

Life Is Elsewhere Study Guide

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Plot Summary

The poet's mother gets pregnant by a young engineer, and to her shock, the engineer wants her to have an abortion. The poet's mother refuses and instead has her parents make the engineer marry her. The mother imagines that she conceived of the poet by way of Apollo, and names him Jaromil, a name in Czech almost as exalted as Apollo. Jaromil grows up a spoiled child, not only because of his mother's family's wealth, but because he is mother-dominated. Though Jaromil is picked on, he becomes boyhood friends with the janitor's son, who helps Jaromil beat-up and torture another boy. This is a foreshadowing of the relationship between Jaromil and his friend later in life.

Jaromil's father is not in love with Maman anymore and is gone more and more from the family. When Jaromil is about 13, he becomes a student of the artist, who fills him with surrealistic ideas about art and poetry. At this time Jaromil draws pictures such as dog-people and headless women, but later Jaromil concentrates on poetry. Maman becomes involved in a sexual affair with the artist. This ends when Maman is exhausted by the artist's intellectual theories, and humiliated by his painting on her nude body. Later as he grows older, Jaromil goes through a struggle to win girls. He cannot go through with having sex with his university girlfriend. Jaromil's second girlfriend, the red-headed girl gets Jaromil to have sex with her, but later Jaromil is upset because of her obvious sexual experience. The Communists come to power in Czechoslovakia, and Jaromil readily decides to back the new revolution and its ideals of poetry. He drops his surrealist style of poetry and adopts rhyme and rhythm to his poems. Jaromil takes up the themes of the debating Communist, and the socialist worker who makes his production quota.

A big change occurs in Jaromil when the janitor's son seeks Jaromil. Jaromil finds out that the janitor's son is now a police official who interrogates and tortures prisoners. This makes Jaromil think of him as a real man. The janitor's son invites Jaromil to a police poetry night. Jaromil recites there, along with his former idol, a grey-haired poet. The two men and others get taken home to a beautiful filmmaker girl's flat, where Jaromil turns down a chance for sex with the girl. Jaromil protests virtue, but his real reason is his lousy underwear. Jaromil gets into a fight with his red-headed girlfriend who is late to meet him. She claims she was talking to her brother who wants to flee abroad. Jaromil decides to tell the police about this and both the girl and her brother are arrested. There is a chapter in the book that tells of the redhead girl meeting with her middle-aged lover after Jaromil's death. She made up the story of her brother's problems when she is late from seeing her middle-aged lover.

Jaromil is invited to a party of the filmmaker girl, and thinks he has a chance to win her. He is sick and does not realize that he is courting death as other lyrical poets did, like Lermontov. A man verbally attacks Jaromil at the party for abandoning his artist friend, and producing horrible poems. Jaromil defends himself as representing progress, and says that the man and the artist are dead. The man challenges Jaromil to a fight, and picks up Jaromil and throws him on a cold terrace. Jaromil is mortified and stays there for hours. Jaromil finally goes home, but catches pneumonia and dies.



Part I: The Poet is Born, Chaps. 1-5, pp. 1-27

Part I: The Poet is Born, Chaps. 1-5, pp. 1-27 Summary

Chapter 1- The poet's mother gets pregnant by a young engineer, and to her shock, the engineer wants her to have an abortion. The poet's mother refuses and instead has her parents make the engineer marry her. Though the engineer gets money from the parents, the mother does not forgive the engineer. The mother imagines that she is giving birth to Apollo without a father at all.

Chapter 2- When the poet is born, his mother is full of pride. The mother is glad to give her newborn son suck on her breasts. This is the new focus of the mother's love and physical attraction. The mother goes back to having sex with her engineer husband, but it is not the same as before. Now, her life is devoted to her son, Jaromil, doing things like making sure he eats.

Chapter 3- The poet begins to speak, and Maman takes note of the words and sounds he makes. Soon, the poet finds joys in little rhymes that get him lots of attention. Maman makes little drawings with Jaromil's favorite sayings. However, she improves the rhymes to make them all nice and pleasant. Jaromil is quiet about this, but he is still very happy and is propelled in the direction of becoming a poet.

Chapter 4- Jaromil is a bright student and skips to the second grade. At a dentist's office, Jaromil finds that some other adults resent his loud talk. Jaromil is spoiled and comes from a wealthy family. The chief thing that makes him irritating to his other classmates is that he is mother-dominated. Jaromil has other outlets in that he likes to play soccer with his father. His grandfather is another friend, and so is a stray dog. Soon Jaromil is drawing funny pictures of dogs acting as humans, doing things like playing soccer. His one schoolmate that is a friend is the janitor's son, another outcast. The janitor's son helps to defend Jaromil from abuse by other classmates. Later Jaromil and the janitor's son torture a boy their age who they consider to be a mama's boy.

Chapter 5- Jaromil's mother thinks of having another child. She has sex with her husband, but he avoids letting her conceive a child. There is a military mobilization and the husband is called to military duty. However, at Munich it is agreed to make Czechoslovakia surrender. Maman still resents the husband and will not have sex with him until he explains why he does not want a child. Maman goes away for a rest cure, realizing that Jaromil is all she needs.

Part I: The Poet is Born, Chaps. 1-5, pp. 1-27 Analysis

Ch. 1- The poet's mother decides that she must have been made pregnant in a romantic Prague park. At that time, the poet's mother was in a revolt against her bourgeois



parents and she becomes the lover of a young engineer. Soon, she finds out that she needs her wealthy parents to force the man to marry her. Maman is disillusioned when, even though just married she has lost the love of her husband. There is a small statue of Apollo in the poet's parent's house, but it is usually covered over by the father, symbolizing the father's dislike of poetry. Maman loves the statue and ponders if she can name her son Apollo. She knows it will be seen as absurd, and instead names the baby, Jaromil, a Czech name with similar implications as the god, Apollo.

Ch. 2, 3- Maman had tried to be intellectual when she was young and single, and taken courses in philosophy. Then she was swept off her feet in love with the young engineer. Now, she is happy to be a mother and nothing else. Without thinking about it, Maman encourages the child in the direction of poetry, writing down his random rhyming words. The mother, Maman starts to think that Jaromil is very sensitive, when he apologizes to a rock for kicking it. The poet's grandfather is against poetry, but still encourages the boy to make stupid little couplets.

Ch. 4, 5- It is easy to tell when Jaromil brags about all his Christmas presents, that his mother adores him. There is a foreshadowing of the resentment that many others later feel when confronting Jaromil. Jaromil obviously loves to get approval from others. Jaromil's friendship with the janitor's son has ominous aspects, as they torture a weak and spoiled boy for no reason but that it amuses them. Later, as young adults they will collaborate in the arrest and torture of others. Meanwhile, Maman is not allowed by her husband to again have a child. She cries and feels that she is not loved. The mother is distracted by the war threat that Czechoslovakia faces, and feels closer to her husband. This feeling soon dissipates as the country is sold out by the great powers at Munich.

Part I: Chaps. 6-11, pp. 27- 62

Part I: Chaps. 6-11, pp. 27- 62 Summary

Chapter 6- Jaromil goes with his mother and another lady to a rest resort near a lake. Jaromil gazes out the window and stares at a man with a dog. The mother also asks about this man and finds out that he is an art teacher at Jaromil's school. The Artist joins Maman, Jaromil and the other lady, and looks over Jaromil's drawings with the dog heads, and finds them interesting. Back at home, Maman goes for long walks with Jaromil and has vague feelings that Jaromil is her ideal male companion.

Chapter 7- Jaromil is in high school and having more problems. His mother decides to bring Jaromil to the artist's studio for lessons. In a later lesson, Jaromil gets the Artist's approval by showing the artist his secret notebook with sketches of female nudes. Some sketches involve tortured woman and all are headless. Jaromil often inserts a picture with the head of a girl at school. The artist shows Jaromil a book of surreal pictures and also tries to help Jaromil to draw better.

Chapter 8- Maman sees Jaromil looking up the maid's, and Maman is also nervous about Jaromil's nude sketches. She decides to go and see the artist to complain. The artist quickly brushes her complaints aside and takes over the conversation. He shows Maman an abstract painting and turns towards her, kissing her. Much to Maman's shock, the Artist carries her to bed and has sex with her. The doorbell rings, and it is Jaromil coming for his lesson. The Artist has Jaromil come into the front room, concealing Maman in the studio. The Artist has Jaromil paint an imaginary scene, and speaks of using the imagination even if it involves a boy and a woman visiting an artist. Jaromil gets the hint and knows that there is some woman in the other room. The boy feels the Artist's happy mood and is also happy. Jaromil leaves, while the Artist goes back to making love to Maman.

Chapter 9- Maman is still off-balance about her new love affair. She is embarrassed how her belly has grown over the years. The artist tells Maman about his thoughts and about painting, so Maman is reassured that it is not only a physical affair, but then she becomes nervous about understanding art. The Artist gives Maman books to read about art and poetry, which she barely can understand. When the Artist gives more books to Jaromil, Jaromil is much better at reading them, and Maman feels more inadequate. One day the Artist begins to photograph her. The Artist toys with Maman, paints her face, takes pictures of her, and finally makes love to her. At the next visit, the Artist paints Maman's breast, but Maman refuses to totally undress. Finally the artist strips Maman, and she feels terrible with her large belly exposed to him. That day she comes home in a state of nervous breakdown.

Chapter 10- There is a crackdown, after Czech partisans assassinate the Nazi Governor of Bohemia. There are mass arrests, and the servant Magda's fiancé is arrested and executed. Magda is an object of pity as she eats with Jaromil's family and

sometimes breaks into tears. At the same time, Maman slowly recovers and decides she cannot see the artist anymore. Maman refuses to confess what really happened to her and instead writes a letter to the artist that she is afraid to disgrace the family and Jaromil.

Jaromil becomes obsessed by the sad Magda, and one night plans to watch her through a keyhole as she takes her bath. He sees her naked briefly, but then is heard and told to stay away. This event inspires Jaromil to begin writing a poem. The poem refers to Jaromil's excursion in peeping in on the naked Magda, but using metaphors so the reference is concealed. Chapter 11- Maman is sad that her affair is over, and her husband is seldom around. Jaromil barely misses his father, and shows his new poems to Maman. Maman finds the poems remind her of the artist and says they are beautiful. She hugs Jaromil and softly weeps, and assures Jaromil that he will be a poet.

