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Between Then and Now, There and Here, Guilt and Innocence:

**Škvorecký's *Two Murders in my Double Life* and the Ambiguities of Transitional
Justice**

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**Between Then and Now, There and Here, Guilt and Innocence:
Škvorecký's *Two Murders in my Double Life* and the Ambiguities of Transitional
Justice**

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Thesis

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Between Then and Now, There and Here, Guilt and Innocence:

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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I situate Škvorecký's novel as both a primary document in the historical record of transitional justice and as a literary creation in the author's larger oeuvre. In creating this work of autobiographical fiction, Škvorecký deals with the ambiguities of a tumultuous historico-political moment and creates an appropriately complex work of art. I combine social science research with close-reading of the text in the tradition of new historicism.

In the introduction I explain the historico-political background, specifically transitional justice and lustration in Czech Republic in the early 1990s, that engendered *Two Murders*. In my first chapter, I examine the book reviews, Czech and English, that appeared following the two language-respective publications of *Two Murders*. In the remaining three chapters I present my analysis of the novel based on close-reading and applied historical information. Chapters two and three discuss different but interconnected manifestations of distance. Chapter two examines memory as the temporal distance of the mind, while chapter three explores exile as spatial distance. Škvorecký invests memory and exile with enormous significance, and uses both concepts to depict his characters' isolation. In the final chapter, I discuss rumor and reputation in the novel's two distinct story-lines, demonstrating how they come together to create a cohesive artistic work. Approaching the novel as both a historical document and a work of art, I hope to critically examine this complicated historical moment and appraise Škvorecký's contribution to the post-communist Czech dialogue.

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Introduction

Two Murders in my Double Life is a doubly unique novel. Josef Škvorecký originally published the book in 1996 in Czech as *Dvě vraždy v mém dvojitým životě: detektivní román, částečně autobiografie* (*Two Murders in my Double Life: detective novel, partial autobiography*) through the publishing house Ivo Železný. In 2001 Škvorecký produced his own English translation of the novel, and published it as simply *Two Murders in my Double Life* through Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. And though the blending of political commentary with autobiographical fiction is common in Josef Škvorecký's work, this book is a singular contribution to the civic discussion of 1990s Czech Republic. To date, it is one of the very few literary works that can be considered part of the historical record of Czech transitional justice. This is simply because *Two Murders in my Double Life* is on the very short list of Czech works of art that deal with collaboration and transitional justice. Other works include Petr Placák's 2007 novel *Fízl* ("Snitch") and the films *Pouta* ("Shackles," released in the US as *Walking Too Fast*) from 2009 and *Konfident* ("Agent") from 2012. Each of those works, however, is more precisely about collaboration under communism than the transition that followed. *Two Murder's* uniqueness comes into even sharper focus when the reader considers it not from a strictly literary but an interdisciplinary perspective. This novel, like all literature, is at once a work of fiction and a historical document. *Two Murders* is a reaction to and an exploration of a particular historical moment in which its author was personally, though

not voluntarily, involved. The novel is a unique example of both a historical record and a literary text.

The early 1990s were a fraught time in Czech Republic, as in the post-communist world at large, rife with ambiguities in the conceptions of both past and future. But while social scientists and politicians are expected to produce, respectively, workable explanations and concrete proposals, artists have the freedom, even the responsibility, to work with and within uncertainty. In creating this work of autobiographical fiction, Škvorecký addresses and deals with the ambiguities of a tumultuous historico-political moment and succeeds in creating an appropriately complex work of art.

My approach to this novel combines social science research with close-reading of the text in the tradition of new historicism. Sources include historical and sociological texts as well as literary criticism and other examples of Škvorecký's fiction. In addition to textual sources, I conducted a series of informal, but invaluable, interviews in Prague in the summer of 2012 with specialists on various aspects of Škvorecký's project.¹ I situate Škvorecký's novel as both a primary document in the historical record of transitional justice and as a literary creation in the author's larger oeuvre.

In the first chapter I examine the book reviews, Czech and English, that appeared following the two language-respective publications of *Two Murders*. Chapters two and three discuss different but interconnected manifestations of distance. Chapter two

¹ Michael Špirit, June 6, 2012, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague; Adam Hradilek and Radim Schovaneck, June 21, 2012, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Prague; and Jiří Peňás, July 26, 2012, Shopping Center, Nový Smíchov, Prague.

examines memory as the temporal distance of the mind, while chapter three explores exile as spatial distance. I argue that Škvorecký invests memory and exile with enormous significance, and uses both concepts to depict his characters' isolation. In the final chapter, I discuss rumor and reputation in the novel's two distinct story-lines, demonstrating how they come together to create a cohesive artistic work. Approaching the novel as both a historical document and a work of art, I hope to critically examine this complicated historical moment and appraise Škvorecký's contribution to the post-communist Czech dialogue.

Examining Škvorecký's novel as both a part of the historical record and a work of literature, I contend that it is on those very topics where social scientists are silent, the artist's voice rings out. An uncritical reading of the history of communist Czechoslovakia or the politics of early 1990s Czech Republic might give the impression that there existed a firm line between collaboration and dissent. Škvorecký's novel shows that this was not always, if ever, the case. Works of art complicate assumptions about history, and the admission of literature, particularly contemporaneous works, into the historical record allows for a more nuanced understanding of a given era. Art, particularly literature, allows for the ambiguities that are an integral part of the human experience. Škvorecký's novel both claims and demonstrates that writers have the right and responsibility to tell the truth, as complex, nuanced and ambiguous as it may be.

Two Murders stands by its own literary merit as a provocative and moving work of art. However, to fully appreciate Škvorecký's project, it is necessary to consider the

cultural circumstances that engendered the novel and to understand what is meant by the term “transitional justice.” The novel was written and is set in the early 1990s, as Czech Republic struggled to define itself in the transition from communism. To date, it is one of the few Czech works of art that deals with the issues raised by the transition. Transitional justice describes the set of policies that a new government may adopt in dealing with the outgoing regime. The transition may be subtle, for example from one administration to the next or, it may be dramatic, such as the shift from communism to democracy in the former Soviet bloc.² Transitional justice policies range from reparations and restitution to truth-finding commissions and criminal trials for members of the old regime. In his introduction to the 2006 book *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy*, Jon Elster summarizes how various post-communist countries of Eastern Europe enacted transitional justice policies in the early 1990s; each country would make for a unique and instructive casebook on varieties of transitional justice.³ A key component of some transitional justice policies is the treatment of psychological trauma by remembering repressed or upsetting facts, a process sociologist Gil Eyal calls “healing through truth.”⁴ In studies of contemporary Czech history, the emphasis on “dealing with the past,” a vaguely defined but ubiquitous goal, is a reflection of this psychological process. Notably, this phrase is widely used in Germany (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*),

² Elster, Jon, ed. *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy*. Cambridge University Press. New York. 2006. Elster, Jon. “Introduction.” Pages 1-9.

³ Ibid., Pages 1-9.

⁴ Eyal, Gil. “Identity and Trauma: Two Forms of the Will to Memory” *History and Memory*, Vol. 16, No. 1 Spring/Summer 2004.

where the work to recognize and memorialize specific past atrocities has been thorough. Czech Republic adopted “one of the most comprehensive sets of policies for dealing with the past among all postsocialist countries.”⁵ The Czech policies may have been comprehensive, but they were not without controversy.

The most controversial aspect of Czech transitional justice is lustration, the political vetting of members of the outgoing regime. Enacted in 1991, the Lustration Act disqualified anyone who had worked with the communist secret police *Státní bezpečnost* (“State security,” henceforth StB) from top positions in the new government.⁶ Western human rights monitors worried that lustration could serve vengeance rather than justice, and fail to deal with the ambiguities of life under communism.⁷ Through lustration, the new democracy aimed to purge itself of elements tainted by the old regime and preclude the renewal of repressive policies. Also controversial was the dissemination of information held by the secret police, including the identities of their collaborators, which can be considered a method of healing through truth. Even still, government channels sometimes failed to satisfy the public’s need for justice, and incidents what political theorist Jon Elster terms “private justice”⁸ may occur. For example, beginning in 1992, former dissident Petr Cibulka began publishing unofficial lists of alleged collaborators in

⁵ David, Roman and Choi, Susan. “Getting Even or Getting Equal? Retributive Desires and Transitional Justice.” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2009. 168.

⁶ Ibid., 171.

⁷ David, Roman. “Lustration Laws in Action: The Motives and Evaluation of Lustration Policy in the Czech Republic and Poland (1989-2001).” *Law & Social Inquiry*, Volume 28, No. 2, Spring 2003. 394.

⁸ Elster, Jon. *Closing the Books: Transitional Justice in the Historical Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, New York. 2004. 97.

his magazine *Rudé krávo* (“Red Cow”) and later on his website *NECENZUROVNĚ NOVINY* (“UNCENSORED NEWS”).⁹ Sociologist Gil Eyal describes Cibulka, born in Brno in 1950, as “the current dark prince of Czech ‘wild lustration,’ of anticommunist moral panics and conspiracy theories, was a dissident, member of the famous “Jazz Section,” a Charter 77 signatory, a political prisoner, even member of the first postcommunist parliament dominated by the dissidents.”¹⁰ Cibulka’s publications, and the impact they had, show that as official methods of coming to terms with the past cannot satisfy every need, some ambiguities, particularly regarding memory and guilt, necessarily remain.

For individuals, the transition is no less complex, especially those whose own memories are put on trial. This includes people who are positively lustrated, meaning that, having volunteered for vetting, certain evidence is found which suggests their collaboration with the StB. Others were unofficially, though publically, accused of collaboration with the StB, such as those who appeared on Cibulka’s lists. Individuals in such positions are forced to balance the demands of the society at large with their own memories and conceptions of guilt. One such individual is Škvorecký’s wife, the writer and publisher Zdena Salivarová, who appeared on Cibulka’s list. In the broad narrative of Czech transitional justice, the thousands of people who appeared on the list shared

⁹ Stastna, Kazi. “The Czechs’ Unfinished Business.” (Review of *Smears: The True Stories of the People from “Cibulka’s List”* by Zdena Salivarova-Skvorecka) *Foreign Policy*, no. 123, March-April, 2001. Pages 82-87.

¹⁰ Eyal, Gil. “Identity and Trauma: Two Forms of the Will to Memory” *History and Memory*, Vol. 16, No. 1 Spring/Summer 2004.

Salivarová's experience. A smaller number also had similar experiences mounting lawsuits against the state. But Salivarová alone inspired a novel.

Though unofficial, Cibulka's lists were part of the larger process of transitional justice in the Czech Republic. According to Roman David and Susan Choi, victims' desires for retribution and demands for the imposition of an equal degree of suffering on their offender are often distinguishing characteristics of the transition to democracy.¹¹ In many cases, for example in reunified Germany, these desires are reified by judicial measures, such as the restoration of property and criminal trials against members of the outgoing regime. Czech Republic, along with countries such as Hungary and Poland,¹² relied less on criminal trials and more on lustration.

Jon Elster asserts that "the motivation - at least the official one - for lustration is to prevent high-ranking communist officials or collaborators with the security services from serving in important functions in the new regime."¹³ His use of the word "official" suggests that the political/governmental function of lustration may be a subterfuge for enacting retributive desires. And yet, there is a sense that lustration represents a society's need to cleanse itself of a shameful recent past. The Oxford English Dictionary defines lustration as "the performance of an expiatory sacrifice or a purificatory rite (e.g. by washing with water); the purification by religious rites (*of* a person or place *from*

¹¹ David and Choi, 2009, 161.

¹² Elster, 2006, 1-9.

¹³ Elster, 2004, 69.

something).”¹⁴ Historically, the word was first used in ancient Greece and Rome to describe

any of various processes...whereby individuals or communities rid themselves of ceremonial impurity (*e.g.*, bloodguilt, pollution incurred by contact with childbirth or with a corpse) or simply of the profane or ordinary state, which made it dangerous to come into contact with sacred rites or objects.¹⁵

In the modern usage, the application of lustration, (Czech - *lustrace*) implies that a society, tainted by its recent past, must be made pure before beginning a new, usually democratic, political era. The inherited apparatus, explains Roman David, is inimical to a new democracy, and so must be purged entirely.¹⁶ Lustration reimagines the popular Czech slogan of 1989 “We are not like them” as “We are demonstrably not them.”

Though criticized by some, including Havel, lustration in the Czech Republic seems to be a relatively tidy affair. Like the Velvet Revolution, transitional justice in Czech Republic has been accomplished out without bloodshed. In his article “Lustration Laws in Action: The Motives and Evaluation of Lustration Policy in Czech Republic and Poland,” Roman David explains the procedure thus:

The lustration act procedure can be broken down into the following steps: An individual, who holds, applies, or stands for a position specified by the act, is required to submit both a certificate issued by the Ministry of the Interior about her work for, or collaboration with, the secret police, and an affidavit that she did not belong to other groups specified in the act (§§ 4 [1] and 4 [3]). If an individual belongs to any group specified in the act, the organization is required to terminate

¹⁴ OED Online. "Lustration, n.". OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/111398?redirectedFrom=lustration>. Accessed May 2, 2013

¹⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. “Lustration.” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/351853/lustration>. Accessed April 4, 2013.

¹⁶ David, 2003, 395.

her employment contract or transfer her to a position that is not specified by the act (§ 18 (2); cf. §§ 15, 16). The publication of the certificate is impermissible without the written consent of the citizen (§ 19).¹⁷

From this formulation, it is clear that three important intentions officially underlie the lustration process. First, it is a voluntary, individual undertaking, not a compulsory, universal process. Second, it is designed only for individuals intent on holding certain governmental offices or other influential public positions. Third, the results of an individual's lustration are meant to be strictly private. According to the letter of the law, an individual's right to privacy trumps the need for public acknowledgement of the truth.¹⁸ Public shaming, though a component of retributive desires, is not supposed to be an aspect of Czech lustration. To some victims of the communist regime, however, lustration was not enough. Many in Czech Republic felt that the reparations made to former political prisoners and public recognition of their suffering was minimal, while the fortunes of former communist officials hardly changed at all. According to David and Choi, there was no official forum for victims of the communist regime and/or political prisoners to tell their stories.¹⁹ Therefore, retributive desires, at the very least a desire for acknowledgment, emerged through spontaneous channels, including what Elster terms "private justice."²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., 409.

¹⁸ Ibid., 424.

¹⁹ Gil Eyal, however, describes the widespread "public apologies, historians' tribunals, truth and reconciliation commissions, private meetings between informers and their victims, self-criticism, the erection of monuments and the building of museums" (Eyal, 2004, 23) in the Czech Republic. Without more research, I can neither confirm nor deny David and Choi's claims.

²⁰ Elster, 2004, 97.

Petr Cibulka's lists, a catalogue of the names, code names and birthdate of thousands of alleged StB collaborators, are a prime example of private justice. The lists, which Cibulka acquired from an anonymous source, first appeared in Cibulka's magazine *Rudé Krávo*, the title of which is a pun on the official Communist organ *Rudé Právo* in 1992, and later on his website *NECENZUROVNÉ NOVINY* at www.cibulka.com, where they remain available. Akin to vigilante justice, private justice refers to actions carried out by individuals against other individuals. It is "a substitute for, or preemption of, legal justice."²¹ In Cibulka's case, his lists, at least to his mind, were a substitute for legal justice. The transition from communist Czechoslovakia to democratic Czech Republic in large part favored the outgoing communists.²² In their excellent study of the satisfaction of former political prisoners in the Czech Republic, Roman David and Susan Choi found that some 90% of those surveyed felt that the wrongdoers had not been adequately punished. They also note that the compensation given to victims, such as an increase in pension, was not satisfying, especially compared to the mild disciplinary measures meted out to members of the former regime.²³ Cibulka was not cited as a subject in their study, but being a former political prisoner himself, it is reasonable to assume that his attitude fits David and Choi's model. In many cases, members of the former regime or Communist Party did not even lose their jobs, but suffered only a title change or

²¹ Ibid., 98.

²² David and Choi, 2009.

²³ David and Choi, 2009, 176.

department transfer.²⁴ The collective sense, therefore, was that Czech society did not value sacrifice made by victims of the communist regime. Because the state was not prepared to right its wrongs, some felt it was necessary to find satisfaction through other channels.

Cibulka rose to prominence on the wings of this publication. And yet, it is possible that he had a sincere, if not disinterested, desire to see justice served. David and Choi do not contest the validity of the retributive desire in and of itself. It is not only a natural human inclination, but also may be a necessary social measure. Political crime in particular creates social inequality which judicial measures may correct. Ultimately, David and Choi found that reconciliation, enacted through repentance, apology and forgiveness, is the most effective means of satisfying retributive desires. According to David and Choi, Cibulka's lists were a "significant substitute for justice in the eyes of many victims."²⁵ Where perpetrators are not voluntarily penitent, it may be necessary, from the victims' point of view, to force the issue.

Such acts of private justice compromise the validity of the state judicial system as a whole. I contend that at issue is not free access to information, but rather the right to keep private one's own past. In building the new democratic Czech Republic, the government had a responsibility to evaluate the various degrees of complicity extant

²⁴ This information comes from a conversation with political theorist Aviezer Tucker in spring 2012. It called to my mind an earlier cultural shift, namely de-Stalinization, embodied by Zemanek in Kundera's *Joke*, who "gave courses in Marxism-Leninism at the university, but...told me he was teaching *philosophy*" (Kundera, 270, original emphasis).

²⁵ David and Choi, 2009, 171.

under communism, and determine what under such circumstances constituted guilt. If private citizen is free to determine guilt and innocence, and to punish those he deems guilty, it undermines the entire justice system. In the case of Czech Republic, the courts were forced to respond, in a sense, held hostage to the demands of one man whose publication had massive ramifications. Those ramifications included lawsuits, the creation of state institutions such as the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and, as my paper goes on to explore, Škvorecký's novel. Cibulka's lists, lustration and the discourse of transitional justice engendered *Two Murders in my Double Life* by inspiring Škvorecký to portray and problematize his experiences through fiction.

Writing about *Two Murders in my Double Life* was, for me, like solving a mystery. Working on this novel, I discarded more hypotheses than I kept and changed more tacks than I followed, while my list of suspects and possible motives grew ever longer, all of which would probably have delighted Škvorecký. I struggled to maintain a distinction between the author and his alter-ego, and between the alter-ego and other incarnations of a similar character. Today, having spent over a year working on this relatively short novel, questions remain unanswered, angles unexplored. The deeper I looked into this text, the more complex it became. It is my great hope that the following pages will simultaneously problematize and illuminate Škvorecký's deceptively simple book. Among the many themes that Škvorecký explores hides his larger, eternal message. The human experience is too complex to be described using binary terms like as guilt and innocence. History and historical memory are too ambiguous for non-fiction

to tell the whole story. In times of political transition, indeed any sort of cultural transformation, the artist has a responsibility to tell the truth as he experiences it. It is to the benefit and delight of his readers that Škvorecký took on this responsibility.

Chapter 1: Background and Critical Reception

Two Murders in my Double Life is, as the title suggests, an amphibious novel. Škvorecký's alter-ego is split, in heart and mind, between two physical and conceptual worlds. This is not the foolhardy young Danny Smiricky of Škvorecký's *The Cowards*, written 1948-49 but not published until 1958, nor the older, nostalgic Professor Smiricky of his *The Engineer of Human Souls* from 1977. In fact, this hero is never explicitly referred to as Danny Smiricky, but he is nevertheless strikingly familiar to Škvorecký's readers. Although this novel can be considered an addition to the Danny Smiricky cycle, and indeed would be interesting to consider from that perspective, throughout this paper I will refer to the protagonist simply as "the professor." The aged professor has traces of the younger Danny, especially in his attitude towards women, but his boyish optimism has been replaced by a mournful, more experienced tone.

