

## **A MURDER IN ACADEMIA: CHARACTERIZATION AND CHARACTER FUNCTIONS IN KARL VOCELKA'S NOVEL *DER DOZENT UND DER TOD***

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**Abstract:** Karl Vocelka's novel *Der Dozent und der Tod*, published in 2022, represents an intriguing combination of a campus novel and detective fiction, falling entirely within the subgenre of campus crime novel. The story, set in Vienna in 1986, revolves around an amateur detective, a lecturer at the University of Vienna, who finds himself in the middle of a murder investigation and begins a quest for the truth, which results not only in exposing the perpetrator, but also in revealing several hidden agendas in academic circles. The aim of this paper is to examine the characterization of fictional characters, as well as the determination of their functions in the context of the specific subgenre – the campus crime novel. The analysis of crucial characters of the novel will be based on their actions, physical appearances, language and interpersonal characterization. Their functions will be established by implementing Greimas' actantial model, which offers an opportunity to describe elementary action relationships within narrative texts by taking specific generic characteristics into consideration, while creating a productive basis for analysis and further interpretations. The analysis will show that Vocelka's novel follows the traditional line of campus crime fiction, but also differs at some points from the expected elements of this hybrid genre, most clearly in relation to the main character and the diversity of character functions.

**Keywords:** campus crime novel, campus novel, crime fiction, actantial model, Austrian literature

### **1. Introduction**

The novel *Der Dozent und der Tod/The Lecturer and Death* (2022) is Karl Vocelka's first work of fiction. The author is a prominent (retired) professor of history at the University of Vienna, whose research on Austrian history is highly respected in the scientific community in Austria

and abroad. Vocelka's academic background, his insider position, as well as his personal interest in crime fiction resulted in a novel with the subtitle *Ein Universitätskrimi*, which determines not only the academic setting of the novel, but also its generic classification – it should be read as a campus crime novel.

Crime fiction as a genre has its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it took over one hundred years for it to awake the interest of researchers. The main reason for the lack of its presence in scientific papers and books lies in the very nature of the genre – it follows schematic structures in narratives, so it cannot be considered *worthy*, but rather trivial, popular fiction. On the other hand, crime fiction as a generic term has always been one of the most popular and most read genres. There have been several trends when it comes to crime literature. These directions of development are foremost content-related – hard-boiled, police procedural, historical crime fiction, spy fiction, the thriller, and many more are examples of the “Spielarten” (Suerbaum 439), all subgenres of crime fiction. The main characteristic of crime novels in general is their topic – crime, mostly murder, as well as answering all the questions in relation to the crime, foremost those considering the identity of the perpetrator and his/her motives, together with reconstructing the course of events (Suerbaum 438).

The campus novel or academic novel is a genre that is present most clearly in Anglophone literature(s) from about 1950 onward, only expanding beyond the borders of English-speaking countries in the last few decades. The main characteristics of this genre include the author's close connection to the academic world (a professor or a researcher, whether retired or still active), his/her satirical intention (“the academic novelist writes out of an urge to reveal, and perhaps punish, the follies and shortcomings of the academic institution”, Moseley pg 7), a protagonist, a professor or a student, as a main focal point in the narrative, and very often a tendency to show “the university as a microcosm of society at large” (Lodge, pg 169). As Rudolf Weiss states, “the academic novel is a rare species in Germanophone literature” (93), and Dieter Schwanitz' *Der Campus* (1995) is a pioneer in this field.

The campus crime novel combines elements of the campus novel and mystery/detective fiction and should be viewed as a subgenre of the campus novel. A crime, in most cases a murder, takes place in a closed academic community and an amateur detective, most often a member of the faculty, begins his/her investigative work, revealing not only the identity of the murderer, but also certain hidden agendas in academic circles. It is no surprise that the academic community is not immune to reading, but also to writing detective fiction. Marcus (pg 263) explains

this phenomenon by pointing out two characteristics of crime fiction in academic settings. First of all, academia is a closed community, which corresponds to the expectation of a limited number of characters in detective novels, and secondly, it emphasises the concept of literary scholarship as a form of detective work.

Having Algirdas Greimas's theory as a starting point, the aim of this paper is to analyse the character functions in Vocelka's novel from two generic perspectives – those of detective fiction and the campus novel – in order to determine the similar or distinct functions from these two points of views. Greimas' actantial model of analysis shows six basic character functions: the Subject, the Object, the Sender, the Helper, the Opponent and the Receiver. The Subject is almost exclusively the main character, the hero, and his/her function is to have a desire for something, to want something. The Object is a thing or a person that the Subject is longing for – it can be a single character, but also something abstract such as happiness, power and so on. The Receiver is a character for whom the Object is intended, and this function often overlaps with the Subject. The Opponent's main purpose is to prevent the Subject from reaching the Object, and the Helper is a character who can be personally involved in the conflict and assist the Subject as well as the Opponent in their missions (Bachorz 54-55; Pasula 125-126). The Sender is quite a complex category in Greimas's structural approach, because it can involve two different functions. The Sender can be regarded as the Judge, someone with a greater power, or as the Mandator, a character who orders or instructs the Subject, who sends him on a mission (Kim 50-55; Pasula 126).

The narratological aspects of the analysis in this paper, such as narrative perspective (focus or focalization)<sup>1</sup> and narrative voice<sup>2</sup>, are derived from work of Gérard Genette (<sup>3</sup>2010) and his structural theory of narratology. Franz Stanzel's (<sup>7</sup>2001) narratological theory based on typical narrative situations, formed on oppositions within aspects of person (first- or third-person narration), perspective (internal or external), and mode (teller mode vs. reflector mode), will also be addressed in the following chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Focalization represents a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator and the characters (Niederhoff pars. 2–4). Genette (121–124) identifies three types of focalization: zero, internal and external.

