live a comfortable, almost work-free, life. He was forty-three, but looked much younger. He was so exceptionally successful as a leech on other people's inexperience, weakness or need.'[39]

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[36] Dušková: Hra na lásku 73.
[37] Stuchlý: Měsíc 41.
[38] Souchop: Hluboko nahoře 68.
[39] Prouza, Petr: Krámek s kráskami [Beauty booth]. Prague 1981, 174.

It is often difficult to distinguish between *Protektion* and corruption. I use the word corruption advisedly, since that is the word the Czechs use. Corruption may consist in petty bribery, such as in the Prouza novel, when the main character has to bribe the assistant in a while-u-wait cobbler's because, otherwise, he would not have had a shoe repaired while he waited. I do not know whether it is *Protektion* or corruption to enjoy the luxury of a private ward, if one knows one of the doctors (cf. Švejda's "Okna bez mříží", Windows without bars, 1983). If one goes by literature Czechs are just as much or more on the make than Brits. One thinks of the wangling lorry-driver in Bartůněk's "Milión bláznivých chutí" and the wangling brickworks employee in Švejda's "Požáry a spáleniště" (Fires and fire-sites, 1979). The main aim of Frais's "Narozeniny světa" is to show the corruption (or: initial stages of *Protektion*) in the furniture business. When a load comes from Vienna, the 'deputy director chooses four suites for himself, and the floor-manager two. Then along runs the shop-manager, who seems to have a sixth sense for Western deliveries, and chooses five suites for himself.'[40] Often not a single suite gets into the shops. Any employee who reserves a suite for himself can earn a Kčs 500 'commission'. Kčs 50, the employees are told, is a bribe. Kčs 500 is a donation. Around Christmas they arrange to sell all the damaged furniture they have in the warehouse, and thus they fulfil their norm. Plumbers and fitters are automatically corrupt according to Ráž, and roofers and brickies according to Stavinoha. The greatest evidence of corruption seems to be found in the catering business. Volráb in Páral's "Profesionální žena" constitutes a caricature of the swindling restaurateur or hotelier. The rich night-club head-waiter in Švejda's "Havárie" is also almost a caricature of a villain. We hear that head-waiters are nearly always fundamentally dishonest in Kočová's "Tychonova hvězda", and we have a slithery, on-the-make head-waiter in Presler's "Beatles se stejně rozpadli". In Dušek's "Lovec štěstí" we learn one can freely mug waiters for the sake of illegally obtained Western currency; the victims can never report it. In that same novel we hear of a waiter who is so good at swindling his customers that he has earned enough to buy a house and a luxury car and can regularly take holidays by the sea. In Vladimír Přibský's "Podezřelý je Kamil" (Kamil is suspect, 1975) the rich hotel receptionist, Kopecký, has a white Chrysler and a Ph. D. He has abandoned intellectual life for the sake of shekels. That seems here to be an ill-conceived attempt at explaining why so many intellectuals were working in hotels etc., after 1969. In Klevis's "Toulavý čas" (Wander time) and Frais's "Narozeniny světa" we have beer stallholders who give short measure. In "Tomáš a Markéta" Křenek speaks of the vinegrowers and vintners who grow rich by doctoring or mixing wines. Butchers are said to be naturally on the fiddle in Presler and Ráž and in "Alexandra" (1979) Klevis criticizes the cold-meat supply situation where anything more interesting than cheap, dry salami is sold only to Prague shops or under the counter. In that same novel we hear about the tricks of check-out girls in supermarkets; usually they either add the odd Kčs 5 'by mistake' or double-charge an item. According to Presler greengrocers are as corrupt as

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[40] Frais: Narozeniny světa 71.

butchers. In Frais's "Den, kdy slunečnice hořely" the fat greengrocer, Kovář, shows rare talent in adjusting his scales, but still manages to be promoted to boss of a new fruit-and-vegetable supermarket — and thus to begin to adopt the coldness of an incipiently new-class man. In Vojtěch Steklač's "Jak se vraždí Zlatý slavík" (How to kill Golden Nightingale, 1977) we are told it takes a pretty well-placed Prager seven years to get a flat, and so it is not surprising that a private-enterprise lodging-house syndicate is created in Prague. We meet the queen of that syndicate in John and Pelant's "Začátek letopočtu". She lives in the Hampstead of Prague, Dejvice, and has a beautiful swimming pool. The syndicate works by finding out about all flats in Prague officially owned by pensioners or the dying. They get hold of these flats by various means and then flog them at inflated prices. Stavinoha points out, anyway, that the estimated value placed on a flat or a house by the local Party committee, i. e. the official price of living quarters, bears no relation whatsoever to the actual price. From John and Pelant's novel we see that rent for decent Prague flats is often charged half in ordinary crowns, half in Tuzex vouchers. Because the corruption ingenerate in the university system is too close to writers' own patch, it is rarely mentioned. Šerberová, however, does allude to it in "Vítr v síti", as does Trunečekin "Blažená alma mater uprostřed týdne".

Within the bourgeois socialist set of values common-or-garden corruption is a lesser crime than vandalism. Šerberová also mentions vandalized telephone-boxes and Presler's hero is pleasantly surprised when he actually finds a telephone-box which has not been vandalized (in the Letná area of Prague). As far as I know, the only novel to have been published which concentrates on big-time gangsterdom in today's Prague is Dušek's "Lovec štěstí". The only optimistic element in that novel consists in the fact that the knuckle-dusting pederastic psychopath, Malambo, is, in the end, killed. Ondys's messy, melodramatic "Právě narozené blues" (New-born blues, 1984) fails to convince us that organized crime flourishes in Czechoslovakia supported by West German lorry-drivers. It is no longer denied that violent crime against individuals exists in socialist Czechoslovakia. Affluence in a socialist society has the same repercussions as it does in so-called capitalist society. We have a thoroughly Western mugging in Frais's "Strom na konci cesty", a thoroughly Western brutal murder in Ondys's "Právě narozené blues" and a thoroughly Western corpse-robbing in Dušková's "Hra na lásku". In that authoress's "Bobby" we hear of muggings for Kčs 8 in Prague — sounds just like muggings for a couple of bob in Tunbridge Wells. We have the weak and shady, wheeling-dealing coward of a *Lumpenbourgeois*, Moly, in Dušek's "Lovec štěstí" and in Kočová's "Tychonova hvězda" we have the con-trickster who feigns the warmest friendship to sick old women so that he can pinch and flog their valuables before any heir can turn up. The most common type of criminal in 1970s and 1980s Czech literature is, however, the woman who sells her wares and tears for Western money or Tuzex vouchers. Again, as far as I know, "Lovec štěstí" is the first novel to establish the existence of Tuzex call-girls in Prague, and of their pimps. Ordinary Tuzex-girls are hirable for orgies in Prouza's "Krámek s kráskami" and they hang around bars in Švejda's "Havárie", Dušek's "Tuláci" (Tramps, 1978; set in the Fifties) and "Dny pro kočku", Ondys's "Právě narozené blues" and Přibský's "Po-

dezřelý je Kamil". In John and Pelant's "Začátek letopočtu" the heroine is picked up by a man in a Chrysler who tries to persuade her to become a Tuzex girl, so that she can have a decent flat. In Presler's novel the main character is unsuccessfully solicited by a Tuzex girl in a Prague night-club. Soon after his gruff rejection a thug approaches him, declaring himself the prostitute's brother, and demands Kčs 1000 compensation for slander. He refuses to pay and when he leaves the club the 'brother' attacks him, would have killed him, if he had not been rescued by the Arab with whom his girlfriend had gone to the club. Křenek depicts elderly whores hooking Arabs in "Tomáš a Markéta" [41]. We have awfully pleasant non-Tuzex prostitutes in Dušková's "Bobby" and Stavinoha's "Hvězdy nad Syslím údolím". Both John and Pelant and Křenek describe hard-currency black-marketeers. Since I am dealing with a socialist state, I have to remember criminality is a broader concept than it is in the Western world. No one will employ the hero of Prouza's "Krámek s kráskami", because he has been involved with a crooked recent emigré the StB (Czechoslovak equivalent of the KGB) is interested in. Similarly Tomáš's father-in-law will not allow Tomáš to invite his boss to his wedding, since his boss's son had emigrated to Switzerland and taken industrial secrets with him. The sins of the child are visited on the father. In Zapletal's "Poslední knížka o dětství" Hana cannot go to university, because her father had been either a Dubčekite or an embezzler. That is never made clear. Anyway, she suddenly begins to get worse marks at school than she deserves. The sins of the father are visited on the child.

