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# HANDBOOK OF POLISH, CZECH, AND SLOVAK HOLOCAUST FICTION

WORKS AND CONTEXTS

*Edited by Elisa-Maria Hiemer, Jiří Holý,  
Agata Firlej and Hana Nichtburgerová*



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Elisa-Maria Hiemer, Jiří Holý, Agata Firlej, and Hana Nichtburgerová (Eds.)  
**Handbook of Polish, Czech, and Slovak Holocaust Fiction**



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Hana Nichtburgerová

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# Introduction

## About the Project

This handbook is the fruit of the cooperation of a Polish-Czech-German team of researchers that has been working together for more than ten years. Starting on the initiative of Prof. em. Reinhard Ibler in May 2010, when specialists in Jewish literature, history, and culture from the universities of Giessen, Lodz, and Prague first met, the project has produced nine workshops and six publications to date. Researchers from Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan joined the project in 2015. Our group consists mainly of Slavists and comparative literature researchers who decided to explore the East-Central European literatures about the Holocaust and persecution of Jews during World War II, first by a chronological approach and second in terms of aesthetics.<sup>1</sup> Throughout our meetings, we noticed a gap between the literary production of the Slavonic countries where the Holocaust mainly took place and recognition of these works outside this community. We want to increase the visibility and show the versatility of these literatures in the academic representation of the Holocaust in the arts. Mainly émigré authors (like Jerzy Kosinski, for his *Painted Bird*, 1965) received international attention because there was no language barrier right from the beginning. The underrepresentation is clear from the numbers: the *Reference Guide to Holocaust Literature* (Young, Riggs, 2002) presents 225 authors but only two of them were of Czech origin, three of Slovak. For Polish the situation looks slightly better: 23 authors. In *Holocaust Literature. An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work* (Kremer, 2003), out of 312 entries, we count 31 Polish, 3 Czech, and not a single Slovak entry. Sicher's *Holocaust Novelists* (2004) includes three Polish and four Czech authors out of 43 articles. The entry about Holocaust literature in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies* (Hayes, Roth, 2012) mentions three Polish authors but no Czech or Slovak ones. Simi-

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1 Ibler, R., Golebiowski, A., eds. (2012). *Ausgewählte Probleme der polnischen und tschechischen Holocaustliteratur und -kultur: Materialien des Internationalen Workshops in Gießen, 27.–28. Mai 2010*. München: Sagner. Holý, J., ed. (2012). *The Representation of the Shoah in Literature, Theatre and Film in Central Europe: 1950s and 1960s*. Praha: Akropolis. Holý, J., ed., (2012). *The Representation of the Shoah in Literature and Film in Central Europe: 1970s and 1980s*. Praha: Akropolis. Ibler, R., ed. (2014). *Der Holocaust in den mitteleuropäischen Literaturen und Kulturen seit 1989. The Holocaust in the Central European Literatures and Cultures since 1989*. Stuttgart: ibidem. Gazda, G. et al., eds. (2014). *The Representation of the Shoah in Literature and Film in Central Europe: the post-war Period = Die Darstellung der Shoah in Literatur und Film in Mitteleuropa: die ersten Nachkriegsjahre = Reprezentacje Shoah w literaturze i filmie w Europie Środkowej: lata powojenne*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego. Holý, J., ed. (2015). *Aspects of Genres in the Holocaust Literatures in Central Europe. Die Gattungsaspekte der Holocaustliteratur in Mitteleuropa*. Praha: Akropolis. Ibler, R., ed. (2016). *Der Holocaust in den mitteleuropäischen Literaturen und Kulturen: Probleme der Poetisierung und Ästhetisierung*. Stuttgart: ibidem. Firlej, A. et al., eds. (2017). *Recepcja literackich i artystycznych dzieł o Szoa*. Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne 12, Poznań: Wydawnictwo PTPN.

larly, John K. Roth's *Holocaust Literature I–II* (Roth, 2008) considers three Polish, two Czech, and not a single Slovak work. The notion of “Polish”, “Czech”, and “Slovak” literature is especially difficult to define in the case of Holocaust literature, since a large number of Jewish (and non-Jewish) writers emigrated and switched to the languages of their new home countries. Counting the authors and their works, we applied quite loose criteria such as the country of origin or usage of their mother tongue.

### **Why Eastern European Literatures and Why Fiction?**

One of the crucial questions the editors' board had to answer is who to consider in our publication. The ongoing debates about postcolonial destruction of binary identity patterns also affect literature and its creators. Hence, we decided to consider authors of Jewish and non-Jewish origin to depict different ways of perception and narration styles. Additionally, we focus on works originally published in Polish, Czech, or Slovak. Surely, some of the names in the handbook might sound familiar to persons dealing with literary Holocaust research but we are convinced that East-Central European literature is underrecognised and remains widely unknown even in translation. This leads to the erroneous assumption that Eastern Europe began Holocaust remembrance only after 1989 (Brumlik, Sauerland, 2010, p. 24), creating a perspective on East-Central European cultures of remembrance that often goes with a subtle notion of “Western” supremacy. American scholars often consider Jewish culture in Europe (and especially in post-Communist states) to be virtual or artificial (Gruber 1994, 1996, 2002; Kugelmass, Bukowska, 2008). One reason for this might be lack of knowledge about the cultural and political context that underwent crucial changes within a short period. With this introduction we aim to help readers understand the main factors that influenced literary production in pre- and post-Communist countries by naming historical milestones. Another reason is the fact that Holocaust literature is still rated by its authenticity and exposed to the pressure of legitimacy (Pfohlmann, 2010, p. 26; Ziębińska-Witek, 2005). Although the newest literature cannot be read as testimonial literature, researchers often ascribe the obligation to remember “the right way”. Fortunately, the literary works of the third generation show how important it is to use fictional devices not only to get an idea of the past but also to add new perspectives on the power of art that “translates” the temporal and generational gap into its own images. It is astonishing that the discussion is not finished, although as early as 1988, James E. Young argued in his *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* that even survivor literature cannot meet the authenticity criteria since every process of writing is creating (*poesis*) not imitation (*mimesis*) (Young, 1988, p. 17). Nevertheless, innovative or fictionalised narrations (→ *The Flytrap Factory*, → *The Devil's Workshop*) often provoke harsh criticism and are labelled as “Holocaust-Kitsch” (Leociak, 2010 or Horák, 2009). The editors do not want to judge literature but give you, the readers, a compilation of Holocaust fiction

from the last eight decades and invite you to read, compare, and draw your own conclusions. It is one of the main tasks of literary studies to categorise works but the “fact and fiction controversy” – as our team calls it – is hard to pacify. We include examples of works primarily labelled as factual literature or documentary in academic discourse (such as → *Confession*, → *Trap with a Green Fence*, → *I Didn't Want to Be a Jew*) but we are convinced that, taking a closer look at the devices the texts use, you can see that they should not be regarded only as historical references to the Jewish persecution and Holocaust but also use their narrative strategy to broaden the possibilities for speaking about history and to encourage the reader to make up their own mind about the literary truth. At the same time, due to the growing spatial-temporal distance, literary devices are gaining more attention since they are the only means of dealing with the topic for the younger generation of writers (Krawczyńska, 2008; Cuber, 2013; Ibler, 2016, Artwińska, Tippner, 2017). As the following sketch of literary history will show, there were and always are plenty of lyric, dramatic, or prosaic expressions to communicate about the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup>

### Practical Information and Acknowledgements

The entries contain practical information (about translations, film adaptations, the author and further publications of his or her authorship related to the topic) but mainly focus on a short summary of the plot and an overview of the main issues and problems in each work. We pay attention to the comparative aspect, which means that the articles contain cross-references, both to other entries in the book (marked by an arrow signed →) and to well-known examples from literary history. Every entry ends with a short, selected bibliography that – if possible – includes not only Polish, Czech or Slovak but also English references to encourage readers to further study. Common motifs, topics, characters, situations and literary devices mentioned in the books (for instance “Aryan papers”, aryanization, Jewish nose, postmemory, Jozef Tiso, grotesque, shtetl, etc.) includes the Index of Topics, Motifs, Images, Places, and Devices at the end of the Handbook. See also here below, p. 31. Such contextualization will be indispensable for researchers in other fields who are not familiar with the historical and sociocultural contexts.

All entries in our handbook are edited in accordance with academic standards, but also written in a way that encourages the broader public to learn more about this topic. We use Harvard Citation Style and prefer British English. The spelling “antemitism”, “antisemitic” is written according to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Two types of quotation marks are utilised: for English words “silver meadow” however for Polish, Czech, German etc. words: „bledy ako stena“.

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<sup>2</sup> For the sake of completeness, we wish to underline that we use the terms Shoah and Holocaust synonymously.

This handbook took two years to produce and could not have been realised without the great support of our contributors, whom we would like to thank for the effort and time they put into this project. We are also grateful for the financial support from the Jewish Claims Conference, Czech-German Future Fonds (Česko-německý fond budoucnosti), The Foundation for Holocaust Victims (Nadační fond obětem holocaustu), The Prague Centre for Jewish Studies, The Institute for Czech and Comparative Literature at Charles University, and the Rector of Adam Mickiewicz University Poznan.

We would also like to thank the De Gruyter publishing house, our proof-readers Kate Sotejeff-Wilson, Sterling Thompson, Peter Gaffney, Kateřina Krejčířová for their fruitful cooperation and Jaroslav Vlček for compiling the Index of Names that made this Handbook possible. Last but not least, we owe the cover collage to the courtesy of Jiří Sozanský.

## Polish Holocaust Literature

### Early Writings: World War II until 1948

In consequence of the aggressive German war strategy, Poland undoubtedly became the epicentre for extermination of the Jews (Grynberg, 1984, p. 91). From the very first day of World War II until 1945 it was constantly under German occupation and statistically, saw the highest number of victims of the Holocaust (about three million). The first deportation trains headed to destinations in Poland. About 50 % of all Holocaust victims were murdered on Polish soil, what made Grynberg describe his country as the “biggest Jewish cemetery” (Grynberg, 1984, p. 73). The image of the Poles being only involuntary witnesses to the genocide of European Jews has been questioned in the two-volume historical book *Night without End: The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland* (*Dalej jest noc: losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, 2018). The editors, Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, with co-authors from the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research, present the results of several years of investigation into the fate of those Jews who managed to escape from the ghetto. The research shows that two out of three Jews in this group died by or with the participation of Poles. At the same time, Polish citizens were recognised more often than those of any other nation as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem.

Literary production began during the war. The literary outcome from the ghettos of Litzmannstadt (Lodz) and Warsaw have been explored especially extensively, the latter in the edition series of the Ringelblum Archive that has been appearing since 1997. This underground archive was built on the initiative of the Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum in 1940. The group called Oneg Shabat aimed at documenting ghetto life. Besides religious essays, correspondence, and newspapers, the series includes literary works (vol. 26) and diaries (vol. 23). The texts bear witness to the special terms of reception since they are made by and for immediate “consumption”, often multilingual, fragmen-

tary but not restricted to a special genre. Theatre events, lectures, and chorales were part of Jewish cultural life in the ghetto as well as poems or short stories (Person et al., 2017). Similarly to Warsaw, a chronicle of the Litzmannstadt ghetto has been published (Feuchert, 2007) as well as several publications with a biographical approach to ghetto authors, focusing on the circumstances of their production (Feuchert, 2004). Regardless of the genre or artistic value, all texts aimed at leaving a trace of someone's life but their authors faced a double moral duty with respect to the chosen narrative mode, first towards the victims and second towards the coming generations (Leociak, 2016, p. 122), which explains the dominance of facts over fictionalisation.

In the first years after the end of World War II, a clear dominance of testimonial literature can be observed. A prominent example are Adam Czerniaków's diaries, published in 1946, which have been transformed into a play named *The Last Days of Adam: The True Story of Adam Czerniaków*, staged in 2015. The narrations are mainly based on authentic documents and conversations, such as Zofia Nałkowska's → *Medallions* (1946). In her prose miniatures, the author lends her voice to various people. Although the question of the origin of human abysses and the behaviour of human beings in extreme situations is central, the narrator never allows herself to comment on the situation and focuses instead on articulating the indescribable. Tadeusz Borowski chose another way to confront the reader with the reality of daily camp life in his short prose collection → *A Farewell to Maria* (1948). Its language simply overwhelms the reader with its provocative drastic colouring. The consciously documentary depiction of something like a concentration camp normality creates an alienation effect through his radicalness which is probably a basic characteristic of all Holocaust works of the earliest period (see also → *Death of a Liberal* by Artur Sandauer, written in 1946). Explaining mechanisms of dehumanisation in various literary ways also makes clear that the Holocaust was a personal and not a collective experience (despite all the discussions about national memorial sites and collective remembrance policies). Individuals experienced and survived it alone, so this literature, like no other, is fragmentary, often provisional, and imperfect in its form. Borowski's narrative strategy thus represents a turning point and, in some way, an artistic reappraisal of the war topic: authors either distance themselves from it or use it as a basis for further experimental narrative processes (Wolski, 2008, p. 251).

For Polish literature, the production of Christian narrations plays an important role. Borowski is considered the strongest critic of Zofia Kossak's → *From the Abyss: Memories from the Camp* (1946) which, for him, signifies an inappropriate attempt at justifying people's acts by inventing crude moralistic worldviews. Moralistic and deterministic implications are, besides martyrologic approaches, characteristic for the early period of Holocaust literature. Nevertheless, throughout all stages of literary production, there have always been more philosophic approaches to Christian-Jewish background, such as Leopold Buczkowski's → *Black Torrent* (1954, written 1947), Roman Brandstaetters's → *The Day of Wrath* (1962), Ireneusz Iredyński's *Modern Nativity Play* (1962), or Calek Perechodnik's → *Confession* (1993, written in 1943).

With regard to poetry, a large number of works were written during wartime or immediately afterwards. This genre discussed the role of literature either using obvious images like cut hair or by inventing strong metaphors that endured throughout the years like the “cloud of people” in Szymborska’s 1945 poem *Still* (→ *Selected Poetry*) that reappeared in the title of Piotr Matywiecki’s prose collection *The Cloud Returns* in 2005. In one of the most important poetry books written just after the war, Stanisław Wygodzki’s → *Love Diary* (1948) the poet uses the convention of lament to commemorate his daughter who perished in Auschwitz. This volume becomes a contrasting reference – with the same image of a daughter’s death – to Jan Kochanowski, the best known Polish renaissance poet, and his *Laments*, the founding work of Polish literature.

### The Early Communist Era: 1949–1953

In the first postwar years there were anti-Jewish attacks and pogroms in a large number of Polish cities (Białystok, Cracow, Bytom, Sosnowiec, etc.), which were rarely prosecuted. The pogrom in Kielce in 1946, in which 40 people died, is considered to be the greatest outrage. After the end of World War II, about a quarter of a million Jews were living in Poland, of whom about 220,000 had left the country by the beginning of the 1960s. Due to this political and ideological climate, the Holocaust could only be described either in émigré or samizdat literature until the Thaw after Stalin’s death brought liberalisation to cultural life (Krupa, 2015, p. 29).

It is not surprising that both moralistic and relieving narratives were predominant after the literary world had been forced to follow the dogma of socialist realism (as imposed by the Polish Writer’s Association in 1949) to empower and strengthen people’s minds (following Stalin’s attitude in considering authors as “engineers of human souls”). Most of these works are nowadays unknown due to their tendentious character, like Adam Włodek’s poem *From the Red Biography of Warsaw* (1953), where the author misrepresents the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as a “workers’ Uprising” thus connecting it unreasonably with a socialist fight against the so-called privileged class.

At the same time, Polish literature not only had to deal with the experiences of concentration camps and genocide of Jews but also with the Soviet perpetrators murdering non-Jewish Poles in massacres like Katyń or by deporting them to labour camps in Siberia. This is why Polish literary scholars distinguish between Nazi concentration camp literature (*literatura obozowa*) and Soviet Gulag camp literature (*literatura łagrowa*) which was clearly an exclusive topic of the literary underground (Trepte 2012, p. 12). Another duality of this period is commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising vs the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Kazimierz Brandys’s text *Invincible City* (1964) depicts both events and their meaning together (Buryła, 2019). Adorno’s dictum that poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric was discussed amongst authors in exile. Witold Gombrowicz accused his compatriots of producing poor literature by revealing banal-

ities about the human soul and character (Gombrowicz 1986, pp. 325ff.). In contrast, from an early stage Michał Borwicz tried to introduce a sociological pattern of reading Holocaust poetry by composing the anthology → *The Song Will Survive...* (1947).

### **From the Thaw until the March Campaign: 1953–1968**

The political Thaw deeply influenced the production of literary texts dealing with the Holocaust. Especially in the early 1960s, the voice of Jewish writers in Poland was Henryk Grynberg, whose books → *The Jewish War* (1965) and *The Victory* (1969), had a decisive influence on the development of Holocaust literature. The author confronts the reader with the uncomfortable question of the place of the Jews in Poland after 1945 since their return to Polish society had been postulated with the moment of liberation in 1945 and thus their further fate faded out of most depictions of the country thereafter (Quercioli-Mincer, 2007, pp. 201ff.). Grynberg was also the first to expand the genre of autobiographical fiction. He applied for asylum in the U. S. in 1967, hence his further oeuvre was published abroad which made him surely one of the most prominent examples of Holocaust writers of international reputation. In the Polish People's Republic, the Holocaust and World War II was depicted in manifold ways and – thanks to the liberalisation in cultural life – this portrayal became more courageous. A good example is Ireneusz Iredyński's drama → *Modern Nativity Play*, written in 1962 and staged in 1965, that rejects moralistic explanations of the tragedy of the Holocaust since in the end, evil triumphs over good. Besides profanation of fundamental Christian beliefs (signified by the title), the author used his play to criticise current cultural politics. The country underwent an economic crisis leading to mass protests, for example in Poznań in 1956. The new leader of the United Polish People's Party, Władysław Gomułka, exempted Polish Jews from the travel ban to Western countries, motivating them to leave the country. During October 1956 and July 1957, almost 57,000 left the country for Israel, Western Europe, or the United States (Trepte, 2012, p. 12). Besides, struggles within the Party led to brutalisation among officials. The Polish Jews were directly affected by the internal crisis since they got consistently pushed out of public life. After the victory of Israel over the Arab states in the Six-Day War in 1967, anti-Jewish propaganda reached its climax. The USSR forced the Eastern Bloc countries to cut all diplomatic relations with Israel, although a large number of Poles supported Israel's victory since the Arab States were supported by the USSR. Gomułka requested all sympathisers of Israel to leave Poland and named the Jewish population a fifth column aiming to destabilise the inner workings of the state. With this statement, he triggered the most massive persecution of Jewish citizens since 1945. The result was mass layoffs of Jewish employees and internal denunciation lists in corporations. Especially the cultural and intellectual scene were suspected of class enemies. Due to supposedly anti-Soviet content, productions of Mickiewicz's drama *Forefather's Eve* had to be cancelled. Layoffs and exclusions also affected Jewish students

and staff in higher education. Under Gomułka's leadership, the creation of an enemy image of Jewishness escalated into a systematic purge of all public institutions from Jews throughout the 1960s, causing the exodus of 220,000. It is estimated that as a direct result of the March events, about 13,000 left the country for good (Tych, 2010; Wiszniewicz, 2008, pp. 766–774). At this point it is worth mentioning the lively literary scene of Polish-Jewish emigrants in Israel who produced numerous works over the decades, including Irit Amiel, Ida Fink (→ *A Scrap of Time*) or Ryszard Lów (Fałuska-Ciesielska, Żurek, 2012)

### A “Silenced” Topic until Martial Law: 1968–1981

Jan Błoński, famous after publishing his essay *The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto* in *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 1987 accusing Poles of being passive bystanders in the face of Jewish persecutions, wrote about this decade:

In the sixties, a process began [...]. A process that no one paid attention to, it was so spontaneous and nonreflective: it took place completely without writers' programmes and declarations. I am thinking of a phenomenon that could be called emigration of the imagination. Emigration into the past or imagination. Literature builds its own – absolutely unofficial, although not necessarily oppositional – homeland, built of provinces and environments that writers haven't much cared about so far. [...] Writers seem to say [...]: We live in a different Poland than the official one. We live primarily with memory. With family memory, hooked on memoirs, but also with historical or intellectual memory. (Błoński, 1991, p. 16.)

Looking at the post-1968 literature, one has to consider the trichotomy of literary channels. The underground literature depicted topics deeply affecting society like the absence of intellectual freedom, but also the imminent national bankruptcy due to the repayment of loans, from which the supposed prosperity was generated in the years before (like Tadeusz Konwicki's *A Minor Apocalypse*, 1979). In order to escape censorship, some authors of the “official” channel chose to transfer the plot to the deep past, as Andrzej Szczypiorski did in *A Mass for Arras* (1970). In this novel, he depicted fifteenth-century historical events like plague and famine, focusing on the persecution of Jews as a parable for twentieth-century fanaticism in Poland (Hiemer, 2012a, p. 136). The influence of censorship becomes obvious in the posthumous edition of Zofia Nałkowska's *Wartime Diaries* (1969), in which the words Jew or ghetto are not mentioned at all, even in her account of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (entry for 18 April 1943). It may be surprising that only three years after the mass exodus of Polish Jews, a Polish-Jewish survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, Bogdan Wojdowski, succeeded on the official Polish book market. With → *Bread for The Departed* (1971), he created an extensive novel that illustrated ghetto life until the *Grossaktion* Warsaw in 1942 from the viewpoint of a 12-year old boy. Showing the cruelties of war through spotlight-like narrative gives the reader a panoramic view of the people living behind the wall. On

the one hand, the attention to detail satisfies the need for authenticity (Kaniewska, 2008, p. 483) and fits into the politically accepted perception of the German perpetrator. On the other hand, Wojdowski experiments with different narrative devices: not only different languages but also changes between authenticity and lyrical episodes, as shown in the main character's dreams and fantasies. The 1970s can be called the decade of factual literature, as other examples such as Kazimierz Moczarski's *Conversations with an Executioner* (1972–1974) or Hanna Krall's literary interview *Shielding The Flame* (1977) exemplify new narration techniques. In the latter, the reader is confronted with an interview situation with the ghetto survivor and participant in the Warsaw Uprising, Marek Edelman. The narrator-interviewer interweaves scenes from his memoirs *The Ghetto Fights* (1945) but minimalises her role as interviewer as the limited guiding in the interview proves. Krall focuses on secondary testimony<sup>3</sup> meaning to leave space to describe Marek Edelman's experiences without intervening in the narrative situation or making comments. By including research literature and quotations, Krall created a distanced but authentic narrative mode that breaks with the heroic narrative about the resistance struggle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

### Rediscovery of the Topic and Cultural Liberalisation: 1981–1989

The impact of martial law (1981–1983) on the cultural sphere has not been researched sufficiently (Białokur, Fic, Gołębiowska, 2012, p. 117) but for the case of the Holocaust as a topic of public, political, and artistic interest, most scholars consider the second half of the 1980s to be the starting point of an open discussion (the topic itself never disappeared completely but appeared in a camouflaged form, e.g. allegories). The TV transmission of a shortened version of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* in 1985 evoked debates about the behaviour of Poles during World War II and the film was considered to be anti-Polish. Jan Błoński required a rethinking of Polish self-image and a moral revolution in Polish-Jewish relations in his essay *The Poor Poles Look at The Ghetto* (Krupa, 2013, p. 60). The clear paradigm shift was soon noticed and intensively reflected on both a social and a scientific level.

In terms of literature, *Shielding The Flame* (1977) can be seen as starting point of Krall's career although in the following decades, she clearly focused on autofiction and autobiographic narratives, as in → *The Subtenant* (1985) describing her own fate as a Jewish subtenant under a false name. One year later, Szczypiorski's novel → *The Beautiful Mrs Seidenman* was published, for which the author received international attention, especially positive in Germany (Hiemer, 2012a). The sensitive presentation

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Langer and Terrence de Pres use the term to describe persons who “inherit” the Shoah experiences of primary witnesses either orally or in writing. According to them, Geoffrey Hartman (1998) develops the concept of intellectual witnessing, reflecting the responsibility of memory.

of the psyche of the German commander Stuckler seems disturbing – as do the numerous controversies portrayed in the book (antisemitic or collaborating Poles standing alongside polonophile Germans and an open criticism of March 1968). This kaleidoscope of Polish society and psyche during the war was often criticised for its superficiality although the polyphonic perspective is typical for this period in Polish literature (Krupa, 2013, pp. 59–64). In 1988 Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz published → *Umschlagplatz* which plays on two temporal levels. The author makes use of two voices: that of the figure of Itzhak Mandelbaum during the war and, in contemporary Poland, a voice close to that of the author. Both positions question the passivity of his compatriots which is the main reproach of Jan Błoński's above-mentioned essay.

With the loosening of censorship, the liberalising book market included works by emigrated Polish Jews such as Henryk Grynberg. His *Selected Poems* from 1964–1983 were published in Warsaw in 1985 and his novel *Kadisiz* in 1987. Aleksander Rozenfeld, who returned from Israel to Poland in 1987, was supported by cultural magazines such as *Życie Literackie*, *Kultura*, and *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, spreading his poems to the public in and outside Poland. At the same time Julian Strykowski (*Syriusz*, 1984; *Echo*, 1988) made his comeback. These autobiographical works, which cover a broad spectrum of genres, raise the question of double identity. Eugenia Prokop-Janiec considers the autobiographical intention of the works as an enrichment and continuation of the identity discourse that can be traced back to the interwar period (Prokop-Janiec, 2001, pp. 133ff.).

Besides the undoubtable importance of factual literature, the 1980s signified an opening of literature (and critiques) towards an increasingly fictional mode of representation that cannot be explained by the generation change alone. Piotr Szewc and Paweł Huelle, two authors born after the end of World War II, succeeded with their fictional interpretation of Holocaust fates. Their lack of personal experiences inevitably made them use their own imagination. In 1987, Huelle published his debut novel *Weiser Dawidek*. The plot is about a disappeared Jewish boy who becomes a figure of mystification that the other children encounter with both fascination and fear. The insecure and somehow prejudiced way in which he is treated also reflects the approach to Judaism that was typical of the generation that grew up under socialism. This novel is juxtaposed with Piotr Szewc's micro-narration → *Annihilation*, which depicts an absurd calm and normality in Polish-Jewish daily life in the south-eastern town of Zamość in the summer of 1934. The speed and fragmentariness make the work seem like a sequence of snapshots and stand in contrast with the strange calm that pervades the text. The effect is caused by the reader's knowledge advantage over the characters who of course have no idea of the outbreak of World War II. The omniscient narrator consciously inserts the possible and the imaginary into the plot. Underlining its fictitiousness, the reader is left with this sole perspective to trust or to question. The narrative thus reveals the dilemma of remembering: despite all accuracy, memories remain incomplete and every attempt to remember leads inevitably to failure (or rather inadequacy) of memory.

The literary historian Przemysław Czapliński summarises the schematic depiction of Poles as either victims or saviours and the awakened interest in Polish-Jewish coexistence as follows:

The dominating story of in the eighties [...] about what history has done to us, a story about the evil that Nazism and Communism have done to us, give way to narratives that, without denying the guilt of the Germans and Russians, try to talk about what we did to each other – what our neighbourly relations were like during the war and just after it. (Czapliński, 2009, p. 102)

### **The Age of Late Testimonies and Family Stories: 1989–2004**

In Poland, as in other post-socialist countries, there was initially a need to catch up in terms of consuming Western and especially U. S. literature, which displaced Polish literature on the book market. Astonishingly, the fall of Communism was a historical event that did not cause immediate literary representations. Although the abolition of censorship changed all conditions for publishers, authors, and the book trade, the political change in Poland took place gradually and – in contrast to Germany or Hungary – without major external events. It took a few years until Polish literature regained its voice, started creating styles and contents, and finally overcame this “turning point without turn” (Krupa, 2013, p. 157; see also Legeżyńska, 2007, p. 18; Nasiłowska, 2010, p. 58). In this context, Edward Balcerzan (1997, p. 17) criticises the researchers and critics for putting pressure on literature after 1989 by the inflationary use of the term “new literature”. In Polish literary studies, this term always experiences a renaissance after drastic political events and promotes the impression that the previous literature has become void. However, Polish writers hardly follow this imperative of change. Balcerzan argues that the notion of “recent literature” is not a literary or historical, but primarily a psychological category that refers to those involved in the process of creation and reception.

For Jewish writers, the caesura effect of 1989 had a clear impact on their works and themselves. The founding of the Third Polish Republic was a turning point, since political democratisation and liberalisation continued the social opening that began in the 1980s and gave this group the opportunity to write freely and attract the attention of a wider audience.

After a short period of literary speechlessness and the de-historicisation of literature, one can assert an “abundance of history” (Röger, 2012, p. 442) in this period, during which World War II and especially the Holocaust were depicted in various works. The mid-nineties are the era of late literary debuts and delayed publications of war memoirs. Thus, the child’s perspective on the trauma of war took on a new significance (Sokołowska, 2010; Kowalska-Leder, 2009). In connection with the interest in private history and individual perspectives – which can be asserted as one of the main features of post-1989 literature – Jewish autobiographical literature in particular ex-

perienced a peak phase. Four major types can be identified in terms of content (Hiemer, 2019, pp. 65–74). First, memorial literature, whose primary concern was the survival of the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust. Specialised in testimonial literature, the publisher of the NGO Ośrodek KARTA launched the series *Polish Jews* (*Żydzi polscy*) at the beginning of the 1990s and published manuscripts from the time of the Holocaust, including diaries or family chronicles that were later often translated to English such as Joanna Wiszniewicz's *And Yet I Still Have Dreams: a Story of a Certain Loneliness* (1996, English version 2004). The frequently used narrative strategy of the child narrator is pursued by Józef Hen in his memoirs *Nowolipie Street* (1991, English version 2012) or by Henryk Schönker, whose childhood narration *The Touch of An Angel* (2005, English version in 2020) was the first release of the new edition of the series, and received the History Award from the weekly *Polityka*. There was great interest in the re-release of Calek Perechodnik's → *Confession* in 2004, a corrected and revised edition of the 1993 version first published as *Am I A Murderer?* His descriptions of the policeman in the Otwock Ghetto expanded the picture of Jews forced to collaborate with the Nazis.

A second group of books used the wartime and Holocaust experience for further reflections on the state of Jews in Poland after 1945 and 1989. They have a certain coming-out character that describes the difficulty with letting Jewishness be part of one's identity, trying to explain, to question, or to accuse the real experience of exclusion and tabooing Jewish life within their own families and in society (Marszałek, 2013, p. 275). Inspired by the filmic figure of the little girl in *Schindler's List*, Roma Ligocka published *The Girl in the Red Coat* first in German in 2000 and one year later in Polish (Bąk-Zawalski, 2014). The author, who publishes in both languages, took the positive reception but also the rumours about her father's role in World War II as a basis for further research into her family history in *Only I Alone* (2004). The Polish literary historian Michał Głowiński debuted with → *The Black Seasons* in 1998, in which he described war experiences from a child's perspective. The author described the inner and outer resistance to this publication: "I never could motivate myself to this work, I was neither psychologically nor literally ready for it [...] I also had to overcome inner resistance and fears of which it was difficult to get rid of" (quoted in Adamczyk-Garbowska, 2004, p. 182). Drawing on his knowledge as a literary historian, his text consciously plays with meeting and denying the reader's expectations. The contrast between the world of war, that is the world of adults, and the world of a child becomes obvious. The solution is the acceleration of the process of growing up to overcome the childish need for security. Similar narrations are identifiable in Wilhelm Dichter's → *God's Horse* (1996) and in Julian Kornhauser's *House, Dreams and Children's Games* (1995). This narrative technique offers a new (or already forgotten) view of the narrator's own childhood. The works usually share a descriptive character and focus on the child's immediate environment or the people who come into contact with it. General observations and universal reflections do not occur. In consequence, these narrations avoid schematic assessments and the use of commonplaces.

Piotr Matywiecki's → *Boundary Marker* chose a more universal way of interpreting Polish-Jewish relations. He depicts his search for identity in a time when not only post-totalitarian states have to face their history and contextualise themselves in the European community – it is also about individual experiences of social repositioning. Literature thus functions as a mirror of contemporary history and uses a prism broken into the smallest units to observe reality. (Hiemer, 2019, p. 69)

The depiction of Jewish family histories tracing back to the prewar period characterises the third group of literature. In this group, feminine perspectives are predominant. Holocaust literature, but also literature that draws primarily on historical material, was largely influenced by the perspective of male authors and their (also mostly male) narrators. Tatiana Czerska refers instead to the clearly female character of family memory since narrators mainly consulted female family members to complete *curricula vitae* and stories (Czerska, 2011, p. 274). This genealogical work is above all work on and with the female identity. This applies both to the generation of authors who experienced World War II and to those born afterwards. An example is Joanna Olczak-Ronikier's *In the Garden of Memory* (2001) that presents a family biography starting from the generation of the great-grandmother. Using private original documents, the author, born in 1934, creates a courageous image of her ancestors who had dedicated themselves to Poland as a nation and country. Despite the constant personal setbacks and historical threats that the author faced throughout the life, Olczak-Ronikier creates a positive portrayal of the pre-1939 situation.

One of the newest books referring to personal experience of Jewish and non-Jewish relations in Poland is Monika Sznajderman's *Pepper Counterfeiters* published in 2016. The author-narrator reconstructs the fates of the Jewish part of her family on the father's side and the non-Jewish nationalistic part on her mother's side. The two stories are separated, and while the history of the mother's family is perfectly documented, very little is known about the father's family, whose members mostly died in Auschwitz. The author reconstructs this story arduously from shreds of memories, a few photos, and letters.

Besides narrations based on meticulous archive work, works written in interview form like Maria Orwid's *Surviving... And then?* (2006) focus on the psychological impact of the Holocaust on the survivors. The psychological consequences are also crucial for Ewa Kuryluk's oeuvre, as in *Goldi* (2004) or → *Frascati* (2009). Her works take a spatial approach to family history. The reimagination and narrative rebirth of former Jewish spaces become an important feature in the latest Holocaust literature. This is often accompanied by strong identification with the traumatised generation, for example in *Family History of Fear* (2005) by Agata Tuszyńska (Czemarmazowicz, 2011).

Mieczysław Dąbrowski considers the narratives of Polish-Jewish family chronicles to have a high discursive potential for Polish society. "This is a very uncomfortable knowledge, but it must be acknowledged with an unconditional responsibility, like others do" (Dąbrowski, 2011, p. 187).

To sum up, the dominant female voices in family narratives can be interpreted on the one hand as the beginning of a female literary counter-discourse. On the other hand, one can consider this view an inadequate reduction of female literature to the depoliticised, to the family, as Agnieszka Mrozik notes:

“The family as the domain of the private is the kingdom of women. At the same time, it is a space in which collective identity is (re)produced against the background of her memory of the past, thus it is not free from the power of the dominant nationalistic, patriarchal discourse. Placing the family at the centre of their story, women disappear, they dissolve in it” (Mrozik, 2012, p. 321).

### **Pop Culture Depictions and Struggle for Interpretative Predominance: 2004 – Present**

Combining the remembrance of Holocaust experiences and its impact on collective and personal memory with contemporary political debates is typical for the latest period, in which one can find the fourth group of literature. It uses the Holocaust as background to elaborate on contemporary social developments and as a reminder (or warning sign) to keep the memory alive despite the decreasing number of survivors. This device can be found in general in Polish, Czech, and Slovak literature.

The publications of Jan Tomasz Gross caused long-lasting discussions about rethinking the self-perception of Polish war time destinies.<sup>4</sup> With *Neighbors* (Polish edition 2000), *Fear* (2008) and *Golden Harvest* (2011), the Polish-American historian questioned the Polish image of themselves during World War II by describing cases of complicity and enrichment through the murder of Jews and accusing Polish society after 1945 of failing to come to terms with what he considered to be widespread anti-semitism. The literary historian Sławomir Buryła even concludes that Gross’s books were the beginning of a new era: in interpreting the Holocaust as “after Gross” one had to write differently about certain topics (Buryła, 2016, p. 14). The sharpness of the debates gives an idea about the fragile status of Jewish culture that has to be constantly renegotiated and secured. This is what recent literature undertakes through imagination, linking history and the present in a surprising way.

In connection with the critical debate on antisemitism and xenophobia in Poland it is worth mentioning the work of Irek Grin, *Out of Rage* (2003), which offers an interesting perspective since the non-Jewish author adopts a Jewish point of view. The first-person narrator, a Jewish boy, describes his life and the conflicts between the Jewish and non-Jewish population before World War II, which he did not survive. This posthumous narrative perspective illustrates powerlessness and bewilderment about not being able to revive Jewish life in Poland:

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<sup>4</sup> For further analyses see: Borodziej (2003), Tych (2010) and Wolff-Poweska, Forecki (2012).

So what, you ask, that's all? That's it? About what else am I supposed to write? About who? [...] They don't exist, so about who am I supposed to write? About what am I supposed to write, for fuck's sake? About how we still hate the spirits? How we still try to chase them crying "Jude raus" [...] How the blind pretend that they see? How the seeing don't want to talk? [...] I'm not going to write about this. I am not a judge. [...] But as a writer I had the right to invent postwar stories risking constructions like "What if...". Yeah, exactly. What if what? If I had survived the war. But I didn't. As a Jew, I didn't survive the war. And I have the right to be angry about that. (Grin, 2003, pp. 223–224)

Another non-Jewish author of the younger generation who makes the Jew the narrator of his pop history books is Szczepan Twardoch. In his *King of Warsaw* (2016, English 2020) and its second volume *The Kingdom* (2018) Twardoch shows the prewar and war society of Warsaw Jewish criminals (thieves, prostitutes, and gangsters). Historical facts are mixed with reflection on Polish antisemitism all of which is presented in a brilliant pop culture style, full of action and tension.

Defenders of a literary historic approach are particularly wary of such narratological inventions: "Nowadays folklorisation of the war memory already has a pop culture or hobbyist character, and that means that the trace [of history, ed.] operates either as a gadget or as a collector's fetish" (Majchrowski, 2011, p. 12).

Pop culture elements are a typical feature of twenty-first century literature and extend the creative possibilities for speaking about the Holocaust but raise a lot of problematic questions. Second and third generation artists and writers use a variety of pop culture methods to respond to the increasing forgetfulness of history. For instance, in Igor Ostachowicz's story → *Night of the Living Jews* (2012), zombies walking through shopping malls are supposed to be the visualisation of unconscious historical memory. Artistic reappraisal goes hand in hand with commemoration topics, not exclusively in literature but also in many television productions. The concepts of *edutainment* and *infotainment* (often appearing as historicising feature film scenes, which are intended to make the material easier to convey) are evaluated differently. While Iwona Kokoszka regards this as a particular "demand for history" (Kokoszka, 2016), other researchers have noted a questionable simplification and profanation of memory. Anna Wolff-Powęska (2013) speaks in this context of a virus of "pop history" and "history recycling". This is followed by discussions about the functioning of taboo zones in culture and the change in a so-called code of decency. When are pop culture representations of the Holocaust a danger and when an innovation? In Poland, Krystian Piwowarski's book → *More Gas, Comrades* (2012) was clearly disapproved of by most critics due to its unclear narrative standpoint. The same reproach was levelled at → *Dr. Josef's Beauty*, a 2006 novel by Zyta Rudzka, for her striking allegory between a contemporary retirement home and the concentration camp Auschwitz (Hiemer 2012b). Bożena Keff's drama → *A Piece About Mother and Fatherland* (2008) is a highly controversial mixture of private, national, and pop culture elements in one narration. In terms of language and content, it deals not only with the resurgence of antisemitism and Polish nationalism, but also with the question of the "liberation of the daugh-

ter from the tyranny of the traumatised mother” (Marszałek, 2013, p. 277). However, the topic of Jews or the Holocaust represented as ghosts haunting and agonising the living has also been acknowledged in various research publications (Karolak, 2013; Czapliński, 2016; Dziuban, 2019).

These books may sometimes appear trivial but their poetics can appeal to younger generations for whom the Holocaust represents the distant past. Spheres of transition in the most recent literature sometimes make it difficult to decide whether they refer to war events or not. What role do Holocaust motifs play within the thematic or motivational level of the text? In some newer novels even a paragraph on a completely different topic suddenly gains a double meaning, and seemingly innocuous phrases can trigger specific reactions. This property was used by Polish writer Joanna Bator in her novel *Dark, Almost Night* (2012):

“Where does your family come from?”

“Mine?” Zofia Socha was surprised. “Who told you such a gossip?” Dark eyes looked at me above the remains of the pork chop.

Cymes, no pork. Mossadam Husain himself would not refuse – I thought and banged a bite on the fork. So Zofia Socha is a survivor. This poor survivor hiding from herself in the Wałbrzych Palestine. I have changed the subject.

Besides the problematisation of Polish-Jewish memory there is an internal Jewish discussion about positioning and redefining a role in Polish society. From a statistical perspective, the Jewish community is very small. While Statistics Poland indicates the number of Jews in 2019 as 1,860 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2019, p. 198), other sources estimate their number at 4,000–7,000. The public perception of the few, but therefore all the more significant statements by representatives of Jewish organisations can be described as pessimistic. Piotr Paziński, who made his name with his debut novel → *The Boarding House* (2009), claims: “It must be said clearly: there will be no more Jews in Poland. They will continue to exist for some time, two or three generations, but they will become fewer” (Paziński, 2005, p. 40). Moreover, the opinion-makers who dominated after 1989 belong to a Judaism based on more conservative convictions, which relies on religion as the cornerstone of community-building (Gebert, 1999, p. 16). Interview volumes devoted to young people socialised after 1989 prove that the scientific and institutionalised discourses do not reflect the whole spectrum of individual opinions (Hiemer, 2020). As Katka Reszke concludes in her book *The Return of The Jew: Identity Narratives of the Third Post-Holocaust Generation of Jews in Poland* (2013, 2019): “In our case of young Polish Jews, as we have established, Polishness remains that component of their identity, which they indicate no need to ‘defend’. In other words, it is secure. Jewishness, on the other hand, is existentially threatened” (Reszke, 2019, p. 203). Reszke also observes a “sudden Jewishness” (p. 199) in her subjects, which witnesses how their families have thematised Jewish culture. They are trying to bring this new and unexpected aspect of identity together with the Polish part of their identity. The strongly internalised opposition of Polishness and Judaism

(Hiemer, 2019, p. 60) is reflected in their answers. At the same time, the majority of the interviewees represent a clearly secularised conception of Judaism, which is measured above all by being together with other Jews. “To be Jewish in Poland is to create Jewish life – from scratch, a completely different one, and on a smaller scale, but that doesn’t mean that it is a lesser one” (Reszke, 2019, p. 101).

Besides, the small Jewish community faces new problems in Poland. Poles coming to terms with their role as bystanders and responsibility during World War II seems to be replaced by a revival of so-called victim rivalry between the non-Jewish and Jewish population in recent years (Chmielewska, 2017). This debate, led by right-wing extremists and conservatives is about the establishment of a new Polish practice of memory that is oriented towards ethnic and religious patterns and excludes multiple affiliations. The dictum that a Pole is a Catholic (*polak-katolik*) implies an unbroken normative character (Molisak, Kołodziejska, 2011) and has been questioned again only in the last decade by younger scholars (Reszke, 2019). “Polokaust” appears as a new keyword and shows the wish for a distinct Polish wartime memory. The social psychologist Michał Bilewicz claims:

This need is nothing new. The reactions to uses of the term “Polish concentration camps”, as in the words of Barack Obama in 2012, show the need to fight for Poland’s historical good name, which is also nothing new. However, this fight has never been used as much in politics as it is now. The attempt to latch onto the Shoah is a phenomenon which actually began in the last few months, after the adoption of the amendment to the IPN [Institute for National Remembrance, eds.] Act. (Andersz, 2018)

Similar polemics are being debated in Slovakia. On the one hand, the right-wing nationalists are defending the Slovak clerofascist regime as a part of the national memory. On the other hand, numerous intellectuals and writers assign responsibility for the victimisation and deportations of Slovak Jews to Slovak politicians and also to “ordinary citizens” (Viliam Klimáček’s → *The Holocaust*; Denisa Fulmeková’s → *Doctor Mráz*).

The discourse on victim congruence finds resonance in some literary examples like Anna Janko’s autobiographical text *Small Annihilation* (2015), which deals with the massacre of Polish children in Sochy. From the perspective of a survivor’s daughter, she develops the narrative in such a way “that the reader gets the impression that both Poles and Jews suffered common atrocities.” (Chmielewska, 2017, p. 142.). Chmielewska regards this as a clear limitation or even exclusion of a Jewish historical narrative: “The Polish witness as a discourse-figure strives to take over the symbolic capital of Jewish trauma” (p. 144).

## Czech and Slovak Holocaust Literature

### Early Writings: World War II until 1949

The Shoah theme also went through various phases within Czech and Slovak literature. The very first works came from the war period. Apart from diaries and other testimonies (ego-documents), many poems, reflections, and short stories were written in ghettos, concentration camps, and hiding places. Authors created their works in extreme conditions, often struggling for survival. This is why many of these texts have not been preserved.

In Czech literature, the Theresienstadt Ghetto (1941–1945) played a substantial role. In the autumn of 1941, during the first period of the mass murder of Jews in the lands occupied by the Germans, Reinhard Heydrich decided to establish a transit centre for Czech Jews in the former fortress town Terezín/Theresienstadt in North-Western Bohemia. Starting in November 1941, the Jews from Bohemia and Moravia were transported to Theresienstadt and from there to extermination camps in the East. Later, from 1942, elderly and “prominent” Jews from the *Reich* were also taken to Theresienstadt and the ghetto served Nazi propaganda as a Potemkin village. Specific circumstances in Theresienstadt, where cultural activities could be developed to a much greater extent than in other camps or ghettos, allowed writing and performing of cabarets and plays. The culture in Theresienstadt was multilingual, in Czech, German, and to some extent Yiddish and other languages. In their works, some authors escaped from the demeaning and confined reality into fictional worlds using symbolic imagination. However, records of the tough reality of the ghetto were more frequent. For example, Otto Weiss sent God from Heaven to Theresienstadt to help his truly devout servant Vítězslav Taussig in his short story → *And God Saw That It Was Bad* (written 1943). After seven days of being confronted with the harsh reality of the ghetto and totally helpless, God had to escape. Pavel Friedman became posthumously famous for his poem *Butterflies Don't Live Here*, written in June 1942. Unlike Friedman, Michal Flach survived the war and published his Theresienstadt poems 50 years later (see p. 103). The play → *The Last Cyclist* written by Karel Švenk was an exceptional work from Theresienstadt. It mocked the Nazi propaganda and traditional antisemitic stereotypes in grotesque form. For fear of persecution, it was forbidden by the Jewish self-administration in Theresienstadt. After the war, the play was reconstructed by witnesses, adapted, and premiered in Prague in 1961.

In the vast majority of cases, literature and other artistic endeavours in ghettos and camps gave prisoners a mental boost. They helped them to overcome their current distresses and allowed them to forget or relax, even to hope. They were sometimes a gesture of mental resistance against the Nazi terror. Josef Bor's novella → *The Terezín Requiem* (1964) illustrated such an act. Bor, a former Theresienstadt prisoner, depicted the rehearsal and presentation of Giuseppe Verdi's *Requiem* by the Jewish conductor Rafael Schächter in the harsh conditions of the ghetto.

The same applies to Ota B. Kraus and his novel → *The Land without God* (1948), inspired by the author's experiences in Auschwitz, and to František Kafka's short story → *A Christmas Legend from the Ghetto* (1946), written in 1942 in the Lodz Ghetto. The most crucial writer of this period and of Czech literature thematising the Shoah in general was Jiří Weil. Like many other Czech Jews, he did not decide to emigrate in time and stayed in Prague while it was occupied. He tried to save himself by marrying a non-Jewish woman and living in a "mixed marriage". However, in February 1945 he was summoned for deportation to Theresienstadt. He staged his own suicide and went into hiding. This is where his short stories → *Colors* (1946) and the first version of his novel → *Life with a Star* (1949) were written. *Colors* is dedicated to the Czech victims of Nazi violence, Jews and non-Jews, and portrays various aspects of the Holocaust. The characters are typified and reduced to central features such as bravery, self-control, and toughness versus villainy, egoism, and brutality.

Weil's novel *Life with a Star* not only presented the atrocity of the Shoah but also its seemingly banal, even mundane side in a Kafkaesque manner (Franz Kafka is directly mentioned in the second manuscript of the novel). The protagonist and narrator Josef Roubíček is a Czech Jew and an ordinary man living alone in Prague. He tries to cope with the Nazi persecution through passive resistance. However, he cannot bear to live with the incredible complexity of bureaucratic authority and the hostile environment to which the Jews themselves contribute. He totally collapses mentally and physically and is finally saved by Josef Materna, a Czech labourer who offers to hide him illegally.

Weil's novel denied the concept of the war and the Holocaust as a heroic history which clearly distinguished between good and evil. It used elements of grotesque and black humour continuing the narrative strategies of Czech tradition, mainly Jaroslav Hašek's *Stories of the Good Soldier Švejk*. Weil faced sharp criticism for his novel from official Communist writers and journalists. He was excluded from the Writer's Union and his works were not allowed to be published until the end of the 1950s.

The Jews in Slovakia were faced with a rather different situation to that in the Czech lands. Czechoslovakia was split in two in March 1939. While Bohemia and Moravia were occupied by the Nazis, the formal independent Slovak Republic was established (excluding parts of today's Southern and Eastern Slovakia, which fell to Hungary). The Catholic priest and leader of the clerofascist party Jozef Tiso became the Slovak president. The ruling ideologies were nationalism and clericalism (Ward, 2013; Nižňanský, 2019). In fact, Slovakia existed only as a client state of Nazi Germany in Hitler's coalition. Unlike in the Czech lands, "aryanisation", i.e. the seizure of Jewish property, was organised by the Slovak authorities. Therefore many Slovaks were enriched by stolen Jewish property, especially exponents and supporters of the regime. In the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, only German people could "aryanise". In September 1941, the "Jewish Codex" was declared in Slovakia; a set of antisemitic regulations restricting the rights of the Jews substantially. In March 1942, the transports of Slovak Jews and Gypsies to labour camps and extermination camps

started. The Slovak government paid Germany 500 marks (approximately 2,000 U. S. dollars today) per deported Jew for “retraining and accommodation”. From March to October 1942, 58,000 Slovak Jews were deported and only a few hundred of them survived the war. The second wave of Jewish transports followed from September 1944, when German troops invaded Slovakia to suppress the Slovak National Uprising. In general, an estimated 68,000 to 71,000 Slovak Jews were killed, which was more than 80 % of the prewar Jewish population. From the Jews living in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, approximately 80,000 people were killed, almost 70 % (Kamenec, 2007; Rothkirchen, 2005).

All of these circumstances were reflected in literature. The seizure of Jewish property by Slovaks appeared very often in Slovak novels, short stories, and plays. A significant number of wartime poems or stories concerning the persecution of the Jews were not preserved. Immediately after the war, two important works were published, both written by renowned non-Jewish authors: Dominik Tatarka’s novel → *The Clerical Republic* and František Švantner’s short story → *The Peasant*. The first was set during the beginning of the Slovak state from 1939 to 1941, the second in the Slovak National Uprising in the winter of 1944. They depict various forms of behaviour towards the Slovak Jews: inhuman greed, cowardice, pragmatism, selfless support, and help. While Švantner used traditional narration with the point of view of a naive and tough Slovak peasant, Tatarka utilised modernist and avant-garde devices, similar to Jiří Weil and later Jiří Kolář.

An outstanding personality among Slovak writers of Jewish origin was Leopold Lahola. During the war, he was interned in a labour camp for Jews and later he participated in the resistance. After the war, he was successful as a playwright and screenwriter interpreting war events and the partisan movement in Slovakia. Nevertheless, in 1949 Lahola faced a strong critical attack on his works and emigrated to Israel. His short stories, written from 1949 to 1956, were not allowed to be published in Czechoslovakia until 1968 → *The Last Thing*. These stories reflected Lahola’s biographical experience, and were often brutal and expressive. They also addressed existential problems, such as the war and the Holocaust as limit situations (e.g. corporeality and animal instincts in humans).

### **From Stalinism to Liberalisation: the 1950s and 1960s**

The Stalinist regime, which was implemented in Czechoslovakia after the Communist takeover in February 1948 and climaxed at the beginning of the 1950s, was marked by a flagrant antisemitism, as in other Communist regimes of that period. It culminated in the trial and media campaign against Rudolf Slánský and other “Zionist conspirators” in November and December 1952. Fourteen high-ranking Communist officials, eleven of Jewish origin, were branded as alleged agents of the West and Israel. Eleven of the accused were hanged; the remaining three were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Similarly to Poland and other socialist countries, socialist realism was declared the prescribed canon of art. Publications about the Nazi regime and their concentration camps emphasised the communists' heroic fight, while the systematic extermination of the Jews was only mentioned in passing or not at all. Jiří Kolář represents an exception in the Czech literature, but his works could not be published officially. They were only known to his friends or later spread through samizdat and exile publishing houses. Kolář's experimental book → *Liver of Prometheus* was written in 1950. In its first part, he deconstructed Zofia Nałkowska's short story *By the Railway Track* (→ *Medallions*) using collage (a technique combining various sources and forms into a new whole). In his play → *Plague in Athens* (written in 1949) and other works, Kolář utilised authentic testimonies about Auschwitz and other concentration camps in a similar way. He aimed to present the horrible face of the Holocaust on the one hand and its universal character comparable to other genocides and acts of human maleficence on the other. Jiří Weil, Kolář's close friend, used collage of documents and different narrative levels in his → *Elegy for 77,297 Victims* (1958) dedicated to the memory of Czech Jews, murdered by the Nazis, whose names are written on the walls of Pinkas synagogue in Prague.