<sup>2</sup> Genette (159) distinguishes between two types of narrative: one with the narrator absent from the story he tells (*heterodiegetic*), the other with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells (*homodiegetic*).

Considering the nature of the campus novel with its specific spatial structures, the theories of Yuri Lotman (<sup>4</sup>1993) and Boris Uspensky (1983) play a significant role in this aspect of the analysis. The structural analysis of space is based on the term *sujet*, which, according to Lotman (329–339), emerges when the character/protagonist crosses the border between two complementary parts of space. The oppositions of these parts can be present at the topological, semantic and/or topographic level. Uspensky (58–65), on the other hand, dedicated a chapter of his widely recognized book to the problem area of narrative space, examining several forms of concurrence and nonconcurrence of the spatial position of the narrator and a character.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the relevant characters of Karl Vocelka's novel, as well as to determine their functions in the context of the specific subgenre – the campus crime novel. Since the classic detective fiction (popularly known as a *whodunit*) has continued to exert a strong influence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with its widely recognizable *death–detection–explanation* model (Horsley 287–289), its combination with an academic setting, resulting in the subgenre of the campus crime novel, offers various opportunities for scientific researches in the problem area of character analysis.

## 2. The Characters in the Novel *Der Dozent und der Tod*

Like any campus crime novel, Vocelka's work comes down to a closed circle of characters surrounding the title character. It is quite interesting that the protagonist does not appear at first by his name, but rather by his title – he is a lecturer in the Department for Turkish Studies at the University of Vienna. The other characters include all levels of academia: professors and their wives, students and former students, but also a worker at the institute and the chief inspector as the representative of the official police investigation.

### 2.1. Rudi, the Lecturer

The Lecturer is the main character and the amateur detective figure in the novel. From the first chapter on, he, with very few exceptions, remains the dominant focalizer in the heterodiegetic narrative<sup>3</sup> and the reader is almost exclusively limited to the information provided by his thoughts and actions. The initial introduction of this character is in his professional surroundings, which corresponds to his identification by an

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<sup>3</sup> According to Stanzel's (71) narratological theory, this type of narrative situation is a figural one, with the Lecturer being dominant in the reflector mode.

academic title, paints a vivid picture of an academic outsider – a characterization of which he himself is aware, and moreover proud of: “Seine fortschrittliche politische Haltung prallte gegen die Phalanx der konservativen Professoren und anderer Mittelbauvertreter. [...] Aber er resignierte nicht, setzte den ‘langen Marsch durch die Institutionen’ fort und konnte gelegentlich etwas Positives erreichen oder zumindest Ärgeres verhindern”<sup>4</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 7-8).

The Lecturer’s rebellious political ideas are also visible in his appearance. His personal style and his clothing stay in sharp contrast to his colleagues’ and speak volumes about his intentional distance from the unwritten rules of conservative academic circles. Chief inspector Lietzmann instantly notices: “Seine Kleidung und Frisur erinnerten an die Gestalten der Studentenrevolte [...]. Gegen diese Typen empfand er nach wie vor eine tiefe Abneigung”<sup>5</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 22). Lietzmann’s prejudice against the Lecturer is related to the protests of 1968, where the two stood on opposite sides. The Lecturer’s upkeep of the same personal style also shows his tendency to stand out and intentionally provoke his political opponents. It is also remarkable how much attention the Lecturer pays to the clothing of other characters. Since the reader experiences the other characters mostly from Rudi’s perspective, the narrator does not withhold the description of (mostly male) characters including their physical appearance as well as their clothing. This much attention paid to others, and Rudi’s comparison of himself to them, testifies to the insecurities hidden behind the rebellious facade.

The name of the protagonist, Rudi, is most likely a shortened version of the traditional Austrian/German name Rudolf. The Lecturer is called by this name exclusively by the female characters, with whom he has intimate relationships. We can only speculate that the name/nickname of the main character could be, as an aptronym, connected to the Austrian political scene of 1986, which itself is never mentioned in the novel, but several historical events clearly point to the story time. There are numerous conversations in which Kurt Waldheim’s election to president of Austria<sup>6</sup> becomes one of the topics. Since Rudi

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<sup>4</sup>“His progressive political opinions clashed with the phalax of conservative professors and other non-professorial representatives. [...] But he did not give up, he continued the ‘long march through the institutions’ and was occasionally able to achieve something positive or at least prevent trouble.”

<sup>5</sup>“His clothes and hairstyle were reminiscent of the figures of the student protests [...]. He still felt a deep dislike for these guys.”

<sup>6</sup>The year 1986 was a turning point in Austrian domestic politics. The former foreign minister and the fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kurt

supports the Left, it can be speculated that his name is associated with the former president, Rudolf Kirschläger, a popular politician and the former Austrian president who stood for Austrian neutrality. On the other hand, the Lecturer's name could also be connected to Rudi Dutschke, a famous German leader and spokesperson during the protests of 1968, whose tragic death made him a symbolic figure of the rebellious movement (see Winkler 251).

