The Male Capital and Its Female Provinces: Ivan Olbracht's O *Anně, rusé proletářce* (On Anna, the Red Proletarian, 1925)

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ABSTRACT
In 1925, St. K. Neumann's magazine *Reflektor* published *O Anně, rusé proletářce* (On Anna, the Red Proletarian), a novel by the Czech author Ivan Olbracht. Its significance for Czechoslovak political literature of the interwar period is commonly compared to the role Fedor Gladkov's *Cement* (1925) played in what was later institutionalised as Soviet socialist realism. However, because the label of socialist realism too quickly draws the reader's attention to typical elements such as positive heroes and political messages, *Anna* seems to be difficult to approach without bias. Simultaneously, as the novel represents an evidently more straightforward version of literary activism than e. g. the literary avant-gardes, it can also be read as a testament to the gridlocked binarity of sexes and corresponding gender roles, as these were characteristic of both conservative circles and the new communist ethics that were imposed by the Comintern in the late 1920s. Together with these dichotomies, the novel testifies to a solidification of the unbridgeable gap between centre and periphery, capital and province. A careful look, however, reveals an interesting gender, spatial and class dynamic behind this reinforcement – a dynamic far more complex than both the label 'socialist realism' and the postmodern understanding of modern juxtapositions of genders seem to suggest.

KEYWORDS
socialist realism, centre and periphery, capital and province, ethical regime, political literature

In 1925, Stanislav Kostka Neumann's magazine *Reflektor* published *O Anně, rusé proletářce* [On Anna, the Red Proletarian], a novel by the Czech author Ivan Olbracht. Although this novel foreshadowed some ideas of socialist realism, so that later, in the Second Republic, when Olbracht was acknowledged as a 'národní umělec' [people's artist], it was institutionalised as a role model for socialist realism, Olbracht's position in the 1920s was neither straightforwardly communist nor utilitarian. For his disagreement with the new direction of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), which he made public in 1929, Olbracht abruptly fell out of the frame of what was then considered as progressive (revolutionary) literature (Piorecká 2022: 155). This discontinuous historical path of the novel – first public acknowledgment, then the heresy of its author, afterwards stately authorised acclaim – conditioned it so that the novel was commonly conceived somewhat outside of time and space ("pojímána poněkud

mimo čas a prostor"; Mocná 1985: 216).[1] It is the task of this article to reconsider *Anna* not only in its own time and space, but also with regard to its own critical account of the evolutionary (social democratic and petty-bourgeois) and counter-revolutionary deviations (of which the author was accused himself).

Anna's significance for the interwar socialist literature of the Czechoslovak Republic has been commonly compared to the role Fedor Gladkov's *Cement* (1925) played in what was institutionalised as Soviet socialist realism at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. Although both titles are considered by scholars to be outstanding realisations of this style of writing, the label of socialist realism makes it difficult to approach them without bias. The same goes for a series of related readings such as – in *Anna*'s case – novel of social biology ("román společenské biologie"), novel for servants ("román pro služky"), agitprop ("agitační"; all Opelík 1995: 562) and colportage novel ("kolportážní román"; Opelík 1995: 561), educational novel ("výchovný román"; Mocná 1985: 206) and collective novel ("kolektivní román"; Josef Hora, qtd. in Mocná 1985: 209). In contrast to these inherited compartmentalisations, I refrain from emphasising features such as positive heroes and political instructions and instead read the novel by considering the *longue durée* of socialist world views that permeated literary writing in the pre-1934 period, of which both *Cement* and *Anna* are telling examples. Both novels, each in its own way, testify to the existence of a revolutionary ethos that later became incompatible both with the ethical turn of Stalin's 1928 Cultural Revolution and with the official version of socialist realism as institutionalised in 1934.[2]

Simultaneously, I fathom *Anna*'s discursive working out of women's emancipation. This is discussed here not only in terms of the historical variability of the revolutionary image of women, but also in terms of a woman's social placement. Namely, the image of the proletarian and revolutionary woman changed not only from the mid- to late-1920s, but was also differently conceived in different left-wing and revolutionary camps and groups. A comparison with another account of the same time, but from the angle of an upper-class Communist – Alice Rühle-Gerstel's *Der Umbruch oder Hanna und die Freiheit* [The Upheaval or Hanna and Freedom; published posthumously in 1984] – highlights the specificity of *Anna*'s proletarian (and even potentially conservative) ethos: Representing a more traditional and, simultaneously, more raw image

1 Unless stated otherwise, translations are by the author.

2 Reacting to 'socialist realism' as an umbrella term which was applied to the literature of the 1940s and 1950s in most socialist countries, Karel Kosík argued in *Dialektika konkrétního* (1966) that whenever socialist realism is considered only as a style of writing, it is reduced to a mechanical pattern applied to preselected phenomena that emerges, flourishes and necessarily fades away after its own stylistic and social exhaustion. When socialist realism, however, is understood as a specific world view, then it is able to transcend its own status as a style. Alluding to literary debates about realism which revolved around the question of whether the represented reality was depicted in an appropriate and artistically adequate way, or what aesthetic means the artists used etc., Kosík instead asked a question that was usually omitted in the received debates, namely, "Kdo opsal kruh, jímž je uvažování sevřeno?" [Who circumscribed the circle by which reasoning is bound?] (Kosík 1966: 81) By asking about the conditions of possibility of literary representation, Kosík reminded us that any idea of realism or anti-realism rests on an underlying notion of reality, either conscious or unconscious. It follows that the question of realism in art necessarily leads to the question of reality as such (Kosík 1966: 82). Therefore, it is not only legitimate but moreover necessary to ask about the concept of reality that underlies not only socialist realism but every literary style and epoch.

of a female proletarian than the revolutionary ideal of 'red love', *Anna* may at first glance seem like a testament to the gridlocked binarity of sexes and corresponding gender roles. This seemingly gridlocked binarity ties in with the perhaps unbridgeable spatial distance between, on the one hand, the centre (urban, industrialised capital) and, on the other, the provinces (backward rural area) and the peripheries (suburban proletarian districts such as Žižkov). A careful look, however, reveals an interesting spatial dynamic, which corresponds with gender and class relations in this novel, making *Anna* a far more complex narrative than both the label 'socialist realism' and the postmodern understanding of modern juxtapositions of genders seem to suggest.

Besides this, the novel, whose slightly revised version was republished as a book under the new title *Anna proletářka* [Anna, the Proletarian] in 1928, the year of Czechoslovakia's tenth anniversary, speaks volumes about the time and space of local left-wing dynamics as they developed during the first two years of the new state. This period is in the first edition described as follows:

> Bylo to na podzim roku devatenáctého a doby byly plny dění. České dělnictvo si počínalo ujasňovati to, co francouzský proletariát věděl již padesát let: že demokratická republika je pokrokem proti tyranii z boží milosti, ale konečnou metou pracující třídy že býti nemůže. Že jest jen novým bojištěm, snad o něco výhodnějším, než bylo to, které již leží vzadu, polem, na kterém bude dělnictvu svést i rozhodný boj o nový svět, o jeho svět. (Olbracht 1925: 36)

> [It was the autumn of 1919 and the time was full of events. The Czech workers began to realise what the French proletariat had known for fifty years: that a democratic republic was progress against tyranny by God's grace, but that it could not be the ultimate goal of the working class. Instead, it was only a new battlefield, although perhaps a little more promising than the one that lay behind them, a field on which the working class would lead the decisive struggle for a new world, for their world.]