Half the book deals with and takes place in contemporary Canada, where the couple lives in exile. The other half is divided between Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and Czech Republic in the 1990s, as the couple recalls, works through and answers for the past. Despite having a largely autobiographical plot, it is very much a work of fiction. This is of course Škvorecký's *modus operandi*. As he wrote in the preface to his collection of autobiographical essays *When Eve Was Naked*, "Even the most nonsensical crime stories and the wildest science fiction/fantasies are permeated with the germs of reality which were part of their authors' life."²⁶ In *Two Murders*, however, in the

²⁶ Škvorecký, Josef. *When Eve Was Naked*. Picador, New York. 2003. xi.

moments where invention diverges from reality, a second, perhaps unintended, plot emerges.

Josef Škvorecký was born in the Bohemian town of Náchod in 1924.²⁷ During World War II he did manual labor in a German airplane factory, which formed the basis of his first novel *Cowards*. *Cowards* introduced to the world Škvorecký's alter-ego Danny Smiricky, who works in a German airplane factory, lives for jazz music and is hopelessly in love with any number of women. The book satirizes both the Czech resistance and the Soviet liberation, and thus Škvorecký began his career on the wrong side of the censor. Following the war and the reopening of the universities, he began studying at Charles University. He entered the Faculty of Medicine but switched to the Philosophy Department and eventually earned a PhD in English. During the 1950s, Škvorecký worked as an editor at various publishing houses and magazines and produced Czech-language translations of his favorite American authors including William Faulkner and Raymond Chandler. He continued writing fiction and developing his singular style, but it became increasingly difficult to publish. Both *Cowards* and 1956's *The End of the Nylon Age* were condemned by the Communist regime and although Škvorecký was made a member of the Czech Writers' Union, he was limited to the rank of translator.

His 1960s novels, including *Lviče* ("The Lion Cub;" released in English as *Miss Silver's Past*), and *Tankový prapor* ("The Tank Battalion;" released salaciously as *The*

²⁷ Biographical information was found and cross-checked in two main sources: Glusman, John. "Josef Skvorecky, the Art of Fiction No. 112." *The Paris Review*. Winter 1989, No. 112. <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2392/the-art-of-fiction-no-112-josef-skvorecky>; and Příbáň, Michal. "Životopis." <http://www.skvorecky.cz/>

Republic of Whores), addressed complex political issues with insight and humor, inspiring many to consider Škvorecký the voice of his rather combustible generation. Unfortunately, the Soviet Invasion of 1968 made it clear that it would be a long time before Škvorecký could write or publish freely in Czechoslovakia. The following year, he and the writer/entertainer Zdena Salivarová, his wife since 1958, emigrated to Canada where Škvorecký had been offered a position at the University of Toronto.

In Toronto Škvorecký was able to write unfettered and it was in exile that he produced some of his best works. However his other literary venture, undertaken with Salivarová, may be an even greater contribution to Czech literature. In 1971 the Škvoreckýs founded 68 Publishers, a firm dedicated to the promotion of Czech and Slovak writers who were banned under communism. They began by publishing Škvorecký's novels in both the original Czech and English translation but soon produced works by some of the most important Czech writers, including Václav Havel, Bohumil Hrabal and Ludvík Vaculík. A prime example of *tamizdat* work, 68 Publishers kept Czechoslovak literature vibrant throughout this repressive period in three major ways. First of all, it liberated frustrated writers with the knowledge that their manuscripts need not come to rest in their own desk drawers. Secondly, 68 Publishers brought these prohibited texts back into Czechoslovakia where they had a cherished, if shadowy, circulation. For example, Milan Kundera's *Unbearable Lightness of Being* was first published in French in 1984, but appeared in Czech only a year later thanks to 68 Publishers. Finally, through translations, 68 Publishers brought to international attention

so many talented writers and, consequently, the cause of Czech liberation. The company distributed Škvorecký's work, but it was in many ways Salivarová's brain child. After all, in addition to his prolific writing career, Škvorecký taught film and, charmingly, American literature, at the University of Toronto.²⁸ Salivarová's tireless promotion of Czech literature throughout the late communist period gives the fall from grace endured by her alter-ego in *Two Murders* a terrible pathos.

Škvorecký died of cancer in January 2012, survived by Salivarová. Over the course of his life, he wrote over a dozen novels, plus short stories, criticism and screenplays. He was the winner of the 1980 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, a nominee for the 1982 Nobel Prize, a member of the Order of Canada, a Guggenheim Fellow and a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. In 1990, Havel awarded both Škvorecký and Salivarová the highest Czech honor, the Order of the White Lion, for their service to the Czech literary community. In terms of his creative output, *Two Murders* is a relatively minor work but poignant nevertheless. Its moments of bitterness and confusion alternate with beauty and humor, reflecting the historical moment in and by which the book was produced.

Two Murders in my Double Life novel consists of two distinct, seemingly unrelated stories. First, the Edenvale campus in Toronto is scandalized, though not particularly grief-stricken, by the murder of Raymond Hammett, husband of math professor Mary Mather. Many at Edenvale expect the professor, because of his expertise

²⁸ According to Sam Solecki, a fellow faculty member in the Department of English at the University of Toronto, Škvorecký was beloved by the students who, in his fiction, he ridiculed so mercilessly

in the mystery genre, to take a professional interest in the case, and he does not disappoint. In fact, thanks to his observant wife Sidonia, he eventually solves the mystery, though he does not publicize his discovery or bring the killer to justice. Curiously, the murder plot is hardly gruesome or tragic. It is a lighthearted mystery, a game for the professor and other lovers of the genre. Rather than Raymond Chandler's hard-boiled Philip Marlowe stories that Škvorecký so admired, the *Two Murders* mystery calls to mind Škvorecký's humorous and world-weary Lieutenant Borůvka mysteries from the 70s and 80s. And yet, although appearing to lack gravitas, the murder story incorporates all the important thematic elements, such as confession, guilt and revenge, that Škvorecký develops in the rest of the book. In reviews of the novel, critics uniformly dismissed the murder mystery. However I will demonstrate that the inclusion of this detective story is one of the critical literary differences between this novel and Škvorecký's essays on the subject of lustration. The Canadian half of the book is absolutely essential for understanding the Czech half.

The second plot is, admittedly, more nuanced and far more serious than the murder. The temporal setting is not specific, but frequent references to the Velvet Revolution and "my wife's playwright friend who was now president"²⁹ place the action some time in the early 90s. Through a friend visiting from Prague, the professor and his wife learn about "the subject that at the time was very hot in Prague: Mr. Mrkvicka's

²⁹ Škvorecký, 2001, 80-81 *inter alia*.

List,”³⁰ a catalogue of people supposed to have been informers for the StB throughout the communist era. Sidonia, a writer and, since the late 1960s, publisher of Czech literature in exile, learns that she is among the entries on the List, and is accused of having been a regular informer since the 1950s. The accusation is based on something Sidonia did, and never denies having done, all those years ago.

Sidonia had been a member of Daisy, a traveling women’s choir, but is prohibited from traveling abroad with the group. This is because her father had emigrated to the United States and her brother, convicted of an unspecified political crime, was sentenced to labor in the uranium mines, thus Sidonia’s class origins are suspect. With the best of intentions, her boyfriend, who would later grow up to be her husband and the protagonist of this novel, visited the Ministry of the Interior in an attempt to prove Sidonia’s bona fide working-class status and free her from travel restrictions. Not long after, Sidonia was on the receiving end of an official visit. While Daisy was on tour, the government agent Sedlacek appeared in the group’s otherwise deserted offices and questioned Sidonia about Juliette, a member of the group and Sidonia’s close friend. Sedlacek wanted Sidonia to confirm or deny that Juliette was dating a Serbian, and therefore connected with enemies of the Czechoslovak state. Because Juliette dreamt of joining the Communist Party, Sidonia decided to help her friend by submitting a false report to the

³⁰ Ibid., 91. Škvorecký refers to Mrkvicka’s publication as the List. Non-fiction sources, however, designate it as *cibulkovy seznamy* or Cibulka’s lists. When referencing the novel, I use Škvorecký’s capitalization, but for all other sources I use standard capitalization.

effect that Juliette's boyfriend was not Serbian but Bulgarian.³¹ Her friend is thus freed from scrutiny and Sidonia is never confronted by the StB again. Some forty years later, this report, and Sidonia's name in the Interior Ministry's database, resurfaces.

Sidonia's name appears, along with thousands of others, on a published list of alleged secret police collaborators. The list appears in the magazine *Kill Kommunism!*, a product of the former dissident and current yellow journalist Mr. Mrkvicka. Mrkvicka also publishes a direct assault, an article entitled "Lay Your Cards on the Table, Mrs. Sidonia!" Although Mrkvicka's publications are not official government documents, they quickly assume legitimacy; his victims are many, but his adherents are more. Sidonia is racked, not with guilt but despair, finding herself ostracized from the very community she helped to create. With her husband's support, she begins the complicated process of lustration in order to have her name officially cleared. And yet, well she knows, the stain on her reputation is permanent. Even her steadfast husband wonders whether all his wife's efforts can make a difference, "if the acquittals in numerous detective stories really did clear the accused of all suspicion. Wasn't there a residuum of doubt left?"³² The durability of rumor is thematically significant in both plots. Although Sidonia wins the legal battle, she loses the psychological war. As the story progresses, Sidonia reaches with increasing frequency and intensity for the bottle, and eventually drinks herself to

³¹ When I presented my work at the 2012 Czech Studies Workshop, the linguist and literary critic Jindřich Toman drew a parallel between Sidonia's false and yet consequential document and Ludvik Jahn's postcard in Kundera's 1965 novel *The Joke*. It seems that the great Czech tradition of mystifications was yet another casualty of the communist regime.

³² Škvorecký, Josef. *Two Murders in my Double Life*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York. 2001. 78-79.

death. Thus is Sidonia emotionally, and eventually physically, destroyed by this ordeal. Though he survives, the professor loses the better part of himself by witnessing the slow (self-)destruction of his wife.

The second, but by no means secondary, plot of the novel has its basis in fact, but diverges from the Škvoreckýs' actual experiences in provocative thematic ways. In this story, the professor's wife is accused of having collaborated with communist-era secret police. She then goes through the process of lustration, and mounts a lawsuit against the Czech government. In the novel as a whole, the most expansive point of departure from reality is the murder mystery. In the Czech-based lustration half however, the most significant departure is also a death. Though in reality Škvorecký died in January 2012, survived by Salivarová, in the novel, the professor witnesses his wife's slow suicide. In comparing fact with fiction, Sidonia's death becomes yet another intriguing mystery.

The character of Mr. Mrkvicka is based on Petr Cibulka. Beginning in 1992, Cibulka published a list containing the names, code names and birth dates of thousands of alleged StB collaborators in his publications *Rude krávo* ("Red Cow," a play on the communist-era newspaper *Rude pravo*) and *NECENZUROVANÉ NOVINY* (sic; "UNCENSORED NEWS"), which appears in the novel as the orthographically-incorrect and passionately-punctuated *Kill Kommunism!*.³³ Leaked from the StB archives by a still unknown source, *Cibulkovy seznamy* ("Cibulka's lists") garnered rapt attention from both

³³ Škvorecký's mockery of Cibulka is merciless. The fairly common Czech surname Cibulka happens to mean "small onion." Mrkvička (diacritical marks are regularly omitted from Škvorecký's English translations) has an emasculating undertone; it means "baby carrot."

the government and the Czech citizenry. Many, including Václav Havel, criticized Cibulka for oversimplifying a complex issue, failing to differentiate levels of complicity and omitting the names of Party-members and professional StB agents from his publications. The lists played an important role in the broader scheme of Czech transitional justice, but I turn now to their role in the Škvoreckýs' lives.

In an autobiographical essay, Salivarová describes learning in 1992 that her name was among the thousands on the list; she immediately knew the reason for its inclusion.³⁴ It is of critical importance to note that the list, in spite of its shadowy origins, did not generate itself, but is an accurate reflection of the StB archives. That is to say, the StB, for all its unscrupulous dealings, did not invent records of collaboration. Everyone whose name was found in the StB archives had done something, ranging from years of informing to submitting a single report, that warranted their entry in the registry. However, one of the problems with Cibulka's list is that all entries appear as if on equal footing. The list fails differentiate between career informants and people who, like Salivarová, had only a single encounter with the StB. As a young woman, she submitted an isolated report to the StB, to the effect that the friend's boyfriend was not Serbian but Bulgarian. In *Two Murders*, Škvorecký depicts Sidonia's absurd, though consequential, encounter with an StB agent. Remarkably, this story not only is based in fact, but also has already been fictionalized. Her autobiographical 1972 novel *Honzlová* (published in

³⁴ Salivarová, Zdena, ed. *Osočení: Pravdivé příběhy lidí z "Cibulkova seznamu"*. Host. Brno, Czech Republic. 2000. Translated with help from Jiří Novák, University of Texas, Spring 2012. Salivarová, Zdena, author. Pages 162-164.

English the following year as *Summer in Prague*) tells the story of a young member of a women's choir, barred for political reasons from traveling abroad with the group, who is approached by an StB agent.³⁵ *Honzlová* is a work of literature, but it is autobiographical fictional. Salivarová had not tried to hide her history with the StB, but still felt that she did not deserve to be categorically condemned as a collaborator. In 1992, she reapplied for Czech citizenship in order to go through lustration. The result was negative, but to prove herself beyond a shadow of a doubt, she volunteered for a second vetting. This time, a search of the StB archives did reveal her name. Finally in 1993 Salivarová decided to sue the Ministry of the Interior to have her name removed from the registry, arguing that her brief dalliance with the StB should not be considered collaboration. The case concluded in 1994 with the decision that Salivarová's entry in the registry was unwarranted, and her name was officially cleared.³⁶

In addition to mounting the lawsuit, the Škvoreckýs undertook a literary quest for justice. Salivarová edited, and both she and Škvorecký contributed to *Osočení: Pravdivé příběhy lidí z "Cibulkova seznamu"* (*Smears: The True Stories of the People from "Cibulka's List"*). The book is an anthology of essays, mostly by people whose names appeared on the list. Salivarová contributed two essays. The first, "*Vinný a nevinný*" ("Guilty and Not-Guilty") discusses the StB's own three-tiered system for classifying its informants: those who collaborated for ideological reasons, for material

³⁵ Salivarová, Zdena. *Summer in Prague*. Marie Winn, translator. Harper & Row, New York. 1973.

³⁶ Salivarová, 2000.

gain or out of coercion. Salivarová locates herself in the third category, but argues nevertheless that only the Party was truly guilty. Her second essay describes her dealings with the StB agent, and it very much echoes the story that Škvorecký supplies in *Two Murders*. For his part, Škvorecký contributed forewords to each edition in which he ruminates on the philosophical and social ramifications of Cibulka's rise. *Osočeni* was first released in 1993, significantly as the final product of 68 Publishers. A second edition appeared in 2000 thanks to the Brno publishing house Host, although critic Kazi Stastna, a senior writer for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, credits the rerelease to the fact that "it did not find a Czech publisher and appear on Czech bookstands until October 2000."³⁷ To date, the book has not been translated into English.

In a sense, the lawsuit and *Osočeni* represent two different types of text about transitional justice. First, all the legal documents associated with the case are first-hand sources that are part of the historical record of transitional justice. Czech laws prohibit court transcripts from becoming public record, but I was able to have a look at the judge's decision when I visited USTR, the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, in Prague in June 2012. The document is as abstruse as any piece of legal writing, and perhaps even more so because of the political issues surrounding the trial. Nevertheless, both the legal documents and the coverage of the trial constitute a sizable body of work. Salivarová was among the first high-profile people to mount such a case, but she was not

³⁷ Stastna, Kazi. "The Czechs' Unfinished Business." (Review of *Smears: The True Stories of the People from "Cibulka's List"* by Zdena Salivarova-Skvorecka) *Foreign Policy*, no. 123, March-April, 2001. Pages 82-87.

the last. A collection of these documents would certainly yield an instructive view into the inner-workings of transitional justice in the courtroom. On the other hand, *Osočení* is an example of literary nonfiction. Most contributors are, unlike Škvorecký and Salivarová, not writers; the authors of these essays span all strata of Czech society. Some of these essays are autobiographical sketches, some are more theoretical, but none are works of fiction. Thus there are three distinct types of text that attest to Salivarová's innocence: legal documents that led to her victory in court, her own non-fiction essays and her 1972 novel. For all that, Škvorecký, who had to some degree contributed to all three, still felt the need to fictionalize the entire experience in a novel. One may ask, what did the other types of text leave unsaid? After all, he made his contributions; to the lawsuit as a character witness and to *Osočení* as an author. What is gained by Škvorecký's fictionalizing the experience in this very specific way? What does he achieve, and what do his readers reap?

The body of criticism on *Two Murders in my Double Life* is small, but greatly illuminating. The criticism consists of Czech-language book reviews written at the time of the novel's initial 1996 publication and English-language reviews from the release of Škvorecký's own English translation in 2001. To my knowledge, no critical study has yet been devoted exclusively to this novel. Instructively, the Czech reviews demonstrate two major tendencies: most critics seem sympathetic to Salivarová and forgiving of the novel's flaws, while only a few are accusatory and dismissive. This schism largely mirrors, and in fact echoes, the conflict at the heart of the novel. Those who forgive

Salivarová her political and Škvorecký his artistic trespasses, or at least write sympathetically of the novel's shortcomings, tend to have been members of the literary community and/or friends of the couple. In contrast, the harshest critiques of the book are coupled with wholesale dismissals of Škvorecký's grievance, suggesting that the reviewers' sympathies lie not with Salivarová, but with Petr Cibulka.

When the Czech edition of *Two Murders* was first published, the book was a brief bestseller in Czech Republic. The reviews of Pavel Vašák,³⁸ Jiří Peňás³⁹ and Josef Chuchma⁴⁰ went the furthest to illuminate the Czech perspective on this book. Also greatly informative was Lubomir Dorůžka's essay "The Double Life of Josef Škvorecký,"⁴¹ which discussed *Two Murders* as part of Škvorecký's entire oeuvre. Finally, perhaps the most interesting review was Josef Mlejnek's "Much Ado about One Mishap,"⁴² in which the author, a Charter 77 signatory, harshly critiques, or rather criticizes, *Two Murders*. The review is so antagonistic, it inspired author Miloslava Holubová, also a Charterist, to write a response in support of Škvorecký and his wife.⁴³

The scanty English language criticism of the novel tells its own fascinating story. Anglophone critics had, in almost every case, to explain who Škvorecký was, whereas

³⁸ Vašák, Pavel. "Hořkej svět Danny Smiřického." *Celostátní deníky*, February 1, 1997.

³⁹ Peňás, Jiří. "Příběh osočení." *Respekt*, November 25, 1996.

⁴⁰ Chuchma, Josef. "Škvorecký musel novou knihu stihnout za každou cenu." *Celostátní deníky*, November 30, 1996.

⁴¹ Dorůžka, Lubomir. "Dvojitý život Josefa Škvoreckého." *Celostátní deníky*, August 27, 1999.

