

DOCUMENTS IV

The wave of feminist movement, reaching also into linguistics, will probably spread even further. Right at the start, I would like to refute the possibility of being suspect of promoting this fashionable wave in our environment. I used the question mark in the title to indicate that, if this 'linguistics' is worthy of the name (that is, if it brings interesting grammatical, stylistic and other findings), it deserves our attention, however; if its main feature is its feminist orientation, then we do not need it. [...] I hope that the information about the negative expressions [of feminist linguistics] does not have to serve as a warning in our environment; fortunately, I cannot imagine that our women-linguists would like to travel along a similar road of one-sided and distorted judgements.

Jana Hoffmannová, 1995. Feministická lingvistika [Feminist Linguistics?], *Naše řeč*, 78, 80–91 (p.80).

The author [Czech feminist socio-linguist, Jana Valdrová] was probably misguided by the text of one Czech sociological study [...] which mentions the equivalence of the terms *rod*—gender, but immediately after that introduces the term 'gender'. That is done with the curious explanation that the term supposedly 'pinpoints the nature of the different social positions of men and women'. This idea, however, is probably a construct of feminist authors, because standard dictionaries of the English language do not mention anything of the sort.

František Daneš, 1997. 'Ještě jednou "feministická lingvistika"' ['Feminist Linguistics' Revisited], *Naše řeč*, 80, 256–59 (p.256).

The Czech Women's Union was a member of the National Front, that is, it promised loyalty to the programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. For decades, it was the only officially permitted women's organisation. On the International Women's Day, the eighth of March, Novotný, Husák, and others always shook their hands, and women had to be represented in all state institutions by quota. [...] In return, the [Union's] leaders kept silent, or only praised the government and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. [...] Their last chairwoman [...] went so far in her servility that she published a 'thank-you' to the People's Militia and the Red Barrettes at the end of November 1989 for hitting young people over their heads with truncheons on the 17 November. The Women's Union never came to support women who were imprisoned, never protested against human rights violations, if they were being violated in our or other socialist countries.

Jiřina Šiklová, 1991. 'Dopis přítelkyni Aleně o sjezdu Českého svazu žen' [A Letter to My Friend Alena about the Czech Women's Union Congress], *Lidové noviny*, 7 November, p.6.

[Journalist:] Your position is, actually, an exception on our political scene. What do you think about women in public functions?

[Minister of Justice—a woman:] That it is not easy for them! This situation is a consequence of the burden of the past years, because two years since the revolution everything could not have changed the way we would have wished it [...] that is, also in women's interest. Women have a difficult task: to ensure that their families function, to raise children, while also work for eight hours a day. Women have so far managed, and I consider it heroism. The conditions of our women—the family and children—have to change radically in the conditions of a democratic society. But we do not need to think long how to do it—perfectly functioning service sector has been successfully tested in the West. The only thing is to introduce it here. [...] Only then we'll find more women who will be able to afford the great time load also in politics.

Šárka Helmichová, 1992. 'Preferovat prospěch státu jako celku: Rozhovor s první dámou české politické scény' [To Prioritise the Interests of the State as a Whole: an Interview with the First Lady of the Czech Political Scene], *Práce*, 3 June, p. 6.

6. DISCOURSE OF FEMINISM: LAPSED ROMANCE IN *FOR UNKNOWN REASONS* AND *MEMENTO*

In this chapter, I will look at the same novels I considered in Chapters 4 and 5: Zdena Frýbová's *Z neznámých důvodů* (*For Unknown Reasons*) and Radek John's *Memento*. Then, I examined the representations and functions of femininity and masculinity in the texts; here I will offer a feminist reading of them outside the models of femininity and masculinity discussed earlier. I will be primarily interested in the ways these texts present challenges to narratives usually considered patriarchal: in particular, to the structures of love/marriage; the representation of the family; and, finally, the power of men over women. I shall also ask if these texts endorse and/or present challenges to feminism? Here, I will discuss, first, the models of feminism I am using in my analysis, then the problems with looking for the feminist potential of the novels, before moving on to an analysis of this feminist context.

As in the case of the varied use of the word 'femininity', I had to find a manageable and suitable model of 'feminism' among the diverse scholarship. It seemed productive to look at feminist engagements of texts similar to those that are the subject of my study. Therefore, rather than looking for any of the traditional categorisations of feminisms, such as liberal, radical and socialist, I looked at feminist perspectives on popular literary texts targeting primarily a female audience.¹ Two such texts provided a breakthrough in the feminist views of romance and related genres: Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women* (first published 1982; my references to the 1990 edition) and Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (first published 1984; my references to the 1994 edition). The arguments in favour of popular genres which were new to feminism concerned women's reading experience and their possible empowerment through that experience (see also my discussions in Chapter 2.5.). Although these two texts are of older date, they are still relevant to my analyses of Czech middlebrow novels published before 1989 and I will use them as my principal models for feminist reading.

The last point requires some qualification. In the Introduction I mentioned the absence of any women's movement in the pre-1989 Czech Republic which would provide a source of ideas. Therefore, the chapter can only discuss the feminist *possibilities* of the texts, rather than any 'real' feminism in them. Apart from the problem of a non-existent feminist intellectual environment, the texts struggle with the usual necessity—whether conscious or unconscious on the part of the author—to camouflage any subversive tendencies by exterior compliance with the rules of the residual patriarchal discourse as well as with those of the state-socialist ideology, which I discussed earlier.² Finding feminist elements in either of the two main texts I will be considering in this chapter thus requires an experienced reader, one who possesses at least some of the knowledge of Lynne Pearce's critical persona in 'Finding a Place from Which to Write' (Pearce 1995), an essay on her own development as a reader and critic:

¹ Although I suggested in Chapter 5 that *Memento* possibly excludes a female audience, the application of the model of feminist criticism as applied below proved to have some limited usefulness even for this text, as I will show further.

² Modleski makes the argument about the carefully hidden rebellious subplots in Harlequin romances (Modleski 1990, 25 and passim).

a reader well-versed not only in traditional textual criticism, but also in contemporary theoretical and feminist debates about the nature of the text and the reading process.

The chance that such a reader would constitute a significant proportion of the novel's readership is minimal. That is due to the already mentioned lack of diverse theoretical literary discussion in the Czech Republic before 1989, although that may not have been the main difficulty since Janice Radway's romance readers were certainly no literary scholars and yet they could articulate why romances were important to them as women. My key doubt about the ability of the readership of either *For Unknown Reasons* or *Memento* to detect other subversive sub-plots, apart from the resistance to state socialism (which was a part of everyday experience of resistance, as I argued earlier), derives from the tradition of literature teaching in the Czech educational system. Elementary-school involvement with literature consisted of simply reading in class (or at home when assigned), while secondary school focused on biographies of authors, synopses of their key works and general characteristics of important phases in the history of literature. Even this minimal secondary-school literary education would be limited mostly only to those students attending the academic type of school (called *gymnázium* in Czech), after which they were expected to go on to university, and thus a broader educational basis was provided. Students from technically or trade-oriented types of school would have even less exposure to literature. If we include in this bleak picture the fact that barely any essay-writing, that is, any writing involving critical thought, was carried out at these two educational levels we will have some idea about the experience of an average reader with handling any kind of a text.³

³ We must have been required to write compositions at elementary school, but they must have been so few and so undemanding that I have no memory of them whatsoever—with one exception in Grade 2. Then, we were to write something on blackbirds in class. I got down to work, but then stopped after the first sentence, since I only then realised that I was *not* expected to express any independent thoughts. The idea was that the *teacher* would suggest a sentence, ask for comments from the pupils briefly and write it down on the blackboard—the whole class would then merely *copy* it down. When I proceeded to a *gymnázium*, I had to produce a three-page composition on an assigned topic three times a year, usually written in class in each of my three languages (that is, Czech, Russian and English) and concluded my study by an exam equivalent to an 'A' level in educational status, although probably not in content. The length of the essay was between 4–5 pages on topics announced on the national radio the morning of the exam. This exam was only in Czech and Russian, not in any other foreign languages, unless the school was registered as specialising in languages.

I have every reason to believe that this tradition of non-writing (and, by extension, non-thinking) still survives to a large extent given my experience as a university lecturer and an occasional trainer of secondary-school teachers. At the beginning of every academic year, I have to brace myself for the new students who sit in front of me with the tips of their pens poised, ready to transcribe the 'truth' which is going to come out of my mouth. And every academic year I have to face the students' shock after I tell them that I am not going to give them the one and only valid interpretation of a literary text and that I expect them to *discuss* literature, not *to learn* it, whatever that would mean. The situation with secondary-school teachers is similar, only it is seen from the teacher's perspective. Some of them do not at all understand what I might mean by *studying* a literary text; others understand, but defend themselves by lack of class-time: how can they include discussions and more literature in their classes, if their curricula require that the students acquire such and such factual knowledge, and/or master such and such grammatical structures? Over the last few years, critical voices appeared in the press pointing out the unsatisfactory state of the Czech educational system: its over-emphasis on encyclopaedic learning and lack of independent work and critical thought (see, for example, Nováčková 1998; Hausenblas 1999a and 1999b; Matějů 2000; Šiklová 2000; and also note 16 in Chapter 4).