III

Writers who began in the 1970s and 1980s and who were born between the mid 1940s and the early 1960s, were, at least to some extent, educated in a system which claimed retribution. They could no longer write in the Salingeresque sentimentalizing style introduced by the well-intentioned trashist Josef Škvorecký at the end of the 1950s, although such as Navrátil or Jiří Medek began somewhat in the sentimentalizing manner. Dušek introduced the new, callous style for the new, callous generation — the tough-kid style. This style expressed the disaffection of youth. Dušek himself rendered the style somewhat more literary in "Lovec štěstí". Precisely that style can be compared with Ludvík Němec's in "nejhlasitější srdce ve městě" (Loudest heart in town, 1978) or Presler's "Beatles se stejně rozpadli". Bartůněk's style in "Milión bláznivých chutí" ineffectively combines pseudo-Dušek with allusions to Greek mythology. Stuchlý's, even less effectively, combines the tough-kid style with the folksy and the highly literary. Ondys combines tough-kid style with 1880s Czech literary style and 1930s *Trivialliteratur* style. Whatever the

[41] Czech racism is generally avoided in literature. In Křenek's novel we see an American negress immediately adored by all the Moravian villagers. That is unconvincingly related. In Stavinoha's "Hvězdy nad Syslím údolím" the description of the local female doctor's affair with a medical student from Sierra Leone evinces at once the author's racial prejudice and his desire to regurgitate olde-worlde Cold War propaganda against the British Empire.

variety or scragginess of the style, it does exhibit a questioning of social norms. In Presler it is clear that this tough-kid style constitutes the expression of a sense of honour which these disaffected young people do not see in the society around them, either in the workers or the bourgeois. The apparent violence of the language, particularly in similes, masks a sensitivity which rejects the physical, mental and economic violence they see all around them. The jokey female tough-kid style used by Červenková in "Semestr života" expresses the same thing; unfortunately Červenková's style does not quite come off (however much less jarring it is than Stuchlý's or Ondys's), but that does not make her devastatingly pessimistic assessment of Czech society lose any of its clarity, though it might diminish its impact. The world of these young people's parents represents authority and untruthfulness. John is explicit on this in his "Džínový svět", but he does suggest that parents and teachers sometimes lie to deceive, but sometimes out of the ignorance of those who do not care. Bartůněk's "Milión bláznivých chutí" is an unconvincing picture of rebellious youth; there is not even a decent generation gap, but the author does state, however banally, the desires to be felt in most of these novels of disaffected or disillusioned youth; the narrator is speaking of himself and his friend, Josífek: 'we're two lost children of the jeans generation, who're making their way through this over-rational world and who couldn't care less, whether they are acting rashly or not.' [42] Then, of himself only: 'I belong to the world of jeans and guitars and protests and parodies of everything that smells fetid, stinks of frowsty, immobile rules.' [43] Still, as in most such novels, in the end the youth is assimilated in socialist society. Often these young people commit crimes only because they are frustrated by the hypocrisy of the society around them, like Viky in Dušková's "Hra na lásku" or the yobbish foursome of Klevis's "Toulavý čas". In "Bobby" Dušková suggests that Czech youth has become so disaffected because of the turpitude of the Dubčekites. She also shows how good Communist schoolmasters can cure youth of its disaffection. In "Vítr v síti" Šerberová first gives the parents' generation's assessment of present-day youth: 'They've got everything and aren't interested in anything. Or if they are interested, it's only in discos, fashion, jeans from Tuzex, how to wangle a place at university or how to manage to work very little for a lot of money.' Then she gives her own assessment; a character from the parents' generation is speaking: 'I could reel off just such a list of failings in our generation. [...] Corruption, duplicity, indifference. Wangling and manoeuvring. We've got our cars, our beautifully furnished homes, our weekend houses, our bank accounts, our positions — [...] Positions just for positions' sake [...] they have got all this superficiality and destructiveness straight from us.' [44]

Very few novels in new Czech literature concerning youth or people who have not reached middle age end in disillusion. Křenek's "Tomáš a Markéta" ends with the main character's having abandoned all idealism and his joining the new class. That, however, constitutes disillusion on the part of the author and the reader, not

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[42] Bartůněk, Petr.: Milión bláznivých chutí [A million mad desires]. Prague 1982, 95.
[43] Bartůněk: Milión 165.
[44] Šerberová: Vítr v síti 141 f.

of the hero. The ending of Dušek's "Lovec štěstí", however, suggests that evil will always vanquish good and that the ordinary, amiable, honest human being will always be crushed (in this case, literally) by the manipulators. If the ordinary man slips up, he will be punished; the malignant, ferine, amoral manipulator will always escape scot-free. Němec's "Hra na slepo" (Playing blind) ends on a note of despair. The hero, Oto Repus [45], is the victim of a double obsession, chess and sex. Chessplayers outside Oto himself behave like secret policemen. Perhaps that is why Oto is confined to mental hospital. In this novel chess is a self-contained system of communication, and chess-players recognizable types within their own mythic world. From the outside they look like uninteresting average men (like the plain-clothes policemen in Křenek's "Tomáš a Markéta"); their opinions and appearances are concentrated on the mythopoetic world of chess. They constitute an introspective secret society, alien to the outside world, but on the face of it not threatening that world, because they look so average. In fact, however, their life consists in a manipulating game which is inhuman in its very averageness. For Oto the game of chess creates a method by which he can order his disintegrated mind; his fellow human beings are pawns, though he longs for childish idealism (here emblematised by his trout-fishing excursions with his uncle). Oto is both afraid of reality and longing to discover what reality is. That, quite literally, schizophrenic approach to living is embodied in the symbol of the ringing bell. The bell which he hears ringing at the main entrance leading to his flat represents both amnesia and threatening reality. When he actually rushes down to open the main entrance, no one is there. The reality he wants to get to know, the reality he also dreads, is the knowledge of whether he had 'killed' his girlfriend or not, whether she had died during the abortion of his child or not. Oto has no place but the lunatic asylum of the socialist world. He wants to know in a society which denies information but cultivates the acquisition of knowledge, a society which stunts knowing. "Hra na slepo" is an intense and difficult novel; the politicality of its apparent apoliticality is bold [46]. Červenková's "Semestr života" is far from intense, at least until the reader gets to the end, when he will realize that all the jolly playacting, all the japes and bumptiousness, amount to bright squares of cloth which, when stitched together, make a smothering counterpane of determinism. The novel's action is parallel to that of "Lovec štěstí", but Červenková's anonymous narrator is completely assimilated with society at the beginning. Her experience of socialist society epitomized in the town of Vraná makes her more and more of an outsider. Everyone

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[45] In my article on the Czech adolescent hero (see note 19) I claimed that his name was 'Super' backwards. According to an article (Hlad po psaní. Kmen 23. 1. 1985, 4) his editor presumed that as well. I still think that was at least partly intended, but Němec claims that the name Oto Repus was meant to echo 'Orpheus'. The Orpheus myth, Němec says, "forms the *leitmotiv* of the whole novel". He goes on: "anyone who desires to excel in any specific area, must impoverish his life elsewhere." In this article we learn that Němec had submitted a third work to the publishers, but that it had been rejected. Anyone who knows Němec's first two works would love to lay their hands on that third.

[46] At least one critic has noticed its politicality, Tomáš Sedláček, in: Přítomnost mladé literatury a literatura přítomnosti (1985) 19.

in Vraná, whatever part of the system they belong to, even if they are on the margins of the system, like the parish priest, seem to betray her. At the end of the novel she decides to set off hitchhiking to visit an architect in a nearby town and to have a child by him, for, perhaps, her child will be someone she can trust. She is picked up by a drunken lorry driver with a number of drunken mates. The novel ends with this bright, honest, pretty, jolly, straightforward girl about to suffer multiple rape. Thus does worker society repay a girl who had set out to do her bit to make it a really happy society. Any attempt at constructive individualism must be defiled in today's Czechoslovakia. The narrator experiences nothing like *Angst* until the last few lines of the novel. Some authors, all poets, do express the *Angst* concomitant with living in socialist society. One poem in Schildberger's Knížka s modrýma očima (Book with blue eyes, 1980) is actually called 'A úzkost' (And anxiety), as if the author wanted to preempt the reader's natural interpretation of the whole collection. That poem speaks about the sensation of being a prisoner. The all-pervasive despair felt by sensitive, thinking people is depicted in 'Prám Medúzy' [47]. In his first collection since coming off the black list Mikulášek expresses that same anxiety of despair:

> Darkness before me, darkness behind me. [a deliberate use of a *cliché*]
> In the middle, dark, dark darkness.
> I see nothing
> but a deceptive will o' the wisp
> leading into darker darkness [48].

