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Peter Steiner

Making a Czech Hero:
Julius Fučík Through
His Writings

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*To the memory of
Miroslav Procházka—a connoisseur
of Czech-made absurdities*

Foreword: The Legend and My Gun Loader

Josef Škvorecký

Peter Steiner's convincing and meticulous analysis of Julius Fučík's *Reportage* brings to my mind memories that are not particularly enjoyable. For me and those of my contemporaries who shared my political convictions in the early 1950s, the Fučík cult—for he had become the object of an officially enforced cult—was highly unpleasant, if not downright disgusting. There were many anti-Nazi resistance heroes like him, people who, unlike him, had been ready to die if they could take one or two of the enemy with them. But—through no fault of Fučík's—the others, mostly non-Communist, such as Czechoslovak fighter pilots in the Battle of Britain or the Czech and Slovak parachutists who killed Heydrich, have been hushed up and eliminated from Czech history. Fortunately not forever. Yet the Communists treated Fučík not just like a *primus inter pares*, but—so it seemed to us—as the only anti-Nazi fighter worth talking about. When I eventually became acquainted with his *Reportage* during my military service, under curious circumstances described below, the main elements of the book were quoted *ad nauseam* not only by *politruks* (officers in charge of political indoctrination) but also by *kultprops* (officers in charge of cultural activities). This in spite of the claim that *Reportage* is not a novel and ostensibly is not based on any formula.

The strongest argument against the authenticity of Fučík's *Reportage* was, for years, its absolute uniqueness. It is the only known case of a book-length manuscript that was smuggled out of a Gestapo prison; otherwise, merely brief messages or, at most, short letters were known to have gotten out illegally. The post-Communist critical edition of *Reportage* explains this seeming impossibility: there was an interesting collaboration of two men, one helping for patriotic reasons, the other for reasons that were apparently more self-serving. Responsible for providing Fučík with paper for *Reportage* was a prewar Czech prison guard, not at all a Gestapo type. He may have known who Fučík was and must have seen him as a courageous victim of the Nazis. Like the majority of his compatriots, he very likely felt no love for the occupiers, and so he decided to help the martyr. The second prominent player in the drama was another prison guard, Kolínský, a member of the *allgemeine* SS. Since his father was Czech, as the war progressed with less and less success for the Nazis, he may have had second thoughts about his decision to claim his mother's German nationality and developed a contingency plan. His actions, more likely than not, were motivated with an eye for the future.

I would have expected, however, that the two men—or at least the Czech guard—who preserved for posterity a manuscript that became a canonized text for

the Communists, would receive some official recognition, or at least be rewarded with a good job. But nothing was ever heard of them publicly. The Czech guard, I presume and hope, retired and lived the remainder of his years unmolested by the party. The SS man, Kolínský, who had joined the Communist Party after the war, apparently tried to defect to West Germany where his sister lived, but was caught. According to an interview he gave sometime during the brief Dubček era, after his unsuccessful attempt to flee the country, he was badly manhandled by the Communist secret police. He then led an inconspicuous existence as a factory worker in a small town in Bohemia. I know of no trace of him after the arrival of the Soviet tanks.

The Fučík cult culminated in the early 1950s, which I spent in the army. It was a time of unprecedented absurdities. Since I was one of two intellectuals in my tank unit, I became a member of the Fučík Badge Examination Committee. Here I must lightly correct Professor Steiner who writes that “a candidate for this honor [the Fučík Badge] had to undergo a thorough examination [my stress] of his or her knowledge of books selected from a prescribed list.” Although a member of the examination committee, I was absolutely innocent of any knowledge of the books, Fučík’s *Reportage* included, and in this I was not an exception. Equally innocent were the majority of the candidates. Nobody noticed. This was the high time of Socialist Realism, and all novels (most of the mandatory works were novels) were written according to a strict and binding formula. It was enough to know the formula from merely listening to an occasional illiterate lecture by the unit’s *kultprop*, and one could successfully answer any question, speaking in broad generalities and adhering to the formula. And yet a private who was a member of my tank crew, entrusted with loading the cannon, opened my eyes to a suspicion that Fučík’s text used at least some imagery quite foreign to Marxism. I repeat: although an examiner, I had not read *Reportage*. Nor had my cannon loader. But we both had been forced to listen to the occasional indoctrination lectures. Therefore, when asked about Fučík’s encounter with Gestapo Commissar Böhm, my usually sleepy cannon loader came to life and commenced to tell the story—of all possible stories—of the Temptation on the Mountain! He concluded it with Commissar Böhm telling Fučík: “All these things will I give thee, if you wilt fall down and worship me.” This episode made me read—very superficially—Fučík’s *Reportage*, and though Böhm’s words were different, the scene was obviously modeled on the episode from the Scriptures.

But I never gave it much thought until, many years later, I came to read Peter Steiner’s essay on Fučík. My cannon loader’s instinctive recognition of the model—the result, I guess of his early training as an altar boy—came long before Vladimír Macura’s article mentioned in the notes of the essay. It came long before Peter Steiner’s analysis.

I cannot resist a nasty thought, though. What would have happened to Fučík’s

book (censored anyway by the party) in the unlikely event of some influential party literary historian realizing that the work manifested most of the characteristics of romance, as defined by Northrop Frye? And not only that but that it was permeated by scriptural references? Wouldn't it have been seen—horror of horrors—as propaganda for the opium of the people?

Preface

This essay is a modified version of chapter 3 from my book, *The Deserts of Bohemia: Czech Fiction in Its Social Context*, to be published by Cornell University Press. In gathering information about Julius Fučík—a fairly obscure figure by local scholarly standards—I have depended on the good will of a great many people. But rather than trying to draw an exhaustive list (running the danger that, inadvertently, I might forget someone), let me, in a synecdochic fashion, mention just the names of the four without whose substantive help this study would have most likely never made it into print. I wish to thank, first of all, Zuzana Nagy of the Harvard College Library who was always there to provide esoteric material that I considered relevant for the topic. My research was further facilitated through the generous and all-encompassing assistance extended by Dr. Libuše Eliášová, director of the Museum of Labor Movement in Prague—the true Mecca for anybody seriously interested in Fučík and his era. Likewise, I am indebted to Bob Donnorummo of the University of Pittsburgh for his numerous suggestions that improved my piece and for the amicable fashion with which he managed the manuscript through the editorial process at the *Carl Beck Papers*. Finally, I owe enormous gratitude to Jean Gurley here at Penn who with a patience worthy of a more serious cause rendered my barbaric prose comprehensible to native speakers of English. And, last but not least, I am also much obliged to the Research Support Scheme of the Higher Education Support Program whose grant No. 539/95 enabled me to roam libraries and archival repositories in Prague to substantiate some of my harebrained hypotheses about Fučík.

Philadelphia, January 16, 1999.

I

ANDREA: "Unhappy is the land that breeds no hero."
GALILEO: No Andrea: "Unhappy is the land that needs a hero."
—Bertol Brecht, *Galileo*

The Brecht play from which my epigraph was chosen has a curious relevance for the topic of this essay. Written by an exiled leftist author in 1938–1939, it pondered the economy of heroism which, given the precarious political situation in Europe at the time, was not just idle thought. Is a hero someone willing to sacrifice his or her life to affirm a noble ideal? What about somebody like Galileo, who, by submitting ostensibly to those in power, preserves his life to be able to further promulgate an ideal? By publicly renouncing the heliocentric theory of the universe he was able to escape the wrath of the Inquisition and to return to his scientific research.¹

Where might one place Julius Fučík in such a dilemma? Would he have sided with Andrea or with Galileo? The answer to this question is not so simple as I might wish: the signals he emits are quite contradictory. One position is suggested in his 1934 essay "On Heroes and Heroism," which asks the reader what the heroic response is to a situation in which one finds a person drowning in a treacherous stream.² Is it to dive in thoughtlessly and, because of difficult conditions, be unable to extend the intended help, even drown in the process? Or, instead, is it a calculated attempt to get a boat and without great risk to anybody to save the endangered life? This is obviously a leading question. Cost-benefit analysis separating means from ends clearly champions efficiency over foolhardiness and puts Fučík squarely in Galileo's camp. Yet, on the other hand, by his deeds, by his martyr's death at the Nazis' hands, Julius responded, so to speak, to Andrea's call for heroic self-sacrifice. Viewed from this perspective, Fučík cuts a rather paradoxical figure, as if he simultaneously were and were not willing to risk his life. What kind of a hero, one might only wonder, is such a schizophrenic, and by which facet of his split personality should he be judged? Even in his homeland, Fučík's image is far from uniform. Was he a self-promoting narcissist whose cowardly behavior devastated one branch of the anti-Nazi underground in 1942, as some insist? Or a brave man killed in the line of patriotic duty, the author of the immortal *Reportage: Written from the Gallows*—a faithful record of his ordeal in a Gestapo prison and the most translated book ever written in Czech?³

Before jumping into this controversy, let me introduce some biographical data.⁴ Born in Prague in 1903 into an artistic family (his father was a part-time actor and singer), he was named after his famous uncle Julius, the Czech John Philip Sousa. Theater, it seems, was a most important experience during his formative years. From

the tender age of three until he was about twelve, Julius performed a number of children's roles, including Little Lord Fauntleroy. In 1912 his family moved to the industrial town of Pilsen where he finished high school. After graduation he entered Charles University of Prague and for about seven years studied there intermittently without, however, receiving his final degree. He attended lectures and seminars by some of the most prominent literary scholars of the era, including the leading critic F. X. Šalda. During his studies he regularly contributed to various literary journals, co-translated from Russian Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry*, and became associated with the leading Czech avant-garde group, Devětsil.

In 1921 Fučík not only entered the university but, more importantly for his life and death, he also joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCS), founded that year as a Comintern-inspired splinter group of the local Social Democratic Party. In the most fateful moment in the CPCS's history, during its Fifth Congress in 1929 when the Moscow-backed group headed by Klement Gottwald ousted the "reformist" leadership and recast the party according to a ready-made Stalinist model, Fučík sided with the radical wing. He followed the party's general line unswervingly until his untimely death in 1943. During those years he served the party in many capacities. In 1928, for example, when the Czechoslovak authorities erected administrative obstacles to publishing and distributing Communist periodicals, Julius and a few friends managed to persuade Šalda to turn over to them his literary journal *Tvorba*. Fučík promptly transformed it into a militantly leftist periodical devoted to politics and culture. A year later he joined the editorial board of the Communist daily *Rudé právo*, for which he wrote articles and reportage from various places of labor unrest (like the coal miners' strike in northern Bohemia in 1929). Julius visited the Soviet Union for the first time in 1930, and his two-month sojourn resulted in a book of reportage with the catchy title *In the Land Where Tomorrow Already Means Yesterday*, published the following year. He returned to the USSR some four years later as the Moscow correspondent of *Rudé právo*. Back in Prague in 1936 he continued to work for various party periodicals, including *Tvorba*.

The Munich agreement of 1938 that ceded to Hitler parts of Czechoslovakia and the subsequent Nazi occupation of the entire country in March 1939 dealt Fučík a profound blow. He kept an emotionally charged diary of the hectic weeks prior to Beneš' humiliating surrender to the British and French ultimatum insisting that Hitler's territorial demands be accepted without qualification. And the day after the German troops marched into Prague he began to write an autobiographical novel conceived of as a dialogue with his imaginary unborn son Peter. The three completed chapters teem with existential anxiety and a sense of doom. Now married to Gusta (née Kodeřičová), our hero decided to move to a family retreat in southern Bohemia where for more than a year he devoted himself fully to the study of nineteenth-century Czech literary

history. His essay about the leading Czech woman writer of this period—Božena Němcová—is, curiously enough, the first sustained effort at feminist criticism in Czech letters. Warned of his impending arrest in the summer of 1940, he fled to Prague where he lived at various “safe” apartments and continued his literary-historical research.

The arrest of the first clandestine Central Committee (CC) of the CPCS in February 1941 apparently compelled Fučík to seek contact with the Communist underground (the party was officially dissolved in December 1938). From July 1941 until his apprehension by the Gestapo in April 1942 he went under the *nom de guerre* of Professor Jaroslav Horák and was one of the three members of the newly reconstituted clandestine CC in charge of resistance publishing. In this capacity he managed to bring out about ten issues of *Rudé právo*—which, under difficult conditions, became a monthly—as well as several other journals published irregularly. Whether it was a breach of conspiratorial silence or simply an accident that led the Gestapo to the apartment where Julius and several of his fellow resistance fighters met on the fateful night of April 24 is a matter of discussion, as is Fučík’s refusal to use guns to resist his captors. Equally debated is who caved in first to the Gestapo’s cruel torture and triggered an avalanche of arrests that almost entirely wiped out the party’s underground. The fact remains that for over a year Julius remained at the Gestapo prison in the Pankrác district of Prague where, during the spring and summer of 1943, he secretly recorded his experience on some 167 sheets of scrap paper (distributed among the inmates for an altogether different purpose) which he contrived to have smuggled out. His interrogation completed, Fučík was taken to Germany in July of the same year, sentenced to death in Berlin, and with Nazi exactitude duly beheaded on September 8, 1943.

“Turning their backs to life, everyone here dies daily,” Fučík reminisced about his experience in the “in-house prison” at the Gestapo’s Prague headquarters in the preface to *Reportage* “But not everyone is reborn.”⁵ Fučík, I am happy to report, belonged among the lucky ones capable of transcending their deaths. And what a second, postmortem life he had! It all started somewhat inconspicuously. Shortly after the war one of the Pankrác guards during whose shift Julius was able to write in his cell and who also smuggled parts of *Reportage* out of the prison, Adolf Kolínský, contacted Fučík’s widow and informed her of the existence of the manuscript. Additional scouting around was necessary to assemble all the separate pieces (some were discovered only after the book appeared in print), and the first edition was published in the second half of 1945.

Judging from the number of its reissues, *Reportage* was slowly received: the first edition in 1945 and the second in 1946. But three editions appeared in 1947. This increase can be attributed to the ideological drive of the CPCS which, for self-serving reasons, launched after the war a comprehensive campaign to present itself as the only

domestic political force that actively fought the German occupation of Czechoslovakia. Fučík's well-documented martyrdom fitted this design perfectly. In his speech at the Eighth Congress of the CPCS in March 1946, its general secretary, the ill-fated Rudolf Slánský, declared the acceptance of the Munich diktat the heinous betrayal of the working people by the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie, and the Communist underground the beacon of anti-Nazi resistance. "Just read Julius Fučík's book," he urged the sympathetic audience. "Fučík describes how inhumanly they tormented him, how they wanted him to speak. He was beaten again and again, he was tortured, his life hung by a thread. And at this moment, recalling the May First [celebrations] in Moscow, he realized that he was not alone, that together with him millions of people waged the ultimate battle for human freedom. . . And this awareness endowed him with strength not to submit, to persist."⁶ Thus the heroic image of Julius Fučík was launched by the Communist Party, an image that, essentially without alteration, hovered high above the horizon for more than forty years.

But it was during the 1950s that the full-blown cult of Fučík was truly developed. Party propagandists appointed him as a role model for Socialist youth. "No other personality of the Communist movement," Václav Černý (one of the most vociferous detractors of the Fučík cult) ventured, "equaled Fučík's seduction of youth. Not by the nature, content, or significance of his resistance activity, did Fučík seduce, but rather by the way in which . . . he rushed with zealous joy to face death."⁷ To be a role model, however, Fučík's image had to be better packaged. So his prosopopoeic presence in the text was augmented by a real face: an idealized portrait drawn from a profile by the Art Nouveau-style painter Max Švabinský: "almost girlish, effervescent, pure, and so beautiful," as Milan Kundera put it mockingly, "that perhaps those who knew Fučík personally preferred this noble drawing to their memory of a real face."⁸ And an appropriate slogan was selected from *Reportage* as a brachylogical substitute for the entire book—a shorthand verbal accompaniment to the visual icon. The merger of the concluding two sentences: "People, [I liked you.] watch!" (91; 112) dovetailed perfectly with the image of the book as a monument to heroic self-sacrifice proffered so that there would be no more imperialist wars.

It is not possible to enumerate here all the accolades bestowed on the martyr. Since 1946 the honorific "National Hero" has been used regularly in front of his name, and in 1948 he was decorated with the highest Czechoslovak military medal, the Order of the White Lion. At the 1950 Congress of the Moscow-backed Conseil Mondial de la Paix in Warsaw a "watchful" jury headed by the Italian Socialist Pietro Nenni awarded Fučík the Peace Prize for his immortal book. The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (who by chance borrowed his pen name from a nineteenth-century Czech poet, Jan Neruda—Fučík's favorite) declared in his address to this distinguished international gathering: "We live in the literary epoch which tomorrow will be called

the epoch of Fučík, the epoch of simple heroism.”⁹ And to make sure that this prophecy would not go unfulfilled, the Czechoslovak Youth Union (the local variety of the Soviet Komsomol) instituted in the early 1950s a new tool of indoctrination aptly called the “Fučík Badge.” A candidate for this honor had to undergo a thorough examination of his or her knowledge of books selected from a prescribed list, including *Reportage* as one of the obligatory texts. The coveted prize for passing this rite was a pin bearing Fučík’s authorized profile which the fortunate ones could sport on their blue shirts—the Union’s official gear.¹⁰ And there was no better place to show it off than Fučík’s Park of Culture and Relaxation (as the old Prague fairgrounds were renamed in the 1950s).

Needless to say, Fučík also became an object of literary adulation, and not only by run-of-the-mill propaganda hacks. Poets of Pablo Neruda’s or Milan Kundera’s stature felt an urge to pay homage to the dead martyr.¹¹ To boost his image as the premiere man of Czech letters, comprehensive publication of Fučík’s oeuvre was carried out from 1947 to 1963. This undertaking was actually suggested by the hero himself in his “last will,” embedded in *Reportage*, which also appointed a friend, Ladislav Štoll, as editor. But while Fučík envisioned his collected works as a “modest” five-volume project, Štoll, aided in his valiant efforts by the hero’s widow, managed to extend it to twelve volumes. And it surely could not have hurt the sales of Fučík’s collected works to have been edited by the man who was not only a member of the CC CPCs, one-time minister of education, perennial director of the Literary Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, but above all the top party Cerberus in literary matters.

