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Subversive Adaptations

Czech Literature on Screen behind the Iron Curtain

Petr Bubeníček

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For my grandfather

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The subject of this book concerns film adaptations of literary works undertaken in Communist Czechoslovakia over the 16-year period from 1954 to 1969. This particular chunk of history was selected not only because of its signal value for Czechoslovak cinema in general, but also because it has, until now, remained shrouded in many myths and much misinformation, which the present study hopes to dispel.

But the chief goal of my inquiry is to challenge the view that all films produced by the state-controlled movie industry behind the Iron Curtain were artistically uninspired flops whose sole raison d'être was to expound official ideology by other means. The actual situation was much more complex. Although Party apparatchiks did their best to mold all film adaptations produced in Communist Czechoslovakia according to the tried-and-true spirit of Marxism-Leninism, despite their valiant efforts, not every movie coming out of this ideological pressure cooker turned into a mere passive mouthpiece of doctrine emanating from high above. Despite the daunting conditions of their origins, the best cinematic works managed to shed, in one way or another, this oppressive yoke, becoming instrumental agents in a gradual liberalization of the Communist regime culminating with the Prague Spring of 1968.

Focusing on internationally celebrated films like *Vynález zkázy* (*The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* 1958) and *Marketa Lazarová* (*Marketa Lazarová* 1967), I will illustrate with concrete examples how the local filmmakers managed to defy, regardless of the infelicitous political and economic context of the 1950s and, to a lesser degree, of the 1960s, the

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restrictive, flatfooted aesthetics that the one-party regime promulgated. It was the multilayered structure of cinematic signs—visual, audio, and verbal—that enabled adapters to imbue their renditions of well-known literary works with ingeniously encrypted messages. To wit: if official ideology called for a monochromic realistic simplicity (as was the case in the 1950s), deft filmmakers subverted such a command by employing imaginative allegories. For a sophisticated viewer always ready to venture beyond the facile surface, such films teemed with discreet allusions incongruous with the ruling dogma. The venerability of the adapted literary texts—their classical status—served as a decoy that legitimized the film in the Party establishment's eyes, while, at the same time, provided a convenient cover for the exhilarating heterodoxies of various kinds that would have otherwise been censored. The only trick was to grasp the appropriate hermeneutic key. But in this game, Czech moviegoers were more than *au fait*.

Viewers were able and willing to interpret art in a manner that would allow them to entertain the possibility of a duplicate, or antithetical, reading. The reason for this was simple—official interpretations (the interpretation presented by the political or school systems, etc.) did not offer sufficient scope for their actual interpretive abilities. Adaptations served, in more ways than one, as ideal means for subversion. I do not mean to imply that adapters always purposefully inserted content into their films that was—politically or otherwise—revolutionary, unconventional, or anti-ideological, while shielding themselves with a culturally canonized work. In fact, it is much more probable that such meanings were often realized unwittingly, due to the logic of adaptation, which is inherently dual. Film adaptations constantly gesture to two things at once: adapted works and, in the case of literary film adaptations, literary texts and cinematic devices. I do not, therefore, focus primarily on works of art as autonomous creations carrying predetermined meanings, whether these meanings were established by author, genre, or aesthetic form. I am interested in the ways that a work of art functions at the intersection of reception, culture, ideology, politics, and creativity.

Subversion, however, can also be achieved simply by focusing on, or enhancing, a work's aesthetic qualities. This approach was particularly prevalent in the early 1950s when socialist norms pushed for works rooted in ideology and political indoctrination. The Communist dictatorship viewed anything overly artistic with suspicion (and some movements—such as surrealism—were outright prohibited); yet at the same

time, the regime wanted to support what it perceived as *the right kind of art*—that is, the kind it prescribed.

In the politically more liberal 1960s, cultural production, including film adaptations, diversified. Adaptations from this decade not only disturbed the socialist canon and norms and weakened official ideology, manifesting an agitating influence on viewers, but they also addressed social topics that did not require filmmakers to hide polemical meanings in the way they had to in the 1950s. Even in this more liberal atmosphere, however, the government still censored works of art, and, thus, potentially subversive screenplays were still at risk of being considered anti-socialist and denied production. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a space had opened up for autonomous artistic expression, thus allowing some filmmakers to strive for purely aesthetic goals: to bypass ideology and film the "unfilmable." Did such works still express criticism or any kind of political or social engagement, though? I will demonstrate that some works from this period, which are nearly universally considered to be purely aesthetic in nature, do indeed efficiently convey meanings that are not entirely aesthetic.

The book deals with two decades set apart not only by liberalization of the Communist dictatorship, but also by a whole range of other social, media, and pop-culture phenomena, such as urbanization, the building of a welfare state, the introduction and rapid spread of television, new fashions, and Western products (e.g., the license to produce Coca-Cola).[1] Therefore, this study searches for the subversive space between strict prohibition and ideological promotion in these adaptations. These larger dynamics are illustrated by examining six adaptations that demonstrate a wide variety of means of subversion and polemics; all of these films pushed against prescribed boundaries—both aesthetic and political—and brought something new and remarkable into the restricted Communist culture of this period.

* * *

For years, adaptation scholars have commented on the lack of and need for more studies of adaptation outside Anglophone traditions and cultures; recent publication trends demonstrate a rising interest in the discipline from an international perspective (e.g., Della Colletta 2012; Krebs 2014). Adaptation scholars tend to focus on either formal or cultural issues (Elliott 2014). This study, in contrast to the prevailing dichotomization, strives to deal simultaneously with both, exploring a workable alternative to the either/or approach to film adaptation studies,

thereby informing readers of the formal as well as cultural aspects of this important, yet understudied region and period of film adaptation.

My approach to the cinematic adaptation of works of fiction, the reader should know, is not without its intellectual antecedents. As a literary historian weaned on the Prague school of structuralism embodied by Jan Mukařovský and Roman Jakobson, as well as on the phenomenological quest for the meaning of *das literarische Kunstwerk*, I was initially influenced by Seymour Chatman's *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (1990) and Brian McFarlan's *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996), works that evaluate adaptation from a narratological perspective. The structuralist tradition enriched this method, the way I saw it, with versatile tools for analyzing the text's semantic structure. And Ingardenian phenomenology liberated me from being overly concerned with the (in)fidelity of film adaptations to their literary sources.

In 1991, Petr Málek, drawing from the Central European phenomenological tradition, published a study entitled "K pojmu konkretizace v literatuře a filmu" ("On Concretization in Literature and Film"), in which he states:

> If we accept the idea of a literary artefact as a reservoir of infinite, non-predetermined concretizations, as something that is in perpetual motion and whose meaning is constituted and reconstituted in the process of reading, we cannot be surprised about the multiplicity of various opinions on the "fidelity" of adaptations […]. (Málek 1991, 8, my translation)

Málek directs attention to the ideas of Roman Ingarden, which caught on in Europe and inspired the globally known and wide-reaching reception theory. Drawing from the ontology of art and using the term *concretization*, Málek casts doubt on simplified ideas about literature in film; he refers to plurality of choice, varied forms of the final product, and liberty in adaptation practice. The logic of his argument implies that any offence taken to the form of an adaptation is futile because semiotic projects disposed to polysemy change throughout their concretizations and artefacts exist to be defined and interpreted by their recipients.

The phenomenological approach, however, cannot provide a complete solution to the problem of fidelity, as it principally emphasizes the role of the subject, be it authorial or receptive. Thus, concretization does not constitute a true dialogue between a text and its pre-text, and further

definition does not make the artefact a joint effort of two equal partners. The widespread intertextual approach is also somewhat restrictive—Thomas Leitch points out its limitations as a methodological framework: "[…] it makes it difficult to distinguish adaptations from other intertexts and threatens to dissolve adaptation studies into intertextual studies" (Leitch 2017, 5). "All-encompassing" adaptation theory progressed further, and included in its scope the substantial flow of modifications that fuel not only literature and film, but culture as a whole. This interpretative angle enabled adaptation to become a model elucidating the function of texts in the broadest possible perspective. The formalist measures of structuralism are, in themselves, insufficient for understanding the interplay between media and their functions within cultural communication. Immanent analyses of text have exhausted their potential, and instead of an aesthetic approach, thinking about literature and film as a social practice has emerged. In the new paradigm of adaption studies, the artefact itself is not a sovereign or autonomous creation that exists independently and whose structure can be described, categorized, and expressed in general terms. Each adaptation falls within particular social, economic, cultural and political structures.[2] Signs no longer obtain meaning by their position in a text: they are already endowed with meanings when they enter the text. All texts are substantially influenced by the various discourses entering into them (in the adaptations I discuss in this book, one can observe the Marxist discourse, the "adoration of novel" discourse, etc.). It is no longer enough to consider the deviations from an adaptation's textual predecessor, as these too are codetermined by context (Hutcheon 2006, 141–167).

The new adaptation studies have changed the theoretical paradigm, and it is not easy to navigate the labyrinth of their theoretical stimuli. I myself have "adapted" to essentialist, structuralist, and phenomenological approaches to text and their terminological apparatuses. Therefore, in each chapter I shall consider how meaningful aspects are conveyed from one semiotic system to another. I will pay attention to the poetics of media transformations and their parallel phenomena, such as the treatment of themes, topics, or scenes. For example the chapter devoted to the adaptation of the poem *Romance pro křídlovku* (*Romance for Flugelhorn*, 1962) treats verbal devices and moving images as carriers of meaning: in it, I will show how poetry and film reveal their medium potential by representing forms of temporality and human experience of time in ways whose demonstrative and expressive potential is in the

respective medium strongest. In this regard, my research is inspired by continental intermedia studies.[3] Lars Elleström provides a pertinent theoretical framework in the edited volume *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality* (2010). In the introductory essay, Elleström develops a theory of intermediality, in which he includes—besides the basic separation of the visual and audio track—subtle modalities such as physical carriers or the spatio-temporal aspects of the artefact's inception.

How does my book understand film adaptation? A literary work and its respective cinematic rendering, I maintain, are two equipotent, autonomous artefacts that carry out clearly disparate functions of their own. An adaptation, in my view, is an open dialogue between two interlocutors, an exchange of values. In processing and interpreting the initial meaning of the text, the audio-visual rendition modifies and develops it according to its own needs. The transformation of a "pre-text," it must be stressed, is not just the function of the new medium's material properties, but also, among other things, of the economics of this undertaking, of the institutional setup in which it takes place, and, needless to say, of its agents' (whether screenwriters, directors, or camera operators) creative aspirations. The list could go on. Embedded into an ever-changing sociocultural context, an adaptation is not an *ergon*, a simple task culminating with a finished product, but a dynamic process, an *energeia*, a never-ending *alloiósis*.

From the First Republic to Normalization

This book puts the individual adaptations into a broader cultural and historical context. It focuses on the "first half" of the Communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia, from the coup d'état in 1948 to the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the beginnings of what is known as *normalization*. I shall call attention not only to the consequences of the Communists' rise to power and Czechoslovakia's inclusion in the Eastern Bloc on cultural and social life in the country but also the ways in which contemporary society dealt with the single-party rule of the Communists. I aim to define the contours of the regime. However, there is an additional layer of interpretation concerning the period that follows the shift from "big history" to common day-to-day life. The people with whom this book is concerned—directors, screenwriters, and writers—faced various obstacles and barriers put up by the Communist bureaucracy in their work, the products of which were subsequently subjected

to ideological readings; and yet they were still able to navigate the political waters and negotiate with the regime in order to bring their artistic visions to life. Some of these people were born in the times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and started their careers during the interwar years of the First Czechoslovak Republic; thus, they carried within themselves a certain professional and artistic continuity with the pre-Communist cultural scene. The Communists, in their attempts to purify the country, failed to erase people's memories of the First Republic's economic, social, and cultural advances; political plurality; and a high-quality education system. In the end, it was obvious that even enormous, collective, socialist projects could not have been done without the creativity and critical thinking that had been instilled in people in earlier, more liberal times. By emphasizing the social reality, I hope to avoid a stereotypical interpretation of the national narrative that would reflect only upon major historical events (such as the Communist takeover in 1948 and its political ramifications). Finally, I examine national identity, an issue that remained topical even after the introduction of the "international" ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

To properly explain what happened in Czechoslovakia after World War II, a broader historical overview is in order. The country gained its independence after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, when the First Czechoslovak Republic was established. In the following 20 years, a democratic political system and liberal culture were built up. Interwar Czechoslovakia was a democratic Central European state conceptually based on the French and US democratic systems that strived for a national order based on the Swiss model. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, a philosopher and statesman, and subsequently the first president of Czechoslovakia, played a major role in establishing the country's independence. The creation of independent Czechoslovakia was largely aided by the Czech anti-Habsburg national movement, which manifested itself by the rise of the Czechoslovak Legions during the First World War. The accomplishments achieved by Czechoslovak troops on the Eastern Front bolstered the idea of creating a new republic.

The First Republic was characterized not only by a prosperous economy and a cultural boom, but also by unresolved nationalist struggles and social issues. Czechoslovakia was not only home to Czechs and Slovaks, but Germans, Poles, Hungarians, and Ruthenians as well. As the "minority issue" was largely inherited from the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the First Republic is sometimes referred to as a "little Austria."

Czechoslovakia was home to an extensive German-language minority, which in large part did not identify with the nominally Slavic state's political order and approached the new republic with worry and distrust. The Czech political elites attempted to achieve contented coexistence between various ethnic groups by constitutionally establishing civic equality. Nevertheless, the German minority was long reluctant to accept the idea of the new republic. Ethnic Germans became involved in the political establishment only in the late 1920s, when the German Christian Social People's Party and the German Farmers' League became a part of Prime Minister Anotnín Švehla's third government (cf. Rokoský 2011, 123–124). However, the Czech majority dominated the country linguistically and bureaucratically, with Slavs holding most positions in public administration, the gendarmerie, and the army. The First Republic never fully resolved the issues of internal Czech-German relations, as became evident after 1933, when the German inhabitants of the Sudetenland radicalized in the wake of Hitler's rise to power in neighboring Germany and Konrad Henlein's Sudetendeutsche Partei was founded. Masaryk's democratic program gradually became a liberal-patriarchal national democracy. Henlein's party demanded a resolution to the Sudeten German national issue—among other things, it "asked for territorial autonomy for the German inhabitants of the Czech Lands based on national status and for the national group of Sudetenland Germans to be recognized as a corporation with public law and united representation, which transcended the constitutional framework of the republic" (Rokoský 2011, 245, my translation). As the government could not gratify those demands, Henlein attempted to generate international pressure, mainly from the UK and France. His requests were supported by the German establishment, as Hitler saw Henlein and his politics as a convenient instrument for eventually breaking up Czechoslovakia (cf. Rokoský 2011, 298). The build-up of Henlein's demands and international pressure, and the Czechoslovak government's unsuccessful attempts at compromise and maintaining peace, culminated in the Munich Agreement.

In September 1938 four powerful European heads of state—Neville Chamberlain, Édouard Daladier, Adolf Hitler, and Benito Mussolini—met in Munich where they signed an agreement in which they jointly demanded that Czechoslovakia surrender almost 40% of its land inhabited largely by a German-speaking population to Hitler's Reich (cf. Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 18). The First Republic's democracy, however, was not toothless, and the army was prepared to defend the country. Czechoslovakia had been preparing for the possible conflict, building

defensive systems with a realistic sense of the dangers their country could potentially face. In addition to physical defenses, however, the country relied on a system of alliances, mainly with the UK and France, ones though that had broken down. Czechoslovakia's second president Edvard Beneš found himself in a difficult situation in the autumn of 1938 (when also confronted with Poland's and Hungary's territorial demands) and saw no other way forward than surrendering to the great powers' demands on Czechoslovakia's territory. Together the shocking behavior of Czechoslovakia's Western allies, the transfer of power over the annexed territories to Nazi Germany, and the withdrawal of Czechoslovak troops from their borderland fortifications, which had been constructed as a line of defense against Hitler's Germany, took profound root in the nation's collective memory. The "Munich Betrayal," as the agreement is often referred to by the Czechs to this day, subsequently formed a convenient justification for the Czechs to transfer their loyalties towards the East: "The experience of Munich gravely damaged Czech willingness to rely on the West for the state's security, which manifested itself in Czechoslovakia's close military alliance with the Soviet Union" (Abrams 2004, 157). In signing the Munich Agreement, the European powers had effectively abandoned Czechoslovakia. With the loss of such a large amount of territory, the economy took a major hit (weakened agriculture and industry, steep rise in unemployment), as did the country's transportation infrastructure; rump Czechoslovakia also had to contend with an influx of Czech refugees from the Sudetenland. Another substantial problem was posed by the effective non-existence of Czechoslovak borders, which were not internationally recognized during the Second Republic (i.e., from October 1938 until early March 1939). Despite the Czechoslovak government's efforts to define and legitimize the state's boundaries, the signatories of the Munich Agreement prevented any such action. Both France and the UK demanded that Czechoslovakia reach an agreement with Germany concerning its border even though Germany had no interest in an agreement, all the while escalating its demands on Czechoslovakia (cf. Rokoský 2011, 387).

The Second Republic brought along with it a significant transformation in the political and social atmosphere of Czechoslovakia, as the Masarykian model of democracy was replaced by an "authoritative democracy" (cf. Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 45–47 and 69–88, my translation). The principle fallout of the Munich Agreement was emotional: disillusionment, disappointment, uncertainty, and anger gave rise to doubts about the very legitimacy of a sovereign Czechoslovak state

(cf. Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 34). Antagonism towards Masarykian democracy intensified amongst those who had been radicalized pre-Munich (radicalization took place across the entire political spectrum; cf. srov. Klimek 2002, 669–670, Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 34–49.) Soon an alternative reading of the failure of Czechoslovak interwar politics was established. This interpretation included the assumption that the unfavorable situation in which the republic had found itself was caused by Masaryk, Beneš, and their collaborators. This reading did not reflect the reality of the situation, but rather was an expression of general helplessness and anger. It was nonetheless enforced when President Beneš retreated into exile in Britain. The failure of the hitherto functioning liberal-democratic state was proclaimed, and calls for "restructuring" and "simplifying" politics spread through the country. At the helm of change were nationalist-conservative political fractions, which sought to establish a regime that would eliminate the "chaos" of democracy (cf. Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 37 and 46). The existing plurality of political parties was reduced to two new political groupings: the governing Party of National Unity and the National Labor Party, which was supposed to play the role of a loyal, state-building opposition party (cf. Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 65). This authoritarian order was presumed to aid in overcoming a period of uncertainty and weakness, but instead it ushered in "a long period [marked by a] lack of liberty wherein collided the two basic phenomena that permeate [Czech] twentieth-century history: the phenomenon of democratic development and the phenomenon of totalitarian social and political development. The clash between, and (at the same time) the intertwining of, elements of continuity and discontinuity with previous historical development formed an integral part of this collision" (Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 34, my translation).

The fact that Czechoslovakia's various nationalities did not fully identify with the new republic ultimately manifested itself in the creation of the Slovak Republic (also known as the Slovak State). This event was in direct denial of the idea of Czechoslovakism that proclaimed Czechs and Slovaks were of the same nationality. The decentralizing tendencies of Slovakia were expressed by the gradual emergence of various political parties seeking autonomy, greater participation in decision-making, and the strengthening of local government. Such calls had been made throughout the existence of the country, intensifying in the 1930s in particular. (The roots of these tendencies even stretch back to the founding of Czechoslovakia, as at the time Slovaks' expectations

differed from those of the Czechs.) It was therefore made apparent that Czechoslovakism was not embraced by all members of the multinational republic (as confirmed much later by the definitive dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993). One of Czechoslovakism's most significant problems was the imperial nature of Czech state-building efforts. Czech teachers were sent to "backwards Slovakia" in order to make Slovaks into a more cultured nation: they promoted education, enforced the state apparatus, and founded the university in Bratislava. After Munich, radical Slovak political groups harnessed these long-standing tendencies in the struggle for national autonomy, which was eventually won under significantly contentious conditions: on 14 March 1939 (following the visit of Jozef Tiso, the head of the autonomous Slovak government, to Hitler) Slovak politicians declared a sovereign state, which immediately became a client republic of Hitler's Germany. The Slovak secession from Czechoslovakia under such conditions clearly demonstrated the strength of the Slovaks' desire for self-determination. Following the secession of the Slovak lands, the only remaining non-Czech area in Czechoslovakia—Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia—was occupied by the Hungarian army and later claimed by Romania.

The separation of Slovakia weakened the Czechs' position. Government officials assumed they would be able to negotiate new diplomatic relations and establish peaceful co-existence; however, on the night of 14 March 1939, the German army entered Czech territory. The following day, Hitler presented President Hácha with a proposal for conditions of annexation, and Hácha, with no other options, accepted. On 16 March, the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was officially declared (cf. Gebhart a Kuklík 2006, 169–178). The social, economic, and cultural conditions of life in the Protectorate were dictated by Nazi Germany. In the first 2 years under Nazi rule, with the German censors yet unable to grasp the stylistic nuances of the Czech language, allegories, and the symbolism of certain pieces of art (cf. Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 482), Czech national culture experienced a considerable upswing, which was all the while condoned by the official establishment. Various ceremonies celebrating the nation's cultural life were conducted—among them were the re-interment of the remains of Romantic poet K.H. Mácha at Prague's Vyšehrad Cemetery, the remembrance of the 55th anniversary of Bedřich Smetana's death, and a memorial ceremony dedicated to medieval church reformer Jan Hus (attendance at religious pilgrimages rose steeply as well). These events

molded public opinion: society not only saw their symbolic meaning but also regarded them as an expression of national resistance towards the occupation (cf. Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 480–481).

In an effort to control Czech public and social life, the occupiers attempted to discredit the Czech intelligentsia in the eyes of the rest of society. Members of the intellectual elite were principally involved in trying to salvage Czech national identity and to defend Czech society and culture from Germanization. However, "attempts at isolating, discrediting, and persecuting Czech intellectual and creative elites incited an adverse reaction in the Protectorate public. Endeavours to create an influential group within the intelligentsia that would be willing to collaborate with the regime and that would identify itself with the ideas of the national-socialist New Europe failed to elicit a substantial response—those who did respond [such as Protectorate Minister of Education Emanuel Moravec], were largely rejected by the public" (Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 508, my translation). The German fear of the intelligentsia manifested itself early on: in the autumn of 1939, the occupiers closed Czech universities. Germanization and the cultivation of loyalty towards the Reich were realized at the primary and secondary levels of schooling. The occupiers sought to seize power over the school system, which was meant to play a key role in re-educating Czech youth with Nazi ideals (cf. Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 536–537).

The situation of the Czechs under the Protectorate grew considerably worse after martial law was declared on 27 May 1942 following the assassination of Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich. Over 1500 people were executed (among them were General Alois Eliáš, who served as prime minister from 1939 to 1942, and the writer Vladislav Vančura), and the villages of Lidice and Ležáky were burned to the ground. The occupiers took advantage of the situation to further decimate the ranks of the Czech intelligentsia, as one-fifth of their numbers were killed, including university professors, judges, teachers, engineers, architects, physicians, writers, and clerics (cf. Gebhart and Kuklík 2007, 145). After 1942, art could no longer exhibit nationalistic tendencies, and the political events of the time caused many artists to withdraw from public life. Theater was likewise affected—over the course of just a few months starting on 1 September 1944, theaters were effectively closed and performers were conscripted for forced labor (cf. Gebhart and Kuklík 2006, 514). These complex conditions had an impact on Czech society and cultural life until the end of the war.

The short but crucial period that falls in between the liberation of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the Communist regime (1945–1948) is habitually referred to as the Third Republic. In the once-again-sovereign Czechoslovakia, the parliamentary political system was not renewed to its interwar degree and the republic operated in a state of a somewhat diminished democracy. The influence of the political Left and Moscow increased, democratic parties withdrew to the background, and the Communists infiltrated both social and cultural institutions. These developments, along with the changing geopolitical situation, contributed to shifts within society and public opinion. The Yalta Conference of February 1945 had serious consequences for Central Europe, which was subsequently split in half by the Iron Curtain (cf. Trávníček 2010, 269). A newly emergent idea (which was accepted by the public) postulated that the USSR defeated not only Nazi Germany, but also the treachery of capitalism. The disillusionment that was once felt over the real politics of the USSR (e.g., the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact) disappeared from the public's collective memory. In the postwar period, Czechoslovaks aspired to rebuild the country in a new, collective manner and thus achieve a more just society. This enthusiasm was seized upon by radical groups, and this combination of enthusiasm and political radicalism significantly contributed to the overwhelming victory of the Communist Party in the elections of May 1946. The Communists' success lay in their ability to provide the public with a new perspective and to convince people that the capitalist system had failed. They therefore managed to garner significant support for their own vision of a postwar political transformation that would result in an affluent country and lead towards a "bright tomorrow" for all of society. Two years later the Communists would fully consolidate control and establish a dictatorship.

In 1948, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia gained absolute power that it would hold for the next 41 years, and the state and its inhabitants fell firmly under the Soviet sphere of influence. The takeover marked the beginning of an experiment whose goal was to establish a social order based on social equality. Instead, the brutal period of Stalinism, the darkest era in postwar Czechoslovak history, ensued. Nowadays, it is very difficult to imagine this period's atmosphere and its pointedly political, propagandist discourse. The power elites of the time excused their actions by referring to their historical mission; they were acting for the greater good—an equal society, progress, and well-being—goals that were to be achieved by any means necessary, including mental,

physical, and material oppression and the destruction of the "enemies of the state."

Shortly after the Communists came to power, they enacted measures to consolidate their power over all areas of social and cultural life. Between 1948 and 1953 (the Stalinist era), the Party completely restructured the state establishment and the means of economic control. The Communist dictatorship was built upon a hostile view of the world, sought out its enemies, and acted ruthlessly against those it identified, including former democratic politicians, soldiers who fought alongside the Western Allied forces, clergymen, and many others. Revolution devours its children, however: even some of the highest-ranking establishment officials were persecuted. In 1951, a spectacular show trial was held that resulted in the death penalty for Rudolf Slánský, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, who had actively participated in unleashing violence and terror after the 1948 takeover. By the early 1950s, the political trials, executions, and repressions against the country's inhabitants had produced an atmosphere of fear.

Until recently, Czech historians viewed 1948, when the Communists executed their takeover, as a great, insurmountable chasm in modern Czechoslovak history that severed what had preceded it with what came after. However, newer works, which examine the concept of totalitarianism, have focused on the links between the domestic political events of the late 1930s (and World War II) and the beginnings of the Communist dictatorship; these studies differ from the earlier stereotypical interpretations (which were often concerned only with power structures, repression, and state-organized violence) and strict periodization. Historians have analyzed contemporary sources and documents to produce studies of everyday life under Communism and how individuals "negotiated" with the reigning regime; in doing so, they have revealed a clear post-1948 continuity with the social reality of earlier times. Today, historians focus in particular on society's role in the Communist project. Jiří Knapík and Martin Franc describe how collective models of behavior, such as eating in unison at workplace canteens, were supported and encouraged under the Protectorate (Knapík and Franc 2011, 21). They also point to similarities in the ethos of building a "new state" and the glorification of workers in heavy industry (which was present during the Protectorate).

These authors have also taken an interest in childhood and adolescence. In their most recent research, they try to demonstrate that a number of traditional values continued to be passed down through families; despite

the regime's attempts to control children's extracurricular activities, these values survived into the 1960s, when they could then be further cultivated under more liberal conditions. Furthermore, they point out that the regime—after its initial radical endeavours—never let the generational divide become too prominent. The motto "Youth Forward" had its limits; indeed, older, more conservative elements of society, primarily consisting of workers, regularly held the youth back (Franc 2014, 82–85).

Bradley Abrams, who has examined how common citizens facilitated the establishment of the Communist dictatorship, focuses on the previous experiences of the people that helped the transformation along: "The experiences of 1938–1945 triggered a set of radical changes that manifested themselves after liberation, changes that considerably eased the Communist's road to total power" (Abrams 2004, 275–276).

Matěj Spurný, who has studied how ethnic minorities viewed the establishment of the Communist dictatorship, finds continuity in ethnic homogenization trends, which started already during the Protectorate. Ever since the beginning of the war, the citizens of Czechoslovakia were familiar with the process of segregating and "cleansing" all that was alien. This familiarity was subsequently put into practice during the postwar expulsion of the majority of Germans from Czechoslovak territory. The forced displacement of nearly three million Germans brought radical national stereotypes into clearer focus, and the Communists were able to use this for their gain.

> This cleansing of the society, which involved various forms of repression and terror, was first and foremost an expression of society's will, not just a method used to intimidate those who were being controlled. This strategy for forming society was driven predominantly from below, and in the 1940s and the 1950s it was successfully utilized by the Communist Party to obtain legitimacy. (Spurný 2011, 340, my translation).

Stalinism lasted a relatively short time in Czechoslovakia, a mere 5 years, but it cast a long shadow. The enthusiasm accompanying the idea of building a true Communist society in Czechoslovakia slowly evaporated as it became gradually obvious that the promise of a classless society and prosperity for all would remain unfulfilled. The vision of a just society, which was allegedly on the horizon, never materialized. The transformations made in the state, be they matters of social or cultural engineering, or of economy, were failing to deliver on their promises.

Growing skepticism about Czechoslovakia's trajectory after 1948 amongst the populace became evident starting in 1951; this discontent bred crisis. The Soviet approach to building a Communist state emphasized heavy industry but did not provide the people with the prosperity they had been promised; on the contrary, Czechoslovakia had fallen behind the West in terms of progress. The "inner enemy" could not be held accountable for the unequal living standards, nor for the problems with the food, textile, or power supply. As Knapík and Franc note: "Communist leaders considered it alarming that social tensions also found their outlet in the form of the first spontaneous protests against government policies and that these were supported even by those who were supposed to represent the pillars of society—by the workers" (Knapík and Franc 2011, 21, my translation).

From approximately 1953, when Stalin died, onwards, the regime's reign of terror began to weaken (Kaplan 2005, 63). De-Stalinization, along with a change in political course, began in earnest only after Khrushchev's secret speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, in which he denounced Stalin and his crimes. In the late 1950s, ideological control over art was relaxed somewhat[4]; this change, however, did not mean that Party leadership was prepared to allow substantial political liberalization. In conclusion, the late 1950s witnessed a distancing from the Stalinist version of socialism.

The following decade saw even more forceful attempts at changing the political system, freeing the Czechoslovak people from repression, and democratizing society. The reform faction's ascent to power within the Communist Party ultimately resulted in what is probably the most well-known event in postwar Czechoslovak history—the Prague Spring. In 1967 and 1968, reform-minded Communists, represented by Alexander Dubček, Zdeněk Mlynář, Josef Smrkovský, and others, attempted to establish democratic principles within society and the Party itself and thus create "socialism with a human face." These reforms, steering the political system away from Communist dictatorship and towards democratic socialism, were so progressive that, according to Karel Hrubý,

> the Communist intellectuals striving for a substantial change in the system ultimately progressed towards requirements concerning the renewal of a plurality of opinions and representation in Parliament and comprehensive checks on power; they even accepted the idea of an opposition party […]; they demanded a revision of the legal system and that consideration be given to the rights of non-Communist citizens. (Hrubý 2008, 572, my translation)

It is necessary to add, especially concerning the chapter devoted to the film adaptation of the novel *Žert* (*The Joke* 1968), that before the Prague Spring the artistic scene, particularly that centered around the literary newspaper *Literární noviny*, formed a surrogate space for otherwise standard political discussions common in liberal democracies. This was not a form of political activism, but a situation in which art offered a parallel platform for political discourse. *Literární noviny* and some other magazines for limited, specific readerships were after the Twelfth Congress of the Communist Party in 1962 able to print a limited amount of restrained criticism, thus participating in spreading reformist ideas (Hoppe 2011, 125–126).

Ever since the end of the 1950s, starting at Expo 58 in Brussels, Communist ideologues began to focus on the concept of socialist consumer society that they themselves had created. In the USSR, the situation was similar as Nikita Khrushchev promised citizens would be better supplied not only with food, but with consumer goods as well: "contemporary ideologues assumed that a communism presuming a full sufficiency of all common commodities might be a very near possibility" (Franc 2011, 135, my translation). Socialist consumer society was expected to not only catch up with the West, but to exceed it, especially in making high-quality cultural production available to a wide public. A significant portion of the Czechoslovak population chose the Western middle-class lifestyle as their ideal. Although the growing demands of the people led to the incorporation of Western features into the everyday functioning of society, the establishment of an original model was out of the question (cf. Franc 2011, 134). Thus, domestic goods were produced to substitute their Western counterparts; for example, beginning in 1962, Kofola, a Czech-made soft drink, could be found on store shelves as a replacement for Coca-Cola. This play at "consumer society" (Franc 2011, 140) and unfulfilled promises about material prosperity subsequently caused the discontent to spread further beyond the confines of consumer culture.

The growing understanding that the Communist regime held for consumerism and material prosperity led in the 1960s to the liberalization of all aspects of life. People gained more free time (Saturday ceased to be a working day), which they spent doing hobbies, playing sports, working on their cottages—a form of recreation that was growing in popularity—or watching the increasing amount of programs being broadcast on television. New opportunities for personal, individual development corresponded with a thaw in cultural and social norms. The film *Starci na chmelu* (*Hop-Pickers* 1964) presents a fine example of the progressively

freer climate. This musical's rule-breaking youths, who even engaged in what appeared to be premarital sex—still a taboo at the time—won audiences over; in the movie, the voice of authority belongs to black-clad young men with electric guitars, not to teachers and their strict norms (cf. Bugge 2011, 143). There were also greater opportunities to travel to the West, which helped cultivate more intense contacts with the western cultural influences. From the mid-1960s onwards, "Western" and "local" cultural trends were considered to be complementary, and not necessarily at odds with each other. Western popular culture had a marked effect on local musical taste—in the same year that *Hop-Pickers* hit the silver screen, the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* was released in Czechoslovakia. Society accepted rock music as a legitimate form of expression (occasional repressions targeted not the music itself but certain aspects of the broader youth culture, such as men with long hair, who were pejoratively referred to as *máničky*), and the ruling regime was well aware of its commercial potential (cf. Bugge 2011, 146–147). In 1964 Supraphon Music Publishing produced the first domestic rock singles, and rock music was incorporated into radio programming (a show called "Mikrofórum" went on air) and television broadcasts (coverage of music festivals). The 5 years between 1964 and 1969 are generally considered to be the "golden era" of Czechoslovak pop and rock music. The music, the development of cultivated pastimes, and opportunities for personal and social advancement were all things that led to the gradual democratization of the dictatorship.

Democratization came to a violent end on 21 August 1968, when Czechoslovakia was invaded by five Warsaw Pact nations—the USSR, Bulgaria, East Germany, Poland, and Hungary. Subsequently, the Party was purged once again of "counter-revolutionary" forces; all attempts at democratization and freedom of speech were snubbed out. The resurgent Communist dictatorship, pursuing a neo-Stalinist ideology, began to repress its enemies, starting off a 20-year era known as "normalization" (1969–1989). Jonathan Bolton describes this period as possessing "a mixture of ironic resignation, boredom and often despair" (Bolton 2012, 12). The Communist regime was finally overthrown during the Velvet Revolution of November 1989.

Art and Its Objectives

A cultural and social history is not supposed to fit the same template as a political history. Instead, it would be more appropriate to speak about certain longer-term tendencies. Thus in this book, I attempt to show

the continuity of prewar institutional practices of literary and film artists, which were transferred through time, regardless of changing political regimes. In the interwar period, Czechoslovak national culture was established through enlightenment, education, and its extensive library system. The First Republic was a time of great creativity and plentiful modern art, whose spontaneity, imagination, fresh aesthetics, and "new perspective" left a deep mark. Significant artistic movements developed in the interwar period continued to exist even during the Protectorate (let me at the very least mention the formation of post-avant-garde groups and the constant search for new ways in which art can connect with reality). At the height of Nazi terror, artists felt they could be targeted by the occupier's security forces at any time. Under such unique circumstances, they sought to find a position for themselves that would stand somewhere between the official and outside of official channels, cultural production was also circulated through unofficial means. After 1948, the avant-garde and modernism were officially rejected, but the need for an "authentic expression of self" (Klimešová 2010, 21) did not vanish, even in the all-encompassing atmosphere of collective euphoria. The prewar avant-garde's enduring influence represented one of the subversive tendencies in a period of anti-modernism and totalitarian art.

The national film industry prospered in the free, business-oriented environment of the First Republic, and several filmmakers made a name for themselves beyond of Czechoslovakia's borders (for example, Gustav Machatý with his film *Ecstasy*, 1932). During World War II, the Germans took over the Czechs' modern, well-equipped film studios (the most famous in Prague's Barrandov district were built in the 1930s) and started to use them for their own goals. The occupiers restricted Czech cinema and made their own propaganda films. During World War II, plans were already made to reorganize the postwar film industry. In October 1945, the film industry was nationalized on the basis of a presidential decree in a move that was accepted by the wider cinematic community. The question arises, why was there such overwhelming consensus about the state's changing role in film production? Film historian Ivan Klimeš states that together with the euphoria of the war ending, and the country's overall orientation towards socialism, the experience with centralization initiated by the Germans could have played a role as well (Klimeš 2016, 270–272).

The Czechoslovak film industry became fully subordinate to the Party apparatus in 1948: the medium of film was considered one of the most important ideological instruments for educating the new socialist citizen. To ensure ideological supervision, the Party centralized production;

the goal was to create a closed-off, plan-based system, similar to the one implemented in heavy industry, with all filmmaking plans under the control of two newly created institutions, Central Dramaturgy and the Film Board. This new arrangement was supposed to guarantee that creative employees would fulfill their political duties in the form of story sketches and screenplays that followed Communist ideology[5]; According to Klimeš, "works of film were thus expected to be created only under political order, which essentially demanded the 'artistic-technical' reworking of a selected political thesis" (cf. Klimeš 2000, 137, my translation).

Literature, as well, gained an important role because the engineers of the new social order believed in its "formative influence on the reader's personality" (Šámal 2015, 1099, my translation). Literature has played a role that surpasses its intellectual confines since the Czech National Revival of the mid-1800s, when it served as an expression of national pride and a carrier of national identity. After the Communist takeover, this traditional role was adopted by the political power structures. Literature was considered to be superior to audio-visual art, as this declaration by the head of the screenwriting union, Jiří Síla, demonstrates: "If Czech literature develops rich content and form, Czech film will develop as well" (Síla 1953, 770, my translation). Writers were supposed to bring suitable reading material to the working man and affirm in him revolutionary ideas. The guiding aesthetic was Socialist Realism, an intricate system of norms authorized by the politicians themselves (even including Stalin). Literature was expected to provide film with pre-endorsed themes focusing on the present or the future, while historical content was to be interpreted uniformly as the gradual progress of society towards Communism. The importance of adaptation and literary writers in the state-owned film industry was therefore unassailable (Mareš et al. 2007, 445–453). Ideologically approved writers wrote the screenplays, took part in approving new films, and monitored ideological conformity (the important control and approval institution, the Film Artistic Board, was staffed by distinguished writers such as Marie Majerová, Marie Pujmanová, Karel Konrád, Bohuslav Březovský, and others).

A number of non-subversive, regime-conformist adaptations were created. One example of a political-ideological collaboration between literature and film was the adaptation of Antonín Zápotocký's novel *Vstanou noví bojovníci* (*New Warriors Will Rise* 1950), which portrays the victorious battle between the old, bourgeois order, and the new, socialist one. Antonín Zápotocký was not only a writer: he served as prime minister

during Stalinism, and after Klement Gottwald's death in 1953 he became president. His agitprop novel was adapted into film by Jiří Weiss in 1950. Its schematic plot relates the political transformation of a small village thanks to the tireless efforts of a socialist. It presents an easily comprehensible story of society progressing towards a more just order. The book and its adaptation use a simple ideological template to depict the good and bad characters: on one side there are the antagonists of socialism—the miserly bourgeoisie and a priest; on the other there are simple, poor village folk—the principle revolutionary warriors. According to the protagonist, who in the end is elected to parliament, it is possible to disentangle oneself from the old ways; he also confidently believes that the socialist model will one day prevail worldwide. His words are underscored by a shot of a crowd of people singing "Even if we all fall / New warriors will rise / The red flag shall fly."

K.M. Walló's *Botostroj* (*Giant Shoe-Factory*) is another strictly ideological adaptation, based on the eponymous 1933 novel by Svatopluk Turek (written under the pen name T. Svatopluk). The main message of this 1954 feature was denouncing the owner of an enormous shoe factory, an exploiter of the poor and a Nazi collaborator, and, as a result, showing the necessity of breaking from the capitalist system.

Otakar Vávra, whose artistic ambitions are discussed in Chap. 5, was himself the creator of several highly ideological adaptations. He adapted a canonical socialist realist novel, *Nástup* (*Deployment* 1952) by Václav Řezáč, which, alongside the usual Communist motifs, emphasizes the fight between the Czechs and the Germans. Vávra subsequently directed the so-called Hussite trilogy, updating the image of the medieval Hussite movement, which the Communists had declared to be the first step on the journey to a classless society (Bubeníček 2017, 569–572).

The centralized filmmaking system, staffed by people who often lacked professional competence and were appointed on ideological grounds, eventually brought the state film industry to an impasse. The plan to make more than 50 films a year was not being fulfilled, partly due to the fact that not enough suitable screenplays were being submitted for approval. Therefore, quite soon after the 1948 takeover, it became obvious that the centrally organized industrial production model was not suitable for art, not to mention other economic sectors (cf. Kunakhovich and Skopal 2015, 292). The state-controlled film industry, however, gained new momentum in 1954, when writer and journalist Jiří Marek was appointed general director of Czechoslovak Film, a position he would

hold until the early 1960s. The film industry then underwent a gradual decentralizing process—in place of the existing creative collectives and the screenwriting department, four creative units of qualified film professionals were established.[6] They were led by seasoned directors who had worked in the film industry before 1948, including Vávra, though he occupied the position only for a short time (cf. Szczepanik 2012, 54).

After 1954, therefore, the film industry management system was shaken up, and the result was more effective film production. Creative employees were given greater leeway to seek out topics, prepare screenplays, and appoint film crews, making them more capable of effectively influencing the final form of the film. This crucial step paved the way for the well-known Czech New Wave of the 1960s and its various stylistic manifestations.

The careful differentiation of opinions in the area of literature-film relations can be illustrated by a debate from the mid-1950s that took place in the magazines *Literarní noviny* and *Film doba*. The most frequently occurring terms and phrases in this debate, which was organized in honor of the 10th anniversary of the state-controlled film industry (1955), were *screenplay*, *the approval process*, *the present*, *contemporariness*, and *ideology*. Contributors to the debate referred to Soviet experience and agreed that collaboration between literary writers and filmmakers was necessary, but not yet very frequent. Writers were deemed responsible for film as a whole (the aforementioned shortage of quality screenplays was their fault), whose duties included writing screenplays and participating in the development of film. Contributors also criticized the approval process, describing it as being too lengthy, uncertain, and anonymous. They suggested making the process simpler and more transparent and demanded greater responsibility for a film be placed on its creators (the director and the writer/screenwriter) and the establishment of smaller creative units.

Next the discussion moved on to collaboration between writers and directors, which was supposedly affected by poor dramaturgy. Screenplay and film were designated as independent artistic genres, and how to make film production easier starting already with the screenwriting stage was discussed; writers were urged to keep in mind that film has certain specific attributes (emphasis was placed on film's pictorial aspect).

The latter half of the 1950s saw differences in opinion between the champions of more liberal cultural activities and artistic autonomy, and their opponents. In a speech to the 1956 congress of the Czechoslovak

Writers' Assembly, František Hrubín likened Czech poetry to a swan whose wings were frozen in a block of ice and declared his support for jailed or otherwise persecuted poets—Jiří Kolář, the future Nobel Prize winner Jaroslav Seifert, and František Halas. Hrubín was later harshly reprimanded by the minister of culture, Václav Kopecký, and called a counter-revolutionary and a traitor (Málková 2011, 165). However, not even the attacks of Party ideologues could stop the shift away from a system in which literature, film, and other arts were seen as primarily ideological and subservient to political power. In the late 1950s, the cultural scene's limited horizons began to broaden, a process that would continue on a much wider scale in the relatively liberal years of the upcoming decade.

In the last third of the 1950s, both Czech literature and film saw the emergence of the less "revisionist" poetics of the "poetry of the everyday," which is discussed in this book in connection to the adaptation *Romance for Flugelhorn* (1966). This poetics gradually contributed to asserting the right of both lyrical and epic literature to devote attention to the private sphere, an area not immediately influenced by Marxist ideology. In Czech film, this tendency is represented by the adaptations *Florenc 13.30* (*The Bus Leaves at 1.30* 1957) and *Tam na konečné* (House at the Terminus 1957), which at the time were a breath of fresh air in the oppressive atmosphere. These films, while still a long way off from liberated modernism, pointed to a gradual break in ideological restrictions.

Such debates, along with political developments, resulted in organizational and economic changes in the Czechoslovak film industry, primarily decentralization. Most importantly, autonomy of the creative units was further extended. According to film historian Petr Szczepanik, from 1957 onwards, creative group:

> answered directly to the studio's director, and [were] responsible for all ideological, artistic, and economic issues of the production. Along with the lead dramaturge, they would direct the literary preparation: seek out, discuss, and approve topics and film treatments, as well as (sometimes) shooting scripts (literary screenplays were approved by the director of the studio); they would suggest the appointment of the seven main creative members of the crew (director, director of production, director of photography, editor, architect, sound engineer, and make-up artist) and assess the director's choice of actors; they would supervise the budget; they would manage and

> control production in all its stages, including the daily rushes and the cut; they would organize meetings of the leading crew members, and supervise the wages and employee politics in the units (in 1957 creative units had 47 employees in total); they would compile a partial dramaturgical plan of the unit for the upcoming year. (Szczepanik 2012, 55, my translation)

Although the film industry witnessed a short period of renewed repression in the late 1950s,[7] from 1963 onwards the authority of creative team members was strengthened, and they were given greater creative space. Adaptations were discussed in one of the six creative units. The leaders of creative units and the dramaturge of each adaptation were responsible for selecting the literary material, choosing the director, and defending the adaptation methods at meetings; they were also in regular contact with their superiors at Barrandov and with employees of the Communist apparatus. The emphasis placed on the authorial gesture, which is associated with the Czech New Wave, and a sufficiently liberal attitude to creativity in adaptation-making would not have been possible without the economic and political support provided to directors and screenwriters by the more autonomous creative units. This aspect of production explains why so many declaratively artistic adaptations could come into existence.