Skácel in his first collection since coming off the black-list speaks both of the *Angst* of contemporary society and of the function of memory destruction in that society:

> and in the cold stove dwelt fear
> fear is always
> always to be found
> A truncheon is walking around
> Anyone who is stupid
> Will not look over his shoulder [49]

Gärtnerová expresses not only that *Angst*, but also the way that *Angst* is augmented by organized or imposed optimism or self-delusion [50].

Thinking writers tend to consider contemporary Czech society fundamentally immoral. Again, Czech writers have been saying that since the end of the 13th century. And again, one dare not forget that newspapers are constantly telling Czechs what a wonderful society they live in. The essential rottenness of today's

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[47] One must not forget the immanent cannibalism inherent in Géricault's painting in the Louvre.

[48] Mikulášek, Oldřich: Bludička. In: Veliké černé ryby a dlouhý bílý chrt [Great black fish and long white greyhound]. Brünn 1981, 11.

[49] Skácel, Jan: Dětství. In: Dávné proso [Long past millet]. Brünn 1981, 11.

[50] Compare Gärtnerová: Úsměvy and Lék. In: Autogenesis 11—13.

society is epitomized in Červenková's description of schoolteachers whipping bottles from a jolly common-room party. The party itself is awful because it is forced. The only natural aspect is the way those colleagues steal bottles. The picture of Czech society Páral depicts in "Generální zázrak" is depraved, almost grotesquely immoral. Presler's Czech society is violent and Hájek's cold. The latter's "Balada číslo jedna" (Ballad number one, 1975) expresses first and foremost the emotional insecurity of Seventies Czechoslovakia. That insecurity results from that social coldness represented in the fate of the eccentric manic depressive, Tibor Krátký, who has been sitting dead outside his cottage in his habitual pose for a whole day before anyone notices. One might compare that with society's coldness towards the elderly Jew, Petr Horn, in Hájek's "Areál snů" (Dream site, 1980). Petr Horn had developed homosexual predilections while in a German concentration camp. In "Vypouštění holubice" (Releasing doves, 1982, i. e. 1983) Vladimír Křivánek depicts a society which is essentially hypocritical, sexually debasing, coldly materialist — in other words, utterly selfish.

IV

The socialist system which, ideologically speaking, is meant to have rid society of alienation, in fact creates alienation, as Křivánek explains in his poem, 'Pocta Karlu Marxovi' ("Vypouštění holubice"). Dušek's "Lovec štěstí" suggests that Czech society is a society where no one can be trusted and Červenková's "Semestr života" states the same thing, except that it adds: especially no one in authority is to be trusted. In the course of the novel we find that the following types of authority are completely undependable: the military-cum-Party authority represented by Suchánek, petty bourgeois moral authority represented by Suchánková, police-cum-Party authority represented by Jaroška, the authority of the upright headmaster, Bartak, spiritual authority represented by the local priest and male sexual authority represented by the narrator's colleagues, Mirek and Bešta, and various motorists driving from Vraná to Prague. The interpretive account of the small-ad notice board in the Prague Lucerna Arcade which John and Pelant give in their joint novel constitutes a commentary on the nidorous sordor of Czech society in the 1980s: 'Profiteering out of sheer affluence or gorging, profiteering for fun; traps for cultural snobs; the selling of inherited antiques so that there is room for a normal family life; desperate pleas for life essentials which one cannot get hold of any other way; pleas for any sort of flat for any sort of money; pleas for just some refuge where it would not rain on one. All these postcards mixed up together.' [51]

The system which everyone hates survives because of Czech prudence, that Czech petty bourgeois mentality which has been attacked by Czech writers since the 1830s. Štemberková mocks it in 'Opatrnost':

> Is it a plant? An animal? An unclassifiable creature
> As blind as a mole as deaf as a post

[51] John / Pelant: Začátek letopočtu 125.

Nevertheless with an abnormally developed sense
Of retracting even that which has only been thought [52]

The picture Stuchlý gives us of the film-academy lecturer, Krasl, is a picture of just such prudence: 'Krasl is one of those who want a comfortable life. [...] Mustn't take any risks. Mustn't burn one's fingers. Play on one's own little swing and forget others. [...] He is scared stiff lest any of his students should deviate from the well-worn track and thus, perhaps, tread on one of Professor M.'s corns' [53]

In his "Cesta kolem mé hlavy za čtyřicet dnů" (Journey around my head in forty days) Miroslav Skála gives his sarcastic recipe for dealing with Czech society in the following set of rules for a mental hospital:

1) When in company always speak openly about everything.
2) Use every moment to work on yourself and on others.
3) Do not isolate yourself. Join in all social events, excursions, games and theatrical productions.
4) Do not start any erotic relationships.
5) You do not need to believe in the treatment, but you must obey the rules [54].

That last rule summarizes the basic cynicism which allows Czech society to survive as it is. The socialist system no longer relies mainly on central government. Government ministries are no longer important. Actually they never were, but formerly the populace did believe in them. This new awareness is infrequently evident in literature. A colleague of the main character in Křenek's novel does say: 'There was a time when the Ministry meant something. Somehow things have changed.' [55] The loss of prestige of ministries is reflected in the following sentence from Frais's latest novel: 'In the theatre today you can say that the deputy minister is an awful idiot, but you can't use the word "shit".' [56] Probably the main reason why most ministries have lost their power (the Ministry of the Interior is an obvious exception), is that all that matters to both state and individual is hard currency. Thus, for example, the Ministries of Culture and of Foreign Trade are still vital sources of funds and influence. Kozák diffidently attacks that situation in "Adam a Eva"; machinery vital to fructiculture around Roudnice is not available because it can easily be sold to the West. Černík openly criticizes the way Czechs will export anything for hard currency, even raw materials ('Ráno porazili strom', "Deset tisíc píšťal", ⟨Ten thousand flutes, 1983⟩). In "Krámek s kráskami" Prouza points out the double standards engendered by the 'socialist' state's partiality for 'capitalist imperialist' lucre. Here the cultural foreign-trade agency supports the making of a pornographic encyclopaedia of costume because it will be sold to a Swiss publishing house. The work could not be published in Czecho-

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[52] Štemberková: Sestřenka ironie 36.
[53] Stuchlý: Měsíc 51.
[54] Skála, Miroslav: Cesta kolem mé hlavy za čtyřicet dnů [Around my head in forty days]. Prague 1979, 44.
[55] Křenek: Tomáš 242.

slovakia. In this novel Prouza also points out how the Czechs exploit Czech nude models for advertising material concerning costume jewellery for export to Scandinavia.

If the State itself appears to behave so cynically, there is no reason why writers should not criticize 'pillars of the State'. The Communist Party or local Party committees are rarely mentioned in serious or would-be serious Czech Literature. When they are, they are usually idealized, for example in František Kopecký's prize-winning "Svědomí" (Conscience, 1973) or Eva Bernadinová's much-praised gimcrackery, "Dobré slovo" (A good word, 1976), in Dušková's novel of buck-passing social criticism, "Bobby", or in Navrátil's elegant "Nitky" (Threads, 1975). Indeed there are still C. P. writers who express self-pity about their loyalty. Jaroslav Čejka in his "Kapesní sbírka zakonů, vět a definic" (Pocket book of laws, articles and definitions, 1983), for example, informs his reader that he had lost many friends by remaining a steadfast Red. I only know one example of an attack on an individual who belongs to Communist-State mythology and that is the depiction of Gusta Fučíková in a novel by Navrátil: 'The Fifties had hardly begun when the papers printed a prosecution statement which made Anka [the novel's earnest Communist heroine] gasp, when she read it. Every day the wireless was broadcasting the court proceedings well into the night. It was necessary to come to terms with this trial. In a trembling voice the widow of a national hero repeated the words with which her man bade his farewell to the world: «People, be vigilant.»' [57]

In Hájek's "Areál snů" we have a Party V. I. P. who is a former German collaborator (compare the Slovak Alfonz Bednár's "Hodiny a minúty"). In Křenek's "Tomáš a Markéta" we have a local Party official who invents pensioners in his parish so that he has more funds to gamble away. In John and Pelant's novel we hear of the way Prague pedestrians are terrorised by Tatra 613 limousines, i. e. by Party, government or top business officials. In Dušková's "Bobby" we have thoroughly unreliable Party members who read Solzhenitsyn's "August 1914". Much more important than that, however, is the hard-line new Party slimming offensive reflected in Kozák's "Adam a Eva". Kozák condemns the time-serving Party official as follows: 'how wretched it is when a man and his work are dependent on various fools, dossers, arrogant careerists or buck-passers, who blether on about socialism but are only really interested in their positions and in the financial benefits and power those positions give them.' [58] Kozák also attacks in this novel those old-style Communists who live off their 1940s and 1950s construction glory and are self-righteously unwilling to adapt to new economic circumstances. Of course, the local Party boss is a paragon of honesty and go-aheadery. Self-prostitution for the sake of the odd Party buck is satirized in Němec's "Nejhlasitější srdce ve městě". The main character, Petr's, schoolmaster father had presumed his son was going to stay in the West and so had started

[56] Frais: Strom 65.