What has been so far left out of my account, however, was the special status of Fučík’s *Reportage* in Czechoslovak society following World War II. It was more than just fabulous, a hagiographic account of what happened to a man personifying essential Communist virtues; it was scriptural: a Holy Writ enlivened by the last breath of the dying hero. The metaphor of St. Veronica’s scarf—the direct imprint of Christ’s face on a piece of cloth—employed by the avant-garde Czech poet Konstantin Biebl in his “Fučík in Prison,” grasped well the special status of *Reportage* as a textual *vera ikona* signifying the immediate presence of the author.¹² So when quoted at pregnant moments it was not perceived as just another prosaic instance of reported speech but as if Julius’s authoritative voice itself had just resounded (the first person form of his narrative was quite helpful in this respect).

And pregnant moments these were! What comes in mind immediately is the false testimony of Fučík’s widow during the Moscow-orchestrated Prague show trial of 1952 against the leadership of the CPCs, including its general secretary, Rudolf Slánský. In accusing one of the defendants, Bedřich Reicin (a close family friend, even a witness at the Fučík’s wedding in 1938), of betraying her late husband to the Gestapo,

she concluded her court appearance by quoting apropos a passage from *Reportage* crowned by the obligatory warning: "People, I liked you. Watch!"¹³ After this devastating oratory, the disgraced Reicin—even though innocent—might have considered himself lucky just to be hanged. Kundera's novel *The Joke* (1967) reenacts this symptomatic device of Fučík-quoting in the scene where the main hero, Ludvík, is being expelled by his fellow students from the university for an ideological lapse. And to endow it with an interartistic dimension, Kundera locates this trial in a lecture hall adorned by (guess what?) Julius's likeness.

Given the nature of a totalitarian regime, it is not surprising that the party-sponsored cult of Fučík lasted untarnished for so long. True, there were a few troublemakers who claimed to remember some facts quite differently from how they were presented in *Reportage*. But they were quickly hushed up, and their heterodox views became known to the general public only much later. The only dissenting voices came from émigrés who had known Fučík before the war and whose recollections of him were very much unlike the official legend. The most sustained text of this kind, successfully kept away from Czech readers by the Iron Curtain, was a long essay by Fučík's erstwhile friend, the writer Egon Hostovský, published as a separate brochure in April 1953 by the National Committee for a Free Europe. Hostovský's attempt at puncturing as many holes as possible in the Communist hero's nimbus is quite unflattering in every conceivable respect. Yet, despite its rancorous tone, some of its observations appear remarkably insightful as far as the origins of *Reportage* are concerned. "Fučík," Hostovský volunteers, "nurtured immense admiration for vaudeville magicians, and he himself had learned many tricks that remained unbeknown to his friends for a long time. . . . It amused him to play a double role and the problem of treason fascinated him to an extent almost pathological. . . . If Fučík really was great," Hostovský concludes his exposé, adding insult to injury, "then his era was desperately petty."¹⁴

With the passage of time and the gradual erosion of the Communist ideology for which the image of Fučík was an important prop, the 1960s marked a significant decline in the hero's popularity, although his official status remained the same. The Czechoslovaks grew tired of being watchful all the time and instead they started to ask some pretty embarrassing questions about the book. What questions? Well, better not to ask! How, for example, could such an extensive text have been written in a closely guarded prison and why was the facsimile of the manuscript never released in its entirety but only as a few isolated pages? Or, how could this sworn archenemy of the Nazis roam at leisure through the streets of Prague with the Gestapo interrogator Böhm at his side, as described in *Reportage*? And what was the ultimate meaning of Julius's heroic gesture anyway? The latter topic was addressed head on by Milan Kundera—one of the lionizers of Fučík during the previous decade: in *The Joke* he derides the hero's superhuman bravery as sheer histrionics. The excommunicated

Communist Ludvík takes a jab at the symbol of the era that wronged him: *Reportage*, he declares, should not be seen as a sign of its author's strength but of his weakness. It was written because "Fučík needed the help of an audience. In the solitude of his cell he created at least a fictitious audience for himself. He needed to be seen! To draw strength from applause! At least a fictitious applause. . . . To turn the prison into a stage and make his lot bearable not only by living it, but also by exhibiting it, performing it!" (113, 152; 156). And a year later, during the hot summer of 1968, the young journalist Miroslava Filípková, in the popular weekly *The Young World*, suggested for the first time in public that Fučík's text contains certain discrepancies that not only ought to be closely scrutinized but that cast a shadow of doubt about his alleged supreme heroism.¹⁵

The "fraternal aid" of the Red Army in August 1968 that suppressed the short-lived experiment with "democratic" Socialism brought an end to all such blasphemies. The larger-than-life statue of Fučík—a war hero and above all a true friend of the Soviet Union—was ceremoniously dusted off and put back on its pedestal. But it was more and more difficult to get young people (for whom World War II was but a few boring pages in school textbooks) excited about this didactic figure so closely identified with the Stalinist era. True, as penance for his political sins committed in the heady atmosphere of Prague Spring, the respected writer Ladislav Fuks published in 1978 a novel focusing on Fučík's childhood; a full-feature movie about Julius was released at about the same time; and in 1987 the one-and-only Fučík Museum opened in downtown Prague next to Café Slavie—the favorite hangout of Czech dissidents. But despite all this worthy toil, the enthusiasm of yore for the resistance martyr was never again to be fully resuscitated.

One of the denizens of Café Slavie, the literary historian Václav Černý, in his 1977 memoirs—published abroad but with a sizeable underground circulation at home—subjected Fučík's *Reportage* to the closest critical examination up to that point. Černý's comments were perceived as especially incisive because of his firsthand experience of the Pankrác prison during the war. For, like Fučík, he too was a member of the Czech anti-Nazi resistance and a captive of the Gestapo. Some of his questions reiterated the doubts mentioned above—the mystery of Fučík's manuscript, his unusual socializing with a Gestapo interrogator. But Černý's inquiry probed still further. If Fučík was such an important underground operator why was not he kept in an isolated cell? And how could he have become a prison trustee before his interrogation was finished? The gist of Fučík's text, Černý declared, was to find a scapegoat for the author's own failing. More than anything else it was a rhetorical exercise in persuading readers that it was not he who had caved in to the Gestapo's torture, but his second-in-charge, Jaromír Klecan. So far we had only Fučík's word to this effect—quite apodictic and all too shrill, Černý asserted. But if he were telling the truth, why, Černý

asked slyly, were the 1945 protocols of Böhms' interrogations by the Czechoslovak authorities never released? Especially if they would substantiate Fučík's version of what transpired the first night at the Gestapo headquarters? (321–31)¹⁶ But Černý could only pose troublesome questions, for the relevant documents were safely beyond his reach.

And they were inaccessible for virtually everybody until the Velvet Revolution of 1989. This sudden historical turnabout finally abolished all the taboos of the *ancien régime*, and the *causa* Fučík entered its final stage. Now some of the most conspicuous passages from *Reportage* could be critically examined, above all the scene of our hero's arrest by the Gestapo on the fateful evening of April 24, 1942. Fučík, according to his own account, came to a clandestine meeting and immediately reproached other participants gathered there for not observing strict conspiratorial rules. Alas, his wise words were uttered in vain, for, just as tea was being poured to refresh the plotters, Gestapo agents began to bang on the door. Nine Nazis entered the apartment through the kitchen while Fučík, armed with two 6.35-mm caliber pistols, observed them from behind the partially opened door to the adjacent bedroom. Clint Eastwood would have known what to do: the "Krauts" would simply have made his day. Then again, he is not particularly famous for his writing skills. Fučík, a man of letters, proved to be much less trigger-happy. "If I shoot," he soliloquized for two, three seconds, "I wouldn't save anything except myself from torture. But in vain would I sacrifice the lives of four comrades. Is that so? Yes! It's decided. I leave my hideout" (13; 2).

Riva Friedová-Krieglová, the only participant in this meeting who survived the war, remembered what happened on April 24 somewhat differently. After returning from a Nazi concentration camp in 1945 she even made a written deposition (sounding more like an indictment) about that touchy event; it, however, promptly disappeared in the bottomless party archives. So only after 1989 could her voice be heard, crisp and clear. According to Krieglová, Fučík's lack of resolve to shoot during the Gestapo bust was something she clearly did not expect. "We ran to the [other] room from the kitchen. We pulled up the blinds and opened the window. . . . Outside [as if] glued to the wall stood a Gestapo man. I was quite disappointed by Comrade Fučík's behavior. Instead of fulfilling his duty and using the weapon against the Gestapo man, he hid it under a quilt. Had Comrade Fučík killed the Gestapo man under the window he and other Comrades would have perhaps been able to escape. Meanwhile, Gestapo men broke down the door. How many of them I do not remember. And still Comrade Fučík did not use his weapon."¹⁷

It would be utterly futile to try to adjudicate almost sixty years later which version of the event is more accurate (though, apparently, the detail about how the weapons were concealed so unheroically in a bed was corroborated independently by a member of the arresting team, Commissar Josef Böhms, during his postwar

interrogation by the Czechoslovak authorities). What would have happened if Fučík actually had offered armed resistance might only be conjectured upon. Most commentators, however, agree that his refusal to use his weapons and his irenic surrender to the Nazis was very much out of step with the cruel ethos of the Communist resistance, whose deliberate unwillingness to distinguish POWs from traitors was rather notorious.

But Friedová-Krieglová's testimony—regardless of its informative value—was not the greatest surprise of the season. With archive doors wide open, answers to most inquiries about Fučík could finally be provided on the basis of evidence, not hearsay. A team of historians led by the late František Janáček sieved through all relevant sources and came up with a bundle of surprises. The manuscript of *Reportage*, the Forensic Laboratory of the Czechoslovak police attested, is genuine and has not been altered mechanically or chemically. Also, a comparative graphological analysis carried out by the same lab established that the handwriting is Fučík's and his authorship of the text is indisputable. Furthermore, from what could be culled from existing Gestapo archives and from the testimony of Gestapo personnel after the war, Fučík—Janáček and the members of his team are absolutely insistent on this point—did not provide any incriminating evidence against his fellow resistance fighters, and Klecan was the one who did start to talk. Whether this investigation dispelled all doubts about Fučík's behavior in German captivity remains to be seen. But it is, surely, the best we have so far.¹⁸

Fučík, however, and here comes the kicker, did talk to the Gestapo. He even mentioned this fact at the very end *Reportage*:

For seven weeks I did not give any evidence. I was aware that no word could save me but could endanger comrades outside. My silence was my action. . .

Seven weeks with the Gestapo taught me a lot. . . . I realized that even here I have an opportunity to fight; by different means than outside but with the same purpose and the same direction. To remain silent meant not to exploit this opportunity. More was necessary so that I could tell myself that I fulfilled my duty in every place and in every situation. It was necessary to play a high-stakes game. Not for one's own sake—I would lose immediately. But for the sake of others. They expected a sensation from me. I gave it to them. They expected a lot from my talking. So I "talked." *How*, you will find in my protocol.

The results were even better than I expected. I turned their attention in a completely different direction. . . . I gained their trust and I continued. For a few months they were chasing a mirage which—like every mirage—was greater and more attractive than reality. . . .

That I postponed my death in this way and that I gained time that could perhaps help me was a reward, which I did not calculate.

For a year I was writing a theatrical play with them, one in which I ascribed to myself the lead. It was sometimes amusing, sometimes exhausting, but always dramatic. But every play has its own ending. Climaxes, crises, denouements. The curtain falls. Applause. Spectators, go to sleep! (90–91; 0)

The reason why nobody knew about this was that the passage was excised from all pre-1989 editions.

It is not difficult to understand why the editors of Fučík's *Nachlass* resorted to this radical measure. As if it were not enough that their man refused to shoot at the Nazis. He was even fraternizing with them! A Communist who, for whatever reasons, might ingratiate himself into the Gestapo's trust would hardly have been an inspiration for Czechoslovak youth. How, after all, can you tell the dancer from the dance?¹⁹ But, within the context of the book, Fučík's admission to his covert play provides a plausible explanation for some of the most controversial passages: his excursions in Böhm's company to a pub in suburban Bráník and to the Hradčany hill overlooking Prague. Without being able to refer to Fučík's duplicitous scheme, official propaganda had to employ some pretty tenuous construals to justify them. Like depicting these strange perambulations as the Gestapo's desperate attempts to break Fučík psychologically, to soften his resolute stance by exposing him to the spring beauty of his native Prague. Milan Kundera's lengthy poem *The Last May* (1955), for example, presents an extended argument why Fučík had to emerge victorious from this existential duel. Obviously, the editors found it more palatable to publish such tenebrous passages than to expose the hero's motives to potentially embarrassing second-guessing. Furthermore, they might have also preferred this segment deleted because it imbued the hallowed phrase, "People, watch!" with undesired connotation. In the conclusion of his text Fučík was juxtaposing a somnolent theatrical audience to alert participants in real life where "there are no spectators." The spin doctors, however, used Fučík's words in a way that had nothing to do with one's dozing or being awake. They wanted people to "Be on guard!" against all the nefarious imperialist schemes threatening the welfare of humankind.²⁰

With all this information at hand we can now return to the issue of heroism with which this essay opened. Was Fučík a hero? Well, he participated actively in the anti-Nazi resistance—a deed of which very few of his countrymen may boast. He held his own while tortured by the Gestapo and was not, it seems, the primary cause for the wholesale destruction of his underground group. And if we take into account his "functionalist" understanding of a heroic action, according to which the ends justify the means, we can understand the *telos* of "the high-stakes game" he played with his captors. Despite the bad aftertaste it might have left in the mouths of some. Yet, there still remains one of Fučík's actions which does not neatly coincide with this straightforward heroic interpretation: why did he not resist arrest while armed against

such an event? There was no conceivable gain to be derived from this decision but saving his own life. He could not have known in advance that he would withstand brutal interrogation or that he might successfully mislead the Gestapo under the pretense of providing them with valuable information about the Communist underground. Moreover, to continue in my role of Monday-morning quarterback, had Fučík turned the Prague apartment into an OK Corral, the ensuing shoot-out would have diminished considerably the number of potential “weak links” able to lead the Gestapo to the rest of the Communist underground. True, this is all just probabilities, but the odds do seem stacked against Fučík.

So why did not he shoot? In the realm of speculation which this question usually elicits, the answer offered by Fučík’s friend and fellow member of the Communist resistance, Vladimír Vrána, is most intriguing: “I believe that the real reason why Julek [a nickname for Julius] gave up the fight was his reporter’s passion, his curiosity for what would follow. Julek simply could not leave life like that, like blowing out a candle. He could not leave without writing his big reportage about the CPC’s resistance against the invaders, about which—I noticed—he was thinking at each step” (92). Whether Vrána’s insight into Fučík’s psyche is correct ultimately depends on one’s personal opinion. But his observation introduces a refreshingly new twist to my discussion of Fučík. The reason that this man (not exactly a household name in prewar Czechoslovakia) provoked so much ado after his death is not just a function of his courageous achievements. Without detracting from Fučík’s actual merits, Černý’s assessment of his role in the Communist underground—“his significant resistance activity was of limited duration [and] it consisted of fulfilling directives coming from the agencies or personalities truly in command” (324)—does not seem altogether off the mark. What really matters about Fučík, and this should be obvious by now, is not his heroism *per se*, but its representation, or, self-representation, to be more precise.

II

If it is not propaganda, it is not art!
—Diego Rivera

Fučík, hero or not, was a child of his own epoch, and his writings carry an indelible imprint of the time. This said, I must emphasize that the 1920s and 1930s were turbulent decades in Czech culture, the age of Modernist experimentation and of political radicalism which, moreover, often went hand in hand. Given this confusing

spectrum, a short discussion of the avant-garde theories with which Fučík was familiar will be necessary to ascribe to him an appropriate place.

In his 1934 essay, "What Is Poetry?" the vice-chairman of the Prague Linguistic Circle, Roman Jakobson, pointed out what he perceived to be the most fundamental dichotomy inherent in every act of representation: "besides the direct awareness of the identity between sign and object (A is A₁)," he ventured, "there is a necessity for the direct awareness of the inadequacy of that identity (A is not A₁)." It is the latter tendency toward nonsameness (*différance*, in a more recent parlance) that characterized artistic signification for Jakobson. Such a semiotic bifurcation might appear, at first glance, quite convincing. There are, on the one hand, opaque, nonreferential texts of avant-garde writers (whether Khlebnikov or Joyce) and, on the other hand, Fučík's forthright *Reportage*—clear-cut examples of a utilitarian, journalistic mode of writing. And Fučík was never tired of swearing again and again to the documentary veracity of his texts. But is the matter really so simple? And was it not, to be sure, Jakobson himself who in the same article warned us to be cautious, to watch out for literati speaking with forked tongues: "Do not believe the critic who rakes a poet over the coals in the name of the True and Natural. All he has in fact done is to reject one poetic school, that is, one set of devices deforming material in the name of another poetic school, another set of deformational devices. The artist is playing no less [of a] game when he announces that this time he is dealing with naked *Wahrheit* rather than *Dichtung*."²¹

What is the source of this anxiety, one might ask? Why would creative writers repeatedly repudiate the very premises of their art? The reason for this, I suspect, has something to do with the spirit of the time. In scrutinizing the Modernist paradigm for an answer I could not but notice that one of its most salient features is the idea of transgression (the frustration of expectations, the power of the extraordinary, and various modifications thereof). A brief look at writings stemming from the most different fields of knowledge and/or from authors of very unlike political orientations of interwar Europe supports this hypothesis. "*It must be possible for an empirical scientific system to be refuted by experience*," emphasized Karl Popper in 1934, making the principle of "falsifiability" the mother of all scientific methods.²² And though the probability of an errant slice of bread flying up instead of landing on the floor (with its buttered side down) is pretty slim, it must exist for the law of gravity to have scientific status. In a similar vein, the political theorist Carl Schmitt argued that the ultimate criterion of legality is not the adherence to law but, on the contrary, its breach: "The exception is more interesting than the rule," he affirmed in 1922. "The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything: It confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from exception. In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition."²³ And to revitalize a dormant legal system, Schmitt proposed the institution of a God-like

sovereign with absolute decision-making power who at any moment could transcend the existing order, destroy its reduplicative self-sameness.