Against the "Monostyle"

Czechoslovak cinema of the 1960s gained international renown due to the emerging generation of young New Wave filmmakers—Miloš Forman, Věra Chytilová, Jiří Menzel, Jan Němec, and Ivan Passer—and their artistically challenging films. The variability in genre and style, typical of this period, and the search for new topics to be depicted led to the creation of a significant number of remarkable works that were filmed by both the up-and-coming directors and older filmmakers. The general diversity of artistic approaches that flourished in film and literature contributed to the era's plentiful and variegated adaptation production. Film historian Petr Mareš has called the 1960s an era of creative "symbiosis between literature and film" (Mareš et al. 2008, 545). Directors worked closely with writers, they discussed modern art and aesthetic innovations that transcended the older conventions of the film medium, they wrote screenplays together, and they worked together both in the adaptation process and then on the set. In the 1960s, writers had a

greater understanding of the production process, so directors no longer complained that they were being provided with screenplays that were unsuitable for filming. Writers themselves were at this time members of ideologically artistic board of the Barrandov production teams. The very establishment of these boards, which supplanted the previous model of only one Ideological-Artistic Committee, constituted an important aspect of the decentralization process.

In the 1960s the subversive function of adaptations was changing along with liberalization and the instatement of creative freedoms. The previous harsh restrictions in the form of screenplay authorization, administrative interference in film production, and the distribution of "unsuitable films" were subdued, thus allowing filmmakers space to discuss more openly the social and political climate of the country, the unfulfilled ideals of socialism, or the dogmatic views of socialist art. Lukáš Skupa, a film historian specializing in censorship, interprets the intricate authorization mechanisms as a negotiation forum shared by representatives of censorship agencies, various departments of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, ministries, and the main officials of the film industry—and even the creatives themselves—who, though divided by different interests, ultimately sought consensus:

> In the film industry, the employees of censorship agencies were driven to consider the financial demands of film production and the time involved (had the screenplay in question or a copy of the film already been paid for?), as well as the fact that production involved works in progress (a finished film could possibly have a different tone than a screenplay, which too could change during filming). Furthermore, radical interference with the copy or banning the film's distribution would effectively function as the censors' criticism of themselves or a contradiction to their previous pre-production decision when they had authorized the film's conception. (Skupa 2016, 186, my translation)

Not even the "golden Sixties" were free of conflicts with the state censorship authorities and the exponents of the Party's conservative fraction, and the adaptation authorization process was not entirely free of ideological prejudice. Any significant divergence from socialist art norms still carried the threat of confrontation with the guardians of dogmatism. Moreover, in this period the atmosphere in society was not unchanging; in fact, it changed from year to year. For example, 1965 temporarily

brought in greater restrictions, as a result of which the adaptation of Jiří Mucha's semi-autobiographic novel *Pravděpodobná tvář* (*The Plausible Face*) was left unfinished (cf. Skupa 2016, 114). In the novel, Mucha, who was imprisoned in the 1950s for "seditious actions," depicts how power structures encroached on people's lives and in doing so effectively described the atmosphere during Stalinism. Thus, the Communist Party strove to maintain control over cultural production via censorship agencies and by carefully choosing employees (such as the general director of Czechoslovak Film Alois Poledňák).

Whether a film would actually be made depended on the year it was slated to be made, its subject matter, and the proposed director or screenwriter. The adaptations of Hrubín's poem "Romance for Flugelhorn" and Vančura's *Marketa Lazarova*, which are discussed in Chap. 3 of this book, were not impeded by the authorization process, and were immediately perceived as significant works of art, praised by general director Alois Poledňák in front of the Communist Party's ideological committee. These two films were not expected to encounter authorization problems, as both were the flagship projects of the production plans in the years they were made. Films based on historical subject matter, such as *Marketa Lazarova*, were seldom problematic, and *Romance for Flugelhorn* was directed by Otakar Vávra, who enjoyed a good relationship with the authorization agencies and was one of the most established directors of the era.

The adaptation of Kundera's novel *The Joke*, which is the focus of the last chapter, made its way to the screen through a more circuitous route. The film treatment of this ideologically inconvenient book (which brought to light the still unresolved social traumas of the 1950s) was initially banned, and was only enabled by the temporary abolishment of censorship in July 1968. This brief reprieve, which lasted only until September of the following year, made possible the release of several films that would have otherwise remained in the vault (cf. Skupa 2016, 107). The primary objective of subversion becomes more complex as the ideological atmosphere of the 1960s comes into focus—it is no longer enough to monitor the political point of view, but it is also crucial to pay attention to medium and style.

Dina Iordanova writes that New Wave directors "made quietly subversive films that looked at present-day realities" (Iordanova 2003, 100). She pinpoints the shift from ideological viewpoints to the reflection of everyday life situations, which Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel, and

Ivan Passer portrayed humorously in their films. Jonathan Owen has also picked up on the subversive aspects of such films; he claims that in them "reality is itself never fully comprehensible and legible, but always opaque, ambiguous and multifaceted" (Owen 2011, 10). The tendency to seek autonomous artistic expression of ordinary people's lives established itself in Czech literature in the late 1950s. Filmmakers who relied on literary antecedents saw Czech literature as a wellspring of productive topics because it engaged in contemporary social analysis. Filmmakers' interest in the socially resonant literature of the 1960s can be illustrated by one of its many examples: the anthology film *Perličky na dně* (*Pearls of the Deep* 1965), an adaptation of Bohumil Hrabal's eponymous short story collection. Several emerging New Wave directors—Věra Chytilová, Jan Němec, Evald Schorm, Jaromil Jireš, and Jiří Menzel—collaborated on the film. The book, as well as the author himself, appealed to these filmmakers because Hrabal, with his focus on the minutiae of everyday life and the language of his characters, represented a new, unique literary voice. In mid-1963, one of these young directors—Jaromil Jireš—sent a letter on behalf of the group to dramaturge Ladislav Fikar. In his letter, he outlines the reasons these filmmakers wished to make a film adaptation of Hrabal's texts: he says that the short stories provoked a "spontaneous response" from these young creatives. The main allure was the figure of Hrabal: a surprisingly energetic man on society's fringe, someone who defies conventions. The young directors argued that the artistic inclination toward authenticity, typical of the period, was an attribute of film rather than literature: "These people [Hrabal's characters] continue to be a taboo subject in film, although through their on-screen authenticity they could make an even more remarkable and convincing impression than in literature" (Jireš 1969, my translation). They appreciated Hrabal's new perspective as well as his poetics: fascination with everyday life, the accent on the ambiguity of the world, the dialogues of characters located at society's fringes, and an attempt to capture the atmosphere of the day.[8] Thus, they aimed to introduce the audience to everyday features of the present day without resorting to typification. One way to do this was to employ non-actors whose uneducated portrayals could express the human experience more authentically.

A defining aspect of the adaptations made in the 1960s is an awareness of the specific nature of the audio-visual imagination, and the subsequent need to process linguistic and stylistic attributes of books using film-specific means. Many Czech filmmakers were familiar with

the institutional practices and stylistic tendencies of modern European film, as well as its artistic principles, which made possible introspective approaches that had hitherto been restricted to literature: abstraction, subjectivity, and reflexivity (Kovács 2007, 140). A book's film counterpart was supposed to be an independent work of art, and transformations of "unfilmable" material signified film's maturity as a medium. The contemporary press discussed the artistic metamorphosis of Czech cinema, the "self-expression" of the up-and-coming generation of filmmakers, the emergent auteurism, which contrasted with the monolithically prescribed style of the time, and the methods discredited by schematism seen as needing to be overcome (cf. Kadár 1966, 95). Film's increasingly innovative aesthetics strengthened its position within the national culture; writers themselves emphasized film's sovereignty. Literature was no longer the master of film.

One experiment in adaptation, one that stood in contrast to the approaches favored in the 1950s (in its coherence of meaning, its emphasis on characterization, etc.) is the film *Démanty noci* (*Diamonds of the Night* 1964) by another New Wave director, Jan Němec. This film is based on Arnošt Lustig's short story "Tma nemá stín" ("Darkness Casts No Shadow"). The plot revolves around two boys' escape from a Nazi deportation train. They flee through a forest, exhausted, hungry, and cold, and are ultimately caught by a German militia consisting of elderly men no longer able to fight in the war itself. The film's structure is complicated by its mixing of the boys' journey to freedom with dream-like images, reminiscences, and memories. According to Peter Hames, Němec "is not interested in telling a story or explaining the actions of his characters, but in creating a sense of identification with their mental state" (Hames 2005, 168). Along with its rejection of outdated artistic approaches, *Diamonds of the Night* marks a thematic shift towards the Holocaust and the fate of the Jews. In the late 1950s, several books were published in which Czech authors eschewed ideological schemata in portraying the horrors of war and the extermination of the Jewish people. Some of these works were subsequently made into films (*Transport z ráje* 1962 (*Transport from Paradise)*; *…a pátý jezdec je Strach* 1964 (*The Fifth Horseman is Fear*); *Dita Saxová* 1967).

A suggestive example of subversive adaptation, which also happens to be closely connected to the social situation of the early 1960s, is the 1965 film *Obchod na korze* (*The Shop on Main Street*) by the directorial pair, the Slovak Ján Kadár and the Czech Elmar Klos. It was a

remarkable artistic achievement and the first Czechoslovak film to ever receive an Academy Award. Its setting, World War II–era Slovakia, brought back into the public consciousness Slovakia's role in the conflict, when it was an independent state allied with Nazi Germany. The film, set in 1942, is concerned with the carpenter Tono Brtko, who becomes the Aryan overseer of a shop belonging to Mrs. Lautmannová. The elderly, deaf woman has no idea what is happening. She reckons that Tono, who in reality is supposed to seize her possessions, works for her as her helper. When Mrs. Lautmannová is not deported alongside the town's other Jews, Tono worries that he will be prosecuted for harboring a Jewish person. He hides the woman in a cellar, and when he accidentally kills her, he hangs himself. Hames notes, "The film is a grim moral fable that works on a number of levels. Tono is a proverbial 'little man', whose main object is to stay out of trouble, and he wants life to continue as normal. […]. The film shows how Tono's minor compromises take him on a path leading to virtual collusion but it avoids simple moral statements through its emphasis on the central relationship" (Hames 2009, 104). In the Communist interpretation of World War II, Slovakia's involvement had been reduced to a ritual emphasis on the national anti-Nazi uprising in 1944, without reflecting the full complexity of the situation in the Slovak Republic. This film thus signified a gradual change in how recent history was viewed and formed a part of the reform process in Slovakia.

At the very close of the decade discussed—that is, after the abolition of censorship—an adaptation was made that reveals just how far cinema had moved from socialist poetics. The film, Pavel Juráček's *Případ pro začínajícího kata* (*Case for a Rookie Hangman* 1969), which is a loose adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels* that makes reference to its literary predecessor in the names of the characters and significant motifs,[9] examines the absurdity of fate in a mechanized, estranged world. Unlike in Swift's novel, however, the film's protagonist, Lemuel Gulliver, lands in a country named Balnibarbi, which is modelled on 1960s Czechoslovakia. The world through which Gulliver travels is characterized "as both familiar and unfamiliar, where logical connections have been destroyed" (Hames 2009, 135). Pavel Juráček belonged to a younger group of directors, who viewed Communism from a distance, and saw it as a bizarre and dangerous menagerie (disregarding the fact that Juráček was himself a member of Communist Party for some time). To him, the "Stalinist idealism" of the Youth Communist League of 1949 was an unfamiliar

sentiment and he had no illusions of Communism bringing any applicable solutions to social problems. Juráček's film presents a poignant analysis of the world of socialism based on "make believe"—a convention of pretending accompanied by permanent and obtrusive police surveillance. The adaptation, based on an 18th-century text, shows the irreversible decay of the Communist regime and its elites. Some of the absurdities Gulliver encounters are explained to him, but these explanations only breed further absurdity. The film is therefore "much more than a political parable or a transferring to film of real absurdities of the bureaucratic world" (Hames 2009, 135); it also shows the absurdity in everyday human actions.

The year 1968 saw a change in Party leadership, and the installment of a new, reinvigorated authoritarian regime. Political liberties and civil rights were curtailed anew, and they stayed that way until the end of Communism in 1989. The powers that be were, again, searching for ways to control and manage cultural production. In the film industry these changes amounted to the end of film production's decentralized structure, purges on all levels, halting the production of all ideologically "unsuitable" projects, and locking all "politically unsuitable" films in the vault.

Against the Grain

The writers, directors, screenwriters, dramaturges, and artists discussed in this book lived and worked in a country ruled by a Communist dictatorship. Their work was codetermined by political structures, the organization of production in the state-controlled film industry, the economic situation of the country, and so on. Even in the most liberal periods they encountered limits to their autonomy.[10] Many were imperiled by the ever-present possibility of political intervention: Party officials could limit or even put a stop to their artistic career and lock up already-completed films.

The Communist putsch of 1948 brought with it a radical transformation of social institutions, but society did not break entirely from the culture of prewar Czechoslovakia.[11] A great impact in the area of remembering "the old times" was enjoyed by interwar cultural icon, theater and film actor, and comic Jan Werich, whose partner Jiří Voskovec had emigrated to the USA after the events of 1948. Viewers encountered Werich on the film screen as well as in new productions of Werich and Voskovec's plays from the 1930s, which sometimes included variously

veiled anti-regime remarks.[12] In his shows, Werich toyed with norms that should have officially been left alone. His publicly pronounced satire made him into a subversive artist because he took an ideological symbol, transformed it into aesthetic material, and used it in a theater production, thus creating political subversion. When it was impossible to talk openly, Werich and others were moved to converse in Aesopian language, which, as socialism progressed, nearly became a dominant code in cultural communication. Everything said aloud became an allegory, as people presumed symbolic meanings even in what seemed to be passing references or infantile jokes. Consumers had been conditioned to understand culture as being multi-layered on principle, and implanted meanings into messages: the meanings were only present as a potential or latency, which was nonetheless acceptable in the given code. A portion of the viewers were pre-disposed to this kind of reading, as everything was read, at least at some level, politically.

Subversion, the topic of this book, often pointed at untouchable social, political, or sexual taboos, indirectly working with them and transforming them. Although subversive adaptations were not always made intentionally, such films nonetheless created the conditions for a subversive reading. Potential subversion was based on the "coded" heterogeneity of artistic representation, which the political apparatus attempted to control, reduce, and eliminate. To this end it used various means, such as censorship, economic limitations, restrictions in the form of approval processes, and, finally, official reception in magazines and newspapers.

In a "proper" socialist-realist work of art, ideological norms were implemented so seamlessly that any other contrary reading was severely limited. However, even in cases like these, it was possible to read such works "against the grain"—that is, to interpret them in a way that consciously went against the intention of their creators. Such an interpretation could have been based on a reversal of the declared values, made possible by the fact that they were presented too simply and directly and did not therefore resemble reality much. It is, however, generally true that socialist-realist novels and the films based on them are internally homogeneous: the good character is good, the bad character is bad, and the story ends predictably. The basic plane of the text corresponded with all its other planes, and the whole tended towards a conformist effect. By contrast, a multi-layered, heterogeneous artefact could be interpreted in various ways, with some interpretations emphasizing divergence from period norms.

Chapter 2, "Adaptation as Subterfuge," deals with an adaptation created in the first half of the 1950s, a time when institutions within the Czechoslovak state-controlled cultural sector were expected to work tirelessly toward promoting Communist values. In 1954, Václav Krška adapted the work of the nationally beloved modernist author Fráňa Šrámek, *Stříbrný vítr* (*Silvery Wind* 1910). When the film was released after a 2-year delay in 1956, it was something of a revelation; it touched upon subjects that the literary and cinematic Socialist Realism of the time had expressly excluded from its program. The film *Silvery Wind* (1954) differed from contemporary film productions in its grasp of human existence, as it examined themes of individuality and subjectivity, the painful transition from adolescence into adulthood, disillusionment, the rebellion of sons against their fathers, and remembrances of first loves. However, there was more to Krška's *Silvery Wind* than the picturesque depiction of fragile youth and nostalgia for years past. In applying an alternative perspective to the film, the viewer can uncover heretofore hidden meanings. From this perspective, analyzing the adaptation process—resulting in a film which features (for the time) bold depictions of male nudity, expresses adoration of the profound friendship between boys, and is skeptical toward heterosexual relationships—reveals a successful subterfuge aimed at the contemporary guardians of heterosexual values.

Chapter 3, "Adaptation as Play," shows how implicit messages could be delivered to audiences by appropriating stories officially meant for children. It diverges from the concept of Czech literature on screen because it is concerned with adaptations of the works of Jules Verne. The director and artist Karel Zeman did not strive for a "faithful adaptation monolith" and his artistic projects were greatly influenced by Czech aesthetic, social, and political movements. Both films could be enjoyed by children due to their adventurous and fantastical nature, but a second layer of meanings was also crafted with adult audiences in mind. *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* (1958), an adaptation of Verne's novel *Face au drapeau* of 1896 (*Facing the Flag* 1897) focuses on a serious topic—the constant threat of atomic war. This adaptation, however, does not promote the official political positions of the ruling Communist Party; it avoids this type of political discourse altogether and instead pursues a universally comprehensible message about personal freedom, responsibility, and the dangers of uncontrolled technological progress. *The Stolen Airship* (1966) also treats other serious topics, such as how easily reality can be distorted through the media and the corruption of state

police forces, but the overwhelmingly parodic and slapstick style of the adaptation somewhat obscures them. The adaptation *The Stolen Airship* effectively functions as a carnival of forms and symbols—and therein lies an innovative artistic gesture. The most revered symbols of Austria-Hungary and the Belle Époque, in which the story is set, are the subjects of this carnivalization. By foregrounding playfulness and clever genre usage, Zeman managed to get away with criticism aimed at those in power.

Chapter 4, "Adaptation as Challenge," brings us to a time when Czech New Wave cinema was ascendant and filmmakers were searching for new themes as well as new methods to express them. The chapter focuses on the development of an increasingly visually oriented culture. In the 1960s, the influence of visual media was on the rise, a trend illustrated by adaptations of two canonical books previously thought "unfilmable." First, František Vláčil reworked Vladislav Vančura's *Marketa Lazarová* (1931), a book valued for its highly aesthetical composition, style, and language. Vančura was a remarkable writer whose fondness for unusual expressions distinguished his writing style. The novel *Marketa Lazarová* stands out for the comments and musings of its self-reflexive narrator, who repeatedly calls attention to himself and questions the story, the characters, and their behavior. These features of the novel were long considered unique to the medium of literature, but nonetheless Vláčil managed to turn the book into a film that is still considered to be the most important Czech film of all time. Second, Otakar Vávra took František Hrubín's long poem *Romance for Flugelhorn* (1962) and adapted its verse into images filled with delicate, lyrical beauty hitherto thought to be only possible in verbal art. These successful adaptations of "unfilmable" works from the Czech literary canon can be recognized as subversive readings of literary texts because they disrupt the once sovereign reign of words over culture.

Chapter 5, "Adaptation as a Reflection of the Zeitgeist," deals with Jaromil Jireš's adaptation of Milan Kundera's novel *The Joke* (1967). When the novel was published, it caused a sensation because its narrative depicts Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s unfavorably. Jireš, one of the filmmakers belonging to the Czech New Wave, only finished the adaptation after the country had already been invaded by the Soviet army. In this film, the subversive interpretation of historical events unfolds openly within the film's narrative rather than being hidden in symbols and subtexts as it might have been in an earlier period. The

adaptation stands against Stalinism's oppressive dogmas and methods, it demystifies the workings of a Communist regime, and it seeks answers about the place of both the victim and oppressor in the reformed state. At the same time, the work resonates with larger political themes, criticizing those who have conveniently short memories and are deliberately oblivious to their previous sins. In an epoch in which many people wanted to forget the shameful events of the 1950s, the adaptation drags these events to light and presents them for all to see, opposing the desire to suppress the past and forcing audiences to deal with it.

Notes

1. Kevin McDermott observes that "[…] everyday life in the cultural field was a permanent cycle of conflict-ridden discussions and stand-offs between younger generally radical artists, their elder professional colleagues and various party-state cultural and censorship functionaries. But compromises were possible" (McDermott 2015, 113).
2. In this I partially echo Simone Murray's claim that "Adapted texts may be interesting, in short, not so much for their intricate ideological encodings, but for the way they illuminate the context of their own production" (Murray 2012, 5). I am, however, reluctant to follow her fully in her eager abandonment of textual studies, and it is not because they provide me with an "intellectual comfort zone" (Murray 2012, 4). Film adaptation can be viewed in a number of ways that are not always necessarily in accord. In my approach I do not want to leave behind the ingenious and creative methods filmmakers used to mold the discussed adaptations in their own image. These particular directors and screenwriters do not aim to slavishly imitate the books, but strive to display their artistic abilities through the adaptation process, an approach that still interests me.
3. The crossing of media boundaries is the focus of the theory formulated by Werner Wolf and Irina Rajewsky. Alice Jedličková, who works with the theory of intermediality in the Czech context, claims that intermedia poetics are: "viable in dialogue with media studies and newer concepts (such as the fictional worlds theory) and it provides findings valuable for, e.g., research into cultural construction of identity; it is also successful in connection to traditional genre studies, iconological approaches to art history, structural narratology…" (Jedličková 2011, 24, my translation).
4. After 1953, social changes and the criticism of dogmatism and formulaic portrayals brought about a demand for "a greater variety of genres in art

production (particularly for comedies and satire) and support for various forms of popular entertainment" (Knapík 2015, 53, my translation).

5. The rigorous politically based measures implemented in the film industry are revealed in the transcript of a meeting of Party dogmatists employed by the Board of Culture, one of the Party's key surveillance institutes, held on 21 November 1949:

   > Comrade Hendrych [Culture Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia] […] We need such an organ which would help ideologically and surveilled the ideology of film. This is a demand which cannot be discounted. […]
   > We need to create a Party group of creatives, with a Party leadership. It should include the best directors and screenwriters, and they should discuss all film issues as they pertain to the Party.
   > That would take care of all the work, while the management of the film is down to the comrades who are in Film, that is, comrade Macháček [director of Czechoslovak Film in 1948–1954], and the whole director board that manages those things.
   > Every screenplay that goes into production should be signed by comrade Macháček, and after the board's decision, by comrade Kopecký. Apart from that, it is necessary to put together a group that would see the films before they are released.
   > Comrade Kopecký [at this time the Minister of Information] remarked that a film cannot be released before it is seen by comrade President. (Klimeš 2000, 162–163, my translation)

6. Since 1945 when the film industry came under state control there were several types of units prevailing in film production: production groups (1945–1948), creative collectives (1948–1951), the central Collective Board with an internal screenwriting department (1951–1954), and creative units (1954–1970) (see Szczepanik's typology 2013, 121).
7. The journey towards the 1960s was far from smooth, as is evident from the events of the first Festival of Czechoslovak Film held in Banská Bystrica in 1959, which saw harsh criticism of liberalizing tendencies. It was made obvious that the portrayal of contemporary problems had its limits, and the late 1950s proved to be too early to be overly critical about society-wide issues. Several films were withdrawn from cinemas, among them Václav Krška's adaptation *Zde jsou lvi* (*Here Be Dragons* 1958) based on Oldřich Daněk's book.
8. One of those young directors, Jiří Menzel, focused on Hrabal throughout his career. In 1968, he was awarded an Academy Award for his adaptation of Hrabal's novel *Ostře sledované vlaky* (*Closely Watched Trains* 1966).

9. References are also made to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* and to Franz Kafka's literary world.
10. František Daniel offers an interesting remembrance of working in a Communist dictatorship: "Filmmakers became aware that there were some officially approved and publicly heralded philosophical concepts and premises that could be used in making films filled with meaning: One of them was the authoritatively proclaimed humanism. The other was the regime's pledge to defend national integrity and cultural traditions. These were acceptable slogans, if you will, and therefore we could use them as frameworks within which to fight against the inhuman and anti-national elements that the official politics imposed upon our society. This tactic provided us with a "playground" where we could experiment with both form and substance in our films and gave us a certain freedom to pursue our work" (Daniel 1983, 53).
11. The top-down, forced attempts to make the year 1948 a historical watershed was, it seems, futile. Despite all their efforts, Party ideologues failed to entirely destroy the cultural link to the avant-garde, especially Cubism, Poetism, and Surrealism. According to art theorist Jindřich Chalupecký, who observed the transformation of the visual arts in the 1950s, a number of artists and teachers adjusted to the new order. Modern art, labelled "bourgeois" in period-speak and despised by the establishment, did not disappear completely. From the "dialogue of the deaf" between artists and their critics, the artists understood that what was asked of them was something "which would cause them to no longer be artists, and their critics understood from their actions, speech, and defense that those artists are no use to them" (Chalupecký 1999, 155, my translation). One of the artists who defied the cultural demands of the era was (according to Chalupecký) Czech graphic artist and painter Vladimír Boudník (1924–1968). During the most crushing repression (in the late 1940s and early 1950s), Boudník organized unauthorized conceptual performances on the streets of Prague, designed to cultivate the public's imagination. He discovered the raw reality of everyday life in the cracked walls of buildings, in which he added colored stains and fantastic images. His art commanded attention: people stopped to talk to him on the street. Under the inhospitable conditions of Stalinist socialism, he realized associative methods of modern art in public places and established a new kind of connection between the artist and recipient, who partook in the creative act. Boudník's artistic expression, which created neither ideology nor an aesthetic image and effect, transcended political norms. His independent, apolitical escape into an aesthetic world could be construed as an expression of subversive subjectivism. The doctrine of Socialist Realism preferred the ideological function to be structurally dominant. Being apolitical at a highly political time constituted a subversive act because it positioned the artist against socialist society and the goal of achieving Communism.

12. One of the best known satirical allusions is this one from 1955: "Against the sky, there was outlined this terrific building. An enormous building. A hell of a building. And it had a tower sticking out of it, and another tower, and another tower. And it was all ugly!" These sentences were uttered during one of Werich's *forbínas,* short sketches in front of the curtain, during the play *Caesar*. At the time there was a new hotel in Prague. The Internacionál, as it was known, was built in the socialist realist style and intended originally as luxury accommodations for Soviet counsels staying in Prague. The building, which was reminiscent of a cake, and whose tower was topped by a five-pointed star, clashed thoroughly with Prague architecture, and thus it earned nicknames such as "Lomonosov University" or "a mad confectioner's dream."

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CHAPTER 2

Adaptation as Subterfuge: *Silvery Wind*

The film *Silvery Wind* by director Václav Krška, based on Fráňa Šrámek's novel of the same name, was made in 1954, when, despite the beginning thaw, conditions in the country remained adverse to freedom of artistic expression. However, coming on to 1956 when the adaptation was released (after a 2-year delay), both ideological pressure and dogmatic approaches to art had abated. *Silvery Wind* resonates with these changes as it differed from the then-standard portrayals of fervent socialism. It conveyed to the audience doubts about fundamental aspects of life and touched upon subjects that the literary and cinematic socialist realism of the time had expressly excluded from its program. *Silvery Wind* distinguished itself in its grasp of human existence, as it examines themes of individuality and subjectivity, the painful transition from adolescence into adulthood, disillusionment, the rebellion of sons against their fathers, and remembrances of first loves. Šrámek's central metaphor—the titular *silvery wind*—enabled generations of readers and later film viewers to recall their youth, dream about a life in harmony with nature, and idealize the picturesque landscape of South Bohemia. The blowing of the silvery wind symbolizes not only the fragility of youth, but also longing for years past. Some viewers perceived the film as a nostalgic reminiscence of life during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy or the First Czechoslovak Republic, which for a portion of the Czech and Slovak public at the time represented a "dream of their youth." Such a nostalgic reminiscence was subversive because, as the historian Andrea Orzoff writes, "discussion

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or commemoration of the First Republic and its leaders took on new significance as symbols of political protest" (Orzoff 2009, 216).

My further commentary is aimed at demonstrating how Krška's audio-visual interpretation of Šrámek's text, carried out in a nostalgic mode and utilizing portrayals of "small events" and original poetic techniques, contributed to the enforcement of private values and the establishment of continuity with prewar culture. But there is another factor involved in the film's inception, one that shifts the perception of the film in a crucial way. While interpreting the adaptation, it is necessary to consider sources in which Václav Krška speaks about his homosexuality (mainly statements given at police and court proceedings from the 1930s). When Krška was an adolescent, homosexuality was a criminal offense. In the 1950s, it remained illegal, and was concealed and silenced. Krška's earlier literary and cinematic work, when viewed in light of this information, led me to hypothesize that the adaptation of Šrámek's *Silvery Wind* speaks much about the director's own homosexual experience. It is not possible, however, to say that this film is merely Krška's sublimation of his sexual orientation, as no clear evidence exists to support such a claim. My hypothesis, based on the sources available, is therefore more restrained: the director adapted *Silvery Wind* in a way that enabled some viewers to perceive it as a refined allegory. Applying such subversive perspective to the film, the viewer can uncover its heretofore unseen meanings (Skupa 2010, 19). In this light the adaptation process—resulting in a film that features (for its time) bold depictions of male nudity, expresses adoration of a profound friendship between boys, and is skeptical towards heterosexual relationships—appears to successfully subvert the contemporary guardians of heterosexual values.

Additionally, I will address another layer of interpretation that can be applied to *Silvery Wind*, which, however, diverges somewhat from my main focus. It follows the second life of the film after the lead female actress, Jana Rybářová, committed suicide in 1957. This facet of the adaptation is of interest to me mostly due to the intensity with which the film's audience identified this newly emerged actress with her role of "crazy Anička."

Before starting on the main points of the interpretation, I will briefly summarize the film's plot. *Silvery Wind* is set in a small town in South Bohemia, whose depictions in the film alternate with nature scenes. The narrative centers on Jan Ratkin, a student and poet, whose experiences encompass the pain of romance and heartbreak, youth's rebelliousness,

and revolt against petty bourgeois conventions and religion. Šrámek's novel, covering a long period in the boy's life (from 12 to 18 years of age), could quite obviously be read as a coming-of-age story. Although in the adaptation the time span depicted is reduced to 1 year, the film still emphasizes the dynamics of a sentimental upbringing and centers on the emotional state of the main character, which oscillates between the optimism of a full, authentic life and the resigned emptiness of existence. The romantic and erotic layer of the narrative is embodied by Ratkin's relationship with Anička, an unstable girl who gives into the boy's affections one moment and resists them the next. Ratkin's life experience, meanwhile, is also affected by his platonic relationship with an aging actress and his bleak sexual encounter with an older widow, which leaves him bitterly disappointed. His revolt against conventions and religion is expressed most poignantly in his conflict with the catechist, in his friendship with Zach (an older student who introduces Ratkin to anti-church writings), and in his conflict with his father, a court councilman and a typical representative of the petty bourgeoisie. Ratkin's uncle Jiří, recently back from travelling through exotic lands, understands his strong emotions and romantic desires. As someone who appears to have escaped small town life, Jiří represents for Ratkin an ideal worth following. As the film ends, Zach is expelled from school, while Ratkin is saved by a young teacher, Ramler. At the same time Ratkin learns that his uncle has committed suicide by shooting himself. His last encounter with Anička provides a conclusion to both their failed relationship and Ratkin's life so far.[1]

National Artists

I will now provide an outline of the position Fráňa Šrámek held in Czech culture and the reasons for the uncommon popularity of his novel with readers at the time of its publication. Fráňa Šrámek (1877–1952), Czech poet, novelist, and playwright, published *Stříbrný vítr* (*Silvery Wind*) in 1910, when he was 33 years old. At the time he was already an accomplished author, whose writings bore similarities to the works of the poets and writers of the Czech Modernist movement, as well as Czech Symbolism, Impressionism, and Decadence.[2] Šrámek's personal life was tumultuous: after he rebelled against his father and abandoned his law studies, he devoted all his time to literary pursuits, and thus lived

without a steady income. Socially and artistically, he adopted anarchist views and publicly opposed war and militarism.

Šrámek's political views are reflected in his collection of poems called *Modrý a rudý* (*The Blue and the Crimson* 1906). He was sentenced to prison for four weeks for his poem "Píšou mi psaní" ("They Write Me a Letter") and as a result was later demoted to the rank of private. The verses combine motifs of rebellion with anarchist revolt. In Czech, the poem's gesture, affecting to this day, is expressed in the melodiousness of the verses. His verse reflects the tendency towards a more trivial mode of expression (this triviality interestingly enough alternates with the mentioned complex Symbolist phase connected to the metaphysical Czech poet Otokar Březina) by working with the diction of a folk song: being enlisted into military service is a recurring theme in such songs, which Šrámek imitates in the poem. This form of the poem—along with the theme of revolt against military (and, more generally, social) power—contributed much to its popularity.[3] The sentiments he expressed were, after all, quite commonly held by people of Šrámek's generation. Šrámek began to mature as an author in the first decade of the 20th century, a time pervaded by an apocalyptic atmosphere. Czech people from all social classes felt they were being oppressed by Habsburg rule and saw revolt and bringing down the monarchy as a way out of tyranny. And apocalypse nearly did come—4 years after the publication of *Silvery Wind*, World War I broke out. Young cultural elites enlisted to fight. Those who believed what they were told going into the war quickly lost that belief on the front. On the battlefield it became clear that civil and moral values had no actual merit, that present friendships were what was important. The war mowed down its "Ratkins" in a terrifying way, making anarchists' explosive protests in the heretofore "harmonious" patriarchal world seem suddenly idyllic.

Silvery Wind received a warm welcome from a wide spectrum of readers. Its influence persisted throughout the entire 20th century. It brought—as a reviewer for the newspaper *Lidové noviny* noted 30 years after its publication—"epidemics, an avalanche-like daze, which we fell into in 1910, 1911 and 1912, like drunken flies giddy from sweetness" (M. N. 1940, 4, my translation). Its earliest readers were members of Šrámek's artistic generation who had had a taste of bohemianism and anarchism, and also included grammar school students versed in the Habsburg school system's ways. Early-20th-century reviewers noted that the plot of the novel consists of the inner development of a sensitive, restless child. Karel

Sezima, literary critic and writer, found the main character to be a nervous child,

> whose exceedingly changeable feelings are usually shaken by sad thoughts. Bewitched by dissimilar objects, they easily transform into feelings of opposite quality. The boy abounds in imagination and tenderness; his eyes are piercing, derisive, and sorrowful. (Sezima 1911, 27, my translation)

At the time of its conception, *Silvery Wind* was perceived as a novel about a young man's desire to live a fulfilling life, defined by excitement and love for life and for a girl. It was also read as an expression of melancholy and regret stemming from the realization that youth's ideals cannot be attained. It was also viewed as a painful novel, as every young person, according to Šrámek, "leaves a piece of flesh on every thorn" (Šrámek 1955, 238, my translation). The book's reviewers took note of the rebelliousness of youth against the force embodied by their fathers' generation, a revolt against conventions, old systems and values, bureaucracy, and religion. Other reviewers—influenced by modern art and the radical break in the aesthetic tradition, and looking for new sources of reading pleasure—pointed to the artistic aptitude with which Šrámek portrays fleeting moments of happiness, in which youth declares its love of life. The themes of the novel were attacked by advocates of the patriarchy for giving into the contemporary criticisms of "the malignancy of schools, the bigotry and pedantry of teachers and the villainous catechist" (Jež 1910, 283, my translation) and for supporting a break from parents and God.

Four years after the book's publication, World War I broke out, and boys barely out of school, still harboring the ideals of youth, suddenly found themselves on Europe's battlefields. The silvery wind, however, continued to blow even after the atrocities of the war ended. Contemporary reviews reveal that the novel's lyrical sensuality still inspired perceptivity and an enthusiastic outlook on the world. At Šrámek's 50th birthday celebration in 1927, he was praised as a poet of wistful heart, affecting words, and sorrowful melodies. Several years later, poet Josef Hora noted that Šrámek's originally antimilitarist songs had entered the repertoire of the interwar tramping movement and that they were sung by campfires without it always being known who wrote them. According to Hora, the contemporary popularity of Šrámek's writing reflected the recurring myth of the Czech countryside, an idyllic place of calm repose, as opposed to the feverish environment

of the city, because, as he writes, the youth of the time found Šrámek's poetry "under the high sky, in the movement of clouds and in the shadow of green hillsides" (Hora 1931, 1, my translation). Šrámek's recognition as the nation's poet was surely helped by the author's non-conflicting nature, his proximity to the president T.G. Masaryk, and his friendship with one of the most renowned interwar authors, the democrat journalist Karel Čapek. Čapek's words, "it is beautiful to be Šrámek," further illustrate the author's cult status. In the post-World War II period, the book was read—as the exiled writer and journalist Josef Jedlička asserts—

> as an account of a happier world, full of great emotions and private passions, whose place in this world was diminishing; and [as] a melancholy message about the unstoppable fleeting of youth, which changes irreversibly into an age of reason and maturity. (Jedlička 2009, 44, my translation)

This remark is important as it highlights an innate desire for private life, which not even the radical social changes of the early 1950s could eradicate.

I would like to close my examination of the popularity of Šrámek's writings—which I have attributed to the melodiousness of his verse and the sensuality of his books and their propensity for evoking nature—with the ironic remarks of one of the most important turn-of-the-century and early-20th-century Czech literary critics, F.X. Šalda (1867–1937). In 1926, Šalda likened the conception of Šrámek's writings to preserving apricots, in his essay "Fráňa Šrámek čili jak konservovati meruňky" (Fráňa Šrámek, or, How to Conserve Apricots; it is necessary to add that preserved apricots—or apricot jam—are a Central European phenomenon par excellence). According to Šalda, a writer's success can be achieved by preserving characters, themes, and events in sugar or vinegar, or by dehydrating them. In the case of *Silvery Wind*, Šrámek pickles youth (whose praises he sings in the novel) in melancholy.[4] In Šalda's piercing gaze, the reason for Šrámek's popularity emerges:

> Šrámek's fiftieth birthday was celebrated very loudly; superlatives capable of burying greater authors than Šrámek were thrown in the air, exploded, cracked, deafened. Why, though? It is because Šrámek does not require polarization, neither poetic nor ideological; he is mainly a creature of compromise, a poet of the senses, nature, mood, ease; he never attained any order in his writing. He has remained the anarchist he was in his beginnings, only appearing in muted colors now, older and more settled. All these negations are particularly favored by the Czech people of today. They do not

> demand commitment; they are boundlessly comfortable, and thus, likeable. … Nature and life are today's most popular slogans; if you seek success, call upon them at least once a week. (Šalda 1963, 224–225, my translation)

These aspects of the novel settled deep into the audience's consciousness and remained there long after people stopped actually reading Šrámek's book. Ratkin's image acquired a gloomy, melancholic, and easily pleasing form.

A "Ratkinesque" desire for youthful enchantment still resonated in the 1970s. *A řeka mu zpívala* (*And the River Sang to Him*), a 1976 documentary devoted to the directorial work of Václav Krška, sees the aged actors of *Silvery Wind* revisiting the original filming locations. The main actor, Eduard Cupák, walks again through the streets of Písek and, accompanied by the film's original soundtrack, seeks out these places. The camera pans over linear elements of the urban landscape, such as a bridge and a promenade; aerial scenes (shot from a crane) depict the rural landscape of South Bohemia, effectively entering this documentary about Krška into a dialogue with the visual effects of his films.

Placing the aged actors into the film's original settings elicits nostalgia. Here metalepsis is also employed: the narrative about actors returning to Písek overlaps with the fictional reality that they helped create. Narrative shots of Eduard Cupák reminiscing about times past alternate with scenes from *Silvery Wind*. A group of musicians suddenly appears on the streets he is walking on. A weather-worn balcony transforms into its former self and Ratkin's old love Anička appears. The documentary effectively utilizes the metaleptic permeation of fictional narrative. Viewers can recognize intertextual allusions, as they imitate the fictional setting. The documentary also seeks to convey the evocative nature of the film—dialogues are paraphrased, and certain scenes are imitated and acted out again. By rehashing scenes from the film their uniqueness is emphasized by an intertextual paraphrase: aged actors talk about times that are never to return. The balance between the present and the unreproducible past creates a unified lyrical mood and a nostalgic sentiment.

A Delayed Film

For Krška, Šrámek-based material was nothing new. In April 1940, an amateur theater group performed a dramatization of *Silvery Wind* in Písek, his hometown. The performance was met with outrage, especially

from the catechist and the headmaster at the local grammar school. Miloš Hlávka was responsible for the script and the play was directed by Václav Krška. Jiří Srnka composed the music. Even though the play earned Krška the status of persona non grata in Písek, it was well received by critics from Prague. This dramatization later served as the basis for the film's screenplay.

Before moving on, I would like to mention one more element in the adaptation process. At the time, a set of photographs was taken in the streets of Písek of the actors in period costumes. One of the preserved photographs depicts a meeting between Ratkin and Anička as portrayed by actors Rudolf Hrušínský and Zorka Janů, sister of the notorious Czech actress Lída Baarová. Ratkin is standing with his head bowed down, holding his hat, while Anička regards him haughtily. It is scene that is repeated in the film: a coquettish girl tormenting the sensitive poet. The two young people are captured standing on Písek's ancient medieval bridge, against the backdrop of the town. This and other photographs were variously alluded to in the film adaptation, which corroborates Krška's interest in visualizations of Šrámek's writings and the diversity of the filmmaking process.

The shooting of the film itself was fraught with complications. Krška had already adapted one of Šrámek's works—in the melodrama *Měsíc nad řekou* (*The Moon over the River* 1953). It was an adaptation of a play wherein the characters, Jan Hlubina and his aging daughter, Slávka, praise youth and in a magical summer evening make peace with the events of their lives. The film's popularity with audiences prompted thoughts about adapting *Silvery Wind*, but at the same time there was hesitation: Would it be suitable to bring two Šrámek adaptations into cinemas within such a short period of time?

Expectations about the film were high. Official media informed the public about casting choices, the first studio takes, and on-location filming in Písek, Prague, and Jičín (Stříbrný vítr opouští ateliéry 1954, 7; Blahovec 1954, 5; Pa 1954, 248; Tarantová 1954, 164). Contemporary sources emphasize the character of Jan Ratkin played by Eduard Cupák. This young actor was known for his portrayal of the main character in *The Moon over the River*: "Cupák's boyish appearance and the temperamental acting with which he admirably conveys the nuances of his characters guarantee his success in portraying this new Šrámek character" (Příští filmová role 1954, 8, my translation). Jana Rybářová was a dance student who was chosen for her girlish looks to portray Anička Karasová.

It is not surprising that the film was heralded as ideologically charged in the press: youth was supposed to be seen revolting against the degenerate sensibilities of small-town society; the townhouse salon, filled with sentimental and debauched decorations, was supposed to symbolize decadence and profligacy, and the hateful catechist was to represent a caricature of the church.

In Autumn 1954, the magazine *Filmové informace* reported that *Silvery Wind* would be ready for release by the end of the year. The editors asked film journalist Jan Wenig to use interviews with the director and his knowledge of the screenplay to predict the final appearance of the film. The critic joined those who admired Šrámek's work as a source of spontaneous vitality, furthered the author's cult, and expected the film's enthusiastic reception, particularly among young people. He regarded the attempt to translate a poetic reflection of adolescence, fantastic tension, and, above all, "our" reading of Šrámek into an hour-and-a-half long spectacle with both excitement and apprehension.

Krška, who was well aware of the interest in his new project, announced in advance his intention of seeking innovative audio-visual approaches: "I wish to give the movie a visual intimacy, I wish … to work mainly with medium shots and with close-ups and use them to illustrate both the action and the mood" (Wenig 1954, 18, my translation). Nevertheless, few people anticipated just how much this stylistically varied and playful film would enrich the culture of the time. The emphasis on lyricism and the metaphorical aspect of the final product were one of the most significant attributes of the creative adaptation process. Krška sought to convey Šrámek's poetic language to the audience via film. His comments clearly indicate that he understood his work as the creative act of an avant-garde artist looking for a space for self-expression and for a possibility to communicate his own approach to Šrámek's work and to the author himself:

> This is how he was; he walked quietly through the town and through the country. He was both present and absent, and the whole town was filled by him and permeated by him, and many minds accepted his name into their innermost hiding places, forever. This is how generations of the young and the bareheaded knew him … . Such was my Šrámek in my Southern Bohemian birthplace, untouched and visibly invisible, while the flesh-and-blood poet settled in Vinohrady and later in Černý vrch, Smíchov [in Prague], and looked at the sky with his blue, twinkling eyes full of life. (Krška 1957, 5, my translation)

However, expectations were dashed in 1954. Available contemporary testimonials indicate that the female evaluators, one of whom was the wife of Ladislav Štoll (the principal ideologist of official literature), were scandalized by the displays of male nudity at the first projection of the film (*Příběhy slavných – Eduard Cupák: herec v zahradě* 2001). And thus, after all the feverish and loud preparations for its release, *Silvery Wind* was suddenly shelved. It came up again in an official forum only in 1956, when a reader wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper *Práce* and enquired about its fate:

> Why has this film, having commanded so much time, as well as the best and most earnest creative effort of filmmakers, and significant financial resources, not yet appeared in our theaters? There has been no explanation for this. It seems strange, if we declare, as we do, our pride in Šrámek's literary legacy, and require contemporary writers to work with film. (Mrázek 1956, 4, my translation)

The newspaper's editorial office followed up on this question and asked for an explanation from the Ministry of Culture or Czechoslovak State Film, lending the situation more gravity. The reader of *Práce* was by no means the first person to inquire about the fate of Krška's adaptation; reviewer Ludvík Veselý wrote in 1957: "…viewers, curious and persistent, wrote letters and asked about the film at meetings, what has happened to it and when it will get to the cinemas" (Veselý 1957, 23, my translation). The difference, of course, was that the question was officially published in an influential newspaper. In fact, the whole episode illustrates how the building up of the audience's expectations ultimately worked against the film's censors, as members of the public—enticed by the widespread media coverage of the adaptation's making—refused to forget *Silvery Wind* once it failed to pass ideological muster. Their unfailing interest may have been the ultimate factor in deterring the permanent shelving of this film.

Variations in Style

The most important source of inspiration for the adaptation was Šrámek's book. The novel's narrative, however, is repeatedly suppressed by inserting lyrical passages and impressions into the film. The book's structure was appropriately characterized by reviewer Julius Schmitt, who wrote in 1910 that due to Šrámek's poetic nature he was unable to build up the novel by

writing vast, unified storylines, that "these are snippets of early years, and whether and how serendipity granted them significance of upheavals, joys or sorrows" (Schmitt 1910, 469, my translation). According to Schmitt, the novel consists of a string of "little happenings," which resonate with the subjective impressions of the main character and with Šrámek's thoughts on the relationship between an adolescent individual and society. As early as in the screenplay, Krška created a mosaic of scenes that when put together convey an impressionist reflection of a past world.