The absence of critical thought at Czech universities before 1989 is a fact generally known, but its discussion is not relevant for the present problem, because the university-educated population was quite minimal at the time and therefore its proportion among the readership of the novels which I am looking at would have been quite insignificant. (*Unesco's Statistical Yearbook 1990* records 6.0

Still, the two feminist studies I am using as principal sources in this chapter seem to me the most relevant ones for the present purpose. Radway and Modleski, as well as other feminist writers of the 1970s and 1980s, approach women consciously as an underprivileged group, restricted in its access to a number of human concerns, achievements and environments. Perhaps this approach can be extended to both women and men under state socialism: whether an ordinary person, a scholar or a scientist, they were all aware of their limited options in life if they decided to stay in the country rather than emigrate to the West.⁴ Therefore, they were all (or almost all) in a marginalised position toward the dominant. It is, of course, hard to say what or who the dominant were: the abstract ideology and power, or the individuals—the party members—who were in the position of power? An entertaining and articulate essay by Petr Fidelius 'People, Democracy, Socialism: a Contribution to the Study of the Terminology of Contemporary Official Propaganda' (Fidelius 1998, 15–100) illustrates the devastating logic of the communist rhetoric on editorials of the main party daily the *Rudé právo* and shows how the rhetoric formed a tightly organised system of thought.⁵ However, even in his account, the propaganda and the power are more or less ahistorical: it is clear that they must have been created after the Communist Party election victory in 1948, but at the time of his analysis (1977–78), they are simply there. His investigation as to who are the leaders and those 'who decide' leads to the answer that it is 'the Party'. Nevertheless, his further analysis of the powers and inner structures of the Party, as presented by the official propaganda, shows that since every communist had to place him/herself under permanent self-censorship as to whether s/he was 'worthy of party membership' (Fidelius 1998, 82),⁶ the inevitable result was that the only individual who had the truth, and therefore the power, was the leader of the Party: 'Some call this phase in the development of "socialist society" "Stalinism", others prefer the term "personality cult"' (ibid., 85). Fidelius proceeds ruthlessly in his deductions and concludes that the present phase of the Party development, that is, the 'de-Stalinised' phase, is necessarily a step back from the perfect one-leader phase, at least within the logic of the propaganda and it has consequences: 'The so-called collective leadership only reflects the factual situation, in which the "leaders" keep each other in check to the extent that any significant reduction of their numbers is not feasible' (ibid., 86).

percent of the population over 25 years of age with post-secondary education for Czechoslovakia in 1980; compared to 11.0 percent for the United Kingdom in 1976 (age group 25–69); 37.4 per cent for Canada in 1981; and 32.2 per cent for the USA in 1981).

⁴ In the fiction examples discussed here, the limited options for professional development are discussed between Anka and Marek, when the heroine weighs the pros and cons of studying biochemistry in the Czech Republic versus in France (Frýbová 1993, 75–78).

⁵ Fidelius's text first appeared in *samizdat* in 1978 (Czech title 'Lid, demokracie, socialismus: příspěvek ke studiu pojmosloví současné oficiální propagandy'), was then reprinted in a collection of author's essays *Jazyk a moc* (Language and Power; Fidelius 1983), which was also translated into French as *L'esprit post-totalitaire* (Fidelius 1986). A later (1989) essay on the communist language by Fidelius was published in English as 'The Mirror of Communist Discourse' (Fidelius 1992).

⁶ The quoted phrase is cited by Fidelius from the Editorial of the *Rudé právo*, 30 October 1978.

This flippant, but entirely documented argument shows that apart from the one 'leader' or handful of 'leaders', everybody else had to consider themselves in some way disempowered or marginalised. Other studies were written by Czech scholars about the internalisation of the underprivileged status by common men and common women (Možný 1991; Šiklová 1997b). It is then reasonable to presume that the audience of the 'best-readers', regardless of their sex (as we have no available documentation on what the breakdown by sex was), were looking up to these middlebrow novels for the same reasons as the readers implied by Modleski and interviewed by Radway: escape, release of tensions, or 'vicariously [to] enrich the social space [the reader] inhabits' (Radway 1994b, 113).

It is perhaps no coincidence that the plots of both 'best-readers' are structured around romantic relationships, which run parallel to the plots concerning the 'big issues' of the novels (that is, advances in bio-chemical research and the problems of drug addiction, respectively). Romance, being *compensatory literature* (Radway 1994b, 95), could provide the desired release (whether from the tensions of the oppressive state environment, or—in the case of women-readers—from the pressures of the residual patriarchal discourse) and, given the strong presence of the residual patriarchal discourse, it was also a genre likely to be seen as either harmless or even suitable as a backdrop to a host of themes. The last point is particularly valid about *Memento*, where romance is used to hold the factual information together and create the appearance of a story.

Both Modleski and Radway, as well as the editors and contributors to the collection of essays *Fatal Attractions: Re-scripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film* (Pearce and Wisker 1998a) and a number of other critics treat romance as a literary genre, primarily targeted at women, which is traditionally seen as upholding patriarchal values. *For Unknown Reasons*, as the title suggests, is meant to be a romance. It is also exactly the type of romance with which Radway (1994b) deals at some length: where the gradual coming together of the hero and the heroine is complemented by a setting providing the reader with instruction (in our case, the novel even includes a scholarly account of the nature of the DNA, complete with a drawing of the double-helix).⁷ The novel seems to offer the reader an escape into romance, but—contrary to the examples Radway classifies as successful romances—it refuses to allow a *complete* escape. In a way, it thus undermines the 'grand narrative' of a romance by suggesting that romance is not achievable and I will discuss this point later in the chapter. The title of *Memento* suggests that this is not supposed to be a romance. However, the pursuit of a heterosexual relationship forms the centre of the plot, therefore I will consider the novel in terms of romantic structures. The narrative stimulates the reader's desire for romance and shows how drug addiction threatens this ideal state. The novel does not question the institutional framework of romance, but it does undermine its power by bringing the plot to the conclusion that romance must lose in the

⁷ While factual instruction is not a usual part of the romance formula, Radway's readers repeatedly emphasised that they expected education from a romance novel. The reasons they gave for this preference were often that it justified the expense on books to them and to their husbands, or that their self-esteem grew if they could amaze their husbands with information they gained from their books. Radway's research at a publisher's confirmed that also the authors 'understand that instruction is one of the principal functions books can perform for their readers' (Radway 1994b, 109).

confrontation with drugs. Unlike *For Unknown Reasons*, which allows for some positive feminist reading, *Memento* generally does not question the traditional patriarchal structures, such as, love/family and marriage. Therefore, I will look at the latter novel first and then consider the former at greater length.

Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker (Pearce and Wisker 1998b) provide a concise characterisation of romance as a *romantic desire* (for union, merger, closure and so on) associated with *institutions of romance* (heterosexuality, marriage, same-race relationships—*ibid.*, 16). *Memento* contains elements of romance exactly in this sense: Michal, a somewhat talented grammar school (that is, *gymnázium*) student, who feels under pressure and lack of understanding from his (hardworking and 'proper') parents, meets a group of young people at a disco with whom he finds what he misses in his family. Eva is one of the group and Michal begins to pursue a relationship with her, a relationship which lasts for a number of years and, at times becomes the only 'thing' to which Michal clings to save himself from drugs. At moments of personal resolution to start a new life, he hopes for an orderly, conventional relationship with her and also for a child. In one of these scenes, Michal returns from two-year army service and immediately seeks out Eva, with whom he has not communicated during the whole time. They make love, enjoy their reunion and plan a bright, uncomplicated future:

He realised he'd had his last shot almost twenty-four hours ago and he did not need another one yet. 'We'll start a new life, what do you say, Eva?' [...]

'I will earn money. We'll travel. [...] We'll be able to have what you want. A record player, records, a tape recorder ...,' he thought aloud. 'From time to time, as a treat around weekends, we'll take a thing. Nothing more.' (John 1989, 71)

My previous argument in Chapter 5 claimed that Michal's family environment was not viewed positively, that the family was to a large extent to blame for his attraction to drugs and his father's type of masculinity was seen as oppressive and inadequate for Michal's generation. However, in this case, it is not so much the family which is questioned as an institution, but *that kind of family* produced by a society which does not pay attention to the different needs of its members and has a restrictive view of what an individual needs and should do. This view centres around the importance of work for one's good, rather than emotions and understanding, and it is the latter two (romantic) values that Michal pursues in his dreams of a family, while work (earning money) is not an end in itself, but a means of achieving the romantic values. This is how far the romance goes in *Memento*.