It is uncanny how close the rhetoric of Schmitt's decisionalism comes to that of the Slavic Modernist aesthetics (with which my argument started) and its dialectics of defamiliarization/automatization. Art, in Shklovskiy's 1914 dictum, was precisely the creative impulse capable of "bringing back to a human being its experience of the world, resurrecting things and killing pessimism"; the antinomy of *byt*—"an immutable present, overlaid," as Jakobson put it eloquently in 1930, "by a stagnating slime, which stifles life in its tight, hard mold."²⁴ This theory, I believe, accounts well for the strange behavior of artists that earlier puzzled me so much. What motivated their negative attitude toward the past is the premium that Modernism placed on novelty. The keen urge to reject a particular mode of representation has nothing to do with its inherent signifiatory characteristics, but with its historical status. A replacement is used not necessarily because it is semiotically more appropriate than that discarded but simply because it is more exciting. And within this simple developmental scheme one could perhaps argue that if at a certain moment the artistic canon mandates a high degree of identity between signifier and signified, it will be succeeded by a system appreciating their maximal nonsameness. Or vice versa. The heuristic value of this model lies in its appealing simplicity. The actual historical material at hand, however, muddles things somehow. Making the process of artistic representation as complex as possible did not by any means fully exhaust Modernist radicalism. Its ultimate gesture was transgressive to the point of self-annihilation. What true Modernist iconoclasts desired was not just to displace the works of their venerable predecessors with their own creations but to smash the vicious circle of denial and affirmation that hitherto had characterized the history of art, to end this "strange" activity once and for all.

I do not wish to comment here on the feasibility of such a project, but some of its formulations, I will illustrate soon, had considerable impact on Fučík's writings. Let me, therefore, introduce just one example relevant for my argument: Marcel Duchamp's ready-made sculpture, *Fountain*, which rendered an ordinary urinal a work of art. And, before getting to the thorny issue of what this artifact may or may not stand for, let me mention only a single aspect of it—its shocking sign-vehicle—the fact that it recycled as artistic material an "undignified" object connected to the lowest bodily functions. Fučík's *Reportage* too, I would like to remind those who have meanwhile grown impatient with my digression, has a peculiar material substratum: it was written on scraps of toilet paper. The Duchamp-Fučík analogy—and I am ready to take the fire—might look quite strained, to say the least. The French sculptor, an objection may go, had full liberty to employ any material he wished, and his use of a urinal was a well-calculated choice made with a specific purpose in mind: to *épater le bourgeois*. The Czech writer, on the other hand, imprisoned by the Nazis as a resistance fighter

and writing in an environment more than hostile to such a pursuit, was forced to use the *only paper* he could get hold of. Moreover, the result of this illegal toil is a fairly straightforward account of his ordeal at the Gestapo's hands, a quite digestible reading produced to enlighten the masses, to steer them in a particular ideological direction. So is it legitimate to compare *Reportage* to Duchamp's *Fountain*? Some further discussion is obviously needed.

Anybody who inspects the manuscript of *Reportage* cannot help but notice that its physical appearance was not dictated entirely by harsh prison conditions.²⁵ The author really cared what it looked like. Thus, in a situation where those who smuggled the individual pages of his manuscript out of prison were literally risking their own lives, Julius did not hesitate to expand the contraband by an additional sheet of paper—a front page to the book—that contained nothing but the title, the date and the place of its origin, and the author's customary pen name “-jef-.” Furthermore, it should be observed that Fučík's experimentation with a genre of illicit prison writing (*motáky* in Czech) that employs unorthodox media predates his encounter with the Gestapo by more than a decade. In February 1930, for example, while incarcerated for ten days at the Prague police headquarters he managed to get out a missive (to the lady he was to marry some nine years later) inscribed on an unfolded cigarette box, his text artfully woven around the commercial graphics on the wrapper.²⁶ As if emboldened by the results of that endeavor, he decided to go public with such epistolary efforts at the next available opportunity. And he did not have to wait very long. Arrested in August 1931 for crossing the Czech-German border with somebody else's passport, and kept for about two weeks in investigative detention at the Pankrác prison (of all places), he wrote another contraband letter, this time to Kurt Konrád, his temporary replacement as editor-in-chief of the weekly *Tvorba*. Well aware that his epistle would be formatted for print, the author was more than eager to call attention to its unusual physical appearance, written “on scraps of paper with a match found in the courtyard and dipped into a stinky solution from a cigarette butt.”²⁷ Yes, Fučík conceded, his legal status entitled him to write regular letters but, then, going through official channels would take much too long. Was this a credible argument? Well . . . From the editorial commentary appended to Fučík's text in *Tvorba* of August 27 (the letter itself was dated August 18), the reader learns that Konrád received this contraband correspondence on the very same date that its author was released from detention.

The point I am trying to make is that Fučík, not unlike other Modernists, was attracted in his creative praxis to strange or unusual materials. In contrast to true aesthetic experimentalists like Duchamp, however, he did not defamiliarize his medium in a playful, detached manner but strove to ground this act in existential circumstances. Such a grounding, however, should be recognized for what it actually is: a ploy for justifying phenomena which, from a practical perspective, make very little sense. Thus,

Duchamp's and Fučík's creative *modi operandi* may easily be seen as opposite sides of the same avant-garde gesture: signing art's death warrant. If even a urinal can be elevated to that level, Duchamp's sculpture suggests, then art as a privileged category of special artifacts does not exist. Fučík's use of a cigarette box or toilet paper as writing material, on the other hand, is like a label whose warning to the end-user might be summarized as: What you are going to read is not belles lettres or fiction. This is a factual account of what did really happen, produced under the described circumstances as certified by the physical appearance of this document.

But wait a minute, a sensible reader might exclaim at this point. Duchamp's attitude toward artistic material truly revolutionized our understanding of what representation is all about. He was among the first to shock the public with one of the greatest truisms of our age: The medium is the message! From this perspective, Fučík, for whom the material had only a secondary, authenticating function, appears to be a pre-Modernist retrograde naively striving to depict the outside world "as it is." This charge can be countered in a number of ways. Historically speaking, Modernism is not a synchronous, homogenized structure but a period comprised of antithetical trends and competing generations. In the latter respect, one might observe that Duchamp was Fučík's senior by some fifteen years, which, in those turbulent times, was not a negligible gap. And it follows very much from the antinormative spirit of Modernism that a mode of representation affirmed by one generation would have been spontaneously challenged by the next. Within the dialectical scheme of change discussed above, the automatized semiotic formula $A \neq A_1$, so dear to the likes of Duchamp, would be replaced by its opposite, $A = A_1$, championed by Fučík and his cohorts.

This negation of the status quo, however, does not imply a return to the status ante quo: a wholesale abandonment of the Modernist canon for nineteenth-century Realism. What had meanwhile changed is not only the concept of reality itself but also how literature should relate to it. Marxist-Leninist doctrine (whose impact on Modernist thought can hardly be overestimated) proclaimed that the world around us is the product of economic relations invisible to the naked eye. Furthermore, these relations exist in real time and they develop according to their own logic: from capitalism to communism, if only to speak about the final sequence of this historical series. Though the direction of history is clear, the timetable of the transition from an exploitative to a classless society is not. It all depends on how quickly the proletariat mobilizes for its "last battle." And this is where the literature championing progress can find its new role: to educate the masses, to steer them in the right direction, to mourn martyrs and to celebrate heroes. The reason why some Modernist artists found Marxist-Leninist ideology so attractive is quite obvious. Earlier I drew a parallel between Schmitt's decisionalism and the avant-garde aesthetics based on the proclivity toward transgression that they both shared. This similarity, however, should not obfuscate the significant

difference between the two normative spheres these theories treat: politics and arts. An unprecedented decision of the Schmittian sovereign would impact significantly on the lives of all his subjects, whereas even the boldest artistic experiment always concerns only very few and carries virtually no existential consequences. Or, put differently, of all the norms governing human actions, the aesthetic ones seem the least obligatory and socially relevant. So what is the point in transgressing them if nobody really cares! Subscribing to the theory of history as a class struggle and the progressive function that literature can effectuate within it promised to release artists from their proverbial ivory tower, to boost their bruised egos, to put them where the real action is. By accepting this new social engagement, however, writers eager to play ball had to adjust their discursive strategies accordingly.

What marginalized Modernist literature above all was the hypertrophy of exclusive, esoteric, and experimental texts that it generated. If this trap is to be avoided, the message of art cannot be its medium, they recognized clearly, but political action. Trotsky's polemics with the avant-garde theorists who conceived of verbal art as the art of language neatly encapsulates this point. "They believe," he charged from the Marxist position, "that 'In the beginning was the Word.' But we believe that in the beginning was the deed. The word followed as its phonetic shadow."²⁸ One need not be Einstein to figure out what "deed" meant to Bronshteyn—the architect of the October Revolution. If art is just a function of politics, and this is, I believe, what he was actually saying, albeit more elegantly, then literature as an autonomous field of human creativity is dead indeed. For, as an instrument of social engineering, or, more apropos, a weapon of class struggle, there is only one yardstick to measure its value: its utility for the revolutionary cause.

It was the Russian writers and critics around the group the Left Front of Art (the Lef, and the New Lef after 1928) who, in my opinion, elaborated the Modernist program of *littérature engagé* in the most systematic way. The fallacy of traditional literary mimesis, these challengers of the status quo maintained, was not its intention but its implementation. Texts written by the esteemed members of various realist or naturalist schools might have indeed been intended to depict the world as it is, but as works of fiction they succeeded merely in producing a pale semblance, verisimilitude. Drawing an unflattering analogy with another form of deceptive inauthenticity—religion—the Modernists declared belletristic prose to be "an opium for the masses" and "the shamanism of literary priests."²⁹ To retain its right to exist, the literary praxis had to be fundamentally transformed: from fictionmaking into factography (*literatura fakta*). Or, even more radically, replaced by certain forms of expository writing.

Because of its social function, it was printed journalism that attracted young iconoclasts' attention. What gives the media its punch, they correctly assessed, is its referential mode of signification. In reading a newspaper we do not suspend our belief

about the actual existence of the events and personalities reported. On the contrary, we pick up a paper every morning firmly convinced that the knowledge derived from this source is not about the world “as if” but *as is*. And in comparing its form to that of the “realistic” novel, the theoreticians of Lef were quick to point out why the latter failed its mimetic project. The novel, first of all, developed as a concatenation of several short stories. The law of the genre, however, required the author to obfuscate this fact, to provide some “credible” motivation for the fusion. The psyche of the main hero, for example, provided a convenient unifying frame for the typical nineteenth-century novel. It is precisely the patchwork structure of a newspaper that exposes the make-believe nature of this convention. It presents individual articles for what they are, without false pretense of interconnectedness. Secondly, a newspaper piece is capable of rendering reality more faithfully, the theoreticians of Lef believed, because its narrative need not fit the Procrustean couch of literary emplotment. It tells a story as it actually unfolds without scrambling the order of events for composition’s sake. And finally, unlike the traditional novel, to get its message across journalism utilizes some completely nonnarrative devices: photographs, statistics, and graphs. These iconic/indexical signs, no doubt, further enhance the potential of the printed medium for presenting what has happened in a way that seems authentic and verifiable.

Lef’s quest for the new prose I have just briefly described has its definitive merits. By drawing attention to the technology of writing per se (the “making of the work”), the champions of factography succeeded in highlighting those aspects of the literary process that traditional critics had hitherto neglected. And by creatively appropriating formal principles and devices from the nonartistic realm, avant-garde writers effectively transformed the artistic praxis as well. Yet, all these achievements necessarily had only limited repercussions, far too limited for those whose appetite for transgression knew no bounds. For them the mere change of an artistic canon was too lame an affair. To jolt the audience thoroughly, the use of journalistic devices could not be an end in itself but a means for imparting a radical political message. It was intended to foreground not “an organized violence of poetic form over language”³⁰ but of one class over the other: not to *épater le bourgeois* but to annihilate it. This sounds pretty heady and might have remained just another intellectual pipe dream if not for the unique historical situation in which the Russian avant-garde found itself in the 1920s. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent civil war violently rent Russian society, and the champions of change (whether artistic or political) joined the strife as comrades-in-arms. The vacuum created by the destruction of the existing social fabric was to be filled, and the young Modernists eagerly stepped into the void: for a while they became the official representatives of the new Soviet culture. To justify this identification with the victorious political power a theory of “social command [*zakaz*]” was advanced, according to which the best art of every epoch expresses the interest

of the most progressive social class of the moment. So the appropriation by the avant-garde of Bolshevik ideology—the language of Marxism-Leninism—was explained as an instantiation of this general historical law.

As far as Lef's project of *literatura fakta* is concerned, it was scientific Communism that provided the factographers with the cognitive lens through which to observe and report "objective reality" surrounding them. But as the Soviet system became firmly entrenched and its backbone, the party apparatus, stronger and stronger, the range of creative possibility for serving the proletarian cause remaining to leftist writers grew proportionately narrower and narrower. It was no longer up to them to decide how their works could contribute to the welfare of the new Communist state. The party became the ultimate arbiter of "literary" taste and, with all the coercive power at its disposal, the innovative quest for the most direct and truthful rendition of social reality backslid quickly into a ritualistic exercise in preapproved political propaganda. A narrative about the Beauty marrying the Beast and then becoming just like it would not in itself be particularly new or interesting. History is full of examples of rebellious writers turned state's apologists. But the Russian avant-garde added another twist to this cabala: the Beast changing into the Beauty. The poets who forged their pens into arms for class war declared politics to be the continuation of poetics by other means. The never-ending game of rendering the artistic form strange lost its purpose, members of Lef were happy to announce, because the proletarian revolution itself had totally defamiliarized the world. Literature was dead because life had finally become artistic! So much in 1926 did the "poet of revolution," Vladimir Mayakovsky, tell the visiting Prague writer (and close friend of Fučík), F. C. Weiskopf, when the topic was broached:

"Literature. . . literature is already passé."

"?"

"Yes, because it's more boring than Soviet life. More boring, for example, than a meeting of citizens suffering a housing shortage. . . I attended such a meeting recently and I tell you that what the simple speakers 'from the crowd' related about their family lives, small adventures, and about their plans was much more interesting than the best constructed novel. . . . And a Komsomol demonstration in Red Square is better than any one of my poems . . . with the exception, of course, of advertisements, like the one for Mosselprom [a Moscow food store]. . ."³¹

And, to keep Soviet life that way a Schmittian sovereign was needed: a demiurge with the power and will to prevent it from relapsing into normalcy, an automatized, "torpid-by-repetition," nonartistic state. Many might have been pretenders to the title

of the “Grand Defamiliarizer” but nobody was better suited for the job than the man whose truly breathtaking campaigns—collectivization, industrialization, purges, political trials, and wars—have for decades prevented Soviet citizens from ever having to endure a single dull moment. The *coryphaeus* of arts and *poeta laureatus*, Yosif Vissarionovich Stalin.³²

This detour has been necessary, I believe, to place Fučík’s writings into the context where I believe they rightly belong. For within the tradition of Czech letters alone Fučík’s factographic *Reportage* is usually miscatalogued. His calculated rejection of the norms of belletristic fiction for the rendition of documentary truth has been all too often taken at face value, as turning his back on literature and applying his talents solely to partisan journalism. And there are good reasons why Fučík’s antipoetic gesture was taken seriously. The Czech literary avant-garde, first of all, never generated a full-fledged theory similar to Lef’s. This is not to say that leftist Czech writers did not discuss the possibility of journalism taking over the role of traditional prose genres. But such pronouncements never reached the scope or intensity witnessed in Russia and, moreover, they came at a moment when the political fortune of Lef began to decline dramatically.³³ In 1929, for example, the legendary “furious” (*rasend*) reporter, Egon Erwin Kisch, provoked some Czech literati with his short, provocative, and Lef-like manifesto: “The novel? No, reportage.” “What do I think of reportage?” Kisch asked bluntly. “I believe that it is the literary victuals of the future. Of course,” he continued his staccato barrage, “a high quality reportage. The novel has no future. There will be no novels, books with fictitious plots. The novel is the literature of the previous century.”³⁴ The lively discussion which Kisch incited proved, however, to be rather short-lived. With the ideological streamlining of Soviet arts in the late 1920s, the death sentence meted out to traditional literature by Lef was suddenly perceived by party pundits as alien to the spirit of “Proletarian Realism” (“Socialist Realism” after 1934). So, just a year later, the not-so-furious Kisch, in an “Open Letter to Revolutionary Writers in Czechoslovakia” from the International Congress of Revolutionary Literature held in Kharkov, Ukraine, in November 1930, repudiated his thesis about the supremacy of reportage over novel as a “leftist deviation” and a “sectarian, formalistic stance.”³⁵

Furthermore, the situation in Czechoslovakia after World War I was very unlike that in the USSR. The relative political stability of the new republic guaranteed that a Soviet-like revolution would not take place, while the boring bourgeois system allowed Modernist artists to play their amusing role of *enfant terrible*. So with great fervor they embraced the most extreme cause at hand: the violent transformation of society according to the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism. It also should not come as a total surprise that for a long period of time aesthetic and political radicalism worked in tandem. “New, new, new is the star of Communism,” the members of Devětsil declared

jointly in 1921. "Its collective work creates a new style and there is no modernity without it."³⁶ And a couple of years later young avant-gardists had an excellent chance to put their money where their mouth was.