Václav Krška, a former writer, read *Silvery Wind* as a book filled with colors, contrasts, and scents. The storylines, therefore, were not the most substantial aspects he saw in the novel. His screenplay shows that he identified with Šrámek's emphasis on the intensity of the sensual and emotional awakening of youth, his aesthetic rendering of nature, and so on. Krška's artistic and aesthetic attitude, which manifests itself mainly in the lyrical passages of the film and in the testimonies of "young, wild blood," stemmed from his efforts to adapt those aspects of the novel that were difficult in terms of semantics. The creative process (writing the screenplay, shooting the film) presents itself as a quest for filmmaking solutions that would correspond to Šrámek's poetic style. Krška was drawn to filling the film with miniatures to evoke the atmosphere of its setting, and with impressive metaphors.

The authenticity of his self-expression is rooted in the fact that Krška, who had recognized and understood the status of an artist under the new sociopolitical conditions, drew upon his long-standing method of interpreting Šrámek, which contemporary critics praised as experimental and avant-garde. His "answer" differs from the interpretation by the cultural ideologists of the 1950s. Those ideologists noted the dangers posed by Krška's adaptation as early as when reading the screenplay: "There are parts of the screenplay in which Krška favors his own writing and the tradition of his early films, rather than the philosophy of that rebellious lyricist, the nation's bard Fráňa Šrámek" (Zvoníček 1954, 141, my translation). Krška's creation (despite the necessary libations to the ideology, such as the parading of the working class or the criticism of small-town decadence) shows, as early as in the screenplay, transgressions from the cultural and political activism, and tends towards an alternative style and a certain degree of independence.

Most of the film's crew started their career during the first Czechoslovak Republic. One of them was cameraman Ferdinand Pečenka, who had shot dozens of films since the beginning of the 1930s, including

Krška's adaptations of Šrámek's works. While in *The Moon over the River* he employed static camera work, imbuing the film with the semblance of a theatrical production, in *Silvery Wind* he intended to shake up the audience's visual expectations. Static shots subside in favor of dynamic ones, with frequent panning and close-ups of the characters that were intended to emphasize their emotions. This means of camera work shows that the film's style is not a return to tradition but an exploration of new possibilities. At the beginning of the adaptation, the setting—a small town reflected in the river's surface—is introduced with a sweeping shot, a technique that disorients the audience. The following shot then continues with the visual innovation: the image of the town overlaps with the fabric of a promenading girl's parasol. The film *Silvery Wind*, then, is built upon elaborate camera shots, further defamiliarized and complicated in order to capture the audience's attention.

It appears as though the nationalized film industry provided the director and the crew with novel technological means for adapting a modernist text. For example, sensuality is conveyed in the "flying" scene shot on a swing ride: it is at this moment that Aničk a momentarily gives into Ratkin's enchantment. A reviewer noted upon this scene:

> This scene, taking place directly while flying around on the ride, was fraught with various technical difficulties. The swing ride purchased by Czechoslovak State Film for the purpose of filming this scene had to undergo multiple modifications in order for the cameras and lighting to be attached to it. The resilience of the actors' stomachs was also tested prior to shooting the scene—if all went well, the filming could commence. ("Stříbrný vítr v exteriérech" 1954, 4, my translation)

The music, composed by Jiří Srnka, was a critical component of the adaptation. Srnka, a composer and a noted collaborator with many filmmakers, caught the public's and critics' attention with his score to the first film adaptation of Šrámek's work, *The Moon over the River*. The audience was especially impressed (Pilka 1957, 72) by the musical motif of the river flowing under Slávka Hlubinová's window. The musical score to *Silvery Wind* contains a wide spectrum of motifs: violin solos imitate the sounds of nature, the violoncello indicates love and pain, and women's voices fill in as the titular "silvery wind." Concerts on the promenade take up a prominent place in the film's diegetic music; such concerts remained popular well into the first half of the 20th century.

The use of various musical motifs (from the street organ to the work of Jacques Offenbach) attests to the creativity and playfulness that Srnka employed in his work on *Silvery Wind*.

A Secret Brotherhood

At the beginning of this chapter I hypothesized that Václav Krška was able to make a film that uses socialist symbolism while at the same time subverting faith in heterosexual romance by portraying relationships with patently unclear endings. Krška was born in Písek in 1900 and was a young man during the politically and culturally liberal first Czechoslovak Republic. This perceived liberty, however, had its limits: Krška realized he was homosexual during the 1920s, a sexual orientation that was considered criminal in the contemporary legal system.[5] The director's "awakening" was summarized by court physicians in 1939:

> He broke up with the girl in 1922, as he had recognized that he liked a boy. The boy was a machine fitter. He talked to him as to a friend. He did not confess his feelings. There was no sexual intercourse. That was the time when he laid his hands on the book *Prokletá láska* (Cursed love). … This book opened his eyes. He recognized the feelings he had for the feelings described in the book. The book told him "you are like this." He attempted suicide, but was dissuaded from it by his mother. He confessed to his mother. She knew "it" about him. … He himself resisted it; he saw the head physician Šťastný. He is reported to have confuted that it is incurable. The mother wrote to Vienna, but the reply was negative. … He has not felt an erotic attraction to any girl since 1922. (Nozar 2011, 397, my translation)

This report sums up in official-sounding language the adolescent Krška's painful journey to sexual self-identification. It implies his initial homophobia, a fear of otherness, which led to his suicide attempts.

Krška was subsequently subjected to more examinations, as doctors tried to "diagnose" him. Later on, he often resisted society's interpretation of his actions as being ill or sexually degenerate. His image as an aesthete and bohemian is, however, inseparable from the humiliating admissions that led to the reports of his perceived perversity: "As for sexual intercourse, there was mutual masturbation and sucking of the sexual organ. He did not pay anybody anything. These were people who sought him out by themselves. Especially in Písek" (Nozar 2011, 408, my translation).

He was diagnosed as suffering from a psychopathological disorder, a common diagnosis at the time. Písek's public denounced the perceived perversity of the young man and his friends. One of the medical reports reads:

> The examined committed homosexual acts in a state of mental feebleness, which was caused partly by his … emotionally accentuated perverse nature and partly by his … inhibitions being lowered as a result of the whole situation, and particularly the incipient influence of alcohol-induced intoxication. (Nozar 2011, 407–408, my translation)

When juxtaposed, reports like this one and the cinematic conflict between Jan Ratkin and his teachers, who (along with the fanatic catechist) embody heterosexual conformity, reveal a possible reflection of the director's difficult adolescent years (as well as themes such as individuality and the subjectivity of an adolescent male conscious of his otherness) within the adaptation. The sexual dimension of the film, then, is seen in the context of Krška's social standing in Písek (and later, Prague), along with his homosexuality.

In the 1930s Krška experienced a grievous personal tragedy: his close friend Vladimír Zanáška committed suicide in 1934. The same decade saw Krška sentenced to four months' probation for homosexuality. Part of this experience appears in several of Krška's works. One, the novel *Odcházeti s podzimem* (*Leaving Along with Autumn* 1930), is of particular interest for this study because Krška (in collaboration with František Čáp) made it into a film called *Ohnivé léto* (*Fiery Summer* 1939). The book contains clear autobiographical elements, mainly in the way that the behavior of the other characters towards two boys, Walter and Julius, is thematized. The former openly admits to his homosexuality and is banished from his home, and the latter (despite not having had intimate relations with Walter) is subjected to corrective re-education, which leads to his premature death. The tragic story at the base of the novel is nothing out of the ordinary for its time; the book constitutes a testimony to the ambiguous nature of a young person's identity.

Arne Novák, an influential contemporary literary historian, did not pay particular attention to Krška in his *Přehledné dějiny literatury české* (*A Survey of Czech Literature* 1936–1939). However, when characterizing Krška's literary work, he contends:

> The most resonant tone in Krška's works…remains the sensually erotic lust and enchantment, escalating from the impatient tremors of puberty to wild heat between men and women, though occasionally disturbed by unhealthy perversion. (Novák 1995, 1481, my translation)

During World War II, and even after the war, Krška used to organize meetings for homosexuals in his apartment in Prague. During these, he could meet other men in private and hold cultural events (Schnidler 2013, 318). Thanks to transcribed pieces of oral history, we learn about the young men who attended the meetings and who also played in movies directed by Krška:

> And of course there were always a plenty of people around the director who wanted a role in a movie and he used to use them as supernumeraries. It's beautiful to watch his films these days. Of course, the public only sees the film don't they, but we know that those ten guys standing there that it is simply that those are the director's boys from the meetings, right? […] And we all admired him so, cause what he did and how he could rein the Communists in, right? Those were the 50s, yeah, it was still forbidden for quite some time, criminal and he was quite brave and there was that solid barrier around him, maybe even cause among those Communists, those big shots, were queers as well. (Schindler 2013, 319, my translation)

Apart from Krška's personal experiences, which support the subversive reading of the film, his directorial decisions also need to be considered, especially his casting of the young actor Eduard Cupák. The conditions of Cupák's engagement with the project are telling: in 1951 Cupák was publicly condemned for his homosexuality and (just before graduating) was expelled from the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno. His subsequent attempts to find a job in a regional theater were in vain as the actor was banned from working in his chosen field. In the same year, the actor Eduard Kohout introduced Cupák to Krška, who took him under his wing. In their first collaboration, a film about the writer Alois Jirásek, they briefly met on screen: Cupák played the writer as a young man and Krška appeared as an elderly castle caretaker. The casting of Eduard Cupák in *Silvery Wind* (in spite of all the condemnations levelled against him for his homosexuality) was the first step in creating a film that would disturb the ostensibly heteronormative practices of the nationalized film industry. The oft-praised sensual experience that affected the minds of then-adolescent boys and girls and embedded

itself as a sentimental memory of first love, is presented ambiguously in the film, and creates connotations that can be interpreted as homosexual. Two marginalized people of a "strange nature"—a director not so long ago persecuted for "unnatural relations" and a young actor whose career was never meant to begin—managed to make a film that portrayed reality through a homoerotic lens. It is particularly interesting that the person who bent the socialist-realist norms of the early 1950s was not a capitalist bogeyman—but an established artist, a well-known director apparently content with his position within the nationalized film industry.

Town and Nature

The adaptation operates with two kinds of settings, urban and rural, that signify two different aspects of life and the world. The role of urban space, as opposed to that of nature and of transitional zones such as parks and gardens, is continually emphasized throughout the film. The image of a picturesque South Bohemian small town, a setting emblematic for Czech and Central European culture, emerges from a tangle of streets, from promenades, its corners, its bridge. Fráňa Šrámek employed in his novel the nineteenth-century literary topos of an enclosed, small town, and thus alludes to an important cultural topos that crosses various media boundaries. Krška's depiction of a small town as a microcosm does not merely draw on Šrámek's work, but it derives from numerous literary works by early-20th-century writers. The parallel between the *Silvery Wind*'s small town and the real town of Písek, that is, between fiction and the actual world, was and is particularly vivid,[6] although Šrámek himself warned against equating the actual town with its fictional counterpart:

> My dear Písek friends, I will not proclaim that this wind blew somewhere else than in your town. However, there is a limit to this, gentlemen: do not go pointing fingers at anyone; those are not the same feet running through a street that run through the book. What I embellished, I embellished, and let these embellishments rest; and let there remain a warm feeling of having gifted one another: this lovely town gave unto me and I gave unto it in return. (Šrámek 1955, 321, my translation)

The author's pleas notwithstanding, nobody could stop fascinated readers from lingering in Písek's Palacký Park, on its promenades where students met girls, in the grammar school park, on the ancient Jelení

(Deer) Bridge, or anywhere along the Otava River. Ever since the novel was first published, Písek has resonated with Jan Ratkin's story, and at the same time the town itself made a contribution to the national culture. The reception of both the novel and the film contains frequent notes on the fact that Písek played a central role in forming the nation's identity.[7]

The town in the adaptation seems to be illusory, projected as color snapshots of bygone places. The houses, huddled together, and the remains of town fortifications and the church tower are all first seen reflected, quivering, in the river, with the image gradually stabilizing. There is a certain enchantment to this view of the town. The narrative starts off with a poetic commentary, which is being declaimed in a stylized way by a narrator's voice. The narrator's very first sentences introduce the notion of nostalgia for times past: "It is long ago, oh, so long ago as though it is not even true" (Krška 1954, my translation). This sentiment is emphasized by the narrator's sigh and tone of voice. A string of episodic scenes from everyday life in the town ensues: girls with parasols enchant young men; a fashionable lady looks into a shop window; people linger in the streets, in their windows and gardens; imperial officers escort a lady; gossipers huddle together; and washerwomen toil by the river. Two scenes in particular are pursued to convey with a fanciful lightness the overpowering joy of life. The first involves an airy, playful shot of a female swimmer entering the water in colorful garb and with comical gestures, while watched by a pair of young men. In the second scene, boys watch a ballerina dancing on a table, while the medium shot that is used shows only the dancer's legs and her skirt blowing in the wind. Both of the scenes exude the poetics of avant-garde art with its playfulness and airy fantasies.

The first sentence of the narrator's commentary captures the very character of this Central European town with a certain distance, irony, and indulgence: "Here it is, the small, peaceful, and honorable, having risen on the banks of the river" (Krška 1954, my translation). Using gentle irony, the narrator underlies this portrayal of a world that takes itself immensely seriously. The sleepiness and honor ascribed to the town is, however, in contrast to the existence of the town brothel. The brothel, pushed to the periphery of the town, close to the river (which imbues it with another, darker significance; Zach refers to the place as "the house near the water"), is portrayed as a place of unrestrained revelry. Some of the townsmen make use of the services offered there by two prostitutes, Lorča and Anděla, archetypal characters who channel

society's needs so that life, peaceful on the surface, can go on undisturbed. There is a crucial distinction between the two prostitutes: while Anděla is unambiguously presented as a typical prostitute figure, Lorča is portrayed as a beautiful girl, whose profession is hard to guess without any context. Accordingly, her flower-filled room does not resemble a typical prostitute's chamber.

The game Krška is playing is fully revealed in the ironic confrontation between trivial small-town life and an ordinary day in the brothel. In an added two-minute scene, the camera first focuses on a wall painting depicting a sailor embracing a woman holding a glass of wine in front of a vast expanse of water; anchors hang from the wall. The connotations are of a tavern in a port town, and thus, licentious behavior and a dissolution of the honorable roles of men and women. Then someone's hands counting upturned cards on a table come into view. As the camera moves away, the viewer can see a woman, emphatically stylized as an elderly prostitute, playing a game of solitaire.[8] Lorča is sitting next to her.[9]

One of the central topographical points of a Central European small town is the promenade with a gazebo. In the past, town inhabitants would don their Sunday best and embark on a stroll, walking through parks and town squares greeting each other, while the socially inferior would pay their respects to the mayor and his wife or other politicians. An army band (habitually playing the Radetzky March by Johann Strauss, Sr.) was an important part of the small-town scenery. This ritual rendered the town an important metaphor of order and hierarchy (Hrbata 2005, 383).

The first scene at the promenade is pursued on two levels in the film. First, students meet girls there, which serves the plot. Second, the scene implies the nature of the imperial officers' lives: they intermingle with ordinary people, but the eccentrically dressed Mrs. Staňková is at the center of their attention. This public behavior is in contrast with their actions at the salon, where all lines are deliberately crossed. Here the officers gather to drink, play cards, and court women. They are the stylized embodiment of the decaying empire's atmosphere.

The town is rooted in the surrounding countryside. It is easy for the characters to leave its cobbled streets and, if the plot commands it, run around in the countryside. Thus, the students are able to chase after a butterfly at the beginning of the film, to go "outside, into the meadows, to the river, to the hills" (Krška 1954, my translation). Without the

topography of the town itself having been shown, the following scenes show the boys racing through the countryside. Two of them, Ratkin and his classmate, are the first to reach the peak of a hill, and along with them the viewer gazes at the idyllic, slightly undulating landscape. The shot, which shows the students' backs in the forefront and the landscape in the background, implies that it is not only scenery the viewer is seeing but also, in a way, the inner life of the characters.

Shortly afterwards, all the boys are seen jumping naked into the river, but not the one that flows through town. They have left the astringent space of the grammar school building, and, being in the free countryside, they can break the rules and show off their naked bodies to the washerwomen. The punishing hand of the catechist does not reach places governed by the order of nature. It is nature, not the town, that offers comfort and beauty, a familiar idea in Czech culture. As the film shows later on, Ratkin *escapes* into nature, which is essentially a Romantic idea.[10]

The Silvery Wind

The film *Silvery Wind* contains two storylines. The first I will call "the journey towards the silvery wind," as it recapitulates, on several levels, the adolescence of Jan Ratkin. This storyline contains Ratkin's feelings towards Anička, the girl he pursues romantically, and his desire to reunite with his mysterious uncle Jiří. The second storyline follows Ratkin's rebellion against various authorities: his father, the catechist, and his teachers. The screenplay shows that the specific events of the book are reconfigured in the film: for example, Ratkin's conflict with his father and the encounter with his uncle are moved to the latter half of the narrative.

Images of family life in the adaptation foreground the conflicts stemming from an asymmetrical triangle: an authoritative father, a subjugated mother, and a defiant son. On a visit home during his summer break, having spent a day with his friends in the countryside, Ratkin finds his father angry because he has received a letter from Ratkin's landlady about his son's alleged philandering in Písek. Ratkin rebels against his father because he does not want to grow up just yet. The situation is settled by the sudden arrival of Ratkin's uncle Jiří, the father's brother, who has come back from faraway travels and who gets involved in the argument by defending the boy's youthful rashness. Here a conflict between stormy youth and old-fashioned patriarchal values comes into light. The adaptation shows the old world mixing with a bold, young temperament.

Ratkin runs away, and his uncle answers his mother's plea to go and look for him. What follows is one of the key scenes in the film, which has the potential to answer some basic questions: What is the "silvery wind" and which one of the forking paths in life should an adolescent choose?

First the camera follows Ratkin as he hurries through a garden at night: he is filmed through the branches of trees and rose shrubs. A moment later uncle Jiří arrives. On the one hand, Ratkin's image of his uncle as a free man who has fulfilled his desire is confirmed: his uncle has travelled to remote and exotic places, experienced life in many countries throughout the world, and rebelled against bourgeois conventions. In Ratkin's words, "he ran away from everything and has lived dozens of lives, in Europe, Africa, on the sea" (Krška 1954, my translation). Here though this image is brought face-to-face with the reality of an aging man who no longer represents youthful euphoria, but rather skepticism and disillusion.

The crucial function of this scene, however, is the explication of the silvery wind metaphor. It is the uncle who talks about "the silvery wind" as "the tidings of beauty, beguiling promises, from far away and yet within one's grasp, not yet here and already near" (Krška 1954, my translation). The silvery wind is a metaphor for youth: life as a wind, blowing. The uncle adds sadly that it no longer fills his sails; he has become disillusioned in his old age. Still, he urges his nephew not to give up: listening to the silvery wind requires courage. The scene starts a dialogue between Šrámek's poetry, artistic imagination, and glorification of youthful vigor. Ratkin sets out to follow the silvery wind, even though his journey is doomed beforehand. His gestures give rise to new determination that will drive him forward.

Ramler, Ratkin's teacher who regularly comes to his student's defense, plays a role similar to uncle Jiří. In Ramler's worldview, tolerance plays an important role, as we can witness in three scenes. The first one focuses on the catechist's fanatical preaching: he is hollering from the pulpit at the boys and promises them God's punishment for their vices and sins. To everybody's surprise, Ramler suddenly leaves the chapel; shortly afterwards, Ratkin faints and is guided out to the hallway. Later the catechist meets Ratkin alone and urges him to confess his worst sins. The tense situation is ended by the non-conformist Ramler, who does not heed the catechist's threats and tells the boy to go to the countryside, to enjoy the trees and flowers in bloom.

In the second scene, Ratkin meets Ramler after Zach has been expelled from school; they take a walk outside of the town. They are

filmed walking en face, their bodies brushing against branches blowing in a strong wind, as if they were becoming part of the surrounding restless countryside. Their facial expressions reveal Ratkin's rebelliousness and the teacher's wise understanding. The two stop to lean against some trees. The perspective underscores the boy's listening when his teacher says: "Yes, I understand that. There should be a cry that would make the windows shatter. That would make the obedient students' desks and superior teachers' desks fall apart" (Krška 1954, my translation). For the second time, we find him sending young people out of the schools, under the trees in bloom, to talk "about love, manliness, and honesty" (Krška 1954, my translation).

The third scene features Ramler's theatrical monologue, in which he defends Ratkin in front of the other teachers. Wearing a light-colored suit unlike the rest of the teaching staff, he prevents the boy from being expelled.

Strange Amatory Relations

Krška elaborates on problems in romantic relationships between adolescents in four meetings between Ratkin and Anička. The adaptation was incompatible with general period norms in that it depicts personal experience as something intimate, not to be shared by the collective. If the film had followed official ideology, it would have had to have shown young people fighting for a new world together, agreeing with Communist goals, perhaps working in a factory, encouraging each other to work their way towards building a socialist society. The characters in *Silvery Wind* contest this image. They are not stereotypes: they behave eccentrically and their inner lives are elaborately developed.

In the first scene to feature Ratkin and Anička alone, we find them in a park where the girl's coquettish distance is contrasted with the boy's delicate sensitivity. The two stand on opposite ends of a fountain; a violin motif blends with the burbling water, conjuring up a summer idyll. The reverse shot augments the focus on the two characters. Ratkin is jealous of his teacher Ramler, who has been courting the girl; then he seems to forget everything, bows his head and touches the water's surface. Both characters' attention then turns to the water, which until that point had been a safe barrier between them, and Anička splashes Ratkin in a capricious gesture. Then Ratkin looks at Anička and reads aloud from his notebook: "There is something somewhere and I would like

to approach it on tiptoe and suddenly I would stand facing it; it would be like a miracle, it would open its arms and I would feel a long, long kiss" (Krška 1954, my translation). While he is reading, the perspective changes and the girl exclaims theatrically: "Take me along!" (Krška 1954, my translation). This surprises Ratkin, who violates the physical space between them and comes up to Anička, who, however, returns to her previous role and chases him away.

During their first encounter by the park fountain, Anička is very self-confident and manages to make use of her feigned ambivalent emotions; this is not so in their next scene together, where Anička enters Ratkin's domain, somewhere on the boundary between the town and countryside. Again, the camera offers a wide shot of a riverine landscape, focusing on the lush vegetation, of which Ratkin, admiring the lovely flowers, seems to be a part. The sound of violins enhances this authentic sensory experience. A person longing for freedom has extricated himself from conventions, gone to the countryside, and become a part of it. Yet soon there comes an ironic twist, as suddenly Anička slides from a steep slope towards Ratkin. In the countryside, the dressed-up girl with a parasol loses ground; she is at the mercy of her instincts, which clash with her ingrained urbane manners. In this way, the film critiques bourgeois society, which produces girls who find such freedom incomprehensible and thus follow prescribed plans in everything they do. Convention stands in opposition to the biological principles symbolized by the river. Here, the girl herself becomes an unnatural part of the landscape; she is an artificial flower amongst natural ones. Indeed, the mis-en-scene is filled with various natural elements.

After she has pulled herself together, Anička starts playing flirty mind games with Ratkin again; they have, however, lost their effect on the young man, as they belong on the esplanade, not here in the country. Upset, Anička attempts a dramatic exit towards the river, but slips and falls down, which is followed by a childish outburst of anger. Then the two part, returning to their separate worlds: Anička to the esplanade of convention, Ratkin to the natural and instinctual river.

To shoot the third meeting of the two young protagonists, the filmmakers had to buy and convert a swing ride. The result was a short romance evoking impressionist sensuality. The scene begins with what has by now become the usual scenario: Ratkin meets Anička on the esplanade, where Anička is being courted by a pharmacist. Subsequently Ratkin and Anička go on the swing ride together, where Anička expresses

romantic feelings toward Ratkin. Nevertheless, when the ride is over, Anička goes back to her official position and to the pharmacist. In this scene, the camera "flies" together with the protagonists, underscoring the exclusivity of their feelings and their distance from the ordinary world. The effect is enhanced both by the musical motifs used in the scene (the original funfair songs change into violins) and by the changes of light shed on the protagonists' faces.

The unclear romantic motivation prefigures the even more ambiguous conclusion of the film, where the two meet for the fourth time. Elaborate stylistic methods, the "dance" of the camera and the compelling music, communicate the protagonists' states of mind. First the camera moves along the overgrown river valley, like at the beginning of the film. The branches move slightly in the wind. The score, centered around a violin solo, evokes an impressionistic mood and reinforces the poetic image and the link to nature. The camera ends its journey at the village cemetery dense with crosses. On this sunny day, Ratkin is sitting on the cemetery wall, a very romantic place, and writing a poem.

The camera films Ratkin from a low angle and approaches him while he is reading his verse: "If you love stars / Find the most beautiful one woven from our footsteps / With a grave in the middle and should you follow the footsteps from here / A beautiful star from pearls you will find / Pearls that birds strew on the grave" (Krška 1954, my translation). Ratkin notices Anička walking with her bright red parasol. The camera then offers 12 different shots of the conversation between them. The girl uses two registers in her speech: on one hand she addresses Ratkin formally, accentuating distance. On the other hand, she also communicates with him in a sincere, informal manner, evident in her gestures and facial expressions. However, she never abandons the role she adopted when she first met Ratkin—that of his muse. Playing this game brings her pleasure, but distance also means a certain degree of safety: it helps her exert control over the situation.

In the first of the subsequent shots, Anička casts her eyes down and turns her head away, perhaps a consequence of Jana Rybářová's scant acting experience.[11] Nonetheless, this gesture reveals the character's double role: her theatrical behavior masks her affection for Ratkin. Soon though, Anička begins to enjoy her superiority, as the tone of her voice betrays. In a formal register, she proclaims: "Silly you are, in what you speak and in what you write" (Krška 1954, my translation). She torments and humiliates the young man; she derides the love letters he has been

writing to her. The feigned distance climaxes when Ratkin interrupts the flood of offenses with a smile, and the camera quickly approaches Anička to capture her from the side in a medium shot. Anička turns around and, with her head bowed, declares her love for Ratkin, yet immediately afterwards pronounces this love forever gone. The girl's drama of dashed hopes now intensifies. Although her words are sincere, her facial expression remains theatrical (Fig. 2.1).

Afterwards the two leave the cemetery together, observed by the fluently moving camera. They stop and Anička gives Ratkin a twig from a tree as a good-bye present, expecting him to embrace her, but instead Ratkin goes away. Anička stays on the path, shown in a medium shot against the landscape and horizon. Her depiction, her gestures, and the musical motif of sudden violoncello tones convey her astonishment and disappointment: Ratkin never even looks back at her. For the first time she forgets her parasol: the game is over, pretension has lost its effect,

Fig. 2.1 *Silvery Wind*. The goodbye scene between Jan Ratkin and Anička. *Stříbrný vítr* (*Silvery Wind*; Václav Krška 1954). Courtesy of Ludmila Zeman. All rights reserved

and Anička has lost Ratkin for good. The violoncello expresses Anička's love and pain. A medium shot shows her sadly wiser. A large part of the frame is taken up by the emblematic parasol; the viewer can also see the lushly green landscape and the fragile figure of the girl dressed in light colors. Anička's gestures change as she realizes her thwarted affections. She hangs her head and exits the scene, accompanied by the growingly intense violoncello. Afterwards, the camera follows Ratkin in a blooming forest; he only stops at the river in the valley and is shown once again as a component of the natural world.

What happened to Jan Ratkin? In the novel his parting with Anička is explained by the narrator and the reader is led to expect that Ratkin will soon find a new love. In the film, however, Anička offers her love, but he abandons her at the very moment she expects him to hug or kiss her. By exiting the scene, Ratkin's actions do not correspond with his young age and inexperience. His words ("you crazy Anička"), facial expressions, and gestures reveal a sudden superiority, as if he were an adult poet writing a nostalgic book called *Silvery Wind*, in which he comments upon his own story. It is as if he has discarded the stormy emotions of youth and become an observer of other people, for he has reconciled with his own role, without paying much attention to the fact that he is part of a cliché (students fall in love and write poems). Ratkin might have shrunk at the possibility that his ideal would materialize and thus lose its status. The fulfilment of desire may bring not only pleasure, but also pain. Ratkin might be losing more than he is gaining: his romanticism and ideals may be gone.

Anička and Ratkin's conversations constitute a game of true or false. Anička's stirring sexuality is real; the way she hides behind trite phrases is not. All four scenes share the same pattern: superficial chatting transforms into a revelation of inward feelings. Even if the first scene, in which Ratkin recites poetry to Anička by the fountain, appears to be rather banal, the viewer can soon perceive the emotions buried under the seeming triviality, which become even more apparent by the end of the film. Anička fights primarily against herself, against her instincts. On the one hand she obeys her passion and seeks Ratkin, but on the other hand she tries to resist it. Her immaturity only allows her to play games with the young man.

By developing the theme of intoxicating romantic desires and the erotic tension between a boy and a girl, the adaptation concentrates on the meaning of life. The manner in which the film deals with the characters' inner lives emphasizes unique individuality. Ratkin, Anička, uncle

Jiří, Ramler: all are shown in medium and close shots that emphasize their faces. Far from being ideological portraits, these representations aim to depict authentic emotional experiences. In this way, the film defies the promoted conventions of Socialist Realist art that encouraged stereotypes. Had *Silvery Wind* been filmed in keeping with the ideological norms of its time, it would have given up the subjective perspective and probably depicted the transformation of an effeminate bourgeois lad into a politically conscious worker, who loves the tasks he does for his society and country, and in rare moments of rest writes poetry glorifying the working people, Stalin, and Gottwald. Yet Václav Krška himself indicated the year the film was made that his protagonist was to be quite different:

> And a defiant path, even though veiled by fog, arches above all that, a path that leads to the unknown, towards something enticing and promising, where silvery wind can always be heard. All that faraway, luring and seductive, all that pure, bright and strong. Silvery wind! That lovely image in the heart, which must guide you in your life! The future that awaits one perhaps at the end of the journey! (Krška 1954, 2, my translation)

In the film young people are not subordinated to cultural-political norms and to the socialist creed, but to their own hearts. Not even far-reaching social changes could affect the desire for love and intimacy. Despite some sacrifices, such as emphasizing the conflict between youth and the bourgeoisie or the obligatory criticism of the church, Krška did not succumb to the political demands of his time. His film focuses on intimacy and inner life. It celebrates the moment: fragile, transient, difficult to capture.

Another Reading of *Silvery* Wind

The colorful spontaneity of Šrámek's *Silvery Wind* had a great impact on the cultural mood in post-World War II Czechoslovakia. It was seen by many as a surprisingly romantic adaptation celebrating the vitality of youth. Ignoring standard post-1948 Communist ideology, some viewers welcomed the film as a nostalgic reminder of a time when people's lifestyle choices were not supervised by the ever-watchful eye of the establishment. The film's popularity was due to its portrayal of a reality that resembled nothing in contemporary cinema.

Still, there existed a minority, which—being aware of the connections with the adaptor's life—could interpret the film in yet another, even

more subversive, manner. The prewar personal life of the film's director, Václav Krška, was considered scandalous by the general standards of the times and attracted attention well beyond Písek, his South Bohemian home town. As he gained more and more influence within the Czech cultural scene, his already bold calls for homosexual liberation became louder, despite his awareness that homosexuality was considered to undermine the value system of proletarian society. After World War II, Krška chose not to draw too much attention to his own persona, but his opinions and attitudes were well known to those familiar with the homosexual subculture. It therefore makes sense to now present an interpretation of the film that will turn Šrámek's "lyricism of vitality," richness of motifs, and semantic nuances of the text on their heads.

One of the dominant motifs in Krška's literary texts and film adaptations are rivers. A trope not unusual in Czech culture, in his system of symbols flowing water stands for something hidden, latent. It reflects the world around us (in the film the quiet provincial town, the house by the water), yet it does not allow us to look under the surface. The stream symbolizes a latent, subsurface, non-actualized state of existence. Its surface only offers a semblance of the truth; if we wish to find out what is really going on underneath, we must get wet. We are left with two options—we can either passively observe what is happening on the surface, or we can enter the stream and start searching underwater amongst the vortices and hidden flows. Is the adaptation's thematizing of masculinity and admiration of the relationships between boys—a theme alien to Šrámek's original novel—a phenomenon that can be given a name? In the film, homosexuality is a subcultural affair, flowing under the surface of official culture.

I believe that the context of the director's life can serve as a relevant basis for re-evaluating older interpretations of the film and offering up a new one. The above-presented documents and testimonies allow us to view the film in a different light. It violated norms by opening the door to a homoerotic interpretation. One could argue that the film's focus on physical sensuality is predominantly associated with young men on the cusp of sexual awakening. The interactions between Ratkin and Anička show that heterosexual love is corrupted and burdened by the falseness of amorous games and scheming. Following this interpretation, the key function of Anička's character is to reject Ratkin and other adolescent boys because any attempts at intimacy, or achieving the romantic ideal, will inevitably fail.

If adaptors are viewed as surgeons who remove from the body of the source text anything they deem unsuitable, Krška's operating methods appear to be rather odd. By removing one of the most significant female characters, Lidka, from the film version of the story, he cuts out the central theme of the novel—the possibility of fulfilled heterosexual love (in the text this possibility is represented by other female characters as well). The character of Lidka, Ratkin's first love, stands for profound feelings and belief in the necessity of love. When in the novel Ratkin puts his arms around a young birch tree, he calls out Lidka's name—in his eyes she is a forest fairy, a symbol of pure, platonic feelings. In the film we see that Ratkin associates the tree with Anička, a girl who cannot fulfill his desired ideal. By removing one of the novel's important semantic layers, Krška aims at a more conflicted message, and the manifestations of the protagonist's complex inner life are directed towards relationships between members of the same sex.

Seen from this perspective, relationships with girls suddenly seem like a mere formality, not expressions of authentic feelings. In the context of the small-town bourgeoisie, these relationships become a commodity available to honorable citizens, Austrian soldiers, and even men of the cloth, courtesy of the brothel hidden away in a remote part of the town, as well as the caricaturized salon of Madame Staňková. This commodification must have come in handy to Krška when, during the adaptation process, he was making necessary concessions to the cultural politics of the Communist establishment. The prostitutes in the film are regarded with good humor; they only seek love and understanding, not unlike the protagonist of Guy de Maupassant's *Butterball*. It is the members of the small-minded bourgeoisie who are to blame for forcing them into their current position. The maid in the Staněk household also contributes to criticizing the morals of the "old" society, represented in terms of class war in keeping with the contemporary cultural-political program. Whereas in the novel the Staněk boy falls in love with the maid, in the film she is seen as a commodity and her only purpose is to satisfy the basest of male impulses. This alteration confirms the official Communist belief in the new world order and can occasionally make the film adaptation look like a vehicle of ideological propaganda. The question that must be posed at this point is, of course: Was this blatant submission to Communist norms on Krška's part, or were there possibly other reasons for this change?

Fashion, people promenading along the Otava River esplanade, the clothes hiding the beauty of the male body—these are all manifestations of class differences and varying social status. Along with hypocritical

small-town morals, they expose and exclude those members of society who reject the norms of established sexual behavior. The official boundary of what is considered appropriate and "proper" is suggested by Ratkin's risky little game in which he recites to a young lady from Prague a poem about a mistress's uncovered bosom upon which her lover's head is resting. This provocative act, although scandalous and outrageous, was still safely within the confines of contemporary morals, partially due to the fact that it was in keeping with artistic conventions contained in the poetry of Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853–1912),[12] salon wall paintings, and pseudohistorical architecture, where the motif of bared female breasts is extremely (and conspicuously) widespread. In the patriarchal system of the late nineteenth century, the only truly shocking and unacceptable work of art would have been a poem, a painting, or a stucco wall featuring a homoerotic theme. Bourgeois culture considered homosexuality the gravest of all offenses. Thus, Krška targets the middle class—the proletariat (the working class) and the "art crowd" viewed same-sex relationships with much greater benevolence. If we see instincts as "natural," then clearly a lady with a parasol has no business wandering in the wilderness. Culture, being a representation of civilization, serves as a tool to keep the animalistic urges of homosexuality in check and under wraps.

Whereas heterosexuality was considered one of the cornerstones of social relationships, homosexuality was regarded as an inadmissible sexual practice and as such had no place in official culture. Its marginalization allows it to shed some much needed light on the whole construct of what is regarded as "natural" and acceptable by the social majority, which tends to displace what it cannot process. Homosexuality, therefore, cannot be used as an explicit point of reference in the adaptation because then the film's clearly identified sexual ideology would become a tool of official cultural politics. Thus, the film adaptation of *Silvery Wind* offers no such clear ideology, and it is precisely for this reason that it can be labeled supremely subversive.

One of the key scenes in the film is the already-mentioned swimming trip to the river. Here, homoerotic motifs are most clearly visible. Krška created this scene by combining various sentences and passages selected from throughout the novel. In the above-described shots the swimming scene follows the strengthening of the friendship between the boys from the lyceum and the brief moment of admiring the beauty of the countryside when observing the faraway horizon. Looking closer at the scene, we realize that the boys are positioned very close to each other. Krška

took this introductory episode from the novel's fourth chapter, where the ten-year-old Ratkin and his friend Malkus run up a hill on the spur of the moment. "You oaf …!" Ratkin blurts out, patting his friend on the back. "You … you … ape!" Malkus replies and returns the poke (Šrámek 1955, 58, my translation). The scene is gradually transformed so that in the adaptation it can be seen as the beginning of the film's storyline dedicated to homoerotic desires. In the film script Ratkin holds hands with Malkus; in the film we can actually see them embracing after having climbed the hill. Further on, we see the boys' community grow in numbers; one of the boys, with no clear motive, removes his shirt, showing off his torso. Frequent touches and embraces shared between the male characters scattered throughout the entire film are in a sharp contrast with the awkwardness with which Ratkin touches the female characters. In the fair scene he does not put his hands on Anička's waist when they meet on the swing ride, but grips the chains of her seat instead (Fig. 2.2).

Fig. 2.2 *Silvery Wind*. Jan Ratkin embraces one of his schoolmates. *Stříbrný vítr* (*Silvery Wind*; Václav Krška 1954). Courtesy of Ludmila Zeman. All rights reserved

The swimming scene is filled with tension that is created by a number of contrasts and elements inviting us to interpret it as a manifestation of homoerotic desire. This scene too has its origin in the novel; however, the film significantly deviates from the text. In the novel, women are spied upon by the town cripple, who hides by the river bank. His character symbolizes the dark side of human sexuality, animalistic urges, and perversion. It does not, however, breach the heterosexual conventions guiding the novel. In the film, sexual otherness is always hidden in the subtext; it never openly disturbs the dominant narratives. The latently homoerotic undercurrents rise to the surface for a second, just as it is possible to catch only a fleeting glimpse of the naked male bodies in the river. The shot of the river in which the naked boys are swimming conceals the ambivalent subsurface textual structures. Ratkin is different from the other boys—while they hurry to the spot where women come to wash clothes, he stays behind. He spots a daisy floating on the river's surface and puts it in his mouth—a symbolic gesture of his innocence and purity. The following shot creates a contrast between a boy who plans to surprise the women, thus representing heterosexual desires, and the passive Ratkin. While the leader of the group becomes the center of the frame gesturing in order to convince the others ("[the women] will enjoy us watching them" (Krška 1954, my translation), Ratkin is hiding away from the group in the background. Although he is outside the camera's focus, he remains discernible throughout the duration of the shot (partially thanks to the color of his hair—he is the only one with fair hair; the other boys are all dark-haired). Semantically, though, he is the main focus: as he is shouting out to the boys to get back, the viewer is made aware of his timidity and difference. The scene ends with the group leader whistling at the women and flashing his young body at them.

This scene does not show standard eroticism; it holds no sexual fulfilment for the male characters. It is here to demonstrate the beauty of the naked male body, suggesting that there is something other than the majority view of masculine and feminine sexuality hidden in the inscrutable river stream. The "alpha boy" represents the legitimate mode of sexuality, symbolizing the social majority, which produces new generations of children (i.e., the future of Communism), whereas Ratkin's passivity suggests (at least) reluctance towards this normative mode of sexuality, which makes him a threat to it. How is this parade of naked boys justified in the film? First of all, the women are not young girls, but older wives and mothers; moreover they are not bourgeois ladies from

the esplanade, but washerwomen, the female symbols of the working class. Their presence in this scene fulfills ideological obligations and allows Krška to deviate from the text in so many other details.

As I have mentioned already, the themes of physical closeness and the profound relationships between men constitute a dominant feature of this adaptation, which differs from its literary pre-text by its addition of the questioning of contemporary gender stereotypes. Furthermore, the adaptation favors the male element on both the thematic and formal levels (e.g., in the scenes with Ratkin and Anička, the camera constantly shifts towards the former), and focuses on firm relationships between male characters, opposing patriarchal (or heteropatriarchal) norms and conventions in yet another way. The conflicts explored in the pre-text are expanded in the adaptation by incorporating a new element.

The character of Zach, Ratkin's older schoolmate and closest friend, plays an important role in this expansion. The two youngsters meet for the first time in the Madame Staňková's infamous salon, the scene of many a boisterous party attended by the Austrian officers stationed in the town. Ratkin is—unsurprisingly—a fish out of water in this environment; his unease seemingly illustrates the decadence of bourgeois society, and at first he comes across as an introverted eccentric. Zach's arrival throws him off balance even more, with the newcomer taking Ratkin's hands into his own, describing them as "delicate and pink," and proceeding to read Ratkin's future as a poet in his palms. Zach, then, is the first person to recognize Ratkin's otherness by identifying it as heightened sensitivity and poetic inclinations. When they raise their glasses to drink to "never having their hearts broken," (Krška 1954, my translation) Ratkin calls out, "Evoe,"[13] explaining that the word does not mean anything, it is a mere incantation. However, he does not offer any clarification as to what he has exclaimed.

Once again we can observe the strategy of hiding behind play here—the salon scenes, in keeping with the ideological critique of bourgeois decadence, allow Krška to portray Ratkin as an outsider, someone who does not fit in. This game of hide-and-seek enables those perceptive to the clues—that is, a specific group of people strictly excluded from socialist society—to extract hidden meanings from an entirely different symbolical system. The sensitive protagonist's loneliness is emphasized even more in the following scene, in which he leaves the salon and wanders through the town's deserted streets, calling out his uncle's name. It is Zach who answers, thus strengthening the connection between the two

men who for Ratkin represent a kind of solace from the mostly uncomprehending society around him. In this scene, Zach and Ratkin are standing very close to each other; later in the film when Ratkin finally meets his uncle, they share a close embrace and their proximity is even more intimate. Towards the end of the film, Zach and Ratkin say goodbye at the train station, their passionate embrace reminding us of lovers being torn apart by external forces, in this case the former's expulsion from the lyceum.

Krška proved to be a master conman in his adaptation—at a time of heightened political repression he managed to appropriate socialist imagery to make a film that addressed one of the most socially excluded groups of that time. The audience accepted the adaptation as a fresh take on the work of a beloved novelist, along with its additional meanings that they could not or did not want to see. The adaptation became a part of Czechoslovakia's cultural heritage, and through it the cultural capital of the period was enriched by challenging and subverting the values on which the adaptation was ostensibly built: homosexual love is shown as superior to heterosexuality. Adapting the work of a poet who is regarded as one of the pillars of Czech national literature thus becomes a subversive act par excellence.

A Discordant Adaptation

During the first half of the 20th century Fráňa Šrámek had a wide, almost cult-like following in Czech literature; he was celebrated by his fellow writers, literary critics, and readers alike. The takeover in 1948 not only preserved his cult status, but strengthened it by exonerating his prewar anarchist and anti-Communist views.[14] Even though the 1950s did not favor the themes he had explored in his literary work, the state-controlled film industry made it possible to produce a film with a distinct emotional tone and impressionist aesthetics, a film that did not offer its audience clear-cut clues for interpretation. *Silvery Wind* was uncharacteristic of its time, revolving around the fragility of the human psyche, a theme hardly obliging the official poetics of postwar Czechoslovakia. The film's director focused on the value of individuality—an approach in sharp contradiction to the official artistic practice. In this context it is important to point out that the 1950s were an inherently conflicted decade—members of the prewar intelligentsia were still around, including a generation of classically trained high school teachers who were still active and exerted influence

on public opinion, albeit not as explicitly as before. Similarly, the legacy of interwar literature and cinema was still alive in the minds of the people. The most obvious function of Krška's *Silvery Wind* and *The Moon over the River* was to sentimentally reminisce about old times.

The adaptation's romantic sensitivity towards nature also opposed the period's socialist enthusiasm. Unlike official, Communist-approved images of man embedded in the urbanized, machine-operated environment, Krška's film is filled with scenes depicting nature as a soulful, sensitive entity and man responding to it with matching perceptiveness. He accentuates this relationship in shots of the flowing river and trees swaying in the wind accompanied by vivid musical motifs. The landscape does not just serve as an inanimate backdrop to the story; it is a living organism. This approach to depicting nature reveals yet another dimension of the adaptation: the representation of "queerness," as experiencing nature is shown as the contrast to leading a standard life in the industrialized society of postwar Czechoslovakia.

Postscript: The Film's Second Life

So far I have discussed how the adaptation resonates with its pre-text as well as with other—both literary and non-literary—motifs. My final analysis, however, requires a shift from the social to a deeply personal context. I now wish to discuss how the making of the film influenced one individual's life. This change of perspective demonstrates how a work of art can significantly mark a person's life.

On 11 February 1957 actress Jana Rybářová, who played the role of Anička in the film version of *Silvery Wind*, committed suicide; she was 20 years old. Her death had a profound impact on Czech society. Just like the film's message, her fate did not fit the official ethos of the time. Unlike the majority of contemporary female characters in Czech cinema,[15] her Anička offered the audience something they could easily relate to—the troubles of a young girl confused by her own feelings of bittersweet first love. The actress's personal story—her tragic death and, most significantly, the reasons behind it—thus amplified the romantic fortune of the film's Anička, creating a sharp contrast between the narrow emotional range of the standard female character of the period and the complexity of her existentialist act. The death of a young artist is a theme with universal appeal, at least ever since Romanticism, and as such, Rybářová's suicide drew much attention and speculation. However, from

the establishment's point of view with its firm belief in historical optimism the suicide of a young person was obviously highly inappropriate.

Silvery Wind was Jana Rybářová's first film, after which she was offered a permanent contract with the Realistic Theater of Zdeněk Nejedlý (1955–1957, nowadays Švandovo Theater). She was also courted by famous film directors of the time; apart from the roles Krška offered her, Otakar Vávra also offered her a role. During the filming of Krška's *Legenda o lásce* (*A Legend about Love* 1956), she met opera singer Přemysl Kočí, and so her own ill-fated love story commenced. Kočí was 20 years her senior and a married man; she soon became the butt of jokes. In early 1957, Rybářová committed suicide by coal gas. She was buried at Prague's Vyšehrad Cemetery, the resting place of many famous Czech artists.