In other aspects of the story and characters, the novel breaks away from the romantic tradition. If Modleski and Radway characterise the romantic hero as a model of strong, but ultimately gentle masculinity, the heroine as young, inexperienced and singled out by the hero 'expressly because her intrinsic nature has been recognised by [him]' (Radway 1994b, 106), and the romance between the two as a means of overcoming all adverse circumstances, none of that applies to *Memento*. Michal, as we have seen in Chapter 5, is far from any ideal of masculinity, indeed, his appearance before the drugs take their toll is not even described, so the reader cannot picture him as either physically attractive or unattractive. Throughout the novel, he is presented at varying stages of physical decay. He does not possess any other features of a romantic hero either: he is neither rich nor powerful (his only dubious power is that he can prepare the best home-cooked drug in Prague—John 1989, 257), his capacity for

gentleness is not an issue in the novel, and he does not even choose his 'heroine': instead, Eva chooses him and he gratefully accepts. Eva is no romantic heroine either: unlike romantic heroines, she is older than her 'hero' and far from being inexperienced or exceptional in her nature. In fact, she later confesses to Michal that she did not approach him because she wanted him, but because she wanted to set up a situation in which Richard (the homosexual and drug supplier, the villain of the story) could get close to Michal and reward Eva for her efforts with a dose of drugs:

'Wait, wait,' interrupted her Michal. 'It wasn't your idea to come to me? You came only because he sent you ...?' 'Of course not. But I couldn't exist without things from Richard.' [...]

'He took it also as a service to himself ...'

Michal still did not want to grasp what she's just told him.

'He has invited you over to his place several times. Don't you understand?', she finally blurted out. (John 1989, 54)

The implication is not that Eva was necessarily evil or scheming, but that she was already so addicted that she was willing to do almost anything for her dose of drugs. If Michal and Eva are in the end 'destined' for each other, at least in the sense that their relationship lasts throughout the novel, it is because Eva is dependent on Michal's ability to prepare drugs and he clings to the idea of having a relationship, through which he could one day free himself from drugs. Thus the main subversion of the romantic narrative in *Memento* is its subordination to the power of drugs. This is certainly the effect the author intended—hence '*Memento*', a reminder, or better, a warning. The last scenes of the novel, however, perhaps betray the author's strong belief in the power of romance: although the logic of the author's argument has to lead both Michal and Eva to physical destruction and they are certainly two wretches for the larger part of their relationship, their final death/incapacity comes only *after* they are separated. While Michal serves a term in prison, he learns about Eva's death—possibly suicide, but possibly murder. He believes the latter and resolves to avenge himself on those he thinks killed Eva. His immediate response to the news of her death is that 'he could do it [that is, to overcome his addiction] with her [...] His whole life could be different. But without her? Nevermore' (John 1989, 257). He abandons all remaining resolutions and efforts for self-preservation and gives himself up to drugs, which eventually brings him to the state reported at the end of the novel when he lies in the psychiatric ward for people with permanent brain damage:

He has to be fed, when receiving food he squirts liquids out of his mouth, his clothes have to be changed for him, he has to be washed and put in bed; he is unable to ask when he needs to defecate, he is incontinent. (John 1989, 277)

It is hard to claim *Memento* for feminism on other grounds than that it undermines the power of romantic love. In a number of other aspects, the novel rather presents challenges to feminism. I already mentioned that patriarchal structures are, on the whole, seen as desirable. Again, their preservation is threatened by drugs: Michal, at one point, tries to gain control over Eva and her drug-taking as befits his masculine role, but fails. He and Eva cannot start a family because they both become impotent/uninterested in sex due to their drug addiction. Drugs are also stronger than heterosexual orientation: I discussed in Chapter 5, how Michal submits to a homosexual intercourse with Richard in order to obtain a dose of drugs from him. The only case which could be made in favour of the novel from a feminist standpoint is similar as in the case of the romantic structure: patriarchal structures are not unbreakable. The

weakness of such a case (as in the case of subverting romantic structures), however, is obvious: for one, it is the patriarchal values and structures which are something to which one *should* aspire and the threatening forces are not an alternative life and alternative structures, but gradual and inevitable destruction.

Perhaps the main challenge to a feminist reading of *Memento* is the text's exclusion of the woman-reader; that is, a reader consciously reading *as a woman*. Arguably, there would not have been many such readers among the novel's audience due to the lack of any feminist discussion at the time, as I mentioned above, and due to the socialisation of women and their identification with male values and male viewpoints. Even the leading Czech feminist thinker Jiřina Šiklová allows for the following slip in her analysis of women's inequality under state socialism:

Real patriarchy could not develop in our country, not even after the Second World War. [...] Women worked more than men because they *had to* run the household, bring up children, and cultivate the permitted bit of a field or garden, but men as patriarchs *did not* exploit them, at least not in the sense of economic laws. (Šiklová 1997b, 265–66; my emphasis)

It is not clear, what she means by 'real patriarchy' and 'exploitation' in this description of fairly traditional patriarchal allocation of roles. The confusion in her argument testifies to her own identification (however unconscious) with women's role as the primary providers of care in the private sphere.

As I documented already with respect to the novel's promotion of patriarchal values, the point of view is male and male values are given priority. It is the man who is not able to live up to those values, while values to which Eva should aspire are never articulated and her thoughts or state of mind are never revealed. In short, this text can hardly be seen as significantly subversive, because as Pearce and Wisker suggest:

For a text to be fully subversive it must do much more than 'retell' the stories of classic romance, even if that retelling contributes to a critique of the discourse and its cultural (re)presentation. We have suggested that a thorough-going romantic *rescripting* will interrogate not only the structural components of the romance narrative, but also its articulation with/within the discourses and institutions in which it is produced/reproduced. (Pearce and Wisker 1998b, 15)

Despite all these negatives, there is, however, one feature of this text that can be 'read on behalf of feminism'. This is the lack of threat ascribed to femininity: unlike the usual antagonism of femininity and masculinity, there is no sense of femininity being a threat to masculinity (Easthope 1990, 166).⁸ In this story it is not the world of women which threatens man's independence, but the world of drugs. (Although effeminate behaviour in *men*, that is, homosexual orientation, is threatening to masculinity.) An association with the world of women is, on the contrary, seen as almost the last possibility to save the self-destructive man.

I have to admit that reading *Memento* was not a pleasant experience and writing about it has not been joyous. It was hard to find any redeeming elements in a text whose imperious narrator demanded sympathy for his male character who does not think of anything or anybody except himself (with the few exceptions when he reflects on his mother and on Eva) and in which I was exposed to unsavoury 'macho' language standing sometimes for anger, sometimes for tenderness, sometimes for just banter. *For Unknown Reasons* was not exactly a profound aesthetic experience either. Initially, I

⁸ For a historical overview of the opposition of masculinity and femininity see, for example, Connell (1995, 68). Horrocks (1994) points out the contradictory construction of masculinity: at the same time antagonistic to femininity and needing it.

was rather annoyed that I had to read this book, because it came up among the two 'best-readers' set in the present which Haman's study of library borrowings (Haman 1991) characterises as typical for the category. My distaste, however, gradually ebbed away as I read on, and even more when I began to think about the contradictions and fissures in the text. In Chapter 4 I argued for the possibly resistant qualities of the kind of femininity with which Anka, the main character, is endowed, if we consider that femininity within the context of state-socialist ideology. In this chapter, I will argue that the text can be seen as at least partially subversive in relation to both structures of romance and structures of patriarchy.

Radway (1994b) distinguishes between two types of romances according to the criteria whether her respondents liked them or not: 'good' romances and 'failed' romances. She then outlines the characteristics common to the one or the other type. Good romances 'replenished their readers' emotionally and provided them with a fantasy of the ideal closure when the heroine's qualities were recognised by the hero and the two came together in a perfect union. Failed romances, on the other hand:

Fail to demonstrate that a long-term ideal relationship is possible and that it can provide all the nurturance, care, and love that women need. As a result, they do not permit the reader to escape completely from the real world into a fantasy realm where she can enjoy the pretence of being the centre of someone else's attention. (Radway 1994b, 178)

A theoretical problem arises from comparing Radway's 'defence' of romances (and particularly 'good' romances) as having a value for feminism, because they are a source of positive feelings for the woman-reader, with the argument of Pearce and Wisker (1998b) quoted above that feminists have to insist on the dissociation of romantic desire from the institutions of romance in a literary text. Trying to reconcile this contradiction is not the purpose of the present study. Rather, I will look into what elements of *both* of these arguments can be found in *For Unknown Reasons*. What feelings the novel motivated in the woman-reader (if at all the readers were mostly women) can, at this point, be only deduced from the characteristics of the ideological/discursive environment I tried to outline in Chapter 3 and from available secondary sources documenting the lives of Czech women before 1989, but that is the case with any historical reconstruction of reader-reception.⁹ I will argue that, in the light of these sources and despite my characterisation of *For Unknown Reasons* as a lapsed or failed romance, the novel has a potential of providing certain release of tensions to its readers by providing a kind of fantasy specific for the social and political context of the time (I touched on this already in Chapter 4).¹⁰ The failure of the romance is then associated with at least partial subversion of the tie between romantic desire and the

⁹ Nadace gender studies (Gender Studies Centre) in Prague has been co-ordinating an extensive project 'Women's Memory' and so far published two volumes of interviews with women of various generations under the title *Všechny naše včerejšky* (*All our yesterdays*; Frýdlová 1998).—The allusion to *Macbeth* in the title may puzzle those versed in English (And all our yesterdays have lighted fools / The way to dusty death.—v.v.), as to its implication for the content of the two volumes. Following my inquiry, the editor confirmed that no association with Shakespeare's play was intended, as she took over the title from another publication and was unaware of its original context.—Another type of documents are essays by feminist scholars written in the post-1989 times, but these have one serious weakness, which is that, although they contain frequently acute observations, they are not based on any research—field or textual (I have been referring to a number of these throughout).

