

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1.: THEORIES OF DISCOURSE

I first encountered theories of discourse in the mid-1990s and they opened up a whole range of new possibilities for me with respect to textual analyses. At the same time, however, and as I confronted these theories with theories of ideology which were more familiar to me at that point, I encountered a host of terminological and theoretical problems with the application of this theoretical framework to texts produced under state socialism and immediately after. These problems stemmed from the relatively isolated intellectual development of Central/Eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century and from the Cold-War divisions in language I mentioned in the Introduction. I will be dealing with these issues more closely in Chapter 3. It is necessary to mention them at this place, in order to explain the particular selection of texts which were important for clarifying theoretical issues for myself and for developing a functioning theoretical model.

Diane Macdonell's *Theories of Discourse: an Introduction* (1986) was a useful introduction to the key frameworks with which I knew I should be working in my research. As will be obvious from the review below, however, her work is now rather dated and of limited use for my work, primarily because of her misreading of Foucault's concept of resistance. She outlines, first, the historical development of theories of ideology and of discourse from structuralism to post-structuralism, and second, the thematic development of the work on discourse from Michel Pêcheux's linguistic studies to Michel Foucault's research on discourse and power. The main contribution of her overview for my work is the contrast between definitions of ideology and discourse: ideologies are material, because they are formed in institutions and in struggle; discourse, by contrast, is 'a particular area of language use' (Macdonell 1986, 2), is 'identified by institutions to which it relates and by the position from which it comes and which it marks out for the speaker' (ibid., 3); it is 'one of ideology's specific forms' (ibid., 45). Although this distinction remains, for me, somewhat obscure, it leads to her main hypothesis which is that discourses are shaped by antagonism and struggle. No discourse (not even the dominant—or 'prevailing' as Macdonell's calls it) can exist by itself: it is always formed in an antagonistic relation to another discourse. From here derives both her appreciation and criticism of Foucault: she credits him for introducing the argument that 'discourses exist materially as well as institutionally' (Macdonell 1986, 96) in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, but criticises his concept of power as being 'always already there' (Macdonell 1986, 122). She argues that this position 'leave[s] resistance in a blind alley' (ibid.), for although Foucault allows for resistance—'reversals, reverse discourses and counter-identifications' (ibid.)—it does not help in explaining major changes, such as revolutions. This is so because Foucault locates resistance only as 'a counter-effect in the networks of power' (Macdonell 1986, 124). Whilst most would agree that this is something of a misinterpretation of Foucault's position, my own theoretical framework will draw significantly on Macdonell's thesis of antagonism and struggle: in particular, on her assertion that 'a discourse finds its meanings by reference to an ideological position: it is pinned down where it serves as a weapon in struggle' (Macdonell 1986, 110).

While Macdonell focused specifically on the development of theoretical debates concerning ideology and discourse, Sara Mills's *Discourse* (1997) discusses the concept of discourse in various disciplinary contexts, as well as giving an overview of 'discursive structures' and their operation. She also brings out a sharper distinction between theories of discourse and theories of ideology, than Macdonell does. For my work, it was particularly productive that Mills also focused on the usefulness of discourse theory for feminist theory and that she herself writes from a feminist position, illustrating general arguments with examples from feminist debates or women's concerns.

Mills specifies that 'in some sense the term discourse has been defined in dialogue with and in reaction to the definition of ideology' (Mills 1997, 32). One of the areas of difference is the effect of institutional power. Theories of ideology approach the power of institutions (for example, the State), as decisive for constructing (group) subjectivities, and are thus repressive. Foucault's concept of discursive structures differs from ideology in that: 'He considers that there is a combined force of institutional and cultural pressure, together with the intrinsic structure of discourse, which always exceeds the plans and desires of the institution or of those in power' (Mills 1997, 54).

Here Mills rehabilitates Foucault's concept of power, which Macdonell criticised, for the purposes of feminist analysis. She brings out the aspect of Foucault's theory which emphasises the productive nature of power: 'that it produces as well as represses' (ibid., 37). She contrasts the way femininity can be studied within the framework of theories of ideology with that of discourse. In ideological analyses, femininity can be only seen 'as only having one clear meaning; that is, a woman acting in a feminine way can only be interpreted as displaying weakness or deference' (ibid., 87). Work on discourse, on the other hand:

[Does] not deny the importance of institutional power (the power of the State, the judiciary, the police, and so on), since it is clear that roles are carved out for individuals by these institutions; but perhaps [it is] more concerned with mapping out the multiple sites where power is enacted and negotiated. Within discourse theory, it is possible to see that the practices which oppress women are not uniform, since women are not a homogenous group; some women negotiate for themselves positions of institutionalised power and others accrue power to themselves by negotiating with the seemingly powerless positions which they have been allotted. (Mills 1997, 93–94)

Mills especially promotes the work on discourse by Dorothy Smith (see section 2.3. below), whose contribution she sees in treating power 'as enacted within relationships and thus as something which can be contested at every moment and in every interaction' (Mills 1997, 88). In the case of femininity, this means that women can be seen as active agents who negotiate their positions within discourse, rather than as 'simple dupes of an ideology' (ibid., 91). This way, it is also possible to see *multiple* effects of femininity, depending on context. I shall adopt this definition of discourse in my own reading of Czech texts.

Two works by Michel Foucault proved especially useful in the course of my research: 'The Order of Discourse' (1981; written in 1970) and *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, an Introduction* (1990; written in 1976). Although I did not use 'The Order of Discourse' in my actual analyses, it provided a helpful base for understanding Foucault's concept of discourse, from which I worked towards developing my own approach. In this respect, the key parts of Foucault's argument were his definitions of

the 'procedures of exclusion' (Foucault 1981, 52) and the 'procedures which permit the control of discourses' (ibid., 61). The concept of procedures of exclusion (prohibition, division and rejection, the opposition between true and false) is important for understanding both the discourses of gender (such as, antagonising 'feminine' and unfeminine' behaviour) and the environment of state socialism (for example, in state socialism, any other approach than Marxist in any discipline was placed in the realm of 'false'). From among the procedures which permit the control of discourse, the 'doctrines' were the most immediately relevant for my research: 'Doctrine binds individuals to certain types of enunciation and consequently forbids them all others; but it uses, in turn, certain types of enunciation to bind individuals amongst themselves and to differentiate them by that very fact from all others' (Foucault 1981, 64). I will work with the notion of 'doctrines' in the discourses of femininity and masculinity in the chapters dealing with these two discourses (Chapters 4, 5, and 8).