⁴² Mlejnek, Josef. "Mnoho povyku pro jeden přešlap." *Lidové noviny*, January 25, 1997.

⁴³ Holubová, Miloslava. Response to "Mnoho povyku pro jeden přešlap." *Lidové noviny*, February 7, 1997.

Czech critics' task was to explain the role of this novel in the already familiar life and work of the writer. For some Anglophone critics, Škvorecký is a beloved adopted son, but for most, he is unfamiliar. Overall, these reviewers tended to be kinder than the Czech ones, for whom Škvorecký is a (extra-)national treasure, and whose expectations are based on decades of reading. Some reviewers, for example E.J. Czerwinski⁴⁴ and Neil Bermel,⁴⁵ are clearly fans of Škvorecký, for they compare *Two Murders* to his earlier novels. Others, such as Christy Post⁴⁶ and Gilbert Taylor,⁴⁷ seem to be reading Škvorecký for the first time. Taylor, for example, calls the protagonist "a never-named literature professor." While it is true that the professor in *Two Murders* is not referred to as Danny Smiricky, to Škvorecký's fans, the character is instantly familiar. There is, however, an interesting mystery that emerges out of the English-language criticism.

More than half of the English-languages reviews that I found refer to *Two Murders* as the first book that Škvorecký wrote in English. To be sure, the 2001 English edition fails to credit any translator. And yet, the book was in fact published first in Czech a full five years earlier. What was the source, I wondered, of this illogical rumor? Infected by detective fiction, I determined to solve this mystery and in January 2013

⁴⁴ Czerwinski, E.J. Review of *Two Murders in my Double Life*. *World Literature Today*, Vol. 76, No. 2, Spring 2002, 221

⁴⁵ Bermel, Neil. "Dead Man on Campus." *New York Times Book Review*, May 2001, 37.

⁴⁶ Post, Christy. Review of *Two Murders in my Double Life*. *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Fall 2001, Vol. 21 Issue 3, 199.

⁴⁷ Taylor, Gilbert. Review of *Two Murders in my Double Life*. *The Booklist*, May 2001, Volume 97, Issue 18, 1737.

began corresponding with Sam Solecki.⁴⁸ In addition to being Škvorecký's colleague at the University of Toronto, Solecki was his editor and friend. In response to my query, Solecki confirmed that Škvorecký had indeed translated the book himself, reaching out to native speakers, such as Solecki himself, for editorial help.⁴⁹ Solecki also noted that the technical anonymity of the Danny-like character in *Two Murders* is not unique in Škvorecký's work. Rather it joins the company of *The Legend of Emöke* and *The Bass Saxophone*, as books about an anonymous young man from Kostelec who loves jazz, literature and women. So, as in the novel itself, those English-speakers who seem not to understand must ultimately be forgiven their lack of knowledge. Furthermore, although this book does not represent Škvorecký's attempt to write in his non-native language, the process of that translation, or the implications of this novel being "dual language," though outside the scope of this paper, would certainly be worth exploring.

In his review for *Lidové noviny*, David Garkisch claims that "critics marked the book as 'artistically successful,'" ⁵⁰ however almost no Czech review heralds *Two Murders* as an unqualified success. Vašák, Peňás and Chuchma all refer to the haste in which Škvorecký wrote this novel, a period of about two months. Vašák suggests that the book was rushed to print out of a sense of urgency. Both Peňás and Chuchma describe

⁴⁸ I sent Mr. Solecki an initial email on January 14, 2013. He responded that day and provided more information in another email the following day.

⁴⁹ Oddly, Edward Galligan, who, along with Solecki, Škvorecký thanks in opening pages of the book, both refers to the novel being written in English, and claims that he read the manuscript. Unfortunately, and yet somehow appropriately for a Škvorecký plot, Mr. Galligan died in 2012, leaving the case open.

⁵⁰ Garkisch, David. "Zaručeně 'pravé' seznamy." *Lidové noviny*, February 8, 2002. "Kritici sice knihu označili za umělecky úspěšnou."

the novel as syntactically confusing, and Peňás even suggests that Škvorecký did not read over some passages before sending the book to print. In his article “*Příběh osočení*” (“The Story of Smears”), Peňás, while mindful of the novel’s weaknesses, nevertheless shows great admiration of Škvorecký’s abiding strengths. In the informal interview I conducted in the summer of 2012 in Prague, Peňás suggested that although Škvorecký wrote fiction constantly, his chief resource was his own life experience.⁵¹ By the 1990s, Peňás added, Škvorecký may have exhausted his artistic reservoirs. In his review, Peňás writes that “It had seemed that the reader of Josef Škvorecký would have to become reconciled with the fact that the character of Danny Smiricky had been definitively bequeathed to nostalgic tranquility on a Canadian university campus.”⁵² The experience of lustration therefore activated Škvorecký’s impulse of novelization, but, like an aging rocker who continues to produce new albums, Peňás suggests that the writer may no longer have been artistically innovative. Peňás praises Škvorecký for his ability to simultaneously render an emotional landscape and deliver biting criticism. He does not, however, rank *Two Murders* among Škvorecký’s best works.

The title of Peňás’ article refers to *Osočení: pravdivé příběhy lidí z "Cibulkova seznamu"* (*The Denounced: True Stories of People from "Cibulka's List"*).⁵³ *Osočení* was the final product of 68 Publishers, which ceased operations following the Velvet

⁵¹ Interview. July 26, 2012, Shopping Center, Nový Smichov, Prague.

⁵² Peňás, 1996. “Už se zdálo, že čtenář Josefa Škvoreckého se bude muset smířit s faktem, že postava Dannyho Smirického byla definitivně zanechána nostalgickému poklidu v kanadském univerzitním kampusu.”

⁵³ Salivarová, 2000.

Revolution. The collection of essays, which Salivarová edited and Škvorecký contributed to, was critically and commercially unsuccessful. Researchers Adam Hrádilek and Radek Schovánek, in a conversation at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in Prague,⁵⁴ claimed that Salivarová initially enjoyed great public support, but that *Osočení* had an alienating effect. Not all of the book's contributors, Hrádilek and Schovánek suggested, were innocent victims of slander. For those who believe that a man is known by the company he keeps, the other authors listed in *Osočení* may have compromised Salivarová's claims of pure innocence.

In her review of *Osočení*, Kazi Stastna cynically notes that “a second printing (of Cibulka's list) in book form sold nearly five times the average print run for a work of fiction in the Czech Republic.”⁵⁵ Stastna maintains that the Czech government had largely kept the police files secret. Later, the 1996 Act on the Access to Files Created by Activity of the Former State Security enabled anyone to view his own file in the secret police archives.⁵⁶ David and Choi contend that “Although the names of informers were deleted, people could nevertheless identify the person who had informed on them.”⁵⁷ Cibulka's list of approximately 185,000 names included an astonishing number of “revelations” about alleged collaborators, such as Salivarová. Stastna claimed that even though the list is not a government document, the state would neither confirm nor deny

⁵⁴ Interview. Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, Prague, June 2012.

⁵⁵ Stastna, 2001, 82.

⁵⁶ David, Roman and Choi, Susan. “Getting Even or Getting Equal? Retributive Desires and Transitional Justice.” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2009. 171.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

the veracity of the document, and some officials had asserted that Cibulka's list is "seen as incomplete rather than inaccurate."⁵⁸ Even in the novel, the professor notes that the List "had metamorphosed into a *de facto* government bulletin."⁵⁹ The point is not whether the list is legitimate, but that it is widely read and largely believed.

Many of the Czech critics mentioned *Osočení* in their reviews of *Two Murders*. Garkisch's reference to *Osočení* as Salivarová's "own interesting public cleansing"⁶⁰ clearly situates the anthology within the broader discourse on lustration. However the book functions differently from a literary perspective. For one thing, the *Osočení* project is a plot point in *Two Murders*, as Salivarová's alter-ego Sidonia publishes just such an anthology. For another, on a conceptual level, the novel begins where the Škvoreckýs' contributions to *Osočení* end. That is to say, the facts had been related and the verdict had been reached, but somehow the whole story had not yet been told. One purpose of *Two Murders* is to depict the emotional nuances of this experience in a way that a non-fiction essay cannot.

Overall, both Czech and American critics agreed that the Canadian story-line is the less interesting half of the book. Vašák calls the murder mystery "really a rather boring story[...]serving as a crutch for the emphasis of the rage over the Prague murder-

⁵⁸ Stastna, 84. Adam Hradilek told me that the state-sponsored Center for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes was founded partially in response to Cibulka's list, in an effort to curtail such private publications, while also making the information available through standardized channels.

⁵⁹ Škvorecký, 2001, 113

⁶⁰ Garkisch, .2002 "*svou veřejnou očistu pojala zajímavě.*"

by-lustration.”⁶¹ Of course, the Prague affair is the emotional crux of the novel. I agree with Andrej Halada, whose review of the novel is the only entirely positive one, when he writes that “when in the Czech story no kind of actual murder comes, the allegations against Sidonia of collaboration with the StB have the same effects.”⁶² However, I demonstrate in chapter four that the murder mystery has even more significance than this. Throughout his career, Škvorecký was a devotee of the detective genre. The ambiguous conclusion of the mystery at the end of the novel makes it clear that Škvorecký put more thought into this story than most critics have acknowledged.

Škvorecký’s variations on the theme of detective fiction is best summarized by his lifelong friend, the writer and musicologist Lubomír Dorůžka:

The "light" genre of detective for him meant a symbol of this connection: in the setting of a typical "whodunit" he managed to open up social climate of the times and to instill *them* into the consciousness of the readers, maybe furtively, but deeper than any profound analyses. And in this direction he continued also to those realms, which for Czech literary scene had an element of certain taboo.⁶³

Dorůžka, as well as Peňás, points out that even Škvorecký’s lighter works, like the Lieutenant Borůvka stories, are not free of social critique. Although Škvorecký had no

⁶¹ Vašák, 1997. “*Je to vlastně dosti nudná povídka [...] sloužící jako berlička pro zvýraznění onoho pražského vražedného lustračního běsnění.*”

⁶² Halada, Andrej. “*Dannyho neveselý návrat.*” *Mladý svět*. December 22, 1996. “*I když v českém příběhu o žádnou skutečnou vraždu nejde, má nařčení Sidonie ze spolupráce s StB prakticky stejné následky.*”

⁶³ Dorůžka, 1999. “*Lehký” žánr detektivek pro něj znamenal symbol tohoto sepětí: na pozadí typického “whodunit” dokázal rozehrát společenské klima doby a vtisknout je do vědomí čtenářů třeba nenápadně, ale hlouběji než jakákoliv hlubokomyslná analýza. A v tomto směru pokračoval i do končin, které pro českou literární scénu měly nádech jistého tabu.*

haughty biases against so-called mere entertainment, he seems to have been almost unable to write it himself.

Though it mentions *Two Murders* only briefly, Dorůžka's 1999 article is called "The Double Life of Josef Škvorecký." Lubomir Dorůžka is best known as a journalist and musicologist; Škvorecký describes him, in the essay "Tenor Sax Solo from Washington," as "the doyen of Czech jazz critics."⁶⁴ But he was also a life-long friend of Škvorecký, with whom he translated literature from English into Czech.⁶⁵ A volume of the men's correspondence, titled *Na shledanou v lepších časech : dopisy Josefa Škvoreckého a Lubomíra Dorůžky z doby marnosti (1968-1989)* ("Goodbye in Better Times: Letters of Josef Škvorecký and Lubomír Dorůžka From Futile Times"), was published by Books and Cards in Prague as recently as 2011. In his 1999 article Dorůžka evinces a nuanced understanding of and appreciation for Škvorecký, and his concise discussion of the novel is among the most insightful. For one thing, Dorůžka is the only critic to mention that *Two Murders* was the first work of Czech literature to discuss Cibulka's lists at the time. This is hugely important, as the publication of the lists was, and twenty years later still is, an incendiary topic. That Škvorecký was the first writer to address this extremely pervasive issue in fiction is a testament to his understanding of the Czech zeitgeist, even from an enormous distance. Škvorecký and his alter-ego grew a

⁶⁴ Wilson, Paul, ed. *Prague: a Traveler's Literary Companion*. Whereabouts Press. San Francisco, California. 1995. 209.

⁶⁵ Willoughby, Ian. "Lubomír Dorůžka: Legendary music journalist and translator of Western literature." Radio Prague interview. <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/one-on-one/lubomir-doruzka-legendary-music-journalist-and-translator-of-western-literature>

great deal between *Cowards*, written 1948-1949 and published 1958, and *Two Murders*, written and published in 1996. But in both cases and so many in between, Škvorecký was immediately and critically perceptive of the cultural climate. This is not, as Jan Meier suggests in his review for a newspaper from Škvorecký's native town, evidence that "Škvorecký is one of the authors who still really write only one book."⁶⁶ Rather, Škvorecký's enduring interest in certain themes and his ability to depict precise historical moments suggest that he was and remained, as Dorůžka claims, the speaker for his generation.

Not every generation has such luck, that it sets out for itself a speaker, who calls their youthful dreams and expected period, where those dreams meet with reality, and their additional hindsight from certain distance[...]Josef Škvorecký succeeded in becoming such a speaker. ⁶⁷

Far less laudatory, but equally illuminating, is Josef Mlejnek's "Much Ado About One Foul." Mlejnek uses an extremely derisive tone in his review. Mlejnek explicitly takes a pro-Cibulka, anti-Škvorecký-Salivarová position, as evidenced in his explanation: "Zdena Salivarová is drowning in traumas, because she could not cope with the reality, that her name found itself on the list of StB collaborators illegally published by the anti-communist activist Petr Cibulka."⁶⁸ Mlejnek betrays no sympathy for Salivarová, the

⁶⁶ Meier, Jan. "Škvorecký napsal novou knižku, jejíž děj se odehrává i v Americe." *Noviny Náchodska*, December 5, 1996. "Škvorecký je z autorů, kteří vlastně stále píší jednu knihu."

⁶⁷ Dorůžka, 1999. "Ne každá generace má to štěstí, aby ze sebe vydala mluvčího, který pojmenuje její mladistvé sny a očekání, období, kdy se tyto sny střetávají se skutečností, i její dodatečné z jistého odpustu[...]Stát se takovým mluvčím se podařilo Josefu Škvoreckému"

⁶⁸ Mlejnek. "Zdena Salivarová se utápí v traumatech, neboť se nedokázala vyrovnat se skutečností, že se její jméno ocitlo na seznamech spolupracovníků StB vydaných nelegálně antikomunistickým aktivistou Petrem Cibulkou."

word “trauma” is used here sneeringly, and although he concedes that Cibulka’s publication was illegal, he confers legitimacy on him with the appellation “anti-communist activist.”⁶⁹ He assures his readers that in the past he has enjoyed the Smiricky stories, in spite of Danny’s “blunt (pan)sexual ‘sincerity,’”⁷⁰ indicating a profound misunderstanding of Škvorecký’s celebrated eroticism. Mlejnek’s opinion of *Two Murders* is dismissive of the novel’s context as well as its content: “Josef Škvorecký in his trauma probably reacted in the worst way possible: he wrote a novel about it.”⁷¹ He goes on to point out, as if having solved a mystery, that Škvorecký’s characters are thinly veiled fictionalizations and to defend Cibulka’s project. Other critics also note Škvorecký’s familiar characters, but do not confuse autobiography with a lack of creativity. Mlejnek condemns all those who had a file with the StB, namely the “‘wounded geese’⁷² [who] summarized their testimonies and published them in a 600 page book titled *Osočení*.”⁷³ Both the *Two Murders* and *Osočení*, are, in Mlejnek’s opinion, confessions of guilt disguised as self-exoneration.

Mlejnek’s review inspired an extraordinary response from the writer Miloslava Holubová. In a letter to *Lidové Noviny*, Holubová describes how she too was one of “so

⁶⁹ In my conversations with people ranging from historical researchers to professors of literature in Prague in the summer of 2012, I found that Cibulka is more often mockingly referred to as a cowboy.

⁷⁰ Mlejnek, 1997. “*neomalená [pan]sexuální ‘upřímnost.’*”

⁷¹ Mlejnek, 1997. “*Josef Škvorecký na své trauma reagoval patrně tím nejhorším myslitelným způsobem: napsal o něm román.*”

⁷² “*Potrefená hus,*” literally “wounded goose,” is a Czech idiom used to describe someone who is accused of a crime and whose proclamations of innocence rather suggest his guilt.

⁷³ Mlejnek, 1997. ““*potrefené husy’ a jejich výpovědi shrnula a vydala v šestisetstránkové knize navzané Osočení*”.

many upstanding people Petr Cibulka shamed in his periodical *Rude Kravo*.⁷⁴ Like Salivarová, Holubová then sought redress from the government, and ultimately “was cleaned to perfection, as my friends knew.”⁷⁵ Holubová not only garners the reader’s sympathy with her story, she also points out Mlejnek’s baseless assumptions, writing, “I wonder how the editor of *Lidové noviny* can write that nobody seriously questioned the list in *Rudé krávo*.”⁷⁶ and “None of my friends read *Rude Kravo*.”⁷⁷ Mlejnek’s response to her letter repeats his original opinions, but also emphasizes the difference, as he sees it, between people like Cibulka and people like Salivarová. For him, as for some antagonistic characters in the novel, resistance alone is commendable; any concession that would land a person on Cibulka’s list is shameful and cowardly. Mlejnek thus implies that Holubová is, for all her official documentation, as guilty as Salivarová and everyone else on the list. He ends his response with the request for “all ‘smeared’ to silently accept the reality, that Cibulka declassified their names.”⁷⁸ Calls for public repentance are a common feature of transitional justice, and in Czech Republic, it seems the discussion was not limited to judges’ chambers, but occurred even in newspaper book reviews.

⁷⁴ Holubová, 1997. “*kolik slušných lidí Petr Cibulka v periodiku Rudé kravo zostudil.*”

⁷⁵ Holubová, 1997. “*byla očištěna na jedničku, jak přátelé uznali.*”

⁷⁶ Holubová, 1997. “*Divím se, jak redaktor LN může napsat, že seznamy v periodiku Rudé krávo nikdo vážně nezpochybnil.*”

⁷⁷ Holubová, 1997. “*Z mých přátel Rudé krávo nikdo nečetl.*” This modest sentence speaks to a great mystery surrounding Cibulka’s lists. In every conversation I had about Cibulka in Prague in the summer of 2012, I asked, “Did you or the people you know believe the list?” Not a single person answered in the affirmative, and yet the publication had enormous ramifications.

⁷⁸ Mlejnek, 1997. “*všechny ‘osočené’, aby mlčky přijali skutečnost, že jejich jména Cibulka zveřejnil*”

Mlejnek's article has unintended metatextual significance. The most poignant conflict in the novel concerns Sidonia's irreparably damaged reputation in the literary community. The professor describes his incredulity when an opinion poll circulated among Czech writers reveals "how vehemently they condemned their colleagues who were alleged to have ratted to the StB. One would expect writers to be more thoughtful in their handling, if not of ideas, at least of words and their meanings, especially in a definite historical context."⁷⁹ Mlejnek's review of the novel ironically mirrors the action within it. Although Mlejnek intended to discredit the novel, in fact he reinforced its message.