The Lecturer's usage of language also contributes to his characterization. Keeping in mind that Vocelka's heterodiegetic narrator does not often let his characters express themselves in their own words, the analysis of this aspect will be focused on the parts of the text which can be undoubtedly identified as the Lecturer's. Rudi's words, almost exclusively made visible by quotation marks, as direct speech, often contain colloquial expressions in Austrian German. Thinking of his disagreement with the colleague Schimanek from years back, the Lecturer clearly remembers calling him "ewig gestrigen Depp, der beseitigt werden sollte"<sup>7</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 7). This insult will be brought up several times in the story and used to emphasize the Lecturer's animosity towards the murder victim and mean that some suspect his involvement in the murder case. The word *Depp* is typically used in southern German speaking regions, Austria included, as an insult related to someone's narrow-mindedness. Another example of Austriacism can be detected in Lecturer's characterization of professor Weesmann from Germany: "Alles an ihm schaute beängstigend germanisch aus und der Dozent spürte, wie Vorurteile gegen die Piefkes in ihm hochstiegen"<sup>8</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 59). The noun *Piefke* has a pejorative meaning in Austria and refers to (northern) Germans. There are not many examples of this praxis in the novel, particularly because the storyteller, who

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Waldheim, and his process of election were surrounded by controversy. The so-called Waldheim scandal revealed the candidate's inappropriate past, which included his military record and his knowledge about crimes committed during World War II (see Vocelka 2000, 349-352). "He won the election and became the Austrian president and remained in office until 1992. [...] Because of his uncertain role between 1938 and 1945, Waldheim was internationally isolated [...]. The Austrian government installed an international commission to investigate Waldheim's past. The commission found that Waldheim must have known about war crimes but could not prove any personal involvement" (*Britannica* pars. 2-3).

<sup>7</sup>"Eternal yesterday's fool who should be eliminated".

<sup>8</sup>"Everything about him looked frighteningly Germanic and the Lecturer felt prejudice against the Germans rising in him."

himself/herself (gender unknown) narrates in standard German, is quite dominant and the textual interference of narrator's and characters' texts<sup>9</sup> is rarely noticeable.

Interpersonal characterization<sup>10</sup>, meaning characterization by other characters, can be organized into several groups, depending on the *Charaktant*, the character who gives us information about these others. In the case of the Lecturer, Jadwiga, his love interest, and the chief inspector Lietzmann offer us two different perspectives of Rudi's character. The chief inspector is summoned upon immediately after the murder of Schimanek. During the interrogation of the Lecturer as one of the witnesses and potential suspects, he, initially prejudicial against Rudi's appearance, is irritated by his arrogance: "Das Gefühl, dass der Dozent ihm beweisen wollte, wie blöd die Polizei und speziell sein Gegenüber sei, ließ ihn nicht los. [...] Einerseits war da diese zur Schau gestellte Eitelkeit, andererseits das Erscheinungsbild dieses Mannes"<sup>11</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 22). The next meeting of the two takes place in the Lecturer's room at the Institute and testifies to the animosity between a rebellious individual and the representative of the police: "Ah... Sie haben bei Ihren Kollegen von der GESTAPO, ich meine von der Staatspolizei, nachgefragt"<sup>12</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 41). Lietzmann's position triggers Rudi's defiant character traits and confirms his inborn disobedient nature. The initial dislike on both sides will be gradually overturned, due to the willingness of both characters to modify their approach to each other. The same tastes and interest in wine and food, as well as similar opinions about everyday politics (including negative criticism of Waldheim's election) turn these two into professional allies in solving the murder case and, finally, into friends.

Rudi's romantic life is one of the aspects which is crucial for his characterization. His active interest in conquering women speaks to his need to prove himself as irresistible, as well as to avoid potential hurtful situations which would show his vulnerability. The Lecturer starts a sexual relationship with Irene Moser, a female student well known for

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<sup>9</sup>On the topic of textual interference, see Schmid 181-229.

<sup>10</sup>Lahn and Meister (240-241) recommend four categories of elements which contribute to the indirect characterization: character's action, his/her physical appearance, language and interpersonal characterization.

<sup>11</sup>"He couldn't let go of the feeling that the Lecturer wanted to prove to him how stupid the police and especially he was. [...] On the one hand, there was this vanity that was on display, on the other hand this man's appearance."

<sup>12</sup>"Ah... you asked your colleagues from the GESTAPO, I mean, from the state police."

her promiscuity, out of curiosity along with his desire to confirm his charm. He is almost unprepared for her unrestrained willingness to engage in sexual activity with him, making him wonder if she is more interested in his academic title than his appeal: “Irene Moser sagte ohne langes Zögern zu. [...] Je länger der Abend dauerte, desto mehr war der Dozent von dieser Frau fasziniert”<sup>13</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 69). The relationship with Irene will cloud the Lecturer’s judgment on several occasions, especially when it comes to his involvement in the murder case – he ignores the fact that she is one of the suspects. As it turns out, Irene did have a hidden agenda while entering the relationship with Rudi, but it is only partially connected to the murder case, since she turns out to be a call girl, but not a murderer.

Jadwiga, who comes along later in the story, is the second love interest of the main character. Her relationship with him paints a more personal, gentle and caring picture of Rudi. She sees him for the first time in her professional environment, in the house of the family Holub where she works as a maid, when the Lecturer appears in the role of amateur detective and interrogates Mrs. Holub as a potential suspect. Jadwiga’s initial characterization of the protagonist testifies to her being attracted to his self-confident approach, as well as to his kind and understanding attitude towards her: “Der Dozent, der sich wie ein Polizist benahm, hatte sie beeindruckt. [...] Jadwiga fand ihn interessant, seine Stimme war klangvoll und auch ein wenig erotisch”<sup>14</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 85). Rudi’s relationship with Jadwiga evolves gradually and shows potential for it to be long term when he realizes that it is the simplicity of life and love that he needs and not a pure quest and conquering.

