A good work of literature confronts the reader with the totality of life: the reader is not only stimulated to ponder upon the meaning of human existence, a literary text also offers various points of view from which this question can be approached. In its representation of life, a literary text does not generally restrict itself to a specific 'model'; it will play off various conflicting aspects of life against one another, such as, for instance, religious, philosophical and social aspects.

It probably is the complexity and the totality of its approach to human existence that imparts a liberating potency to literature: liberation from dogmatic and stagnant forms of religion, thought, political views, and so on. It is this cathartic function that makes rigidly ideologically structured societies approach good literature with such fear; it explains why they manipulate, censure, and persecute it. Apparently such societies consider a good work of literature to be a threat to their existence. Indeed, many a good literary work presents a potential danger to social inflexibility. As Jan Mukařovský has said: "A poetic work as a global designation enters into relation with the total set of the existential experiences of the subject, be he the creative or the perceiving subject."¹

These experiences are at variance with the intolerance of stagnant forms of society. It may even be argued that a great work of literature will always transcend the limits of any form of

cultural organization, however liberal and variegated that organization may be; otherwise the ever renewed value of such a work and the frequent discovery of its hitherto unnoticed aspects would be unexplainable.

II

The relations of the creative and perceiving subjects—of author and reader—to life have been allocated to the aesthetic function of the literary sign by Jan Mukřovský. According to him, the poetic sign reflects reality as a whole. This all-embracing scope is conditioned by the fact that "in poetic designation attention is concentrated on the sign itself, and thus the semantic relation of every word to the surrounding contexture comes to the fore." Elsewhere Mukřovský states that "the focal point of our attention will immediately become its relation to the surrounding contexture." As a result of this network of intratextual relationships, the so-called "practical" functions of the sign are weakened. On the other hand, Mukřovský acknowledged—somewhat contradictorily perhaps—that it is these practical functions that often emphatically manifest themselves in a literary work, e.g. "the presentational function in the novel, the expressive function in lyric poetry."

I propose to do away with the above paradox by a) distinguishing between the presentational (referential, denotative, cognitive) function in everyday practice and in the novel and other forms of literature, and b) by distinguishing between the expressive function in poetry (and in every work of literature) and in practical communication. Mukřovský himself has already hinted at such a distinction in his discussion of the expression of feelings in literature and emotive language. As a result of the

5. Ibid., p. 68.
6. Ibid., p. 69.