

CZECH LITERATURE FROM 1945 TO THE MID 1980s: A REVIEW

By Robert B. Pynsent

This collective volume*, edited by Dušan Jeřábek, is the latest attempt to compose a history of post-war Czech literature. One might say that since, for Party and patriotic political reasons, it has been impossible to publish a comprehensive, politically impartial history of Czech literature in Czechoslovakia since the last war or since 1948, any attempt is futile, and, on top of that, time-consuming and nerve-racking for the contributors. The various authors in this volume, Jeřábek and Vlastimil Válek for literature 1945–48, Jiří Pavelka, apparently the volume's politruk, for verse 1948–86, and for the political and cultural background of the whole period, Milan Suchomel for prose fiction, 1948 to the end of the 1960s and for 1960s drama, and Jiří Kudrnáč for prose and drama of the 1970s and 1980s, have taken few risks.

Indeed, because of when the book went to print some of the omissions even look a little quaint today. Ržounek's useless history of modern Czech literature became a *cause célèbre* because he mentioned various émigré writers, though he left their names out of the index. Still, since 1988, particularly since September (Michal Černík's interview in *Rudé právo* and the Seminar for Scholars of Czech and Slovak in Dobříš) and since the subsequent bickering of Bastlová, Vlašín, Hájek and others in *Kmen*, and since Peterka's assessment of the "Gordian knot" of Czech 1960s literature, also in *Kmen* (June, 1989) it has become normal to write about certain authors. Though some writers are "outside the competence of the Writers' Association" (i. e. writers like Havel, Vaculík or Kriseová, who are a police matter), one was, apparently, considering the publication of people like Putík or Ivan Klíma (now a short story has been published) and Kolář; collections of verse were due to come out by Wernisch (not mentioned by Pavelka for the 1960s, however important he was at that time; he is generally mentioned in literary critical monographs, e.g. by Peterka, and does publish translations) and Šiktanc.

The chief problem with Jeřábek's *Česká literatura od roku 1945* is that it devotes so much space to writers (nearly all poets) whom no one reads and who have contributed nothing positive to the development of Czech verse, though they have had a negative impact in that the mass of collections, selected poems, collected poems and bibliophile editions of their poems which have appeared in the 1970s and 1980s have used up a great deal of paper and printing-press time and so, theoretically, prevented the publi-

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cation of more valuable literature. On the other hand, if I may slightly pervert Palacký's words, every nation has the literature it deserves.

It would be senseless if I enumerated the omissions (authors) in this book for every reader of this journal could make the list in his head. To be sure, one is concerned that perhaps not every Czech undergraduate who uses the work as his basic text-book would be able to make a similar list. I should, however, like to point out a few perversions, unnecessarily heavy political loadings, and some tendencies to meaningless cliché.

I begin with the last. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century in central Europe as a whole, then since the last two decades of the century in the Bohemian Lands, the notion of synthesis as an artistic and, indeed, religious, goal has been fashionable. One understands why that was so in the *Fin de siècle*: Czechs felt their society was crumbling and that their religion had failed and so synthesis accrued qualities of a panacea. In fact, except in terms of the Hegelian dialectic and its derivatives, and in the natural sciences, synthesis is normally an unuseful word or a word which helps its employer to avoid analysis. In this book the following works are called syntheses, synthetic or attempts at synthesis: Kainar's *Moje blues* (My blues), Holan's *Noc s Hamletem* (A night with Hamlet; twice on p. 66), Skála's *Co si беру na cestu* (What I'm taking on my journey), Peterka's *Autobiografie vlka* (The autobiography of a wolf, pp. 101 and 127), Vyhlídal's *Cirkus*, Skála's collected 1957-68 verse, *Lomikámen* (Saxifrage), Janovic's *Báseň o sněžné levitaci* (Poem an snow levitation), altogether prose of the 1970s and 1980s (p. 130 three times, then, pp. 134, 140), Fuks's *Obraz Martina Blaskowitze* (Picture of M.B), Hrabal's prose in general (p. 135), Pavel's "Syn celérového krále" (Son of the celeriac king) and "Pohádka o Raškovi" (Tale of Rašek), Miroslav Skála's *Holubník na odvrácené straně Měsíce* (Dove-cot on the other side of the moon), Otčenášek's *Pokoušení Katerína* (Katerina trials, twice on p. 148), Kolárová's *Můj chlapec a já* (My boy and me), and Pecháček's *Dobří holubi se vracejí* (Good pigeons come back). Valenta's *Jdi za zeleným světlem* (Follow the green light) fails to achieve synthesis, and Kozák's *Adam a Eva* just promises some synthesis in the future.