I would now like to turn my attention to Rybářová's diaries. Writing in a stylized manner that was a common practice in the days when diaries were often written so that they could be published posthumously as public texts, the young woman seemed to strive to be in control of the account of her own life. Her diaries are full of self-analyzing contemplation, exalted emotions, and concerns about her unfulfilled life. As an adolescent girl searching for herself, she is torn between feelings of intense happiness and profound sadness. Her writings also expose her fear of revealing her own inadequacy—in her goodbye letter she asks her mother to ensure that all her outstanding payments are seen to, so that she does not leave any unfinished business behind. Commenting on her death, she says that she "wanted to die in a more beautiful fashion." The diaries further reveal that the actress felt very close to the character she played, and also how the fictional world of the story mirrored her personal experience. In one of her entries she writes:

> My beautiful, beloved Anička! She doesn't know what she wants; she wants beauty but doesn't know how to get to it. She's a silly flirt who can't see clearly. My Anička. How sweet you were, how happy I was when I could be you. I only wanted to go forward. I would like to play you again, my crazy Anička, and better this time, the way you deserve. I couldn't play you as well as I should have. I know I didn't give you enough. But how extraordinary it felt putting on your clothes and your face each morning! For a whole day you would belong to me and no one else. And the tremors that would come each time before the "action!" and then the disgust and anger I felt watching myself in the dailies and seeing how empty it all was. (*Nevyjasněná úmrtí – Nelze umírat štěstím* 2000, my translation)

The diaries as well as friends' and colleagues' reports suggest that Rybářová was dealing with similar issues as the character she famously portrayed. The role must have had a great influence on her inner life, especially on how she assessed her self-worth. Despite constantly doubting her acting skills, she managed to render a character so well that it lived on in the memories of countless viewers.

From a psychological perspective Anička's mood swings—feigned or real—may be an expression of her narcissistic personality with its characteristic fear of her own self-worth. Subconsciously believing she has no value as a person, Anička compensates for this fear by acting as if she were too good for Ratkin. Her game is a manipulative one—she can see he is quite helpless against her charms. Ratkin's courting allows her to treat him with disdain and to turn him down whenever she pleases to. Again and again she teases Ratkin, testing his loyalty and demanding new proof of his devotion. Not unlike Jana Rybářová herself, Anička is torn between her desire and the need for rejection prescribed by social conventions.

Suicide, apart from being an expression of irreducible despondency, can also be seen as a symbolic gesture. This theme is present in the novel (and partially in the film as well) in the story of uncle Jiří, who was not able to live life as he desired. His character combines the tragedy of the idealistic hero (the world turns out to be different than he had expected) and the romantic longing to live one's life in exotic and faraway settings. His idealism and escapism stand in sharp conflict with reality and so his desire to attain the ideal is replaced by a desire to leave this world altogether. Jana Rybářová's suicide can also be seen as her attempt to overcome the discrepancy between the ideal and reality. Uncle Jiří kills himself because he could not construct a meaningful life, and Ratkin solves his ambiguous romantic situation by leaving Anička; the young actress may have attained the ideal through the romantically perceived act of suicide.

Jana Rybářová's suicide was eventually aestheticized in 1960s Czech poetry, when Jaroslav Seifert published his book of poems *Koncert na ostrově* (*A Concert on the Island* 1965). One of the poems is dedicated to the tragic fate of the actress:

Young Jana Rybářová
Died from a broken heart.
But there was something great in her death,

And stronger than the force that lifts the ribs
So that lungs can fill with the bitterness of life.
[…]
They call it love. It may be so.
But it is something see-through and lighter still
Than the wing of a fly
That weighs nothing. (Seifert 1965, 58–59, my translation)

The poem is part of a section titled *Muší křídlo* (*The Wing of a Fly*), which includes four poems in total; two of these poems address transformations—those of young girls from the innocence of childhood to womanhood and those of young lovers' happiness and fears; the final poem talks about love's tragic fate. It helps us see the connection between the death of the young actress and Krška's adaptation in the presence of a desire for something grand and pure. The film's uncle Jiří and Jana Rybářová leave "our indifferent time" and they have to muster up all the courage in order to do so. As Seifert puts it, "There was something great in her death." The actress had to gather superhuman strength to overcome the survival instinct that bound her to her earthly existence. Her doing so becomes mythologized in Seifert's poem; her act reveals the meaning of love itself.

In his poem Jaroslav Seifert grasped—and thus "possessed"—the suicide of the young actress. Her death ceased to be an exclusively personal matter. The poet—or society—usurps an intimate moment, turning it into something that belongs to everybody. Seifert's poem links suicide and love, showing us how society appropriates works by adapting and interpreting them.

Notes

1. The lyrical power of Šrámek's novel, the sensuality of his images, and the modes of his poeticism are illustrated by Ratkin's declaration, which concludes Krška's film as well:

   "Life! Life!—Let us bow to its glory, let us sing its praises! Its fires blaze at night at hills that are ever nearer. It had sent forth its messengers, and we have laid promises of our devotion in their hands. We want to love our great and beautiful master; relay that, messengers! We want to carry his colors and thus claim victory! We want to be so that his eye can dwell on us proudly, nodding his head to our rhythmic march! But tell him not to betray us, not to sell us! We want to battle him, even! Even him—tell him that. And that we sing his praises, don't forget…!" (Krška 1954, my translation)

It is surely a significant question where this panvitalist celebration of nature has its roots. F.X. Šalda noted with interest the similarity between Šrámek's writings and the prose of the Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun. Hamsun's oft-translated novels were extremely popular among Šrámek's peers and with Šrámek himself because of the emotional force they possess, the psychology of the characters (including its analysis), and their forays into the subconscious. The characters from *Mysteries* (in Czech 1909) and *Pan* (in Czech 1896) appeared to be complex riddles, which were then subjected to microscopic psychophysiological examination in the books, which in itself must have ignited the interest of the young Czech modernists. Šrámek, then, appears as an appropriator of Scandinavian culture. First, he "adapted" Hamsun's life experience for the Czech environment when he published the prose *Mistr v hladovění* (Master in starving) in the anarchist journal Právo lidu in 1905. *Silvery Wind*, then, borrows its ambiguously motivated romantic games between men and women, and its panvitalist celebration of nature, from Hamsun.

2. He collaborated mostly with poets connected to the magazine *Nový kult* (New Cult), such as Stanislav Kostka Neumann, Karel Toman, Viktor Dyk, and František Gellner.
3. This relates to an important phenomenon in Czech culture—songwriting and setting poems to music. The cult of the future national poet, which would later become an icon of the socialist take on literature, emerges from this relation.
4. "Elsewhere, Šrámek conserves his apricots in sugar. And that is much more likeable; in this way the most pleasing and successful of his writings are created. This is how it is in the novel *Tělo* (Body). A sensuous, though smart, suburban girl marries the man she first succumbed to. Youth and sensuousness are conserved in quite a happy marriage; only the conclusion of the novel, very external and non-organic, the declaration of war and the separation of man and woman, enters the novel dissonantly and suggests the marriage's beginning dissolution. It is a pity. Here, Šrámek missed a truly great subject: showing how sensuality evolves and changes form, or fades and dissolves, in ordinary marriages—where there is no catastrophe this external and frankly rare as the beginning of a war. Don't let us deceive ourselves: the tragedy of sensuality is internal" (Šalda 1963, 219, my translation).
5. This era can be reconstructed by using the study by Lukáš Nozar (see Nozar 2011, 395–431, my translation).
6. While creating an audio-visual presentation of the town in 2012, students from Písek chose a melody from Krška's *Silvery Wind* as a central motif of its musical component.

7. For example: "Písek, the town of music, of poets, the town which saw the first Czech theatrical productions of Josef Kajetán Tyl, where Bedřich Smetana worked, where Adolf Heyduk lived; it is a town with a substantial role in our national history. Jan Neruda used to write here, and more than one writer or poet gazed on the countryside—Alois Jirásek, Julius Zeyer, F.X. Svoboda. Here, the music of our composers, our virtuosos played. And it was here, where our national bard, Fráňa Šrámek, left his traces" (Pa 1954, 248, my translation).
8. Another instance of Krška's playfulness is at view here, as the supporting role of the elderly prostitute is played by Zdeňka Baldová, a film and theater star from the interwar period, and the wife of K.H. Hilar, an important personality in the world of theater. While in this film she portrays the "madam from the house at the river," in the previous Šrámek adaptation of *Moon over the River* she played the anxious and fearful wife of the stationer Hlubina.
9. This motif originated in 19th-century Czech literature: it appears in the short story *Za půl hodinky* (In Half an Hour) written by Jan Neruda and published in the collection *Arabesky* (Arabesques, 1864).
10. The means of depicting natural spaces changed for Šrámek by way of reading the novels of Knut Hamsun, though Krška also reveals links to Karel Hynek Mácha (1810–1836). Mácha, a representative of Czech literary Romanticism, sees nature as a space in which to project his subject, and he views his own self against the backdrop of the witnessed processes. Nature understood in this way is a mirror reflecting one's state of mind. For Šrámek, the countryside is a space of freedom, unchained by the conventions of the town, and it is often so for Krška as well. Krška therefore constructs an image of nature close to that of 19th-century authors (such as K.H. Mácha or Vítězslav Hálek), with one key difference: nature is not meant for sweet melancholy, but for riotous play.
11. The actress's lack of experience was mentioned by the other actors, too (cf. "*Nevyjasněná úmrtí – Nelze umírat štěstím*" 2000).
12. Jaroslav Vrchlický was a Czech poet, dramatist, and translator, the author of an extraordinarily broad oeuvre that transmitted Western European models into Czech culture.
13. The interjection "evoe" comes from the Greek εὐοῖ, an exclamation of Bacchic frenzy.
14. In the 1924 survey titled "Why I do not support Communism", journalist Ferdinand Peroutka asked many famous Czech writers, including Karel Čapek and Josef Kopta, this topical question. Fráňa Šrámek answered:

    I have never been a supporter of the Communist Party, not even in its earliest days. I've always preferred the word "freedom" to "dictatorship," "a man" to "the masses"; I find that the word "proletariat" can

be too easily abused; the flag of class war can be waved with not very good intentions. I accept that it is a new, great leap forward in terms of human and social prospects, so we must not be irritated and show patience instead. I have never been a sworn enemy of the movement either; I could have been—and wanted to be—enlightened. And if now I am not—or in a different way than I expected to be—it is not my fault and it may not be Communism's fault either. It is the Communists and their examples, sometimes very illustrative ones too, that accompany their slogans, who are to blame. (Šrámek 1924, 785–786, my translation).

15. In the ideologically immaculate films of the 1950s the female characters often faced clearly defined tasks. The female protagonist of the film *Cesta ke štěstí* (*Way Leading to Happiness* 1951), directed by Jiří Sequens, strives to become a tractor driver. She is opposed by her father, who refuses to become part of the local cooperative farm, and gets a job at the Machine and Tractor Station. After a long night shift she successfully finishes plowing the field and persuades the villagers to enter the collective. In the film *Slovo dělá ženu* (A Woman as Good as Her Word 1952) , directed by Jaroslav Mach, we follow the story of lathe worker Jarmila Svátková, who develops a dishwasher prototype to help women with their household work, impressing her future husband by showing him that women are just as able to work in technical professions as men.

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CHAPTER 3

Adaptation as Play: The Worlds of Jules Verne Come Alive

In the 16-year period this book is concerned with, director and animator Karel Zeman—called "the great wizard of cinema," "the king of cinematic fantasy," and "today's Georges Méliès" (Hořejší 1970, 1) by Czech and international critics—made two adaptations of Jules Verne's novels: *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* (1958) and *The Stolen Airship* (1966). The first film was made in the 1950s, the second in the 1960s. Even though both films were made in different political climates, their aesthetic impulses have a common source: avant-garde aesthetic principles (an emphasis on untamed fantasy, free association, combining different artistic media, etc.) realized through original art processes.[1] A clear subversive contrast can be identified in the earlier film in particular: *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* went beyond the boundaries of prescribed art, for—in contrast with Communist norms—it featured a new, complex approach in which lightheartedness mixed with seriousness. By declaring children the target audience, the film was less vulnerable to ideological pressure.

A duality of message was common to both films. To children, the films promised an adventurous story based on Verne's books. At the same time, Zeman's adaptations reached out to the adult audience, for whom they recreated the fading memory of reading the novels: they reanimated what had been lost to memory and projected it on film. One review of *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* expressed this idea:

> When you come home from the cinema maybe you won't go to bed. You will go to your bookcase, to the last shelf, where you have hidden the

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> books of your youth. And you will dust off those characteristically golden-red volumes from Vilímek's publishing house. You will leaf through them—yes, Bennet's, Roux's, and Férat's romantic illustrations are there. But at that moment they will seem unnatural to you; you will find them rigid and unmoving, even though just a while ago you had seen them alive and in full motion. (Kratochvíl 1958, 8, my translation)

Furthermore, adult audiences were able to discover abundant allusions to the political climate and the problems of the 20th century in general in the allegorical subtext of the films, which undermined ideologically driven ideas of modern history. The production of *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* offers an insight into the conflict between the time it made and the creative determination of Karel Zeman and his collaborators. Despite modernism and the avant-garde having been outright condemned by Communist-era critics, the film contains traces of Surrealism. *The Stolen Airship*, made eight years later, draws from the poetics of parody and absurdity; it appropriated exotic themes for Czech audiences, and it ultimately comes off as an inventive play on various sources of inspiration. The film unfolds as a carnival of genres, forms, and symbols, and sets into play a number of semantic-cognitive effects, which earned it the attention of older viewers. Although the adaptations' approaches differ, both evoked an atmosphere of nostalgia, a yearning for a vanished world, which called into question the clear-cut depictions of social change in postwar Czechoslovakia.

Verne's works have been available to Czech audiences in translation since the second half of the 19th century. Not only did they relay suspenseful stories, but they also provided insights into the overwhelming technological and social changes happening at the time. An article from the popular weekly magazine *Světozor* published in 1876 helps illustrate the interest that Verne's books generated amongst their readers:

> There might be no other foreign writer who has garnered such excited and universal approval as the Frenchman Jules Verne has with his strange novels. His writings were translated into Czech in a ravenous manner, and wherever they wander, they arouse genuine awe. Let us remember how a brief abstract from his work *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*, published within a feuilleton in one of our prestigious newspapers, caused a great upheaval of minds by its being put out in several parts. Even intelligent readers cognizant of the nature of our Earth pressed for the next installments and the ending, eager to learn about the developments in the story. Such is the interesting and captivating way in which Verne introduces

> readers to the newest discoveries of the natural and geographical sciences. ("Jules Verne" 1876, 142, my translation)

Here, and elsewhere, Verne's writings were heralded as pioneering: their themes and ideas celebrated the successes of progress and scientific discovery and resonated with the spiritual and cultural climate of the era. For a wide spectrum of readers, his books presented a new program for humanity to follow, one based on the tenets of reason. The spirit of the Industrial Age permeated the collective consciousness of the Czechs. The Czech lands were one of the fastest developing parts of Austria–Hungary, and they furnished the monarchy with industrial goods as well as agricultural products. Enormous lifestyle changes occurred within the span of a lifetime. Change was most visible in the transformation of cities, whose urban fabric was thoroughly rearranged: new buildings disturbed medieval urban patterns, and fortifications were torn down to make place for newly built boulevards and beltways. Verne's novels accentuating faith in scientific and technological progress arrived at the right time in the Czech lands, which were undergoing a technological boom, and thus attained great popularity.

Contemporary readers were captivated by the extraordinary feats and audacity of the intrepid trailblazing explorers portrayed in Verne's novels (cf. Jacobson 1936, 15–16; Bass 1931, 1–2). Verne's literary works mirrored the ongoing social changes. The use of rationality, which could reveal the world's mysteries and help dominate the world itself, denoted happy prospects for the future. Discovery and positivist science, made accessible by means of captivating novels, assumed the position previously occupied by divine law. Verne's writings brought 19th-century readers closer to the rapidly developing scientific understanding of the world:

> There have been many diverse attempts to disseminate, or popularize, the natural and geographical sciences in amusing, fictional ways, but those attempts never garnered universal approval. That which was thus unsuccessfully pursued was achieved by Verne in a rapid manner. His novels, translated into many languages, have become the domain of the masses, and they have contributed, more than all scientific writings together, to the popularization of science. Verne holds all rights to the founding of this movement, and it is doubtful that anyone will be able to venture to imitate him. ("Jules Verne" 1876, 142, my translation)

Such progress, however, was not always met with open arms, and for good reason. There was a gradually emerging feeling that rationalization,

as well as technology, is in fact two-sided: on one hand it could produce an exciting Verne-like utopia, and on the other it seemed to be steering humanity towards a dark dystopia. As cities grew, so too did criminality; as people migrated, rural areas were depopulated. The growing concern over rapid social change was reflected in Czech "sugar-maker novels," a fictional subgenre that developed in reaction to the transformation of the countryside due to the growth of the sugar industry. One of these novels—*Duše továrny* (*The Soul of the Factory,* 1894) by A.M. Šimáček—tells the story of a girl from a traditional background, who becomes infatuated with her factory job and loses herself in it. This radical change in her psychology destroys her social bonds and, ultimately, her life: she dies cut into pieces by a factory machine.

In 20th-century Czechoslovakia Verne's literary output was categorized as young adult literature. Entertaining narratives facilitated an understanding of scientific discovery and modern technology. By the mid-20th century, when the inventions from Verne's novels had become common place or even already obsolete, his works conjured up romantic images of scientific pioneers, aeronauts, seafarers, mechanical engineers, and geologists. Verne was celebrated as a visionary—his once fantastical descriptions of electric energy and submarine travel had turned into reality.

Verne's writings remained consistently popular in Czechoslovakia, from the democratic interwar period, through the hard-line 1950s, to the more liberal 1960s. However, in the early 1950s, the status of his books began to change; according to literary historian Pavel Janáček, censors tried to fully relegate Verne's works to children's literature and proposed his books not be published for the general public (Janáček 2004, 213).[2] His attractive stories, alongside those of Jack London, however, remained compulsory reading for adventure-seeking youth. Most importantly, Verne's fictional works inspired a great pioneer of Czech animation, Karel Zeman, who at least at first glance, approached them as adventure stories for boys.

The Fabulous World of Jules Verne in the Age of the Bomb

I will now focus on *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*, which was made in 1958 in the puppet film studio in Gottwaldov (today's Zlín). The filmmakers based the story on the novel *Face au Drapeau* (*Facing the Flag*, 1897), which details the kidnapping of the inventor of a dangerous

explosive. One might expect Communist functionaries would have co-opted an adaptation of *Facing the Flag* to illustrate their ideological worldview, but that was not the case. Even though the film was made in the 1950s and thematized the dangers of a "deadly invention" (one possible translation of the Czech title) in a divided world, the overall mood of the film did not adhere to contemporary cookie-cutter concepts and normative aesthetic demands.

The film follows a simple plot and includes features common to adventure narratives: kidnapping, interpersonal conflict, and risk. The linear, chronological narration, riddled with captivating subplots, progresses at a brisk pace. The villainous Count Artigas kidnaps Professor Roch, the inventor of a very effective explosive, and transports him to a deserted island equipped with a secret underground laboratory for perfecting his invention. The Professor's assistant, an enthusiastic proponent of modern technology named Simon Hart, is also abducted; seeing through the Count's dishonest intentions, he manages to send out a message about the impending danger to the world and, in the end, to escape. Despite all the unfortunate happenings, Professor Roch eventually realizes how his invention is going to be exploited and destroys it along with the entire island, marking a victory for the civilized world. *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*'s narrative is clearly intended for children. However, the film's playful animation (and the formal and meaningful dynamics contained therein) managed to captivate older audiences; serious passages alternated with humorous scenes in this gently ironic reflection on boundless wonder at technological innovation and human ingenuity (Fig. 3.1).

Verne's narrative is related from two points of view: The first is provided by an impersonal omniscient narrator, whose style is documentary and (in the last chapter) journalistic. The second is by the diary entries of the main character, Simon Hart. The transliteration of an objectivized narrative act into audio-visual form was not an issue in the filmmaking process, unlike the diary entries: those are, in the film diegesis/story, transformed into extensive, making voice-over one of the fundamental narrative instruments of the film. This conventional solution puts forward a subjective line of narrative informed mainly by enthusiasm for the age of invention and by humanist pathos.

Karel Zeman wrote the screenplay alongside respected poet František Hrubín. Clearly these two extraordinary creative personalities were drawn to more in the source material than the escalating struggle

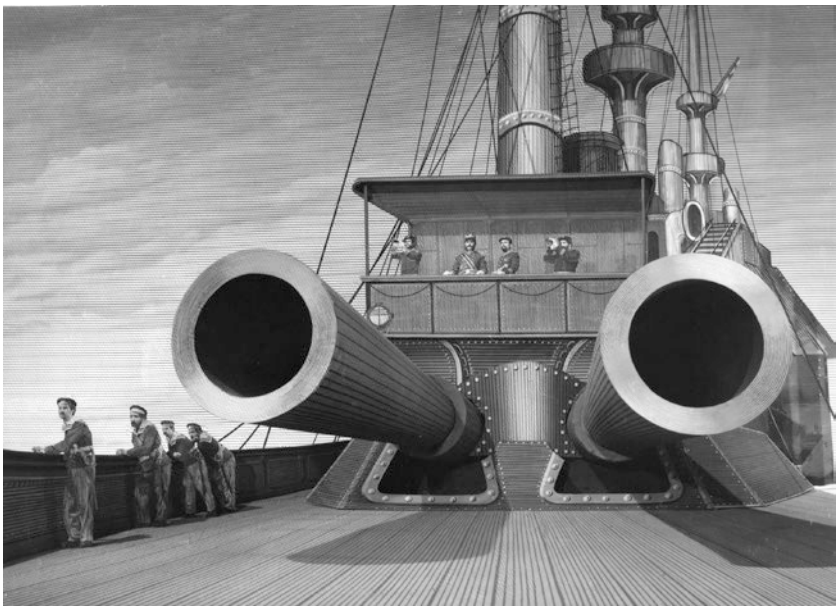

Fig. 3.1 *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*. The warship searching for the kidnapped Professor Roch. *Vynález zkázy* (*The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*; Karel Zeman 1958). Courtesy of Ludmila Zeman. All rights reserved

between good and evil. *Facing the Flag*, apart from its obligatory utopian motifs and celebration of scientific progress, looks skeptically at human society. Instead of merely depicting noble and moral heroes and explorers, the novel takes it upon itself to warn its readers of potential catastrophes and the peril that could befall the whole world. In the adaptation, the filmmakers build heavily upon this line of thinking.

The adaptation was made at a time when the Eastern Bloc was bolstering its military might in anticipation of another worldwide, and possibly nuclear, conflict. This period also witnessed the reinforcement of the border between East and West—the "Iron Curtain." The themes dealt with in *Facing the Flag* thus resonated with a society subjected to the ongoing threat of nuclear war and the possibility of global annihilation. František Hrubín was well known as the author of the epic lyrical work *Hirošima* (*Hiroshima*, 1948), which was composed in reaction to the recently ended world war. In *Hiroshima*, Hrubín uses poetry to convey a

sense of endangerment and the fear of a nuclear war's unfathomable consequences. He expresses what it is like to be aware of the constant presence of the greatest danger in the modern world: "it [the bomb] keeps falling down with us / it will always fall down with us / even then, when we are laid flat / as we die – and the fall / will shake the ground we molder in" (Hrubín 2010, 225, my translation).

In *Hiroshima* a tragic event happening in a seemingly distant Japanese city is brought closer to ordinary people in Prague as they experience a peaceful morning—and a similar tactic is used in the Verne adaptation. Simon Hart, having been kidnapped and brought to the remote island, manages to alert humanity of the looming danger: he succeeds in sending out a message about the ultra-modern military lab in the island's interior and about the pirates' intent to abuse Professor Roch's invention. An enormous flock of frightened, screaming seagulls surrounds the balloon carrying Simon's letter; this visual, accompanied by the unsettling soundtrack, generates a feeling of danger and uncertainty. After first being found by a group of men and women, the letter keeps changing hands, until it reaches a telegraph man, who then broadcasts Simon's message to the world. Then follows a series of static shots of illustrations or models displaying telegraph wires, cathedrals, immense ringing bells, harbors, cities, and a gathering of miners. This section features three jump cuts to the real world, which serve a specific function: first, a camera captures the undercarriage of a fast-moving train, followed by a carriage hurtling forward, only the wheels and the horses' legs visible, and finally there is a medium shot of a World War I—era destroyer crashing through ocean waves. This rapid sequence of alternating images, which elicits the 20th century's "real world" rush into war, serves as a vehicle for accentuating a catastrophic scenario that needs to be stopped. The world is hurtling towards destruction, and—as represented by the shot of the battleship—20th-century technology definitely proves its dystopian nature. However, this sequence ends with five shots that remove the audience to a strikingly different environment: hurry and haste are replaced by an old-fashioned steam train model slowly crossing a bridge somewhere in the countryside, a picture of a wooden house with a bell clanging in its belfry, and a little girl playing with baby chickens. The fast-paced modern world is replaced with intimate rural motifs, a brief reminder of the pastoral tendencies typical of 19th-century Central European art. Formally conventional, this sequence is an emotionally acute evocation of a peaceful and harmonic space connected to motifs

of home and childhood. Nevertheless, the jarring clanging of the bell implies anxiety. The fact that the last frame of the sequence is a medium shot of a child protectively holding a baby chick to her mouth shows that the film places emphasis on all earthly life being in danger. This conclusion could refer to a threat striking at society's core, which may have played into the hands of Communist ideologues who tried to exercise control over all areas of social life. They could choose to see in it a clearly formulated argument in favor of isolating the country and its inhabitants from the capitalist world by sealing the borders.

Adaptation Through Čapek's Lenses

The adaptation manages to show continuity with pre-Communist artistic and social traditions, with no intervention from the Party's bureaucratic apparatus and its censors. Both the screenplay and the film demonstrate Zeman's and Hrubín's experience with the avant-garde art and culture of the democratic First Republic.

Facing the Flag's conclusion best evokes the immediate danger presented throughout the novel: on the pirates' order the Professor destroys one of the battleships nearing the island, but once he sees the French flag on another ship, he revolts against the pirates and their malevolent intentions. The film treats the situation differently: the tired old inventor is seen standing next to an enormous cannon. The juxtaposition of flagrant human futility and a threatening weapon provides a poignant scale, which reinforces the scene's effect. The soundtrack also comes to the fore here, accentuating this trying moment's suspense and importance. The audience wonders how the Professor will fare. Will he destroy the weapon, the fruit of his labors? Will concern for society's welfare outweigh a scientist's dream? Contemporary political events certainly influenced the film, but its humanist message is surprisingly coherent with the literary legacy of the First Republic. The anti-war novels and plays[3] by Karel Čapek (1890–1938), a dauntless journalist and defender of democracy, also feature inventors who find themselves in similar situations.

Verne's novel and Zeman's film do not share the same goals: the adaptation addresses ethical and philosophical issues absent from the source material. In the film mere greed does not drive Count Artigas as in the novel: he takes part in an allegorical parable concerning the destruction of the technological world. It is an interesting coincidence that after Čapek's anti-utopian novel *Továrna na absolutno* (*The Absolute*

at Large, 1922) was published critic Miroslav Rutte compared Verne to Čapek in his review:

> [S]cientific hypotheses remained a mere outline for Verne, and he built his adventurous and romantic stories around them without trying to explain or describe their ethical, political, or moral consequences. This sociological background did not feature in scientific utopias until H. G. Wells's writing. He is mainly interested in those hypotheses which are able to influence the very mechanism of life, force it to create new phenomena, or act like a lever to induce a movement in the whole social, moral, and political mechanism. (Rutte 1922, 1, my translation)

Rutte continues his commentary by stating that Verne fails to develop his utopia, while Čapek uses adventure motifs only as a device enabling him to write about social and political topics and convey his philosophy of human actions.

Čapek's fictional heroes often find themselves alone, facing destruction and having to decide what to do while acutely aware of their personal responsibility. Prokop, a chemical researcher and the main character in *Krakatit* (*An Atomic Phantasy: Krakatit*, 1924) invents a powerful explosive—similarly to Professor Roch—and has to guard it from evil powers set on using his discovery against humanity. *An Atomic Phantasy: Krakatit* was apparently Zeman's most important inspiration. Professor Roch is a naïve humanist who practices science for science's sake and accepts the pirates' assistance because it enables him to continue his research. He is fascinated by his sensational finding that unlocks the enormous energy bound in physical matter: "and other discoveries will be needed so that the energy can serve people, so that it can power machines, provide light and warmth" (Zeman 1958, my translation). He bequeaths his theoretical work to technicians who can harness this energy and use it for common good. Just like in Čapek's works, the newly gained energy is supposed to help humanity and to rid it of slave labor. In the film, the professor is unaware of the risks of industrialized society. Immersed in his research, he is blind to the threat the world is subjected to, and he does not understand Artigas's desire to rule the world: his blindness makes him similar to Čapek's heroes, "[whose] actions become a satire on naïve human faith in progress through mechanical civilization and the modern natural sciences" (Černý 1992, 577, my translation).

The image of the professor in *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* clumsily destroying the pirates' cannon loaded with his own explosive expresses a symbolic moral that shares the appeal articulated by Čapek's writings. Professor Roch is a solitary individual, taking a stand against the transpersonal power of history. Blowing up the island is his answer to questions of human freedom. He is searching for the meaning of an individual existence at a period of "collective enthusiasm"—in early 1950s Czechoslovakia, a heretical idea. Literary critic Zdeněk Kožmín noted in his interpretations of Čapek's writings that in his prose's time:

> is treated mainly as a sequence of open or expired time limits. Its function is vividly anthropological: it offers the possibility to realize oneself, or it takes it away. Čapek's heroes do not ask themselves to be or not to be—they ask themselves how to be. The question, even if posed in this way, is chiefly dramatic. (Kožmín 1995, 381, my translation)

When one of the pirates informs the protagonist of *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* that he is no longer needed to execute their plans, the Professor indeed asks himself "how to be." Choosing such a conclusion was not incidental—it arose from the needs of the screenplay and the direction. Professor Roch is tested and prevails, just like a number of Čapek's characters, minor and major, before him.

Seeing the adaptation through the filter of Čapek's work is possible on yet another level, that is, in keeping with the philosophy of relativism: ideology cannot be forced on people, everyone has their own truth, and it is always prudent to use common sense. As literary historian Václav Černý writes:

> Čapek does not love the marvels of science and the wonders of technological civilization. He denies them love in the name of life. All his utopias resonate with the celebration of a modest, hard-working life, in which moments of little, intimate joy alternate with times of honest, earthly labor—the greatest blessing. (Černý 1992, 578, my translation)

The screenwriters read Verne through the transparent fabric of Čapek's apologia for life: through the emphasis on human liberty, and the shock inflicted on one who has experienced the pitfalls of progress. Even as the Professor destroys his deadly invention (and, in the process, himself), his decision imparts a message about the meaning of humanity, which is

also articulated in *An Atomic Phantasy: Krakatit* in the words that God addresses to Prokop:

> […] you will not achieve the highest and you will not release everything. You tried to tear yourself to pieces by force, but you have remained whole and you will neither save world not smash it to pieces. Much in you will remain closed up, like fire in a stove; that is good, it is sacrifice. You wanted to do great things, and you will instead do small ones. That is good. (Čapek 1948, 292)

Illustrations: A Window on the Word of Stories

In the 19th century the function of books and literary culture shifted somewhat as decoration gained importance at the expense of text. The urban salon, a new phenomenon, was a representative showcase often centered on an aesthetically pleasing library collection. Apparently untouched copies of Verne's works in second-hand bookshops seem to imply that some "readers" only ever entered the author's fantastical worlds via illustrations. Karel Zeman's use of Verne's original illustrations would go on to cement their place in Czech culture.

Prague publisher Josef Richard Vilímek, Jr. made perhaps the greatest contribution to establishing Verne's place in popular Czech culture. He began acquiring the rights to Verne's books, and the illustrations they contained, in 1889, and continued to publish them for 60 years. His original goals were commercial in nature, as he primarily intended to "reach out to the largest possible number of consumers, and [achieve] the subsequent financial and social success of his company" (Horák 2005, 19, my translation). Initially the books were—for commercial as well as customary reasons—serialized. However, contrary to custom, Vilímek insisted that Verne's novels be printed along with the original illustrations from the French editions, thus fostering a connection between the words and the original engravings in the minds of the public. Vilímek helped select the images for his publications and discussed the matter with Verne's publisher, Pierre Jules Hetzel; the technical means at his disposal enabled him to publish high-quality, richly illustrated books. Some of the higher-end publications included color engravings. After the rights to publish Verne's books were obtained by another publishing company in the early 20th century, Vilímek decided to save on expenses by reducing the books' dimensions. However, he

still insisted on his original concept and named his new edition "The Cheap Illustrated Edition of Jules Verne's Novels." Even under commercial pressure, he chose a format that highlighted the engravings (Horák 2005, 62).

How did the original illustrations attract generations of readers? Why did Verne's works become sought after by passionate collectors? Illustrations contributed to establishing the "Jules Verne phenomenon," which transcends the monomedial borders of verbal narrative. Late-19th-century readers of exotic adventure novels encountered phenomena and artefacts that were nearly impossible to imagine. Thus, these illustrations aided in visualizing the fantastical. One example is the detailed description of the airship *Albatross* in the novel *Robur the Conqueror*:

> Above the deck rose thirty-seven vertical axes, fifteen along each side, and seven, more elevated, in the centre. The "Albatross" might be called a clipper with thirty-seven masts. But these masts instead of sails bore each two horizontal screws, not very large in spread or diameter, but driven at prodigious speed. Each of these axes had its own movement independent of the rest, and each alternate one spun round in a different direction from the others, so as to avoid any tendency to gyration. (Verne 1978, 189)

While the verbal medium provides a gradual, linear, and descriptive representation of the airship, the visual representation offers a quick effect. The interplay between the verbal and the visual helps readers establish and refine their mental schemata.

Illustrations have the power to evoke the seemingly unimaginable. While viewing the engravings in Verne's books, readers repeatedly enter familiar situations, returning to the worlds they had visited in their youthful minds. Pleasure is invoked by repetition. It is therefore not surprising to find that Karel Zeman, who identified as a passionate reader of Verne's novels, used this principle in his films.

The adaptation's opening is a direct tribute to the French visionary and writer (the film correlated with the 50-year anniversary of Verne's death). The audience is welcomed into the fictional world by a voice-over saying "Good evening, dear friends. Come closer. I will tell you about the greatest adventure of my life" (Zeman 1958, my translation). The camera pans over a cozy room resembling a 19th-century scholar's office. The scene's score underscores the calming nostalgic atmosphere, opening with a clarinet solo joined gradually by strings and a

harpsichord. The camera focuses on a well-known portrait of Verne, present in most of the Czech editions of his writings, as well as on Verne's books, a petroleum lamp, an open diary, and, finally, on a portrait of the narrator: the main character of *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*, Hart Simon. Both Simon's and Verne's portraits are woodcuts. Wood engraving is also the main formal feature of the adaptation's poetics, as most images in the film bear a hatching effect. The audience is prepared to enter a fantastic world of wonders (often mentioned by Karel Zeman when talking about Verne's oeuvre). In Zeman's subsequent adaptations of Verne's works, this direct link to the factual author withered away, but here it is clear from the start that the film brings to life a world created by an author and his illustrators, Léon Benett, Édouard Riou, and so on, and that it does so with reverence and respect. Technological progress enabled artists to give movement to worlds made of words and illustrations within the film frame. Zeman's exuberant imagination thus brings back memories of romantic pioneers, and of childhood.

Zeman's aesthetic stance was indeed closely linked to imitating the atmosphere of the illustrations: "[My] Verne … must originate not only from the spirit of his work, but at the same time from the characteristic appearance of the original illustrations, whose wood-engraving form must be preserved and visible" (Brož 1986, 38, my translation). To do so, Zeman elected to combine animation and live action. He could thus create "a synthesis of the real and the fantastic" (Vestergaard 1986, 42). As mentioned above, the original illustrations of Verne's works were woodcuts, and thus the "hatching" aesthetic unified the film's artistic concept. The influence of the illustrations is apparent on the machines, technological inventions, costumes, and so on presented in the adaptation. Creating such visuals, of course, involved a complex preparation process:

> [I]n shooting a film like this, it is simply impossible to use any of the normal props used in other films. It is, for instance, not possible to use ordinary chairs; even the barrel which Hart writes about, the one in his dwelling in the core of the island, could not have been an ordinary barrel, because it would be visually jarring. All objects have to have the hatching characteristic for line engravings. The same applies to the costumes and make-up of the actors. (Navrátil 1956, 10, my translation)

After the audience has been invited into the fictional world, someone's hand starts turning the pages of a book containing Verne-related

engravings. The individual images show the airship *Albatross*, Captain Nemo's submarine, a man battling sea monsters, a steamship-filled harbor, and a map of the world, while Simon Hart's off-camera voice says: "I lived in a time which bore so many beautiful dreams of human progress—our heads were full of it, mine and my friends'—there was Robur the Conqueror, Barbican, Captain Nemo … that was the world of our youth" (Zeman 1958, my translation). The camera stops still over the last illustration, showing a steam paddle-wheel schooner. Then, suddenly, the picture comes to life: the ship sails across the moving sea as the stack emits steam, the paddle wheel turns, and people wander around the upper deck. Here the adaptation alludes to the "cinema of attractions" (Gunning 1989, 31–45)—the earliest cinema made hitherto static objects suddenly move, to the amazement of audiences.

The next shot subjects the audience to an inventive combination of diverse representational forms: whereas the ship is animated, the water is "real" (in terms of film as a medium), and so is the rising steam. Further on, the camera gets closer to the boat, and passengers sailing to America are visible, represented by actors in period costumes, while an amplifier-holding sailor is represented by an animated figure. However, the sailor "comes alive" in the next frame, in which he is portrayed by an actor.

The film uses various animation techniques and playful combinations: mainly frame-by-frame animation mixed with real-time animation. Two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects are animated, and figurines and props alternate with images of birds and marine life, as do live actors with photographic portraits; the smoke rising from the battleships can be real, animated, or a static illustration, and so on. When Professor Roch and Simon are kidnapped from the coastal castle, the weather is stormy. While both exterior and interior sets consist of painted scenes, the pirates leave in real-life footage. This group of men fighting enormous waves in a small boat evokes Edison's 1897 short film *Return of Lifeboat*. The technological aspect of Zeman's effort towards stylistic experiment was described by the assistant director of the film, Milan Vácha:

> A substantial portion of the film material is double-exposed or even triple-exposed. One frame captures a live actor in the studio with a little decoration. In the exterior, the same frame is exposed to another part of the real world—the surface of a pond or a stony bank reminiscent of a sea coast. The same frame is put into a camera for the third time in the trick studio, and a photograph of a miniature decoration or a moving figurine is added to the picture. (Taussig 2014, my translation)

The fantastic atmosphere and the blending of the real, unreal, curious, and bizarre were achieved by a unified visual expression created by hatching, matte paintings, special sets, and lighting. This combination generates a playful space which immediately informs the audience that the filmmakers are not trying to emulate reality.

The illustrations, embedded in cultural memory, were so important to Zeman that some even served as storyboards. The director's notes on storyboard preparation, where we can encounter remarks like "the whole shot following exactly the illustration in Verne's novel" indicate as such. This particular note refers to the scene in which the Sword, an English submarine, has set off for Back Cup in order to rescue Professor Roch. The illustration captures Simon Hart, an English officer, and the pilot inside the Sword, which serves as a background to the dramatic narrative. This episode is preceded by Simon's attempt at escaping the island across the bottom of the sea in a diving suit, and his rescue by the suddenly appearing English seamen. The camera is trained on the submarine's "control center," dominated in the forefront by its driving mechanism. The pilot sits in the center, and the officer and Simon sit on the sides by the windows. The whole scene highlights the atmosphere in this enclosed space, which the troubled expression on the officer's face underscores even more. The film is, at this moment, faithfully stylized as an illustration, and creates a moving copy of a picture known to generations of readers. A dialogue between the film's diegesis and the illustrations is established: the intermedial relationship is based on animating a timeless artistic work, and the illustration creates new relationships with other aspects of the film further on.

The film crew's creative work directly reflects a new approach to Verne's texts. The dynamics of the adaptation process were generated by the use of various artistic methods. Generally speaking, the creators of *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* chose two main approaches: showing-showing—through intermedial dialogue between the film's narrative and book illustrations (predominantly those from *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*)—and, obviously, telling-showing. It is, however, debatable whether this dichotomy, used by Linda Hutcheon in her *Theory of Adaptation*, is sufficient to describe this film. Zeman's films adapted a peculiar aesthetic object—a fusion of the textual and the graphic, which determined the poetics of the resulting work. The film presents and adapts not only characters, events, and places, but also the visual character of wood engraving. The intermedial flow is at least three-fold here: book—illustration—film.

Fantasy, Playfulness, and Hyperbole

Surprising associations and hyperbole in approaching the ethos of rationality is one of the characteristic features of the adaptation. Zeman's creative reflection of literary materials, which draws from childhood experience, employs aspects of hyperbole and naïveté. It is apparent from Karel Zeman's oeuvre, as well as from his own words, that he was deeply impressed by the utopian enthusiasm of Verne's writings and the by late-19th century optimism about the dawning new era. The film begins with Simon commenting upon a spectacle that introduces the audience to Verne's world; a parade of automobiles, trains, ships, submarines, flying objects, and fantastical inventions presents the viewer with an enthusiastic vision of human ingenuity. Along with the main character, the viewers witness the triumphs of science and technology, which are introduced in a playful manner. *Spontaneity* and *lightness* constitute the semantic gesture of this parade, which is unburdened by technology's darker aspects, and therefore presentable as a world of imagination and fantasy. The marching music–style soundtrack imitates the rhythms of a street organ and imparts a funfair atmosphere, accompanied by the harpsichord. It also implies a lightly ironic and parodic distance from the achievements of modern technology, which are presented in the film like funfair attractions.[4]

The film then continues with Simon Hart aboard the first Europe-to-America steamer, where "unforgettable impressions" are made on him; he witnesses how "the human spirit commands not only the sea but also the sky," and "with joyful trepidation observes the ever new triumphs of science and technology" (Zeman 1958, my translation). His voyage can continue on land, as "the iron horse knows no obstacles" (Zeman 1958, my translation). However, the aesthetic model of the world does not correspond with the enthusiastic declaration that "the century of steam and electricity puts the servants of yesterday to rest" (Zeman 1958, my translation) because the shots of new inventions clearly show that they are two-dimensional or three-dimensional models, and therefore the established form of things is subordinate to the creative view of the set designer.

Several shots show the *hyperbole* and *parody* at play in the film: the engineer driving the train across America resembles a Czech miller puffing on a pipe; the scene from a Prague street showing a coach driver standing over his fiacre's broken wheel, where the only parts moving are the driver's hand and one of his horses' heads; a short slapstick episode

on the train in which a cowboy nearly shoots a passenger, who is used to the dangers of the American West—he does not find gunfire extraordinary, but instead marvels at the dangers of new inventions. Instead of the immediate danger to his life, he is amazed by newspaper articles covering the destruction of yet another technological invention—the submarine (viewers later discover that the submarine actually was not destroyed, but that Count Artigas merely faked the sinking of this vessel).

The world of pioneering, inventing, and innovating is, in Verne's works, embodied by male characters. However, Zeman and Hrubín wrote a female character into the screenplay—a young woman named Jana—who, in her naivety, forms a striking contrast to the male world of exploitable technology, aggression, and wars. The character, stylized as a gullible girl, fails to see what is really happening on the island until the last minute: while the nearby factory is producing a powerful explosive, she waters her flowers with army helmets. Another scene employing contrast is also built upon humorous exaggeration: after the girl is rescued by pirates who sink her boat with a submarine, she retreats under the deck and tries to iron her wet clothes on the muzzles of cannons and gunpowder-filled barrels until she is stopped by the terrified captain of the vessel.

It is worth noting the unorthodox way in which Zeman represents the beginnings of cinema with parodic exaggeration. The technical limitations of the new form of art are demonstrated in a scene in which—thanks to "the newest technological invention" (Zeman 1958, my translation)—Artigas learns that his secret has been revealed. A portly pirate approaches a primitive mechanism on a stand, lights a candle within, attaches the handle, and starts the projection. The audience, made up of the villainous Artigas and two of his accomplices, watches a program comprising three parts: journal, sports, and news. They show various curiosities and sensations designed to captivate the audience. The film's creators based the ironic subtext in this sequence on the Poetist tradition of playful absurdity: English soldiers in African colonies ride rollerblade-equipped camels; a weightlifter lifts a barbell with increasing rapidity, while an innkeeper plays a Strauss-like waltz on an old-time piano reminiscent of the music that accompanies silent films; modern athletes move across the sky and water, aided by peculiar machines whose appearance demonstrates the farcical and absurd quality of the athletes' feats. However, the three-man audience is not impressed by these sensational images, or by the medium itself: they are only interested in the

third part of the film, which shows a submarine—their own—being pursued by various nations' armies, and which tells them that they have been exposed. The actual film does not thematize awe over the emotional power of moving images, but the awe of the invention itself, which is still in its infancy. The clumsy machine catches fire during the final projection, and the projectionist tries in vain to extinguish it with his hat before he drenches the machine in water from a tub. Then a pirate takes the machine, still on fire, out of the grand hall, as though this invention does not belong in the refined environment of a salon.

Zeman, although impressed by the romantic ethos of the pioneers of science and technology, had also experienced a world war and was thus wary of the progress Verne describes. He sought a way to deal with the tension of the modern era, and he found it in creating worlds of artistic fantasy that enabled him to depict the *contrasting motif of technology used for good or evil*. He created a diverse world built upon paradox, hyperbole, and irony, in which the audience is constantly confronted with new, surprising, and comical scenes. The English submarine created by the animators differs poignantly from Artigas's vessel. The likeable vessel, which is propelled by curious paddles, contrasts with the ideal technological form of the battle submarine. Their differences embody the conflict between a defensive and an aggressive political program.

There are other instances in which the director demonstrates his original treatment of the literary text. In one of the opening episodes, the pirates are heading to Back Cup with the kidnapped Professor and Simon, when they encounter the merchant ship *Amélie*. As is their habit, they rob the ship and sink it. While the submarine's captain directs its nose towards the ship, one of the pirates sounds the battle horn, and the camera shows the other shipmates: they are senselessly sharpening their weapons in the grand hall of the submarine. The shot of the pirates running their sharpeners to and fro is followed by a shot of the submarine's propulsion device: two pistons making the same movements as the pirates. These two shots keep alternating back and forth and the movement keeps getting faster, accompanied by a trumpet solo imitating military signals, until the submarine rams into the hull of the merchant ship. The impact is preceded by shots of surprised passengers on deck, watching, uncomprehendingly, the disturbed sea and the approaching shadow underneath the water's surface. After the crash the view, as well as the music, changes: the battle trumpet is replaced by a musical elegy for the sinking ship and the camera focuses on the sad-faced sculpture

of a nymph on the *Amélie*'s bow. A destructive scene follows, as sailors clumsily try to avoid the falling rigging and leave the ship. A girl appears, who, despite the catastrophic happenings around her, rescues two doves from a cage and sets them free. While the ship, with men hanging on its masts, sinks to the bottom of the sea, the girl grabs a floating piece of timber and stays afloat; she is later rescued (per Professor Roch's wish). After the ship has sunk, the pirates set off to loot it. They use special undersea bicycles, equipped with both propellers and bells, and a lift that they use to transfer the treasure from the ship to the submarine.