Foucault's concept of power as developed in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, an Introduction* (1990), is also useful for my work. Here I follow Mills, rather than Macdonell: that is, I focus on the instability of power relations; on the multiple effects of power; and on resistance as an intrinsic part of power. Foucault himself places repeated emphasis on exactly these properties of power. He defines it as 'the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society' (Foucault 1990, 93). Foucault locates power in relationships, which makes it part of a process, shaping these relationships through continual struggle. This accounts for the omnipresence of power, 'not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (ibid.). This feature of power to be 'produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another' (ibid.) constitutes both the strength and weakness of power. If it is not fixed and all-encompassing, it can be destabilised, which is exactly the position Mills is taking and thus differs in her evaluation of Foucault from Macdonell, who sees the concept of power as Foucault's weak spot for its inadequacy to explain revolutions and for not allowing for pluralities of resistance. Macdonell is effectively misreading Foucault, because he merely asserts that 'there is no *single* locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary' (Foucault 1990, 95–96; my emphasis). He says that 'power comes from below' (ibid., 94), that is, it is not located in one, hierarchically positioned place, but it is in every relationship. This means that revolutionary potential does not grow 'linearly', so to speak; that is, from one single motivation or idea. Instead, it can accumulate in a large number of individual relationships. However, the power in a particular relationship does not remain constant, but shifts and transforms. As Foucault says, 'the manifold relationships of force [...] are the basis for wide-ranging *effects* of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole' (Foucault 1990, 94; my emphasis). The important point here is the plural form—effects—rather than one single effect, which would be a line of argument pursued by the various theorists of ideology (see section 2.2. below). This concept of numerous effects of power will be at the core of my treatment of discourses of gender in the pre- and post-1989 Czech Republic. Foucault further argues that there is no clear divide between 'accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one' (Foucault 1990, 100). Instead,

there is a 'multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies' (ibid.). This proposition will enable me to account for the various appropriations of discourse by different groups in my textual analyses.

Norman Fairclough tries to combine the linguistic and social-science understanding of discourse in *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), in order to develop 'an approach which will be particularly useful for investigating change in language, and will be usable in studies of social and cultural change' (Fairclough 1992, 3). He constructs a 'three-dimensional' model of a discursive 'event', that is, of 'any instance of discourse', which can be seen from three perspectives: as 'a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice' (ibid., 4). The 'text' dimension is concerned with the language analysis of texts; discursive practice looks at 'the nature of the processes of text production and interpretation' (ibid.); and social practice includes social analysis of the institutional context of a discursive event. In this last dimension, Fairclough emphasises the need for linguists to consider Foucault's proposition that discourse constitutes individuals into subjects (that is, shapes their social identity), apart from the usual argument that it is social practice which alone effects discursive practice. At the same time, he criticises Foucault for not paying enough attention to text and textual analysis (that is, instances of discursive practice), which results in 'the dominant impression [...] of people being helplessly subjected to immovable systems of power' (Fairclough 1992, 57). Fairclough thus argues for the need to 'regard language as a form of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity' (ibid., 63). This approach allows him to study the relation between the use of language (that is, his understanding of discourse) and social change. The emphasis on text as a means of studying social change is important for my own research. Of particular interest to me is also Fairclough's argument of the *double* social constraints on processes of production and interpretation (Fairclough 1992, 80). They are constrained not only by the 'effectively internalised social structures, norms and conventions' (ibid.) available to the discourse participants, but also by 'the specific nature of the social practice of which they are parts, which determines what elements of members' resources are drawn upon, and how (in *normative or creative, acquiescent or oppositional* ways) they are drawn upon' (ibid.; my emphasis). It is this second constraint which is of primary importance for Fairclough and which is crucial for my own position toward the texts I will be analysing.

On the feminist front, Lois McNay provides a detailed critique of Foucault's work and its potential for feminist theory in her book *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (1992). Here she focuses on the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, in which Foucault moves his theoretical focus from the body to the self. She argues that 'in order to reveal the differences within monolithic sexual differences, it is necessary for feminists to analyse the processes through which the female body is transformed into a feminine one' (McNay 1992, 23). Such exploration is enabled by Foucault's theory of the self, because it makes possible the move from the essentially victimised, 'disciplined' female body, on which power inscribes its effect, to a more active subject, who constructs herself through practices of the self: 'In contrast to this static model of gender construction, Foucault's later idea of practices of the self implies an understanding of gender as an active and never-completed process of engendering or enculturation' (McNay 1992, 71).

McNay admits that the idea of active resistance to power was contained already in Foucault's theoretical propositions made in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, but observes that 'his concrete studies of power relations [...] tended to show power as a monolithic, dominating force' (McNay 1992, 59). She acknowledges that Foucault does not explicitly formulate a theory of gender identity, but that his notion of the practices of the self suggests 'a more active notion of the acquisition of gender identity' (ibid., 72). The importance of her work for my research lies primarily in pointing out the possibility of 'manipulating' discourses of gender within the framework of Foucault's thought, an approach developed also by other scholars whose work I will be using, such as Sara Mills (1991; 1997, above) or Dorothy Smith (1988, below).

## 2.2.: THEORIES OF IDEOLOGY

The theories of ideology were not as new a 'discovery' for me as the theories of discourse when I began this project and my thinking about the research started from this theoretical framework. However, being directed by my supervisor to read also in the area of discourse theory, I discovered the problem of differentiation between ideology and discourse. Diane Macdonell's and Sara Mills's discussion of the relation/contradiction between theories of discourse and theories of ideology revealed the need to become more familiar in depth with Western theories of ideology. In this endeavour, David Hawkes's *Ideology* (1996) proved to be a useful guide through the developments in the field. Hawkes, as he himself acknowledges, focuses on a particular definition of ideology 'as a false consciousness resulting from the belief in the autonomy and determining power of representation' (Hawkes 1996, Preface). He traces the origins of the concept of false consciousness to Greek philosophy and continues through the discussions of empiricism and idealism to the outlines of Marxist and postmodernist thought. It is the latter two treatments of ideology which are the most relevant for my research given the privileged status of Marxism in the pre-1989 Czech Republic.

Hawkes takes as his pivotal issue Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism, in which 'exchange value is the principle of false identity' which 'renders different use-values identical for the purposes of exchange' (Hawkes 1996, 182). This argument is further developed by Adorno, Althusser, Macherey, Baudrillard, Žižek and others in debates over the nature and function of representations. A great part of Hawkes's account turns on whether these thinkers treat ideology and ideas/representations as 'ideal' or 'material', which is not a concern central to my particular discussion of cultural representations. Nevertheless, Hawkes's book directed my attention to Althusser and Žižek as productive sources for my project: in particular, Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses and Žižek's belief in ideology as a part of our everyday material practice: of 'reality' itself being ideological (see both authors below).

There is little doubt that Terry Eagleton's *Ideology: an Introduction* (1991) is another outstanding contribution to the various understandings of the concept of ideology from the Enlightenment to post-Marxism, as well as a useful clarification of the contradictions and confusing propositions in the history of the concept. Eagleton admits

that not one but several ways of conceiving of ideology might be useful for various purposes. However, he contests the understanding of ideology as 'false consciousness' championed by Hawkes (above). Some of his arguments against this view are that 'ideologies must make at least some minimal sense of people's experience, must conform to some degree with what they know of social reality from their practical interaction with it' (Eagleton 1991, 14) and that 'other types of ideological enunciation are true in what they affirm but false in what they exclude' (ibid., 16). He holds that 'distortion' in the case of ideology has nothing to do with the ideological language as such, but with 'something inherent in the social structure to which that language belongs' (ibid., 28). This brings him to his argument of the connection between ideology and discourse. He suggests that 'ideology is a matter of "discourse" rather than of "language"—of certain concrete discursive effects, rather than of signification as such. It represents the points where power impacts upon *certain* utterances and inscribes itself tacitly within them' (Eagleton 1991, 223; my emphasis).