The Lecturer’s actions play the most significant role in his characterization. His interactions include the following sets of characters/fields of relations: friends, women, colleagues, and outsiders (characters which are not part of his everyday life routine or social circle). When it comes to friends, Peter Hassinger is the closest and the most present character in the story. Rudi’s meetings with him almost exclusively involve food and/or drinks, which could be interpreted as a leitmotif of this character’s appearance. Their conversations often summarize the Lecturer’s professional and personal affairs and are useful for his future decisions. Rudi’s actions in the field of social contacts show his openness and sincerity and he is well-liked for these

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<sup>13</sup>“Irene Moser participated willingly without much hesitation. [...] The more the evening progressed, the more was the Lecturer fascinated by this woman.”

<sup>14</sup>“She was impressed by the Lecturer who acted like a policeman. [...] Jadwiga found him interesting, his voice was sonorous and also a little erotic.”

qualities. His closest social circle includes politically like-minded friends, but their personality traits often differ from the Lecturer's. Hassinger is characterized by the protagonist as his best student ever, a person with qualities the Lecturer himself is aware of lacking: „Die analytische Fähigkeit dieses jungen Menschen beeindruckte ihn ebenso wie seine Gründlichkeit und Genauigkeit. Die beiden letzteren Eigenschaften gingen dem Dozenten, der ein einfallsreicher und fantasiebegabter, aber auch sehr oberflächlicher und schlampiger Mensch war, leider weitgehend ab“<sup>15</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 25). Hassinger's insight into Rudi's detective work often leads to new developments in the protagonist's investigations, because his decisions are positively influenced by an element of rationality.

The Lecturer's sleuthing shows elements of deduction, but also of coincidence, and at this point his character differs from classical fictional detectives. He often witnesses some interesting scenes during his walks through the city, or accidentally runs into potential suspects while visiting the galleries or the opera.<sup>16</sup> His spying on Malcolm leads to his repressed uneasiness and culminates in a nightmare,<sup>17</sup> which contradicts his bold investigative activity and testifies to his deep psychological involvement in the murder case (see Vocelka 2022, 154-155).

Rudi's questioning of the suspects shows his lack of awareness of or even care for the consequences it might have on his professional life and on the relationships in this social field. The most noteworthy

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<sup>15</sup> „He was impressed by this young man's analytical ability as well as his thoroughness and accuracy. Unfortunately, the Lecturer was largely lacking the latter two qualities – he was a resourceful and imaginative person, but also a very superficial and a sloppy one.“

<sup>16</sup> According to Uspensky (58), the concurrence of the spatial position of the narrator and a character, in this case the Lecturer, testifies to narrator's "attachment" to the character and he/she holds the same spatial position as the character; then the authorial description is not limited to the subjective view of the character but is "suprapersonal".

<sup>17</sup> From Lotman's (329–339) point of view, Lecturer's border-crossing(s), foremost considering relations of academic surrounding vs. personal space, could be on topological level described as opposition between inside and outside (of academic community). On semantical level, to these spaces are added qualities such as intimidating vs. familiar or outsider vs. insider position. His border-crossing from the generic point of view brings success in the sleuthing activities, and can as such be described as *revolutionary*, but his position at the faculty, taking genre of campus novel into consideration, is only slightly affected by his actions, mostly influencing his professional relationships.

conversation is with professor Holub's wife, whom Rudi quite recklessly confronts about her affairs with the murder victim, as well as with another candidate for the professor's position at the University and suggests her motive for murder (Vocelka 2022, 82-83). On the other hand, the Lecturer notices that his detective work has a bad influence on his relationships with others, but does not show willingness to control the urge to investigate, as his determination overpowers his social engagement (Vocelka 2022, 113). The majority of these conflicts will be settled at the end, but it will take time for Rudi to exclude each one of the potential suspects from his list so that he can engage in reestablishing communication.

## 2.2. Leitner, the Murderer

The *whodunit* conception of Vocelka's campus crime novel corresponds to the traditional expectations the reader might have of this genre. The identity of the murderer is revealed at the very end of the story, but there are four *teasing* chapters incorporated in the main plot, as well as the prologue, which offer an introspective into the killer's thoughts, past and present fears along with his future plans, without disclosing the name or the gender.

This character's appearance occurs mainly in the conversations he has with the Lecturer. Rudi questions him on several occasions, never as a potential suspect, but only as one of the witnesses to the crime. This mistake will be later explained by the fact that Leitner belongs to the type of people who are considered *invisible*: "Er wäre, wenn er in den Hörsal gegangen war, von niemand beachtet worden, da er ständig im Institut herumwieselte und irgendwie zum Inventar gehörte"<sup>18</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 181).

The description of Leitner is concentrated on a few physical characteristics ("[...] um die 50, klein und mager und – das war auffallend – er hatte eigenartige Ohren, denn er besaß keine Ohrläppchen"<sup>19</sup>, Vocelka 2022, 180-181), which are enough to identify him as the thief and the murderer. The five chapters dedicated to Leitner's introspection are thus necessary for his characterization, since the other sources of information are insufficient. These short chapters differ from the others with regard to narrative elements – the homodiegetic narrator offers us

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<sup>18</sup>"If he had gone to the lecture hall, no one would have noticed him, because he was always scurrying about in the institute and was somehow part of the inventory."