Olbracht was prudent enough not to equate these revolutionary workers with either the Russian Bolsheviks or the authority of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party (ČSDSD). The novel makes clear that it is the urban proletariat, rather than control from Moscow or the well-intentioned strategies of Social Democratic "předáky strany, poslance, ředitele podniků, sekretáře, redaktory" [party leaders, parliamentarians, company directors, secretaries, editors] (Olbracht 1925: 52), who could and should besiege the local bourgeoisie and lead the Czechoslovak "nedodělaná revoluce" [unfinished revolution] (Václavek 1950: 13) to its magnificent fulfilment. *Anna* is, thus, not only a story about a country girl coming to the capital, a story which unfolds in a revolutionary city that politicises the female character, but also a story, I argue here, that entertains the backward countryside as a potentially revolutionary subject. The questions arising from these constellations cut deeper than those commonly asked in literary analyses of genres and styles; the answers then lead beyond the aforementioned labels *Anna* has hitherto been endowed with. What is required is a formal analysis that is abstract enough to bring into relation the spatial, gender and ideological constellations: How, if at all, do the poles of the mutually related oppositions meet each other? Do they ever grow together? What does the masculine class struggle in Prague

have to do with the feminine proletarian household on the one hand and the backward peasantry on the other? How does *Anna* negotiate revolution and backwardness and what role do the two most influential left-wing groups – Social Democratic and Communist – play in this revolution? Finally, reaching out to contemporary wording, how does the novel illustrate the difference between the old and the new world, that is,

> mezi antagonistickou rodinou maloměšťákovou, kde žena soukromou služkou svého muže, kde celá rodina slouží svému zákonnému živiteli, a rodinou proletářovou, kde žena pod tlakem kruté průmyslové racionalizace historicky přestala byt soukromou služkou rodiny a zařazena ve výrobním procesu vedle svého muže stala se jeho soudružkou (Štoll 1970: 350)?
>
> [between an antagonistic petty-bourgeois family, in which the wife is her husband's private servant, in which the whole family serves its legal breadwinner, and a proletarian family in which the wife, under the pressure of cruel industrial rationalisation, has historically ceased to be the private servant of the family and, included in the production process alongside her husband, becomes his comrade]

In exploring the answers to these questions, I place Olbracht's novel against the background of the proletarian culture of the international 1920s, which advocated the emancipation not only of urban male workers but also of women and peasants, in line with the philosophy of revolutionary Marxism. I argue that rereading the works of proletarian literature and proto-socialist realism requires a broader framework of analysis than that which was common in identifying socialist realism with the lens of ideological "monosemy" (Kolešnik 2006: 32), pinning it down to baleful optimism, aesthetics of content and an uninteresting schematism of 'good guys' and 'bad guys'. Even if writings such as *Anna* sometimes exhaust themselves by, in the words of Peter Weiss, holding back the "questions about style and form, acknowledging only the content, which differ[s] fundamentally from that of all other art movements" (Weiss 2005: 50), this is not to conclude that *Anna* should be remembered only as an example of "záměrném zjednodušení a jednoznačnosti charakteristik i v celkovém traktování příběhu proletářské mileneské dvojice v poloze blízké lidové četbě" [a deliberate simplification and unambiguity of the characteristics and the overall handling of the story of the proletarian lovers in a position close to folk literature] (Strohsová 1995: 221). Rather, it is necessary to not only ask about the revolution of literary forms, but also about their ethos and political content. With this aim, I set out with Caroline Levine's understanding of forms as "the forms of the content" (Levine 2015: 16), that is, as "organizing principles that encounter one another inside as well as outside of the literary text" (Levine 2015: 16). Based on her claim that "aesthetic and political forms emerge as comparable patterns operating on a common plane" (Levine 2015: 16), I examine the content-related layer of the narrative (images of gender, spatial characteristics, ideological profile of the political positions involved) and then go on to inspect its formal features, also in terms of the common plane on which these formal characteristics of related parts of the narrative meet and mutually intersect. Specifically, I trace how the urban periphery brings the future to the centre, and then

go on to ask how modernity – via an inherently reactionary female character of rural origin, who however experiences a revolutionary awakening – comes to the provinces.

ANNA'S ETHOS: BACKWARD OR REVOLUTIONARY, RURAL OR URBAN?

Besides the fact that *Cement* and *Anna* occupy a prominent position in their respective (national) canons of socialist realism, that they have the same year of publication and focus on female protagonists, the two novels also show that a socialist ethos was articulated in literature prior to the mid-1930s, when socialist realism was officially established as a normative poetics. This ethos in the proletarian 1920s was a matter of a bottom-up development and did not simply follow Stalinist prescriptions or, in Jacques Rancière's words, uncritically adhere to an 'ethical regime'. In speaking of this ethical regime as opposed to the ideal of an 'aesthetic regime', Rancière denounces those works of art that are used for ideological purposes of constructing and maintaining ethical communities. He claims that "[i]n the ethical regime, works of art have no autonomy" and mentions Plato's *Republic* as "a perfect model of this regime" (both Rancière 2002: 135). However, I argue that the sweeping nature of Rancière's critique of the ethical regime which relies heavily on modernist canonisation criteria, makes an adequate reconstruction of the literary politics of the interwar period virtually impossible. As an influential theoretical requisite, which grew out of the 1960s' aesthetic disidentification strategies, Rancière's critique virtually delegates socialist realism to the proverbial dustbin of history because it systematically excludes from the designation of the 'politics of literature' the kind of writing that straightforwardly follows an ethical mission and in so doing is also supportive of organised politics. In what follows, I have chosen instead to capture the ethical overtones of interwar writing both historically and dialectically, that is, to consider *Anna* in its time and space.

Much like *Cement*, whose 1925 edition is emblematic of the (post-)revolutionary gender roles developing in the wake of massive urbanisation and (re)industrialisation processes,[3] *Anna* presents emancipation as the exclusive prerogative of the masculinely dominated proletarian class. It seems to testify to the almost natural secondary status of the women's question (let alone feminism) in 1920s proletarian culture, rooted in both the Social Democratic labour movement and the MarxistLeninist revolutionary philosophy which treated women not as "the other gender" but as the "other half of the proletariat" (Studer 2015: 48). Against this background, and because revolution "denied almost any symbolic capital to gender" (Studer 2015: 47), Gladkov's heroine Dasha and Olbracht's Anna can find their way to independence only if they renounce their inherited identity as mothers and housewifes. Yet whereas Dasha accomplishes this (and her husband realises, "Somehow love will have to be arranged differently," Gladkov 1980: 292), Anna's reorientation toward class struggle leaves her in perfect accord with inherited social roles that are based on the reproductive function of her sex. Her path to emancipation (unlike Dasha's) is not hindered but rather empowered

3 For subsequent repeated rewriting of *Cement* (36 editions before the author's death), see Busch (1978), Veselá (2003), Lahusen/McGuire (2020).

by the birth of her son. Her "young proletarian" (Olbracht 1925: 106[4]) is expected to empower the new world that his father is fighting for: "Té noci se narodil mladý proletář. Ne už bojovník, jako jeho otec, ale příští stavitel." [That night a young proletarian was born. No longer a warrior like his father, but the future master builder.] (Olbracht 1925: 106) It is plain to see: Once a body that served for the social and material reproduction of the peasantry, then of the bourgeoisie, Anna finally becomes part of the collective subject of the class struggle while at the same time remaining "the subject of the (re) production of the workforce" (Federici 1975: 7).