This is, of course, a variation on Foucault's concept of the *omnipresent* power. Eagleton argues that if there was nothing but power, if subjectivity was entirely an effect of power, then there would be no need for the moulding and controlling role of ideology, since there would be no place from which resistance could develop (Eagleton 1991, 47). The fact that this is not so means that whether ideologies are dominant or resistant, they acknowledge the existence of other ideologies simply by employing certain strategies to perpetuate themselves. Thus they need to be 'unifying', 'action-oriented', 'rationalising', 'legitimising', 'universalising' and 'naturalising' (Eagleton adds qualifications to all of these) (Eagleton 1991, 45). This need for identification *against another* breeds conditions for resistance against the particular ideology: which mechanism I will illustrate on the case of state-socialist ideology.

Eagleton promotes the concept of representation as important for his understanding of ideology. Political and ideological representations are not static, in the sense of merely reflecting socio-economic conditions, but 'what is represented [...] will be moulded by the practice of representation itself. Political and ideological discourses thus produce their own signifieds, conceptualise the situation in specific ways' (Eagleton 1991, 208). This is again very important for my own argument which is based on analyses of textual representations of state-socialist ideology.

The last part of Eagleton's account I would like to mention at this point is his outline of the various definitions of ideology. He finds three basic types of definitions: descriptive, pejorative and positive. He mentions Lenin as an example of someone who spoke about 'socialist ideology' in positive terms (Eagleton 1991, 44). This is a key point for my treatment of the state-socialist ideology: I look at it from the point of view of self-consciously proclaimed *positive* ideology, but one which was also *dominant* and used the 'rationalising', 'legitimising', and other strategies cited above.

It is when Eagleton needs to speak at the same time about 'a *particular* model of ideology—that of fascism and Stalinism' and 'the quite different discourses of liberal capitalism' (Eagleton 1991, 198; original emphasis) that he runs into a terminological difficulty with 'ideology' and 'discourse'. In the argument from which the quotation above is taken, he contests Althusser's concept of the fixity of subjects under ideology and pleads for more agency for the subjects. I will try to resolve this difficulty at least at

the level of terminology in Chapter 3. Part of my account will contest Eagleton's view that 'the rationalist view of ideologies as conscious, well-articulated systems of belief is clearly inadequate: it misses the affective, unconscious, mythical or symbolic dimension of ideology' (Eagleton 1991, 221). I will argue that state-socialist ideology was based on a system of institutions *especially* and *overtly* designed to uphold the ideology (see Althusser's concept of ISA below), and that to bring the existence of state-endorsed 'positivist' ideologies to light greatly contributes to understanding of texts produced in such an environment.

Louis Althusser's essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', originally written in 1969 (Althusser 1984), provided me with a suitable terminological distinction between what I term the state-socialist ideology (see Chapter 3) and the resistances to it, for which (even allowing for the complex overlap between the terms already discussed) I use the term *discourse*. The important point Althusser makes is the close connection of ideology with *institutional* power. He distinguishes between the Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA): the former 'functions by violence', the latter by ideology (Althusser 1984, 19). Arguably, in the conditions of state socialism, *compliance with ideology* was supervised by a Repressive State Apparatus. For Althusser, ideology 'represents the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (ibid., 36). Ideology's function is to recruit all individuals as subjects by a process he calls 'hailing' or 'interpellation' (ibid., 47). What he means is that there is no escape to a space outside of ideology: 'individuals are always-already subjects' (ibid., 50). This part of Althusser's argument was heavily criticised by Foucault, Hawkes, Eagleton and others mainly for its definite, closed nature: if there is no outside of the ideology, then there is no place from which resistance can develop. Nevertheless, the concept of the material existence of ideology in institutions, practices and rituals proved useful for my argument about state-socialist ideology.

A review of theories of ideology from a literary perspective would not be complete without Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (Macherey 1978), originally written in 1966. Although his postulate that 'the work is what it does not say' (Macherey 1978, 87) is now so central to literary inquiry that it may seem redundant to explicate this position, I will outline the part of his argument which runs as the backbone of my justification for considering middlebrow texts as locations of a clash of discourses. Macherey asserts that a literary work is not autonomous in that its creation is always tied up with the circumstances of its production, of which an important part is ideology. Ideology resides in the 'not said' of the literary text, in that which the text cannot say: 'there the elaboration of the utterance is acted out, in a sort of journey to silence' (Macherey 1978, 87). A literary work, however, cannot, 'become its own criticism' (ibid., 64): its critique of ideology is only implicit, 'if only because it resists being incorporated into the flow of ideology in order to give a *determinate representation* of it' (ibid.; original emphasis). No book, then, is ever complete. However, the task of the critic is to uphold this incompleteness, because it is 'the true *reason* for its composition' (ibid., 79; original emphasis). It follows that meaning lies 'in the relation, between the implicit and the explicit' (ibid., 87). The critic has to expose the 'splitting within the work', the work's 'unconscious', which is history (ibid., 94).

Macherey develops his argument further in the later essay 'On Literature as an Ideological Form', co-authored with Etienne Balibar (Balibar and Macherey 1981) and originally written in 1974. In this essay, the authors draw on Althusser's ISA essay and move from the relation of literature and its conditions of production to the effects literature has in its social context. They argue that literature functions as an ideological form in that it is in an 'internal relationship' (Balibar and Macherey 1981, 84) with history. They define ideological forms as 'manifested through the workings and history of determinate practices in determinate social relations, what Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA)' (ibid., 84). As such, literature participates in the process of 'hailing' or 'interpellation' of individuals as subjects—Authors, Works, Readers, and Characters. In order for the subjects to be produced, they have to be contrasted with objects, placed 'in and against a world of "real" things' (Balibar and Macherey 1981, 93): 'The realistic effect is the basis of this interpellation which makes characters or merely discourse "live" and which makes readers take up an attitude towards imaginary struggles as they would towards real ones, although undangerously' (ibid.). The literary effect thus reproduces other ideological effects, rather than just being their product, by 'constraining [socially determined individuals] materially to treat literary texts in a certain way' (Balibar and Macherey 1981, 94). Similarly, criticism, 'the discourse of literary ideology' (ibid., 95), participates in reproducing the ideological effects of literary works. Balibar and Macherey conclude that literary texts always reproduce *the same ideology* (a necessary conclusion from Althusser's ISA concept), which is the ideology of the dominant class.

Although I do not endorse this conclusion, because that would not leave any space for resistance and/or other effects, some of Macherey and Balibar's insights proved helpful for my textual analyses. First is the assertion that 'the primary material' of a literary text are 'ideological contradictions which are not specifically *literary* but political, religious etc.' (Balibar and Macherey 1981, 95; my emphasis). The second point is that the 'literary effect' does not belong only to the domain of the aesthetic, but 'it sets up a process itself: the rituals of literary consumption and "cultural" practice' (94).