[57] Navrátil, Jiří: Kamilův život po matčině smrti [Kamil's life after his mother's death]. Prague 1983, 18—19.

[58] Kozák, Jan: Adam a Eva [Adam and Eve]. Prague 1982, 219.

publishing awful Socialist Realist verse in newspapers. That is a typical example of the Commie con, quite different from the doggerel produced by the Commie-keen schoolmistress, Slavína, in Červenková's "Semestr života", however similar the results. Červenková's reproductions of Slavína's poems constitute satire on old-style Communist teachers on the notice-board cult, on hollow optimism, and on the Party terror which has existed in schools since the early 1970s and which has produced far more rebels and cynics than Stalinist schools. I quote two examples of Slavína's ditties:

> I've got many books without paying.
> And now I'm wondering what they're saying. [59]

and:

> Everywhere, always, abide by hygiene,
> Then you'll be being most obliging.
> Come rain, come wind you'll know what to do,
> And keep quite clean the schoolhouse loo. [60]

The welfare state constitutes a part of the socialist system which is virtually unassailable. The average Czech's disrespect for the welfare state is inadequately reflected in literature. One of the great achievements of socialist society is the day nursery. In "Semestr života" a woman who has experience of them as trainee midwife refuses to entertain the thought of sending her own child to such an institution. Ráž mentions corrupt dentists ("Vrabčí hnízdo"). Corruption is rife in mental hospitals, if we believe Němec's account in "Hra na slepo" (there is no reason for not doing so). Oto is able to visit the encaged, catatonic Hynek by bribing an orderly with cigarettes. After he has bribed him thus, the orderly demands another cigarette, and when Oto is affronted by that demand, the orderly tells him he, too, will soon be in a cage, if he does not learn how to behave. A major problem for today's average Czech is the corruption of doctors, but on the whole literature is more inclined to show doctors are not corrupt than to document corruption. A typical scene is a doctor refusing a bribe and saying medicine is free in Czechoslovakia (e. g. John and Pelant, "Začátek letopočtu" or Frais, "Strom na konci cesty"). Still even such scenes, given that they are set in the late 1970s or 1980s, indicate that citizens expect to have to bribe or give hefty tips (nearly forty years after the introduction of 'socialist medicine'). In other words, what looks like State propaganda is, in fact, anti-propaganda. Within his first month at hospital the new-class Tomáš in Zapletal's "Poslední knížka o dětství" has taken his first bribe, i. e. before he has done his military service, before he has had a chance to organize his career. In his "Profesoři" Dub suggests that there are three kinds of corruption in the health service. First, there are those who have inherited the urge to be subject to corruption, like Krejčí, whose mother had been the favourite *masseuse* of bourgeois families before the Communist take-over. Secondly there is the group of doctors who have shop-keeper origins and, thus, are naturally corrupt. His example of that is Dr Poupa, son of a butcher who had for reasons

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[59] Červenková, Jana: Semestr života [Term of life]. Prague 1981 [1982], 36.
[60] Červenková: Semestr 154.

of personal gain voluntarily joined a collective. Dr Poupa is a weak, ambitious, domineering would-be jet-setter. Thirdly there are professors of clinics who are corrupt by personality. 'Any patient who does not officially belong to the hospital's district has to pay for admission with a demijohn of Moravian wine or five bottles of sliwowitz.' [61] For Czech writers, indeed for Czechs altogether, the worst element in the health service is the Commission for the Termination of Pregnancy. The Commission is just mentioned in Páral's "Mladý můž & Bílá velryba" (The young man and Moby Dick, 1973, i. e. 1974), Francouz's "Takové ticho" and Presler's "Beatles se stejně rozpadli". In Zapletal's "Poslední knížka o dětství" Mirek puts Radek's future wife, the voluptuous Klára, in the chubby club: 'She had herself dragged before the termination commission, where they looked on her as an exotic animal, elegantly justified termination on medical grounds as a result of a report supplied by Mirek's father; the papers were signed; the operation was performed in the gynie unit and Mirek brought a huge bunch of autumn flowers to the ward — which Klára, cursing, flung out of the window.' [62] John and Pelant's depiction of the Commission is the most emotive I have read. In the waiting room are socialist-kitsch posters including one with a perverted quotation from the Proletarian Poet, Jiří Wolker (1900—24) 'Ballad of an unborn child' ("Balada o nenarozeném dítěti"): 'Mummy, Daddy, I want to live!' The commission grills Markéta mercilessly. They tell her how much an abortion will cost the State and try to browbeat her into saying who the father is. Though Markéta is far from promiscuous, at this moment she really cannot know. Eventually she comes up with the stock excuse that it was some foreigner. The reaction of one member to that is: 'I must point out to you, that employees of certain agencies appear here from time to time; they are particularly interested in girls who have several sexual partners or intimate relationships with foreigners.' [63] This same girl is pleasantly surprised by the kindness of the social services, when she decides to become an unmarried mother.

Although in the 1970s pensioners were greatly talked about in Czech literature, largely because the middle-aged formed politically dangerous subjects, in the 1980s the more serious problems of the elderly begin to be touched on. In the 1980s the old are still usually linked with olde-worlde eccentricity (cf., e. g., Prouza and Hercíková), but Frais, in "Narozeniny světa" does, at least in passing, mention pensioner poverty. In "Strom na konci cesty" he speaks of the loneliness of pensioners and the way, once one is pensioned off, one may quickly go to seed and start pushing up the daisies. What Czech writers seem to be beginning to take seriously is the sexuality of the elderly and the frustrations imposed on them by social norms. Navrátil just touches on that real social problem in "Kamilův život po matčině smrti" (Kamil's life after his mother's death); Kočová is more serious about it in "Tychonova hvězda", though she does not take her seriousness to the extent Bohumil Hrabal does in "Harlekýnovy milióny" (The harlequin's millions,

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[61] Dub, Ota: Profesoři [Professors of medicine]. [1980]. Second edition, Prague 1983, 226.
[62] Zapletal: Poslední knížka 18.
[63] John / Pelant: Začátek letopočtu 52.

1981) or Gärtnerová does in 'Vteřina smíření' ("Autogenesis"). The elderly, unless they have influentional Party or Party-organ positions, are as irrelevant as women. Conforming with the Soviet mould, Czechoslovakia has become or remained an unacceptably male-dominated society. Because of the constitution there can be no official place for feminism in Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless Hlinka, in "Už není návratu", depicts woman as the automatic sufferer in such a society. Through Kočová's account of a journey to Iceland *via* Norway and the Faroes, "Chvála putování" (In praise of journeying, 1984) there runs a muted feminist frustration. Feminist awareness is also evident in Gärtnerová's "Autogenesis". As far as I know only one thoroughly feminist literary work has appeared since the 1970—71 Purges, Jana Pohanková's collection of lyric verse, "Žena nůše píseň kost" (Conventional roles, 1981). That was met by the old-guard Communist author, Jiří Taufer's, long review, in which he rebukes the authoress for not having experienced a decently socialist enjoyment of the deflowering process [64].

As the welfare state patently fails, so does industry in Czechoslovakia. The inefficiency of industry makes for a constant theme in modern Czech literature. And it goes a tiny bit deeper than consideration of the fact that lifts seem just never to work in tower-blocks (cf. Macháček's 'Zloba' in "Láska v kaluži" (Love in a puddle, 1975) or Ondys's "Právě narozené blues"). It also goes further than discussions of food shortages and of queuing. A description of a queue, particularly a meat queue, a queue which starts long before the shop opens, is not rare in Czech literature. In fact it is underplayed, for a Western reader, because the Czechs by now have a sophisticated system of surrogate queuers. Neither the reasons for shortages (except foreign trade) nor suggestions for dealing with such shortages are discussed. The inherent didacticism of Czech literature is suddenly losing in insistency. In Establishment Křenek we are given an example of the way the press deals with shortages: 'The 'flu season will come; there'll be no lemons, so we journalists'll start writing that sauerkraut is the food richest in vitamin C.' [65] In "Adam a Eva" Kozák also speaks about the wastage caused by inefficient supply chains. In that same novel, in keeping with the Party line, he speaks of how the establishing of unrealistically high norms encourages fraud. A centralized economy encourages dishonesty.