Her emancipation is mediated by her husband Toník (Antonín Krouský), a factory worker who was born and raised in the Prague suburb of Pohořelec and is now active on the far-left wing of the ČSDSD. At his side, Anna's character is still rooted in the traditional imaginary that sees the proletarian woman as an honest and hardworking housewife. From the beginning of their life together, Anna makes herself useful to the proletariat by serving her husband: by doing his laundry, saving money and keeping house, but also by making sure that he is "šťasten, neměl starostí a mohl věnovati volný čas a spokojenou mysl straně" [happy, has no worries and can devote free time and a contented mind to the Party] (Olbracht 1925: 55). While Toník's personality is similarly reduced to a single dimension – as a worker and conscious proletarian, he "znal jen slovník pracovního dne a revolučního boje. Milostná slova mu byla cizí" [knew only the vocabulary of the workday and revolutionary struggle. Words of love were foreign to him] (Olbracht 1925: 72) – the novel's heroine is portrayed as passive, sentimental and subordinate to her politically conscious and active partner. Toník lends her books, teaches her about the ABC of socialism – she learns, "Byl dvojí druh lidí: Bohatí a chudí." [There were two kinds of people: rich and poor] (Olbracht 1925: 53) – and introduces her to the revolutionary class struggle.

Anna's agency was commented on only when the novel was republished as a book, in 1928. Besides the Czechoslovak critics (Josef Hora, Pavel Fraenkl, Arne Novák), the international left-wing critics also reacted to the novel. In 1929, in the prominent German left-wing journal *Die Linkskurve*, Otto Biha reviewed the German edition. The translation was prepared by Otto Katz and released simultaneously by two publishers in 1929, whose different titles illustrate the tension between the heroine's peasant origins and her new proletarian and urban identity: While the title of the edition released by the publishing house Universum-Bücherei für alle was *Anna, das Mädchen vom Lande* [Anna, a Girl from the Country], Internationaler Arbeiter-Verlag titled its edition *Anna: Der Roman einer Arbeiterin* [Anna: The Novel of a Working Woman]. Biha, however, ignored this tension between rurality and urbanity and took the novel as an opportunity to provide an overview of the "new woman in literature" (thus reads the title of his review). When recognising it as an important new piece of the proletarian-revolutionary literature, Biha (1929: 26) reminded the reader of related achievements in the field – John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), Alexandra Kollontai's *Red Love* (1923), Lidiya Seifullina's short story "Virineia" – and finally focused on Gladkov's insurmountable achievement. Gladkov's heroine Dasha was described as

4 Page numbers are according to the digital copy provided by the Hollar Library of the Charles University in Prague.

> Die neue, proletarische Revolutionärin. Die ebenbürtige Kämpferin am Aufbauwerk des Sozialismus. Der Kamerad des Arbeiters. Der unermüdliche, aufopfernde Parteikämpfer. Die namenlose Frau im Milionenheer der Revolution. Aber auch die Führerin in Komitees, in der Wirtschaftsfront - die rote Direktorin. (Biha 1929: 25)
>
> [the new, proletarian revolutionary. The equal fighter in the construction of socialism. The comrade of the workers. The tireless, self-sacrificing party fighter. The nameless woman in the army of the millions of the revolution. But also the leader in the committees, on the economic front – the red director.]

Although Biha's critique of *Anna* was benevolent, this comparison with the other new women, however, made the conservative character of Olbracht's heroine clearly evident.

ŽIŽKOV: THE PERIPHERY OF A METROPOLIS

Anna's linear narrative tells the story of a provincial girl from Pelhřimov, a small Bohemian town of about 10000 inhabitants, who migrates to Prague to work as a maid in the bourgeois household of the architect and entrepreneur Rubeš – a person described by Anna's friend and comrade Máňa as "největší zloděj z celé Prahy" [the greatest thief in all of Prague] (Olbracht 1925: 17). Exploitation and theft are represented not only by the figure of the entrepreneur Rubeš, but also by his wife, the "milostpaní" (literally, 'merciful lady') and bourgeois mater dolorosa, who despairs over the decadent lifestyle of her dissolute offspring, including Miss Dadla and her two other children. This "milostpaní" warns Anna of the dangers of city life. She explains to her the difference between the city and the country: "Anna, jste nezkušené venkovské děvče a nevíte, co je Praha. Nezaměstnávám ze zásady pražských služek, protože jsou všechny zkažené. Čekají vás tu velká nebezpečí, na která vás chci v zastoupení vaší matky upozornili." [Anna, you're an inexperienced country girl and you don't know what Prague is. On principle, I do not employ the Prague maids because they are all spoiled. There are great dangers waiting for you, of which I want to warn you on behalf of your mother.] (Olbracht 1925: 1) Anna, however, unaware of what this spoiledness might mean, is ensnared by the amorous adventures of Mrs Rubeš' daughter, Dadla. Dadla occasionally lets Anna in on the mysteries of love's passions (lovers, secret letters, fancy fashion accessories) and lends her volumes of popular literature, brimming with pomp and pulp, which similarly entertain the rich and the poor:

> Tak se v ubohé rusé hlavě Annině mísily husitské války s ložnicovými dobrodružstvími vrchních deseti tisíců a vražedné příběhy z Whitechapelu se sladkobolnými náladami měsíčních nocí. Z toho poznávala, že nejen Praha, ale celý svět jest velmi spletitý a velmi, velmi zamuchlaný. Skrčena na stoličce pod spuštěnou elektrickou žárovkou, mezi dresem na mytí nádobí a kuchyňskou tabulí, snila o svém budoucím království. Nebude to již princ na bílém koni se zlatou čabrakou, který přijíždí z hájů na polní meze a zvedá k sobě do sedla malé pasačky, aby je dovezl do hradu a učinil královnami, ale bude to syn měděného krále s půl milionu roční renty, nejlepší hráč póla a vítěz v jachtavých závodech, elegatní, zajímavě bledý a s pěstěnýma rukama.

