

MARIA DILETTA GIORDANO
Sapienza University of Rome

**Severin the Walker and his Dark Path:
Declinations of the Act of Walking in Paul Leppin's
*Severins Gang in die Finsternis***

Abstract

This paper investigates the themes of walking and wandering in Paul Leppin's novel *Severins Gang in die Finsternis* by analysing their occurrence and aesthetic connotation. The act of walking and the exploration of urban landscape are strongly present in the novel, which is set in Prague and is characterised by several depictions of the milieu; therefore, the text has been analysed from this angle in numerous previous studies, mainly mentioning the elements of *flanerie* appearing in the narration. The present study discusses the problematic aspects in defining the protagonist of the novel as *flaneur*, suggesting alternative interpretations that can describe the aesthetic experience of Severin's walking more exhaustively. The analysis mainly follows Francesco Careri's research on the aesthetics of walking, which are summarized in his work *Walkscapes. Walking as Aesthetic Practice*. Following the same methodological approach, the paper also analyses occurrences of the act of walking other than Severin's walkabouts, focusing especially on the presence of processions throughout the text.

Keywords: walking, flânerie, Prague, procession, urban landscape

This paper proposes an interpretation of Paul Leppin's (Prague 1878-Prague 1945) novel *Severins Gang in die Finsternis* based on the researches on the aesthetic of walking conducted by Francesco Careri in his work *Walkscapes. Walking as an aesthetic practice* (Careri [2002] 2017).

Published in Prague in 1914, Leppin's novel *Severins Gang in die Finsternis* revolves around a Bohemian-German employee named Severin, a young man who is constantly restless, unsatisfied with his life and his romantic relationships and who, in order to reduce his own disquiet, spends his free time wandering through Prague, the city where he lives. The novel begins with a clear description of Severin's boredom and indifference towards his job and, after that, a depiction of the unexplainable restlessness that torments him daily and that turns into pure curiosity towards urban environment.

During his walks, Severin encounters many women he finds attractive and fascinating. In almost every case, he seduces them and obtains their trust with no effort, but he normally gets easily tired of these romances. The only exception to this rule is his relationship with Mylada, a former prostitute who works in a tavern as a singer and who bewitches Severin to the extent that he renounces any aspect of his life which is not linked to her. Completely charmed by Mylada, Severin ends up planning a terroristic suicide action when the woman ceases to show interest in him. Even if this attempt fails and all the characters survive, this ending partially explains the meaning of the title *Severin's Road into Darkness*.

The novel was published with the subtitle: *A Prager Gespensterroman*, “a Prague Ghost Story”, a detail added in order to attract a larger number of readers despite the lack of any supernatural element in the plot (Schmeer 2015: 63–65). Although critics agree on the absence of proper ghosts in Severin's story, most of the literature regarding this work highlights the unsettling quality evident in many aspects of the novel, including Mylada's characterisation as *femme fatale* and the peculiar depiction of Prague where, especially at night, dark alleys, strange taverns, oppressive Gothic churches and cemeteries predominate.

It can be easily said, anyhow, that the narration concentrates on Severin's impressions and thoughts. Due to the high frequency of scenes where Severin walks through the city and the value that is given to his feelings and to his close observation of urban environment, the protagonist has been defined as a Prague *flâneur* in many studies.

In this paper I will discuss the idea of *flânerie* in relation to Severin's walkabouts, and I will point out some elements that could lead to interpreting Severin much more as a walker than a *flâneur*, without however denying the aesthetic value of his experience. The importance of walks and movements in the narration is unquestionable: walking scenes relate not only to the protagonist, but also to other minor characters and to Prague's citizens in general. Similarly, city streets seem to build a path for the protagonist and give him directions, while natural elements such as the Moldova and the swaying trees follow the character's movement. The act of walking is therefore highly stressed, and can be seen in many cases as an aesthetic action, but the aesthetic of *flânerie* does not quite capture all the nuances of this phenomenon. It can be said, on the other hand, that a study based on different aesthetic approaches to the experience of walking, approaches which mainly developed in the first half of the Twentieth century, could give a broader frame to analyse this novel.

In his research *Walkscapes. Walking as an aesthetic practice*, Francesco Careri explores several connotations of the act of walking. The relationship between walking and architecture is central in his analysis: his study investigates this relationship starting from the first forms of architecture in the Neolithic Age, and links the act of walking to the concept of wandering in nomadic societies.