Work *morale* is bad in Czechoslovakia, if one goes by literature. In Frais's "Narozeniny světa" there is panic, but no disgruntledom, when the underground-railway builders cut through a watermain and thus flood the storage-cellars of one of Prague's chief shopping streets. In his "Havárie" Švejda points out the extent to which employees do their own work while in the offices in which they are employed to do work for the firm. Quite in the mode of British Leyland, workers in Páral's "Generální zázrak" often use the nightshift to have a good kip. In "Narozeniny světa" Frais satirizes the *Schlamperei* endemic in the social situation in his account of the narrator's instruction in safety procedures: '«Don't go where you shouldn't and don't touch any electric wires», said the foreman and then he

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[64] J. T.: Erotické flagelantství [Erotic flagellation]. Kmen, 13. 1. 82, 11.
[65] K ř e n e k : Tomáš 236 f.

asked me to sign a declaration that he had given me a two-hour course in safety at work. «Don't take money from anyone and, if you must, don't let anyone see it», he continued and had me sign a document stating he had given me instruction on the harm caused by taking bribes.' [66]

Křenek suggests that Czech workers lack incentives, when he writes: 'at work machine-tool engineers discuss, for example, methods of baking a decent loaf of bread, and bakers at work muse on how to produce decent tools. Something is really wrong when financial advisers talk about women at work and about finance in the pub.' [67]

Truneček takes the same problem from a different angle when he is describing his academic hero's experience of industry. First, we have a description of managerial slapdashery: 'The conclusions of his work were included in the appropriate reports, which were read out at the appropriate meetings and then filed away in the appropriate cabinets.' [68] Secondly, we have a depiction of the path to success in industry — a thoroughly rational path, actually, if one accepts medical influence, but a miasmic path: 'If he had thoroughly understood the mechanics of the firm, by means of his rationalisation studies he would have secured for himself the most advantageous position in the firm's pyramid of rank. Then he would have put a brake on things when it seemed necessary to him (that was the conventional way of going about it), and everything would have seemed to be in perfect order. That was the normal path to promotion and, usually, it worked.' [69]

Little is said in literature about the all-pervasiveness of the bureaucracy. The ministries themselves may now have little power, but the minor bureaucrats in the ministries still have great power. In the 1970s the Czechs suddenly found themselves in a situation comparable with their situation in the last decade or so of the Habsburg Monarchy. It is, thus, not surprising that neo-Ruralism has become such a strong force in contemporary Czech literature (cf., e. g. Jiří Medek, Navrátil, Kostrhun, Souchop, Křenek, etc.). Kozák ("Adam a Eva") is unremitting in his attacks on the old-fashionedness or inefficiency of minor Party bureaucrats, but, naturally, the big Party man will prevent petty bureaucracy's having its way. Páral's "Pokušení A-ZZ" contains gentle satire on the bureaucratic system (status symbolism constitutes a minor *motif* of the novel). At meetings the managing director speaks for fourteen minutes, the senior deputy for eleven, the second deputy for nine and a half, and so on down the line [70]. The titulation we have in that novel of the back-door boss makes for strong satire on today's Czech Establishment: 'the Corresponding Member of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, J. A. T. [Yugoslav Airlines] Oberthor[Superfool]—Obora [Reserved occupation], laureate of the bronze plaque of the Pure Water Year (awarded to him

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[66] Frais: Narozeniny světa 32 f.
[67] Křenek: Tomáš 250.
[68] Truneček, Jan: Blažená alma mater uprostřed týdne [The happy alma mater at mid-week]. Prague 1984, 45.
[69] Truneček: Blažená 46.
[70] See for example Páral, Vladimír: Pokušení A—ZZ [The A—ZZ of temptation]. Prague 1982, 30.

by the General Secretariat of UNO).'[71] The main secondary villain of Dub's "Profesoři" is the functionary director of the hospital in which the novel's action is set, Dr Miloš Jizera, a money-minded, wheeling-dealing bureaucrat, who keeps pristine volumes of the literature he ought to read on his office shelves and who is interested mainly in opportunists like Krejčí — until they get into hot water —, and is certainly not interested in honourable hard-workers like Grund. Stuchlý criticizes the manner in which the bureaucracy can dam up talent. The following passage concerns the way the overprudent Krasl prevents an intelligent film's being accepted: 'It was a political documentary about contemporary Sisyphuses, inventors who, careless of their health and their time and, often, the disfavour of their colleagues, come along with new, usable ideas which some dust-covered bureaucratic incompetent naturally buries at the bottom of his drawer [in his film]. With bold explicitness Petr pillories the shortsightedness and bureaucracy, sometimes also the corruption, of the arrogant functionaries whose word ensures the wasting of both money and promising talent. [... Petr rejects Krasl's judgment and points out] the corruption, irresponsibility and inefficiency of such bureaucrats, which can no longer be considered mere cosmetic flaws, but which constitute a serious disease, which must be challenged.'[72] Patera's demagogic, bad-tempered, tasteless boss in Truneček's uncouth satire is intended as a parody old-guard boss of any socialist enterprise: 'The head of department, Velenička, played an unusually democratic act. She never ordered that anything should be done. She just offered things for consideration. The consideration stage was followed by the planning stage and that was concluded with a statement on how to safeguard the initiative.'[73] Bureaucratic jargon is satirized in the statements uttered at work by the police informer, Arsen, in Páral's "Válka s mnohozvířetem" and also in general statements in Truneček's "Blažená alma mater". Truneček is such a hide-bound writer, however, that one never knows exactly how satirical he is being.

The censorship system constitutes a major element in the bureaucratisation of literature. The Dubček régime abolished the central censorship organisation in Czechoslovakia. The Czechs have been left with the system of *předposrání* — literally 'pre-emptive brick-shitting'. The weight of responsibility for publication, thus, lies on the 'editor responsible' named in the colophon. In some publishing houses, like SPN or Naše vojsko, a Party reader has to be drawn in to okay a manuscript. If an 'editor responsible' deems a manuscript publishable, but has political reservations, he will send it up to his superiors. The job of an 'editor responsible' is to get books out. Once he 'sends it up', the likelihood of its being published is diminished. The task of editors responsible is aided or hindered, depending on the occasion, by a practice pointed out by Navrátil in "Kamilův život po matčině smrti": reviewers tend to review blurbs rather than the novels themselves. Navrátil's novel is set mainly in the 1950s and early 1960s, but that is to a large extent irrelevant; it concerns the position of editors in publishing

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[71] Páral: Pokušení 147.
[72] Stuchlý: Měsíc 51.
[73] Truneček: Blažená 37 f.

houses. (Navrátil is himself an editor in Mladá fronta.) Navrátil depicts what the job of an editor should be, that is to coax, reprimand and encourage writers until they have produced something of value. He is, then, criticizing the slapdash manner in which modern editors work, rather than their role as censors. In "Vrabčí hnízdo", on the other hand, Ráž shows how editors responsible are used by the chiefs of publishing houses to get works by influential people published. Simultaneously such chiefs are seen to be able to hide behind the editor responsible's name, if something goes wrong. Because the editor responsible can easily find himself to be a whipping boy, he will be careful with what he lets through. Ráž states the policy of editors responsible in Vrtílek's words: 'it is not a matter of what I like or what I do not like. It is a matter of what would be a good tactical move, what is safe and what is not. What is likely to evoke the least unpleasantness and what might further my career.' [74] That suggests that pre-emptive censorship may often result from editors' prudent cowardice. On the whole censorship is not a matter Czech literature today can deal with in other than pretty general terms. John and Pelant do mention themes or subjects which cannot be treated in films, 'as if the problems did not exist in Czechoslovakia at all' [75], but do not tell us what those themes or subjects are. The brilliant young film-maker, Petr, in Stuchlý's "Měsíc jde nahoru" is expelled from the Prague Academy of Performing Arts for making a film which is too critical of contemporary society. We have a comment on the general demand for optimistic endings in Švejda's "Okna bez mříží". Švejda's hero tries to flog his lyrics on the basis of their optimistic quality. In John and Pelant's novel, we hear how a film has to be changed because, in its first version, the leader of a bevy of junkies dies. In "Vrabčí hnízdo" Ráž seems to be sitting on the fence on this matter. He writes the following ironically: 'A happy ending is a precondition for success, even if the critics do not quite know what to say about the piece. But what is one critic against seven million satisfied souls?' [76] Thus happy endings on television ensure good viewing figures and so keep everyone happy apart from a few intellectuals. Ráž implies that the average carpet-slippered Czech wants the same thing as the hack critic and that, partly for the sake of peace and quiet and partly out of sheer incompetence, the intelligentsia are prostituting their art. He also implies, however, that those few intellectuals who attempt to set vigorous standards are regarded as irrelevant to the well-being of society. When Souchop treats the television plays and their happy endings in "Hluboko nahoře" he blends irony with sentimentality so efficiently in his Kenwood that the reader is left uncertain what he is saying. On the face of it he exhorts to escapism; the reader may read between the lines what he pleases: 'A two-hour sequence of events ending in marriage constitutes stimulating cleanliness. Those of our friends about whom it is said behind their backs that they are intellectuals, laugh at us, but we really do not like pessimistic pieces in which actors treat each other to despondent gazes, utter the odd gloomy phrase, stub out their