The book takes as its dates for literary periods the conventional political dates, which do not necessarily comfort with any marked change in literary trends. 1945 may be a significant date, since a few Communist writers of the old Avant-Garde had not been publishing for a couple of years, and a few, largely minor, writers returned home from exile and so began publishing in Bohemia again. On the other hand, one could say that 1945 saw the beginning of the organisation, hence centralisation and bureaucratisation, of literature. Thus 1948 becomes an unuseful date, like 1956. The Soviet Twentieth Party Congress had no immediate impact on Czech literature. The first Thaw, the "mini-Thaw", may be said to have begun with Škvorecký's lively, pubertally narcissistic, Scottesquely fence-sitting, but more or less pro-Communist, *Zbabělci* (The Cowards). The real Thaw did not set in much before 1963; one thinks of Havel's *Zahradní slavnost* (The Garden Party). Neither work is mentioned in the book under review (at the September 1988 Dobříš Seminar, the head of the Academy's Literary Institute, Hana Hrzalová, stated that no one could deny the importance of Škvorecký's novel for the development of modern Czech literature). 1970 or 1971, the

Party Purges, is possibly a serious date, since so many writers were blacklisted. On the other hand, 1970s literature carried on very much in the style of 1960s literature; the *Ich-Form* prevailed, like the intellectual hero; social criticism increased, but political criticism of the past (except of the late 1960s) diminished to almost nothing. According to Kudrnáč 1970s (and 1980s) fiction is marked by a "search for a new hero" (*passim*); if he is right, and he certainly is not as far as the mainstream is concerned e. g.: Červenková's *Semestr života* (A term in life), Berková's *Knížka s červeným obalem* (Little book with red cover), Dušek's *Lovec štěstí* (Happiness hunter), Němec's *Hra na slepo* (Playing blind), that may turn out to be an important idea.

On the 1940s it is clearly wrong to make Pilař so important (Pilař was in charge of the Writers' Association publishing house) and not to mention Hauková (p. 6). The little anthology of anti-German verse *Křik koruny české* (Paris, 1940) is mentioned with some melodrama, but the names of its editor, Josef Palivec, and one of its best known contributors, Rudolf Medek, are omitted (p. 8). That is typical of the fudging that goes on in this book. That type of fudging bears fruit, when Jeřábek and Válek quote lengthily from Gottwald's speech at the constituent Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Association (March, 1949) and thus conveys to the undergraduate reader something of the repugnance of Stalinist manipulation of information and the arts (p. 14). All the emphases on the lasting value of the 1940s and 1950s literary critical works of Nejedlý and Štoll surprises me because I should not have thought such distortions of reality were necessary. Jeřábek and Válek, like most of the other contributors to this book, attack Socialist Realism – for which there is a new general euphemism, *schematismus*, since *socialistický realismus* sounds as if it is/was "good". Jan Kozák was considered a reform writer in the early 1960s. According to Kudrnáč, and essentially I agree, Kozák has not changed much since then: "All Kozák's writing is a modification of the 1950s construction novel" (p. 140). Pavelka spends a great deal of time on Halas's verse, but does not mention his last collection (and fragments); dates of publication of books by Seifert are sometimes false, since publication abroad does not apparently count. A great deal of time is spent on Nezval and the 1950s, but not a word is said about his brutish emasculation of his own interwar verse. (Similarly this book does not mention that Majerová omitted the central character of her *Náměstí republiky* (Place de la République) in her 1947 revision, because Russian anarchists were no longer the done thing. Suchomel, however, analytically despatches Řezáč's Socialist Realist work – and points out that the resettlement of former German territories in the Bohemian frontier regions was not even a new literary theme (he cites Sedlmayrová and Říha). Similarly he dismisses M.V. Kratochvíl's tedious historical novels of the 1950s, but even Suchomel can sometimes slip into the mythopoeic language of the authors he is treating. Thus, writing of Josef Toman's *Slovanské nebe* (Slav heaven), he speaks of the "victory of the Slav nations in World War II" (p. 39). Still he conveys the atmosphere of the 1950s well with statements like "The historical novel received the task of re-evaluating the national past and traditions from the point of view of the present" (p. 37), and "Satire was entrusted with the task of revealing the internal and external enemies of socialism" (p. 42). In other words, literature became an instrument of the politicians.