Careri's approach is interdisciplinary and embraces architecture, literature and anthropology – therefore it allows a very broad analysis of city texts. In addition to this broad view on the subject, two elements of *Walkscapes* are meaningful for a lecture of *Severin's Gang in die Finsternis*: the first one is the in-depth analysis of the experience of wandering in Surrealism; the second one is Careri's interpretation of cult spaces, such as temples and megalith sites, as transition spaces. The reference to these elements allows a reflection on the walkabouts in Leppin's text that goes beyond the concept of *flânerie*, since it highlights the connection between Severin's paths and the surrealist idea of a liquid city hiding an unconscious layer.¹ On the other hand, it also points out the presence of processions and oriented forms of walking in the narration, processions where cathedrals and cemeteries play a central role.

1 Careri describes the Surrealist city as an “amniotic fluid, where everything grows and is spontaneously transformed” (Careri [2002] 2017: 80).

One of the most detailed studies on Severin's "flâneur personality" was conducted by Nora Schmidt in her monograph on Czech *flânerie*, *Flânerie in der Tschechischen Literatur* (2017). The study highlights the frequency of the protagonist's night walks, moments in which Severin wanders apparently aimless through the city and stops in several taverns in order to find some kind of entertainment or to overcome his restlessness. Schmidt also points out the protagonist's obsessive relationship with the city: Severin has a natural talent to interpret the city of Prague, he feels the urban environment as if it was a living being and seems to interact with it through a kind of wordless language he perfectly understands. He also tends to personify Prague and to ascribe it a proper body and an unsettling will:

It always felt as if invisible hands were caressing him. [...] It felt as if a spell was oppressing him. An angry desire to break and change the spell was growing within him. [...] That day he walked through the city, irritated, with pursed lips and his collar raised². (Leppin [1914] 2016: 7)

Schmidt interprets Severin's relationships with women as expressions of his relationship with the city: the five women Severin meets should represent different sides of Prague, therefore the *Slavic* city is embodied in Zdenka, the *depraved* city lives in Mylada and so forth. (Schmidt 2017: 141)

Susanne Fritz places *Severins Gang in die Finsternis* among the *Prager Texte* (Prague texts) about the mysterious, unsettling and magic Prague, and she highlights the analogies between Severin's behaviour and the Parisian *flâneur* as well, by affirming that the protagonist usually walks aimlessly through Prague at night with the only intention of getting closer to the city.

It can be affirmed that the main structure of Leppin's text is made of walking scenes and moments where walkabouts stimulate reflections and childhood memories in the protagonist. It is during walking scenes that Severin thinks about his time in school, his father, his aunt Regina and so forth. Only two memories come to him in different circumstances, as he lies in bed with a fever, but even in this case the memories are triggered by looking at the streets from his window and observing the movement of people passing by. As previously introduced, the act of walking is strongly present in the novel also because it relates to more than one character: Schmidt, Fritz and Huebner point out the presence of a *flâneur* other than Severin in the novel, the *flâneuse* Zdenka. Zdenka, Severin's girlfriend at the beginning of the narration, is one of two characters, along with Nathan Meyer in the second part of the novel, whose thoughts and inner life are introduced by the narrator (Schmidt 2017: 141-142, Fritz 2005: 179-180, Huebner 2017: 286). In the third chapter of the first part, Zdenka remembers the beginning of her romance with Severin and describes the way he taught her the language of the city and the science of urban exploration:

Beautiful days awaited her. She walked with Severin around the city, just like he had been doing for years. She acquired that fine hearing, which lived in him and which he taught to her, for noises and cries in the distance. When she closed her eyes and let him guide her, she recognised the streets she stepped on by the smell of their stones and their paving. He disclosed to her the monotone beauty in the landscape of the suburbs, the shudder of the Vyšehrad with its stone threshold, where the memorial to St. Wenceslas stood. She learned to love the Moldova, when the lights of the banks flickered on the water, and the smell of tar on the chain bridges. (Leppin [1914] 2016: 24)

It is interesting to observe, however, that this description of Severin's love for city observation comes from Zdenka's point of view and finds no explicit reference in Severin's own thoughts. Though the need of going out in the evening is frequently stressed in Severin's inner life, the protagonist does not seem to find

² The following translations from the text *Severins Gang in die Finsternis* are provided by the author of the article.

any real pleasure in his walkabouts. In some cases, he is also aware of the shallowness of this distraction: in chapter 7 of the first part of the novel, Severin laughs at his hope of finding solace in his night walks:

It made him smile at himself, to think he had once believed he could satisfy the hunger of his soul there [...]. He did not know how long he had been hanging around the city at night and lingered in the taverns until they closed in the morning. But he felt that he was walking in circle around the same spot, like a chained animal. (Leppin [1914] 2016: 56–57)

The lack of satisfaction and enjoyment in Severin's walking is repeatedly pointed out in the novel, while Zdenka considers the discovery of city observation a precious gift. The joy of getting closer to the urban landscape that characterises the *flâneur* seems to belong to Zdenka rather than the protagonist. The words "Aber er fühlte, daß er im Kreise um einen Punkt herumging wie ein angepflocktes Tier an der Kette" highlight the need of a way out: Severin is actually looking for something, and his destination can't be the urban space itself, since he does not find any solace in it.

It seems clear, on the other hand, that Severin uses walkabouts as a tool to reflect on his own feelings and to investigate his own disquiet. This element is visible in the predominance of childhood memories and manifestations of the protagonist's inner life over depictions of urban landscape. In one of the central scenes of the novel, in the first chapter of the second part, Severin walks along the Moldava on the Franzeska and watches the boats floating on the river, while an intense fragrance of acacias spreads throughout the riverbank: the smell of acacias immediately reminds him of his most important childhood memory, one of his aunt Regina and his first understanding of sexual impulse:³

Severin had first known this landscape when he was a child. At the time, he would occasionally wait for his aunt Regina under the acacias of the dock, along with his father. A mouldy memory rose drowsily in his brain and the dark room at the ground floor, where his aunt lived with the old lady, appeared in front of him. [...] The whole thing had a special appeal, trembling with childish thoughts, in Severin's mind. (Leppin [1914] 2016: 81)

The rest of the scene is completely led by this recollection: since aunt Regina was a nun, Severin starts noticing a group of priests walking on the Karlsbrücke "in pairs, like schoolchildren", then a group of orphans, all wearing the same uniform, walked by a nun who is very similar to Regina. Consequently, Severin follows these groups to the Niklaskirche. Even if not completely intentional, this movement is oriented and has a clear direction, which is also stressed by the description of the floating boats and the moving clouds. The same mechanism leads Severin's walking scenes in most cases: they are not aimless, he always looks for solace by following any element that can help discover his memories and understand his inner life, and the discovered memories have a direct effect on his following actions.

Nevertheless it is interesting to observe how Severin relies on the streets of Prague during this process: he does not know which part of his inner life will be awoken, nor has he any clue of the destination he will be pressured to reach. However, every element of the city he observes interacts with his emotions and memories. This insistence on Severin's inner life makes the definition of *flâneur* problematic, since the characterisation of the *flâneur* is based on the anonymity of the subject, and also requires an intentional distance when observing the urban environment (Conlin 2014: 14–16, Turcot 2014: 48–52).

3 The centrality of this scene and of the incest theme in Leppin's novel is highlighted in: Schneider, Thomas, *Verführungen*. forthcoming, likely to be published in September 2021. In: Dieter Heimböckel, Steffen Höhne, Manfred Weinberg (ed.): *In-terkulturalität, Übersetzung, Literatur – am Beispiel der Prager Moderne*. Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau 2021.

Since his first appearance in *Le Figaro* (1831), the *flâneur* considers the streets a theatre where spectacles take place, and his main interest lies in the analysis of city life, especially in relation to elements of the crowd (Conlin 2014: 14, Turcot 2014: 50).⁴ The intentional observation of people's behaviour and references to the crowd are basically absent in *Severins Gang in die Finsternis*: even when in crowded spaces, Severin looks at people only in order to find his acquaintances. The distance between Severin's torment and the indifferent, loud voices and faces of the crowd is strongly stressed, but unlike the distance between the *flâneur* and the object of his observation, which has the function of focusing the attention on urban life, Severin's distance has the only aim of pointing out the protagonist's solitude and disquiet, while reminding the reader of an attitude tending to self-isolation, an attitude that shows egocentric and neurotic traits.