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[74] Ráž: Vrabčí hnízdo 28.
[75] John / Pelant: Začátek letopočtu 70.
[76] Ráž: Vrabčí hnízdo 205.

cigarettes and walk off into the night, the rain, the storm, the gale or, as it was in a certain Asian production, into the cyclone. We do not like sad stories, for they do not contain any cleanliness.' [77] I have come across only one reference to the cleanliness of Czechoslovak newspapers. In "Generální zázrak" Páral says they relate the success stories of the Eastern Bloc and the disaster stories of the rest of the world.

V

At first sight it appears remarkable that more is said about the police in new Czech literature than about censorship. The writer is, however, more immediately a potential victim of censorship than he is of the police. Censorship is also invisible, indeed officially does not exist, but the police, uniformed, plain-clothes criminal police and secret police are visible or at least all too palpably present. In detective stories and thrillers it stands to reason that the police are goodies. Thus, for example, we have the jolly Captain Hříšný in Steklač's "Jak se vraždí Zlatý slavík", but we also have the kind, indulgent Lieutenant Hájek (a detective who is also working for the StB) in Prouza's "Krámek s kráskami", the kind, omniscient Ledr in Dušek's "Panna nebo orel" (Heads or tails, 1974) and an equally kind and understanding policeman in Macháček's 'Dluhy, které mi nadělal Beethoven' ("Písek v zubech") and Frais's "Den, kdy slunečnice hořely". In Stuchlý's "Měsíc jde nahoru" the two policemen who are sent to make sure the main character turns up at his divorce hearing are decently embarrassed about their task. In his short-story, 'Mladistvý opilec v parku' ("Takové ticho"), Francouz presents a policeman who is at the very least insensitive, but who is mainly a representative of adults' lack of understanding for the way the young might sometimes jump for joy in public. Nevertheless I know of only one author who is openly critical of the uniformed police as such [78], Petr Hájek. In "Halelujá!" (1977) the hero, Leo, finishes his military service on the day of his grandmother's funeral. On leaving his barracks quite legally he is stopped by the police. The scene constitutes a comment on police ubiquity and boorish authoritarianism. And when the police come round an open-air pub checking the ages of those drinking alcohol, and Leo shoves his drink over to the older woman he is sitting with, and thus avoids not only being caught, but also the publican's getting a hefty fine, the latter's reaction expresses the general public's dislike of the police. Leo calls policemen 'strážci veřejného blaha' (guardians of public bliss) [79]. The police are officially called V. B. 'Veřejná bezpečnost' (public security). That scene probably also comments on police ubiquity. In the novel, "Strmá voda" (Precipitous water, 1974), Kudela's example of the concrete poetry popular in the 1960s is a poem called 'POLYCAJT' (the

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[77] Souchop: Hluboko nahoře 19.

[78] Jiří Medek's policemen in Vdova (In: Všechny barvy duhy [All the colours of the rainbow]. 1976) are representatives of public insensitive censoriousness rather than of police coarseness. See Pynsent, Robert B.: Assimilation, Childhood and Death: New Czech Fiction Writers of the 1970s. SEER 59/3 (1981) 370—84.

[79] Hájek, Petr: Halelujá! Prague 1977, 128.

colloquial Czech for a policeman is 'policajt', which can have pejorative connotations). The poem consists in something like a matchstick figure of a policeman made up of the word, or fragments of the word, 'monocajt' [80]. The poem appears to represent monolithic aggressiveness, but it is so unexplicit that it can hardly be regarded as definitely critical. None the less, even to have fun at the police's expense is bold. Police jokes abound in central and eastern Europe (and not only in the Eastern Bloc), but that abundance is not reflected in Czech literature. The fact that they exist is mentioned in Frais's "Strom na konci cesty", when two failed actors come to report to the new wheeling-dealing theatre director, Kolár, about their conversation with the novel's main character, Hanák. They tell Kolár that there had been jokes about policemen. The microphone-conscious, Party-truckling Kolár, who is going all out to belong to the Czech flotsam of the jet-set, reacts that, of course, they mean jokes about policemen in Soho. There Frais is commenting not only on Kolár as a type but also on the impossibility of fulfilling the literary Establishment's demand that Czech writers depict Czech reality as it is. Though the uniformed police are frequently mentioned in literature, the StB are not, but, when they are, the mention is not as likely to be positive as it is in the case of the ordinary police. The StB come out in a positive light in Prouza's "Krámek s kráskami", for though no one will have anything to do with the hero because he has been involved with a nasty emigré the StB are interested in, the StB do nothing to prevent his obtaining a passport and exit visa to go to Switzerland to sell his soft-porn encyclopaedia of costume. Predictably, the senior StB or, perhaps, military intelligence, officer in Zbyněk Kovanda's unthrilling thriller, "Oběť číslo nula" (Victim number zero, 1982), is a highly professional, patient and understanding fellow. Something of the Czech-in-the-street's awareness of the StB is to be seen in Hana Bořkovcová's veiled reference to telephone tapping in "Vzteklouni" (The bad-tempered ones, 1975). In Dušek's "Dny pro kočku" (1979) we have a pop group which is banned from Prague, but then banned altogether after a member of the group beats up a secret policeman who had demanded a bribe. John and Pelant give a comic account of the way the StB have permeated public consciousness, but also of the ambiguous attitude to the authorities of the 'decent Czech citizen', when the drunken brickie, Joska, is driving the main character in his Tatra 603 through a Bohemian village: 'Some man is there peeping out from behind his garden wall. Joska turns down the car window, shouts «Heh . . .» and sticks his tongue out at him. «When that bloke sees a 603, he never knows whether it is a minister bringing him a medal or a secret policeman coming to take him away».' [81]

In any state a stand-by of the security system is the police-informer, but he or she, again, rarely appears in new Czech literature. To be sure the custom of sending anonymous letters is documented and condemned by Establishment and non-Establishment writers (e. g. Medek, "Všechny barvy duhy" (All the colours of the rainbow), Dušková "Bobby", Červenková "Semestr života", Křenek "Tomáš a

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[80] Kudela, Petr: Strmá voda [Precipitous water]. Prague 1974, 153.
[81] John / Pelant: Začátek letopočtu 61.