Surprising Traces of Surrealism

In the introduction I explained how the new political regime spoke out against interwar artistic movements and strictly rejected one of them in particular: Surrealism. In the words of literary historian Jiří Holý:

> Surrealism was no longer perceived as sympathetic to the Communist revolution as it had been before the war. However, surrealist poetry, "concrete irrationality", could still stand as a rebellious, liberating force against the stark rationalism of industrial civilization. (Holý 2008, 34)

Nonetheless, in *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* Zeman visualized fantasy worlds with creative spontaneity that still fascinates. Some of his fantastic visions recall the Surrealist aesthetic and elaborate on interwar avant-garde traditions (especially Poetist playfulness). It was beyond imaginable that a non-conformist film featuring Surrealist imagery would be financed by the state film industry. It was paradoxical that *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* included elements stylistically related to officially despised "formalist and bourgeois" art (as Surrealism and Poetism were called). Josef Vojvodík has remarked that "Surrealism discovers new approaches to objects, to things which had lost their original function and their practical place" (Vojvodík and Wiendl 2011, 163). This fitting characterization corresponds with the creative devices used in adapting Verne's novel, especially in the parts taking place in the ocean depths.

The richly expressive imagery of *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*'s underwater universe is closest to Surrealist poetics. The filmmakers were not solely interested in creating a science-fiction world inhospitable to humankind, which had to be conquered by romantic adventurers. The unknown

provided them with a space where they could contrapose creative imagination and rationality. Zeman and his team of animators combined uncommon motifs into new ensembles; individual images are artistically unsettled, the links between them are made less clear, and a poetic projection of the undersea world is created. The underwater voyage does not merely serve the story: it unveils a mysterious, spectral world. The film emphasizes the bizarre appearance of undersea formations, the unusual shapes of various fish, and the unrealistic scale of the seahorses. The kidnapped Professor, the rational scientist, is the first character in the film to see the underwater world and observe its diversity (from a large window in the submarine's grand salon). He peers into an unknown world, which the film presents as a combination of real animals and animated figurines. Count Artigas introduces the seafloor to the Professor as a land he has conquered, and which has provided him with such wealth that he is now able to complete the Professor's invention. There is a conspicuous aspect of Zeman's play with the world he has created present in several shots: a peculiar type of illusion, the jellyfish, a creature that offers a number of possible associations. The jellyfish is driven by internalization and reveals irrationality because its body is volatile, ethereal and variable. Bizarre formations emphasizing sensory impressions inhabit the film's underwater world; they are drawn from the imagination rather than biology or oceanography. The viewer can only guess at what is a dream and what is reality. This place cannot be grasped by scientific objectivism's rational devices because its mysteriousness evokes irrational wonder. While Artigas discusses his plans, the submarine passes shipwrecks—vestiges of human fates and ideas—and the obvious dominance of natural forces denotes the futility of human actions (Fig. 3.2).

Surrealist imagination is also present when Simon loses consciousness inside an underwater tunnel. The underwater world, having thus far imitated some of the natural world's laws, now exits the realm of reality and normal human experience. Simon Hart offers the pirates his help in repairing a cable in an undersea tunnel—the camera follows three men in diving suits walking on the ocean floor. They find themselves among peculiar-looking fish. A dramatic episode ensues as the divers are attacked by an enormous octopus. Simon battles the creature and manages to escape. He enters the tunnel, pursuing his way to freedom, but he soon learns that his oxygen is running out. He stumbles amongst coral reefs, jellyfish, and fish, until he falls down, fainting. The viewer now witnesses the visual hallucinations of a man trapped in a diving suit.

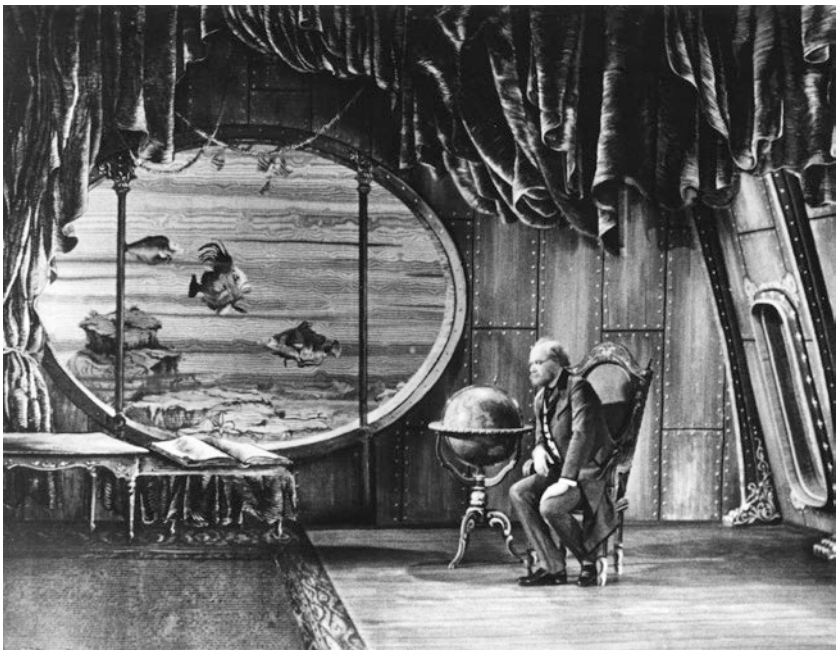

Fig. 3.2 *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*. The kidnapped Professor Roch in count Artigas's submarine. *Vynález zkázy* (The Fabulous World of Jules Verne; Karel Zeman 1958). Courtesy of Ludmila Zeman. All rights reserved

Surprise comes at the very beginning of this episode, as the camera shows an obviously alive fish, floating belly-up in an unconcerned manner. The following shot of Simon Hart with his eyes closed confirms that these images are just an unconscious man's visions. The next shot shows two fish, which, having come head to head, merge and create one body: eventually all that is left of the fish are their tails, which begin to move—they have now become a butterfly. More butterflies arrive: they fly above the seafloor and in the moving water they land on coral and underwater fungi amongst schools of fish. Their wings are made from crocheted yarn. These bizarre creatures bring new meanings to the space outlined in the scene, eliciting associations with home: a room with crocheted doilies. This hallucinatory scene marks a slowing down of the film's narrative pace. Underwater phenomena are visualized through the

consciousness of the human mind: the mimetic convention of the illustrations and their pretense of reality make way for an inner principle, and finds itself standing against outer images of the actual world.

This scene has no actual basis in the screenplay or in the storyboards. While the original narrative is partially maintained here, this moment of lonely deliriousness was initially supposed to be expressed in a more fairytale-like manner. After Simon loses consciousness, the nymph from the bow of the *Amélie* was supposed to appear, her sad facial expression seemingly predetermining the boat's fate. A close-up shot of her face with a wiped tear was to follow, the nymph symbolizing sorrow over the current prevalence of evil in the story. The nymph was originally intended to wake Simon up and encourage him to make his way out of the tunnel. This directorial change shows how new ideas incessantly influenced the creative adaptation process, and that the conception of the film on the whole favored free imagination.

A Carnival of Forms: *The Stolen Airship*

Zeman's second Verne adaptation, *The Stolen Airship*, was made 8 years later and was loosely based on the novel *Deux ans de vacances* (1888). It tells the story of five boys' extraordinary adventure, and its main themes are children's games and imagination. However, a number of formally and meaningfully complex expressions intended for adult viewers are embedded in the film. Thanks to the freer political atmosphere of the 1960s, this film could, to an even higher degree than *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*, incorporate allegory, metaphor, and parody hinting at meanings beyond the literal ones presented.

The film's plot diverges from its literary source, though the adventure genre is preserved in one of its two main plotlines. The protagonists leave home and, after a sequence of dramatic events, find themselves in exotic lands and experience extraordinary adventures. The story does not commence in New Zealand, as it does in the book, but it takes place in 1891 in Prague. As the Czech lands are landlocked, the boys travel by airship, as opposed to the literary text where the boys, boarding school students in Auckland, are on a boat.

At an exhibition, the five boys are captivated by the wonder of their time: a dirigible airship made by Findejs & Comp. Gentlemen who had paid for a ride in the airship are hesitant to board it after they watch a balloon catch fire and explode in the air. The company's owner, Findejs,

says (falsely) that his airship is filled with non-flammable gas and offers a free ride to the boys, who are in the audience. In the ensuing confusion, the boys take off in the airship with Findejs's money box on board. Even though Jakoubek, the youngest of the boys, wants to go back home, the others outvote him and they all set off on a wondrous journey. Meanwhile the news about "the stolen airship" travels around Prague, catching the attention of Marek, a journalist. The case is taken up by the court, and the attorney Dufek, not knowing that his son Tomáš is on board, demands a grave punishment for the children. After he finds out the truth, he changes his stance before the court and attacks Findejs. Findejs, however, has suddenly become a highly sought-after inventor: he is visited by a delegation from the army, as well as by a foreign secret agent. Now, the whole world is after the airship with the boys on board.

Having withstood a dangerous flight and a storm, the boys land on an island in the middle of the ocean, and the reportedly non-flammable airship explodes. Just like in the novel, the boys find a cave there. It is inhabited by a character that fascinated Zeman—Captain Nemo. Observing that various objects are marked with the letter N (the mark of Captain Nemo), the boys learn that this is, indeed, the Captain's shelter. From a distance they spy the Captain leaving in his submarine. Jakoubek writes a note to his parents and throws it into the water. It is intercepted by army men, who presume that it is in fact a coded message. The journalist Marek discovers the boys' location and launches a rescue mission. Meanwhile, a schooner carrying the rich Mr. Penfield (originally from the Czech town of Beroun) and his daughter, Kateřina, accidently lands at the island. Some of the sailors want to steal Mr. Penfield's money, a skirmish ensues, and Kateřina throws a trunk full of gold into the sea. The boys take part in the subsequent victorious battle against the mutineers. Mr. Penfield gets back his gold and promises the boys he will foot the bill for their adventures. The navy then arrives, the admiral learns that Findejs was lying about having invented non-flammable gas, and the little aeronauts return home triumphant.

The story's outline itself implies alternation of two expressive poles: illusive enchantment, childlike playfulness, and excited explorations on one hand, and the "reasonability" of the adults' sedate world on the other. This confrontation is anticipated in the film's idiosyncratic animated opening. Four brief episodes offer insights into the difficulties of childhood and adolescence: a caveman berates his son for urinating on a fire, their only heat source; a Roman emperor threatens the little

boys who accidentally drop a vase on his horse's head; an elderly knight and his wife react disapprovingly to a young man climbing a ladder in pursuit of his lover; and in a Pointillist style, a man scolds a boy for his recklessness in a Prague park. This montage is ended by the voice of an old judge, who calls upon the film's child protagonists to talk as they huddle behind a courtroom railing somewhere in the sky. Jakoubek says, "It's not us boys' fault; it was only a game" (Karel Zeman 1966, my translation). This defense, however, provides an entirely different initial viewpoint than that of Verne's novel, whose characters yearn to leave the world of make-believe and become adults.

The adaptation is a unique twist on the robinsonade as the boys set off on their journey with the desire to experience extraordinary things, to see exotic lands, and also to escape the adult-ruled world. Even though the boys accidentally "steal" the airship, they ultimately decide to undertake a dangerous voyage around the world that will test their courage and perseverance. As the narrative escalates, their flight becomes increasingly perilous, and the boys are forced to find their way out of many predicaments. They only narrowly avoid a foreign army's airship, which fires its canon at them. When the airship finds itself in tempestuous weather, the boys cut off its basket and hang on to the ropes to save themselves from drowning. They land on an unknown island, where their survival adventure begins: surrounded by the endless ocean, the boys experience absolute freedom; they climb dangerous rocks and hunt wild animals.

Here Captain Nemo, borrowed from Verne's other novels, introduces an important subversive element to the film. Zeman's Nemo wanders the ocean without a definite purpose (unlike, for instance, Count Artigas in *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*, whose purpose was very clear); he is a mere shadow of his former glorious self. Nevertheless, he can be perceived as a technological anarchist, as he rebels against all human and social conventions. Technology becomes a tool of revolution and emancipation, of class and anarchism: a world thrown into chaos liberates itself. Nemo's anarchism lies in his position outside society, in the microspace of his submarine. He uses technology in a way radically different from its original purpose. This, however, is not taken into account by Zeman, who leaves Nemo to float close to the ocean floor like an exhausted pilgrim; "Now I am all by myself…" (Zeman 1966, my translation) he laments.

It Was Only a Game

The story is set in late-19th-century Prague, during the Jubilee Exhibition of 1891. There were several reasons for the decision to link the story to this momentous event in the Kingdom of Bohemia. The exhibition itself was a grand showcase of the Age of Steam's technological innovations, the subjects of Verne's writings. The adaptation emphasizes the exhibition's patriotic significance for the Czechs. While Paris had hosted the Exposition Universelle of 1889, the last Czech event of such importance was several decades removed. By showing the exhibition, balloons over Prague, and the newly built exhibition palace, the adaptation reflects on the national-liberation tendencies of late-19th-century Czech society, the ideology of patriotism, and the contentious relationship between ethnic Czechs and Czech Germans. The illustrated Czech magazine *Světozor*, popular in the late 19th century, and which appears in the film, published an article about the exhibition:

> At this very moment, visible, clear, indubitable proof is being unveiled that the Czech nation is one of those cultural nations leading the way towards the highest aims of humanity: towards the elimination of all moral and material poverty. (Hořica 1891, 302, my translation)

The specific historical setting enabled Zeman to utilize *fin de siècle* social norms and the period's rapidly technologizing atmosphere in the film, both in a serious way and as light mockery. The film's world is that of a mechanical, rationalistic Austro-Hungarian monarchy, whose systemic, organizational nature is strongly exaggerated. All human actions are mechanical, and life is both theatrical and uptight, often to humorous effect. In certain places the film and its sets display a flagrant artificiality. For example, in one scene the journalist leans on a police station counter and it bends: it is very obviously made of cardboard. The thorough stylization of the environment results in two semantic frameworks: a clearly structured world with an air of nostalgia to it (an era of technological progress, strict conventions, and clear principles), and a parody of this world with details adding to its hyperbolic and farcical dimensions. The film blends the nostalgic and the parodic; some of its elements are capable of conveying both of these modes: an image or a sound can be nostalgic at one time and ironic at another (Fig. 3.3).

Fig. 3.3 *The Stolen Airship*. The film is set in late 19th century Prague. *Ukradená vzducholoď* (*The Stolen Airship*; Karel Zeman 1966). Courtesy of Ludmila Zeman. All rights reserved

The story begins on a Prague street in the late 19th century. A close-up shows a hand ringing a bell. The next shot reveals it to be a tram driver's hand.[5] While the first shot captures a real human hand, the second shows a painted background and a flat model of a moving tram full of passengers. The next shot features a wind-up toy horse rolling across the pavement. Both images (the tram and the moving horse) are repeated, and it is shown that the horse, along with a crowd of townspeople, is headed for the Jubilee Exhibition. The wind-up horse travels in the forefront, creating a peculiar point of view, in which the crowd is only visible as shadows.

The film makes intertextual connections with various tiers of culture. Its nostalgic tone does not limit it—on the contrary, on several occasions it clearly alludes to the contemporary artistic trends of the 1960s. For example, the wind-up horse references the work of Milan Grygar. He became famous for his mechanical hen (a common toy at the time), which hopped across paper, leaving a different trail of footsteps behind each time. Such graphic experiments, which Zeman references, opposed social technological norms, declared aesthetic sovereignty, and introduced a new kind of imagery to those already existing.

As the camera lifts its focus from the pavement, the audience can see a painting of Prague from above, hot-air balloons rising above the city's skyline, and the exhibition palace's illustrated gate. An episode follows in which an animated aeronaut accidentally drops one of the sandbags from his hot-air balloon. It falls on a (live-action) lady with a parasol, demonstrating that technology, although exciting, is not entirely safe. The camera then returns to a crowded street and finds Jakoubek accompanied by his doting grandmother. He runs away from her and jumps on a train with the help of a boy who calls himself Captain Corcoran and says he aids all strangers pursued by Scotland Yard.[6] Jakoubek introduces himself hesitantly as "Artagnan," only to be reprimanded for inappropriately bringing musketeers into the century of technology.

The boys arrive to an area outside the city, where the latest inventions are being demonstrated. The exhibition is permeated with enthusiasm for technological progress. Departing from Verne's semantics in the source novel, the adaptation utilizes a flagrantly fairground-like atmosphere—a flying airship carries a floating stage on which several female can-can dancers show off their choreography. The film alternates between various modes of representation, with the dancers shown as both live actresses and figurines. The camera stops on a group of hat-wearing men, the aerial variety show's audience. Contrastingly, while the film thematizes liberation, the new age is being ushered in while girls in can-can skirts and fishnet stockings lift their legs: women are viewed as sexual objects. While the men are allowed to watch them, the boys are jostled out by a policeman, representing the state apparatus; as evident from the rest of the film as well, the adaptation portrays a smoothly functional world where the permitted and the forbidden are clearly delineated. The general buzz of the crowd is pierced by the voice of a man with a circus ringleader's diction, alerting the predominantly male audience to

> …the greatest sensation of the century, a flying man, a winged hero, he has surpassed the eagle, he has surpassed the stork—epochal invention, the first step towards space, the sky is wide open: the man will not plainly step into the twentieth century, he will fly into it with his own wings. (Zeman 1966, my translation)

Meanwhile the camera follows an aeronaut flying in a winged contraption and then descending amongst the crowd.

In the spirit of the film's circus-like poetics, the dirigible airship central to the plot is also loudly showed off for the audience's benefit. The businessman Findejs cries out that a group of paying customers will soon rise into the skies, along with a beautiful girl who "knows everything and will take care of everything" (Zeman 1966, my translation), and will be served a typical Czech lunch on board—roast pork, dumplings, sauerkraut, and beer.

Marek, a journalist for *Světozor*, is trying to photograph the aeronautical pioneers-to-be, but his camera keeps keeling over. Intercut into this episode is the resulting photograph, which clashes with the fictional reality: collage-like, its main subject is the girl, while the airship and especially the men in their dark suits are relegated to the background as dark silhouettes. The final photograph, as well as the way it was procured, offers up several levels of interpretation: what is being captured, what is actually seen, and what is favored by the particular culture. While the audience is reduced to outlines in the background, the foreground is devoted to a girl's legs clad in delicate fishnet stockings. Zeman portrays period technology along with its limitations (the unstable propeller on the dirigible, the drooping camera, a smoke-exuding motorcycle, the exploding airship). Although nostalgia and the idyllic are constantly present, so too are parody and irony. Even though the crowd rushes towards an exhibition of revolutionary scientific and technological progress, its balloons, airships, and other machines are not cast in an admiring light.

Experiments in visual representation continue with the boys' ascent over Prague, which is presented with almost documentary obsession. The audience sees St. Vitus Cathedral without its Neo-Gothic towers, which were (along with the Western nave) added to the building after 1891. The city is then shown as an ensemble of flat models in a clear reference to a famous 19th-century three-dimensional model of Prague.[7] The adaptation then alternates between two representational modes: the model and the diorama. Dioramas were originally intended to create an illusion of reality by layering models in a three-dimensional space framed by a background. In the adaptation, however, the artificiality of the scenery is meant to be clearly evident. Zeman utilizes period-specific approaches designed to induce illusion, but at the same time he employs scenery whose artificiality defies illusion: for example, one of the shots of the boys flying away finds the animated airship in the midst of a typical period genre painting of the Charles Bridge.

The artificial nature of the Prague exterior shots is emphasized by several rapid intercuts featuring statues and close-ups of their fingers pointing at the airship. While the airship flies over the city, developing the heroic narrative mode, the pointing statues represent the film's symbolic models. The film's treatment of these models generates an ironic tone to the episode: apart from models of actual statues, the sequence shows the fictional statue of a warrior, created especially for the film. National symbolism—that is, ostentatious, statuesque patriotism—is parodied here, as are symbols of power and history (the reproachful finger). Zeman ironizes Czech myths and monuments: the models clearly allude to Myslbek's statues that used to stand at Čech Bridge and were later moved to Vyšehrad. The statues drew from old Czech mythology: here, with their fingers raised, they gain additional meanings. They point at the "stolen" airship and therefore become the carriers of the serious grown-up world's norms and values.

The opening assemblage of moving images, sounds, screams, and various motifs set in the fading Austro-Hungarian Empire shows the adaptation as a complexly constructed film replete with playful details and stylized naivety: these aspects, in turn, hamper efforts at defining the film's genre. Nonetheless, the adaptation's classification as an "adventure film" intended for a young audience is not called into question—the theme of adventure clearly dominates the film's structure. The narrative's adventure aspect was not up for parody. The plot, a sequence of dramatic scenes taking place in exotic locations in the air, on land, and in water, is, on one level, a suspenseful survival story that entertains children. However, Zeman's treatment of the source material transcends this simple concept, and the film crew created in the adaptation an extraordinary spectacle.

The innovativeness of *The Stolen Airship* lies in its ability to effectively function as a carnival of forms and symbols. The most revered symbols of Austria-Hungary and the Belle Époque are the subjects of this *carnivalization*. For the time the adaptation was made, its variety of meanings and its nostalgia for the Belle Époque, which is also gently made fun of at times, were quite unusual. Laughter is induced by objects that, at one time, were held in the utmost respect. This phenomenon is in keeping with Bakhtin's understanding of carnival merriment, whose subjects were things perceived as holy by the people of the Middle Ages (the carnival was born from religious festivities). In *The Stolen Airship*, established symbols (the eagle insignia, military marches, medals) of

the Belle Époque are usurped (the novel itself as a genre was born from the destruction of previous formats—legends, myths, chronicles, and epics) and become the subject of parody merely by being placed into an incongruent environment. They are therefore subject to estrangement. Bakhtin's carnival is closely related to heteroglossia, and it is primarily concerned with style. The carnivalesque manifests itself when various expressions of vernacular language and "street" genres of speech can be found within literary narration. The concept is transferrable to visual culture: a foundation genre is permeated by aspects of other genres, especially comical ones, or, as Bakhtin would say, the laughing ones. Saturnalia was a phenomenon that Bakhtin found fascinating: in the case of *The Stolen Airship*, the Saturnalia is audio-visual.

Parodic Exaggeration

Although the type of political satire and parody Zeman works with only originated after World War I, some of the absurd and farcical elements in the film already existed in Habsburg-era Czech culture (i.e., during the period the film is set in). A subversive parody of state power was dangerous during the rule of "lex maiestatis." Nonetheless, traces of criticism were present in the political poetry of Svatopluk Čech (1846–1908), whose lyrical composition *Písně otroka* (*Slave Songs*, 1895) became a literary sensation when it was published. While the work was contrary to power, its derisive tone was aimed at those who collaborate with it (the old men who pin medals to their rachitic chests and ramble against the nation for a bowl of rice). In his article "Jarní noviny" (The spring news, 1883), Jan Neruda parodies a county bailiff's work. It tells the story of a male spruce growing in the woods surrounded by younger—female—trees: "They say that last year the old spruce—wed—the young ones! And this year it probably expects to wed young ones again! It is to be noted that when the county bailiff was told, he did nothing but laugh!" (Neruda 1911, 149). Neruda ends the article with a notice saying that the political atmosphere of the country forbade him from adding anything else.

After Czechoslovakia gained independence in 1918, a number of literary works and films emerged that openly criticized the monarchy and ridiculed Franz Joseph I, the former emperor. The most prominent is Jaroslav Hašek's comedic novel *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za světové války* (*The Good Soldier Švejk And His Fortunes in the World War*, 1921),

which focuses on anecdotes from the life of a Prague dog catcher conscripted to fight in the Austrian army during World War I. The comedic value of Švejk, who has been officially declared an imbecile by the authorities, lies in his perpetual readiness to follow the orders of his superiors. When Švejk's superior, Lieutenant Lukáš, announces that they are both being sent to the front, the soldier replies that it will be beautiful when they both die for "His Imperial Majesty" (Hašek 1984, 213). Literary historian Jiří Brabec has developed a fitting characterization of this aspect of the novel:

> Švejk repeatedly and loudly identifies himself with the powers that be, starting with the emperor and finishing with the military aims of Austria-Hungary. This total identification of an individual with a system and its representatives is the comical starting point, which is then given many variations. Švejk renders the representatives of power angry, frustrated, paranoid, and ultimately helpless by his declarative unambiguity. (Brabec 2010, 386, my translation)

Švejk's ability to comment upon war's atrocities with naïve-sounding comments, which can be read as pub banter, a play on words, or satirical testimony on the mirthless fate of modern man, played a significant role in Czech culture. When Švejk, for instance, finds himself in a military hospital attending to the administration of extreme unction, he says to a wounded soldier:

> I think it's splendid to get oneself run through with a bayonet…and also that it's not bad to get a bullet in the stomach. It's even grander when you're torn to pieces by a shell and you see that your legs and your belly are somehow remote from you. It's very funny and you die before anyone can explain it to you.
>
> The young soldier gave a heartfelt sigh. He was sorry for his young life. Why was he born in such a stupid century to be butchered like an ox in a slaughterhouse? Why was all that necessary? (Hašek 1984, 153)

Interwar cinema—especially films starring comedian Vlasta Burian—constitutes another vein of inspiration for the adaptation. In Karel Lamač's comedy *C. a k. polní maršálek* (*Imperial and Royal Field Marshal* 1930), which mocks both the Austrian army and the Emperor, Burian plays a devoted military captain who is suspended because his subordinates were heard singing a humorous song about the field marshal. In Martin Frič's *Anton Špelec, ostrostřelec* (*Anton Špelec, Sharp-Shooter* 1932) Burian plays a musical

instrument manufacturer who is so offended by not having received an army medal that he insults the emperor while drunk.

Burian focused on entertaining audiences, so he sought out captivating topics for his comedy. Apart from the army and the emperor he also criticized senior civil servants in *U pokladny stál…* (*He Stood at the Till…* 1939). Wary of criticizing the members of the Czechoslovak Legion, Burian looked for his army material further back in the past, and found his ideal target in the officers of the Imperial army.

Zeman's adaptation combines Švejk's and Burian's comedy, which is apparent in the efforts to mock the old emperor. An army general character, obviously stylized to look like Franz Joseph I, bears the derisive moniker "the old Walk" ("starý Procházka"[8]); he is an elderly authority figure whose chief duties include attending official festivities and ceremonial processions. His portrayal combines the majestic and the profane. Surrounded by pompous and narrow-minded officers, he takes part in caricatured rituals that have assumed bizarre forms.

The genre-specific approaches pertaining to comedy are utilized for parodic and comic purposes in a number of scenes. In one the journalist Marek negotiates with a police officer, a typical representative of the imperial regime, from whom he wants to find out what Jakoubek looks like. This scene starts off on a comedic note, with the audience seeing actor Jaroslav Štercl, a comedian known for playing "befuddled" characters, portraying the policeman—it was hard to imagine an actor less suitable for the role of a serious Austro-Hungarian civil servant than he. Marek arrives at the police station on a motorcycle emitting copious amounts of smoke and leaves it outside smoldering on the street, until a patrolman finally extinguishes it with a bucket of water. The camera notices the sign above the police station entrance: an eagle whose head has been replaced by a threatening upward-pointing finger. The journalist's attempt to fetch his hat back, which keeps falling off his head, provides more slapstick humor. His hat falls behind the police station counter, and thus to retrieve it Marek must violate the boundary between the private and the official: we see him performing awkward gymnastics only to keep hitting his head on a chandelier. In doing so, he—seemingly inadvertently—encroaches upon official space. This episode culminates when Marek, who has managed to bribe the police officer, obtains an image of Jakoubek only to see that it captures the boy as a baby. This scene is a model example of the film's mockery of the authorities (the police, the courts, the army)

because everything that happens in it should be excluded from dignified official conduct (Fig. 3.4).

The Austro-Hungarian monarchy is portrayed as a fading relic of bygone glory. The army is depicted as a group of harmless officers in medal-covered uniforms, who rule over salons and coffeehouses. This environment makes even the greatest threats seem to have a certain charm; they seem trifling and—compared to the reality of the 20th century—even grotesque. Nevertheless, a real danger is present in the form of a foreign monarchy that resembles Prussia. This power is represented by military staff located in a well-guarded fort, from which generals have the airship watched and then attempt to seize it to gain its technology. These army officers also intercept Jakoubek's message in a bottle, which reads: "Dear parents, do not worry about us. Love and kisses from your son, Jakoubek" (Zeman 1966, my translation). They see the message as "devilish cunning" (Zeman 1966, my translation), and praise their intelligence for deciphering it. What seems like parody—the misinterpretation of a boy's letter—suddenly becomes serious when over- interpreted by those in power to further their interests.

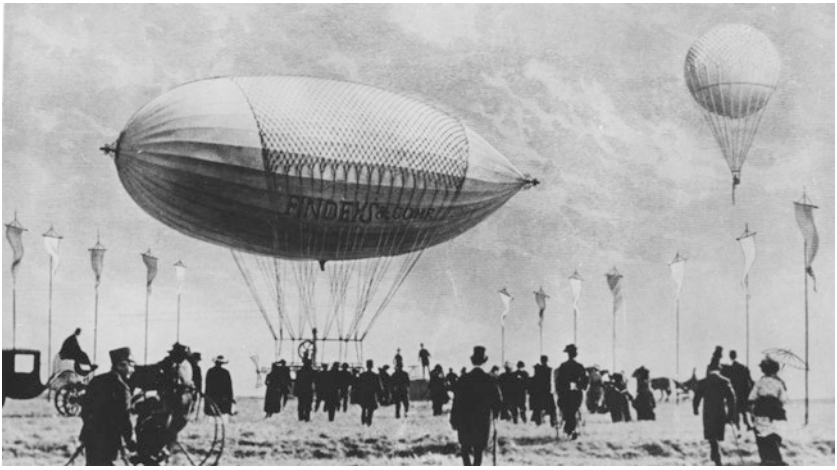

Fig. 3.4 *The Stolen Airship*. The exhibition is permeated with enthusiasm for technological progress. *Ukradená vzducholod'* (*The Stolen Airship*; Karel Zeman 1966). Courtesy of Ludmila Zeman. All rights reserved

The appearance of comedian Karel Effa as the most important foreign agent lightens the tone, however. Effa's mere on-screen presence could elicit a smile. Here he exhibits bizarre behavior: he travels the skies in a creaky paddle-powered airship, he travels around Prague in a vehicle with horse legs instead of wheels, he exits Findejs's flat by jumping headlong from the window, and so on.

Světozor[9] magazine and journalism in general are further objects of parody. The newsroom itself is portrayed as a modern "openspace" office, but the journalists sit at a large table, resembling pensioned civil servants. The editor-in-chief dominates his staff, with the exception of the inventive Marek, and his actions are always driven by either public opinion or political pressure. When he learns that one of the boys is an attorney's son, he refuses to make the news public. He tells his subordinates to write "about foreign countries, distant lands, romance, women, song, drama, blood, passion" and to "mention the love for one's native country" (Zeman 1966, my translation). Images of exotic places accompany his speech. As he emphatically pronounces the words "drama" and "passion," "Les Toreadors," the well-known melody from Bizet's opera *Carmen*, plays in the background, while the screen shows images of a bullfight with a toreador and a wounded bull. The parodic sequence culminates in the mention of love for one's native country, as an idyllic scene featuring a little shepherd in the Czech countryside is replaced by a partially moving illustration of an Austrian military band accompanied by an excerpt from the "Radetzky March" .

The editor-in-chief's refusal to make certain news public hints at information manipulation. Nevertheless, the film does portray manipulation and the interpretation of information dictated by those in power. The film's richness lies in how information is handled not only in journalism but also in society in general. One piece of information can be exchanged for another, the powers that be evaluate the manner erroneously, and an avalanche of unexpected consequences may be unleashed.

At a different point in the film, the editor-in-chief admonishes his staff to write about children in mortal danger because that is what readers, especially women, like to read about. From a sociological perspective, the existence of such magazines reflects the emergence of the Czech middle class. This social phenomenon is thematized in *The Stolen Airship*: it is the urban middle class that populates the streets of Prague. As recently (in the temporal context of the story) as the early 19th century, the intellectual community was limited to the educated, who made up a very

small fraction of the population. In the period in which the film is set, the middle class has already started to form, and it includes women. Although they lacked a prestigious education, they were economically secure, aware of their own social status, and desired to be culturally sophisticated. These women often read Světozor.[10]

Humorous moments are often achieved by treating metaphors literally, often to absurd ends. When the editor-in-chief wants the journalists to change the topic, he says, "Turn the page" (Zeman 1966, my translation). The following shot shows the journalists literally turning pages in their notebooks. At another point, the editor-in-chief uses Marek's materials without his knowledge to make a collage featuring baby Jakoubek pointing a pistol at a girl's parted fishnet stocking–clad legs behind whom male spectators admiring the airship are visible. The collage is surrounded by headlines: "Sensation of the Exhibition!!!," "Airship Theft," and "A Dangerous Act by Minors" (Zeman 1966, my translation). While Marek is surprised that the magazine has printed fabrications, the editor-in-chief says jovially that "a journalist needs to have an imagination" (Zeman 1966, my translation). This is followed by an animated duck made of newspaper scraps stamping on copies of *Světozor*. Through the duck, canards, or false, sensational stories,[11] are being referenced. In the following shot a female villager chases a flock of ducks along a street in Prague, and Findejs nearly hits her with his automobile. The incensed woman, captured against the illustrated Prague cityscape, shouts "What do you think you're doing, young man? This should be banned in the city. Where will this end?" (Zeman 1966, my translation) The canard metaphor materializes as frightened actual ducks running around in Prague. The woman's words "This should be banned" (Zeman 1966, my translation), have a double meaning that concerns both the falsehoods produced by journalism (which are a recurrent motif in the film) and technology (here represented by the new car).

Slapstick humor, parody, and satirical hyperbole are employed in the episode featuring Mr. Penfield, who enters the story as the boys' savior. His very first scene is based on situational comedy: the camera pans over the ship's hull and pauses at a window behind which a girl is playing the piano and singing a religious song; the second window shows a group of sailors playing cards—one of them has just stabbed his mate's hand, and another has shot through another's leg—with a lone civilian, the girl's rich father, Mr. Penfield. The film utilizes parody and slapstick to show the sailors' desire for gold, the shipwreck, the rebellion, the battle

between the boys and the pirates, and finally the rescue of Mr. Penfield. When Penfield eventually finds out that the boys are Czech and that Jakoubek comes from Beroun, he exclaims: "The boy is ours, a countryman! I've spent forty years rambling all over the world, just to find a fellow countryman here!" (Zeman 1966, my translation).

In the 19th century, many Czechs left their homes for good. In the 1850s, in particular, many emigrated to the USA. At one point, in an attempt to prevent further emigration, flyers describing the USA negatively were published. Later, however, Czech-Americans marched through Prague in Sokol uniforms and were admired and mythologized as successful countrymen. The moment in *The Stolen Airship* where Mr. Penfield accidentally runs into a compatriot is a literary and cultural trope that was present as early as in Josef Kajetán Tyl's (1808–1856) patriotic drama *Strakonický dudák aneb Hody divých žen* (*The Bagpiper from Strakonice or Nymphs' Feast*; first staged in 1847): in a stylized scene at a sultan's court, the honest Švanda encounters the trickster Vocílka. "Are you Czech?" cries Švanda, and Vocílka replies: "Oh, and what a Czech! They could not even stand it at home and they advised me to go see a bit of the world" (Tyl 1958, 38, my translation). Both Tyl and *The Stolen Airship* employ an Aristotelian principle, a patriotically and sentimentally modified anagnorisis. However, contrary to this and other examples, Zeman's take on the matter is comical because the compatriot is a boy who cannot play partner to the adult Mr. Penfield.

A different encounter with the home country occurs after a naval fleet appears on the horizon. Accompanied by the "Radetzky March," enormous ships and airships in the sky above approach, carrying, among others, the journalist Marek. The boys' small boat is shown, sharply contrasting the immense battleship. The boys are to be honored because everybody thinks they have a casket containing the instructions for manufacturing non-flammable gas. When the admiral resembling Franz Joseph gets hold of it, however, he immediately abandons the boys on the deck beside the ship's huge cannons, and the baffled navy band stops playing. Mr. Penfield assumes control of the band and starts singing the folk ditty, "My lovely Baruška, take me to bed with you." The performance of a bawdy song on a battleship parodies ritual and, broadly speaking, official manipulation as well. This scene resembles a sequence from the beginning of the film wherein Findejs praises his grand invention and ends up having his dirigible airship flown away by little boys. The reoccurrence of this motif throughout the film signifies Zeman's

interest in the bizarre and implies that he was more interested in creating an effect than he was in ideological tones.

The Good Old Days

The Stolen Airship also scorned period norms in the way in which it examined the relationship between people and history. The story ends with all the major characters, both child and adult, riding on a creaky train.[12] The conclusion primarily conveys uncertainty: the audience has no idea why and how this disparate group of people ended up on one train. Where are they going? The motivations of the individual characters remain the same: in the first compartment, the conman Findejs is trying to assure the rich Mr. Penfield of his invention's commercial benefits; in the second one, the journalist Marek and the beautiful female aeronaut kiss over the pages of *Světozor*; in the third compartment Penfield's daughter Kateřina sings religious songs while playing the piano; the last compartment contains the boys, who have just agreed to stage a train robbery. Everything seems idyllic until the audience realizes that unlike Simon Hart's train, which was driven by a jocular man smoking a pipe, this train is driven by the foreign agent and, as is soon evident, he is driving his child and adult passengers into a tunnel. This final train ride into darkness constitutes an allegorical situation: after all, the Belle Époque, with all of its beauty, invention, and playfulness, was heading towards war. Individual free will is confronted with power mechanisms entirely different to those which were earlier so easily lampooned. The inscrutability of power stampedes the individual, whose personal ambitions are set aside as the entire world is driven into destruction.

The world of the Habsburg Monarchy thematized in the film may have been considered ideologically misled, but the experience of two world wars put it in a new perspective. The adaptation might caricature the prewar period, but it does this not by means of revolt—Zeman depicts it using a slightly ironic sentiment. The tunnel's darkness disregards the class distinctions between the passengers and their social and cultural identities; it represents rationally premeditated barbarism. The monarchy was built upon rules, but these rules contributed to making a space for the life of its subjects. It vehemently prevented arbitrary behavior, and people could rely on it being a *Rechtsstaat*.

The film employs a mythology that Claudio Magris was also exploring at the same time. In his book *Il mito absburgico nella letteratura*

austriaca moderna (The Habsburg Myth in Modern Austrian Literature, 1963), this Italian scholar analyzes the nostalgia for the Habsburg world that emerged after World War I ended, the 1918 flu pandemic took place, fascist regimes gained control in some European countries, and Russia was overwhelmed by the Bolshevik Revolution. People reminisced about the Viennese waltz and the Belle Époque in general, and their nostalgia transformed what used to be thought of as an oppressive period into an idyllic and orderly time in Central Europe.

The world depicted in the film followed a strict order that everyone could rely on, which was personified—for several generations—by only one emperor: Franz Joseph I., who reigned from 1848 to 1916.[13] The nostalgia for this "immortal monarch" and his long reign was captured in Ladislav Smoljak's and Zdeněk Svěrák's play *Lijavec* (*The Downpour*, 1982), which features the non-existent patriot, writer, and inventor Jára Cimrman[14]:

> Imagine a 6-year-old boy who goes to school at eight o'clock in the year 1848. He walks with his bag, climbs over two or three barricades, meets Frič, Špína, Márinka, comes to school, seats himself, and next to the blackboard he sees the picture of Emperor Franz Joseph I. Fourteen years go by, the boy is twenty, he gets married, has a son, and in six years the son goes to school again. The barricades are gone of course; it is the year 1868, it is twenty years later (14 plus 6). And this son, again, sees the picture of Franz Joseph I. next to the blackboard. Well, and then history repeats itself: the son grows up, so that is fourteen more years until he is twenty, he has a boy, his boy goes to school six years later, it is twenty years on, it is 1888, and next to the blackboard—who does he see? Franz Joseph I. And here's his boy, twenty more years have passed, it is 1908 and next to the blackboard, still firmly attached, hangs the immortal Franz Joseph I. That, my friends, is the fourth generation with the same picture next to the blackboard. (Smoljak 1998, 8–9, my translation)

In the film, the orderly world of Austria-Hungary is based on obligations instead of rights. When journalists find out that one of the hijackers is the little boy Jakoubek, they besiege his grandmother's house and call to her through an amplifier: "Why did you not put your boy in a reform school in time? Does your family attend mass regularly? Has your family displayed criminal tendencies before?" (Zeman 1966, my translation) These questions concentrate on her station and purpose in society. The upright man's, woman's, and even child's responsibilities are defined by their situation. Thus, there are a number of things that should *not* be

done.[15] The notion of human existence at the time was not based on individuality. *The Stolen Airship* intentionally subverts this concept into absurdity. One of the questions shouted through the amplifier was "Why didn't you put your boy in a reform school in time?" (Zeman 1966, my translation). In the world depicted in the film, it is possible to clearly recognize what is right, and when someone fails to observe this, they need to be institutionally reformed. The conventional, ideologic concepts are embodied by the character of Jakoubek's father: a shoemaker (a common fearful protagonist in a number of Czech fairytales), he is worried that his son's adventure is going to ruin his business. Emancipation fails to manifest even in the next generation: Jakoubek initially wants to return home because he has the same concerns.

This level of the narrative is closely related to the activization of memories of the lands of childhood to which an adult is unable to return. When Jakoubek, the youngest of the boys, is the only one to meet Captain Nemo in his submarine, they engage in a brief conversation:

Jakoubek: And you are the famous Captain Nemo?
Nemo: Yes
Jakoubek: I feel like I am at a feast at home—pork, sauerkraut…
Nemo: Once I had a Canadian here—what was his name…
Jakoubek: Ned Land, the King of the Harpooners
Nemo: That's right, Ned Land. And he had with him a professor…
Jakoubek: Professor Aronnax
Nemo: Excellent. Aronnax. Excellent. And how do you know all this?
Jakoubek: I really like to read, Captain. (Zeman 1966, my translation)

The old Captain has forgotten his own adventures, and they are returned to him by a child, a passionate reader of Verne's novels. Zeman might made elaborate allusions to uncertainty, but the key element of his work is the effort to bring back the lost paradise of a child's world.

Captain Nemo proceeds to talk about the violin, asks the boy how often he practices, and then lectures him on music being the queen of all arts. The tone of Jakoubek's voice then changes, and he leaves the submarine shortly afterwards. He is shaken by Nemo's lack of originality and conformity; he is just like other adults. Neither the submarine nor its captain live up to the dreams of the young reader: instead of offering intriguing adventures, the vessel becomes a space for generational conflicts. A technological invention, the robotic hand, does not bring a new

exotic adventure, but the despised violin. The child's ingenuous vision and sensitivity are confronted by adults who insist on bringing him up while forcing him to accept compromises. While Jakoubek heads towards new adventures (he paddles away from the submarine in an inflatable boat towards the approaching battleships), the Captain, hunched, his hands clutching his head, is seen through a window of the Nautilus: lonely and willingly excluded from the social organism, he heads through the water into the unknown.

I have argued that Bakhtin's carnival concept (and the related theories of polyphony and heteroglossia) is useful in the study of film because film language is based on a combination of intentions and mutually permeating genres. The adaptation can, in its polyphony, assume a serious tone: once the screen starts showing images of old-time Prague, parody vanishes entirely. A carnival atmosphere no longer dominates the film—there is then a distinct aspect of solemnity in the film, which could also signify wonder. Even though the film is set at the turn of the century, during the Belle Époque, the narrative about the adult world is a timeless story. The beauty of the old world lay partially in people's unawareness of the world's hurtling journey towards the catastrophe symbolized by the tunnel. Furthermore, Zeman's film moves within yet another set of coordinates: the director witnessed the greatest catastrophe in history, World War II, followed by the brutal excesses of 1950s Stalinism. A Central European living behind the Iron Curtain could plausibly yearn for something as stable as the Habsburg monarchy. Zeman, however, could not express this nostalgia openly because the Habsburgs were officially deemed class and national enemies; they belonged to the hedonistic, power-hungry aristocracy. The old world, thus, had to be depicted under the veil of farce and comedy; the ambivalence of comedy provided space for longing and nostalgia. *The Stolen Airship* enabled its adult audience to interpret the film as a specific political allegory, a testimony of the exploitability of power and the dangerous nature of progress. The filmmaker aspired to a parable of the modern world which has sacrificed progress to destruction. The nostalgia for the monarchy represented a look back to the world of childhood, to the unique vision of a child which he rediscovered through film. His work can nonetheless be interpreted as such an approach to the mechanisms of history and manipulations of power that could be concretized as a specific testimony on totalitarian oppression.

Notes

1. According to J. Vojvodík and J. Wiendl (2011, 9) the beginnings of the Czech avant-garde movement can be dated to 1907, when the first modernist groups with their own aesthetic platform began to form.

   Two streams within the broader avant-garde movement that had a fundamental impact on interwar Czech culture are critical: Poetism and Surrealism. The former, Poetism, was founded in the 1920s as a purely Czech artistic movement influenced by Western European modernist movements; it took a stand against the older symbolist traditions and expressionism. Its aim was to approximate life to art and to present a vision of the harmonious, joyful world of humanity, which had gone through the horrors of World War I.