> A ten, sedě u volánu šesticylindrového automobilu značky Rolls Roys [*sic*], pevnou rukou bezpečně ji proveze vší tou změtí a úklady světa. A ona mu bude oddána, vděčná mu bude a bude ho milovat. (Olbracht 1925: 10)
>
> [In Anna's poor red head, the Hussite wars mixed up with the bedroom adventures of the upper ten thousand, and murderous stories from Whitechapel with the bittersweet moods of moonlit nights. From this she realised that not only Prague, but the whole world is very complex and very, very musty. Crouched on a stool under a switched-on light bulb, between the dishwasher jersey and kitchen board, she dreamed of her future kingdom. It would no longer be a prince on a white horse with a golden cap, coming from the groves to the edges of the fields and taking little shepherdesses in his saddle to bring them to the castle and make them queens. He would be the son of a copper king with half a million annual income, the best polo player and winner in sailing regattas, elegant, interestingly pale and with manicured hands. Sitting at the wheel of a six-cylinder Rolls-Royce, he would hold her with a firm hand and drive her through all the confusion and pitfalls of the world. And she would be devoted to him, grateful and would love him.]

Anna is long unaware that Dadla's literary taste is defective not only from the point of view of Mrs Rubeš but also from the viewpoint of her own (Anna's) social class. Her distancing from the fantasies of "the upper ten thousand" begins only after Máňa introduces her to the proletarian collective. When Anna becomes pregnant to Toník, however, she rejects Máňa's advice to have an abortion, quits her job and moves with Toník to the Žižkov district to live in a squatter flat in Jeseniová street, a flat given to them by Černá ruka (Black Hand). Černá ruka was a revolutionary organisation that provided apartments to the working people who struggled with housing shortage. One of its most important activists is mentioned by name in this novel – František Franta Sauer – an anarchist who wrote short stories about the lumpenproletariat in the early 1920s: "Kolohnát Franta Sauer ze Žižkova… Trochu dělník a trochu agent, půl soudruh a půl žižkovský flamendr, ale celé čtyřicetileté dítě s dětským čelem a neskonale dobrýma očima." [Oaf Franta Sauer from Žižkov… A bit of a worker and a bit of an agent, half a comrade and half a Žižkov drunkard, but all in all a forty-year-old child with a child's forehead and infinitely good eyes.] (Olbracht 1925: 60) In his essay on the working class families in interwar Prague, Stanislav Holubec mentions that in the early 1920s, the "presence of new workforces allowed owners to cut wages". As a result, the "lack of appropriate housing led to crowding in apartments and the spread of slums" (both Holubec 2014: 173). The emergence of new zones of precarity was most intense in Prague's peripheral districts of Karlín, Libeň, Holešovice and Vysočany, as well as in the proletarian agglomeration of the Žižkov district. However, a concomitant phenomenon was also evident: Flooding the industrial centres, the new proletarian masses became a problem in their own right, demanding solutions and driving the transformation of the industrial gravity zones into revolutionary hotspots. Thus it came that in the first "political radicalization of the post-war period", when "the Communist Party become [sic] an important representative of the professionally less qualified and poorest strata of Prague inhabitants" (Holubec 2014: 171f.), the successes of Černá ruka's housing activism were remarkable. Although squatting and

evictions were performed illegally, police officers generally did not intervene because of the power of the organised proletariat and its expected future role in local affairs.

After moving to the vibrant periphery of Žižkov, Anna continues to cling to the gender roles she has grown into and made a living with in the early days of her new life in Prague. Unlike Gladkov's intransigent Dasha, who sacrifices her own child in order to build a new society and a new humanity, Olbracht's heroine is guided by the ideas of love and care, as well as the tasks of child-rearing and housework. In the new proletarian environment, the heteronormative division between the public and the private, that up to that point structured her everyday life, remains stable: While Toník is busy with party meetings, street protests and confidential contacts with international political refugees in addition to his work at the Kolbenova Továrna (Kolben's factory, later the famous ČKD – Českomoravská–Kolben–Daněk), Anna for her part is busy with family and domestic obligations. Unable to fully understand Toník's political activities, let alone actively participate in them, it is only at the very end of the novel that she makes the leap forward, leaving her child unsupervised at home and joining the workers' protest against the leadership of the ČSDSD which had betrayed the class struggle as early as 1919 by its 'ministerialism'.[5]

This is in stark contrast to *Cement*, where the pull factor of emancipation is not the male character Gleb but his (ex-)wife Dasha, where the action is set not in the Soviet metropolis but in a cruel environment framed by a cement factory near the inhuman, almost moon-like expanse of bare sea beaches, and where Dasha as an individual remains the true, if perhaps somewhat tragic, example of the new woman. The most striking difference between the two novels is the following: Against the backdrop of a harsh natural landscape and relentless social and wartime circumstances (the Russian Civil War and the general restructuring of social institutions and morality are two processes that take place in parallel), Gladkov's heroine abandons her pre-war femininity in order to perform immediate revolutionary tasks. Olbracht's heroine, on the other hand, a country girl sent to the capital to serve in one of Prague's most luxurious households, is for a long time unable to understand the social conditions into which she is thrown, let alone the purpose of social and political struggle.

A CLASS CULTURE THAT IS BUILT ON STRUGGLE

In terms of spatial analysis, the heroine's hesitant development from peasant girl working in a bourgeois household to proletarian housewife and finally to revolutionary street fighter coincides with her movement from the provinces to the urban centre (from Pelhřimov to Wenceslas Square, the bourgeois heart of the city where the Rubeš family's seven-room flat is located) and then to Žižkov as the vibrant proletarian periphery. It is only with this second spatial move that Anna achieves her politicisation, which is, as indicated above, a politicisation of a special kind. When

5 In the interwar era, 'ministerialism' was a critical label of those Social Democrats who abandoned the revolutionary course and forgot about the class struggle upon joining the governments of allegedly reactionary and proto-fascist regimes. In Olbracht, this is articulated as the contrast between "průmyslových závodů a dělnických schůzí" [industrial plants and workers' meetings] on the one hand and "ministerských salonů a sekretárskych kanceláří" [ministerial salons and secretarial offices] on the other (Olbracht 1925: 115).

she joins the masses, however, she once more touches upon the political heart of the capital: She heads to Hybernská Street, where Lidový dům, the headquarters of the ČSDSD and seat of the party newspaper *Právo lidu* [People's Right], is located – a workers' home which is now occupied by policemen 'defending' the party leadership against its members – the enraged workers. This move back to the centre, however, has a very different quality to Anna's initial migration to Prague. It comes as a result of her forceful politicisation – forceful in the sense that it goes against her female 'nature', which is conditioned by the "odhodlání ženy, bránící milence a vášeň matky, chránící mládě" [determination of a woman who protects her beloved, and by the passion of a mother who protects her offspring] (Olbracht 1925: 126). When Anna jettisons her inherited identities, this includes her "counter-revolutionary"[6] attitude, her 'biological', motherly instinct and her provincial attachment to home and hearth. The entire novel develops teleologically towards this moment in which the dynamics of class conflict between rich and poor and the internal left-wing quandary of evolution and revolution accelerate to an extent that the internal conflict of the heroine is resolved in favour of revolution.