The continuous interaction between urban environment and the protagonist's emotions expresses an aesthetic of walking that differs from the *flânerie*. The act of wandering described in Leppin's text shows a direct connection to the exploration of the subconscious, especially in the way Severin relies on city streets and on his own walking to investigate his own inner world. As previously said, the protagonist is led by the city to his memories, then his reawakened memories lead him to his consequent paths and actions. The idea of undertaking a path that can lead anywhere, with a strong component of investigation on an unconscious level, is close to the ideas outlined in Francesco Careri's *Walkscapes* in relation to the birth of Surrealism. According to Careri's studies, the transition from Dada to Surrealism can be traced back to an experience relating to the act of walking: the erratic journey organised by Dada in 1924, to which André Breton participated just before writing the Surrealist Manifesto *Poisson Soluble*. In the introduction to the text, Breton referenced the experience of walking from Blois to Romorantin, calling it an "exploration between waking life and dream life". Since the first definition of Surrealism given in the document was: "pure psychic automatism with which one aims at expressing, whether verbally or in writing, or in any other way, the real functioning of thought" (Breton [1924] 1992: 87–88), Careri points out the connection between the idea of "automatic writing" and the aforementioned trip, which was a form of "automatic writing in real space" (Careri [2002] 2017: 78).

Unlike Dadaists, Surrealists didn't choose the banal city as central setting of their walking experiences, but based their theory on the concept of "empty space". The first *deambulation*, as they defined this experiment, had taken place on paths in the countryside, among rural settlements, and implied a desire for approaching the limits of known spaces, or real spaces. Careri states:

The Surrealist path was positioned out of time, crossing the childhood of the world, taking the archetypal forms of wandering in the empathic territories of the primitive universe. Space appears as an active, pulsating subject, an autonomous producer of affections and relations. (Careri [2002] 2017: 78)

An important part of this journey was the sense of uncertainty and danger experienced on the path, a feeling that led to a state of *apprehension*, a term that expresses the concepts of *feeling fear* as well as *grasping* or *learning*. The *deambulation* leads to the interaction with an empathic territory where reality, nightmares and thoughts transport the artist into a state of unconsciousness "where the ego is no longer definite." (Careri [2002] 2017: 78-79) Therefore, Careri explains the Surrealist concept of *deambulation*

⁴ See also: Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, in: Baudelaire, Charles [1964](1995) *The Painters of Modern Life*, translated into English by Johnathan Mayne, London: Phaidon.

as: “[t]he achievement of a state of hypnosis by walking, a disorienting loss of control. It is a medium through which to enter into contact with the unconscious part of the territory” (Careri [2002] 2017: 79).

In comparison to Dadaists, who used their visits on the territory to reveal the banal and the ridiculous aspects of city life, it can be said that Surrealists moved to a more positive project, since they denied the nihilism of Dada and suggested the existence of something “hidden” in urban environments. According to this view, that was strongly influenced by the nascent psychoanalysis, urban space can be explored and crossed like the human mind and, just like human unconscious memories and thoughts, a hidden reality can reveal itself in cities. The act of walking in Surrealism had the function of investigating and unveiling “the *unconscious zones of the city*” (Careri [2002] 2017: 81).

Severins Gang in die Finsternis cannot be directly connected to Surrealism as a movement, because it was written ten years before Breton’s Manifesto. Nevertheless, similarities between Severin’s walkabouts and the surrealist conception of wandering are visible in this will of unveiling the subconscious and the repressed. Severin starts his walkabouts as spontaneous and automatic acts, interacting with an empathic city and experiencing a different dimension of consciousness. Similarly, his interest for the underground can be compared to the surrealist tendency to reach the edges of the urban environment, where the city gets progressively more disintegrated and the limits of rationality and social conditioning wear thin:

His restlessness led him to the last limits of the suburbs, where the zinc barracks stood in a never-ending row, along the fifth district, where people would get lost in its boring, modern roads even with the day light. Here and there ruins of the old Jewish district crawled out of the darkness, the monastery of the Brothers of Misery pushed its unsettling trunk against the advancing new buildings, where the scaffolds still hanged. Only a pair of lamps burned on the bank of the Frantischek, and the water of the river struck the bridge heavily at a steady pace. (Leppin [1914] 2016: 54)

Starting from the importance of Severin’s subconscious, it is also possible to reflect on the existence, and potentially on the role, of a Prague subconscious in Leppin’s novel. As both Susanne Fritz and Nora Schmidt point out, the representation of Severin’s Prague belongs to an uncertain sphere between the realistic depiction and the *topos* of the unsettling city (Fritz 2005: 177–184, Schmidt 2017: 141–151). The previously quoted passage where Severin affirms to feel the city’s hands caressing him suggests an environment with its own will and body. Another meaningful passage that shows the power of Prague’s will on the protagonist is in chapter 7:

He would often close the door of his apartment two or three hours after midnight and he would walk down the dark stairs that led to the streets. The city which he waked far and wide during the day at night had an unknown and timid power over him. It pulled him out of horrible dreams to rest him on its lap. (Leppin [1914] 2016: 53)

The second part of the novel is named *Die Spinne*, the spider, after the tavern where Severin meets the prostitute Mylada during the first chapter of this section. After this first meeting, the tavern becomes the main indoor space of the novel. Even if walking scenes and external spaces are still very present in this section, every movement and every piece of narration steers towards the tavern: *Die Spinne* is by far the most described indoor space in the novel, and all the last walking scenes show Severin desperately looking for it. Therefore, the narrator starts to refer to the events in Severin’s life and to his thoughts as a *Gespinst* (a web) in this section, suggesting an expansion of the tavern’s space that reached every aspect of the protagonist’s life.

Though some interpretations relate these manifestations of living space to the field of fantastic literature and to the *topos* of a “magic Prague”, they can be also read as the result of the interaction between Severin’s subconscious and the subconscious of the city, a hidden reality not unlike the one revealed through the aforementioned aesthetic experience of surrealist deambulations, since the city interacts so strongly with the protagonist’s emotions that it seems to hide a living, feeling and willing essence – however it remains ambiguous, how much the protagonist’s inner life participates in perceiving or imagining this trait of Prague. It can be affirmed, anyway, that the city interacts with the protagonist as an empathic environment throughout the whole novel and that a hidden dimension of this environment reveals itself progressively along with Severin’s exploration – and above all, along with the unveiling of his repressed memories.

If a direct connection to Surrealism cannot be affirmed in the case of Leppin’s novel, it can be at least pointed out that, when *Severins Gang in die Finsternis* was first published, one of the acknowledged precursors of the movement, Guillaume Apollinaire, had already influenced Prague’s literary context and its perception of urban space through the publication of his texts *Le Passant de Prague* (1901) and *Zone* (1913) (Schmidt 2017: 151–153).

When it comes to the depiction of the unconscious zones of Prague and to the aesthetic of the act of walking in the urban landscape, *Le Passant de Prague* is a very meaningful work. In this text, a French tourist comes to visit Prague by train from Dresden. After some difficulties in orienting himself, the tourist, who is de facto an anonymous observer, meets an interesting figure who leads him through the city and shows him not only the present landscape, but also the historical events that shaped Prague through the centuries. The man is actually the Eternal Jew, or the Wandering Jew, and represents the history, but also what is repressed and forgotten, of the environment.

Apollinaire wrote a second story about this character, where the “I” narrator of *Le Passant de Prague*, the tourist, meets him in his Paris apartment.

It is meaningful to point out that the walking scenes are central in the Prague story and not in the Paris one, and this detail becomes even more interesting when we consider the 19th century conception of Paris as the capital of *flânerie*, where walking had a very clear connotation. Apollinaire’s text introduces the concept of city exploration connecting the walker to an unconscious dimension of the city of Prague, and also stresses the idea of “wandering” by presenting the “Wandering Jew” as guide and historical memory of the urban space: the subconscious of the city, its memory, its real shape, all these elements emerge through a walkabout and through the act of wandering. Apollinaire’s text differs from Leppin’s novel in the plot and in the main topic (also because *Le Passant de Prague* really concentrates on the Bohemian city, while Leppin’s novel focuses on Severin’s inner world), nevertheless it can be suggested that some of the literary motifs related to walkabouts, which were theorised in the Surrealist Manifesto, had already started to circulate in Prague’s literary context when *Severins Gang in die Finsternis* was published.

As previously said, Severin is not the only walker in Leppin’s novel. A very meaningful trait relating to the act of walking is the strong presence of processions in the narration. The processions in the first chapter of the second part of the novel have already been presented: on the Karlsbrücke, Severin follows two groups of people, both connected to the religious sphere: a group of priests and a group of children from an orphan school, being walked by a nun. The motif is also present in chapter 8 of the first part, in the description of a funeral procession for a character called Doctor Konrad. The presence of a procession in this situation is not peculiar in and of itself, but it is interesting to point

out that this action reminds Severin of another funeral procession, to which he participated with his parents when he was a child, and that this memory includes a further kind of procession: a group of Czech patriots coming home from the burial of one of their martyrs. In both cases, the presence of processions is linked to the re-emergence of childhood memories, and both situations lead to crucial transitions in the narration. After the scene in chapter 8 of the first part, Severin decides to kill a friend's pet, a raven, with a poisonous substance he had received from another character. Before this moment, Severin had always been a non-violent character. Likewise, after the scene in chapter 1 of the second part, Severin understands that his romance with Zdenka has no meaning, since he remembered the childhood memory that shaped his sexuality – the visits to aunt Regina with his father. This leads him to the tavern where he meets Mylada, who looks exactly like the aunt he saw in these memories, and the path into the darkness that was mentioned in the title becomes concrete.