In Czech and Slovak official literature, the theme of the Shoah was not developed until the end of the 1950s, when the Stalinist system was being dismantled, and later, especially in the 1960s, as Czechoslovak culture underwent great liberalisation. In 1958, two works of prominent writers were published, Rudolf Jašík's novel → *St Elizabeth's Square* in Slovak and Jan Otčenášek's novella → *Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness* in Czech. Both of them depict the love between a non-Jewish boy and a Jewish girl in wartime and the Shoah with the tragic death of the girl. Both authors focused on personal stories and the feelings of their male protagonists, in the setting of that horrible time. Young Slovak poets, Ján Ondruš and Mikuláš Kováč described the persecution of Jews in their poems. Kováč's poem *Auschwitz 1958* offers a parallel to the Polish author Tadeusz Różewicz and his short story → *A Trip to the Museum*. Jaroslav Seifert, a renowned Czech poet of the older generation, reflected on World War II in his *Concert on the Island* (1965). In this collection, the bitter fate of Czech Jews was incorporated in a little girl called Hanele.

The prosaist who entered the scene in that period was Arnošt Lustig. He was of Jewish origin and survived both Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, thus the Shoah became the theme of his life's work. His first short stories were among his best: *Night and Hope* and → *Diamonds of the Night* (both 1958). Similarly to Jiří Weil, he makes use of an intimate, inner perspective. His protagonists are outsiders, children, or old people. Despite all the bleakness which these people must repeatedly undergo, fighting just to survive, the majority of them try to maintain basic moral values. This is true of his most famous book, the novella → *A Prayer for Katarina Horovitzova* (1964). The story was inspired by actual events in Auschwitz in 1943 – the murder of a group of rich Jews whom the Nazis had promised safe passage across the border for a high price. This event was depicted by others including Tadeusz Borowski in his short story *The*

Death of Schillinger (→ *Farewell to Maria*). However, Lustig's prose is structured in an extremely complicated way, unusual for his work, pushing the intelligent Nazi Brenske, who acts like the devilish Mephisto, into the foreground.

For some Czech authors who did not have Jewish roots, the Shoah became a metaphor for people caught in the machinery of the totalitarian regime and for the functioning of evil in general. They understood the cruel fate of the Jews as that of a helpless people who succumbed to a fanatical, systematic hate and to their own personal fears. Such is the case for Josef Škvorecký who published a cycle of seven stories → *The Menorah* (1964) and for Ladislav Fuks and his works. In Fuks's debut novel → *Mr Theodore Mundstock* (1963), the protagonist is an unobtrusive character who lives, similarly to Weil's Roubíček, in complete loneliness in Prague while waiting to be summoned for transport. This novel, based on elegant repetition and variation, smoothly fused realistic tableaux with fantastic ones. The author used similar stylistic and narrative devices in his novel → *The Cremator* (1967). Mundstock was a victim who, through no fault of his own, found himself under extreme threat and was trying to defend himself, but the main character of *The Cremator*, Karel Kopfrkingl, developed into a culprit. Even though he was not Jewish (Czech), and thus predisposed to being "neutral" and only a "witness" to the Shoah, he began to follow his German friend and Nazi ideology. The "dark side" of his personality, at first seemingly inconspicuous and harmless, made him a perpetrator due to the conditions of the criminal regime. In this novel, Fuks skilfully and even monstrously painted the fun-house atmosphere as ceremonious and stark ornamentation that devolves into horror.

Several Holocaust pieces of prose which take place in Slovakia were written both in Slovak (Knieža) and Czech (Grosman and Kalábová). Emil F. Knieža came from a Slovak-Jewish family in Eastern Slovakia and was forced to serve in the Slovak Army, in the "Jewish labour squad" without weapons. Later, he fought in a partisan unit against the Nazis. His experiences inspired him to write the novel → *The Sixth Battalion, On Guard!* (1964). It depicts tragicomic adventures of young Jewish men conscripted into military service. The Czech author Věra Kalábová, who spent her childhood in Slovakia, published the novel → *The Stein Brothers Are in Town* in 1967. It was set in a small town in Slovakia 20 years after the war. After the news came that two allegedly dead Jewish Stein brothers, former citizens of the town, were returning, the past and crimes against the Jews during the war unexpectedly came back to haunt the townspeople. The responsibility of "common Slovak people" for the persecution of the Jews and for the seizure of Jewish property was thematised also in the most well-known work on this topic, Ladislav Grosman's novel → *The Shop on Main Street* (1965). Grosman himself came from a Slovak-Jewish family, went through various labour camps during the war, escaped being transported to an extermination camp and thus had to go into hiding for the rest of the war. After the war, he published mostly in Czech. *The Shop on Main Street* was made famous by the film directed by Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, eventually winning an American Academy Award for the best foreign film in 1965. The main character was a ordinary man, the carpenter Tono Brtko who

lived in a provincial city in Eastern Slovakia and acquired a small store belonging to the old Jewish widow, Rozália Lautmanová. Because he was a good person at heart, he pretended to be her helper, while at home he made out to be a strict “aryaniser”. The situation became acute when the Jews from the town were lined up for transport. They had forgotten about Lautmanová, but Brtko assumed that this was really just a clever move to designate him as a protector of Jews. He inadvertently slammed a door on her head, which caused her to have a stroke and die. He then went completely crazy and committed suicide.

The novel depicted the drama of a person who was roped into an oppressive, irresolvable situation through no fault of his own. Moreover, the film version utilised grotesque and surrealistic scenes. This film was one of several world-renowned Czechoslovak film adaptations of Holocaust prose in the 1960s, including *Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness* (directed by Jiří Weiss), *Diamonds of the Night* (Jan Němec), *...And the Fifth Horseman Is Fear* (Zbyněk Brynych), and *The Cremator* (Juraj Herz).

Slovak high officials refused permission for filming *The Shop of Main Street* because they did not want to be reminded of Slovakia’s fascist past. However, because the highest-ranking person in Czechoslovakia at that time, Antonín Novotný, the president and the leader of the party, could not stand the Slovaks, the film was allowed and it was not filmed in the Slovak studio, Koliba, but in the Czech studio, Barrandov. The Slovak review *Slovenské pohľady* expressed a critical attitude towards the film in 1966, stating that the Jews represented an exploitative social group in Slovakia and creators of *The Shop on Main Street* praise them very sentimentally (Holý, 2015).

The revival of Jewish topics in Czechoslovakia also brought an interest in Franz Kafka and other authors from the Czech lands who wrote in German. The Kafka conference which was held in 1963 in Liblice marked the beginning of growing attention to his works. It became one of the first milestones among the Czech and Slovak intellectuals who started the process of reform in the 1960s.

Stalinist antisemitic resentments appeared in 1967, after the Six-Day War, when socialist countries branded Israel as an aggressor and occupier and broke off diplomatic relations with the country. Several Czech and Slovak writers protested against this campaign (e.g. Arnošt Lustig, Ivan Klíma and Ladislav Mňačko). It was also one of the themes during the Writers’ Congress in June 1967 that became the prologue to the Prague Spring.

### **The “Normalisation”: the 1970s and 1980s**

After the quelling of the Prague Spring through the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the neo-Stalinist “normalisation” regime was established. Free intellectual life was suppressed and many Jewish and non-Jewish writers emigrated; from the authors mentioned, Ladislav Grosman to Israel, Arnošt Lustig to the U. S., Emil F. Knieža to Switzerland, Josef Škvorecký to Canada, and Jiří Kolář to France.

In the 1970s open attacks against “Zionism” and the State of Israel appeared repeatedly and Jewish themes were marginalised once again. For instance, Ivan Kamenec’s historical book about the Holocaust in Slovakia, that he finished at the end of the 1960s, could only be published in 1991 (Kamenec, 2007). The secret police monitored people with Jewish backgrounds while censors banned works with Jewish themes. Unlike Poland which experienced a cultural liberalisation in the 1980s, the literary life in Czechoslovakia was reduced and strictly censored for both decades.

In November 1987, 45 years after the first deportations of Slovak Jews, 24 Slovak opposition intellectuals of different political and religious orientations signed an important petition. They criticised the Communist regime’s attitude towards the Holocaust. Their statement described the persecution and transports of the Jews as being tragic events that Slovak society had not reflected on enough.

“Anti-Jewish measures and above all deportations of Jewish inhabitants from Slovakia conflicted with those principles that we would wish to see as fundamental principles for Slovakia’s future – everybody’s equality regardless of race, tolerance, freedom of religion, democracy, respect for laws, love between people...” (Jelinek, 1989, p. 61).

Works thematising the Holocaust mostly had to be published abroad or in samizdat. An exception were Norbert Frýd and his family history *A Message in the Bottle* (1971) or Ota Pavel who managed to get through the war alive as a child of a “mixed marriage”. His father and two older brothers were sent to concentration camps but the whole family survived. Pavel’s autobiographical short stories → *The Death of the Beautiful Deer* (1971) and *How I Met the Fish* (1974) had a great response. He depicted the life of his family before, during, and after the war with humour and nostalgia. Nevertheless, his story *The Race through Prague* that described his father’s despair over the antisemitism after the Slánský trial was edited out of the book and could not be officially published until 1989.

Viktor Fischl was a Czech-Israeli author who paid close attention to Jewish and Holocaust topics. Fischl, a Zionist-oriented poet and journalist, escaped from Czechoslovakia to Britain in 1939 and worked as an officer in exile Czechoslovak government in London. After the war and Communist coup, he moved to Israel. He served as an Israeli diplomat in several countries. Of his novels and short stories thematising the Shoah → *Court Jesters* (1982) is worth mentioning. In the foreground of the plot is Kahana, a former judge who survived an extermination camp. Due to his terrible experiences, Kahana asks whether people are not only helpless puppets in the hands of God. Like other samizdat and exile works, Fischl’s stories and poems could only be published in Czechoslovakia after 1989.

In Slovakia the oppression of culture was not as harsh as in the Czech lands. That is why it was possible for some books with Jewish and Holocaust topics to be published from time to time. This is true of Klára Jarunková’s novel → *A Black Solstice* (1979) where the victimisation of Jews is a partial motif and Peter Karvaš’s short story → *The Old Man and Fate* (1979). The latter tells the story of an old Jewish watchmaker

and his family during the beginning of the persecution of Jews in Slovakia. Karvaš, an outstanding playwright, novelist, and essayist, had Jewish roots. Both his parents were killed by the Nazis. Surprisingly, he did not pay significant attention to this theme, except for in this work.

In the middle of the 1980s Ján Johanides published his novel → *Elephants in Mauthausen* (1985). The frame of the story is a meeting of two former Mauthausen prisoners, the Slovak Fero Holenyšt and Dutch Winston Van Maase, almost 40 years after the war. They remember the brutal situations in the camp and their postwar lives. The narration is very complex and sophisticated, with allusions, anticipations, and reminiscences.

### After the “Velvet Revolution”: 1989 – Present

In November and December 1989, the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia was dismantled and strict political censorship of culture was abolished. Closed borders with the West were opened and relations between Czechoslovakia and Israel were re-established. President Václav Havel supported the Jewish community and stood up for returning Jewish themes to the public discourse. In 1993, Czechoslovakia was split into two countries, the Czech and Slovak republics.

In the 1990s and later, both countries' literatures enjoyed a revival in Jewish and Holocaust topics. Novels of older Jewish authors were published, such as Viktor Fischl, Ota B. Kraus, or Arnošt Lustig. Several significant ego-documents were issued, including the testimony of Rudolf Vrba about his imprisonment in and escape from Auschwitz and Egon Redlich's diaries written in Theresienstadt. New works were also edited based on survivors' experiences: Richard Glazar's → *Trap with a Green Fence* (in German translation 1992, Czech original 1994), Juraj Špitzer's → *I Didn't Want to Be a Jew* (1994) or Hana Bořkovcová's → *A Private Conversation* (2004). These authors' Jewish origins were remarkably different. Glazar managed to escape from Treblinka and was one of the few surviving prisoners who was able to describe this extermination camp, sometimes with situational humour. Like Borowski in his short stories about Auschwitz (→ *Farewell to Maria*), he wrote about immoral acts in the first person, not trying to soften or explain them. They harshly confronted themselves with immorality without any excuses. After the Soviet invasion in 1968, Glazar emigrated from Czechoslovakia to Switzerland and was interviewed (as well as Rudolf Vrba) in Lanzmann's famous documentary *Shoah*. Špitzer was a convinced communist; he was held in a Slovak internment labour camp during the war and participated in the resistance fight against the Nazis. After the suppression of the Prague Spring, he was excluded from the party and forced to be a manual labourer. Only at this time did he confess his Jewish identity, and for the first time began to deal with Jewish themes. Bořkovcová, who converted to Catholicism, also proclaimed her Jewish roots many years after the war. In the novel *A Private Conversation*, she utilised an untraditional narration: a dialogue

between a young girl who undergoes persecutions because of her Jewish origin and the old lady perceiving these events from a distance.

Czech and Slovak historical culture concerning the Shoah developed rather slowly when compared to literature and film. In the Czech Republic, the memory of the Holocaust had to compete with the memory of Czechs enduring the Nazi occupation. In the Czech lands, antisemitic attacks and pogroms did not take place during or after the war. Czech public opinion did not have to face up to the massacres of the Jews in Jedwabne and Kielce like the Poles or in Topolčany like the Slovaks. For average Czechs, oblivion and indifference towards the persecution of the Jews were rather typical. As Michal Frankl noted, the Holocaust was still ignored in Czech textbooks during the first post-Communist decades (Frankl, 2003).

The “gypsy camps” in Lety in South Bohemia and Hodonín in South Moravia have become part of a difficult heritage for Czechs (Adler, Capkova, 2020). During the war, Roman people from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were sent there. They were forced to work hard with inadequate food, poor sanitary and housing conditions. The commanders and wardens in the camps were Czechs, not Germans. Also Czech gendarmes detained the Roma and transported them to Lety and Hodonín. Approximately 2,700 people were imprisoned in the two camps, six hundred of whom escaped or were released. About 1,300 Roma from Lety and Hodonín were deported to Auschwitz and most of them were gassed. Only 326 prisoners from the Lety camp survived (Polansky, 1998).

After the war, during the Communist regime, these camps were not mentioned and the Czech complicity in *porajmos* (the “devouring”, the Nazi genocide of Roma and Sinti population) was concealed. In the 1970s, a large-scale pig farm was set up in the immediate vicinity and included part of the former Lety camp. No commemorative events were organised or monuments built until after the Velvet Revolution. Whereas the memorial in Lety was declared a cultural monument in 1998, the pig farm was not actually purchased by the state until 2018. The site where the camp in Hodonín had been located was bought by the state and the Museum of Romani Culture, who built a monument there which is open to the public.

In Slovakia, the new political elites condemned the Shoah and distanced themselves from the clerofascist regime of the wartime Slovak Republic. Nevertheless, the Slovak emigrants returning from the West, who had often been active collaborators in this regime, began to defend wartime leader Jozef Tiso. They were supported by numerous representatives of the Catholic Church who had retained relatively extensive influence in Slovakia. The Holocaust was presented as an exclusively German crime, which in Slovakia was supported by only a few radicals. Even traditional anti-Jewish stereotypes were revived. The Jews themselves were blamed for antisemitism because they allegedly had not helped Slovaks in their struggle for their rights and had preyed upon the Slovak people. In this way Milan Ďurica trivialised the persecutions of the Slovak Jews in his book *The History of Slovakia and the Slovaks* (1995), which the Slovak Ministry of Education subsidised and recommended as a text book for schools. It has been sharply criticised by historians, Jewish organisations, and the EU (Sniegón, 2014).

Several Slovak historians and other intellectuals have actively and systematically argued against this “Slovak revisionism” (Kamenec, 1994, p. 165; Szabó, 2014). In recent decades, significant documentary editions, testimonies of survivors, and historical surveys have been published (e.g. by Eduard Nižňanský, Peter Salner, and Monika Vrzgulová). The Museum of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica as well as other institutions no longer present the Holocaust of Slovak Jews from a nationalist point of view but within the contemporary “European historical narrative” (Sniegon, 2014, p. 193). Slovak writers who deal with this topic in their fictional and semi-fictional works (Milan Richter, Viliam Klimáček, Jana Juráňová, and Denisa Fulmeková) have begun to play an important role in recent years.

After 1990 the second and third generations began to appear – the children and grandchildren of Shoah survivors, perpetrators, witnesses, and bystanders. According to Aleida Assmann, the first generation owns an individual memory of the Holocaust while the second and third generations constitute the social memory, which is more homogenised (Assmann, 2006, p. 220). This social memory is related to the existing iconography of Holocaust images and motifs as well to national narratives.

Several of these authors adapted stories of their parents and grandparents. The Slovak poet Milan Richter evoked his grandparents and aunts who perished in camps and portrayed the first meeting of his mother and father in Theresienstadt → *The Wreckled Temple in Me* (2002). Denisa Fulmeková described a dramatic story from her family history in her documentary novel → *Lily of the Valley* (2016). It is a love affair between the author’s grandmother Valéria Reiszová, and the renowned Slovak poet Rudolf Dilong. Dilong was a Franciscan monk and prominent writer in the clerofascist regime in Slovakia, while Valéria was a Jewish girl. Valéria gave birth to a daughter and Rudolf managed to help them and save them from the transport. However, after the war, Dilong escaped to Argentina and Valéria was left without any support. She was even persecuted and interrogated by the police as the mistress of a clerofascist emigrant. Another example of a family history was adapted by Milan Uhde, a well-known Czech playwright. After the Velvet Revolution he was also a politician (Czech Minister of Culture, speaker of the House of Deputies). His play → *Miracle in the Darkhouse* (2012) is set in June 1992 when all the members of the Pompe family meet. Due to their past, all their relationships are tense. The father, Dr Pompe, saved his Jewish wife (the mother) during the war by falsifying her documents to prove she was not a Jew. However, he refused to help her parents and brother to escape. He did not want to lose his magnificent “darkhouse” that he had just got from the Jewish parents of his wife.

Such stories with timelines which return to the past can be found very often in the contemporary Holocaust literature. They are frequently connected with the revelation of Czech and Slovak complicity in the Nazi persecution of the Jews. This is true in the Czech novels → *Money from Hitler* (2006) written by Radka Denemarková, *Aaron’s Leap* (2006) by Magdalena Platzová, → *White Elephants* (2008) by Irena Dousková, the Slovak novel → *Pending Matter* (2013) by Jana Juráňová, and in the Slovak play → *The*

*Holocaust* (2012) by Viliam Klimáček. All of these cases demonstrate antisemitism, xenophobia, and greed for property that had been seized from Jews, not only in the past but also in the present day. Nonetheless, stories about “Aryan” people who helped victimised Jews while risking their own lives are presented as well. Simultaneously, works by Denemarková and Juráňová, Czech author Andronikova (→ *The Sound of the Sundial*, 2001), and Slovak author Grusková (→ *Woman Rabbi*, 2010) can be examples of a feminine perspective in Holocaust writing which, similarly to Polish literature, was formed for decades by male narrative models.

A conservative discourse similar to that which is presented in Marcin Pilis’s *Meadow of the Dead* (2010, *Łąka umarłych*) cannot seem to be found in Czech or Slovak literature. In Pilis’s novel, Polish villagers killing Jews during the war are shown as ordinary people who have been manipulated. They were first exploited by the Germans, and later by communists who concealed the Polish guilt for these murders. The Polish monastery in Pilis’s story symbolises a place of truth and penance that corresponds to traditional Polish martyrology (Nowak, 2020, pp. 97–119).

As the numbers of eyewitnesses of the war dwindle, the memory of the Holocaust is increasingly presented in ways other than eyewitness testimony. As a consequence of it being a universal symbol, the Shoah is more often becoming the subject of fiction. Sometimes the Holocaust provides an attractive backdrop for stories taking place during or after World War II. It can be connected with the forced expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia after the war. Josef Urban’s novel *The Mill of Habermann* (2001), Miroslav Bambušek’s play *Porta Apostolorum* (2004) and Denemarková’s above-mentioned novel *Money from Hitler* analogise both of them. For the second and now third generation, traditional images of the Holocaust and concentration camps – crematorium chimneys, barbed wire, sadistic German wardens, the unloading ramp, and selection in Auschwitz – have all become a convention without any artistic attraction. The iconography and poetics of works created in recent years are often different from the fixed poetics of older authors. These more recent works use components of tragicomedy, grotesque, shocking farcical exaggeration, and black humour.

The works of these newer authors can continue to use the devices of Jiří Weil, Leopold Lahola, Ladislav Grosman, or another Holocaust survivor, J. R. Pick, whose novella → *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (1969) was subtitled “A Humorous – Insofar as That Is Possible – Novella from Theresienstadt.”

At the same time, the Holocaust now appears in forms and genres that were incompatible with how it was presented in the first postwar decades. Today, this theme is integrated into popular culture in genres like thriller, fantasy, horror, romance, graphic novels, or even pornography. In previous decades, these genres were only utilised extraordinarily (Ladislav Fuks’s → *The Cremator*, 1967 or Pavel Kohout’s → *Lessons in Love and Dancing*, 1989).

The best examples of these new approaches are Slovak writers Pavel Vilikovský and Peter Krištúfek as well as Czech authors Arnošt Goldflam, Jáchym Topol, and Ra-

dek Malý. They all exploit elements of traditional war and Holocaust images to deconstruct stereotypes of the Shoah using a polyphonic perspective, comparable to younger Polish writers. They ironise mainstream and conventional ideas about the Nazis, Jews, Czechs, and Slovaks. Radek Malý's verses "you're half a Jew / and half an SS man" (poem Buchewald, 28. 11. 2000) provoked a public debate about alleged relativisation of the Shoah → *Crow Songs* (2002). Some representatives of the Czech Jewish community argued that such verses had marginalised the suffering of the Shoah victims and this offended Czech Jews who had lost their relatives during World War II. Radek Malý stated he had not denied Jewish suffering during the war. He added that the Jewish representatives had based their statement on the confusion surrounding the general attitudes of the author, his work, and the manner in which his work had been treated in public. According to Holý (2013) and Balík (2015, p. 231), too, this provocative poem has been misinterpreted. Radek Malý's works give clear evidence of his artistic and moral values. Also Pavel Vilikovský applies sophisticated narrative plays to re-construct the transport of Jewish women and girls from the district of Patrónka in Bratislava to Auschwitz in the spring of 1942 → *The Fourth Language* (2013). Jáchym Topol traces the effects of the current "Shoah tourism" and "Shoah business" in his novel → *The Devil's Workshop* (2009).

Recent works accentuate more intimacy and eroticism than earlier ones. For instance, Polish, Czech, and Slovak authors of the third generation openly depict homosexuality, like Igor Ostachowicz in → *Night of the Living Jews* or Agnieszka Kłos in *Games in Birkenau* (2015). The protagonist Marie in Jakuba Katalpa's Czech novel *Bitter Sea* (2008), the daughter of Holocaust survivors, frees herself from the traumatic experiences of her mother. At the same time, she frees herself from her male lover, finding her identity in a lesbian relationship. On the contrary, in the postwar decades, homosexuality was presented negatively (homosexual prostitution in camps), covertly through hints (in the works of Ladislav Fuks in the 1960s), or with ugliness (Susanne Fall's autobiographical memories from Theresienstadt written immediately after the war).

## Looking to the Future

According to the British historian Tony Judt, the Holocaust has become a part of a common European identity created after the Cold War. The renewed memory of the killed European Jews has become the actual definition of and guarantee for the continent's renovated humanism (Judt, 2005, p. 804). The German cultural anthropologist Aleida Assmann states that the Holocaust is recognised as a collective trauma and has been transformed into a global icon in European and North American civilisation. It represents inhumanity in general, related to universal morality values, and is perceived as a part of our transnational memory (Assmann, 2010, pp. 97–98 and 109). As far as the Polish, Czech, and Slovak contemporary literatures and memory cultures are

concerned, the Holocaust is presented both in traditional national narratives as well as in this transnational narrative.

Voices questioning this universality are very rare (Novick, 2015). Additionally, the last decade showed the rapidly increasing power and influence of media contents. The free and fast circulation of images via social media such as messenger services leads to an increasing decontextualisation of historical events and to changes in the perception of the Holocaust. The noticeable dominance of the image in the present (animated GIFs, memes) implies a supra-temporality and fragmentation of the historical and thus simplifies access to the topic. Furthermore, research on Jewish themes can be used to illustrate that culture can no longer be thought of within territorial boundaries, but that (especially in the age of Web 2.0) phenomena are transnational and elude any national-cultural classification.

The number of pop culture devices will increase. The echoes of projects that provoke with images and art compositions show how powerful the combination of the Holocaust with topics of daily life and daily use can be. It not only reduces the temporal distance to the historical events but viewers are forced to reconsider their own attitudes towards the Holocaust: How willing and able are we to let history be part of the present? This question was taken up by Shahak Szapira, an Israeli author, comedian, and cultural activist living in Berlin, who launched the internet page [www.yolocaust.com](http://www.yolocaust.com) (obviously a neologism of the youth speech term yolo – you only live once – and Holocaust). He draws attention to the thoughtlessness in dealing with the commemoration of the Shoah, combining private selfies of strangers taken from their social media accounts in front of the Berlin Holocaust Memorial with pictures from the extermination camps. One attempt at combining historical re-enactment through a computer game animation with a pedagogical outcome is Vít Šisler's *Czechoslovakia 39–89. Assassination* (<http://cs3889.cz/>), which allows the player to experience history by adopting different actors' perspectives. Critics argue that the Holocaust has been transformed, losing its specificity. As Alvin Rosenfeld puts it, today the culture of the Holocaust is constituted by alternative forms of narrative, art, and film created mainly by TV writers, journalists, and filmmakers. It has been changed from an authentic historical event into a symbol, or even “entertainment” (Rosenfeld, 2011, p. 15). Closely related to this is the so-called “Americanising” of the Holocaust, a term which was probably first used by Lawrence Langer, the U. S. scholar of Holocaust literature in 1983. Another American researcher, Michael Rothberg, lists some parameters of these changes:

“the predominance of media and information technologies; the hegemonic position of American media in a global media environment; the ‘sequencing’ of the Shoah in various spheres of the media with other genocides and histories of oppression, as well as with other images and commodities of a postmodern consumer culture” (Rothberg, 2000, p. 221).

Maybe this phenomenon had its roots in the U. S. but looking at the recent developments in Europe, one can observe similar changes. The Polish literary scholars Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Magdalena Ruta write about “Shoah business” and about

the universalisation of Jewish phenomena in culture, the material world (“Jewish” pubs and cafes for tourists) and politics describing it as a “virtual Jewish world” instead of the authentic world created by Jews (Adamczyk-Garbowska, Ruta, 2011, pp. 723–732).

## Common Topics, Motifs, and Strategies

As this extensive but still not exhaustive introduction shows, the three literatures were subjected to their specific national-historical discourses. Yet they share plenty of common motifs, topics, and strategies that connect not only Polish, Czech, and Slovak literature but establish a link to Holocaust fiction from other countries. These motifs, devices, and important places are presented in the index to this handbook. In the following, we outline two popular features that underwent significant changes, especially in recent years: humour and the depiction of perpetrators.

The Holocaust was a historical event which has become the embodiment of evil and atrocity. In literature or film, it is often represented with motifs and methods of classical tragedy. Numerous master narratives and untold mainstream works have been written using the style of tragedy. It may seem that laughter and comedy are not suitable to depict this topic. Nevertheless, they occur in various forms in Holocaust literature. In Nazi ghettos and camps, humour had already begun to be used as a kind of defence against persecution and humiliation. Karel Švenk wrote his satirical play → *The Last Cyclist* (1944) that mocked the racist ideology in Theresienstadt. The pioneer of this device was Charlie Chaplin. In 1940 Chaplin filmed his *Great Dictator* in the U. S., in which an identical tool was utilised. Chaplin played both main characters, physically very close each to other: the little Jewish barber in the ghetto and the fascist despot hinting at Hitler.

Such works recall the tradition of Jewish humour and Jewish jokes with a mixture of comic, tragic, and farcical features. These devices are frequently utilised by Czech or Slovak authors of Jewish origin like Ludvík Aškenazy, Emil Knieža, Ladislav Grosman, and J. R. Pick. In Grosman’s → *The Shop on Main Street* (1965) the protagonist Tono Brtko has ridiculous, clownish features, with his small dog and Chaplinesque hat. Another and more provocative configuration of humour was presented by the Polish author Tadeusz Borowski immediately after the war. His short story collections → *Farewell to Maria* (1948) and *The World of Stone* (1948) both met with sharp critical responses, mainly from Catholics. It can be understood in the context of Polish martyr literature thematising World War II, which is bolstered by the strong tradition of Polish romantic messianism and heroism. In contrast to the renowned works by Andrzejewski, Kossak or Żywulska, Borowski depicts both the victims and perpetrators of persecution without tragic pathos and moralism, in realistic harshness, and with brutal humour. He describes a number of drastic scenes, stories of torture, and killing. His prose is based on autobiographical experiences, but the main character Tadek does not stylise himself as a fighter or martyr. Contrarywise, he steals food from other prisoners or laughs at an in-

experienced inmate who is beaten by an SS man. The author described his short story as a small battle with the hypocrisy of literature since this behaviour was the only way of surviving and there was no space for heroic acts.

In recent decades, the use of comic and grotesque scenes in Holocaust literature can be found more often. It is connected with the substitution of the established and conventional iconography of the Holocaust and with the generational change. Mainstream novels and films now refrain from only presenting brutal persecutors and noble victims, as well as from only exploiting pathos, heroism, and brutality. While the works of Tadeusz Borowski and Jiří Weil which were published immediately after the war provoked readers, Roberto Begnini's film *Life Is Beautiful* (1997) utilised comedy in its depiction of the Holocaust and became a worldwide success.

One of the most constant topics of Holocaust literature is the depiction of the perpetrators, which still provokes manifold debates about appropriateness. Probably the first embodiment of the "good German" in Polish literature was the character of Wilm Hosenfeld, the *Wehrmacht* Captain in Szpilman's *The Death of the City* (1946 → *The Pianist*). Władysław Szpilman, the Polish-Jewish musician and pianist, escaped death in an extermination camp and was hiding in a ruined house in Warsaw at the end of the war. In November 1944, he met the German officer Hosenfeld, who helped him survive. Szpilman's autobiographical book was published immediately after the war but was censored. Among other things, passages describing the collaboration of the Poles, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians with the Nazis were deleted. The nationality of the brave German officer who rescued Szpilman was also changed from German to Austrian, because it was more acceptable. This corresponded to the stereotype of the decent Austrians who were more kind towards the Jews (see for instance Norbert Frýd's → *A Box of Lives*, 1956) despite the fact that Adolf Eichmann and Adolf Hitler were both Austrians. Just another type of a good German, the Nazi soldier in the SS uniform (Willy) presented by Klára Jarunková in → *Black Solstice* (1979), is in fact, not a German but a Dutchman.

The extended and uncensored version of Szpilman's book was edited under the title *Der Pianist* in German (1998), and *The Pianist* in English (1999) which included Hosenfeld's diaries. Translations into 35 other languages followed. It became famous through Roman Polanski's film adaptation in 2002. Paradoxically Wilm Hosenfeld, who helped Poles in Warsaw, was captured by Soviet soldiers and died in a prison camp near Stalingrad in 1952 despite Szpilman's effort to save him. In 2009, Hosenfeld was posthumously awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations in Israel.

In later decades, the character of the good German can be found more often, for instance in short stories by Josef Škvorecký (→ *The Menorah*, 1964) or in Andrzej Szczypiorski's novel → *The Beautiful Mrs Seidemann* (1986). Certainly, the best-known good German in Holocaust literature and film is Oskar Schindler, the protagonist of Thomas Keneally's novel (1982) and Steven Spielberg's film (1993).

Contemporary images of the perpetrators in literature can be summarised with provocative scenes of mass violence and brutality narrated by the killers themselves

(e.g. Walter S. Zapotoczny in *For the Fatherland*, 2009; Krystian Piwowarski in *→More Gas, Comrades!*, 2012) but at the same time, the characters of prominent Nazis, German officers, and soldiers are de-demonised and even humanised. The dyad of good and evil is not a recent theme; contemporary literature research tend to interpret the Shoah as a universal lesson of failing humanity in history. In literature, attempts have been made to explore genocide poetics (Morawiec, 2018). As Zygmunt Bauman, a Polish-British sociologist with Jewish roots, writes: “The most frightening news brought about by the Holocaust and what we learned of its perpetrators was not likelihood that ‘this’ could be done to us, but the idea *that we could do it*” (Bauman, 1989, p. 152).

In the last few decades, traditional boundaries between the sacred and profane have increasingly been broken down. Several extraordinary works written after the war immediately began using grotesque and black humour to destroy the stereotypes of martyrology and heroism (Tadeusz Borowski’s *→ Farewell to Maria* and Jiří Weil’s *→ Life with a Star*). Authors of the second and third generations go further to deconstruct common Holocaust images, devices, and stereotypes. The works of Andrzej Bart *→ The Flytrap Factory* (2008), Jáchym Topol’s *City, Sister, Silver* (1994) and *→ The Devil’s Workshop* (2009) or Igor Ostachowicz’s *→ Night of the Living Jews* (2012) may be mentioned here. They do not follow a realistic display of the Shoah and disrupt the traditional *mimesis*.

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## **Entries**



# The Abandoned Doll (Opuštěná panenka)

**Author:** Josef Bor

**First Published:** 1961

**Translations:** German (*Die verlassene Puppe*, 1964); Hungarian (*A gazdátlan baba*, 1964); Bulgarian (*Izostavenata kukla*, 1965).

**About the Author:** Josef Bor, originally Bondy, was born in 1906 into a Czech-Jewish family in Ostrava. He studied law and became a lawyer. His promising career came to an abrupt end after the beginning of World War II. In 1942, his whole family, among them his wife and his two little daughters, was deported to Theresienstadt and later, in 1944, to Auschwitz-Birkenau. There, Bondy witnessed his family being murdered in the gas chamber, whereas he himself was selected for forced labour in the concentration camps of Monowice and Buchenwald. In April 1945 he was liberated near Jena. After the war, Bor married again and took up a post in the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defence. At the beginning of the 1950s, in connection with the Slánský trial, Bor got into political trouble and lost his employment in the ministry. After several positions in Košice and Prague he started his literary career in the early sixties. In 1966, he retired due to his health. Up to his death in 1979 in Prague, Bor dedicated himself to the dialogue between Christians and Jews.

**Further Important Publication:** *Tereziňské rekviem* (1963, → *The Tereziň Requiem*; novella).

## Content and Interpretation

The novel *The Abandoned Doll* was influenced by the author's own horrible experiences in the concentration and death camps of the Nazi regime. Bor began creating his work in 1951 (Dobeš, 1965, p. 4). Being inexperienced in writing literature he found support from the famous Jewish-Czech translator and journalist Pavel Eisner (p. 4). After its publication in 1961 the work immediately achieved great success so that further editions followed in 1962 and 1965.

The relatively comprehensive novel (330 pages in the Czech original) consists of four parts that differ in composition and style. The first three parts are divided into many short chapters and are narrated from changing points of view, whereas the last chapter presents a continuous, almost homogenous narration. The title of the first part is *The Sluice* (Šlojska). This part shows the fate of the Jews from Kutná Hora in Central Bohemia who were deported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1942, among them the family of the novel's protagonist Jan (Honza) Breuer. The action is comprised of the time from the plans for the deportation, up to the arrival of the transport at Theresienstadt. Within the 23 chapters of this part of the novel we find a great variety of scenes from,

among others, the private lives of people being transported, from the organisation and assembly of the transport, but also from the Nazi milieu. Breuer, an energetic man with wide influence within the Jewish community, is delegated to organise the transport. After the transport's arrival at Theresienstadt, it is his task to carry out negotiations with the Elders of the Jewish self-administration who have to decide on who will be transported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz and other death camps. Despite his strenuous efforts, in the end Breuer cannot prevent his sister's and her family's deportation and death in the gas chamber. Parts two and three, *The Theresienstadt March* (Tereziňský pochod) and *On the Ruins of the Ghetto* (Na troskách ghetta), show the life and daily work of Breuer and his remaining family up to the mass transports in October of 1944 and, beyond that, again present a wide range of scenes from everyday life at the Theresienstadt Ghetto, e.g. from the Jewish self-administration, the smuggler milieu, the rich cultural activities in the ghetto, where numerous renowned Jewish artists were interned, and the Nazi headquarters. Vladimír Forst in his review of *The Abandoned Doll* refers to this structural complexity as a "colourful kaleidoscope of all kinds of events from the Theresienstadt Ghetto" (Forst, 1961, p. 548). This "kaleidoscopic" narration, however, comes to an abrupt end with the fourth and final part. This part entitled *The Darkness before the Dawn* (Temno před úsvitem), is not divided into chapters at all and is nearly exclusively narrated from the point of view of Jan Breuer who, after the arrival of the last Theresienstadt transport at Auschwitz, loses the rest of his family, including his wife and daughters, to the gas chamber. After this, the readers become witnesses to his way of suffering at the camps of Monowice, Gliwice and Buchenwald as well as several arduous death marches. All these horrid experiences engender a growing dissolution of ego in Breuer who in the end feels like a person without any individuality. In the narrator's words, Breuer is a mere "Number". In the novel's final scene showing the protagonist's liberation near Jena, Breuer undergoes a process of rebirth, lastly regaining his individuality and his name. In an emotional outburst, he asks himself what all this suffering was for:

The prisoners joyfully cheer and wave their hands. Some of them, however, remain silent while standing still.

Also the Number is silent.

He stands there gaunt, lousy, filthy. A something without a soul, feeling, will or desire.

Suddenly, he is shocked by a terrible thought.

Why?

Why him, and not his wife and children? Why all this?

Why?

The questions penetrate into his brain wildly beating all of his nerves and convulsively flashing through his whole body.

And the Number gradually realises that he is again becoming a human being.

He weeps. (Bor, 1961, p. 330)

Literary criticism has largely welcomed *The Abandoned Doll*, although there have also been reservations. So, e.g., the critic Jiří Opelík characterised the novel as a “precious testimony” (Opelík, 1961, p. 7), but also saw deficiencies:

It vacillates between being a documentary and fiction, between mosaic and narration. The book gets hard going, in the beginning it thrills the reader only with its wealth of material, but not with its conception. (p. 7)

### Main Topics and Problems

The idea that *The Abandoned Doll* is a work of documentary value, but with artistic shortcomings runs like a common thread through the text’s history of reception. This prompts the question, why Bor did, after all, choose a literary genre, when his aspiration was really merely a documentary one? And if there are reasons for the author’s decision towards literature: are the critical notes actually justified?

This rather compendious summary of *The Abandoned Doll* already shows that the novel has a great deal to do with the traumatic events the author himself had to go through in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, and the other camps. Several critics even refer to the work as an autobiography (see, e.g. Vavřík, 1961, p. 5). There is undoubtedly a huge abundance of details in the text that have clear parallels with events in Bor’s/Bondy’s life during the war. But there are also significant differences between the novel and the writer’s biographic reality such as the protagonist’s name (Jan Breuer instead of Josef Bondy) or the name of his wife (Duška Breuerová instead of Edita Bondyová), whereas the names of the daughters are the same in both fiction and reality: Věra and Hana.

Apart from such rather secondary details, the major question, however, is, why the largely inexperienced writer explicitly decided on the use of a literary genre (a novel), although he was free to write a mere documentary text. From a thorough reading of the work, it becomes manifest that Bor’s aims were beyond the scope of bearing witness in the sense of factual truth, i.e. the author did not want to confine himself to the reproduction of events that he had undergone himself. Bor wanted to show life in the Holocaust in its totality and with a maximum of facets. For this purpose he needed additional perspectives – perspectives the real detainee could not have witnessed, at all (e.g., glances into the inner sphere of the Elders within the Jewish self-administration or into the life of the Nazi headquarters, not to mention – in one scene (Bor, 1961, pp. 173ff.) – the immersion into Adolf Eichmann’s world of thoughts when reflecting on the Holocaust in his Berlin office. Such views could only be gained by the help of information from others as well as imagination and fiction. So, if the documentary character of the work is discussed, this to a lesser extent refers to the author’s own experiences in the sense of biographical or historical authenticity. These experiences rather form a creative impulse for Bor’s true concern: to give the reader a broad and detailed picture of the Holocaust and its structure and functioning. Documentariness in this sense is more a literary device than a demand for authenticity. *The Abandoned*

*Doll* can thus be related to famous works of Holocaust literature such as Peter Weiss' documentary theatre play *The Investigation* (1965), Hanna Krall's documentary prose *Shielding the Flame* (1976) or Richard Glazar's → *Trap with a Green Fence* (1992), which are all based on this device marking the transition from documentary to literature, thus uniting the functional potential of both spheres: the authenticity of individual experience and persuasiveness of the narrative, philosophical, emotional etc. context.

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# And God Saw That It Was Bad (I viděl bůh, že je to špatné)

**Author:** Otto Weiss

**First Published:** 1997 (written 1943)

**Translations:** German (*Und Gott sah, dass es schlecht war*, 2002); Hebrew (*Va-yar Elohim ki ra': sipur mi-ge'ot Terezin*, 2009); English (*And God Saw That It Was Bad*, 2010).

**About the Author:** Otto Weiss (1898–1944) was born in Pardubice, a town in Eastern Bohemia. Having been injured during World War I, he was not able to study the piano which had been his dream. He became a bank clerk and lived with his family in Prague. In December 1941, he was deported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto along with his wife Irena and daughter Helga. Before being transported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz-Birkenau (1.10.1944), he managed to hand over his literary works and along with his drawings and the diary of his maturing daughter to his relative Josef Polák, who bricked these items in Theresienstadt. Weiss did not survive, unlike to the rest of his family. After the war, Polák retrieved the documents and handed them over to Weiss' daughter. Otto Weiss was a non-professional writer and an occasional poet. His literary work was mainly written in Theresienstadt. It contains, apart from this novella, several dozen poems that he collected into a volume (edited posthumously).

**Further Important Publications:** *Tak boley hvězdy* (1998, How the Stars Were Hurting; poems).

## Content and Interpretation

The plot of the story, which was written in the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1943, is very simple. Hearing the prayers of the truly devout Vítězslav Taussig, who lived in the ghetto, God decided to go in the flesh of Aron Gottesmann in order to visit Theresienstadt personally to help him. Mr Taussig's package, which God sent answering Taussig's prayers, seemed to have gotten lost; in reality it was stolen. Although God wanted to right the wrongs, he was not able to help Taussig, in addition, He could not save himself from the transport to the East. Moreover, He was not even able to help Himself from being charged with theft and sentenced unjustly. Consequently, He decided to pretend to be terminally ill and His human alter ego died in order to get out of Theresienstadt.

His escape (sic!) back to Heaven from all the human sufferings happened during His seventh day in Theresienstadt, the biblical day of rest (Wittemann, 2004, p. 218). Significantly, He was hurrying "home" by way of the crematorium in Theresienstadt and the narrator speaks directly to the reader about the fact that God has left and returned to Heaven. "Be patient a little while longer, wait quietly, and you will soon be rewarded. And then forgive Him, please, because He didn't mean it to be like that"

(Weiss, 2010, p. 70). And leaves it up to the reader whether or not this was meant sarcastically.

God seemed to be a totally helpless entity. However, the sense can differ while reading the novella word by word, sarcastically or stressing the hidden hints which can be even seen as a picture of the European political insanity in the 1930s and 1940s of the 20th century and the Nazis themselves. The war and the Shoah can be interpreted as a punishment like the biblical flooding for people's loss of faith in God and being evil to each other as it is shown in God's perspective in the very beginning: "Mankind no longer believed in Him; they bowed down other gods, and it served them right!" (p. 11) On the other hand, God's manner of thinking in the story can also recall the figures of speech and rhetorical strategies towards Jews and the public in general by the Nazis.

He had taken care of His faithful, His Chosen People, and almost to the last He had led them from the great cities and the towns and the tiny villages to deliver them from evil and the hatred that had run wild over half the globe. He had gathered them all together in a few large centres, crowded together so that they would not feel lost and lonely in the world gone mad. He had led them eastward and gathered them in a small town in the heart of Europe, where they could wait in peace for things to settle down; where they could work hard and serve Him (pp. 11–12).

The narrator also stressed the Jewish expectations and desperate dreams of Jewish prisoners hoping to come home. Their belief in God, by contrast, had disappeared (p. 70). However, old people were the only social group which represented the old world where there was no place for any doubts about God almighty, even though they suffered the most: "Vítězslav Taussig, Mr Pentlička, old Mr Winter and all the rest would go on believing in the face of all the trials sent to them (as they thought) by God" (p. 70).

The title of the novella is an ironic allusion to the words from Genesis (Genesis 1, 21 and 25). The story's ironic perspective is stressed by using the structure of religious fairytale like parable, which is divided into a six day rhythm (Wittemann, 2004, p. 217; cf. Badinová, 2016), that could be seen as the "narrative trick" for the author's plot (Sabin, 2002, p. 61; cf. Demetz, 2003, p. 32). Demetz also stressed a connection with the traditions of Czech literature (p. 32).

### **Main Topics and Problems**

The *hic et nunc* perspective determines the writing in general. In addition, the book was originally created for only one reader. In the ghetto, the novella, illustrated by author's daughter Helga, was dedicated to the author's wife Irena for the occasion of her birthday (22nd June, 1943). Thereby, the text served as an interfamilial communication primarily, because each of them was stationed in different barracks (cf. Demetz, 2003, p. 32).

The illustrations in the typewritten original were smaller, as the author left some place for his daughter's drawings, thus, from the very beginning, the work was in-

tended as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, to a certain extent. In this way, it was analogous to Jan Munk's *Theresienstadt in Bildern und Reimen* (Theresienstadt in Pictures and Rhymes) or some handmade magazines produced by persecuted Jewish teens (Munk, 2004; cf. Balík, Holý, 2016, pp. 473–476) (*Klepy* from České Budějovice or *Vedem, Kamarád, RIM RIM RIM, Domov, Bonaco* from Theresienstadt).

The depiction of the Theresienstadt Ghetto was also formed by its specific language devices. Apart from specific Jewish vocabulary, (e.g. *nebich* = poor fellow), the most of the significant expressions came from Theresienstadt Ghetto jargon (*šlojska* = the place where the deportees were checked and part of their belongings was confiscated or stolen, *terezínka* = enteritis caused by poor food condition, often fatal etc.). Some particular devices of the Weiss novella were names as signs (*nomina omina*) and language hints as well as plays on words. God came to the Theresienstadt Ghetto in the person of Aaron Gottesmann from Himmelblau (Blue Heaven in German) and, exceptionally in contrast to other people transported to Theresienstadt, he was an *Einzelreisender* (lone traveller), which connotes with God's uniqueness. The name of God itself was also often targeted by significant phrases as e.g. "God help you". Moreover, Gottesmann went for delousing, "partly because he did not want to risk taking his lice back to Heaven with him" (Weiss, 2010, p. 56).

The narrator was also very critical of the injustice in the ghetto, the situation of elderly people and especially of the Zionists, who were in charge of the Jewish self-government including labour, youth health services and the elderly people in the ghetto (Bondy, 2010, p. 76). The author refrained from any pointed direct remarks about Nazi authorities probably because they feared for personal safety. Further on, Ruth Bondy showed other circumstances and stressed Weiss' Czech Jewish point of view, which comes out of the Austro-Hungarian and Czechoslovakian cultural and political traditions (pp. 75–76).

Criticism of the social status of elderly people, discrimination of the weak, favouritism and inhuman behaviour in the ghetto are shown very often in a very sarcastic way in the novella. An old man even claimed: "That's the saddest thing of all, that we've created our own Hell here" (Weiss, 2010, p. 58). Such a picture of the Theresienstadt Ghetto was supported by a disgusting scene some pages afterwards. Although a nurse seemed to be gentle to the old dead Gottesmann, she grumbled with disappointment "A bachelor, by the look of him, not even a ring..." (p. 68).

The topoi of the Theresienstadt literature as the fear of being transported to Poland (to the unknown East) are also present in both Weiss' novella and poetry (Weiss, 1998, p. 94). Moreover, František Kafka – as well as Otto Weiss – in his short story → *A Christmas Legend from the Ghetto*, which was written in the Lodz Ghetto in 1941, also used religious motifs. Weiss' sarcastic personification of God definitely questions His omnipotent nature. The helpless God (Emil Knieža's → *The Sixth Battalion, On Guard!*; Viktor Fischl's → *Court Jesters*), however, does not mean the work can be interpreted as atheistic (Demetz, 2003, p. 32). The narrator is rather searching for an answer about the limits of one's belief and for God's reasons for having to face such

a tragic situation. This interpretation is supported by the introductory poem called Prayer (Modlitba) which is included in the Czech edition of the prose. However, it is not part of the original manuscript of the English or German editions (Weiss, 2016, pp. 7–8). Moreover, Weiss' original placement of Prayer as the closing piece of his collection of poems *How the Stars Were Hurting* (which he had already finished and compiled in Theresienstadt; Weiss, 1998, pp. 112–113), was crucial for expressing Weiss' artistically faithful attitude towards God. Its placement in the collection of poems expresses no sarcasm, seemingly in contrast to its placement to the Czech edition of the novella (by his daughter) in 2016.

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ŠB

# Annihilation (Zagłada)

**Author:** Piotr Szewc

**First Published:** 1987

**Translations:** French (*L'évanescence des choses*, 1990); Italian (*La distruzione*, 1991); English (*Annihilation*, 1993); German (*Vernichtung*, 1993; *Das Buch eines Tages. Zamość, Juli 1934*, 2011); Hungarian (*Pasztulás*, 1994); Norwegian (*Byens øye*, 1994); Croatian (*Uništenje*, 2002).

**Theatre Adaptation:** Teatr Współczesny w Szczecinie and Hebbel-Theater, Berlin (1995, in cooperation; adapted and directed by Klaus-Rüdiger Mai).

**About the Author:** Piotr Szewc was born in 1961 in Zamość. He studied Polish philology at the Catholic University of Lublin. His debut was a 1983 volume of poetry *Testimony* (Świadectwo) which was an underground publication. His first novel was *Annihilation*, which, together with his subsequent novels *Sunsets and Daybreaks* and *Storks over the District*, is part of the Zamość trilogy. A writer of poetry and prose, he is also a literary critic. Since 1996, he has been the editor of the monthly modern Polish literature column in the *Nowe Książki*. *Annihilation* is one of the author's two works referring – even if indirectly – to the Holocaust. The other, which foreshadows some of the themes of his novel, is the essay entitled *Our Towns Are on Fire*, published in 1983.

**Further Important Publications:** *Pał się nasze miasta* (1983, *Our Towns Are on Fire*; essay); *Zmierzchy i poranki* (2000, *Sunsets and Daybreaks*, 2002; novel); *Bociany nad powiatem* (2005, *Storks over the District*; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The novel's plot unfolds over one day in July of 1934, between early morning and late evening, in an unnamed Polish town (which is quite obviously modeled on Zamość). The location is both the background against which the plot is set, as well as being the novel's main protagonist, since none of the numerous locals depicted in the novel (mainly Poles and Jews) stand out in particular. The most prominent person in the town is Walenty Danilowski who is a lawyer. Some of the others are a teacher named Mariusz Mroz, Antoni Wrzosek and Tomasz Romanowic who are both police officers. Then there are, Kazimiera M., a prostitute, Hershe Baum, a mercer, as well as his wife, Zelda, and their five children. Others are Rosenzweig, the owner of a pub, Wasyl Czehyra, who is a Ukrainian, also Roza, a Gypsy, as well as the nameless customers and patrons, Hasidic Jews, and a carter. They each show a different side of life in the town.

On the one hand they are all shown performing their mundane daily chores. On the other hand, the story's narrative is rather unconventional. At some points, the

narrator uses the pronouns “you” (in the singular) and “we” referring only to characters within the story. At other times the pronoun “we” is referring to the narrator within the story as well as addressing the reader of the story, for whom the past is being reconstructed via photographs that the narrator had taken around the town one day in July of 1934. The narrator attempts to include the reader in the story so they would become part of it, and experience it. By showing the town’s “Book of the Day” (Szewc, 1993, p. 107) to the reader, the narrator is also a carrier of collective memory.

The author prefers description over storytelling, while the past tense gives way to the present, which suggests the enduring character and continued relevance of the world presented in the story. *Annihilation* begins and ends with the same sentence: “We are on Listopadowa [street] ” (pp. 3, 107). The account of a beautiful, sunny day in 1934 may be, following the author’s suggestion, revisited time and time again. The day filled with commonplace trivialities is elevated to the status of a ritual (the remarks concerning the position of the Sun in the sky play a significant part in the narrative). Meanwhile, the town, which serves as “the model of the universe” (p. 8) and “the true center” (p. 11) for the locals, is imbued with mythical qualities. The world of the novel is ordered, constant, and safe, resembling Arcadia.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Through detailed description, Szewc tries to revive remnants of the past which do not normally fit into the narratives of historians – the remnants which are “seemingly insignificant, yet important and interesting” (p. 6). He juxtaposes privacy, ordinariness, and “insignificance” with the “significance” of political history, which is insensitive to local worlds.

The title of the novel may lend itself to a two-fold explanation. First, it means the disintegration of a myth: the novel’s protagonist is a mythologised town presented as the Cosmos, simultaneously being eroded away by time. Secondly, it refers to the annihilation of a particular world – the effects of World War II and the Holocaust – and to the obliteration of the past world in the collective memory. Annihilation in the sense of the Holocaust is not presented in the novel directly. However, this meaning is implied on a number of occasions. The word “annihilation” is sometimes used with reference to natural phenomena, such as heavy rain, drought, or fire. The siskins being hunted by people are described by the narrator as follows: “They perch quietly, chilled – perhaps in anticipation of the impending annihilation” (p. 53). Objects that are personified stand out in a telling manner: “The death of houses and market stalls follows its own rhythm established through the years. For the present they are still alive” (p. 97). One of the novel’s motifs which shatters the “arcadia” is the description of how lawyer Danilowski tortures a bee. Cruelty is also present in Hershe Baum’s nightmares, as he sees a flood, with the heads “of half the people in town” floating around (p. 5). Equally telling (“prophetic”) is a painting which hangs in the pub, which depicts fire devouring people hovering in the air. Another sign “presaging” or even initiating the annihilation is the meteorite which falls near the town: “In the dis-

tance, where the meteorite fell into a field of grain, a rushing, rumbling train stops. The trail of sparks shoots up, hissing, into the darkness” (p. 106). Anxiety then turns into terror: “A distant train rumbles. [...] Sparks are shooting up as if someone were sharpening a knife” (p. 96). Another passage later in the story reads, “That trail of sparks irretrievably vanishing in our eyes, will shoot up again many more times, though at another place, at another hour, over another train” (pp. 106–107). The anxiety of Mrs. Baum is also ominous, as she raises her eyes from a stove where she lights the fire and asks, “But where are our boys?” (p. 82). The Jewish boys are playing nearby and will be home in the evening. Toward the story’s end, their father is immersed in reading: “Over the *Talmud* the yellow flame explodes in front of his face” (p. 103). It may be an ordinary flame, or the glow from the Book (a reference to *Sefer ha-Zohar*), or alternatively the fire consuming the Jewish holy books. 1934 is not a random date for the story, as one year before, Adolf Hitler, the instigator and perpetrator of the Shoah came to power in Germany. However, the residents of the town are unaware of the impending misery. But the reader and the narrator are aware, the latter saying, “Nothing can be stopped” (p. 56).