Part I: Chaps. 6-11, pp. 27- 62 Analysis

Ch. 6- Jaromil likes being with adults, but is careful not to boast and show off too much. He is somewhat wary of shooting off his mouth when he is with his mother and the ladies. Meeting the artist is a pleasant change of pace both for Maman and Jaromil. The artist likes Jaromil's drawings, and Jaromil is very pleased that his random idea of putting dog-heads on people has found approval. Jaromil is satisfied that his thoughts are important and that he has natural talent.

Ch. 7- Maman gets the artist to give Jaromil's lesson. Is she interested in the artist or just in helping Jaromil? The artist is not particularly impressed with Jaromil's current work, but Jaromil still enjoys the lesson. Jaromil's nudes impress the artist, however the artist's explanation for the women being headless is all wrong and absurd. In this way, the author shows the defect of the arbitrary method of thinking of the surrealist artist.

Ch. 8- The Artist quickly rejects Maman's criticism of Jaromil drawing nudes. The Artist recalls that Jaromil used to draw people with dog-heads, and now draws women that are headless, and faceless, as people are in war. War is supposed to promote facelessness as the fighting arbitrarily kills people. Then, the Artist takes Maman as his lover, totally overturning her neat little world. Ch. 9- The books that the artist gives to Maman to read are mostly incomprehensible to Maman, making her feel a failure. The Artist gives Jaromil books to take home, and mother has an excuse to read them, to monitor Jaromil's activities. The Artist wants Maman to be free and spontaneous with him, but for Maman this is hard work. Jaromil imagines being drawn into the semi-secret world of modern art. Maman discusses the books with Jaromil, and is irritated with the arbitrary poetry that connects random objects. Ch 9- Maman asks the Artist why he loves her, and the artist answers with arbitrary reasons. Actually, the Artist is deliberately driving Maman crazy, seeing how much she can take. He justifies this by his need to take art to extremes.

Ch. 10, 11- Magda is the family servant, and she mourns when the Gestapo kills her fiancé. Jaromil in a perverse way, turns her into a target of his erotic fantasies, precisely



because she is weakened by this sadness. He peeps at her, but does not achieve all the pleasures that he wants in this. Jaromil is sad that his chance to stare at the naked Magda has been stopped so abruptly. He retreats to the artist's books about art and poetry and philosophy. He reads a poem about a woman and water and identifies the subject as Magda in the bath. Jaromil is inspired to write his own poetry from this point on.

Part 2: Xavier, pp. 65-89

Part 2: Xavier, pp. 65-89 Summary

Chap. 1- Xavier is a character made up by Jaromil, and sort of an alter-ego. It is after the war and Xavier is wondering what is inside a window in a house by the Charles Bridge. Xavier sees a woman there and jumps on the ledge. Chap. 2- Xavier's briefcase is in the room and he follows it, when the woman sees him. Xavier explains that he has to get the briefcase, and somehow the woman is not afraid of him. Xavier jumps down, talking about his classes and then touches the woman. The woman warns Xavier that her husband is coming, and he hides under the bed.

Chap. 3- Xavier imagines that he is rescuing the woman from danger. Then he hears the man enter the room, and sees his black boots from under the bed. Though the woman says no, it sounds like the man and the woman go to bed and make love. Then, Xavier sneezes. The man hears and gets up, and looking around sees the briefcase. The man decides to look in the big wooden clothes wardrobe. At that point, Xavier comes out, pushes the man into the wardrobe, and locks the key on it. Chap. 4- The man is trapped in the wardrobe closet, and Xavier embraces the woman who only wears a slip. The woman does not know what to do, and Xavier tells her they can go away together. The woman caresses Xavier's face, and Xavier lies down and goes to sleep.

Chap. 5- Xavier sleeps and passes into another existence in his dreams. Xavier sees a man in a train and jumps on. Chap. 6- Xavier is on a train with his classmates on a school trip. Xavier sees a blonde girl that he desires, and walks past. He sees a woman teacher and a male student embracing in the bathroom. He goes out and sees the blonde girl again, sees the couple again and drifts off in thoughts. Chap. 7- Xavier leaves the train with his classmates and he is at a ski resort. He glances at the blonde girl and then goes to a dance hall, where Xavier starts to dance with a woman. Soon, the blonde girl comes in and sees Xavier dancing with the woman. Chap. 8- Xavier feels that he is putting on a show for the blonde girl who is now sad. He embraces the woman he is with, and goes with her to her room. Xavier starts to undress the woman, but then goes off into a dream again.

Chap. 9- Now, Xavier is living his life at the Charles Bridge and in the woman's room at the same time. Then he drifts off into another dream, knocking at a basement door. Chap. 10- Xavier is brought through a long passageway, and into a room full of men in a secret conspiracy. They ask him for the preparation list, but it is in his notebook in the room by the Charles Bridge. The men are mad at Xavier and fear that he has betrayed them to the enemy. Then, suddenly there is a signal that the men have been spotted. Xavier leads the way out, and shows that he still has courage. Chap. 11- Xavier is quickly leading the men over rooftops, while gunfire is heard far away. Then he hears the notes of a band playing a sloppy version of Chopin's funeral march. Despite his best effort, Xavier slips off again into a dream.



Chap. 12- Xavier gets up, dressed from sleeping on a bed. He is in a room, and jumps out of a low window, into a crowd at a funeral. He takes part in the funeral, putting dirt on the casket. The blonde girl has died after she froze in her pursuit of Xavier. Only Xavier knows why the girl died, as he consoles the girl's parents. Then, Xavier feels as if the dead girl accepts his gesture towards her. Chap. 13- The dreams mix, of the girl, the woman, the other woman all touching Xavier. Chap. 14- A woman wakes up Xavier from his bed, and he remembers the woman's husband is locked in the wardrobe closet. There is shooting in the distance, the woman says that the revolution is executing people. Xavier is not worried because he has the list of people to be executed in his briefcase. Then he realizes he cannot join the revolution again because he is regarded as a traitor. Xavier looks to the window, and tells the woman he must go, and leave her behind. Despite her need of him, Xavier breaks free and flees.

Part 2: Xavier, pp. 65-89 Analysis

Ch. 1- Xavier is the imaginary superhero that Jaromil envies, but cannot be. In a way, Xavier is an alter-ego for Jaromil, and also Xavier is the subject of a poem that Jaromil thinks about, but never writes down. Xavier is not shy of women, and can literally jump into a window to approach a woman. Ch. 2- The briefcase is metaphorically the source of Xavier's power. It is his writings and school notes, and possibly his poetry. Ch. 3, 4- Xavier has the power to take a rival, the woman's husband, and throw him into a locked closet, a kind of dungeon. Xavier is also deceitful and an escapist. Instead of making love to the woman, he sleeps and disappears into another dream.

Ch. 5, 6, 7, 8- Xavier now confronts Jaromil's schoolmates. Unlike in reality, Jaromil is able to subject the blonde girl to his arbitrary whims. He abandons her for another woman on purpose, in order to torture her. This foreshadows Jaromil's treatment of his redhead girlfriend, and his turning her over to the police, along with her brother.

Chap. 9, 10, 11- In another dream, Xavier fails to prepare to lead the resistance. There is a funeral march that is nominally for the blonde girl in the dream, but seems could be for Jaromil's father. Jaromil's father is still alive, but is in the resistance to the Nazis.

Chap. 12, 13, 14- Xavier is arbitrary, first favoring one woman, then the other. This is like Jaromil's lusting after the film-girl after abandoning his chance to seduce her. All of Jaromil's protesting that he is faithful to the redhead girl is self-serving lies. Jaromil, like Xavier, tails after the revolution, but whether the revolution needs Jaromil or Xavier is a different question. When confronted with opposition, and stress, Xavier and Jaromil both flee from reality.



Part 3: The Poet Masturbates, Chaps. 1-14, pp.93-114

Part 3: The Poet Masturbates, Chaps. 1-14, pp.93-114 Summary

Chap. 1- Jaromil's father is arrested by the Nazi Gestapo, and later it is learned that he dies in a concentration camp. After the war, Maman is out of money and has to get a job, while the lower floor of her villa is taken over by her sister.

Chap. 2- Maman looks in the mirror at her still pretty face. She does not know how her husband, the resistance fighter died.

Chap. 3- Jaromil now has reproductions of cubist paintings on his wall. He has fine features like his mother and still looks very young.

Chap. 4- Jaromil is nervous about his manhood. This is a common problem with lyric poets. He looks at women in the street but is afraid that they will look back.

Chap. 5- Jaromil not only writes poetry, but also writes about poetry. Jaromil feels very special to be a poet and to get the approval of the artist, who he still occasionally visits, for his poetry. Jaromil does not understand the source of his poetic power, and feels like he has been elected to an almost magical role.

Chap. 6- Jaromil is lonely and jealous of his relatives downstairs, who often have parties. Jaromil dates girls only once in a while. Jaromil uses lines from his poems, but made into prose, to compliment girls.

Chap. 7- Maman takes down the picture of her late husband, after finding out about his love affair with a Jewish girl during the war. That is what led to his arrest.

Chap. 8- Jaromil writes poems about death, or sometimes about the death of girls. He dreams of magical deaths where lovers are united and then die.

Chap. 9- Maman now yearns for her artist-lover. She follows him around and the artist invites her up for wine, but is no longer interested in touching her.

Chap. 10- Jaromil huddles up to a female classmate, when the other students leave class. The others lock them in the room. Jaromil wants to kiss the girl but instead has her smear his face with lipstick, looking like he was kissed.

Chap. 11- Maman is thinking of taking a new lover, a man she knows from work. She talks to Jaromil about such a situation, and he says that war widows cannot betray their heroic husbands. Maman then refuses the man.



Chap. 12- Jaromil goes for a walk in the park, with a girl who likes him. She leans on his shoulder and he becomes sexually aroused. This fills him with immense embarrassment.

Chap. 13- Jaromil knows little about a woman's anatomy. He has poems talking about a girl's clock and other terms, referring to her sexual organs. He is in an artificial childhood, not quite adult yet.