The Slovene philosopher Slavoj Žižek's work is a refreshing and important contribution to the theory of ideology. Unlike the other authors I have been reviewing, Žižek comes from a background of state socialism, although the Yugoslav version was certainly very different from the Czech one. His outline of the concept of ideology in western thought engages with what he refers to as 'real Socialism' and thus is key for my treatment of state-socialist ideology. In the essay 'The Spectre of Ideology' (Žižek 1994), he advances the argument that ideology does not need to function as a 'lie necessarily experienced as truth' (Žižek 1994, 13).<sup>1</sup> He recalls the example of 'Fascist ideology' given by the German philosopher Wolfgang Fritz Haug in his criticism of Adorno: the promoters of the ideology themselves did not take it seriously. This, for Haug, 'asserts the founding gesture of the ideological as such: the call to unconditional subordination and to "irrational" sacrifice' (Žižek 1994, 14). Žižek maintains that this 'cynical ideology', the subjects' distance from it, is itself ideological and necessary for proper functioning

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'real socialism' is sometimes used to denote the whole period of communist rule until its fall in the 1980s.

of the system. Here he gives the examples of late-capitalist and late-'real-Socialist' cynicisms as showing a substantial difference in how the respective systems functioned:

It is as if in late capitalism 'words do not count', no longer oblige: they increasingly seem to lose their performative power; whatever one says is drowned in the general indifference; [...] Perhaps the key feature of the symbolic economy of the late 'real Socialism' was, on the contrary, the almost paranoiac *belief in the power of the Word*—the state and the ruling party reacted with utmost nervousness and panic at the slightest public criticism, as if some vague critical hints in an obscure poem published in a low circulation literary journal, or an essay in an academic philosophical journal, possessed the potential capacity to trigger the explosion of the entire socialist system. (Žižek 1994, 18; original emphasis)

By making this point, he clarifies the very different notions of ideology that have been embraced by 'East' and 'West': late-capitalist Western society is believed to rely on 'argumentative persuasion and free consent, "manipulated" and fabricated as it may be' (Žižek 1994, 18), while 'real Socialism' operated through force and coercion. Yet, it is in 'real Socialism' where the performative role of language was crucial to the everyday functioning of the ideology and individuals' lived experience within it. Žižek thus arrives at a similar dilemma to Eagleton's when trying to relate the two ideological systems. He tries to resolve the problem of keeping them both under one 'umbrella' by introducing the concept of the 'spectre of ideology', a term he borrowed from Jacques Derrida's book on Marx *Spectre de Marx* (Derrida 1993). The 'spectre' occupies the gap between the reality and the real, 'the spectre gives body to that which escapes (the symbolically structured reality)' (Žižek 1994, 21). The spectre, in other words, is the 'formal matrix, on which are grafted various ideological formations' (ibid.). While this concept undoubtedly enriches the theories of ideology, its use for my analysis is necessarily limited, because Žižek's argument suggests the impossibility of a critical position from within the spectral space. However, his point about the role of language in 'real-Socialist' ideology will be crucial for my analyses of texts produced before the political changes of 1989.

Žižek returns to the problem of subjects not believing in a certain ideology and yet 'doing it' in his later essay 'The Supposed Subjects of Ideology' (Žižek 1997). He argues for the 'subject supposed to believe' (Žižek 1997, 41): 'every honest man has a profound need to find another subject who would believe in his place' (ibid., 42). He illustrates this mechanism on the case of an article on a Soviet politician who fell out of favour in the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* in 1954 when the publisher sent a letter to all subscribers asking them to cut out and return the article. In replacement, they received another, 'neutral' article on another subject, which filled the place in correct alphabetical sequence and length. Žižek is asking, for whom was this '(semblance of) wholeness' performed if the subscribers knew about the act of re-writing history. He concludes that 'the only answer is, of course: *for the non-existent subject supposed to believe*' (Žižek 1997, 56–57; original emphasis). He then combines Marxian and Lacanian approaches to develop an argument of how Lacan's 'barred' subject, 'the pure void with no positive substantial content' (ibid., 56), the subject of ideology, is constituted. The function of the 'subject supposed to believe' is to do something for me, that is, to believe for me. Žižek draws a parallel between this substitution and the 'substitution of a *signifier* for the subject [...]: a *signifier* is precisely an object-thing which substitutes for me, which acts in the place of me' (Žižek 1997, 45; original emphasis). From here derives what he calls the 'paradox of the notion of the "performative", or speech act' (ibid., 46): In everyday

experience, uttering words commenting on something somebody else does, symbolically carries out the act itself (such as, crying out 'Oops' if I see somebody slip—Žižek's example) and thus deprives me of authorship: 'the "big Other" (the symbolic institution) speaks through me' (ibid.). Žižek concludes:

This primordial substitution of the Big Other, the Symbolic Order, for the Real of the immediate life-substance [...], gives rise [...] to the 'barred subject' who is then 'represented' by the signifiers, that is on whose behalf signifiers 'act', who acts through signifiers. (Žižek 1997, 47)

He points to the paradox of this phenomenon: it 'subvert[s] the standard opposition of 'subjective' and 'objective' (ibid., 53) and gives rise to the category of 'objectively subjective'. This category is useful for understanding how state-ideology was maintained and Žižek actually provides this explanation: people in that regime did not support it through 'subjective semblance (nobody really believed in it), but rather through a kind of "objective semblance", a semblance in the actual functioning of the regime, in the way the ruling ideology was materialised in ideological rituals and apparatuses' (Žižek 1997, 54–55). Several Czech writers make references to this occurrence, such as, when they cite Havel's example from his essay 'The Power of the Powerless' (Havel 1992a) of a grocer decorating his shop-window for some official holiday, although he does not believe in the symbols and slogans he puts on display (Možný 1991, 24; Šmejkalová-Strickland 1994a, 202).

### 2.3.: FEMININITY

It is perhaps impossible to try and select even a fraction of influential texts dealing with femininity, because of their sheer quantity and disciplinary spread. Therefore, in this review, I will focus on several texts which help to set out the vocabulary and agenda for a discussion of femininity in popular texts. Since my aim is to confront the Western understanding of femininity with the Czech case in a particular period, I preferred works on femininity from around the time in which the texts in my sample were produced.

A review of literature on the understanding of femininity—at least during second-wave feminism—cannot start without at least a brief mention of Kate Millett's influential work *Sexual Politics* (first published 1970; my references to the 1990 edition). Millett carries out a comprehensive analysis of the various aspects of patriarchy. She includes her understanding of femininity in a brief section on the ideological aspect of patriarchy. Although *Sexual Politics* is a relatively old work, it is useful to mention it at this place because it sets down some elementary categories which are also important for later research in femininity (and masculinity). Millett's analysis of patriarchy, now a feminist classic, is perhaps the first account which clearly defines the feminine and the masculine characteristics in terms of the *ideology* of patriarchy. She looks at three components of socialisation, through which individuals give their 'consent' to the practice of 'sexual politics' (that is, a system of domination on the basis of biological sex). These components are: temperament, role and social status. As to temperament, 'aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy' are considered masculine values, while 'passivity, ignorance, docility, "virtue", and ineffectuality' are regarded as

feminine values; social role accords 'domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male' (Millett 1990, 26). She observes that this role places women in the realm of biological experience, while anything which is 'distinctly human' belongs to the men's role. Millett concludes that the inferior social status generally given to the female is a logical consequence of the distribution of temperamental qualities and social roles. She addresses the crucial difference in what constitutes femininity, and which runs through most of the work on femininity I encountered during my research: 'internal' traits on the one hand, and 'external' manifestations—social interaction and perception—on the other. I will be mostly concerned with the latter, focusing on gesture and appearance, although my considerations will frequently overlap with properties ascribed to female psychology.