The nearest context for *Annihilation* are the few books concerning the Holocaust, including Julian Strykowski’s *The Inn* (Austeria, 1966) and Aharon Appelfeld’s *Badenheim 1939* (Badenheim, ‘ir nofesh, 1975), where historical events – the extermination of the Jews in particular – are not so much depicted as implied. Evoking the Holocaust, Szewc applies it to everybody: not just Jews, but also to other nations and ethnicities present in the book (and in history books): Poles, Ukrainians (Wasył Czechyra), and Gypsies (Roza). The author writes about the annihilation of a heterogeneous, pluralistic world of perfect concord (which, without a doubt, he nostalgically idealises). *Annihilation* is the memorialisation of a world that is gone for good. At the same time, it calls on the reader to search for the (metaphysical) order in the world, to recognise the value of cultural heterogeneity, and to nourish the notion of tolerance.

Subsequent editions of the book, reprinted with corrections, were published in 1993 (with a foreword by Julian Strykowski) and in 2003.

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AM

# At Home with the Hitlers. The Hitlers' Kitchen (Doma u Hitlerů. Hitlerovic kuchyň)

**Author:** Arnošt Goldflam

**First Published:** 2007

**Theatre Adaptations:** Brno, HaDivadlo (2007); Olomouc, Divadlo Tramtarie (2008); Prague, Divadlo Kolowrat (2009); Prague, Divadlo v Dlouhé (2009); Cheb, Západočeské divadlo (2010); Košice, Štátne divadlo (2015).

**About the Author:** Arnošt Goldflam (1946) comes from a Czech-Austrian-Polish Jewish family, his parents survived the Holocaust. He is known as a playwright, theatre director, actor, novelist writing for children and adults. In 1977, he graduated from Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts (Brno). In 2007, Goldflam was appointed professor at the Theatre Academies in Prague and Brno. Jewish topics and the Holocaust occupy an important role in his works. For instance, he adapted several of Franz Kafka's works for theatre (*The Metamorphosis*, 1989; *The Trial*, 1989; *The Judgment*, 1991). He also took part as a screenwriter in two TV documentary films which contained his interviews with Czech, Slovakian and German Jews who had emigrated from Czechoslovakia to Israel, *Lost Home* (Ztracený domov) and *Found Home* (Domov nalezený), both 1996.

**Further Important Publications:** *Písek* (1986, The Sand; play); *Sladký Theresienstadt* (1996, → *Sweet Theresienstadt*; play); *Smlouva* (1999, The Contract; play); *Osudy a jejich pán* (2005, The Fates and Their Lord; short stories); *Standa a dům hrůzy* (2008, Standa and a House of Horror; stories for children).

## Content and Interpretation

The play consists of six parts, arranged as loosely tied together separate scenes. As an exposition (Part One), the young Hitler and Stalin happen to meet at the Brno railway station. Hitler is on the way to apply for art studies in Vienna. He declares himself to be an “artist, philosopher and pacifist” (Goldflam, 2007, p. 9). Stalin also changes trains in Brno, on his way to Switzerland because of political affairs. Both travellers find themselves together in a rather excessive conversation about their dreams for the future. The wannabe artist Hitler fantasises about a monumental building, a new “central dominant” for the inhabitants of Brno, to replace the architectonic function of the old Špilberk jail. Both of them outdo each other: Stalin proclaims “houses like heros”, Hitler “houses like Gods”, buildings that people should admire like “old Germanic pyramids” (p. 14). These and other phrases show that Goldflam's piece is best characterised as a *farce*, combining ridiculous megalomania and self-voiding phrases and actions.

Part Two, entitled Hitler and *Gemütlichkeit* (cosiness and friendliness) at Home (around 25 Years Later) gives an idea about abysmal banality, brought in with further gobbets of mental nonsense. The bimbo-like Eva Braun naively suggests that Adolf should take her with him on an inspection trip to a pretty place called “Birkenau”.

The shifts into the bizarre become more and more intense: When Hitler responds to Eva’s bashful wish for a child with his own fantasy about performing the act of conception of their child, the Nazi-environment is expanded to a kitschy monstrosity. As Hitler imagines, the act should be accompanied by music from Wagner and torch-bearing SS men. Choirs of the SS and German virgins should sing, generals of the *Wehrmacht* would have to show up, and after all, the couple should fly away in a Zepelin. Not to forget that the whole action would have to be filmed by “Leni [Riefenstahl]”. (pp. 23–24)

As if this is not enough, in Part Three, A Love Romance, the play is still more enriched with grotesque effects. Hitler sings and dances in his bunker (pp. 25–26). He produces himself as a genius of jokes, giving a parody of himself. As the “Bull of the nations” (p. 29), he also acts in a secret Nazi programme: that day, he is to inseminate a delegation of 88 Czech virgins. The hyperbole results in a gag: instead of the girls, there appears a cow wearing a sash in Czech national colours (blue-white-red) around its neck.

In the fourth part, presented under the cover of An Ordinary Day, the Holocaust theme is touched once more, when Hitler gets a letter from Mengele.

Hitler: [...] there is a professor who wrote me, a great scientist! A researcher [...]

Eva: And what’s the name of your professor?

Hitler: Mengele!

Eva: That’s a funny name. And what about its Jewish ending?

Hitler: I beg you, don’t be so suspicious. The name is funny, but he himself is of pure race and, moreover, a dashing fellow.

Eva: You are the only one to please me! (pp. 33–34)

The shift into the bizarre keeps increasing: In the fifth part, called Playing the Game of Death, the villain also nullifies his world physically: He murders his companions Göring, Goebbels and Himmler with poisoned smarties. Dancing Samba with his newly married wife Eva, he seems to be already prepared to escape from Europe.

In Part Six, All’s Well That Ends Well, Hitler, now undercover alias “Adolfo Esperanza Muñoz”, appears again, during a carnival fiesta in South America, in a bizarre mask (p. 48). Taking the mask off, he presents himself as a people’s painter in his new homeland, and distributes smarties among the children. But he falls out of his role as a friendly “uncle Adolpho”. When discovering a scorpion, he pitches a violent fit, swearing in German. The theatre gives a satiric lesson in horrible “banality of the evil” (Arendt, 1964, p. 252). The ending can be understood symbolically as a warning against the hidden persistence of this evil.

### Main Topics and Problems

The play provokes questions about the aesthetic means for critical artistic depictions of the era of the Nazis and its context, e.g. whether “humour and irony” (Firlej, 2016) are apt devices for an adequate treatment of this subject-matter (similar questions also came up concerning George Tabori’s approach; discussed by Anat Feinberg, 1999). The character outline of the *dramatis personae* satirically joins Hannah Arendt’s idea formulated in her famous report *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1964, p. 252) and shows the banality of the evil characters. The public is challenged to imagine them as dummies of what Arendt called in the full wording of her phrase the “fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of the evil” (p. 252). Using grotesque (comedy) and farce, Goldflam’s poetics of ironic-sarcastic distance to the Hitler figure drives the world of this “genius of mediocrity”, of this henpecked family man (Goldflam, Kubíčková, 2009), into self-voiding. This basic feature is fostered by various shifts from the serious to the comic and grotesque, from the real to the surreal. See also Grosman’s → *The Shop on Main Street* or Pick’s → *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*. As Agata Firlej (2016, p. 108 and 113) mentions, the roles show affinities to the sketch I, 12 (1969) of Monty Python. Goldflam launches a provoking series of absurd constellations ending up in a *mise en abyme* which leaves the villains and their entourage as ridiculous and at the same time morally despicable figures. “Banality, mental bullshit disguised as normality and growing into monstrosity [...] is exposed to destroying laughter.” (Schwarz, 2014, p. 170)

Goldflam dedicated this piece to the famous Budapest-born theatre maker George Tabori (1914–2007). Tabori is known for his dramatic farce *Mein Kampf* (1987) “parodying Hitler’s rise to power“ (Meirich, 2013, p. 60) and for staging the Holocaust, combining Jewish self-ironic wit, grotesque humour, sarcasm and tragic situations, e.g. in *The Cannibals* (1968; more about that in Feinberg, 1999, pp. 34, 257–267). According to Goldflam’s dedication in *At Home With the Hitlers* (Goldflam, 2007, p. 3), Tabori reported that once, when he was a little boy, his father had lost him at the Brno train station. In Part One of Goldflam’s play, this motif is implied where Brno serves as a fictitious meeting point on the crossroads of history.

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WFS

# The Beautiful Mrs Seidenman (Początek)

**Author:** Andrzej Szczypiorski

**First Published:** 1986

**Translations:** German (*Die schöne Frau Seidenman*, 1988); French (*La jolie Madame Seidenman*, 1988); Italian (*La Bella Signora Seidenman*, 1988); Danish (*Den smukke fru Seidenmaneller Begyndelsen*, 1989); Dutch (*De mooie mevrouw Seidenman*, 1989); English (*The Beautiful Mrs Seidenman*, 1989); Norwegian (*Begynnelsen*, 1990); Swedish (*Den vackra fru Seidenman*, 1990); Hungarian (*A szép Seidenmanné*, 1991); Czech (*Počátek*, 1993); Finnish (*Alku*, 1994); Slovenian (*Začetek*, 1996); Spanish (*La bella señora Seidenman: el comienzo*, 2002).

**About the Author:** Szczypiorski (1928–2000) was born to a well-educated family. His father organised an underground university during World War II and he was a member of the People's Army (*Armia Ludowa*). For his participation in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 he was arrested and detained in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. After the war, he worked for local newspapers and Polish Radio. His first literary productions were released under the pseudonym Maurice St Andrew in *Życie Literackie* in 1952. After joining the Polish Communist Party in 1956, he worked as cultural attaché in the Polish embassy in Copenhagen and continued to publish feuilletons in numerous Polish magazines. He resigned from his membership in the party after the political crisis in 1968. He was forbidden to appear in public in 1969 and his texts were banned from 1972, but he continued writing in the literary underground (*drugi obieg*), wrote anonymously for opposition newspapers, and started working for the Polish exile monthly *Kultura* in Paris (Worsowicz, 2003). After his death, the right-wing media in particular discussed the evidence for Szczypiorski being a secret agent for the Polish Security Service in the 1940s (Kruczek, 2007).

**Further Important Publication:** *Msza za miasto Arras* (1971, A Mass for Arras; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The plot is situated in occupied Warsaw where 19-year-old Paweł Kryński tries to earn money as an assistant to an art trader. Apparently, he is in love with two women, one of whom is the Jewish widow Irma Seidenman. The Jew Bronek Blutman reveals her new assumed identity as a Catholic Pole, Maria Magdalena Gostomska. In consequence, she is arrested and sent to the Gestapo headquarters at Szuch Avenue. She manages to inform her neighbour, Adam Korda, who later turns out to be her secret admirer, about the arrest. Together with Johann Müller, a Polish-speaking German born in Lodz, they convince the head of the Gestapo, Stuckler, to release Mrs Seidenman. Meanwhile, Paweł Kryński and Henryk Fichtelbaum, the son of a Jewish

lawyer, become friends. When Henryk flees from the ghetto, Paweł offers him shelter. After some time in hiding, Henryk decides to go back to the ghetto to face his fate. Unlike his sister Joasia, he does not survive the war. Joasia is carried out of the ghetto by Wiktor Suchowiak. This action is threatened by a brawl between Wiktor and a Polish *shmaltsownik* (a person blackmailing Jews) called Beautiful Lolo. Once Wiktor has successfully delivered her to a Polish nun, Joasia assumes a new identity as a Catholic orphan. The main plot is frequently interrupted by glimpses into the future lives of the characters. Joasia becomes Marysia Wiewiórka, leaves Poland after 1968, and settles in Israel. After the war, Irma Seidenman becomes a high functionary in the Polish State Service, ironically located in the Szucha Avenue building, and then emigrates to France, although Paweł keeps begging her to stay. Beautiful Lolo and Wiktor Suchowiak meet again years later in a building materials factory. Lolo is the factory manager and pays Suchowiak hush money to keep quiet about his behaviour during World War II. In stylistic terms, the novel is founded on a binary model of characters mainly presented through the narrator's point of view. Every positive character seems to have its antagonist (e.g. the "good German" Müller vs the "bad German" Stuckler, → *The Pianist*, → *The Menorah*, and → *Death is Called Engelchen*) or diametric opposite in terms of religion or education. Whereas the narrator's voice often mixes philosophic thoughts and judgement, the dialogues between characters serve to underline the narrator's opinion, which leads to a certain degree of predictability.

### Main Topics and Problems

Polish literary critics were particularly sensitive to the contrast between the undoubted importance of the topics raised in the plot and the platitudes expressed by the narrator and characters. Furthermore, numerous critics mention the problem of trivialisation of the Polish fate under German occupation. Especially the character of Paweł reflects on the role of the Polish nation:

"What are you thinking about?" Gruszecki asked silently. "About my internment," Paweł answered. "A short, trivial story. But in a spiritual manner worse than the concentration camp. When I looked at the Masovian and the Lesser Polish faces of boys in police camouflage jackets, I fell into the abyss." (Szczypiorski, 2004, p. 231)

The omniscient narrator appears in the role of a moral instance, often accompanied by an ironic subtext: "whereas for the Poles there was no doubt that they were under special care of the Holy Mother, while Germans were crusaders, and Russians slave souls" (p. 253). In contrast to the generalised negative judgement about the Polish nation, the narrator stresses individual character features of the German figures, e.g. the Gestapo officer Stuckler. In the narrator's opinion, "Stuckler wasn't born as a killer without consciousness, because killers without consciousness aren't born anytime or anywhere. And nobody started his or her criminal acts by setting fire to the world or by mass executions." (p. 252). Szczypiorski's novel succeeded especially on

the German book market. His approach to presenting history was considered as a way of rethinking stereotypes and common convictions. As a central figure of German-Polish reconciliation (Jaranowski, 1992, p. 8), Szczypiorski was awarded the Order Pour le Mérite by the German Federal President in 1995. Besides the controversial historical topics addressed in the book, the meaning and the influence of the title is worth considering. It is obvious that the literal translation, *The Beginning* was preferred in Eastern European countries, whereas other translations mainly followed the German edition. This causes remarkable differences in interpretation. Critics of *The Beautiful Mrs Seidenman* stressed the love story around the supposedly main characters of Irma and Paweł, which of course allowed them to overlook the controversial historical allusions and discussions in the text. (Hiemer, 2012, pp. 136ff.) Deprived of its original title, the story also loses its often ironic subtext and the historical dimension the narrator wants to point to. Obviously, after World War II a new beginning was possible, but Poland could not take advantage of that, as one totalitarianism succeeded another.

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EMH

# The Black Seasons (Czarne sezony)

**Author:** Michał Głowiński

**First Published:** 1998

**Translations:** Czech (*Černé sezóny*, 2002); English (*The Black Seasons*, 2005); German (*Schwarze Jahreszeiten: meine Kindheit im besetzten Polen*, 2018).

**About the Author:** Michał Głowiński (1934) was born in Warsaw into a Jewish family which was deported to the ghetto at the beginning of the war. He was one of the Jewish children saved by Irena Sendlerowa's team in the children's part of *Żegota* which was the Polish Council to Aid Jews. After World War II, Głowiński became a distinguished literary researcher and critic, on top of being a professor at both the University of Warsaw and of Cracow. He is well known for his analysis of Communist newspeak (*Totalitarian Speech [Nowomowa po polsku]*, 1990) as well as the various ways of reception of literary works (reader-response theory) (*Styles of Reception*, 1971), in addition to his student and academic handbooks of Polish literature. He was also engaged in the *Solidarity* movement during the Communist regime.

**Further Important Publications:** *Kręgi obcości. Opowieść autobiograficzna* (2010, Circles of Foreignness: Autobiographical Story); *Realia, dyskursy, portrety: studia i szkice* (2011, Realities, Discourses, Portraits: Studies and Essays); *Carska filiżanka: szesnaście opowieści* (2016, Tsar's Cup: Sixteen Stories).

## Content and Interpretation

The action begins with the outbreak of the war, just a moment before the deportation to the ghetto, which excites the little boy and stimulates his imagination – but quickly gives way to his understanding and disappointment. The first part of the book consists of his memories from the ghetto, filtered through the eyes of a child, along with numerous gaps, and blank spots of memory, which the author hesitates to fulfil with factual information.

The second part of the book, which describes the time just before and after escaping from the ghetto, is a story of hiding and fear, divided into fragments, episodes and detached images that have been preserved in memory. Many of them have a metaphorical dimension, which gave literary scholars the incentive to reflect on the specific form of Głowiński's narration, which is filtered through literature, art and psychology, and which becomes not so much an act of remembrance rather than of self-therapy and psychoanalytical vivisection. One of the strongest memories that the author describes is hiding in the cellar together with other residents of the tenement house at the beginning of the liquidation of the ghetto. Głowiński concludes "that sojourn in the cellar has remained with me to this day, it did not come to an end with the opening

of the doors” (Głowiński, 2005, p. 13). The author remembers that there was a terrible crowd in the basement, it was dark, no one could make any sound. At some moment, however, the silence was broken by a small, several-month-old child who began to cry. His mother tried to silence him, but nothing worked, even tranquilizers. Each of the people hiding began to fear for their own life and this fear became almost tangible – just like the atmosphere of growing hostility towards the crying baby; even for the narrator, who was also a child himself, it became clear that the toddler would have to be silenced: there was a suggestion that it should be strangled. Such a psychological experience leaves its mark forever – leaving an inner doubt in human altruism and solidarity during the moment of threat.

In another place Głowiński considers a certain “leap” in his literary formation: after the war, when his non-Jewish colleagues recalled their favourite childhood readings, fairy tales or adventure novels, he did not have any such memories. After surviving the war it was no longer possible to make up for these reading deficiencies: this experience had deprived him of this kind of naivety, which is necessary to be able to delight over adventure novels. Isolation and a sense of foreignness, which became the subject of reflection in another autobiographical book by Głowiński (*Circles of Foreignness*), are also drawn here in a subtle way. Through the use of specific key words and metaphors, rhetorical and narrative structures, *The Black Seasons* is read as a modern, hybrid literary form, a fresh way of writing about the Shoah. Such literary devices are effective ways to describe trauma. Głowiński has many complications connected with determining the duration of events and with time itself. In many places the narrator helplessly gives up any attempt to organise the chronology, he does not speculate about how long individual events took place, e.g. the hiding in the cellar. The solution is to allow one’s subjective sense of time to take precedence over the objective one; the narrator repeatedly warns the reader on the pages of his book that he does not control the chronology of the scourge on the Aryan side. The length of the Holocaust is undoubtedly the longest lasting time, as it stays forever in the memory of every person “singied”: this last term refers to the title of Irit Amiel’s collection of stories; after reading it, Michał Głowiński postulated that the term “singied”, defining the survivors and the second generation, should permanently be entered into the dictionary. One of the most outstanding and most frequently quoted examples taken out of *The Black Seasons* is the situation of the blackmailer’s arrival for their payment: when the main character’s aunt runs out of the house to get the money, the remaining family is experiencing the agony of waiting for what seems to last forever. They do not know if the aunt will come back before the man changes his mind and gives them up to the Germans. Blackmailer, meanwhile, decides to play chess with the narrator (then still a little boy, aware, however, that he is actually playing for his life): this situation is almost a quote from the famous film *The Seventh Seal* by Ingmar Bergman, in which the main character plays chess with Death itself.

Along with the factual running of time of the Holocaust and the subjective time of the narrator, another kind of time is in play; natural or biological time. “It was hot, the

sun was shining. The season of great dying reached its fullness at the height of summer”, Głowiński wrote (p. 15), and further on the sun: “it was cruel and inhuman, like everything else behind the ghetto walls, it intensified suffering, it brought no hope, but rather scorched even more those condemned to death” (p. 16). Therefore, the whole of Nature participates in the cruelty of events arranged by people; this way of writing also belongs to the established repertoire of literary topics, and such a distinguished literary scholar as Michał Głowiński is perfectly familiar with it. The chaotic stream of memories, flashes of memory, is organised by literary consciousness; it is built on the basis of a kind of questionnaire (time, space, language, episodes, characters, metaphors). “In my memories, the color of the ghetto is the color of the paper that covered the corpses lying on the street before they were taken away” (p. 7), recalls the writer. He adds: “Precisely a color without color – neither white nor ash, nor even gray – defines the colorscape of the ghetto and imparts its tone” (p. 7). What immediately refers to the latter, postwar memory, associated with the artistic sphere: once he noticed this specific color-without-color again in Andrzej Wajda’s black and white film about Janusz Korczak (1990). Apart from the ghetto, Umschlagplatz and Treblinka, also the cellars left a strong mark on Głowiński’s memory. The writer particularly remembered and described these places which became the spaces of his psyche. For years he struggled unsuccessfully and without hope with his own inner “cellars”; fears and claustrophobia. The cellar is for him a space filled mainly with anxiety. A young Głowiński also met with similar confinement during the train transport from the ghetto in Pruszków to the Warsaw Ghetto. There, too, huge amounts of people were squeezed together in a small, dark, stuffy space. All these closed spaces create a claustrophobic sphere, separated from the rest of the world in Głowiński’s book, and at the same time they are ambivalent: both a prison and a hope for safety. This ambivalence is yet another emblematic moment in Głowiński’s work and at the same time – like all the components of his work described above – it is the sign of a specific, separate style of Shoah literature, which can be found not only in his books. → *The Jewish War*; → *The God’s Horse*.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Michał Głowiński revealed his Jewish origins and traumatic war experiences after many years, on the threshold of his old age and he is not isolated in his late debut, although – as Henryk Grynberg described it with irony – he broke the record with his fifty years of silence. The same experience of late debut share with him Miriam Akavia, Ida Fink, Wilhelm Dichter, Irit Amiel, Krystyna Żywulska, Roma Ligocka and many others. It is characteristic that most of them decided to write their memories in the decade of the nineties. Henryk Grynberg’s initial reaction to the book was unfavourable: the writer accused Głowiński of being naive, and of repeating clichés. He also questioned Głowiński’s decision to resign from filling in his blank spots of memory with factual material. The way in which Grynberg expressed criticism was also characteristic – he used terms derived from the Nazi war language: “the surprise was the debut of

Michał Głowiński, a literary expert who, after fifty years on Aryan papers, admitted his Jewish past [...]. Strongly defined terms (“Aryan papers”, “he admitted”) may themselves be a psychological material for considering the durability of war syndromes, which Henryk Grynberg probably himself realised as he finally softened the evaluation of Głowiński’s book and the phenomenon of late debuts; as he wrote: “the trauma of the Holocaust does not give way under the influence of time. That explains the late prose debuts of children of the Holocaust in the nineties” (Grynberg, 2011, p. 793). The main problem, then, is how the reader should treat Głowiński’s text, as Bartłomiej Krupa remarks: “it is up to the reader to choose the criteria for assessing *The Black Seasons*. The criticism expressed by Grynberg builds the opposition – which can also be deduced from various statements and declarations made by Głowiński and which are also explicitly present on the pages of *The Black Seasons* – the opposition between the document and literature”. (Krupa, 2013, p. 295)

Ryszard Matuszewski counts *The Black Seasons* among the group of works giving “the highest artistic testimony of the Holocaust” and placed this book next to the → *Medallions* of Zofia Nałkowska, stories by Adolf Rudnicki (→ *The Escape from Yasnaya Polyana*), → *The Jewish War* of Henryk Grynberg, → *Bread for the Departed* by Bogdan Wojdowski and the output of Hanna Krall. The modality of words (like possible worlds, coincidence, probability, fiction) is a specific feature of Głowiński’s output, according to Ubertowska, where upon the common understanding of the word, the theoretical literary (narratological) grid is imposed. The researcher sees in Głowiński’s prose a significant disproportion between the fragile memories’ material and the extensive meta-narrative. It can actually be understood as a supercategory where analysing, inquiring and answering previously asked questions takes on the form of a narrative filter that distances, delays, and slows down the story itself. Memories are essentially devoid of tension and drama, they have no punch lines, they are burdened with self-interpretation, striving to name and explain the meaning of the phenomena described, having no power of interaction, they lose their visual appearance, color, specificity (Ubertowska, 2011, p. 860).

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# A Black Solstice (Čierny slnovrat)

**Author:** Klára Jarunková

**First Published:** 1979

**Translations:** Hungarian (*Fekete napforduló*, 1981); Czech (*Černý slnovrat*, 1984); Ukrainian (*Čorne soncestojannja*, 1985).

**Film Adaptation:** Čierny slnovrat, TV film; screenplay Ondrej Sliacky, film director Ivan Teren, premiered 25 March 1985.

**About the Author:** Klára Jarunková (1922–2005) was born in Červená Skala in the Slovakian mountains Low Tatras. When she was eight years old, her mother died. She graduated from the high school in Banská Bystrica, she never finished her studies of Slovak and philosophy at Comenius University in Bratislava. From 1940 to 1943, she worked as a teacher near her birthplace. After the war, she was a clerk, an editor for the Czechoslovak Radio and the satirical magazine *Roháč*. She wrote many successful books for children and novels for girls and teenagers. They were often translated into foreign languages. The basis of the fictional world of her works is often a confrontation between children and adults as seen through children's eyes.

## Content and Interpretation

The novel, consisting of 16 chapters, is situated in Central Slovakia, Banská Bystrica and its surroundings, at the end of World War II, from November 1944 to March 1945. The historical background of the plot is the Slovak National Uprising against the clerofascist regime in Slovakia connected with Hitler's Germany. The heart of the uprising was Banská Bystrica. The uprising broke out at the end of August 1944, but the Nazi army, supported by Slovak collaborators, started a counter-offensive. At the end of October 1944, German troops had also taken Banská Bystrica. Although the resistance was largely defeated by German forces, guerrilla partisan operations continued until the Soviet Army entered Slovakia.

In the foreground of the plot is the Malatinec family, the mother Berta and her three daughters, Anna, Pavla and Zuzka. The father has died during the war; he was a railway worker and opponent of the Slovak clerofascist regime. The oldest daughter Anna returns home from Bratislava where she had been studying philosophy at the university. Her boyfriend Julo joined the Hlinka Guard, so Anna broke up with him. (The Hlinka Guard was the Fascist militia in Slovakia from 1938 to 1945. Its members appropriated Jewish property and rounded up Jews for deportation.) The middle daughter, working nearby in Podbrezová as an accountant, sympathises with the communists and helps secretly partisan fighters in the mountains. The youngest Zuzka is only eleven years old and often is suffering from bronchitis.

When the uprising broke out, many people who had been persecuted by the Slovak Fascist state returned to Banská Bystrica. There were also three Jews from Bystrica among them who had fled from the labour camp in Sered' in West Slovakia. They were accommodated in the flat of widow Malatincová. Before German soldiers entered Bystrica, Jews had escaped into the mountains. Nevertheless, one of them, Estera Rosenkranz, later secretly returned. She says that German soldiers had been bombing and shooting them. Her sister had been killed and her brother-in-law had disappeared. Estera asks Berta Malatincová for help. She agrees and hides her in the flat, even though she and her daughters are threatened with execution for it.

The Malatinec family is supported by Marko Kráner, a communist and worker, who is involved in the resistance. All the while, Lauko, a local Hlinka Guard leader and informer is living in the same building. He suspects that someone is hiding here. Moreover, Dutchman Willy van Lee, a Nazi soldier in SS uniform, regularly comes to the flat. All of them are afraid of him, but Willy behaves friendly. Later Pavla and Marko Kráner realise he is a deserter.

Estera Rosenkranz leaves the flat at night and walks around the town. She becomes dangerous for the family and the whole household. Kráner decides to move her to the countryside. However, one morning Estera does not return.

Anna is visited by her former boyfriend Julo, now a high-ranking member of the Hlinka Guard. He asks her to run away abroad with him. Anna rejects him harshly and she is almost immediately attacked and injured by SS soldiers. Berta Malatincová takes care of two little Slovakian boys, her nephew Peter and his friend Laco, who have fled from concentration camp transport.

The dramatic situation culminates during the Christmas celebration (similar to Peter Karvaš's play *The Midnight Mass*, 1959, also set in Slovakia during the Christmas of 1944). Three Nazi officers come to the Malatinec flat where the two boys are hiding and they even meet Willy here. Fortunately, they only want to sing Christmas songs.

Willy tries to find a resistance group to join, but he is caught and killed. Pavla leaves home and joins the partisans in the mountains, however, she also dies. The rest of the family survives the war.

The point of view changes throughout the story. For instance, chapters five, eight, nine and part of eleven are narrated from Pavla's perspective, who works and lives in Podbrezová. Other parts of the novel are narrated from her mother's or sisters' (Anna's as well as Zuzka's) perspectives. Nevertheless, the main character of the story is the figure of Berta Malatincová. Originally a pious and humble mother, who only wants to protect her daughters, she becomes a confident woman that helps other people. She follows her own conscience, not external laws or regulations. Jewess Estera Rosenkranz is rather a marginal figure. Unlike Berta Malatincová and her family, Estera comes from a higher social class. She offers money and property for hiding in the Malatinec flat. She can not understand that Berta refuses it and only helps her because of moral principles ("they are things that can not be paid for").

### Main Topics and Problems

Klára Jarunková used some autobiographical motifs and her own experiences in this novel. She spent her childhood and youth near Banská Bystrica and in this town. During the war, she worked as a teacher there. In this story, the time of the war, the Holocaust and the Slovak National Uprising are presented without heroism, monumentality and pathos typical for most literary novels on these subjects. The everyday life of a common Slovak family is in the foreground. The title *A Black Solstice* refers to Christmas as the time of the winter solstice but also as the chilly, dark atmosphere of the war.

Like in her other stories, Jarunková uses a child's view in the character of Zuzka. Zuzka's perception of reality is authentic and naive but also limited. On the other hand, extreme situations during the war speed up her mental maturation and she becomes a "young adult", similar to other characters of children in Holocaust literature. See Lustig's → *Diamonds of the Night*, Grynberg's → *The Jewish War*, J. R. Pick's → *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*, Dichter's → *God's Horse* or Šikula's → *The Lilies of Erika*. Nevertheless, Zuzka's perspective does not dominate the novel.

The hiding of Jews is a common topic of Holocaust literature. See Otčenášek's → *Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness*, → *The Jewish War* or → *God's Horse*. However, in this case, Estera Rosenkranz is not only perceived as a helpless victim of the Shoah, but similar to other characters in Slovak or Polish literature (i.e. Samko Weimann in Jašík's → *St. Elizabeth's Square*), she is also characterised by traditionally negative Jewish qualities: she is greedy, distrustful and ruthlessly pragmatic.

The character of Willy van Lee, an SS man, belongs to the type of the "good German" (although he is actually Dutch), see the officer in Szpilman's → *The Pianist* or in Mňačko's → *Death Is Called Engelchen*. In world cinema this character type appears, for instance, in Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) or in Roman Polanski's adaptation of Szpilman's book (2002). These characters stay in contrast to the usual portrayal of Nazis as one-sided negative figures. On the other hand, the character of Willy seems to be rather implausible. Also some narrative and stylistic devices seem to be more conventional (Germans are compared to wolves etc.).

The film adaptation eliminated some scenes and characters, for instance Pavla's work in Podbrezová and the little boys Peter and Laco.

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JH

## Black Torrent (Czarny potok)

**Author:** Leopold (Wincenty) Buczkowski

**First Published:** 1954

**Translations:** Croatian (*Crna bujica*, 1961); Italian (*Torrente nero*, 1964); English (*Black Torrent*, 1969); Czech (*Černý potok*, 1972); German (*Die schwarze Flut*, 1972).

**About the Author:** Leopold Buczkowski (1905–1989), a writer, painter, and sculptor, was born in Nakwasza near Brody in Podolia, in the former Austrian Empire. Attending an Austrian school as a child, he would demonstrate talent in a variety of artistic pursuits, including painting, graphic design, music and literature. Starting in 1914, Buczkowski lived with his family in Podkamień. After World War I, he went to a grammar school in Brody where he also worked as a stonecutter and sculptor. In 1927 he started painting, and after his military service (1928–1929), he studied Polish literature at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. Buczkowski was later admitted as a free listener to the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, where he studied painting and worked as a lithographer for a printing press. In 1934 he returned to Podkamień, where he worked as a carver and participated in the local cultural scene. Buczkowski made his literary debut in 1936 with the play *Murder (Zabójstwo)*, which he wrote for an amateur theatre production. At the outbreak of World War II, Buczkowski was taking part in skirmishes against German troops when he was compelled to flee, hiding in the woods, and in 1944 he survived a massacre that took the lives of two of his brothers. After moving to Warsaw, he took part in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Later he was interested in photography, and wrote his diary (Buczkowski, 1986, p. 12). Many of his texts were destroyed by fire in Czesław Miłosz's apartment, and his remaining works would only be collected and published much later, in 2001. After the war Buczkowski settled in Cracow, where he worked primarily as a book illustrator. From 1950 until his death he lived in Konstancin, near Warsaw.

**Further Important Publications:** *Wertepy* (written 1938, published 1947, The Potholes; novel); *Dorycki kruźganeł* (1957 The Doric Cloister; novel); *Młody poeta w zamku* (1960, The Young Poet in the Castle; stories, illustrated by the author); *Pierwsza świetność* (1966, First Splendour; stories); *Uroda na czasie* (1970 Beauty in Time; novel); *Kąpiele w Lucca* (1974, Spas in Lucca; a treatise in form of a novel); *Wszystko jest dialogiem* (1984, Everything Is Dialogue; stories); *Proza żywa* (1989, Living Prose; autobiography, memoirs); *Żywe dialogi* (1989, Living Dialogues; essays); *Dziennik wojenny* (2001, War Time Diary; memoirs).

### Content and Interpretation

Buczkowski is one of the most enigmatic and experimental Polish prose writers of the 20th century. His novel *Black Torrent*, probably finished in 1947 and not published until 1954, would become the subject of intense critical discussion due to its complex and unusual aesthetic, its elements of fantasy, and psychological realism that includes apocalyptic visions and nightmares. Buczkowski himself considered *Spas in Lucca* to be his *opus magnum*, and another novel, *The Doric Cloister*, is notable for the fact that he intended it to be read together with his novel *Black Torrent*.

*Black Torrent* tells the story of the Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian partisans who fought for the Polish resistance in the former Eastern Borderlands during World War II, defending the local population with the principal aim of saving the lives of Jewish children. The novel describes an idealised binary Polish-Jewish collaboration, portraying it as a relationship of equals that transcended blood kinships and religions. The narrative provides a straightforward demonstration of the way Buczkowski's *ars poetica*, as a function of his enlightened humanistic upbringing, conveys his vision of human solidarity, mutual support and moral obligation under the extreme circumstances of war and genocidal terror. The protagonists, hunted by German occupying forces, fight for their survival across a bleak, hostile landscape of dark forests and waste grasslands. Buczkowski's narrative focuses on the lives of the partisans in a series of short episodic revelations, depicting events with a nightmarish immediacy, connected primarily with the destruction of the Jewish shtetl Szabasowa. Simultaneously, by virtue of his "lyrical prose", the author manages to evoke a hallucinatory atmosphere, where descriptions of brutality mingle with poetic images of singular landscapes and nature. Given to painterly as well as literary aspirations, Buczkowski approached composition in a manner reminiscent of painting with a very fine brush, especially while writing his novel "in a sanatorium", influenced by "feverish pneumonia, wartime experience, the memory of my three shot brothers [...], the Warsaw uprising and the Pruszków prison camp" (Kolińska, 1987, p. 4). The bestial conditions in which his characters suffer interminable boredom are juxtaposed to moments of terror and unbearably difficult moral decisions. While some of Buczkowski's protagonists fail tragically, others manage to preserve their human dignity even at the price of losing their lives. In *Black Torrent* a work of manifest narrative experimentation without any unifying authorial perspective is to be found, and no single character that would stand in for the author. The disordered plot breaks down into smaller narrative units, resembling the techniques of montage and collage.

### Main Topics and Problems

Buczkowski believed, like Adorno, that after the Holocaust it was no longer possible to describe the world by means of conventional artistic methods. He therefore regarded dissonance as the only appropriate means of artistic expression for art and literature after Auschwitz. It is with this purpose that he aimed to compromise those aspects of (Western) European culture and civilisation that he saw as its faults, because

“after all the destruction and catastrophes true writing is impossible” and only documentation seems to be adequate (Tomkowski, 2005, p. 131). Buczkowski’s writing thus juxtaposes poetic fragments and rural idylls with scenes of cruelty, deploying multiple points of view to express the whole tragedy of war and genocide in an incoherent narrative. Narration is presented as if it were a kind of “archive”, comprised of documents, recollections, investigations, inquiries, scenarios and accounts to form an “aggregate of reported speech” (Karpowicz, 2007, p. 47). Indeed, the writer himself regarded *Black Torrent* and *The Doric Cloister* not as novels but as works of documentation (Tomkowski, 2005 p. 131), or in any case as “studies” that the reader is compelled to dwell on as matters of fact – that the reader “should keep in mind” (p. 179). Buczkowski’s departure from typical diaristic narrative conventions can furthermore be seen as an attempt to recreate the inscrutable chaos of wartime and the Holocaust by means of language. It is a language characterised not only by the special idiom of the Eastern Borderlands, but also by Buczkowski’s unique use of Polish syntax and punctuation, which, together with Teodor Parnicki, Miron Białoszewski, and Andrzej Kuśniewicz, may be regarded as one of the most important representatives of Polish “experimental prose” (Buczkowski, 1986, p. 12).

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# The Black Tree's Memory (Černá paměť stromu)

**Author:** Lumír Čivrný

**First Published:** 1974 (in samizdat), 1991 (official publication)

**About the Author:** Lumír Čivrný (1915–2001) was a Czech journalist, writer and translator. He was born in Červený Kostelec in East Bohemia as the son of a dyer in a textile factory. He studied law, French, German, comparative and aesthetic studies at Charles University in Prague. From 1936 to 1938 he was a member of the Communist-oriented literary group Blok (The Bloc). During World War II he was active in the resistance, he was imprisoned by the Gestapo. After the war, he occupied various political functions in the parliament and the Communist government, among others as a Deputy Minister of Education or Deputy Minister of Culture. Since 1954 he became a freelance writer and translator from Spanish, German, French, Portuguese and Bulgarian (Federico García Lorca, Nicolás Guillén, Rutebeuf, Charles Cros, Rainer Maria Rilke etc.). During the Prague Spring, he was engaged in political reforms; this is the reason he could not publish in the 1970s and 1980s.

**Further Important Publications:** *Co se vejde do života* (2000, What a Life Contains; memoirs); *Bylo takové ticho* (2005, ed. Václav Daněk, It Was So Silent; anthology of poems).

## Content and Interpretation

The novel describes the story of the Czech Jewish doctor Rudy Fleischner trying to save himself from persecution during the Holocaust. The book is set in the time period from 1942 to 1945. The author states in the dedication of the book that it was inspired by the real life of his friend, doctor Jindřich Urban.

The book consists of six chapters; the first five are followed by so-called “pauses” („odmlky“). The texts of these chapters describe the adventurous journey of Rudy using the internal perspective and internal monologue of the protagonist, while the pauses are reflections full of existential thoughts of the sense of being human using the external perspective of the author.

The last chapter differs because it takes place after the war has already ended when Rudy returns home – to Prague. Here he finds just one of his beloved women, Mařka, and he learns that the other one, Staša, has died in a concentration camp. In the previous five chapters, the author describes retrospectively Rudy's escape from the camp in Izbica on the border of Poland and Ukraine where he had worked as a doctor. He had met another important woman in his life – Mrs Salzerová there – whose high moral character causes him to be ashamed and who accompanies him for the rest of the time in his thoughts.

Rudy already escapes from Izbica in the first chapter. One Polish widow gives him clothes and documents belonging to her husband killed by the Germans as well as

some money, and Rudy pretends to be a Pole. From Izbica he gets to Skole – a small town near Lviv. Here Rudy hides in the mountains during the winter along with two Jewish families – the rich one is named Lejbs and the poor one Tambors. After their shelter is betrayed and all the Lejbs are shot down, Rudy escapes with the Tambors. However, Rudy becomes seriously ill and the Tambors must leave him in a village with a hunter. After a short recovery, Rudy manages to join the group of Jews working on the railway construction. He is lucky because he is able to treat the illness of Rockteschl, a sick German foreman who then protects him and provides him with benefits like sleeping in a separate room or getting a package with clothes from Mařka’s sister. Unfortunately, after a conflict between Rockteschl and *Bauführer* (building site manager) Müller, Rudy must leave Skole. His friends provide him with food and help him to get into the train. The next stop on Rudy’s journey is the small town of Báracs in Hungary on the border with Croatia. Using a false identity again, this time as the Polish doctor Stefan Nowak, Rudy works as a doctor for some time before he is denounced (probably by his colleague doctor Jesenski) and arrested. The last thing the reader learns about Rudy’s life are his stay in prison and finally his transport from Hungary. Rudy’s future life is explained in the last chapter. After being transported from Báracs, he is taken away to the concentration camp Oberlansendorf where he is later liberated by the Americans. Then he works as an interpreter for American Captain Shirra and comes back to Prague with the Captain, where he meets Mařka and her friend Klára who have both survived concentration camps.

### Main Topics and Problems

The book was written in the 1960s. It was ready to print in 1970 but after the beginning of “normalisation”, the typeset was destroyed. This is why the novel was published in samizdat and the official edition could not be published until the Velvet Revolution.

The first main topic of the novel is the memory which becomes the moral criterion showing the protagonists the right way. The memory means the permanent presence in the protagonist’s consciousness and thoughts of the people he has met. The old prisoner Witting says in the last chapter the memory is saved in the black naked branches of the tree standing above the *apelplac*, the black tree’s memory (Čivrný, 1991, p. 218). Actually it is “the memory that is protecting the protagonist even in the moments of his despair and that [...] defeats the despair in the limit situation” (Balajka, 1991, p. 15). The memories of the people Rudy has met during his life run like a scarlet thread through the whole novel. Rudy speaks often to these people in his thoughts and asks for their opinion. Particularly his girlfriend Staša and his co-prisoner from Izbica Mrs Salzerová both become a kind of imaginary arbiter of Rudy’s life and doing. In this sense, *The Black Tree’s Memory* is related to many other literary works; the memory, as the communicative memory as well as the cultural memory (Assmann, 1995), is the dominant theme of Holocaust literature.

Another important topic of this book is fear. This topic also appears very often in novels and short stories that thematise the Shoah, for instance Hana Bělohradská’s

→ *Without Beauty, without a Collar*, Ladislav Grosman's → *The Shop on Main Street* or Michał Głowiński's → *The Black Seasons*. The last sentence of Čivrný's book says that "fear became his only mission" (Čivrný, 1991, p. 242). Rudy feels the fear almost all the time on his hard journey. He hopes to lose his fear after the end of the war. Nevertheless, he can still feel it even in Prague. He recognises that the fear will always accompany him. But, "Rudy's mission – the fear – is a value protecting all of humanity, not only his individual life" (Kadlečík, 1991, pp. 243–244). Jews are depicted differently in the novel. On the one hand, some Jews help the protagonist, on the other hand, Orthodox Jews in Hungary distance themselves from him and Rudy takes a dislike to them.

However, it may seem that the novel is a distressful odyssey of Rudy's almost miraculous rescue. Actually, it is a "deeply reflexive deliberation about the place of a human being who is trapped and who has lost all human dimensions and has been reduced to a number which can be erased at any moment. It is a novel about how not to yield to evil even if there are no means how to resist it" (Balajka, 1991, p. 15).

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# The Boarding House (Pensjonat)

**Author:** Piotr Paziński

**First Published:** 2009

**Translations:** Czech (*Letní byt*, 2012); German (*Die Pension*, 2013); Serbian (*Pansion*, 2013); Croatian (*Pansion*, 2014); French (*Pension de famille*, 2016); Slovenian (*Penzion*, 2016); Hungarian (*Panzió*, 2016); Italian (*La pensione*, 2016); Bulgarian (*Pansionât*, 2016); English (*The Boarding House*, 2018).

**About the Author:** Piotr Paziński, born in 1973 in Warsaw, holder of a PhD in literature studies, is one of the main contemporary representatives of the third post-Holocaust generation of Jews in Poland. Between 2000 and 2019, he was the editor-in-chief of the Jewish monthly *Midrasz*. Besides, he writes for the culture and literature feature pages of the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, is co-author of numerous publications of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and works as translator from Hebrew. His book *The Boarding House* received international attention.

**Further Important Publications:** *Ptasie ulice* (2013, The Birdy Streets; short stories); *Rzeczywistość poprzecierana* (2015, Frayed Reality; essays); *Jerozolima: Książka do pisanania* (2018, Jerusalem: A Book To Be Written; anthology).

## Content and Interpretation

The idea of writing *The Boarding House* was inspired by a longing for his childhood memories when he visited a guesthouse during the summer holidays. Paziński started making first notes when a friend of his grandmother died. Inspired by the friend's destiny, he created the character of Tecia in the novella (Kęczkowska, 2009). The act of writing corresponds to the will to witness in order to rebuild places that were once centres of Jewish life and now seem to be peripheral, both geographically and in terms of commemoration. The story is about a short stay of a man with Jewish origins in a guesthouse called Śródborowianka in Otwock, a town southeast of Warsaw, where a few Jewish pensioners are staying not just for a holiday, but for the evening of their lives. The narrator's flashbacks to his childhood show that the now old-fashioned and unprofitable guesthouse used to be a vibrant and popular holiday destination for Jews from all over the country. The narrator's character is never described more precisely and the pensioners are sceptical about his intentions at the beginning. Additionally, the young man puts himself into an observing and exterior position by his extremely silent and reserved behaviour. On the one hand, for the elderly people his presence signifies a new interest in the Jewish history of Poland. The younger generation is looking for a kind of back-to-the-roots experience. On the other hand, the pensioners completely lost their belief in

a Jewish future in this country and consider the narrator's growing interest to be pointless (Paziński, 2009, p. 122).

The narrator faces an emotionally challenging stay. He is overwhelmed by his impressions of the pensioners' stories about the past, which he likes to enhance by his own imaginative power. At the same time, the trenchant discussions about Jewish religion led by Abram and the complicated Polish-Jewish history after 1945, more precisely the political crisis of 1968 show a gap in experiences the young man only knows from hearsay. At a certain point, the narrator's mood changes because he realises the emotional and intellectual connection to people who are living an isolated life based on photographs and the power of narration.

My past is deep inside me, but when I try to get through to it, I encounter a hollow void, as if I was only born yesterday and all that happened before was just a tangle of blurred images [...] The amount of these images brings back the appearance of memories, just as the amount of photographs becomes a substitute for life. [...] And today I know that I have it from here, from this dining room comes the feeling that is always with me of living on an island, the feeling of inadequacy and inappropriateness. (Paziński, 2009, p. 103.)

After silently observing daily life in the guesthouse for two days, the narrator decides to leave. His journey back to the train station becomes an oneiric situation. Summoned by Jakub, all the Jews who the narrator had got to know through the pensioners' stories – living and dead – appear in a clearing in the near woods. The narrator unexpectedly cries out his desire to stay and to be part of the eternal Jewish community but, at the very end, he reaches the railway station at midnight.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

*The Boarding House* can be understood as a typical postmemory narration that explores the prefix "post" not only in terms of time, but also in terms of distance to the generation of witnesses. The narrator takes delight in listening to the elderly people. Their stories enable him to enter the unknown world of his ancestors, since the absence of his parents' generation signifies a break in the family narrative. The narrator tries to fill this gap by attending history classes and figuring out stories of the past motivated by objects like photographs, postcards, newspapers, and bills that residents like Teca have been collecting for almost a century. Similarly to other postmemory narrations, like Paweł Huelle's *Moving House and Other Stories*, the presence of objects means access to the past in a palpable way. The exclusive circle of pensioners in this hardly accessible countryside guesthouse – which is a metaphor of not belonging to Poland – reminds the reader of a modern Noah's Ark (Wróbel, 2013, p. 291; Kindermann, 2013, p. 267).

The book raises questions about how formerly Jewish places undergo a change of meaning, or how they can be reconstructed, or defended. Paziński's work can be examined in terms of how space and narration correspond. The peripheral location of the Jews in the story makes the reader understand the loss of meaning and social sta-

tus of Jewish citizens in Poland. The dyad of the city and countryside is deepened in Paziński's second book, *The Birdy Streets*. The motif of the guesthouse or retirement home appears also in Zyta Rudzka's → *Doctor Josef's Beauty* and Stanisław Benski's → *The Most Important Particle*. Józef Wróbel explains this motif with the aura of wisdom and experience the elderly want to share. In Paziński's case, the emphasis is on the generation gap and related problems. Storytelling helps connect the broken generational chain and gives individuals an idea of their cultural origins, but it cannot replace identity, since only a very abstract part of the narrator's personality becomes clearer. The absence of their parents' generation makes it hard for the third generation to forge connections to Jewish traditions and lifestyle. *The Boarding House* serves as an example for the definition of Jewishness in 21st-century Poland (→ *Tumult*). The focus is not on the Holocaust itself, but on Jewish-Polish relations before and after World War II. It is more about a feeling of being Jewish and how Jewish origins influence someone's personality. This attitude demands not only conscious remembrance of the genocide of the Jews in Europe but above all the construction of positive references for Jewishness. In *The Boarding House*, the narrator's childhood memories support this positive identity-building process. Therefore, more attention is paid to inventing and idealising the past. At the same time, the focus on the past limits options for the future. The omnipresence of Jewish traces and the number of historical allusions going back to biblical parables are merely illustrative of a world that cannot be restored. The narrator seems to be overextended by the denseness of historical references, leading him to escape into fantasy and to play between the ontological text levels (Hiemer, 2019, p. 111).

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EMH

## Boundary Marker (Kamień graniczny)

**Author:** Piotr Matywiecki

**First Published:** 1994

**About the Author:** Piotr Matywiecki was born in 1943 to the parents who had both escaped from the Warsaw Ghetto: Maria née Balut, a lawyer, and Anastazy Matywiecki, who was also a lawyer, as well as a social activist and poet, and who perished in the Warsaw Uprising (1944). In 1963, Matywiecki became a student of Polish philology at the University of Warsaw, but did not finish his studies, instead taking a job in 1968 at the Warsaw University Library, where he worked until 1987. In the early 1980s, Matywiecki helped to found the university Solidarity movement, publishing in underground literary journals and later working as deputy editor-in-chief of *Tygodnik Literacki* (1990–1991) and *Potop* (1991–1994, published as *Przegląd Literacki*, Literary Review, from 1992) then he started a cooperation with the Polish Radio.

**Further Important Publications:** *Zdarte okładki (1965–2009)* (2009, Ripped Covers; poems); *Widownia* (2012, The Audience; poems); *Do czasu* (2018, By the Time; poems); *Dwa oddechy. Szkice o tożsamości żydowskiej i chrześcijańskiej* (2010, Two Breaths: Essays on Jewish and Christian Identity; essays); *Twarz Tuwima* (2007, Tuwim's Face; biography).

### Content and Interpretation

Piotr Matywiecki's monumental book is somewhat difficult to place in any genre. One may consider it an essay in four parts, each slightly different in form, with the characteristics of a philosophical treaty or anthology.

The first three parts of *Boundary Marker* are autobiographical, although they do not recount events from the author's life or invoke them only sparingly. Their autobiographical nature lies in the conclusions that Matywiecki draws from the conditions of his birth, creating a study of his consciousness and life as a "posthumous child of the Holocaust" (Matywiecki 1994, p. 13). More than once, he tries to describe the paradox of his existence: it is a life without life, life made impossible at its very outset, life gravitating towards the death and non-existence of a slain community, of which he considers himself a member. These first three sections – *Shame*, *Empty Magic*, and *Three Treaties* – are linked thematically, returning again and again, as Matywiecki points out, to the same issues, with the aim of showing their various different faces. It is important to note that these sections are presented in a different order than the one in which he wrote them. We know this as Matywiecki eagerly describes the circumstances of their elaboration, including the date and time of their creation in the narration itself, hoping to show how his thought processes wander, but also how his thoughts mature with regard to the expression of certain issues. His monologue be-

comes a critical, idiosyncratic analysis of the basic notions of discourse on the Holocaust, conducted through the lens of an intimate experience.

In each section, Matywiecki emphasises a different aspect of this combination. In *Shame*, he relates the eponymous shame to his radical style of expression, characterised by a form of exaggeration most evident in the recurring declarations of being “chained to death” (p. 13) of ghetto residents, and presented as a style the author finds impossible to overcome. This is also the shame of knowledge, emerging in the face of an uncrossable distance, and resulting in the shame of indifference, of the inevitable failure of his inquiries. *Empty Magic* is the author’s way of calling the defence mechanism that involves blocking one’s awareness of the suffering of people living in the Warsaw Ghetto, facilitated by the fact that the mass character of the Holocaust tends to obscure the individuality of – and in this way turn our attention away from – the victims. In this part, Matywiecki enumerates and characterises the various symptoms and strategies of “external participation through thought” (p. 53) in the reality of the ghetto, which thus comes to receive a fictional status. According to Matywiecki, post-ghetto life of the post-humorous child is also fictional. *Three Treaties* opens with a question regarding the emptiness left behind by Jewish inhabitants of Warsaw – an emptiness that is also a permanent lacuna in memory and language –, and proceeds to explore the notion of nothingness in this context. Among other things, Matywiecki tries to explain how the prewar collective imagination was already prepared for the possibility of the community’s total annihilation. Central to all three sections is a reflection on the phenomenon of Warsaw, the status of a city that has lost its historical continuity, preserved only in its name (p. 95), and in which the memory of the annihilation of its Jewish residents has undergone a process of ritualisation – the very function of the ghetto in the collective imagination.