The pivot of the novel's emancipatory programme is thus as follows: The provinces (a peasant girl) are emancipated under the leadership of the urban periphery (male proletariat), which itself is well on its way to occupying the central stage of history. As Anna moves from the provinces to the capital, she becomes a self-conscious element of the working masses, but – significantly – this is only made possible through the mediation of others: first by Máňa, then also and especially by Toník. Anna and Toník's relationship is marked by the persistent gap between her sentimental, even biologically conditioned care and his proletarian pathos: In one of the rare displays of intimacy, she asks him if he loves her, adding the rhetorical question, "A je nám dobře, viď?" [We are well, aren't we?] (Olbracht 1925: 25) Toník answers in the language of politics, not love, saying that they are doing "lépe" [better], but it will be a long time before they are "dobře" [well]. The narrator comments that "Toníkovo 'my' bylo mnohem, mnohem širší než Annino" [Toník's 'we' was much, much broader than Anna's] (Olbracht 1925: 25), thus including the "we" of the whole proletarian collective, and this discrepancy between Anna's and Toník's "we" persists until the very end of the novel. And when in one of the very last scenes of the novel, Anna overcomes her private urges (care for the household and the new-born child) and leaves the homestead to join the stream of proletarian men and women protesting against the ČSDSD leadership, she is actually forced to take this step – first by Toník, who accuses her of counter-revolution, then also by a neighbour Mrs Činčvarová, who says,

> "To je vám líto, že se šli chlapi na ulici trochu prát pro větší kousek chleba pro nás a pro naše děti? [...] Jen ať se trochu tahají s policajty! Vždycky to trošíčku pomohlo a pomůže to trošíčku také teď... A vy se styďte, paní Krouská! Hodně se styďte!" (Olbracht 1925: 127)

6 Because she is reluctant to join the protest and wants Toník to stay at home with her and their baby, Toník criticises her for being a "kontrarevolucionářka" [counter-revolutionary] (Olbracht 1925: 126).

> [Are you sorry for the guys who went out to the street to fight a little for a bigger piece of bread for us and our children? [...] Let them mess around with the cops! It helped a little in the past and it will help a little now as well... And you should be ashamed, Mrs. Krouská! Shame on you!]

Her private, anti-political passion for the family thwarts the idea of Anna as a positive hero, which is something that critics observed early on (see Mocná 1983: 516). If any character fulfils the criteria of the positive hero, it is Toník. Yet he, albeit politically important, is not the novel's supporting pillar. It is Anna's ideological turnabout that is of primary interest to the author and the reader: The question is, how does the reactionary province – via its politicisation in the urban periphery – become a progressive social agent? This does not happen by a miracle; rather, what in contemporary, post-1968 theory counts as an 'event' (Badiou) happens only through guidance, sometimes even persuasion and coercion, by those who are more experienced.

Near the very end of the novel, on her way to the protest march, after she finally breaks out from her flat, leaving the child in the care of Mrs Činčvarová, Anna runs into Dadla. Their encounter is now the long-expected climactic clash – no longer between the dutiful maid and her demanding master, but between representatives of confronted classes: an active Communist and the wife of a bank director[7] (Olbracht 1925: 128). It is significant that they meet in, of all places, the city centre, which is not only Dadla's 'terrain' but also the heart of the political and economic system to which they both belong. Miss Dadla, now Mrs Urban, demonstrates her goodwill when she warns Anna that the orderlies will shoot at the workers. Rhetorically, she excludes herself from violence by saying, "*Budou* dnes do vás střílet" [Today *they* will shoot at you], but Anna corrects her: "*Budete* do nás střílet?! My do vás take, paní!" [Will *you* shoot at us?! We will shoot at you too, my lady!] (both Olbracht 1925: 129, italics I. P.) At this culmination point, their worlds finally appear, as the contemporary Zagreb critic Mirko Kus-Nikolajev put it on another occasion, "different not only in economic but also in moral terms", thus exhibiting "moral qualities between which there [are] neither connections nor transitions." (Kus-Nikolajev 1932: 42)

This last remark about the impossibility of connections and transitions between classes was typical of the proletarian writing of the time, which was decidedly antagonistic and sometimes also militant. In this, Olbracht's confrontation of classes strongly echoes Anatoly Lunacharsky's 1919 theses collected in the pamphlet *Die Kulturaufgaben der Arbeiterklasse* [Cultural Tasks of the Working Class]. Lunacharsky portrays the culture of the proletariat as

> eine scharf abgesonderte Klassenkultur, die auf Kampf aufgebaut ist, eine ihrem Typus nach romantische Kultur, in der der sich intensiv abzeichnende Inhalt die Form überholt, weil die Zeit fehlt, um sich genügend um die bestimmende und die vollkommene Form für diesen stürmischen und tragischen Inhalt zu kümmern. (Lunatscharski 1919: 19)

7 Dadla's husband is the director of *Živnostenská Banka* (Trade Bank) that upon secession from Austro-Hungary became the new state's key bank (Živnostenská banka 2021).

> [a sharply segregated class culture that is built on struggle, a type of romantic culture in which the intensely emerging content overtakes the form because there is not enough time to find the decisive and perfect form for this stormy and tragic content.]

Only in the later stage of revolutionary development could this segregated class culture give way to a universal human culture – the "sozialistische Kultur der Zukunft" [socialist culture of the future] (Lunatscharski 1919: 19). Lunacharsky's juxtaposition of class cultures was taken up several times, for example in St. K. Neumann's 1921 essay *Proletářská Kultura* [Proletarian Culture], in which Neumann similarly announced the beginning of "socialistické společnosti" [socialist society] (Neumann 1971 [1921]: 127) that would follow the class culture developed by the struggling proletariat. I argue here that Olbracht's narrative is a telling example of this "segregated class culture that is built on struggle" (Lunatscharski 1919: 19). Therein, the collectivist interests of the proletariat sharply contrast with the individualistic attitudes and practices of the bourgeoisie. Despite attempts to mediate between the classes – and these attempts will be shown on Toník's friendship with the comrade Jandák, much as on the example of Rühle-Gerstel's autobiographic narrative – it is antagonism, rather than reconciliation, that prevails. This insurmountable antagonism was expected to be resolved only in the future socialist society, which was, however, to be accomplished not in terms of a conciliatory third way, but as the realisation of a future whose only beacon was the revolutionary proletariat.

For the constellation Anna–Dadla, this does not mean that the two women would ever become friends; rather, through the victory of the proletariat, the bourgeois woman was expected to cease to exist in the function she had in the capitalist order – namely, a means of capital exchange – much as the proletarian housewife would cease to belong to a subordinate class. Only on the condition of the abolition of classes would Anna and Dadla become comrades. In this light, Anna's outcry, "Will you shoot at us?! We will shoot at you too, my lady!", not only brings the opposites to a climax, but also promises an ultimate dialectical solution.