In her work *Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* (1983), Marjorie Ferguson carried out a detailed analysis of, what she calls, the 'cult of femininity' as presented in women's magazines. She looks into how this cult is constituted and how it operates. She observes that women's magazines cultivate femininity as a *difference*—a difference from masculinity. A pronounced feature of femininity is that it is a *learned* process which is then *performed*. This implies that femininity is not what the woman is. The learning begins in early childhood and women's magazines give advice to women of all ages how to achieve the ideals of womanhood. Magazines stimulate women to achieve higher results in their performance of femininity, when their message often is: 'You can do this better, you can do it.' I would suggest that this strategy presupposes the existence of traditionally 'masculine traits' in women: ambition and desire for success—but, tamed within the bounds of femininity. The concept of femininity as a performance of a learned role is particularly useful for my reading of *For Unknown Reasons*. The nurturing of 'masculine' qualities is manifest in some of the billboards addressed to women with which I deal in Chapter 9.

Ferguson explores, above all, women's interests and values implied by the 'cult'. She finds in the content of women's magazines the following list of feminine values: 'self-control', 'self-esteem', 'romantic love', presented as 'the necessary and sufficient condition for a heterosexual relationship' (Ferguson 1983, 113), 'work', 'wealth', 'friendship', 'family life', and 'good looks'. We will see later, in the discussion on the research on masculinity, that some of these values, particularly, self-control, self-esteem, work and wealth, have been traditionally conceived of as masculine. My analysis of *For Unknown Reasons* shows how these values are incorporated in the romantic narrative and also into the state-socialist environment, in which several of them were transferred to both sexes.

Just like Ferguson, Janice Winship also chose women's magazines as the object of her analysis in *Inside Women's Magazines* (1987b). She observes that women's magazines strive to please their readers. For Winship, pleasure is not subjective, but it is learnt: 'It depends on being familiar with the cultural codes of what is meant to be pleasurable, and on occupying the appropriate social spaces' (Winship 1987b, 52), which means the spheres of (hetero)sexuality and domesticity. The latter is then associated with pleasure by the logic that women's work belongs to the sphere of leisure—from the male perspective, because women are men's pleasure. Particularly, adverts in women's magazines present domesticity and pleasure as creative through

addressing the woman consumer as the designer of kitchens, menus, wardrobes and other locations of the private sphere. They often present these 'feminine fictions' as ways of achieving individuality. For Winship, this individuality is only second-rate: 'any achievement of 'individuality' has a somewhat hollow ring, barely registering on a "higher" masculine scale of values' (Winship 1987b, 64), and presents 'an unwarranted optimism about the position of women and what it is possible for individual women to accomplish, the spectre of superwoman looms' (ibid., 65). This again touches on the, at least, dualistic, if not pluralistic, nature of femininity, and the paradoxical way in which individuality (traditionally a 'masculine' concept) is rendered feminine. My reading of *For Unknown Reasons* will show how even this 'feminine' individuality can be politicised in the state-socialist context.

Dorothy Smith develops a Foucauldian model of 'Femininity as Discourse' (1988). She focuses on the activities and 'labour' which go into the production of femininity. For Smith, femininity is an act, which is learned and performed (in this, she is close to the concept of femininity in Ferguson 1983; Bartky 1988, below; and Butler 1990, below). She argues that femininity, as a form of social consciousness, is constituted through 'actual practices, actual activities, taking place in real time, in real places, using definite material means and under definite material conditions' (Smith 1988, 38). This leads her to argue that 'femininity' is 'a social organisation of relations among women and mediated by texts' (ibid., 39). In her understanding of femininity as a discourse, she starts with Foucault's idea of discourse as expressed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972; first published 1969), which she summarises as:

An assemblage of 'statements' arising in an ongoing 'conversation', mediated by texts, among speakers and hearers separated from one another in time and space. The notion of discourse displaces the analysis from the text as originating in writer or thinker, to the discourse itself as an ongoing intertextual process. (Smith 1988, 39)

However, she criticises Foucault for making texts central and the subjects submitted to them by way of socialisation. Instead, she argues that although the subjects orient themselves to the texts, they remain active in their social relations. The texts themselves organise social relations, but they are also embedded in them. Thus, to view femininity as discourse means to address it 'as a complex of actual relations vested in texts' (Smith 1988, 41). The texts are not self-contained, but they are 'indexed', by which she means that they contain gaps (coded gaps), which are then decoded or supplied by the woman, 'the practitioner of the discourse of femininity' (ibid., 44). In this she differs from Macherey's view of literary production subjected to ideology, the view that the text says what it does not say (Macherey 1978). Smith says that the text says *also* what it does not say and this whole 'textual discourse creates new forms of social relations' (Smith 1988, 43): 'women use, play with, break with, and oppose' the codes placed in the texts and, therefore, the discourse of femininity becomes 'an ongoing, unfolding, historically evolving social organisation in which women and sometimes men are actively at work' (Smith 1988, 53). As I already set out in the Introduction, my own approach to the texts I investigate very much follows the strategy adopted by Smith in looking for the 'coded gaps' containing messages about the 'real relations'.

Sandra Lee Bartky (1988) defines femininity in terms of external appearance in 'Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernisation of Patriarchal Power' (1988). She focuses

on the manifestations of femininity as attached to the body (that is, gestures and appearance), and theorises the feminine body in a critical reading of the docile and disciplined body as proposed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1991; first published 1975). She accepts Foucault's concept of individuals being subject to disciplinary practices in relation to their bodies, but she criticises him for being gender blind:

But Foucault treats the body throughout as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. [...] Women, like men are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine. (Bartky 1988, 63–64)

She argues, that if Foucault sees institutions as those who impose the disciplinary practices on individuals, he misses 'the extent to which discipline can be institutionally *unbound* as well as institutionally bound' (ibid., 75; original emphasis). This is the case of femininity, whose model is forced upon the consciousness of women, while 'the disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular' (ibid., 74), it is 'an anonymous patriarchal Other' (ibid., 72).

A departure from Smith, in Bartky's argument, is in her negative evaluation of the specialised knowledge necessary to produce the feminine body. Together with Smith, she acknowledges that femininity includes work and involves acquisition of skills, but she then goes on to see this work, skills and specialised knowledge only as disciplinary practices. The woman, in this framework, is entirely subjected to the discourse, there is no space for her to dissent, while dissent from and negotiation with the discourse of femininity are activities that Smith identifies as potentially empowering for some groups of women. This necessarily leads Bartky to the conclusion that the skills and knowledge involved in creating femininity are in contradiction to the ideals of feminism, although 'discipline may bring with it a certain development of a person's powers' (Bartky 1988, 77). Her argument does not open up the possibility that women may create communities through sharing and negotiating the skills and knowledge, which is a point emphasised, for example, by Smith (1988, above), Modleski (1990; see section 2.5.), and Radway (1994b; see section 2.5.). Bartky's work was important for me, in particular, in the phase of the research when I was trying to work through the position of femininity presented in my textual samples to the ideological/discursive environment. I was also confronted with prescriptive, 'disciplinarian' images of femininity, but I was trying to acknowledge also their other effects.