The last and most extensive section of *Boundary Marker*, with the title *Sentences from the Ghetto*, is composed of over a hundred passages of different length, each one describing various aspects of life in the Warsaw Ghetto and its functioning, and presenting key words that indicate different thematic categories such as: Walls, Street Dirt, Typhus, Gymnastics, Mass Emptiness, and the Death of Family Members. Each passage features quotes from journals and other documents from the Warsaw Ghetto, coupled with Matywiecki’s inconclusive and meditative commentaries. This gesture gains special meaning in the context of the other parts of the book. Matywiecki tells us that this structure follows from his conviction that he has failed in the three previous attempts, in this way suggesting that the Holocaust testimonies resist all explanation. This is why, should we heed the call for an ethical reading, we would be best simply to quote the testimonies – to refrain from glossing the text or reducing it to aphoristic formulae.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

*Boundary Marker* received extensive critical acclaim and is still considered an unprecedented and groundbreaking work in Polish literature on the Holocaust. Matywiecki

wanted the book to be hermetic and challenging. It is for this reason that he debates with the notion of inexpressibility, a notion so highly revered in Holocaust studies of the 1990s and often simplified or overused as a pretext. For Matywiecki, meanwhile, the incomprehensibility and indescribability of the Warsaw Ghetto does not invalidate the necessity of undertaking the effort to express the Ghetto's reality and its modern conceptualisations. Matywiecki's monologue is uncompromising in its aim to deconstruct the rhetorical devices usually applied in reflections on the Holocaust. Matywiecki questions the discursive consensus and proves that our understanding of the reality of the Warsaw Ghetto is an illusion, the result of a kind of contract. It is in this way the language itself that resists, composed of meandering thoughts, based on paradoxes and contradictions, metaphors and neologisms. Language is not only the basic matter but also the overarching theme of *Boundary Marker*.

What gains particular importance in Matywiecki's essay is the notion of birth-place, which he implicitly reinterprets as the place of his conception that imposes an obligation on the writer, but also takes away his courage to live. It is therefore the continuously problematised and unstable position of the subject – the perspective projected by the narration – that is the main focus of *Boundary Marker*, a position that corresponds to the fallen and subsequently rebuilt status of the city of Warsaw with which it is emotionally “knit together” (Mach, 2016, pp. 319–321). Tomasz Łysak sees the title of the book (literally “boundary stone”) as a reference to the author's identity (Łysak, 2004, p. 296; Mach, 2016, pp. 310, 323–324). This theory may raise objections, however, as the condition of the posthumous child is by definition exterritorial (Ubertowska, 2007, pp. 197–198). A more fitting interpretation therefore might be that the title indicates the quality of the Warsaw Ghetto as a liminal event, one that leaves behind material traces in the form of “dead stones” (Matywiecki, 1994, p. 91). In its finality, the Warsaw Ghetto lies beyond imagination and – as “ground zero” (p. 5) – founds the postwar city of Warsaw and postwar consciousness. From the perspective of its reception, the title *Boundary Marker* appears self-referential: the book is a turning point in Holocaust discourse.

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## A Box of Lives (Krabice živých)

**Author:** Norbert Frýd

**First Published:** 1956

**Translations:** Russian (*Kartoteka živých*, 1958); German (*Kartei der Lebenden*, 1959); Slovak (*Truhlica živých*, 1959); Slovenian (*Kartoteka živih*, 1959); Bulgarian (*Kartoteka na živito*, 1960); Latvian (*Dzīvības kartoteka*, 1960); Hungarian (*Élők doboza*, 1961); English (*A Box of Lives*, 1962); Tajik (*Kabristoni zindache*, 1962); Polish (W bloku żywych, in part in *Razem, w imieniu życia*, 1980).

**About the Author:** Norbert Frýd (also Norbert Fried and Nora Fried; 1913–1976) was a Czech writer, poet, writer for cabaret, theatre, and film. He was born in České Budějovice in Southern Bohemia, his father came from a Czech-Jewish and his mother from a German-Jewish family. His family history and the life of Jews in the Czech lands were later described by Frýd in the trilogy *The Last Hundred Years*. He studied law and literary science at Charles University (doctorate 1945). Before the war, he wrote for cabaret, theatre and film, cooperated with the Czech avant-garde director E. F. Burian. In November of 1941, Frýd was transported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto where he worked as a tutor of children and was involved in the cultural life of the Jewish community (among others, he directed the play *Esther*). In the autumn of 1944 he was deported to Auschwitz and subsequently to Dachau in Bavaria, and located in the Kaufering IV concentration subcamp near Landsberg. In April of 1945, as the German guard were starting to evacuate the camp, he managed to escape. Frýd's father, brother and his wife all died in concentration camps. In 1946, he changed his name from Fried to Frýd. In 1947 Frýd became a cultural diplomatic attaché in Mexico and later worked in various diplomatic posts in the United States and Latin America. From 1953 to his death he was a freelance writer.

**Further Important Publications:** *Meč archandělů* (1954, Archangels' Sword; short stories); *Vzorek bez ceny a pan biskup aneb Začátek posledních sto let* (1966, A Sample without Value and Mister Bishop or The Beginning of the Last Hundred Years; first part of his family history); *Hedvábné starosti aneb Uprostřed posledních sto let* (1968, Small Worries or in the Middle of the Last Hundred Years; second part of his family history); *Lahvová pošta aneb Konec posledních sto let* (1971, A Message in the Bottle or The End of the Last Hundred Years; third part of his family history).

### Content and Interpretation

The novel is divided into three parts, each containing twelve chapters. It is set in the fictitious concentration camp of Gigling in Bavaria, in October and November of 1944. At the beginning, a mass of new prisoners are deported to Gigling from Ausch-

witz. Among others, Zdeněk Roubík, a 32-year-old Prague intellectual, writer and filmmaker of Jewish origin. He becomes an assistant of the *Lagerschreiber*, camp typist, the Austrian prisoner Erich Frosch (nicknamed “Toad”, Žabák). Zdeněk had to leave his pregnant wife Hanka in Theresienstadt. After this, and his stay in Auschwitz, he is exhausted and deprived. He is “numb and stupefied, they had made him into a thing to be unloaded and loaded into trucks by the thousands” (Frýd, 1962, p. 20). Nevertheless, in Gigling he gains self-confidence and courage – thanks to his better position in the camp, and thanks to his fellow prisoners (like the Greek communist Fredo or the Czech Jewish doctor Oscar nicknamed “Chin”, Brada). At the end of the novel, Zdeněk’s older brother Jirka comes to Gigling. Jirka is a communist and a determined fighter against the Nazis, but he is seriously ill and dies. Zdeněk decides to continue his brother’s fight and to be a part of the resistance group in the camp. “...to go in living in Jirka’s stead, to see that he left no empty gap, to take his place as well as he could, and to carry on his life’s work under Jirka’s name...” (p. 446).

The title of the novel hints at two boxes with the prisoners’ cards that Zdeněk has to manage: a box of the dead and a box of lives. First, he tries to keep his own card but later also as many cards as possible in the box of lives. It means helping his fellow prisoners to survive. His efforts clash with the German SS guards but also with some prominent prisoners who are capos and often German professional criminals.

Nevertheless, the presentation of the characters in the novel is rather nuanced. The SS commanders are very complex and also the behaviour of the prisoners is varied. Some of them are unscrupulous and want to exploit their position at the expense of others (the German criminals Fritz and Paul and the Greek cook Motika), while the others are anxious and only want to survive (the Jewish barber Jenkele is compared to a small mouse). The bravest prisoners are cohesively helping their fellows (Greece Fredo, Spaniard Diego or German Willy).

In terms of the status of the Jews in the camp, their position is not significantly worse in comparison with other prisoners. So the Jewish doctor Oscar is the head of the revier (infirmary) and Zdeněk Roubík is the assistant of the *Lagerschreiber* and later even *Lagerschreiber* himself.

The author presents many dramatic situations in the camp using devices of adventurous and crime novels. The figures are also characterised through their languages: spoken Czech, vulgar German, French, Spanish, Hungarian or Yiddish.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Frýd’s inspiration for the camp Gigling was the real camp Kaufering where he was imprisoned. He already depicted this location in the short story *Archangels’ Sword* in the eponymous book (1954). Significantly for the beginning of the 1950s, in *Archangels’ Sword*, none of the prisoners were identified as being Jews. Two years later, in *A Box of Lives*, Frýd reaches beyond the limits of the schematic socialist realism that was obligatory for writers in Czech literature in the 1950s. His novel avoids black-and-white

descriptions. On the other hand, “his book does retain its traces, the communist prisoner Fredo can do no wrong, and the hero Zdeněk matures along the standard trajectory from self-absorbed egotist to politically conscious” (Bolton, 2010). Later in *A Message in the Bottle* (1971) the theme of the Jewishness and Holocaust is dealt more explicitly and without any ideological concessions within the framework of the family chronicle. Here Frýd writes authentically about his imprisonment in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz and Kaufering and notes differences to his depiction in *A Box of Lives* (Balík, 2012, pp. 43–50).

*A Box of Lives* contains some motifs typical for Holocaust literature. For instance, the persecution of the Jews is compared to a circus. See Jiří Weil’s → *Life with a Star*. The prisoners are not people but trained animals or numbers. “Next number on the programme... there you are, you see, a number! The prisoners are only numbers – and now I’m to be a number as well” (Frýd, 1962, pp. 117–118). The SS-man Leuthold says these words to himself, because he is also a part of this circus performance. Leuthold comes to the camp from the Eastern Front and is astounded by the situation in Gigling. He feels like he is in a wild animals’ cage, “[...] here in the dark, in the middle of this cage of wild animals filled with inhuman screaming” (p. 298). Leuthold’s relationship with the Hungarian Jewish woman Juliska grows into a passionate love. However, it ends unhappily in the inhuman conditions of the camp. Juliska is arrested and will probably be executed.

The homosexuality in the camp appears as a new motif in the Czech Holocaust literature. Nevertheless, it is connected with the negative figure Karlchen and portrayed as something repulsive. Karlchen abuses his *capo* position in Gigling and seduces young boys, such as the Jewish teenager Berl.

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## Bread for the Departed (Chleb rzucony umarłym)

**Author:** Bogdan Wojdowski

**First Published:** 1971

**Translations:** German (*Brot für die Toten*, 1974); Japanese (*Shisha-ni nagerareta pan*, 1976); Hebrew (*Lehem zaruk la-metim*, 1981); Esperanto (*La pano jetita al la mortintoj*, 1990); English (*Bread for the Departed*, 1997); Hungarian (*A holtaknak vetett kenyér*, 2014); Italian (*Il sentiero*, 2015); Spanish (*Pan para los muertos*, 2017).

**About the Author:** Bogdan Wojdowski was born into the Jewish family of an upholsterer and carpenter in 1930 in Warsaw. Due to the war and Holocaust he changed his first name from Dawid to Bogdan. Wojdowski belongs to the main group of witnesses of the Holocaust in Poland, having spent three years in the Warsaw Ghetto. He survived as a child (like Henryk Grynberg, Hanna Krall or Wilhelm Dichter) when he was at the age of twelve placed on the Aryan side of Warsaw outside of the ghetto. Wojdowski graduated from the Department of Polish Studies at Warsaw University, worked as a reporter, literary critic, essayist and teacher. He was the co-editor of the Polish weekly *Przegląd Kulturalny* (1954–1956), co-operated as a reporter for the weekly *Wieś* (1951–1954), and the Jewish paper *Folks-Sztyme* (1971–1974) in Yiddish and Polish. Wojdowski, although generally considered as a part of Generation '56 or *Współczesność* (named after the cultural magazine of the same name), denied belonging to any literary group or programme. He made his debut with the drama *Ramsynit or the Egypt Parable* (*Ramsynit, czyli przypowieść egipska*, 1959), followed by theatre critiques, and short stories (*Job's Vacation* [*Wakacje Hioba*], 1962). In his novel *Bread for the Departed* (Polish book of the year 1971) he processed his traumatic experiences in the ghetto. Having achieved international acclaim, the book was translated into English in 1998 with the euphemistic title *Bread for the Departed* (literally “Bread Tossed to the Dead”) belongs to best known literary works on the Holocaust. Most of Wojdowski's prose is more or less directly devoted to his wartime experiences. After committing suicide on the fifty-first anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising on April 19th, 1994 he was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw.

**Further Important Publications:** *Konotop* (1966, *Konotop*; novel); *Mały człowieczek, nieme ptaszę, klatka i świat* (1975, *A Little Man, a Dumb Birdie, a Cage and the World*; short stories); *Maniuś Bany* (1980, *Maniuś Bany*; short stories); *Krzywe drogi* (1987, *Crooked Roads*; including the story *Stary doktor* [*The Old Doctor*] about Janusz Korczak); short stories); *Judaizm jako los* (1993, *Judaism as Fate*; essay); *Tamta strona* (1997, *The Other Side*; novel, published posthumously).

### Content and Interpretation

Bogdan Wojdowski's extensive, ground-breaking epic embraces the period of the existence of the Warsaw Jewish ghetto from its establishment in 1940 through the so-called *Grosse Aktion* in September 1942, when most of its inhabitants were sent to the gas chambers in Treblinka. Within its elaborate and artistic composition, the book provides a comprehensive and reliable account of these tragic historical events. The title can be understood in a realistic and symbolic way. It refers to the great famine, and to an actual event, when German soldiers shot a Polish tram driver who was illegally delivering bread to the starving Jews inside the ghetto. The story depicts the gradual annihilation of the ghetto seen through the eyes of a boy with the allusive name David Fremde (alien), belonging to the same age group as Wojdowski. Without commentary, the boy relates his detailed observations with nightmarish scenes of misery, corruption, ugliness, and despair. The novel offers a complex panorama of the ghetto community along human, economic, professional, and social lines from the Jewish upper class to the poor craftsmen, thieves and prostitutes.

By leaving home to smuggle some food, David was serendipitously saved from deportation and extermination. His grandfather, the pious patriarch of his family, took David away from his parents and sent him to the Aryan side of the wall dividing Warsaw, instructing him: "Forget you are Jewish. [...] Live a wild dog's life. Skirt away from people but go on living... Forget who you are. Forget who your father and mother are. Forget who your grandparents were. You must have a heart of stone." (Wojdowski, 1997, pp. 46–47) Autobiographical allusions determine the character and expression of the novel. Wojdowski preserved the memory of the exterminated Jews in his literary strategy, stating that "during the day you have to carry the weight of the dead who are dying now, and at night you have to carry the weight of the dead who died a long time ago" (Molisak, 2004, p. 162). Bread is a leading motif of the book, a symbol of surviving during cruel times of starvation. Wojdowski's "novel symbolically keeps all exterminated Jews alive, just as bread kept alive the ghetto inhabitants." (Gawliński, 2020, p. 1) The novel's action hardly ever crosses the ghetto walls thereby demonstrating the desperate isolation of its inhabitants. Most of Wojdowski's writing deals with the deadly insecurity of existence with walls separating in a physical as well as in a metaphorical sense. "The wall divided people and that's why it was erected; I cannot express it more briefly", since "each look may be the last one." (Polonsky, Adamczyk-Garbowska, 2001, xxi). The other side "throwing bread to the dead" would be in its symbolic importance an "eternally existing space of the ghetto outside of time, while the Holocaust continues" (Molisak, 2004, p. 162). Wojdowski's last work, the unfinished novel *The Other Side*, takes place after the war in a resort near Warsaw in a dilapidated holiday house similar to Paziński's → *The Boarding House*.

### Main Topics and Problems

Wojdowski's 500-page novel integrates different genres and modes of literary writing. It is partly autobiographic and at the same time a fictional record of the Holocaust. It has no delineated plot, it is rather a sequence of different, drastic in their brutality, shocking scenes, dialogues, and innumerable instances of human degradation caused by brutal repression, hunger and disease. It can be regarded as a vast biographical portrayal of people of different social backgrounds along with the main character, locked up in the ghetto. The author places "spiritual values in the principal character's psyche, in his dreams and fantastic associations, and his feverish lyricism." (Gawliński, 2020, p. 1) Wojdowski's mosaic of Jewish fates is filled with references to Jewish tradition, to the cultural, social but also linguistic Polish-Jewish heritage. That's why the novel is also presented as an "example of polyphonic narrative art, creating an authentic image of everyday life in the ghetto preserving in memory all those cultural contents which the occupiers wanted to destroy." (Höllwerth, 2019, pp. 5–7) The author took the opening sentence of his novel from the Bible, reminiscent of his father's prayers in the once happy days before their captivity in the ghetto, which also often led to despairing situations, and blasphemous arguments with God. "Jakow, Jakow, where are you?... I am here. I am dying, therefore I am. [...] The logic of faith is hopeless when faced with the reality of the Shoah, [...] drawing any analogy between Gomorrha and the ghetto is groundless. Also interpreting the present Jewish tragedy in terms of religious guilt and punishment is futile". (Gawliński, 2020, p. 1) *Bread for the Departed* can be regarded as a biographical documentary and a poetic requiem for the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto at the same time. Wojdowski's later narratives touch the same questions of the Jewish tragedy revealing the author's predilection for parabolic compositions. A characteristic feature of Wojdowski's book is the usage of different languages spoken by its varied characters stretching from Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew to German and slang of children and criminals. That is why *Bread for the Departed* may also function as an aural representation not only of the ghetto but also of the once-thriving Jewish Warsaw. As a writer Wojdowski seems the most closely related to the autobiographical book *The Empty Water* (1964) by Krystyna Żywulska. Like Julian Tuwim in 1944 (→ *We, Polish Jews*), Wojdowski perceptively described the existential situation of Polish Jews almost half-century later in an excellent essay *Judaism as Fate* published in 1993.

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HCT

# A Christmas Legend from the Ghetto (Vánoční legenda z ghetta)

**Author:** František Kafka

**First Published:** 1946

**About the Author:** František Kafka (1909–1991) came from a cultivated Czech-Jewish family, his father was a doctor. Kafka graduated with a degree in law from Charles University in Prague in 1933 and worked as a lawyer and journalist. In October of 1941, he was sent with the transport of the Czech Jews to the Lodz Ghetto (Litzmannstadt Ghetto). Only 80 people from 1000 Jews survived in this transport. Kafka was deported from Lodz to the forced labour camp Skarżysko-Kamienna and later to Częstochowa where he was liberated in January 1945. After the liberation, he crossed the Tatra mountains to Poprad in Slovakia and joined the Czechoslovak Army Corps that was a part of the Red Army. In April 1945, he became secretary in the first Czechoslovak postwar government, established in Košice. From 1945 to 1954 he was an official in the Ministry of Industry in Prague. After a severe illness, Kafka retired in 1961. He concentrated on researching at Jewish Studies, German literature in the Czech lands (Werfel, Kafka, Brod, Weiskopf) as well as translating (Franz Kafka's letters, Franz Werfel, Peter Lotar) and writing. His son Vladimír Kafka (1937–2005) wrote poems, on the topic of the Holocaust among others.

**Further Important Publications:** *Žíznivá poutnice* (1947, A Thirsty Pilgrimage; short stories); *Krutá léta* (The Cruel Years, 1963; novel); *Hanuš Fantl – neumlčený básník* (Hanuš Fantl – A Poet that Was Not Silenced, 1964; the study and anthology of poems written by the Jewish Czech poet); *Básník Bernard Kosiner a jeho svět* (The Poet Bernard Kosiner and His World, 1964; a study about the Jewish Czech poet and philosopher and anthology of his works); *Hanuš Thein* (Hanuš Thein, 1971; a study about the Jewish Czech opera singer and theatre director); *Velký pražský rabi Jehuda Löw. Nová vyprávění z doby renesance* (The Great Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague: New Tales from the Time of the Renaissance, 1994, anthology).

## Content and Interpretation

This very short story (about ten standard pages) was written in the Lodz Ghetto where the author was interned, in December of 1942. Nevertheless, it doesn't describe the situation of the prisoners but it is more of a fairy tale or legend. The story takes place first in Heaven, later in the Lodz Ghetto, on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1942. St. Peter, a porter in Heaven, is sitting on a chair and reading the news. He knows about the cruel war raging on Earth. Suddenly Peter is sent to the throne of God. Jesus tells him to get ready for a journey, they will fly to Earth together. During the flight, Peter sees two triangle pictures in front of him. In the first triangle he can watch famous and heroic scenes from the Jewish past (Adam's awakening by Eve's side, Isaac

being sacrificed, Jacob's fight with the angel, Moses and the burning bush, David singing and playing the lute, the building of Solomon's Temple, etc.). In the second triangle, dark fates of the Jews are to be seen (the killing of Abel, Sodom and Gomorrah, selling Joseph to slavery, the golden calf, Uriah's wife in David's palace, Calvary, the destruction of the Temple). Jesus and Peter fly down to the Lodz Ghetto. They are able to follow, invisible for others, the desperate situation of the imprisoned Jews who are dying of hunger, poor hygiene and brutal Nazi treatment. Jesus doesn't answer Peter's questions why is this happening and why these innocent people must suffer and die. In the middle of the night, Jesus and Peter enter a poor dingy room smelling of rotten turnips where seven people are sleeping. Jesus remains by the bed of a thirty-year-old man. Suddenly Jesus's figure is illuminated by light, the man can see him and sits up in his bed. The man recognises Jesus and thanks him for revealing himself today. He remembers his wife and little son in his native country who believe in Jesus Christ as he does and says he was sent here because of the faith of his ancestors but he doesn't understand the language and habits of his fellow prisoners (Yiddish and Orthodox Jewish rituals). "Why do I have to suffer so much, so much to remember [...]? Why, my Lord?" (Kafka, 1947, p. 130).

Jesus doesn't answer, he just runs his hand over his face and the man falls asleep again. On the way back to Heaven, Peter asks Jesus why they have visited just this man. Jesus says:

"Specifically he is chosen to describe the suffering of his tribe. [...] From his fellow countrymen only he will survive this whirlwind and return to his wife and child. And he will bear witness to everything that he has survived, suffered and watched [...] Because he is a poet...!" (p. 131).

### Main Topics and Problems

The text is dated "December of 1942". Undoubtedly, the description of the situation in the Lodz Ghetto is based on the author's own experiences. In the character of the sleeping man who is visited by Jesus and chosen to tell about the ghetto it is possible to find some František Kafka's autobiographical features (his distance to the Orthodox Judaism, his family in the Czech lands, his poetic gift that is visible in his early works). Although the man is a Christian, he comes from a Jewish family. So it is possible to understand Jesus' words about bearing witness as a continuation of an old tradition of Jewish *Memorbücher* (works dedicated to the memory of martyrs written in Jewish communities in Central Europe, existing from the 13th century) and the even much older *Book of Deuteronomy*, the fifth book in the Hebrew as well as Christian Bible (Assmann, 1997, pp. 212–228).

On the other hand, Jewish or Christian spiritual symbols are used very often in Holocaust literature. Nazi concentration camps, ghettos or slave labour camps are compared to Hell, prisoners to martyrs, their liberation to redemption etc. Nevertheless, the idea of Jesus' visit of the ghetto is very original. An analogy can be drawn to the short story of Otto Weiss (1898–1944) → *And God Saw That It Was Bad* written in the

Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1943. Here God descends from Heaven to Earth to make sure how the Jews are living in Theresienstadt. He appears in the figure of an ordinary prisoner. However, he is helpless and returns to Heaven in desperation. Weiss' short prose is heretical in fact by denying God's omnipotence. Kafka's text is closer to a traditional Jewish or Christian legend.

*A Christmas Legend from the Ghetto* was published first as a limited edition in 1946. One year later, it became a part of Kafka's collection *A Thirsty Pilgrimage* which contains mainly stories from the time before the author had been summoned to the transport, but also with one other story from the Nazi labour camp.

In the 1960s, Kafka's long novel *The Cruel Years* was edited. Its topic is the stay of Czech Jews and other prisoners in the Lodz Ghetto. Unlike *A Christmas Legend from the Ghetto*, *The Cruel Years* depicts the ghetto in a more realistic manner including authentic characters such as the head of the Jewish council, Chaim Rumkowski (A. Bart's → *The Flytrap Factory*), or the chief of the Nazi administration, Hans Biebow.

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JH

# The Clerical Republic (Farská republika)

**Author:** Dominik Tatarka

**First Published:** 1948

**Translations:** Czech (*Farská republika*, 1949; new translation 1961); Hungarian (*A plébános köztársasága*, 1951; new translation *Reverendás köztársaság*, 1997); German (*Die Pfaffenrepublik*, 1960); Ukrainian (*Popivska respublika*, 1961); Russian (*Respublika popov*, 1966).

**About the Author:** Dominik Tatarka (1913–1989) was born in Drienové in the Kysuce region of North-Western Slovakia into a large family of peasants. His father was killed in World War I, his mother had to take care of him and his five sisters alone. He studied French and Czech philology at Charles University in Prague and at Sorbonne in Paris (1934–1939). During World War II he taught in high schools in Žilina (1939–1941) and Martin (1941–1944). In 1944 Tatarka became a member of the Communist Party and took part in the Slovak National Uprising against Nazi Germany. After the war he worked as a journalist and as a scriptwriter. His works often reflect his personal experiences. His first pieces of prose were influenced by surrealism and the avant-garde. Tatarka translated French works (Musset, Maupassant and Vercors) into Slovak. In 1956, he wrote a satirical short story *The Demon of Conformism* against Stalinism (it was published in the journal *Kultúrny život* in 1956, but it couldn't be edited into a book until 1963). Tatarka protested against the Warsaw Pact occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and resigned from membership in the Communist Party. In the 1970s and 1980s he was persecuted by the Communist regime, banned from public life and not allowed to publish anymore. From 1970 he worked as a forest worker. Later he lived as a permanently disabled pensioner, his works were edited only in samizdat or exiled publishing houses. He was one of the few Slovak signatories of Charter 77. In October 1987 he was the first to sign Charter's Declaration on the deportation of Jews from Slovakia (to the 45th anniversary of the deportations organised by the Slovak government).

**Further Important Publications:** *Panna Zázračnica* (1942, *The Miraculous Virgin*; novella); *Démon súhlasu* (1963, *The Demon of Conformism*; satirical short stories); *Prútené kreslá* (1963, *Wicker Armchairs*; prose); *Proti démonom* (1968, *Against the Demons*; essays); *Pisáčky* (samizdat 1979, Köln 1984, *Scribbles*; reflections, reports and letters); *Sám proti noci* (in the Czech translation, München 1984, *Alone Against the Night*; reflections); *Navrávačky* (samizdat 1987, Köln 1988, *Recordings*; memoir).

### Content and Interpretation

The story is set in Žilina, a town in North-Western Slovakia, and its surroundings in the years between 1939 and 1941. These years are the first of the Slovak clerofascist republic that is mentioned in the title of the novel. The main character is Tomáš Menkina, a young teacher who has some of the features to be found in the author's autobiography.

Tomáš came from a nearby village. His father died when Tomáš was a child. Fortunately, they had an uncle in the U. S., John Menkina, who supported the family and paid for Tomáš' studies.

The plot of the novel begins at the moment when John Menkina returns home from America after several decades. At the same time Tomáš returns from his military service in Poland where the Slovak army has helped the Germans in the war against the Poles. Neither of them likes the governing of Slovak clerofascist and national regime, an ally of Hitler's Germany, that persecutes leftist intellectuals, and workers as well as Jews.

The director of the high school where Tomáš teaches, Belo Kovál', a coward and a hypocrite, enforces the clerofascist ideology. Tomáš and his colleagues, Darina Introbusová, a daughter of the Lutheran pastor, and Fraňo Lašut, "a quarter Jew", all have intense feelings of disgust and annoyance. Tomáš admires Darina, but he sleeps with the publican's wife Achinka. Fraňo decides to save a Jewish girl Edita Soláni from persecution and convinces Darina's father to falsify her baptismal letter. Fraňo wants to marry her, but they are revealed. All the names of the baptised Jews are in the newspapers and the pastor is arrested. Tomáš revolts against the obligatory visit to the church, spiritual exercises and confession.

The real change in Tomáš' life and persuasion comes as a result of his later imprisonment. He unknowingly carried suitcases with leaflets which had been given to him by his Communist friend Lyčka. He is detained. Tomáš' mother, a pious and simple Christian woman, wants to help him and visits a Roman Catholic priest named Jozef Tiso, who is also the Slovak president, with pleading for mercy. Tiso orders a rigorous investigation, and so she has harmed her son. Tomáš is strictly interrogated and maltreated, because the police chiefs are convinced he is a member of the Communist resistance. He spends ten months in prison. As a consequence of this, Tomáš becomes a conscious communist and a regime opponent.

At the same time, Tomáš' uncle John Menkina on the contrary changes into a conformist. He "aryanises" the hotel and the pub which were confiscated from Jewish owners, and hosts agents of the Fascist regime there. Returning from prison, Tomáš separates from his mother and his uncle. Hitler's war against the Soviet Union breaks out and the Slovak army, as one of Germany's allies, takes part in it. Tomáš receives his orders and departs to the front.

The first version of *The Clerical Republic* was written during the war (Olonovová, 1993, p. 300). In the early 1950s, when Stalinist communists established the doctrine of socialist realism, Tatarka was criticized for "naturalism" and "underestimation of

the role of Communist Party” in this novel. He was forced to eliminate some scenes of sexual intercourse between Tomáš and Achinka (Petřík, 2013).

The novel depicts real historical characters and places, brings autobiographical motifs (see above) but is also fictive. Some characters are ironized and caricatured (the Slovak president and priest Jozef Tiso, director of the school and military guards).

The novel utilises modernist and avant-garde devices. The plot is not presented in traditionally realistic narration, but in hints, abbreviations, metaphors using fantastic and imaginative scenes. For instance, in scenes in the prison violence and brutality are not broadly described but only indicated in some small details (Hudymač, 2008). Or the Communist orientation of the workers is suggested by the red colour on the dirt on their fingernails (Tatarka, 1948, p. 173) and the red signs marking the trails in the mountains (p. 248).

### Main Topics and Problems

Motifs of disgust, depression, nausea and annoyance as well as “hygienic love” (Tomáš’ relationship with Achinka was only physical) might be inspired by the famous works of French literary existentialists, J. P. Sartre’s novel *La Nausée* (1939, Nausea) or by Albert Camus’s novel *L’Étranger* (1942, The Stranger). The language of ideology in periodicals, radio or politicians’ speeches is depicted in snippets, like in modernist collages. It also concerns official antisemitic propaganda: the “radical solution to the Jewish question in Slovakia, Jews were removed from public services [...] the end of international Jewish Bolshevism [...] the Jew will always remain a Jew” etc. (Tatarka, 1948, pp. 127, 132 and 135).

Jewish characters play an important role in the novel. After anti-Jewish laws were enacted, most of them are outsiders in society. They are “people without a future” living in the “bubble” (p. 125). Some of them resign themselves and accept their fate, for instance the old married couple Klapovecs, whose hotel and café are expropriated, “aryanised” by John Malkina. They are happy to have a small room in their former big house. Or Edita Solani’s father who is a stonemason. His shop is painted with tar and he gives up his job.

Other Jews try to save themselves. The old Jewish attorney Werner offers John Malkina a large sum for his American passport which is a guarantee of freedom. The rich family of the former factory director Friedmann converts to Lutheranism. Edita hopes to be rescued through a false confirmation of baptism and marriage to Fraňo Lašut. See Jašík’s → *St. Elizabeth’s Square*. She jokes with Fraňo about her large Jewish nose. But at the same time, she undergoes plastic surgery for fear of being found out. The narrator describes the result as a grotesque scene. Later, Edita, a former student of medicine, moves to Bratislava. She works in a pharmacy and is involved in the resistance.

On the other hand, Slovak Roman Catholic nationalists and officers of the Hlinka Guard (the Slovak military Fascist organisation) proclaim their struggle against the Jews. But actually they use their services and want to get their property.

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## Colors (Barvy)

**Author:** Jiří Weil

**First Published:** 1946

**Translations:** English (*Colors*, 2002); German (*Farben*, in: *Sechs Tiger in Basel*, 2008 [seven of ten texts, pp. 83–115]).

**About the Author:** Jiří Weil (1900–1959) was a Czech writer, poet, journalist, translator and scientist. He was born into an assimilated Czech Jewish family in Praskolesy in Central Bohemia. His father owned a small factory. Weil studied comparative literature and Slavonic philology at Charles University. He became a member of the Communist Party and worked as a journalist, translator and critic of Soviet literature. In 1933 Weil went to Moscow as a translator. In 1935 he was denounced as a detractor of the Soviet Union and sent to Interhelpo, a Czech cooperative in Kyrgyzstan (see his novels *From Moscow to the Border* and *The Wooden Spoon*, both with autobiographical features). After a few months he travelled to Central Asia as a reporter. At the end of 1935, he was allowed to return to Czechoslovakia. Weil's first novel *From Moscow to the Border* (1937) became one of the first true testimonies about the situation in the Soviet Union in the middle of 1930s. During the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands, Weil was persecuted for his Jewish origins. He tried to save himself by marrying Olga Frenclová, an Aryan woman, and worked in the Jewish Central Museum from 1943 to the beginning of 1945. In February of 1945, he was summoned for deportation to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. He staged his own suicide by pretending to drown himself in the Vltava river and went into hiding. His parents were transported to Auschwitz and his sister to Treblinka; none of them survived. His brother died after returning from Theresienstadt to Prague in May 1945. After the war, Weil worked again in the Jewish Museum. In 1946 he began working for the Prague publishing house ELK. His literary works concentrated on the Jewish topics and mainly on the Holocaust. He published short stories and his best known novel → *Life with a Star* (1949). Nevertheless, after the Communist coup in 1948, this book was sharply criticised as formalistic and damaging, Weil was excluded from the Writer's Union and banned. He focused on his professional activity in the Jewish Museum again, for instance, he pushed through a collective presentation of children's drawings and poems from Theresienstadt. Weil was allowed to publish again at the end of the 1950s (the novel *The Harpist*, → *Elegy for 77,297 Victims*, both 1958) but he died of leukemia in 1959 and his last novel *Mendelssohn Is on the Roof* was edited posthumously.

**Further Important Publications:** *Život s hvězdou* (1949, → *Life with a Star*; novel); *Žalozpěv za 77 297 obětí* (1958, *Elegy for 77,297 Victims*; short prose); *Dětské kresby na zastávce k smrti. Terezín 1942–1944* (1959, ed. Hana Volavková, introduction J. W; in

English as Children's Drawings and Poems. Terezín 1942–1945; children's paintings and poems); *Na střeše je Mendelssohn* (Mendelssohn Is on the Roof, 1960; novel).

### **Content and Interpretation**

*Colors* is a cycle of ten short prose texts, each from four to six pages in length. All of them are entitled including the names of two colours and are dedicated to individual victims and persecuted Czech people of the Nazi violence, among others Milena Jesenská and Pavel Eisner. The texts portray various aspects of the Holocaust with respect to the diversity of the groups of victims. Each text focuses on one character or a group of characters, who find themselves in existentially exceptional circumstances which are literally about life and death (Opelík, 1966, p. 192). A Communist resistance fighter, for instance, is pressured to betray a friend. However, he evades his predicament by suicide (Green and Red). A fugitive tries to escape his persecutors (Brown and White), a man gives himself up to his murderers without a fight but with dignity (Yellow and Black), people take up arms and defend their home against assailants though in vain (Purple and Black) or there are accounts of various fates prisoners suffer in a camp (Yellow and Blue).

Still, the groups to which the individual characters belong are not explicitly named. Neither is there a mention of communists, Jews nor Nazis. Furthermore, the characters usually do not have names or psychological depth in order to portray them as types rather than as individuals. This typification is further enhanced by focussing on one dramatic climax rather than the whole story by omitting the beginning. Consequently, what is portrayed is more of an individual character than a self-contained sequence of actions. However, these portraits are reduced to a central characteristic feature such as braveness, self-control, strength of character on the one hand and infamy, egoism and brutality on the other. Occasional references, for instance, a number tattooed on a prisoner's forearm, the black-yellow star or the indirect mention of incinerators and mass graves, evoke the actual historic background.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Weil's approach is rather astonishing considering the tendency to documentary also in *belle-lettres* in the immediate postwar period (Ibler, 2012, p. 65). With their tendency to typification and thus generalisation, the *Colors* texts follow a diametrically opposed poetic. Moreover, this tendency is intensified by the almost complete lack of place names and time references. Therefore, the actual object of presentation is not the Holocaust, which rather serves as the reason for reflection on the *conditio humana*. Alongside typification, Weil employs a wide range of other methods in order to transcend the historic events, for example, conventions of the genres fable (allegorisation of the characters via the use of names of animals and the introduction of texts with maxims having the function of a *promythion*) and fairy tale. First and foremost, it is evident in the clear distinction between Good and Bad which obviously originates from religion as occasional references in *Colors* to the Bible point out, above all John's

apocalypse *Book of Revelation*. These and other intertextual references reveal the texts' artful character. The same purpose is served by the individual texts' specific coherence formation which is not created by causal-temporal connections at the deep structural level but at the text's surface via poetisation of the language (Opelík, 1965, p. 63). That might be by the repetition of sounds, words or entire passages; personification and anaphoric enumerations; the use of overstated colour symbolism or the reflections of the heterodiegetic mediator, that appears on occasion as the lyric "I" due to the associative connection between the issues and the conveyance of direct impressions and thoughts as well as the highly stylised language.

All these processes mark the *Colors* texts as ornamental prose – a principle for the construction of epic texts based on mythical thinking (Schmid, 1992, pp. 15–28). Here the event is not seen as an individual case in the context of a teleological concept of time but as an expression of cyclical processes and thus as an example of anthropological constants. It is not the singularity of Nazi crimes that is brought into the reader's focus in the *Colors* cycle but rather the fundamental ability of humans to commit such crimes (Ohme, 2016, pp. 75). This is by no means a relativisation of the Holocaust, on the contrary, it is for 1946 an astonishingly far-sighted warning that a phenomenon like the Holocaust can repeat itself under certain conditions at any time because history has shown that human beings are capable of such crimes.

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## Concert on the Island (Koncert na ostrově)

**Author:** Jaroslav Seifert

**First Published:** 1965

**Translations:** Slovenian (*Koncert na otoku* in: Jaroslav Seifert: *Nobelova nagrada za literaturu* 1984, 1985); Polish (*Koncert na wyspie* in *Poezje wybrane*, 1986; in part in *Być poetą*, 1997, in part in *Księga pocałunków*, 2019); Russian (in part in *Proščanie s vesnoj*, 1987); Slovak (*Koncert na ostrove*, 1988); English (in part in *The Poetry of Jaroslav Seifert*, 1998).

**About the Author:** Jaroslav Seifert (1901–1986) was a member of left-wing oriented artistic circles in between the world wars. He also worked as a journalist for many years. In the 1950s and 1960s, he supported his colleagues who were imprisoned authors, and he openly backed the liberalisation of Czechoslovakian cultural life. In 1969, he became the chairman of the Czech Writer’s Union, but this was soon dissolved by the new generation of ruling Communist authorities. In some periods of the Communist regime, publication of his works was officially limited, so his texts were also printed abroad or in samizdat. In 1977, Seifert signed the human rights manifesto Charter 77. Besides writing poetry, he worked as a translator also in cooperation with other particularly educated professionals; e.g. *The Song of Songs* with Stanislav Segert (*Píseň písni*; 1958, revised 1964). As a famous Czech poet, he wrote a book of his memoirs *All the Beauties of the World*, which was, after some changes, also allowed to be accepted by an official publishing house in 1982. He became the only Czechoslovakian holder of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984.

**Further Important Publications:** *Deštník z Picadilly* (samizdat 1978; the official edition 1979; *An Umbrella from Piccadilly*, poems); *Všecky krásy světa* (samizdat 1979, the official censored edition 1982; *All the Beauties of the World*, memoirs).

### Content and Interpretation

Seifert’s *Concert on the Island* represents a turning point in his writing in regards to both theme and form, which changed radically. He abandons rich metaphorical language and regular harmonic verse with sophisticated rhyme structure and starts to prefer free verse, prose-like language and metaphorical austerity (Janoušek, 2008, p. 185; Zelinský, 1999, p. 339). In this collection of poems, he depicts a picture of Prague, strong subjectiveness and intimacy are still present as in the author’s previous works. Nevertheless, the prevailing grim reminiscent perspective of World War II, motifs of danger and death, with only hints of hope begin to appear in Seifert’s poetry.

Above all, this work – divided into eleven parts (songs) – is a kind of a “personal encyclopaedia of death. In such an eschatological concert even the figure of the lyrical

subject is placed somewhere on the edge of life and death” (Balík, 2017, p. 36). Both Karel Kostroun and later Zdeněk Pešat have stressed the fact of the fleetingness of human life (*lidská dočasnost*) work (Kostroun, 1966, pp. 145–146; Pešat, 1991, p. 191; Balík, 2017, p. 36).

According to A. M. Píša, Jewishness is represented either by general visionary lament or “agonisingly incarnated in the particular creature of a girl called Hendele” (Píša, 1966, p. 267). The theme of the Shoah culminates in the eighth part of the collection called Through the Ropes of Nooses (*Šňůrami oprátek*). The Holocaust is demonstrated in the poem The Song about Hendele, by a nursery rhyme, and the dry gnomic commentary added to the end of it. The evocative verses below reveal not only the tragic fate of the girl, but also a picture of the traumatised postwar mind of the lyrical subject (Balík, Holý, 2016, p. 492; Balík, 2017, pp. 36–37).

One, two three,  
out goes she

And she went  
[...]

After so many years  
sometimes she comes back  
but I have to be alone  
and hold onto the chair.

As she suddenly disappears,  
and there's crying from afar,  
then a desperate scream  
and dead silence at last.

(Seifert, 2004, p. 66; translated by Alexandra Šipová)

Thus, not only victims are displayed, but also the bystanders and Nazi oppressors. They are depicted by name, but also often implicitly or in general as in the case of Jews. The victims and simultaneously heroes are Jews as well as brave members of artistic circles (e.g. prose writer and playwright Vladislav Vančura and others) and the Czechoslovakian paratroopers, who assassinated Reinhard Heydrich, deputy Reichsprotektor of Bohemia and Moravia, and one of the authors of Final Solution to the Jewish Question.

In the 1950s, when Pinkas' Synagogue in Prague was renovated, the inner walls were used to commemorate the Jewish Shoah victims from the Czech lands. All of their names were written into the fresh façade of the walls. Seifert contrasts this list to the biblical *Song of Songs* as “the saddest song of all songs, / written on a moist wall recently” (Seifert, 2004, p. 68; Balík, Holý, 2016, p. 492–493). See Jiří Weil's → *Elegy for 77,297 Victims*.

The picture of free and innocent plants as a hidden parallel to Czech bystanders appears repeatedly in contrast with imprisoned people (the Jews). This is similar to some of Michal Flach's poems in his book *Looking Back from a Great Distance* (1997).

In Seifert's poem *Just Be Calm, Everything Evil...* (incipit), pansies in Theresienstadt fortress, whose surprised eyes look at the boots – metonymy of oppressors – are firstly blamed (*damned pansies*) and then they are excused (*poor pansies*) (Seifert, 2004, p. 73). The second short poem *The Little Hendele Knows It Well* (incipit) is written from a quasi naive childlike perspective, where barbed wire, the symbol of concentration camps, is compared to lines in a notebook. Meanwhile dandelions are in bloom pretending nothing has happened (p. 76). Above all, the lyrical subject counts himself among the bystanders in *(I Feel Shame I Have Survived*, p. 77) – in contrast with Vladislav Vančura who was executed during the war.

The Nazi oppressors are represented in various forms of “inadequate” shocking metonymies or periphrastic euphemisms implicitly. The assassinated Reinhardt Heydrich (p. 74) is mentioned as an alien corpse, which was driven away with flambeau at night. Members of the Nazi secret police Gestapo are depicted as „door-to-door sellers offering death“ (p. 77). In addition, the more drastic picture of objects made out of human bodies, which already have appeared in Jiří Kolář *Eyewitness* (*Očitý svědek*, 1949) as well as → *The Liver of Prometheus* and in Zofia Nałkowska's → *Medallions*, is presented – “Even their boots are made out of human skin” (p. 74).

### Main Topics and Problems

As a result of Seifert's radically changed style, critics of the time (Brabec, 1966; Kostroun, 1966; Píša, 1966) and the literary historians (Pešat, 1991, pp. 190, 195–196; Zelinský, 1999, p. 339) concentrate on the sudden change of Seifert's poetic language and the theme of the Shoah stands out in their reviews of his later works.

A very similar reaction also happened twenty years before. The Czech poet with a Zionist orientation František Gottlieb (1903–1974), who served as a soldier of the Czechoslovak foreign army in Great Britain, released his collection of poems *Double Line-Up* (*Dvojí nástup*) in London in 1942. Despite the fact that A. M. Píša reflected on Jewish motifs, he concentrated on the different issues of Gottlieb's poetry, e.g. its formal registry (Balík, 2017, pp. 35–36).

On the other hand, in the context of Seifert's work after 1945, Josef Škvorecký, a Czech prose writer who became a part of Czech exile literature in the United States and Canada after 1968, mentioned his poem *The Song of Hendele*, written in memory of a girl who died in Auschwitz among Seifert's “lyrical slaps in the face of Nazism” (Škvorecký, 1985, pp. 289–290). Moreover, Škvorecký underlined that Seifert's poetry is untranslatable because of historical hints and coded meanings. It is not enough to only know all of them, but a reader should also be moved by them in a way that is simply not possible unless the person is Czech (p. 289).

Seifert's poetry in the context of the Shoah ought to be seen in the perspective of Polish (Milosz's → *Selected Poetry*) and Czech (Kolář's *The Liver of Prometheus*, Radek Malý's → *Crow Songs*) “bystanders writing”, which is very sympathetic in relation to the Jewish neighbours' fate and simultaneously regretting having taken no action to lead to their rescue. An explicit declaration of collective guilt of the Czech bystanders,

who ought to also be responsible for their Jewish neighbours, appeared later in Seifert's poem *Lost Paradise* (*Ztracený ráj*) in the collection of poems *Umbrella from Piccadilly* in the late 1970s (Seifert, 2003, pp. 215–216; cf. Balík – Holý, 2016, pp. 494–495), which was translated into English.

In the context of Czech poetry about the Shoah, Kolář can be considered a possible predecessor to Seifert with his prose-like poetry which uses free verse → *The Liver of Prometheus* (Balík, 2016, p. 143). However, Seifert developed his new specific free verse using e.g. surprising simile and gnomic style with sharp points (Janoušek, 2008, p. 185). *Concert on the Island* is considered the first step towards the de-poetising of his verses. He also cultivated the theme of the fight between evil and good in his later collections (Zelinský, 1999, p. 339). The thematic aspect thus matches the formal one – expressed in the words of the poet himself: “Away with the poetic junk / full of metaphors and rhymes / Life is freezingly bare sometimes” (Seifert, 2004, p. 78; Balík, Holý, 2016, p. 491).

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## Confession (Spowiedź)

**Author:** Calek Perechodnik

**First Published:** 1993 (the publication is not based on the manuscript but on its changed version, which was retitled as *Am I a Murderer?*; second edition, “corrected and with additions”: 1995; first complete edition: 2004).

**Translations:** Hebrew (*ha-Tafhid he-atsuv shel ha tiud: yoman mahbo*, 1993); French (*Suis-je un meurtrier?*, 1995); English (*Am I a Murderer? Testament of a Jewish Ghetto Policeman*, 1996); German (*Bin ich ein Mörder? Das Testament eines jüdischen Ghetto-Polizisten*, 1997); Italian (*Sono un assassino? Autodifesa di un poliziotto ebreo*, 1996).

**Musical Adaptations:** The text also provided an inspiration for: Sylvia Glickman, *Am I a Murderer? A Cantata for Bass Voice, Flute, Piccolo, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Violin, Viola, Cello and Piano*, poetry by Frank Fox, 1999.

**About the Author:** Calek (Calek) Perechodnik (1916–1944) was born to a prosperous Jewish family. Together with his older brother, Pejsach, he joined the right-wing Zionist group *Bojtar*. Studying agronomy at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, he would go on to earn his master’s degree in Toulouse. In February 1941, Perechodnik joined the Jewish Ghetto Police, which had been established in Otwock in the autumn of 1940. During the liquidation of the Otwock Ghetto (19 August 1942), he supervised the movement of Jews from the main square to wagons destined for Treblinka. His wife and daughter were in the group. After the liquidation of the Ghetto, Perechodnik went into hiding until August 1944, at which point he joined the Warsaw Uprising. On 17 August 1944, he joined the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*), and would continue to be an active member until 5 September, when, as a result of contracting typhus, he was moved to the military reserve and then discharged. When the Warsaw Uprising ended in failure (1 September 1944), Perechodnik was likely killed in a bunker by local looters, or else committed suicide.

### Content and Interpretation

*Confession* begins with an inscription: “To S.N. / P.P. /T.Ż. / I dedicate these memoirs. Warsaw, 7 May–19 August 1943. Epilogue: 19 October 1943” (Perechodnik, 2004, p.7). Drawing on clues in the text, these abbreviations are thought to stand for German sadism (*sadyzmowi niemieckiemu*), Polish ignobleness (*polskiej podłości*), and Jewish cowardice (*tchórzostwu żydowskiemu*). Perechodnik’s brother, Pejsach, understands “T. Ż.” to mean “the Jewish tragedy (*tragedii żydowskiej*)” (Engel, 2004, p. 288), but such a reading does not seem to be justified by the text. The inscription is followed by a motto, originally written in French: “To be born a Jew is not disgraceful, / It is a misfortune! / Anka, my dear wife, / Will you be avenged? / Athalie, my little daughter, /

Will you be avenged? / The ashes of three million men / women, children burnt in Treblinka, / Will you be avenged?" (Perechodnik, 2004, p. 7). Throughout the text, the motif of revenge links Perechodnik's personal tragedy to the extensive losses of the Jewish nation, culminating in the Epilogue: "I ask for one thing only: to fulfil my last will of revenge, and remember, at least occasionally, my magnificent wife Anka and my beautiful daughter Athalie" (p. 280).

The subsequent three chapters relate what the author witnessed until he went into hiding. In Chapter I Perechodnik relates the history of his life and of the lives of his family members, his work with the Jewish Ghetto Police, and liquidation of the Otwock Ghetto, conveying his feelings of guilt for his role in leading his wife and daughter to the railway ramp, to be transported to Treblinka and instantaneously killed.

The next chapters describe Perechodnik's wanderings after the loss of his family, recording his immediate experiences as well as his attempts to come to terms with his guilty conscience. In sentences pregnant with emotions and fury, there appear vivid pictures of German crimes, but also the immoral behaviour of Poles and Jews juxtaposed to examples of noble acts by members of both groups. Perechodnik records his impressions of the mass execution of Jews in an exceptionally expressive style.

Chapter III gives a detailed description of Perechodnik's time in hiding, and the opportunistic behaviour of Poles who gave assistance to Jews for personal gain – the looters and denouncers. He also describes the indifference of Jews and his own passivity in the face of German persecution, which become recurring motifs as the narrative progresses. He concludes the chapter with an imaginary farewell to Anka and Aluška in the manner of a conversation. It is here that Perechodnik speculates about the future fate of his memoir, which he calls a "foetus" – the "child of Calel and Anka" (p. 258).

In his conclusion, Perechodnik confesses to having committed a betrayal while in hiding. He asks his wife: "Anka, Anka, have you really forgiven me?" (p. 265). In an epilogue, added on 19 October 1943, Perechodnik presents an account of his father's death, as well as a description of the death of his mother and his own reaction to that death. Her death, he argues, was caused by "German vandalism and [P]olish [i]gnobleness." Finally, the author promises he will do his best to safeguard the manuscript of his memoirs (p. 279).

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Left with the task of seeing *Confession* through to publication, Perechodnik's brother Pejsach produced a typed version of the manuscript and conveyed it to the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Lodz (which later was turned into the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw). In 1946, Pejsach Perechodnik and the Commission signed a contract for the printing of five thousand copies of *Confession*, with the stipulation that "the text required some editorial correction." After the war, an unidentified person prepared an altered, censored version of the manuscript, which KARTA published in 1993 with the title *Am I a Murderer?* David Engel's negative review of that publica-

tion persuaded KARTA to issue a second critical re-edition in 2004. The 1993 edition of Perechodnik's writings has been translated from the original Polish into several other languages. From the very beginning of his narrative, Perechodnik stresses the unimaginable character of the events he has both witnessed and taken part in: "I need to emphasise the fact that all this is authentic. My eyes have seen, and my ears have heard what otherwise I would not have believed in – how could one Jew, who miraculously escaped his own death, have acted like a leech and harassed another Jew, one who was on the point of being killed, so as to appropriate his jacket?" (Perechodnik, 2004, pp. 101–102).

Perechodnik takes various stylistic approaches throughout the text, from irony to sarcasm, and from the grotesque to the absurd, which combine to intensify the tragic aspect of the atrocities. At the same time, the world he depicts seems unnatural, populated by grotesque puppets. His use of the Polish language is also exceptional, moving as it does from one stylistic mode to another, changing tone from lyrical and pathetic to sarcastic and tragic.

In terms of genre, the memoir is a hybrid. In his confession and epitaph for Anka and Aluška, for example, Perechodnik draws on elements of prayer, conversation, tragedy, a last will, an ironic tragicomedy, a mystery play, and an intimate journal. The "cinematic" character of the narrative tends to transform the Holocaust into the stuff of illusion: "From time to time I would fall asleep and dream that I am sitting in a cinema, watching a bloodcurdling, horrible motion picture with synchronised sound" (Perechodnik, 2004, p. 92).

Perechodnik's writing betrays his erudition in myriad cultural references that include Jewish and Christian biblical traditions (prayers, psalms, the Tower of Babel, and the *New Testament*), ancient culture and the modern humanities (Latin adages, Titus Livius, Jan Hus, and Nietzsche), as well as the Polish romantic tradition (Mickiewicz, and Słowacki).