   Literary and art theoretician Karel Teige (1900–1951), who witnessed the birth of this movement, described it:

   The art that Poetism brings is leisurely, frolicsome, fantastic, playful, non-heroic, and amorous. There is not even a drop of romanticism in it. It was born in an atmosphere of abundant sociability, in a smiling world; what does it matter if it has tears in its eyes. A humorous temperament dominates; pessimism was abandoned in earnest. Emphasis shifts towards experiences and the beauties of life, from stodgy offices and studios, it points the way that leads from nowhere to nowhere. It winds through a splendid, aromatic park, for it is the path of life. (Teige 1924, 199–200, my translation).
2. Pavel Janáček describes how the board members strove to "[…] leave the author with a place only within children's literature and more specifically to make it so that his books would not be published in the mainstream publishing house Práce" (Janáček 2004, 213, my translation).
3. Such as *Válka s mloky* (*War with the Newts*, 1936), and *Bílá nemoc* (*The White Disease*, 1937).
4. The film's soundtrack was composed by Zdeněk Liška, an outstanding Czech film composer. I have already noted that the introductory heavy chords, intended to convey the threats posed by new inventions, are followed by a melancholic clarinet, along with an orchestra, and they underscore nostalgia for Jules Verne's day. This musical moment recalls the trumpet solos in Mahler's symphonies, which have a similar nostalgic streak. The third minute brings a rush of popular music resembling street organ music. This stylistic range and—at the same time—tension is present throughout the entire film. The music does not usually call attention to itself—it often serves a descriptive/illustrative function (e.g., string glissandi strengthening the atmosphere of suspense). However, the harpsichord has an important role because its "peculiar" sound helps create a

distance from the period in which the story is set (in the late 19th century the harpsichord was not included in symphonic orchestras, and it only resurfaced again in the 20th century).

5. This scene references the first tram line built in 1891 in Prague-Letná, by Czech engineer and inventor František Křižík.
6. An allusion to the extraordinarily popular novel by Alfred Assollant, *Aventures merveilleuses mais authentiques du capitaine Corcoran*.
7. Between 1826 and 1837 Antonín Langweil, a librarian at the Clementinum University Library, created over 2000 cardboard models of the historical part of Prague, which were then set on a wooden platform.
8. The Czech word *procházka* means "a walk." The appellative "Procházka" is a common Czech surname. According to an old anecdote, Franz Joseph's moniker originated from a 1901-newspaper photograph of the emperor visiting Prague and crossing a bridge (*most* in Czech), titled "Procházka na mostě" or "A Walk on the Bridge." However, historians Otto Urban and Jiří Rak have argued that the moniker is in fact older and comes from the 1870s.
9. This family-oriented illustrated magazine primarily published photographs obtained abroad. It occupied a vital role in Czech society at the time. Literary magazines (*Ruch*, *Lumír*, etc.) addressed a different, artistic audience—*Světozor* was a large-format magazine built around illustrations. Magazines like *Světozor* appealed to readers' cultural senses via illustrations. The magazine *Květy*, for instance, published Doré's engravings "The Death of Atala" and "The Burial of Atala" without any further comment, clearly assuming that the readers knew who or what Atala is and could recognize the points in the story that are depicted in the engravings. Illustrations could therefore have an educational purpose or, on the contrary, evoke something that is commonly known.
10. The adaptation excludes a significantly more sizable population group: rural inhabitants, who had an entirely different worldview of culture and identity. Some of the people who lived in the countryside did not even identify with the nation state idea, as they preferred to maintain a local identity.
11. *Canard*, beyond its English meaning of a false story, is the French word for *duck*. In Czech the equivalent term is *novinářská kachna* (literally, "a journalistic duck").
12. Cf. the opening of *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*, in which Simon Hart, excited about modern technological inventions, rides the train towards the new industrial civilization.
13. The political scandals of the 1890s display the political and power-related context of life in this particular period. On the other hand, the inhabitants of Austria-Hungary lived in a *Rechtsstaat*. The patriotic journalist

Karel Havlíček Borovský (1821–1856) was repeatedly accused of anti-government activities by Austrian courts, but he always successfully defended himself, either on his own or with the assistance of attorneys. After the administration finally concluded that it could not legally exile Havlíček to Brixen, they deported him by imperial edict. When amnesty was issued to revolutionaries in 1853, Borovský petitioned to return to his homeland—he was told that since he had not been technically convicted, amnesty did not apply to him.

14. The character of the non-existent creator and inventor Jára Cimrman, who lived during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is featured in the comedic plays that Zdeňek Svěrák and Ladislav Smoljak began to write in the 1960s.
15. It was, for instance, unacceptable in the 19th century for a civil servant to use his proper name to publish poetry or join a theater group. These circumstances are reflected in Czech cultural history. The dramatist and revivalist Josef Kajetán Tyl (1808–1856) was temporarily employed as a clerk in a military office. He lost this job due to his extensive literary and theatrical pursuits. The prominent Czech poet and dramatist Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853–1912) writes repeatedly in his letters and memoirs that when he was employed as a professor, each Sunday he would take his sword and uniform and go to church because as a representative of the university he needed to be seen at mass.

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CHAPTER 4

Adaptation as Challenge: *Marketa Lazarová* and *Romance for Flugelhorn*

The liberalization of the Communist regime in the 1960s enabled the creation of several artistically successful adaptations. Writers, visual artists, and filmmakers sought to reestablish art as an inherent part of culture at large. These efforts originated from the era's innate need to recreate art for itself to once more foreground the aesthetic, and not ideological, function; the social and cultural discourse revived the half-forgotten ethos of the avant-garde.

To illustrate the forms and methods that the film newly created or put to use, I have chosen two adaptations, both of which were intended as art films and were subsequently codified as such by critics and viewers alike. They are also both based on literary texts commonly considered "unadaptable." The text of Vladislav Vančura's *Marketa Lazarová* (1931) was considered medium-specific because of its thematic and compositional structure, its style, and its use of language's audio properties.[1] In the case of František Hrubín's lyrical poem *Romance for Flugelhorn* (1962), its genre determined its apparently "unadaptable" nature: verse constitutes an uncommon source for film adaptations. Emulating certain features, such as the rhyme, seemed unattainable within the medium of film.

The directors of these adaptations, František Vláčil (1924–1999) and Otakar Vávra (1911–2011), respectively, chose to adapt texts they understood to be of high aesthetic value. Although their creative processes, as well as their personal and artistic journeys, differed considerably, they both faced difficulties in understanding the meaning of an aesthetic-oriented text in order to create a freestanding work in a different medium.

P. Bubeníček, *Subversive Adaptations*, Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-40961-0_4

Both Vláčil and Vávra adapted literary texts deemed by the general public as artistic and in doing so sought to produce new, independent works of art. For they were artists in their own right, poets who composed in a cinematic language. However, no matter the creative independence involved, these films were never received as stand-alone pieces. The 1960s cinema-going public did not separate the books from the films in their minds, and Vláčil and Vávra were inevitably left to consider whether the literary sources' innate dynamism bestowed their films with artistic quality. Ultimately though, these directors successfully created films by employing innovative, richly aesthetic audio-visual methods. The authors did not merely utilize the themes and motifs contained in the books: they expanded upon them and added new meanings.

The success of these films, however, did not hinge on a single, "exceptional" creative individual; a crew consisting of film professionals interested in and supportive of these ambitious projects proved essential to both adaptations. Records of pre-production debates over various film concepts testify to the efforts to make the films in such a way that they could gain artistic prestige.

Marketa Lazarová

František Vláčil, the director responsible for adapting Vladislav Vančura's novel *Marketa Lazarová*, cannot be easily categorized. Vláčil's works are permeated with unusual signals. The subjective perception of the artist guided his conception of cinema. *Marketa Lazarová* (1967), a defining example of 1960s art cinema, aptly demonstrates his approach to filmmaking. Peter Hames considers the adaptation to be on a par with other world-famous art films:

> Vláčil has converted a short and unified text into a vast and sprawling two-part epic that evokes comparison rather with Akira Kurosawa's *Schichinin no Samurai* (*Seven Samurai*, 1954) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966). (Hames 2004, 152)

The film was created concurrently in the minds of František Vláčil and the coauthor of the script, František Pavlíček. It took four years to write the screenplay, which was not completely finished even when shooting began. It took six years to produce the most expensive film of its day: the time and the financial means granted to it were only made possible

by the "auteur" position Vláčil occupied. In March 1965, Barrandov Studios director Vlastimil Harnach composed an urgent letter to the creative team's leader Erik Švabík, expressing his dissatisfaction over the production's progress. Harnach was disturbed by the ever-growing budget of the film, as well as the stubborn attitude of its director. However, despite Harnach's reservations towards Vláčil, the director remained, in Harnach's words, "the principal artist and creator of the film" (Barrandov Studio archive—"BSA", my translation).The auteur approach to film adaptations, however, was not new to Czech cinema—as is attested by the cult-like attitude of *Kinorevue* magazine towards directors such as František Čáp and Otakar Vávra in the 1930s. Aesthetic experimentation and enthusiasm for creativity and innovation brought a favorable reputation to some directors, which helped them secure permissions to make their adaptations, in addition to a certain amount of freedom concerning the manner of their creation. However, this freedom was still, even for Vláčil, certainly limited. In artistic adaptations, as in more mainstream ones, economic and technical considerations drove aesthetic choices.

Before going into detail about artistic expression in *Marketa Lazarová*, let us examine one other perspective on this adaptation: the matter of artistic merit. Available archival materials inform us that Jiří Bureš, an expert witness specializing in copyrights, the book market, and author royalties, was tasked with devising a system for splitting the royalties between Vančura's widow and the film's screenwriters. This legal specialist examined the relationship of the literary source to the adaptation of *Marketa Lazarová* in terms of authorship. Bureš produced a 10-page long report; it is a peculiar text, which on one hand strives for lawyer-style pragmatism, but at the same time explores Vančura's style and general aspects of the relationship between literature and film.

Bureš considered Vančura's share in making the adaptation as well as Pavlíček's and Vláčil's. He describes the literary *Marketa Lazarová* as a monolith, a granite block, the apotheosis of the Czech language, and calls Vančura a magician of the written word. According to Bureš, the crux of Vančura's work lies not in the story, but in its stylistic structure and fantastic atmosphere. This conclusion generates concerns about the possibility of transfers between literature and film, and the problem of media specificity. His distinction between "a standard film treatment, a mere screenwriter's treatment, and a different creative approach," one whose premise includes "authorial intervention in the subject matter itself" captures the atmosphere surrounding the period's work with a literary

text and the screenwriters' efforts. A certain type of substantial authorship consists, according to Bureš, of searching for the equilibrium among the novelist, the screenwriter and the director, as only a creative author is able to resist the temptations of the story, to strive for understanding the artistic intent of the literary text and, following that, "achieve an artistic impact by different means of expression" (BSA, my translation).

To prove how substantial the screenwriters' contribution to the film was, Bureš points to added dialogue, plot changes, new motifs, and so on. In the end, he suggests they receive half or at least two-fifths of the royalties. However, Bureš includes a surprising twist in the conclusion of his appraisal: *Marketa Lazarová*, to him, is so rooted in Czech culture and consciousness that a different ratio is called for. Vančura's spirit will always be present in the adaptation. He suggests, therefore, that two-thirds of royalties be given to Vančura's widow and the remaining third be divided between Pavlíček and Vláčil.

In writing the appraisal Bureš transgresses his competence; he does not stick to the letter of the law. He writes what is, in essence, an aesthetic, literary analysis in defense of "high culture" and infers that even in this case legal action should be pursued. The legal counsellor emerges as an exponent of an elitist approach to culture and as an arbiter of values. According to his text, Vančura's literary work demands a "true creator", a person František Vláčil can become. A cinematographer is supposed, via extraordinary creative action, to produce a new artefact which will not hinge on imitation and captures the viewer by its aesthetic appeal. The screenwriter and director is expected to relate the adaptation to the original literary text, but escape its difficulties by using unconventional and novel audiovisual approaches. At the same time, this instance of a legal text highlights the monopoly for establishing and advancing the artistic space. The auteur-adapter exists close to literature, verbal culture and critical practice, they can recognize the stylistic nuances of any given literary work, and in the end they employ authentic creative action in their work.

An *Unfilmable* Icon of Czech Literature

The novel *Marketa Lazarová* is a stylistically multilayered literary work. Vančura's writing was peculiar in that it was based heavily on the choice of expression. The semantic axis of the text consists of the commentary and the musings of the narrating subject.

The book is dominated by a Rabelaisian narrator, one who is ostentatious in his self-expression—he constantly poses questions and comments on the ongoing story. Placing the narrator in the foreground and everything else in the background establishes a close relationship between the narrator and the reader. Therefore, the essential aspect of Vančura's prose becomes not what is narrated, but how. Jan Mukařovský, a Prague structuralist, described the prominent nature of a narrator that assumes various stances towards the story and the characters. He highlighted the way a narrating subject influences the text via his or her constantly changing assessments of the fictional world and even of the readers, occurring both on the lexical level and in the overall presentation:

> The narrated story appears to Vančura's narrator both important and unimportant at the same time, deserving of laughter and sadness, praise and judgment, seriousness and levity. These various hues of the narrative voice change rapidly during narration, up to the point of overlapping with one another (Mukařovský 2006, 54, my translation).

Mukařovský came to the conclusion that the narrative's many-sided evaluation of characters and events is a momentous aspect in Vančura's writing, a declaration he supports with an excerpt from the novel *Marketa Lazarová*:

> It is not difficult for me to imagine a frolicking wise man, a remonstrative angel or a lover who beats his lady without ceasing to love her for even a little while. … All things are subject to change, and many a color includes other colors, ones that are altogether far away. (Vančura 1931, 106, my translation)

In the latter half of the 20th century, Vančura's narrative modes and his style were repeatedly analyzed by literary scholars. Czech structuralism suffered persecution under the Marxist regime and was banned in official publications and research. Jan Mukařovský eventually succumbed to political pressure and denounced this analysis method. However, in the 1960s structualism was rehabilitated, and Czech literary scholars returned to the structurally-analytical approach to writing about artistic literary texts. When *Marketa Lazarová* was adapted, several philologically oriented (and free from the Marxist view of art and literature) interpretations of Vančura's writing had already been published. These inspirational texts include analyses written by Zdeněk Kožmín about the stylistic structure of

Vančura's prose. In his book *Styl Vančurovy prózy* (*Vančura's Prose Style* 1968), which he had worked on since the early 1960s, Kožmín states that the stylistic approaches chosen by Vančura in his books establish the text's poetic-rhetoric quality: "A narrator, a reporter, a poet, and an orator seem to be alternating in relating exciting events happening to the audacious characters" (Kožmín 1968, 86, my translation). Kožmín describes the prose's narrative dominants, its complicated structure, the wide range of stylistic and language devices used to create the greatest possible variety in the text (e.g., lyricism, archaisms, parallelisms, affinity to spoken language, etc.; Kožmín 1968, 76–87).

Vančura's writings were at the time examined in another creative area: film adaptation. To the screenwriters, František Pavlíček and František Vláčil, the original text of *Marketa Lazarová* was akin to a living tissue being transplanted to a different environment. Both writers were also partial to the philological analyses produced at the time: František Pavlíček had studied Slavic literature and aesthetics in Prague, and František Vláčil had studied art history and aesthetics in Brno; therefore they were familiar with the methods of structural interpretation and the appropriate terminology. They built upon the dominance of the aesthetic function of the novel, following the structuralist conception of literature; they saw the text's focal point in its narrative mode:

> I was, strangely enough, captivated by the absolutely non-film aspect of it, the peculiar sentence structure and its rhythm and poetic quality—I would even call it a musical aspect—so I started to imagine the story in interesting images which could be exquisitely composed together. The film language has a very particular magic to it: it is immensely like poetry. I can combine various shots, each of which has its own aesthetic—and, by the virtue of that—emotional, quality. I can make changes within this quality by combining the shots differently… (Hrivňáková 1984, 4, my translation)

This and other similar statements make it evident that their formal training drove the filmmakers to define the adaptation primarily on aesthetic grounds. The basis of their work, therefore, rested in treating the text's aesthetic function by separating it (the most important task from a structuralist perspective), and finding ways to further develop and transform it. The creative adaptation process employed in writing *Marketa Lazarová* suggests that the filmmakers tried, from the very beginning, to capture Vančura's originality, the secret of his art, and to devise a new way of existence for

this "body." Both writers were aware that they were dealing with an author whose work is generally considered "unfilmable," largely because of the illusion of closeness between the narrator and the reader. They did, however, manage to transcend the period's conventions as soon as in writing the screenplay, and in the following years of shooting the film, Vláčil worked as a modern artist: fully consumed by the process of the work's inception he nearly sacrificed himself for the originality that was emerging.

The filmmakers were not primarily concerned with relating a simple story: they were focused on the complexity of expression found in the source work. Vláčil created an equivalent to some of its aspects by "rhapsodizing" in moving images. Contemporary critics mainly celebrated the adaptation of *Marketa Lazarová* as an artistic revelation:

> One would most suitably take on this task in silence. Anything that can be said about the film *Marketa Lazarová* will neither add nor subtract beauty from this work, which will remain a milestone in our cinematography. It is enough to say: Go and admire the beauty which the film's authors managed to wrench from the captivity of words and reincarnate in images! (Francl 1967, 2, my translation)[2]

The critics wrote about Vláčil's struggle with the words of a great avant-garde writer, about poignant visual evocations, disturbing the main narrative line, an authentic rendering of medieval way of life, of bringing to life the long-gone times and people whose actions were, unlike the actions of the critics' contemporaries, instinctive and thus real.

In the Midst of Pagan Myths

The plot of the film *Marketa Lazarová* is fairly simple. Kozlík, a robber knight, lives with his children at the Roháček stronghold. Two of his sons, Mikoláš and Adam, capture a Saxon noble called Kristián. The young man, who was previously bound for a religious life, falls in love with Kozlík's daughter Alexandra. Meanwhile, a governor called Captain Pivo ("Beer"), accompanied by soldiers, sets off on a punitive expedition against the robber clans. Mikoláš visits a hostile robber knight called Lazar, who lives at the nearby Obořiště stronghold. He is nearly beaten to death, but he manages to return home. Mikoláš's clan attacks Obořiště, and Lazar is tortured. Mikoláš kidnaps his daughter, Marketa, who was supposed to join a nunnery the following Spring. Captain Pivo tracks down Kozlík's clan, and in the ensuing

fight most of the robbers are killed. Kozlík, who is gravely wounded, is captured. Kristián goes insane and is later killed by Alexandra. Mikoláš, having found both Marketa and his mother hiding in the swamps, sets off for the nearby royal town of Boleslav in order to set his father free. He is wounded, captured, and sentenced to death. Before he is executed, he and Marketa get married. Marketa is pregnant and eventually gives birth to their son.

The adaptation is set in a vaguely medieval age. The film tells a story from a time long gone, but its core elements (love, betrayal, insanity, a ferocious struggle to maintain one's way of life) transcend this setting, being applicable to any moment in human history. The film's makers were interested in creating a historical story that was also concerned with contemporary issues. The intertitles used in the film express this idea. The first of them reads: "This is a story composed almost in vain, and hardly deserving of praise. What can you do? The dowser's divining rod still bends above these ground waters" (Vláčil 1967, my translation). It is meant to imply that everything repeats itself, and—as the voice-over declares—even the oldest of things are "caught in the net of the present time" (Vláčil 1967, my translation). The film's composition rests on two major parts —"Straba" (a male character from pagan mythology) and "Lamb of God." The theme of paganism permeates the first part, whereas an allegorical tableau of a victorious journey towards a love that not even death can conquer dominates the second. According to Vláčil, his *Marketa Lazarová* newly embodies the idea "that in the center of Christianity's rise there are still islands, represented by Kozlík's clan, where fading paganism still exists" (Strusková 1997, 172, my translation). The spiritual borderline between paganism and Christianity manifests itself when Kozlík calls to the gods to decide on the life or death of his son Adam. However, he momentarily corrects himself and speaks of one god. Analogously, Kozlík's youngest daughter Drahuše, a wild bandit child, grows up in a world of pagan stories and superstitions while wearing a cross on her neck.

The film and novel both offer up a sketch of a world unrestrained by norms—a world where one is entitled to one's own actions. Men are unspoiled, belligerent, elemental, and (most importantly) free. They are close to an original natural state, and their actions resonate with unbridled natural phenomena.

Vančura's novel reads:

> 'Tis better to be a bandit with the soul of a lynx and the honor of a lynx, than a captain whose face is human and his teeth are dog's teeth. The

> robbers' conduct is vulgar, but we call it what it is—you, then, also confess your nature. (Vančura 1931, 59, my translation)

The literary Mikoláš lives like a wolf or a lynx, he communicates with his comrades in animal speech, his nose is reminiscent of a bird of prey's beak, and he is driven by instinct. By cultivating his repository of motifs, Vančura aspired to convey "a nature of the characters that is inherently whole and is set firmly in nature" (Holý 2002, 122, my translation). The film works with the same principle; from the very beginning it systematically builds up an image of Kozlík as a wolf—this is apparent from the wolf skin that he wears, from his eyes that gleam in the darkness, and from the brutal behavior he uses to force order upon his "pack." Contrary to the book, the film Kozlík does not express any compassion towards living beings—this "softened" nature did not resonate with the wholesome human ideal of the pagan world. As Mikoláš returns to Roháček with the captured Kristián, he first meets his father. The first shot shows Kozlík from above, standing in the center of the courtyard and setting to inspect the stolen bounty. His laughter and his breath are heard, his eyes are shown, and, finally, an image emerges of a wildly grimacing man, surrounded by frightened horses and people, as he yells and cracks a whip. There is no doubt as to who is the master at Roháček.

The screenwriters, having Vančura's novel as their starting point, made up a world in which there is a forest-dwelling clan connected to wolves, animism, and animals in general. However, they were also inspired by the Romantic fascination with the ancient past. Beside Vančura's novel, the film also found inspiration in the *Rukopis královédvorský* (*Manuscript of Dvůr Králové*, 1817), a 19th-century example of Czech ossianism. The near-absence of paganism in Czech literature, and the lack of historical continuity thus created, disturbed some of the proponents of Czech nationalism. At the same time, the creation of literary forgeries is one of the aspects of the Romantic tendency to create historic-seeming imitations. The person likely to have created the forged manuscripts is a Czech writer and archivist Václav Hanka (179–1861), who "discovered" a fragment of the manuscript in 1817 in Dvůr Králové. The purpose of the manuscript, said to have originated as far back as the 13th century, was to show the nature of Czech culture uncontaminated by Christianity. The Slavic people are presented as wild, unrestrained people, who, at the same time, possess a "dovish nature."[3] Even though the manuscript was ultimately declared a fake, its influence on Czech culture and literature was formidable.[4]

If we focus on the parallels in *Marketa Lazarová* to the so-called oldest Czech stories included in the *Manuscripts*, an allusion can be found in the images of sacred trees taken up by birds of prey which symbolize the souls of the dead. The *Manuscript* poem named "Jelen" (A Stag) makes a connection between the life of a strong animal and that of a young man: both wander freely through the woods until the man is killed by a treacherous assassin. An oak tree grows beside his grave, whose branches are occupied by sparrow hawks, which, along with the deer, recall the sad fate of the murdered man. In the film, a similar concept is used in the scene from the part "O sudbě mužů a údělu vdov" ("On the fate of men and the lot of widows"), in which Mikoláš says goodbye to Marketa before he sets off on the ultimately futile quest to rescue his father. While Mikoláš recalls hunting with Kozlík, the camera shows a herd of grazing deer seen from a distance. In the following shot Marketa and Mikoláš are lying on the ground in the forest. Mikoláš speaks about stags fighting over does and reminisces about seeing an injured stag who led them to a barren plain:

> I had once seen a burial ground, and it was less sad than that place. Skeletons, skeletons, bones, a thousand pairs of antlers on white skulls. In the center of it he stood, still. Alone. Beaten. Alone. Kozlík whispered to me: "Look, see, the solitude of death." (Vláčil 1967, my translation)

In Romantic characterization, the Kozlíks are not feeble, jaded people divorced from nature. They have ties to their gods; they can live and they can die.

The *Manuscript* inspiration resonates within the story of Straba itself, which is set in pagan times and claims affinity to Slavic mythology. Kozlík's wife tells the story to her youngest children. Straba alienated himself from people; he defamed what they held sacred, killed an innocent girl, and thwarted the order imposed by the gods. In the end he was banished to the woods, and "on these words, Perun struck the earth though the sky was clear, and Straba laughs the quiet laugh of the wolf…"[5] (Vláčil 1967, my translation).

A Parable of Love

The second part of the film—"Beránek boží" ("Lamb of God")—is dominated by the idea of the regenerative power of love. The characters placed by the screenwriters in the center of action express a categorical

consent with their own fate. Core questions of being manifest themselves in the protagonists' willingness to die for love. Mikoláš steals Lazar's daughter Marketa, drags her to his camp, and makes her his sexual partner. In the morning they are both confronted by Kozlík, who orders Mikoláš to torture Marketa and then banish her. His son defies his authority and throws the torture instrument away in front of other bandits. Kozlík, furious, then punishes two pairs of lovers—the "sinners of love" (Mikoláš and Marketa, Alexandra and Kristián) are all shackled to a tree. They remain that way until Captain Pivo's attack on the camp. Mikoláš, having robbed both Lazar and the nunnery of Marketa, is the lamb who walks towards death in the end. In the film, he does not sacrifice himself in the name of salvation, but in the name of love. Mikoláš and Marketa's relationship calls forth the question whether the contrast between the praying, nunnery-bound Marketa and the erotic Marketa is not too stark. It is, in fact, not—in medieval times many pious men and women embraced sensuality, as it was needed in life. Thus Marketa remains a devout woman, not having betrayed her family or her family's beliefs. She is then herself part of the hopeful conclusion of the story. Even though she was associated with her kidnappers' way of life, her story does not have an altogether negative ending (Fig. 4.1).

The added character of Bernard, a mendicant monk, who travels the land accompanied by a sheep, plays an important part. He is first seen through the eyes of Lazar, who has just promised to send his daughter to a nunnery and, being of a greedy nature, refuses to give the monk

Fig. 4.1 *Marketa Lazarová*. Marketa and Mikoláš. *Marketa Lazarová* (*Marketa Lazarová*; František Vláčil 1967)

anything. In the second part of the film, the monk can be seen from above, wandering the early-spring countryside, while a voice-over opens the chapter. The voice-over suddenly changes the topic and its tone, and addresses the monk, initiating a dialogue, finally exclaiming "Bernard, if only your voice were as good as your humbleness is great" (Vláčil 1967, my translation). The perspective shifts to a medium shot seen from below, and Bernard, pondering whether God is showing him the way, is alone again. He pursues his running sheep to Lazar's courtyard, which is now under siege. He begs for alms, but is assaulted and robbed of his animal. In his third on-screen appearance, Bernard encounters the Kozlík clan on the other side of the ongoing conflict. They get the monk drunk and kill his sheep, leaving only its head, which the terrified Bernard takes with him on his further journey.

The lattermost event plays out in the part of the film called "Poslední večeře" ("Last supper"), recalling that important religious narrative. A parallel is made with the death of Mikoláš, which, in contrast to the slaughter of the sheep, had a purpose. At the end of the story, Bernard is seen through the eyes of the pregnant Marketa. He is again travelling with an animal, this time a male kid goat, which symbolizes Mikoláš's as of yet unborn son. He stops to talk with Marketa, trying to convince her that they should travel together; however, they part ways when Bernard runs off to catch the restless animal. The voice-over narrator informs the viewer that Marketa will give birth to a son named Václav, whose soul will be fought over by "love and cruelty, certainty and doubt." (Vláčil 1967, my translation). Along with Bernard, the story reaches a peaceful ending. Children embody the uncertainty of human choices as well as the future and the continuity of the lineage—Kozlík's clan will survive. Like the restless baby goat the monk chases vainly across the plain, the Kozlík tribe will always be defiant and the whole cycle of life will repeat itself in further generations.

A different kind of romance than the one that Marketa and Mikoláš experience unravels between the young noble Kristián, set to become the new Bishop of Hennau, and Kozlík's wild daughter Alexandra, whom he falls in love with. In the novel, Vančura portrays Alexandra as a robber's daughter who can wield a sword, but who is also a graceful and delicate girl. In the adaptation, however, she is treated differently. The film Kristián first sees Alexandra as she is butchering a bull with an ax in the center of the crude courtyard at Roháček. Kozlík has just decided to execute Kristián but suddenly changes his mind. Alexandra watches intently

as the young man prepares to die, and later, as he is taken back to the castle, swift flashback scenes are shown, hinting at her past. These images "mix magic and eroticism" (Škapová 2002, 57, my translation), showing Alexandra naked and carrying out a pagan ceremony beside an ancient oak tree. A shot follows of her naked figure as she walks through high grass, a knife in one hand, in the other a dead rooster. Unclear images of her lying in the grass with a man are shown next. These alternate with shots of blood from the slaughtered animal trickling into a bowl, establishing a symbolic connection between death and physical love. The sequence continues with an image of an adder slithering along a tree trunk, as a man kills it. The man is bitten by the snake, and Alexandra sucks the venom out of his wound. The image shifts between Alexandra's face, the man's hand, her body embracing the oak tree, and the ornaments adorning its trunk. The last image is of a girl running through a winter landscape, looking back in fear. The shifting of these images, Kristián's aborted execution, and a mysterious return somewhere in the girl's past, illustrates the complicated web of erotic relationships between man and woman. There is no apparent key to the events, and it cannot be safely assumed which interpretation is closest to the truth. It is uncertain whether these images are memories, fantasies, or the director's free associations intended to give the viewer new interpretative possibilities.

This particular romance has a bitter ending. The intertitles marking off this part of the story anticipate the situation ironically: "Where the Bishop of Hennau was taken by love…" (Vláčil 1967, my translation). The camera finds Kristián having gone insane and wandering through a desolate land. He passes a sacred tree adorned by amulets, statuettes of gods, and animal skulls, and enters a swamp. Flashbacks show a terrible battle between soldiers and the robbers; presumably this event robbed the young man of his sanity. Alexandra sets off to find Kristián, tracks him down, and follows him through high grass as if he were a game animal. The young people are shown struggling through the bushes, and finally Alexandra's sight rests on Kristián, the camera showing a close-up shot of his bloody face. Alexandra picks up a big stone and kills her lover. She is then seen from below as though rooted in nature; her character's shift into animalism is complete.

According to literary historian Jiří Holý, the oppressive atmosphere of the film is a shift from the book, whose tone is "rather joyful and benign, lacking even a slight aspect of morbidity" (Holý 2002, 149, my translation). While the bleak attributes of the Straba story permeate the

adaptation, in the novel the motifs of cruelty and damnation are "gradually balanced out by motifs of kindness, tenderness, and hope" (Holý 2002, 147, my translation). This interpretation is certainly valid. The screenwriters treated some of the characters differently than Vančura did; Alexandra, as well as other characters, is portrayed more brutally. Nonetheless, a victorious journey towards love remains the film's main concept. Immediately after Kristián's murder, the film cuts to Marketa. The desolate, inhospitable swampland is gone, and Marketa, covered with fur, is sleeping under a large tree with the sun shining on her. The film's evocation of a cold world is replaced by a more pleasant perspective on man's existence on earth. Even though she is alone, as Mikoláš has already gone to find his father to break him out of prison, the film implies that Marketa will not be without help and that she will find a safe haven.

In the Web of History and Faith

One of the opening scenes of the film shows Kozlík travelling to Boleslav and negotiating unsuccessfully with Captain Pivo, then attacking him and fleeing back to Roháček.[6] His flight starts with a look towards a grey sky and the branches of tall pines, heavy with snow. The camera then shifts gradually to a horizontal position, moving forward, tearing through black tree branches. Afterwards Kozlík is shown trudging through deep snow, dragging behind him a heavy branch in order to cover his tracks. His "wolf" cap is seen, and his breath can be heard. The scene evokes a greater heavenly power looking down on the tiny soul of a robber wandering through the woods, endangered by the severe cold, wolves, and those who pursue him. All this is communicated merely through images and sounds. In this world people are perpetually in danger; soldiers may come at any time to ransack or raze settlements, killing or running out their inhabitants. The life of robbers and bandits is more dangerous still: they endanger the lives of others, while at the same time putting themselves at risk.

The people portrayed in the film had no fixed expectations about their immediate future (being permanently at risk due to the factors mentioned above), and thus they took refuge in faith, which was straightforward. They believed firmly in Heaven and Hell, seeking eternal life, which was perceived as leaving the mournful valley that was their earthly existence. These circumstances created the basis of medieval spirituality,

built upon only later by theologians. Medieval piety was marked by danger. The two versions of spirituality present in the film were not in conflict with each other—both represent the need of a person living in permanent state of peril to look hopefully to something higher than human existence. When Mikoláš arrives at Lazar's stronghold, the camera moves rapidly and enters a room with a crucifix on the wall. The spiritual can inhabit a young Christian girl's room as well as a monastery, it can be found in trees, in ponds, and in the mountains. In *Marketa Lazarová*, Christianity is merely one of the options. It and tree worship are far from each other, but they are not in conflict: they are different, they ignore each other, yet their purpose is the same. The film gives an eloquent description of medieval high culture with its dogmatic structures, as well as the other spiritual aspects of the time.

The spiritual aspect of the story, which could potentially offer answers about the transience of human life, was however impaired by Vančura's criticism of belief in God.[7] The screenwriters transferred the novel's peculiar anti-religious stance from the 1930s into the film: some of the book narrator's ironic comments were softened in the script, but some more obvious hints were left in, many of them inserted in the monk Bernard's dialogue. There is an eloquent example of this in the scene after Pivo's soldiers battle the robbers. The monk finds the already insane Kristián in the plundered stronghold and utters a long monologue in his presence. Amongst other things, he asks "Why appeal to God? Captain, you heard, with God's help, they make a master out of a brute" (Vláčil 1967, my translation). In this fashion Vančura's ideas were transferred into the film—the criticism of faith, however, is transformed into a criticism of people who abuse God's name to further their own selfish interest. The objective is not to denounce Christian faith, but to call judgment upon those who treat it illegitimately. Analogously, in the film's conclusion Marketa first seeks shelter in a convent. When the mother superior makes her confess her sins, Marketa repents but refuses to denounce her lover. In this way people act in God's name, even though it is obviously against their faith. The aforementioned scene with the deer boneyard brings the film closest to book's existentialism: death is perceived the same way it is approached in the novel—as a hollowness, a void. The film absents Vančura's heretic narrator, who exclaims: "Oh, you sceptic, even you pale, even you tremble? Fear not! Heaven is empty. Infinity is empty. Infinity, the madhouse of gods on whose edge a tiny star is wandering" (Vančura 1931, 206, my translation).

Vančura's book includes two key themes that are retained in the adaptation: social and anti-military. The novel was written in the difficult 1930s, during the Great Depression, which brought social inequality into the story, a topic later taken up by the film. The book narrator's ideas on this social aspect are communicated by Bernard, who says that human beings defend themselves like a bear sow, but can also attack like a lynx when under pressure. This is a clear allusion to social issues and the hypothesis that people must have become criminals because they were driven to it by a dire situation.

The second area of interest concerns the anti-militarist ideas expressed in the book. While the literary robbers are often depicted as acting with honor, soldiers are portrayed as mercenaries who act not in the name of justice, but for their own profit and that of their masters. This issue is also addressed by Bernard (albeit in a minor way), when he says that a bad farmer clears woods and a bad king pursues wars. The significant difference in the soldiers' temperament is most obvious in the character of Sovička, who strives for honor, fame, and the admiration of women. The screenwriters contrasted him with Captain Pivo, creating a dynamic that is examined from multiple perspectives. While Sovička desires to be seen as heroic, Pivo pursues justice. The contrast culminates during the eventual execution of Kozlík and Mikoláš, which is fully divorced from the film's literary source. The film Pivo is ultimately shown to feel the greatest regret of all about the tragedy of the Kozlíks (and particularly of the lovers), as though the redemptive power of love had enlightened him and turned this soldier into a compassionate man.

The screenwriters made the adaptation topical by including an issue typical for the 1960s: a human experience with history that did not match the Communist mantra of social optimism. This is illustrated by the character of the monk Bernard. Here is a man thrown around by events beyond his control, a puppet in the hands of history. He wanders through a dangerous, threatening world, unable to defend himself or to change anything—he can only bear witness to the times. There are various places in the film that show the existential anguish of a character in the throes of violence and death, such as in the scene where a bloody-faced Bernard, having been assaulted by the soldiers, flees Obořiště. The camera shows the robbers who have just attacked and killed several men. They are hidden in the shrubbery, watching as the monk, in search of his sheep, arrives at the scene of their crime. He is terrified as he sees that man is always being thrown into a world of malice and violence. He

mumbles to himself, first leaning on God's mercy, then calling for divine anger and punishment. As he searches for his sheep, one of the robbers mimics its sound. Bernard, ignorant of this being a cruel joke, searches in vain through the trees. The scene appears as a metaphor for human life: wandering in pursuit of chimeric voices. People are thrown into the depersonalized world; they are helpless against the vicious snares of history.

Romance for Flugelhorn

In 1961 František Hrubín published a poem in book form titled *Romance for Flugelhorn*. This poem eventually became his most popular work, as it was an unexpected revelation to many readers who had just endured a decade of Communist dictatorship-building. This extended poem is built upon a simple premise—the unfulfilled love between a village youth and a fairground girl—but it carries a more wide-reaching message about life. It brings topics such as transitioning from adolescence into adulthood, growing old, and dying into the foreground. Hrubín offers his readers an affecting, tender image of young love, the regret over its lack of fulfilment, and more broadly, regrets over youth's irreversible passing.

At the beginning of the adaptation process, there were two authors, František Hrubín and Otakar Vávra, who decided to work with the topic of aging. They were both born just before World War I, experienced the postwar avant-garde, lived through World War II, and saw the Communist takeover in 1948. At the beginning of the 1960s they had both just turned 50 years old and connected in ruminating about their lives so far. Vávra was quoted as saying: "I make films which are a testament of my generation—the fate of a part of my generation and my class" (Kudela 1967, 31, my translation). Hrubín and Vávra worked together on three film adaptations. The first, *Srpnová neděle* (*August Sunday* 1960) was an adaptation of Hrubín's theater play about the ambivalence of human relationships. For *Zlatá reneta* (*The Golden Queening* 1965) Vávra used Hrubín's eponymous novella: in it, an aging man searches in vain for the places where he spent his youth and for his long-lost love. Their third adaptation was *Romance for Flugelhorn*, a film seeking to convey an existentialist interpretation of life; it ultimately became one of the most important Czech films of the 1960s.[8]

Otakar Vávra managed to work in film in *all* political regimes that were prevalent since the 1930s, and any evolution of his work is often

controversial; for example, Czech critic Jiří Cieslar called him "the classic of Czech mediocrity" (Cieslar 2003, 410, my translation). Vávra began his career in the 1930s as a screenwriter, conducting avant-garde experiments such as *Světlo proniká tmou* (*The Light Penetrates the Dark* 1931) and making successful adaptations of Czech literary works like *Filosofská historie* (*Philosophical Story* 1937) and *Panenství* (*Virginity* 1937). After the Communist takeover in 1948, he directed many films intended for "ideological education" (perhaps the best known of these are those of the "Hussite Trilogy," which comprises adaptations of works by Alois Jirásek, the regime's favorite writer). In the early 1950s, though, Vávra simultaneously opposed radical Communist dogmatists and put professional values ahead of ideological proclamations, demanding "a quality literary source, a screenplay with a complex dramatic structure, thorough preparation for the shooting, elaborate sets and mass scene choreography" (Szczepanik 2012, 87, my translation). In 1957, he started teaching at the directing department of the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. He urged his students not only to study film, but to devote time to other art forms; he encouraged their interest in aesthetics and philosophy. His students included many of the main exponents of the Czech New Wave (Věra Chytilová, Evald Schorm, Jiří Menzel, Jan Schmidt), on whom he had a significant influence. After Vávra's death in 2011, he was judged for his political and social conformity and intentionally letting the censors interfere with his creative process. Several of his works, however, were remembered for their aesthetic values, none more so than *Romance for Flugelhorn* (cf. Blažejovský 2008, 231–232). Jan Žalman wrote a piece on the film in the context of the director's other work, and concluded that "Vávra was paying his dues, 'through Hrubín,' to the same disillusionment that the whole generation of 50-year-olds was experiencing with varying intensity; he pays a toll to the disenchantment over a society which swore by the noblest moral ideals, and then let them fall in a blind dogmatic rampage immediately afterwards" (Žalman 1990, 266, my translation). Aside from disillusionment over political developments in the country, Vávra had an even more significant motivation: by adapting an "unfilmable" text, and transferring its lyrical qualities to the screen, he strived to prove himself more than a routinist, show off his creative talent, and keep pace with young directors. Thus, an adaptation was made that still pleased the director even many years afterwards: "Recently I saw this film on TV, after 24 years…and I really feel that it is flawless. All the aspects of the film are

right. Both the tempo and the rhythm are right; I am convinced that this is my best film" (Vávra 2011, 211, my translation).

The relaxing of political restraints at the end of the 1950s made creative expression in film possible. Filmmakers could slowly make their way back to using methods that had previously been suppressed, and they focused on the prewar aesthetic, among other things. Vávra's creative vision was preceded in the literary and cultural context by the "discovery of the everyday," whose main proponents in the last third of the 1950s were the poets connected to the magazine *Květen*. Working on a collective platform, these authors built upon the reflection of everyday life, the search for the ordinary, and making contact with raw reality. Their works reflect the conflict between individuals and society, which was growing ever more prominent at the time: "If the *Květen* generation strove to perceive details in a universal perspective, this of course involved their euphoria from the careful dismantling of the existing ideological taboos, which had ordered to see the world split in two—the new world of socialism and the backward world from before socialism" (Macura 1993, 37, my translation). And it was the poetics of human life, not turning away from its most mundane or bleak aspects, that became the central principle in the film adaptation of *Romance for Flugelhorn*. The film builds upon the representation of raw reality; it captures everyday situations and shows them in their simplicity, yet the viewers feel they are witnessing something extraordinary. This sensation is made more urgent by systematically thematizing time's ephemeral nature. Vávra highlighted simple things and their presentation, and by these means he built a coherent, polyphonic world, which unites the tragic and the fiercely alive aspects of human life.

Nostalgic Romanticism as a Gesture of Lyrical and Cinematic Expression

Hrubín's text is structured around several basic points: adolescence, love, and death. *Romance for Flugelhorn* takes place in Lešany, a village in rural Bohemia, in the 1930s, and then 30 years afterwards. The narrator—in the adaptation his name is Vojta—falls in love with a younger girl named Terina. Over a three-year period, they spend two extended periods of time together when her travelling fair comes to the village. In the first year, their romance is disturbed by the narrator's duty to take care of his ill grandfather, while Terina is busy at the fair. The latter

part of their relationship is marred by the narrator's fit of jealousy, in which he strikes Terina. He does not get the chance to mend the situation. Terina leaves with the fair, and the next year he learns that she died of diphtheria during the winter. Almost 30 years later, he has a chance encounter with Viktor, a carnival worker who had also pursued Terina, and they both return to Lešany as though waiting for Terina's ghost to appear.

The complex layering of the poem's temporal and place settings is an important aspect of the literary *Romance*. A depiction of the narrator and Terina on a warm August night is momentarily replaced with the mature narrator's voice as he reflects back on the crucial events of his youth. Connecting the past to the narrative present determines the poem's dynamics. There is a central point in time that serves as a base for the narrative—segments titled "Tonight (on 28 August 1930)" open and close the poem, respectively, marking the most revisited moments. They contain both the actual experience of a summer night and its memory: "I sit on the windowsill, awake in the night. The warm fragrance of nettles / flows over my shoulder / the other one freezing in the room's black ice…" (Hrubín 1962, 22, my translation). These verses contain the central image of the poem—imminent contact with both love and death at the same moment. The lyrical subject is trying to come to grips with this aspect of existence, and his ruminations on growing up with the consciousness of human mortality transform into a melancholic testament of people at turning points in life. While Terina is outside, radiating warmth and life, inside the dead grandfather is laid out, emitting a deathly freeze. Both of the situations involve a heavy, nearly unbearable burden, which this young man must contend with during this key night.

In the poem, youth resides in a summer countryside represented by a repertoire of natural details. The text emphasizes the charms of the country and the experience of the intimacy of summertime feelings. Colorful, tangible, fragrant nature presents an overwhelming whole that towers monumentally over human life and its brevity. The young, however, appear to be reaching the whole range of natural and cosmic forces:

> Terina, I will dress you in stars and plant
> universes on your body, you shall hear
> the last chirp of an autumnal cricket
> as well as an explosion creating a new star,
> you will exist in the meanest Sweet William

> even as the universe is too small
> for the tear which mirrors your sobbing
> emotion when I embraced you yesterday.(Hrubín 1962, 22, my translation)

Hrubín, who had experience with cinema, was well aware of the fact that the film would need an epic drive if it was to be more than a short experimental picture. He wrote a film treatment of the poem, in which he chronologically reordered the asymmetric structure of the original: "[W]ith *Romance for Flugelhorn* nothing else could be done than to leave the poem as it is, extract the story, extend it, and work according to the laws of filmmaking" (Träger 1970, 3, my translation). The plot acquired a distinctly romantic form: a young man falls in love with a carnival girl, another man ruins their relationship, and the girl dies in the end. The story's time and space were condensed. The pivotal moment of first love, the grandfather's death, saying goodbye to Terina—all this takes several years in the poem, yet it unravels in the space of several days and nights in the adaptation (with the added frame story of Vojta's present). A unity of time, space, and action is thus achieved, along with an intense emphasis on the romantic nature of the story.

The film starts with a camera slide from the dark of the night through an open window into a tavern. It is late. Card players are sitting at a table, singing a song, whose lyrics are taken from a poem by Hrubín, about a cemetery somewhere by Újezd in Prague, where "everyone" will end up eventually. The words of the song, as well as its wistful melody, communicate a feeling of loneliness and isolation, which grows deeper as two customers are singled out by the camera. One of them belongs to the card-playing group; the other one is sitting on his own and is on his way out. So far, unbeknownst to them, two old rivals—Vojta and Viktor—have been reunited by chance in this village pub.

In one of the shots, Vojta is seen at his table on the left, with the bar and the barman washing dishes on the right. A shot across tables stacked with chairs intensifies the notion of Vojta's isolation. Suddenly, Viktor reaches for his flugelhorn and plays eight notes. Vojta's gaze changes, as though he was suddenly very far away.

The three shots that follow show how the men's gestures reveal their memories being awakened; the cuts now follow each other more closely. Viktor grasps the flugelhorn and begins to play. As he plays, Vojta, with his head bowed, enters the shot from the right. The past reappears. Soon

after their unexpected encounter, Viktor takes Vojta to "see" Terina. Viktor, who knows that Terina has died, drives the baffled Vojta on a tractor to a nearby cemetery. They discover that the girl's grave cannot be found anymore: someone else has bought the plot. When Viktor asks what became of Terina, a gravedigger curtly exclaims: "What's left of her" (Vávra 1966, my translation). A frantic ride through darkness follows, to another village where the fair brought the three of them together 30 years before, underscored by a disharmonious string tremolo. Viktor plays his flugelhorn on the village square, and the musical motif transforms along with the scene: there is a long shot of a moving swing ride accompanied by a slower variation of the central melody. A wistful atmosphere envelopes this look at a past, no-longer-accessible world. The memory in the fragments of recollection reawakens, brought up by the flugelhorn's sound.