Chap. 14- Maman thinks that despite the fact she cannot have an affair, still Jaromil gives to her much more than he takes. She resents his adolescence because he is somewhat distant from her psychologically.

Part 3: The Poet Masturbates, Chaps. 1-14, pp.93-114

Analysis

Ch. 1, 2, 3- There are a lot of changes in Jaromil's and Maman's life. Jaromil's father disappears and dies in a concentration camp. Maman must go back to work. She dreams of finding another man, but fears that Jaromil will disapprove. Grandma is becoming old and forgetful. Jaromil hopes to attract women, but looks and feels very young.

Chap. 4, 5, 6- The author looks at Jaromil as compared to famous young lyric poets, who often were also mother-dominated. Jaromil wants to get the Artist's approval, but is confused about what the Artist likes. A masterpiece by Jaromil, in his eyes, is ignored, while something done quickly is lavishly praised. Jaromil envies his male cousin downstairs, who has lots of girlfriends. Jaromil's dates involve him memorizing lines and he is more like an actor than a young man enjoying himself on a date.

Chap. 7, 8, 9- Maman is forced to reinterpret her life after finding out about her late husband's affair with a Jewish girl. Maman visits the Artist, hoping that something sexual will happen, but the Artist does not touch her at all. She feels that she has sacrificed her whole life for the good of Jaromil. Jaromil has fantasies in his poems and love and death. This is actually a common theme in romantic music and poetry, for example in the operas of Richard Wagner.

Ch. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14- Jaromil's fantasies about love and the opposite sex are even more elaborate than his fantasies about death. In real life, he has to pretend that the female student kisses him all over, with her connivance. Jaromil foolishly discourages Maman from taking a lover. If Maman is busy with a lover, Jaromil would have more time to fool around. Instead, much to his disadvantage, Jaromil forbids Maman to take a lover. This backfires against Jaromil in a very bad way when he finally gets a girlfriend. Jaromil's poems speak of two haystacks like female breasts. This echoes a common romantic theme of the earth as feminine, or blood and soil.

Part 3: Chaps. 15-28, pp.114-158

Part 3: Chaps. 15-28, pp.114-158 Summary

Chap. 15- Jaromil is at the home of a dark-haired man, and in a debate with Marxist students. He argues in the artist's voice, but against surrealist art, and for a socialist type of art. A girl is attracted to Jaromil and offers to leave with him.

Chap. 16- Jaromil and the girl go for a walk in the park. Soon after they kiss and they are even stopped by a policeman, and asked for their identification.

Chap. 17- Maman is worried sick because Jaromil is home so late. He talks to her in the accents of the artist, her old lover.

Chap. 18- Jaromil's alter-ego, Xavier never has such problems, since Xavier's parents do not exist.

Chap. 19- Jaromil and the girl get together every day. They go to the park again, and the theater and movies, and do a lot of kissing. After this, the girl invites Jaromil to her house in the near future, and he is not quite ready to handle this opportunity to have sex with her. That night they walk too much in the cold, and Jaromil comes home with a fever.

Chap. 20- Jaromil is sick but is also anticipating his first sex act. He is afraid, and also realizes that he must get a condom or a so-called amorous sock. Jaromil is so nervous about what sex will be like, he decides to masturbate, which is new to him. As Jaromil recovers, he hears that the Communist Premier Gottwald is dumping the non-communist, and taking over. Jaromil's uncle curses the revolution, remarking that it is backed by the army and the so-called big country. Jaromil makes a speech backing the revolution and his uncle slaps him, and then runs away. When Maman comes home from her office, she is nervous and afraid that people will be arrested. Jaromil tells her to calm down, and says he will join the Communist party. This upsets Maman, and soon Jaromil backs down.

Chap. 21- Jaromil and his girlfriend are in her apartment. They talk a long time, until Jaromil eases the girl down on to a couch. They embrace, but Jaromil is too nervous to get undressed and put on his condom. The girl insists on keeping the light on. Jaromil undresses her, but is so nervous that he cannot continue. Instead the two again talk, the girl sitting down naked. The girl asks if he likes her naked, and decides that Jaromil is nice, though she is somewhat puzzled that nothing more happens.

Chap. 22- Jaromil writes a poem about time. He feels time slipping by, and old age approaching. A man and a woman are together and lovers, but feel wretched and weak in the face of time. Jaromil shows the poem first to Maman and then to his girlfriend. The narrator describes the poem as a flight from the sensuality of youth. It represents Jaromil's fear of the girl's nude body. The poem is also about an artificial, poetic death.



Chap. 23- Jaromil and the girl are in Jaromil's room, with Maman and grandma away in the country. They both undress, but Jaromil gets in his pajamas, and is nervously under the covers. At first he is excited, but then his nerves overwhelm him when he has to try to put on the condom. He and the girl thrash about, but Jaromil is no longer sexually excited. In the morning, the girl accuses Jaromil soon of loving someone else. Jaromil admits this is true, but not really true, and uses it as an excuse.

Chap. 24- Jaromil is still seeing the girl, but it is becoming a strain. He shows her his poems, but gets no applause. He spends time again preparing his conversations. The girl chatters, but becomes sad. They walk in the park and again Jaromil becomes excited, but now the girl does not want to embrace anymore.

Chap. 25- Jaromil decides to visit the artist, and is let into the studio, where there are also several men and women. The artist praises Jaromil's poems, and Jaromil is likened to the young poet Rimbaud. The discussion switches to the topic that now it is difficult to get surrealistic poems published. This is now the era of poems about worker-heroes. Jaromil becomes depressed but a woman draws him into the conversation. Jaromil wants to be nasty and starts to argue that surrealism must be discarded in favor of the revolution. Jaromil agrees that the revolution can trash modern art, though in the tone of voice that the studio artist himself had taught Jaromil. Jaromil even denounces his own poems and a terrible feeling fills the room.

Chap. 26- Maman reads Jaromil's cryptic poems. Then she reads his diary and thinks that she sees the day that Jaromil has his first sex with a woman. Maman notices that her perfume bottle has been tampered with. She is disturbed until she notices that Jaromil is becoming melancholy.

Chap. 27- Jaromil is graduating from school. He finds out that his girl is involved with another boy. Soon the girl leaves town that summer, and she does not answer his letter. Jaromil masturbates in rage and loneliness. Jaromil cuts off phone receivers to mail to the poet who ignored his poems offered for publication. He sees and visits his old friend, the janitor's son, who is now married and a father. The janitor's son is now with the police. The janitor alludes to police action against the dark-haired man, a Jew, who had the meetings of Marxist students. Jaromil decides he wants to get involved with politics.

Chap. 28- Maman gets Jaromil to go out with her and three other ladies to a lake to enjoy the warm weather. The ladies try to get Jaromil to change into swimming trunks, but instead he runs away.

Part 3: Chaps. 15-28, pp.114-158 Analysis

Ch. 15-19- Jaromil attends this Marxist discussion group, with many results in the novel. The dark-haired man shows up later as the so-called dark-haired Jew that is arrested according to the Janitor's Son. Jaromil meets his first steady girlfriend here. Much to Jaromil's surprise, his loud mouth attracts the attention of a female University Student, who soon kisses him in a park. Now, he finds that he is not quite ready to receive his



good fortune. The girl is two years older than him, which makes Jaromil feel good. After walking in circles, discussing philosophy, Jaromil puts his arm around her. Soon Jaromil sees that she does not stop him from touching her anywhere. At this time, Maman is upset in how Jaromil's theoretical talking about socialism and poetry reminds her of the speeches of her former lover, the artist. She cannot take being reminded of who former lover and storms out of the room, away from Jaromil. Jaromil is getting close to making love to the University Student, but then he gets sick. This episode of Jaromil getting cold and sick in the midst of his attraction to a woman is a foreshadowing that getting close to a new woman is dangerous for Jaromil. He could get sick and even die in such an episode, the reader is warned.

Chap. 20, 21- This episode is somewhat problematic. A young man masturbating is hardly a unique or noteworthy event. For Jaromil, it is an acknowledgment that sooner or later he is going to have sex with a women. Then, the Communist revolution breaks out. This is a very interesting episode for a Western reader, since the book is written by a native Czech. The takeover by the communist is backed by the Soviet Union and the army, but to the people at the time, it seems like a genuine people's revolution. Jaromil is happy about the Communist revolution, but it does not make him sexually potent. In a funny episode, Jaromil cannot perform sexually, although he gets the University Student to strip totally naked. Still, the relationship is far from over.

Ch. 22, 23- In his poems, Jaromil talks of old and impotent couples who are ready to die. It just seems too complicated for Jaromil to have sex with the University Student. Her chatter, or perhaps her being overweight adds up to an inability to perform. Jaromil is more excited about making up a story of a rival lover to the girl, than about the girl herself.

Ch. 24, 25- Jaromil's relationship with the University Student winds down and peters out. Jaromil sees the Artist again but gets into an argument, since Jaromil cannot see surrealist poems being published anymore. Now in their country is the time for socialist poems about workers and Communist debaters. Jaromil leaves the Artist's studio, never to return again. This is an important point of no return in the book. From now on, Jaromil seeks to win fame as a poet of socialism and the current regime.

Ch. 26, 27- Soon after breaking with the Artist, Jaromil meets his childhood friend, the Janitor's Son, who is now with the police. Jaromil wants to get involve with politics, and become a real man like the Janitor's Son. Yet, Jaromil still is running away from women, even the old lady friends of Maman.

Part 4: The Poet on the Run, pp. 161-181

Part 4: The Poet on the Run, pp. 161-181 Summary

Chap. 1- The narrator introduces the poet Rimbaud, who is described as running from his family.

Chap. 2- Like Rimbaud and Lermontov, the poet Jaromil is running from his family, and running towards a battle, in this case a political battle.

Chap. 3- Revolution is great for youth who have nothing to lose. Czech youth have a role in the communist revolution, in monitoring and controlling their professors.

Chap. 4- Jaromil is reporting on professors to the political Council. He still feels childish, being sharply questioned on his reports.

Chap. 5- Jaromil is doing errands at the market for his mother. He falls in love with a young woman in a cashier's cage.