The Czech leftist literary scene, I should observe first, was far from uniform. Among the writers actively supporting the CPCS one may distinguish two groupings separated by a generation gap of some twenty years and by correspondingly different aesthetic sensibilities. There were, on the one hand, authors born around the 1880s like S. K. Neumann, Marie Majerová, or Ivan Olbracht. Associated initially with the anarchist movement, they entered the literary scene before World War I as representatives of *fin-de-siècle* poetics. The other circle consisted of avatars of postwar avant-gardism—writers born around the 1900s and organized in Devětsil. The political conflict of the two generations reached its apogee in 1929 during the above-mentioned Fifth Congress of the CPCS when the Moscow-backed Klement Gottwald took over the party's helm and molded it into a Bolshevik-like instrument of revolution. Neumann and his cohorts reacted to this change by demonstratively leaving the CPCS, whereas their younger colleagues threw unqualified support behind Gottwald and his hard line. In an open proclamation published by Fučík's *Tvorba* on March 30 the twelve signatories stated unambiguously: "We are convinced that the genuine development of modern culture depends upon the revolutionary labor movement, and its victory is determined by the victory of the working class. We are convinced that it is the Communist Party that should and of itself could be the leader of revolution and the vehicle of our cultural efforts. . . . We voice our opinion," they informed the elders who had quit the party, "not to correct [your] mistake—but to emphasize that from now on our paths have diverged."³⁷

Yet, despite this strong rhetoric, in its artistic praxis, the Czech avant-garde tended to be distinctly aesthetic rather than political. The predominant mode of its writing was poetry which, after a short-lived "proletarian" phase in the early 1920s, gravitated toward experimental, self-centered texts. Both Poetism—the only genuinely autochthonous Czech "ism"—and the *fabriqué en France* Surrealism, which became fashionable in the 1930s, always reflected more interest in the linguistic and/or psychoanalytic dimensions of the literary process than in a correct depiction of social reality. This in stark contrast to the "didactic verse" of the older leftist writers like Neumann, accused in 1925 in a Devětsil journal "of making poetry into a contraband smuggled [into print] under the pretense of communicating needed truths to the proletariat."³⁸ Or Majerová's and Olbracht's novels from the 1920s and 1930s that thinly dressed the radical political message in a traditional "Realist" garment.

It is apparent that Fučík's output doesn't fit well into either of these categories. His texts are clearly not set toward the message itself but toward the social context that they strive to influence. On the other hand, even a cursory look at Fučík's first

book of reportage from 1931 suffices to illustrate how much it differs stylistically from similar travelogues sympathetic to the Soviet Union: Olbracht's *Pictures from Contemporary Russia* (1920) or Majerová's *A Day After the Revolution* (1925). Plenty of statistics, graphs, photographs, and quotes from journalistic and historical sources (the latter often set for authenticity's sake in a typewriter—like font) augment in Julius's text the fragmentary, newspaperlike narratives with imaginative headings. Repeated rhetorical questions, frequent use of verbal leitmotifs and of nominal sentences, sometimes set one per line—all these and other devices fit well the aesthetic sensibility associated with the program of Lef, including the unabashed glorification of the Soviet Union as the first proletarian state in the world and the tomorrow of all humankind. The syncretism of Fučík's style, deliberately straddling politics and poetics, makes the question of whether he was just a partisan journalist or a creative writer impossible to answer. Such a traditional distinction, however, makes little sense when dealing with an author for whom literature was a weapon of class struggle and class politics the continuation of art by other means. But what can be said for sure is that Marxist-Leninist optics provided Fučík with a highly peculiar vision of the world. If his was a factographic program, it was definitely a very strange one. Contemporary Czechoslovakia in his rendition was such a monstrous abomination and the USSR such a wonderful never-never-land that I am tempted to speak of Fučík's "mythopoetic universe" rather than of a documentary prose. This claim, however, requires closer scrutiny and I will return to it immediately. But as far as the reception of Fučík's blatantly utopianist discourse is concerned, within the Czechoslovak context it wielded robust defamiliarizing potential. And as a credible threat to the existing political system it exhibited considerable transgressive appeal. Local authorities, it must be stressed, collaborated with Fučík in this respect (albeit unwittingly) by frequently censoring those segments of his manuscripts they judged seditious. The published texts, perforated liberally by blank spaces (the author intentionally refrained from substituting anything for the expurgated material), endowed Fučík's writings with an aura of the forbidden, the uncanny.

So how factual was Fučík's factography? The answer to this question depends on whether or not one shares his set of beliefs about reality. Words are mere arbitrary signs that turn into facts only if interpreted that way. Galileo's trouble with the church was precisely the clash of two understandings of the universe, of two cosmologies. But if it was the heliocentric view that eventually carried the day, better corresponding to the interplanetary state of affairs, this did not happen as a matter of facts. On the contrary, an abstract scientific explanation was needed to shatter humankind's most down-to-earth experience that it is the sun doing all that revolving. And passing from palpable phenomena to intangible social reality only increases our dependence on interpretative frameworks of various kinds. Whether we see profit as a necessary stimulus to economic growth, beneficial for everybody, or as the fruit of exploitation—

the root of all social misery—depends entirely to which *Weltanschauung* we subscribe. Fučík, as should be clear by now, made his choice relatively early in life, and his writings refracted the world according to the achromatic prism of Marxism-Leninism.

I do not wish to engage here in an involved argument about the merits and shortcomings of this once-so-popular ideology. What interests me at the moment is its formal structure inherently exhibiting a specific generic predisposition. In *The Secular Scripture*, Northrop Frye called attention to certain parallels between the structure of the romantic narrative and Marx's theory of history. Romance, according to Frye's broadest definition, is a tale concerned with "man's vision of his own life as a quest" fueled by his keen desire to transcend the unsatisfactory situation to which he is confined.³⁹ Such stories are constructed around disrupted harmonies to be subsequently realigned, and the mental landscape that these tales project reflects this fact. They are made up of clear-cut polar oppositions where the good guys are better than sliced bread and the villains bad beyond the pale. A romance begins with its hero's fall from a happy and a secure setting into a world of suffering and horror. In this process his or her identity is questioned—the hero is confused, bewitched, metamorphosed—only to be reasserted as genuine at the end of the story. Through this happy return to the beginning, however, the narrative potential of romance is exhausted. Truth, justice, or beauty has triumphed over lie, injustice, or ugliness, and there is nothing more to speak about. The romance ends.

History according to Marx follows this romantic emplotment rather closely though its hero is not one but many: the entire working class. Once upon a time, the story goes, there was a society that produced only as much as it could consume, so its members lived in peace with each other. But alas, increased productivity created a surplus and its unequal distribution spoiled everything. A division of labor followed, together with a host of other undesirable phenomena: alienation, exploitation, etc., etc. Good men and women became slaves, serfs, or proletarians all depending on the socioeconomic formation into which they were born. As bad as it looks, however, Marx's story has its happy ending. The inescapable proletarian revolution will eventually come to wrest away the means of production from those who usurped them and abolish all private property. And since the division of humankind into antagonistic classes was begun by a skewed distribution of surplus, in a classless society people will be rewarded solely on the basis of their natural needs. Only then will initial harmony return, albeit on a dialectically higher level. Lenin's embellishment of Marx's basic design, made in his *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), adds additional romantic overlays to the scheme. He, first of all, conceived of the revolution in terms of a quest for self-identity. The Achilles heel of the labor movement, his argument went, is the proletariat's unawareness of its signal historical role. And its spontaneous striving for immediate economic gains (shorter work hours, higher salaries), by ameliorating social inequities,

in fact prolongs the existence of retral capitalism instead of overthrowing it. The only way to bring about the desired revolutionary change, Lenin argued, is to impregnate the minds of the masses with socialist ideology, the Marxian romance of their own ascension. To raise them from their self-oblivion, to make them conscious of what they really are: not passive objects of history but its ultimate makers.

The split of the Russian Social Democratic Party into reformist Mensheviks and revolutionary Bolsheviks which Lenin's book had heralded was a powerful reaffirmation of the Manichean view of the world so proper to the genre of romance. Those striving toward gradual improvement in the situation of the working class were taking the proletariat from its destined revolutionary path, and so they were nothing but its traitors, unwitting assistants of the oppressors. Bolshevik logic, their leader declared, is disjunctive: "the *only* choice is—either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course."⁴⁰ Such a black-and-white picture of the world, I am ready to admit, might appear quite shallow in every conceivable respect, yet it is not entirely void of appeal. By freeing the decision-making process from all-embarrassing doubts or incomprehensible dilemmas, it corresponds to the fundamental human yearning for pure and simple justice from which, Frye reminds us, the genre of romance draws its inspiration.

With this in mind, I will now return to Fučík to illustrate how his writings (and I will concentrate here primarily on his pre-World War II texts) reflect the romantic predisposition of Marxism-Leninism just outlined. To this effect let me call attention to Julius's description of a specific creative project of his in a letter to Gusta dispatched from Moscow in February 1935. It concerns the material he collected on his trip to Soviet Asia about Interhelpo, an industrial cooperative established in Kirghizia in 1925 by Czechoslovak immigrants eager to contribute their skills to the fledgling Soviet state. "I was there for a second time," an elated Fučík writes, "and only now have I grasped what 'Interhelpo' means for understanding the difference between the Soviet Union and capitalist countries. How, through it directly, through its living history and living people, one can show this difference without having to commit any compositional violence." And he goes on to provide a general plan for the book he would like to write. It was to unfold along three major thematic lines: how the building of Interhelpo transformed the former citizens of a capitalist country into new people of socialist Kirghizia; how this poor and backward Russian colony grew into a rich and modern Soviet Republic; and, finally, how those Czechoslovaks who, frightened by initial hardship, had unwisely returned to their capitalist homeland, pined there jobless wishing they could go back to Interhelpo.⁴¹

Fučík's plan sounds fascinating and one may only regret that he never executed it. But what does the quoted passage say about his creative method? Let me, first of all, attempt to explain what he meant by the "compositional violence" he wished to

avoid. Julius, it seems, had in mind traditional literary emplotment, a device particularly abhorred by the Lef group. The engine of his book, the letter suggests, would not be tension stemming from a sequential dislocation of events within the narrative, but a conflict generated by the juxtaposition of facts. The same would be rendered as different or the different as same by presenting it in two unlike contexts. And the above passage also suggests two basic ways for doing this: temporalization and spatialization. Returning somewhere after a prolonged absence is, on the one hand, one of Fučík's favorite methods of temporal juxtaposition. An identical location can look surprisingly strange during a second visit. Or it might, equally surprisingly, remain as it was before. The oscillation between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, on the other hand, provides Fučík with a convenient vehicle for the spatial interplay of sameness and difference. The two pairs of appurtenant oppositions, "now/before" and "here/there," however, appear in Fučík's narrative not as disparate categories but as a united chronotope. What is important about the difference detected through iterative visits to the same place is not change per se but its directionality. For repetition is used by Julius to present facts as historical phenomena evolving along the progressive trajectory sketched clairvoyantly by Karl Marx. The spatialization of time in Fučík's universe entails the temporalization of its space. Distant localities might look unexpectedly similar because of their isochrony (measured by the Marxian timetable of historical change) or, on the other hand, their geographic proximity might be totally overshadowed by their belonging to quite different historical time zones. Thus, movement in space implies in Fučík's travelogues a simultaneous movement in time. Going from Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Union is not just a mundane matter of transversing some thousand miles or so but, more importantly, a journey into the future: from retrograde capitalism to "the land where tomorrow already means yesterday." But what happened to today, a curious reader might ask? Significantly, it is absent from Fučík's chronology. For he sees historical time not as a continuum where what-has-been passes smoothly into what-will-be via some indefinitely long what-is. To return to Lenin, a capitalist society does not gradually evolve into a communist one; the latter is established only through violent destruction of the previous socioeconomic order. The past, in Fučík's writings, is totally separated from the future by the imposing caesura of the Great October Revolution which makes any mediation between the two simply impossible.

Earlier I argued that the major defamiliarizing device of Fučík's reporting is the juxtaposition of the same fact in two different contexts. The effectiveness of this device, needless to say, is directly proportionate to the degree of contrast between the two contexts providing the comparative backdrop. So, whether they are truly disparate or not, they must be made so if only to prevent readers from yawning. And Fučík is not at all subtle in this respect. Though the past and the future are mutually disconnected, they relate to each other in a particular way. Historical repetition, Fučík learned, most

likely from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, is the ironic subversion of the old by the new. If in capitalism, as an old anecdote has it, a man exploits his fellow men, in socialism it can be only the other way around. And the rest is like that: what was initially tragic turns comic the second time, negative becomes positive, sour sweet, and so forth. Viewed through this optics, Soviet Russia is not merely a more just society, an incomparably better economic system, but capitalism's absolute antipode. A festive carnival, it is the world turned upside down, or, more precisely, the world turned as it should be, revealing as in a mirror the truly perverted nature of capitalism.

The absolute antinomy between the past and the future has tropological actualizations in Fučík's *Reportage*. Let me return yet once more to the above-quoted passage from the letter to Gusta to point out what I see as Julius's most basic metaphor. "Living people" and "living history" are just two tokens of the image "life" he uses consistently to characterize the Soviet Union. And, not surprisingly, its polar opposite—the image of death—is equally consistently applied in reference to capitalist society. Fučík lays bare his usage of this essential human antinomy in the concluding part of the introduction to his 1931 book of reportage, *In the Land Where Tomorrow Is Already Yesterday* (dedicated to "comrades of the Interhelpo commune"). Pondering, as every other author does, how his travelogue will measure up to other books of this kind, he wrote: "I wish to do nothing more than to bring a picture of your creation before the eyes of the people with whom I live in the same subjugation. An exact, good, honest picture. And I admit that I know what it means. It means to place it at the crossroad of two worlds and to inscribe on the outstretched hands of the road sign: Way to life. Way to death. You [the Interhelpo members] are already travelling along the first path."⁴² Who are the poor wayfarers along the second one—moving toward doom and extinction? The author remains eloquently silent. But we should not fail to notice that by returning to his homeland Fučík did choose this very road. A subliminal suicidal gesture on Fučík's part? More about this later.

The overarching image of life generates in Fučík's writings a veritable host of other metaphors—whether spring, youth, or vigor—with the individual reportage as their respective permutations. Portrayed in this manner, the Soviet Union appears not as a static structure but as a dynamic, self-perfecting process by which the best is constantly getting better and better. Fučík, for the sake of credibility, is willing to admit that here and there not everything is yet entirely rosy in the USSR. But his vitalistic frame of reference easily explains these shortcomings. Some are compared to infectious diseases contracted from a bygone era. Like invisible germs the unrepentant members of the defeated class have been wrecking the Soviet economy from within, stealthily undermining its health. This is the imagery Fučík employed in his quasi-medical report about the 1928 Shakhty case against the prerevolutionary technical specialists—the first show trial of the Soviet era—with the dreaded secret police (then the OGPU)

portrayed as doctor (280). Other imperfections of Soviet society are treated as mere dislocations stemming from too ebullient a growth: "Soviet poverty—it is not rags on the wasted, crippled body of a beggar. Soviet poverty—it is clothes on the body of a child who is growing out of them." Never mind the clothes, Fučík admonishes his reader, but look at the growing boy, "at his young, strong figure, broad chest, and legs which support him firmly" (340–41).

This incessant drive of Soviet society onward makes it virtually impossible for an outside observer, Fučík confesses to his audience, to keep abreast of the true life there. Hence the necessity for repeated visits through which the colossal positivity of changes can be fathomed almost instantaneously. Yet, no sum of its discrete states can substitute fully for the fluidity of organic change. And, by extension, no written record, including Fučík's own reportage, can ever do justice to the protean dynamism of Soviet life. So, in a Mayakovsky-like gesture, "frustrated" Fučík in the 1931 introduction declares his text already passé, hopelessly limping behind real life: "Literature capable of capturing your contemporaneity for an hour," he intimates to an imaginary Soviet reader, "is just a stenographic abbreviation of a telegram. . . . Thus, my book is a *historical* reportage. A conscious historical reportage, because I feel sorry for it, because I feel sorry for a weak pen that cannot keep up with you, because I want it to live at least as a segment of your ever growing work. I wished to depict the curve of this segment's growth; you yourself will extend it further. Beyond the pages of this book it will ascend higher and there, in its continuation, further and higher, somewhere at that elusive point, there are you—today, tomorrow or, again, already yesterday" (25–26).

One would assume that Fučík, the "necro-romancer," portraying the demise of bourgeois society, would have a much easier time. Death is, after all, something so fixed that comparing it to a doornail is not entirely off the mark. Moreover, he had some respectable models to follow. The Czech leftists, it must be stressed, exhibited a somewhat morbid infatuation with this subject. Such a tendency can be attributed, at least in part, to the popularity of Jiří Wolker, the leading figure of proletarian literature after World War I. This sickly young author, about whom Fučík wrote a good deal, prematurely succumbed to tuberculosis at the age of twenty-four. But before that he managed in a number of his most memorable poems to thematize dying and death within the context of class struggle. And before Wolker it was the local Decadents who creatively exploited the great transgressive potential that the representation of this unpleasant topic carries in bourgeois society.

Fučík's obsession with death was not, it seems, for public consumption only. It spilled into his private correspondence as well. As he wrote to his close Moscow friends (in whose apartment he often used to stay) soon after his return to Prague in mid-1936: "This is what initially had the greatest impact upon me here: that this street

appears as before, life here has not changed. . . . And this seems absolutely improbable to the man who in your country got used to life that changes every day. . . . Only I have fewer friends now. . . . Fritz F[euerstein] jumped into the Vltava river. He was jobless for many years. Alcohol killed Longen. A landslide in his 'wild' mining pit buried Weiner. Well, this too is life."⁴³ Once again, the passage involves repetition, this time of coming home. Only now the same is reiterated as self-same, affirming from the opposite vantage point the total difference between the buoyant Soviet Union and torpid Czechoslovakia. If change is the most obvious symptom of life, then the only vital sign Julius detected in his native land was the death of his friends.