A "TERRIBLE DISTRUST BETWEEN THE WORKERS AND THE INTELLIGENTSIA"

The disambiguation between workers and upper classes was, however, not only a matter of class antagonisms – a related paradox underlay the left-wing movement as well. Just as not all members of the working class were organised into socialist collectives (Social Democratic, Communist, anarchist and other), the movement also encompassed much broader social strata than exclusively members of the working class. Consequently, the mutually conflicting perspectives on ethics and morality did not only come about as a result of a traditionalisation of the international movement towards the end of the 1920s – or even in the early- and mid-1920s; rather, they were also a sign of social differences within the movement. This especially pertains to the realm of cultural production, which was almost exclusively preserved for higher educated, so-called intellectual workers. In this sense, the centrality of monogamous

heterosexual marriage and childbearing in *Anna* contrasts with "the experimentation with new forms of everyday life (*byt*) and sexual reform", as historicised by Brigitte Studer (2015: 46). If this other ideal, which included the "New Woman" as much as the "new morality" (Studer 2015: 45f.), most famously advocated by Alexandra Kollontai, appealed to the middle and upper classes, *Anna*'s ethos is attuned to a way of life that is indeed more likely to belong to conservative circles than to the lifestyle that in some revolutionary circles emerged after October 1917. However, instead of classifying Olbracht's novel under the label of conservatism (both local and Soviet), the narrative actually voices the perhaps disheartening yet realist experience from below that was, on the one hand, too conventional for the idealised image of 'red love' and, on the other hand, still too promiscuous for the ethical regime that was imposed at the turn of the decade.

In her discussion of the "cultural life of the Cominternians", Studer refers to the communist style of life in the Foucauldian sense as "working on oneself" (Studer 2015: 10). This style of life was not only the stumbling block between the propertied and propertyless classes, but also a bone of contention within the revolutionary left, which often found itself forced to distinguish between bystanders and genuine revolutionaries, or between bourgeois evolutionists and genuine members of the revolutionary class. That is, in addition to the class contradiction of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the other bipolar structural element underlying the ethos of Olbracht's novel is this rift within the left: the opposition between the proletarian (revolutionary) and the bourgeois (evolutionary) left. This is most evident in Toník's distancing of himself from his comrade Jaroslav (Jarda) Jandák, a student and son of the Social Democratic parliamentary representative Karel Jandák. Toník explains his own reticence towards Jarda by the fact that Jarda's wife is dressed in silk and his daughter wears patent leather shoes. Toník's explanation that a husband and father who can afford such luxury amongst the female members of his family (who, like the Rubeš women, are both ruthless consumers and at the same time maintainers of the family's reputation in prestigious social circles) cannot be a true socialist is recognised by Jarda as "strašné, tahle nedůvěra mezi dělnictvem a inteligencí" [terrible distrust between the workers and the intelligentsia] (Olbracht 1925: 52). This distrust is overcome after Toník listens to an agitational speech by Karel Jandák, which convinces him that Jarda's father's socialist intentions are true and sincere. In this way Toník expresses his regained trust in the comrade, not forgetting to mention the mistrust he was able to overcome:

> "Dlouho jsem ti nevěřil, Jandáku, proto že jsem viděl tvou ženu v hedvábných šatech a tvou dceru v lakových botkách, ale už ti věřím." I to bylo na Toníka mnoho. Oba muži se při těch slovech začervenali. "Nó, ničevó", řekl Jandák a usmál se, "lidé se musí dříve poznat, než jdou spolu na život a na smrt." (Olbracht 1925: 86)
>
> ["I didn't trust you for a long time, Jandák, because I saw your wife in a silk dress and your daughter in patent leather shoes, but now I trust you." [...] Both men blushed at these words. "No, nothing", Jandák said, smiling. "People have to get to know each other before they enter life and death together."]

However, the continuation of the plot shows that Toník is wrong in his concession to the husband who finances silk dresses and patent leather shoes. The union leader Podhradský, speaking on behalf of the Party leaders who want to suppress the radicalisation of the Social Democratic left – perceived as a development towards Bolshevism – instructs Karel Jandák to "nechat propagandy bolševismu" [refrain from Bolshevik propaganda] and to support their course of "politiku státotvornou a reelní, která je konec konců také jedině užitečnou pro dělnickou třídu" [realpolitik and state-building, which is after all useful for the working class] (both Olbracht 1925: 97). Karel Jandák is expected to publish an article condemning Bolshevism in *Právo lidu*, which he is determined to refuse. For Karel Jandák considers himself, despite everything, a sincere and honest socialist. However, he is reminded that his own brother was doing profitable business thanks to his, Karel's, position in the Party. Faced with the possibility of public disgrace, Karel gives in. This concession is musically accompanied by an earwig that reveals his shift to the right:

> Ale jaká to melodie víří Jandákovi hlavou? Jaká pitomá kupletová melodie? Jandák to najednou ví. Ta melodie má refrén. A ten jest: "Jandák se točí!" (Olbracht 1925: 102)
>
> [But what is this melody that is buzzing around Jandák's head? What stupid couplet melody? Jandák suddenly knows. This melody has a refrain. And it is: "Jandák turns away!"]
>
> Ale teď měla písnička jiný refrén: "*Jandák* se točí!" Poslanec zabořil hlavu hlouběji do batikovaného polštáře. Tvář se svraštila v ošklivý úšklebek. Jandák se točí, Jandák se točí! Jandák se otáčí do prava! (Olbracht 1925: 103)
>
> ["Jandák turns away!" The representative buried his head deeper into the batik pillow. The face contorted into an ugly grin. Jandák turns away, Jandák turns away! Jandák turns to the right!]

This clear distrust between the workers and the intelligentsia is best illustrated by Alice Rühle-Gerstel's *Der Umbruch oder Hanna und die Freiheit* [The Upheaval or Hanna and Freedom], the abovementioned posthumously published autobiographical novel. Rühle-Gerstel's autobiographical social and political identity is incompatible with Anna's. While the latter was a girl from the provinces, untrained in political work and debate, Rühle-Gerstel was a Jewish Czech-German with upper-class origins and an experienced cultural activist. She worked for the Communist left and was inspired by Austro-Marxist educational and social programmes, especially Alfred Adler's "individual psychology" (Marková 2007: 420). She also translated the works of Ivan Olbracht into German. *Der Umbruch* is the story of the heiress of Aschbachs, a member of an unconventional family whose children, born of a Czech mother and a Jewish (German-speaking) father, were raised in both languages (Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 25). After fourteen years of Communist activity in neighbouring Germany, the imprisonment of her husband Otto Rühle (a prominent Communist, man of the hour and, together with Karl Liebknecht, the only member of parliament to vote against the war credits in 1914), and her retreat into the underground, Rühle-Gerstel returned