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# The Court Jesters (Dvorní šašci)

**Author:** Viktor Fischl/Avigdor Dagan

**First Published:** 1982

**Translations:** Hebrew (*Letsane he-hatser*, 1982); English (*The Court Jesters*, 1989); German (*Die Hofnarren*, 1990); Dutch (*De hofnaren*, 1992); Swedish (*Hovnarrarna*, 1996); Romanian (*Bufonii curții*, 1997); Japanese (*Kyutei no dokeshi tachi*, 2001); French (*Les Bouffons du roi*, 2006).

**About the Author:** Viktor Fischl (1912–2006) was a Czech poet, novelist and Israeli diplomat. He came from a Czech-Jewish family in Eastern Bohemia. Fischl began his literary career with Zionist-oriented journalism and collections of poetry. He graduated with a degree in law (1938) from Charles University, after the beginning of the Nazi occupation in 1939 he escaped to Great Britain where he worked in exile Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry. In London, Fischl was in touch with the Polish-Jewish poet Antoni Słonimski (→ *Elegy for the Little Jewish Towns*) whose poem Alarm he translated into Czech. In 1949 he moved to Israel and took the name Avigdor Dagan. Fischl served as an Israeli diplomat, he was an ambassador in Poland, Yugoslavia, Norway and Austria. After his retirement (1977) he returned to writing and published a large number of short stories, novels, essays and poems. He edited three volumes of *Jews in Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys* released in the U. S. (1968, 1971 and 1984). Fischl's works were able to be published in Czechoslovakia again only after 1989. His translation of six books of the *Old Testament* from Hebrew into Czech was issued in 2002. He was also the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* co-editor for Czechoslovak literature.

Viktor Fischl's brother Pavel Fischl (1922–2008) was also a poet, dramatist and novelist. He survived the Holocaust in Nazi camps, worked as an actor and psychologist in Israel and the U. S. Pavel Fischl took the name Gabriel Dagan. The Fischl brothers wrote the novel *The Watchmaker from Zodiac Lane* (in Hebrew 1984, in Czech 1992) together.

**Further Important Publications:** *Hebrejské melodie* (1936, Hebrew Melodies; poems); *Píseň o lítosti* (A Song about Regret, in the Hebrew translation, 1951; in Czech 1982; novella); *Moscow and Jerusalem* (1970; political essay); *Jeruzalémské povídky* (Jerusalem Stories, in Hebrew 1982, in Czech 1985; short stories); *Ulice zvaná Mamila* (The Street Called Mamila, in Hebrew 1984, in Czech 2006; novel); *Loučení s Jeruzalémem* (Farewell to Jerusalem, 1997; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The narrator of the short novel, divided into 23 chapters, is the judge Kahana who comes from a German-Jewish intellectual family. After his birth, his nanny dropped

him on the floor and therefore he is hunchbacked. Nevertheless, on the other hand, he can predict the future. In the first nine chapters, Kahana describes his life in an extermination camp during World War II. He and his three friends, the dwarf Leo Riesenberg (an ironic name, Riese means giant in German), the juggler Adam Wahn (Wahn = delusion) and the astronomer Max Himmelfarb, (= sky colour) all of them Jews, are “the court jesters” of the Nazi camp commandant Major Kohl. They serve as entertainers amusing the Major and his guests. All survive the war but they are traumatised by their experience. Unfortunately, Leo is crushed by a train at the moment of returning home from the camp. Adam has to witness the murder of his wife and sets out to search for her killer, Nazi Captain Walz. Upon returning home Max finds out that his brother has been battered to death by the Nazis and his love Hilde as well as her father have been shot because of helping the Jews. As Kahana starts losing his ability to predict the future, he is convinced he can no longer be a judge.

The second half of the novel depicts life 20 years later. All three remaining friends, Kahana, Max and Adam, meet again in Jerusalem. It is just before the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War in 1967. However, Adam is badly injured by an Arab terrorist attack. Kahana and Max visit him in the hospital and Adam tells them about how he chased after Nazi Captain Walz (from Chapter 15 to Chapter 21 in flashbacks). After about a dozen years, Adam found Walz in Argentina. Adam wanted revenge but he was not able to kill him. Walz drowns himself in the sea and Adam sees his suicide as God’s justice. After a few days, Adam succumbs to his injuries and dies in the Jerusalem hospital. The novel ends with Kahana’s reflections about Jerusalem and God. Despite all the suffering, he believes that people are not puppets or court jesters in the hands of God. People have to search for truth even if they sometimes do not find it.

### Main Topics and Problems

The first sketch of the novel was published as a short story *The Judge* in Fischl’s collection *Jerusalem Stories*. Already here the story about “four jesters” in the extermination camp is presented. Unlike to the later novel, after the war Adam Wahn is transported to a mental hospital and Max Himmerfarb commits suicide. Only the hunchbacked former judge survives and tells his doctor in Jerusalem his life events.

The novel *The Court Jesters* is the first part of the triptych located at Jaffa Street and surroundings in Jerusalem. The second part is *The Street Called Mamila* and the third *Farewell to Jerusalem*. In the centre of the narrative is the main character, the former judge Kahana. He has survived the Holocaust and questions the omnipotence and goodness of God in the world after Auschwitz. See Weiss’ → *And God Saw That It Was Bad*, Kraus’s → *The Land without God* or Knieža’s → *Sixth Battalion, On Guard!* After Adam Wahn’s death, his friend Max Himmelfarb queries:

“God? Why does cause God all this horribleness that happens? [...] Hilde, the poor small Leo Riesenberg, Wahn’s wife and now Wahn herself? Why? I ask you why?” (Fischl, 1990, p. 143)

Max doesn't find the sense of life and accuses God of bringing pain and suffering. On the other hand, Kahana's other friend in Jerusalem, Menachem Salz, an Orthodox Jew and a simple man, encourages him by saying it is necessary not to lose faith and hope.

Viktor Fischl presents the Holocaust as a breach in the civilisation. This event was disastrous, moreover, it can be repeated and varied. The terrorist attacks in the Israel and Arab-Israeli wars are reminiscent of World War II and the Shoah. Nevertheless all these tragic occurrences can be healed and overcome.

In the second novel of the Jerusalem Triptych, *The Street Called Mamila*, Kahana is reading the *Hebrew Bible* and the wind blows the Bible open to the *Book of Job* where he finds the idea about inability to recognise God's purpose. Human beings should turn away from evil and stick to God's wisdom (Fischl, 2006, p. 141).

Jerusalem plays an important role in Fischl's *The Court Jesters* as well as in the whole triptych. It is a magical place of tradition and God's presence that helps characters to find inner peace and serenity.

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JH

# The Cremator (*Spalovač mrtvol*)

**Author:** Ladislav Fuks

**First Published:** 1967

**Translations:** Hungarian (*A hullaégető*, 1971); Italian (*Il bruciacadaveri*, 1972); Polish (*Palcz zwłok*, 1979); English (*The Cremator*, 1984); Swedish (*Brännaren*, 1986); German (*Der Leichenverbrenner*, 1987); Croatian (*Spaljivač leševa*, 1987); French (*L'incinérateur de cadavres*, 2004); Lithuanian (*Lavonų degintojas*, 2007); Slovenian (*Sežigalec trupel*, 2008); Japanese (*Kasōnin*, 2012); Bulgarian (*Krematorāt*, 2015); Hebrew (*Soref ha-gufot*, 2015).

**Theatre Adaptations:** Disk, Prague (2008); Národní divadlo, Prague (2016); Divadlo Petra Bezruče, Ostrava (2016).

**Film Adaptation:** *Spalovač mrtvol* (The Cremator), feature film, screenplay Ladislav Fuks and Juraj Herz; film director Juraj Herz, premiered 14th of March, 1969.

**About the Author:** Ladislav Fuks (1923–1994) was born in Prague as the son of a high ranking police officer. In high school, he witnessed the Nazi persecution of his Jewish friends. In 1942 he was forced to work on a farm in Moravia. After World War II, he studied philosophy, psychology and art history at Charles University in Prague. He became a professional writer in the 1960s, after his successful debut of → *Mr Theodore Mundstock*. Jewish figures and the Holocaust play an important role in his works from the 1960s.

**Further Important Publications:** *Pan Theodor Mundstock* (1963, → *Mr Theodore Mundstock*; novel); *Variace pro temnou strunu* (1966; Variations on a Dark Chord; novel); *Smrt morčete* (1969, Death of the Guinea Pig; short stories).

## Content, Main Topics and Interpretation

The plot of the novel takes place in Prague at the end of the 1930s with a short coda set in May 1945. The main character, Karel Kopfrkingl, is an employee at a crematorium. At first he seems to be a conscientious worker and attentive father for his family, but with somewhat quirky interests. Kopfrkingl likes to read sensational morbid news. He calls the crematorium “the Temple of Death”. A “timetable of death” (a schedule of funerals from the crematorium) hangs in his flat. He likes reading the Buddhist *Tibetan Book of the Dead* about reincarnation and rebirth or transmigration and believes he liberates the souls of the dead during cremation. He speaks about his “blessed home” and caring for his family, but secretly visits prostitutes. Kopfrkingl’s darker nature rises to the surface under the influence of his friend, Nazi

Willi Reinke, and after the Munich Agreement, when an authoritarian regime was installed that would soon become a totalitarian one. Kopfrkingl professes German nationality and becomes a member of the Nazi party. He informs on his Jewish fellow citizens and colleagues in the crematorium and murders his own wife and son, whose Jewish origins would stand in the way of his career. He interprets these murderous acts as a liberation of their souls. Kopfrkingl believes that he has been visited by a messenger from Tibet and has been selected as the new Dalai Lama. In the last chapter of the novel, he is assigned the task of building large cremation furnaces and chambers that were supposed to “liberate” the Jews from their earthly life. However, he then goes completely insane and has to be taken away to a mental institute. The novel ends with a short scene in May 1945 where Kopfrkingl appears in a hospital train going from Germany to Prague and watches haggard Jewish prisoners returning from camps.

The novel is based on stylisation and complicated construction. The entire text is full of intimation, codes and figures recalling puppets, which repeat and vary. It is a refined third-person narrative, which is however perceived from the personal perspective of the protagonist Karel Kopfrkingl. Readers cannot see his inner workings, so for a long time Kopfrkingl seems to be a good crematorium worker and an attentive husband and father, only with somewhat bizarre inclinations.

Fuks’ novel skillfully, and even monstrously, paints a fun-house atmosphere as solemnity and stark ornamentation devolved into horror. Kopfrkingl seems to be a decent, respectable, peaceful man. “He rules over his family with a loving hand, with traces of despotism wrapped up in kind words.” (Sladovnicková, 2018, p. 59) But he abuses all decent words and becomes an informer and murderer. “We must make sacrifices...” “We live in great, revolutionary times and we still have a lot of worries. We all lose. [...] All Jews in the German Reich are, irrevocably, excluded [...] it’s the law, and as you know, we have to respect the law...” (Fuks, 2016, pp. 169–170).

This rhetorical strategy is very similar to that of the Nazi but also to that of the Communist perpetrators.

Willi Reinke, his friend and former fellow fighter, a Czech German, entices him to become a Nazi. After the Munich Agreement and German occupation, Kopfrkingl repeats Reinke’s words and joins the Nazi party. He becomes “a poor Germanic soul” (p. 125). Now he can visit the German Casino in Prague and the gorgeous blonde beauties in it. “The Führer is building a paradise.”

The system of names of the protagonists is also curious. The names Strauss, Dvořák, Rubinstein, Janáček and Wagner suggest composers and music. *Inter alia*, the employees in the crematorium are: Vrána (Crow), Fenek (Desert Fox), Pelikán (Pelican), Lišková (Miss Fox), the dead people among others Vlk (Wolf), Sýkorová (Ms. Chickadee), Daněk (Fallow Deer), Piskoř (Weather Loach)... These names may also suggest an inhumane and bizarre characteristic of the entire fictional space.

Kopfrkingl is delighted with death. He admires the young dead women in the crematorium. He kills his wife with a smile. Before the murder, she had to put on her

black dress and listen to funeral music. “It’s such perfect funeral music. [...] What if I hanged you, my dear?” (pp. 154–155).

However bizarre, psychologically disturbed and insane, Kopfrkingl is not the embodiment of the traditional villain. In essence, he has a *petite bourgeois* mentality, works carefully, loves music (opera melodies waft from the crematorium), cares for his family, does not drink or smoke, and enjoys speaking in a flowery manner (he calls his cat “enchanting-beauty” and his wife Marie “Lakmé” and “heavenly”). Similar to Tono Brtko → *The Shop on Main Street* and other figures, he is a *little man* exposed to an extreme situation. The question of responsibility of ordinary citizens is asked here. While, however, Brtko faces the aggression of the outside world, Kopfrkingl himself becomes an aggressor and killer. Brtko accepts responsibility and commits suicide, Kopfrkingl, on the contrary, covers his crimes with pontifications.

### Film Adaptation

The novel was soon filmed after its release. Ladislav Fuks participated in the script, the film director was Juraj Herz who had survived the Holocaust as a child. One of the best Czech films in the 1960s was created. It premiered in spring 1969, but was then banned after just a few weeks, and audiences did not get another chance to see it again until in the late 1980s.

The film intensifies the story’s elements of horror as well as the protagonist’s cruel malice and brutality. In the end, Kopfrkingl is not taken away to an institute; he leaves to fulfil his “calling”. Thus, as part of the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews, the main character can put his perverted leanings into action on a large scale.

Rudolf Hrušínský played the role of Kopfrkingl with a smiling face and a seductive, monotonous tone of voice. He calls his family “my angels”, his profession “noble”, his home “beautiful” and “blessed”. He is obsessed with death and sexual perversity. The film version in black-and-white underlines these hidden attributes of his. The camera operator Stanislav Milota often used an extreme close-up and a special “fish-eye” lens that deforms Kopfrkingl’s face and intensifies his morbidity.

For instance, Kopfrkingl delivers the funeral oration for his wife in the crematorium. This scene is only in the film version. His sentimental words about death as a blessing escalate to aggressive Nazi propaganda.

Kopfrkingl’s perversity is evident in the film version in the dialogue with a high ranking Nazi officer (chief of the *Sicherheitsdienst*, the Nazi secret police, in Prague). He has to prepare “the gas furnace of the future – the equipment for incinerating as many people as possible”. Kopfrkingl says:

“If we had enormous, mass furnaces, where one hundred, five hundred, a thousand, would all fit at once, it could be done in ten minutes perhaps. [...] In this way, all of humanity, the entire world, could be liberated very quickly. [...] In an enormous hall like that, constantly in operation for a thousand people, once you entered, you wouldn’t come back to life”.

The original intention was to move the plot of *The Cremator* into the Sixties and to present the protagonist in the then current political and social situation including the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. (Poláček, 2013, p. 158) This original intention couldn't be fulfilled, the film was banned and screened again in the 1990s.

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JH

## Crow Songs (Vraní zpěvy)

**Author:** Radek Malý

**First Published:** 2002

**About the Author:** Radek Malý (1977) studied Czech and German at the Palacký University in Olomouc. Apart from teaching at the university and researching translational tasks (e.g. two monographs reflecting Czech reading of Georg Trakl's and Paul Celan's work), he translates from the German (especially expressionistic poets) and is an editor of many anthologies of poems as well as the Czech anthology of German expressionistic poets. Although Radek Malý is also the author of plays or fairy tales, representative part of his fictional production is based on poetry.

**Further Important Publications:** *Lunovis* (2001, Lunovis; poems); *Větrní. Zcestné verše* (2005, Poems on the Road; poems); *Malá tma* (2008; Little Darkness; poems); *Pocit nočního vlaku* (2008, The Feeling of a Night Train; broadcasted also as a radio drama); *Světloplaší* (2012, The Light Shy; poems); *Domovem v jazyce: České čtení Paula Celana*. (2012, Resided in the Language: Reading Paul Celan in Czech); *Všehomír* (2015, Universe; poems); *Franz Kafka – Člověk své a naší doby* (2017; Franz Kafka – A Man of His Time and Our Own; essay, in Czech, German and English versions).

### Content and Interpretation

Extraordinary position of Radek Malý's poetry in the context of fiction about the Shoah is tied, besides other things, with the frequency of such motifs. At least one Shoah motif is present in every collection of his poems. This theme appears also in his short play *The Feeling of a Night Train*, naturally in his academic book about Celan, translations and anthologies of Jewish authors (e.g. Czech German Hugo Sonnenschein, Vlastimil Artur Polák-Avalos).

In his second collection of poems *Crow Songs*, there are several motifs of Shoah too. The poem *Buchenwald, 28. 11. 2000*, in which he combined Czech high standard metric style dactyl (rhyme: ab-ab), colloquial language and fatal absurd grotesque (rk, 2014).

Prolapsed November  
Drizzling gently down from grey clouds  
A day perhaps only good enough  
to visit a concentration camp

You got up early after a binge  
You see it in a non-conform way:  
A hundred skeletons dressed in pyjamas  
A few gods in uniforms

(Technical subject translation by Alexandra Šípová, also in other fragments of Malý's poems.)  
(Malý, 2002, p. 34).

This poem is preceded by another two texts of this kind: iambic *Jedem das Seine* (To Each His Own; a motto displayed over the entrance of Buchenwald concentration camp) and trochaic *Es ist mir trotzdem kalt* (Nevertheless, I'm Cold). In the first one, Malý – fascinated by folk songs and nursery rhymes – elaborates two slogans, the first one from the gate in the Buchenwald camp, the other from Auschwitz. He creates an inappropriate absurd connection between the form with nursery rhymes and the Nazi propaganda sense hidden in defenceless words. Misusing the misused words Malý shifts the language back to its original basic meaning (Latin: *suum cuique*) (Balík, 2015, p. 237).

ARBEIT MACHT FREI.

Ayay.

Ayayay.

(p. 32)

In the following poem *Es ist mir trotzdem kalt*, Buchenwald and Auschwitz appear explicitly. The structure of a pun is apparent in this text. However, fatal grotesque is elaborated by rhyming *Osvětim* (Auschwitz) with the verb *posvětim* (I will consecrate) and misusing the ambiguity of the phrase *step on the gas* (*přidej plyn*) (p. 33). See Borowski's *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* → *Pożegnanie z Marią* and Piwo-warski's → *More Gas, Comrades!* For Malý's poetry in general, it is significant that the Shoah is presented in the context of Germany, Sudetenland and Czech-German relations. The macaronic German-Czech verses, which appear in his texts very often, refer to this aspect as well as to the former partial bilinguality in the Czech lands. All three poems dedicated to the Shoah here are included in the part with an odd title. It questions the German moral condition by putting together two contrasting texts: the well-known and very emotional inscription from Auschwitz and a traditional neutral name for a collection of poems: *Arbeit macht frei. básně z Němec* (*Arbeit macht frei. poems from Germany*)" (Balík, 2015, p. 238).

### Main Topics and Problems

In general, there are two sources of Malý's inspiration. Firstly, his poetry is influenced by German (Georg Trakl, Georg Heym) and Czech expressionistic poetry (Bohuslav Reynek). One can find – aside from natural motifs – distinctive elements of eschatology and the grotesque.

Secondly, he is also inspired by work of two poets coming out from the former Jewish Austrian-Hungarian region Czernowitz (today in Ukraine) and thematising the Shoah in their poems, Rosa Ausländer and Paul Celan.

Consequently, Malý mentioned also Vlastimil Artur Polák-Avalos, who lived in the same Moravian town Olomouc as Malý has been, and especially his taciturn poem

Ost-Transport (written 1944/1945, Transport to the East), of which he proposed the new translation (cf. Malý, 2014a, pp. 99–101). Whereas Celan and Polák wrote in German, their mother tongue, but also the language spoken by the murders of his relatives and friends (cf. Baer, 2002, p. 60), Malý writing in Czech (even though with macaronic elements) chooses the language of the bystanders, who were present in the time of the destruction of their Jewish and then German neighbours' world, but they did nothing to save it.

In this context, it should be understood regarding the verses where the general “labels” of the Shoah (Auschwitz, well known Nazi slogans, gas etc.) are mentioned, Malý uses these constant representations unusually in order to shock the reader and to force him/her to perceive these untouchable taboo symbols anew (Balík, 2015, p. 235). The rhymes words *Faust – Holocaust* or *Mengele – zbabělé* (adjective “coward”) are very striking especially in the context of his formally refined poetry. However, this kind of grotesque “misusing” of Holocaust cliché (also with the image of Auschwitz doctor Mengele) is not the unique in Czech literature. It can also be found in Arnošt Goldflam’s play → *At Home with the Hitlers* or even in the 1960s in J. R. Pick’s poems (Balík, 2017, p. 38). Shocking combination of simple childish form and the Shoah content was already deliberately used – as one of the first probably – by the Polish Warsaw Ghetto poet Władysław Szlengel in poem *The Small Station Treblinka*. However, in the poetry *hic et nunc*, the motivation is rather different (cf. Balík, 2014, pp. 49–62). Szlengel → *Selected Poetry*.

A question considering the appropriateness of Malý’s treatment of the Shoah seems to be very important. However, a polemic which arose about this issue in Czech Jewish public forums revealed a possible misunderstanding of his specific poetic language. In 2013, a public debate about the sense of one of his poems overlapped the literary discourse after the Cermat office chose Radek Malý’s poem *Buchenwald*, 28. 11.2000 as a part of the “maturita” Exam (the Czech equivalent of the British A-levels), without the author being informed (Balík, 2015, p. 229).

Some authorities from Czech Jewish community argued that such a choice in the context of the Maturita questions had relativised the suffering of the Shoah victims and offended the Czech Jews who lost their relatives during World War II, mainly in the last two verses: “You’re half a Jew / and half an SS man” („Je v tobě Žida půl / a půlka esesáka“). Radek Malý stated he had not relativised Jewish suffering during World War II. He added that the proclamation of Jewish representatives was based on the confusion of the person of the author, his work and the manner in which his work has been treated in public (Malý, 2014b).

Also according to Holý (2013) and Balík (2015, p. 231), these provocative poems has been misinterpreted. Radek Malý’s work gives clear evidence about his artistic and moral values.

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ŠB

# The Day of Wrath (Dzień gniewu)

**Author:** Roman Brandstaetter

**First Published:** 1962; second edition, amended, 1971, with the subtitle: “Dramatic mystery play in three acts” and the dedication “Dedicated to the memory of those Poles who died as martyrs from the hands of Hitler’s cains, because of the help and shelter given to Jews during the occupation”.

**Translations:** German (*Tag des Zornes*, 1962); English (*The Day of Wrath*, 1971); Esperanto (*La tago de la kolero*, n.d.); French (*Le jour de la colère*, n.d.); Russian (*Den’ gneva*, 2002).

**Theatre Adaptations:** (selection) Burgtheater, Vienna (1962); Polish Theater, Los Angeles (1982); Teatr Ludowy, Nowa Huta (1988); Teatr im. Aleksandra Fredry, Gniezno (1989); Teatr Nowy, Lodz (1996); Teatr Nie Teraz, Tarnów (2013)

**About the Author:** Roman Brandstaetter (1906–1987) was a Polish writer of Jewish origin. He was religiously, culturally and intellectually shaped by the tradition of the *Old Testament*, but found his identity in Christianity, which he understood as a natural consequence of his Judaism. He graduated with a degree in Polish studies and philosophy at the Jagiellonian University. Before World War II, he travelled around Europe, publishing four volumes of poetry and a collection of pamphlets and writings for the Zionist press. During the war, he lived in – and survived the occupation of – Palestine, where he came to recognise Jesus as the Messiah of the *Old Testament* and converted to Christianity. Before returning to Poland in 1948, he spent two years in Rome, where he was baptised, married Regina Wiktorówna, and wrote several plays, including his dramatic debut *Return of the Prodigal Son* (*Powrót syna marnotrawnego*). In addition to writing for theatre and translating Shakespeare’s plays, Brandstaetter also wrote poems, among which the most popularly received would be *The Song of My Christ* (*Pieśń o moim Chrystusie*, 1960). His tetralogy *Jesus of Nazareth* (*Jezus z Nazarethu*, 1967–1973) is still regarded as a landmark achievement in Polish biblical prose and widely considered to be his *opus magnum*. Brandstaetter remains one of the best and most famous Polish Christian writers, referring to the philosophical tradition which leads from Saint Augustine, through Saint Francis, Pascal and Kierkegaard to the Christian existentialism of such artists and thinkers as Gabriel Marcel.

## Content and Interpretation

The story is set in Poland during World War II, in a monastery on a hill where the monks pray for enlightenment regarding the Nazi occupation and find it in the secret of God’s destiny. Their anxiety is caused by visits paid to the prior of the monastery by the head of the local Gestapo, *Sturmbannführer* SS Born. The situation becomes more

complicated when Emanuel Blatt, a runaway Jew, comes to the monastery. The monks are initially frightened and unwilling to help him. When Blatt announces he will leave the monastery they are initially silent, but they decide finally to stop him from leaving and allow him to stay. The prior accepts their decision, and is soon forced to accept the visit of Born, a former colleague from the seminary in Rome who has abandoned his studies and chosen to follow Nazi ideology. Julia Chomin, a former prostitute, is next to visit the prior. She reproaches the priest for a sermon he gave years ago but has now forgotten, a sermon in which he condemned her profession. Blackmailing him with the knowledge that the monastery is hiding a Jew, she demands – unsuccessfully – that the prior give her a string of pearls from the altar of the Virgin Mary. In the second act, the prior is visited by a representative of the underground, who trusts him because of the help the monastery has given to the Jew. The visitor reveals that Julia is Born's lover, and asks the clergyman for a sign that would help them ambush the Gestapo officer. The prior, faithful to the fifth commandment, and without losing hope in converting the German, refuses. The prior is then confronted by Blatt, who has lost all faith in Christians and blames them for the Holocaust. In response, the priest points to Jesus, who suffers in every Jew condemned to death. The centre of the third act is the torture of Blatt staged by Born to resemble the Passion of Christ. This happens after Blatt has revealed himself to the Gestapo officer, who had blackmailed the prior, threatening to execute the monks and spare only him if the Jew was not released. Like Jesus, Blatt moves Born, reminding him of the God he has abandoned. The German kills Julia, who appears in the monastery once more to demand the pearls. Before leaving the monastery, Born involuntarily gives a sign to the underground soldiers, sealing his death. At the end of the play, Blatt recognises Jesus on the cross as God of the *Old Testament*.

Brandstaetter looks to the Gospels for answers to all questions posed by reality. The foundation of his work is the conviction that this is the attitude required by faith. *The Day of Wrath* is a drama confronting Christianity with the Holocaust. In searching for the causes of the Holocaust, Brandstaetter favours the individual and religious perspective to the exclusion of all others. Born, who directs the extermination of Jews, is a former cleric, who has abandoned God. His Polish friend from the seminary, the prior, neither comes from an innocent nation nor is blameless himself – including in his dealings with Blatt, who is seeking help –, but the prior knows that he will meet the moral requirements of his conscience if he remains faithful to the Judeo-Christian God. This God leaves neither the prior, nor other characters of the drama alone. He reveals himself in the Jew tortured by Born. He reveals the power of weakness, of humiliation and of the cross, his power, which oversees history in an incomprehensible way, and which at the same time accompanies those who are its victims. *The Day of Wrath* is widely seen today as “the most difficult – in many places controversial – and most painfully personal of Brandstaetter’s plays” (Trojanowska, Stępnia, 2015, p. 22).

### Main Topics and Problems

*The Day of Wrath*, inscribed in the current of poetic theatre (Zajączkowski, 2007, p. 414), has been interpreted variously as a drama that indirectly addresses the subject of the Holocaust (Kurzyńska, 1964, p. 1) and as a mystery play focused on religious issues, as read in the context of the language and content of the Bible. Some have identified the mystical aspect of the play, highlighting moral issues entangled in existential perspectives, confronted with transcendence (Bednarczyk, 2002). Above all, however, this is a text that establishes the relationship between a historical liminal experience: the Holocaust and Christianity. Brandstaetter defines this relationship by taking up the subject of Jewish-Christian religious relations, the responsibility of Christians for the Holocaust, and even Jewish participation in the Holocaust. All this takes place on an individualised existential plan, confronting faith with History.

Brandstaetter's drama is a false theodicy, because God, like in the *Book of Job*, does not need justification here. One may assume responsibility for evil – for the Holocaust, in this text – as a matter of faith, as a matter even of martyrdom. Or one may reject it, to take the side of evil. History in *The Day of Wrath* has an apocalyptic dimension, but it is carried out by people. God deploys it as a sign that verifies every human being. The humanism in *The Day of Wrath* is subordinated to morality, built on faith and treated as the most important substance of existence. The theology and historiosophy of the drama have an orthodox Christian character, marked by the severe, demanding and unforgiving character of the *Old Testament* and classical Greek tragedy.

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DK

# Death Is Called Engelchen (Smrt' sa volá Engelchen)

**Author:** Ladislav Mňačko

**First Published:** 1959

**Translations:** translated into almost 20 languages, among others Russian, Polish, German, French and Spanish.

**Film Adaptations:** *Smrt' sa volá Engelchen* (Death Is Called Engelchen), TV film, screenplay Ladislav Mňačko and Daniel Michaeli; film director Ivan Balada, premiered 1960; *Smrt si říká Engelchen* (Death Is Called Engelchen), screenplay and film directors Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, premiered the 3rd of May, 1963.

**About the Author:** Ladislav Mňačko (1919–1994) was a Slovak writer and journalist. He became the most translated Slovak author in the world. His parents were Czechs living in Moravia. He spent his childhood and youth in the town of Martin in Central Slovakia where his father worked as a postmaster. He did not finish his studies at high school and instead got training to work in a drugstore. In 1940, he tried to cross the border between Germany and the Netherlands; he was detained and imprisoned. In 1944 Mňačko escaped from the forced labour camp in the Ruhr region in Germany and took part in the partisan movement in East Moravia. After the war, he was at first a staunch supporter of the Czechoslovak Communist regime and one of its most prominent journalists. He travelled both in Czechoslovakia and abroad and wrote many reports (for instance books about Israel, China and Vietnam). His works of fiction were also based on actual events and real characters. In 1961, Mňačko took part in the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem (see his book *I, Adolf Eichmann*). In the 1960s, he became a vocal critic of the Communist regime, for which he was censored. Due to the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, he emigrated first to Israel, later to Austria, where he lived for the next 20 years. His works were forbidden in Czechoslovakia. After the fall of the Communist regime in November 1989, he returned and lived in Slovakia. But subsequent political developments and the growth of nationalism in Slovakia disappointed him. After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia (1992), he moved to Prague.

**Further Important Publications:** *Izrael* (Israel, 1949; reportages); *Já, Adolf Eichmann* (I, Adolf Eichmann, 1961; a report about Eichmann and the Eichmann Trial); *Nočný rozhovor* (Dialogue in the Night, 1966; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The novel is divided into ten chapters and set in Moravian Wallachia (Valašsko) in East Moravia in the last months of World War II and first months after it. The author

used the frame narrative composition. The narrator and main character is Volodá, a 24 years old partisan fighting against the Nazis who was seriously injured and after the war must spend four months in the hospital. He has some features which enable to identify him with the author of the novel and the whole novel is based on real events. The story (actual time of the narration) is set around Volodá's stay in the hospital, his dialogues with the doctor, his visitors and mainly the nurse Eliška with whom he falls in love. However, the main storyline takes place in the past, through flashbacks of Volodá's memories. There are partisan fights with Germans, Volodá's fatal love for the young woman Martha (Marta) and the village of Ploština in the mountains that is a base for the partisans. However the partisan unit is infiltrated by traitors and Ploština is set ablaze by the Germans for helping partisans; the village men are burned alive. On that day, the partisans are absent and can not defend the village. Volodá and his co-fighters are stricken with deep remorse while innocent people are dying because of them. At the end of the novel, the healed Volodá leaves the hospital to find and punish the SS officer Engelchen (Engelchen means a little angel in German) who is responsible for the massacre in Ploština.

The Jewish topic is connected with the character of Martha. She is a beautiful and mysterious woman. She works for the Gestapo as a secretary and sleeps with Nazi officers to gain information that she then provides to the partisans. Volodá gets to know her in the partisan base of Ploština and is sent to accompany her to the town Zlín. They spend the night together there and become lovers. The Nazis humiliate Martha; one general scars her back with a riding crop. The partisans take revenge, by assaulting the general and his unit. Martha kills the general herself and the partisans also kill other high ranking officers. Nevertheless, this attack sets the Germans against them and the villagers. Only gradually is it revealed to Volodá, that Martha is a Jewess and has a double identity. An indication of it may be that she quotes the *Book of Ruth* while they are making love for the first time. After the war, Martha is traumatised by the events that she has experienced and commits suicide.

Martha: "I had to go the way of all Jews. The way to Auschwitz..."

[...]

I said to her, "Martha, you can go to Auschwitz, to tell millions of the Jews, you are a Jewess, you slept with the Germans, but only for the few of the Jews was it as hard as it was for you..." (Mňačko, 2016, p. 37).

The Holocaust is implied in a scene where the partisans capture a German unit. Soldiers are disarmed and released but the officer should be executed. Volodá is supposed to shoot him dead. The German officer is a calm, distinguished man, who constantly carries a book under his arm. He tells Volodá that he has never killed anyone in the war while being a part of a technical rear guard unit. The officer gives him his book which he is reading, Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, is actually a forbidden book in Germany. When Volodá opens the novel, he finds the name of its former owner, Armin Weiss, a Jew. In a fit of rage, Volodá shoots the German officer.

The novel uses the same devices as thrillers. The author keeps readers in tension, dramatic events are disclosed step by step in flashbacks. The character of Martha includes the features of a *femme fatale*, while the nurse Eliška is calm, patient and devoted. On the one hand, the story deheroises the partisan movement in Czechoslovakia authentically depicting the fight against the Nazis including the topic of the Jews what did not appear in the literature of the 1950s in Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, in several ways the novel is still schematic (the role of the Red Army and Communist Party as well as the criticism against the First Czechoslovak Republic).

### Real Background of the Story and Film Adaptation

The novel was firstly published in Czech in the daily *Mladá fronta* (1959). Then it was edited as a book in Slovak in the same year. It received a great acclaim and was translated in many languages.

Ploština was a small settlement in Moravian Wallachia. On April 19, 1945, at the end of World War II, it was burned and its people were massacred by the Nazis in response to their support of the partisan movement. It was the result of the denunciation caused by agents of the Gestapo who wormed themselves into the Partisan Brigade of Jan Žižka of which Ladislav Mňačko was also a member. Nevertheless, Mňačko didn't know and describe the whole background of the events. Only after 1989 was possible to give true testimony about these events (Novák, 2003; Pospíšil, 2003).

Mňačko's interest in Jewish topics was undoubtedly peaked through his first wife Hedwiga, a Jewess, whom he met in Germany during the war. He presented a positive image of the Jewish nation in his reportage book *Israel* (1949). Later, as an eyewitness, Mňačko described the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem, and in 1967 he went to Israel protesting against the official statement of the Soviet Bloc regarding the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War.

The novel *Death Is Called Engelchen* was first filmed in 1960 by the Slovak director Ivan Balada as a TV film. The second adaptation, made in 1963 by directors Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos in Czech, became world-renowned. The filmmakers preserved the main line of the plot. Like in the novel, various narrative times are interweaved, the present is followed by various events from different points in the past. Several names, characters and situations were changed. The partisan and narrator was named Pavel Kubec, the nurse in the hospital is Elizabeth (Alžběta), a nun, and her love relationship to Pavel was downplayed. At the beginning of the film, Martha seems to be dead having committed suicide immediately after the liberation of Zlín. Astonishingly, she later visits Pavel in the hospital to tell him goodbye. The village which is burned by the Nazis is called Paseky, a fictitious place, not the authentic Ploština. The book that is carried by the "good" German officer, originally owned by a Jew, is Thomas Mann's novel *Buddenbrooks*. Earlier, Pavel had found this work in Martha's library. Generally, the film is more compact and impressive.

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# Death of a Liberal (Śmierć liberała)

**Author:** Artur Sandauer

**First Published:** 1947

**Translations:** French (*La mort du libéral*, 1958); German (*Tod eines Liberalen*, 2001).

**About the Author:** Artur Sandauer (1913–1989) was a Polish literary critic, essayist, translator, and professor at the University of Warsaw. After studying classical philology in Lviv, Sandauer was a teacher in Sambor (1939–1941), where he was imprisoned in the ghetto. Escaping again in 1943, Sandauer lived in hiding, and in 1944–1945 worked as a war correspondent for the daily *Pancerni*, a publishing organ of the Polish People's Army (*Ludowe Wojsko Polskie*). In 1946–1948 he lived in Paris, and upon returning to Poland began working for the publishing house of the weekly *Odrodzenie* (1948–1949). As a direct opponent of socialist realism, he was not allowed to publish until the end of the Stalin period. Instead, Sandauer sent his first articles to be published in the Paris-based *Kultura* (a monthly journal for Polish exiles). He was known as an enthusiastic promoter of the works of Bruno Schulz and Witold Gombrowicz.

**Further Important Publications:** *Zapiski z martwego miasta. Autobiografie i parabio-grafie* (Notes from a Dead City: Autobiographies and Parabioographies, 1963; biography); *Studia biblijne. Bóg, Szatan, Mesjasz i...?* (Biblical Studies: God, Satan, Messiah and...?, 1977; essays); *O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku* (On the Situation of the Polish Writer of Jewish Descent in the Twentieth Century, 1982; essays).

## Content and Interpretation

*Death of a Liberal* is a collection of six stories in realist style dedicated to the author's father and based on the tragic experiences of Polish Jews during the war. The titular first story focuses on doctor Herbert Kirsche, a sophisticated representative of the prewar intelligentsia. An expert on Western painting (Velasquez and Breughel) – and ironically reminiscent of the writer Anatole France –, Kirsche turns out to be the learned friend of the narrator, who is a young resident of an anonymous town. His thirst for knowledge in the prewar period leads him to be one of the most frequent guests in Kirsche's flat. For him, Dr. Herbert is at once the personification of humanitarianism, individualism, aesthetics, liberalism, and democracy. In the final account, it is irony that plays the greatest role in the lives and fates of the characters who, however grim their chance of survival, desperately try to live according to their values – but even these will ultimately vanish before the reader's very eyes as the crisis grows. We see this most clearly in Dr. Kirsche's case, as he conveys his willingness to cooperate with the Nazis – a manoeuvre that will earn him a promotion to the title of President of the Jew-

ish Council. The narrator concentrates on the ridiculous behaviour of Dr. Kirsche, who wields his apparent authority and obeys the Berlin laws as if persuaded that it will extend his life. His activities are summarised in a fragment from *The Odyssey*, which the narrator quotes at the end of the story. The cannibal Polyphemus has imprisoned Odysseus and his companions in his cave. In gratitude for the excellent wine which Odysseus has given him, the cannibal promises that he will eat him last. This is how Dr. Kirsche finally loses his life: the last resident of his town, shot dead by the Nazi officer Gabriel. The irony and absurdity is intensified in Limited Liability Company (Spółka z ograniczoną odpowiedzialnością), not least by the total anonymity of the town that serves as its setting (in this respect Sandauer seems like a precursor to Samuel Beckett). Dr. Henryk Jassym, the protagonist, deals with death records and, like Dr. Herbert, is an ardent supporter of adhering to the rules, no matter how absurd they may be. In his office, Dr. Jassym keeps two types of records: the first registers the number of dead, the second the living. The ratio of one to the other changes with dizzying speed. This situation is overturned, however, when Józef Grad has the audacity to die twice (that is, to fool the system). Another hiccup in Dr. Jassym's steady work is caused by Dr. Kirsche, who has been forced by the Gestapo to compile a list of inhabitants not yet intended for deportation to the extermination camps – described euphemistically as “resettlement”. In his attempt to place responsibility for the list on Dr. Jassym, Kirsche suggests implementing possible selection criteria based on “moral value and social utility” (Sandauer, 1947, p. 43). In the course of their painstaking work, these criteria go through repeated revision, until finally only the length of one's name is taken into consideration. Dr. Jassym's participation in the selection process ends with a nervous attack and then madness. In the final passages of the story, he becomes a mad guardian of the death records, under the delusion that the “displaced” will return, compelling him to include their names once more in the files of the living. The central theme of these stories, involving a character who chooses to prolong his life at the expense of others – the unspeakable logic of survival –, returns once again in *The Night of Law and Order* (Noc praworządności). Here Sandauer discretely considers the very issue of guilt inscribed in the Jewish fate – germ of his concept of allo-Semitism –, along with its negative definition of otherness: the only fault that could ever be attributed to a Jew has nothing to do with his or her deeds, but with the mere fact that he or she was born a Jew. This is the view held in *The Night of Law and Order* by a young Jew named Edmund, who has been forced to take part in the Gestapo purges, yet is brave enough to intervene when Gestapo agents begin rounding up the wrong family to be deported to the camps. The only “reward” for Edmund's principled intervention is to deport him as well. This situation reveals the thin line between positive and negative aspects of allo-Semitism, a notion which, on the one hand, speaks to a certain uniqueness and otherness, but which, on the other, strip it of subjectivity and condemns it to non-existence:

Edmund stands obediently in the crowd. He is already melting, the remains of his personality falling away. No friend will recognise him now, so similar to others, so nameless. He thinks about his

mother, his sister. He thinks about the train that will take him to the new mad world. He hasn't heard about the crematoria yet, about the gas chambers: it is the year 1942. The emptiness breathes forward, created by ignorance, a descent into unimaginable Hell followed by people who have long since died (p. 64).

In conclusion, it is worth noticing how these stories might be read in the context of Sandauer's *Notes from a Dead City* (1963, published many years after *Death of a Liberal*). In this work, the writer seems to test the artistic possibilities of autobiographical and parabiographical forms. There is, however, a series of episodes and events depicted in *Notes from a Dead City* that might easily be found in the earlier collection (Hellich, 2017, p. 437). This allows us to presume that an autobiographical thread runs through Sandauer's works, that certain experiences and anxieties described by the narrator (who is also the protagonist) were taken directly from the writer's life, and that the anonymous town might be shaped along the contours of his real home town of Sambor.

### Main Topics and Problems

In *Death of a Liberal*, Sandauer dwells above all on the theme of death, in several aspects. First, it traces the fate of a particular community of Jews living in the ghetto that have been condemned to extermination. The pointlessness of death underscores the absurdity of life in the ghetto, which stands in opposition to the outside world. This last aspect is emphasised by the sharp contradiction between the neighbourhood's spring landscape (the writer makes frequent use of the trope of spring in its traditional metaphorical sense of the awakening and renewal of life) and the dark interiors of ghetto buildings, as if they were already inhabited by death. Conveyed by realistic description, death also remains not so much a symbol of exclusion, but a sign of the senseless destruction of human life, reduced to the point where it signifies no more than the material body and flesh.

In addition to allo-Semitism, *Death of a Liberal* engages with such literary concepts as autothematism (self-reference, self-conscious literature, self-reflection), especially in *Diary of Nonsense* (*Pamiętnik bezsensu*), where a reflection on the possibilities of language is juxtaposed to the world of mass extermination.

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# The Death of the Beautiful Deer (*Smrt krásných srnců*)

**Author:** Ota Pavel

**First Published:** 1971

**Translations:** German (*Der Tod der schönen Rehböcke*, 1973); Swedish (*De vackra rådjurens död*, 1974); Dutch (*Karpers voor de Wehrmacht*, 1976); Polish (*Śmierć pięknych saren*, 1978); Slovak (*Smrť krásnych srncov*, 1983); Japanese (*Utsukushi shika no shi*, 2000); Spanish (*Carpas para la Wehrmacht*, 2015).

**Theatre Adaptations (in selection):** Viola, Prague (1977, *Povedený tatínek a já*); Divadlo E. F. Buriana, Prague (1987, *Můj tatínek a zlatí úhoři*); Divadlo Rokoko, Prague (2008, *Zlatí úhoři*); Městské divadlo v Mostě, Most (2012, *Povedený tatínek a my*).

**Film Adaptations:** *Kapři pro wehrmacht* (the short story *Carp for the Wehrmacht*), short feature film; screenplay and film director Karel Smyczek, premiered 1975; *Smrt krásných srnců* (the short story *The Death of the Beautiful Deer*), short feature film; screenplay and film director Vladimír Merta; *Zlatí úhoři* (*The Golden Eels*), TV film; screenplay Dušan Hamšík and Karel Kachyňa, film director Karel Kachyňa, premiered 1979; *Smrt krásných srnců* (literally *The Death of the Beautiful Deer*, in English as *Forbidden Dreams*), feature film; screenplay Dušan Hamšík and Karel Kachyňa, film director Karel Kachyňa, premiered 1987.

**About the Author:** Ota Pavel (1930–1973), originally Popper. His father Leo was a Czech Jew, his mother Hermína a Czech. Leo Popper was a commercial traveller. After the Nazi occupation, he lost his job and the family moved from Prague to the small town Buštěhrad near Kladno where Leo worked as a miner. Both of Ota's older brothers, Jiří (Jirka) and Hugo, were deported to Theresienstadt in February of 1943 and his father Leo in February of 1945. All three managed to survive. Ota's grandfather Ferdinand Popper died in a Jewish hospital during the war, his grandmother Malvína was killed in Auschwitz.

After the war, the whole family changed their surname from Popper to the Czech name Pavel. Ota worked as a sports journalist for magazines and Czechoslovak Radio. He accompanied the Prague football club Dukla on the way to the U. S. and other countries (the book of reports *Dukla among the Skyscrapers*). His literary tutor was Arnošt Lustig. In 1964, during the Olympic Winter Games in Innsbruck, Pavel had a nervous breakdown. From 1966 until his death, he received a pension for being disabled. In the beginning of his career, he published stories about Czech athletes. At the end of the 1960s, he started writing about his family's tales. These stories found great response and were often adapted for theatre, radio and film.

**Further Important Publications:** *Jak jsem potkal ryby* (1974, posthumously, How I Met the Fish; short stories).

### Content and Interpretation

In his collection *The Death of the Beautiful Deer* (as well as in *How I Met the Fish*), Ota Pavel describes his autobiographical experiences. The book is narrated in the first-person, often from the perspective of Otík, a child and gradually becoming a young teen. He can be identified as the author himself, nevertheless some remarks and comments belong to the adult author in the time of the writing (similar to Grynberg's → *The Jewish War*, Dichter's → *The God's Horse* or Bořkovcová's → *A Private Conversation*). Moreover, the style includes some features of exaggeration and fairy tales. Therefore the stories oscillate between reality and fiction.

The first two stories recount the tale of the Popper family before the war. It is centred mainly on the narrator's father Leo, "a funny dad", a Jew who makes good business as a commercial traveller. However his greatest hobby is fishing in Nature and the whole family spends beautiful days near the Berounka river in Central Bohemia. Nevertheless, Otík's happy childhood "finished suddenly, because the former Private First Class Mr Adolf Hitler came with his moustache under his nose" (Pavel, 1991, p. 70). The stories *The Death of the Beautiful Deer* and *Carp for the Wehrmacht* (and also *They Can Even Kill You* in *How I Met the Fish*) depict the Nazi occupation and the restrictions of the Jews. The family has to move from Prague to the village. The father loses his job, his pond with carp is confiscated. Otík's brothers and father are sent to concentration camps and the young boy Otík nicknamed "Tushie" (Prdelka) stays alone with his mother and has to play the role of the head of the family.

However, his father shows great courage when he harvests fish from his former own pond to feed his family thereby risking his life. Later Leo removes his Jewish star and rides his bike to the Berounka river to bring food to his older sons who have been summoned for deportation. His friend, the ferryman Prošek, helps him by lending him a German Shepherd named Holan who can hunt deer. In the past, Leo Popper had fed Holan with sausages but now both of them, the man and the dog, are in a similar situation.

"Holan, now I'm a *Jude*, a Jew. I don't have any sausage. I'd need them for myself. I'm a Jew and I need meat for my wonderful boys. You have to get it for me!" [...] The eyes of the dog and the man met. Their eyes looked at each other for a long time, perhaps an eon. [...] and what they said to each other, no one will ever know because they are both dead. [...] Maybe they were griping about what it was like as a dog, or maybe as a Jew, but maybe all that doesn't matter. (p. 75)

All members of the family manage to survive the war. The remaining short stories describe their life after it. The father and later Ota both became impassioned communists believing the socialist regime removes all racial prejudice and inequality between people. The story *The Race through Prague* (*Běh Prahou*, in English in *Cross Currents*, 1983) depicts this enthusiasm but also father's despair after the Slánský trial (1952).

This was a great show trial against high-ranking Czechoslovak communists where their Jewish origin was stressed, in the spirit of Stalinist antisemitism. Ota's father paints over the red star on his front gate with the star of David. He "stopped being a communist and became a Jew again" (p. 142).

*The Death of the Beautiful Deer* contains alternately comic, idyllic and dramatic situations. It connects the naivety of the child's view with the nostalgia of the adult's perspective. The persecution of the Jews is presented in a few impressive scenes. For instance, in the scene where the dad has to bring the family's dog and the neighbour's cat to a Nazi office in Prague. Jews are not allowed to keep pets, and the animals will be probably killed.

### Main Topics and Film Adaptations

In 1971 the book could only be published in censored form. The short story *The Race through Prague* was banned and also other "defective passages" criticising the socialist regime or mentioning the Jews were eliminated. The full and original edition of the author's manuscript was only possible in 1991, after the Velvet Revolution.

The character of Leo Popper is portrayed with some stereotypical Jewish attributes. He is an excellent businessman and *bon vivant*. On the other hand, he is also a Czech patriot and a brave man. During the war, he tries to protect his family, is not afraid of the Nazis (harvesting fish from the pond as well as hunting deer). After Leo leaves to Theresienstadt, little Otík imitates his father's courage by fishing illegally and exchanging carp for food necessary for him and his mother (in the short story *They Can Even Kill You* in the collection *How I Met the Fish*). Most ordinary Czech people help the Popper family in their hard life while the German Nazis are presented as rough people. The antisemitic behaviour of the Czechs appears only rarely.

Czech director Karel Kachyňa created two full length films based on Ota Pavel's stories. The first *Golden Eels* (1979) narrated from the perspective of Otík, an innocent child. The second *Forbidden Dreams* (1987) from more characters' points of view, nevertheless the father Leo is in the centre of the story. The persecution of the Jews and the Holocaust are almost a peripheral topic here. However, these short stories and films belong to the few works during so-called normalisation in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s, which present the Jewish and Holocaust motifs.

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JH – ŠS

# The Devil's Workshop (Chladnou zemí)

**Author:** Jáchym Topol

**First Published:** 2009

**Translations:** Swedish (*Kallt land*, 2009); Dutch (*De werkplaats van de duivel*, 2010); German (*Die Teufelswerkstatt*, 2010); Norwegian (*Gjennom et kaldt land*, 2010); Slovenian (*Hladna dežela*, 2010); Hungarian (*Az ördög mihelye*, 2011); Serbian (*Hladnom zemljom*, 2011); Bulgarian (*Prez studenata zemja*, 2012); French (*L'Atelier du Diable*, 2012); Italian (*L'officina del diavolo*, 2012); English (*The Devil's Workshop*, 2013); Polish (*Warsztat diabła*, 2013); Spanish (*Por el país del frío*, 2013); Croatian (*Hladnom zemljom*, 2015); Ukrainian (*Majsternja djavola*, 2016); Belarusian (*Cech djabla*, 2017); Russian (*Masterskaja djavola*, 2019).

**About the Author:** Jáchym Topol is a Czech poet, novelist, songwriter, and journalist. Born in 1962 in Prague, he was denied university admission during the late socialist period because of his anti-regime father, the playwright Josef Topol (1935–2015). Jáchym Topol was forced to work as a boilerman and stocker, among other jobs, and avoided military service by having himself committed to a psychiatric hospital. He signed the human rights manifesto Charter 77. In 1985, he co-founded the underground periodical *Revolver Revue* and after it was legalised, he was its editor in chief from 1990 to 1993. He wrote song lyrics for the rock groups *Psí vojáci* (Dog Soldiers) and *Národní třída* (National Avenue) and also played in both of them. He has been working as a freelance writer since 1991 and is programme director of the Václav Havel Library in Prague.

**Further Important Publications:** *V úterý bude válka* (1992, On Tuesday There Will Be War; poems); *Sestra* (1994, literally “Sister”; in English as *City Sister Silver*; novel); *Supermarket sovětských hrdinů* (2007, Supermarket of Soviet Heroes; short stories and plays).

## Content and Interpretation

The novel revisits themes that were already central in Jáchym Topol's earlier prose: Central and Eastern Europe's role as *terra incognita* to the West, the structural transformation of the post-socialist landscape, and the memory of war and genocide that he had explored in *City Sister Silver*, which contained a chapter about Auschwitz. In *The Devil's Workshop*, which fits within the “road story” genre, he retraces memorial tourism as a kind of dark tourism: people making pilgrimages to places that historically commemorate death and tragedy. The two-part grotesque begins in Theresienstadt, Czechia and proceeds to Khatyn, a village outside Minsk, the Belarusian capital and the place of Nazi massacre in Khatyn. Here almost the entire population of the village was murdered.

The first section takes place in Theresienstadt, a former eighteenth-century fortress town north of Prague, which during the German occupation and World War II served as a transit camp for Jews and others who were bound for deportation to the death camps. The unnamed first-person narrator, whose mother was once camp inmate, describes the development of the Theresienstadt memorial museum into a flourishing tourist attraction. He and his companions oppose the scholars, the official guardians of commemoration, with a form of memory enacted through performance art: they roam the catacombs, eat “ghetto pizza” (Topol, 2013, p. 47), fetishise commemorative artifacts, and carry out evening get-togethers. The organisers call the young Westerners who come to retrace the footsteps of their ancestors – including both perpetrators and victims – “bunk seekers” (p. 32), travellers possessed by history: “But some of them took to the road, heading for the East, all on their own, with a backpack and a credit card from their parents, and went digging through the damp ruins of Poland, Lithuania, Russia – in short, everywhere mass graves were common” (p. 32). Eastern Europe represents an easy-to-exoticise craving for blame and atonement.

In the second part of the novel, the protagonist's adventure takes him to Minsk and then Khatyn, whose residents had once been mass-murdered by the SS. As an expert in turning the sites of massacres and mass murders into tourist attractions, he is hired by the people there to establish a “Jurassic Park of horror, a museum of totalitarianism [...] the Devil's Workshop, the European monument to genocide” (p. 116). On the press of a button, mummified survivors play recordings of their life stories. At the end of the novel, the narrator destroys the endless loop of this grotesque performance of oral history.