¹⁰ Katrin Sieg identifies fantasy and dream as pronounced features of the GDR literature by women of the 1970s. She argues that 'they mark what has been suppressed, censored, and rendered impossible' (Sieg 1995, 113).

institutions of romance, although the text can hardly be considered 'fully subversive' (Pearce and Wisker 1998b, 16). I will, first, demonstrate the main features of a romance according to Radway's findings manifest in the novel, and then, illustrate the possibilities of subversion on several passages which seemed to me especially significant because of the contradictions they contain.

Radway characterises the heroine of romances as young (usually between 17–20) and sexually inexperienced, extraordinarily beautiful, but unaware of the effect of her beauty on men, displaying 'tomboyish defiance and [...] verbal facility' (Radway 1994b, 125), asserting her own voice, while not trying to attract men. The hero's sexual needs are forced on her and she is sexually 'awakened' by him and 'overcome by her own bodily response which she cannot control' (ibid., 126). All of this applies to Anka, as I have shown in Chapter 4 and will demonstrate still further below. Also the characteristics of the romantic hero apply to Marek to a great extent: he is substantially older than Anka (by 23 years), promiscuous, but without love toward his partners before he meets Anka. He is a 'man among men', that is, committed to public good and morally pure, and the reader is allowed greater knowledge of him along with Anka and Miloš. There are also the necessary adversaries to the hero and the heroine as Radway characterises them: a villain (in this case, Miloš) and a female foil for Anka, the more experienced, older woman who is pursuing the hero because he would provide her with a 'comfortable social position' (Radway 1994b, 131). This is Anka's aunt, Eva, with whom Marek had an on-and-off relationship before Anka, and who desperately pursues Marek and becomes mean when she finds out that he has a relationship with Anka. The reader is given some idea about Miloš having a controversial character right at the beginning of the novel: Professor Prokop calls him a 'bastard' (one of the few vulgarisms used in the novel), a plagiarist of his colleagues' scientific work, and thinks that the police should be interested in Miloš's activities (Frýbová 1993, 16 and 19); at the same time, Miloš's secretary thinks about her boss as 'the first [director of the five she worked for] who did not require anything outside precise fulfilment of the obligations for which she was paid. For him, there was nothing except work and his wife' (ibid., 16). Nevertheless, by the time Miloš marries Anka (several years after she leaves Marek due to a misunderstanding), the reader knows that, unlike Marek, he is not morally pure and that he is impotent. That means, that he is insufficiently masculine, which is a typical feature of the male foil, according to Radway (Radway 1994b, 133). However, the full villainy of Miloš is revealed to the reader only in the last part of the novel, while Anka never learns about it.

Despite the numerous similarities with the ideal romance according to Radway's characterisation, the characters of *For Unknown Reasons* differ from this model in several interesting ways, which I will discuss in more detail in the textual examples. Some of the differences are: Anka does not get many opportunities to prove to the reader that she is 'unusually compassionate, kind and understanding' and has 'extraordinary capacity for empathetic nurturance and tender care' (Radway 1994b, 127). Quite the opposite: the narrator emphasises her selfishness and lack of compassion, although her actions within the story often testify to the contrary (see also Chapter 4). Further, both the hero or the villain have minimal capacity to hurt the heroine's emotions and they have no intention to do so. If Marek hurts Anka—and she leaves him for twelve years and marries Miloš instead for convenience—it is through a misunderstanding of which he is unaware. Miloš wants to hurt Anka by making up a

story of Marek's terminal cancer at the very end when his identity is being threatened by Anka's request for a divorce. Rather than hurting her, he succeeds in provoking unmitigated hatred toward himself and a desire to kill him. Another difference is that most of the story is not taken up by the overcoming of the couple's antagonisms and the hero's realisation that he loves the heroine, but by recounting the more or less idyllic life of the heroine with Miloš, the villain: Anka leaves Marek on page 165 and meets him again on page 539 (the novel ends on page 546). Finally, and most importantly, *the narrator* does not present Anka as the innocent heroine, although this is how her actions and behaviour present *themselves* to the reader. The narrator communicates to the reader more than once that Anka is a *femme fatale*. One of these warnings for the reader comes at the end of the prologue, in the scene when funeral guests begin to line up to give their condolences to Anka, Miloš's widow:

Anička looked at the slowly and orderly approaching crowd through her veil and lost her nerve. She had to invest all her effort not to burst into mad laughter at the image of herself tearing off the veil, bowing to the funeral guests with a smile and saying lightly: Don't worry, please ... Everything is all right ... You know—I killed my husband. (Frýbová 1993, 19–20)

Arguably, the narrator's insistence on the use of the diminutive ('Anička', instead of 'Anna') may suggest to the reader that the assertion about the murder is misleading. However, it is reinforced from time to time in the text, such as when Miloš's search for a bride after his mother's death is recounted: '[he] married the twenty-one-year-old RNDr. Anna Berková who, after ten years and seven months of marriage, killed him following careful consideration' (Frýbová 1993, 176). Anka's innocence is restored at the end, when the reader learns that Anka did not kill Miloš. Nevertheless, she believes till the very end—and, significantly, does not regret—that she did kill him.

This incongruity in the presentation of Anka is perhaps the most interesting element in the text in relation to the ideological/discursive environment: as if the omniscient narrator complied with the requirements of one ideology/discourse and the characters with another. Apart from illustrating well the typical mindset under state socialism (that is, saying one thing in public and thinking another in private), this incongruity is also a textual expression of the clash between the potentially feminist writer persona—the one who has been told repeatedly that she is emancipated, that she is equal—and the woman well adjusted to the patriarchal discourse. Thus the authoritative voice of the narrator is constantly undermined by the utterances of the character, and the feminist potential is located within this fissure, as it will become apparent from the textual examples below.

Apart from listing the typical features of the main characters of a romance, Radway also constructs a structure of an ideal romance narrative. Such a narrative always starts with the destruction of the heroine's social identity and concludes with its restoration. In between there is her antagonism to the hero, his initial indifference to her, her interpretations of his intentions as being of a purely sexual nature, her angry/cold behaviour toward him, his punishment of her, the physical/emotional separation of the hero and the heroine, the tender response of the hero to the heroine, her reinterpretation of his previous behaviour in a more favourable light, the hero's proposition to the heroine and her sexual and emotional response to him (Radway 1994b, 134).

In its rough outline, *For Unknown Reasons* follows this structure, but with interesting variations. It can be said that Anka does go through a period when her social identity is destroyed and then restored, although the moment of destruction is not at the beginning of the story. It comes when, at nineteen, her parents are killed in a car accident. The person who takes on the burden of informing her is—who else?—Marek, as her old friend with somewhat fatherly feelings toward her. Among her first reactions to the news are the following: "And now I have nobody. Not even them. [...] But I've made dinner for them, because they promised to be home in the evening, and they ..." (Frýbová 1993, 91–92).

The first things she can think of after the accident are that she is now alone in the world and that her parents were not going to appreciate the meal she had prepared. The reader already knows at this point that when Marek was first introduced to Anka, aged nine, and suggested that they might go somewhere together some time, her reaction was: "You are not going to go anywhere with me. [...] Grown ups never have time for me. I have only Aunt Johanka" (Frýbová 1993, 24). In Chapter 4, I quoted the passage about Anka's desolation in the large family house after the death of 'Aunt Johanka', a widowed neighbour who spent considerable time with Anka. Finally, Marek later reflects that Anička never missed her parents after their death (*ibid.*, 117). The quotation about Anka's grief over the loss of her parents seem to be in contradiction to the other examples I gave about her relationship to her parents, which show that their death could not mean any major break in her life. Yet, in the logic of the story, the loss of parents stands for the loss of hope for *home* and *safety*, two values which motivated Anka's private life. She prepared the meal for her parents (who never had time for her) because she had not given up the idea that they would one day provide her with the home and parental attention she craved (she tells Marek, while still in a shock after the accident, how much she enjoyed talking to her father, while he ate the dinner she prepared for him, when he came back late from work and her mother was already asleep—Frýbová 1993, 91). When, at the age of fourteen, she went to France as a holiday companion to a French girl, she returned excited by the fact that Mrs. Dutourd came every night to wish the girls good night, and happily accepted the Dutourds' invitation to spend an entire school year with them. The reason for her was that she felt welcome and cared for in that family. Anka herself voices her longing when her aunt Eva asks her if she was planning to go to an intensive French course during the summer when Anka was with Marek: "Right! I am going to go to an intensive course, just when for once I am having a good

time *at home!*" (Frýbová 1993, 141; original emphasis). She found her home and safety in the relationship with Marek. Until the scene when Marek practically makes her have sexual intercourse with him, she is entirely happy in a non-sexual relationship with him. She even tries to make a match first between him and a visiting Scottish colleague (ibid., 119) and then between him and her aunt Eva (ibid., 123).