Significantly, the adaptation features a musical leitmotif, a melody from "Souvenir de Herkulesbad," an old waltz by Austrian composer Jakob Pazeller that might elicit nostalgic feelings in viewers familiar with the music. It is worth noting that, like *Romance for Flugelhorn*, Pazeller's piece had a double life. The waltz was initially considered an upper-class form, as it was often played at balls and on colonnades. The melody, however, was made widely popular by organ-grinders who reproduced it in towns, in villages, and at country festivals. It would be picked up in this fashion by Viktor (a carnival worker), and his use of it is a manifestation of its second life. *Romance for Flugelhorn* was similarly "picked up" by Vávra—he was captivated by it, eventually adapting it to a medium inherently more widely consumed, animating the poem's meanings in the process. A poetic text intended for an elite audience of literary critics, teachers, and students who had to memorize it, was in its film shape shown in town and village cinemas and later entered people's homes through television.

Romance for Flugelhorn emphasizes understanding the complexity of human existence, a theme uncommon for films made in the previous decade. One reviewer declared that Otakar Vávra and František Hrubín rehabilitated

> emotion as the cornerstone of human existence. In this overly rationalized and smugly complicated world they attempted what nearly amounts to a quixotic gesture: they put a romantic story on its stage, wherein sentiment is equally important as reflections on life; pure love grows out of enchanted childhood naiveté into staggeringly seductive heaviness which stays with a person all their life. (AN 1967, 5, my translation)

Romance for Flugelhorn suddenly emerged as a comprehensible artistic work emphasizing individual humanity at a time when collectively filling commitments made at Party congresses was a publicly proclaimed goal. Instead of expanding upon the challenges facing socialism or accentuating Cold War threats, the film elicited nostalgia. Both the poem and its adaptation opened up a space for human uncertainty. Propaganda urging collective euphoria was replaced by recognition of the fact that something still exists that cannot be taken away: one's personal desires. Both Hrubín and Vávra spoke of "nostalgic romanticism" in interviews detailing their poetical methods. The social function of *Romance for Flugelhorn* was to bring relief, as the film served no educational purpose; it merely talked with no embellishment about profound values in life. From the big history of building a Communist state, the adaptation turned to small, intimate histories, and showed what beauty—sweet as well as bitter—can be found there.[9]

Metamorphoses

The literary *Romance for Flugelhorn* draws from an ancient textual source—Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It contains a quote from this Latin classic that was subsequently also included in the film's screenplay, production sheet, and credits, and carries the first instance of *Romance's* mythological connotations: "magna petis, Phaethon, et quae nec viribus istis / munera conveniant nec tam puerilibus annis: / sors tua mortalis, non est mortale, quod optas (Ovidius 1915, 29–30)."

The book's readers may realize that the textual construction of *Romance for Flugelhorn* rests on a semantic connection to Ovid's work, and this association reveals Hrubín's poetic concept of life's purpose. In the Phaethon myth, which he incorporated organically into his text, the author found means to convey such a desire that reaches beyond individual possibilities.

This was not the first time Hrubín used ancient myths in his work. In the poem "Proměna" (Metamorphosis 1957) he transposes the story of Icarus and Daedalus to the time following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Such updated myths and overt intertextual connections mean Hrubín's poems are not isolated texts—instead they demonstrate the changes and variations in art throughout time, and the ways ancient motifs are capable of gaining new meanings and connotations.

Hrubín and Vávra agreed to work together on a film treatment, and they both participated in writing the screenplay. They utilized two age-old methods to work with and appropriate ancient texts: *imitatio* and *aemulatio*. Imitatio, or imitation, was widespread in classical times. Ovid himself chose myths, late- antiquity authors appropriated texts from previous epochs, and early Christian epic writers imitated Virgil. This mode involves a distinct effort to find a germane meaning in old texts and to learn from working with them. Imitation in itself is worthwhile, and one can, for example, improve his or her oratorical skills by imitating respected speakers.

The second mode utilized by the filmmakers was *aemulatio*, or emulation: the effort to emphasize those issues that could interest modern audiences. In this mode the previous text's presence can be found in the new text and deciphered. In his treatment of myths, Ovid emphasized the changeability of the world. The readers of *Metamorphoses* move through various motifs. Each metamorphosis's beginning builds up tension, the story gains in intensity, people change into animals, trees, or stones, and a new story emerges immediately afterwards. Generations of interpreters read Ovid's book as an *opus perpetuum*, an internally connected text in which narratives exist separately yet are connected to each other.

Romance for Flugelhorn appropriates the myth of Phaethon. Phaethon, a young man unsure of his paternity, journeys to the sun god Helios, who he supposes to be his father, in order to receive confirmation. The god acknowledges his son, and offers to grant him anything he desires. Phaethon, however, wishes for something unreasonable: he wants to drive his father's sun chariot across the sky. Helios hesitates and tries to convince Phaethon to choose something different, but he ultimately submits to his son. Phaethon quickly loses control of the horses, and his frantic ride, which threatens to destroy the world, is stopped by Zeus, who kills the boy with a thunderbolt.

This story contains a model of a father-son relationship: a more powerful father is enticed into doing something by a son who desires to have his power, if only for a moment. Hrubín connects the man of antiquity to the man of modern times, and builds upon the myth in two ways. Phaethon's youth leads him to ask for something beyond his capacity; moreover, and more importantly, he yearns for divine power. Hrubín shifts the story from the divine to the human, from transcendence to the limited horizons of existence. The *aemulatio*, a lasting and newly highlighted connection between antiquity and the present, consists of an expression of human helplessness and the eternal desire for the transcendent.

Hrubín actualizes human mortality and boyhood with its intense mental challenges through a metaphor involving shaving and a razor given by a father to his son:

> Once, it started:
> It was when you first lent me your razor, Dad.
> The parlor smelled of dill sauce that day
> and you were in a good humor, watching
> the ash of a cigar retaining the form of something
> that is no longer there, and from that exciting
> sight you kept looking up at me,
> I was just leaving you forever
> by the soap on my cheeks, by eyes that want
> by staring at it to shatter the mirror
> fragment into dust, to see myself beyond: a man.
>
> (Hrubín 1962, 13, my translation)

In the film, the passage from boyhood into adulthood is captured in an affecting sequence. The camera shows a broken mirror hanging on the frame of an open door, which reflects the face of Vojta lathering up his face. This image is followed by a shot of a man's hand sharpening a razor. It is then shown in a medium-shot that the person readying the razor is Vojta's father. The man's hand checks the sharpness of the razor, and, in a close-up, meets with the boy's hand: Vojta accepts the gift. In the following scene, the boy is shaving for the first time, carefully observed by his father. The scene changes into a close-up of Vojta's back and a grass-hook, which the suddenly arrived Tonka (who, as is later revealed, is having a sexual relationship with the boy) uses to gently prod his skin. Ash falls off the father's cigar, and Vojta cuts his face. "Some man, *you are*," exclaims Tonka (Vávra 1966, my translation). The shaving, the hands of the boy and his father, the handing over of the instrument, the acceptance of the gift along with the symbolic acceptance of the responsibility for one's own life—all of these fragments form a complex metaphor of the transcendence from boyhood into adulthood (Fig. 4.2).

The theme of life's finality is embodied by Vojta's grandfather, a stroke victim divorced from reality and living in an imaginary world inhabited by long-gone friends. It was this motif that captivated Vávra:

> I was "taken" by Hrubín's poem immediately after it was published … [T]here was an image I could not get out of my mind: a boy who walks

Fig. 4.2 *Romance for Flugelhorn*. Vojta, walking with his grandfather. *Romance pro křídlovku* (*Romance for Flugelhorn*; Otakar Vávra 1966)

> with death. The connection between the boy and his grandfather, who is already outside this life, affected me so strongly that one day we decided to find a form in which this could be expressed. (Fiala 1967, 4, my translation)

Vojta, whom his grandfather calls "Mr. Berka"—the name of a pub owner he used to know—accompanies him on his walks around the village and beyond. In the heat of summer the old man walks around wearing a heavy coat, a scarf, a hat, and gloves because he worries about the cold. In one scene in the film, they walk along an overgrown passage, with the summer countryside buzzing with the sounds of insects, birds, and other animals. The grandfather stops by some bushes, bows before them, and greets the dead, talking to them, with Vojta acting out the other side of the conversation:

Grandfather:	You're getting younger and younger, Madam Head Forester. How do you do it?
Vojta:	You are dreaming, my old man. Why, I am dead already.
Grandfather:	Oh, really! You see, you are ever so pretty. (Vávra 1966, my translation)

In the following shot the two men's faces fill the frame. The camera focuses on the old man, who gazes absently into the distance. The focus then shifts to Vojta, who—as a cutaway shot shows—is thinking about Tonka and, prompted by the memory, he leans his head back, laughing. Both of the young people (Vojta and Tonka) belong in the landscape the film composes from close-up shots of nettles, grasses, and flowers, while the old man is being inexorably drawn away from it. Nature's noises—the buzzing of the bees, flies, and other insects—signify the sounds of life for the younger man. The grandfather, however, constricts his face in terror—different symbols come to his mind: flies buzzing over an already dead body. This aspect of the film was noted by Marie Mravcová:

> The film *Romance for Flugelhorn* gained in emotional force and lifelike intensity by including the cold-fearing figure of the old man, whose physical body is already working towards its end, into the sensory profusion of the summer countryside with its overgrown vegetation and choirs of insects. (Mravcová 1989, 48, my translation)

Vojta and his grandfather eventually reach the river, and in another iterative allusion to ancient mythology the grandfather goes on about a ferryman who can bring them to the other side, who can bring them home. Here it seems that Charon will not ferry the grandfather to the underworld—his earthly departure includes a symbolic return home, a notion that is ultimately fulfilled.

Vávra takes advantage of the audio-visual medium of film in order to separate the sounds of nature present in the sequence. Human mortality is accentuated by its connection to the buzzing of flies. Vojta, enchanted by nature, hears noises that converge into a "choir of life." His grandfather, meanwhile, continues to only hear flies—impending death skews his perception of the world. Afterwards, as he is alone, waiting by the river, the camera shows a close-up shot of a fern leaf and horsetail plants emerging from darkness. A buzzing sound overtakes the score, and the parallel of human existence and natural processes reminds the viewers that the old man is nearing

the end of his life. The insistent buzzing is only drowned out by the hum of the river, rushing over the naked bodies of Vojta and Tonka; unrestrained vitality opposes death, despite—or maybe because—of having death in sight.

In the film's conclusion the boy comes into close contact with death; his passage from boyhood to manhood is complete. Shortly before his death the grandfather emerges from his delusions and reminiscences. He finally recognizes the boy, and he asks after his father—the grandfather's son. He then asks Vojta to light a lamp. He is an old man wandering through the darkness, asking for light. A kerosene lamp cuts through the murk, the camera pans over the house's interior, and the old man finally recognizes the home he strove to go back to. The shrubbery, which once displayed chimeras of the dead in the countryside, returns to its true nature—the grandfather proclaims: "We should shear the elderberry bushes in the garden; there's not enough light" (Vávra 1966, my translation). He dies a moment later. The notion of home is significant here, as it is no longer associated with the darkness of the grandfather's confused mind, but it now means light. The room is no longer shrouded in darkness, and the buzzing of the flies has ceased. The grandfather departs peacefully, leaving his grandson at a pivotal point in life.[10]

In a close-up, Vojta's hand touches the old man's forehead, flinching as the boy realizes that his grandfather has died. He is now the one holding the light, while his ancestor has just passed into the realm of darkness. Vojta, taken by surprise, looks upon the dead body, placing his hand on his grandfather's chest, and is distracted by a rattling clock. He directs his gaze at it, and the camera pans smoothly over a grandfather clock. The scene emphasizes our helplessness when it comes to the passage of time. The ticking permeates the house. It is heard all the while as the boy accompanies his grandfather on their walks (some of them take place inside, the grandfather is very disoriented and cannot really tell the difference), as he prepares his body for burial, and then afterwards as he talks to his father. There is no escape from the clock within the house—there is no shelter from the cycle of emergence and departure. The absence of the boy's mother, who had probably already died, accentuates the male family lineage, and the particular relationship between father and son, ever changing throughout various phases of life. The sequence culminates when Vojta's father returns to the house and finds his own father dead. The camera shows his tired, aging face leaning over the body, the face of the grandfather, and the face of the baffled Vojta.

The boy, the father, and the grandfather share an unavoidable fate: they have all been sentenced to the finality of human existence.

After his grandfather's death, Vojta first runs to Terina, to meet her by the water where they sometimes met and where they wanted to leave from together. He is too early, and the girl is not there; he returns home. The following sequence is shot as though the camera were standing, in awe, over the limp, dead body. Vojta is then seen carrying a kerosene lamp, a water bowl, and a towel—he is preparing to wash the old man's body. The film does not ruminate on the boy's feelings—it addresses the general human situation and states plainly that the boy knows what to do. But who taught him? While the first rite of passage—shaving—was performed under the supervision of his father, Vojta is left alone for this final rite. The camera shows, with a rough concreteness, Vojta undressing and washing his grandfather: it shows close-ups of the inert body, the twisted arms being fitted into the sleeves of a clean shirt and a jacket—while the soundtrack is filled with the boy's strained, weary breathing and the clock's ticking.[11]

Vávra made an effort to express a stance towards the boy's decision to return to the house. He may look for the girl, but his actions signify his hesitation—he does not know where to go. In one moment he is seen standing by a caravan, and Terina's voice can be heard from outside the frame, saying "whatever will happen to us—we are together after all" (Vávra 1966, my translation). The chosen medium-shot accentuates the boy's figure and generates a distance from the carnival people's world. Vojta turns his head towards home, and the next shot already shows the dead grandfather's face and the clocks are heard, ticking. Vojta's abandonment of the girl is treated very differently than it was in Vávra's previous Hrubín adaptation, *The Golden Queening*, in which the protagonist abandons a girl in order to escape a conflict, making a decision that would haunt him for the rest of his life.

The Uncommon in the Common

While writing the treatment that preceded the screenplay, Hrubín transposed his poetic creation into another genre, but with the intention of preserving the poem's emotional impact on the reader.

In the film treatment as well as in the screenplay, which Hrubín and Vávra co-authored, the roles of the authors can be perceived as Hrubín described them:

> [I] get on well with Otakar Vávra, even though my tendency towards the poetic may clash with Vávra's demands of precise dramatic construction. Otakar Vávra has a very particular system of work, which I sometimes resent, but at the same time I feel respect towards it. I am an element which will disturb that system. (Hořec 1966, 21, my translation)

The writers created a film treatment that centers around the visual experience. Hrubín interacted with his own poem as a reader, and the verbal metaphors he created are now re-imagined visually. He writes in terms of long shots, medium shots, and close-up shots, and the rhythm—though still related to the work's literary composition—becomes a symbiosis of the verbal and the audio-visual. His vision of the film encompasses plain takes of a landscape or a human face. Darkness is penetrated by a flashlight's beam or a kerosene lamp's calm glow, which reveal pieces of the world to the reader; the playful imagination of the filmmakers concentrates on the reflection of the sunlight on the *trembling geraniums*, forests of nettles whipped by starlight, a thickening milky light.

In transposing his text from paper to celluloid, Hrubín also develops the story's acoustic realm. He endows sound with a spatial aspect: the flugelhorn's call repeatedly reaches the sky, it rebounds and returns back to people; it changes—the melody is *gentle* and *feeble* at one point, and it *thunders* at another. The countryside can be an overwhelming aural experience. Chirping crickets bring the landscape to life. At times they act as a terrible insect choir; however, at other moments, when they "wrest the most striking sounds" from the distant fair songs and "extend them to the stars," they embellish human melodies (Hrubín 1965, 22).

Hrubín's aesthetics is not therefore based on harmonizing gestures: ordinary life and its joys are permanently under threat. Vojta's grandfather is trapped between the world of the living and the world of the dead; he gazes intently, and at great length, at the "cream-colored elderflowers" (Hrubín 1965, 18, my translation), he smiles at them and talks to them, as though he were searching for the same thing that his grandson will be searching for in 30 years in the darkening burdock leaves: the ghost of the past. In Hrubín's poetry, various forms of death make themselves relentlessly present, constantly emphasizing life's finiteness and frailty.

These base existential notions were adopted by Vávra, who, in a return to simpler cinematic techniques, chose to shoot a black-and-white film

with a standard aspect ratio; his previous Hrubín adaptation *August Sunday* was shot as a wide-angle color film. This earlier film was typical of his previous work, in which he strove for expression by promoting color, mass scenes, and elaborate sets and costumes. Thus in the context of his career, *Romance for Flugelhorn* is a modest, unassuming film. This shift in modes of expression, which represents change within the filmmaker's poetics as well as the aesthetic norms of Czech cinema at the time, was encouraged by young and original-minded members of the film crew, such as cameraman Andrej Barla.[12]

The film's cinematographic modesty contributed to its affecting portrayal of the travelling carnival employees' lives, which, alongside the areas they inhabit, are presented void of any romance. One of the central settings of the adaptation is a dusty carnival ground placed right next to the cemetery. The impermanent nature of the carnival people's home marks a pointed contrast between their world and the world of the village. In one scene, as Vojta is walking by with his grandfather, he sees Terina holding a small child in her arms. He takes hold of her hand and tries to cajole her into meeting him at the pond, away from this poor desolate place void of privacy. We see her mother mending clothes in front of the open caravan, her father sharpening knives, and Viktor making air rifle projectiles. As the boy and the grandfather walk away, two industrious villagers pass fleetingly through the shot. People hurrying after work represent movement and function as a synecdoche of a life spent in everyday caring for a household, while the carnival folks sit around among their rummage.

Another scene examines the poverty of Terina's environment in greater detail. Here we witness her father, sharpening his knives, shouting at her prohibiting nightly wanderings. Viktor tells him that he is too weak to deal with the girl, and that he could take care of her himself. The camera watches both men as they neglect their work at hand, capturing the tense atmosphere of their exchange. The father does not want to give Terina to Viktor yet; to him she is still too young. But the mother, suddenly entering the dialogue, says: "Some child [she is]—you went after me when I wasn't even fifteen" (Vávra 1966, my translation). The stronger of the men—Viktor—announces that he wants to marry Terina and asks her parents for their permission. The agreement between Terina's father and Viktor is shown with a subtext of social criticism. First, Terina is shown taking down laundry. While she folds one of the sheets, a horse's rear end appears, and she leans against it, listening,

with her head bowed, to her parents' reproaches. The horse/girl parallel conveys the position of a girl who is to be treated as an animal for sale. Shots of the two men follow, and Terina is shown only when Viktor gains advantage over the father, saying: "I don't want to wait anymore; there is a priest at the next stop" (Vávra 1966, my translation). There is a medium shot of Terina appearing behind a bed sheet. The girl observes passively as the men agree on her fate. A dramatic play of details and fragments manifests itself in a shot with the men in the foreground, and Terina, slightly blurred, in the background. In the front, her father has just promised her to Viktor, while in the back the girl is taking laundry down from the clothesline strung among the horses. There is a close-up of the girl's face, followed by a shot of the mother sitting in front of the caravan, and then the camera returns to the men. Terina is being denied the freedom to choose her own way of life. She is unable to exit the closed environment she is in and enter another world. The image of Terina as an object is finalized when Viktor, back in front of his caravan, shouts out her name in order to compel her to do a task for him. He is beginning to decide for her. The detailed shot of the girl's face is partially covered by her hair as she leans over the laundry basket, but the close-up clearly shows the terrified eyes of a child.

Both the poem and the film present various models of love and death. The adaptation deals with the issue of loneliness and emotional disillusionment, and at the same time it emphasizes the importance of interpersonal bonds. It is one of the reasons why Vojta's fragile relationship with Terina begins at the moment when the dull village center is alive with the hustle of the carnival. The camera shows the internal workings of the swing ride by focusing on the legs of the men who operate it. As the swing ride seats begin to fly through the air, they are carrying two young people, whose bodies flash around the wall of the cemetery, as a number of headstones come into sight. The screenplay pairs the dying down of the carnival with the weak light of the lightbulbs, which is confronted with suddenly ignited emotions; love mixes with death, and the moving images and the music elicit the awareness of the ephemeral nature of life. The people flying through the air, as well as those watching them from the ground, all participate in the symbolic expression of the human desire to overcome one's limits.

The swing ride motif is pivotal for the story because the film character of Terina emerges nearby: she is walking barefoot on the swing ride's floor, calling out for people to have a ride. She does not share

the pragmatism of her father, whose motive for staying in the village is only *business*. Terina compels the villagers to enter an illusion of a journey into mysterious and remote lands, a journey to the imaginary land of *Mindjapoor*. The village fair, the carnival, and exotic people entering briefly into the village's community and traditional culture—all this creates a counterbalance to the uniformness of everyday life.

As mentioned above, one scene shows the flight of the young people in love on the swing ride: Vojta is in the seat, Terina jumps aboard and stands behind him. The camera focuses on the young characters, showing first Terina, then Vojta, and the girl's legs being clutched by the boy as though he were trying to prevent her from falling. Their movement is accompanied by Viktor playing his flugelhorn, which has begun to resonate throughout the place. The diegetic music then changes into non-diegetic, the opening scene's motif returns, and a slowed-down variation harmonizes the audience's experience. The story of two young people in love is no longer taking place in the world of everyday concerns—it transcends into an enclosed world, and, for a brief moment, there is no ill grandfather, no travelling carnival life, no unwelcome suitor. In the flight of the swing ride, the image of the world's limited horizon comes forward as its movement connects the headstones to the country, the trees to people, and everything is flying around, ever changing. The audiovisual medium's means of expression allow the audience to discover the sensory experience of Vojta and Terina, as well as capturing the flying passage of time. The close relationship of the body to the earth (Kožmín 1995, 477), the recurrent motifs of love and death, all is given a new life. In the stream of motifs, the motif of wings stands out ("my wings unfolded in your blood," [Hrubín 1962, 16, my translation]). This motif carries multiple meanings: from the first, uplifting sexual experience, to the breaking of wings and a fall. This symbolism connects the adaptation further to ancient mythology, recalling stories of the human desire to fly (both Phaethon and Icarus fall from heavenly heights).

Terina arrives with the swing ride, and ultimately she leaves with it. While in the night, she still had hope for leaving the constricted world of the carnival and beginning a new life with Vojta. The night escape, however, is marred by the grandfather's death. As the boy dresses the dead body for the coffin, Terina waits for him in vain. The girl is eventually found in the dark village by Viktor, who drags the terrified girl into his caravan, saying that "your mother made your bed at my place" (Vávra

1966, my translation). Terina thus definitively becomes a mere object, her fate having been decided by her parents.

The scenes from the morning following the fateful night were used by the film's creators to show harsh images conveying feelings of loneliness and alienation. Those sentiments are created on two levels, first of them containing the carnival's departure and the second one showing the arrival of Vojta's father to the house where the dead grandfather is laid out. In the scenes covering the end of the fair, Terina and Viktor are shown packing the swing ride's boards covered in naïve imagery (a young woman with a blissful expression, two lovers, etc.). These images had a different role in the beginning, wherein they represented stories about romance, disappearing and reappearing with the movement of the swing ride, communicating the cyclical nature of interpersonal relationships. These image boards are now being roughly thrown on the board of a trailer. Each thump, which resoundingly disturbs the melody of the waltz, and each view of the images on the boards, which Terina struggles with in bringing them to the trailer, come together to convey the falling nature of human life, present in the Icarus myth. The desire for change is replaced by disappointment and defeat. Terina's expression conveys an untimely loss of illusions, brokenness, and resignation.

Terina's only way out is ultimately found in death, about which we learn right at the beginning of the film. According to Viktor, Terina accepted it willingly: "We couldn't get her to the doctor. She struggled with all her might. She probably wanted to die" (Vávra 1966, my translation). This shift from the text of the poem further demonstrates the way the film builds its romantic gesture. In the poem, the girl is frequently connected with stars, in a probable allusion to the work of the Czech Romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha. The girl, whom the poetic images shroud in the light of the moon and the stars, meets a tragic end—she dies of diphtheria. It is only the film's narrative that implies a motive for dying, thus creating a romantic image of dying for a wasted love. Both the poem and the film then contain the allegorical message that all human desire is condemned to destruction.

The last time Vojta sees Terina alive she is being taken away from him on Viktor's trailer. Vojta tries to get her attention, but she seems to be submerged in a deep melancholy and does not respond. Viktor then uses his whip to chase Vojta away from the moving trailer. The final images of the departing caravans and the close-up of Terina's tear-stained face are accompanied by the sound of the flugelhorn, which transports the viewer

back to the aged Vojta and Viktor, standing in the dark Lešany village square, each lost in their own emotions.

The poem, which strove to convey an allegorical account of human life, love, and death, comes to the conclusion that the gift of life, passed from father to son, is only bearable if one is not alone. This sentiment may be reduced in the film, but its resonance with Hrubín's thematic principles is ultimately quite apparent. Vávra managed to put into moving images and sounds a perspective which contained various aspects of life, such as introspection, the experience of loneliness, self-reflection, uncertainty, and the encounter with one's first love and death. The film closes with a long shot of Vojta walking through the quiet village. The *cricket choir* resonating throughout the summer night is joined by new non-diegetic motifs, soothing the emotions heightened by the experienced memory. The close-up shot of the man's face seen from below shows change: his previously tense gestures have slackened, and his expression is now peaceful. The changes in the physiognomy of the main protagonist are accompanied by the sunrise: the night is over. The following shot shows a church at daybreak and a calmly flowing river. This fulfils the allegorical message of the film: human life is bound to the passage of time, and its purpose is in its continuation through further generations.

Notes

1. The following quotation illustrates the expressive language of Vančura's *Marketa Lazarová*: "There is noise in the nature of wars. Pivo's yells are the loudest; he is yelling and his voice hurls his soldiers hither and thither, his voice tells of the monstrosity of the attack. The rank of a hetman! What a splendid way to turn a boor into a gentleman" (Vančura 1931, 114–115, my translation). This fictional situation is commented on by screenwriter František Pavlíček, who describes the "imagination-provoking scene" not only as unfilmable, but even as "anti-cinematic" (Přádná 2009, 347).
2. Young directors associated with the Czech New Wave wrote an open letter to Vláčil, reflecting on the situation of the film artist:

   When someone makes a film, and they make it with such a passion as you do, they will always end up alone, no matter the happy or unhappy fate of their work. This cannot be changed by viewers, festivals, or critics. We are writing this letter to thank you for the experience which you have given us in *Marketa Lazarová*. We know how demanding it is to direct a feature film, but we cannot even imagine the effort that you and your

collaborators had to put forward in order for the adaptation to become more than a historical film. Filmmakers rarely realize their dreams, maybe once in a lifetime. You have realized yours with *Marketa*. You have made a film that festivals have so far avoided. It will probably not become a popular hit either, as its beauty, while not exclusive, is one of the rare values that one does not receive for free. We wish that many people should find their way to your film, but even if there are only a few, we consider ourselves happy to count ourselves among them. (Jireš et al. 1967, 1, my translation).

3. As Czech literary historian Vladimír Macura has shown, the manuscripts were significant at the time of their "discovery," as these patriotic forgeries became an "integral element in the construction of the ideals of Czech culture" (Macura 1995, 110, my translation).
4. Various works of art allude to these manuscripts (e.g., the music of Zdeněk Fibich and Antonín Dvořák, the art of Mikoláš Aleš); remarkable among them is the film adaptation of the prose *Babička* (*The Grandmother*, 1855) by Božena Němcová, directed by Antonín Moskalyk in 1971.
5. The story alludes to the old Slavic god Perun, who the manuscripts describe as "truth-giving," "truth-revealing," and "valiant."
6. Zdena Škapová used this scene to demonstrate how events in *Marketa Lazarová* are conveyed from a subjective perspective:

   Vláčil is not particularly interested in the certainly dramatic happenings in Boleslav, but he concentrates all his inventiveness on the night journey: the darkness is only penetrated by the fallen snow. The camera, mimicking the gaze of the exhausted Kozlík, is running through the woods… bowing to look at animal tracks, turning sharply and quickly backwards, jumps shakily up and down, as Kozlík totters speedily from the wolf pack that is pursuing him. The transfocator's ride from the walls of Roháček, in the opposite direction of his run, lets the audience experience his anxiety (he feels as though a safe haven is not getting any closer), and it also amplifies the suggestively chanted whispers, sharp and unintelligible, which underscore the scene in place of realistic sounds, and which also suggest a feeling of the thumping and the churning of blood inside his head. And the negotiations in Boleslav? In this part they are only present in Kozlík's barely intelligible and incomprehensible mumblings, and several fleeting, fragmented, mostly pantomimic flashbacks running through his mind first in the forest, and then at home in his bed. (Škapová 1998, 13, my translation).
7. Vláčil's *Marketa Lazarová* has been called a spiritual work, similar to Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*: The conviction about the films' congeniality had its roots in the film clubs of the 1970s and 1980s. However,

in contrast to Andrei Rublev, whose message is globally comprehensible, *Marketa Lazarová* has only remained "a cult film" in the context of Czech cinema (Blažejovský 2007, 225, my translation).

8. Existentialism was one of the artistic movements panned by Communist propaganda as "bourgeois art" because its ideas subverted the hierarchy of collective norms sought after by the Communist dictatorship.
9. František Hrubín aptly described the renaissance of private values: "[I] think that many viewers miss films with romantic, naïve plots (I am not afraid to use these taboo attributes), which deal with the ordinary drama of two young people, ever repeating itself in thousands of variations, that always contain a great deal of poetry" (Hořec 1966, 21, my translation).
10. The adaptation thus commits to a significant shift in ideas—its semantics is extended to religious motifs. It seems as though the film recalled Hrubín's earlier poetry, which included poems permeated by the consciousness of a divine order and family succession (e.g., *Včelí plást*, "Bee comb," 1940).
11. The portrayal of death was criticized at the time of the adaptation's first showing, but A.J. Liehm brought a new perspective:

    Some will criticize Vávra for going too far in the passage where the boy is alone with the dead man and prepares him for the burial. I, however, respect Vávra for this because I know that this passage took nerve: it signifies taking the poetic principle to its extreme. And it is in this passage… that its validity is confirmed. It is one of the moments which occur in art in order for further steps to be possible. In this respect Vávra has merit within Czech film, which has always feared that which is called naturalism. Vávra, such a Czech director and poet, along with František Hrubín, whose Czech-ness was never doubted, light-heartedly lets go of this taboo and helps us from the pair of baby booties we have been unwilling to shed since the previous century (Liehm 1967, 237, my translation).
12. The choice of cameraman interested period critics: "Barla transformed his camera into a poetic instrument, which is able to discover poetry in a carnival melee, as well as in a look of the eyes, in a landscape, and at the river bank just the same" (AN 1967, 5, my translation).

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CHAPTER 5

Adaptation as a Reflection of the Zeitgeist

The essayist Pavel Švanda has aptly characterized the 1960s, when the last adaptation to be studied, was created: "I think that the most significant experience of the period was that we could ultimately see the political scene in motion with our own eyes…" (Švanda 2006, 174, my translation). He recalls how an idea that had been to that point in time absolutely impermissible began to spread through society—that the politicians who ruled the country were not supposed to answer to themselves, but to the public. In his opinion these reflections on political accountability are the most important legacy of 1968. Švanda also turns his attention to two groups within the Communist party—convinced dogmatists and reform-minded, progressive "comrades"; he sees, however, no fundamental difference between party ideologues and those who had deviated from the hardliners: "They were all Communists. They believed in 'world revolution.' If they did indeed differ, it was only in their opinions on the methods with which they wanted to accomplish and maintain global domination" (Švanda 2006, 175, my translation). The changing political scene, the return of political prisoners from jail, and the transformation of Stalinists into progressive Communists are themes that play an important role in this study.

The generational novel, whose sub-plots play out in 1950s and 1960s Czechoslovakia, acquired special importance in the politically relaxed climate of the 1960s. Novels addressing the recent past and the present offered space for criticizing the Stalinist system and the wrongs that were committed in implementing dictatorial policies. One such novel is Milan

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Kundera's *The Joke*, whose publication in 1967 was a first-rate literary event, as this book deals with how a dictatorial system based on Marxism–Leninism destroys its enemies. The book does not contain an extensive reflection that sheds light on a society-wide coming to grips with the past, but it clearly "diagnoses" the period. The central theme in Kundera's *The Joke* is a mechanically directed society in which a man is condemned to do that which his surroundings force him to do. The protagonist, who assumes he can become the master of his own fate, fails in the end, as he is just a cog in the totalitarian machine. His antithesis is an opportunistic politician who changes positions with the blowing wind—a former Stalinist firebrand and who later becomes a progressive Communist.

When the book was originally published, and later after 1968 when footage of Prague streets occupied by Russian soldiers circled the globe, *The Joke* was read as a critique of Stalinist Czechoslovakia (Chvatík 1994, 13). As Guy Scarpetta recalls, the book was published in France not long after the military intervention, and readers read it "two-dimensionally, strictly politically," and in its day *The Joke* was mainly regarded as a testimony to resistance against the Communist regime (Scarpetta 2012, 162). In the epilogue to the post-Velvet Revolution edition of 1991, the novelist writes that at the time it riled up critics, who in this book, which reflects the European spirit, saw a political pamphlet. In the early 1990s, when Kundera had a thoroughly developed concept of the novel genre, he placed pragmatic values over artistic ones. This nonetheless changes nothing about the fact that when it was first published *The Joke* was read as a socially and politically topical book:

> Milan Kundera's cruelly ironic mirror has a number of surfaces, big and small, that are masterfully synchronized so they reflect an image, a testimony to our dogmatic period, of unjust years, when great and sublime words masked low and villainous deeds, when false official optimism patched the mournful reality that was the degradation of human individuality on to a manipulable instrument of power. (Obermeierová 1969, 4, my translation)

Both the book and the film tell the story of Ludvík Jahn, a man who cannot simply forget what he has experienced. Undoubtedly, many readers and viewers recognized their own plight in both the textual and audio-visual versions of this work. It was impossible to rid oneself of the Stalinist 1950s. It still lived in them; it had become a part of them.

As opposed to Kundera's later novels, *The Joke* does not take place in the timeless arena of the imagination, but in the midst of a real time that the author knew very well. In 1948, when the Communists came to power, 19-year-old Kundera finished secondary school in Brno, started studying at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, and joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Two years later, his party membership was revoked, only to be renewed again in 1956. He spent the 1950s at the film school, FAMU (Academy of Performing Arts) in Prague, first as a student of film and screenwriting and then as a lecturer of world literature. By the mid-1950s he had published the poetry collection *Člověk zahrada širá* (*Man: A Wide Garden*, 1953) and the poem "Poslední máj" (*The Last May*, 1955), which bore the influence of contemporary poetics. He later became a critic of the regime, which culminated in his speech at the Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers Union of 1967. Here he publicly stood up for Czechoslovak filmmakers by reading a message from the Czechoslovak Film and Television Artists Union criticizing the insensitive interventions the authorities had made in art through censorship.

The novel *The Joke* was brought to the silver screen by director Jaromil Jireš, a member of the "Czech New wave." Jaromil Jireš had already written the screenplay with Kundera in 1967, and filming began a year later; that is, at the height of political-cultural change. The film was finished after the August Warsaw Pact invasion and was released in early 1969. Just like the novel, this film adaptation also bears testimony to the social situation in 1950s and 1960s Czechoslovakia.[1] The film examined and hinted at how the Stalinist machine had destroyed the promising existence of an individual and how history had played a cruel joke at his expense. The adaptation of Kundera's *The Joke* demonstrates how society reflects itself in a social and historical study, filled with criticism and polemics.

The film revolves around the story of Ludvík Jahn. Not long after the February revolution and the installment of Communist dictatorship, Ludvík, a young Communist, sends a postcard to his girlfriend with the short message: "Optimism is the opium of the people. A healthy atmosphere stinks of stupidity! Long live Trotsky" (Jireš 1968, my translation). In doing so, he is responding to her naive enthusiasm and the ideological cliché with which she described to him her experiences from a Czechoslovak Union of Youth camp. He was, of course, also encroaching upon the "most sacred ideals" of the revolution. The girl informs on him, and Ludvík is expelled from the Party as well as from school. As

a politically unreliable person, he is assigned to a penal battalion. Thus, he spends his youth in the mines and in jail. His desire to avenge an old wrong is the main motif of the film.

The 1960s find Ludvík returning to his hometown after many years. Here he has arranged a meeting with Helena, the wife of university classmate and the former chairman of the school's Party organization—Pavel Zemánek. Pavel was largely responsible for Ludvík's expulsion from school and the Party, and Ludvík now plans to exact his revenge by sleeping with his wife. In a borrowed apartment he succeeds in seducing Helena. Later, Helena is reporting on a traditional folk music festival, which is also attended by Pavel Zemánek—now an enthusiastic reform Communist—accompanied by a young female student. Ludvík thus discovers that Zemánek's marriage to Helena has been a mere formality for years and realizes that his act of vengeance has fallen flat. He then rejects Helena, who is unable to recover from this new loss and attempts suicide, but ends up taking a laxative by mistake. The story ends at an awkward impasse. Any attempt at undoing old wrongs is hopeless. Revenge cannot be had for past wrongs because Ludvík has already found himself in another time and is fighting something that no longer exists.

The structure of Kundera's book, as opposed to the adaption, draws from a polyphony of voices into which the author inserts a diversity of recollections and reflections.[2] The characters Ludvík, Helena, Jaroslav, and Kostka figure in the plot. I have not yet mentioned the last two, so a brief description is called for here. Jaroslav is a dreamy lover of traditional folk music, and in the novel he acts as a counterweight to "Ludvík's big city rationalism" (Chvatík 1994, 49, my translation). Kostka is a character trying to live a Christian life full of forgiveness and in accordance with God's will. In the symmetrically organized fictional world (cf. Blahynka 1967, 52), Ludvík has the main role; we hear his voice in three chapters, whereas the other characters each have one chapter to themselves, each telling their story in the first person. At the end, we encounter the alternating perspectives of Ludvík, Jaroslav, and Helena. This multi-perspective narrative is employed to examine a diversity of human experiences during a turbulent political and social era. Whereas some scholars have interpreted this narrative symposium as an attack on dogmatic monologues (cf. Doležel 1973, 113), others have noted the coherence of meanings flowing from this seemingly open interplay of voices. For example, Milan Suchomel judges that

> it's as if the disorder of the depicted reality did not quite go together with the a priori order of novel structuring. Despite featuring four narrators, *The Joke* is homophonous. The narrators occasionally move to the wayside to arrive in time to tell their story; one unleashes a pamphlet (one that is against himself), another adds a number of events or dumps them into another projection. (Suchomel 1992, 130, my translation)

The film's screenplay does not disrupt this "homophony." [3] The rewriting process led to a more compact form of expression as the screenwriters left out the four-voice narrative and emphasized the most important plot elements as seen through Ludvík Jahn's eyes. By transforming the text's multi-voice strategy into an augmented single-voice one and boiling down the plot, the screenplay focuses on the uncertain path through life of a person forced to come to terms with a historical wrong. This shift more clearly demonstrates just how hopeless Ludvík's endeavours are, as the more he wants to get revenge on his enemy, the farther away his goal is. The new epoch in which he has found himself is trying to forget about past events. The medium of moving pictures grasped and artistically expressed the Central European experience with totalitarianism.

Time and Betrayal

Starting with the first shots, the filmmakers sophisticatedly pull us into the basic narrative themes. From the beginning it is clear that the tense relationship between layers of time—the narrative present and the past—will be crucial for the epical framework.[4] The adaptation sets up this element using an apt audio-visual parallel that has no basis in the novel: the film begins with a detailed shot of the astronomical clock of the Renaissance city hall in Olomouc. Certainly, Prague's fifteenth-century astronomical clock is the most well known in the country, with its allegorical apostle figurines, its bell-ringing grim reaper, and its crowing cock symbolizing life's finality. The Olomouc clock, which inspired the filmmakers, is something else entirely; the original clock from the fifteenth century was destroyed during World War II. It was newly built in the early 1950s and was supposed to be unveiled alongside statues of Lenin and Stalin during the 10-year anniversary of the city's liberation by the Red Army (Beneš 1955, 8). Painter Karel Svolinský designed this Socialist Realist astronomical clock. Here, spectators will not see the apostles, as the new clock could not embody the Christian values that

the Communist regime sought to suppress. Instead, the Olomouc clock tower is the scene of a parade of carefully conceived workers and scientists, who embody a centralized society headed in the right direction. These figures, engaging in various activities, represent different types of Socialist man (and woman), who act in the spirit of the new ideals, endeavour to give their most in predetermined economic sectors, and fully submit themselves to the higher interests of the collective. Thus, the adaptation is introduced by shots of a modern astronomical clock, whose appearance proclaimed the aesthetic and ideological norms of Communist art and which replaced Christian values, the relics of an older time, with Communist ones.

In this introductory sequence, the figures of two blacksmiths capture the camera's attention; after a moment of stillness, they begin banging their hammers on an anvil. The clock's chiming fills out the soundtrack. The film's title— *Žert*—appears in the middle of this shot. Combining the motif of the anvil-hammering workers with the title of the film foreshadows Ludvík Jahn's fateful plight after ironically joking about the values of a new, serious era. Although Ludvík was a Communist, his careless action put him on the other side of the barricades. The element of subversion in both the literary and film versions of *The Joke* consists in revealing how things got out of control for this young Communist, as his situation reveals a world of false political interests. Ludvík makes fun of an era that believed in its own authenticity and demanded people feel the optimistic joy of living. The powers that be responded harshly, as joking outside the narrow confines of the new social order's official doctrine meant disagreement, and thus anyone who dared make fun of the regime could end up in prison. The few words Ludvík wrote on the postcard are, in the context of a strict Marxist system, considered anti-state activity, making him an enemy of the state. If we return to the astronomical clock, the working class—represented by the two blacksmith figurines coming to life—relentlessly opposes the enemies of socialism and breaks up all conspiracies in carefully scripted show trials.

After the long introductory shot, this detail is put into a broader context, as we can now see another section of the clock containing a rooster in the middle, dials, and the zodiac. The camera then alternates between moving figures appearing—and then disappearing—in a window and the mosaic that fills out the astronomical clock's niche. Thus, we get a detailed view of musicians, a peasant woman, a baker, a factory worker, a mother with a child, a government official, a male and female athlete,

a mechanic, a chemist, and finally the mentioned rooster, whose crowing ends this exposition. The viewer is served the image of a cohesive and closed society, in which everyone has a role to play and travels along a predetermined path. The Olomouc astronomical clock clearly demonstrates a preference for heavy industry and agriculture and also establishes the position of women, who are engaged in hard work and are at the same time mothers. The film masterfully employs another work of art and in doing so prepares the viewer to better understand the atmosphere of life in a totalitarian society.

The optimistic spirit of the early Communist period that is made so clear in the astronomical clock's design is addressed in several scenes. In one of them, which combines authentic footage with acted-out shots, we first see a mass celebration on Prague's Wenceslaus Square in May 1949. The crowd, carrying portraits of Stalin and Gottwald along with banners espousing revolution, is shown from above in order to stress the event's mass nature. This shot is followed by a passage filmed for the adaption in which young people are singing and dancing in the middle of the celebration. They are mostly dressed in the Communist youth organization's uniforms, though some are wearing traditional folk costumes, and they are singing folk songs. It is if all of society has voluntarily and collectively stylized itself into folk prototypes, not unlike the ones that March aimlessly on the astronomical clock.

The adapters employed the Communist-remodeled clock to establish contrast between the new and the old, as it is directly in front of this clock that we first encounter Ludvík Jahn as he waits for Helena; right before our eyes, an image of narrative past and present begins to form slowly.

To the meanings connected to the astronomical clock we can also include the moment of betrayal, which the crowing rooster brings into play. It is mainly Ludvík Jahn who is betrayed, by both his closest friends and his girlfriend. Betrayal of course can be understood differently, as the new Socialist world promised the unattainable. Despite these promises, the 1960s did not see an economic boom; shots of the fictional world's material aspects clearly demonstrate this fact. The Socialist planned economy did not achieve dominance over the capitalist model as was expected. Also, with the crowing cock, motifs of accounting for the past come to the forefront.

Director Jaromil Jireš opposed analyses of the film that interpreted it as playing out strictly in the historical background of the 1950s. And he

refused to concede that the fictional world to which Ludvík Jahn repeatedly returns in his recollections was once and for all limited on the individual or social level:

> I think that "those days" are not so distant to our own—both temporally, but also in what they entailed—and that the so-called 1950s and the late 1960s are very closely related. Even though today we don't have grand political trials and poppa Stalin, we have other things in their place (as a kind of heritage of those days), about which one day it will perhaps be possible to make a film. I would like to be involved in that. (Jireš 1969, 4, my translation)

Nonetheless, it can be said that the film version of *The Joke* reconstructs social and political events more clearly than its literary source by using stories from two eras. Social problems transferred to the plane of the individual reveal key turning points in history. Unmasking Pavel Zemánek, a careerist who achieves success in both the 1950s and 1960s, is central to the film. At first he is portrayed as a fanatical Stalinist, and then a progressive Communist hobbling through the era of "socialism with a human face." The ideals of the early Communist period betrayed those who acted in the interests of their own careers. In contrast to Zemánek stands Ludvík, who was unable to tell which way the wind was blowing and ended up paying dearly for it.[5]

Two Sides to One Generation

The film version of *The Joke* focuses more than the novel on two main conflicting experiences of a generation in a tense time, although other recollections of the past are occasionally present in the adaption in the thoughts of Helena and Kostka. These, however, only serve to supplement the Ludvík–Pavel dichotomy. A defining factor here is connecting personal stories with historical events.

As opposed to the book, in the film narrative Ludvík Jahn and his personal interpretation of the past acquire a thoroughly prominent space. Ludvík lived in a country with a social system that provided him with limited opportunities for finding purpose in life.[6] As his story develops, we encounter more frequent quarrels with other people and conflicts with society as a whole. Although we learn very little about his political activities during Stalinism—his position then was surely ambivalent—it is

certain that in the end external forces stripped him of his social role. In the early 1950s, his role was defined by his membership in the Party, his proximity to political activities at university, and his friendship with Pavel Zemánek, the leader of a Party cell. Ludvík shows himself to be a man of irony. Thus, his outlook differs fundamentally from the others and he becomes a counterrevolutionary figure, as irony is a meta-attitude.