### Main Topics and Problems

The subject and treatment of *The Devil's Workshop* may seem lurid, and the author's tone less eloquent than some of his earlier works, but the text expands the range of storytelling about historical trauma. This applies directly to the first-person narrator and the plot structure. The narrator character, being instinctive and naive, fits the mould of a picaresque, joining the simpletons of Czech writers Jaroslav Hašek and Bohumil Hrabal.

The novel also juxtaposes conventional archival techniques of commemoration against immersive memory practices focused on intensively “diving” into virtual or fictional worlds, which it partly achieves by importing spatial and visual trappings from computer games into literature. Like that of a first-person shooter, the text's structure is mirror-like and repetitive. When the story “levels up” from Theresienstadt to Khatyn, the narrator/player is assigned a mission, and is expected to orient himself topographically, and must finally guide the reader through the landscape of memories. Christine Gözl describes the computer game analogy as follows: “Equipped with useful objects and weaponised objects, and with the varying presence of almost interchangeable (female) helpers, Topol's protagonist also fights his way through his task, just [...] to be confronted with the same mission again, on a higher level of difficulty

and under more acute conditions”. She calls his mission “revitalizing memory” (Gözl, 2011, p. 70). Critics accused Topol of peddling a thesis in his prodding of the ethical boundaries of commemorative aesthetics. Yet the book speaks to something that seems to have fundamentally shaped contemporary literature from Eastern Europe after 1989. See provocative works of younger generation thematising the Shoah like Malý’s → *Crow Songs*, Piwowski’s → *More Gas, Comrades!* or Ostachowicz’s → *Night of the Living Jews*. Topol portrays Central Europe’s forgotten or repressed past and the competition between victim groups with a strong sense of otherness, always bearing in mind Western readers’ notions of Eastern Europe as the obscure side of the continent. He juxtaposes Khatyn, Belarus against the Katyń forest in Russia, the site of a better-known massacre of Polish officers and intelligentsia by the Soviets for which it is frequently confused – thus playing with the spectral interchangeability of horror.

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AK

# Diamonds of the Night (Démanty noci)

**Author:** Arnošt Lustig

**First Published:** 1958

**Translations:** English (*Diamonds in the Night*, 1962; the new translation *Diamonds of the Night*, 1977); Spanish (*Diamontes de la noche*, in: *Esperanza*, 1963); German (*Demanten der Nacht*, 1964); Slovak (*Diamanty noci*, 2010).

**Film Adaptation:** *Démanty noci* (the short story *Darkness Casts No Shadow*; *Diamonds of the Night*); feature film, screenplay Arnošt Lustig and Jan Němec; film director Jan Němec, premiered the 25th of September, 1964.

**About the Author:** Arnošt Lustig (1926–2011) was born in Prague into a comfortable middle-class Czech-Jewish family. In 1941 he was expelled from secondary school because he was a Jew. In 1942, his family was sent to the Theresienstadt Ghetto, from where in September 1944, they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. His father was gassed there. Arnošt, his mother, and sister survived. Lustig was taken to Buchenwald and then, in April 1945, he escaped from a train carrying him to the Dachau concentration camp. This experience inspired his short story *Darkness Casts No Shadow* in the book *Diamonds of the Night*. He returned to Prague in time to take part in the May Uprising against the Nazi occupation in 1945.

After the war, Lustig became a member of the Communist Party. He studied at the School of Political and Social Sciences in Prague (completing his studies in 1950) and worked as a journalist in newspapers, magazines and at Radio Prague. He reported on the Arab-Israeli War from 1948 to 1949. From 1961 to 1968 Lustig was a scriptwriter for the state Barrandov Film Studio. In June 1967, Lustig and other Czech writers supported Israel in the Six-Day War against Egypt and Syria, and so they came into a conflict with Communist leadership which condemned Israel as an “aggressor”. Following the Soviet-led invasion in August 1968, he left Czechoslovakia, first to Israel, and later in 1970, to the United States where he taught, mostly in Washington D.C. at the American University, giving lectures on creative writing, film and literature. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, he divided his time between Prague and the U. S.

Apart from a few stories, the Holocaust was the subject of Lustig’s writing the whole time. His first works were among his best. They included the short stories *Night and Hope*, and *Diamonds of the Night*. Lustig’s stories often thematised the fate of beautiful Jewish girls or young women in prison camps (→ *A Prayer for Katerina Horovitzova*, *The Unloved*, *Colette*, *Lovely Green Eyes* etc.). It is typical for his later works that the author adapted and expanded his earlier texts, their original introspective and laconic character changing to a contemplative, verbose style.

**Further Important Publications:** *Noc a naděje* (1958, Night and Hope; short stories); *Dita Saxová* (1962, Dita Saxová; novella); *Modlitba pro Kateřinu Horovitzovou* (1964, → *A Prayer for Katerina Horovitzova*; novella); *Z deníku sedmnáctileté Perly Sch.* (1979, From the Diary of Perla Sch., seventeen years old; later under the title *Nemilovaná*, The Unloved; fictional diary); *Colette: Dívka z Antverp* (1992, Colette: A Girl from Antwerp; novella); *Krásné zelené oči* (2000, Lovely Green Eyes; novel).

### Content and Interpretation

*Diamonds of the Night* originally contained nine short stories. In 1966, the new story The Last Day of the Fire, was added. Later Darkness Casts No Shadow, the longest of the stories, was extended, and came out separately as a novella (at first in the English translation, 1977). Since the 1970s and 1980s another story, Early in the Morning, originally published in the collection *The Bitter Smell of Almonds* (Hořká vůně mandlí) in 1968, was attached. The texts were also gradually expanded with new episodes, reflections of characters as well as narrator's comments. For these reasons they lost their concise laconicity.

These stories thematise the persecution of Jews in Nazi ghettos, concentration camps and also the escape of two Jewish teens from a transport (Darkness Casts No Shadow) or the resistance of the Jews in the Warsaw Uprising in 1943 (The Last Day of the Fire) and in the Prague Uprising in 1945 (The Boy at the Window or Black Lion). Lustig's characters are often children, very young or old people, unheroic "ordinary" figures who find themselves in extraordinary "life or death" situations. For instance, the Warsaw Uprising is depicted through the eyes of two characters, the eighty-year-old Prague Jew Emil Löwy-Cohen as well as his very young grandson Josef nicknamed Chick, who both remain alone in the ruins of their house in the ghetto.

The author uses third person narrative with a lot of dialogue. Mainly in the original versions of the stories, the narrator describes the surroundings, appearance and behaviour of the characters without emotion.

For example, the story Morsel (Sousto), in the English translation as The Lemon, describes a boy in the Lodz Ghetto who extracts his deceased father's golden tooth in order to trade it for a lemon needed urgently by his ill sister. After his father's death, he is forced to accept the role as the family's breadwinner. Therefore, he convinces himself that his father's body is something foreign:

For a short while an insurance agent had lived in the corner shop. *But this isn't your father anymore, he told himself, he was only until yesterday. Now there is nothing but a weight and the task of carrying it away, he reminded himself immediately. But I'll think of him only in good ways. And mother and Miriam will think about him as if nothing's happened.* (Lustig, 1986, p. 22; italics by A.L.)

Lustig's narration concentrates on his characters' minds at the moment of crisis. It portrays exceptional situations beyond all normal limits where decisions about life and death must be made. The narration uses hints, condensation or description of

subjective observations of time. The Second Round depicts a boy nicknamed Marquis who only has a few minutes to run up to a wagon, steal a loaf of bread, and return to his starving friends before the *Scharführer* makes his rounds once again. If he does not make it in time, the patrol will shoot him. The narrator details the boy's inner consciousness during this situation for more than ten pages. He gets the bread, but is followed by the patrol. Therefore he throws the loaf away where it is immediately eaten by other prisoners, and not by his friends. The *Scharführer* wants to shoot him, however, Marquis's friend named "the little one" rescues him in the last second by jumping between him and the patrol. The story describes the solidarity among friends in the transport, a certain humanity of the German soldier (who in the end saves Marquis), but also the indifference and non-solidarity of the other prisoners who eat the bread intended for Marquis and his friends and who watch apathetically as Marquis is threatened with death.

### Main Topics and Problems

In Czech literature, the theme of the Shoah was increasingly developed only at the end of the 1950s, when the Stalinist system was being dismantled, and later, especially in the 1960s, as Czechoslovak culture underwent great liberalisation. One of the first prose writers to enter the scene in that period was Arnošt Lustig.

Lustig knew the ghetto and the concentration camps from personal experience during the years between 1942 and 1945:

I remember getting off a train in September 1944, and finding myself on a railway platform at Auschwitz-Birkenau. We felt like animals during an eclipse of the sun or forest fire or just before an earthquake. In the space of a few minutes everyone – children up to the age of fifteen, men and women over forty, people who were ill, wore glasses or had grey hair – found themselves in bathtubs where gas (Zyklon-B) instead of water poured down from the showers. (Haman, 1995, p. 10)

Lustig's stories interweave several autobiographical experiences, such as his escape from the transport in the story *Darkness Casts No Shadow* (see above) in a fictional way. Nevertheless, his first stories avoid horrible scenes from ghettos or concentration camps. A specific feature of Lustig's writing is the use of a child's point of view of the Holocaust. Arnošt Lustig was the first Czech or Slovak author who applied this narrative device very often. See → *The Association for the Protection of Animals*, → *The Death of the Beautiful Deer* or → *The Lilies of Erika*. Children, both innocent victims of the war and authentic, naive witnesses, have since been used as some of the main symbols of the Holocaust.

Similarly to Jiří Weil and his → *Life with a Star*, the author makes use of an intimate, inner perspective (even though he narrates in the third person) and "coldness" of the narration (understatement). Lustig's protagonists are not traditionally heroic men and women but outsiders, children or old people. Interestingly, the narrator does not equate good only with the Jews (as victims of persecution) nor evil only with the

German Nazis (as the executors of this). See the short story Michael and the Other Boy with the Dagger describing an encounter between a Jewish and a German boy. Lustig also distinguishes himself by his non-conventional picture of the war and the concentration camps, usually depicted in terms of active resistance against the Nazis. Despite all the bleakness which these people must repeatedly undergo, donning an outer shell just to survive, the majority of them try to maintain basic moral values.

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JH

## Diary of Love (Pamiętnik miłości)

**Author:** Stanisław (Szyja-Jehoszua) Wygodzki

**First Published:** 1948

**Translations:** Hebrew (anthology, 1987); English (*The Auschwitz Poems*, 1999); German (*Tagebuch der Liebe. Eine Begegnung in Gedichten, Briefen und Interviews*, 2005).

**About the Author:** Stanisław Wygodzki (1907–1992) at a young age was a supporter of communism which led to his imprisonment in 1924. In consequence, he could not finish his studies. During World War II he was interned in the Będzin Ghetto. In August 1943, he and his entire family were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. On the train he, his wife and their four-year-old daughter all took poison, but Wygodzki survived. His remaining family (mother, father and two brothers) all died in Auschwitz. Wygodzki was also a prisoner of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, and the Dachau-Kaufering II camp. He returned to Poland in 1947 and started a new family. He was a member of the Communist Party. Until 1953, he worked for Radio Poland. Afterwards he dedicated himself only to literature. Two topics dominated his work: the Holocaust and communism. In 1956, he wrote a political novel exposing the evil of the communists, which was forbidden by the state censorship. He translated literature from Yiddish and German into Polish. In January 1968, he left for Israel and settled in Giwataim. He wrote only in Polish. He published in the Israeli magazine *Maariv* where his texts were translated into Hebrew. And in Israeli newspapers his works were published in their original Polish. He died due to lung and heart disease.

**Further Important Publications:** *W kotlinie* (1949, In the Valley; short stories); *Poezje* (1950, The Poetry; poems); *Przy szosie* (1957, On the Road; short stories); *Milczenie* (1958, Silence; short stories); *O świcie* (1959, At Dawn; short stories); *Upalny dzień* (1960, A Hot Day; short stories); *Koncert życzeń* (1961, The Wish Concert; short stories); *Człowiek z wózkiem* (1961, A Man with a Trolley; short stories); *W deszczu* (1962, In the Rain; short stories); *Nauczyciel tańca* (1963, Dance Teacher; short stories); *Basy* (1965, The Bas Family; short stories); *Boczna uliczka* (1966, Side Alley; short stories); *Drzewo ciemności* (1971, Tree of Darkness; poems); *Podróż zimowa* (1975, Winter Journey; poems); *Pożegnanie* (1979, Farewell; poems).

### Content and Interpretation

*Diary of Love* is a collection of 33 poems that tell the story of the poet's traumatic experience of losing his family during the Holocaust. The title of the collection of poems shows the intimacy of the story presented in the works. The poet, who can be identified here with a lyrical subject, talks about his pain, despair, lack of consent for the death of his loved ones and the loneliness resulting from his experience. At the same

time, the diary, as a literary genre, allows the author to maintain a certain distance resulting from the passage of time and to show his assessment of events. He also pointed out that two of them, *Everything Reminds Me of You*, and *About Myself*, he created, while being a prisoner, in Auschwitz-Birkenau, hence these poems document his experiences from that period. The remaining works were written after the liberation of the poet from the camp in Dachau-Kaufering. The volume begins with the short poem *Urn*, in which it turns out that the ashes of his loved ones can be collected into one single vessel and this urn will be able to concentrate his lament upon itself. The poems are like the memories of each character. They appear successively: father, mother, brothers, wife and child. This beginning is a prelude to a more general statement. Looking at the entire layout of the volume, the lyrical subject has moved from that of an individual to a general experience, inscribing the experience of the Holocaust in the *continuum* of human fate. The lyrical subject, when speaking of his loved ones, left them unnamed. These are anonymous characters. This is how the description of one individual's pain was able to become a representation of the despair of all of those who lost all who were dear to them. According to Kaliski, due to this literary device, the poems lost their message because the poet could not escape the tradition aiming at universalisation of literary messages (Kaliski, 2005, p. 210). When discussing the volume Polish critics and poets immediately compared Wygodzki's pain (in *Baleful Names*) with the suffering of Jan Kochanowski, the best known Polish renaissance poet (Wielowieyska, 1948, p. 4; Włodek, 1948, p. 6). This is due to the fact that when writing about the loss of his child, the lyrical subject of Wygodzki referred to Kochanowski's fate who had described his own despair after the loss of his daughter Urszula. Wygodzki dedicated some of the most beautiful poems to his daughter Mindla. In this description of pain and despair, critics saw a common thread between both authors. However, this is an interpretation that raises many doubts. Urszula died of an incurable disease in the 15th century, while Mindla lost her life due to an ideology that forbade her to live because she was a Jew. Moreover, Wygodzki actively took part in the death of the child giving her the poison in order to allow her to escape the gas chambers. The ending of the last poem *Profil* reads:

And I lost loved ones, and I poisoned myself,  
 And with the killer's hand, I wrote these strophes,  
 But from the poems and from what hurts and from what I felt,  
 It's not just my profile that's growing. (Wygodzki, 1948, p. 55)

The awareness of this weighs on him for the rest of his life. In 1963, the volume was published for the second time, but at that time it had already been extended by 15 more poems. Wygodzki included several more excellent poems dedicated to his daughter. In 1964 the edition was reissued with two additional poems. For the last time *Diary of Love* was published in 1987 in London and the volume consisted of 50 poems. Its message became more intimate, the lyrical subject focused more on his own emotions. At the time, the reception emphasised that the autobiographical layer

testifies to the strength of the message, but does not always justify the lack of writing abilities (Kamieńska, 1948, pp. 10–11).

### Main Topics and Problems

The main themes of Wygodzki's collection of poems are trauma and the experience of survivor's syndrome, indirectly asking why it was he who survived. He is unable to come to terms with reality, still remembering his lost family life (The Book of Evidence, Kamionka) and emphasising the new tragic role that he has to fulfil: testifying about the lives of the murdered (Biography, The Auschwitz Way, Wartime Mail, Reading Ruins). Mourning the death of loved ones, especially the beloved daughter, who experienced nothing (Childhood) apart from fear and death, are important elements of the presented lyrical world. Wygodzki's daughter became a symbol of the many Jewish children killed in concentration camps (Gross, 1948, p. 7; Ficowski, 1948, p. 11). Important components in the texts are trains, rails, associated here unequivocally with travel and death. The poem *Locomotive* is particularly important for the Polish reader. With its title and (partly) with its content, it refers to the famous children's poem by Julian Tuwim (→*We, Polish Jews*) describing a huge locomotive, which takes forty wagons filled with people, animals, on an unknown but funny and joyful journey. Wygodzki's poem also depicts the train, the children, and the announcement of the journey, but not into life, but into death in Auschwitz-Birkenau. This poem is one of the first works in world literature and culture to tell the story of the Holocaust through the metaphor of a station, railway, and the train (see e.g. Kertész in his novel *Fatelessness*, 1975; Mihăileanu in his film *Train of Life*, 1998; Appelfeld in his novel *Iron Tracks*, 1991). Solitude and emptiness after the Shoah have also become crucial motifs. The lyrical subject tells the story of dead streets, the ruins of houses, and of entire cities he crosses (Biograph). The world declined and will never return to the old order. People who survived the war are mutilated. However, Wygodzki's texts stress the universalisation of suffering. War and the loss of loved ones are possible everywhere and affect everyone, regardless of nationality or religion (Baleful Names, Prayer, To the Next).

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MSZ

# Doctor Josef's Beauty (Ślicznotka doktora Josefa)

**Author:** Zyta Rudzka

**First Published:** 2006

**Translation:** German (*Doktor Josefs Schönste*, 2009).

**About the Author:** Zyta Rudzka (1964) is a playwright, novelist, and psychologist from Warsaw. She began her career as a poet in 1989 and debuted in 1991 with the novel *White Clichés* (Białe klisze) and became famous for her plays (e.g. *The Sugar Bra*, 2008, *Cukier stanik*) that were translated into Russian, Bulgarian, Italian and German and staged abroad (Kotkowska-Kachel, 2011).

**Further Important Publication:** *Mykwa* (1999, Mikveh; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The story focuses on two twin sisters, Leokadia and Czechna, who live together in a retirement home not far from Warsaw. The main storyline is short on action as it is based on descriptions of the lives and destinies of retirement home residents of Jewish origin, who are suffering an extraordinary hot summer. The atmosphere can be described as monotonous but somehow also familiar and laconic since most of the conversations are about the death which the elderly residents are about to face. (“And you wanna get buried or burnt?” Rudzka, 2006, pp. 146, 152, 183). The subject of death is not only evoked several times by the pensioners, but also by the life-threatening heat, which gets more intense during the story. The narrator’s voice comments on this as follows: “The elderly people were spoiling fast. They had cancer. Exanthemas. Abscesses. Boils. As if they had cellulite on their faces. Dribbling. Sweating. Puffing. Trembling. Whimpering.” (p. 271) Additionally, the head of the retirement home is portrayed as unusually strict and lacking compassion or indulgence. He cuts off the water supply in order to save water, makes the residents stand in a row to get showered or arbitrarily sends people to the “House by the Sea” that nobody has ever seen and from which nobody ever has returned. This basic plot is constantly interwoven with flashbacks to World War II and the sisters’ fate in the Auschwitz concentration camp. They survived only because they were test subjects for doctor Josef (Mengele)’s experiments on twins (→ *At Home with the Hitlers. The Hitlers’ Kitchen*). “He is approaching her again. doctor Josef. Slim. Heavenly. Not present. [...] Laughing. Loudly. Vociferously. Like a boy. Laughing with his lips. The greedy ones. The sucking ones. [...] He wants her to stretch out. To lay her naked shoulders on the metal bar that is covered with the excrement of strangers.” (pp. 204–205) Not only the narrator focuses on the detailed description of bodies; Czechna herself also emphasises her beauty and the fact that she survived Auschwitz thanks to her looks, for which she was called

“Miss Auschwitz” (p. 67). The pensioners seem to be deprived of dignity and vitality. They are eking out a miserable existence in the home, which turns out to be anything but a shelter. In contrast, the unusual attractiveness of Czechna is even more remarkable and, at the same time, displaces her. The storylines are clearly defined by the use of tenses. Whereas the story in the retirement home is written in the past tense, the flashbacks to the childhood in Auschwitz are reported in the present tense from the viewpoint of a witness. The composition and the role of the narrator seem significant for the whole novel. The scenes in the retirement home and the concentration camp are distinguished by the setting and time, but are similar in terms of motifs. While the scenes are constantly mixed up, they are primarily linked by their inhumanity and the vivid depiction of physicality and carnality. In combination with the cruelty portrayed, they evoke feelings of embarrassment and discomfort. Throughout the story, there are incidences of posttraumatic stress disorder, since Leokadia suffers from anorexia, while Czechna is haunted by nightmares and cannot deal with suddenly occurring scenes in daily life that remind her of her childhood. The smell of urine makes her paradoxically recall the good odour of the doctor in Auschwitz, which signifies a psychopathological attraction to her tormentor (“I never thought I would say that [...] but I am longing for the concentration camp,” p. 162).

### Main Topics and Problems

Not only the comparison of daily life in a retirement home to life in Auschwitz led to very varied reactions among critics. The text oscillates between a sort of sexual attraction and childish trust, for example illustrated by the usage of doctor Josef instead of his full name, and in metaphors describing him as a magician. It remains unclear if the doctor is interested in the girl for more than scientific reasons but the sexual connotations in the book can be considered as taboo breaking: “Doctor Josef’s enthusiasm has to be muted. Maybe he could just nest in her. With the scalpel. With the needle. With the syringe. With bacteria. Sinking into her.” (pp. 206–207)

The novel also raises the problem of lack of solidarity and empathy for the traumatised victims. This becomes obvious when Czechna is convinced she has recognised a medical assistant some years later at a train station, which gives her a nervous breakdown. Instead of trusting her suspicion, she gets labelled as a sick, hence untrustworthy person. Her sister Leokadia goes through moments of humiliation in her marriage where her husband forces her to put on the prisoner’s uniform. People around her try to explain this away with his alcohol addiction. For these reasons, *Doctor Josef’s Beauty* is also a story about double traumatisation: in public and in private, in youth and old age (Hiemer, 2014, p. 324). The novel is a thematic synthesis of the topics Rudzka most commonly addresses in her plays and other novels. She is fascinated with bodies, especially older ones, psychological issues, Jewish topics, and – more generally – questions of dignity. Due to its controversial plot and presentation, the novel triggered manifold reactions. Whereas Polish critics pointed out the realistic depiction of older people’s isolation (→ *The Boarding House*), German critics accused

the author for the double setting and considered it to be a cynical comparison between the retirement home and a concentration camp. The questionable allegories are surely not easy to adjust to, but they help the narrator to convey the inhuman living conditions to the reader by provoking uncomfortable feelings. The narrator considers these feelings to be necessary to understand what the victims went through and still are going through. Daily life in the retirement home reminds readers of a panopticon of physical and mental decline in people who are living together but apart and forgotten. Applying this reading, the text can be understood as a critique of the failure to commemorate and respect victims of the Holocaust.

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# Doctor Mráz (Doktor Mráz)

**Author:** Denisa Fulmeková

**First Published:** 2018

**Translation:** Czech (*Doktor Mráz*, 2020).

**About the Author:** Denisa Fulmeková (1967) studied journalism at the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava (1985–1989). She has worked as an editor in cultural reviews, from 1997 to 2004 she was editor-in-chief in the esoteric magazine *Orientácia*. She has been a freelance writer since 2004. She has published poems, reports, short stories and novels. Fulmeková's works use devices of popular literature and often focus on the lives of contemporary Slovakian women, their hopes and illusions.

**Further Important Publications:** *Konvália: Zakázaná láska Rudolfa Dilonga* (2016, → Lily of the Valley: Rudolf Dilong's Forbidden Love; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The story of the novel takes place in Slovakia in the fictional village of Himberany, in the region of Závrsie, and in Bratislava. It is set predominantly in World War II from 1939 to 1945, with overlaps from the early 20th century through the 1950s as well as to the present. In the prewar events, the novel depicts the gradually increasing antisemitism in Slovakia in connection with the family of Dr Albert Mráz (Marton) who was born as a Jew. It describes his conversion to Lutheranism and the changing of his surname from Marton to Mráz. At the end of the book, the story of the Mráz family continues after World War II. The structure of the novel is based on two intertwining narrative levels. The first level is the author's narration, which presents the story, the lives of the characters chronologically. The second level, which is also distinguished from the first in italics, consists of recorded audio interviews by Anna Olšaníková. She is the daughter of Dr Mráz, now a 95-year-old woman who tells the author about her life. These interviews help the reader to understand better some events of the novel and behaviour of the characters.

The main character of the novel is Albert Mráz (Albert Marton). Despite his conversion, his marriage with a Catholic woman, and raising his daughter in the Catholic faith, he is still considered a Jew after the racial laws declared in Slovakia ("Jewish Codex" in September of 1941). Mráz, as a convert, is refused by his former community, the Jews, and is also not accepted by his new religious community (including his wife's family).

Dr Juraj Rárbocký, a young lawyer, is Mráz's competitor in Himberany. He is an antisemite and the leader of the Hlinka Guard (the Slovak Fascist organisation) in the

town. Rárbocký tries to take all the necessary steps to get rid of Mráz. He accuses Mráz of anti-Slovak actions, of impoverishing his clients in Himberany by overcharging them. Rárbocký even initiates petitions aimed at revoking his licence to practice law. Rárbocký is a typical example of the moral decline of a man under the influence of the ruling regime, but also of careerism and mammonism in connection with the confiscation of Jewish property. Thanks to his status, he helps members of his family, as well as local supporters of the Slovak clerofascist regime, to cease Jewish property.

The change of Marton's surname to Mráz is the reason for writing an article in the newspaper *Gardista*, in which the author calls for an attack on this reputable attorney. Mráz suspects that his family, and respectively Jews in Slovakia will be facing difficult times, so he tries to do everything possible to save his wife, daughter and sister – before almost being deported to a concentration camp. Thanks to his connections and his sacrificing as well as his family's assets, he manages to avoid deportation and the seizure of his property, but he fails to save his sister who is transported firstly to the internment camp in Sereď and then to a death camp in Poland. Mráz loses a large number of his former clients, which has an economic impact on the family. Surprisingly, in his efforts, he is assisted by a local supporter of the regime, the landowner Laco Hošťák, who helps Mráz and other Jews taking money for his support.

Mráz's fight for survival for his family and himself becomes harder after the suppression of the Slovak National Uprising in the autumn of 1944 when the second wave of Jewish persecution and transports starts. The Mráz family decide to escape from their hometown and a simple, modest peasant named Jozef Kmetík who lives nearby, in Svrčinovce, provides them with shelter. In the background of the tragic events of World War II, the author develops the love story of two young people, the daughter of Dr Mráz, Anna, and Kmetík's son, Janko. Although they come from completely different worlds and Anna's parents initially disagree with their relationship, they find their way to each other and their love gradually develops. But they are hit with events from the war – as a doctor, Janko is sent to the Eastern Front, where he dies. Nevertheless, Anna maintains contacts with Janko's parents, they accept her as their daughter, and therefore they do not hesitate to help Anna and her family, even though they are risking their own lives.

The story of the Marton family ends in the postwar period, which brought some relief, but the war has marked them forever. “The relief of the end of the war was indescribable, but what we as a family experienced during the Slovak State will always be in us forever” (Fulmeková, 2018, p. 173). After the war, Rárbocký is sentenced to the prison but some other Slovak fascists become communists and in the 1950s the Jews are again persecuted. Dr Mráz dies in March of 1957.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

The novel *Doctor Mráz* is the result of the author's extensive research of contemporary archival documents as well as the testimonies of survivors. Denisa Fulmeková also cooperated with historians Ivan Kamenec, Martin Macejka and Eduard Nižňanský to

make the novel credible. However, the story presented in the novel is fictitious despite the fact that in the parts written in italics it seems like an authentic conversation between the author, as a reporter, and Anna Olšaníková. Most of all, the introduction of the last chapter suggests: “I think I have already told you everything, and I confess, I would like our recording to be finished [...]. I am tired, you know?” (p. 179).

The story takes place in Himberany, although the indicated geographic location suggests that it is the town of Malacky in the Záhorie region. Similarly, the photo on the cover is reminiscent of this town – the military parade of the Hlinka Guard in Malacky. However, locating the story in a fictitious place suggests that many similar stories happened during the Slovak State, and that is why Dr Mráz’s story could have taken place elsewhere.

Despite the fact that the novel depicts the Holocaust of the Slovak Jewish community, the author does not focus on the mass murder of the Jews. The story is based on the degradation of a man (Dr Mráz) and the members of his family. Under the influence of Nazi ideology, they were deprived of their fundamental rights and security of life Mráz had developed over the years when he was a reputable lawyer. He sinks from the centre of social life to the margins of society. At the same time, the novel is a story of humiliation of the powerless by the holders of power in the Slovak State and a desire for power and property.

The author does not consider racial prejudice against the Jews as the main reason for antisemitism in Slovak society. There are rather economic reasons for it. From this perspective, antisemitism stems from the stereotype of a Jew – a trader who profits from, and exploits the Slovak nation.

The main disseminator of these ideas is Mráz’ rival, Dr Rárbocký, who, in addition to eliminating the competition, is also interested in the material benefits, the aryanisation of Jewish property. And there are also others who would like to get to the property in such an easy way, which implies that “behind the great disputes about how the Slovaks should get rid of the covetous people, there are only obvious and limited interests to reach material improvement, achieve a higher status, get something more regardless of the tragic circumstances, violence, victims or even wider political contexts” (Schmarcová, 2019, p. 23).

Thanks to a play on facts and fiction, telling a universal story that could have happened in any Jewish family, the novel *Doctor Mráz* impresses the reader as being very authentic. In contrast to the tragic time of the war, there is the story of young Anna Mrázová, who was scarred by both prewar and especially war events during her adolescence. The novel describes her school times, for instance her changing relationship with her schoolmate Hanka Zábojníková. Her first big love is depicted in detail, though ending with her fiancé’s death. The love between an Aryan boy and a Jewish girl in the time of the war and the Shoah often appears in Slovak and Czech literature. See Jašík’s → *St. Elizabeth’s Square*, Otčenášek’s → *Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness* and Fulmeková’s earlier work → *Lily of the Valley*. All these scenes serve to soften some of Dr Mráz’s troubling story.

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MA

# The Earth Under Your Feet (Zem pod nohami)

**Author:** Mikuláš Kováč

**First Published:** 1960

**About the Author:** Mikuláš Kováč (1934–1992) was a Slovak poet, playwright and author of children’s books. He graduated from High School for Industrial Studies in Zvolen in Central Slovakia (1953) and studied pedagogy at Comenius University in Bratislava. He did not finish his studies for health reasons. Kováč spent almost his whole life in Banská Bystrica in Central Slovakia where he worked as a local government official, a manager in the puppet theatre, a journalist in newspapers and for Slovakian radio. He participated in writing the script of the film *Build a House, Plant a Tree* (1979, *Postav dom, zasad’ strom*) directed by Juraj Jakubisko. From 1980 he drew social security benefits for being on disability.

**Further Important Publications:** *Rozmery* (1964, Dimensions; poems); *Návraty* (1966, Returns; poem), *O modrej labuti* (1966, About a Blue Swan; poems); *Vybrané verše* (1978, Selected Poems); *Básne* (1984, Poems; anthology of poems).

## Content and Interpretation

The collection of poems, written in free verse, consists of three parts. The first contains nine poems, the second twelve poems, and the third one extensive poem My Town (Moje mesto) inspired by Kováč’s home city Banská Bystrica.

The main topic of the poems is the current everyday life of ordinary people confronted with the brutal reality of World War II that the author experienced as a child. So the introductory poem The Wall (Stena) first depicts the pale white wall where a man has been executed. Secondly the same expression „bledý ako stena“ (in English free translation “white as chalk”) is used for someone who is sated with food today. The author comments “we have already forgotten these scenes”, which means the war (Kováč, 1985, p. 11). A similar confrontation can be found in the following poem The Rose Garden (Ružová záhrada). An idyllic springtime nature with a “silver meadow” is presented here. In the meadow, the soldiers shoot the inhabitants of a village, pile their bodies in a pit and cover them with lime. In the evening, the same soldiers play music and listen to Franz Schubert’s song Germany, Germany, a rose garden (p. 13). They cry and being deeply touched whisper: “The music of our master is so beautiful, so human” (p. 13).

Auschwitz and other concentration camps are directly presented in two poems, Auschwitz 1958 (Osvienčim 1958) and The Prison Compound (Dvor). Auschwitz 1958 describes the author’s visit to this extermination camp. He watches the exhibition of victims’ hair, their suitcases, prosthetics and lists of their names. He asks where all of these people are. The people answer they have left to blue Heaven through the black

chimney. Therefore Heaven is full of “legless angels, / angels marked with numbers, / angels / with their teeth kicked out” (p. 26). A sarcastic author’s comment follows: “Great God, / mighty and just, / these angels play the harp for you / if you’re bored?” (p. 26). In the following part of this poem the victims answer the question of what they left behind. There are blankets and scrub brushes made from their hair, soap made from their bones, a big black cloud from which it still rains and a bird who has drunk their blood and sings in their voice. The poem Auschwitz 1958 was set to music by Ilja Zeljenka in 1959 (*Auschwitz*, cantata for two reciters, a mixed choir and orchestra). Six verses of the poem The Wall became a part of Eugen Suchoň’s musical composition *Contemplations* (1964, *Kontemplácie*) consisting of several poems and literary works.

Also the poem The Prison Compound (Dvor) contrasts the situation in a concentration camp with current life. The death toll of the camp of four million victims seems to point to Auschwitz again, because it was the supposed number of killed prisoners in Auschwitz at that time. The prisoners are standing in the yard where some of them are shot down by an SS officer. The “good German bullet” fired from his pistol “is still flying [...] around the world” (p. 29). And the dead prisoners envy a young modern day man who is currently standing in the yard with his girlfriend and chewing a blade of grass.

Motifs of the war and the persecution of the Jews appear again in the third part of *The Earth Under Your Feet*. Here, among others, the author depicts men in black uniforms and black shoes (the Slovak military Fascist organisation the Hlinka Guard) who came in a black car and took away his Jewish neighbours, Mr Štraus, his wife and their children, who were friends of the narrator (the poet). Later the same men also arrested the boy’s father who had participated in the resistance. The father never came home again. He left behind his books, an empty bed, an empty room and the half empty world of his wife and the son (p. 82).

### Main Topics and Problems

*The Earth Under Your Feet* was Mikuláš Kováč’s debut book. Kováč belonged to the generation of young Slovak poets at the end of the 1950s who disagreed with the abstract, only declarative works of their predecessors in the official literature. They proclaimed to present everyday life and their own private experience in their poems. These poets also thematised the persecution of the Jews (that was marginalised in the preceding period) and the extermination camp in Auschwitz. It inspired the slightly older Ivan Kupec in his collection *Seashell* (1961, *Mušľa*) and mainly Ján Ondruš in his poems The Fire in Auschwitz (Osvěčimský oheň) as well as The Ashes in Auschwitz (Osvěčimský popol) in the book *The Egg* (Vajíčko) that could not be published in the late 1950s (Matejov, 2005). These poems were published later in Ondruš’s book *The Mad Moon* (1965, *Šialený mesiac*).

Both Ján Ondruš and Mikuláš Kováč create limit situations in their poems to ask about the guilt and responsibility for the mass murder during the war and to remind the public of the victims and in general of the human situation. Nevertheless, cruel

acts are depicted in a factual and sober way, without the usual pathos and direct ethical condemnation (Matejov, 2006, p. 199). Both young poets were probably inspired by the poems of the Polish author Tadeusz Różewicz whose poems *The Braid* (Warkoczyk) or *Massacre of the Boys* (Rzeź chłopców) as well as the short story → *A Trip to the Museum*, depict topic similar to Kováč's *Auschwitz 1958*. The same subject thematised the young Czech poet Petr Prouza in his poem *Silence in Auschwitz* in *Židovská ročenka* 1964.

The collection *The Earth Under Your Feet* caused a strong response. Reviewer Pavol Števček reproached Kováč for “aesthetical adventurism”, little life experience and indiscipline in his poetics. It provoked many reactions from young poets and critics who in most cases stood up for Kováč and his poetry. Critic and literary scientist Milan Hamada stated, polemicising with Števček, that Kováč's asking questions and his moral anxiety are more important than ideological correctness as well as virtuosity of the style (Hamada 1961 and 1966).

Mikuláš Kováč continues in his subsequent works (*Dimensions*, 1964; *Returns*, 1966) on topics and stylistic devices beginning in his debut. There are stories of ordinary men who have to endure the burden of tragic historical events, their tiny pleasures and worries (Matejov, 2019, pp. 70–71).

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# Elegy for 77,297 Victims (Žalozpěv za 77 297 obětí)

**Author:** Jiří Weil

**First Published:** 1958

**Translations:** German (*Elegie für 77 297 Opfer*, 1999; the new translation *Klagegesang für 77 297 Opfer*, in: Jiří Weil: *Leben mit dem Stern*, 2000); Russian (*Psalom pamjati 77 297 žertv*, in: *Pochorony kolokolov*, 2001, pp. 71–92).

**Theatre Adaptation:** Divadlo Miriam, Praha (2002).

**About the Author:** Jiří Weil (1900–1959) was a Czech writer, poet, journalist, translator and scientist. He was born into an assimilated Czech Jewish family in Praskolesy in Central Bohemia. His father owned a small factory. Weil studied comparative literature and Slavonic philology at Charles University. He became a member of the Communist Party and worked as a journalist, translator and critic of Soviet literature. In 1933, Weil went to Moscow as a translator. In 1935, he was denounced as a detractor of the Soviet Union and sent to Interhelpo, a Czech cooperative in Kyrgystan (see his novels *From Moscow to the Border* and *The Wooden Spoon*, both with autobiographical features). After a few months, he travelled to Central Asia as a reporter. At the end of 1935, he was allowed to return to Czechoslovakia. Weil's first novel *From Moscow to the Border* (1937) became one of the first true testimonies about the situation in the Soviet Union in the middle of 1930s. During the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands, Weil was persecuted for his Jewish origins. He tried to save himself by marrying Olga Frenclová, an Aryan woman, and worked in the Jewish Central Museum from 1943 to the beginning of 1945. In February of 1945, he was summoned for deportation to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. He staged his own suicide by pretending to drown himself in the Vltava river and went into hiding. His parents were transported to Auschwitz and his sister to Treblinka; none of them survived. His brother died after returning from Theresienstadt to Prague in May 1945. After the war, Weil worked again in the Jewish Museum. In 1946 he began working for the Prague publishing house ELK. His literary works concentrated on Jewish topics and mainly on the Holocaust. He published short stories → *Colors* and his best known novel → *Life with a Star*. Nevertheless, after the Communist coup in 1948, this book was sharply criticised as formalistic and damaging, Weil was excluded from the Writer's Union and banned. He focused on his professional activity in the Jewish Museum again, for instance, he pushed through a collective presentation of children's drawings and poems from Theresienstadt. Weil was allowed to publish again at the end of the 1950s (the novel *The Harpist*, *Elegy for 77,297 Victims*, both 1958) but he died of leukemia in 1959 and his last novel *Mendelssohn Is on the Roof* was edited posthumously.

**Further Important Publications:** *Barvy* (1946, → *Colors*; short stories); *Život s hvězdou* (1949, → *Life with a Star*; novel); *Dětské kresby na zastávce k smrti. Terezín 1942–1944* (edited by Hana Volavkovková, introduction J. W; 1959, Children’s Drawings on the Way to Death. Terezín 1942–1944; children paintings); *Na střeše je Mendelssohn* (1960, Mendelssohn Is on the Roof; novel).

### Content and Interpretation

From the existing documents kept in the Prague Jewish Museum Archives it becomes obvious, that the work was preceded by a detailed study of the available documentation from the persecution period, as well as of other dirges, which Weil translated in the 1950s into Czech.

The number 77,297 refers to the death toll of Czech Jews whose names are written on the walls of the Pinkas Synagogue in Prague. *Elegy* is a montage of three interlinking narrative levels marked with different fonts. It reports on the persecution of the Czech Jews; from the arrival of the Nazi army to the mass murders in the extermination camps. The work oscillates on the genre boundary between poetry and prose, while straddling the interface between nonfiction (facts soberly documenting historical events documents) and literature.

The first layer of *Elegy* has a frame composition, where the introductory and concluding passages are similar describing the ashes of millions of Jewish victims decomposing into fertile ground. The narrative is linked not only by chronology, but also by the omniscient narrator, who presents general information on the individual stages of the Holocaust in the Czech lands in poetic form. During the final sentences the narrator falls silent and the liquidation of the Jewish population in the extermination camps is portrayed purely as a prose poem. The principles of contrast and parallels as well as allegory, metaphors and symbols are often used in this layer.

The second layer in *Elegy* describes factual episodes of persecutions, concrete figures, dates and terms are presented, while the sober form of the text comes close to that of a newspaper report. The final scene in Auschwitz comes to serve as a link with the framework of the first narrative level – symbolising the strength and courage of the Czech Jews tied to their homeland, who at the hour of death find human heroism and banish fear with a song from their native land. The style of the description of individual characters in this second layer is similar to that in Weil’s other works. Although *Elegy* describes the fate of all Czech Jews, it presents the Shoah through the eyes of an assimilated Jew, for whom it is a disaster, when he cannot buy raisins to bake a Christmas stollen, or that the inscription on the Jewish star is written “in a foreign language”. The third narrative level is made up of sensitively selected quotes from *Kralice Bible*, the first translation of Bible from its original languages into Czech created in the 16th century, mostly from *Psalms* and closely related with texts from the second layer.

The connections between all three narrative levels result in a blending of texts that were written thousands of years apart. Hence the text of *Elegy* is resurrected in new contexts that are relatable to present-day events.

### Main Topics and Problems

Thematically, *Elegy* covers Weil's entire work on the topic of the Holocaust. Individual motifs from *Elegy* are presented in detail in → *Life with a Star*, *Mendelssohn Is on the Roof*, the unfinished novel *Here the Lambeth-Walk Is Dancing* and also in his short stories → *Colors*.

The dominant motif of the landscape in the setting is a clear symbol of the Jewish people, which like the landscape itself, is gradually recovering from the ordeal it has suffered. At the same time, however, the motif of ashes (Ficowski's → *A Reading of Ashes*) swirling in the wind and the omnipresent shadows point to the weight of the past, which the survivors will always carry with them. At the end of this reflective framework the author addresses the reader and by alluding to the Czech national anthem, points to the imprescriptibility of the crimes committed.

*Elegy* was published in Czech in 1958 in a special graphic format with three art prints by graphic designer Zdenek Seydl. For the second and last time it was edited in 1999 as a part of a more extensive volume of Weil's works. Nevertheless, this edition, as well as the translations of *Elegy*, don't preserve the originally intended format. This different layout prevents the reader from reading the text not only vertically (as a connection of three different layers) but also horizontally, as a sequel each of the narrative layers. When vertical reading reveals the deeper connections between first and second layers in front of the reader: e. g. Czech Jews, who were murdered and only dust remains of them, will not be forgotten. The numbers turn into names again and a memorial will be created to memorialise them for the whole world.

The motif of revolt and painful dying of the characters in *Elegy* is connected by a parallel with the motif of the hopeless fight of the Czech land, which resists by natural elements – unusual snow in spring and mud (the wheels of enemies get stuck in it). The Czech land is waiting vainly to be defended. It is occupied, trampled and hoped “on deliverance dies”.

*Elegy* has appealed to creative artists to consider its subsequent artistic representation. Several dramatic and literary-musical adaptations have been created. One of the best-known of these was a performance by the Miriam Theatre, first presented in 2002 to mark the 60th anniversary of the first transports of Czech Jews to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. No less impressive were the radio adaptations by Czech Radio in the 1990s.

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### Other Resources

Archiv ČRo (Czech Radio Archives), Prague; Národní archiv (National Archives), Prague; Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví (Museum of Czech Literature), Prague

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# Elegy for the Little Jewish Towns (Elegia miasteczek żydowskich)

**Author:** Antoni Słonimski

**First Published:** 1951 in: *Poezje*, Warszawa: Czytelnik.

**Translations:** English (*Elegy for the Little Jewish Towns*, 1951); Hebrew (*ha-Kina al ha-‘ayarot ha-yehudiot*, 1957); German (*Klagelied für die jüdischen Shtetl*, 1961); French (*Elégie pour les villages juifs*, 1962).

**Music Adaptations:** Szymon Laks, *Elegia miasteczek żydowskich*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1963 (adapted in 1961); Antonina Krzysztoń, *Elegia żydowskich miasteczek*, in: *Czas bez skarg, music disc*, Warszawa: Pomaton 1995; Tomasz Gwinciński, Paweł Szamburski, Juri Jaremczuk, Patryk Zakrocki et al., *Sztetlach, music disc*, Dembitzer Music: Dębica, 2005.

**About the Author:** Antoni Słonimski (1895–1976) was born in Warsaw in a Polish-Jewish family of prominent intellectuals. He graduated the Warsaw School of Fine Arts (1917) and exhibited his artistic works at numerous group and individual exhibitions before the war. He collaborated with satirical weeklies, co-founded the famous cabaret Pikador (1918) and co-created the famous and influential avant-garde poetry group Skamander (1919). As a columnist (especially as the author of the well-known “Weekly Chronicle” for *Wiadomości Literackie*), he expressed the views of the liberal intelligentsia, rationalists and sceptics, and confronted racial and national prejudices, especially fascism. During the war he stayed in Paris and London, returning to Poland in 1951. He printed articles, poems and columns in magazines and was a member of the board of the Polish PEN Club. In addition to working with UNESCO, Słonimski took part in a number of democratic opposition actions and openly criticised the authorities during the events of 1968.

**Further Important Publications:** *Rodzina* (1933, The Family; poems); *Dwa końce świata* (1937, Two Ends of the World; novel); *Wspomnienia warszawskie* (1957, Warsaw Memories; memoirs); *Sąd nad Don Kichotem* (1965, Court over Don Quixote; poem); *Alfabet wspomnień* (1975, The Alphabet of the Memories; memoirs).

## Content and Interpretation

The poem was composed by Słonimski during his immigration to England in 1947. It is written in the classic form of six four-legged verses made up of thirteen-syllable lines. Classical order conveys a sense of the sublime, but it also soothes emotions: a nostalgic gesture that bids farewell to a world that has been destroyed. The poet Anna Kamińska wrote in the late 1970s that “*Elegy for Little Jewish Towns* is a lamentation after a cruel pogrom. It is a poem that would remain of Słonimski’s entire output, even

if the rest drowned and faded” (Kamieńska, 1977, p. 46). Yet it must be pointed out that the question of the pogrom (and of the Shoah) in Słonimski’s poem, contrary to Kamieńska’s assessment, is raised in the subtlest way, perhaps for fear of “appropriating” an experience of collective suffering that Słonimski, living in exile, only witnessed from afar, but perhaps also in recognition of the unseemliness of any aesthetic or artistic attempt to describe the Shoah. Thus, the centre of gravity of the poem and its general idea tend towards the future, not the wartime past. Bartłomiej Krupa (like Michael C. Steinlauf) remarks that the opening verses of this poem serve as an epigraph for almost every other text devoted to the history of local Jews, especially in the 1980s and 1990s – proof positive of a nostalgic literary formula for writing about this community. If so, it is a formula Słonimski co-founded. Recalling the first lines of Słonimski’s text, Krupa suggests that these verses introduce a sentimental, prayerful mood based on the recollection of the Jewish presence in the setting of small towns, which still exist in a certain sense under an unchanged name. Analysing the last verses of the work, Krupa notes how they are constructed in such a way as to convey a simple message: that two nations living in proximity to one another, Polish and Jewish, co-existed during the interwar period in peace and amity, and that only war and the Holocaust, which came from outside, ended this symbiosis. In fact, attendant on this message, the poem seems to convey a certain optimism, as if to say that it is only due to these outside influences, the shadow of the Holocaust, that the close relationship between Poles and Jews has been lost – not forever, however, because there is still hope for a future, as the closing lines of Słonimski’s poem claim, where the two nations will “come together fraternally and unite again”. Krupa indicates that here are two rhetorical conventions deployed in *Elegy*: the rhetoric of suffering that brings people together and the rhetoric of local, multicultural communities living in harmony. Over the last three decades, these conventions have come under increased scrutiny by researchers who have come to consider them naive – perhaps even, in the light of historical research, completely off base. Słonimski’s poem is an important testimony of a certain myth perpetuated in the minds of Poles and Polish Jews after the war (see Krupa, 2013, pp. 226–227).

The poem is also significant for artistic reasons: it is a song mourning narration, the loss of a world that never existed, by means of a unique lyricism. As Magdalena Ładoń pointed out, the phrase “no way” appears in the poem as many as five times, in connection to such words as “vain”, “leftovers”, “last” and “disappeared”, and to such phrases as “they will not find” and “have gone away”. This all seems to point to a conscious mythologisation of the non-existent little towns. The evolution in describing the *shtetl* tends to present it as an unreal place, “enchanted in time”; it is a place associated with the transference of a tangible reality, remembered by the author or learned through his relations with others individual memory, into the realm of the literary imagination. *Shtetl*, at the moment when Słonimski writes his poem, is considered to be a town of the dead, and so the poet is compelled to create a “funeral lament”, as Natan Gross describes *Elegy*. The work is dominated by the aesthetics of

nostalgia, which arises from a certain dissonance between the past and the present. As such, it is reminiscent of certain works of art with which Słonimski, an artist himself, would have surely been familiar: the visions of Marc Chagall, for example, whose nostalgia, lyricism, magic, and sadness co-create the “mythisational” potential of *Elegy*.

### Main Topics and Problems

Antoni Słonimski, writing *the Elegy for the Little Jewish Towns*, adds his voice to other poetic confessions concerning the tragedy of the Shoah. At the same time, however, it is a gesture connected with the personal experiences which the author himself witnessed. In this regard, it is worth turning our attention to the pre-war years, to the 1930s when Słonimski's texts dealt primarily with the rise of fascism, which he considered as the biggest threat. The author then became the object of attacks by Polish nationalist groups, pointing out his Jewish origins. When in 1938 he published the poem *Two Homelands*, proclaiming his “Jagiellonian” patriotism, open to various attitudes, nationalities and religions, he was publicly slapped by the right-wing writer Zygmunt Iphorski.

Thus *Elegy* can be conceived as a lamentation with a resounding personal dimension. Its specifics and mythisational character can be easily seen in the background of the text → *We, Polish Jews*, published in New York in 1945 by Julian Tuwim. While the lyricism of Słonimski's verse aims to produce a certain emotional tension, to evoke – and say farewell to – a lost world that the poet considers as his own point of origin, Tuwim (also a Polish Jew) regards the whole post-war situation differently. “I am Polish, because I like it that way”, he declares, which has been considered as a testimony to the final formation of the poet's Jewish identity. Słonimski, unlike Tuwim, never had problems with his double identity; he defined himself as Polish all his life, but he proudly spoke about his Jewish ancestors. Emphasising the different situation of Tuwim, his biographer Piotr Matywiecki writes: “Certainly Antoni Słonimski was someone different coming from a family assimilated culturally and religiously for generations, Józef Wittlin was also someone different. He intellectualised his first Jewishness, and the second he made the centre of his ethical attitude – the attitude of a Christian.” (Matywiecki, 2007, p. 316)

The *Elegy* of Antoni Słonimski, on the one hand, is a component of a nostalgic myth that was created in Polish literature after the war, and on the other, it can be read as proof of the diversity of attitudes and identities of Polish Jews.

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# The Elephants in Mauthausen (Slony v Mauthausene)

**Author:** Ján Johanides

**First Published:** 1985

**Translations:** Czech (*Sloni v Mauthausenu*, 1985); Hungarian (*Mauthauseni elefántok*, 1988).

**About the Author:** Ján Johanides (1934–2008), a Slovak prose writer and essayist, belonged to the 1960s generation. He came from a Lutheran family, his ancestors had emigrated from Moravia to Slovakia because of their faith. He studied at the Faculty of Arts in Bratislava, but was excluded from the faculty, due to his behaviour which was considered as “inconsistent with the morality of socialist society”. His literary work was inspired by existentialism as well as by the French Nouveau Roman. After the suppression of the Prague Spring, between 1972 and 1976, he was unable to publish. The fictional world in his literary works is very complex, sophisticated and provocative. That is true of his late works in the 1980s and 1990s which often include Jewish topics. The Shoah and fate of the Jews are represented by the viciousness and unpredictability of the modern world in Ján Johanides’ prose. The plots of his short stories and novels are filled with allusions, digressions, reminiscences, and anticipations. The realistic scenes of everyday life are intermixed with scenes of grotesqueness, unexpected brutality (murders and suicides) as well as dreams. Johanides’ characters, mostly outsiders or bizarre figures, are frequently unclear and enigmatic. The point of view is very limited. The plot is often full of contradictions, gaps and mysteries. Readers can perceive just a part of the characters’ complex and intricate minds.

**Further Important Publications:** *Zločin plachej lesbičky. Holomráz* (1991, The Crime of a Shy Lesbian. Black Frost; novellas); *Inzeráty pre večnosť* (1992, Advertisements for Eternity; short story); *Kocúr a zimný človek* (1994, Tomcat and Winter Man; novella).

## Content and Interpretation

The narrative components of the novel *The Elephants in Mauthausen* are very complex and sophisticated. In the novel, two former prisoners of the Nazis, a Slovakian communist who is a former miner, Fero Holenyšt (a telling name, meaning “Absolutely Nothing” in English) and a Dutch businessman Winston van Maase, meet 37 years after World War II in the small Central Slovakian town of Handlová. They talk about their memories of the Mauthausen concentration camp, remember the fate of their fellow prisoners who have gone mad or committed suicide since the war. Holenyšt saved van Maase’s life in the camp. Nevertheless, they mostly keep silent, because “it is impossible to discuss Mauthausen” (Johanides, 1985, p. 57). These words can be a hint to

the famous Adorno's statement that it is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz. "Mauthausen was an experiment with horrible lies and horrible truths" (p. 42). Surprisingly, the very identical sentences can be found in Johanides' later story *Tomcat and Winter Man* (1994): "I don't like to talk about Mauthausen! It is impossible to discuss Mauthausen!" (Johanides, 1994, p. 67). Both Holenyšt and van Maase, were in the resistance against the Nazis. They survived the concentration camp and want to testify in the trial against the brutal German doctor Gross, so-called "Gambusino", who has been caught in Brazil. But in the end, they see the contemporary world as one where brutality, egoism and forgetting the past have been restored.