The importance of parental attention for a child is not any hidden undercurrent in the novel. It is a recurrent theme and Anka's parents are exposed to frequent attacks from the narrator or through the utterances of Anka and Marek. Marek's reaction to Anka's declaration that she wants to be grown up so that she could pay her parents back for the lack of time they have for her now is spontaneous anger and hatred. Apparently, he has admired them until this time (Frýbová 1993, 24–26), but now he declares: "I would have parents who drive their child to this extreme locked up" (ibid., 26). The implication of Anka's investment in family values for the structure of romance is that there is a shift in the meaning of the means by which Anka's social identity is restored. Although the means is still a relationship with a man (Marek, during their brief fourteen-month life together and again at the closure of the novel), the emphasis is on domestic—in the sense of having a loving home—rather than on sexual fulfilment. Anka tries to make the best of her situation after leaving Marek and, subsequently, marries Miloš. The narrator then lists the characteristics of their marriage—how they do things *together*, invite *friends* over—but emphasises, too, the absence of sexual contact. These relationships (whether with Marek or with Miloš) stand for the need of safety, attention and communication in the heroine's life, and seem to imply that domestic security and family life are the most important things. In this respect, it is important to realise that the reader—male or female—would be approaching the novel in the context of the crisis in social, economic and family values that preceded the 'Velvet Revolution' of 1989.¹¹ Divorce rates were high, living standards hard to keep up in the falling-apart economy, and the instabilities of the political situation—although, contributing to the final collapse of the whole political system—certainly did not encourage feelings of stability.¹²

During this period, women were, arguably, placed in a more insecure position than men, since the new demands of the *perestroika* were addressed to them equally as to men, but unlike men, they were told at the same time that they needed to spend more time with their families. Every 'New Year's Presidential Address', every speech at the occasion of the International Women's Day, and other official documents in the late 1980s mentioned that 'also this year, the preparation and gradual realisation of the economic reform [that is, *perestroika*] will be in the foreground of our attention' and that meeting the 'challenging tasks' will require 'perseverance and consistency, bravery and consideration, higher quality of work from everybody' (Husák 1988a). By what means the *perestroika* was supposed to happen and what exactly it meant for every individual, that was typically not said. The Czechoslovak Prime Minister, Ladislav Adamec, addressed the traditional delegation of women invited to the Prague Castle on the eve of the International Women's Day with a symptomatically muddled speech.

¹¹ Havel devotes a substantial amount of space in his first New Year's presidential address to the moral void and corruption of human relationships in Czechoslovakia after the demise of the communist government (Havel 1992c).

¹² Gorbachev's *perestroika* began in 1985 in the Soviet Union; the government announced its beginning in Czechoslovakia in 1987; and a whole series of demonstrations against the system was initiated by the dissident movement from 1988 till November 1989, and was severely suppressed by the police. (An eight-hour compilation from the archives of state television was broadcast on Czech Television on 20th November 1999, recording chronologically the demonstrations and their suppression, interspersed with clippings from other events documenting the last spasms of state socialism—Fenič 1999.) Writing about the history of Central and Eastern European *samizdat*, Gordon Johnston characterises the political leadership in the 1980s as 'in an important sense, [having] lost both the ability and in some cases the willingness to rule' (Johnston 1999, 133).

That year, the delegation of 'women working in industry, agriculture, education, representatives of the cultural front, deputies, members of the People's Militia' was supplemented by a delegation of 'twenty-five women-mothers who raised in an exemplary fashion a larger number of children' (n.a. 1989a). The speech then focused on the 'unsubstitutable role of the family' (ibid.) and the role of women within family and society. After the introductory phrases about the family being 'the foundation of the prosperity of the State' and the need for 'healthy environment of mutual respect and support, equal responsibility of both parents for the upbringing of their children', Adamec shifted from 'parents' to 'women'. He asserted that '[socialist] practice showed that liberation and equality of women was not nonsense or Utopia', that women could study whatever they wanted and work in any profession they chose, that 'they are educated, economically independent and the legal system is on their side'. It was not enough, though, because 'lack of *free time* for fulfilment of *their duties* in the family' (my emphasis) became a frequent subject of criticism. The whole speech kept the same structure of making its individual points: first, the importance of women's public work was emphasised, then women's equality was brought in and each point concluded in defining women within the family. In other words, women were to give themselves to the *perestroika* and to their families. As Adamec clearly said, women's free time was for the family (as opposed to for them as individuals, but then it can be argued that neither men nor women were really conceived of as individuals in the language of the ideology): 'Is the return of women from the workplace to the household and the kitchen a solution? We are for a different way—to give women greater possibilities of family involvement while maintaining their access to public participation' (Adamec 1989b).

The confusion inherent in the roundabout argument is obvious: women were to be a part of both worlds, but the speaker did not at all touch on how this ideal should be achieved. The impression from his speech is that women had to change or expect changes to come because there were these contradictory demands on them, but what exactly they should expect and do was never clarified. It was this type of vague and mostly illogical argumentation which contributed to the creation of a social atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty. Šiklová adds another perspective on the ambiguous position of women between the public and the private spheres in the following way:

Formal equality of right did not lead to equality in reality; lack of time (and overburdening) meant women were much more stressed than men. Most women had a false sense of equality, resented having to be like men, and dreamt instead of a withdrawal into private life. (Šiklová 1993, 75)

It is perhaps not surprising that the desire for permanence and safety was recurrent among the novels I read while compiling my sample. The author of *For Unknown Reasons* brings it in again in another novel *Falešníci* (*The Swindlers*; 1982), which I originally discarded as schematic beyond redemption.¹³ The novel starts with the sentence: 'When Jana Stejskalová was getting married to Oldřich Burget, she managed to hold her eyes tightly shut against the premonition that their marriage was going to be a precarious journey across thin ice' (Frýbová 1982, 9).

The premonition is, of course, confirmed when her husband's promiscuity threatens to destroy their family. However, the heroine's efforts are not so much directed at reforming her husband, as at creating a peaceful and safe home for herself and her

¹³ The total print-run of this novel by Frýbová has been somewhat less impressive than of *For Unknown Reasons*: 'only' 90,000 copies in two editions before 1989, and another edition since with undisclosed print-run.

children. Longing for the warmth of the hearth repeatedly makes its way into the consciousness of Sabina, the independent woman and an artist in Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, despite the fact that she perceives the image as kitsch: 'and from the depths of her being, a silly mawkish song about two shining windows and the happy family living behind them would occasionally make its way into the unbearable lightness of being' (Kundera 1985, 249).

Most of the plot of the ideal romances according to Radway are taken up by the antagonisms between the hero and the heroine, while the reader 'knows' that the ending would bring love and reconciliation. In *For Unknown Reasons*, there is the exact reversal: it begins as a fantasy of harmony, with the narrator having to 'plant' false tensions to create vehicles for suspense. The main one of these vehicles is the suggestion that Anka killed her husband, and another is the refusal to reveal Anka's motives for leaving Marek until the very end of the novel. From the perspective of the Czech context outlined above, these cheap devices to create suspense, may also be expressions of typical fears of Czech women (and men) of the time: a calamity comes from the outside, without an explanation or warning, and an individual has no power over it. In the novel, this is expressed particularly well in the account of Anka's break up with Marek. The two of them lived in loving harmony until 'he came home one afternoon, Anička was not there and even her personal belongings were gone. A note on the table informed him briefly that she had begun to date a colleague of hers, [...] and that she was leaving him' (Frýbová 1993, 164–65). Marek had no way of predicting or controlling this event, although he suspected all along that their happiness could not last.