Depicting its terminus, however, proved for Fučík almost as impossible as representing life itself, albeit for different reasons. Czechoslovak authorities were always ready to deny him the dead bodies he staked out, to snatch corpses away from him. This is what Gusta tells us in her memoir about a chance encounter with her sweetheart in October 1928. That month an unfinished building collapsed in downtown Prague, burying in its debris almost fifty construction workers. A few days after this fatal incident she was going by the construction site. From it, to her surprise, Julius emerged exhausted. "From his unshaved face, sunken, drowsy, feverish eyes stared at me. 'What are you doing here?' I looked at him surprised. 'I am watching the dead'," he replied. Julius, she goes on, and one of his comrades "had not budged from the scene of the catastrophe for days. Literally, they watched so that not a single. . . . corpse could be denied. The builder and the authorities attempted to do so because they were afraid of workers' riots."⁴⁴

For Fučík, to be sure, death was not just a matter of simple arithmetic. The corpses were not to be merely counted but paraded publicly. The opportunity for doing so came about some sixteen months later during labor unrest in northern Bohemia. In a confrontation with the police, four rioting miners were shot dead and Julius made a beeline for the place. But the problem was that the corpses were stowed away in the local morgue under police guard. Fučík's plan was to get in to take a picture of one dead's man face and publish it. He knew that the authorities would not permit this, so he cut a hole through his trousers pocket where he hid a small camera. The petty bulge near his crotch, he calculated, could be easily mistaken for a mild erection. An ingenious idea, indeed, but thwarted, to the plotter's chagrin, by the vigilant security guards on account of a single flaw: the noise produced by the opening of the shutter. Fučík's female assistant in this adventure told Gusta later what had happened, and she immortalized this incident in her memoir. The experiment worked fine during its dry run, we learn, "but things took a turn for the worse in the morgue where policemen flanked Fučík on both sides. And they did not like it a bit that he was just standing there staring. So in this graveyard silence he pushed the button. Policemen searched him immediately and that was it for the picture." (238).

But Fučík refused to give up. Prevented from attaining graphic portrayal of death he went for its verbal representation. Yet, once again, those in power foiled his efforts. Death was effectively whitewashed. To wit: Fučík's introduction to his 1931 book from which I quoted earlier contains a highly dramatic account of the horrors the author witnessed in his native Czechoslovakia (as a striking counterpoint to his positive experience in the USSR). Leaving aside some minor inconveniences that the local proletariat had to endure, according to Fučík—unemployment, homelessness, or crime-inducing poverty—his damning list contains a few truly moribund items: "I saw a man dying of hunger," the avid death-watcher started his litany. "I saw a woman pulled out of a river. . . . I saw female workers burned to death by an explosion of dynamite. . . . I saw four boys in the morgue of a mining town," and so on (28-30). The latter, a discerning reader will undoubtedly recognize, were the dead bodies Fučík tried to photograph. But the fist of the law struck once more. The censor confiscated the entire register of grievances (about seventy-three lines), and the introduction appeared with a gaping blank space instead, a fact mourned with glee by the "injured" author in a new introduction to the second edition of his book.

By focusing exclusively on the victims of bourgeois society, Fučík managed to draw a highly unflattering picture of contemporary Czechoslovakia—a place of human misery and existential jeopardy. But his obsession with death has more to it than this sheer negativity, I believe. By casting the binary opposition of capitalism and communism as the metaphoric antinomy of death and life, Fučík, it seems, departed somehow from the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. Class antagonism according to this romantic script has its obligatory positive outcome: the proletarians vanquishing the bourgeoisie. But can there be a happy ending to the terror of the Grim Reaper? Can the dead be resuscitated, revived? In a romance, yes! Too weak to depict life but strong enough to defeat death, Fučík's numinous pen turned into a mighty instrument of resurrection. In the universe of fulfilled desire, good guys and gals cannot simply perish, disappear into a void. The dead must rise, if only symbolically. "Oh indeed," Fučík tells his future readers in *Reportage*, where the theme of coming back to life plays a central role, "even dead we will live somewhere in a bit of your great happiness because we have invested our lives in it" (46; 48). Judged from this angle, Fučík, it seems, was concerned not as much with the representation of death as with the possibility of rendering the dead again present. Once captured, recorded, portrayed, they can be always wrested away from lethal oblivion and reincorporated into new living presence. In the just world of the romance, unjust suffering cannot go unredeemed. After the final victory of the proletariat, comrades fallen prematurely on the road toward a better future should be able to partake somehow of the classless Elysium: living happily ever after in the memory of all.

Which brings me obliquely to the issue of Fučík's return home: his taking the

“way to death” instead of, as one would expect of this apostle of life, the opposite path. But from what was just said it is clear that his choice was not suicidal at all. On the contrary, according to his own understanding of the matter, it was a rescue mission. Like Jesus, who upon hearing of Lazarus’ infirmness, returned to Judea despite the danger he would face there, Julius abandoned the succor of the Kirghizian sun and willingly descended into the perilous underworld of shadows to deliver the Czechoslovak proletarians. And, to extend my scriptural metaphor further, the message he was bringing had a distinct Christological ring to it: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). Only the kerygma he was preaching to the masses was somewhat different: *ad resurrectionem per insurrectionem*. The Soviet revolution, Fučík’s chief article of faith, validates fully the Marxist-Leninist historical romance about the ascension of the downtrodden. Come forth, he bade the workers of Czechoslovakia with a loud voice, and follow them! Complete this story on your own, bring history to its felicitous resolution!

III

It also occurred to [Espinosa] that the generations of men, throughout recorded time, have always told and retold two stories—that of a lost ship which searches the Mediterranean seas for a dearly loved island, and that of a god who is crucified on Golgotha.

—Jorge Luis Borges,
“The Gospel According to Mark”

So far I have been dealing primarily with Fučík’s prewar writings. There is, however, a good reason for this self-imposed limitation. The profound political changes brought about by the fateful year of 1938 significantly affected not only Julius’s life but his writing as well. Despite all its shortcomings the Czechoslovak Republic was a liberal democracy with a broad spectrum of political parties represented in parliament and an independent judiciary. Not exactly “an earthly paradise at first glance,” as its national anthem would have it, but perhaps nearly so if compared to its neighboring countries. It was precisely this social system that allowed Fučík to play his transgressive Modernist games without much personal risk (as his criminal record clearly indicates).⁴⁵ A closer look at some of his most notorious infringements of the law, like his 1930 trip to Russia without a valid travel document, reveals a thick histrionic layer.

His childhood involvement with theater had taught him the importance of props and costumes. If we are to trust his widow's memories, his "illegal" return home from "the land where tomorrow is already yesterday" had been nothing short of spectacular: "Jula walked across [the border] dressed in a Red Army summer uniform. He only hid a white cloth cap with a five-point star on his chest during the crossing." And to make sure that everybody would know about his caper, he had worn this gear around Prague for a few days after his arrival (207–08).⁴⁶ With the Nazi invasion, all such charming jests turned into a distant memory. The risk became real and death not just a figure of speech.

So how did the political situation evolve as of 1938? The blatant betrayal of Czechoslovakia to Hitler by its trusted allies—England and France—at the Munich conference in the fall of that year, which has made "appeasement" a bad word ever since, totally discredited all democratic parties in that country. It was also a bonanza for Communist propaganda, never tired of presenting this tragic moment as high treason by the Czech bourgeoisie. Instead of exercising its defense treaty with the Soviet Union, so the legend goes, the class-conscious government of capitalists acquiesced to a lesser evil—Nazi occupation. This story, however, became superannuated rather quickly. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of September 1939 that followed the partition of militarily defeated Poland between the Germans and the Soviets made the Communists and the Nazis official allies. And the CPCS, always following the Kremlin's lead, suddenly seemed reconciled with foreign occupation. Fučík, as far as I can tell, did not deviate from the party line, at least not in public. But it had to be a bitter pill to swallow for the man who on so many occasions had insisted that the Soviets were the only true enemy Hitler would ever have. In light of this, one might wonder whether his retreat to southern Bohemia and his compulsive preoccupation with literary-historical studies was not for Fučík a form of self-imposed exile. His letter to Ladislav Štoll of April 1940 from that locale hints at its author's disillusionment with the deceptive world of international politics ("I am finding now more and more, diplomacy has absolutely nothing in common with clarity").⁴⁷ And he sounds quite rueful about the years 1939–1941 in his short history of the Communist resistance sketched in *Reportage*; he characterizes them as the period "when the party was deep underground not only vis-à-vis the German police but the people as well" (87; 108).

Closer scrutiny of his literary-historical output from these troubled times reveals a curious fact. Fučík's essays actually entertained certain themes—treason, duplicity, or illicit writing in captivity—that would subsequently occupy the central position in *Reportage*. The piece which, in this respect, has traditionally attracted most attention is his essay "On Sabina's Betrayal" written in 1940 as a chapter of a larger study devoted to this Czech Romantic writer (author, among other things, of the libretto to Smetana's *Bartered Bride*) and a radical political figure. After serving a long prison

term for his role in the uprising of 1848, the destitute Sabina accepted the role of paid police informer, a move that, curiously enough, provided him with the financial means to continue his anti-Austrian political activities. His secret, however, was revealed in 1872. Ostracized by his former friends, Sabina became a pariah in Czech society. One could expect this case of quid pro quo ethics to have intrigued Fučík. But, strangely enough, his condemnation of Sabina is quite unequivocal. The “crown” stops here, Julius declared: accepting money for such services represents moral and psychological degradation from which there is no return.⁴⁸ And this conclusion might explain a seemingly gratuitous remark about the strictly not-for-profit nature of his “collaboration” with the Gestapo that Fučík made at the end of *Reportage*: “That by doing so I postponed my death, that I gained time that could *perhaps* help me, was a reward which I did not calculate” (91; 0).

If Fučík found Sabina’s duplicity reprehensible because of its pecuniary motivation, he was clearly attracted to other deceitful characters from Czech letters with more complex behavioral patterns. I have in mind Jaroslav Hašek’s protagonist, the good soldier Švejk, whose deeds never fully match his words, but whose perfidy cannot be interpreted unequivocally. Fučík wrote several critical essays about this hero and, according to some, even emulated his conduct. As recalled by one of Gottwald’s top lieutenants, Václav Kopecký, who knew Julius well, he “was not only extremely fond of Hašek’s *Švejk* but. . . by his nature and talent he was close to Hašek’s jocularity and witty humor, and. . . during his stay in the Soviet Union Julius Fučík was often called a Švejk, this despite his handsome and knightly appearance.”⁴⁹ Fučík returned to Hašek’s novel once again in 1939 to reinterpret its main protagonist from a new and strikingly different perspective. While earlier he had praised Švejk for his stolid passivity, capable of corroding any oppressive system, now he conceived of him as a potential fighter. Comparing explicitly his deceptive façade to a tiger’s camouflage, Fučík imagined vividly “how Švejk [can] become serious at a certain point. He might not stop joking but when the situation gets tough he will fight seriously and tenaciously.”⁵⁰ One may only speculate how much of Fučík’s strategy in his game of deception with his Nazi captors was inspired by his insight into Hašek’s character. But he was definitely not the only modernist, I must observe in passing, who conscripted the Good Soldier to the anti-Hitler campaign. In a curious coincidence, Brecht’s *Schweyk in the Second World War*, written almost exactly at the same time as *Reportage*, rendered Švejk an interrogatee at the very same Prague Gestapo headquarters where Fučík underwent his ordeal. But with one small difference: Brecht’s protagonist managed to finagle his way out of this tight spot.⁵¹

Karel Havlíček-Borovský, a mid-nineteenth century Czech journalist and satirist, is the third literary-historical figure about whom Fučík wrote in early 1939 in a way that seemed to foreshadow his own *Reportage*. Though politically less radical

than Sabina, in the conservative ambiance of the years after 1848 Havlíček too was deemed subversive by Austrian authorities. Unable to indict him in a court of law they committed Havlíček in 1852 to administrative exile in the Alpine city of Brixen (Bressanone). There, under the nose of watchful police, he managed to compose and smuggle out to Bohemia some of his most pungent antigovernmental poetic satires. Returning home in 1855 only to die of tuberculosis a year later, Havlíček immediately became a national martyr. “Indeed, the time of his enforced stay in Brixen was lost neither for Havlíček, nor for Czech culture,” Fučík wrote of the man whom he would soon join in the national pantheon. “It was heroic work. Havlíček was under strict surveillance all the time; police officials could freely enter his room at any moment and at any moment they could also confiscate any of his writings”; and, “it was equally difficult to preserve what had been already written, pass it onto the Czech public.”⁵² True, Fučík’s own experience with carrying on a clandestine prison correspondence well preceded his essay. But Havlíček’s situation as portrayed in the 1939 piece matched the conditions that Fučík was to encounter in the Gestapo jail more closely than the fuddy-duddy ambiance of Czechoslovak penal institutions.

Earlier I mentioned Fučík’s unfinished novel, *The Generation Before Peter*, conceived one day after the German troops annexed the rest of his homeland to the Third Reich. This text, I believe, marks a significant shift in its author’s style. Suddenly the motifs of existential anxiety totally absent in earlier works become predominant. In many respects this novel can be seen as a prefigurement of *Reportage*. It is an autobiographical account, a flashback triggered by the author’s sensing his imminent end, addressed to an implied future reader apostrophized in the text as an unborn son Peter. And the two works are mirror images of each other: the novel focuses on Fučík’s birth and his early childhood; *Reportage* records his last few years. The antinomy of life and death so essential for Fučík’s earlier writings is maintained in *The Generation* but redefined accordingly. Social change is no longer seen as a mere succession of classes but as a succession of generations. The author and his coevals are portrayed as preterite people or, more optimistically, as a provisional transition between the sordid past and the bright, yet unborn future represented by Peter. The organic trope is modified to include not only healthy growth but also mortal decay. “We are the spring crop, Peter, sown underneath. This is our generation. . . . Not all of us will germinate, not all of us will grow when the spring comes. Each of the hobnailed boots walking above our heads can trample us down. Can crush us—whether by accident, hatred, or the joy of destruction—and we know that. And we live with that.”⁵³

The metaphor of a seed eventually yielding its fruit had been used by Fučík earlier and would sprout once again in *Reportage*. But in his unfinished novel he imbued it for the first time with a distinctly eucharistic spirit. Earlier I argued that in his

prewar writings Fučík presented himself as a Christ-like figure capable of bringing the dead to life. This image, however, was only implied and never used explicitly. Now the scriptural analogy becomes unmistakable. But it is a different Jesus who emerges from the writings of a man facing the possibility of his own death: not one resurrecting others but he who was himself resurrected. “But, Peter,” Fučík continued the dialogue, “do not think that we are scared. Not all of us will grow but neither will all perish. We know this and live with it too. The rustling of mature corn ears will obscure the footprints of graves, they will be forgotten, all will be forgotten—the worry and the grief. Only the crop will tell your generation on behalf of us, dead and alive: Take, eat; this is our body!”(29) *Hoc est corpus [meum]*. Not too bad for someone who quit the Catholic church at the tender age of sixteen because he could not accept, on zoological grounds, the biblical story of a whale swallowing the poor prophet Jonah.⁵⁴

Turning now to *Reportage: Written from the Gallows* let me first point out its extreme heterogeneity. The text is a montage of narrative and descriptive passages which include the story of Julius’s arrest and ordeal at the hands of the Nazis, but also a plethora of verbal portraits of both other prisoners and their captors. These two main ingredients are interspersed liberally with, among other things, Fučík’s recollections of different events and places, a record of his torture-induced delirium, a short history of the Communist resistance, and his last will. Above all it contains his *ex cathedra* comments about various matters; instructions to his relatives, his future audience, and humankind at large on how to read his text and understand his feelings; or equally elevated exhortations to good behavior. If one discounts such insertions and flashbacks, the text is organized chronologically. And this “natural” order of events is intended, I would argue, to underscore the work’s nonfictional character.

There are two other important exceptions to this ordering principle. First of all, only at the very end does Fučík mention his “trafficking” with the enemy—the fact that much earlier in the game he had decided to protect his comrades at large by feeding the Gestapo false clues to throw them off the scent. This information casts new light on his chummy relationship with his interrogator Böhm, thus providing not only a surprising resolution to the problem which might have puzzled many readers throughout the book but, more importantly, an entirely new perspective on the author himself. At the same time it could be argued that this time lapse was not dictated solely by the norms of literary plot but by life itself. To divulge his furtive plan while it was still being executed would, if the manuscript fell into the wrong hands, compromise it, blow it to shreds. So Fučík had to hang onto his secret until the last minute when everything was over.

The other exception to the linear sequencing of the story is more complicated. It concerns a year-long lag between the beginning of the narrated events and the event of narration itself. Fučík was arrested in April 1942 but he dates the inception of his text

(on its title page) to the spring of 1943, so most of it is a relatively distant recollection. The two take place not only within different spaces (one mental, the other actual) but also at unlike speeds (the first faster than the latter) until they merge at the end of the text when memory turns into living presence. Throughout the text Fučík highlights this discrepancy by interrupting the story with details not belonging to it but, instead, concomitant with the very act of writing. This effort seems to anchor the immaterial realm of what is being represented in the “reality” of the representational process as such, authenticating, in this way, its nonfictional origins.

There are plenty of other markers in *Reportage* indicating its factographic status: exact dates and real places are rendered in details that only an eyewitness could provide. The same can be said about the copious verbal portraits of the living people (with their proper names always mentioned) who populate the book. In the absence of a camera at the Pankrác prison, they are a close approximation to the documentary photographs that Fučík used to employ in his other reportage. Some other strategies for achieving the intended reality effect may be subtler. The title of a subchapter, “Suspenders: An Intermezzo” (60; 67), that yokes together a somewhat comical object of everyday use and an artistic term charged with lofty “operatic” connotations, ironically implies how inadequate is the conventional aesthetic taxonomy for grasping the reality of a Gestapo jail.⁵⁵ Or Fučík’s confession to positively weird behavior—the guessing of his future predicament from the shapeliness of women’s legs glimpsed on the way to his interrogation—suggests that the author is truly hiding nothing from the reader.

Though, obviously, *Reportage* has its documentary dimension, a careful reader of the book will notice small details whose truth value might seem somewhat compromised. I do not have in mind the reality of some of the presented events—the traditional target of all Fučík’s detractors—but just small textual clues (like certain temporal data) whose neatness seems to contradict the usual sloppiness of life. The first chapter, for example, starts in the evening of April 24 at five to ten (12; 1) only to end on the 25th at 9:55 P.M. and not a single minute later (17; 8). One may be equally doubtful about the exact duration of Fučík’s silence while interrogated by the Gestapo: “For seven weeks,” he insists, “I have not provided any evidence” (80; 0). While the former example is unmistakably an instance of a conventional literary device of circular framing (the first and the last sentences of this chapter are identical save for the date), the latter, because of its magic numerological valence (7 x 7), exudes the aura of the mythical.