I will conclude this part of the literature review by a reading of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Her concern reaches beyond femininity alone, as she looks into the origins of gender in general. She conducts a genealogical inquiry into the category of gender, that is, she investigates 'the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin' (ix; original emphasis). Thus she considers the issue of identity, the relevance of the category of 'women' for feminism, the division between sex and gender, and the roles of the body and sexuality in constructing gender identity. Her theory of gender as 'performative' is the most productive part of her argument for my research. She maintains that 'if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a

gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way' (Butler 1990, 6). Gender identity, then, can be understood as a '*relation* among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts' (ibid., 10; original emphasis) and, as such, can be destabilised. The gendered self is 'produced by the regulation of attributes along culturally established lines of coherence' (ibid., 24) and, therefore, 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender' (ibid., 25). This brings Butler to the crux of her argument that 'that identity is *performatively* constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (ibid.; my emphasis). In her theory, gender is not a fact, but an act, and is determined by a process of regulated repetition. The aim of this process is naturalisation of gender identities. She proposes that the task for feminism is not to try and get outside the constructed identities, but 'to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions [...] and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them' (Butler 1990, 147). Investigating challenges to the traditional models of gender will be also my project in this research.

#### **2.4.: MASCULINITY**

Similarly to my selection of texts in the field of femininity, also in the case of masculinity I was looking for texts which would help to define common models of masculinity available in Western scholarship around the time when the texts in my sample were produced, and against which I could read state-socialist and post-state-socialist texts. The latter condition was somewhat difficult to observe, due to a certain time-lag in the field of men's studies in relation to women's studies caused by the simple fact that pro-feminist men's studies appeared only after second-wave feminism formulated its basic agenda. Although I found an excellent study of the models of masculinity in English society by Andrew Tolson first published in 1977 (my references to the 1987 edition) and I will be drawing heavily on it, the other writings are from as late as the early nineties. There is, nevertheless, an advantage to this with respect to my textual sample: the images of masculinity on billboards also appeared with a 'time-lag' compared to the images of femininity. They date from 1994–96, while the billboards representing femininity are from 1993–94 (just a couple of years made a big difference in the transitional Czech Republic of the early 1990s). Finding studies of masculinity which would *only* consider popular culture was a problem, too. Two of the reviewed texts (Segal 1990; Horrocks 1994) more or less fall in this category, but the other two (Tolson 1987; Morgan 1992) are more social-science oriented. It may be caused by the trend in the men's studies at the time to attempt, first of all, a complex understanding of masculinity, rather than its particular aspects and manifestations, such as in representations of men and masculinity in a specific type of magazines or television programmes. The explanation of this phenomenon is again the relative novelty of the whole field of men's studies. Theorists working in the field had the entire and abundant feminist research into particular aspects and the social and cultural construction of gender behind them, and the untouched territory of the research in men and masculinity ahead of them.

I will draw on the work of a number of scholars in my textual analyses, such as

Jeff Hearn (1996) and R. W. Connell (1995), but at this stage, I will introduce only the four main texts which provided me with the basic concepts. Thus one of the first comprehensive studies of masculinity, Andrew Tolson's *The Limits of Masculinity* (1987; first published 1977), draws on the English (and American) tradition in the gender division of roles within the family when he argues that masculinity is institutionalised through family, schools, and peer-groups in early childhood: the absent father representing the world of work and money, and the mother at home who mediates the father to her son. On the example of the story of his great-grandfather, Tolson demonstrates three pivotal characteristics of middle-class masculinity: work, achievement and promotion in the world, and moral integrity. He recognises that much of the rites surrounding the building of middle-class masculinity through the institution of public schools is dying out, but that the values defining masculinity remain the same in society: 'competitiveness, personal ambition, social responsibility, and emotional restraint' (Tolson 1987, 39). Working-class masculinity is, for him, 'characterised by an immediate, aggressive style of behaviour, [rather] than a vision of personal achievement' (ibid., 28). Working classes develop a kind of 'subordinate masculinity' through peer-groups. In them, masculinity is not constituted by individualistic competitiveness, but rather by acted-out collective toughness:

The dramatic assertion of masculinity thus becomes an end in itself—always a suggestion, never a realisation, of potential power. [...] In essence, this violence expresses an inner desperation, a lack of self-confidence. The working-class boy is beginning to learn that he is a part of a world which condemns him, inevitably, to fail. (Tolson 1987, 45)

Tolson concludes that although masculine identity becomes differentiated according to class, it still retains the continuity of gender. Masculinity is institutionalised not only through learning in the above institutions, but here "institutionalisation" also implies a certain social regulation, even an exploitation of 'gender-identity' (ibid.). Tolson's two models of masculinity—middle-class and working-class—have been crucial for my readings of *Memento* and, to an extent also for the analyses of masculinity in billboard images. I will show how these two models were incorporated in the state-socialist ideology.

Lynne Segal's *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (1990) is an invaluable resource in mapping the research on masculinity in culture and reviewing the types of masculinity (and 'anti-masculinity') in modern Western social consciousness. With reference to the works of various researchers, Segal suggests that:

'Masculinity' [...] is best understood as transcending the personal, as a heterogeneous set of ideas, constructed around assumptions of social power, which are lived out and reinforced, or perhaps denied and challenged, in multiple and diverse ways within a whole social system in which relations of authority, work, and domestic life are organised, in the main, along hierarchical gender lines. (Segal 1990, 288)

Thus, along with the findings of Tolson (1987), the construction of masculinity centres around the world of paid work ('skilled' work as she points out—Segal 1990, 297), while women at the workplace represent a threat to the masculine status. In social consciousness, men continue to be associated with 'power' (a point central to the argument presented by Morgan 1992, below), with 'economic and social power' (Segal 1990, 295), while women are equalled with 'love' and the domestic sphere. This is despite the development in consumer society, in which the traditional 'macho' image has been challenged with the sexualised male body and the ideal of the "new man"—a

softer, more emotional, self conscious sex object himself' (ibid., 291) since the 1980s. Even this new man, she argues, retains his power over women and other groups of men.

Homosexual men present another challenge to the traditional masculinity whether by embracing the 'feminine' or stylising themselves into the image of a 'gay macho'. The former shows the way to straight men in the questions of external appearance (concern for fashion or cosmetics) and in 'the idea of more open, imaginative and responsible attitudes to sex, and of men nursing and caring for each other' (this is said in the context of gay men's attitude to AIDS—Segal 1990, 164). The latter—'gay macho'—places the macho image into an ironical context and thus assists its disruption. Also, according to some of her research, the image of muscular, aggressive masculinity is more an idea (or, we may say, a discourse) rather than reality: 'In an urban, industrial society the traditional pursuit of manhood via displays of physical prowess and courage seem increasingly obsolete. Mind rather than muscle, manipulation rather than endurance, are the more likely attributes of men with power today' (Segal 1990, 130).<sup>2</sup>

Segal's contribution to the discussions of masculinity is in that she sees masculinity and femininity as mutually dependent, which means that any change in women necessarily affects men, but because it is men who have the power over women, gender relations can change only if men change. She concludes with an idealistic vision that if men helped women in their struggle against exploitation in public and private spheres, 'it will spell the end of masculinity as we have known it' (Segal 1990, 204). Any considerations of her conclusion are years away with respect to the Czech environment, in which discussions of masculinity are yet to begin. Nevertheless, Segal's summary of the 'new man' model emerging in the 1980s will be a complementary model to the two models presented by Tolson (1987) in my discussion of masculinity in Czech texts and, more specifically, in the billboard samples.