Pavelka is inaccurate about the fate of *Literární noviny* at the end of the 1960s; from

the way he writes one imagines the inaccuracy is deliberate. First there was a government or Party version, edited by Zelenka, to oppose the Writers' Association weekly, which then became *Literární listy* and then plain *Listy*. Also, *Tvář* was not published in one run from 1964 to 1969. Altogether the pages on the 1960s and 1970s cultural-political situation (pp. 44–48, and 97–99) will be useful to historians in years to come as a semi-official statement of the Party line. Šotola's replacement of Ivan Skála as First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Writers' Association in 1964 is an example of the growing conflict "between progressive and regressive forces in the literary community, a conflict which was aided by the errors and inconsistencies of the Novotný leadership" (p. 47). One has almost forgotten that at the second congress of the Czech Writers' Association (1977), literature was again given a *taské*; now its main task was "to join in the struggle for securing world peace" (p. 99). The book came out too late to mention the resignations of Kozák, Skála and Nohejl for health reasons from their functions in the Czechoslovak and Czech Writers' Associations at the beginning of 1989. Not long before that Čejka had been promoted from editor-in-chief of the Party weekly *Tvorba*, to deputy chief of culture in the Central Committee. A little later he became chief – when Miroslav Müller (Kapek) resigned.

In the chapter on late 1950s and 1960s verse Pavelka spends a great deal of time on Ivan Skála, but instead of giving his own judgement, he uses others': thus for works like *Máj země* (May of the land) or *Fronta je všude* (The Battle Front is everywhere) he uses Rzounek. Here the user of the volume would appreciate serious critical appraisal from Pavelka, since in the Skála Collected Poems only expurgated versions of the 1950s propaganda verse appear. The importance of Jiří Tauer as an original poet is overplayed, and his importance as a translator is underplayed. Pavelka's own love of Florian (who was certainly admired by many readers in the 1960s and early 1970s) leads him to spend far too much time on this bland poet. Holub's 1969 collection, *Ačkoli* (Although), is described as "ideologically problematic", even if, Pavelka continues, the poet's "humanist accent is here becoming more pronounced" (p. 62, see also pp. 100, 102). The word "humanist" is a cliché which was particularly overemployed in the Brezhnevite era; I do not believe its meaning is clear even to most of those who use it. (In the National Revival Kollár used it equally unclearly and, thence, at the end of the century so did Masaryk.) The concept "humanising" is almost as vague and almost as much of a cliché. Thus even Suchomel, who has generally written a balanced, politically unbiased, account of Sixties prose (given that half contemporary writers are omitted) says of the hero in Frýd's *Krabice živých* (Box for the living), "The humanising force [...] was victorious in him" (p. 80). Perhaps I am being unfair here since "humanise" could be understood to be an emotive opposite of the "brutal" attributable to the flagitiousness of German concentration-camp personnel.

Suchomel dismisses Pluhař as a didactic novelist (he uses the term, "pedagogical", p. 81) and gives serious assessments of a significant minor *nouveau romancier*, Jiří Fried, and of the minor popular writer who was once known as "the President's (Novotný's) writer", Jan Procházka, whose works have apparently only recently left the black list, and of the experimental Vyskočil (who performs his drama more or less freely, but whose works are not published and who has only recently come to be mentioned in the press).