Markéta"), but those letters scarcely concern matters of interest to the police. In Červenková's novel the school-mistress police-informer, Jaroška, is of that boisterously sebaceous type, who is always putting her (his) arm round one to emphasize her (his) sincerity. The informer, Arsen Králík, is the most repulsive character in Páral's "Válka s mnohozvířetem". Páral's description of him amounts to an expression of revulsion at informers altogether (his name, by the way, gives him *bourgeois* origins): 'The sad case of Arsen Králík: a bad librarian, then a bad office-worker, poet, husband, lover . . . bad at everything. Immense ambition, non-existant intelligence and, on top of that, with absolutely no principles at all. Slightly hunch-backed and with a wrinkly bald head, as if Nature despised him as much as the women he so desires.' [82]

We have gentle satire on concierges as informers in Macháček's 'Jak jsem nakreslil Bahňáka' ("Písek v zubech"); as is true in life, this concierge informs to the street Party committee, not to the police. In the title story of "Abiturienti" Klevis refers to the necessity to keep on good terms with concierges, but since that necessity is declared by the opportunist Loužil, who is far too powerful to have to worry about such things anyway, Klevis could, just, be attacking those who automatically presume concierges are informers, i. e. most ordinary citizens. The reader has a similar problem with the picture of the personnel-file officer (*kádrovačka*), Drábková, in Křenek's "Tomáš a Markéta". Křenek could be taking the same line as Kozák in "Adam a Eva": that narrow old-style hard-liners have little place in today's Czechoslovakia. Whatever the case the figure of Drábková constitutes as effective a satire on the Commie-keen woman as Červenková's Slavína. This painted, mauve-haired dragon dashes about instructing people in socialist class-awareness. She is a declared feminist and expresses that in oppressing her lovable husband. She is a declared anti-racist and expresses that in doing everything she can to stymie her son's love for an American negress. She is such a busybody that she has become a walking secret-police file on everyone in the village she has retired to. The way she trots out Party jargon, for example on modern Czech literature, comprises satire on both the dyed-in-the-wool activist and, perhaps coincidentally, on the Eastern-Bloc tourist guide (one cannot help being reminded of Malcolm Bradbury's "Rates of Exchange"): 'Our literature draws on rich traditions and is constantly developing. Our state ceaselessly looks after our writers. In our country the writers even have their own country house.' [83]

In Czechoslovakia military personnel, border guards and, since the late 1960s, the police all wear fundamentally the same uniform. Prison warders are rare phenomena in Czech literature of the 1970s and 1980s. Where I have come across them they are frightfully nice (for example, Macháček, 'Kostřička', "Co skrýváme pod kůží", What we hide under our skins, 1979). When Dr Poupa, in Dub's "Profesoři", hides away in the back of a Dutch lorry-driver's cabin, he is found there by the border guards, dragged out and, having expressed his gratitude to them, sent back to his place of work (at his own expense). Dub's picture of

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[82] Páral, Vladimír: Válka s mnohozvířetem [War with the multi-bestia]. Prague 1983, 151 f.

[83] Křenek: Tomáš 35.

magnanimous border-guards is offset by the slightly more true-to-life Křenek who has his baulked emigré be due for a number of years in prison, albeit Hungarian, not Czech border guards had caught him. Emigrés are usually criminals or insensitive opportunists in new Czech literature. The model for repulsive emigrés was drawn up by Jan Otčenášek (1924—79) in the Socialist Realist novel which is said to have shown the way for 'Thaw' novels, "Občan Brych" (Citizen Brych, 1955) [84].

It may be difficult for a Czech writer to criticize the police, but it seems to be even more difficult for them to criticize the services. Air-force life is idyllically comradely in Podzimek's "Vysoká modrá zeď" (The high blue wall). Compulsory military service is the best means of making men out of men in both Dušek's "Panna nebo orel" and Kozák's "Adam a Eva". One would expect military-service life to be as idyllic as it is in Kovanda's "Oběť číslo nula", but one might, quite misguidedly, not expect it to be so idyllic in Švejda's "Dva tisíce světelných let" (Two thousand light years). The most blatant and least convincing assertion of the army idyll is to be found near the beginning of the novel: 'One must occupy oneself with something, particularly during military service, because military service constitutes one great experience of friendship. All servicemen must find others who are close to them in mentality, men on whom they can rely 100 %, not only in the mess or at some function, but also, and mainly, when boys become men on exercises, when those boys have to achieve some really major task.' [85]

The hero of that same novel overcomes his wretched 'identity crisis' while organising a track for napalm practice. Švejda lacks the sense of humour to see the horrific irony of that. Generally speaking the picture Zapletal gives us of compulsory military service in "Poslední knížka o dětství" is of something which is an awful

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[84] The evil or corrupt emigré is a topos of 1970s and 1980s literature. Examples of such criminals, wheeler-dealers or just feelingless bastards, often traitors, are to be found in, for example, the following: Bednář, Petr (= Ota Ornest?): Cesta bez návratu [Journey with no return] (1978): Černík: Maturitní. In: Daleko stín daleko sad [Far the shade, far the trees]; Dušek: Tuláci [Tramps] (1978); Gruber, Milan: Pacient tajné služby [Patient of the secret service] (1979); Klevis: Toulavý čas; Kovanda: Oběť číslo nula; Ondys: Právě narozené blues; Páral: Profesionální žena, Mladý muž & Bílá velryba; Pludek, Alexej: Vabank [All out] (1974); Prouza: Krámek s kráskami; Přibský: Podezřelý je Kamil: Ráž: Vrabčí hnízdo; Steklač: Sbohem, lásko [Farewell, love] (1974). In Václav Podzimek's: Vysoká modrá zeď [The high, blue wall] (1974) an escaping amateur pilot is as grateful to be shot down as Dub's Dr Poupa is to be retrieved from the Dutch lorry. We have legal emigration to America for a man whose wife has betrayed him in Křenek's "Tomáš a Markéta" (explanation for visits by so many illegal emigrés with American passports?). A man is forced into emigration by his crooked boss in the title story of Klevis's "Abiturienti". We have a man sent to the West to pretend to be an emigré in Jiří Stano's "Svědectví kapitána Minaříka" [The testimony of Captain Minařík] (1976). That piece of would-be 'faction' concerns a man who was, it is said, killed a few months later in a motor accident in Moscow. In 1985 he was said to have turned up again. The way the West lured decent patriotic Czech top-grade scientists into emigration in 1968/69 is exemplified in Gruber's "Pacient tajné služby".

[85] Švejda, Jiří: Dva tisíce světelnych let [Two thousand light years]. 1978. Second edition. Prague 1984, 22.

bore. The only author I have ever read in new Czech literature who has had anything to say about the unpleasant sides of military service is, again, Hájek. In "Halelujá!" he writes of Leo's training as an N. C. O., of his friend's snatching his girl and then the way he punished that friend for bullying a green soldier — and prevents himself from being ostracised for trying to stop bullying by pretending he is actually punishing that friend for snatching his girl. It is just about explicitly stated that officers encourage the bullying of new conscripts. The army reserve is satirized in Presler's "Beatles se stejně rozpadli", where Michal is suddenly called away from work to take part in an army cross-country run. The lack of seriousness with which all participants take it (except for one keeny, who makes a fool of himself) suggests criticism of the Czechoslovak People's Army just as serious as Hájek's. Perhaps more serious is Červenková's portrayal of the regular army officer, Suchánek, in "Semestr života". Suchánek is a middle-aged junior officer in the local garrison, a bad officer with no chance of further promotion, a jumped-up sergeant who only holds down his commission because of some big noise or other. Suchánek is also a fine, bigotted Party and anti-Church man who uses the jargon of Party propaganda to keep the locals in their place. His unpopularity with rankers is demonstrated when his ghastly wife finds herself suddenly surrounded by military-serviceman louts, who proceed to undo their flies and piss all over her. It is bold of Červenková to make Suchánek such a pompous idiot, even if she says nothing to suggest all officers of the Czechoslovak People's Army are like Suchánek.

VI

Červenková is also the only writer in new Czech literature I have come across who takes the Christian alternative seriously. The reader notes that the Vraná parish priest is the only important character to remain anonymous apart from the narrator-heroine. Generally speaking the Christian faith is something for the elderly, as in Křenek's "Tomáš a Markéta", or for the senile, as in Stavinoha's "Hvězdy nad Syslím údolím". In Kočová's "Tychonova hvězda" the main character learns that Christianity constitutes no way out of finding one's own meaning to life. The run-of-the-mill writer who wants to express some interest in God will usually clothe that interest in something like would-be atavistic sentimentalisation — like Jitka Badoučková in "být deštěm" (To be the rain, 1973). Even an arch-Establishment writer like Podzimek has to introduce a 'progressive' priest who had been in a German concentration camp in his "Vysoká modrá zed' ". In his "Solo pro dva dechy" (Solo for two brothers, 1983) Mikulášek will not commit himself to Christianity. The use of liturgical imagery, even the way the name of God is used, might, hoverer, suggest here, as in previous collections, that he is expressing a Christian faith. All he actually tells us in this collection is that he talks with God when he is pretty drunk. Medek's short-story, 'Vánoční hvězdy' ("Vsechny barvy duhy"), gently attacks Czech anti-clerical bigotry. The description of the ruined, plundered church in Hlinka's "Už není návratu" at least implies muted criticism of the State's behaviour towards religion and places of worship, even though it is pointed out that individuals rather than the State had caused the