The text would provide the release of the real-life tensions at the end by explaining that the conflicts were false and the harmony real. Nevertheless, the novel is a 'failed romance' in Radway's terminology, because it undermines this fantasy through suggesting that the harmony is nice, but it does not last. Both in the middle of the relationship with Marek, and, a second time, in the closing sentences of the novel, the narrator remains at least ambiguous about the possibility of a happy union: 'And at the same time he heard his voice, tuned into the long-lost tenderness, which did not speak to any woman before or after her' (Frýbová 1993, 546). The past tense in the last verbal phrase can, in Czech, imply both the time until the present moment or generally over Marek's lifetime, which may include a time without Anka after the present moment.¹⁴ The suggestion that Anka and Marek may not be together forever, is pronounced in the context of Marek's intentions to marry Kamila, an 'emotionally mature woman' (ibid.), which are, of course, at that very moment thwarted. The prospect of future conflict and Marek's personal life, doomed to impermanence, leaves the reader unsettled, rather than replenished. The novel is thus suggesting through its narrative structure that the reader's idealistic desires are impractical and unrealistic. The closing paragraphs of the novel are interesting also from the perspective of the relation between work and private life. It is about a week after Miloš's funeral and Anka goes to see Marek to tell him that she left him due to a mistake twelve years ago. She also narrates to him the horror of the scene between herself and her husband which followed after she asked Miloš for a divorce

¹⁴ Unlike English, Czech has only three grammatical tenses: past, present and future. Thus, the past tense in the quoted sentence allows for the ambiguous reading.

because she had found out about her past error. Miloš turned nasty and told Anka a made up story about Marek's terminal cancer, implying that if she left him (Miloš) and returned to Marek, it would only be for a short time. As soon as Anka unloads her emotional burden to Marek, she suddenly realises that due to personal worries she forgot about her scientific experiments. While she is on the phone to the laboratory inquiring about the state of her experiment, Marek reflects with certain bitterness:

That's it. That's what's really on her mind, what really matters to her, and what's going to help her get over practically anything. She was crushed and thrown off balance by the image of the tragedy that supposedly happened to me, but now, when she sees that I am all right, she would not be overwrought if I told her that I didn't want her any more. She would continue living happily in her lab. I have always known that a man can only come second in her life. [...]

[Anka comes back from the telephone and changes the subject of their conversation from the personal topic to a professional issue on which she demands Marek's opinion.]

The idea of being drawn into the problems of Prokop's laboratory in her usurpatory manner was not unpleasant to [Marek]. Biochemistry has always been a field whose discoveries fascinated him [...] But Anička ... I can't simply afford her. It would be madness to bury the three pleasantly calm, gently passing years with Kamila, hurt her terribly, smash my peaceful future and dive into an adventure which can only end up badly again. I have some sense. [...] In the spirit of his commendable resolution, he got up off his chair resolutely, [...] And at the same time heard his voice, tuned into the long-lost tenderness, which did not speak to any woman before or after her: 'Would you like to stay with me, my love?'

'And where else do you think I would go?,' wondered Anička. (Frýbová 1993, 546)

In general, the narrator (and Marek himself) always stresses the importance of one's devotion to one's profession and criticises those characters who only seek personal advantage in their jobs and do not take them seriously.¹⁵ Anka is also frequently praised for her professional enthusiasm. Nevertheless, if her choice of field of study was not so exceptional for a woman in state socialism, her ambition in research certainly was.¹⁶ Marek, who always makes professional commitment the priority in his assessment of all people, men and women alike, expresses a touch of resentment in his thoughts. His contemplations place Anka within the traditional role of patriarchal discourse: she ought to value her man before her work. Also the narrator extends this role to Anka and other female characters (such as, her mother and Eva) in the form of drawing attention to their bodies before their professional and other qualities or vices (while this is not the case for male characters). As we saw in Chapter 4, the initial description of Anka also concerned her appearance, and her actions and utterances were frequently accompanied by 'feminising' adjectives, for example, in the scene from the funeral (see p.63) or in the descriptions of the impression she makes on Marek when he meets her after periods of separation (see p.64).

¹⁵ The Czech Prime Minister, František Pitra, in his address to the women invited to the Prague Castle at the occasion of the International Women's Day, identified 'the conflict between honest and slipshod work' as one of the conflicts which must not be avoided, but rather, need to be 'provoked through our everyday activities' (Il and nig 1989).

¹⁶ Šiklová observed about Czech women in the workforce: 'While women were expected, and expect themselves, to be in the workforce, employers automatically assumed that women would perform at a low level, since they had to take care of children and family, and therefore would not aspire to higher positions' (Šiklová 1999b, 160).

That this level of stereotyping is not particular to romance as a traditional (patriarchal) narrative structure, but rather is symptomatic of the less than perfect 'emancipation' under state socialism becomes apparent if we look into the official rhetoric about women. When Raisa Gorbacheva accompanied her husband on a state visit in April 1987, the journalists were obviously confused as to how to report this new phenomenon.¹⁷ They saw her as an appendage to Mikhail Gorbachev, rather than as an individual with her own agenda, and placed emphasis on her femininity, while contrasting it with her serious interest. The coverage of Mikhail Gorbachev's arrival details the schedule of his visit, but does not mention Raisa's, although it becomes clear from the articles during the visit that she did have her own agenda. There is actually a perceptible move from the representation of her as an 'appendage' upon her arrival to a woman interested in women's issues at the close of her visit. Nevertheless, no matter how serious her interest, the articles are often prefigured with adjectives drawing attention to Raisa's feminine appearance and gesture: 'a frail woman', 'very sweet, spontaneous, with a sense of humour' (Líkařová 1987a); 'two *small* hands pressed against the car window' (Líkařová 1987b; my emphasis).¹⁸ Needless to say, Mikhail Gorbachev's appearance is documented simply by photos from the visit, rather than by vivid adjectives.

Similar interventions from the residual patriarchal discourse which allow, at best, presenting a 'substantial woman with a compromise', appear also in a much more 'official' context, namely in speeches by the state and party leaders on the International Women's Day. Thus President Husák speaks to the delegation of Czechoslovak women invited on this occasion to Prague Castle about how 'the experience of the last forty years shows that only the removal of capitalist exploitation and the victory of socialism create realistic conditions for a radically new position of women in society, for their real equality' (Husák 1988b). The whole speech, however has the undertone that women are there to 'help', they are not thought of as real initiators of social and economic processes: 'In the fifties, they selflessly went to work everywhere *society needed them*', 'their *help* in executing [...] revolutionary tasks is priceless' (my emphasis). A year later, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, Ladislav Adamec, repeats the same idea: 'nothing can move ahead or be substantially changed in our lives without the *trust* and *support* of [women]' (Adamec 1989b; my emphasis). In other words, women, their interests and capacities are not seen as equal partners in the socialist project, but they are the usual 'Other', set apart from the One, that is, the 'society', but useful when that 'society' needs someone to put its decisions into practice.

In this context, it is no wonder that the fictional hero, Marek is unable to judge Anka by the criterion he extends to 'society': a full commitment to one's work. His contemplations in the last quotation from the novel can be read once again as the voice

¹⁷ In contrast with the full-page coverages of Mikhail Gorbachev's visit, Raisa's schedule merited two 200–300-word articles in each of the two main dailies *Mladá fronta* and *Rudé právo*. It was perhaps no accident that Raisa's visit was covered by female reporters. It could even have been a wish on Raisa's part (one of the articles mentions that she asked the male journalists present at her visit to the Czechoslovak Women's Union to leave after the preliminary formalities—Bohatová 1987a). The female reporters are, in a way, in a similar relation to their subject and to their texts as the woman-author of *For Unknown Reasons*: they write from perhaps felt, but not articulated position as women and also from within the patriarchal discourse.

¹⁸ Interestingly, the *Rudé právo* articles did not include the feminine adjectives, although they seem to be working from the same story outline or even the same original text as the *Mladá fronta* ones, as the similar structures and even the use of some same phrases suggest.

of the residual patriarchal discourse: appreciating the 'feminine' (that is, relating to the private sphere and to the body) in women rather than their capacities in the public sphere. It seems that the impact of Marek's thoughts is reinforced by the fact that this is the last page of the novel: the patriarchal message wins over the state-socialist ideal of emancipation. However, the ending can also be interpreted as subversive to the structures of romance in that it is the heroine's professional interest which takes priority over the relationship with the hero. Moreover, it is the hero, not the heroine, who can only think about his private life in the present situation and has to make—in long-term potentially unfortunate—adjustments. He has to accept Anka back on her terms. Contrary to the conventions of romance, it is not he, but she who makes the proposition (more like a claim, in this case) of a relationship—although he makes the verbal proposal. She gets what she wants without having to compromise her professional ambitions.¹⁹