<sup>19</sup>"[...] around 50, small and skinny and – what was striking – he had strange ears, because he didn't have any earlobes".

an external focalization<sup>20</sup> carried out in the form of an internal monologue. There are several topics repeatedly emphasized in these monologues: Leitner's current emotions, his unhappy childhood (a father complex) and the *demons* which, as he believes, plague him.

The father is described as strict, violent and controlling and Leitner blames him for his current state of mind. The mother is mentioned only once in her passive role: "Von meiner Mutter konnte ich keine Hilfe erwarten. Aus Angst vor der Unberechenbarkeit ihres Ehemannes war sie innerlich erstarrt"<sup>21</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 5). The father is brought up again in the context of his past: "Ich habe die Deutschen immer gehasst – ganz im Gegensatz zu meinem Vater, der sie für Herrenmenschen hielt und glaubte, dass sie die Welt regieren sollten"<sup>22</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 141). The father's liking for and support of National Socialism stands in opposition to the son's dislike of Germans, except that the roots of hatred in his case are not ideologically predetermined, but lie rather in Leitner's disregard for human life in general. Chapter 58 is the last one dedicated to his internal monologue and it recapitulates this character's feelings towards his father: "Vater ist schuld, dass mich nie jemand erkannte, meine unschätzbaren Talente und meine Genialität nicht sah"<sup>23</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 183). Blaming the father for the lack of accomplishments in life stands in contrast to his narcissistic self-image and culminates in the (internal) admission of responsibility for his father's death (Vocelka 2022, 183).

Leitner's current emotions and his state of mind are quite interestingly described on several occasions using meteorological comparisons: "Alles ist vom Sonnenlicht zerfressen"<sup>24</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 5), "in diesem strahlenden Sonnenschein meines Erfolges tauchten heute die ersten Wölkchen auf"<sup>25</sup> (Ibid. 63), "Die schwarzen Wolken, die am Horizont aufgetaucht waren, wurden wie durch einen starken Sturm

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<sup>20</sup>According to Stanzel (71-72), this is the case of first-person narrative with internal perspective.

<sup>21</sup>"I could not expect any help from my mother. Fearing her husband's unpredictability, she was dead inside."

<sup>22</sup>"I've always hated the Germans – unlike my father, who thought of them as master race and that they should rule the world."

<sup>23</sup>"Father is to blame that no one ever recognized me, failed to see my invaluable talents and genius."

<sup>24</sup>"Everything is eaten away by the sunlight".

<sup>25</sup>"In this radiant sunshine of my success, the first little clouds appeared today."

aufgerissen”<sup>26</sup> (Ibid. 141), „Alles verdüstert sich“<sup>27</sup> (Ibid. 183). This tendency to express emotions indirectly, using metaphors, shows Leitner’s inability to channel them properly. The dominant feelings in the homodiegetic chapters are anger and hatred. He is using his father as an excuse for his urge to kill (Vocelka 2022, 5). Leitner’s appetite for murder, which he does not attempt to control, results in Schimanek’s death. There is no remorse nor guilt during and after the act, but instead joy, excitement and pleasure: “Was für ein Tag – mein Traum hat sich erfüllt. [...] Sein Röcheln und Stöhnen, seine verdrehte Bewegung im Kampf mit dem Tod, ehe sein Leichnam am Boden aufschlug, das begeisterte mich”<sup>28</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 15). Choosing poison as a weapon is justified by his lack of courage to engage in a more personal method of killing.

Searching for the motive of Leitner’s need for murder does lead to many questions, but some of them remain unanswered in the novel. His suicide during the interview with Chief Inspector Lietzmann leaves the police and the Lecturer, but also the reader, longing for further explanations. The very choice of the victim shows a hidden agenda and does not correspond with the mental state presented in the four chapters and in the prologue. Leitner steals valuable manuscripts from the Institute and statuettes from Schimanek’s office with the intention of selling them – this decision involves careful planning and contradicts his delusional ideas represented in the internal monologues.

### 2.3. Chief Inspector Lietzmann

This character is given more space and depth in Vocelka’s novel than most police representatives in classical crime fiction. He is summoned after the murder takes place. His initial characterization as a grumpy looking man (Vocelka 2022, 16), is deepened by the explanation of his antipathy towards academia in general (Vocelka 2022, 18). There are several chapters in which the chief inspector acts as a focalizer and they are helpful for his further characterization. The highlights of his private life are presented in the story – the tragic loss of the son, the painful death of his wife. The chief inspector feels personally lonely, but also committed to his professional life.

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<sup>26</sup>“The black clouds that had appeared on the horizon were torn open as if the strong storm began.”

<sup>27</sup>“Everything grows dark.”

<sup>28</sup>“What a day – my dream has come true. [...] His rattling and groaning, his twisted movement in the struggle with death before his corpse hit the ground, that fascinated me.”

His interaction with other characters brings up his insecurities and points out his inferiority complex. This presents itself particularly in context of higher education, which Lietzmann himself did not achieve: "Ein Intellektueller, der ihn mit dem, was und wie er es sagte, demütigte. Er selbst hatte nichts studiert. Von Turkologie und Indologie verstand er nichts. Das Gefühl, dass der Dozent ihm beweisen wollte, wie blöd die Polizei und speziell sein Gegenüber sei, ließ ihn nicht los"<sup>29</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 22). The friendship, which will evolve from this less than favorable beginning, shows the willingness of both Rudi and Lietzmann to discover and nurture a more humane side of their relationship.