Suchomel also writes succinctly and usefully of the first postwar Czech novel to become something like a bestseller in the United Kingdom, Stýblová's *Mne soudila noc* (Night's judgement), which was meant to be published in 1948, but did not appear until 1957. (Sometimes this work is considered the beginning of the Thaw rather than Škvorecký's *Zbabělci*.) The reason the book sold so well in England was that abortion was as "hot" a theme there as in Czechoslovakia. *Mne soudila noc* is a document of the times rather than great literature.

Suchomel respects Fuks for the same labyrinthine playfulness that he is respected for by many Czech intellectuals, and indeed intellectuals in other socialist countries. Fuks is respected in the West as a powerful writer of stories and novels about the persecution of the Jews. In the East he is read for the meanings that can be sucked out of most of his works. In *Pan Theodor Mundstock* and *Mí černošlasí bratři* (My black-haired brethren) Fuks has, maintains Suchomel, "created a style whose essential characteristics are hidden conflict, systems of withholding and alluding, and a ritual of dark discretion. It is what remains unexpressed that plays the most important role" (p. 89). Kudrnáč speaks of Fuks's playing with reality, his deliberate little "displacements of minor authentic contemporaneous facts" (p. 131). If, however, Kudrnáč accepts Fuks's "mystification", he cannot say of *Oslovení z tmy* (Address from the dark) that it is "unambiguously a parable on the end of the world" (p. 131) – especially when Fuks has his narrator say near the beginning of the novel, "I realised it was the end of the world" (*Oslovení z tmy*, Prague, 1972, p. 13). The society referred to is actually probably Prague Jewry in the late 1930s and early 1940s and the novel constitutes in part a reaction against the short-lived official anti-Semitism of 1970–71. Intellectually the novel is important because it states that there is no longer any guilt; there is only responsibility. Furthermore, all totalitarianism is immanently in man, and only Satan may say life is elsewhere. In Fuks's last novel, the over-long *Vévodkyně a kuchařka* (The Duchess and the cook – but, given the contents of the novel, the title could also be translated, The Duchess and a cookery book), Kudrnáč sees again the withheld or incompletely revealed secrets Fuks enjoys playing with, but he also sees the work not simply as an historical (and I doubt it is that), but also as a social novel (p. 132). If he is thereby suggesting that the reader should relate the events apparently narrated from 1897/98 to current events in Czechoslovakia, then that needs further explaining. Kudrnáč may be right; then this novel is a particularly powerful (while still playful) statement. A theme which helps tie the would-be bizarre set of episodes together is the Duchess's writing a play about the fall of the Roman Empire, based on her reading of Tacitus, Petronius and Marcus Aurelius (the last two were popular in the 1890s). As a whole the novel may be seen as on the surface a picture of the decaying Austro-Hungarian Empire; indeed Fuks lures the reader, sometimes tendentiously, into doing so. Nevertheless, a large part of the novel is taken up by a disquisition on looking glasses, and so the fall of Rome pre-reflects the fall of the Habsburgs and this pre-reflects the fall of the new feudal régime, the Brezhnevite system. In the Brezhnevite system aristocracy and lackeys exist, but also the middle ranks outside the Party *apparatus* who actually get things done. The international aristocracy Fuks imagines in Vienna is matched by Brezhnevite interbreeding (e.g. the ex-Stalinist, ex-liberal Czech poet, Maršiček, who helped to run the Bulgarian Cultural Centre in Prague in the 1970s and

1980s, allegedly because of family connections with the Zhivkovs). Fuks does not write that the socialist system is decaying and will soon fall, but his manner of composition leads the reader to imagine the author may be thinking that. *Vévodkyně a kučarka* contains lots of jokes, deliberate distortions, perhaps jokey and perhaps serious Czech patriotism – but it also contains unwanted distortions, for example, the coachman's made-up bow-tie, the Czech mistakes in the German dialogue, the consistent misspelling of the French Rothschilds. It is a parody of *Trivialliteratur* as well as a mystery game as well as a study of *homo ludens* (in this case mainly *mulier*), but because love does not belong to Fuks's code, he cannot deal with *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. What we end up with is a product of snobbish superficiality.