It is perhaps a flaw of the novel that it is hard, not to enjoy but to fully appreciate without a fair amount of background information about transitional justice. However, while this may be a literary limitation, it is perhaps an advantage to the historian. The novel is an artistic contribution to the study of history, and a historically rich work of art. As the theoretical and historical writings on transitional justice suggest, this is a fraught topic. Pure, disinterested justice is always a difficult task. In extreme scenarios, when collective trauma and widespread desires for retribution enter the equation, pure justice becomes next to impossible. There is a wide, murky gulf between guilty and innocent, and ambiguity is unavoidable. For this reason, a work of fiction is at liberty to tell artistic truth, unconstrained in the ways that straightforward history strives to be. *Two Murders* may not be Škvorecký's best novel, but it is nevertheless a unique contribution to the

⁷⁹ Škvorecký, 2001, 146.

discussion of Czech transitional justice. Moreover, it is a thoughtful, complex work of art, and as such bears serious literary scrutiny. After all, no Škvorecký novel is without its beauty, humor and truth.

Chapter 2: Memory

In the following two chapters, “Memory” and “Exile,” I consider the titular double life of the main character in terms of two interconnected manifestations of distance. The central conflict of the novel is not the List itself, but the psychological distress and social ostracism that the List brings on the professor and his wife. And yet, the List represents a complex antagonist; it is an attack coming from long ago and far away. The professor and his wife are, both temporally and physically, far away from the scene of the crime of which Sidonia is accused. In order to mount a defense, they must make two demanding journeys. First, they must reexamine their own memories of the 1950s, in a sense traveling through time. Also, as the List captivates Czech society, both in Prague and Toronto, the nation reconsiders and reworks its collective memory. Second, the professor and his wife must physically travel back to Prague for a legal battle, a deceptively simple journey. In fact, the entire ordeal reveals the sometimes liberating, sometimes agonizing reality of life in exile. In Toronto, where the professor and his wife have lived for more than twenty years, they achieved freedom and success, but never complete assimilation. In light of the complex and historically-specific accusation, the couple’s cultural isolation becomes staggeringly obvious. Moreover, Sidonia’s accusation comes from Czech Republic, and refers to action undertaken in Czechoslovakia, which controverts the security that emigration theoretically guarantees. When a trip back to Prague reveals that the couple has fallen out of favor with their compatriots, the distance between then and now, there and here, becomes unnavigable.

For the purposes of this paper, I conceive of memory in the conceptual model that has dominated the historical discourse since the twentieth century. Drawing on the theories of Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) and Paul Ricœur (1913-2005), I consider memory to be malleable, subject to the influence of internal and external forces. Particularly important are the concepts of collective and historical memory as distinct from individual memory. In the novel, historical memory is activated, arguably manipulated, to advance certain political ends, and collective memory is quick to recast former heroes as new villains. Škvorecký rails against those whose memory is so easily influenced, and yet he is uncritical about the unreliability of individual memory. His narrative invests individual memory, particularly the memories of his main characters, with great power, almost to the point of infallibility. That his main characters' memories are faultless while the memories of their antagonists are deeply flawed may seem at first like a messy inconsistency. However, this contradiction operates within the novel, as well as in the real world, as a sort of workable paradox. Our memories have only as much power and strength as we assume they do.

Gil Eyal's 2004 article, "Identity and Trauma: Two Forms of the Will to Memory" provides a useful theoretical framework of coming to terms with the past, which I apply to Škvorecký's novel.⁸⁰ I consider the power and function of memory as enacted by Škvorecký's alter-ego, the Danny Smiricky-like professor character. Additionally, I treat both of these literary themes in terms of their legal and political implications. Through

⁸⁰ Eyal, 2004.

close reading and applying Eyal's theoretical model to the novel, I conclude that *Two Murders* is both an exploration and example of confession. Working through his memories in an artistic medium, Škvorecký creates a nuanced, appropriately ambiguous picture of the experience of transitional justice.

In "Identity and Trauma: Two Forms of the Will to Memory," Gil Eyal discusses the function and goal of memory as a political tool. He focuses on Slovak historians and Czech dissidents in both countries' transitions to democracy. His findings, however, are equally applicable to Cibulka in publishing his lists, which Eyal discusses, and to Škvorecký in writing this novel. The will to memory can be vested with the goal of overcoming psychic trauma and "healing through truth."⁸¹ For the former Czech dissidents, "memory and confession were called upon to cure society - healing through truth - and to protect it from repetition, from the return of totalitarianism in any guise."⁸² This is as true for Škvorecký, and indeed for the professor, as it is for Cibulka/Mrkvicka.

Here it is necessary to clarify how I use the word "dissidents" throughout this paper. In his seminal 1978 essay "The Power of the Powerless," Václav Havel famously rejected the designation,⁸³ and yet following his death, one was hard pressed to find an obituary that omitted the fraught term from its headline. Havel took issue with the use of the word "dissident," particularly in the west, as a catch-all for any of a multitude of

⁸¹ Ibid., 6.

⁸² Ibid., 23.

⁸³ Havel, Václav. "The Power of the Powerless." Paul Wilson, translator. The Hannah Arendt Center. . (Reprinted from *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*. John Keane, editor. London: Hutchinson, 1985). http://www.hannaharendtcenter.org/?page_id=3640 Accessed April 6, 2012.

ideological opponents to the communist regime. Though Eyal's argument is nuanced and cogent, he fails to either define or complicate the term "dissident." Rather, he proceeds as if "the Czech dissidents" were a uniform group with a singular philosophy and goal. He goes so far as to make statements about "The dissident response[...]all across Eastern Europe but especially in the Czech Republic"⁸⁴ and "the structure of the dissident argument."⁸⁵ Ironically, Eyal's uncomplicated use of the term suggests what he himself would call a "crisis of memory." When discussing Eyal's work, I will utilize his lexicon but in my own critical analysis of Škvorecký's work, I am working towards an understanding of this complicated term. In *Two Murders*, the word rarely appears. Because the professor and Sidonia live in exile, they are not dissidents per se, and yet they explicitly opposed the communist regime. The characters run a publishing house modeled on 68 Publishers, which "rescued from oblivion many manuscripts that had been silenced by Communist censors in Prague,"⁸⁶ that is, dissident literature. Because Škvorecký and Salivarová's exile status categorically precludes them from being considered dissidents, I will exclude Škvorecký and his autobiographical characters from the group of dissidents as Eyal conceptualizes them. In *Two Murders*, Sidonia and the professor are, ironically, antagonized by the self-styled former dissidents such as Mrkvicka. *Two Murders* depicts a post-revolutionary/transitional world wherein the

⁸⁴ Eyal, 2004, 20.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁸⁶ Škvorecký, 2001, 8.

former dissidents, lacking a clearly-defined target for their accustomed resistance, have turned in on each other.

Eyal discusses crises in collective memory engendered by “a historically specific *will to memory*, a constellation of discourses and practices within which memory is entrusted with a certain goal and function, and is invested, routinely, as an institutional matter, with certain hopes and fears as to what it can do.”⁸⁷ His focus is on the distinct uses of collective memory in Slovakia and Czech Republic following the so-called Gentle/Velvet Revolution in 1989. Later, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the “velvet divorce” of 1993, allowed more freedom for the two states to activate collective memory in different ways, to different politico-cultural ends. His article shows

how the different goals and utilities ascribed to memory correspond to the different ways in which Czech and Slovak intellectuals envisioned their social roles after the fall of communism. When it is entrusted with the role of maintaining identity [as in Slovakia], collective memory stands for the embeddedness of intellectuals in society, especially in the nation or ethnic group, whose spirit and destiny they merely articulate. But when its goal is to heal through truth and to overcome trauma [as in Czech Republic], collective memory positions intellectuals as the transcendent pastors of the individuals that compose civil society, whose consciences they guide.⁸⁸

In post-communist Slovakia, the task of activating collective memory fell largely to the new generation of historians, whereas in Czech Republic, it was the project of (former) dissidents. Eyal suggests that for the Czech dissidents, “memory plays a role in overcoming psychic *trauma* and the processes of dissociation it sets in motion.

⁸⁷ Eyal, 2004, 6-7, original emphasis.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

Individuals are healed by remembering that which was repressed.”⁸⁹ In the years both leading up to and following the Velvet Revolution, the dissidents called on individuals to acknowledge their traumatic memories and confess to any crimes committed under communism. They held that only by bringing these repressed memories to light could psychological healing begin, recalling Milan Kundera’s words in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” Although Eyal was chiefly concerned with history/politics and collective memory, I contend that his theories are equally useful for analyzing works of art and individual memory. By applying his model to Škvorecký’s novel I will show that the characters in *Two Murders* use memory to both maintain identity and, more importantly, heal through truth.

Eyal outlines four dimensions of collective memory as a means of overcoming trauma: the injunction to remember (duty of remembering), mnemonic substance (what is to be remembered), mnemonic operation (techniques of memory) and interpretation of the goal of memory (why remember). When using memory to heal through truth and function as therapy (mnemonic operation), it must be invested with palliative power (interpretation of goal). In Czech Republic, this conscious will to memory, “originated in the struggle of the dissidents to reclaim history and memory as an act of resistance against communist power, which they depicted as a power to erase and forget.”⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Ibid., original emphasis.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 19.

Memory became “‘historical responsibility,’ because power benefitted from forgetting and encouraged it.”⁹¹ Frank discussion of painful memories was, to the Czech dissidents, an antidote to the internal repression and dissociation that communism fosters, what Havel called “living within the lie.”⁹²

Following the Velvet Revolution, those who had been dissidents were buoyed by the reversal of their status and newfound power, and continued to promote memory for its healing properties. A failure to admit guilt, they argued, was a symptom of the repression and denial that characterized the communist regime. In an effort to reverse the unconscious effects of communism, they called on each person to confess or witness a confession. At this point, though, certain crises resulted from investing too much power in memory. Of this phenomenon, Eyal sees Cibulka’s lists as a prime example.

Memory, which was meant to heal, becomes itself in need of defense by radical surgery, for example by the publication of black lists of communist collaborators, regardless of how they were obtained, how accurate they may be, and regardless of the consequences[...]The emergence of “false memory” thus makes it even more difficult to decide on the “true” nature of the trauma, and to my mind indicates that the cause of this crisis of memory is in what memory is required to do, i.e. in the investment of postcommunist life by a certain will to memory characterized by the idea that memory protects and heals, that at issue in memory is not justice per se, but society’s safety, well-being and normalcy.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid., 20.

⁹² Havel, 1985.

⁹³ Eyal, 2004, 27.

As Eyal sees it, Cibulka's lists were an effort to accelerate the rehabilitation process, at the cost of accuracy.⁹⁴ Eyal uses the term "false memory" to describe a distortion of the facts, occasioned by a well-intentioned effort to heal through truth.

In applying his model to *Two Murders*, one can see how the professor also invests memory with the power of healing through truth. He maintains, "I knew what I knew about her. I knew how it had been, forty years before in Prague, when she told me that an agent of the state police, the StB, was pestering her. That was how I knew what I knew about the List of StB informers."⁹⁵ He is confident, or at least hopeful, that this knowledge, this truth, will vanquish the rumors. Like Eyal's dissidents, the professor seeks "to reclaim history and memory as an act of resistance against communist power, which they depicted as a power to erase and forget."⁹⁶ In this novel of course, the communist power is not the target of resistance. The antagonist is rather the hypocritical post-communist system, wherein the "shame was shifted to the Party's various victims, now all forced to stand on the pillory of public disgrace."⁹⁷ The professor's experience of healing through truth is not something he undertakes voluntarily. On the contrary, it is thrust upon him after the fashion of the dissidents' calls to confession that Eyal discusses.

⁹⁴ Aviezer Tucker discusses the same phenomenon as it occurs in transitional court cases. He quotes Czech President Václav Klaus as saying "quick but rough justice in restitution is better than precise but delayed restitution" (Elster, Jon, ed. *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy*. Cambridge University Press. New York. 2006. Tucker, Aviezer. "Rough Justice: Rectification in Post-Authoritarian and Post-Totalitarian Regimes." 276-298. 282)

⁹⁵ Škvorecký, 2001, 7.

⁹⁶ Eyal, 2004, 16.

⁹⁷ Škvorecký, 2001, 20.

Nevertheless, the professor telling Sidonia's story and Škvorecký fictionalizing Salivarová'ss are examples of activating memory to heal through truth.

The professor and Škvorecký both take the duty to remember quite seriously. Sidonia's victory in court and the couple's contributions to *Smears* could be considered memory-work, but for a novelist, the injunction to remember would have to result in a work of art. The substance of the professor's memory-work here is two-fold. First, he recounts the recent publication of the List, the public's response to it and the trial the couple brings to the state. Concurrently, he relates the events forty years back, the critical choices he and Sidonia made as young people in the 1950s in Czechoslovakia. The former mnemonic substance occasions the latter, and the List is the catalyst for the couple to endure healing through memory.

The former Czech dissidents that Eyal describes, including Cibulka, activated memory to heal through truth in much the same way as the fictional professor. The dissidents called on their compatriots to accept responsibility for their own actions and confess to any crimes they committed, willingly or not, under communism. Cibulka's publication of the list is a sort of imposed mnemonic operation, an attempt to force others to confess. The professor's technique of remembering also takes the form of confession, his own as well as that of his wife. The professor's confession is further complicated through Škvorecký's artistic mode. Not only does Škvorecký relate the autobiographical narrative, he also makes his alter-ego more complicit by imagining a meeting on Sidonia's behalf between the character when still a young man in Czechoslovakia and a

government official. This gives the professor an added stake in the charge against his wife. This is not to suggest that Škvorecký's novel functions as Salivarová's confession. On the contrary, the point of the novel is not to exonerate Salivarová/Sidonia but to implicate Škvorecký/the professor. In the novel, if not in real life, the professor is first passively, then actively complicit in his wife's undertakings. Eyal's assessment of the Slovak historians who sought to maintain identity through memory may also be helpful in understanding Škvorecký's mnemonic operation. By rehashing these memories, Škvorecký reinforces both his role as an ordinary victim of communism and his place in the Czech literary canon. Additionally, implicating the professor in Sidonia's ordeal through his visit to the Ministry of the Interior with the intention of clearing his then-girlfriend's name is a sort of new origin myth. Eyal's article about the new Slovak history describes "a narrative about the formation, continuity and final identity of the nation."⁹⁸ Similarly, Škvorecký's novel about the Czech experience concerns the formation, continuity and final identity of the self.

The interpretation of the goal of memory, often described as coming to terms with the past, is the most difficult to assess in this novel. Was this novel, beautiful but minor, meant to be a slap in Cibulka's pseudo-literary face? What does Škvorecký accomplish here that was not accomplished by the court victory or the publication of *Smears*? Art can be a terrific way to right wrongs and create a more appealing reality.⁹⁹ In the case of

⁹⁸ Eyal, 2004, 13.

⁹⁹ Not in the sense of socialist realism, but rather, for example, the handsome actors that Woody Allen and Federico Fellini cast to play their own alter-egos. Just so, one wonders if the young Škvorecký was as successful with women as was the early incarnations of Danny Smiricky.

Two Murders, though, the fiction is sadder than the fact. True, Sidonia wins her case against the Ministry of Interior and is legally cleared of all charges. Even so, the ostracism she suffers destroys her. Jon Elster clinically reports that, “Anecdotal evidence suggests that the informal social ostracism to which (people implicated in transitional justice) were exposed could be deeply hurtful.”¹⁰⁰ In their 2009 article “Getting Even or Getting Equal? Retributive Desires and Transitional Justice,” Roman David and Susan Choi similarly remark that Cibulka’s “lists did not lead to any retributive attack, although they may have led to the ostracism of those who were included in the lists.”¹⁰¹ These statements, while accurate, in no way reflect the depth of the misery the political theorists describe. For a novelist, only the fiction through which he interprets the goal of memory has that power. The point of the novel is not to once again assert innocence, but to depict the experience of being called guilty.

In the chapter “How I Failed Sidonia When She Needed Me the Most,” the professor explains his long overdue realization that this visit brought Sidonia to the attention of the Ministry. Had he truly been so naive, or has he spent the last forty years repressing a painful memory? The professor claims he did not make the connection when Sidonia was first approached by Sedlacek, but only forty years later when Mrkvicka publishes his List. Sedlacek’s appearance and request for cooperation is “when I failed miserably[...]I approved the silly project.”¹⁰² In Salivarová’s autobiographical account,

¹⁰⁰ Elster, Jon, ed., 2006. Elster, Jon, author. “Introduction.” 1-9. 8.

¹⁰¹ David and Choi, 2009. 171.

¹⁰² Škvorecký, 2001, 35.

she does not mention her husband's preemptive visit to the Ministry of the Interior.

Škvorecký is likely to have invented the episode for *Two Murders*, wherein it serves a functional purpose. The professor is in a strange position as the first-person narrator/main character who, in both plots, is more of a thoughtful observer than an active participant. The visit to the Ministry of the Interior, however, transforms the character from a passive, though invested, witness to an influential actor in the events.

And yet, it is not the professor whose name appears on the List. He is implicated in Sidonia's collaboration, though in a passive way. Mrkvicka even alleges in his article "Lay Your Cards on the Table, Mrs. Sidonia!" that the marriage was part of Sidonia's work for the StB, a way for her to keep her husband "under round-the-clock surveillance. As a writer who kept concocting crime stories modeled on American thrillers, I was regarded by the Party with keen suspicion."¹⁰³ Mrkvicka does not accuse the professor of collaboration, and seems to almost congratulate him on earning the Party's mistrust. Despite not being guilty in the eyes of Mrkvicka and/or the state, the professor feels far from innocent. The publication of the List forces the professor to remember and reconsider his naive attempt to help Sidonia at the Ministry of the Interior. Moreover, he now realizes that his inaction, that is, not stopping Sidonia from writing her report, was his worst mistake. His silence was complicity, but it takes forty years, a regime change and defamation for him to realize it. Whether the professor was repressing the memory of his guilt, or had truly not understood it until now, his memory is now put on trial. But

¹⁰³ Ibid., 8.

because he invests memory with such profound power, the combination of his wife's legal battle and the social ostracism amount to a keenly painful process.

Even if the couple comes to terms with their own memories, collective memory is less forgiving. "The Opinion Poll of the *Prague Literary Weekly*, and the Case Begins to Clear Up, At Least for Me" is one of the saddest and most important chapters in the book.

The professor describes how a magazine

printed an opinion poll about the guilt or innocence of the writers named in the List. I was stunned by how many engineers of human souls, except for a tiny minority, responded to the poll and how vehemently they condemned their colleagues who were alleged to have ratted to the StB. One would expect writers to be more thoughtful in their handling, if not of ideas, at least of words and their meanings, especially in a definite historical context. Nobody, except maybe finks, liked the StB informers. But on the authority of stories printed in an obscure tabloid, the engineers uncompromisingly denounced not colleagues who had been finks, but colleagues who appeared on the List, which, to quote the highest authority--the blonde lawyer--meant only that these individuals had been put on the List and nothing else. I had never studied semantics, but I was a writer--admittedly of mere detective stories, but still a writer. The semantic shift from the neutrally expressed hypocrisy of the Ministry lawyer to the angry public condemnation in the poll of the writers' weekly was painfully obvious.¹⁰⁴

This paragraph practically tells the entire story, in uniquely Škvoreckian terms. The title "The Case Begins to Clear Up" refers directly to the murder, which is also treated in this chapter. On a deeper level, Danny is finally starting to realize the true verdict of Sidonia's case. His reference to "engineers of human souls" is metatextually autobiographical. It refers to Škvorecký's 1977 masterpiece *The Engineer of Human Souls*, the title of which is itself a reference to Stalin's description of the true task of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 146-146.

writers.¹⁰⁵ However, Škvorecký undoes the self-promotion by claiming to be a writer “of mere detective stories.” The writer’s biography aside, the phrase functions as a nod to communist rhetoric and a time when an accusation was proof of guilt. More important, though, is the discussion of his characters’ position within the literary community.