Chap. 6- Jaromil is taking his exams and nervous about getting good grades. He is writing a poem in the proper worker-revolutionary manner.

Chap. 7- Jaromil follows the dark-haired cashier girl, who always leaves with a thin redhead. They disappear into an apartment building.

Chap. 8- There is a vision of the revolutionary poet Wolker reciting his poem to his mother.

Chap. 9- Like another poet, Jaromil feels trapped and alone. He longs for big, revolutionary crowds.

Chap. 10- Jaromil is on the run from being a poet, instead putting up a picture of his father in a military uniform.

Chap. 11- There is a presentation of new poetry in an auditorium. There is a poem about a worker who wins his girl back by speeding up his production.

Chap. 12- A sixty-year old male poet talks about the power of youth and poetry. It is the poet to whom Jaromil sent the cut-off phone receivers.

Chap. 13- The narrator describes the poet Rimbaud trying to get published. The old man-poet reads a poem about the war, and the proud Soviets.

Chap. 14- The old poet is applauded, but then denounced for linking socialism with the old, out-of-style surrealism, including by Jaromil.



Chap. 15- The old poet defends himself. He demands the freedom to still talk about sensuality and love. The narrator compares this to the students in 1968 Paris demanding the so-called impossible.

Chap. 16- Jaromil is in a classroom writing May Day placards. It is like the 1968 student revolution in Paris, but this is in Prague during the Communist revolution.

Chap. 17- Jaromil's wild slogans are changed to a slogan supporting the so-called socialist family.

Chap. 18- A slogan seen is life elsewhere. That is also used in 1968 Paris.

Chap. 19- In 1949, the Czech students are making the revolution a reality, with Jaromil marching alongside them.

Chap. 20- Percy Shelly is not able to make a revolution in Ireland. Jaromil marches with the revolution, but he wants to liberate his beloved girl from the cashier's cage.

Chap. 21- Jaromil stares at a large man with a beautiful and chic girl. It is the old poet again.

Chap. 22- It is getting dark and Jaromil walks to the apartment building of the cashier girl. Instead he sees her redhead friend. She sees Jaromil and he runs away.

Chap. 23- Jaromil goes to see his cashier girl, but instead the redhead comes out of the store alone. She invites Jaromil home and they make love.

Chap. 24- Jaromil is amazed that he is beside the naked girl, and proud of his accomplishment. Jaromil realizes that the redhead is quite attractive, and claims he was always waiting for her.

Chap. 25- Jaromil feels he has been running a long time, like the poets Rimbaud and Shelly. He rests after making love with the redhead girl again.

Part 4: The Poet on the Run, pp. 161-181 Analysis

Ch 1, 2, 3- The Communist revolution is exciting for youth like Jaromil. They run around mouthing slogans, and monitor their professors, who are subject to the power of the communist students like Jaromil. Jaromil senses that by backing the revolution and assimilating its ideas about art and poetry, he can win success as a poet. The upcoming battle is to make a Communist revolution in Czechoslovakia. With the army and police under the control of the nearby big country, the Soviet Union, the conclusion is known in advance. Still the rallies and slogans are exciting for Jaromil.

Ch. 4-7- Jaromil likes taking notes on his professors and informing on them. Still he feels childish, because he has to please the young man in charge. Meanwhile, Jaromil has fantasies about a dark-haired girl who is a cashier. He never speaks to this girl,

other than to make purchases there for his mother. Jaromil does his best to conform to the new society that is forming, but makes no progress in his romantic desires.

Chap. 8-12- Jaromil feels isolated and unloved, despite his mother's care. The narrator compares Jaromil to other young poets who also are trapped and unable to advance for long periods of time. When Jaromil takes down the cubist paintings and instead puts up a picture of his father, it is symbolic that he is orienting more towards the real world. In this case, the real world is the socialistic revolutionary world, not the abstract cubist world of the teacher-artist, his mother's former lover. Jaromil loses interest in his own poetry, and is more interested in mouthing revolutionary slogans. He challenges the silver-haired poet in an arrogant manner. This usual pattern of youth challenges their elders. It happens again in the future, in 1968 during the student protests in Paris, France.

Ch. 13, - 20- In the excitement of marches for communist agitation, Jaromil abandons his poetry and concentrates on agitation propaganda. This foreshadows his total shift to being a tool of the new regime. Despite his desire to be totally in-sync with the new trends, he cannot get anyone to publish his poems.

Ch. 21-25- Jaromil is in a daze, walking around the town and returns to his old haunts like the market and the apartment building where the dark-haired girl lives. He sees only the redheaded friend of hers, and runs away. The next day at the market, the redhead mentions seeing him outside her apartment and talks a lot, inviting him to her apartment. Jaromil keeps with the game that he always liked the redhead, avoiding the fact that he really was after her prettier friend. Soon they are inside having sex, but Jaromil is bewildered since it seems like an accident. The woman strokes Jaromil's genitals, which makes it easy for him to make love to her. Later, this gesture will be remembered by Jaromil when he suspects that the redhead is far more sexually experienced than she admits.



Part 5: The Poet is Jealous, Chaps. 1-3, pp. 185-204

Part 5: The Poet is Jealous, Chaps. 1-3, pp. 185-204 Summary

Chap. 1- Jaromil's uncle is jailed as a class enemy, and the first floor of the villa is occupied by another family. Maman is upset that Jaromil is studying politics. She goes into his locked desk drawer and sees his new poems that rhyme and are more down-to-earth. Maman weeps when Jaromil returns to the house, and he reassures her that he is still close to her. Maman is happy that the girl sounds young, inexperienced, and uneducated, thus not a rival to her influence. Jaromil tries to get permission to bring the girl to his room, but Maman refuses, though this would give her more independence too. Jaromil shows her his new poems, and Maman becomes happy again.

Chap. 2- Jaromil tries to write a poem for the redhead girl that is simple and that rhymes. The revolution also needs poems that have form and rhyme, to give magic and power to the content in them. Jaromil writes about a mythical river that connects the Czechs to the Soviet Union, and about the striking workers in Marseilles, France. He writes about a communist who debates, and who also loves a woman on a tractor. Jaromil sends his poems to the newspaper, and finally one of them is published. Jaromil shows the poem to the redhead, and tells her, to her pleasure, that she has inspired him to write poems again. Jaromil tells the girl about his dream poem about Xavier, who goes to a woman he sees in a window. The girl then nicknames Jaromil, calling him Xavy.

Chap. 3- The girl jokes about being examined by a doctor, and Jaromil becomes excited and has sex with her. Then Jaromil goes into questioning the girl, saying he does not want her touched by a doctor, getting more and more jealous. He threatens to strangle the girl, and then has sex with her quite roughly, even biting her. The girl swears she made it up, and that no doctor has examined her. Jaromil gets mad again when the girl admits she had another lover. She protests that an older man in her village had control over her, and forced her to have sex. She begs his forgiveness, saying that he is her Xavy. He came through the window, and locked the bad man in a closet, so he starved to death.

Part 5: The Poet is Jealous, Chaps. 1-3, pp. 185-204 Analysis

Ch 1- Jaromil is happier now that he has the redhead as his girl, and drinks a bottle of wine with Maman. It takes some time for Jaromil to adjust to his new situation and return to his usual pattern of resentment and rage. In his new poetry, Jaromil sticks

closely to socialist ideals. He is obviously seeking approval from the new authorities, symbolizing his lack of independence. The ideal of the time is the young communist who is always debating and advocating socialist methods and solutions. Jaromil reaches the high point of his pleasure when he is first published in the newspaper, and shows the redheaded girl.

Ch 3- Jaromil complains about the girl undressing herself, in violation of his literary ideal of love affairs. This relates to the other set of controlling ideas of Jaromil. He wants to be a socialist poet, but is still attracted to the stories and legends of poets such as Rimbaud and Lermontov. Though not fully explained, the author hints that Jaromil believes in a certain poetical way of having affairs and making love. What if she needs to be checked for cancer? Jaromil goes into a ridiculous, jealous fit, which is obviously absurd to the reader. It is a foreshadowing of the ridiculous length Jaromil goes to have the girl reassure him of her love. Jaromil senses that the girl may even have other lovers, and that somehow she is untrue to him.

Part 5: Chaps. 4-6, pp. 204-225

Part 5: Chaps. 4-6, pp. 204-225 Summary

Chap. 4- Jaromil takes the redhead girl to see his mother. Maman likes to say that her son is getting married, since the tenants downstairs are trying to seize part of her second floor as well. The girl has dinner at the house, and upsets Maman with her awkward manners. Maman makes belittling remarks about the girl, saying that maybe she is sexually abused by her manager. Maman admits that her jealousy of the girl is wrong. Jaromil again questions the girl's morals and her devotion to him.

Jaromil is nervous, even when a classmate reports seeing him with the girl, and tries to avoid being seen in public with her too much. The redhead wonders what Jaromil sees in her, which is not helped when Jaromil writes a poem saying how plain she is. Jaromil's jealousy again erupts, with his being jealous of the girl's brother and her thoughts about her family.

Chapter 5- Poems by rhyming and being lyrical can be truthful, though with the opposite meanings. Aquatic love may sound mysterious, but really refers to Jaromil's peeping on the maid, Magda. Jaromil has several more poems published, but still wants more recognition. Other young poets like Victor Hugo and Jiri Orten also were obsessed with getting recognized as poets. Jaromil goes to beg to an editor to get published, but gets told loudly that there is a huge backlog of manuscripts there. Jaromil's breakthrough is when the janitor's son comes to see him and mentions Jaromil's poems. Jaromil goes to police headquarters and is shown around by the janitor's son. Jaromil sees that his poem is posted on the wall. Jaromil is told, to little effect, that the dark-haired man, the Marxist Jew has been locked up and interrogated. They have a beer and Jaromil is shocked that the janitor's son has memorized the poem on the wall. Jaromil is invited to recite his poetry at a special event, the policemen's night of poetry.