to the city of her childhood and youth in 1932. The novel depicts events in the period between 1934 and 1935, when Rühle-Gerstel finds that "[h]ier in der freien demokratischen Republik war ihresgleichen genauso der Feind wie dort drüben, von wo sie herkam." [here in the free democratic republic her own people are just as much the enemy as over there, where she came from] (Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 26). Her memory of Prague is romantic and contemplative, which is why she is surprised when she encounters street fighting and violence: "Sie träumt von einer Stadt, die sie nicht kennt, die sie aber früher in Träumen oft gesehen hat, einer Stadt mit einer Kastanienallee, die vom Bahnhof zum Zentrum führt, mit schönen, breitangelegten Straßen mit herrlichen Schaufenstern, eine gepflegte Mittelstadt [...]." [She dreams of a city she does not know but has often seen in her dreams, a city with an avenue of chestnut trees leading from the train station to the centre, with beautiful, wide streets with wonderful shop windows, a well-kept mid-sized city] (Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 31). This youthful dream quickly dissolves when she senses "etwas Drohendes [...] in der Luft" [something threatening [...] in the air] and sees "Arbeiter mit Mützen, einer hat ein großkariertes Sportshemd an, alle fuchteln mit den Armen und schreien" [workers with hats coming towards her, one of them in a large-checked sports shirt, all flailing their arms and shouting] (Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 31). Among them she discovers Paul Bergler, a comrade she once met in Halle, who exclaims with shining eyes, "Genossin, jetzt geht's los, heut ist Revolution" [Comrade, it's starting, today is revolution]. Rühle-Gerstel reminds the comrade of their earlier discussions in which they concluded that "daß die Revolution ein langer, schwieriger Prozeß ist, mit vielen Siegen und Niederlagen" [revolution [is] a long, difficult process [...], with many victories and defeats] (both Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 32). He resolutely responds that it is time to quit these slow-motion (evolutionary!) revolutions and take power. This can only be accomplished on the barricades, and Rühle-Gerstel indeed observes in anguish the presence of so-called "Ziegelbladerer" [brick loaders] (Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 32) on the otherwise familiar streets of Prague. When on another occasion she contacts the local Communist organisation, Rühle-Gerstel is surprised by the new morality expected in these circles: Whereas loyalty and virginity were once dismissed as "bürgerlicher Quatsch" [bourgeois nonsense] (Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 129), these qualities are now praised as exemplary. Rühle-Gerstel recalls that the Party used to be explicitly uninterested in private affairs. After both bourgeois monogamy and bourgeois libertinage had been discarded, it was up to individuals to determine their own private lives. All that mattered was to act as "ordentliche, zuverlässige Genossen" [decent, reliable comrades] (Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 129): "Die unbedingte Treue zur Partei. Und andrerseits, die unbedingte Freiheit im Privatleben." [Absolute loyalty to the Party. And on the other hand, absolute freedom in private life.] (Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 406) In contrast to the rejection of "Familienleben, eheliche Treue, das gemütliche Heim" [family life, marital fidelity, the home sweet home] (Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 166), monogamy, the prohibition of abortion, the complication of divorce proceedings and returning women to the home and hearth are now on the agenda. Czech Communists are required to fill out a questionnaire asking them about the most private details of their personal lives, which is sent to them by their Party. Ultimately, it is this questionnaire that makes Rühle-Gerstel realise that in reality,

> Nein, auch sie war keine Proletarierin, so sehr sie es hatte werden sollen. Sie konnte niemals eine werden. Das hatte sie dunkel in Deutschland schon verspürt, das spürte sie [...] unter den tschechischen Genossen, sie gehörte nicht dazu, sie trug ein Imprimékleid und einen Florentinerhut und empörte sich über den inquisitorischen Bogen, den sogar die im Persönlichen so nonkonformistische Jarmila brav und redlich ausgefüllt hatte. (Rühle-Gerstel 2007: 178)
>
> [No, she was not a proletarian, as much as she wanted to be. She could never become one. She had already felt it in Germany, she had felt it with [...] the Czech comrades, that she was not one of them – she wore an imprimé dress and a Florentine hat, and she was outraged by the inquisitorial sheet that even [her friend and comrade] Jarmila, who was so nonconformist in her personal life, had filled out well and honestly.]

Where Rühle-Gerstel's narrative proves most liberal – in the private realm, in the intimate sphere of love, which in her case has indeed been "arranged differently" (Gladkov 1980: 292) – *Anna* displays not only conservatism, but a lack of any progressive theory of love and intimacy whatsoever. The novel showcases acts of love that are completely devoid of idealisation, bourgeois or revolutionary: The *locus amoenus* to which Anna and Toník occasionally escape is a "písčitá pláň na periferii města s trochou bezbarvé a ušlapané trávy [která] vypadá jako šeredně olezlá hlava, a přece se pod palmami Capri a olivami Brionů nikdy nemilovalo žhavěji než zde" [sandy plain on the outskirts of the city, with a bit of colourless and trampled grass, which looks like a ghastly sore head, and yet under the palms of Capri and the olives of the Brijuni, love was never hotter than it is here] (Olbracht 1925: 22). Their first sexual intercourse took place "ani v budoáru s dusnou vůní tuberos, ani v palmovém háji mořského pobřeží" [neither in the boudoir with the suffocating scent of tuberose, nor in the palm grove by the sea], but "na nočních schodech domu číslo 33 na Václavském náměstí" [on the night steps of house number 33 on Wenceslas Square]. The night on which "Anna se [...] stala ženou" [Anna became a woman] (all Olbracht 1925: 56) is not fantasised as a sexual revolution, but as a moment of involuntary and uncomfortable excess:

> Anna se zatím stala ženou. [...] [Byla to] [t]aková žhavá chvíle na odpočívadle schodů, kdy se nemohli odtrhnouti od posledního polibku a nemohli se odloučiti ani pak, když usedli na nejvyšší schod. Proč bylo o rozkoši této chvíle napsáno tolik knih? Políbení bylo hezčí, řekla si Anna. A bylo-li v té chvíli co sladkého, pak jen vědomí, že tomu Toník tak chtěl a že se mu odevzdala. (Olbracht 1925: 56)
>
> [In the meantime, Anna became a woman. [...] [It was] a hot moment on the landing of the stairs, when they could not tear themselves away from the last kiss and could not separate even when they sat on the top step. Why have so many books been written about the pleasure of this moment? The kiss was more beautiful, Anna thought. And if there was anything sweet in that moment, then it was only the knowledge that Toník wanted it that way and that she surrendered to him.]

In her account of *Anna*'s reception history, Dagmar Mocná pointed out that these overtly raw and, for a puritan mind, offensively unembellished love scenes were smoothed out in the 1928 book version (Mocná 1983: 521; see also Piorecká 153). Their taming was much in line with the overall renounciation of the 'red love' ideals towards the end of the 1920s, and Olbracht was no heretic in this matter. If we understand that the novel's agency is primarily based on the political content, and not the personal development of the heroine, then this silencing of sexuality may not be significant. Simultaneously, unsentimental features of Anna and Toník's relationship, as visible in the original version, likewise Anna's reluctance towards political action, not only express a dissonance with both bourgeois and petty-bourgeois morality, but also show that revolution is not only for those who are always-already radical. Rather, it counts on those who still await their political awakening. Finally, if the heroine's migration to the capital functions as a precondition for her proletarian self-becoming and thus also as a parable for the historical emancipation of the proletariat, Anna achieves the transformation from the 'in itself' to the 'for itself' not through the act by which she "became a woman", but through a collective that fills the pronoun "we" with a new meaning. Thus, *Anna* is most progressive where *Der Umbruch* ultimately fails – in taking the path to power and then turning that victory into a revolution not only of urban ways of life but also of living conditions in the backward provinces. This transformation is not the result of a rationally prepared endeavour, but one that requires unexpected shifts which are successively channelled through organised collective action and revolutionary leadership, ultimately also making thinkable the final extension of the revolution towards the provinces. Although the novel does not reveal whether Anna ever returns to the provinces (which is, in fact, highly unlikely), the fact that the movement draws not only a woman but also a peasant to its side – in both cases, the "other half of the proletariat" (Studer 2015: 48) – shows that the provinces, much like women, are an essential component of the struggle for the future.