The Chief Inspector's dedication to work culminates in his dream about a theatre filled with his colleagues and perpetrators familiar to him; however, there is a mysterious figure which he cannot identify (Vocelka 2022, 178). This dream, inspired by the mention of the invisibility of the killer and intertextually connected to Siegfried's cloak of invisibility from the Medieval epic poem the *Nibelungenlied*, testifies to Lietzmann's constant occupation with the case.

Unlike other detectives in classical crime fiction, who often appear as intellectually inferior in comparison with the amateur detective (Nusser 45), much more space is dedicated to the chief Inspector in Vocelka's novel. He is not presented as shallow, but his lack of insider knowledge gives the Lecturer more opportunities to collect valuable information and be one step ahead in the investigation.

#### 2.4. The Candidates

The murder victim is killed during his public lecture – one of the requirements, which every candidate has to fulfil in the second round of selection for the post of soon to be retired Professor Holub. Other candidates – Habermann, Professor Weesmann and Malcolm – were supposed to deliver their lectures in the following days. From the narratological point of view, all these characters should be viewed as flat. They carry out certain functions in the context of the story and are equipped with only a few distinctive features, which shows a tendency towards stereotypes.

Schimanek, the murder victim, is given very little room to express himself as a character. However, the comments, opinions and judgment of the others about him paint quite a colourful picture. This is a typical

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<sup>29</sup>"An intellectual who humiliated him with what and how he said it. He himself had not studied anything. He knew nothing about Turkology and Indology. He couldn't let go of the feeling that the Lecturer wanted to prove to him how stupid the police and especially he was."

element of crime fiction: the victim is used as a requisite that sets the whole mechanism in motion. The reader feels no sentimentality toward him/her, and other characters present him/her as a bad person, who, for various reasons, caused anger to be directed toward himself/herself (Nusser 37-38). Each one of these characters who showed antipathy towards the victim is viewed as a suspect at some point of the investigation. The Lecturer had a quarrel with Schimanek about his unfair treatment of a female student, Professor Holub's wife had an affair with him which ended abruptly and unpleasantly, while the Professor himself has enough reasons to wish him harm. Irene Moser calls him a pig, because he, while in a relationship with her, finds out about her job as a call girl and threatens to expose her. He also planned to expose Professor Weesmann as a plagiarizer, as well as Professor Stürmer for some unethical business transactions. As it turns out, Leitner, the murderer, will have the least concrete or rational motive to commit the murder.

Habermann, the second candidate, is at least present in the story, as he is excluded as a potential suspect at the beginning of the investigations. He succeeded Schimanek in the affair with Professor Holub's wife, which implicates her possible involvement in the murder. He is a useful *Charaktant* of this female character, since he explains her methods of seduction and the family dynamics in Professor Holub's home.

Professor Weesmann stands for all the German qualities, which are not particularly popular in Austria. His Germanic physiognomy and his elegant and conservative outfit, as well as his cold and distant behaviour, leave the Lecturer reserved and annoyed at the same time (Vocelka 2022, 59). Weesmann's actions will lead him to the very top of the suspect list but, it turns out, he was only trying to protect himself and the information that his doctoral thesis resulted from the act of plagiarism. This arrogant character from the beginning will break down in desperation at the end of the investigation, because, as the Lecturer points out, plagiarism is a deadly sin in academia (Vocelka 2022, 140). Weesmann's flat character is given an unexpected twist in the plot development, which has the function of turning the police investigation into the wrong direction, but also portraying certain academic issues in this campus novel.

After a few brief mentions, Malcolm is characterized by the Lecturer as an exotic looking man (Vocelka 2022, 65). Rudi finds him to be the most enigmatic of all candidates and this quality will raise his suspicion towards the foreigner, but also cause some repressed fears of the main character to surface. His insecurities will be foremost

expressed because of the fact that Malcolm represents the unknown, which leads the Lecturer into the undefined territory of his experience, as well as his mind. The most enigmatic of all appearances is the one of Ilja Petrowitsch Jakowlew in Rudi's office, a Russian professor at the University of New York, specialized in Asian History, who pays him an unannounced visit and willingly offers interesting information about Malcolm's personal and professional life. The Lecturer is left perplexed after this visit (Vocelka 2022, 159) and the function of this character, as well as his role in the plot, remain a mystery to the reader as well. Malcolm's professional connections in Vienna and his knowledge of the antique trade market will finally prove the significance of this character for solving the case of not only the stolen manuscripts, but also the murder.

### 3. Character Functions in Vocelka's Novel

The Lecturer's quest for the murderer begins for two reasons. First of all, he wants to clear his name and prove his innocence, as he is considered one of the suspects, and, secondly, he is intellectually intrigued by the case and possesses an inborn need to investigate. There is no Sender in the standard meaning of this word, because Rudi is not a detective by vocation and he is not employed by another character to solve the crime; thus this function could be replaced exactly by his urge to act upon the situation. This conception of the Sender function is typical for a closed academic community and can be treated as a trait of a campus crime novel. Rudi's landing on the suspect list is a result of his problematic relationships at the faculty, and one of the colleagues, Professor Stürmer, is eager to denounce him as a potential killer: "Stürmer hatte bei seiner Habilitation schreckliche Gerüchte ausgestreut und gegen ihn heftig Stellung genommen. Jetzt sah er wahrscheinlich eine Gelegenheit, den ihm verhassten Dozenten, der ein deklariertes Linker war, abzuservieren"<sup>30</sup> (Vocelka 2022, 20). Stürmer's actions activate the Sender function, although not willingly or in a pre-planned way. Since the Chief Inspector has doubts about Rudi's involvement in the crime from the very beginning (Vocelka 2022, 23), after clearing his name and building a collaborative relationship with Lietzmann, he is solely driven by his desire to get to the bottom of this puzzling case, which represents the Object of his quest.