This brings me once again to the question of the factuality of Fučík’s reporting which I faced when discussing his prewar writings. As I tried to illustrate, his texts were above all creative applications of a specific ideology whose cognitive lens refracted Julius’s interpretation of the world in a very specific way. *Reportage: Written from*

the Gallows adds another wrinkle to this process. This is not to say that Fučík suddenly abandoned the tenets of Marxism-Leninism with its impetus toward a romantic narrative. On the contrary, as I will argue soon, his last book, if generically anything, is a romance. The complication that *Reportage* introduces stems from the fact that, in contrast to his earlier texts, what is represented is not primarily segments of external reality but the author of the book himself. For, as I suggested earlier, *Reportage* is, above all, Fučík's self-presentation.

The autobiographical nature of *Reportage* is underscored in its short introduction by a pun on the word *biograf* (a "movie house" in Czech)—the inmate's nickname for the "in-house" prison at the Gestapo headquarters where the detainees had to wait for interrogation. Its setting—rows of benches where prisoners sat facing an empty wall—evokes in Fučík's imagination the idea of captives mentally projecting "films" of their lives upon the wall they face. "I have seen my own film here a hundred times, a thousand times its details," he says about the origin of his text, "now I'll try to tell it" (11; xiii). And even though the author, following the tradition of a Marxist romance with its plural heroes, praises the collectivity of prisoners and sketches the portraits of others as well, he is, clearly, the star of the book. It is his arrest, torture, dying, his secret game with the Gestapo and his testimonial to what happened, and above all his emotions and ideas which *Reportage* conveys. This overpowering authorial self-indulgence was precisely one of the shocking blasphemies Kundera's novel *The Joke* hurled against this sacred book: "Fučík, though far from famous [at that time], considered it of the utmost importance to inform the world of what he thought, felt, and experienced in prison, of what he conveyed and recommended for humankind. He scribbled it out on tiny scraps of paper [*motáčky*], risking the lives of those who smuggled them out of prison and kept them safe. Think of the opinion he must have had of his own thoughts and impressions! Think of the opinion he must have had of himself!" (152; 156).

Kundera's reproach to Fučík can be extended, *mutatis mutandis*, to all literary self-portraitists and autobiographers. For any writing in which one and the same person fulfills the triple role of author, character, and reader might be seen, to a great extent, as narcissistic. To deflect this unflattering image authors of such texts often invoke a higher authority to legitimize their blatantly self-gratifying impulse. They mold their life stories along the lines provided by the biographies of authoritative figures sanctioned by the appropriate cultural tradition. This strategy (whether applied consciously or not) might absolve them from the deadly sin of vainglory, but such pardon is not free. At stake is, first of all, the credibility of the narrative itself. For the reader might recognize that the alleged biographical facts are in fact mere pseudofacts: ready made *loci communes* derived from elsewhere. Equally troublesome, in the second place, is the issue of the narrator's identity. What would you, after all, call an individual who presents

somebody else's *curriculum vitae* as his own? An imposter? Many autobiographers engage in a secondary game of concealment, obfuscating as much as possible the affinities to the originary source.

Applying these insights to *Reportage*, I will show how the events from Fučík's life presented in the initial four chapters closely trace the trajectory of Christ's death and resurrection in the Gospels. And it is my point to argue that most of the controversies about the documentary veracity of the book center precisely on passages that bear maximal scriptural similarity. As far as Fučík's "anxiety of influence" is concerned, his attitude toward the textual model that he emulated is delightfully equivocal. Though the number of biblical allusions is far too high to assume that Fučík was unaware of his presenting himself *in figura Christi*, *Reportage* makes quite clear that it does not endorse in any way the products or opinions for which this figure stands. Not only did Julius have his own well-defined *Weltanschauung* to peddle but, as some of his earlier writings clearly indicate, he considered religion to be one-sidedly contrarevolutionary. And while *Reportage* deals with the very Christological topics of death and resurrection it is quite clever in displacing a religious symbolism with a Communist one. More about this later.

Reader reception of *Reportage* reflected this ambiguity. On the one hand, poets, who by the nature of their craft are the most sensitive to the figurative usage of language, detected from the very beginning the strong parallel between the Fučík of his last book and the story of Christ. It was not only Biebl who exploited this image but also, to some degree, Pablo Neruda and many others. On the other hand, literary scholars (notoriously slow on the textual uptake) so far almost completely have ignored this dimension of the book. Perhaps, in officially atheistic Communist Czechoslovakia party ideologues were willing to condone scriptural analogy as a matter of poetic licence, but not as a matter of fact. As far as I was able to determine, Vladimír Macura was the first critic who in 1985 dared (albeit quite sheepishly) to bring into the open the most obvious borrowing from the Gospels: the motif of the temptation of Christ on the mountain (Matthew 4:8–10; Luke 4:5–8).⁵⁶ "Sometimes after a day-long interrogation," Fučík reported about his mysterious exploits with Böhm, "he put me into a car and took me through evening Prague to the Castle above Neruda Street. 'I know that you like Prague. Look! Don't you want to return to it? How beautiful it is! And it will be beautiful even when you aren't around. . . .' He played the role of the Tempter well." One might only wonder what this temptation was all about because such trips to the city were organized, Fučík made us believe, only after he became—at least in the Gestapo's eyes—their willing informer. But to keep the biblical parallel intact, Fučík, like Christ, had to reject Satan's lure. Interrupting Böhm he retorted, "and it will be even more beautiful when you aren't around" (59; 67).

This scriptural allusion, however, should not have come as a total surprise to

readers, for there are small cues dispersed throughout *Reportage* hinting in that direction. Most significantly, Christ's name is explicitly mentioned twice at the beginning of the book. In the second chapter, "Dying," delirious Fučík hears a religious song sung by fellow cellmates about "that eternally blazing star / Jesus himself, Jesus himself," invoking life in heaven (18; 9). The second mention of Christ's name, in the next chapter, is more opaque because it is an implicit dialogue with another text: Jan Neruda's "Christmas Lullaby."⁵⁷ In this poem the speaker comforts the infant Jesus in his Bethlehem stall, imploring him to stay asleep rather than enter the treacherous and cruel world. Fučík makes a point of disagreeing with his favorite poet: "Oh, Neruda's infant Jesus, there is no end to humankind's road to salvation. But: you don't sleep any longer, don't sleep any longer!" (24; 18). What interests me here is not just the image of Christ as a social activist in a Fučík-like mold. A careful reader will recall that it is not just the infant Jesus whom Fučík urges not to sleep in *Reportage* but, in its ultimate sentence, entire humankind. "People, I liked you. Watch!" These famous words are as Fučíkian as his impish smile and his love for anything Soviet. But within the Christological context evoked by the reference to the infant Jesus, the authorship of this sound bite becomes somewhat problematic. "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:37). Yes, it is good old Christ speaking now, wrapping up his sermon on the Mount of Olives in which he warns his followers of false prophets and other natural disasters, admonishing them, at the same time, not to be caught napping when the Lord finally cometh.

Can this be just an accident? Yes. But my surprise would be unbearable. For *Reportage* replicates more than just isolated words of Christ. Its affinity with the Bible is much more thorough. Let me be more specific. Entering the book we behold the conspirators' last communion—if not of supper at least of tea. And Fučík's very first words are fittingly vatic: "Comrades, I'm glad to see you, but not together this way. This is the best road to jail and death. You'll either stick to the rules of conspiracy or quit working with us, because you endanger yourselves and others. Understood?" (12; 1). Yet, another participant at this gathering, Riva Friedová-Krieglová, insists vehemently that something completely different was said that evening. Fučík's resistance identity, she recalls, as Professor Horák—an older, limping gentleman with a full beard—looked too histrionic (he was only thirty-nine years old) and was attracting unwanted attention. Thus, according to her, the words of caution about the compromised conspiracy were not made by Fučík at all but, lo and behold, addressed to him by others.⁵⁸ Is she right? It is her word against Fučík's so who can tell? The confrontation, however, can be easily diffused if we realize that it might not have been concern for documentary truth that controlled Julius's pen in this instance but his adherence to the scriptural model. For the Christological parallel necessitates absolutely that it be Fučík who, in his providential wisdom, warns his followers about an impending catastrophe,

not the other way around.

“And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me” (Mark 14:18). Fučík, verily, was not so explicit in his monition as Christ, but a Judas was sitting at his table as well. Which brings me to the villain of *Reportage*—Fučík’s “adjutant” Klecan, the man whom Fučík personally chose as his closest collaborator and whom he trusted fully. This is also the man who gets blamed for all subsequent misfortune. Fučík goes as far as to ground his passivity during his arrest in his belief that Klecan would not talk to the Nazis under any circumstances, so that a suicidal shootout was really not called for: “A man who fought in Spain, a man who lived two years in a concentration camp in France, who made it illegally in the midst of war from France to Prague—no, he won’t betray us” (13; 2). Is this a credible excuse? I have already spent enough time thrashing out this point from many different angles. A biblical perspective, though, might suggest why Julius did include this unheroic incident in *Reportage*, despite its strong reputation-damaging potential. Jesus too, we might recall, not only did not resist his captors in the garden of Gethsemane but even bade the pugnacious Apostle Peter to lay down his sword.

The star-crossed Klecan did, however, crack up, and from this moment his fall from Fučík’s grace was absolute. The fire and brimstone that Klecan drew in *Reportage* was so strong that it startled many commentators, Černý the most vocal among them. Fučík’s censure, he wrote, “is so total, so mercilessly undifferentiated that one is tempted a hundred times to beg from Fučík mercy for his most faithful friend, a little charity shaded by the admission and the qualification that it was a slip of tongue, that his comrade just blabbed out and, that through this aperture of a little word not checked in time, the Gestapo, by force and irretrievably, penetrated the secret of the two. But Fučík is merciless: Klecan—traitor” (325). The apodictic nature of Fučík’s judgment, Černý suggests, might have something to do with Fučík’s own feeling of culpability, an attempt to find a convenient scapegoat for the havoc which the arrest wreaked in the Communist underground. Leaving psychology aside, within the scriptural context this absolute condemnation makes perfectly good sense. It is like wondering why the four Evangelists did not find any extenuating circumstances for Judas Iscariot’s behavior, a single kind word for the services he had rendered previously to the movement. Because!

“And the men that held Jesus mocked him and smote him” (Luke 22:63). In Fučík’s case, though, the beating came before the ridicule: “A tall SS-man stands over me, kicking me to get up. . . . some woman passes me a medication and asks where it hurts and it seems suddenly that all the pain is in my heart. ‘You don’t have a heart,’ a tall SS says” (16; 7–8). And later, “‘Don’t you understand’,” Fučík recalls the chief of the Gestapo’s anti-Communist Department telling him during an interrogation, “it’s the end, get it, you lost the game.’ ‘It’s only I who lost’,” the uncontrite captive replies.

“You still believe in the victory of the Commune?” “Of course.” “He still believes,” asks the Chief in German, and the tall Commissar translates, “he still believes in the victory of Russia” (21; 14). And then—the demise—preceded by long and painful passions culminating in terminal thirst quenched by water from a toilet bowl. In their informative commentary on *Reportage*, historians went to some pains to point out that at the Pankrác prison such a drinking technique was impossible and called Fučík’s account “an expressive hyperbole.”⁵⁹ Perhaps, but where, for Christ’s blood, was the dying Fučík supposed to get a vinegar-filled sponge upon hyssop as his last drink? The death following Fučík’s “hyperbolic” sip of water was, as to be expected, only clinical. Were this Julius’s true and ultimate end, *Reportage* would have not only been much shorter but also much less scriptural. For like J. C., J. F. could not have simply died. The death certificate already produced in his name was torn up next day by the flabbergasted doctor, the very same one who had issued it a short time previously, and Julius stepped marvelously into his second life. “Resurrection,” muses the smug Fučík at the beginning of Chapter 4, “is an unusual affair. Strange beyond words” (31; 28). Christ’s empirically minded apostle Thomas could have only agreed with this assertion, to be sure. But I would not dare to put my cotton-picking fingers into Fučík’s wounds knowing darn well that no amount of sensory data can ever establish mythological truth. For “there are also many other things which [Julius] did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25).

So far I have been trying to illustrate the remarkable fit between Fučík’s book and the New Testament. But, as I argued earlier, though reiterating the Christological narrative of sacrificial death and resurrection, the collective set of beliefs underlying *Reportage* is completely different. And in order to assert its ideological distinctness, the text had to undercut the scriptural analogy somehow. How did Fučík manage to draw the line in the sand? Each myth, so the general claim goes, manifests itself in everyday life through specific ritualistic actions. For Christianity, it is the celebration of Easter that symbolically reenacts the sequence of events centered around the crucifixion of Jesus. So, arrested on the eve of Friday, April 25, and having his way with words, Julius could have easily and effectively linked his own predicament to this holiday. But instead he deliberately drew attention to the celebration of another feast that, though Easter-like in its content, is, from the Marxist-Leninist perspective, politically supercorrect—the International Labor Day of May 1. Commemorating the judicial murder of seven American labor leaders in connection with the Chicago Haymarket massacre of May 4, 1889, this holiday provides a suitable ritualistic backdrop for Fučík’s own dying. Listening to the endless litany of cheering euphemisms about “Jesus—the eternally blazing star” from his singing cellmates, our hero bridled a bit: “O people, people, cut it out. It is, perhaps, a nice song, but today, today is the eve of the First of

May, the most beautiful, the most joyful human holiday. . . . First of May!” And a few hours later, Fučík, just before taking a last sip, projected his martyrdom into the politically correct rite of spring: “In these hours on the streets of Moscow the first ranks take their place for the May Day parade. And in these hours today millions of people are waging the last battle for human freedom and thousands are dying in this struggle. I am one of them. And to be one of them, one of the soldiers of the last battle, that’s beautiful. But dying is not beautiful. I’m choking. I can’t exhale” (22–23; 15–16).

Not surprisingly, given the author’s penchant for repetition, the May Day celebration appears in *Reportage* once again: the second time pertaining to May 1, 1943. Though separated from the moment of Fučík’s “death” by a year-long interval, this latter May Day celebration actually comes in the text just a few pages after the former, at the beginning of Chapter 4. This proximity is motivated ostensibly by the temporality of the writing act itself. By chance May 1 caught Fučík at this very spot in his manuscript and the significance of this holiday absolutely necessitated that he interrupt his recollection of the past to report the present moment. This “coincidence,” it is easy to recognize, enabled Fučík to employ his favorite device of reiteration, of juxtaposing the same as different that I discussed earlier. In this way Fučík introduced the death-transcending nature of the May Day celebration. For a May Day parade is not just a commemoration of fallen comrades but, above all, a symbolic act affirming the continuation of their heroic quest and uniting the dead with the living. If the dying Fučík of May 1, 1942, was joining the ranks of memorable Communist martyrs joyfully sacrificing their lives for others, the resurrected Fučík of May 1, 1943, reenters the ranks of the fighters for a better future. And, he does so even though the symbols of the ongoing struggle can be only furtive under harsh prison conditions: a clinched fist, movements imitating hammer and sickle during morning exercise, and so forth. But they are by no means less powerful, Fučík insists, than their full-blown counterparts displayed elsewhere. “All is in such minor details,” Fučík cautions his future audience, “that who knows whether you who did not live through this all will ever understand it as you read. But try to understand. Believe me, there is force in it” (32; 29–30).

The recurrence of the International Labor Day festivity in Fučík’s book should not, however, be seen as just isolated implementation of the author’s favorite device. More importantly, this repetition is a function of the overall structure of *Reportage* as a romance. To substantiate this claim let me retrace my steps a bit. Earlier I argued that Fučík’s prewar writings displayed certain stylistic markers—mode of emplotment and selection of protagonists—proper to the romantic genre. And these markers share a common feature: the tendency toward symmetrical organization. A quest for self-identity is a process entailing its initial loss and eventual recovery; heroes and villains are grouped into neat pairs. But there are other narrative reduplications in a romance, Frye tells us, which mirror each other. The hero’s passage from self-oblivion to

anamnesis usually consists of two opposite movements: a descent to the lower world of sheer negativity and an ascent to the altogether positive higher world. A closer look at Fučík's text reveals such a bipartite organization. The resurrection, I believe, is the dividing point in *Reportage* that separates downward movement from the journey up: the world of the hero's passive suffering from that of his active defiance. From this perspective, each of the two references to the May Day celebration fits well this scheme, capturing through a single symbolic rite the dual thrust of the hero's search for his true self: the martyrdom of descent and the pugnacity of ascent.

Approaching *Reportage* now as a romance, permit me to quote in full its brief "Introduction," which in a remarkably economical way manages to bring forth some of the most salient features of this genre:

To sit at attention with your body rigidly erect, with your hands pressing against your knees, and with your eyes riveted to the point of blindness on the yellowing wall of an "in-house prison" at the Petschek palace—this is certainly not a position most appropriate for thinking. But who can force a thought to sit at attention?

Once upon a time, someone—we will probably never find out when or who—called the "in-house prison" in the Petschek palace a "movie house." A stroke of genius. The spacious room, six long benches in a row occupied by the rigid bodies of interrogatees and an empty wall in front of them like a movie screen. All the production companies of the world could not shoot as many movies as the eyes of the interrogatees, waiting for new questioning, for torture, for death, have projected on this wall. The movies of entire lives and of life's most minute segments, movies of your mother, of your wife, of your children, of a destroyed home, of a ruined existence, movies of a brave comrade and also of a betrayal, to whom you gave that illegal leaflet, of blood that will flow again, of a firm handshake that obligated me, movies full of horror and of resolve, of hatred and love, of anxiety and hope. Turning one's back to life, everyone dies here daily in front of his own eyes. But not everyone is reborn.