The insistence of processions in these cases is an insistence on the idea of movement, as well as on the concept of transition. The presence of these oriented walking acts in the contexts of a church and of a cemetery is peculiar because of the religious component present in both places, a component that is not explicit in the novel but reveals itself from time to time. In order to better understand these scenes, it can be useful to reference Careri's view on the connection between cult spaces and the act walking since, according to his research, the first conception of cult spaces was related to the idea of transition, and religious rites are the only cultural sphere where the concept of wandering never lost its importance throughout the development of different social models. The first architectural forms analysed by Careri in these regards are *menhirs* sites and the Amon's Temple in Karnak, the oldest Egyptian temple (which can be dated back to the 2nd Millennium B.C). In relation to *menhirs* sites, Careri points out that one of the main functions of these structures was to host religious rites linked to primitive wandering, where the ceremony represented a journey expressed by walking and dancing, creating a separated "space of going" that showed a symbolic depiction of the usual nomadic space. It is specified, though, that these sites were not considered static spaces. The Egyptian temple in Karnak was the first attempt to give a frame to this "space of going" and, despite the present use of temples and other cultural spaces, it used to serve as a transition area for the king and the procession taking the God from one sanctuary to another. The persistence of processions in religious rites shows the reminiscence of a conception of cult spaces where the idea of journey is an intrinsic and fundamental element of spirituality (Careri [2002] 2017: 50–59). Therefore a strong link between processions and the representation of paths can be affirmed. Severin's walk from the Franzenskai to the Niklaskirche, where he follows the group of priests and the orphan children walked by the nun, is linked to the childhood memory describing the awakening of his sexuality. The end of the scene in the church, where Severin mixes the invocation to Virgin Mary with the name of Regina ("Gegrüßet seist du Regina!"),⁵ represents a renewed initiation to adulthood and therefore to sexualised life. The initiatic quality of this scene has been pointed out in a recent study on Leppin's text conducted by Thomas Schneider, where Severin's experiences are interpreted from a psychoanalytical point of view and the presence of repressed memories, especially the ones covering up the incestuous idea that characterises the protagonist's neurosis, is exhaustively clarified and highlighted (Schneider 2021). The importance of the transition introduced in this situation,

5 „The Church was empty, but for a woman in black who was kneeling not far from the doors. She turned around, as soon as he entered, and he recognized the nun he had seen on the bank. Her face was white and her eyes blazed under her hood. Severin knelt next to her and prayed loudly: Hail, Regina!" (Leppin [1914] 2016: 84)

which brings Severin back to a deviated sexuality, and of the other transition introduced in the cemetery scene, which leads to the killing of Lazarus Kain's raven, confirms the link between these moments and the ideas of personal development and initiation. Thus, these oriented walks clearly reminiscent of processions not only introduce narrative transitions by insisting on the idea of movement, but also stress the initiatic character of the scenes. Furthermore, the processions and their link to the concepts of journey and path connect the narration to the title *Severins Gang in die Finsternis*, where the substantive *Gang* can be understood as *road* but also as *walk* or *path*. This gives an overall view of the text and helps explain the insistence on walking scenes in its structure, since Severin ends up following an actual path through the apparently aimless city exploration, an initiatic and narrative path.

It can be concluded that the centrality of walking scenes in Leppin's novel can be interpreted as expression of the main idea presented in the title, where the protagonist unconsciously undertakes a journey leading to his own ruin. The attention given to the depictions of Prague's landscape does not make this city the actual object of Severin's observation, since these depictions are functional to the unveiling of his memory and inner life: the extreme egocentrism of Severin's reflections and the insistency of the narration on his emotions exclude any possibility of describing him as an indifferent observer, therefore the definition of *flâneur* for this character proves itself problematic. Despite the lack of actual *flânerie*, the act of walking remains one of the main themes in the novel and characterises the whole structure of the narration, a structure where the notion of "narrative path" acquires a very concrete meaning.

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