Drawing on feminist research, David H. L. Morgan's study *Discovering Men* (1992) is concerned primarily with problems in researching men and masculinity from an interdisciplinary perspective, which provides a methodological background to the various arguments of the other authors. Morgan focuses on employment and unemployment, because he sees work as central to the construction of traditional male identity and status. He advocates the term 'masculinities', rather than 'masculinity', but admits that it needs to be discussed further.

He claims that we can learn about men's perceptions from their writing, however sexist it may be—although we have to qualify our observations in terms of sexual preference, class, race, and culture. He points out the fundamental difference between writing about women and writing about men. He argues that when men are discussed in academic writing or elsewhere, their identity does not turn around their being men, as it happens when women are discussed and researched. This point became relevant for my consideration of *Memento*, written by a man, when it became obvious that the narrative voice which presents itself as 'gender-neutral' in terms of the values to which it appeals, is in reality coloured by a particular understanding of masculinity.

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<sup>2</sup> She refers to Raphael (1988).

Roger Horrocks also draws on feminist research in *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies and Realities* (1994). Horrocks is a therapist and his work follows from his experience, although he looks also into popular culture (see below). He asserts that masculinity is not fixed, but 'heterogeneous, contextually sensitive, interrelational' (Horrocks 1994, 5), a point relevant for my reading of *Memento* against the state-socialist context. However, he confirms that there is a unifying element legitimising the term 'masculinity' rather than 'masculinities' for this field of study: men have to distance themselves from women, they have to prove that *a man is not a woman*.

His main thesis is that patriarchy is harmful to men: it deprives them of humanity because it forbids them to show emotion, vulnerability, any traits that might be considered feminine. Horrocks calls this a process of 'masochistic self-denial', through which men construct 'a self-destructive' identity. He sees power as the core of patriarchal gender relations and masculine identity. To become a man and to acquire power, a man has to discard the more sensitive and vulnerable side of himself:

This is the cryptic message of masculinity: don't accept who you are. Conceal your weakness, your tears, your fear of death, your love for others. Conceal your impotence. Conceal your potency. Disparage women, since they remind you too much of your own feminine side. Disparage gay men since that's too near the bone as well. Fake your behaviour. Dominate others, then you can fool everyone, especially yourself, then you feel powerful. (Horrocks 1994, 25)

Horrocks draws upon anthropological research in his thesis to argue that men see women as powerful and fear them, and therefore impose restrictions on them. He further characterises masculinity as 'the ability to suffer and remain cut off from human feelings. Male hegemony has a very dark shadow side: masochism, self-destruction, self-denial' (Horrocks 1994, 42). He sees the discourse of masculinity as ambivalent and full of contradictions: 'It constantly wrestles with the feminine, absorbs it and then expels it; it purports to be tough, and then reveals its fragility; it seeks to hide neediness and intense feeling—and privately clings to others' (ibid., 48). Again, these contradictions will be seen in *Memento*, when the protagonist is presented at the same time in antagonism and in relation to women.

Horrocks devotes one chapter of his book to the analysis of male stereotypes in popular culture. Just as it is socially unacceptable for women to display anger or aggression, aggression is the only emotion that men are permitted to express. He makes an interesting connection with his previous arguments on masculine values and the imagery surrounding the male body in popular culture:

The two critical areas of the body for many men are head and the penis. The head is the instrument of thought, and therefore the source of intellectual and organisational power; the penis, while potentially the most potent, is also the most vulnerable area. (Horrocks 1994, 157)

This will be manifest in *Memento*, when the destruction of the protagonist is marked by the loss of reason and potency, although, as I will argue, it is presented as an ultimate failure of the body. Also, the masochistic and self-destructive aspects of masculinity are strongly represented in the text: it connects to the central character's inability to develop 'normal' masculinity.

## 2.5.: FEMINIST THEORY

Most of the feminist literature I considered in the section on femininity is critical of popular cultural forms and their contribution to the stereotypical feminine imagery, although, particularly Smith (1998) acknowledges the possibility of agency even within the popular cultural discourse. Therefore, in my search for suitable critical sources for studying Czech middlebrow fiction texts, I looked for feminist criticism which tries to explore how the study of popular literary genres can *contribute* to our knowledge of women's reading experience and how these genres can even be viewed as sources of women's empowerment. Two studies of this kind have now become feminist classics: Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (first published in 1982, my references to the 1990 edition) and Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture* (first published 1984, my references to the 1994 edition).

Modleski is interested how three popular genres—Harlequin romances, soap operas and Gothic novels—'speak to very real problems and tensions in women's lives' (Modleski 1990, 14). She maintains that their narrative strategies are designed to 'smooth over these tensions' and help women cope in a dignified way with the often restrictive circumstances of their lives. The argument of popular genres addressing real-life tensions is important for my analyses of texts produced in the oppressive influence of both state-socialist ideology and patriarchal discourse. I will be looking at middlebrow, rather than very schematic texts like Harlequin Romances, but Modleski's study is still relevant, as she shows how contemporary romances developed from 'more serious' genres, such as domestic and sensational novels of the nineteenth century and so-called women's film of the 1930 and 1940s. In other words, 'my' middlebrow novels belong thematically in the same group of texts as romances or soap operas.

The 'disappearing act' relating to the immersion of the reader into the romance and to the heroine's desire to obliterate herself from her circumstances (and often from the world) is similar to Radway's (below) findings about the readers' reasons for reading: as an escape from their mundane routines. Modleski follows this concept and analyses a number of women's psychological conditions which find their expression in the 'hidden plots' (Modleski 1990, 25) of popular narratives. Some of the main features of romances are, according to her: the heroine's anger; the desire for revolt and revenge; the reader's superior knowledge of the plot since romances use the same formula over and over again; and the seemingly impersonal third person narrative. The third person narration allows the reader to distance herself from the heroine—and thus have superior power—but it is often told from the heroine's point of view (what narratologists call *focalisation*—Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 71–85), which allows a great deal of identification with the heroine. All these points are again important for my analysis: reading for release from everyday oppressiveness, and empowering the reader through giving her superior knowledge, while keeping her within the boundaries of the information the author chooses to provide.

While Modleski used a traditional method of literary research, in which the critic with superior training attempts to explain the possibilities of the text, Radway approached her project ethnographically by interviewing a group of female romance readers to learn about their motivations for reading and about the significance of the texts for them.

In her introduction to the British edition of *Reading the Romance* (1994b), Janice Radway looks critically at the context in which her study was produced. She observes that she began her research out of the efforts of her department to re-think the nature and dynamics of American culture through popular, rather than high, cultural genres. Her main focus is 'what a literary text can be taken as evidence for' (Radway 1994b, 2). However, she herself states that the book has been read 'as a contribution to feminist scholarship or as a contribution to discussions within communications theory about the status of the reader and the nature of mass cultural consumption' (ibid.). This makes obvious its relevance for my inquiry into the possible functions of 'best-readers' during state socialism: can there be a feminist case made in favour of these texts produced under the 'joint censorship' of state-socialist and patriarchal ideologies?

