Czech exile literature was a frequently discussed topic during the first years after the fall of Communism. In the time of post-revolutionary euphoria, Czech newspapers wrote numerous, though mostly superficial and panegyric articles about the writers living in exile. After a short, but painful period of political and cultural hang-overs, sobriety came to the Czech lands at last. Most of the exile literary production is now seen as an integral part of Czech literature with all its ups and downs. I do not want to bore the reader by listing the obvious good qualities of our exile literature along with textbook clichés about its importance. I would prefer to stress those aspects which are not taken for granted, but which have the power to provoke questions.

I have always found it useful to touch upon the problem of terminology before beginning any discussion. The term "Czech exile literature" has several connotations in the Czech Republic at the moment; it is necessary to differentiate between them so as not to confuse several viewpoints:

1) Czech independent literature published in exile
   It is quite common and in some ways logical to regard the hundreds of Czech books published in numerous houses abroad, especially in Toronto, Cologne and London, as exile literature. However, many of these books were written in Czechoslovakia and were originally published in samizdat editions. A good deal of meticulous bibliographical work on the topic has been done by Ludmila Šeflová, Vilém Prečan, Igor Hájek and others, and this type of scholarly activity never ends. In the present essay I do not wish to deal with this, however. The word "exile" here means only the place of publication, and the links with the more general phenomenon of "exile literature" are often very loose.

II) Literature written in exile in the Czech language
   This group includes books created mostly by authors of the older generations. Their typical feature is that they are deeply rooted in the native Czech cultural context and personal experience from the time before their authors left Czechoslovakia. The authors who left their country as well-
known and even famous writers mostly repeated themselves in exile. They only rarely developed their opinions and their poetics when they lived abroad. The bulk of Czech exile literature belongs to this group.

III) Czech literature written abroad in foreign languages

This group includes the literary activity of younger émigrés. They usually have a good knowledge of Czech from their childhood and their teens, but for various reasons they often decided to write in the language of their new home. Most of their work deals with the traumatic moments of their Czech experience, along with the Czech national situation. Their thoughts are often expressed differently in a foreign language than they would have been in Czech. Their position in the cultural context is therefore "inter-national". There are not many of these authors. Their importance is based not only on their role in radically breaking Czech literary clichés but mainly on the exceptional qualities of their work.

The dividing line between group II (i.e., exile authors writing in Czech) and group III (exile authors writing in foreign languages) is not absolute, of course. A few writers belong to both groups. One example is that of the late poetry of Ivan Blatný (1919-1990), who within a single poem often combined Czech with English (and also French or German). Iva Pekárková (b. 1963), a taxi-driver in New York who appears to be the youngest successful Czech émigré, has written three novels (Péra a perutě — 1989, Kulatý svět — 1993, Dej sem ty prachy — 1996) in Czech, but her articles and short stories are written in English. Nevertheless, in my opinion the main features of the two groups are relevant, and they will prevent us from becoming excessively confused. In the limited space of this essay I will pay particular attention to just two authors from each of the groups II and III: Josef Škvorecký and Milan Kundera; Libuše Moníková and Jan Novák. They are both typical and at the same time exceptional representatives of these groups. All four exhibit a specific relationship to Czech literary clichés.

But I would first like to point out several more general ideas before discussing the above-named authors and their books. What deserves special attention is the fact that the Czech writers moving to the West not only left behind a context defined by their native language, but also a country inhabited by a special kind of readers. Only two hundred years had passed since the first pioneers of the Czech national revival had set out to re-establish Czech firmly as a language of literature, science and everyday intellectual life. Retaining an extraordinary respect not only for the great, but also for the many rather mediocre Czech writers seems to be one of the most influential relics of revivalism. This has remained apparent in Czech literary life over the last few decades. In the West, Czech writers found a very different cultural milieu, where the social status of a creative artist is not that