The plot of *The Elephants in Mauthausen* is extraordinarily complicated, filled with digressions, reminiscences, and anticipations. The author uses different means to vary the style of the novel. The narrator does not merely use standard Slovak, but for instance uses also Czech in various modifications, the language of Slovakian Jews, other languages (German, French or Spanish), different dialects and non-standard phrases.

The Shoah in Slovakia is presented in a few significant scenes. For instance, in the story of a Jewish merchant named Ringelhaupt depicted by Holenyšt's individual memory. Ringelhaupt was an honest man. At the moment that the Jewish synagogue was set on fire, Ringelhaupt died of a heart attack. Holenyšt also recalls another story. In Mauthausen he saw Alfred Ganz, a prisoner and cook, giving an egg to a young Jewish prisoner. Ganz was caught, his right hand was broken twice and then he was executed. Later after the war, Holenyšt surprisingly meets Ganz in Dresden in East Germany. Ganz tells to him that he had only been saved by sheer luck. But after returning home to Dresden, he had found nobody alive and he could not recognise his street which was in ruins. He collapsed and was taken to a mental hospital. His doctor was a young Jew whose office walls were covered with posters of pin-up girls. The doctor told him: "So your first name is Alfred. [...] Every German should feel like Alfred Rosenberg. You were responsible for the fate of the Jews. [...] You Germans need more sexuality, and less militarism" (Johanides, 1985, pp. 72–73). Ganz was shocked and he could not explain his position. He was not a Nazi, he had been imprisoned in the camps Buchenwald and Mauthausen. Eventually, he thought of a distant relative named Rosenberg and began to feel like Alfred Rosenberg. (The Nazi racial ideologist, executed in the Nuremberg trials in 1946.) He spent six years in the psychiatry department. After meeting Holenyšt and telling him his story he only repeats „Ist das wahr?“ "Is it true?" Holenyšt and Ganz celebrate their meeting in Dresden all night. In the morning, they find out it is carnival time. They meet a group of merry and unscrupulous French students singing Mozart. Suddenly Ganz sinks to the ground and whispers "Holenyšt... Holenyšt... Ich sterbe. Das ist wahr." "... I am dying, that is true" (p. 76).

### Main Topics and Problems

According to Peter Zajac, Johanides' works are based on a "network of metaphors that illuminate each other" (Zajac, 2009, p. 758). Throughout the story, recurring motifs with symbolic significance, especially the motif of "elephants" connect a changing flow of images. At first, this motif appears in the form of elephantiasis, a disease that is characterised by the thickening of the skin and malformation of the afflicted person's body parts. Before the war, Holenyšt was convinced, he had this disease because his hands had swollen. For the second time, the word "elephant" evokes a scene in Mauthausen. Holenyšt and his friend Stráňai (who probably was a real person – due to the fact the book was also dedicated to the author's relative Karol Stráňai) find a French textbook for children in Mauthausen that has pictures of elephants in it. At this moment the sadistic Nazi guard Gambusin begins to shoot the prisoners. In the middle of the shooting Stráňai reads the captions under the pictures and laughs lamentably. The caption reads "with God and his blessing" (Johanides, 1985, p. 31). That reminds van Maase of another scene in Mauthausen where he sees a group of Jewish or Roma children in front of a bus that serves as a gas chamber. They are extremely exhausted and are speaking French. Suddenly one boy says to the others: "Come, we'll play elephants!" (p. 82). He makes tusks from his fingers and a trunk from his arms. So the children playing elephants enter the gas chamber. Later, van Maase meets a bizarre old man one night in Amsterdam. His face is similar to Rembrandt's self-portrait and his gestures similar to elephants' moves in the zoo. Finally, the elephant motif appears during van Maase's visit to Indonesia. He buys a miniature figure of an elephant there. The elephant is incredibly flawless; it had been made by an Indian in a British concentration camp. It seems, there are some words in Sanskrit or Hebrew on the figure: maybe "peace and life" (p. 104). These words are analogous to the words in the textbook from Mauthausen "with God and his blessing".

Holenyšt and van Maase are both traumatised by their Mauthausen experience. "Mauthausen presents mankind from another point of view, from the side of mankind's inner forest in Brazil" (p. 42). This is the invisible Mauthausen in their mind. And they both feel, the cruelty and brutality (for instance students dying and at the same time Ganz is dying in Dresden, the sadistic games of young people in the hotel where van Maase is staying, but also van Maase's and Holenyšt's children) continue in the contemporary world in the West as well as in the East.

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# Emma and the Death's Head Hawkmoth (Ema a Smrtihlav)

**Author:** Peter Krištúfek

**First Published:** 2014

**About the Author:** Peter Krištúfek (1973–2018) was a Slovak writer and filmmaker. He graduated with a degree in Film and Television Direction from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. He worked as a moderator in various radio stations. Krištúfek filmed around 20 documentaries as well as some feature films based on his own screenplays. For instance, his documentary *Join Us When You're a Rebel* (2012, *Pridaj sa k nám, keď si rebel*) depicted the extremist movement in Slovakia. In his works, he often used dramatic storylines and fantastic motifs. He died in a bus accident near Banská Bystrica in 2018.

**Further Important Publications:** *Dom hluchého* (2012, *House of the Deaf Man*; novel); *Atlas zabúdania* (2013, *The Guide Book of Forgetting*; historical documents from 1914 to 2013); *Nepresné miesto, Voľným okom, Hviezda vystrihnutého záberu* (2018, *An Inaccurate Place, With a Free Eye, The Star of the Scene That Was Edited Out*; two collections of short stories and one novella).

## Content and Interpretation

The novella is divided into four parts. It begins and ends with a short background story in 1961. The main character, Simon (Šimon), 29 years old, spends his holiday on the Black Sea coast in Bulgaria with his wife and two children. He can't swim and this is the first time he sees the sea.

The main narrative is set in Slovakia between 1937 and 1945. In 1937 Simon is five years old and lives with his parents and his younger brother Leo in Bratislava. His father is a Czech architect who designs dams and his mother is a Slovakian Jew who makes women's clothes sewing fashion costumes and women's dresses. Both brothers visit a synagogue with their mother on Saturdays and a Catholic church with their father on Sundays.

After the foundation of the Slovak clerofascist republic and the outbreak of World War II, the family's situation becomes complicated. The father must leave to the Czech lands and the mother and children are threatened by persecution for being Jews. In 1942, when the transport is coming, Leo and his mother flee to Central Slovakia while Simon is hidden in the village of Biskupice near Bratislava, in the barn of his mother's friend, the old *néni* (aunt) Marika. Simon spends all his time alone with smelly pigs and goats. In the winter, he suffers from the cold, his toes get frostbitten. He reads some magazines and watches a death's head hawkmoth in the barn. Simon invents a story in his imagination where a beautiful woman named Emma is lying in a deck chair on the beach and is threatened by a German General wearing a picture of a

death's head hawkmoth on his cap. He calls him General Death's Head Hawkmoth. The General imprisons Emma in his house but Simon sets her free and they run away together.

After the war, Simon's father comes for him and they return to their flat in Bratislava. All the family members survive. His mother wants to thank Marika for Simon's rescue, but Marika has disappeared without a trace. At the end, the novella returns to the background story. On the beach, Simon sees his wife in a yellow swimsuit sitting under an umbrella. She looks similar to Emma.

The story is narrated in the third person, nevertheless from the point of view of the main character Simon. His naive, unburdened mind draws a sharp contrast to his dangerous situation. That is why he escapes to daydreams. Emma on the one hand is a figure that he saw in a magazine advertising sunscreen. She embodies peace and love. On the other hand, General Death's Head Hawkmoth incorporates danger and evil. Simon saw this moth in his father's butterfly collection and it was also on the uniforms of the Slovak fascists.

### Main Topics and Problems

*Emma and the Death's Head Hawkmoth* was Krištúfek's third work of prose inspired by Slovak history, it followed *House of the Deaf Man* (2012) as well as *The Guide Book of Forgetting* (2013). The author was interested in Slovak historical events in the 20th century that indirectly project into the present. According to Krištúfek, general models of human behaviour could be found there.

The perspective of a child is very often present in Holocaust literature. *Inter alia*, it is used in Arnošt Lustig's → *Diamonds of the Night*, Henryk Grynberg's → *The Jewish War*, Josef Škvorecký's → *The Menorah*, Ota Pavel's → *The Death of the Beautiful Deer*, Vincent Šikula's → *The Lilies of Erika*, Wilhelm Dichter's → *God's Horse* and in many films. Similar to all these works, Peter Krištúfek exploits childish naivety, simple-heartedness and imagination. Unlike other literary works, the prematurely growing up of Jewish children in ghettos or camps (for instance Wojdowski's → *Bread for the Departed* or Ota Pavel's → *The Death of the Beautiful Deer*) is not presented here.

The second aspect of the narration is its sophistication and refinement. The author uses a complex network of motifs (the death's head hawkmoth), their variations (Emma in Simon's imagination in the barn, Simon's real wife on the Bulgarian beach). Some important plot connections are intentionally omitted and readers have to guess them. Fast changes of situations and black humour are reminiscent of an action movie. This art of narration is similar to Pavel Rankov and his novel → *It Happened on the First September (or Whenever)* or Igor Ostachowicz's → *Night of the Living Jews*.

The background story, taking place in Bulgaria more than 15 years after the war, manifests Simon's trauma and his physical disability (frostbitten toes). As at the time of his hiding during the war, he is still feeling threatened and sees the dream figure of Emma in his wife.

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JH

# The Empty Field (Puste pole)

**Author:** Tadeusz Hołuj

**First Published:** 1963

**About the Author:** Tadeusz Hołuj (1916 in Cracow – 1985 in Cracow) was a poet, prose writer, and playwright. After graduating in Polish philology and law at the Jagielloonian University, he worked as an editor for the magazine *Nasz Wyras*, as well as taking part in the September 1939 campaign against Germany. During the German occupation, he joined the resistance group Union of Armed Struggle (Związek Walki Zbrojnej), and was later arrested and imprisoned in Auschwitz and Flossenbürg concentration camps, where he joined the camp resistance movement. After World War II, he was active in the politics of the Polish People's Republic, and a member of both the Communist Party and Parliament.

**Further Important Publications:** *Dom pod Oświęcimiem* (1948, The House in Oświęcim; drama); *Jutrzenka i inne opowiadania* (1956, Dawn and other stories; short stories); *Koniec naszego świata* (1958, The End of Our World; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

Hołuj's novel *The Empty Field*, alongside Bogdan Wojdowski's short story *The Naked Land* (Naga ziemia) and *The May Beetles* (Chrabąszcze) by Marian Pankowski, is one of the few works to question the innocence of the victims of Nazi terror – a Polish national taboo. The story is set in the 1960s at the former site of the Treblinka extermination camp, and involves several former prisoners, including Leon, who now works in the area as a janitor. Because the men know the history of the place and the location of the barracks perfectly, they begin, with the help of local peasants, to search for Jewish gold hidden in block 26 where several transports of Jews were incinerated. The idea that treasure may be buried in the ground beneath the camp comes from Werner, a former commandant of Treblinka (and other sources). It is claimed that Werner himself handed over the treasure during the Munich trial, which took place after the war and was aimed at prosecuting Nazi criminals. The truth of this claim, however, remains uncertain, and many characters in Hołuj's play see it as a legend or rumour. As the work of the diggers proceeds, the plot turns to the figure of the museum director (the Director), who is primarily interested in preparations for the jubilee, and not in the matter of the memorial site or its profanation. We also learn of the private conflicts between the two former prisoners, Adam and Leon, as each one argues for his right to the gold. After the death of Leon, the Director brings in excavators to search the ground – now he too would like to see the gold recovered and deposited in the bank. In the background of these events, a team of filmmakers is creating a documentary on the Holocaust. The actresses taking part in the documentary are forced to act out dras-

tic scenes in the crematorium – to shave their heads, run naked, etc. – sequences in which Hołuj demonstrates a certain lack of psychological depth. Hołuj's play also seems to lack any kind of metanarrative that would help the audience to distinguish the actors' role-playing from the memories of camp survivors, so that there is no clear delineation between truth and fiction. This is partly deliberate, as the author aims to present us with a confused intermingling of memory and reality, and in this way to explore the virtually schizophrenic reality of Treblinka in the second half of the 20th century. In order to achieve this, he uses a device like the one in Leopold Buczkowski's novel *The First Glory*, which similarly describes the surroundings of the Bełżec extermination camp in connection with the making of a film on the Holocaust. If the model for this motif is, on the one hand, *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann, a documentary nearly ten hours in length, broadcast in Poland for the first time in 1987, it is, on the other, the films reportedly made by an amateur Nazi film crew of Krystian Piwowarski's *Women in the Meadow and I*, published in his collection → *More Gas, Comrades!* At the centre of *The Empty Field* we find a plot concerning the dispute over plans to build a memorial on the former site of the extermination camp. Hołuj presents various possible projects to commemorate the site, from anthropocentric to ecological (a proposal to allow the forest to overgrow the former camp). It is the Director who supports the anthropomorphisation of Treblinka, proposing to turn it into a memorial park, erect a monument, fill in the pits, and lay asphalt over the remains, effectively sealing off the underground from any relation with the living. The peasants, however, have landed on an altogether different idea. In need of farmland, they propose turning the site into crops and grassland, without any regard for the human remains that lie beneath them. The project of commemorating the site by paving it over with concrete is criticised by both the gold diggers and the peasants, since it would irreversibly cut off all contact between the living and the land in which the Jews and gold are buried.

### Main Topics and Problems

Hołuj's play engages principally with the discussion on the best way to commemorate the former sites of extermination camps – a discussion that continued with the publication of Jáchym Topol's novel → *The Devil's Workshop*. On the one hand, as written anonymously in *The General Weekly*, various attempts have been made to demolish and plough these sites. On the other, plans have also been made for commemorating them in a sophisticated manner, drawing on the idiom of modern architecture (as in the proposal for a monument called "The Road", which was submitted for the competition at Auschwitz Birkenau in 1958 by a team of Polish artists led by Oskar N. Hansen). Recent discussions taking the side of non-interference typically argue for leaving trees and other vegetation intact, since removing them would amount to an act of ecocide on the historical site of a genocide. In *The Empty Field*, the Director is in favour of paving over Treblinka, while peasants would like to plough it. In contrast, the narrative of Leon and Adam presents an image of Treblinka as a kind of El Dorado for gold diggers, reminiscent of attitudes reported by Rachel Auerbach in her 1947 book *In the*

*Fields of Treblinka*. The local population, meanwhile, have been conducting their own excavations for decades, as Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross write in *Golden Harvest* (Gross, Grudzińska-Gross, 2012).

Hołuj shows the plunder of Jewish gold and the profanation of mass graves from the perspective of individuals rather than the historical bird's-eye view. As a critique of the myth of the innocence of the Polish *Häftling*, Hołuj's play does not describe the phenomenon of extermination camp gold diggers in detail (as they are, for example, in *Golden Harvest* by Jan Tomasz Gross). Conversely, Hołuj breaks new ground by openly portraying the Polish peasants' pragmatic view that the former site of the camps should be given back to farmers and restored to its original purpose as farmland – a subject once considered too controversial for such representations. As one of Hołuj's characters points out in *The Empty Field*, "people would rather have milk than great mourning" (Hołuj, 1979, p. 147).

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# The Escape from Yasnaya Polyana (Ucieczka z Jasnej Polany) and Shakespeare (Szekspir)

**Author:** Adolf Rudnicki

**First Published:** *Shakespeare* (1948, in the volume under the same title); *The Escape from Yasnaya Polyana* (1949, in the volume under the same title).

**Translations:** Czech (*Útěk z Jasně Poljany, Shakespeare*, in *Živé a mrtvé moře*, 1958); French (*La Fuite de Iasnaïa Poliana*, 1973); Italian (*Cronache del getto*, 1995).

**About the Author:** Adolf Rudnicki (1909–1990) was born as Aron Hirschhorn (also Hirschhorn) in Żabno near Tarnów. Many sources list a false date (1912) and place of birth, probably due to Rudnicki's own efforts to "[blur] the traces of biographical identification" (Wróbel, 2004, p. 18). In 1928 he joined the army, and in the 1930s he moved to Warsaw, where he joined bohemian circles. During the interwar period he published in numerous literary periodicals and made his literary debut in 1930 with the short story *The Death of the Operator* (*Śmierć operatora*), which he published under the pseudonym Rudnicki. Two years later, he published his first novel, *Rats* (*Szczury*). In 1939, he took part in the September campaign (the defensive war against the German invasion of Poland) and was taken prisoner, but managed to escape to Lviv, where he stayed until 1942. After leaving Lviv, he lived in Warsaw on the Aryan side of the city. As Piotr Kuncewicz recalls, Rudnicki spent a short time, by his own choice, in the ghetto (*Finezje literackie*, 1997, part I), where he was involved in a conspiracy and took part in the Warsaw Uprising. In 1944 he moved to Lublin, and later to Łódź, which was an important centre for literary and artistic life after the war.

**Further Important Publications:** *Szczury* (*Rats*, 1932; novel); *Niekochana* (*Unloved*, 1937; short story); *Doświadczenia* (*Experiences*, 1939; novel); *Wielkanoc* (*Easter*, 1947; short story); *Czysty nurt* (*The Crystal Stream*, 1948; short story); *Moja czarna broda* (*My Black Beard*, 1948; short story); *Kartka znaleziona pod murem straceń* (*A Card Found Under the Wall of Executions*, 1948; short story); *Żywe i martwe morze* (*Living and Dead Sea*, 1952; short stories); *Niebieskie kartki* (*Blue Cards*, 1956; feuilletons); *Kupiec łódzki* (*Merchant from Łódź*, 1963; short story); *Złote okna* (*The Golden Windows*, 1963; short stories).

## Content and Interpretation

While such stories as *Ascension*, *The Crystal Stream*, and *A Card Found Under the Wall of Executions* may seem like more obvious choices in a collection of Holocaust literature, the two lesser known texts by Rudnicki chosen here, relate to more fundamental issues concerning the role of literature and art after the Holocaust, according to Theodor Adorno's famous statement about writing poems after Auschwitz, as well as other

more current discussions (Rosenfeld, 1988). *Shakespeare* traces the conversation between two writers who had competed for the favour of reviewers and readers before the war. The main character, Jakub Z., meets another writer, Maciej Lewicki, whose prewar career was an object of envy for Jakub, and who has had, as he claims, a significant role in his literary failures. Their meeting becomes a painful confrontation between their earlier beliefs and prejudices and the postwar reality. Old jealousies are replaced by compassion. The main character takes note of the misery of his prewar Jewish adversary, a misery that concerns not only Lewicki's inability to write, but also the sorry condition of his physical state, which seems to have nothing to do with the elegant and successful young artist he was before the war. In light of these observations their past animosities no longer seem to matter: "I felt close to this creature – so human, so clumsy, so much like me" (Rudnicki, 1948, p. 241). The tragedy of Lewicki, who goes by the ironic nickname "Shakespeare", is a creative inability based on his deep conviction concerning the insufficiency of words, and a deep-rooted fear caused by the disappearance of the world that existed before. The crisis of literature in the face of the atrocities committed during the war constitutes the main plot of the story, a crisis summed up by a rather sarcastic statement that appears in its opening paragraph: "literature has not sacrificed so much" (p. 221). A flourishing literature, however, would now serve only to hide the atrocities of the war, and all writers are aware too that their literary testimony must bear the burden and memory of its victims. "We are" – writes Rudnicki – "like overloaded sacks. But we have no longer strength to experience once again what we were looking at. We are burned out inside" (p. 221). According to Rudnicki, the title, referring to the great playwright, compels one to think about the "beautiful art of writing" – an art which, in the face of the atrocities, "did not fulfil its elementary duty to humanity" (Dąbrowska, 2015, p. 220). This leads him to the observation that "writers and poets like William Shakespeare did not prepare readers to live in the Age of the Ovens" (p. 220). Survivors in Rudnicki's discourse are often perceived also as Holocaust victims – as those who survived, and who now bear a significant burden of remorse and an obligation to commemorate those who died: "The writer had to face experiences not easy to express, in which the joy of saving his own life could not be separated from the most intense suffering for the same reason" (Wróbel, 2004, pp. 116–117).

*The Escape from Yasnaya Polyana*, from a collection published in 1949, is divided into three parts. The first one of these takes place "two years after the last war" in the "city of Z." (Rudnicki, 1949, p. 157) in Switzerland, where the congress of the PEN International is to take place. Everyone is curious about the German delegation, as well as the German writer Klaus Hofer, who will attend as a special guest of the congress. Hofer, who will be the main character of *The Escape from Yasnaya Polyana*, is "the great prosecutor of the German nation" (Rudnicki, 1949, p. 158), "the sum of all Germans" (p. 159), "the conscience of the nation, the conscience of the era" (p. 161), who "left [Germany] terrified of European deafness" (p. 160) and has been living in the United States for years. Rudnicki seems to have found inspiration for the character of

Hofer in Thomas Mann's biography. During the congress, the old writer meets his son Teodor and a friend from Germany, Oswald Hanemann. Both Teodor and Hanemann share a perspective on the role of the artist and of art in the life of the nation that is diametrically opposed to that of Hofer. The second part takes place two months later, when the writer's journey through Europe – especially to Poland, where “he wants to visit places of human martyrdom” (p. 168) – comes to an end. Father and son meet once more, and Teodor tries to convince the old writer to return to Germany, which Hofer refuses to do (p. 176). Teodor sees his father's trip to Poland as an insult to the Germans and points out the participation of Poles in the Holocaust (pp. 170–171), further describing his father's choice as the careless “act of a twelve-year-old boy” (p. 185) and the result of creative exhaustion. He judged the behaviour of his father as an “escape from Yasnaya Polyana”, in reference to the biography of Leo Tolstoy (Jaworski, 2014, p. 25). However, Hofer himself considers his decision as a matter of morality.

### Main Topics and Problems

Both stories belong to the literary cycle *Age of the Ovens*, a term coined by Rudnicki which has since become standard in Holocaust discourse. The author had planned for the collections in which the stories were first published to be introductory volumes for a larger series, one unfortunately never completed by the author. The name of the cycle, an obvious reference to the Holocaust, draws as well from biblical symbolism connected with the theme of the fiery furnace.

The stories feature many of the themes typical of Rudnicki's postwar work, including a deep fear about the insufficiency of art, burdened as it is with moral responsibility; exhaustion and lack of creative force in the face of the Holocaust; the problem of preserving the memory of places, people, and times that were “wiped out” by the cataclysm of World War II; and the question of carrying responsibility for memory by means of literature. Helena Zaworska calls Rudnicki a “chronicler of drownings”. Writing on Rudnicki's postwar work, Józef Wróbel suggests that the literary process should be treated here as a “measure of suffering” (Wróbel, 2004, p. 9). The stories from both volumes were written between 1939–1948, and included much later in the collection *Living and Dead Sea*. Suspended between Polish and Jewish identities, Rudnicki tries to find a literary form for describing the mass extermination, led by his belief in the important role and value of art, as well as in the heroism and dignity of the human being. This propensity for the creation of literary heroes was criticised by Tadeusz Borowski (Wal, 2002, p. 122). But according to Anna Wal, his stories present “an optimistic testimony, as one can find there an assumption about indestructible human ability to resist evil and save elementary values even under pressure of the greatest fear and against the powerful forces of history” (Wal, 2002, p. 122). Rudnicki's postwar literary works, according to Kazimierz Wyka, performed the extremely important function of “solidary memory” (Wyka, 1948, p. XX). The works from this stage in Rudnicki's literary activity often overshadow those of his prewar work, as well as his

later achievements, and he is persistently classified as “the writer of the Holocaust” alongside such names as Zofia Nałkowska (→ *Medallions*), Tadeusz Borowski (→ *A Farewell to Maria*), and Ladislav Fuks (→ *Mr Theodore Mundstock*).

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UKN

# An Excursion to the Museum (Wycieczka do muzeum)

**Author:** Tadeusz Różewicz

**First Published:** 1961

**Translations:** Różewicz' works have been translated into 49 languages. English: *An Excursion to the Museum* (2002); the text is part of anthologies and collected works in many languages.

**About the Author:** Tadeusz Różewicz (1921–2014) was a poet, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, essayist and translator, who experienced the “fulfilled apocalypse” of World War II and the Holocaust. When his education was cut short in 1939 by the outbreak of World War II, he worked temporary jobs to support his family, and fought for two years in the Polish underground Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*). It was at this time that he started writing patriotic poems and poetic prose, and working as editor for the underground newspaper *Czyn Zbrojny*. Różewicz studied history of art at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow (1945–1949), where he became involved with the neo-avant-garde „Grupa Krakowska”. In 1950, Różewicz made a sojourn to Hungary, and lived in Wrocław from 1968 until his death. His extensive work, which was shaped by the hardship of war, the occupation, and the Holocaust, made him a widely recognised author as well as a highly regarded moral authority.

**Further Important Publications:** *Niepokój* (1947, Faces of Anxiety/Restlessness; poems); *Opadły liście z drzew* (1955, The Leaves Have Fallen from The Trees; short stories); *Poezje zebrane* (1957, Collected Poems); *Przerwany egzamin* (1960, The Interrupted Exam; short stories); *Kartoteka* (1960, The Card Index; play); *Grupa Laokoona* (1961, The Laocoon Group; play); *Świadkowie albo nasza mała stabilizacja* (1962, The Witness; play); *Niepokój. Wybór wierszy 1945–1961* (1963, Faces of Anxiety/Restlessness: Selected Poems); *Stara kobieta wysiaduje* (1968, The Old Woman Broods; play); *Śmierć w starych dekoracjach* (1970, Death amidst Old Stage Props; novel); *Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego* (1971, Preparations for an Author's Evening; essays and sketches); *Białe małżeństwo* (1975, White Marriage; play); *Conversation with a Prince and Other Poems* (1982, selection in English); *Pułapka* (1982, The Trap; play); *Płaskorzeźba* (1991, Bas-Relief; poems); *Zawsze fragment. Recycling* (1996, Always Fragment. Recycling; poems).

## Content and Interpretation

Różewicz wrote *An Excursion to the Museum* in 1959, taking inspiration from his visit to Auschwitz and from the official propaganda on Auschwitz at that time – a time when the former extermination camp was a “principal destination of school groups and workplace groups” (Kosicka, 2016, p. 126). The resulting text, published in the

Polish weekly *Nowa Kultura* in 1961, is an homage to Tadeusz Borowski (→ *A Farewell to Maria*). Beginning with its parodic title, the text demonstrates a new approach to language, expression and style in Holocaust literature. With the help of the “prosaicisation of lyrical speech” (Vogler, 1949, p. 4), the author conveys his disgust for the spectacle of Holocaust tourism. In a manner reminiscent of Borowski’s deadpan tone, Różewicz describes crowds of cheerful, colourfully dressed tourists heading casually to the museum as a sightseeing destination. In search of entertainment, the visitors “repeat sentimental clichés and quote propaganda slogans” (Kosicka, 2016, p. 126) conveyed by stereotypes of Polish literature (Sienkiewicz, Kraszewski), and – in confrontation with the “banality of evil” (Hannah Arendt) people can be seen “eating plums and sandwiches” and to “meander among the display cases”. Without any self-reflection, they ask such questions as “Sir, where are the gallows?” and “Where’s the hair?” (Różewicz, 2002, p. 1). A tour presentation provides “matter-of-fact information” about “numbers, kilograms of clothing, women’s hair, thousands of shaving brushes, combs and bowls, and millions of burned bodies” (Kosicka, 2016, p. 126). Różewicz’s story depicts a superficial response to the Holocaust, a departure from “normal” life to which the visitors will soon return. “The people who visited the museum were taking seats in compartments. Little was said about the museum” (Różewicz, 2002, p. 1.). Together with two other small works – *Massacre of the Boys* (*Rzeź chłopców*) and *The Braid* (*Warkoczyk*), *An Excursion to the Museum* has become a fixture in Polish coursework and part of the canon of Polish studies. Różewicz’s “reportage” stands furthermore in close kinship with Zofia Nałkowska’s → *Medallions* and Tadeusz Borowski’s works on the Holocaust and concentration camps, and it has given inspiration to such literary accomplishments as Mikuláš Kováč’s collection of poems → *The Earth Under Your Feet*.

### Main Topics and Problems

The motifs of war and the atrocities of the Holocaust have been present in Różewicz’s works since his literary debut, as has the poet’s quest to find an adequate language to convey the horrors of war and genocide, so as to give adequate expression to his first-hand experiences. After returning home safely (his brother Janusz was executed by the Gestapo), and in response to Adorno’s well-known assessment of literature after Auschwitz, Różewicz emphasises the importance of the task that awaits him, namely “To create poetry after Auschwitz” (as he writes in the poem “I Did Espy a Marvellous Monster”), and “to reconstruct the human being bit by bit”, taking ethics as a source of his creative work. With his ascetic style, and by means of facts both brutal and banal, as well as an element of the grotesque, Różewicz has become one of the “most respected innovators and stylists in modern European history” (Fowler, 2013, p. 1). With the passage of time, the Holocaust has come to be regarded in the broader global context of genocide and the constant existential threat to human existence. This is why readings of Różewicz’s work so often lead to new interpretations. As a self-confessed “prophet of the waste”, Różewicz also anticipated the ecological crisis, as in his play

*An Old Woman Broods* (Stara kobieta wysiaduje). In his work *Recycling*, Różewicz presents a collection of histories, sensual and brutal – of both “human and animal flesh” –, that trace his experience of war and of writing, as well as the close relationship between words and waste, forcing his readers to reflect on the “living forms” (Hopkin, 2001, p. 4) through which a new art comes into being.

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HCT

## A Farewell to Maria (Pożegnanie z Marią)

**Author:** Tadeusz Borowski

**First Published:** 1948

**Translations:** German (*Die steinerne Welt*, 1963; *Bei uns in Auschwitz*, 1982); French (*Le monde de Pierre*, 1964); Czech (*Kamenný svět*, 1966; *Rozloučení s Marií*, 1987); English (*This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, 1967; *We Were in Auschwitz*, 2000); Slovak (*Rozlúčka s Máriou*, 1974); Swedish (*Välkomma till gaskammaren, mina damer och herrar*, 1974); Spanish (*Despedida de Maria*, 1977); Italian (*Paesaggio dopa la battaglia*, 1988; *Da questa parte, per il gas*, 2009); Greek (*Apo 'dō gia t' aéria, kyríes kai kýrioi*, 1988); Russian (*Proščanje s Mariej*, 1989); Hebrew (*Peridah mi-Maryah*, 1996); and many others.

**Film Adaptations:** *Pożegnanie z Marią* (A Farewell to Maria), TV adaptation, 1966; *Krajobraz po bitwie* (Landscape after the Battle), dramatic film based mainly on the short story *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem* (The Battle of Grunwald), 1970; *Pożegnanie z Marią* (A Farewell to Maria), feature film, 1993.

**About the Author:** Tadeusz Borowski (1922–1951), born in Zhitomir (today Ukraine) into a Polish family, went to Poland in 1932 with his brother. During World War II, Borowski began his underground studies in Polish literature at the illegal Warsaw University and wrote poetry, publishing in 1942 his clandestine collection *Wherever the Earth* (Gdziekolwiek ziemia). In February 1943, searching for his fiancée Maria, he was ambushed by the Gestapo in her apartment, imprisoned in Pawiak prison and then sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp in April 1943 and deported later to the Daumgarten, a subcamp of Natzweiler-Struthof (1944) and Dachau (1945). After they both made their way back to Poland in 1946, he started to publish in the press. His reviews and short stories caused a lot of discussions and were heavily attacked by Catholic circles. He published two collections of short stories, *A Farewell to Maria* and *The World of Stone*. From 1948 Borowski began a close collaboration with the Communist regime and joined the Polish Worker's Party, believing that communism was the only political force truly capable of preventing any future Auschwitz. As a journalist, he published numerous collections of short stories and articles supportive of the regime. On 3 July 1951 Tadeusz Borowski committed suicide at the age of 28.

**Further Important Publications:** *Imiona nurtu* (1945, Names of the Current; poems); *Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu* (with Krystyn Olszewski and Janusz Nel Siedlecki, 1946. We Were in Auschwitz; short stories); *Poezje* (1974, Poetry); *Utwory wybrane* (1991, Selected Works); *Niedyskrecje pocztowe. Korespondencja Tadeusza Borowskiego* (2001,

Postal Indiscretions: The Correspondence of Tadeusz Borowski); *Pisma w czterech tomach* (2003, Writings in Four Volumes).

### Content and Interpretation

One of the key issues is the content of this collection. Printed first in Warsaw in 1948, *Farewell to Maria* consists of only five short stories: Farewell to Maria, A Day at Harmenz, This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen, Death of an Insurgent, and the Battle of Grunwald. Almost all of the further editions also contain short stories which were written earlier, e.g. from the collection *We Were in Auschwitz* published in Munich in 1946 and written by Borowski (119198), Janusz Nel Siedlecki (6643) and Krystyn Olszewski (75817) with their concentration camp numbers on the cover. The authorship of the individual works and of foreword to this collection is not clear (Mikulski, 1954). Before Borowski came back from the displaced persons camp to Poland in June 1946 two of his short stories A Day at Harmenz and Transport Sosnowiec-Będzin further known as This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen, were published in the monthly *Twórczość* in April 1946.

The young author gained undoubted fame after a devastating, ironic review of Kossak → *From the Abbys*. He attacked the traditionally martyrological way of looking at camp reality, emphasising the solidarity of the victims. According to Borowski the writer's duty is a peculiar examination of the conscience: anyone who survived in this inhuman area had to survive at the expense of others. His distinctive voice started large polemics which were continued until the late eighties (Krupa, 2018). Most of all Borowski was accused of nihilism, anti-Catholicism and Marxism. Critics very often mistakenly confused the narrator with the author (see f.e. Miłosz, 1953). From this point of view his polemics and almost all prosaic works from the short period of 1946–1948 constitute a very coherent vision of the world of the concentration camp and explore the depths of human degradation.

As the writer intended, further editions also contain the short story A Boy with the Bible (Chłopiec z Biblią) and The January Offensive (Ofensywa styczniowa). It is also worth mentioning that Borowski's second collection *The World of Stone* contains many other important short stories touching upon the subject of the Holocaust: A True Story (Opowiadanie z prawdziwego życia), The Death of Schillinger (Śmierć Schillingera), The Man with the Package (Człowiek z paczką), The Supper (Kolacja), Silence (Milczenie) or Meeting with a Child (Spotkanie z dzieckiem). The story The Death of Schillinger was inspired by the actual event in Auschwitz in October 1943. It has been adapted by several other authors, among others, Arnošt Lustig in → *A Prayer for Kateřina Horovitzova*.

### Main Topics and Problems

The main topic of Borowski's short stories is his own vision of World War II and Nazi concentration camps, separate from the Polish martyrologic-patriotic literature. The narrative link of the prose cycle is the narrator Tadek. Autobiographical elements with

fictional elements meet in this character to which Borowski even gives his own name, as the author takes on the main character's guilt. In the beginning Tadek is a young student from Warsaw, and later he is a prisoner of Auschwitz and other camps. He tries to survive by undertaking various auxiliary functions in the camp hospital and warehouse when Jews from the incoming transports are sent to the gas chambers (This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen). In *A Day at Harmenz* Tadek has a foreman's function and becomes a privileged prisoner. Generally, the narrator who is starving, is abused and cheated, absorbs the mechanism of the camp struggle for existence as a natural reality, in which adaptation and egoism, submission to persecutors and ruthlessness towards fellow prisoners are the conditions of survival: "Because the living are always right against the dead" (Borowski, 1991, p. 94). Through the prism of the character's average *lager* consciousness, the elementary emotional reflexes and moral values of external reality like compassion, honesty, solidarity, and dignity are no longer valid in the world of the camp. In the writer's concept, the concentration camp is drawn as a model of Fascist order, an extreme but logical consequence of the system of exploitation, conquest and terror (Werner, 1971). As the narrator of Auschwitz, *Our Home* is saying: "we are laying the foundations for some new, monstrous civilisation" (p. 109).

The violation of humanity is particularly tragic here, because the victims are also subjected to criminal purposes, forcing them not only to submissive behaviour, but also to reconcile themselves with the crimes and to participate in them (Wirth, 1965, pp. 42–51). One of the most touching scenes is from *The People Who Walked On* where Polish prisoners play football on the field and in the background Jews are led to the gas chambers: "between one and the other corner three thousand people were gassed behind me" (Borowski, 1991, p. 125).

The title story *A Farewell to Maria* depicts a slightly different topic and stylistic approach (Wyka, 1948) where Borowski shows the reality of "normal life" in an occupied Warsaw. The action of the story is set outside of the camps but the narrator notices similar symptoms of complicity in the occupation reality ruled by fear, violence, deceit and an unscrupulous fight for life. The people are deprived of the right to a normal existence, and suffer from hunger and cold. In order to survive, they have to cheat each other, steal, take part in price-gouging. He also trades with the ghetto. Tadeusz's beloved Maria distributes moonshine. This black market work is the price of survival. Tadeusz deals with poetry, Maria studies in secret groups. Unfortunately, in the end, during one of the round-ups, Maria as an "aryan-Semie mischling was taken with the Jewish transport to the notorious camp by the sea, gassed in a crematorium chamber, and her body was probably turned into soap" (Borowski, 1991, p. 179).

The provocative nature of the collection sharpens its strictly observed naturalistic style in a version reminiscent of American behaviourism (eg. Hemingway's prose), and thus avoiding all of the author's commentary and descriptions of the psyche. One exception is in *Auschwitz, Our Home* which is based on letters written by Borowski to his fiancée Maria Rundo.

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BK

# The Final Station (Umschlagplatz)

**Author:** Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz

**First Published:** 1988

**Translations:** French (*La dernière gare: Umschlagplatz*, 1989); Dutch (*Umschlagplatz*, 1990); German (*Umschlagplatz*, 1993); English (*The Final Station: Umschlagplatz*, 1994).

**About the Author:** Born in 1935, Rymkiewicz is a poet, playwright, essayist, researcher of Polish literature (and former professor at the Institute of Literary Research in Warsaw) and translator of Anglo-American and Spanish poetry. Rymkiewicz's poetic work is inscribed in the twentieth-century revisions of Classicism, which plays with the poetry of culture, while his scientific interests focus on the Polish Baroque and Romanticism.

**Further Important Publications:** *Eurydyka, czyli każdy umiera tak, jak mu wygodniej* (Eurydice, or Everybody Dies the Way He Is Comfortable With, 1957; theatre play); *Czym jest klasycyzm: manifesty poetyckie* (1967, What Is Classicism: Poetic Manifests; essay); *Król Mięsopest* (1977, The Carnival King; play); *Ulica Mandelsztama i inne wiersze z lat 1979–1983* (1983, Mandelstam Street and Other Poems From 1979–1983; poetry); *Rozmowy polskie latem 1983* (1984; Polish Talks in the Summer of 1983; novel); *Kinderszenen* (2008, Children's Scenes; historical sketches).

## Content and Interpretation

The *Final Station* was first published abroad before being released in Poland (following the fall of communism in 1989) to immediate critical acclaim. On the one hand, the 1980s were a period when Polish literary production avidly took up Jewish themes, restoring their place in the national culture after a long period of omission – a period of reflection on the meaning of the Holocaust. In spite of this, or because of it, it was a period when issues in Polish-Jewish relations were considered predominantly in the historical perspective, as a thing of the past. Through fictionalised testimony, Rymkiewicz's novel speaks to the collective consciousness of that era, dealing specifically with the Warsaw Umschlagplatz, a square where Jews were assembled for deportation to the Nazi death camps. Since the square itself has ceased to exist and is largely forgotten, the novel serves to reconstruct its topography and location in relation to other streets. Reading various historical documents, mainly memoirs and stories, the author tries to determine the exact location of the square in 1980s Warsaw, a particularly difficult task given that the whole “Jewish district” was demolished by the Germans during the war as punishment for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

More significantly, what is entailed in the search for the Umschlagplatz (literally “reloading point”) is an attempt to understand how the city reacted to the deportation of its Jewish inhabitants. A declaration precedes this part of the book: “What is meant by Polish life, by Polish spirituality? What does it mean – what might it mean for our future – that we live around the place of their death?” (Rymkiewicz, 1992, p. 10). The novel evokes the prewar period by means of a fictional story set in the summer resort at Otwock (Paziński’s → *The Boarding House*). Conversations at the summer resort are accompanied by the shadow of impending danger. The main character in these fragments, Icyk Mandelbaum, expresses views that resemble those of Rymkiewicz, so that he appears as a surrogate for the author (Marzec, 2005, p. 48; Krupa, 2013, p. 126). Yet various fictional elements point to something that lies beyond the author’s biography, inviting the reader to engage with the text along lines of conjecture and imagination, rather than compelling them to “follow the map through Warsaw”.

At the same time, these fictional elements do not suggest a less credible account, but rather expose the creative and ethical process that such an account must inevitably engage with. Just as the search for the Umschlagplatz traces the invisible course of the disappearance of a place, both physically and mentally, the process of reconstruction undertaken by the novel functions as the expression of a wish which, due to the shift in time, cannot be entirely authentic. Turning attention to this aspect of Rymkiewicz’s writing, some researchers have pointed out the self-reflexive nature of the book. The quest to reconstruct a place, in this sense, is a reflection on the nature of creating the text, with implications for the ethical limitations of any narrative treatment of the Holocaust. (Marzec, 2005, p. 38; Krupa, 2013, pp. 132–138). The writer’s transformation is further complicated by questions of identity, since his search for the Umschlagplatz runs through the reconstruction of his own family history. Yet even though his childhood was marked by war, he emphasises, it was not marked by the trauma experienced by Jewish children. As he writes in one passage comparing a wartime photograph of a young boy with a photograph taken by a German soldier of a Jewish child with his hands raised, “S. I regard it as something highly indecent that we Christian children were allowed to play, laugh and enjoy life” (Rymkiewicz, 1992, p. 23). The novel thus dwells on the important differences between the two experiences, an identity-exploring perspective on the Shoah that allows the writer to claim that his book is a lament for the dead and at the same time for himself: “A Pole who has been abandoned forever by his Polish Jews” (p. 100). Undoubtedly, the somewhat exalted tone of this statement may weaken the message of the work. At the same time, however, we should not forget that some of the topics the novel depicts – the problem of blackmail, for instance – were considered to be a brave gesture in the 1980s. Rymkiewicz’s book ends with an indication of the geographic location of Umschlagplatz, but it turns out to be an “absent” space. Not only is there nothing left of it, but its surrounding have been incorporated into a block of flats. Jacek Kuroń, who accompanies the writer, is initially outraged by the absence of any memorial at the site, but Rymkiewicz’s words change his mind. The absence of the original square of the Warsaw Um-

schlagplatz, the author explains, is memorialised by the people now living next door – they themselves are a kind of “monument”. This only raises the question – a rhetorical one – whether oblivion can be explained in this way. In 1988, a monument was erected on the basis of a design by Hanna Szmalenberg and Władysław Klamarus.

### Main Topics and Problems

In its early reception, *The Final Station* was contextualised in the debate on the inexpressibility of the Holocaust. Grzegorz Marzec drew attention to the sublime poetics and ironic detachment of Rymkiewicz’s style, especially in those passages where numerous memories and versions of history coexist, and the multivalent nature of facts is revealed (Marzec, 2005, pp. 29–35). This emphasises the problem of memory both in individual and cultural terms. According to Aleida Assmann, Ubertowska suggested reading Rymkiewicz’s text as a story oscillating between looking for a “place of memory” and approaching “traumatic places”. A writer who wants to find Umschlagplatz tries to find the right words, finding instead that words are always insufficient. Paradoxically, this incessant writing about writing – the obsessively self-reflexive quality of the narrative – does not undermine but rather “enhances the ‘effect of reality’” (Ubertowska, 2007, p. 245). In the process of searching for the memory of the Umschlagplatz, Rymkiewicz builds a kind of “anti-monument to the Shoah”, one that emerges only to fade away again (Ubertowska, 2007, p. 247).

Alongside the intricacies of memory and expressive limits of language, *The Final Station* speaks to the problematics of historiography. While the accounts on the Umschlagplatz that Rymkiewicz is able to gather from various texts are not always consistent, he does not consider them as mutually exclusive. Rewriting his version of history, he does not try to create the impression that he seeks the truth, but instead a cultural story that reaches for the conventions of the “history of the uncommon”, and becomes “a historian of someone else’s mentality” (Krupa, 2013, p. 141). Other scholarly perspectives focus on the image of the writer as a witness. According to Anna Mach, for example, such attempts to deal with one’s own feelings and experience of the history of the Shoah inevitably lead to sentimentality and kitsch (Mach, 2016, p. 155). Moreover, by focusing on Poles and their reactions, the writer tends to exclude the neighbouring Jewish residents, a tendency best demonstrated by the passage “Someone who is a Jew and a Pole cannot be either a Jew or a Pole” (Rymkiewicz, 1992, p. 156). This explicitly formulated exclusion may indicate an unconscious rejection of the truth about the relationship between Poles and Jews, or a strategy for avoiding it, with the result that “the special fate of the Jews is erased in *The Final Station* – from the words of witnesses, from archival photographs, from memories” (Marzec, 2016, p. 182). While such criticisms represent an important perspective on the novel, one must also consider Rymkiewicz’s book was one of the earliest to call attention to the issue of the “absence” of Jews in Polish literature of the 1980s.

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BP

# The Flytrap Factory (Fabryka muchołapek)

**Author:** Andrzej Bart

**First Published:** 2008

**Translations:** Russian (*Fabrika muchoboek*, 2010); Slovenian (*Tovarna muholovk*, 2010); Czech (*Továrna na muchołapky*, 2011); German (*Die Fliegenfängerfabrik*, 2011); Hebrew (2011); Macedonian (*Fabrika na smrtta*, 2011); Serbian (*Fabrika muholovki*, 2014); French (*La fabrique de papier tue-mouches*, 2019).

**Film Adaptation:** *The Flytrap Factory* (Fabryka muchołapek), feature film, screenplay and film director Andrzej Bart, premiered 2019.

**About the Author:** Andrzej Bart was born in 1951. He is a novelist, film director, and screenwriter based in Lodz. He studied at Lodz Film School (Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Filmowa, Telewizyjna i Teatralna), and is author of the screenplay for *The Reverse* (Rewers, directed by Borys Lankosz, 2009).

**Further Important Publication:** *Boulevard Voltaire* (2010; play).

## Content and Interpretation

In *The Flytrap Factory*, Bart draws on his interest in Jewish Lodz, which he also made the subject of several of his documentary films, including *Eva R.* (1998), *Hiob* (2000), and *Radegast* (2008). The writer has spoken in interviews about the many years he spent in preparation for writing the novel, which would eventually be published during a period of growing interest in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto, alongside such titles as *I Used To Be a Secretary to Rumkowski. Memoirs by Etko Daum* by Elżbieta Cherezińska (2008) and *The Emperor of Lies* by Steve Sem-Sandberg (2009, first published in Polish in 2011). *The Flytrap Factory* opens with the story of its narrator, who is also a writer and screenwriter, as he arrives on the idea to make a film about Western European Jews forced into the Litzmanstadt Ghetto. See also František Kafka's → *Christmas Legend from the Ghetto*. He describes the tensions that result from the chance meeting of Eastern and Western Jewish cultures, particularly with regard to the varying degrees of wealth and poverty, literacy and illiteracy, and more or less developed cultural backgrounds. The protagonist also tries to learn about the real or probable fate of famous Jews, such as Franz Kafka (what would happen if the writer was in the Lodz Ghetto and transported from there to the death camp in Chełmno) and his sisters (this plot was also developed in *Radegast*, and is documented with photos of contemporary memorials of the Litzmannstadt Ghetto). All his efforts are aimed at filming a documentary with a transnational appeal, a film that might interest viewers beyond his domestic Polish audience. Lacking sufficient funding, he is compelled to accept money

from a grotesque Mephistophelian figure (with allusions to Goethe's *Faust*, Kafka's *The Trial*, and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*). In exchange, he is to prepare a report on the ongoing fictional trial of Chaim Mordechaj Rumkowski, head of the Jewish Council of the Litzmannstadt Ghetto (the historical person of Rumkowski was killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944). At the same time, Bart presents fictitious parodic accounts of historical figures who knew Rumkowski and who, appearing before the tribunal, are in a position to judge him: Lucille Eichengreen, Stella Czajkowska, Hannah Arendt, Hans Biebow, and Dawid Sierakowiak. In a gesture that reveals the absurdity of the courtroom drama, Rumkowski is placed on trial in the presence of his wife Regina and adopted son, taking the stand but choosing to remain silent throughout a series of contradictory accounts, and making no effort to defend himself. The narrator focuses on Rumkowski's beautiful and mysterious wife, but he ultimately falls in love with an observer at the trial – a Czech woman by the name of Dora who accompanies him on a journey in the footsteps of Lodz Jews as he abandons the task entrusted to him by the Devil. The story ends on 31 December 2007, the day the protagonist finalises his fictional novel, *The Flytrap Factory*, which he appears to have written in place of the promised report. Drawing on the conventions of the frame narrative, Bart deploys various techniques to weaken the power of his literature, at times mocking the reader or sending up the events of the story itself, attributing everything finally to the protagonist's problems with alcoholism. Bart's approach to the sensitive topic of Rumkowski's cooperation with the Nazis has been the subject of controversy and discussion among literary critics, and has led some to consider *The Flytrap Factory* as a critical failure.

### Main Topics and Problems

*The Flytrap Factory* is not the first novel about Chaim Mordechaj Rumkowski. Earlier novels about Rumkowski, such as *The Merchant of Lodz* by Adolf Rudnicki (1963) and *King of the Jews* by Leslie Epstein (1979), were poorly reviewed by the critics (Tomczok, Wolski, 2016, p. 148) due to what they saw as excessive fictionalisation and a tendency to pass judgement too harshly or unilaterally on the figure of Rumkowski. *The Flytrap Factory* is the first postmodern novel about the Holocaust devoted to the symbolic significance of Rumkowski and the Litzmannstadt Ghetto. The author-narrator tries to be impartial, refraining from judgement, and to give voice to a large number of witnesses, a feat made possible by virtue of the multi-voice theatrical structure of the novel. Doubts raised by critics stem primarily from the combination of three separate yet difficult issues in one book, namely the Holocaust, the novel form and postmodernism. In Central European literature, it is believed that historical nonfiction, rather than the novel, best expresses the truth about genocide. In Bart's approach, however, the opposite is true: the postmodern novel turns out to be an excellent postmemorial form, as it includes not only historical narrative, but also an assessment of history which takes into account a plurality of mutually exclusive perspectives. According to Gustaw Romanowski, the novel raises many important ethical questions while at the

same time devolving into moral relativism that plays out as so many evasions to the matter at hand. The postmodern idiom as deployed by Bart allows him not only to mix various historical plans and revive the dead, but also to diversify the main narrative with varying quoted material (Romanowski, 2009, pp. 269–272).

According to Jacek Leociak, *The Flytrap Factory* is an example of narcissistic kitsch, as is the case with many contemporary stories about the Holocaust which simplify and reduce it to neat one-liners rather than providing the reader with a deeper understanding (Leociak, 2010, pp. 9–19). Significantly, a number of other Holocaust researchers, such as Justyna Kowalska-Leder and Monika Polit, have also taken exception to *The Flytrap Factory*, criticising the novel for failing to bring to light any new facts about Rumkowski or changing prevailing beliefs about his story.

Postmodern theorists, on the other hand, argue that it represents a contemporary approach to history, similar to the concept put forth by Frank Ankersmit, who insists on the right to speak about the past without strict academic criteria. Bart's depictions of the Polish-Jewish relationship are characterised by disagreements, resentments, mutual accusations, rather than friendship, and above all the complicated problem of "Jewish guilt" (an ambiguous assessment of the role of the Judenrat and collaboration of Jewish councils with the Nazis). However, those ideas are lost among his philosophical ideas and literary allusions. In Poland, it is considered inappropriate for a Polish writer writing from a Polish perspective to make any assessment of the Jewish community forced to live in the Lodz Ghetto, or of the attendant problems of overpopulation, language barriers, and class inequalities. German critics have received the novel quite differently. Thomas Schmidt, for example, claims that Bart's goal with *The Flytrap Factory* is not to uncover new facts about Rumkowski but to combine the truth of historical nonfiction with a work of the imagination.

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# The Fourth Language (Štvrtá reč)

**Author:** Pavel Vilikovský

**First Published:** 2013

**Translation:** Hungarian (in: *Első és utolsó szerelem*, 2016).

**About the Author:** Pavel Vilikovský (1941–2020) was a Slovak novelist, translator and essayist. He is the son of literary historian Jan Vilikovský (1904–1946) and the brother of translator Ján Vilikovský. He belonged to a generation of authors who debuted in the 1960s. He studied Slovak and English philology at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava (1960–1965). He was employed as an editor working for reviews and publishers. After the onset of normalisation in the 1970s, he hardly published anything. At that time, he became a renowned translator of English and American prose (Joseph Conrad, E. L. Doctorow, William Faulkner, J. C. Oates, Kurt Vonnegut and Virginia Woolf). Since 1989 he has consistently published prose and essays and is one of the best known Slovak authors.

His first book, *Sentimental Education in March* (1965), captivated readers with its richness of language, imagination, existential view of human coexistence and social empathy. The following episodes often feature an epic story concentrated around a criminal plot. The author interprets the plots ambiguously, showing their secret motifs (for example *Horse on the Floor*, *Blind Man in Vrábce* or *Pedestrian Story*). Another line of Vilikovský's work is creating sophisticated plays with conventional language, especially the language of ideology, and the deconstruction of various iconic themes (family, love, home vs. abroad, or the countryside) and myths (for example, the Slovak national tradition).