Petr Steiner, in his analysis of Kundera's novel, notes that although Ludvík depicts himself as a victim of the Marxist–Leninist regime, the novel's text reveals evidence that Ludvík abused his power as a Communist:

> It was therefore Ludvik himself who, in concert with others, participated in the purges after the 1948 coup: firing professors who did not fit the new ideological mold, thereby in the name of the highest humanistic principles ruining their lives. This is a responsibility, however, that Ludvík is not willing to face. He is eager to paint himself as a victim of Communism, not as one of its promoters. This status furnishes him with the moral high ground for vendetta. Only after his attempt at avenging himself turns him into victimizer does another connection between his past and present begin to down him. […] But Ludvík is too weak to admit his complicity in the wrongs of the Stalinist era. Unable to stand up to his past, he "becomes drunk" with weakness and in "delicious vertigo" yields to a comforting historical amnesia. (Steiner 2000, 206)

The adaptation helps Ludvík's strategy of suppressing his own guilt by relieving him of his worst qualities. In doing so, the contrast between the two main characters becomes more clear-cut. In the film it cannot be clearly discerned whether the ironic distance, which Ludvík's girlfriend, a firebrand functionary, accuses him of, is a reaction to his political activities in the 1950s or whether it is a case of unreliable narration. We do at least know that his returns to the past,[7] in which we see on screen through Ludvík's eyes his friends, girlfriend, and other players in the story, are captive of unrighted wrongs. Ludvík does not endeavour to confirm his existence in the new settings. In the middle of the narrative present, he constructs an image of the past; he constantly returns to his experiences from the 1950s and an ironic tone is present in his voice. Actor Josef Somr's portrayal of Ludvík boosted the overall impression. Stanislava Přádná aptly describes his performance:

> Josef Somr, with the inimitable mimicry of a born master of facial expression, gave the character the distinctive appearance of a fundamental man of

> irony with acrimonious diction and dismissive indifference; the actor's type with his distinctive physiognomy seems to predetermine a refined interior […]. (Přádná 2002, 263, my translation)

Thus, in the film, images of the 1950s are filtered through Ludvík's existentialist coming-to-terms with the past. In these images, Ludvík is not an active member of the Communist Party, but an observer, for whom personal qualities dominate over public ones and who is not a part of the crowd. This attitude is displayed clearly in mass scenes in which the relationship of his then-friends to the new social system is conspicuously outlined. Pavel Zemánek can be seen in the midst of this mass euphoria, dancing in traditional folk costume, urging the musicians to play faster and leading the choir. Although Ludvík's girlfriend, Markéta, does not stick out as much as Pavel, she is nonetheless a dedicated member of this tight collective. She is dancing, smiling, and having fun. She is an earnest young Communist in an earnest time. And it is Markéta who says to Ludvík at one demonstration: "What's that face you're making? […] You're smiling so strangely. […] As if you were thinking about something for yourself" (Jireš 1968, my translation). Therefore, we are presented with an image in which Ludvík's friends have surrendered themselves to Communist enthusiasm, while Ludvík says about himself that in those days he felt distance from this collective euphoria. At the same time though, he admits that together with the others he had experienced an intoxicating feeling, that he had stood behind the "steering wheel of history" (Jireš 1968, my translation).[8]

The motif of misunderstanding and dissimilarity is also clear in the scene where Ludvík meets in private with Markéta. Here this young man and his ideas about intimacy are seen as going against the grain of how relationships between men and women, including sexual ones, were perceived at the time. He clearly is not set on fulfilling Communist ideas of relationships and bearing offspring that will take part in building a Communist society; he wants to have an intimate relationship with his girlfriend. We first see Markéta walking along a river on a summer day. The girl naively combines the personal and the political. Her character embodies the enthusiastic acceptance of the new ideology in all aspects of life. When Ludvík recites a banal poem about romantic relationships between Communist youth, he pits the powerful message of the regime against nature, biology, and his own desires:

> Love is the sky, the wind that blows strong,
>
> The hopes that drive us forward,
>
> Love is not about simple lust, its naked bodies drown. (Jireš 1968, my translation)

We can then be hardly surprised that Ludvík persuades Markéta in vain to go to a remote cottage together for the weekend. The girl informs Ludvík with theatrical enthusiasm in her voice that she has been chosen to attend a two-week-long camp for young people. She begins to cry when she realizes that this news has not made Ludvík happy, and she demands his support. The scene ends with an abrupt cut and in the following shot we see a bus loaded with young Communists, including a happy Markéta waving to Ludvík. Whereas Ludvík, in his quest for a lost past, tells us that he behaved like a normal young man who desired a private and intimate world, he depicts Markéta as a person who has completely surrendered her individual goals and desires to the Communist system's value hierarchy.

The film works with the main protagonist's inner state, with his moods and attitudes, especially at moments when Ludvík returns to events that belittled him and stripped him of the capability to decide for himself. It also switches rapidly back and forth between past and present sensations. One such example of old wrongs being projected into the present is masterfully worked into the scene in which newborn babies are "welcomed" into Socialist society. During this "welcoming of new citizens" ceremony—a reworked christening for an anti-religious world—parents would bring their babies to the local national committee building where in a ceremonial hall the committee chairperson or other representative of the Communist Party would symbolically welcome the young children into society.

This scene starts with shots of Ludvík walking through the empty, abandoned town, evidence of his aimless time-wasting while waiting for Helena. He then spots a young woman in a short summer dress who catches his interest, and he follows her. Shortly thereafter both pass by several baby carriages parked outside of a large building. The camera no longer "goes" with the two along the street as if it was taking part in the action; instead it peers at them from above. Now the shot includes the young woman followed by Ludvík, the row of carriages, and a part of the statue on the building's facade, a muscular leg belonging to an Atlas

holding up the portal. This motif bears symbolic meaning: the infants, who moments before had been lying in their carriages, had been born into a world that was not as unfree as it had been in the previous decade, but the giant's leg is part of that world. Although the totalitarian political system was not as stable as it had been in the 1950s, reforms to the political system did not bring total democratization. The film reconfirms its ironic nature in the following scene when we see a young woman's leg as she walks upstairs.

Ludvík follows the woman into the building and then into a room where instruments can be heard tuning. A man sits under the state emblem; in front of him there are several pioneers with carnations. The music begins and at the same time we see that the violinist recognizes Ludvík as on old friend. It is Jaroslav, who in the novel is mainly portrayed as a simple man with a life-long devotion to folk music who escapes into his fantasies about preserving folk traditions. In the following shots, the mothers arrive with their newborns, followed by a line of fathers. The primness of the ceremony is reflected in the officiant—an older women, who uses hand gestures to instruct the people to sit down. One of the pioneers than bows and begins to recite an ideology-laden poem about welcoming young families to Socialist society. Then in a theatrical tone the chairman of the national committee speaks about how these newly born children will be taken care of by their families, the state, and all working people. However, while he is saying these words, the camera focuses on the details of Ludvík's face. The curiosity and interest in the young woman has already disappeared. He turns his head to the side and looks off into the distance. Ludvík's thoughts are soon revealed as the voice of Pavel Zemánek from the narrative past penetrates the scene: "And now let's deal with the case of comrade Jahn" (Jireš 1968, my translation). In the middle of the ceremony, Ludvík goes 10 years back into the past to the meeting that changed his life. His postcard was turned into a spectacle; Ludvík's condemnation turned into a play that clearly resembles the show trials of the 1950s.

The audience, whose view is guided by exact camera movements, is led to focus on Ludvík's gestures and facial expressions. Close-ups alternate with medium and long shots, contributing to emotionally identifying with the main character whose unresolved trauma has surfaced. Ludvík's feelings of solitude and isolation are thus clear. A series of shots displays present and past events. The past enters the narrative present in the soundtrack and in the end the present enters the past. For a moment,

we see Ludvík among the ceremony attendees, and then for a moment we observe the university's ceremonial hall through his eyes, where Zemánek is sitting alongside Communist youth members. Whereas at the beginning the camera focuses on the details of Ludvík's face, now in the narrative present his face is repeatedly lost in the crowd. When we hear Pavel Zemánek recite from Julius Fučík's book *Reportáž psaná na oprátce* (*Notes from the Gallows*, 1945),[9] in the narrative present we see the speaking national committee chairman and the standing pioneer. Then the film cuts to a shot of Ludvík's face and then quickly to one of Markéta. This character plays an important role in this passage; her uncertain gaze cast in Ludvík's direction is replaced by her nodding in favor of his expulsion. Ludvík's behavior is just the opposite; when a Communist youth member asks him how the Communists who had been executed during the war would have viewed his actions, he responds: "Their lives were at stake. They weren't petty; they would have understood that it was a joke" (Jireš 1968, my translation). When Zemánek orders a vote on Ludvík's expulsion from the Party and from school and everyone present raises their hands, we are, for a moment, brought to the narrative present. The ceremony ends and Jaroslav and the musicians began to play a celebratory melody. Another shot from the past is then accompanied by these tones, and once again we realize that the entire passage was a flashback; from the beginning we were in the present tense of the film's narration and by jumping back in time we returned to events that Ludvík cannot forget, and of which the ceremoniousness of the welcoming of new citizens reminded him. The resulting counterpoint is markedly ironic, as on one hand the civic life of the children is just beginning while on the other in the flashback the civic life of Ludvík is ending.

The film then directly reminds us of the consequences of being expelled from the Party, as this scene cuts to a new one featuring young men joining the penal brigades. Thus, another passage begins that slowly reveals how "enemies of the state" were dealt with. Once again we find ourselves somewhere between the past and present; the contrast is built up differently, however. In chaos and haste, young men, unfit to serve as soldiers defending the Socialist system, who had their head shaved by old barbers, become objects in the hands of the totalitarian machinery. The shouting is muted and a pure girl's voice singing a folk song increases the visual impression even more: "I walked, I walked, over a green meadow, a green meadow. I was carrying a violet in my hand, a

violet in my hand" (Jireš 1968, my translation). On the visual plane we witness the culmination of objectification and demystification; the life of an individual is guided by external forces. On the audio plane, the music announces harmony in this wistful reminiscence about a loved one.

Folk music is connected to the character of Jaroslav, whom Ludvík meets by chance at the welcoming of citizens ceremony. Although Ludvík attempts to avoid direct contact with him, in the end he leaves with Jaroslav for the cimbalom band's rehearsal. We discover that Ludvík was an excellent clarinet player, and that these two had once formed a musical group together. But as the band begins to play, the image on the screen brings us to mines where young men are working hard. In another shot we see Jaroslav looking at Ludvík as if he wants to urge him to enjoy playing. In the soundtrack, though, we can hear both music and the shouting of a young soldier, yelling at the young men to work harder. Once again, the past has seeped into the present. Viewers then soon discover the truth about these young men's situation. During an inspection in the barrack courtyard, a young commander tells them that they belong in prison, but that they were lucky and have been sent to be indoctrinated. The state, however, will not entrust them with a gun. The shot of marching men forced to sing a military song replete with ideological clichés is followed by a return to the narrative present, where musicians begin to sing a new, special song: "It's good, it's good, that the master is no more" (Jireš 1968, my translation). It lacks, however, the celebration of nature typical of folk music. It also demonstrates a certain phoniness to the big picture of social interests; one master has been overthrown, but a new one has taken his place. Alienation from values is also expressed by the discordance between the singer's appearance and behavior. Although his singing is accompanied by traditional gestures and body movements, in contrast to the rest of the members of the group he is wearing normal clothes and sunglasses. The music is then accompanied by shots of soldiers hard at work in a mine and Ludvík's words: "I was definitively relieved of any worries about my future" (Jireš 1968, my translation).

Both the book and the adaptation led us to discover that not even after Ludvík manages to escape his involuntary state service does his quality of life improve. He is unable to free himself from the prison of the past. We get a look into the main protagonist's unhappy life particularly during his meetings with Kostka, which occur in the narrative present. The role of Kostka, an ascetic protestant, was played by prominent

New Wave director Evald Schorm. His calm demeanor imbued the character with mildness, emphasizing even more the disparate relationship between the two. In the adaptation, Kostka's importance is reduced. He has only little screen time to express his attitudes towards life. Kostka appears a total of three times; besides two meetings with Ludvík in Kostka's apartment, we also see him at the university, where he worked as an instructor during Stalinism. In this scene, Ludvík visits Pavel Zemánek and asks him how the postcard affair had ended up. Ludvík is assured he has nothing to worry about as "the Party will certainly take care of it" (Jireš 1968, my translation). As their friendly conversation continues, they spot Kostka clumsily carrying a butterfly display case. Ludvík wants to help him, but Kostka refuses the young comrade's aid. It is not just his apparent clumsiness that sets him apart. He addresses both of the young men as "gentlemen" instead of "comrades," isolating and distancing them from the politics that Ludvík and Pavel both represent at the time.

During the first meeting in Kostka's small apartment, the contrast between both men is intentionally stressed. Ludvík's unexpected visit catches Kostka off guard. While Kostka asks Ludvík if he ever thinks about university, the camera shows Ludvík looking over the apartment and checking the bed's quality. Kostka, who is making tea off screen, enters from the left, and both men stand facing each other. On one side is the hunched-over Kostka in an apron holding a tea tray; on the other side stands Ludvík with a conniving smile on his face. The camera then follows the conversation between the men sitting on a divan and focuses on Kostka's profile when he says: "It is not good for man to be alone" (Jireš 1968, my translation). As opposed to the novel, the adaptation simplifies this character and portrays him as an exemplary figure in full recognition of his own fate, who endeavours to interpret human existence through Christianity. This change sets up a clearer conflict between the two men. The scene then cuts to Ludvík standing facing a window. He is no longer in immediate proximity to Kostka, the pleasant chit–chat has come to an end, and Ludvík reveals the reason for his sudden visit: he would like to borrow his old acquaintance's apartment. Their meeting ends on the street with Kostka heading to work on his bicycle. He hands his keys to Ludvík, wishing the apartment brings him something good. Their thought-worlds, however, are far from each other. Ludvík says borrowing the apartment will allow him to commit "one good destructive act" (Jireš 1968, my translation). Kostka objects in vain; the

following shot captures Ludvík's face as he says, "You are a silent bricklayer on God's eternal construction site. You know, I…"(Jireš 1968, my translation). A jump cut then brings us back to the past, to the already-described May 1 celebration in 1949, where Pavel dances and Markéta watches.

The second meeting of the two men occurs after Helena has been seduced. The presence of items that were not visible in the apartment before are important—mainly a birdcage behind the lying Ludvík's head that helps emphasize a lack of freedom. The man and the bird are caught in a cage from which they cannot escape without the help of others. Ludvík can be helped by Kostka, who names Ludvík's situation in the world and how he is trapped in the net of the past. One way Ludvík can liberate himself from the past is by forgiving those who have harmed him. In the shot we see Ludvík standing and facing a bookshelf, who reminds Kostka that his best friends are responsible for the estrangement between him and his former classmates. The scene then cuts to Kostka sitting on the divan, leafing through a book; he says that he too was kicked out of university and yet he is not in the same place as Ludvík is, mentally speaking. In the shots we then see Ludvík, whose gestures clearly relay his mental anguish. This film, examining the psychological state of its protagonist, makes a clear statement via Kostka: "A world in which no one is forgiven is hell. And you are living in hell, Ludvík" (Jireš 1968, my translation). The camera captures him from the front and in the scene there are no other objects connoting meanings that might support this comment. As a whole, the film resigns from a clear interpretation of reality—on the purely personal level though it takes a clear stand: Ludvík has lost his bearings in life.

Pavel Zemánek personifies another story from this generation. Ludvík's fate was described using complicated interactions with history; in contrast, Zemánek is defined by flip-flopping, as a former Stalinist turned into a reformer in the narrative present. At the beginning was a man who had power and headed meetings at which people were expelled from school and the Party. We do not know exactly what happened to him over the years, how he managed to cast aside his Communist youth past and come to the side of those who were now fighting against the closed Party structure. This flip-flopping is of course a well-calculated move because if it was not, the uniqueness of Ludvík's experience would suffer.

Pavel Zemánek was played by another important postwar Czech actor, Luděk Munzar. The first few times we see him in the film he is in Moravian

folk dress—including in the photograph in Helena's wallet. When Ludvík tells Helena to get undressed in Kostka's apartment, a song from the 1950s enters the narrative present through the soundtrack: "We're building, we're building, a new world/and we'll let no one get in our way/today the motto of youth/forward and never back" (Jireš 1968, my translation); after a jump cut we find that it is being sung by Pavel Zemánek standing in the middle of a large group of joyous young people. Whereas most of them are wearing the Communist youth uniform, he draws attention in his Moravian folk costume. From this scene, it is clear how Pavel is able to elicit a sense of intoxication, to move others to blend into the mass. The traditional folk costume confirms Pavel's political stance, for both the mass song and traditional folk music were considered close to the revolutionary ethos. We also see Pavel in other places, dancing and enjoying himself in the midst of the demonstration. His position is summed up by Helena, who tells Ludvík about how she and Pavel met at the manifestation: "That was Pavel. He knew how to catch people by the heart" (Jireš 1968, my translation).

It is therefore extraordinarily surprising when this proletariat, this lover of the collective and folk celebrations appears at the end of the film. He is modernly dressed in a sport coat and turtleneck. He does not bring to mind an enthusiastic Communist, but a Western intellectual. And he is not alone. One of his young female students, craving for change and the world, has accompanied him to the party. Pavel has cast aside Helena, his aging wife, a relic of the Stalinist past, and his new romantic relationship can be interpreted as a symbol of rebellion against the establishment.

The scene featuring the meeting between the two main characters begins with a shot of Pavel Zemánek, who has found out from Helena about the new man in her life and is approaching the unsuspecting Ludvík. Ludvík looks pensively at something and leans against a wooden railing with his head bowed. He is ungroomed, in a wrinkled shirt with a sport coat thrown over his arm. A detailed shot of Ludvík's head taken from the perceptive of Zemánek, who greets him. Ludvík, visibly shaken, coldly responds to the greeting and refuses to shake hands. During the course of their meeting, the point of view changes many times, expressing tension between the two men. The viewer witnesses several sorties, which are repelled by other sorties, and in the end Ludvík's retreat. The men are posed differently. Zemánek stands erect and is visibly self-assured. In contrast, Ludvík's constantly crossed arms indicate his

Fig. 5.1 *The Joke*. Ludvík encounters Pavel after many years. *Žert* (*The Joke*; Jaromil Jireš, 1968)

tenseness and distrust, as well as a need for protection. They confront each other with arguments. Whereas Ludvík deflects Pavel's comments by mentioning the latter's youth ("you used to wear folk costumes"), Pavel plays with Ludvík's relationship with Helena. The young girl is a disruptive element; her carelessness and naiveté surprises—she is not interested in folk celebrations; she just wants to have fun. She personifies a new type of young person, the kind that Zemánek likes so much. Their meeting ends on a more relaxed, conciliatory note; on parting, they shake hands, although their conflict has not been resolved (Fig. 5.1).

Zemánek could sense which way the wind was blowing and adapted. He is successful, he works at the university, and he is convinced that he has left behind his mistakes in the 1950s. Ludvík can only expect an apology in vain, as Zemánek now stands on the same side as Ludvík. Once again, it is Zemánek who has been able to cope with historic change. He would no longer read Fučík, for he has overcome his crisis

of consciousness and seen the light. At one moment he begins to walk slowly, followed by Ludvík, and states, "All those parades, songs, jubilation—it was a wall behind which innocent people were locked up, condemned, and executed" (Jireš 1968, my translation). He says this while holding cotton candy in his hand. Both came to the same conclusion; both came to oppose the regime, but in different ways. Let us return for a moment to the literary source; in the novel Zemánek, in the narrative present, does not conform to the ideological-social order, putting himself at risk of being expelled from the Party. In the novel Ludvík says:

> In this way I learned that Zemánek was one of the most popular teachers and that his students worshiped him for not being liked by the university authorities: for always saying what he thought, for being courageous and sticking up for the young. Zemánek continued to protest mildly, and so I learned from his companion further details of the various battles Zemánek had fought in recent years: how the authorities had even wanted to throw him out for not sticking to the rigid, outdated curriculum and for trying to introduce the young people to everything going on in modern philosophy (they claimed he had wanted to smuggle in "hostile ideology"); how he'd saved a student from expulsion for some boyish prank (a dispute with a policeman) that the chancellor (Zemánek's enemy) had characterized as a *political* misdemeanor; how afterwards the female students had held a secret poll to determine their favorite teacher, and how he had won it. (Kundera 1992, 270–271)

In the film we don't hear that he has helped anyone or that he had put himself at risk of being punished by the regime; we only find out that he has changed his opinion about the period and people (we wanted to make a better tomorrow, but perhaps today young people will really make it better). Zemánek's character from the novel is transformed in the adaptation; this change indicates that the screenwriters did not want this career Communist to become a model and that they wanted to preserve a clear distinction between him and Ludvík.

It is clear from interviews with Jireš, the director, that the filmmakers did not aspire to change reality through radical social criticism, but what they did endeavour to do was transform viewers' relationship to the complex reality. Careerist Pavel Zemánek's way of "coping" with the past can help establish a diagnosis of the era:

> He is actually supposed to be a likeable character; in him we can compare two different personalities in one person—at two different times. It's

> that loss of memory that allows people to do good deeds even though they have a past with bad deeds. It is easy to condemn Zemánek, but that would close his case. I am more interested in how such a thing is possible. That is why I don't want to make any judgements about him. ("V květnu zahájí" 1968, 7, my translation)

Despite what the director had to say, Zemánek comes off as a character who, in the adaption, represents negative individual and social behavior. The Zemánek of the 1960s gives off the impression of a grand Western cinema hero; he takes a stand against the society's ideals of the past and still knows how to influence many people—although now in a different way. He is loved in both roles, for he is, as Zdeněk Kožmín fittingly writes, a successful grandee of living an inauthentic life (Kožmín 1991, 316). He always adapts and he can abuse his situation for his own gain. Although he has the young female student's sympathy, his careerism irritates viewers. Instead of standing up for his beliefs, he changes with the times like a chameleon. The generally existential plane present in the book is pushed aside and the issue of adapting comes to the forefront.

In the end, in the novel's cinematic adaptation, there is a clear attempt at not putting a generation of career Communists in a positive light. The fictional character of Pavel Zemánek cannot become a hero. The adaptation does not engage in relativism; some characters stand on the other side of the barricade, and it is impossible for them to wear new masks. It specifically shows which people were standing on which side. If, in the 1950s, all Communists were viewed positively and could not have any negative features, then all of a sudden we see a tendency to counterbalance: there are no extenuating circumstances for Communist careerists. In this sense the adaptation comes off as retaliation for the past.

Behind the Scenes of Real Socialism

From the beginning the film tends to display raw, authentic images of real socialism and thus unmasks its social reality. Its environment is presented as worn down and ugly. The adaptation enables viewers to peer into urban scenery, barracks, and the rural environment and show what Czechoslovakia's new Socialist society had accomplished. The disillusioned depiction of Ludvík's provincial and neglected hometown is particularly laden with meaning. At first the camera shows the outline of a walled medieval town. Ludvík's off-screen voice brings viewers up

to speed: "My hometown. Hmm. I haven't lived here for twelve years now. I'm quite indifferent about it and I almost hate it" (Jireš 1968, my translation). This shot is then replaced by low-angle shot of a plague column. The camera then returns to earth and slides along on old building's beat-up facade, peaking into a courtyard, where we see someone cutting grass with a scythe. Once again a low-angle shot follows, this time focused on a Baroque church tower. Another view of the heavens marking the way to big plans and ideals is once again grounded by the reality of daily life. The decline in material values and society is finally confirmed by a counterpoint, as in the next shot the camera finds behind the beat-up wall a grey, prefabricated concrete building.[10] Here this example of Socialist housing becomes a symbol of decline and alienation. Similar to the novel, here the spatial settings, through which Ludvík wanders, gain allegorical significance.[11] The question arises of how to find the meaning of human existence in the value-depraved world of a communist dictatorship.

The town comes off as bleak in other scenes in which Ludvík is waiting for Helena. The camera first captures him slowly walking around benches and tables on a small square, behind which there is a building with a grey, crumbling facade. Disharmony and disorder rule everywhere. The atmosphere is highlighted by a female voice, broadcast over loudspeakers, that monotonously informs town residents about upcoming social activities. The regime's proclamations, however, have no effect, for it is completely clear that economic prosperity has not been achieved, as one look at the desolate confectioner's window display demonstrates. When Ludvík looks there, the female voice promises that this year's folk music festival will be "especially varied and great" (Jireš 1968, my translation). Such a critically conceived scene is the opposite of the aesthetic imagery typical of the 1950s, when illusions about bright tomorrows and coming prosperity were created.

The claustrophobic space of the hotel foyer is another part of the town's symptomatic topography. Behind the counter sits an old man, who ignores the guests and eats food out of a pot that he has brought from home. After spending the night on a creaky bed, Ludvík goes into the empty dining room, where someone is washing the floor. When he asks at the reception whether it is possible to eat at the hotel, the old man just grumpily replies that it is closed. The glaringly empty restaurant to which Ludvík takes Helena does not provide a more optimistic perspective; both are brushed off by the staff, who are lazing about. All

of these situations and details are small and large accusations against a regime that has led society into a trap.

At first it may seem that the countryside acts as a certain counterweight to the town. The adaptation allows viewers to peak behind the scenes of village life and the Ride of Kings celebration. The faces of older villagers can be seen against the backdrop of whitewashed houses, as can a decorated chapel and farmhouse courtyards. Ludvík's facial expressions and gestures clearly reveal his enchantment with the celebration's overall atmosphere, which brings him a sense of calm. After he rejects Helena, the camera shows the Ride of King's path. Ludvík enters the shot, and his figure is shown in direct relation to the men riding by on horses. Ludvík casts a glance at the king, a young boy, their lines of vision crossing. Jireš's use of a telephoto lens increases the intensity of the depiction of a simple traditionally understood life which is larger than any individual struggles and in which Ludvík can take solace even after everything that happened.

Here, the film smooths and rounds the novel's rough edges, a move that Pavel Švanda criticized in his 1969 review:

> […] on screen we see one of the most common tricks—from that which is described critically in the text all that remains on the screen is a nice spectacle. Here we have our Moravian folk traditions, the Ride of Kings, shot nicely in contradiction to the original textual formulations. (Švanda 1969, 8, my translation)

Here, Švanda points out that the film offers viewers a less conflicting dimension to the character of folk-music worshiper Jaroslav, as his son and wife were eliminated. In the novel, Jaroslav meets with failure and tries to save himself with "visions, dream notions" (Suchomel 1992, 123, my translation). Such endeavours turn out to be in vain, as not even the closest people to him—that is, his son and wife—understand his desire to preserve South Moravian folk traditions, which he has dedicated his life to. His son, in whom he has put his hopes, is no longer willing to believe his ideals; he refuses to take part in the celebration, and with his mother's knowledge he leaves for a motorcycle race and has another boy secretly take his place in the Ride of Kings. Jaroslav's enthusiasm is in vain; the attitude of those closest to him harms him to the extent that he has a heart attack and the readers learn that he will never play with such passion again.

Although the adaptation leaves out the conflict between Jaroslav and his family, the motif of betrayal is still present in the film. The Ride of Kings is a carnival of sorts, in which the world is turned on its head. In this folk celebration, which is still held today, particularly in Moravian Slovakia, a boy becomes the king, whose richly decorated horse is led around the village by his father. The young king replaces the old, in a symbol of rebirth. Such a sacred ritual is no longer possible in the world of Communism; the same applies to folk music. Jiří Koten writes in his study of Kundera's novel:

> Music was degraded into kitsch and *at the same time* promoted to a modern and state-recognized art form; in the politicized world it ceased to be music and became insistent agitprop that served to dumb the people down. (Koten 2012, 65, my translation)

A remarkable feature of the celebration is that that boy-king and his pages are dressed in female folk costumes. This carnival has much in common with revolution, in which the normal customs are transformed and the world is turned on its head. However, in *The Joke* the Ride of Kings loses its subversive potential, as it is a state-organized event. Such a carnival does not undermine status, as would be expected, but instead it supports the regime. Severing this sacred tradition from its past meaning is tragic. Just like with Olomouc's astronomical clock, the sacred value of time is disfigured here.

In the film's conclusion, Ludvík turns to Jaroslav and asks him if he was already allowed to play with his cimbalom band once again. The drunken shots of the audience, however, disturb their enthusiastic musical performance. At the auditory level, the voices singing folklore songs are contrasted with a loudly playing radio. Jireš achieves this clearly delineated contrast by combing shots, cuts, and musical elements. On one hand he shows the cimbalom band, whose singing members personify the illusory beauty of the folk song, which one can escape to and hide in. The seductive vision of "holism and originality of being" (Chvatík 1994, 53, my translation) is, however, unmasked; it is humbled by deadening feelings and objectifying interpersonal relationships. For a moment the film's soundtrack is filled only by the musicians, who are closed in their own world; then, however, the noise of the crowd and voices of drunken young men and soldiers begins to rise. The image of a drunk old man closing the musical scene with his out-of-tune rendition

of a schmaltzy tune forms the definitive counterpoint. For the entire message of the film, it is symptomatic that an individual runs up against circumstances that are difficult to fight against. The noise of the modern world cannot be shouted over, not even in a village, so Jaroslav suggests they go play in a field, just for themselves. One of the musicians stops them, however, because according to their contract they must play the entire night despite the indifferent crowd. Subsequently, tragedy strikes as Jaroslav, disappointed that his music has been dishonored, has a heart attack and is taken away to the hospital. The ideology-laden world had bastardized and destroyed everything dear to Jaroslav.

And then the grand finale occurs, when Ludvík is attacked by a young radio technician protecting the honor of Helena, the woman he loves. Ludvík quickly overpowers the young man and transfers all of his rage into his blows. In the next shot we then see Ludvík bowing over the

Fig. 5.2 *The Joke*. Ludvík at the end of the film. *Žert* (*The Joke*; Jaromil Jireš, 1968)

motionless body of his opponent, saying to him: "Man, I didn't want to beat you up" (Jireš 1968, my translation). Then the protagonist raises his head and looks into the camera, while in the soundtrack we hear a short folk song motif. The potential of the generation it represents has not been fulfilled (Fig. 5.2).

The film version of *The Joke* took a stand against dogmatic attitudes, demystified the communist dictatorship and its empty gestures, and posed the question: Where do the victims of oppression stand and where do those guilty of destroying their fate stand in the new social structure? The key message in the film is that history leads nowhere; it merely drags man along as if it was playing a joke for its own enjoyment. History does not follow an aim; not even political developments lead to meaning. Time is headed nowhere in particular and people are left to wander hopelessly through a history that does not lead to an optimistic future. We have been thrown into the whirlwind of history, which does with us as it pleases. Its meaning lies only in its meaninglessness.

Notes

1. In one review, Jindřich Beránek focuses on the film's "non-aesthetic qualities" and claims that it is a work that above all represents its time. He attributes a topical social function to the film, when he writes that it "comes at a time when the clash between the conservers of social development and the representatives of further progress in social revolution (= the liberation of man) has undergone several changes, when powers beyond the borders of this community have entered the fray. … Whereas with the novel words lead the reader to reflect on himself, in the theater the viewer remains a witness of what people are capable of. Certainly what he has experienced since that summer of 1967 plays a role; he is the witness of an era in which he only existed, which perhaps enslaved [him], but which, with its inhumanity, is foreign to him" (Beránek 1969, 25, my translation).
2. Tomáš Kubíček says that this narrative strategy complicates "not only life's (pseudo)certainties, but also the ones of the story itself […]" (Kubíček 2001, 42, my translation).
3. During the adaptation process, individual plot points were boiled down and many of the novel's plot twists and digressions were cut, as were its philosophical and existentialist elements.
4. As Jan Tlustý claims, "The problem of time is of paramount significance in the whole of Kundera's oeuvre; for Kundera, time also constitutes one of the novel's vital challenges" (Tlustý 2012, 85–86, my translation).

5. Jireš adds: "This paradox, even though it is terrible, also has its own mournful laughter to it. Today, how many Pavel Zemáneks have been born around us … Ludvík Jahn still lives in two times—he lugs his past around with him like a ball and chain" (Friedrichová 1968, 1).
6. Many Czechoslovak citizens had similar experiences with actually existing socialism, as clearly reflected in contemporary reactions to the film. In one review, the adaptation is interpreted as a testimony to recent events that would resonant particularly with viewers who had lived through the 1950s as youths and who were now confronted with the reality of the 1960s: "Through masterful editing, sharp and without preparing the viewer, the reality of the early 1950s is interwoven with the not-so-distant past. Memories of a period of earnest ascetic enthusiasm and equally earnest and ascetic wrongs mix with a period of sobering up, skepticism, and faded hopes. It is a very convincing montage. Today many people, especially those who are now about forty, still experience this interweaving" (Pacovský 1969, 2, my translation).
7. Both the novel and the film thematise the strong influence of one's current perspective on the perception of the past. As a result of this influence, it might be difficult to differentiate a narrator's present and past selves as the past self is constructed by the present, remembering self. The film demonstrates this unclear boundary by projecting the image of Ludvík at present onto the scenes of his past that he is remembering. This narrative technique then raises the viewer's suspicion as to the possibility of unreliable narration. For more on the influence of the present perspective on memories and its relation to unreliable narration, see Fonioková (2015, 83–88).
8. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Alfa Lüdtke assert, while comparing Nazism and Stalinism, that, "In both societies, people in all segments and groups were caught up in the excitement of active involvement in a process of fundamental transformation of things both large and small" (Fitzpatrick and Lüdtke 2012, 300).
9. The novel, as well as the adaptation, work with a specific ideological point, by making the connection between Zemánek and the Communist journalist Julius Fučík, who was executed by the Nazis in 1943. Milan Suchomel has noted how above the literary plaintiff "hung an idealized portrait of Fučík; the plaintiff called Fučík as a Crown witness. Fučík and Zemánek interweaved in front of Ludvík. Zemánek was a successful imitator of Fučík" (Suchomel 1992, 124, my translation). In the film, Zemánek invokes Fučík by drawing from the political propaganda surrounding Fučík's cult and reads his words with great pathos to later compare them with Ludvík's postcard.
10. On this issue, Zdena Škapová notes that these images are "silent witnesses of a lamentable social decline" (Škapová 2002, 75, my translation).

11. In this vein, Zdeněk Hrbata writes about the novel how: the disillusioned and anti-mythical image of the town in which almost nothing goes right (not even the Ride of Kings that is present in the plot nor the lives of old friends) does not cut itself free from the resistant symbolic core of all returns, which is in most general terms the disentanglement of life" (Hrbata 2005, 392, my translation).

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CHAPTER 6

Epilogue

In this book, I have recounted how film adaptations of literary works were made, what other non-literary sources they drew from, and the circumstances of their creation in Communist Czechoslovakia, a Soviet satellite from 1948. Thus, I sought to discover how these adaptations resonated in the cultural context in which they originated. My aim was to show not only how the political situation of Czechoslovakia molded the film adaptations created there, but also how these same works in turn shaped the sociocultural conditions of the 1950s and the 1960s.

While I could not present a complex and exhausting reflection of the relationship between Czech fiction and film from the Communist takeover in 1954 to the thwarted Prague Spring in 1969, I did focus on a carefully selected set of adaptations. Through these films, and their reception, I have tried to show the diverse nature of the relationship between fiction and film. The adaptations at the heart of this book were characterized by a struggle: screenwriters and directors faced severe political pressure in the Stalinist 1950s, which, although it loosened up in the more liberal 1960s, still proved to hamper the Czechoslovakian culture in some ways.

The adaptations I have analyzed in this book were not made in an attempt to overthrow the Communist dictatorship. Their goals were instead artistic and so they strived to venture beyond their literary origins, to emphasize a functional blend of various forms of artistic expression, and to utilize playful experimentalism and unrestrained creativity. To do so, filmmakers needed to look for ways to outsmart official

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cultural policy, while holding on to their artistic beliefs. They employed strategies and aesthetic approaches that resulted in films which managed to represent a more complex reality than the one depicted in politically approved, ideology-leaden movies focused on Communism's bright future. I tried to characterize the taboos which the adaptations attacked through their own artistic models of society.

It was mainly in the early 1950s that some adaptations confronted politically controlled and formed art. Politicians decided what the desirable values of art were and enforced them through a system of norms. Therefore, filmmakers had to be subtle when pushing against official boundaries. Václav Krška toyed with the characteristics of Socialist Realism, misused ideological symbols, and subversively presented forbidden homosexual sentiments. Karel Zeman, beneath his creative approach (emphasis on untamed fantasy, free association, combining different artistic media, etc.), adapted Jules Verne's fiction and in doing so hid serious humanist messages about responsibility and the abuse of power.

Later in the 1960s, when the strict political climate became increasingly liberal, František Vláčil and Otakar Vávra challenged the dominance of the written word with audio-visual modes of representation. Finally, Jaromír Jireš's adaptation of Milan Kundera's *The Joke* was an open polemic against Stalinist Czechoslovakia. Kundera and Jireš described the experience of the Youth Communist League, whose members found their political and aesthetic ideal in Stalinism after the February 1948 only to go through a period of harsh disillusion and to face the need to find new solutions, which were not easy to find and were hazardous both politically and aesthetically.

The stories I relay in this book are variously intertwined. They all focus on universally valid principles and nostalgic yearning following the loss of an ordered world and its values. Nevertheless, in many of these adaptations nostalgia eventually gives way to skepticism and existential disillusionment: initially nostalgia bubbles under the surface before it reaches a full boil and is openly expressed, only to be then discarded in favor of an open testimony about the social reality of Communist rule.

Silvery Wind evoked memories of the old world yet unaffected by the immense catastrophes of the 20th century, where subtle, covert love was still possible. Krška's adaptation of a novel by Fráňa Šrámek, whose literary work continued to be appreciated by its readers even after the Communist takeover, stood out from other contemporary films. The nostalgia of *Silvery Wind*, in the form of a longing for enduring values,

thus stands in sharp contrast to the revolutionary present of the film and the dehumanized machinery of power. A quiet boudoir and a murmuring river were offered as a contrast to a marching crowd chanting political slogans. Amongst cookie-cutter retellings of the liberation from Nazism, stories glorifying the working class, and epic spectacles recounting great events in Czech history, here was a film built upon a delicate interplay of morals and feelings. Its emotionality and small-town setting effectively contradicted the period's ideologically charged films. Krška's movie defied the aesthetic norms of its time with its lack of an ideologically formulaic interpretation of the source material. *Silvery Wind* does not offer up a clearly outlined plot, focusing instead on gestures, faces, and nature—a shocking artistic decision at the time of the film's conception. In this context, nostalgia was a synecdoche of subversion: within the ideologically approved interpretation frame of "paradise of today," a film like *Silvery Wind* was distinctly divergent.

In Zeman's adaptations of Verne's books, the innocent world of childhood and its playful, mischievous joy were confronted with the destructive power of technology. A threatening quality hid underneath the patina of beauty of the ingenious inventions and machines traversing through the nostalgically viewed Industrial Revolution and the subsequent Belle Époque. In *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* in particular, the contrast between the playful world of childhood and the sobering hindsight of an adult looking back at the destruction of the Atomic Age is clearly evident. In the case of *Marketa Lazarová* (similar to *Silvery Wind*), the world of universal values is contrasted with the fleeting present day whose disconsolate nature does not support delicate love. *Marketa Lazarová* brings forward an image of the old world and its workings, and reminds audiences of the perpetual internal discord between the soul and the body present in all human beings. *Romance for Flugelhorn* builds up an intimate, erotic storyline, while looking back to the bygone time of youth and uncovering a microcosm of interpersonal relationships presented as being parallel to natural occurrences; it also points out the fragile nature of emotional ties perpetually threatened by human mortality.

While all of the adaptations contain a moment of disillusionment, the theme of personal and social disenchantment is most apparent in *The Joke*. Both the novel and its adaptation thus appear to participate in a deconstruction of nostalgia. They show that an emotional attachment to the good old times is only a sentimental illusion lacking a real

foundation. The memories of *The Joke*'s protagonist, Ludvík Jahn, function in a different manner than recollections in the other adaptations: his recollection of attempts at radical social change and violent subjugation to the new norms bring nothing but pain. In the novel, the nostalgic folklore enthusiast Jaroslav is eventually deeply disappointed with his son, who never becomes the central figure in a rural celebration and instead leaves secretly for a motorcar race. This method of uncovering of nostalgia is close to the theories of Linda Hutcheon, who writes in connection to the postmodern about ironized nostalgia: "In the postmodern […] nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited and ironized" (Hutcheon 2000, 205). Critical and ironical detachment from the nostalgic immersion in the old world is the central feature of *The Joke*.

Krška, Zeman, and Vávra utilized nostalgia as a grand theme; for them it, with its consolatory nature, represented present-day man's salvation. Kundera and Jireš dismantled this approach: they stepped over the vulnerability, longing, and anguish that nostalgia entails, drawing back the curtains of illusion and demonstrating that lost worlds cannot be brought back. For them, nostalgia almost equals kitsch. History has destroyed the world as we knew it; the old times and its order are no more, and trying to recall them is nothing short of ridiculous.

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There is no happy ending to my book. In 1968, the liberal strain in Czechoslovak culture was abruptly brought to an end by the invasion of the armies of the Warsaw Pact, after which ideological control over art was reintroduced and reinforced. In the following year, the Normalization era started by the curtailing of previous democratization tendencies, and the Communist establishment's close link with the Soviet Union brought stern rule and ideological compliance. Many people faced self-capitulation; it was often enough to sign a declaration acknowledging one's previously faulty view of the brief democratic Prague Spring intermezzo and mistaken influence of right-wing opportunists—and he or she was saved.

Tightened political control, strict rules, and active repression had a detrimental effect on production culture. Purges affected the entire film industry. All leading positions were newly appointed and film production was brought under Party supervision (Hulík 2010, 50–54). Employees at Barrandov Studios, especially those who were involved in the democratization process and voiced their disapproval of the occupation publicly, were dismissed. The creative units were dissolved in 1970 and replaced

with "dramaturgical groups," which diluted the autonomy of creative talent and separated them from production (Szczepanik 2015, 84)." The artistic committees were replaced by a central committee. The recentralization of film production was meant to bring control over new projects and to ensure that they did not stray from official cultural policy. A number of films which were deemed ideologically tainted were withdrawn from circulation and put on a blacklist.

Those newly in power tried to use František Hrubín, his work, and his reputation, for their own ends, which, along with the events of the time, probably hastened his untimely death in 1971. In 1975, Milan Kundera permanently left Czechoslovakia for France. Vávra began to cooperate with the new regime, returned to ideological compliance, and filmed a World War II trilogy. Jireš made a film about a female Communist martyr tortured by the Nazis, and Vláčil adapted one of the key works of literary Socialist Realism. In the last two cases, however, both Jireš and Vláčil returned to their earlier ways of making subtle use of film techniques representative of the more liberal 1960s, continuing the subversion.

In the middle of the 1970s, Vláčil accepted an offer to adapt Bohumil Říha's novel *Doktor Meluzín* (*Doctor Meluzin* 1973). He used a novel by an ideologically compliant writer as an entryway to making a film dealing with existential questions—a theme we can also find in some of Vláčil's older films. The adaptation's central motif is mortality as an inescapable limitation of human existence. Bohumil Říha was a pro-regime writer who devoted his writing to helping build Communist social order. The novel clearly showed that—to quote literary historians—political developments after 1968 "brought ideal conditions not only for establishing a peaceful society but also for the inner harmony of an individual" (Dokoupil 2008, 477–478, my translation). Vláčil was aware of the difficulties of adapting a schematic novel about life in a socialist village, a novel with a clear ideological message:

> They offered me various texts which I refused. *Smoke on the Potato Fields* was, to a certain extent, an offering to the gods. But the story was good and I didn't draw any political conclusions out of it. […] Quite a few people held the film against me. (Strusková 1997, 173, my translation)

Vláčil wrote the script together with screenwriter and playwright Václav Nývlt (1930–1999); their collaboration is an important detail of the adaptation. Namely, Nývlt cooperated with many Czech New Wave

directors and was involved in projects such as the adaptation of Bohumil Hrabal's short stories mentioned in the Introduction; Jiří Menzel's *Ostře sledované vlaky* (*Closely Watched Trains* 1966); Věra Chytilová's eccentrically experimental allegory *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme* (*We Eat the Fruit of the Trees of Paradise*1969); and Pavel Juráček's *Case for a Rookie Hangman*. The role of the doctor in *Dým bramborové natě* (*Smoke on the Potato Fields* 1977) was played by star actor Rudolf Hrušínský, who was prevented by the Communist establishment from appearing in both feature films and TV films in the early 1970s following his signing the *2000 Words Manifesto*, which called for maintaining the democratic reforms in Czechoslovakia. Film critic Jaromír Blažejovský praised the actor's achievement:

> Rudolf Hrušínský gave a brilliant performance that captured the withdrawn personality of the protagonist and his inner development. Hrušínský uses no more than a look, a hint of a smile, a subtle gesture, and still his performance is some of the best acting in recent years (Blažejovský 1977, 8, my translation).

Even though Říha's novel *Doctor Meluzin*, on which Vláčil's film *Smoke on the Potato Fields* is based, is formally and ideologically compact and its characters are structured schematically, Vláčil's narrative minimalism, visual style, and concise dialogues as well as his emphasis on the alienation and ambiguous motivation of the main character allow human fate and identity to overshadow ideological commitment and oversimplification of the literary source. As for the depiction of the protagonist's psychological processes, the utterances are short and almost lonely. The film's title even signals the filmmaker's delve into inner life: scenes of small fires and children baking potatoes in the ashes belong to a traditional Czech autumn. At one moment the aging protagonist declares that he is coming back to himself: the film thus seeks to project human stories into the fragile world of childhood. However, he cannot return to the past; all he has left are memories that are going up in smoke.

A crucial attribute of Vláčil's and Nývlt's conception is the emphasis on the psychological states of the protagonist, a once successful doctor who suddenly finds himself in a village. Life becomes incoherent and its ambivalence is antithetical to the novel, in which the main character finds a new place in society. The camera forms an analogy of the vague search for oneself through shots of bare, simple landscapes, where the protagonist is followed in long shots.

The topic of the basic problems of human existence and Doctor Meluzin's reflection of them intensify towards the end (which differs from the ending of the novel), when a young girl named Markéta gives birth to a child and needs to be taken to the hospital immediately. While the doctor drives a dilapidated ambulance, a nurse is taking care of both the baby and the dying girl in the back. In this sequence, we witness another alteration of the pre-text; in the novel the girl voluntarily gives up and abandons her child, a decision that is accepted because of her youth. In the film, the story is different: when Markéta is pregnant, Doctor Meluzin talks her out of an abortion, and not long afterwards diagnoses her with a serious disease (which is never specified). The doctor stops the ambulance in an inhospitable landscape. In a visually polluted industrial environment, death strikes. A sequence of shots shows Hrušínský's face and a set of high voltage lines with an emphasis on the buzzing sound of electricity; this scene evokes experiencing life's finality. The inhospitable landscape corresponds with feelings of emptiness and resignation. The viewer is led to take a look at the intimacy of experiencing basic human themes through the external, as if matter-of-fact, perspective of the camera's eye recording the events. There is no sentiment, no decoration, just the touch of bare reality.

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