Chap. 6- Jaromil is drinking beer with the janitor's son. The narrator refers to the dreams of mistresses that the poet Rimbaud had. Jaromil still feels vaguely betrayed by the redhead girl who is having her brother stay at her room for a week. Maman is forced by Jaromil to let the girl come to her home. The first time together there, the couple are not able to have sex. One night Maman goes wild, and claims that the young lady must be sick because she is moaning. Mother finally is let in, gives the girl some medicine, and finally leaves the room.

Part 5: Chaps. 4-6, pp. 204-225 Analysis

Ch 4- Maman is a bit shocked that the redhead is the salesgirl that she knows from the local market, but manages to calm down. Maman had thought that she wanted a simple girl to be Jaromil's lover, but now is attacked by her own jealousy of the girl. Then Jaromil thinks about how easy it was to have sex with the girl, and how she grabbed his

crouch to encourage him. Now, he wonders if this is the gesture of a wanton woman. This foreshadows the knowledge that the reader gains that indeed, the redhead has another lover. Jaromil has a way of torturing a girl, even with his poems. He admits that she is not very attractive, but exclaims that he loves her anyway. Jaromil writes a poem about the girl along the same lines, which disturbs her. Jaromil becomes nervous about the girl's chatter about her country family, her father and her brother, Jan. Jaromil becomes jealous of the brother, and thinks of writing a socialist poem about death. Perhaps, he wants to write on how the socialist republic requires his death, or that he is unworthy to live.

Ch 5- In this strange episode, Jaromil receives his reward for being a total toady and sycophant of the socialist regime. His old friend, the janitor's son is now a police official and also a fan of Jaromil's poetry. Jaromil has no desire to defend the dark-haired man who once ran a Marxist discussion group, where Jaromil spoke and met a girl. It is quite comical that Jaromil receives his boost into the limelight as a poet from the violent and arbitrary police. Jaromil agrees that it is necessary to be cruel to defend the revolution, and the men go and have a beer. Obviously, Jaromil is only thinking of getting ahead and receiving homage as a poet.

Ch. 6- Jaromil is still immature and yearns for a real life, like the policeman has. Maman has always gone along with Jaromil, but as usual, wants to maintain control of him. Now, she has to allow Jaromil to take the redhead to her flat, in his room. Maman stays out late most night, but finally comes home early one night and hears lovemaking noises. Here, Maman acts out on her side of the oedipal fantasy, acting against her rival for Jaromil. This somewhat repulsive scene is a partial explanation of Jaromil's burning desires for approval not involving his mother, including approval as a poet.

Part 5: Chaps. 7-8, pp. 225-242

Part 5: Chaps. 7-8, pp. 225-242 Summary

Chapter 7- Jaromil is on the bus to the policeman's poetry night. He recognizes the silver-haired male poet who had once recited at Jaromil's school, and now even compliments Jaromil's poems. At the police complex auditorium, there is also a beautiful young woman who is a film student, filming the event. Jaromil is overjoyed that he will say his poems in public. The janitor's son notes that none of the poems deal directly with the police force. A lady asks for a poem about love. Jaromil talks about the quality of genuine love under socialism. A controversy ensues if this point is valid. Finally, an old man with a wooden leg asks that the bus stop in front of the center is restored to its former location. At this point the meeting breaks up.

Chapter 8- The men on the bus back to Prague try to get the attention of the beautiful filmmaker-girl. The woman ends up taking Jaromil, the silver-haired poet and a male editor back to her place. The silver-haired man flatters the woman, while the editor praises Jaromil. Meanwhile, Jaromil and the woman are gazing at each other. It seems that Jaromil is destined to stay the night with the woman, but he cannot because he is embarrassed by his underwear.

Part 5: Chaps. 7-8, pp. 225-242 Analysis

Ch. 7- Eleven poets recite, and then there is a voluntary chat session that most of the policemen leave to go to a dance. Obviously, most of the police have better things to do than listen to ideological poetry and discussion. The questions and answer session shows the routineness and artificialness of the event, including the usual obvious questions. Standard questions are asked such as when the poets started to write, and about socialist realism. When the man with the wooden leg intervenes it is obvious that everyone is bored, and his usual complaint is not welcomed but is tolerated. This man has seen the police center building confiscated repeatedly, and change owners. Apparently this man makes this objection frequently.

Ch. 8- Jaromil realizes that he is wearing his ugly regular underwear and not the nice colorful sports briefs that men like to wear when he takes his clothes off in front of a woman. Again Jaromil cheats himself out of a love affair, though by now he is sexually experienced. Jaromil says he must leave, though the old poet whispers that Jaromil is missing out on a great pleasure. Jaromil claims he is being faithful and moral, but he is not. If he is faithful to anyone, it is to his mother, who chooses his clothes every day. Jaromil walks with the old poet and claims that he cannot be unfaithful to the redheaded girl. Jaromil goes home in a rage state against his mother, who had him wear the ugly underwear.

Part 5: Chaps. 9-11, pp. 242-266

Part 5: Chaps. 9-11, pp. 242-266 Summary

Chap. 9- Jaromil nags the redhead in various ways about her brother and her family. She retorts that his mother dared to spy on their lovemaking. Then on a walk with the redhead, Jaromil is shocked to see his mother and the filmmaker walking together. Jaromil finds out at home that the filmmaker approached his mother to make a film about Jaromil. Over the next few days, the film-girl and Maman set up the film, which requires only short appearances by Jaromil.

Jaromil is upset by the closeness between his mother and the film-girl. He thinks that he better wear his sports-underwear that looks nice, but the filmmaker appears to ignore Jaromil. Jaromil has the idea that the filmmaker is doing the film to give him another chance to approach her. Still ignored by the film-girl, Jaromil angrily goes to his redhead girlfriend's apartment to wait for her. He is angry that she is late, and has sex with her in an odd way with many interruptions, then even hits her. To his discomfort, soon Jaromil is filmed in his home, and then taken to the romantic park. Maman hints to her love tryst when Jaromil was conceived, while Jaromil thinks of the attractive film-girl. Jaromil recites his poem, but does it poorly.

Chap.10- It is cold and has snowed, and the redhead girl is again late in coming home to Jaromil. Jaromil does not accept her excuse and declares that their love affair is over. Then the girl changes her story and says that she had to talk to her brother Jan, who is going on a trip. When that does not satisfy Jaromil, the girl adds that Jan is thinking of defecting to the West. Jaromil states that she must call the police to inform on her brother. The girl swears that she loves Jaromil to her death, and will do anything for him. They make love, and after this, the girl is crying, so Jaromil is very touched. Again, Jaromil wants a statement of total love. The girl says that she would miss him, and he becomes mad that she would survive his leaving her. Jaromil does not go crazy again, but states that now he will go to the police and inform on her brother. The girl is too stunned to object, and Jaromil leaves. Jaromil goes home, rips up his ugly underwear, puts on his sporty trainers, and goes out.

Chapter 11- Jaromil goes through security and visits the janitor's son at the police station. After a while, Jaromil reveals that he knows someone about to flee the country. Another official, takes down the name of the redhead girl and her brother Jan. Jaromil makes up the reasons for the brother's coming defection, claiming he is seduced by the bourgeois. Jaromil is pleased with himself as he leaves, and goes to chat with university students, then going home to write poetry. He goes to see the redhead that evening, but notes that there are two undercover policemen. The men seize the redhead when she arrives, and the girl does not return.

The next day Jaromil realizes the tragedy unfolding, after talking to the janitor's son. The girl is subject to heavy-handed interrogation. At home, Jaromil sees an invitation from

the filmmaker-girl to a party. Jaromil feels justified in his love of the redhead girl, even though it leads to her arrest. Jaromil strangely feels content, though the girl is defenseless in the hands of strange men.

Part 5: Chaps. 9-11, pp. 242-266 Analysis

Chap. 9- This chapter is funny, but also the beginning of Jaromil's tragedy. He sees his mother with the filmmaker, and in a way he feels that the mother has betrayed him. How could Maman get the attention of the beautiful filmmaker that was denied to Jaromil, through his shame of the disgraceful, ugly underwear? Jaromil is willing to betray the redhead, but in turn feels betrayed by Maman who is now arranging with the filmmaker to make a film about her son. The film is to start with photos and childhood trivia about Jaromil. Only at the end will Jaromil recite a poem by the romantic place in the park where Jaromil was allegedly conceived. Here again, Maman has taken control, since it is only for certain in her imagination that Jaromil was conceived here by her and the then young engineer. In fact, her fantasy on the conceiving of Jaromil is communicated to everyone in not too veiled fashion.

Chap. 10- The redheaded girl begs his forgiveness, but Jaromil is nearly insane, so she invents another story, about how her brother had to be talked to before he leaves the country illegally. Now, Jaromil is really mad, about such a possible treason against the state, and wants to inform on the redhead girl and her brother. Somehow it is quite odd that so many characters in the book do not have proper names. The filmmaker girl has no name. Neither does Maman, the young-engineer-father, or the janitor's-son-policeman. Likewise, Jaromil is ready to inform on the girl to the police, to act on his abstract socialist ideals, though these ideas are also quite vague. He cannot think of what the immediate consequences of this will be for him and the redhead.

Part 6: The Middle-Aged Man, pp. 269-286

Part 6: The Middle-Aged Man, pp. 269-286 Summary

Chap. 1- The narrator explains that the novel is constructed looking back from the point of Jaromil's death. The narrator imagines what story would be written from the point of view of the redhead girl, or of the janitor's son.

Chap. 2- Jaromil's time seems strange, with the rallies and the Communist revolution. From the present, with poet and secret police together, it seems absurd. The deceptions of poetry make everything seem true. The narrator then gives another view of the young poet.

Chap. 3- There is an apartment of a middle-aged man that can give the reader a better view of what happened to Jaromil. There is an unexpected visitor.

Chap. 4- The redhead girl comes to visit the middle-aged man, when she gets out of prison. He offers her food, and she hesitates to go home, so he cancels his date for the night.

Chap. 5- The redhead has been gone for three years. Before that she saw the man occasionally in an arrangement that was erotic and not involving faithfulness.

Chap. 6- The redhead girl visits the man first because she hesitates to see her parents. The last time she was there she said she never wanted to see him again.

Chap. 7- Three years ago the girl had told the middle-aged man that she did not want to see him anymore. The man knew all about her relationship with Jaromil. That was before certain things happened.

