

## Adaptation as Subterfuge: *Silvery Wind*

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

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

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

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

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

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

## NATIONAL ARTISTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### A DELAYED FILM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### VARIATIONS IN STYLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### A SECRET BROTHERHOOD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### TOWN AND NATURE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE SILVERY WIND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### STRANGE AMATORY RELATIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### ANOTHER READING OF *SILVERY WIND*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### A DISCORDANT ADAPTATION

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

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

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

#### POSTSCRIPT: THE FILM'S SECOND LIFE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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