I have seen my own film here a hundred times, a thousand times its details, now I'll try to tell it. If the hangman's noose tightens before I finish, millions will remain to write its "happy ending." (11; xiii–xiv)

The structural core of a romance, to exploit Frye's insights into the regularities of this genre, "is the individual loss or confusion or break in the continuity of identity, and this has analogies to falling asleep and entering a dream world. . . . If I dream of myself I have two identities, myself as a dreamer and myself as character in dream" (104; 106). The beginning of Fučík's *Reportage* offers a variation on this opening gambit. The "Introduction" starts by drawing attention to a strange transformation of a human

body. It is petrified, frozen, turned into a peculiar statue watched closely by a special type of audience—prison guards. This passive rigidity, however, is only a matter of appearance, of a corporeal façade concealing very unruly mental processes. Thoughts, we are reminded, are always restless, always free. The captors might be able to immobilize the prisoners' bodies but not their minds.

Fučík, it seems, is utilizing a traditional romantic motif of "sleepwatching" that, according to Wendy Steiner, fascinated such Modernists as Picasso and Joyce. It stands, among other things, she observes, as a symbol of unwelcome artistic exile, the viewer's inability to get beyond an opaque, static object into the concealed realm of dream and fantasy.⁶⁰ The situation presented by Julius at the beginning of his book is, obviously, somewhat different. Here it is a dreaming artist who certainly does not wish the sleepwatchers' gaze to penetrate his mind. The cinematic metaphor, in my opinion, functions as an empowering stratagem, a device enabling the narrator to escape his psychic trauma. The *Ichspaltung* thus created reverses completely the mechanism of power and authority ruling the world outside. It is no longer the guards who watch and control Fučík, but the other way around: internalized, they became mere protagonists in his "home movie." As the sole maker of this film he is in charge of determining who will play what. And given his unenviable situation, it is only human that in this show Julius reserves the best role for himself. At the same time, the introduction exhibits the opposite impulse on the part of its author. While Fučík definitely wished to shield his fancy from the Gestapo, he desperately wanted to share it with others. Why else would he record it? Which fact adds yet another level of complication to the above-mentioned identity deficiency (or excess): Fučík—the writer—imagining himself as watching a third Fučík muddling through his own life!

Turning to the "film" itself, its dramatic tension derives, quite expectedly, from the clash of two diametrically opposed settings: the serene world of before and the demonic world of now. Naturally, the action is in the oppressive present, an idyllic past providing merely a contrastive background against which the depravities of the day loom high. And, as always in romances, the moral system of the "film" is fearfully symmetrical: comprised of two pairs of feuding sins and virtues identified by Frye as violence and fraud against force and cunning (65). Even a perfunctory look at the "film" reveals that at least three of these categories are present. The brutality of Gestapo interrogations and betrayal (by a yet unnamed comrade) figure prominently among the sins listed. The list of virtues includes such manifestations of force as bravery, obligation, and resolve. But the craft of cunning so instrumental for the very existence of *Reportage* is curiously omitted. It is not until the fifth chapter that Fučík unites, quite unexpectedly, force and cunning. "For thirteen months now have I been fighting here for my life and that of others. By bravery and ruse" (49; 52). This remark is obviously too cryptic to be understood by readers until the very end of the book when Fučík reveals the "high-

stakes game” that he played with the Gestapo.

Yet, upon closer scrutiny, one may detect a clear parallel between the opening of *Reportage* and its closure. The introduction lumps together somewhat hastily two fundamentally different activities: a mental representation of the past (the “home movie”), and its secondary verbal recording. It is obvious that in the inner sanctum of our souls we are ultimately free to imagine whatever we wish and Fučík exploits this liberty to the hilt. When ushering our daydreams into the external world, though, we must deal with many practical obstacles. Especially in a Gestapo prison with a death sentence lurking around the corner! To be able to write his book Fučík had to resort to a literary device allegedly invented by another famous romancer, Shahrazad, for the purpose of saving her life from King Shahriyar’s misogyny: death-defying narrative suspense. But with one important difference. *The Thousand and One Nights* was both the means to keep Shahrazad alive and her actual literary output. In Fučík’s case, the tales he fed to the Gestapo were a mere pre-text to prolong his own life so that the real text of his *Reportage* could be written on the sly.

The role of double agent that Fučík assumed for this purpose clearly continues the theme of split identity already developed in the introduction. We have a docile Fučík obeying the Gestapo’s orders, a wily Fučík thwarting the Gestapo’s plans, and his shadowy alter ego busily composing *Reportage*. Once again this multiple-personality syndrome is couched in a histrionic metaphor: albeit not cinematic but dramatic. “For a year I was writing with [my interrogators] a theatrical play in which I ascribed to myself the lead role” (91; 0). This play, Fučík writes, is now coming to its denouement. But what could this mean for his coauthors? Its only dramatic resolution could have been the Nazis realizing that Fučík, for quite a while, had been leading them by their noses. Which, I believe, was not the case. Instead, the denouement of the drama coincides with the end of the film, or, to be more precise with the end of *Reportage*. Only via the conclusion do surprised readers learn the piquant secret that Fučík had withheld from them throughout the text: of the misalliance that has begotten this unusual book.

In contrast to his readers, however, Fučík knew about his sub-rosa game with the Nazis when he started to write his book. And he was aware how delicate the role of a double agent is and how indistinguishable in its outer manifestations from actual perfidy. So it is perhaps no accident that the introduction touches the topic of treason twice. Besides being mentioned directly, “betrayal” is also couched in the proto-Fučikian opposition of life and death. This antinomy, it might be useful to recall, is linked in Fučík’s mythopoetic universe to his overall understanding of the logic of history: of helping or hindering progress toward a Communist future. The cinematic metaphor employed in the introduction surprisingly renders the two existential categories as an asymmetrical pair. Dying is presented as an iterative process (“everybody dies here

daily in front of his own eyes"); not so resurrection ("not everyone is reborn"). This curious discrepancy suggests that Fučík's "home movie" is not just another instance of a work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. Such an identity split provides the basis for moral rather than aesthetic judgment. Betraying secrets of the Communist underground to the Gestapo even under torture clearly trifles with the emplotment of the Marxist-Leninist historical romance, which offence, in the bailiwick of poetic justice, is punishable by death. "The sight of someone whose conscience was damaged," Julius amplifies this idea subsequently, "is worse than the sight of one whose body was crippled. . . . What kind of a life could it be if paid for by the life of a friend! This perhaps was not the first thought that passed through my mind when I was sitting in the 'movie house' for the first time. But it often came to me there" (34; 33). And pointing his finger at Klecan—the *bête noire* of the book—Fučík declares a few pages later: "A coward loses more than his own life. He has lost. . . . And even though still alive he is already dead." (39; 39).

If romantic villains die before their actual demise, heroes, for the sake of symmetry, must be able to transcend their own deaths. The last sentence of the introduction broaches the issue of Julius's own mortality: an author on death row pondering the appropriate poetic closure to his autobiographical project. A romance cannot end badly and Fučík seemed well aware of this generic requirement. At the same time, however, it was quite clear to him that getting out of his present mess unscathed and living happily ever after was highly improbable. Marrying the formulaic with the realistic, Fučík ingenuously employed the device of an implied happy ending, written, in case of his badly timed hanging, by the millions to remain. The Nazis might execute him, Julius seemed to be saying, but they cannot spoil the positive outcome of his book. Wishful thinking? Perhaps. But one firmly rooted in the historical script of Marxism-Leninism that fully guarantees the victory of progress, or your money back. What *Reportage* optimistically depicts, if viewed this way, is the last battle of the long war for the better future of humankind. Many, Fučík included, might perish fighting. But this is no reason for grief, the author comforts his audience. Sooner or later the selfless sacrifice of fallen comrades will be redeemed by the ultimate triumph of the cause in which they joyfully invested their own lives. And *Reportage* makes sure that they will not be forgotten.

Besides affirming the book's happy ending, the last sentence of the introduction exhibits yet another salient feature of the romantic genre: the fusion of the author with the audience. "The artificial creation story in genesis," Frye reminds us, "culminates in the Sabbath vision, in which God contemplates what he has made. In human life creation and contemplation need two people, a poet and a reader, creative action that produces and a creative response that possesses" (185). The appeal of a romance, one might paraphrase Frye's argument, rests in its ability to entice its audience, to compel it to

identify with the quest put forth by the text. Fučík, and there is no doubt about it in my mind, was well aware of the propagandistic potential of this genre when he began to write *Reportage*. The book, one might argue, is an excellent example of what Frye calls a “kidnapped” romance, used for boosting or proselytizing a particular social mythology. The closure of the introduction is a calculated gesture in this direction. The bridging of the gap between the author and his audience, or, more precisely, the empowerment of the reader to conclude the text properly, is a rhetorical device invoking the sense of an ideological bond and a historical obligation. It is a hand extended by the man to be executed to those who come after him, an appeal to continue the mission for which Fučík offered his own life.

Earlier I commented on the bipartite structure of the body of *Reportage* with the scene of resurrection serving as narrative pivot. Fučík’s descent into a world of horror and suffering displays many motifs that Frye mentions as typical for this portion of the romantic quest: the nocturnal setting with which the journey opens, Fučík’s altered appearance and name, the clock meticulously marking every hour of his torture, the dog Julius sees in his death struggle, a symbolic sepulcher (prison cell #267) where his incapacitated body is subsequently deposited, his desperate wish yet once more to see the sunrise, the list could go on. But these are mere details which in themselves do not carry much significance. What matters, I believe, is how diametrically our hero’s characteristics change during the ascent that follows his miraculous rebirth: passivity gives way to activity, isolation to comradeship, endurance to cunning.

One example of this metamorphosis, already provided above, was the two modes of celebrating May Day. Let me amplify. The opening scene brings us to the in-house prison where traumatized detainees stare at the yellowish wall ahead; in mental solitude their life stories unfold in front of their eyes. Only later does the reader learn that there is yet another in-house prison in the building, on the fourth floor, reserved for Communist captives. This is where Fučík is taken almost daily in the second part of *Reportage*. And what a difference: “Downstairs in the ‘movie-house’ the SS guards were pacing in high boots and they shouted at every blink of your eye. Here in Room 400 Czech inspectors and agents from Police headquarters. . . . did their duty as either the Gestapo’s servants or—as Czechs. Or, also, as something in between. Here it was no longer necessary to sit at attention with your hands on your knees and with your eyes riveted ahead; here you could sit more relaxed, look around, wave your hand and could do even more depending on which of your three friends was on duty” (40-41; 41). But it is not just the more humane ambiance that Julius finds praiseworthy. In contrast to the first-floor waiting room where self-absorbed detainees submissively await what the future brings to them, in Room 400 they forge at once an esprit de corps and continue, even while imprisoned, their anti-Nazi struggle. Not a “movie house,” Fučík shifts his metaphor to describe it, but “a very advanced trench completely

surrounded by the enemy, under a concentrated fusillade from all sides but not including a single sigh of surrender. The red flag flies above it" (41; 41).

Fučík's characterization of Room 400 in terms of a battlefield is, in my opinion, an exaggeration made to fit the upbeat spirit proper to the theme of ascent. According to the commentary appended to the critical edition of *Reportage*, this place served the prisoners primarily as a channel for clandestine communication through which, in addition to messages, food was smuggled in. But the Gestapo was able to detect this leak rather soon and the facility was closed even before Fučík started to write his book—in early December 1942 (169–71). Given the enormous power in the hands of the jailers, it is clear that cunning was the only virtue truly available to the detainees to counter Nazi violence. So, in this respect, it is not the metaphor of open warfare but of a theater used by Fučík in the conclusion, that seems better suited to grasp the nature of his resistance activity in jail. But even this figure of speech, I would like to stress, signals a departure from the mode of existence suggested by the cinematic trope that unfolds in the first floor "movie house." While the "home movie," very much in accord with the overall passivity of the theme of descent, is just an instant replay of a story only too familiar to Fučík and fully confined to his solitary imagination, the "play" coauthored with the Gestapo is a step out of this mental isolation into the social sphere, an interactive manipulation of the enemy through the histrionic skills that Julius was lucky to acquire early in his life.

There is yet another important parallel to be drawn between the beginning and the end of *Reportage*. As Frye pointed out, the loss of a hero's true identity, with which a romance begins, and its eventual recovery with which it ends, are sometimes treated as a difference between sleeping and waking (53). Fučík's book, I would like to argue, unfolds along these very lines. The entire cinematic opening has a distinct soporific ambiance and can be seen, I argued earlier, as a variation on the theme of sleepwatching. In contrast to this, the theatrical ending—the scene in which we recognize the hero for what he truly is—suggests an alert state of mind. Technical terminology from the vocabulary of a literary critic ("climaxes, crises, denouements") underscores a detached, almost an analytical attitude toward the "play" on its author's part. But this revelation is not the true conclusion of Fučík's book. Its happy ending, the introduction forewarned us, will not be written by the doomed Fučík but by the millions who remain. Like any other spectacle, Julius's comedy had only a limited duration. Through it he was able to fool the Nazis for a while, achieving his strategic objectives. Its finale, however, marks a relapse into the somnolent state characteristic, in the romantic universe, of an alienated existence: "The curtain falls. Applause. Spectators, go to sleep!" (91; 0).

But no romance true to its generic definition can end on such a note. A final wake-up call is necessary to establish lost harmony. So a special coda is appended

that signals a return to the prelapsarian state of affairs before the sharp descent with which *Reportage* begins. The closure of Fučík's play is portrayed not merely as the usual termination of a single spectacle but as something more radical: the transcendence of the very process of theatrical representation, the exit into the world of unpremeditated spontaneity, of a singular, undivided identity. "Well, my play too is coming to its end. But that I haven't written. That I don't know. It's no longer a play. It's life. And there are no spectators in life." It is the affectionate appeal to the millions who are to furnish Julius's book with its proper epilogue—never to succumb to sleep—that marks the ultimate awakening from the nightmare of *Reportage* and, hence, the end of this romance: "The curtain rises. People, I liked you. Watch!" (91; 112).

The romantic structure of *Reportage*, I have shown, clashes in places with the factographic claims of the book. But as I argued earlier, the correspondence between words and facts is always a matter of interpretation. And Fučík's writings, produced above all to exemplify an ideology committed to radical social change, deliberately strove not to reflect the world as it is but *as it should be*. The genre of romance, it seems, was ideally suited for this task. Its narrative, fueled by desire (whether erotic or revolutionary), is not about reality but about wish fulfillment. But truly amazing about this genre—"the structural core of all fiction" (15) according to Frye's assessment—is the enormous spread of its application: from fairy tales, to both low- and highbrow literary works, to some of the most holy myths of humankind. All these disparate types of texts, Frye argues convincingly, are formally very much the same. What distinguishes fabulous from infantile, or sacred from trashy, is the authority ascribed to particular romances by the collectivity for which they are written.

The unusual aspect of Julius's romance is the relatively wide vacillation in its social reception. Its timely publication just a few months after the end of the war made it a sought-after source of firsthand information about the Germans' repressive mechanism which was hitherto well hidden from public view. The intriguing history of its origin together with the fate of its author accounted for the initial mass appeal of the book. Yet, from the way in which the editors handled the manuscript it was obvious that they, from the very beginning, did not view it either as just a piece of literature or an authentic record of its author's exploits. By censoring the plot's resolution they, on the one hand, ruined the intended aesthetic effect of the work and, on the other hand, imbued the story of its chief protagonist with an eerie ambiance of mystery. This decision, sanctioned by the highest party officials, indicated that from early on *Reportage* might have been earmarked for a very special destiny: to become one of the founding myths of Czechoslovak Communism. This task, I might add, was facilitated by its genre, which easily accommodated such social utility. Moreover, given all the Christological parallels, one might even suspect that the author himself preconceived of his own image along this very line. The solemn tone of his speeches addressed to posterity has

definitely an otherworldly ring. But decisive for these efforts was the Communist takeover of 1948 that gave the party spindoctors a virtually unlimited range of possibilities for rendering Julius's book a new Holy Writ. Aided in these efforts by their Soviet colleagues with more resources at their disposal, they spread the word around the globe.

But there is a cloud to every silver lining. Becoming one of the most important symbols of Communist ideology had its drawbacks too. As such, the book could be judged solely on the basis of the beholder's political convictions, and Fučík-bashing provided a suitable rallying point for opponents of the regime. Given all the imponderables surrounding this text, as well as its sacrosanct status, *Reportage* clearly seemed to them a perfect target for settling their scores with the government. So, not surprisingly, whenever the party's iron grip over society loosened somewhat, vexing questions about the Fučík case always came to the fore. Prague Spring of 1968, I mentioned above, was one such period. But the same holds at the very end of Czechoslovak Communism in 1989. On October 27 of that year—just three weeks prior to the Velvet Revolution's kick-off—the party daily *Rudé právo* considered it necessary to publish a special article refuting the persistent rumor that Bolivia had offered to return the remains of the recently deceased Fučík to his homeland.⁶¹ An omniscient vox populi had it that Julius, the Gestapo informer, had made it to South America after the war while a secret deal was struck with the leadership of the CPCS. He would be officially declared executed by the Germans if his name could be used to authorize the book concocted by the party's propagandists for the sole purpose of glorifying Communist anti-Nazi resistance.

With the popular imagination running wild, the long expected 1995 publication of the full edition of *Reportage*, with appropriate critical apparatus and copious commentaries, added the final twist to this already convoluted history. Yes, it introduced some previously unknown facts, solved certain textual riddles, and cast Fučík's image in a somewhat different light. But it affirmed, to the great astonishment of many, what Communist propaganda had been claiming for all those long years. That Julius Fučík was a hero!