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<sup>30</sup>"Stürmer had spread terrible rumours during his habilitation and took an aggressive stand against him. Now he probably saw an opportunity to get rid of the Lecturer he hated, who was a self-confessed leftist."

The protagonist of Vocelka's novel as the Subject in the quest corresponds to the usual construction of this function. The Subject must rise above typicality, because he occupies a world populated to a great extent by character types: "In order to escape the stigma of typecasting and to establish a modicum of individuality, the detective in mystery is usually ec-centric, literally 'off-center' in one way or another (Holmes with his drugs and violin, Nero Wolfe with his orchids and agoraphobia, Poirot with his mustache and his *bon mots*). [...] He stands apart, uncategorizable, his behavior unpredictable and enigmatic" (Malmgren 155-156). The Lecturer's appearance, his hair and clothing, as well as his political ideas and non-conservative attitude, make him stand out in the professional surroundings and often cause (negative) attention. His process of deduction does not necessarily show ingenuity to the extent of Holmes, Nero Wolf or Poirot, but points out certain human flaws, which make him likeable and, in that sense, somewhat closer to the reader.

From the perspective of campus novel, the Lecturer as Subject has the main function of exposing the hidden agendas of the academic world as a microcosm of wider society, which should be considered the Object of his "mission". The murder investigation is just a trigger for Rudi's activities, which paint a vivid picture of many academic representatives: the shady financial dealings of Professor Stürmer, the financial trouble of students such as Irene Moser and its consequences, the mistreatment of female students in the case of Schimanek, or the moral corruption and double standards within the Holub family, with plagiarism as a sign of moral and academic dishonesty.

The Helpers are characters who offer support and guidance to the Subject (or to the Opponent), which does not always have to happen willingly or with good intentions. There are many Helpers in Vocelka's novel, who can be divided up in two categories: friends and witnesses. The category of helping friends includes the Chief Inspector, who, from the perspective of the actantial model, competes for the function of the Subject, but also Rudi's close friend Peter Hassinger. Since Lietzmann and the Lecturer share the same goal – solving the crime – their relationship, after overcoming initial disagreements, is based on mutual trust. The Chief Inspector has official power to conduct the case and offers support to the Subject in that part of the investigation. Hassinger, on the other hand, could be compared to Helpers such as Doctor Watson or Captain Hastings in classical crime fiction, except that this character does not appear as intellectually inferior to the Subject, as is the case with the other two; on the contrary, he stands for the voice of reason and brings the Lecturer to the right path of deduction. Hassinger also

does not interact with the witnesses and is not actively involved in the case: he is thus no *sidekick* in a traditional sense, but remains a Helper in the background of the story.

Considering the category of friends from the perspective of the campus novel, it is remarkable that the Subject connects on this level exclusively with (former) students and academic outsiders, which testifies to his position within academic circles. At the same time, the distancing himself from the majority of academia, enables the Subject to pursue his exposure of many inappropriate behaviors at the university. Peter Hassinger plays a significant role as Helper in this context, since he offers some additional information, which are not available to the Subject, and supports the Lecturer in his exposing work.

The list of witnesses is much longer and includes female characters (Irene Moser, Jadwiga, Professor Holub's wife), candidates, professors and students (Wolfgang Swoboda). One attribute of the world of mystery fiction is that its various witnesses are usually willing to serve as Helpers (Malmgren 154). This can be applied to several witnesses in Vocelka's novel, but there are some hidden agendas which contribute to a few misdirected investigative paths. For example, Irene Moser hides her work engagement and the conflict she had with Schimaneck shortly before his death. Professor Weesmann is so worried about his professional embarrassment, that he makes himself the prime suspect for murder at certain points. Equally, Malcolm does not share his secretive work with the investigators, which raises suspicion about his involvement in the case.

The witnesses such as Irene Moser and Weesmann should be viewed as Opponents in the world of the campus novel. They stand for morally-questionable and/or unethical behaviour and the exposure of such is Subject's main goal/Object. All these hidden agendas represent a connecting point between two worlds, as well as two generic characteristics of the campus crime novel – they lead or mislead the Subject in his crime-solving, but also give him an insight into the aspects of academic life, which were hidden from him prior to these events.

The Opponents in crime fiction are usually those implicated in or guilty of the murder. They conceal their oppositional status by pretending to act as Helpers (Malmgren 154). Leitner does exactly that by providing all the necessary information to the Lecturer; he is, in fact, the only witness who does not show any animosity while being questioned and generously offers his help whenever asked for it. Because Opponents are profoundly readable, because they are recognizable 'characters', they lend themselves to being identified by type (Malmgren 155). In this case, Leitner's internal monological

chapters offer us a glance at his state of mind and serve as a substitute for the explanations which the Subject gives at the conclusion of the case in classical crime fiction. His suicide prevents the reader from receiving this final solution and somewhat prevents the Subject in Vocelka's novel from reaching the triumph in the manner of Holmes or Poirot.

Leitner's position in the world of academia is an outsider one. From the perspective of the campus novel, he plays a 'supporting role' and cannot be considered as an Opponent from this point of view. He could be even marked as Helper, since he is more than willing to assist the Subject in the uncovering of academic secrets. The double function of this character testifies to the complexity of the campus crime novel and opens up possibilities of interpreting Vocelka's work of fiction as an example of a hybrid genre.