From Fuks Suchomel moves via Hrabal (sound brief treatment) to Páral. For some reason he omits Páral's first work, *Šest pekelných nocí* (Six infernal nights; Suchomel writes about the book in an article in *Romboid*, 6, 1989), but his analytical statements on Páral's subsequent loose pentology (1964-71) are precisely formulated. He avers that the pentology is a re-evaluation of the literary experience of the previous (two?) decades; Páral had replaced an illusive imitation of reality with a meccano-set version of that reality. A character in a Páral novel "passes through matters instead of living his life. The organisation and disorganisation of reality are translated into a literary process" and at the end of each novel either the characters are returned to where they had started, "to a stereotypicality from which there is no escape, or good overcomes evil, ideal reality, illusion truth – which belongs to the author's irony and to that irony's mastery of the kitsch of literature and life" (p. 91). Kudrnáč suggests that Páral's "satirical" and "aphoristic" prose style had a considerable influence on 1970s and 1980s prose social satire; he appears to suggest that Páral's influence was more than sporadic on two literary functionaries, Nohejl (First Secretary of the Czech Writers' Association, till 1989) and Kapek (i. e. Müller, until early 1989 head of cultural section of the KSČ Central Committee). The fact that this is the only mention of these two writers demonstrates the difference in approach between those authors' who deal with prose and that of Pavelka. In fact, Kapek is a competent popular comic writer and Nohejl often shows considerable imagination, however formulaic the political side of his writing. Kudrnáč concurs with Škvorecký in considering Páral's *Radost až do rána* (Joy till morning) idyllic junk, but Pynsent still maintains satirical intention. Though some books published in 1987 are registered in this book, the same author's schematic *Země žen* (World of women) is not mentioned (perhaps had not appeared when this book went to print). *Země žen* caused more literary critical interest than any other Páral novel since 1971; it was seen as a highly political work concerned with the potential developments of totalitarianism. One of the reviews eventually published in *Kmen* was held back for a long time, not by the editor, but by Páral, because of the interpretation it proffered.

On 1970s and 1980s verse Pavelka writes too much about Závada, Pilař, Janovic, Skácel, Černík, Skála, Sýs, Žáček, Peterka and Čejka, and far, far too much about the politically and artistically insignificant poets Odehnal and Vyhlídal. On the other hand, he says far too little about the most original of the Establishment "Poets of the Seventies", Šimon, and for some inexplicable reason, he does not even mention, for example, Schildberger, Skalická, Štemberková, Sedlická or Pohanková. No doubt the

younger angry-young-women poets like Fischerová or Antošová could not be mentioned because their poems had appeared only in periodicals and anthologies when Jeřábek's book went to print. Pavelka is capable of crassness like the following on Sýs, "He wanted to show that love represented an ineluctable component of human life" (p. 121).

At the beginning of his discussion of 1970s and 1980s fiction, Kudrnáč rightly notices the baneful influence of journalism on modern Czech prose (p. 130). One thinks of Radek John's amorphous novel on drug addicts, *Memento*, and one dreads to think of his much-mentioned forthcoming novel on AIDS. One is surprised that Kudrnáč omits Hrabal's *Obsluhoval jsem anglického krále* (I waited on the King of England), which was, after all, published in Prague in 1982, even if it never went on public sale. The novel had three emigré editions and, is due to appear in Prague in 1989 tucked away in a volume of selected prose. Kudrnáč perhaps underplays the social and linguistic importance of Červenková's *Semestr života*. This author's social criticism is strong and original (stronger than Páral or any of the various earlier novels on the disillusion of young people), largely because it is related by the female first-person narrator with a complex voice of hope, irony, sarcasm, then eventually, despair, then pain. The linking theme is hitchhiking. The *Ich* hitchhikes to her first job, at a small border-town school; her headmaster tells her he disapproves of hitchhiking. She reacts by hitchhiking at weekends as a protest, as a naive expression of her independence and her ability to deal with anyone, and as an element of the game she plays with a narrow small-town society. At the end of the novel, despairing, she decides to hitchhike off to visit a young architect and to conceive a child by him. Her plan is thwarted because she is picked up by a lorry and soon all the workers in that lorry rape her, one after the other.