If this interweaving of the urban and the rural is only implied in *Anna*, it becomes explicit when the novel is read in parallel with other Olbracht narratives in which the female characters from the provinces take centre stage. In the novella *O smutných očích Hany Karadžičové* [The Sad Eyes of Hana Karadžičová], whose heroine is another Hana (but with a single 'n'), the emphasis is on the rural scenery. Similar to *Anna*, in this novella the event of change takes place thanks to the travels of the female character. A daughter, who has little hope of a decent marriage due to the miserable financial situation of her impoverished Jewish family, moves from Polana to Ostrava, where she meets her future husband Ivo Karadžič, an atheist of Jewish origin. From him she learns: "Není žádný Pán Bůh, není žádná zaslíbená země, nejsou žádní křesťané a židé." [There is no Lord God, there is no promised land, there are no Christians and Jews.] (Olbracht 1937: 180) Although she is not forced to do so, she decides to pay one last visit to Polana – which is portrayed as the most backward place in Carpathian Ruthenia – and introduces her future husband to her Orthodox parents. Olbracht builds the narrative so that the reader expects a textbook case of ritual femicide. However, by an unexpected whim of telos, the female character is excused and the secular lovers are freed from the constraints of tradition. In an uncomfortable and forced way, Polana's Orthodox Jewish community undergoes modernisation. Similar to *Anna*, this step into the future is again based on the bipolar structure of an active

male and a passive female character: Much like Toník, Ivo Karadžić is involved in journals, organisations and collectives that champion the secular movement, and Hana is destined to follow him. Despite their still one-dimensional and traditional gender identities, or perhaps because of them, Anna and Hana are paradoxically portrayed as inherently progressive female figures, who enable forward-looking dynamics through their travels between province and centre. In this way, they correspond to Alain Badiou's description of female ambivalence, which is grounded in the fact that "a woman is that which passes between two places" (Badiou 2017: 90). Without these mediators between places of backwardness and places of progress, the political dynamics would lose their potential of spatial extension and, in this context, the translation of modernisation in the countryside. Interestingly, Anna and Hana are not so radical as to overthrow the old society as a whole; their agency is not that of radical lifestyles, but much more elementary. What drives Anna is economic survival ("Chleba s máslem! Chleba s máslem! To byla touha jejího dětství." [Bread with butter! Bread with butter! That was the desire of her childhood.] Olbracht 1925: 24), while Hana is driven by the need for social contact because staying with her family would mean becoming an old maid.

Therefore, Anna's adherence to inherited gender roles is not necessarily a sign of deeply rooted and unchangeable hierarchies on the left, but a realistic element in Olbracht's portrait of the proletarian class. This portrait is a revolutionary account as it renders political struggle paramount, whereas cultural and private affairs follow as arenas and domains of its replication and consolidation. In contrast, an *evolutionary* portrait would focus on cultural and private developments and expect the results – an end to the housing crisis, access to adequate means of subsistence and a decent standard of living – to occur as a side-effect of a heroine's personal development. Yet in the early 1920s, as Lunacharsky put it in his abovementioned pamphlet, there was "not enough time to find the decisive and perfect form" (Lunatscharski 1919: 19) for such comprehensive emancipation that would include an even development of the world of work as well as of the private household, of politics and family, of the working and possessing classes. The novel's focus on the factory as an exclusive outpost of revolution, then, not only reiterates the dichotomous relationship between centre and periphery, it also reinforces the gender hierarchies inherent in the constellation between the breadwinning paterfamilias and the supporting wife. By shifting the centre of gravity from the provinces to the capital, as well as from domestic to factory labour, the relationship between these poles, however, is sharpened to such an extent that the entire constellation is about to break down, which can only open space for its reshuffling. Ultimately, the novel ends with a scene in which Anna is literally dragged out into the street and joins the uprising of the masses:

> Anna jest zástupem vrhána dopředu. Jest odrážena vzad. A kamsi nesena. A znova házena vpřed.
> V jedné chvíli vidí, jak zpod kamenného loubí vyrážejí četníci a ženou se s napřaženými bajonety náměstím. Snaží se rozděliti masy a část zatlačiti na most. Také tam je řež. Soudruzi rvou z parku plaňky a bijí se. Také tam se střílí. Bílá plocha vyklizovaného náměstí se brzy rozšiřuje, brzy je menší. Válejí se tam ve sněhu ranění. Ale Anna nepociťuje vůbec strachu. Má dojem něčeho neskutečného a vzdáleného.

> Zase jest kamsi unášena. […]
> Daleko, daleko je Annina vesnice s mateřídouškovými mezemi a topoly v končinách. Daleko, daleko je Rubešova kuchyně a růžový pokojík slečny Dadly. Až na druhém konci města je Jeseniova ulice.
> Kupředu!
> Kupředu, kupředu, Toníku a Anno! (Olbracht 1925: 131f.)
>
> [Anna is thrown forward by the crowd. She is thrown back again. And carried somewhere. And thrown forward again. At one point, she sees gendarmes bursting out from under the stone archway and rushing through the square with raised bayonets. They are trying to divide the masses and push some of them onto the bridge. A massacre. Comrades are tearing planks from the park and fighting. They also shoot there. The white area of the cleared square soon expands, soon becomes smaller. The wounded are lying in the snow. But Anna feels no fear at all. She has the impression of something unreal and distant.
> She is again carried somewhere. […]
> Far, far away is Anna's village, with its thyme hedges and poplars in the countryside. Far, far away is Rubeš' kitchen and Miss Dadla's pink room. And at the other end of the city is Jeseniová street.
> Forward!
> Forward, forward, Toník and Anna!]

To contemporary readers, whose perspective might be closer to Rühle-Gerstel's liberal-revolutionary attitude than to Anna's conservative ethos, *Anna* appears as a perfect case study of what Rancière critically calls an 'ethical regime'. However, both Rancière's contemporary rejection of the ethical regime as inimical to autonomous aesthetic creation and Rühle-Gerstel's account of heterosexual and monogamous morality as hallmarks of Stalinism obscure Olbracht's *Anna* in particular and pre-Stalinist proletarian revolutionary literature in general. This is not to negate the hierarchical constellations inherent in *Anna*'s ethos: The novel shows in exemplary fashion how the proletarian emancipation was based on a hierarchy and that it was by no means unconditionally liberating. It also documents that this proletarian ethos was not coincidental to Stalinisation or Stalinism, but was unavoidably constitutive of class struggle. To contemporary readers, *Anna*'s ethos may seem unsavoury because it is heteronormative; simultaneously, this ethos is also a document of a literary politics that consciously rejected 'liberation' in the sense of freedom from politics and was instead congruent with organised politics that fought for liberation on a universal scale.

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