Škvorecký takes the writer’s responsibility, to tell the truth and to defend those who do, very seriously. Perhaps this sense of duty played into his choice to personally translate this novel in to English, that is, for an audience that knows little about this subject. The Czech readership and literary community, who had always loved and respected Škvorecký, largely abandoned his wife at a critical moment. He may have wanted to give this book to a more receptive, less judgmental, non-Czech audience. In the world of the novel, Sidonia’s tragedy is not that she is implicated by Mrkvicka, still less that she is positively lustrated, but that the community, of which she was such a devoted member, turns against her. Sidonia’s undoing stems not from Mrkvicka’s actions but from the community that sides with him. The condemnation of the Czech literary community is worse than any libel or legal categorization.

As the public tide turns against Sidonia, it becomes clear that collective memory can be by turns both malleable and unyielding. The condemnation she faces suggests a pervasive ability to forget decades of good repute. The issue of reputation will be treated at length in chapter four, but it is very much connected to the concept of collective memory. Mrkvicka’s sensationalized accusation quickly destroys Sidonia’s good name,

¹⁰⁵ Allegedly even Stalin’s use of the phrase in the early 1930’s was referential; Joseph Vissarionovich was quoting the Soviet Russian writer Yury Olesha.

which, even after the victory in court, proves impossible to restore. In an act of grand-scale forgetting, the literary community, and indeed Czech society as a whole, becomes more attached to Sidonia's fifty-year-old, momentary failure than to her more recent decades of service. The ability to turn easily but hold firmly is a peculiar feature of individual as well as collective memory, and may speak to the power of reminding. The crime Sidonia is accused of is half a century old, but it is made fresh by Mrkvicka's publications. In contrast, Sidonia's publishing house is no longer operational, because following the Velvet Revolution, "Sidonia's publishing activities eventually became redundant."¹⁰⁶ In actual historical fact, 68 Publishers was reopened only once following the Revolution: in 1993, to publish *Osočení*. By the early 90s, it was the Mrkvickas, rather than the professor and his wife, who had the Czechs' attention, and hence control of their memory.

Of course, memory is fallible not only in the collective sense. As he comes to his wife's defense, the professor's personal memories are put on trial as well. In providing background information, the professor explains how he gradually came to understand his own responsibility for Sidonia's involvement with the StB. After Sidonia is first approached by the agent Sedlacek, the professor recalls, "Idiot that I was, I did not connect his appearance with my recent visit to the Ministry of the Interior."¹⁰⁷ It is only later, during "an indoctrination session for non-Party employees of the magazine

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 33.

Literature in the World[...]my supernatural stupidity dawned on me by degrees. But when I returned home it was too late; Sidonia was gone.”¹⁰⁸ This too is an example of the power of reminding, though here in the context of short-term memory. When the professor visited the Ministry of the Interior, he received an unsatisfying answer, to the effect that “class origin was an unchangeable constant.”¹⁰⁹ Assuming that would be the end of the story, the professor thoughtlessly continued with his day and his life. Significantly, it is during “an indoctrination session” that the professor realizes why “Sedlacek appeared in the abandoned Daisy office for the first time.”¹¹⁰ The Party rhetoric reminds him.

Actually, it is unclear exactly when the professor figures out the causal relationship between these two important memories of the 1950s: his visit to the Ministry and the agent’s visit to Sidonia. In the scene when he and Sidonia learn of her presence on the list, he recalls

the faint suspicion that had only been smouldering all these years in my subconscious mind, somewhere at the back of my cranium, suddenly burst into a bright flame of understanding. That direct red line ran from my amateur attempt to convince the Ministry agents of Sidonia’s immaculate class origin to the entrance of Sedlacek.¹¹¹

Previously the professor explained his revelation during the indoctrination session, but there is no indication that the professor ever shared his original realization with Sidonia.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 36.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 92.

It seems impossible he could forget such a thought and unlikely that he would spend the next forty years repressing it. Probably this inconsistency is a result of the problem Jiří Peňás diagnoses in his 1996 review of the novel thus: “The reality is that the Škvorecký text works, as if written in speed, with improvised negligence, a few paragraphs may even not have been thoroughly read, which are incomprehensible and confusing.”¹¹²

In any case, the professor is forced, many years (and pages) later, to recall his actions, and remains firm in the belief that “I had been motivated by love; in the last analysis, however, it was I who had begun the process, so many, many years ago, that led inexorably to all the trouble.”¹¹³ Clearly, the professor sees his chivalrous defense of Sidonia, then as now, as inherent justification for his actions. He does little to interrogate his or Sidonia’s memories, never once doubting whether the events really unfolded the way they recall them, or have rehearsed recalling them, after fifty years. Neil Berman writes, in his 2001 review of the novel for the *New York Times*, that “Škvorecký is extremely protective of his characters, leaving nothing for the reader to decide or interpret[...] In a novel about the elusive nature of right and wrong, these excessive protestations rob the story of much of its impact.”¹¹⁴ This criticism applies to the professor’s insistence on both Sidonia’s innocence and the infallibility of their shared and individual memories. Describing a newspaper interview Sidonia gave when she travelled

¹¹² Peňás, 1996. “*Skutečností je, že Škvoreckého text působí, jako by byl psán ve chvatu, s improvizací ledabylostí, některé odstavce snad ani nebyly podruhé čteny, jsou nesrozumitelní a konfušní.*”

¹¹³ Škvorecký, 2001, 92.

¹¹⁴ Berman, 2001. 37

to Prague for her lawsuit against the state, he explains how “since her conscience was clear, she described her dealings with the StB agent truthfully. It was an error of judgement. She should have remembered that to keep silent is golden, but even after her thirty-three years of life in Absurdistan she had not learned the art of tactics.”¹¹⁵ The couple, it would seem, has a monopoly on the truth, which allows for no other interpretations of facts or memories. In effect, the professor imbues his own memory, and the memories of his more supportive peers, with infallibility.

Time and again, the professor accuses his critics of lacking historical memory. For example, when the Interior Ministry’s attorney suggests that judges receive special training for the cases that grow out of transitional justice, the professor reacts thus:

A man like myself, who unlike the young blonde had a personal recollection of old times, could not help remembering how judges of similarly insufficient understanding had been specially schooled in the early fifties by Party secretaries about the specific problems of the show trials, such as the guilt of the defendants even if they were not guilty, because guilt was in the Party’s interest, whereas the old bourgeois prejudice of proof beyond the shadow of a doubt was not in the Party’s interest.¹¹⁶

The analogy is apt, but the conclusion is short-sighted. While the lack of historical memory is troublesome, so too is the substitution of memory for understanding. The professor suggests that only those old enough to have seen the country’s past can be trusted with its future. The imprudence of the professor’s position is exacerbated by the fact of his emigration. The professor may have the advantage of being able to remember

¹¹⁵ Škvorecký, 2001, 50.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 64.

the fifties, but perhaps, as I argue in the following chapter, he cannot speak to the Czech experience of the last twenty-five years.

Chapter 3: Exile

Škvorecký's status as a writer-in-exile gives him a unique perspective as both a player in and teller of this story. On the one hand, his physical distance from the Czech Republic should in theory protect him from its political turmoil. After all, the couple left communist Czechoslovakia in 1969 for political refuge and the chance to write and publish freely. It is painfully ironic that democratic Czech Republic in the 1990s does not afford them the same freedom. The accusations against Sidonia travel so far across space and time as to practically defy the laws of physics.

Although there were thousands of names on Cibulka's Lists, including many public figures, the Škvoreckýs were among the first high-profile people to bring suit to the Ministry of the Interior. In order to do so, the couple reestablished Czech citizenship some twenty years after renouncing it. This begs the question, what effect did their exile have on their reaction to the accusations? On the one hand, the physical and social distance might have afforded them a certain degree of objectivity. Cibulka's lists, though hurtful, did not have any demonstrable bearing on the lives the Škvoreckýs had made for themselves in Toronto. The lists caused a major scandal in Czech Republic, but it was not so in Canada. In the novel, the professor reports, "Naturally, my colleagues at Edenvale College had no idea what was going on. We lived in two very different worlds, and they knew only their own."¹¹⁷ Far from the maelstrom, the Škvoreckýs had every opportunity to ignore Cibulka.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 9.

On the other hand, they may have been too removed to be able to understand the real significance, or lack thereof, of the lists. In the summer of 2012 I met with the editor of Škvorecký's collected works Michael Špirit,¹¹⁸ who also wrote about and worked closely with the novelist. He suggested that *Two Murders*, with its bitter, polemical tone, was offensive to many people who were living through the chaotic 1990s in the newborn Czech Republic. A professor in the Department of Czech Literature and Literary Sciences at Charles University, Špirit said that he and others in his circle did not take the lists seriously. In fact, he referred to Cibulka as a cowboy and a desperado. Such rhetoric, however, reveals a great paradox about Cibulka's legacy. Over the course of two months in Prague in the summer of 2012, I asked many people, ranging in age, education and profession, what they remembered and thought about the Cibulka lists. Everyone responded that they personally put no stock in the lists, and that the lists did not seriously affect anyone's reputation. And yet, Cibulka's publications had massive ramifications. It is difficult, particularly for an outsider, to understand, let alone explain, this inconsistency.

By the 1990s, a gap existed between Škvorecký and those who had not emigrated. Though he was a beloved author, there may have been some resentment on the part of his readers and colleagues. Some may have felt that Škvorecký and Salivarová overreacted to the list, in part because of their isolation. Perhaps one of the reasons that Škvorecký has been the only Czech novelist to write about Cibulka was, simply, Škvorecký is the

¹¹⁸ Interview. Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, June 6, 2012.

only Czech novelist who saw him as a threat. In his preface to the novel, Škvorecký wrote about the implications of being an exile; “the old country never disappears beyond the horizon, and the new one, to the exile, will never become the open book that it is to those who were born there, and can read it with no difficulty.”¹¹⁹ The historical facts suggest an inversion of his claim; Škvorecký, having been Canadianized by the time of the birth the non-communist Czech Republic, was unable to read the new country. Or, as Bruce Chatwin puts it in his novel *Utz*, “certain Czech writers in exile who, assuming for themselves the mantle of Bohemian culture, neglected what was happening in Bohemia.”¹²⁰

Naturally, the circumstances of his exile inform much of Škvorecký’s later work. Adopting Canada as his home has had many implications, ranging from the ability to publish freely to the writing of books set in North America (1984’s *Dvorak in Love* and 1992’s *The Bride of Texas*). For my purposes, however, most interesting is the influence of exile on the character of the professor. In the later Smiricky novels, the character settles, thoroughly if not completely comfortably, into the role of eccentric professor at a Canadian university. In *The Engineer of Human Souls*, Professor Smiricky is aware that he is an object of curiosity for both his colleagues and his students, some of whom romanticize the Eastern Bloc. Like Nabokov’s Pnin, Professor Smiricky is tolerated, if not understood, for his exotic eccentricity. In many of the books, the professor and

¹¹⁹ Škvorecký, 2001, 1.

¹²⁰ Chatwin, Bruce. *Utz*. Penguin Books, New York. 1989. 149.

Sidonia socialize with the considerable Czech émigré circle in Toronto, but they seem to be isolated, at least intellectually, even in this community.

Two Murders yields perhaps the most fruitful examination of life in exile.

Unfathomable in Canada and unforgivable in Czech Republic, the couple in this novel are doubly isolated. Škvorecký takes pains to depict his seclusion in Toronto, both at Edenvale and among the other Czech émigrés. His portrait of life in exile is sufficiently nuanced. On the one hand, Canada offers a fresh start, as its citizens are not haunted by the same ghosts as the couple's compatriots. On the other hand, such a *tabula rasa* makes mutual understanding impossible. Škvorecký fruitfully avails himself of the opportunity to poke fun at a nation whose roots stretch back a mere three centuries. But at the same time he reveals, often unintentionally through certain clumsy references, his own cultural seclusion in Canada. Moreover, and perhaps more painfully, the couple's return to Prague, occasioned by their lawsuit against the state, is an inauspicious homecoming. What critic Andrej Halada termed "the unhappy return of Danny"¹²¹ reveals the impassable distance, physical and thematic, between the couple and the country that now occupies their homeland.

In his forward to the novel, Škvorecký writes:

To be an exile is, in some ways, to be a split personality. The longer one lives in a foreign country, the farther away one feels from the old homeland, and the fonder one gets of the new one. However, the old country never disappears beyond the

¹²¹ Halada, 1996.

horizon, and the new one, to the exile, will never become the open book that it is to those who were born there, and can read it with no difficulty.¹²²

In these few lines, Škvorecký succinctly diagnoses his cultural schizophrenia. Two word-choices stand out, begging for closer scrutiny. First of all, Škvorecký refers to life “in a foreign country,” suggesting that he continued to locate his perspective as originating in the Czech lands. Analogously, after years of formal, foreign language study, one may achieve fluency. Just so, after decades of residence in a country, it might cease to feel foreign. And yet, Škvorecký refers to Canada not as a “second” or “adopted” home, but as a “foreign country.” Is this in spite or because of having lived there for more than twenty years? It is possible that this time in Canada did more to convince Škvorecký that he was, at his very core, a European. Continuing with the earlier analogy, achieving fluency in a second language does not necessarily mean speaking without an accent. The next conspicuous term is “homeland.” Strictly speaking, the professor was born in and emigrated from Czechoslovakia. The country to which the couple returns, whose government they sue, is Czech Republic. It is hard to say what Škvorecký made of this fact. In the novel, the word “Czechoslovakia” appears rarely, and “Czech Republic” not at all. Rather than choose between the two, Škvorecký repeatedly refers to “the country where we lived before.” This phrase, a reification of both temporal and geographical distance, helps explain how Canada remains foreign though the homeland has ceased to exist.

¹²² Škvorecký, 2001, 1.

In Canada, the professor and his wife have enjoyed freedom and success that would have been impossible in Czechoslovakia. “*O, Canada,*” the professor muses, “*our home*, not exactly *native*, but still *our land!* You generous haven for anybody! You unreal land over the rainbow!”¹²³ In the exposition, the professor provides a brief, if sentimental, summary of his wife’s accomplishments:

the world-renowned playwright, who was now president of the country, had awarded her the Order of the White Lion, for her twenty-five years of publishing drudgery in Toronto. The publishing house was her brainchild; she had rescued from oblivion many manuscripts that had been silenced by Communist censors in Prague. Among them were those the world-renowned playwright had kept producing--between incarcerations.¹²⁴

Significantly, in their new home, they were able to protect and cultivate the endangered species that Czech literature had become under the Communist regime. Moreover, although he does not discuss it in great detail here, the professor’s own writing career both necessitated and enabled the couple’s emigration to Canada. In this book the professor refers to himself as a writer of detective stories, but coded references to various other Škvorecký novels remind the reader that some of his greatest works, including 1972’s *Miracle Game* and 1977’s *Engineer of Human Souls*, were written in exile. It is not a great overstatement to say that the University of Toronto, by offering Škvorecký a teaching position, enabled Salivarová to “save endangered Czech literature.”¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid., 17, original emphasis.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 7-8.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 115.

About halfway through the novel, when the couple is thoroughly mired in their conflict, Edenvale College bestows an honorary doctorate on Sidonia. The professor lovingly mocks the ceremony's pomp and circumstance, noting, for example, how "at the head of the procession the beadle was carrying a hundred-and-fifty year-old mace; measured by the age of Canada, a very ancient symbolic object."¹²⁶ The parade of academics "in gowns of their various *alma matres*, but McMountain couldn't remember the uniform of the University of Montana in Helena"¹²⁷ comes off as silly, especially compared to Škvorecký's alma mater, the solemnly medieval Charles University. And yet, the underlying emotion of the scene is deeply moving. This symbolic degree is Sidonia's first: "My wife never acquired a university education, not from stupidity, since she was quite clever, but because she had been assigned the class origin."¹²⁸ Moreover, the university's official reason for this honor is Sidonia's "many years of selfless cultural labours for the Czech community in Canada,"¹²⁹ and yet the timing is no mere coincidence. North American newspapers have begun to report on the List, and alerting people in her new life to Sidonia's ancient and far-away troubles. It is in these days that "Sidonia received a letter from the president of Edenvale College's parent university. She

¹²⁶ Ibid., 105.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 105.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 105.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 103.

opened it with apprehension.”¹³⁰ Readyng herself for fresh reproach, Sidonia instead finds sympathy and support.

At the ceremony, Sidonia delivers a touching address, the text of which later circulates among the faculty and in the college newspaper. Sidonia

speaking a kind of English I had never heard from her lips before, delivered a beautiful profession of love for Canada. ‘Canada,’ she said, ‘is my stepmother; my real mother is Czechoslovakia. Sometimes, however, a stepmother is much kinder than a real mother.’ She left nobody in doubt that this was her case.¹³¹

For Sidonia, the Edenvale degree functions as a certificate of adoption.

At a faculty dinner some time before, a colleague, Professor McMountain, “unexpectedly leaned towards me and said, ‘I read in the *Times* that your wife is on some list of police informers of the Communist regime.’”¹³² It is this occasion that first prompts the professor to consider “the existence of two worlds: the one where I lived with Sidonia, and the other one where I existed among my colleagues. These two worlds had never overlapped. Until now.”¹³³ Edenvale’s support of Sidonia through this time convinces the professor that “The two worlds did not overlap, after all,”¹³⁴ but this is not entirely accurate. The old world had effectively invaded the new, and it is important to appreciate Canada’s active defense.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 103.

¹³¹ Ibid., 106.

¹³² Ibid., 79.

¹³³ Ibid., 80.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 107.

Of course, the couple's transition into North American life could not have been seamless, and they remained to some degree isolated in their new cultural milieu. At times, this self-imposed seclusion smacks of cultural chauvinism. For example, by way of explaining why Sidonia brings *Pishingertorte* and *kolache* to department parties, he volunteers that

Staff members wives would bring an American specialty called cookies, which the students, conditioned by childhood habits, liked and ate almost non-stop. But since the cookies were common sweet biscuits, I, conditioned in childhood by the Sunday sweetshop lineups where people used to buy enormous quantities of delectable rum tarts and cream-filled wafers, wouldn't touch them.¹³⁵

So, the couple's palate is too sophisticated for humble cookies, and anyone who has visited a Bohemian bakery might well understand why. Škvorecký also returns to an artform he perfected in *Engineer of Lost Souls*: ridiculing the provinciality of his Toronto students. One such delightful scene concerns his student Wayne Hloupee, whose last name plays on the Czech *hloupý* ("stupid"), wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the words "Kiss me - I'm NOT a Bohemian!"¹³⁶ Obviously, Wayne has in mind, or rather on chest, the colloquial meaning of "Bohemian," but Škvorecký's joke is not lost on his reader. More often than not, the professor is alone in his humor. When he jokes to a student that he and a famous filmmaker (modeled on Miloš Forman) "grew up together in the same reform school," she responds bemusedly, "Is that a Czech joke?"¹³⁷ Underlying such

¹³⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 118.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 153.

comic episodes is the professor's deep fear that he may be unfunny, hence unintelligible, in English.¹³⁸

Some of the funniest musings come when the professor considers political correctness, particularly that newfangled commodity: sexual harassment. The professor's old world admiration for the gentler sex is scandalous in the context of late twentieth century North America.¹³⁹ He has great fun with the university's policy, which dictates that "office doors (unless a woman sat behind them) remained ajar."¹⁴⁰ Linked in his mind with Mystery of the Locked Room trope from detective fiction, the professor sees more fun than harm in such secrecy. Moreover, in spite of his high regard for coeds, the professor is not quite a would-be Humbert Humbert. The Danny Smiricky of 1972's *Miracle Game*, for example, gave in to his students' charms, but the older professor does not, perhaps cannot, follow through on his flirtations. He is secure in the knowledge that Sidonia

saw through me like a piece of glass, and knew that I did not take my female students seriously as sexual objects. The Professor of Women's Studies, Ann Kate Boleyn, did *not* understand me, and was very suspicious: I had caught that scholar several times watching me when I was watching girls. But Sidonia knew that although I wrote only crime stories, I was a poet at heart, like my

¹³⁸ Ironically, some of Škvorecký's critics agreed, such as E. J. Czerwinski, who opined that Škvorecký was no Nabokov when it comes to writing in a second language. Czerwinski, like most anglophone critics of this novel, suffered under the misconception that *Two Murders* was originally written in English. If he found it "serviceable prose but far from the excitement we are accustomed to encountering in (his) novels written in Czech," perhaps the fault is not in the style but in the self.