Chap. 8- That day she had been late to see Jaromil. She had made up the story about her brother's plan to leave the country. Then, Jaromil had decided to go to the police. She never sees Jaromil again, and the man tells her that Jaromil died soon after she was arrested.

Chap. 9- The girl feels strange now that she hears that Jaromil is dead. He did not commit suicide, but just got sick and died, leaving the reason for her imprisonment gone too.

Chap. 10- The man makes supper for the girl, and she enjoys the quiet routine of it all. The man had lost his wife, and been kicked out of the military by the Communists, but now the two of them happily eat.



Chap. 11- The girl chatters, but then the man realizes that the problem is that her brother has not been released and his fate is unknown. That is why she tries to not go home, and is touched that the man lets her stay with him.

Chap. 12- The man feels weak as the girl cries about her fate. He has been kind to the girl and embraces her.

Chap. 13- The girl likes the man's embrace, but is not open to his sensuality.

Chap. 14- The man feels sorrow for the girl, but becomes excited and wants to have sex with her. However, she stops this from happening.

Chap. 15- The girl huddles against the wall. She does not want sex. Instead, she wants a place to hide.

Chap. 16- The two lay down without action or excitement, and finally the girl goes to sleep. Chap. 17- The man hears the girl sleeping, and the narrator warns the reader that death is the subject of the interlude. This goes back to the story of Jaromil.

Part 6: The Middle-Aged Man, pp. 269-286 Analysis

Ch. 1-5- In a sense, all suspense is lost in the novel now that the narrator states that Jaromil is going to die soon. Since time is slowing down in the novel, and the novel is nearly over, Jaromil cannot live much longer. Jaromil's bowing to authority and betrayals of principles and the redhead girl will catch up with him. On the other hand, the author is discussing the overall type of the wild poet who faces an early death from his own actions. The specific tragedy of living under communism for the redhead girl is broadened. The narrator thinks of the poets from other ages who have also gone to early deaths.

Ch. 6-11- The redhead is trapped between the past and the future. She fears going home since in a sense, she is guilty of the disappearance of her brother Jan. She goes for refuge to the middle-aged man, but the man almost against his will wants the usual sexual entertainment. The reader sees that the redhead was not faithful to Jaromil and had at least this one other affair. Therefore, Jaromil was right in being jealous and suspicious of her. Ironically, when she wants to devote herself only to Jaromil, is when Jaromil betrays the girl.

Ch. 12-17- The girl wishes that the man was an old man or woman. This reminds the reader of Jaromil's poems about old couples who cannot have sex anymore, but cling to each other for security. In a weird way, the redhead has become like a subject of one of Jaromil's poems. Death is approaching, in that the reader will soon learn how Jaromil dies, and the redhead girl is also in a situation of extreme insecurity.

Part 7: The Poet Dies, pp. 289-307

Part 7: The Poet Dies, pp. 289-307 Summary

Chap. 1- The poet is a fragile creature, as the narrator refers to the fate of Pushkin, and other young poets. The same is true for Jaromil, who is going to a party.

Chap. 2- The manner of death can be related to the state of the dying person. Jaromil dreams of death by fire, like the burning of Giordano Bruno. Others die by drowning, or falling out a window.

Chap. 3- Jaromil is going to the party with a bad cold. He thinks of his brave imaginary alter ego, Xavier, and the sad fate of the redhead girl.

Chap. 4- The party is for artists of various sorts. Everyone tries to get attention, and Jaromil uses some sarcastic remarks to join in this.

Chap. 5- Maman is nervous because Jaromil is going to the party, and she is afraid he will become involved with the scheming filmmaker-girl.

Chap. 6- There has been danger for poets who speak too loud and are angry, like Lermontov was once.

Chap. 7- Jaromil sees the filmmaker- girl and she brings him up to her room that is filled with people.

Chap. 8- Maman stays up worrying about Jaromil, hoping she can do something.

Chap. 9- A 30-year old man recognizes Jaromil as a former friend and student of the surrealist artist. The man accuses Jaromil of avoiding the artist, because the surrealist artist is now out of favor with the authorities. The artist is a laborer, but the man says, at least he is unlike the disgusting, vile Jaromil.

Chap. 10- The poet Lermontov once got into a duel because he was insulted by Martynov at such a party.

Chap. 11- Jaromil is shocked and protests that it is irrelevant if the painter cannot paint because, as the saying goes, real life is elsewhere. Jaromil attacks the man, but the man easily grabs Jaromil. The man carries Jaromil across the room, and throws him out a balcony door out into the cold.

Chap. 12- Like the shot Lermontov, Jaromil feels near lifeless on the cold floor of the balcony.

Chap. 13- Jaromil thinks of jumping off the balcony, but decides to not do it. Yet, Jaromil also cannot return into the warm room, and stays out in the cold night.



Chap. 14- Jaromil is suicidal in a sense, because he is sick and stays on the cold concrete.

Chap. 15- No one comes to get Jaromil. In the suddenly dim light inside, Jaromil sees, or imagines two lovers embracing. Jaromil thinks that the man is Xavier, who has betrayed him.

Chap. 16- Jaromil finally comes inside, and stumbles till he finds his coat.

Chap. 17- The narrator describes the early deaths of the poets Wolker and Lermontov.

Chap. 18- Jaromil is lying down at home with pneumonia. Maman is trying to save Jaromil once again, as the flames of fever burn him up.

Chap. 19- A man comes from the police to talk to Jaromil about the arrest of the redhead and her brother, but is stopped by Jaromil's obvious sickness.

Chap. 20- Jaromil imagines being betrayed by Xavier, the way that Xavier betrays women.

Chap. 21- Jaromil notices that the photo of his father has been removed, and he asks his mother about it. She denounces the father, and swears her love for the beautiful Jaromil. Jaromil in turn says he never loved a woman besides Maman. They remember their pleasant time at the spa, by the lake.

Chap. 22- Other poets died, and were buried by their mothers, like Rimbaud and Wolker. Chap. 23- Jaromil sees his reflection in a pond, and then dies.

Part 7: The Poet Dies, pp. 289-307 Analysis

Ch. 1-3- Jaromil is about to confront his death. The narrator continues about the other young lyrical poets who have died. Pushkin and Lermontov died in a duel. Others, like the philosopher Giordano Bruno are burned at the stake. The method of death is supposed to be appropriate to the poet. Bruno dies by fire, to set off a blazing light to humanity. Jaromil is to die through sickness, drowned by his fluids, as he slowly disappears from humanity.

Ch. 4-9- Maman has a premonition that the party is dangerous for Jaromil, but cannot keep him away, despite his bad cold. The filmmaking girl is evil, drawing Jaromil into her web though he has already rejected her once. The film-girl knows that Jaromil has good connections to the police, and she finds this to be a reason to associate with Jaromil. The 30-year old man confronts Jaromil and ends up attacking him. This is strange, since one would think that he would be afraid of the well-connected Jaromil. Perhaps he is too drunk to care if he is acting wildly. Jaromil also acts wildly, making an ideological speech in an arena where ideology is not a concern.



Ch. 10-13- Jaromil fights, but has no ability to fight. He always has someone else, like the janitor's son in childhood, to fight his battles. Jaromil thinks of suicide while out on the cold balcony. In effect, by not coming in to the warm house, Jaromil does commit suicide, though in a concealed form.

Ch. 14- 23- Jaromil decides to leave. He imagines he sees his alter-ego Xavier having sex with the film-maker. Perhaps it is the film-girl embracing the 30-year old man, or someone unknown. Jaromil goes to his sickbed, and Maman cannot save him. Still, they get to talk about their wonderful life together. Indeed, the relationship between a mother and her son can be a strong and beautiful, though usually an immature relationship. Jaromil's protestation of love for Maman has a tone of giving in to his coming death, and being purely through weakness.

Characters

Jaromil, the Poet

Jaromil is a somewhat spoiled boy who becomes a poet. At an early age, Jaromil enjoys making a rhyme and his mother decides that he will be a poet. Maman gives Jaromil art lessons, furthering his artistic aspirations. As a young man, Jaromil chases women, but is easily frightened by them in intimate settings. He has sex with a red-headed girl, but becomes jealous of her and the possibility that she has other lovers. In the midst of the Communist revolution, Jaromil abandons his old mentor, the artist. Jaromil changes the direction of his poetry to socialist realism. Jaromil has an overwhelming desire to be liked and be successful, yet he is also very sensitive. Like the poets, Shelly and Lermontov, Jaromil dies at a young age. In Jaromil's case, he dies of pneumonia after showing his enthusiasm for the new regime by turning in his girlfriend and her brother to the police. Unknown to Jaromil, the alleged crime of his redheaded girlfriend and her brother never happened and was just a figment of the girl's imagination.

Maman, Jaromil's mother

Maman is Jaromil's domineering mother. Maman feels justified in dominating Jaromil, since he is her only child. Maman is made pregnant by the engineer and marries him, but never wins the engineer's love or loyalty. Instead, Maman concentrates her love and affection on Jaromil from a young age. Maman finds an art teacher for Jaromil, and then becomes involved in a romantic affair with the artist. However, Maman is drawn into an affair that is beyond her ability to manage. Her ability to follow the artist's complicated surrealist theories is small. When she breaks off the affair, she decides that it is because of her loyalty to Jaromil. Maman tends to look at Jaromil's girlfriends as her rivals. She bursts into the bedroom when Jaromil is there with the redheaded girl, claiming that the moans of the girl are due to sickness. Ironically, Maman becomes a close associate with the filmmaker girl, when the latter wants to make a movie about Jaromil. Maman actually fears that the filmmaker girl is after Jaromil, and fears that this attraction will harm Jaromil. In this case, Maman is right.

The Red-Head Girl, Jaromil's Girlfriend

The redhead girl is a character introduced about halfway into the book. She is impulsive, in that she decides to take Jaromil as a lover after her friend leaves Prague to get married. Later, in a short chapter near the end of the book, the narrator reveals that at the same time, the red-head girl has a middle-aged man as a lover, who she sees once a month, and possibly other lovers. The red-head girl makes up the story that her brother Jan is about to defect and flee from the country. She tells this to Jaromil because she wants to keep him from breaking up with her. Little does she know that Jaromil will tell the story to the police, and she and her brother will be arrested.