My God . . . This script sounds all too familiar. A quest for identity with a happy ending: a fifty-year-long journey through a cloud of confusion to the ultimate recognition of the protagonist for what he truly is. Am I following Fučík's lead and emplotting his story as a romance? Rather than answering this question directly, let me return to the epigraph from Brecht's play with which I began this essay. A second look at the dialogue reveals another difference between Andrea's and Galileo's respective positions. Whereas the former, it seems, comprehends heroism as a quasi-natural process of breeding, for the latter it is clearly a social phenomenon: a behavioral pattern corresponding to a specific social demand. So, which need did Fučík's text satisfy? Throughout this essay I have pointed out that the genre of romance that informed

Julius's writings so heavily was quite accommodating for the purpose of promoting Marxist-Leninist ideology and, thus the Communist cause to which the author (for whatever reasons) subscribed. *Reportage*, it must be emphasized, served the CPC's propaganda in yet another important capacity. This book managed to bring together almost seamlessly the story of the proletariat's ultimate ascent with the Czech nationalist myth of sacrificing one's life to defend the motherland against the ever present German menace.⁶² Read in this way, *Reportage*, a British critic suggested not long ago, might be seen as well as Fučík's application to join the benevolent association of Czech national martyrs founded in the tenth century by good old King Wenceslas.⁶³ But he did so from a brand new ideological plank. Julius was not just a lonely patriot bravely confronting a numerically superior foreign power but the personification of the Communist movement fighting the rearguard battle after the cowardly bourgeoisie had delivered the nation to the Nazi yoke. To legitimize its claim for absolute political power, party propagandists were never tired of repeating that the CPC earned its hegemonic position deservedly: through its principled anti-Hitlerite stance. Where others had washed out, the Communists had measured up to their patriotic duty, fighting Nazi invaders not only from abroad but on the domestic front as well. Because of its track record, the party, together with the USSR—the only ally socialist Czechoslovakia would ever need—represented an unmatchable barrier against any future German revanchism.

The truth about the Czech anti-Nazi underground of the period when Fučík joined it, however, was far less glorious, an academic historian informs us. "Whether waged by the Communists or by Beneš's followers . . . the actual extent of resistance activities remained insignificant." And a factual comparison further deflates any grandiloquent claims: "Even at the height of the terror in the fall of 1941, when the Gestapo was especially busy, the incidence of arrests for political offenses in major cities in the Protectorate did not exceed that in Germany itself."⁶⁴ Fučík's testimony, so rhapsodic in its tone and vivid in its depiction, was acutely needed by the party to dispel any doubts some might have justifiably harbored about the seriousness and intensity of the Communist resistance. Well written and persuasive to the limit, *Reportage* was an effective ploy in the power game that unfolded in Czechoslovakia after the war if only because none of the political competitors could boast of even a nearly comparable document.

It was the Velvet Revolution in 1989 that provided the Fučík story with its curiously ironic closure, radically altering its generic label. A romance suddenly became a satire. By removing all injunctions by which the previous regime surrounded its cherished myth, it stimulated extensive inquiry into the authenticity and the veracity of *Reportage*, as well as the conduct of its author while in Gestapo captivity. With most of the facts revealed, darkest suspicions about Julius appeared groundless, and his

exemplary status, despite all the well-entrenched skepticism, might finally have been verified. Yet not so, for very few really cared! With the Soviet Union gone, along with Communist dictatorships in its former satellite states, the social demand for Fučík's heroism diminished considerably. The new political elite wasted no time filling up the national pantheon with anti-Nazi martyrs of their own ideological bent, like the Czech and Slovak commandos Beneš had dispatched to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich and who, after accomplishing their mission on May 27, 1942, perished some six weeks later in a shoot-out with Nazi pursuers. Too visible a symbol of the Stalinist era, too closely identified with the unpopular ideology of Marxism-Leninism, Fučík might have been a hero. But, alas, one who was no longer needed. "Havel havelim," saith the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Amen.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive discussion of Brecht's views of Galileo and his use of the actual historical material, see Gerhard Szczesny, *The Case against Bertolt Brecht with Arguments Drawn from His "Life of Galileo,"* trans. A. Gode (New York, 1969).
2. "O hrdinech a hrdinství," in *V zemi milované: Reportáž ze Sovětského svazu*, vol. 5 of *Dílo Julia Fučíka*, 3d ed. (Prague, 1951), 19–25.
3. According to Gusta Fučíková, by the end of 1975 *Reportage* was published in eighty-eight languages. She lists them in "Život a boj Julia Fučíka," *Julius Fučík ve fotografii* (Prague, 1977), 20.
4. I draw most of my biographical information from the memoirs of Fučík's widow Gusta, *Život s Juliem Fučíkem* (Prague, 1971), and *Vzpomínky na Julia Fučíka*, 2d ed. (Prague, 1973).
5. For reasons which I will discuss later, only very recently was Fučík's manuscript published in its entirety. My quotes, therefore, come from the first critical edition of this text, *Reportáž, psaná na oprátce: První úplné a komentované vydání*, ed. František Janáček et al. (Prague, 1995), 11. English translation is taken with some modifications from *Notes from the Gallows* (New York, 1948), xiii. Further references will be given in the text; the first number in parentheses will refer to the Czech original and the second to the English translation. The numeral 0 will be used whenever the corresponding passages are missing in the latter. In general the English edition is not very accurate. Its system of transliterating Czech names and some characteristic mistakes indicate that it was based on the Russian translation of Fučík's book rather than the Czech original. It seems certain that the Moscow-led Cominform was involved in boosting the international success of *Reportage*.
6. "Komunistická strana v boji za svobodu národa" in *Za vítězství socialismu: Stati a projevy 1945–1951*, vol. 2 (Prague, 1951), 92.
7. *Pláč koruny české* (Toronto, 1977), 325. Further references will be given in the text.
8. *Žert* (Prague, 1967), 188. Quoted from *The Joke: Definitive Version Fully Revised by the Author* (New York, 1992), 190. Further references will be given in text; the first number in parentheses will refer to the Czech original and the second to the English translation.
9. "Bor'ba i pesni," trans. F. Kel'ina, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, December 28, 1950, 1.
10. By 1953 about eighty thousand young Czechoslovaks had been awarded the Fučík Badge and, according to a resolution of the CC of the Czechoslovak Youth League, their number was to be doubled within a year. See "Za masové rozšíření Fučíkova odznaku: Usnesení předsednictva Ústředního výboru ČSM," in *Za masové rozšíření Fučíkova odznaku*, ed. E. Hrych (Prague, 1953), 12–13.

11. Pablo Neruda, "Conversación de Praga: A Julius Fučík," in *Obras Completas* (Buenos Aires, 1956), 682–88; Milan Kundera, *Poslední máj: Báseň* (Prague, 1955).
12. "Julius Fučík ve vězení," in *Dílo: Bez obav 1940-1950*, vol. 4 (Prague, 1953), 28.
13. *Proces s vedením protistátního spikleneckého centra v čele s Rudolfem Slánským* (Prague, 1953), 481; *Trial of the Leadership of the Anti-State Conspiracy Center Headed by Rudolf Slánský* (Prague, 1953), 539.
14. *The Communist Idol Julius Fučík and His Generation* (New York, 1953), p 5-6; 16.
15. "Fučík," *Mladý svět*, no. 28 (1968): 9–12.
16. Černý, it might be mentioned in passing, had an axe to grind. In 1938 Fučík attacked rather savagely Černý's journal *Critical Monthly* launched that year. See "'Sklep ze slonoviny,'" in *Stati o literatuře: Literární kritiky, polemiky a studie*, vol. 6 of *Dílo Julia Fučíka*, 1st ed. (Prague, 1951), 269–71.
17. Quoted from Vladimír Vrána, "Dopisy o Fučíkovi," *Střední Evropa*, no. 53 (1995): 95. Further references will be given in the text.
18. See František Janáček, "Pochybnosti i jistoty: Stručně ke starým otázkám" in the critical edition of *Reportage* (note 5 above), 301–37; and Alena Hájková, "Kauza Fučík: Ediční poznámky na pokračování," *Tvar*, nos. 7–13, 1996.
19. According to the moral canon of Socialist Realism, Abram Tertz (Andrey Sinyavskiy) argues convincingly, the very act of talking to the Germans during the war, even with strategic objectives in mind, was perceived as tantamount to treason. He illustrates this point in a scene from Leonid Leonov's novel *Russian Forest*—the winner of the Lenin Prize for literature in 1957. "The brave girl Polya, entrusted with a dangerous mission, makes her way to the rear of the enemy—the action takes place during the Patriotic War. As camouflage she is supposed to collaborate with the Germans. She plays this part for a while in talking to a Nazi officer, but with great difficulty: it is morally painful to her to talk the enemy's language. Finally she cannot stand it any more and reveals her true self and her superiority to the German officer. . . . The fact that by this pompous tirade Polya betrays herself and moreover harms the mission with which she has been entrusted does not disturb the author in the least" (*On Socialist Realism* [New York, 1960], 54–55).
20. This is how the last sentence of *Reportage* was rendered in the English edition (see note 5 above).
21. "What Is Poetry?" trans. M. Heim, in *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 378, 370.
22. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York, 1968), 41.
23. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. G. Schwab (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 14.

24. Shklovskiy, *Voskreshenie slova*, in *Texte der russischen Formalisten*, vol. 2, ed. W.-D. Stempel (Munich, 1972), 12; Jakobson, "On a Generation That Squandered Its Poets," trans. E. J. Brown, in *Language and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 277.
25. The manuscript is presently kept at the Museum of the Labor Movement that has found its uneasy domicile on the campus of Charles University's School of Physical Education in Prague—Vokovice.
26. Ca. February 2 or 3, 1930, *Korespondence*, vol. 12 of *Dílo Julia Fučíka*, 1st ed. (Prague, 1963), 67. For a photographic reproduction of this "letter," see *Reportáže z buržoasní republiky: Z let 1929–1934*, vol. 7 of *Dílo Julia Fučíka*, 3d ed. (Prague, 1955), an insert between p. 88 and 89.
27. "Moták," of August 18, 1931, in *Politické články a polemiky: I. část z let 1925–1934*, vol. 8 of *Dílo Julia Fučíka*, 1st ed. (Prague, 1953), 185.
28. *Literature and Revolution*, (New York, 1925), 183.
29. Nikolay Chuzhak, "Pisatel'skaya pamyatka," in *Literatura fakta*, ed. Nikolay Chuzhak (Moscow, 1929), 28.
30. Roman Jakobson, *O cheshskom stikhe preimushchestvenno v sopostavlenii s russkim* (Berlin, 1923), 16.
31. F. C. Weiskopf, "Kapitola . . . také o literatuře," in *Literární nájezdy* (Prague, 1976), 39.
32. This conclusion reflects, to some degree, Boris Groys's sustained critique of Modernist aesthetics formulated quite provocatively in *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Ch. Rougle (Princeton, 1992).
33. Fučík's postscript to his cotranslated edition of Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry* (1928) indicates his familiarity with contemporary Russian criticism including the theories of Lef. He even quotes from Shklovskiy's essay "Isaak Babel" published in *Lef*, no. 2, 1924 (see Fučík, "I. Babel," in I. Babel, *Rudá jízda*, trans. A. Feldman and Julius Fučík [Prague, 1928], 140–46). This piece, however, was never included in Fučík's collected writings, and after the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia the book itself ended up among other *libri prohibiti*; from Babel's arrest in 1937 until the mid-1950 the name of this "enemy of the people" vanished completely from Soviet literature.
34. "Román? Ne. Reportáž," *Čin*, December 5, 1929, 121. For more information about the discussion generated by Kisch's article, see Mojmir Grygar, "Fučíkovy umělecké reportáže," *Česká literatura*, no. 6 (1958): 373.
35. E. E. Kisch et al., "Otevřený dopis revolučním spisovatelům v Československu," *Tvorba*, December 24, 1930, 794.
36. Quoted from Jaroslav Seifert, *Město v slzách*, 3d ed. (Prague, 1929), n.p. The authorship of this catchy phrase is usually attributed to the Czech avant-garde writer whom Fučík, according

to *Reportage*, met by chance at Gestapo headquarters just hours before his execution: Vladislav Vančura (see, e.g., Milan Kundera, *Umění románu: Cesta Vladislava Vančury za velikou epikou* [Prague, 1960], 64). In his letter to Ladislav Štoll of September 9, 1950, however, F. C. Weiskopf claims it to be his brainchild (see Ladislav Štoll, *Z kulturních zápasů: Vzpomínky—rozhovory—portréty—stati—korespondence* [Prague, 1986], 279–80).

37. “Zásadní stanovisko k projevu ‘sedmi’,” *Tvorba*, March 30, 1929, 177. Among the signatories of this declaration were, besides Fučík, Vítězslav Nezval, Konstantin Biebl, František Halas, Vladimír Clementis, and others.

38. Roman Jakobson, “Konec básnického umprumáctví a živnostnictví,” *Pásmo: Revue Internationale moderne. Éd.: Devětsil*, nos. 13/14 (1925): 2.

39. *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 15. Further references will be given in the text.

40. *What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*, trans. G. Hanna et al. (New York, 1969), 40–01.

41. February 9, 1935, *Korespondence*, 212–15.

42. *V zemi, kde zítra již znamená včera*, vol. 2 of *Dílo Julia Fučíka*, 5th ed. (Prague, 1949), 27. Further references will be given in the text.

43. Quoted from Ida Radvolina, *Rasskaz o Yuliuse Fuchike* (Moscow, 1963), 34.

44. *Život s Juliem Fučíkem*, 145–46. Further references will be given in the text.

45. After the war Fučík’s wife Gusta researched court archives and established that he was “arrested twelve times, most often by the Prague police, and received short . . . sentences for a total of thirty-two days which he served partially at Pankrác and partially at Prague police headquarters prison” (*ibid.*, 216).

46. One might even wonder how illegal Fučík’s first trip to the USSR was. In his account Fučík reports that the hostile Czechoslovak police refused to issue him a passport. According to Gusta, however, Fučík’s confrontation with the authorities concerned an extension of his already expired travel document. In either case the question remains how Fučík managed to cross the other borders separating Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union. We learn from Gusta that during his first trip with an expired passport in 1930 he had to wait in Berlin for over two weeks to receive a Soviet visa (*ibid.*, 196). But to be eligible he had to have a valid travel document. For, as she tells us some forty pages later, Julius had to abort his second journey to the USSR in 1931 after twenty-two days of waiting in Germany, “because the Soviet visa could not have been issued to an invalid passport” (*ibid.*, 248). Unless, of course, the Soviet authorities modified their visa policy between April 1930 and July 1931, Fučík’s first trip could not have been as unlawful as he would like us to believe. It was upon his return home in August 1931 when he was arrested at the border for using somebody else’s travel document.

47. April 25, 1940, *Korespondence*, 256.

48. "O Sabinově zradě," in *Tři studie: Božena Němcová, Karel Sabina, Julius Zeyer*, vol. 6 of *Dílo Julia Fučíka*, 3d ed. (Prague, 1951), 92.
49. *ČSR a KSČ: Pamětní výpisy k historii Československé republiky a k boji KSČ za socialistické Československo* (Prague, 1960), 460.
50. "Čehona a Švejk, dva typy z české literatury i života," in *Milujeme svůj národ: Poslední články a úvahy*, vol. 3 of *Dílo Julia Fučíka*, 4th ed. (Prague, 1951), 111.
51. *Schweyk in the Second World War*, trans. W. Rawlinson, in Bertolt Brecht, *Plays, Poetry and Prose: The Collected Plays*, vol. 7, ed. John Willett et al. (London, 1976), 80–85.
52. "Básník ve vyhnanství," in *Milujeme svůj národ*, 138.
53. *Pokolení před Petrem: Stati, články a pozůstalost z let 1938–1942*, vol. 11 of *Dílo Julia Fučíka*, 1st ed. (Prague, 1958), 29. Further references will be given in the text.
54. See Mojmír Grygar, *Žil jsem pro radost: Životopisná črta o Juliu Fučíkovi* (Prague, 1958), 46.
55. To Czech readers the technique of an embedded "Intermezzo" calls to mind the most famous Romantic poem of their literary tradition—Karel Hynek Mácha's "May"—which, moreover, relates to *Reportage* also thematically. Like Fučík, its main protagonist, the robber Vilém, is waiting in a jail for his impending execution. This textual parallel is fully exploited in Kundera's eulogy of Fučík, *The Last May*. Julius's allusion to "May" seems, however, rather parodistic, while such Romantic props as the "Choir of Spirits," a "Skull," and the "Moon in the Zenith," populate Mácha's "Intermezzi," profane objects such as "suspenders" definitely do not occur there.
56. "Reportáž psaná na oprátce jako dílo literární," in Julius Fučík, *Reportáž psaná na oprátce*, 25th ed. (Prague, 1985), 102.
57. "Ukolébavka vánoční," *Zpěvy páteční*, in *Spisy Jana Nerudy: Básně*, vol. 2 (Prague, 1956), 204.
58. Riva Krieglová et al. "Julius Fučík aneb pohrdání pravdou," *Listy: Nezávislý dvouměsíčník*, no. 2 (1991): 20.
59. František Janáček et al., "Na okraj motáků: Vysvětlivky a komentáře," in the critical edition of *Reportage* (see note 5 above). Further references will be given in the text.
60. *Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago, 1988), 76.
61. Jiří Kohout, "Pravda o smrti Julia Fučíka," *Rudé právo*, October 27, 1989, 2.
62. To achieve this seamless fit, however, the manuscript of *Reportage* had to be sanitized, purged of all internationalist passages that could be interpreted as pro-German. Eliminated was

Fučík's memory of the May Day celebration in Berlin (32; 0) and his attempt to persuade Böhm that only Communism could save Germany's future (59; 0), not to mention his "shocking" revelation bordering on treason that he was prosecuted in the former Czechoslovakia because of his "defending too urgently the right of Sudeten Germans to self-determination" and "seeing too clearly the consequences of the Czech bourgeoisie's national policy for the Czech nation" (24; 0).

63. Robert B. Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (Budapest, 1994), 147–210.

64. Vojtěch Mastný, *The Czechs Under Nazi Rule: The Failure of National Resistance, 1939–1942* (New York, 1971), 205. Internal German documents published after the war indicate how little the Nazis were concerned about the activities of the Czech underground. See, e.g., the entry in Joseph Goebbels's private diary of February 15, 1942, summing up a lengthy conversation with Reinhard Heydrich about the situation in the Protectorate Bohemia-Moravia: "Sentiment there is now much more favorable to us. Heydrich's measures are producing good results. It is true that the intelligentsia is still hostile to us. But we must rally the rank and file of the people to our side against them. The danger to German security from Czech elements in the Protectorate has been completely overcome" (*The Goebbels Diaries: 1942–1943*, ed. and trans. L. P. Lochner [New York, 1948], 88). It was this "unseemly" lack of domestic resistance that, according to some sources, prompted Beneš to order the killing of Heydrich, carried out by two Czechoslovak exiles, Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš, who were parachuted to the Protectorate from England in late December 1941.