Radway interviewed a group of women romance-readers in some way associated with a romance review newsletter published by a woman bookseller in a small American town. Interpretations of the numerous questionnaires and interviews brought Radway to the realisation that romances are a *compensatory literature* (Radway 1994b, 95); reading romances provides an escape from everyday women's roles and a release from tensions:

Romantic escape is, therefore, a temporary but literal denial of the demands women recognise as an integral part of their roles as nurturing wives and mothers. It is also a figurative journey to a utopian state of total receptiveness where the reader, as a result of her identification with the heroine, feels herself the *object* of someone else's attention and solicitude. (Radway 1994b, 97)

This argument can very likely be extended to the state-socialist 'best-readers', and particularly in combination with another observation by Radway, which is that the women valued romance reading because it was *private* (ibid., 92; my emphasis). The appreciation of the fictional texts looked at in this study has to take into consideration the fact that, unlike publishing, the privacy of reading (and thinking) was something which was very hard for the state to control.

Another important point Radway makes is that her respondents were not only fully aware that romances were fictions which had little or nothing to do with real life, but also that they had fairly precise criteria for what they considered a good romance:

Romances are valuable to them in proportion to their lack of resemblance to the real world. They choose their romances carefully in an attempt to assure themselves of a reading experience that will make them feel happy and hold out the promise of utopian bliss, a state they willingly acknowledge to be rare in the real world but one, nevertheless, that they do not want to relinquish as a conceptual possibility. (Radway 1994b, 99)

A romance had to provide particular emotional satisfaction to the reader, otherwise Radway's respondents considered it failed, because it did not allow a complete escape to the fantasy of being the focus of someone else's attention. A frequently mentioned feature of a good romance was the educational value of the romance setting. Not only 'learning from her reading' was something that the woman could present to her family as a justification for reading (and buying) romances, but it also linked her, essentially private activity, with values generally recognised as good in her society. A crowding with information is a prominent feature of two of my central fictional texts for analysis: Frýbová's *For Unknown Reasons* and John's *Memento*. Both these texts also often emphasise the importance of work and learning: two values praised (also) by state socialism.

Radway's ultimate conclusion is that although romance reading can be a subversive activity, the texts themselves reinforce the traditional sexual division of labour and gender imagery: 'the discourse itself actively insists on desirability, naturalness, and benefits of [the role prescribed to women by culture] by portraying it not as the imposed necessity that it is but as a freely designed, personally controlled, individual choice' (Radway 1994b, 208). It, therefore, does not question the traditional hierarchies of heterosexual gender relations.

Bridget Fowler is another scholar conducting a study of romance readership. Her study of Scottish women-readers, *The Alienated Reader: Women and Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century* (1991), revolves around the issue of to what extent the readers' literary tastes are determined by their class. Her argumentation follows from Pierre Bourdieu's theory that 'cultural consumption both intensifies and helps reproduce class inequalities' (Fowler 1991, 115). She modifies his division of culture consumers into four groups by dividing her readers into five categories by taste: (1) legitimate taste (that is, readers of 'high' literature); (2) middlebrow taste (those 'who know only the most accessible works of the masters'—*ibid.*); (3) the 'radical canon of popular literature'; (4) the non-formulaic, or less formulaic, uncanonised fiction: the "Cookson" group; and, finally, (5) the formulaic romantic fiction' (Fowler 1991, 120). The 'Cookson' group, that is, the group of readers with preference for the kind of fiction written by Catherine Cookson, seems to show similar characteristics to the readers interviewed by Radway:

'Cookson' readers had no higher education but were sufficiently perspicacious to require elements of realism rather than social myths within their novels. They wished to educate themselves when they read. However, pleasure in fantasies of individual happiness, especially a vision of well-deserved material success, were still important redemptive elements for these women. (Fowler 1991, 127)

I will show in my readings of the Czech novels *For Unknown Reasons* and, to an extent, *Memento*, that these novels also seem to follow the criteria required by this type of readers in both structure and content, although I have no empirical data available to prove my case. The hypothesis of there existing similar 'categories' of readers will provide me with a suitable framework for reading these novels against the background of state-socialist environment.

Having said this, Fowler's class-oriented approach is a problematic concept to apply in the more-or-less 'classless' Czech society during the period of state socialism and in the first years after its collapse. However, she makes at least two important observations which might be useful even for that context. First, she makes a connection between broadening one's literary tastes toward high (or 'legitimate', as she calls it) literature and the labour movement. Since the Czech state always placed emphasis on educating the masses and, especially, on the advancement of the working class, Fowler's insight may help to explain the popularity of literature with pretensions to higher aesthetic tastes or with a substantial educational content.<sup>3</sup> And second, she proposes that 'the search for magical escapes via fantasy is more often found in the most exploited or oppressed groups' (Fowler 1991, 139), although even then readers rarely confuse the genre with reality. The latter part of the argument is also a conclusion drawn by Radway (1994, above). Fowler's view is again useful for considering the novel *For Unknown Reasons*, if read against the view asserted by some Czech scholars (such as, Fidelius 1998, and Havelková 1993a) that *everybody* belonged to the oppressed group under state socialism.

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<sup>3</sup> That will be the case of all the fiction texts I will be considering, although they are very diverse in style and subject matter.

I will conclude this review by mentioning briefly two anthologies of studies exploring romance in the 1990s: *Romance Revisited* edited by Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (1995) and *Fatal Attractions: Re-scripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film* edited by Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker (1998). The aim of both collections is to re-ignite feminist interest in romance, whether through empirical study of real-life relationships or through textual criticism of a variety of texts. The editors and contributors to the volumes explore the romance formula from a range of perspectives, in order to bring diversity into the so-far general rejection of romance by feminists for being a vehicle of patriarchal ideology. The editors of *Romance Revisited* consider the various changes in the romance formula which occurred in the late twentieth century, and also theoretical approaches used by writers to study romance. They conclude that the 'structural properties of classic romance' (Pearce and Stacey 1995, 37), as defined, for example, by Radway (1994, above), have changed: 'Things do not necessarily happen in the expected order any more, and the roles/actions of the protagonists are being challenged by specificities of gender, class, race, and sexuality' (Pearce and Stacey 1995, 37). Given this situation, the editors promote the theory of discourse and Bakhtinian dialogics as the two most productive approaches to contemporary romance. They place the advantage of the discourse model in that 'it is conceived as historically and culturally specific (different women, in different historical periods, and in different cultures will have experienced it differently), and that it is dynamic: liable to change and transformation' (Pearce and Stacey 1995, 27). Re-thinking romance through this discourse frame proved fruitful also for my readings of two texts from my sample: *For Unknown Reasons* and *Memento*. I will focus on the dimension of the state-socialist environment as another factor changing the structures of classic romance.

The editors of *Fatal Attractions: Re-scripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film* (1998) continue the questioning of the romance formula begun in *Romance Revisited*. They are asking the question of how would that formula have to be changed to produce a truly *feminist* narrative. They conclude that 'for a text to be fully subversive' (Pearce and Wisker 1998, 15), it cannot merely disrupt the structural components of romance, but has to be resistant to the discourses and institutions, within which the text was 'produced/reproduced' (ibid.). I will return to this proposition later in my own assessment of the subversive potential of the narratives at which I will be looking.