The Receivers in *whodunits* mostly are those who initiate the action, because they benefit from the results of the truth uncovered at the story's end (Malmgren 153-154). However, the function of the Sender in Vocelka's novel is not embodied in one character, but represents itself in the Lecturer's desire to solve the crime, so the Receiver in this case is no one in particular; however, it demonstrates itself in Rudi's satisfaction that comes from solving the murder mystery.

Taking other generic characteristics of this novel into consideration, both the Sender and Receiver functions could be perceived as elements of public interest. The Subject's detection of lies within the academic community should be initiated for a *greater good* of extracting problems such as (academic) dishonesty, gender inequality and a lack of transparency of many sorts in the world of higher education. Since there is no specific character or institution initiating the Subject's work, the motivation for it lies in the Subject himself.

#### 4. Conclusion

Karl Vocelka's *Der Dozent und der Tod* takes the reader to the politically turbulent year 1986 and invites us to experience academia from an insider's point of view in light of the murder investigation. The characters of the novel represent a colourful academic atmosphere, filled with competition, hidden agendas, private affairs, and unprofessional behaviour. At the centre of the narrative is an amateur detective who begins his quest for the truth in order to solve the murder mystery, but along the way he also reveals many of the secrets surrounding the victim and the witnesses in this case.

Greimas' actantial model offers an opportunity to get insight into multiple functions of characters within the plot, connecting their

characterization with their role in the action. Since Vocelka's novel is considered to be an example of a hybrid genre, applying this model to analysis opens up various possible interpretations. The Subject has two different functions within the narrative. From the point of view of the classic detective novel, he is on a quest to solve the murder mystery, that is the Object in the novel. He rises above typicality with his appearance, as well as his nonconservative attitude, but does not show ingenuity of amateur detectives such as Holmes or Poirot. From the perspective of the campus novel, the Subject has the main function of exposing the hidden agendas of the academic world. He succeeds in both cases, except that the exposure of academic misbehavior does not lead to final closure, but remains an open issue within this social field. The Sender and the Receiver functions are not embodied in one specific character, but lie within the Subject himself. They are represented through his desire to solve the murder mystery, as well as to investigate all the irregularities in these academic circles. Greimas' model offers slightly limited possibilities in this case, but it does not insist on the fulfillment of all the functions within the particular narrative text. The Opponents in crime fiction conceal their oppositional status by pretending to act as Helpers and the character of Leitner does deliver this as expected. From the perspective of the campus novel, he cannot be considered as an Opponent, since he does not play a significant role in the academic world, which should contribute to the complexity of the genre and the various possibilities of its interpretation. Many Helpers in Vocelka's novel can be divided into two categories: friends and witnesses. Friends offer support and additional knowledge to the Subject, not only in his detective work, but also from the perspective of the campus novel. Witnesses, on the other hand, mostly have some hidden agendas, which contributes to a few misdirected investigative paths. Some of them embody unwanted academic conduct and can be viewed as Opponents in the context of the campus novel.

The author's building of characters and the plot, as well as his insider knowledge of the academic world offer the reader an opportunity not only to enjoy the classical *whodunit* case, but also to witness some unexpected twists and constellations typical of this social field. The generic combination in this work of fiction results in a hybrid genre of campus crime novel, which opens up the possibility of considering its postmodern nature, and, as such, offers many opportunities for further interpretation.

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**DER MORD AN DER FAKULTÄT: FIGURENCHARAKTERISIERUNG UND  
FIGURENFUNKTIONEN IN KARL VOCELKAS ROMAN *DER DOZENT UND DER  
TOD***

Karl Vocelkas Roman *Der Dozent und der Tod* (2022) stellt eine interessante Kombination aus Campus- und Detektivroman dar, weswegen er als Universitätskrimi gattungsmäßig bezeichnet werden kann. Die Handlung, die im Jahr 1986 in Wien stattfindet, entwickelt sich um einen Amateurdetektiv, einen Dozenten an der Universität Wien, der sich im Zentrum einer Morduntersuchung befindet und eine Wahrheitssuche beginnt, die nicht nur mit der Aufklärung des Mordfalls, sondern auch mit der Entdeckung zahlreicher Geheimnisse in akademischen Kreisen resultieren wird.

Ziel dieses Beitrags ist sowohl die Figurencharakterisierung, als auch die Bestimmung der Figurenfunktionen im Kontext der Gattungsmerkmale des Universitätskrimis. Die Figurenanalyse wurde in Bezug auf Figurenhandeln, äußere Erscheinung der Figuren, ihre Sprache und interpersonelle Charakterisierung durchgeführt. Die Figurenfunktionen wurden mithilfe von Greimas' Aktantenmodell bestimmt, weil es die Möglichkeit für eine Beschreibung elementarer Handlungsbeziehungen in narrativen Texten durch Berücksichtigung spezifischer Gattungsmerkmale bietet und eine produktive Grundlage für die Analyse und weitere Interpretationen darstellt.

Die Figurenanalyse hat gezeigt, dass Vocelkas Roman dem traditionellen Schema des Universitätskrimis folgt, aber an manchen Stellen auch von den erwarteten Elementen dieser Gattung abweicht, vor allem im Hinblick auf die Titelfigur und die Vielfalt der Figurenfunktionen.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Universitätskrimi, Campus-Roman, Kriminalroman, Aktantenmodell, österreichische Literatur