The challenge to feminism which remains at the end is, of course, Anka's resolve to remain childless (there is no hint anywhere that she or Marek would change their earlier resolve). The childlessness, nevertheless, can be viewed also as another means of releasing the reader's tensions: Anka is meant to be exceptional, not a norm. She is exceptionally feminine in her appearance and skills, exceptionally intelligent, living in exceptional circumstances (the foreign travel, independence from the age of nineteen) and exceptionally ambitious. A child is the only accomplishment which does not adorn her. Thus it is a certain alibi for the 'average' reader with children, average talents and in average circumstances for not being an outstanding professional, not being such a 'woman of substance' as Anka. The newspaper rhetoric concerning motherhood and 'proper' image of femininity would again support the reader's perceptions. The *Rudé právo* printed a full-page of interviews with four of the women-mothers who received a state award from the President for their contributions to society by raising a large number of children. The coverage very much characterises them as 'superwomen': 'They did not have just the care of the family on their shoulders, but also employment and often public functions. Those who are not yet in the deserved retirement still belong among foremost workers' (Dragounová et al. 1989). As far as I could discern from the interviews, the four women were all Party members or, at least, with high political consciousness, and they raised four, nine, nine, and eleven children, respectively. Both the politicisation and quantification of the quality of motherhood are fairly telling characteristics of the imagery of an ideal state-socialist (super)woman. The women themselves decline the praise by commenting in the sense that they had lived 'not an exceptional, just a usual life'. The interviewers themselves then stress the women's selflessness and modesty: 'She stretches days into nights. There has to be time for a good-night story for children, for knitting and sewing what the children need' (Dragounová et al. 1989). These women are not only exemplary mothers, but in their

¹⁹ The narrator's tone implies that it is Anka—her egotism—which brings disruption into Marek's life (he was about to get married to another woman). In the logic of Anka's actions, however, she cannot do otherwise than to go back to Marek: she has such painful moral integrity that if she loved him and found everything she ever wanted with him, but found out that he was corrupt, she had to leave him no matter what the hurt; similarly, if she found out that she was wrong twelve years before, she had to set that wrong right no matter what the cost. It was the only moral way she could act. In male literary characters, such consistency is usually admired and set as an example. In case of Anka, it is framed as a whim of her selfishness.

jobs they are 'helping', doing what is necessary, they do not display any ambition on their parts. In another article, a young (twenty-three years old) woman functionary was interviewed by the *Mladá fronta* in the same year. She was a member of the delegation of Czechoslovak women to Prague Castle on the occasion of the International Women's Day and thus, in a way, an intended role model for other women. She summarises the perceived social role of women explicitly when she says:

I am beginning to realise that it's high time to decide: whether public life, or what I should call all the going to meetings and organising of various events, or a role of a mother with everything that comes with it. I feel that both can't be well put together. And if, then only with great support available, but nobody will give you that guarantee in advance.' (Kasalová 1989)

Anka, with her unabated ambition and a refusal to sacrifice herself to somebody else's needs, cannot be a fully acceptable role-model for the reader who constantly has to negotiate her position between the residual patriarchal discourse and the state-socialist ideology: between the feminine woman-mother and the state-socialist ideal of the worker-mother. She can only satisfy the reader's secret desires, but these have to be 'officially' banished by the character's unacceptably 'unfeminine' attitude in a matter of such importance as motherhood had been in both the state-socialist ideology and the patriarchal discourse. Modleski considers this textual strategy as a characteristic feature of popular feminine texts. According to her, these texts hide 'anxieties, desires and wishes which if openly expressed would challenge the psychological and social order of things. For that reason, of course, they must be kept hidden; the texts, after arousing them, must [...] work to neutralise them' (Modleski 1990, 30).

The impression that Anka's life is dominated by work is, however, another fantasy: her husband earns three times as much as she does, while she does her hobby and the fact that it does not pay does not matter. In one scene she upsets her over-frugal colleague by revealing to him the budgetary agreements between herself and her husband. These include contributions by her husband to everything concerning the household to the extent that the colleague exclaims: "He leaves her pay to her as luxury pocket money, which she can recklessly spend on trinkets." To which Anka retorts, 'annoyed, because matters which do not interest her are being discussed: "But professor, [...] the few crowns I get paid, those vanish—one even doesn't know how"' (Frýbová 1993, 337). Certainly not very many women had the option to choose their professions according to their interests. Just in my own academic experience I have certainly met more women who openly say that they wanted to do a PhD, but could not because their husbands were working on that degree and they had to take care of the family/earn more money, than I have met women who determinedly pursued their academic interests. In fiction, I came across an articulation of this problem in the, at the time, very popular novel *Skalpel, prosím* by Valja Stýblová (*Scalpel, Please*, 1981).²⁰ In this novel, also from a professional environment, but this time from neuro-surgery, the wife of the main character reveals to her bewildered husband after many years of happy marriage that she longed to do more in her profession, but did not because at least one parent had to set the family as the priority. A more typical example of an average Czech woman who works because the family needs two incomes, rather than because she has a vocation is the character of Michal's mother from *Memento*. The only way she is described in that novel is as tired from work and worrying over Michal. She certainly does not have any

²⁰ This novel, again, reached gigantic print-runs (225,000 copies in three editions before 1989, and two editions with undisclosed print-runs since), and several translations, among others, into English (Stýblová 1985).

space to think about what *she would like* to do in her life. Alpha, a character in *Indian Run* (Boučková 1992) and discussed in detail in Chapter 9, is also referred to in terms of perpetual material struggle to provide for her family at the cost of her own ambitions and happiness.

Work has also another function in Anka's story, which will stand out when contrasted with Rosalind Coward's argument about female characters of novels:

This space of time, or narrative, is one in which the central character or characters undergo an experience or series of experiences which radically affect their lives or transform their attitudes. The effect of this structure is to create a distinct ideology of knowledge and indeed life—that experience brings knowledge and possibly wisdom. But where women have been, and are, the central focus of the novel, a variation occurs. That variation is that the only space where knowledge or understanding for women is produced is across sexual experience—love marriage, divorce, or just sex. (Coward 1986, 234)

In the case of Anka, the function usually occupied by sexual experience is filled by work: she matures through ethical engagement with her profession. She received her direction in life from a meeting with a child suffering from a disfiguring and debilitating genetic disease during her first visit to France at the age of fourteen. It is after this distressing encounter that she asks professor Dutourd to explain the problems of DNA and genes to her and makes a life-long commitment to help to resolve this medical issue. The day when she is supposed to start her first job, she tells her superior Prokop: "In France I met a family with a child afflicted with mucopolysaccharidosis and since then I have been interested in the development of impairments during the process of differentiation in the embryo" (Frýbová 1993, 295). It is true that the meaning of her life is again realised through the extension of the feminine role—compassion and care—even if it is not Marek who gives her life a meaning through offering heterosexual love. Nevertheless, it is a shift at least in the choice of environments available to the heroine, if not in the shift of values which would signify full subversion of patriarchal structures.

This subversion is more fully achieved in the significance of sex for Anka. It is mentioned at numerous places in the story that sex is not what matters to Anka even in a heterosexual relationship. This is most potently demonstrated by her participation in a non-sexual marriage, a fact Marek cannot grasp when she tells him in the final scene of their reunion: "Oh, stop it," said Anička angrily. "Do you think that people have nothing better to do than to look with whom to sleep all the time? You are the only one who has that kind of time" (Frýbová 1993, 544). Here it is obvious that she remained unconventional in this aspect till the end: there is no true sexual 'awakening' of the romantic heroine by the attentions of the hero. Her first sexual experience is framed in a scene of 'almost rape', when Marek repeatedly disregards her wishes and her modesty arguing that she likes what he wants to do:

'I like it that I feel very nice with you all the time—for unknown reasons—and I don't at all want to find out why,' she turned her head lazily and kissed him on the closest spot—on his neck.

'Sweetie, don't be so nice.'

'Why?'

'Because [...] I like you very much. And when you are so cuddly, I want to cuddle with you ... for real. And you would probably not like it.'

'I would not like it,' she agreed and he felt how she suddenly tensed. [...]

'I don't want it, because ... because it would hurt,' she mumbled with her mouth buried into his shirt. [...] '...if it has to be one day ... I want it from you,' she whispered barely audibly into his shirt. 'But let me get used to you.'

Slowly, he raised her face to his and smiled: 'You can calm down. Nothing is happening to you and will not. Until you yourself want it.'

'I will never want it.' [...]

'Of course you will, my love,' and he opened her dressing gown again.

'I don't want that,' she tried to cover herself. 'For one, it is immodest and second—' [...]

'Are you thinking about rape? If so then I am surprised at what an immodest girl you are.'

'I am not an immodest girl,' she jumped. 'But you—'

'You are. A polite girl would not think about any such thing. And she would not have such immodestly beautiful breasts as you do,' he teased her laughing quietly. [...]

'Don't say such awful things or else— —or else— —' she stammered angrily.

'I will keep telling you even worse things and you will like it,' said he taking her to the bedroom. As he pulled her dressing gown off her, she slipped under the covers and pulled the blanket up to her chin. When he was undressing himself, she turned to the wall. [...]

'Close the door. Or turn the light out in the other room,' she whispered.

'I will not turn the light out, my love. I want to look at you.' [...]

They slept a lot, he made love to her a lot and they got up only to take showers or to eat.

'It doesn't hurt now, does it?'