Kudrnáč treats Czech prose published in the 1970s and 1980s in Czechoslovakia fairly and, it appears, honestly, for he treats what he has read – and what he has not read he quotes other critics on. His division of modern historical novels into three types, "the novel whose action is set in historical times", then "the novel with non-fiction elements" and, finally, "the anachronistic novel" (pp. 153–154) is tenable. I would not agree with him that Šotola's novels belong to the third type. Kudrnáč spends far too long on Kozák and not long enough on Frajs; Frajs's works of the 1980s are barely touched upon; some of his novels and long short-stories are linguistically inventive, intertextually complex, and even funny. There is not much really funny modern Czech literature – but Kudrnáč does indicate the originality of the neglected Miroslav Skála's humour; Skála committed suicide in 1989. On the other hand, he claims that Stavinoha is a comic writer whose characters sometimes remind one of Hrabal's. Stavinoha is condescending, which Hrabal is not, and Stavinoha's characters are as flat as his texts, whereas Hrabal's characters are flat but become part of a lively, intimate text.

There is something of the intimate text in Alexandra Berková's *Knížka s červeným obalem* (The book with a red cover), but it is not clear why Kudrnáč considers the work verges on the essay genre. Certainly, one might have difficulty in determining whether it is a (slightly inconsistent) novel or a cycle of short-stories. It is a refreshing work because the social criticism that it contains is incidental; its irony ranges from the jolly to the caustic; life has moments of hell, but fundamentally it is fun. Sometimes the *Ich* is listless in her humour; sometimes she indulges in the grotesque – especially to express

the ineptitudes and incongruities of puberty. Much of the humour is linguistic and intertextual: the Beatles fuse with Suchý, Škvorecký, Božena Němcová, Donald Duck, Wernisch and Karel Čapek. The book could be understood as a record of the female lot, or the female intellectual's lot in socialist Czechoslovakia from the 1950s to the 1980s, but essentially it reproduces a Czech Everyman's impressions of the period. The work's gentle scurrilousness appealed to critics and readers. For example, the Party daily, *Rudé právo*, is called "Rio Brávo" or scenes like: "and meanwhile in the garden a comrade from the regional committee was crying because no one loved him" (*Knížka*, Prague, 1986, p. 122).

Kudrnáč includes in his survey another work which was as popular as Berková's, but which cannot be considered serious literature, Milan Pávek's *Simulanti* (Putters-on). Kudrnáč gives as its date of publication 1983, which is what one will find in the colophon, but, in fact, this formless satirical novel was not released into bookshops until 1986. The central institution satirised is the Institute of Futurology (ÚBLBU; and there really is a similar institute in Prague, the Prognostication Institute and allegedly a television bureaucrat was made its new director in February, 1989), but since the author once worked in the Academy's Institute of Literature one presumes that much of the satire is directed at that refuge of scholarship and that this fact did not aid its punctual publication. *Simulanti* also satirises the bureaucracy in general, jargon, Americanisation and, to a limited degree, socialist class-society, and engineering human souls (the main character has three identities, Hrdina [*sic*], Bohuš Novák and Jason No. 1).

Another popular work of fiction from the period, part of which is academic satire like *Simulanti*, is Radoslav Nenadál's *Rakvářova dcera a jiné prózy* (The coffin-maker's daughter and other stories) which had something of the fashionability of an 'insider's' book, when it came out in 1985. Most of the nine stories in the work (the first six and the ninth) are fusty and written self-consciously in the tradition of Neruda (slightly), Herrmann, Jaroslav Hašek, and Hrabal. The seventh and eighth pieces, where the academic satire appears, are more original, though they often read like superficial imitations of Čapek-Chod. Nenadál is almost always condescending, almost always bitterly mocks his figures (they are not characters) and their actions. This is not the mockery of intellectual contempt, but of a supercilious author, sometimes narrator, who is convinced of his moral and mental superiority to his subjects.