¹³⁹ Škvorecký has been accused, on both sides of the Atlantic, of misogyny. His 1992 essay "*Dobrodružství amerického feminismu*" ("The Adventure of American Feminism") asks such questions as, "Is sex possible without rape?" and "Is it possible to talk with a woman without sexual harassment?" Being a feminist, but a generous one, I deem Škvorecký a product of his times, enlightened on many but not all issues.

¹⁴⁰ Škvorecký, 2001, 4.

hero Raymond Chandler, and pretty young females were for me, well, not quite what Professor Boleyn thought.¹⁴¹

In the end, it will be the professor's wife-sanctioned flirtation with "Queen Candace of Edenvale College"¹⁴² that allows him and Sidonia to solve the murder mystery. Until then, though, he finds satisfaction in scandalizing the sanctimonious, and cheekily named, Professor Ann Boleyn.

The professor betrays a sort of patronizing admiration for North American etiquette, which so often manifests itself in euphemism and silence. Sergeant Sayers, forever struggling to lose weight and seeking praise for her efforts, appears ridiculous when she responds to a compliment with a terse, "'Thank you,' [...] in the polite customary way of the country where we now lived."¹⁴³ More poignant is the episode when the professor's colleague McMountain learns of the accusation against Sidonia. A true gentleman, McMountain dismisses the news item as

some Communist slander[...]and lost interest in the subject that burned like acid in my heart. Or did he just *pretend* a loss of interest? Perhaps he didn't. I hoped he didn't. For him it was just a news item, interesting because he knew the people it concerned. Saul Bellow once wrote: 'We Americans are the best-informed people in the world. Therefore we know nothing'.¹⁴⁴

In the moment, the professor is relieved that McMountain does not pursue the subject.

By this point, he and Sidonia are deeply entrenched in their private crisis, and his

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴² Ibid., 6.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 127.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 80.

colleagues' ignorance of it provides some relief. After all, "when the List first appeared we didn't even know that Sidonia was on it. We lived in Canada, far away from such monstrous things."¹⁴⁵ McMountain's casual comment about reading that Sidonia was "on some list" is shocking, but his even more casual abandonment of the topic is to the professor heartbreaking. The professor interprets McMountain's lack of interest as evidence of North American cultural isolation, but cannot decide whether McMountain is acting out of delicacy or indifference. "Most likely, as a North American, he had an almost instinctive distrust for any naming of names, and so he fully sided with Sidonia although he didn't talk about it. Perhaps nobody else at the college noted the story in the *New York Times*, or maybe they were all similarly conditioned."¹⁴⁶

This is the darker side of the couple's isolation. Škvorecký writes in his preface to the novel that "North Americans have never experienced total crime."¹⁴⁷ As refugees from a country debilitated by the crimes of communism, their new neighbors' ignorance can be both a blessing and a curse. In her memoir *Triumph of Hope: From Theresienstadt and Auschwitz to Israel*, Ruth Elias describes a similar experience when, after surviving the Holocaust, she emigrated from Czechoslovakia to the new-born state of Israel. While making *aliyah* provided her with a fresh start, Elias expected sympathy from her adoptive compatriots, and was instead met by disinterest and willful ignorance. The Israelis she encountered had no interest in the Holocaust or any other old world

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 102, original italics and ellipses.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 1.

trauma. Similarly, a lack of collective understanding is the price the couple pays for their escape from total crime, with all its lingering psychological effects. The professor describes “Sidonia’s niece Lucy, who, at the age of nineteen, had left. People from the world I lived in now would immediately ask, ‘Left what?’ [...]To put it plainly, Lucy defected.”¹⁴⁸ This paradox is at the heart of life in exile. It is the choice between having to constantly, exhaustingly explain oneself, and being misunderstood. After the publication of the List, the couple’s cultural isolation becomes more fraught.

In the country where we lived before, Sidonia and I had troubles, unknown and therefore uninteresting to the people in the country where we lived now. When I mentioned these troubles at a party, people did show interest, but it was about as real as my own interest in the chances of the Baltimore Orioles reaching this year’s World Series, or something of that order.¹⁴⁹

The professor’s difficulty in explaining his troubles compounds his already intense feelings of abandonment and betrayal. Understanding the implications of the List requires great deal of background information. His colleagues have never experienced “total crime,” to say nothing of transitional justice, and so their empathy can extend only as far as their comprehension. An external dialogue about this book illustrates the same phenomenon. Czech reviewers of the novel, including Mlejnek, Halada and Peňás, described how it fit into Škvorecký’s oeuvre and the conversation about transitional justice. English reviewers, such as Berman and Post, had to first explain who Škvorecký

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 90-91.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 29.

was; none that I read, including that of Škvorecký's friend Edward Galligan, mentioned Petr Cibulka or the couple's lawsuit.

Škvorecký writes in his foreword to the novel that the story is "about isolation in paradise,"¹⁵⁰ a phrase which fully encapsulates the double-edged sword of life in exile. Though the couple has enjoyed decades of freedom in Toronto, they are in a sense imprisoned by their cultural seclusion. This is why the honorary degree means so much to Sidonia. It is evidence of two major facts. First, because it is granted "in view of her many years of selfless cultural labours for the Czech community in Canada,"¹⁵¹ it shows that the university recognizes and values Sidonia's life's work. Second, because it comes at the time of Mrkvicka's publication, it shows that the university understands Sidonia's anguish, if not all its complexities, and supports her.

One might well expect the Czech community in Canada to alleviate some of the couple's feelings of loneliness. In fact they do not, and some even contribute, not just to the couple's isolation, but to Mrkvicka's campaign. The professor notes that "Even before that regime finally perished, not with a bang but with a whimper, my wife's behaviour had become suspect among her fellow expatriates in Toronto."¹⁵² The professor describes, somewhat hazily, a rumor which had as its source one Mrs. Parsons and then circulated through the Toronto Czech community, that Sidonia flew to Prague every other month to report to the Ministry of the Interior. To defend his wife's honor,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 103.

¹⁵² Ibid., 44.

the professor confronts Mrs. Parsons when “the most traitorous of all the traitorous organizations of the exiles, the Council of Free Czechoslovakia, held a meeting in Toronto. As a functionary of the pre-Communist Socialist party, Mrs. Parsons was a member.”¹⁵³ The Council of Free Czechoslovakia had once been a progressive, if always strife-ridden, organization. Škvorecký’s characterization as “traitorous” probably speaks to its mutation in the 1980s, the time at which this incident would have occurred. However, calling it “traitorous” may have been a reflection of Škvorecký’s feelings of betrayal when writing the book in 1996. In any case, Mrs. Parson deflects the accusation of spreading rumors about Sidonia by applying it to different member of the Czech community.

Slowly, piece by piece, Parsons concocted a revised story. According to the amended version, it was not Mrs. Sidonia Smiricky whom she had in mind, but Mrs. Amelia Zidlicky. That was a good move on Parsons’ part. Mrs. Amelia Zidlicky *did* travel to Prague: she had normalized her relationship with the Communist government, for which she’d paid a pretty penny[...]her status as a person who had paid the Communists hard currency for a Czech visa made it rather difficult to defend her political honour.¹⁵⁴

Mrs. Parsons receives the reprimand that “to spread such rumours about Sister Zidlicky was almost as serious as to spread them about Sister Sidonia Smiricky,”¹⁵⁵ but even this admonishment speaks more to the community’s internal fragmentation than its unity. First, Mrs. Parson’s instinct is not to apologize for or even deny her impropriety, but rather to redirect it. This may be a reflection of her individual lack of integrity, rather

¹⁵³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 45-46, original italics.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 46.

than a characteristic of the group. However, the fact that her revised rumor is deemed “almost as serious” suggests a hierarchy within the community. The exiles are not bound to each other by a shared background, but rather in competition for legitimacy based on their past triumphs and transgressions. The overall impression is not a feeling of community, but a state of continual distrust.

Mrs. Parsons, the professor eventually learns, helped Mrkvicka by supplying him with so-called information, but other Toronto Czechs support him as well. At the airport on their way to Prague,

Jirousek, a member of the Toronto branch of the Association of Political Prisoners of the Communist Regime, approached us and rolled up his sleeve to show Sidonia scars from cigarette burns on his forearm. ‘This is how the StB worked me over,’ he said, ‘while you were working for them.’¹⁵⁶

This encounter is positively devastating for Sidonia. Like the incident with Mrs. Parsons, it reveals a divide, a hierarchy even, within the Toronto Czech community. Jirousek’s attitude suggests that he, with his physical suffering, has earned his freedom, while Sidonia, with her complaisance, has not. Roman David and Susan Choi’s work illuminates the discussions taking place in organizations of former political prisoners around this time, and thus is instructive in understanding the Jirousek character. According to David and Choi, victims’ desires for retribution and demands for the imposition of an equal degree of suffering on their offender are often distinguishing characteristics of the transition to democracy.¹⁵⁷ In Czech Republic, the reparations made

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹⁵⁷ David and Choi, 2009, 161.

to former political prisoners and public recognition of their suffering was, many felt, minimal, while after the Revolution many former communist suffered little more than a title change. This background information is helpful for the reader, but to Sidonia, who her husband thought “would die of shame,”¹⁵⁸ such sociological explanations are cold comfort. Worse still, Jirousek, whose anger is arguably justified, is not alone. When “Anonymous letters soon began to arrive, recommending that Sidonia leave Toronto,”¹⁵⁹ the couple must have felt that their entire community, or at least large swaths of it, had turned against them, forgetting Sidonia’s “many years of selfless cultural labours for the Czech community in Canada.”¹⁶⁰ Eventually, Sidonia does decide to leave Canada and return to Prague, but not for good, in either sense of the phrase.

Zdena Salivarová explains, in her contribution to *Osočení*, her process of reestablishing Czech citizenship in order to go through lustration.¹⁶¹ Having emigrated in 1969, she and Škvorecký lost their Czech citizenship in 1978 because of their anti-state activities; presumably this refers to the output of 68 Publishers. Then in 1992, on the heels of Cibulka’s accusation, Salivarová returned to Prague and became a Czech citizen once again, solely for the purpose of enduring this judicial process. That lustration requires citizenship has, in the context of the novel, a poetic resonance. In emigrating, Sidonia relinquished her claims to Czech civic participation, though throughout the

¹⁵⁸ Škvorecký, 2001, 9.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 103.

¹⁶¹ Salivarová, 2000.

communist era, the Czechoslovak state routinely harassed émigrés. However, it must be remembered that the List, whatever legitimacy it gained, was the work of a private individual. In an infuriating encounter with Mrkvicka in Prague, the professor says, “‘since your accusation is serious, at the court you will have’ - I was unable to speak without irony - ‘to put your cards on the table.’”¹⁶² Because Sidonia wants more than a personal apology, she goes through the standard procedure of applying for lustration in an effort to be officially taken off the register of StB collaborators. She must therefore seek redress not from the individual, but from the state. Only after reclaiming her rights as a Czech citizen is she allowed to go through lustration, and hence her complaint against the state becomes valid. In former times, honors occasioned returns to her native land, for example, “after the regime of onetime revolutionaries turned finkmasters had collapsed in the year of grace 1989, Sidonia flew over there to get a medal.”¹⁶³ But now regrettable circumstance necessitates, to use Andrej Halada’s phrase, ¹⁶⁴ the “unhappy return” of Sidonia.

In terms of social acceptance, the couple fares no better among the Czechs in Prague than in Toronto. Sidonia is unfavorably depicted in a documentary which I discuss in chapter four and on the losing end of the opinion poll of Czech writers. These two incidents are fairly high-profile examples, but are indicative of a more general trend in Czech society. Michael Špirit, a longtime friend of the Škvoreckýs, told me that when

¹⁶² Škvorecký, 2001, 100.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶⁴ Halada, 1996.

the couple arrived in Prague to mount their lawsuit, they expected absolute sympathy and support.¹⁶⁵ Špirit opined that the Škvoreckýs, having been insulated from the chaos of Czech Republic in the early 90s, were shocked when they were met with skepticism. Because the difference between their expectations and the reality was so great, they felt deeply betrayed. In the novel, the professor and his wife are particularly sensitive to the reaction of their colleagues in the literary community. However, the reaction of the general public is no less important for understanding the characters' conflict. The questions and reactions of the *vox populi* can be inferred from a television interview that the couple has the misfortune to catch. A lawyer for the Ministry of the Interior

was asked to clarify for the viewers the issue of the numerous charges laid lately against the Ministry by persons who had been 'positively lustrated' - that is, their names appeared not only on Mr. Mrkvicka's List but also on the classified lists of the Ministry. And without delay, the young lady launched into her classifications[...]I soon realized that Mr. Mrkvicka, on the strength of documents skillfully leaked to him by a person or persons unknown, had assumed the *de facto* position of an official government spokesman.¹⁶⁶

This clip reveals two important points to both the professor and the reader. First of all, even among the Czechs, there is a great deal of misunderstanding surrounding lustration. The procedures of lustration are complex and the general conversation about transitional justice were emotionally charged. Moreover, Mrkvicka's List first appeared in his own magazine *KILL KOMMUNISM!*, not exactly a preeminent publication. And yet, it becomes the basis of major lawsuits with huge ramifications. The professor notes

¹⁶⁵ Interview, June 6, 2012.

¹⁶⁶ Škvorecký, 2001, 63.

cynically that Mrkvicka's List represents "a remarkable group: one might say, the cream of Prague society."¹⁶⁷ It is not surprising, then, that to the common man, this new realm of justice is mystifying. This is why the lawyer is expected to clarify the charges for the television audience.

The other important detail is Mrkvicka's increasing legitimacy. The professor reports that "Although in the beginning other spokesmen had stated that Mrkvicka's List had not been screened or approved by state authorities, and therefore possessed no validity, slowly such voices fell silent."¹⁶⁸ The Czech Republic came more naturally to democracy than many of its post-socialist neighbors, but nevertheless, the transition created a power vacuum. Questions remained concerning the outgoing regime's responsibility, which Cibulka volunteered to answer, in what political theorist Roman David termed an act of vigilante justice. His detractors may dismiss Cibulka as a cowboy, but they cannot deny that he got people's attention and became wildly influential. The professor himself inadvertently recognizes the legitimacy of the List, saying that it "was clandestinely leaked to the naive, or more likely vile, Mr. Mrkvicka."¹⁶⁹ Although he considers Mrkvicka vile, he nevertheless recognizes that the List was leaked, not invented.

In addition to their feelings of personal isolation, the couple is further alienated by their confusion about the justice system. After all, the couple has never lived in Czech

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 60.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 63.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

Republic. For example, the professor attempts to make Mrs. Parsons legally responsible for serving as Mrkvicka's informant. But she fails to answer her summons, and "According to the strange custom of the country where I and Sidonia had once lived, if witnesses didn't obey the summons, the judge adjourned the case indefinitely."¹⁷⁰ Is this rule, which from the professor's explanation seems completely illogical, a holdover from the Communist regime? The "country where I and Sidonia had once lived" is Czechoslovakia, not Czech Republic. Or is he just confused about the outcome of his case? It seems likely that there are more forces at play than the professor appreciates. He also occasionally elides Communist Czechoslovakia in unfair comparisons with present-day Canada.

In the world where Sidonia and I lived now, suspects, as a rule, were established as guilty by means of proof, not by the application of intensive interrogational methods. Sidonia's brother had made me familiar with the Communist *terminus technicus* for smashing the kisser, and other similar persuasive techniques.¹⁷¹

Surely, the professor does not think that modern-day Czech Republic is any different from Canada in abstaining from torture. However, haunted by ghosts of the Communist past and handicapped by his exile, he possesses a limited knowledge of the current Czech justice system. He is, ironically, as mystified by transitional justice as those television viewers, waiting for clarification from the Ministry's lawyer. Crucially, in her suit against the state, Sidonia is successful, and "After an extremely short deliberation she

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 161.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 47.

passed the verdict in the name of the state where Sidonia and I no longer lived.”¹⁷² And yet, it is more accurately, if less poetically, a verdict in the name of the state where Sidonia and he never lived, and cannot truly understand.

And yet, Bohemia is their home. They celebrate their court victory “in a pub I vaguely remembered, mainly because of the headwaiter, who had been there in the old days and was there still, and who, like me in another country, had grown old.”¹⁷³ The professor’s recollection of the headwaiter is touching, not least because of the circumstances of their reunion. The professor has become an internationally renowned, Toronto-based author while this man has been at best was promoted from waiter to headwaiter, always at the same Prague pub. There is potential for resentment, and yet, here they are, two old, world-weary men. In Toronto, too, he is friends with his bartender, who “had also been raised in the cinema - a different one, to some extent, yet we had much in common.”¹⁷⁴ This friendship, though more current, seems somehow inorganic. If the friendship revolves around cinema, it is probably because the professor grew up watching American films, and not, say, the bartender’s love of the Czech New Wave. Though in Prague he felt mostly lonely and betrayed, there is something touching about the professor seeking out a bartender from “the old days,” who, in fact, he finds, still at the same pub.

¹⁷² Ibid., 126.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 126.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 71.

The professor waxes poetic about “All the years we had lived in the beautiful country which gave us a future” and is unforgiving of “the country where Sidonia and I had once lived,” where “we had no future at all.”¹⁷⁵ Sadly though, at the time of their greatest distress, the couple has no home at all. For the freedom that they gained in Canada, they had to give up their community. And with troubles that they escaped, they lost a stake in their nation’s future.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 173; 171, *inter alia*; and 174.

Chapter 4: Rumor and Reputation

The two distinct story-lines that make up *Two Murders in my Double Life* overlap not in terms of plot, but in terms of genre and theme. By creating the murder mystery on the Edenvale campus, Škvorecký was able to play with his favorite genre, and also to draw out parallels between the actual murder in Canada and the character assassination in Czech Republic. Within the carefully crafted mystery and the main characters' process of solving it, Škvorecký embedded the themes that are the key to understanding the illustration story, ergo, the novel as a whole. In this chapter I explore themes that appear in both story-lines. In the first section I will deal with rumor and reputation, and from there begin a discussion of guilt and innocence. Each of these concepts create, to differing degrees, false dichotomies. These themes necessarily overlap, and this is exactly the point. By focusing on interconnected themes, I hope to demonstrate how Škvorecký depicts the ambiguities in between seemingly binary categories, including wrongdoer/victim and guilty/innocent and how the two seemingly disparate plots explain and enhance one another to create a complex, rich novel.