The Artist, Jaromil's art teacher, the Artist-Teacher

The artist first is Jaromil's art teacher, then he becomes Maman's lover. The artist has elaborate theories about surrealist art that he shares with Jaromil and Maman. Jaromil later breaks with the artist, because the artist refuses to adopt the new regime's style of socialist realism. In Jaromil's final confrontation at a party, he defends his break with the artist, because now the artist is as a person that is dead.

The Janitor's Son, the Police Officer

The Janitor's Son is Jaromil's only schoolmate-friend when he is young. Later, Jaromil finds out that the janitor's son is married with a child and is a police officer for the new Communist regime. The janitor's son invites Jaromil to a police poetry recitation night. Jaromil views the janitor's son as a real man of action. Jaromil goes to the janitor's son to report that his girlfriend's brother is about to illegally leave the country.

Jaromil's Father, the Engineer, the Young Engineer

Jaromil's father is a somewhat impulsive character. First, when he is young he takes up with Maman and gets her pregnant before marrying her. Later, the father chases a Jewish girl, is sent to a concentration camp and dies.

The Filmmaker, the Film-Girl

The Filmmaker, or Film-girl meets Jaromil at the Police offices when Jaromil goes there to recite poetry. The film-gril wants to have Jaromil as a lover, but also has many other admirers. The filmmaker makes a film about Jaromil, and invites Jaromil to the party, which has disastrous results for Jaromil.

The Silver-Haired Poet

The Silver-Haired poet is an older man who Jaromil first sees reciting his poetry on stage. Later, Jaromil meets the silver-haired poet again at the police poetry evening.

The University Student, the Bespectacled Girl

The University Student is impressed with Jaromil's little speech at a marxist student gathering and becomes his girlfriend. She walks with him and kisses him, protesting how serious she is about love. Jaromil tries to have sex with the girl, but somehow she continually makes him nervous at the key moment, and she breaks up with him.

Grandma

Grandma is a quiet character who mainly is there at home. She knits and keeps Maman company, till she gradually becomes senile and then dies.

Jaromil's Uncle

Jaromil's uncle takes over the family pharmacy and under the Communists is arrested as a class enemy. Jaromil does not like his uncle and later uses the regime change as an excuse to call his uncle a capitalist pig.

Xavier

Xavier is an imaginary figure and sort of an alter-ego to Jaromil. Jaromil thinks of a long prose poem about Xavier, who is brave, but then goes to sleep at crucial moments and appears in other adventures or other dreams.

Objects/Places

The Sunny Park in Prague, the Boulder

The Sunny Park in Prague, behind the boulder, is where Maman believes she conceived Jaromil. Maman drags Jaromil and the filmmaker girl back to this site, to have Jaromil recite his poetry for a movie. When Maman drags Jaromil back to this location for the film, in a sense this symbolizes Maman's ongoing control over Jaromil.

Charles Bridge

Charles Bridge is a bridge over the Moldau River in Prague. From the end of this bridge, Xavier can see into a house by the bridge and jumps into the house of a woman.

The Villa

Before the war, Jaromil lives in a villa with his grandfather and grandmother, his mother and his father. It is actually owned by the grandfather, who is Jaromil's mother's father. After the war, Jaromil and Maman have to give the first floor and a room upstairs first to Jaromil's uncle, and then to other tenants.

Jaromil's Poems

Much of the mental focus of Jaromil in his teenage years is around his poetry. First his poems are in a non-rhyming and surreal. The language of the poems is metaphorical and often unfocused. Later, Jaromil's poems become more structured and rhyming, in order to please the new regime. They have themes of the revolution, and the good worker.

The Cut-Off Telephones

Jaromil runs around one day cutting off the receivers of pay telephones. He puts twenty of them or so in a box and mails them to the silver-haired poet. Jaromil had hoped that this poet would reply after being sent some of Jaromil's poem. When the silver-haired poet ignores the sent poems, Jaromil sends the cut-off receiver to him as a symbol of the lack of communication received about his poems, to Jaromil.



The Lyrical Poets

The narrator refers to a group of young lyrical poets, and compares them to Jaromil. These poets include the French poet Rimbaud, the English poet Percy Shelley, and other poets such as Lermontov.

Prague, Bohemia, Czechoslovakia

The novel takes place mostly in the city of Prague, in the province of Bohemia and the nation of Czechoslovakia. After the Munich deal, Czechoslovakia is occupied by the Nazis.

The Concentration Camp

Jaromil's father is killed in a concentration camp. This happens because the father falls in love with a Jewess and comes to see her. He is arrested and thrown into the camp.

The Police Station

The Police Station is a place where people are arrested and tortured, but it is also where Jaromil's poem is displayed. This is where Jaromil's friend, the janitor's son, works.

The Police Headquarters

The Police Headquarters is a place in the country where the poets are brought to have the Police Poetry night. It is a pleasant place, but also a place where interrogation and processing of prisoners, including political prisoners, takes place.

Paris 1968

The narrator mentions the student uprising of Paris, France in 1968, and compares it to the Communist revolution that takes place in Prague. In Prague 1968 the students are drawn to surreal slogans, while in Prague the students yell socialist realist slogans.

The Film, the Film about Jaromil

The filmmaker girl goes to Jaromil's mother and gets her cooperation to make a film about Jaromil. It seems that the girl does this to win Jaromil's protection, and perhaps his love. Jaromil is seen as closely associated with the police.

Themes

The Trials of a Young Male Poet

The author often compares Jaromil's trials and tribulations to other young male poets that are known historically. By writing about the young poet Jaromil, the author gets a reason to write about the conditions of the young poet. Other poets have been near the outbreak of revolution. The English poet Percy Shelley goes to Ireland to seek out the Irish revolution. The French poet Rimbaud is geographically close to the Paris Commune in 1870. There is a revolution there, but Rimbaud is stuck in another town and separated from the revolution by enemy troops. There are also political factions affecting the poets Pushkin and Lermontov, both of whom are killed in duels.

For Jaromil, the Communist revolution in his country is an opportunity. Though Jaromil loves talking to his artist-teacher, he has difficulty understanding the obscure theories of surrealist art. Jaromil has some initial difficulty adapting his poetry to socialist realism, including using rhyme schemes, but is able to do it. He becomes enthusiastic about the new slogans of worker's rights and power. Unfortunately for Jaromil, he takes these slogans too literally, and finds himself defenseless when his ideological purity is attacked. That is when Jaromil suffers his sort of duel at the party that leaves him freezing in the cold.

The narrator also states that most lyrical poets come from households run by women. This is certainly the case with Jaromil. His mother dominates Jaromil's engineer-father until the father disappears into the resistance, and finally into his death in a concentration camp. Jaromil has a hard time pursuing women. His highly developed sense of good behavior often stops him from taking off his clothes and seizing the targets of his desire.

The Artist Versus the Poet Jaromil

A recurring theme in the novel is the changes in art and social and political conventions. At first it is easy to see that the artist-teacher of Jaromil is a sort of hero, and that Jaromil and the Communists are villains. The artist is revealed to stay true to his ideals of surrealist art. He refuses to give up his beliefs to get approval from the new regime. However, this heroic idea of the artist-teacher is weakened when the reader calls to mind the artist's relationship with Maman. The artist tries to indoctrinate Maman in obscure artistic theories that have no relationship to Maman's life and that may be very irrational. This annoys Maman especially since the artist allows no other opinions but his own for her. This situation comes to a head when the artist paints directly on Maman's face and breasts, causing her immense stress and embarrassment.

The artist's attitude can be contrasted to Jaromil's speedy and complete adoption of the conventions of the new Communist regime. Jaromil adopts rhyme and poetical

structures that increase the feeling of truth of his poems. A bigger problem is that Jaromil also adopts socialist realist themes, such as of workers who struggle to meet their production quota. These questions are drawn out at the question and answer session at the Police Poets Night. It is insisted by some speakers that there are socialist ideals for everything, even for love poetry. Though Jaromil makes the case that love is liberated by the end of capitalist oppression, this is not accepted by the middle-aged woman there. In the story, Jaromil's love affairs are as twisted and full of betrayal as anything could possibly be. Instead, the lady insists that love is always love.

Jaromil as a Monster

Jaromil becomes a monster in some respects, as shown in his informing on the redheaded girl and her brother to the police. However, this possibility is already foreshadowed by Jaromil's desire to be totally acceptable to the new regime. If Jaromil did not have this impulse, he would never have become a recognized poet. On the other hand, his poetic recklessness and desire to be recognized are also partial causes of the events that lead to his death. At the time when Jaromil meets the university student girl, Jaromil is still under the influence of his artist-teacher, and promotes surrealism as progress in art. Soon after the Communist revolution breaks out, and Jaromil immediately and fully supports the revolution. His support deepens when he meets his childhood friend, the janitor's son, who is now with the police. Jaromil visits the artist and openly tells him that surrealism must be dropped in favor of the needs of the revolution. Soon after, Jaromil learns to copy the style and the themes of socialist realism. Jaromil learns to use the power of poetic forms and rhymes to convey truth with his poems. The feeling of truth is in the poems even when they tell a lie. When Jaromil finds that the police are willing to promote his poetry, he is hooked. He is willing to betray the redheaded girl and her brother to the police, based on a lie that the girl invents when she is late coming home to Jaromil. Jaromil then pursues the filmmaking girl, even after due to embarrassment because of his ugly underwear, he rejects her. This leads to disastrous consequences for Jaromil. On a more universal level, the examples of the poets Pushkin and Lermontov show that mixing poetry with politics and passion is always dangerous.

Style

Point of View

The point of view is that of an all-seeing observer, who at times is close to the action, and at times is quite distant. The narrator, or observer, makes clear that his intention is to look at the life of a lyrical poet, Jaromil. Jaromil, in turn is compared to some of the well-known young poets of the past, such as Rimbaud in France and Lermontov. Towards the end of the book, the narrator makes clear that the book is told from a point in time after the death of Jaromil. Therefore, Jaromil's childhood is gone over quite quickly, while his relationship with the redheaded girl is followed in-depth until the relationship reaches its disastrous conclusion.