'No, ... it doesn't,' she admitted unwillingly. 'But just because of that we don't have to do it all the time.' (Frýbová 1993, 129–31)

It seemed to me necessary to quote at length to be able to explain what role sex played for Anka from the start. It makes, more or less, the impression of a necessity, rather than of something she needs. She is *emotionally* 'awakened' prior to this scene: she enjoys her life with Marek. The sex scene is violent by Marek's insistence and imposition of his view that sex is what she wants, while she is terrified of the possible pain that defloration may involve. Despite her fear she refuses to have the act performed surgically, because 'if it has to be one day ... I want it from you,' and thus insists on preserving the status of this patriarchal institution. This compliance with the norm, however, is immediately subverted by *the manner* she is (somewhat) sexually 'awakened': Marek approaches Anka in a non-penetrative way before he performs 'the real thing', he makes sure that she achieves orgasm before he does. This is certainly a significant break with the patriarchal tradition, although, in the end, 'her cry sounded out for the first time together with his groan' (Frýbová 1993, 133) in perfect sexual union, as the traditional myth requires.

The last point I should mention is that in attracting Marek sexually Anka preserves an important characteristic of a romantic heroine, namely:

Along with making the heroine young, the novels often place her in circumstances where she can work on the male's sexual desires and yet not be responsible for the 'consequences'. One of the authors' favourite devices is to make the heroine sick, or even unconscious. (Modleski 1990, 51)

This corresponds to the letter with Anka's situation. When she first arouses Marek's sexual interest, she speaks from feverish delirium brought about by the stress from the death of her parents:

'You like me a lot, don't you?', she asked for reassurance in a whisper, and as he was leaning over her, she searched with closed eyes for his face.

'A lot, my love.' Much more than is healthy for me. Much more than I can afford in the name of my own peace. (Frýbová 1993, 103)

She is innocent of Marek's attraction to her, but it is the 'theoretical' sexual knowledge (the fact that the possibility of Marek raping her crossed her mind in the sex-scene quotation) which allows Marek to disregard his promise to wait until she wants, a promise he gave her some ten lines before he breaks it. The traditional patriarchal dictate of a romance permits that his action is not seen as dishonesty, but as a fulfilment of her own wishes. A true romantic heroine should not possess any knowledge of sexual relations whatsoever, as Radway (1994b) points out. Anka 'revealed' that she had such knowledge, which in the skewed logic of a patriarchal romance means that she herself desired a sexual act, in this case, being forced to it.²¹

These last two quotations from the novel show how the text perpetually switches between compliance with romantic and patriarchal traditions on the one hand, and their subversion on the other. Anka is a 'woman of substance', a fantasy of a character who achieved the impossible, that is, the ideal merger of feminine and masculine qualities: feminine on the outside, masculine inside. She is a character above the everyday drudgery of Czech women struggling with the triple burden of work, family and household, unavailability of consumer goods, lack of time for themselves (she is beautiful without effort), uncooperative and uncommunicative husbands and demanding children.²² Her home is her haven, rather than another place of tedious work, and she does only what she wants, instead of having to choose her job with consideration for the

²¹ This logic is, of course, well analysed in feminist writing and is not reserved for fictional worlds as, for example, Susan Brownmiller demonstrates in her early feminist work *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, 1991 (first published 1975).

²² The shortcomings in the service sector, 'whose standards do not correspond to the high employment of women' (Časnochová and Jašková 1987) is a recurrent theme in the coverage of the International Women's Day. Apart from an interview with Nastá Baumruková, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs (the quote above), it is usually included in the politicians' speeches at the occasion of the Day. Not surprisingly, it is always expressed in a way which implies that the household and children are a woman's responsibility. The lack of time is also often phrased in terms of the woman's own responsibility. An interesting concept emerges in an interview with Margita Pekárková, a Secretary for Ideological Work of a District Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia: 'My current work gives me a lot, particularly in learning about people directly at their workplaces. I have to admit, though, that my previous hobbies—literature, gardening, a bit of culture, handicrafts—were almost entirely pushed out. My work consumed all my time. It is like an empty palm without fingers. And that is not good. *I will have to learn to work faster and organise my time better.* I don't know if we did not gain too much in the so-called emancipation and did not *lose what made us women*' (Tomešová 1989; my emphasis). In the context of her utterance, not only does she assume it is her own responsibility to find time for herself, but it is the 'fault' of the women's struggle for emancipation. Most interestingly, the loss of 'woman-ness' means a loss of time for herself, for what she likes doing. In other words, she lost something which made her a unique individual—that is certainly not a typical view for the time, especially not from a party official. Obviously, she thinks about emancipation not in any complex way, but merely in terms of the entry of women into the workplace, that is, the usual way emancipation was always talked about in the state-socialist concept. Texts writing about this aspect of state socialism include, for example, Jiřina Šiklová's 'Are Women in Central and Eastern Europe Conservative?' (Šiklová 1993) and Maxine Molyneux's 'The 'Woman Question' in the Age of Communism's Collapse' (Molyneux 1994).

needs of her family. She keeps her male colleagues (and the reader) 'excellently entertained', but also remains a 'true rebel', which she is not supposed to be according to the classic romance formula (Modleski 1990, 46–47). Until the very end she retains her anger at people's (men's) stupidity (see her annoyance with Marek at his disbelief that she had not had sex for twelve years), instead of being pacified into the role of an 'adorable creature'. She remains unbound until the end and in that she challenges both romantic and patriarchal structures. It can be argued that the text meets the criteria formulated by Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker:

A full disarticulation [of romance] depends upon at least one of the parties [of a 'deviant coupling'] retaining the mark/sign of cultural orthodoxy at the same time as their action shatters the foundations on which it stands. The subversion depends, in other words, on both deconstruction and transformation occurring *simultaneously*. (Pearce and Wisker 1998b, 15; original emphasis)

For Unknown Reasons ends with traditional heterosexual love ('mark of cultural orthodoxy'), but not with the promise of a traditional family, as the reader knows the resolve of both actors, Anka and Marek, not to have children and place work above them (the 'shattering' action implied by the quote above). However, this subversion has its limits. Among the lapses I have noted in the text are: the repeated negative emphasis on Anka's childlessness; the improbable closure ('delivering' the heroine from a conflict-free, but sexless relationship to a 'proper' sexual union with Marek); the deployment of traditional devices (such as, killing the mother) necessary for the independent growth of the heroine; and, at the same time, there is (as I have shown) a significant emphasis on domestic security and the importance of a heterosexual family unit even *without* children. Margaret Marshment's laconic conclusion seems to fit well in this case: 'it seems we can't have everything, not in a single text, at any rate' (Marshment 1988, 43).

The narrator seems to have an ambiguous relationship to the intervening residual patriarchal discourse: sometimes dissenting and sometimes appearing to comply. Ann Rosalind Jones used a similar discursive approach and characterised the conflicts of discourses in romances thus: 'the conflict between feminism as emergent ideology and romance as a residual genre produces three kinds of contradiction: narrative discontinuity, irreconcilable settings, and inconsistency in realist dialogue' (Jones 1986, 203). When I read the novel, I felt that the text compelled me to switch allegiances all of the time: if I achieved a position sympathetic to the heroine or another character, I was immediately 'chided' by the narrator and told that I should not be agreeing with such and such behaviour or attitude. The reverse process was equally frequent: if I felt I was being asked to take a critical approach to something particular, the text immediately showed me a different perspective which compelled me to sympathise.

As a reader, I was simultaneously empowered and disempowered: empowered by being given 'the whole case study' of each character and therefore being placed in the supreme position of a judge over the characters. On the other hand, I was given only that information which the omniscient narrator chose to provide, which manipulated me to agree with the explicit or implied judgements the narrator made over the characters. From this perspective, I, as a reader, was in the same situation as the citizens under state socialism: they were given 'necessary' information from their ideologues, but could not obtain, and were advised not to try and obtain, information from another source. Any resistance could then develop only in 'the space between the lines', in Miklós Haraszti's phrase (1987, 142–49). The same applied to feminist 'resistance'. On the one hand, feminism, as a 'bourgeois' Western movement, was officially not desirable in the state-socialist society which purported to have solved the questions of women's inequality. We have seen that the resulting 'pseudo-emancipation' actually increased the demands

on women. On the other hand, I have demonstrated that the state-socialist practice endorsed the structures of the residual patriarchal discourse. This double bind caused the absence of feminist discussions in the Czech public.

I have further explained that middlebrow fiction constituted a political space in the state-socialist Czech Republic due to the overpoliticisation of all life, and due to the historically political role of literature. A text of this kind would then be very likely to contain dissenting voices 'between the lines', whether in terms of conventional politics or feminist politics. Indeed, the framework of the Western feminist theory on the romance formula helped to uncover the fissures of *For Unknown Reasons* and its 'encoded moderate feminist impulse', as Debra A. Castillo put it (Castillo 1997, 112).²³

²³ Castillo writes about a similarly middlebrow—and therefore not considered worthy of attention by critics—text by a popular Spanish woman-novelist Mercedes Salisachs.