desolation. The brother of one of the main characters in this novel used to serve at Communion until, at the beginning of the 1970s (the date is implied, not stated), his school had prevented him from doing so. The novel's heroine, Lucie, is acutely aware that what she lacks in life is faith. She longs to learn how to pray. Lucie submits to drink, eventually dies through drink, because she has not found a faith. At the beginning of "Den, kdy slunečnice hořely" Frais's hero, Karel, is indifferent to the Christian faith, because he has become indifferent to belief in anything. Eventually Karel has a mental breakdown and one of the things which help him to recover is a long letter he writes to God (Ch. XIII); he places the letter on the window-sill, as he had used to place such letters on St Nicholas's Day when he was a child. The next morning this letter is gone. We presume it is taken by Dr Steinová, the woman he goes off with at the end of the novel. God is love; Steinová is Karel's love. Spiritually, "Strom na konci cesty" is similar to "Den, kdy slunečnice hořely". Karel's letter in "Den" is structurally parallel to the words the Moravian reputed-to-be village idiot addresses to Richard Hanák in "Strom": '«[. . .] By the looks of your hands you're an intellectual, and intellectuals are always confused about everything. After all, you know, when God was botching man together out of clay, he breathed a soul into him to give him life, didn't he? We've all got a bit of that in us. Of God's breath. Try to find an answer there, if you don't know something. In yourself, your own bit of God's breath. Don't ask other people. You know everything best. Do you believe in God?»

Richard shrugged his sholders.

«God doesn't mind. Doesn't matter, if you don't believe. A bit of God's breath 'll be there anyway!» he said knowingly, and tapped his chest. «We're all God, a little bit.»' [86]

In the end Hanák achieves greatness as an actor by leaving the theatre in which he had gained his fame, by going to a far smaller theatre. He achieves greatness by humility, like a Christian. In "Semestr života" Červenková deals not with a Christian, but with the authoritative representation of Christianity in her micro-cosmic Vraná. Though the priest appears to let the narrator heroine down under the influence of anonymous letters from 'faithful parishioners', he is the only person in Vraná who offers her any sort of spiritual and intellectual friendship. This priest knows Marx's works, where the apparently Communist characters know only Party lines. He also has a humility and warmth she meets, and has met, nowhere else. Like the narrator, in Vraná he is a position of authority and, like her, he is an outsider in a position of authority. The concept of an outsider in a position of authority does not comport with the norms demanded by socialist society. Otherwise, too, Červenková takes the Establishment attitude to the Church to task. Schoolteachers, we learn, are not allowed to go to church [87]. On the other hand, when her colleagues send her to Coventry (all of them except the police informer, Jaroška), the reader believes it is because the town is buzzing with rumours that she is a pious young woman, but it turns out to be because her

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[86] Frais: Strom 219.

[87] Červenková: Semestr života 138.

colleagues think she is doing police dirty work for Suchánek on her visits to the vicarage. Still, her headmaster is seriously worried, lest she should be a believer. The inspectorate would take a thoroughly dim view of it. In this novel we also have a serious attack on the Establishment primitivists' attitude to the Church: 'Every bloody atheist has got used to arguing with the Church as it was in the Middle Ages. That's very unfair. Nowadays the Church does not sell indulgences or burn witches or even support the Cold War ... And if we produce for children as documentary evidence the fact that Gagarin [...] didn't see anyone up there, the very least first-form Johnny Smith who goes to R. I. will just consider us idiots.' [88]

VII

I do not intend to be either cynical or oversentimental when I say that the picture Czech writers give of the United Kingdom generally manifests as much ignorance as their understanding of Christian doctrine. In the first case they seem to be keen on keeping alive a mythology. In the second they seem to be keen on reviving a belief they had been told had been based on primitive superstition. I do not choose the U. K. merely as a representative Western country. I do not choose it even because I am a British subject. I choose it because the U. K. (usually referred to as 'England' by Czechs) seems to sum up for Establishment writers all that is arcanely evil about the West. The U.S.A. and West Germany seem to Czechs to be easily definable. The U. K. is not. Though, no doubt, the words of the bureaucratically most influential of Czech writers, Ivan Skála, words about the West at the Third Congress of the Association of Czech Writers, apply to the U. K. as much as to West Germany and the U.S.A. The West, he says, without actually calling in the West (he calls it 'a part of the world') [89]: 'is ruled by a Mafia-like combination of capital and crime, where people are frightened of what the next day will bring, where people are afraid to go out onto the street at night, where there are organized murders, where a repressive police apparatus brutally vents its class hatred on the unemployed and on participators in peace demonstrations, where the working man cannot be sure of the means of survival, his equal rights, his human dignity.' [90]

Czechoslovakia is still well drenched with jokes about lords and graduates of Oxford and Cambridge [91], but Czech Establishment literature feels far from humorous about Britain. In Švejda's "Havárie" even British machine-fitters working in Czechoslovakia are decadent and dishonest and are friends with the area's chief crook. In "Hvězdy nad Syslím údolím" Stavinoha tells us Commonwealth

[88] Červenková: Semestr života 149.

[89] At the opening of the Hašek exhibition at Strahov in 1983 he referred in similar words to all areas to the West of Aš (the westermost parish of Czecholovakia). The Westerner has to become used to Czech top Establishment orators speaking of the West in terms the neo-Nazis or the National Front would use of the Eastern Bloc. Such oratory results from inexperience and the siege mentality.

[90] Protokol III. sjezdu Svazu ceských spisovatelů 136.

[91] An appallingly unrepresentative selection, where, incidentally, Harvard is a British university, has been published within the period this essay covers: Klimeš, Ferdinand (Ed.): Anekdoty Velké Británie [Jokes of Great Britain]. Prague 1979.

citizens study in Prague rather than Oxford because it is cheaper. In his quite extraordinarily ill-informed fantasy novel about wicked ex-Nazi doctors performing transplants on American millionaires, "Fantastické transplantace" (Incredible transplants, 1982), Dub suggests one gets into Cambridge by bribery and gets to Cambridge from Paddington. Furthermore a professor of immunology there is called 'sir Padding'. Results in one's exams at Cambridge depend on one's financial status. The best place to learn golf, a game allegedly played only by the upper classes, is Leeds. In "Vabank" (All out) Pludek not only suggests that the British played a large part in the so-called 'Prague Spring', but also that, if something like Vaculík's proclamation, '2000 Words', were published in "The Times", "The Guardian" or "The Daily Mirror", the editorial board would get a horrendous fine and the author(s) a stiff prison sentence. In Gruber's "Pacient tajné služby" (A patient of the secret service) the C. I. A. are nincompoops who employ the dashing young top Czech agent, Kalach, in their London front organisation called Espania, whereas M. I. 5 and M. I. 6 are the nastiest, most callous of organisations. Every little Austrian policeman is scared stiff of them — perhaps because they appear to employ a large number of Hungarian emigrés. The headquarters of M. I. 5 are in Wigmore Street and of M. I. 6 in a little N. London street called Lullington Garth. The boss of the British secret service's identity-changing clinic in Grawley (*sic*) is a vicious Hungarian surgeon, who had killed several Hungarian secret policemen in 1956. (His telephone number is 01-800-0455). The novel itself is of such horripilant hebetude as far as plot, characterisation and style are concerned that few Czechs are likely to read it through, except for fun.

VIII

On the other hand it is the sort of novel which will find its place into the libraries of military barracks and police stations. Still, it will do nothing for the development of Czech literature, even *Trivialliteratur*. Bad books can, however, be useful, if they are written by authors blatantly espousing the Establishment cause. Thus Švejda's "Havárie" opened paths of criticism for other writers. So did Dušek's first three works, because they looked Establishment, though the author probably did not wish to be an Establishment writer. Without Páral neither of those two might have started writing, but Páral remains outside Establishment and non-Establishment norms, however strong his influence may be in writers as varied as Zapletal, Křenek and Stavinoha. The number of holy cows has greatly diminished since the end of the 1970s, but still there has been no whole-hearted direct satire on modern Czech life. Generally speaking, social commentary is stronger now than it was in the 1960s, even if political commentary (mostly historical in the 1960s) is weaker. Although in the 1960s there were writers who treated universal themes set in contemporary society, for example, Páral, Alena Vostrá, Jiří Fried, Josef Topol, it is in the treatment of universal themes that Czech literature of the 1970s and, particulary, the 1980s looks healthier than that of the 1960s. The essential failing of recent Czech literature is, however, a lack of style. The period has produced no prose stylists, only a very few stylish poets and I have not yet read a single drama of any merit.