It is clear from the description of the unjust imprisonment of people such as the redheaded girl and her brother Jan, that the author highlights the injustices of the Communist government of Czechoslovakia. This is doubly absurd since neither the redheaded girl nor her brother commit any overt act, it is merely alleged that they are about to do something wrong. Still, the author also wants to show the revolutionary enthusiasm there is in the country, as typified by the attitude of Jaromil, to the coming to power of the Communist regime.

Setting

The setting of the novel is in Prague in Czechoslovakia, both before, during and after World War II. A large part of the novel takes place in the villa where Maman and her mother and father live, and now Maman lives with her husband and Jaromil. During the war, the husband disappears and dies. In fact, an important part of the setting is the political situation and how it has an impact on Jaromil and Maman. Jaromil grows up before World War II. He sees his father mobilize for war, and then come home because Czechoslovakia has been sold out to Nazi Germany at Munich by her allies. Maman finds out that her husband dies because the husband fell in love with a Jewess and is put in a concentration camp.

There is a more direct impact on Jaromil when the country goes Communist. Jaromil eagerly decides to back the Communists and change his poetry to conform to their expectation. Unlike Jaromil, Jaromil's former mentor, the artist refuses to abandon his surrealist painting and instead becomes an outcast from any backing by society or the regime. Ironically, it is admitted that when Maman compares the surrealist poems of Jaromil to his new more down-to-earth socialist poems, she likes the latter better. After all, at least the socialist poems have some structure and rhyme.

Language and Meaning

Though the book was originally written in Czech, it seems that the translation is authorized and fairly accurate. One odd feature of the book is that the only major character of the novel with a name is Jaromil. All of the other leading characters have names such as, Maman, the Artist, the Janitor's Son, etc. They are more personality types than distinct people in a sense. Another difficulty is the numerous examples of Jaromil's poetry and their explanations in the text. The interpretations of the poems can change along with changes in Jaromil's life. The same thing happens concerning the meaning of incidents in Jaromil's and Maman's lives. A good example is the incident when Jaromil cuts off the receivers of about 20 public telephones, puts them in a box and then mails them to the silver-haired poet. At first Jaromil interprets the meaning of his action to be that he has tried to get communication and recognition for his poems and failed. After he sees the janitor's son, he decides that he mailed the cut-off telephones to show that he has cut himself off from the world of poetry, or at least from surrealist, non-political poetry. Many events in Jaromil's life are interpreted and reinterpreted by the narrator. In a sense this is the big joke of the book. What is important is not real world action, but what each of the characters think about these events, which can rapidly shift.

The novel is full of disputes in poetry and art, which may be previously unknown to the reader. Most of Jaromil's poems are in the unrhymed, without poetic form style of the surrealist. Many observers would argue whether or not these are poems at all. Yet, these poems also symbolize freedom to many. The surrealist poems allow the reader to think many different things about them. In contrast to this, the poems of older poets like Schiller and Heine, have rhyme and a much more direct and forceful meaning. The Communist ideologues would like to write poetry like the classics, but have too much of a burden of socialist ideology to do that.

Structure

The novel is divided into seven parts, most of which relate directly to the poet, Jaromil's life. One exception is Part 2, Xavier, which is the mental prose-poem of Jaromil's about his alter-ego Xavier. Xavier has powers beyond Jaromil, but then goes into other dreams. The other exception is Part 6, The Middle-Aged Man, which gives a report of what happened to the redheaded girl and Jaromil.

Each part is divided up into numerous chapters, some as short as a page. In the first section, Jaromil is born and grows up. He becomes a student of the artist-teacher, while soon after, Maman becomes the artist's lover. Maman is unable to satisfy the artist's bizarre demands, and also unable to win back her husband. She consoles herself with her love for her son Jaromil. Section 2 is a recount of Jaromil's legend of Xavier, who flees into other dreams in the middle of adventures. Section 3, The Poet Masturbates, is about Jaromil's often desperate attempts to form a relationship with a young woman. Jaromil is close to the university student girl, but cannot consummate his relationship

with her, due to feelings of embarrassment, and anxiety. He retreats into masturbation, trying to escape from his fears. In Part 4, the Poet on the Run, Jaromil adjusts to the new Communist regime, and finds a lover in the redheaded girl. In Part 5, Jaromil instead of finding bliss in his new love affair is consumed by jealousy. He ends up reporting the redheaded girl to the police. Part 6 is a sort of aside in the novel, going through what will soon be described in detail. In Part 7, the poet Jaromil dies, consumed by his passion and rage, and defeated by his ideological inflexibility.

Quotes

She was therefore quite certain that the poet could have been conceived only on a particular sunny summer morning behind a huge boulder picturesquely silhouetted against a gree valley traditionally favored by the citizens of Prague for Sunday outings.
Pt. 1, Ch. 1, P. 1

But she was wrong if she thought that Jaromil had not appreciated the gift. He, too, did not know what to say, but he was not dissatisfied.
Pt. 1, Ch. 3, P. 18

The owner of the dog inspected the drawings with pleasure; then he observed that it was precisely the combination of animal head and human body which he found so bewitching.
Pt. 1, Ch. 6, P. 30

The artist whispered into this inert body's ear, "Yes, it is mad. Love is either madness or nothing at all."
Pt. 1, Ch. 8, P. 41

Magda straightened up, stepped over to the mirror (he saw her profile) , looked at herself for a while, then turned again (no he saw the front of her) and walked to the tub.
Pt. 1, Ch. 9, pp. 55-56

He stepped once more to the noisy piece of furniture, hit it with the blackjack, laughed, and looked at the woman in the hope that she would laugh with him.
Pt. 3, Ch. 4, P. 72

Only he knew about hte icy hand that had touched her calves, her abdomen, her breasts. No one but he knew who had caused her death.
Pt. 2, Ch. 12, P. 85

Look: Jaromil is out on a date. He can think of nothing but his prepared lines, he worries that his voice seems unnatural, that his words sound as if he is reciting them by heart, like a bad amateur actor.
Pt. 3, Ch. 6, P. 102

Maman recognized it at once. She heard her son addressing her with the voice of lost lover... She found it unbearable.
Pt. 3, Ch. 17, P. 120

Deeply moved, they touch each other's wrinkled faces. He calls her "my girl," she calls him "my dearest boy," and they cry.
Pt. 3, Ch. 22, P. 137



"Yes, I know that my poems are completely useless to the revolution. I'm sorry because I like them. But unfortunately my feelings are no argument against their uselessness."
Pt. 3, Ch. 25, P. 150

It was the spring of 1968, in Paris. Alas! The students were completely unable to perceive the visage of youth behind his wrinkled face, and the old scholar watched with surprise as he was booed by those he loved.
Pt. 4, Ch. 14, P. 172

They were rhymed (deep down, Maman always suspected that unrhymed verse was not really poetry at all), they were completely intelligible, and full of beautiful words.
Part 5, Ch. 1, P. 186

Encouraged by her curious, uncomprehending face he proceeded to tell her how he had once written a long prose poem, a fantastic tale, about a boy named Xavier.
Part 5, Ch. 2, P. 196

While Jaromil was engaged in these envious ruminations, the janitor's son looked him deep in the eyes (at the same time his mouth broadened into a dull smile) and began to recite the verse tacked to the bulletin board.
Part 5, Ch. 5, . 218

The middle-aged lady was gratified by the scornful attack of Jaromil's colleague. She said: "Why do you want to meddle with love, comrades? Love will be the same till the end of time, than goodness."
Part 5, Ch. 7, P. 234

This time, however, he had no inkling of what the night would bring and he was wearing a horrible pair of drawers, wide, shabby, dirty gray!
Part 5, Ch. 8, P. 240

He asked her again (sadly and quietly), "Are you going to tell the police yourself?"
Part 5, Ch. 10, P. 259

We did not choose that epoch because we were interested in it for its own sake, but because it seemed to offer an excellent trap for snaring Rimbaud and Lermontov, lyricism and youth.
Part 6, Ch. 2, P. 271

Jan Hus and Giordano Bruno could not have died by the sword nor by the hangman's rope, but only at the stake.
Part 7, Ch. 2, P. 290

"Personally, I am very sorry that the painter is an ordinary laborer and that he doesn't have the proper light. But objectively speaking it doesn't make a difference whether he is painting by candlelight or whether he's not painting at all.
Part 7, Ch. 11, P. 297

Topics for Discussion

Discuss Maman's attempt to dominate Jaromil's life? Is this a normal relationship between a mother and a son? How does Maman contribute towards directing Jaromil to be a poet?

Discuss Jaromil's relationship with women. Why is he able to consummate his relationship with the redheaded girl and not with the university student? Why is he consumed with jealousy over the redhead once he begins a relationship with her?

The narrator characterizes the Communist revolution as being in some ways a popular revolution. Though this is contrary to the popular Western view of the Communists coming to power in Eastern Europe, why does Jaromil feel that there is a popular revolution? Why is he so happy to join the revolution?

Discuss the author's comparisons of Jaromil with other young poets such as Rimbaud, Shelley, Wolker, Heine and others. Is this satirical, or does Jaromil really have features in common with these famous young poets.

The narrator looks at what happened to Jaromil in Part 6, from the location of a middle-aged gentleman's apartment. Is the reader informed about the nature of Jaromil in the long description of the situation between the middle-aged man and the redheaded girl? Is this too much narrative or does this description directly connect to the rest of the novel?

The artist-teacher represents an artist loyal to surrealist art, and who does not change for the new regime. Is he a superior or more moral figure than Jaromil?

Discuss Jaromil's character. Is Jaromil an evil person? He ruins the life of his girlfriend, the redheaded girl and her brother by reporting them to the police. Is he conscious of what he is doing? Does he feel remorse than the consequences of this action become clear?

Discuss Jaromil's final confrontation at the filmmaker's party. Jaromil is accused by a distant acquaintance of betraying the artist-teacher and now producing disgusting poetry. Why does Jaromil have to get into a confrontation over this? Why is he not able to pass this over as a joke, or someone's personal opinion?

Discuss the artist-teacher's relationship to Maman. Why is this relationship unstable and why does it break up after a while? Is the artist trying to develop Maman, or is he playing with her like a toy?