Before beginning my thematic treatment of the novel's two parts, it is necessary to outline, and unfortunately spoil, the murder mystery. In the third chapter, the professor describes a faculty party at which

the chief topic discussed [...] was the tragedy that had struck our colleague Mather a few days before. Perhaps it was a tragedy. In any case, it was a crime. Mather's husband Raymond Hammett got himself murdered.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Škvorecký, 2001, 25, original indentation.

Mary Mather is a professor of mathematics who lives in a Victorian mansion and “kept her maiden name because she was descended from the Salem Mathers, renowned for witch-burning.”¹⁷⁷ The pedigree of her husband Raymond Hammett is not historical but literary; his name references Škvorecký’s two favorite crime writers, Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett.¹⁷⁸ Hammett is no academic, but something of an expert on the student body. His philandering is habitual and brazen; Sidonia even teases her husband “I’m a woman after all, and every woman must swoon before Hammett.”¹⁷⁹ Naturally, a murder tinged with sexual intrigue captures the attention of the sleepy college town, and from local newspapers the professor learns that “the murderer strangled Hammett with a piece of string in his wife’s studio [while] his wife, Mary Mather, spent the night in her cottage at Lake Simcoe and therefore had an alibi.”¹⁸⁰ However the professor also makes use of his own personal informant regarding the ongoing investigation.

The professor is conducting a creative writing seminar on detective fiction, and his most eager student is a young police sergeant, reverentially named Dorothy Sayers. (Raymond Hammett’s name is a clever reference, but many Edenvale characters, like Dorothy Sayers, bear the unaltered monikers of famous people.) Sayers is enamored of the professor, and though the attraction is not mutual, the professor takes advantage of

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹⁷⁸ Thanks to Libuše Hecková who pointed out this allusion when I presented my work at the Czech Studies Workshop at the University of Texas at Austin, April 27 and 28, 2012.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 26.

her willingness to please him by pumping her for information about the murder. During their consultations, the teacher and student alternate discussions of detective fiction theory and the criminal investigation, and these scenes are both entertaining and thematically rich. Another student in the course who figures heavily in the murder mystery is Candace Quentin, “a glorious blonde, the daughter of a rich entrepreneur.”¹⁸¹ But unlike Sayers and even the professor, Quentin’s interest in the murder is not merely professional or intellectual. The professor and his wife encounter Quentin outside Mather’s mansion during a rainstorm on what they later learn had been the night of the murder. Škvorecký never draws out this parallel, but Candace Quentin is a pure Hitchcock blonde.

The intrigue is mired in a seductive admixture of sex and academia. Through his consultations with Sayers, a chance encounter with Mathers and the deductions of his observant wife, the professor eventually solves the mystery. Mathers had wanted her unfaithful husband dead, and hires a colleague to do the job. Mathers’ nephew, the mathematician Mortimer Pasternak, had authored a brilliant, Nobel-worthy theorem, but dies of heart failure before he was able to present his work. Mathers then gives the theorem to a math professor at Edenvale, James F. Cooper, as payment for the murder of her husband. Quentin, unprepared for an upcoming exam in Cooper’s math class, goes to Mathers’ house for help the night of the murder. She finds the corpse, sees the murderer flee and discovers that he had been looking through a file labeled “Mortimer Pasternak.”

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 6.

Quentin then uses the information to blackmail Cooper into giving her a passing grade, and the police never uncover the truth about the murder. Poignantly, though the professor solves the mystery and confronts Quentin, he never shares his findings with the authorities. The heartbreaking final lines of the novel are “And I didn’t tell anyone what I knew. One unpunished murderer more or less, who cares?”¹⁸² Echoing the once hopeful refrain “I knew what I knew,”¹⁸³ the professor has by this point lost faith in administration of justice and lost interest in the writer’s responsibility to tell the truth. His wife is dead, a victim of the rumor mill which proves stronger than the legal system. No one will be held accountable for the death of this brave and faithful woman; why should the professor seek justice for the philanderer Hammett? The professor has come to resemble one of his favorite literary characters: the Continental Op, Dashiell Hammett’s disinterested detective.

In both of the novel’s plots, rumor and reputation drive the action forward. In fact, those forces, rather than any character, are the main antagonistic elements. Through the murder story, Škvorecký unfolds the theme of gossip, and the durability of a rumor.¹⁸⁴ In terms of setting, this is perfectly appropriate; a college campus is to gossip as a petri dish is to bacteria. A chief subject for gossip is “Queen Candace of Edenvale College.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Ibid., 175.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 7, *inter alia*.

¹⁸⁴ In their 1976 book *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay*, Ralph Rosnow and Gary Fine mount convincing arguments about the differences between rumor and gossip. For the purposes of my work, however, these nuances are, regrettably, unimportant. With apologies to sociologists everywhere, I use the two terms interchangeably.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 6.

The Professor brazenly gossips about her and encourages others to do the same. A particularly salient conversation takes place in the *Lame Duck* pub, where the professor encounters his student Wendy McFarlane. McFarlane indiscreetly tells the professor about Quentin's alcohol-induced confession of an affair she had with Hammett. An interesting discussion of the definition of gossip, weighed against the need for confession, follows. Quentin had sworn McFarlane to secrecy, but here she is, artlessly telling the professor all she knows. While insisting that she is "no gossip,"¹⁸⁶ McFarlane takes satisfaction in sharing this secret. She feels confident that Hammett's death releases her from her promise of silence, but still does not intend to broadcast her information. "Once I've told you," she explains, "I don't *feel the need* to tell anybody else."¹⁸⁷ This raises an important point; secrecy is a burden. Knowledge of one's own secret creates a need for confession. Knowledge of another's secret results in gossip. McFarlane compares herself to King Midas' barber, who was instructed not to reveal the secret of the king's donkey ears and eventually confessed his knowledge to a willow tree. She equates the professor to the tree, and he knows she assumes "I would keep her information to myself, and use it for strictly literary purposes. Which, of course, is not the same thing as gossip."¹⁸⁸ Again and again the characters stress, in the professor's case sardonically, that this is sharing information, not gossiping, ironically echoing Mrkvicka's argument. Moreover, McFarlane seems to be aware that the rumor may resurface, even be published, in one of

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 56.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 56, emphasis added.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 56.

the professor's novels. In fact, Sidonia "easily recognized Queen Candace of Edenvale College in the heroine of the little crime novel I was writing at the time."¹⁸⁹ The characters consciously and repeatedly blur the line between reality and detective fiction, suggesting that literature is the ultimate platform for telling truth, or at least secrets. Finally, the professor urges McFarlane to share her information with the police, or else he will. But he silently reflects that on his part, he would have to reveal his source and necessarily compromise McFarlane; "To expect that the energetic sergeant would discern the nuance between a legendary barber and a real-life gossip was preposterous."¹⁹⁰ McFarlane would be revealed as a scandalmonger, and the professor an informant.

Later, in a disturbing episode, the professor indulges in gossip for its own sake. Even before figuring out her role in the murder, the professor has an inappropriate interest in Quentin and her seemingly undeserved math grade. In a conversation with the math professor/murderer Cooper, the professor says, "I was an invigilator at your exams. I almost caught one student cheating."¹⁹¹ This is pure fabrication. He had wanted to catch Quentin cheating, but his schadenfreude endeavor backfired--she was passing a note about the professor's drinking habits, which read "He is not souced [sic] today."¹⁹² Now, in his attempt to disparage Quentin to Cooper, the professor traps himself. The truth would implicate him, a lie would set him free. So he lies, confessing that he did

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 95.

¹⁹² Ibid., 88, original misspelling.

confiscate a note, but fibbing about its contents; “It said: ‘I’m finished. Are you?’”¹⁹³

This episode reveals an ugly, but entirely natural aspect of the professor’s character. He wants to spread unfounded rumors about this beautiful, wealthy young person, someone whose prospects look better than his own. He further asks what her final mark will be, even though “exam results were supposed to be classified, until students would receive them in writing.”¹⁹⁴ This detail makes the whole process discomfitingly analogous to lustration. Is the professor motivated by concern for the murder victim, the desire to play out a Raymond Chandler story or simple resentment? It is unclear, but in this episode, the professor acts uncannily like Mrkvicka.

The theme of rumor is of course paramount in Sidonia’s story as well. From bullying actors to gossiping expatriates to the accusatory writers, nearly everyone is quick to believe the worst about Sidonia. The novel, however, suggests that this is less some sort of lingering psychological effect of communism, as Eyal’s dissidents might argue, and more a natural human inclination. The professor, who the reader holds in high regard, references rumors from decades and even centuries ago. For example, he recalls how his friend Suzi Kajetanova “allegedly became a mistress of Fidel Castro [...and] had urinated on people from a balcony.”¹⁹⁵ Although the professor immediately notes that he does not take these rumors for he nevertheless remembers them. In fact, this is not the first time Škvorecký wrote about this rumor; Suzi Kajetonova appears, along with a

¹⁹³ Ibid., 95.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 96.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 88-89.

mention of this incident, in his 1972 novel *The Miracle Game*. So although his characters deem the story false, Škvorecký nevertheless repeats it. In *Two Murders* the professor describes Sidonia's similar preoccupation with "Sabina, the police informer from the time after the Czech uprising in 1848, who even after a century and a half was held up as the archetypal stool pigeon and a symbol for moral filth, even though he also wrote the libretto for *The Bartered Bride*, the nation's most popular musical."¹⁹⁶ This speaks to Sidonia's two greatest fears. She dreads first, that the rumor will outlive the truth and second, that the nasty association will trump her accomplishments.¹⁹⁷

Ultimately, Sidonia's fears are well founded. The professor tries to comfort her by saying the opposite of what his narration has demonstrated, that "folks took such things with a grain of salt, and besides, it would soon be forgotten."¹⁹⁸ The suggestion that the scandal might soon be forgotten is clearly preposterous. The public will never forget the accusation, and for the professor and his wife it will become a traumatic memory. Sidonia is right in thinking "she would never get rid of that dreadful suspicion [... it] remains there as an invisible but universally known mark of Cain."¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, the professor's reference to "a grain of salt" both echoes and contradicts a motif that appears throughout the novel: "Czech wisdom," the professor tells us early on,

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 123.

¹⁹⁷ To test whether rumors carry more weight than achievements, I propose to my readers an experiment. In a group setting, begin discussing Michael Jackson's work. See how long it takes before someone moves the conversation towards the sex scandals. The crimes of which he was acquitted tend to inspire more lively discussion than does his singularly successful and innovative career.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 123.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 123.

“has it that there is a grain of truth in every piece of nonsense.”²⁰⁰ Indeed, as the story progresses, the “piece of nonsense,”²⁰¹ which contains a grain of truth, has become “shit with the supposed grain of truth.”²⁰² As Sidonia makes her way through this Kafkaesque trial the accusation (“nonsense”) becomes vulgar offense (“shit”). The belief in the grain of truth, however, is unchanged. Initially the professor located this tendency in “Czech wisdom” but now notes that it “may have spread even to these shores.”²⁰³ This suggests that the willingness to believe the worst of people in spite of improbability is not a Czech or post-communist tendency, but a universal human predisposition.

In the end, Sidonia clears her name, but a court verdict proves less potent than a rumor. The publication of the List turns her from a social drinker to a problem drinker. In the bar with Wendy McFarlane, the professor had noted that McFarlane’s desire to gossip “was a fight similar to men’s fights with the bottle in Chandler’s novels. The temptation to blab, like the bottle, always wins.”²⁰⁴ The professor is wont to equate women with gossip and men with drinking, but his and Sidonia’s behavior confutes this expectation. The professor is a relentless gossip and Sidonia has not a romantic, noir-ish

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 8.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 8.

²⁰² Ibid., 81.

²⁰³ Ibid., 81.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 56.

dependence on drink, but an ugly, hurtful and ultimately fatal alcoholism. When a documentarian uses footage of a drunken Sidonia,²⁰⁵ the professor muses,

A famous woman under the influence, and on the screen at that, didn't make a good impression, although everybody loved guzzlers on the screen if they were acting in a comedy. Even viewers who were personally well acquainted with double vision were unfavourably affected by a publicly soused well-known woman.²⁰⁶

This incident demonstrates that as her troubles mount, Sidonia's drinking habits help neither her mood nor her reputation. The professor contrasts Sidonia's productive youth, when "I would bring her a two-litre bottle of red wine, and then read her manuscript," with the end of her life, when "she was allowed on drink every evening, and from early morning she would fix her thoughts on that bright point of her day."²⁰⁷ The victory in court ultimately counts for very little, because her reputation will never recover. Sidonia, once wise and vivacious, is so compromised by this ordeal that she becomes practically unrecognizable, and drinks herself to death. Eventually, the professor comes home to find his wife in a coma, two empty bottles by her bed. The doctor's diagnosis is that "her liver is gone,"²⁰⁸ but Škvorecký is talking about more than anatomy. In ancient humorism, the liver represented hope and courage.²⁰⁹ Sidonia's good name is destroyed,

²⁰⁵ The documentarian is based on the filmmaker Irena Gerová, and the documentary in question is *Krycí jméno Chameleon aneb lustrace a justice* (*Code-name Chameleon or Lustration and Justice*), produced in 1994 by Czech Television. Unfortunately as of this writing, I have been unable to secure a copy of the film.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 136.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 173-174.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 173.

²⁰⁹ OED Online. "Humour | humor, n." Entry 2b. March 2013. Oxford University Press. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/89416>>. Accessed April 25, 2013.

and she knows it can never be restored. Though she wins her case in court, Sidonia loses her liver. Sidonia's experience, a trial in every sense of the word, raises important questions about perceptions of guilt and innocence. On the one hand, Sidonia is certain of, and insistent on, her innocence. On the other hand, those around her are less certain, and her insistence may do more harm than good.

In the summer of 2012, I met with Adam Hradilek and Radek Schovanek at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in Prague,²¹⁰ whose commentary on Salivarová's case illuminated the general reception of the trial and the public discourse on lustration. Schovanek is a historian who served as the expert witness at Salivarová's trial. He opined that Salivarová's articles and books proclaiming her innocence had an alienating effect; she would have appeared more sympathetic had she admitted some degree of guilt and accepted responsibility. This logic follows a Czech idiom, one that Josef Mlejnek quotes in his review of *Two Murders*: "*Potrefená husa se vždycky ozve*" ("The wounded goose is always heard"), meaning that by making a fuss, one becomes more of a target.

The exploration of guilt and innocence is more thorough in the lustration story than in the murder mystery, but the neglect of this theme in the Edenvale setting is interesting in its own right. Murder is an inarguably heinous crime, and yet it is treated here with levity. Moreover, it is fully possible to establish guilt in a homicide case. Compared to the lustration case, where both the accuser and the accused navigate the

²¹⁰ Interview. June 21, 2012, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Prague.

ambiguous space between guilt and innocence, a murderer can be relatively easy to judge. Škvorecký thus challenges his reader's notions of guilt and innocence as being, diametrically opposed categories. He demonstrates that a character assassination can be as horrific as a murder, and guilt harder to establish. In both cases, the justice system is impotent, providing no relief for the victim/innocent party or punishment for the offender/guilty party. In Sidonia's case, the quest for justice is unsatisfying, as the verdict proves inaudible above the roar of gossip. In Hammett's case, only the guilty parties and the now disillusioned professor know the truth, and so, no justice is ever sought.

Although the professor never goes to the police or even confronts the murderer, he does engage in a dialectical discourse about the crime with Candace Quentin. In a way, he is merely extending his role as her teacher of detective fiction. After all, Škvorecký did not imbue the Hammett character with any depth or redemptive qualities; he is an archetype, and a rather unlikeable one at that. Hammett is no sympathetic victim; he is a reckless womanizer, and suspects for his murder are many. In Škvorecký's 1966 book *Nápady čtenáře detektivek* ("*Ideas for Readers of Detective Fiction*"), he quotes Raymond Chandler as saying that Dashiell Hammett "gave murder back to those who commit them for good reason, not purely in order to provide writers with corpses."²¹¹ Ironically, though, Škvorecký introduces the character, and in particular the murder, of Raymond Hammett purely to provide himself with a corpse.

²¹¹ Škvorecký, Josef. *Nápady čtenáře detektivek*. Ivo Železný, Prague, Czech Republic. 1998. 80.

Nevertheless, in his conversations with Candace Quentin, the professor explores the theme of guilt in a way that he cannot with his wife. Sidonia has been deemed guilty and, like Kafka's Josef K., can neither refute or escape the designation. She does not exactly internalize the recrimination, but it comes to envelop and devour her. Candace Quentin, on the other hand, is, if not guilty, at least culpable for the role she played in the cover-up, and yet exhibits no remorse. She has two conversations with the professor, during which he reveals his evolving hypothesis of her involvement in the murder. The conversations, however, more closely resemble the professor's creative tutorials with Sergeant Sayers than they do an interrogation. After the professor accuses Candace of having blackmailed the murderous Cooper, he notes:

Her behaviour was uncharacteristic of detective stories. She should have kept silent and pierced me with hateful eyes, or she should have collapsed. Something like that. But we were not in a detective story - or were we? I at any rate was in a very serious novel, although Quentin didn't know that.²¹²

Although Candace is a player in the murder, it is for her too a mere contrivance or literary game. The extent to which Hammett is (un)developed allows for this kind of treatment, but Candace's coolness also underscores a graver point: unpublicized guilt can be tantamount to innocence. When Candace asks the professor if he will turn her in, he replies "I'm not sure. What if you confessed? You didn't *murder* Hammett. You only kept what you knew to yourself."²¹³ However, Candace is in fact guilty of blackmail and the obstruction of justice. She did not "only" keep what she knew to herself. Of that

²¹² Škvorecký, 2001. 169.

²¹³ Ibid., 172, original italics.

crime, the professor alone is guilty. But still justice for the murdered playboy is of little importance to the professor. He advises Candace to think about her culpability and come see him tomorrow. But “Whether she came to see me the next day, I never found out. When I came home, Sidonia was in a coma.”²¹⁴ In this novel, remarkably, it is not the murder mystery that is harrowing, nor the murderer who embodies guilt. Those distinctions belong to the subtler, more complex lustration story.

In the lustration plot, Škvorecký explores the ambiguities that surround both guilt and innocence, particularly in the context of extreme political situations such as communism. He reveals that it is not only reductive, but even dangerous, to think of the two as being mutually exclusive. Sidonia’s story argues for an appreciation of human frailty and a nuanced understanding of the varying degrees of guilt and innocence. Without this sensitivity, the merest act of compromise with the regime becomes tantamount to total submission; this perspective makes it impossible to recognize the vast majority of people who, under communism, were neither irredeemably guilty nor perfectly innocent. In her eloquent essay “The ‘Gray Zone’ and the Future of Dissent in Czechoslovakia,” published in September, 1989, Jiřina Šiklová describes the “‘silent majority,’ for the most part consumption-oriented and politically uninterested.”²¹⁵ Those who can truly be considered the “socialist establishment” and dissidents are very few; the large part of communist-era Czech society are, she argues, somewhere in the middle.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 172.