Nesvadba's *Hledám za manžela muže (Druhé tisíciletí neskonečí) Sex-fikce* (I am looking for a man as a husband [The second millenium will not end] A sex-fiction) is a more important omission than the Nenadál stories. Nesvadba's more or less science-fiction novel is probably the first thorough-going novel of political speculation to be published in Czechoslovakia since 1948 – but that is not all it is. It is utterly pessimistic, unlike Páral's optimistic *Země žen* which shares some of Nesvadba's subject-matter, for example, the ludicrous inhumanity of the 1930s–1960s pseudo-science, sexology. Nesvadba attacks the go-getting, consumer, Volvo-revolving society of socialist and non-socialist countries. In this novel politicians ("them") and the board of a multinational called "Multilever" run the world. Writing along the lines of 1980s catastrophism (which bears a remarkable resemblance to *fin-de-siècle* catastrophism), Nesvadba considers famine, the nuclear threat, overpopulation and the possible rebellion of the Third World against the "North". Mankind has similar notional cures for the

ills of society to those of late nineteenth-century mankind, Love and occultism, and both will fail. The main character, Jan Jančár (i. e. Joe Janissary), is a paltry pawn for most of the novel, and the game theme of 1970s and 1980s Czech literature reaches an insidious culmination in Nesvadba. He sees computer games and the vulgar leisure-orientated society as symptomatic of mankind's frenetic desire to find a way out of doom. (In *Země žen* Páral uses computer games as an emblem of male domination and a symbol of postindustrial society's destruction of intimacy and loyalty.) Nesvadba is also seriously concerned with the debasing of human sexuality; he starts his jerky novel in the 1960s when he sees sexuality idolised and thus coarsened into the state it was when he was writing. On the other hand, Nesvadba or his narrator, also indulges in sexual mythopoeia (women with thin calves are particularly lustful, and so forth), though perhaps he or his narrator is playing on his readers' gullability. The author's philosophical stance appears to be that every human being has the tendency to evil in him or her; only awareness of that evil can improve the individual and humanity as a whole. That not very original stance is also expressed by Zapletal in his *Půlnoční běžci* (Midnight runners), which was published in the same year as *Hledám za manžela muže*, 1986.

For all the faults I have found with Jeřábek's *Česká literatura od roku 1945 do poloviny let osmdesátých*, it does contain the first serious, academic attempt to give some account of Czech literature in all genres published since the Party Purges of 1970–71. It also contains dates and titles one will not find in other works of literary reference. At least for the moment, it is invaluable for the student of modern Czech literature.

NOTE:

A full "proceedings" of the September 1988 Seminar for Scholars of Czech and Slovak Literature (Seminář bohemistů a slovákistů) does exist in several bound copies, though it has been made available only to a very small circle of people. Many statements made at the Seminar were important for the political history of 1970s–1980s Czech literature. From the outsider's point of view what was particularly significant the same people who had for fifteen years been singing the praises primarily of Kozák, Skála, and Pilař, slightly less of Nohejl and Rybák, now did not mention their names. Only one paper-giver, Křivánek, introduced Pilař and Skála. What concerns the outsider about the changes in tune is not the blatant opportunism itself, but the way Czech intellectual history repeats itself. Stalinists like Kohout or Kundera became reformers and now Brezhnevites like Pelc and Vácha are becoming reformers. No centralised literary establishment can work in the first place, but, if it wants to try to help create something like a liberal atmosphere, then new brooms may be able at least to brush away something more than loose straw lying on the muck. To an outsider it seems that what is needed is a set of sound stainless-steel mucking-out shovels (and they should not be made in Solingen or Sheffield either).