²¹⁵ Šiklová, Jiřina. “The ‘Gray Zone’ and the Future of Dissent in Czechoslovakia.” *Social Research: An International Quarterly*. Volume 57, No. 2, Summer 1990. 347-363. 350.

Written just two months before the Velvet Revolution, Šiklová's article is a call for the politically engaged to leave "the ghetto of dissent"²¹⁶ and activate the majority of their society in a non-judgmental way. That a character like Sidonia would, in post-revolutionary Czech Republic, become a target for former dissidents' vilification, is just what Šiklová feared. On Šiklová's grayscale, Sidonia, because of work publishing dissident literature, is surely closer to white than to black. And yet following the publication of the List, she is shunned like an abhorrent criminal. This is precisely the danger of seeing guilt and innocence as mutually exclusive, binary categories.

The central conflict of the lustration story is not Sidonia's attempt to prove her innocence against the accusation of guilt, but rather the way the accusation itself transforms Sidonia's reputation and damages her self-perception. "Her uncertainty," the professor reports, "originated not in guilt, for she wasn't guilty, but from the bad experiences she shared with all those who lived in that state."²¹⁷ Sidonia's tragedy is not the accusation or even her actions in the 1950s that engendered this accusation, but the inability of the people around her, both Czechs and Canadians, to appreciate the ambiguity of her position.

Is Sidonia guilty? She never denies having submitted a report to an StB agent, but she does deny culpability. Sidonia's entire crime consists of an effort to bolster a friend's bid to enter the Communist Party. The report in which Sidonia claimed that her friend

²¹⁶ Ibid., 359.

²¹⁷ Škvorecký, 2001, 112.

Julie's boyfriend was not a politically undesirable Serbian but a neutral Bulgarian, and which was in fact fraudulent, constitutes the entirety of Sidonia's dealings with the StB.

In her essay "*Vinní a Nevinní*" ("Guilty and Not Guilty"), which appears in *Osočení*, Salivarová utilizes the Ministry of the Interior's system for classifying collaborators, "not because they alone can say something about the truth in the whole dark issue, but because they set categories and rules for being included into the categories."²¹⁸ First were those who collaborated for ideological reasons. Second, those who were rewarded with material advantages or privileges. The final category consists of those who were blackmailed into collaborating. She asserts that the first two categories encompass the guilty, while the third category is actually a class of victims. Not surprisingly, Salivarová's autobiographical essay in the same volume suggests that she considers herself a victim of duress, and therefore a member of the third category. In the novel, however, where Sidonia's innocence is no less strongly asserted, she does not appear to have been coerced. Sedlacek, the agent who recruits her, does not mention her father who had illegally emigrated to the United States and or her brother who was serving a fifteen-year sentence in the uranium mines. Their fates, in any case, would certainly have been known to Sidonia's employers and friends. If he is truly blackmailing her, it is unclear what constitutes his threat. Furthermore, Sidonia's actions certainly do not harm anyone else. In "Guilty and Not Guilty," Salivarová argues that

²¹⁸ Salivarová, 2000, 307.

those “cooperators” who were victims of StB blackmail are not truly guilty. The only truly guilty party, she asserts, is the Party.

Here it is useful to discuss two key terms that differ in Czech and English. In Czech, there exists only the word, “*nevinní*,” “not guilty.” In English, there is a difference between “not guilty” and “innocent.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of “innocent” is “Doing no evil; free from moral wrong, sin, or guilt (in general); pure, unpolluted.”²¹⁹ “Not guilty” suggests a lack of culpability for the accusation at hand, whereas “innocent” has a sense of comprehensive blamelessness, even to the point of holiness. In *Two Murders*, Škvorecký makes use of both terms, and it is possible that the process of translating his book into English forced him to consider the space between non-guilt and innocence. In discussing Sidonia’s anxiety regarding her upcoming trial, he states that “her uncertainty originated not in guilt, for she wasn’t guilty.”²²⁰ This is a clear reference to her lack of culpability; she is not guilty of the crime of collaboration. Later on, the professor discusses *Prague Literary Weekly’s* publication of “an opinion poll about the guilt or innocence of the writers named in the List.”²²¹ This usage is telling, because it introduces the literary community’s total condemnation of Sidonia. At issue here is not just her non-guilt on this point, but her overall innocence. In terms of the court case, neither word is used. The professor reports

²¹⁹ OED Online. “Innocent, adj. and n.” Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/Entry/96294?redirectedFrom=innocent>. Accessed April 25, 2013.

²²⁰ Škvorecký, 2001, 112.

²²¹ Ibid., 146.

“her court victory”²²² anti-climactically before narrating the trial. After the trial, he reports, with fitting obfuscation, that the judge “declared that the report on the best friend did not provide a sufficient reason for dismissing Sidonia’s charge against the Ministry of the Interior, and so Sidonia won.”²²³ Again, the court does not go so far as to declare her innocent or even not guilty. Sidonia’s case is so fraught with ambiguity, it does not fit into the dichotomous legal world. So she wins, but it is clearly a pyrrhic victory.

The other crucial term for this discussion is “*spolupracovník*.” This word translates literally as “coworker” but it can be used to mean either “collaborator” or “cooperator.” In English, there can certainly be a sinister sense of “cooperation,” and it usually implies duress. “Collaboration,” on the other hand, except in an artistic setting, necessarily implies working with the enemy. Whether collaboration is voluntary or forced is discernible only in context. For example, Cibulka’s website contains a call for “*vaši spolupráci s NECENZUROVANÝMI NOVINAMI*” (“your cooperation with UNCENSORED NEWS”);²²⁴ in this context, the word is used neutrally, if cheekily. The word “collaboration” itself is ambiguous. According to Roman David, there is a critical lack of consensus on the definition and causes of collaboration. A typical definition reduces “the complexity of human nature, with all its weaknesses and ambiguities, and here exposed to the extreme situations of totalitarianism, to binary categories of truth

²²² Ibid., 124.

²²³ Ibid., 126.

²²⁴ NECENZUROVANÉ NOVINY. "KOMPLEXNÍ VEŘEJNÁ INFORMAČNÍ FULLTEXTOVÁ DATABÁZE "StB on Line"" *Hlavní Vyhledávací Stránka*. <http://www.cibulka.com/>. Accessed May 1, 2013.

versus lie, and collaboration versus not collaboration.”²²⁵ Clearly, Sidonia’s action is a result of the conditions listed in the first half of this definition and falls into the liminal spaces of the second half. Because she submitted a report to an StB agent, she can accurately be described as a cooperator, especially compared with the former political prisoners she encounters who resisted even under torture. However, to call her a collaborator is more complicating than clarifying. Moreover, there exists in Czech the word “*kolaborant*,” an unambiguously pejorative term for collaborator, usually used in the context of the Nazi Protectorate. This word does not appear in the Czech edition of *Dvě vraždy*; Škvorecký consistently uses “*spolupracovník*,” which less categorical, less indicative of guilt.

Sidonia is neither fully guilty nor fully innocent. “Not guilty” may in fact be the best designation for her, especially considering the huge gap in time between the original act and the ensuing scandal. The examples of the writers Milan Kundera and Christa Wolf illustrate the same phenomenon. In 2008, Adam Hradilek, published an article in *Respekt* containing evidence that as a young man, Kundera had informed on a classmate, who was later sentenced to labor in the uranium mines.²²⁶ Kundera’s defenders argued that, in the context of 1950’s communist Czechoslovakia, he did what he thought was right the right thing. He should therefore not be considered guilty, and especially as he went on to write significant dissident literature. For Sidonia, this judgment is doubly

²²⁵ David, 2003, 418.

²²⁶ For an excellent discussion of “the Kundera Affair,” see Jana Prikryl’s article “The Kundera Conundrum: Kundera, Respekt and Contempt” published in *The Nation*, June 8, 2009.

appropriate, as she was never a Party member and her cooperation, because it rested on a fraudulent account, was in fact subtly subversive. Even if she were found legally guilty, which her positive lustration suggests, she may still be morally and ethically blameless. Similarly in the early 1990s, the East German writer Christa Wolf was revealed to have worked as an informant for the secret police some thirty years prior. In *Two Murders*, the professor discusses “A famous writer of the former German Democratic Republic [who] had been exposed as a Stasi agent.”²²⁷ He is chiefly interested in her reputation and how it changes following the revelation. He reports that for American academics

she embodied the ideal of a Communist who courageously challenged the regime, but who did not defect or join the dissidents, and was therefore not suspected of switching to reactionary views[...].now only a few conservative diehards were still convinced that Gertrude was a living Communist export article.²²⁸

Soon the news media, seeking informed opinions on the German writer, begins contacting the professor, “turning to me as an expert, because of my similarly exposed wife Sidonia.”²²⁹ However, the professor is not interested in engaging in a journalistic dialogue on transitional justice; he notes wearily “In spite of their kind replies to my letters, I did not know to what degree I convinced my acquaintances that my wife was innocent.”²³⁰ Along with Sidonia, the professor becomes enmeshed in a complex political struggle. Unlike the reporters, both fictional and historical, covering this and

²²⁷ Ibid., 80.

²²⁸ Ibid., 80.

²²⁹ Ibid., 81.

²³⁰ Ibid., 81.

similar scandals, the professor cares only about the individual, human experience of transitional justice.

But what of the professor himself, who is innocent in the state's eyes? Where, on the scale from irredeemable guilt to unimpeachable innocence, does he fall? Arguably, the professor is only guilty before his wife. After all, the visit he made to the Ministry of the Interior as a young man backfired; rather than clearing her name, he brought her vulnerability to the Ministry's attention. Moreover, there is no indication that the professor's reputation, literary or social, is in any way damaged by his wife's ordeal. She alone is ostracized by the literary community.

In chapter two I discussed the *Prague Literary Weekly* opinion poll in terms of the collective memory of the literary community. It is also fruitful, and related, to consider the way this episode reflects Sidonia's worsening reputation. The poll reveals Czech writers' opinions on "the guilt or innocence of the writers named in the List. (The professor) was stunned by how many engineers of human souls, except for a tiny minority, responded to the poll and how vehemently they condemned their colleagues who were alleged to have ratted to the StB."²³¹ For the professor, this is a double betrayal. First of all, he notes that "one would expect writers to be more thoughtful in their handling, if not ideas, at least of words and their meanings, especially in a definite historical context."²³² By virtue of their profession, which the professor sees as a

²³¹ Ibid., 146.

²³² Ibid., 146.

responsibility to tell the truth, he expected a more nuanced handling of the ambiguities inherent in Sidonia's case. Second, he refers to "the swift judgments of colleagues who had once been *my* colleagues."²³³ Many of these authors presumably owe their success to Sidonia's willingness to publish their works during communism, but Mrkvicka's more recent publication destroys her reputation even within this community. There is no indication that among his colleagues in the literary world, the professor's reputation is tarnished,²³⁴ but the collective abandonment of his wife forces him to reconsider his assumptions about the sensitivity and responsibility of writers.

The Czech writers' betrayal is pointedly painful for the couple, but it is not the most graphic example of public shaming. Early on in the book, as soon as the List is published, Sidonia is bullied by a former political prisoner. In the Toronto airport, a stranger "approached us and rolled up his sleeves to show Sidonia scars from cigarette burns on his forearm. 'This is how the StB worked me over,' he said, 'while you were working for them.'"²³⁵ This man, "a member of the Toronto branch of the Association of Political Prisoners of the Communist Regime"²³⁶ is a legitimate victim of the old regime. His reference to Sidonia's "working for them" discounts her lifelong efforts promoting non-communist Czech literature. What the professor calls her "twenty-five years of

²³³ Ibid., 147.

²³⁴ During each of the interviews I conducted in Prague in the summer of 2012, I asked whether Škvorecký's reputation was compromised by the scandal surrounding his wife; all interviewees answered in the negative.

²³⁵ Ibid., 9.

²³⁶ Ibid., 9.

publishing drudgery”²³⁷ were no doubt the reason this former prisoner recognized her in the first place. This encounter raises the question of relative degrees of guilt. Sidonia is not guilty of having been an StB agent, she was not even a Party member, but the former political prisoner considers her much less innocent than himself.

It is no great surprise that people not personally acquainted with Sidonia, particularly victims of the regime, take Mrkvicka’s word as law. Less predictably, and more crucially, are those writers, those “engineers of human souls” who not only shun but condemn Sidonia. In the chapter about the opinion poll, the professor describes a few of Sidonia’s favorite authors, the promotion of whom has been her life’s work. The professor is astonished that these writers lack compassion, and that these Czechs lack historical perspective. Sidonia had made a career of “rescu(ing) from oblivion many manuscripts that had been silenced by Communist censors in Prague.”²³⁸ That these same authors denounce her is, for Sidonia, unbearable.

Particularly poignant is the story of “Leonie, Sidonia’s favorite author.” The daughter of a Party member, Leonie, unlike Sidonia and the political prisoner discussed above, truly had benefitted from the Communist regime. Their friendship, like Sidonia’s friendship with Julie, was based not on political conviction but on “female solidarity.”²³⁹ Following the publication of the List, though, Leonie “wrote Sidonia a well-meaning letter, and the letter exploded in Sidonia’s heart like shrapnel. You committed a sin, dear

²³⁷ Ibid., 8.

²³⁸ Ibid., 8.

²³⁹ Ibid., 150.

Sidonia, Leonie wrote, but we shall forgive you.”²⁴⁰ Leonie’s letter is the height of self-righteousness. First, she accepts the List as fact, even though this correspondence comes after the court’s decision to the contrary. Then, she characterizes Sidonia’s alleged action not just as a crime, but as a sin. A crime is a legal wrong with implications in this world, but a sin is a religious error, for which Sidonia must answer in the next world. Finally, she has the audacity to forgive her errant friend. David and Choi found that sincere repentance, apology and forgiveness can assuage retributive desires and reestablish social equality,²⁴¹ but Leonie’s insincere offer of forgiveness only serves to assert her superiority over Sidonia. After all, as both the professor and various real-world political theorists notice, no Party members, such as Leonie’s father, were found among the entries on the List.

“Czech wisdom,” the professor states, “has it that there is a grain of truth in every piece of nonsense.”²⁴² Our narrator challenges the idea that a person is innocent until proven guilty, or at least proposes that an accusation, for most people, is in and of itself suggestive of guilt. When applied in a court of law, this maxim is pure Stalinism. When applied to literature, it is Kafkaesque. In every day life, though, it describes an uncontrollable willingness to believe the worst of people. The professor suggests, and eventually comes to accept, that people will believe and remember the accusation, in some cases a mere rumor, forever.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 150.

²⁴¹ David and Choi, 2009, 184.

²⁴² Škvorecky, 2001, 8.

Conclusion

A great many social scientists, including historians, political theorists and sociologists, have written about Eastern Europe in the 1990s. The dissolution of the Soviet Union created not one but many power vacuums as each former soviet state and satellite republic was left to determine its own new government. In Czech Republic, the era immediately following the Velvet Revolution is often described as “chaotic.” Monumental questions of an institutional nature demanded answers. Would the nation once again be democratic republic with a charismatic leader, as in the oft-romanticized Masaryk era? Would the politics of the 1968 generation hold sway? Or would the decades of subjugation and repression make civil society, a necessary building block for democratic rule, ineffectual? Today, one may easily compare the various paths taken by former socialist states, but in the early 1990s, no such data was available for analysis. As the years pass since fall of the Soviet Union, more and more sources become available, and that complicated era becomes more comprehensible. Indeed, there is much to learn from the sizable body of work on the transitions from socialism to democracy in that region, and historians’ and other social scientists’ work is invaluable in understanding that time.

And yet, social science is rarely written from the first-person perspective or by actual participants. Nation-building questions cannot provide answers about the individual experience. One wishing to understand the psychological and emotional implications of historical events may eventually have to move beyond non-fiction. It is

instructive to consider fiction as a primary source for history, particularly when that fiction is contemporaneous and autobiographical. In attempting to understand East European post-socialist transitional justice, Škvorecký's novel is as instructive as any work of social science. If Alexander Dubček's liberal politics embodied "socialism with a human face," then *Two Murders in my Double Life* is "social science with a human face." Because it is a literary work, it allows for more ambiguity, an unavoidable element of transitional justice itself, than historico-political writing offers. If, because of its basis in fact, we consider *Two Murders* part of the collective record of transitional justice, it is a unique contribution indeed. Indubitably, Škvorecký's personal involvement in lustration accounts for his interest in this highly specific subject, which remains largely untreated by the Czech artistic community. Nevertheless, the novel is valuable as both a literary work and a primary historical source.

For all its singularity, *Two Murders* was neither critically nor financially successful. In the following chapter I treat the novel's critical reception at length, but here it is sufficient to say that many critics characterized the novel's tone as bitter. Many also disparagingly noted the speed with which it was written. Actually, the urgent haste of the writing process works in the novel's favor for inclusion among timely sources for historical study. The majority of critics, however, discussed *Two Murders* in terms of Škvorecký's entire body of work, which is usually treasured and occasionally canonical. No critic argued that this novel is Škvorecký's best work, and nor do I. However, I do argue that the novel has value, in both the context of transitional justice, and the content

that distinguishes it as a work of literature. Early reviewers of *Two Murders* took a comprehensive inventory of the novel's flaws, but they largely ignored its merits. *Two Murders in my Double Life* convincingly depicts the experience of being embroiled in transitional justice, and more broadly, the human reaction to being accused.

I have shown how, through fictionalizing experiences from his own life, Škvorecký depicted part of the narrative of transitional justice that is largely absent from the historical conversation. He introduces ambiguities that complicate our perceptions of both communist Czechoslovakia and transitional Czech Republic in ways that non-fiction writers, constrained by their disciplines, often cannot. Using literary techniques, Škvorecký interrogates various aspects of his specific, but not necessarily unique, involvement in transitional justice, which he synthesizes to produce a complex work of autobiographical fiction. The dual nature of this novel, consisting of two plots, set in two places, concerned with two times, liberated Škvorecký to explore the most important themes from varying perspectives. First of all, memory is hugely important, as transitional justice forces the citizenry to recall and answer for choices made under different circumstances. In the novel, Škvorecký is equally concerned with collective and individual memory, and he invests both with great power. Because the main character is a writer-in-exile, he is able to scrutinize the behaviors of people in both his native land and his adopted home. The tension between the two results in the professor's overwhelming feeling of social isolation, which social scientists may not but are hard pressed to thoroughly depict. Finally, transitional justice, specifically lustration, often

catalyzes such erratic, but nonetheless powerful, forces as rumor and reputation. By interweaving his autobiographical story with a fictional murder mystery, Škvorecký explores the relative strengths of gossip, truth and justice.

In order to understand *Two Murders in my Double Life*, it is extremely helpful to have some background knowledge of transitional justice in Czech Republic. In another sense, though, to understand transitional justice in Czech Republic, one need only read *Two Murders in my Double Life*. Fiction, truly all art, is at liberty to be ambiguous. History supposes that memory is a reliable record of the past, while the administration of justice assumes a binary conception of guilty and innocent. But the human experience is more fraught with contradictions, and for that, far more rich, than non-fiction can necessarily demonstrate. A study of social sciences can only be enhanced by admitting works of fiction into the historical record. Throughout his career, Škvorecký was committed to literature as a forum for truth-telling and though he dabbled in many genres, he was not an investigative journalist. Škvorecký was, above all, a novelist. With his signature combination of humor and gravitas, he tells a moving story of disappointment and heartbreak. *Two Murders in my Double Life* goes far to challenge our assumptions about two complicated eras, but more importantly, it tells a moving story about two people's complicated lives.

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