**Further Important Publications:** *Prózy* (2005, ed. P. Zajac, Stories; collected stories); *Vlastný životopis zla* (2009, The Autobiography of Evil; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The title of the work refers to the motto by the Jewish poet Tuvio Rübner. Born in Bratislava, Rübner managed to leave for Palestine in 1941, but all his family members were deported from Slovakia to Auschwitz in 1942, where they all died. He writes that in Bratislava (Pressburg) three languages were spoken, Slovak, Hungarian and German. But in times of the war, silence was the fourth language. "Pressburg was a city of three languages. The fourth language is silence." (Vilikovský, 2013, p. 137)

*The Fourth Language* was published along with the novella *On the Left Bank of Memory* in the book *The First and the Last Love* (Prvá a posledná láska). *On the Left Bank of Memory* is basically an autobiographical memory of childhood, but literally stylised. *The Fourth Language* handles the experience of the Holocaust.

The novella is in a sense the author's key text. It is related to its theme, the historical appearance of the Holocaust during World War II. Here, Vilikovský follows in a specific way on his previous works, which presented the forms and limits of perpetration. It is a crime as an offence against the natural course of life and human existence. It is not an immediate, authentic experience. Vilikovský uses memory and its several reflections in the novella *The Fourth Language*. This suggests the complex meaning of the text. The way of narration shows a complicated reference between the Holocaust event and the possibilities of its depiction and expression in language.

The crucial event is the transport of Jewish women and girls from Slovakia T 6 transport to the Auschwitz concentration camp in the spring of 1942. It is an event that forms the core of the prose and can hardly be described. It took place in the district of Patrónka in Bratislava. The author uses several historically specific, documentary sources as well as his own experience in reading lists dedicated to Jewish Holocaust victims. He puts all these specifically verifiable facts into the narrative that the event perceives from the side – through the eyes of Gabriel, a present day pensioner. He is a random observer, a former Slovak teacher who, as a volunteer, is devoted to oral history. He overhears and records the memories of a very old man who is over 90 years old speaking about the events of the twentieth century – also about World War II and the fate of the Jews. This narration is also commented on by the author as the narrator. Another layer of the narrative is quotes from the conversations of Nazi generals in British captivity, who were bugged and recorded without their knowledge. They bring appalling testimonies of brutal murder while downplaying the Holocaust (in English Neitzel, 2013).

### **Main Topics and Problems**

In the novella, readers gradually become acquainted with the “great story” of war violence from several different sides. There are ten Jewish women and girls from the T 6 transport. The names have an urgent effect on the narrator's conscience, but also on his empathic participation. He tries to put himself into the life of one of them, 36-year-old Ema Schlesinger. But he finds it impossible. “Gabriel understood that even if Ema Schlesinger were alive, she would have nothing to tell him. So have a good time and nothing more. They would not find common ground, for the abyss between them, the pit of corpses, cannot be crossed – full of the hungry and the dead, they do not believe the living. Gabriel, it cannot be denied, gave up and left Ema still lying there, burnt in an unknown mass grave” (Vilikovský, 2013, p. 191).

In the novella, Vilikovský methodologically precisely shows the limits and limited contexts of the epic representation of the topic of inexplicable genocide. He also draws attention to the exemplary boundaries of imagination and the imagination associated with this theme. Beyond this limit, there are other, exclusively existential decisions. The author recalls this in the text of the allusion to the experience of the Polish writer Tadeusz Borowski. “The Polish writer Tadeusz Borowski boasted that at some point he saw twenty-eight thousand naked women in a concentration camp on

apelplac. The sight of a naked woman usually has an uplifting, even inspirational, effect on men, and with a larger number of women the effect should logically be even greater, but twenty-eight thousand were probably too much. Tadeusz found himself unable to speak for everyone and committed suicide soon after the liberation. He was not even thirty years old” (pp. 196–197).

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# Frascati: An Apotheosis of Topography (Frascati. Apoteoza topografii)

**Author:** Ewa Kuryluk

**First Published:** 2009

**About the Author:** Ewa Kuryluk was born in 1946 in Cracow. She is known as an artist and pioneer of textile installation and air art, painter, photographer, novelist and author of essays. She taught at New School for Social Research, New York University and University of California, San Diego. She exhibited her works in Europe and the United States.

**Further Important Publications:** *Century 21* (1992, in Poland *Wiek 21*, 1995; *Wiek 21. Trio dla ukrytych* napisane po polsku w roku 2000, 2000; novel); *Ludzie z powietrza. Retrospektywa 1959–2002: instalacje, fotografie, rysunki, obrazy* (2002, Air People. Retrospective 1959–2002: installations, photographs, drawings, paintings); *Goldi. Apoteoza zwierczakowatości* (2004, Goldi: An Apotheosis of Animalisation; autobiography); *Feluni. Apoteoza enigmy* (2019, Feluni: An Apotheosis of Enigma; autobiography).

## Content and Interpretation

*Frascati* is the second part of the family trilogy which also includes *Goldi* and *Feluni*. The first part was dedicated to the author's father Karol Kuryluk (known as Łapka), and the third to the author's brother, Piotr, who was called Feluni. The collective hero of all the stories is the post-war Polish-Jewish intelligentsia: Karol Kuryluk was the editor of Polish reviews, later a minister and diplomat; his wife came from a Jewish family, wrote prose and translated.

*Frascati* continues the most important plots of *Goldi* – the secret of hidden Jewish ancestry, as well as the trauma that is associated with it and passes down from generation to generation. The source of the Kuryluk tragedy is primarily Maria's silence about the Jewish origin of her parents, the Kohany family, and withholding her first marriage with Teddy Gleich.

The narrative is not a chronological representation of the facts, but rather represents the problems of daughters living in the shadow of their mothers' Holocaust experiences, which is characteristic for second-generation women's narratives. It can be juxtaposed with *A Family History of Fear* (Rodzinna historia lęku) by Agata Tuszyńska, *Where She Came From* by Helen Epstein or *After Long Silence* by Helen Felmont. A common feature of these stories, in addition to the genre that Tomasz Łysak described as second-generation autobiography, is the children's sudden discovery that their parents are of Jewish origin, a fact that was kept secret as they feared for their lives during the Holocaust.

The situation described in *Frascati* reflects the term described by Barbara Kessel as “Suddenly Jewish” – an identity built around a discovery that was made after reaching adulthood. By writing down fictitious and probable conversations with her mother, Kuryluk tries to present the story of her mother’s stay in the Lviv Ghetto, her escape and survival, parting with her first husband, romance and marriage with Kuryluk, the first years of illness which came after the liberation, her trips abroad, difficult motherhood and worsening of mental illness in parallel with her brother’s Piotr growing up and his serious illness (schizophrenia). Although it is a difficult story and sometimes tragic, it does not lack a sense of humour, and its brilliant and ironic dialogues are characteristic for Ewa Kuryluk’s literature, full of metaphors and allusions to the cultural heritage of Europe. Moreover, Kuryluk tells the intellectual history of the Polish People’s Republic, which was co-created by her father. The keynote of the story is the illness of her brother, multi-talented Piotr, who was devastated by the Holocaust.

As the subtitle indicates, *Frascati* is a story about a place. Firstly, about an elite district of Warsaw, an area that was gardens in the eighteenth century. It was there that the Kuryluk family settled in 1947, turning a tattered three-room apartment into a cultural centre of the prewar capital of Poland. Secondly, it is a story about Lviv: in 2008 the writer goes there in the footsteps of her mother, taking photos of places related to Miriam Kohana’s stay in the ghetto and on the Aryan side.

The book contains almost 60 photographs from private archives, of buildings, from newspaper clippings, of children’s drawings and works of art. Just like in W. G. Sebald’s prose, they create a well-thought-out narrative, developed with great expertise that supplements the words of the characters.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Unlike in the works of Epstein, Tuszyńska, Tulli (→ *Italian High Heels*) or Bożena Umińska Keff (→ *A Piece about Mother and Fatherland*), Kuryluk tells the story of a relationship between a survivor and her daughter without conflicts or tensions (Łysak, 2009, pp. 195–208). She presents the family story merging with the general history of the family and the country, describes multiple political and cultural contexts, combined with verbal and visual narration. She manages to avoid criticism of Poles, and provides no descriptions of antisemitism or analysis of mutual resentments. Therefore, each part of the trilogy goes beyond the Holocaust and has suprahistorical significance, often embedded in the rich tradition of cultural topics. Here are two examples of how the subject of the Holocaust is enhanced. The first of these is through the motif of the *stultifera navis* (ship of fools), which in the Middle Ages was used to transport mentally ill people out of the city. An image of this is in one of the pictures in Kuryluk’s book. This work was dedicated to the mother and brother of the author – two people suffering from a mental illness. The other topos is the image of a psychiatric hospital as a ghetto. Kuryluk arranges the facts with their perception and combines different images, not only to create an artistic history of madness (modelled on Mi-

chael Foucault's *History of Madness*), but also to make the Holocaust part of the humanities and to try to describe it using existing literature.

In *Frascati*, animals are important characters, especially birds and animals of the Warsaw zoo where Jews were hiding during the war. The Kuryluk family pets, a dog and a hamster, also play a key role. Kuryluk is one of the first artists who departed from writing about the Holocaust from a purely human perspective and saw an opportunity in the posthumanist statement that during the war, we were done with *homo sapiens*. This also explains the writer's use of animal masks (similar to the masks worn by the characters in some of her photographs): her father is Łapka (a dog's name, which means paw), her brother is Crab Kępka, she is a Kangaroo herself. As in her previous books, the author combines different narratives, times and materials. This hyper-realistic simultaneity also serves to maintain the impression that the conversation between the writer and her mother, who died in 2001, is still going on.

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# From the Abyss: Memories from the Camp (Z otchłani: Wspomnienia z lagru)

**Author:** Zofia Kossak

**First Published:** 1946

**Translations:** Italian (*Il campo della morte*, 1947); French (*Du fond de l'abime, Seigneur*, 1951).

**About the Author:** Zofia Kossak (1889–1968) was a Polish Catholic writer dealing mainly with Catholic subjects. During World War II she lived in Warsaw, working for the Polish underground resistance organisation. She was the co-founder of the Catholic underground organisation Front for the Rebirth of Poland (*Front Odrodzenia Polski*) and initiator of the Council to Aid Jews *Żegota*. On 25 September 1943, she was arrested under the false name Zofia Śliwińska and held captive in the local Pawiak prison. From 5 October 1943 until 12 April 1944 she was imprisoned in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. When Nazis discovered her true identity, she was sentenced to death, but released through the efforts of the leaders of the underground resistance. Kossak lived in England after the war, returning to Poland in 1957. In 1985 she was awarded the honorary title “Righteous Among the Nations” for her involvement in *Żegota*.

**Further Important Publications:** *W piekle* (In Hell, 1942; journalism); *Wigilia na Pawia-ku* (Christmas Eve in Pawiak, 1946; nonfiction); *Konspiracja w konspiracji* (Conspiracy in the Conspiracy, 1950; nonfiction); *Nagłace wołanie* (Urgent Call, 1953; personal narrative).

## Content and Interpretation

*From the Abyss* presents the author’s accounts of her seven-month imprisonment in the women’s concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, written in the impersonal form. Presenting the story from the perspective of a Catholic, Kossak frames the experience of suffering by camp prisoners in the context of Christianity. Her memoir opens with the description of the transportation of – mainly political – prisoners from the women’s so-called Serbia Prison (located near the Pawiak Prison in Warsaw) to Birkenau. Alongside descriptions of everyday life in the camp, including incidents of torture and executions, Kossak’s account portrays the inmates’ spiritual life, the world of religious values and the fundamental power of prayer, which enabled many Polish women to maintain their human dignity in the extremely difficult conditions of camp life. In particular, Kossak explores the human dimension of this struggle: the courage required simply to carry on in a world where one’s life is under continuous threat, the love of one’s fellow human being and of the fatherland, the bonds of friendship, and

above all the role of religion, which made it possible to accept suffering without giving in to despair, resignation or depression, providing recourse to faith at moments of mental surrender. The motif of martyrdom is interwoven with reflections on the strength that springs from Christian faith, on divine providence under extreme circumstances and in a world where the presence of Satan can be felt at all times, on the power of prayer and faith: “If surviving the camp were beyond our power, then God would not demand it, because He knows how much we can take. And if He does demand it, it means that we can take it” (Kossak, 1946, p. 195). Kossak paints a particularly idealistic picture of Polish intellectuals, in contrast to her negative representation of women from the lower classes, characterised by carelessness, naivety, crudeness and emotional immaturity. Having an ability to keep themselves occupied, to focus on philosophical matters, members of the higher classes endured camp life better than women with lower class backgrounds. The Polish woman, as described by Kossak, is able to sacrifice herself for others, offer help, show love, and seek the path of forgiveness in a world of inhuman degradation.

Kossak’s descriptions moreover reveal a system of values based on one’s dedication to Catholicism, glorifying above all the Polish Catholic prisoners and attributing to them all the characteristics of human integrity and heroism, which cannot be found in Birkenau prisoners of other nationalities. In this way, the author demonstrates her invincible faith in Christian values and the national ethos, values which the Polish political prisoners who are her heroines never cease to display, and who endure suffering at Auschwitz by taking Jesus Christ as their model.

Kossak also seeks to explain why the Germans decided to build a women’s camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau with the aim of debilitating its inmates, contrasting this to the example of the women’s camp in Ravensbrück. According to the author, this difference is evidence of “changes in the German psyche” (p. 28): during the early stages of the invasion of Poland, the Germans did not yet realise the potential of Polish women to act as their political enemy, or that they would be capable of carrying out a conspiracy against them. It was this learned “aversion” to Polish women that resulted in the establishment of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

To this day, the reception of *From The Abyss* remains centred on the Polish perspective, which, according to numerous critics, obscures the truth of life in the camps. Kossak’s camp memoir was favourably received by the Catholic circles of its time, but the author was attacked by Tadeusz Borowski, who challenged the veracity of her account, as well as her stylistics, and reproached the author for her commitment to what he considered to be absurd historiosophic ideas.

Borowski expressed these views in a 1947 review with the title *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. In this review he expresses his outrage at the auspicious moralism of *From the Abyss*, in particular Kossak’s efforts to frame her experience of the concentration camp as an act of martyrdom defined by Christian faith, and her attempt to find a

religious sense in her imprisonment. Borowski accuses the writer of ignorance and even falsification, while also pointing to her numerous topographical and lexical errors. He took particular exception to the case, presented by Kossak throughout *From the Abyss*, for the moral superiority of Polish women over their foreign counterparts, due in large part to their friends' prayers.

Zofia Kossak never responded to Borowski's criticism. Yet she introduced a large number of changes to the second edition of *From the Abyss* (1958), deleting several passages that described the exceptional status of Polish women and presented negative images of women of other nationalities. Yet such attitudes were not uncommon in Polish Catholic circles or the literary works associated with them: for example, Wanda Póltawska's memoirs from the Ravensbrück camp *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams* (I boję się snów).

Also omitted from the second edition are Kossak's stern descriptions of the Jews, replaced by new passages depicting Jewish women as disproportionate targets of Nazi cruelty. Largely modified are those passages which highlighted the superiority of Poles, intellectuals, and – to a lesser degree – Catholics.

In this edition Kossak has moreover struck her claim that "Hate can be conquered by love alone." She most likely made these modifications in response to Borowski's critical remarks.

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# God's Horse (Koń Pana Boga)

**Author:** Wilhelm Dichter

**First Published:** 1996

**Translations:** Czech (*Kůň Pána Boha*, 1997); German (*Das Pferd Gottes*, 1998); French (*Le Cheval du Bon Dieu*, 1998); Dutch (*Paar van God*, 1998); Sweden (*Herrans häst*, 2003); English (*God's Horse, The Atheists' School*, 2012).

**About the Author:** Dichter was born in 1935 in Boryslav (today Ukraine). Many members of his family perished in the Shoah. At the end of 1944, he moved to Southern Poland with his mother and then to Warsaw. He graduated from the Warsaw University of Technology, where he gained his doctoral degree and then stayed on as a researcher. In his cooperation with a team of technology popularisers from the Chief Editorial Educational Office of the Polish Radio, he created radio shows and popular science broadcasts. After the politically motivated anti-Jewish campaigning in Poland in March 1968, he lost his job and, with his wife and two children, emigrated to the U. S., where he became an expert in ballistics, later working in the field of computer graphics. He made his literary debut after retirement, at the age of sixty. He still lives in Boston.

**Further Important Publications:** *Szkola bezbożników* (The Atheists' School, 1999; novel); *Lekcja angielskiego* (An English Lesson, 2010; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

*God's Horse* lies in the genre of memoir and autobiographical prose, yet its structure closely resembles that of a novel (Ubertowska, 2007, p. 107). The narrator, protagonist, and (to all appearances) author surrogate is Wilhelm Rabinovich, born in 1935 to a Jewish family in Boryslav. The plot briefly follows the family's backstory in the initial fragments of the text before moving on to the narrator's childhood, life during the war, and the early postwar years until 1947. Wilhelm's story during the pre and postwar years is representative of a certain class of families which were not very religious or wealthy, and who led a stable life in the Second Republic of Poland (1918–1939). During the Soviet occupation, the everyday aspect of their lives goes on as usual, and it is only after Germans invade Poland that their situation undergoes radical changes. With the invasion come the *pogroms*, one of which causes his family to be separated. Wilhelm and his mother live on the so-called Aryan side, hiding out in such paradigmatic places as stables, attics, and wells, as arranged by his grandfather, who for this purpose sneaks out of the ghetto in which he later dies. Eventually, Wilhelm and his mother, along with his mother's sister and brother, will be the only members of the family to survive. Their later fate is also significant, owing to the mother's second hus-

band, Michał Dichter, a Jewish engineer who resides in Russia during the war and begins working in the oil industry after returning to Poland. As a result, the boy finds himself living in affluence, a status which clearly distinguishes him from his school-mates. Due to his stepfather's work as a manager and refinery director, Wilhelm frequently moves with his family to such places as Rzeszów, Krosno, Ligota, and Trzebiń. Finally, the family takes up permanent residence in Warsaw.

Wilhelm seems to be more of an attentive observer than an active participant, so his narration is simultaneously perceptive and laconic, constrained by his age, though in many respects he seems wise beyond his years (Krupa, 2013, p. 293). His withdrawn attitude also has its roots in the Shoah, which shattered his sense of safety and brought him to understand that even his closest relations may abandon him. Indeed, he considers at one point that he was the only Jewish child who survived. After the war, Wilhelm does not re-establish his relationships with peers and spends his time in solitude reading *David Copperfield* and *Pan Tadeusz* (Polish national epic by Adam Mickiewicz). He lives on the borderline between reality and fantasy, superstitions and recurring dreams. In moments of anxiety or fear, he resorts to private prayers to his father and grandfather, prayers which he perceives as magic spells. This provides the key to the title: often lost in his own thoughts, the boy is dubbed "God's horse" by his stepfather (p. 281). However, the formula also seems to be connected to Wilhelm's memories of his father's drawings of Polish hussars, whose images frequently appear in Wilhelm's visions as symbols of courage and victory.

Especially notable is the portrayal of the boy's mother. Even before the war, she treats her son coldly and cares more for her husband, who suffers from tuberculosis. During the Shoah, she is ready to abandon her son to save herself, a shortcoming she later refuses to admit, claiming to have done everything in her power to save Wilhelm. After the war, by contrast, she treats him as a burden and often accuses him of malicious intentions, lacking understanding and patience for the child's behaviour and needs. At the same time, she cares somewhat excessively for his health.

*God's Horse* and other novels by Dichter – *The Atheists' School* and *An English Lesson* – create an autobiographical triptych. *The Atheists' School*, set at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, is a study of the teenage protagonist's fascination with Communism and Stalinism, while *An English Lesson* describes Wilhelm's life as an adult in exile in the United States.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

In *God's Horse*, the typical portrayal of a Jewish family contrasts with a fairly atypical narrative style. It is this contrast that distinguishes Dichter as one of the key voices on childhood during the Shoah. The processing of memories – understood twofold, through memory and literature – plays a significant role in the narrative. When recounting wartime events, the protagonist portrays his childhood experience of forgetting his exterminated family members. In this context, the structure of the book appears significant, with chapters often composed of short fragments separated by

light, which indicates the impossibility of unifying the elements into one story. This structure shows that the story is not so much testimony as individual construct (Ubertowska, 2007, p. 111), reproducing the functioning of a child's memory and reflecting his misunderstanding of cause-and-effect relationships. The narrative is characterised moreover by oneiric fragments that merge seamlessly with real events, with the oneiric elements making up wartime memories and conveying the boy's emotions, appearing most often in the – more extensive – postwar section of the book. Aleksandra Ubertowska views all these narrative devices as symptoms of trauma, dispersed in the (sub)text, which would be impossible to express otherwise (pp. 115–118).

Dichter outlines the issue of Polish-Jewish relations rather discreetly, without thematising it or, most importantly, commenting on it. Instead, he depicts these relations through the conditions in which the characters find themselves during the war, as they come to depend on the Polish people who hide them. It is notable that the boy is particularly afraid of children, who are most likely to turn him in, a fear that accompanies him after the war. The author employs similar devices to portray the stepfather's engagement in politics and his participation in the establishment of a new state order, which fits into the Jewish-Communist conspiracy stereotype. This kind of insight into the postwar fate of survivors, was a new quality in the literature on the Shoah of the 1990s. when the novel was first published (Krupa, 2013, p. 282).

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AJ

# Hannah (Hana)

**Author:** Alena Mornštajnová

**First Published:** 2017

**Translations:** Bulgarian (*Chana*, 2019); Croatian (*Hana*, 2019); Lithuanian (*Hana*, 2019); Polish (*Hana*, 2019); Slovenian (*Hana*, 2019); German (*Hana*, 2020).

**Theatre Adaptation:** Mahenovo divadlo, Brno (2019).

**About the Author:** Alena Mornštajnová (1963) comes from a Czech family in Valašské Meziříčí in Moravia. She graduated from English and Czech studies at the University of Ostrava and taught English at the Business Academy in Valašské Meziříčí. Since 2000, she has devoted most of her time to translation and writing. She translates popular novels centred on women. Her first book was published in 2013 when she was fifty. Her novels often focus on the impressive or tragic fates of several generations of women in the Czech lands during the 20th century (World War I, World War II and the Nazi occupation as well as the Communist regime). Her work has gained popularity, mainly thanks to her novel *Hannah*. It has become a top-selling book and has achieved massive success on social networks.

## Content and Interpretation

The novel consists of three parts. Each of them is set in a different time period and is narrated in different way. The first part, I, Mira: 1954–1963, is written in the first person narrated by the young girl Miroslava (Mira) Karásková. At the beginning of the story she is seven. She lives in the Moravian town Valašské Meziříčí with her parents and two younger siblings. In February of 1954, the family celebrates her mother's 30th birthday and after dinner, dessert is served, "yolk wreaths" (a sweet pastry with vanilla cream). Mira, despite her parents forbidding it, was playing on the frozen river a day before and fell into the icy water. Now she doesn't get the dessert as a punishment for her disobedience. Paradoxically it saves her life. The whole family gets infected with typhoid, because the water in the confectionary was contaminated. A typhoid epidemic breaks out in the town. All the members of the Karásek family die, except for Mira and her aunt Hannah (Hana). Hannah, who has survived the concentration camps and suffers from depression, also gets ill and falls from the window of the hospital in a delirium. Nevertheless, Hannah is saved at last, because she went through typhoid fever in Auschwitz. After becoming an orphan, Mira first lives with the family of her mother's friend Ivana Horáčková. But Ivana's husband is unenthusiastic about it and Horáček's children, primarily the daughter Ida, chase and victimise her. This is why Mira is moved to her odd aunt Hannah. Hannah is thirty five years old but she is physically and mentally ruined and unable to work

and speak with people. Living together is complicated for both of them, and Ida feels very lonely. She finds a good school friend Jarmila, however, Ida steals her away from Mira. Mira learns for the first time that she is a Jew. Mira gets closer to Ida's brother Gusta, a very clever boy who becomes her lover and later husband. They are expecting a baby but Gusta is expelled from study and is drafted into military service.

The second part of the novel, *People before Me: 1933–1945*, is narrated also by Mira, but she returns to the life of her relatives prior to her birth. Mira's mother Rosa and her aunt Hannah grow up in the secular Jewish Heler family in Valašské Meziříčí. After the early death of Mira's grandfather, her grandmother Elsa manages the family stationery shop and raises her daughters alone. Hannah falls in love with Jaroslav Horáček, a regular soldier, and they secretly plan to live together. In the autumn of 1938, after the German army has taken a part of the Czechoslovak territory (the Sudetenland), Jewish refugees come to the town, among others are Elsa's parents, and they talk about Nazi violence towards the Jews. Elsa tries to save her family. She sells the house and shop and writes a letter to her uncle in Britain to help them to emigrate. However, Hannah does not bring the letter to the post office hoping Jaroslav will marry her. Nevertheless, after the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands, Jaroslav is afraid of living with a Jewish wife, and he breaks up with her and marries her classmate Ivana. (This is moment the reader learns that this is the Horáček family where the orphaned Mira spends some months.) Now it is too late to emigrate. In September 1942, the Heler family is deported to Theresienstadt and following to Auschwitz, except for Rosa, who is hidden in the house of the Czech Karásek family. Rosa Helerová and Karel Karásek fall in love. After surviving the war, they marry and Rosa gives birth to a daughter, Mira.

The narrative perspective of the novel is changed in the third and shortest part, *Hannah: 1942–1963*; it is told by Hannah. She describes her stay in Theresienstadt, then in Auschwitz from October 1944 to January 1945 when the camp was liberated by the Red Army, and her postwar life in Meziříčí. The results of her internment are her physical disability and depression. Moreover, she suffers agonies of remorse because she unwillingly caused the death of several people. In her eyes, the unposted letter in Meziříčí caused the deportation of her family. In Theresienstadt she had a boyfriend, the cook Leo who provided food for her. Hannah got pregnant by him, was sent to the hospital and screamed in a fever that Leo Veselý would care for the baby. The child died immediately after its birth and Leo was sent to Auschwitz and gassed as a punishment. After the war, her sister Rosa was the only person with whom she was able to communicate. Hannah bought the sweet pastries for Rosa's family in an effort to please Rosa on the day of her 30th birthday. However, the desert was contaminated and due to this, the whole Karásek family dies, except for Mira.

In spite of this, the end of the novel seems to suggest hope. Hannah's niece Mira gives birth to a son Otík and Hannah knits caps and small sweaters for him. "My mem-

ories visit me all the time. Many of them are thorny, but more and more come those that make me want to live.” (Mornštajnová, 2015, p. 306)

### Main Topics and Problems

Some situations depicted in *Hannah* were inspired by real persons and events. In 1954 a typhoid epidemic did break out in Valašské Meziříčí. Several hundred people were infected and twenty of them died. Similar to the novel, the town’s public address system announced the names of the gravely ill people, the slightly ill, the healed and the dead every evening. Also the author’s grandmother was among the sick. Being in the hospital she was unbalanced by the sickness and jumped out of the window – just like Hannah in the novel.

The other topic is the life of the Jews and their persecution in Valašské Meziříčí. About 200 Jews lived in the 1930s there but none of them returned after the war. The local synagogue was destroyed in the 1950s. In 2004, a Memorial to the Holocaust was built where the synagogue once stood.

Nevertheless, some of the Jews in Meziříčí survived and emigrated to the West or to Israel, like Michael Honey (formerly Misa Honigswachs, 1929–2013) whose family lived in Nový Jičín and fled 15 kilometres south to Valašské Meziříčí after the annexion of the Sudetenland by the Germans. His testimony, which was recorded by the UCS Shoah Foundation (Honey, 1997) inspired Alena Mornštajnová.

Some ever present motifs of Czech and Central European Holocaust literature can be found in the novel. Like many other survivors, Hannah feels guilty to have survived at the expense of her loved ones. The Czech name Hana sounds identical to the Czech word „hana“ (which means “slur” in English). Another motif is the naivety of the Jews believing it was impossible in the middle of the 20th century to kill Jews massively. They argued that the time of pogroms had gone or that Czechoslovakia was not Germany (pp. 127 and 139). Another common motif is the anxious relation to eating among survivors. Hannah hides slices of bread in her flat as well as in her pockets. The postwar “forgetting” of the Jews is also symptomatic. Mira, a teenager, doesn’t know what the word “Jew” means, although her mother was Jewish.

The novel uses some conventional devices. It escalates drama by combining two main catastrophic events, the war and the Holocaust as well as the postwar typhoid epidemic. The character of Hannah seems to be somewhat stereotypical and implausible. She experiences too many tragic, harsh situations and desperations: the killing of most of her relatives including her boyfriend and newborn baby during the war, the death of her sister and her family (except for Mira) after the war, severe injuries after falling out of the window etc.

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# The Holocaust (Holokaust)

**Author:** Viliam Klimáček

**First Published:** 2012

**Theatre Adaptation:** Divadlo Aréna, Bratislava (2012).

**Translation:** Czech (*Holokaust*, 2013).

**About the Author:** Viliam Klimáček (1958) is a playwright, theatre director and actor, poet and novelist. He graduated from the Medical Faculty at Comenius University in Bratislava and worked as an anaesthesiologist in Bratislava. In 1985 he co-founded the alternative creative GUNaGU Theatre in Bratislava and has been the artistic director and screenwriter of the theatre since that time. In 1992, he left his medical profession and began his professional career in theatre. He uses absurdity and the grotesque in his works, often inspired by the British comedy group Monty Python.

**Further Important Publications:** *Námestie kozmonautov* (2007, The Square of Cosmonauts; novel); *Aupairky* (premiere 2008, Au Pairs; play); *Dílery* (premiere 2009, Dealers; play); *Sado* (premiere 2013, Sado; play).

## Content and Interpretation

The play, divided in two acts, bears the subtitle “A Story which Slovakia Would Rather Forget”. It depicts in a controversial way the modern period of Slovak history. The plot begins after the Velvet Revolution, in 1991, in an unknown Slovakian town. Anna Králiková, the daughter of Slovak emigrants, returns from Argentina to the native country of her parents. She wants to restore her parent’s property, the café Rose, that had been confiscated by the Communist regime. However, she learns the original owner of the café was a Jewess Rosa Rozenfeldová and Anna’s father, Ambros Králik, didn’t get it until 1940, after the Jewish property in Slovakia was “aryanised”. In the following scenes of the first act, located in the Café Rose, historical reminiscences blend with the then present (1991). In the prewar time, several acquaintances often meet in the café: the Catholic Slovak poet Ambros Králik, the Lutheran cinema projectionist Jano Pujdes as well as Jews, namely the young lawyer Jacob Weiss, the owner of the café Rosa Rozenfeldová and her daughter Esther. After the establishing of the clerofascist Slovak State (1939) the positions and behaviour of protagonists change. Králik becomes a high ranking official in the ministry and an awarded poet. He acquires the whole house due to the so-called aryanisation. Pujdes becomes a member of the Hlinka Guard, a Slovak Fascist organisation. Jacob Weiss flees to exile in Britain and fights in the Czechoslovak foreign army against Germany. Esther and her friend Lily Weiss, the sister of Jacob, have to board the transport to Auschwitz. At the same time Králik

and his wife Hana, Mrs Rozenfeld's former maid, attend the premiere of Králík's film *Svätopluk*, Slovakia's first spectacular historical movie.

In the second act, dramatic dialogues are substituted by the monologues of the characters. They talk about their life from 1942 onwards. Esther has survived the concentration camps and Lily in hiding but no other members of their families have survived. They are traumatised, Lily commits suicide, Esther, prevented from studying, emigrates to Israel. Králík tries to please the postwar Communist regime. Nevertheless, he is refused and emigrates with his wife to Argentina. Kristína Majerová, a simple woman who had hidden Lily during the war, is accused of being an "exploiter" and dies during questioning. Pujdes works as a street sweeper while former prominent members of the Hlinka Guard now also make a career for themselves in the new regime.

### Main Topics and Problems

*The Holocaust* forms a part of Aréna Theatre's "Civic Cycle", that began with the production of *Tiso* (2005, docudrama about the Slovak clerofascist president written by Rastislav Ballek). It continued with two plays by Viliam Klimáček, *Dr Gustáv Husák* (2006, Husák was the leader of the Communist Party and the Czechoslovak president during the normalisation in the 1970s and 1980s) and *Communism* (2008) as well with other works. All the plays combine political themes with the desire to provoke historical reflection and contemporary social discussion by means of theatre. In this sense, Klimáček continues with the tradition of playwrights from Germany (Rolf Hochhut's *The Deputy*, 1963; Peter Weiss' *The Investigation*, 1965) or Austria (Thomas Bernhard's *Heldenplatz*, 1984; Elfriede Jelinek's *Rechnitz*, 2010) who questioned conventional images of their lands in relationship to the Holocaust. In the contemporary Slovakian context, *The Holocaust* has common features with the play → *The Woman Rabbi* written by Anna Grusková or Denisa Fulmeková's novels → *Lily of the Valley* and → *Doctor Mráz* as well as with the Czech author Radka Denemarková and her → *Money from Hitler*.

Female Jewish characters in *The Holocaust* are based on the memoirs of Hilda Hrabovecká (1924–2015; *Arm with a Tattooed Number*, 1998; in English 2002), who survived the first girls' transport from the territory of the Fascist Slovak Republic to Auschwitz in 1942. The author also studied other historical documents concerning the persecution and extermination of Slovak Jews during the war and the responsibility of the majority of society for it. The mercenary and pragmatic behaviour of Slovaks is embodied in characters of Ambros Králík and Jano Pujdes. Radio plays a special role in the story. A radio is placed in Café Rose and the sound of popular music, advertisements, current political news and propaganda of the gradually changing regimes are all heard here. On the other hand, the plot contains fictional events and situations, e.g. the Slovak historical film *Svätopluk* about the ancient Moravian and Slovakian king from the 9th century.

At the beginning, Anna Králiková hoping to get back the café is surprised that it was owned by the Jews before the war. She asks the audience "How far backwards do

you want to look? Into prehistory?!” (Klimáček, 2015, p. 425) She wants to draw “a thick line” between the past and the present. At the end of the play, Esther polemises with “thick lines” blocking the past. She does not want revenge, but at the same time she does not want to forget.

In each performance in Aréna Theatre in Bratislava, for the entire second act of the play, the audience traded places with the actors. The audience was moved onto the stage and the actors proceeded to give their monologues from different locations throughout the seating area of the auditorium. “The empty seats evoke the empty graves of the victims who haven’t been buried, a silent and unpunished guilt. Audiences are no longer just observers, but they become actors of the painful history” (Hanzelová, 2016, p. 175). In this manner, the actual meaning of the play, the role of the historical memory, was stressed.

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# Holy Week: A Novel of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (Wielki Tydzień)

**Author:** Jerzy Andrzejewski

**First Published:** in *Night* (Noc, 1945)

**Translations:** Czech (in *Noc*, 1947); German (*Die Karwoche*, 1948; new translation *Warschauer Karwoche*, 1964); Slovak (in *Noc*, 1950); Chinese (*Kunan de yizhou*, 1954); Hungarian (*Nagyhét Varsóban. Regény*, 1966); Swedish (*Dödens karusell*, 1980); French (*Sous le regard des autres*, 1985); English (*Holy Week: A Novel of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, 2007).

**Film Adaptation:** *Wielki Tydzień* (The Holy Week), feature film, screenplay and film director Andrzej Wajda, premiered 1st of March, 1996.

**About the Author:** Jerzy Andrzejewski (1909–1983) was a writer and essayist. He was born in Warsaw, where he lived almost all his life. At the University of Warsaw he studied Polish philology. Following his literary debut in 1932, Andrzejewski's first book, *Unavoidable Roads*, was published in 1936. In the late 1930s, Andrzejewski became increasingly devout, and his novel *Mode of the Heart* has been considered by critics as representative of "Catholic humanism" (Parnicki, 1938, quoted by Synoradzka-Demadre, 2002, p. XI). In 1938 he made a donation to German Jews fleeing their homeland to seek refuge in Poland. As a result, he was criticised by right-wing circles (p. XII). During the occupation, he took part in the underground cultural life of Warsaw. The stories he wrote during this period deal mainly with the reality of the war – the Nazi occupation, conspiracy, executions, and concentration camps. As Synoradzka-Demadre states, "these works share an interest in human attitudes under extreme conditions" (p. XIII). After the war, Andrzejewski's political views were influenced by Marxism, and starting in the mid-1950s, he actively took part in democratic opposition.

**Further Important Publications:** *Drogi nieuniknione* (1936, *Unavoidable Roads*; short stories); *Ład serca* (1938, *Mode of the Heart*; novel); *Noc* (1945, *Night*, short stories); *Popiół i diament* (1948, *Ashes and Diamonds*; novel); *Ciemności kryją ziemię* (1957, literally *Darkness Covers the Earth*, in English *The Inquisitors*; novel); *Bramy raju* (1960, *The Gates of Paradise*, novel); *Miazga* (1979, *The Pulp*; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

*Holy Week* is set in April 1943, during the first days of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. But it is from the perspective of the Aryan side of the city that the uprising is depicted – an outsider's point of view that consists both in narrative accounts and statements by characters representing varying attitudes towards the mass extermination of Jews. In

this way, Andrzejewski illustrates a wide spectrum of Polish reactions to the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto. As Józef Wróbel explains, “For Andrzejewski, the uprising is important as a moment of testing Polish [...] consciences” (Wróbel, 1991, p. 117). Liquidation of the ghetto “triggers acts of the highest sacrifice – alongside opportunism, meanness and hatred” (Maciąg, 1998, p. XXI).

The main characters of the story are Jan Malecki and his former friend Irena Lilien, who had once been a frequent visitor to Warsaw salons. Lilien is the daughter of a respected professor and a woman who did not identify with her Jewish origins until the outbreak of the war. Out of a sense of decency or remorse Malecki offers his old friend shelter, but he remains aware of the danger that his decision brings to himself and his pregnant wife, Anna. The block of flats where Malecki lives and where he decides to hide Irena represents a cross section of Polish society, home to characters after the antisemitic stereotype alongside others that tend to confirm the Polish national mythology. See → *Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness*; → *Without Beauty, without a Collar*.

Andrzejewski’s first draft of the story, which he wrote in spring 1943 as an immediate, fictionalised reaction to the dramatic events of that year as they unfolded, was strongly criticised by the literary community (Iwaszkiewicz, 2007, pp. 224–225). In response to these criticisms and influenced by the poetics of socialist realism, Andrzejewski decided to rewrite the story. The result, completed and published in 1945, is fundamentally different from the original. Jan Kott, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Kuźnica*, which brought together leftist intellectuals after the war and expressed support for the concept of socialist realism in literature, praised *Holy Week* for successfully implementing the new trend: “the dramatic account of a lonely individual has been transformed into the tragedy of the collective, and issues pertaining to the protagonists’ psychology have been replaced with a description of their deeds” (Synoradzka-Demadre, 2002, p. XVII). The plot, as Marcin Piasecki writes, had gained “broad but stereotypical social background” (Piasecki, 1996, p. 10).

### Main Topics and Problems

Andrzejewski’s story is one of the few immediate reactions to wartime events, and one of several literary texts to deal directly with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The critical reception of *Holy Week* has drawn attention to a number of parallels between the novel and Andrzejewski’s own life, and many critics have seen the protagonist as a surrogate for the author, and Irena as a character inspired by the author’s friend Wanda Wertenstein. Andrzejewski himself dismissed such interpretations, pointing out that the character of Irena was based on another friend, Janina Askenazy.

Wyka claims that the text was written “with a great human and psychological courage” and praises the credibility of the characters, in particular Irena, who burns, he writes, with the “violent hatred of a hunted man” (Wyka, 1989, p. 95). Less favourable reviews have accused Andrzejewski of depicting Irena as an unpleasant and unfair heroine, especially in comparison to the figure of Malecki’s wife Anna, a “true

Christian”, with the suggestion that the novel reflects the author’s antisemitic views (Levine, 1997, p. 121). As Żukowski writes, “Andrzejewski makes sure that the reader is not alone with the vision of the Polish community seen through Irena’s eyes” (Żukowski, 2015, p. 176) – a vision in which Polish attitudes towards Jews can be found on the same sliding scale as the Nazi genocide. The characters in Andrzejewski’s story tend to form contrasted pairs: the embittered Irena and the compassionate Anna; the situation of Malecki, overwhelmed by the “unpleasant” sense of duty towards his former friend, and that of his brother Julek, who faces certain death in the name of solidarity with the people dying in the ghetto; the Piotrowskis, and various other antisemites and informers in contrast to Włodek and his mother, Mrs Karska, who understands her son’s decision to participate in the ghetto uprising.

The significance of Andrzejewski’s choice to set the story during Holy Week cannot be overstated, and it is important to note that, for all the author has done to capture real historical events, he organises the plot in such a way that the main characters (Malecki, Irena and Julek) meet their fate on Good Friday. In this way, their deaths acquire symbolic significance: Julek’s dramatic decision echoes the redemptive death of Christ, while the sudden accidental death of Malecki takes on the significance of a sacrifice that serves to remove a blemish on the Polish self-image (pp. 180–181). At the same time, their deaths seem to answer Irena’s curse, which she pronounces as she departs for the ghetto: “‘And may the rest of you all die like dogs!’ escaped her vengeful lips. ‘May you all burn just like us! May they shoot each and every one of you! I hope they murder you all!’” (Andrzejewski, 2007, p. 121). With nowhere else to go, Irena’s departure for the ghetto represents not only her certain death but the final fulfilment of a Jewish identity that, to that point, has been a contingent aspect of her character.

Significantly, the publication of *Holy Week* coincided with the first discussions of Polish antisemitism and Polish attitudes towards Jews during World War II (Jastrun, 1945, p. 1).

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## A Human Matter (Rzecz ludzka)

**Author:** Mieczysław Jastrun

**First Published:** 1946

**Translations:** Slovak (*Milkve monology* [selection], 1964); English (“Here Too As In Jerusalem”: Selected Poems of the Ghetto; in *Polish Review*, 10(3), pp. 22–42, 1965 [poems of Jastrun and other Polish poets]; *Memorials: A Selection*, 2014).

**About the Author:** Mieczysław Jastrun (1903–1983), a poet, essayist, and prose writer, was born in Korolówka (in former Eastern Galicia) to a Jewish family as Mojsze Agatsztejn. At the age of seventeen he changed both his religion and his surname, and never fully accepted his Jewish origin. He studied Polish, German philology, and philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. Jastrun made his literary debut in the prewar period with his poem *The Big Wagon* (*Wielki Wagon*), which was published in the monthly magazine *Skamander* in 1925. He worked as a Polish language teacher, translator, magazine editor (*Wiadomości Literackie*, *Ateneum*, *Gazeta Literacka*), and also lectured on contemporary poetry at the University of Warsaw. After the beginning of World War II, he escaped to Lviv occupied by the Soviets, and in 1941 returned to Poland spending his time in illegality and hidings. In 1964, he signed “Letter 34”, a protest letter by writers and scholars in defence of freedom of speech.

**Further Important Publications:** *Spotkanie w czasie* (1929, Meeting in Time; poems); *Inna młodość* (1933, Another Youth; poems); *Dzieje nieostygłe* (1935, History Is Not Cooling Down; poems); *Strumień milczenia* (1937, Stream of Silence; poems); *Potęga ciemnoty* (1945, The Power of Ignorance, essay).

### Content and Interpretation

Jastrun’s wartime poetry collection *A Human Matter* was featured prominently in *From the Abyss* (*Z otchłani*, 1944), the first anthology of Polish poetry related to the Holocaust, alongside works by Czesław Miłosz (→ *Selected Poetry*) and Michał Borwicz (→ *The Song Will Survive...*). Although some of Jastrun’s poems got burned during the war, he later managed to piece them together from memory. As Natan Gross points out, the situation of a Jew hiding on Aryan papers appears in almost every poem in the collection (Gross, 1993, p. 128). Jastrun, who did not write poetry about the Jewish experience before the war, deals here explicitly with the Holocaust, especially in his poems *Memory* (*Wspomnienie*, 1944) and *Dedication* (*Dedykacja*, 1945), with less direct allusions in such poems as *Looking into the Eyes* (*Spojrzenie w oczy*, 1944) and *On the Ruins* (*Na zgłiszczach*, 1945). The third, fourth, and fifth stanzas in *Dedication* are devoted to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising juxtaposed to verses on the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. In *Folk Song* (*Pieśń gminna*, 1945), Jastrun compares the ruins of Warsaw to

Carthage and Jerusalem, in this way connecting Mediterranean and Semitic cultures – two societies that had lived side by side in Warsaw for hundreds of years. The lyrical subject remains pessimistic about the future and the possibility of avoiding persecution and disasters. As he claims in the poem *On the Ruins*, people will never learn, never adhere to any moral standard. Others, rejected by society, will die in solitude as strangers. The war and occupation demonstrated that the existing poetic language and means of expression did not match the new reality. Jastrun thus set out in search of a new means of expression, a new poetic language, and found inspiration in the figure of Cyprian Kamil Norwid, one of the most famous Polish poets of the 19th century. Norwid's oeuvre belongs mainly to Romanticism, but it also influenced the Polish modernists (including Jastrun). Various elements in the latter's works can be traced to Norwid: the motif of random and anonymous death, for instance, and comparisons between a lifeless man and slaughtered ox; the city pavement as silent "witness" of a crime; the question of death as a harmonious end to human life; the condemnation of crime, and human inclination to sacralise and mythologise acts of vengeance (Dakowicz, 2010). The title of the collection was also taken from Norwid's poem *It's a Human Matter!* (*To rzecz ludzka!*, 1844).

In the face of a suddenly quite inhuman reality, Jastrun's collection is a farewell to prewar poetry and language, and a search for a new language and poetic forms that will be more adequate to the task.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

The war was a turning point in the writer's work, in the sense that the cruelty he witnessed and experienced compelled him to reassess his values and search for new techniques and subject matter for his poetry.

Jastrun's work aims above all to describe this cruelty and the suffering of ordinary people, to convey humiliation and dehumanisation on a universal scale. It is no wonder then that he should focus on Shoah and the mass extermination of the Jews. Most of the poems in *Song of a Jewish Boy* (*Pieśń chłopca żydowskiego*, 1946) show the enormity of the crimes against the Jews, as well as the sadness and brutality that they experienced. Even after the war, Jastrun remained silent about his own Jewish identity, referring to it only indirectly. Perhaps it was the Hell he witnessed during the war, much of which he spent in hiding or on the move, that persuaded him to keep it concealed in the postwar period (Gross, 1993, p. 127).

In his essay *The Power of Stupidity* (1945), Jastrun attacks Polish antisemitism, as well as the widespread indifference in Poland towards the Holocaust, and he condemns those Poles who collaborated with the Nazis in the mass extermination. These issues are raised again in his poem *The Jews* (*Żydzi*, 1944, 1945, previously untitled), which begins with the inscription "Here as in Jerusalem". While an earlier wartime version of the poem addresses Polish indifference towards the persecution of Jews in more explicit terms, these verses were removed from a second revised version and a final stanza was added describing a ghetto in ruins adjacent to a cross, Christian sym-

bol of devotion and suffering. Natan Gross has interpreted this mysterious gesture as a gesture of “gratitude to the people who saved him” (Gross, 1993, p. 126), but adds that it was probably not easy for Jastrun, in the face of ongoing antisemitism during the postwar period, to tone down his accusation. These changes reveal the poet’s dilemma, torn between the desire to bear witness to the persecution of the Jews and give due credit to the “ten righteous” Poles who helped to save their Jewish compatriots (p. 126).

In the postwar years, Jastrun’s work turns primarily to history and the meaning of past events, a tendency connected with his deep interest in Polish Romanticism.

In the period after 1989, as public life in Poland shifted once more, Jastrun’s status and achievements in the context of Polish literature have gone through a process of revision. Right-wing circles have disavowed his work and tried to depict him as a Communist Jewish traitor. Though some defended him, notably those artists who remembered Jastrun personally (like T. Nowak), Jastrun’s work eventually disappeared from school textbooks and he became a forgotten poet.

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# I Didn't Want to Be a Jew (Nechcel som byť žid)

**Author:** Juraj Špitzer

**First Published:** 1994

**Translation:** Hungarian (*Nem akartam zsidó lenni*, 2007).

**About the Author:** Juraj Špitzer (1919–1995) was a Slovak writer, novelist, essayist, literary scientist and critic, screenwriter, journalist and publicist. He studied medicine in Prague, but after the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands he was expelled from his studies due to his Jewish origins and he returned to Slovakia. From 1942 he was held for two years in an internment labour camp for Slovak Jews in the town of Nováky where he met the writer Leopold Lahola under dramatic circumstances. He participated in the resistance against the Slovak fascists and Nazis. He was commander of the Jewish partisan unit. This experience later inspired him to write the screenplay for the film *White Clouds* (directed by Ladislav Helge, 1962), which he reworked into a short story. After the war, he studied French and philosophy at Comenius University in Bratislava. From 1949 he was one of the more important members of the Communist Party and worked in the cultural department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, and then in the Institute of Slovak Literature of the Academy of Sciences. In 1951 he gave a sharply critical report to the members of the avant-garde prewar Slovak DAV writers group, accusing them of “bourgeois nationalism”. He later apologised for this. From 1956 to 1958 and then from 1965 to 1967 he was editor-in-chief of *Kultúrny život*, a major contributor to the liberalisation of culture, and in 1967 Secretary of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers. Due to his support for the liberal reforms during the Prague Spring in 1968 and 1969, he lost his cultural and political positions and was not allowed to publish until 1989.

Špitzer's novel *I Belong to You* was one of the first books in Czechoslovakia to discuss the consequences of the political trials in the 1950s. The novella reminds readers of the real events, the accusation and the trial of the author's fellow combatant, who vainly sought rehabilitation and committed suicide. Špitzer published most of his essays, reflections and prose only after 1989. He deals with Jewish themes and antisemitism in the collection of reflections *Dawn Comes when the Darkness Is Complete*. *Weekdays* was published posthumously from Špitzer's estate. These are reminiscences, reflections on the history of Slovakia, “historically-informed” comments and observations. They are, as said by the author, a personal history of thought and emotional education, which can also be called home.

**Further Important Publications:** *Biele oblaky* (1963, *White Clouds*; novella); *Patrím k vám* (1964, *I Belong To You*; novella); *Letná nedela* (1991, *A Summer Sunday*; novella);

*Svitá, až keď je celkom tma* (1996, Dawn Comes when the Darkness Is Complete; reflections); *Všetné dni* (2001, Weekdays; memoirs and reflections).

### Content and Interpretation

Prose with autobiographical features describes the author's stay in an internment work camp for Slovak Jews in the town of Nováky. Juraj Špitzer, as a Jewish witness to the persecution of Jews and the Holocaust in Slovakia, approaches these events from two sides and two sources. One is to evoke specific situations, characters and events. This is done through narration in the form of memories of a young man, a boy who is trying to survive in difficult circumstances, after the outbreak of the persecution of the Jews in Slovakia. His arrival at the internment work camp in Nováky is the exposition of the novel. Another narrative contains fragments-scenes of experiences from the camp until the moment when the rebellion was being prepared. The author strives for an objective style. He recalls facts, often presents figures and dates, and reproduces details from administrative reports, reports, circulars, resolutions, decisions and statistics. He writes about the Slovak variant of the solution of the Jewish question between 1939–1945. He speaks from his own experience. It is personal experience that gives the narration vivid colour. It is revived by memory and probably also supplemented by the author's historical records of the most important events. The other component of the narrative is an ironic-sceptical attitude towards great historical changes. Small people are in the shadow of this great history, and their responsibility for the immoral or underpowered is not the same for everyone. Human "nature", inclinations to good or evil, is random in Špitzer's concept. However, the story of Jewish destiny is fatally determined. This clash of the objective truth about man and the subjective melancholy of the witness is also evident in the narrative style. It manifests itself in distance, irony and, in places, in an almost self-healing humour. As he recalls, he never understood why the state sent its loyal citizens, the Jews, to the death. It is not a monologue when this reflection is evaluated by the participant. It is more of a conversation, a controversy with everything that troubled him humanly and intellectually. Although the Holocaust is a major theme in Špitzer's books, it is always accompanied by ramified, branched reflections on its context, a context with what is deeply in human nature. That is why this narrative, semantically open, is constructed as the author's conversation with himself. It is a sceptical paraphrase of Psalms, because God is no longer apostrophised. The author addresses the reader, appeals to his sensitivity and perceptiveness. He has a repeated need to return to the Holocaust as an unfinished event. Quotes from the ancient Jewish philosopher, writer and historian Flavius Josephus appear in the novel *I Didn't Want to Be a Jew*. It is always at the interface of chapters into which prose is divided. Quotes are selected from his military biography as well as from the writings of *The Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*.

Špitzer's disposition was intellectually restless and sceptical. If he had a foothold in authority, its experience and opinions, it was Josephus's writings, read by the author responsibly and empathically. There are six quotations from Flavius Josephus

in the prose. Upon arriving at the camp in Nováky, a quote from *The Jewish War* appears: “We were born for death, and for our offspring were born, and even those who live in bliss cannot escape it.” (Špitzer, 1994, p. 67)

Špitzer also writes, following a formulated, presented picture of Jewish destiny: “I would like to throw away from memory all the evil things that resemble those years. I would never want to see people again as they were then, neither as prisoners nor as jailers. At times, it seems to me that my experience in Nováky has been covered by oblivion. But the incomprehensible and distant context – a facial expression, raised voice, modulation and colour, gesture, movement or footsteps – suddenly the experience in Nováky returns as a severe pain.” (pp. 291–292)

### Main Topics and Problems

“Answering antisemitism is not a matter of Jews, but of non-Jews.” (Špitzer, 1996, p. 204) This statement, referring to Sigmund Freud, can be found in Špitzer’s essayist book *Dawn Comes when the Darkness Is Complete*. It is an autobiography based text, as well as the novel *I Didn't Want To Be a Jew*. Here, Špitzer brings a sad testimony to the fate of the Jews, not only in the historical framework of the 20th century. It tries to summarise the facts of the displacement of the Jews beyond their homeland and to understand them in concrete contexts. It tries to understand the persecution and marginalisation of this ethnic group, which culminated in mass destruction in the mid-20th century. He also talks about the Holocaust as well as the identity of the Jews, their sense of belonging to the state, the country and their homeland, which renounces their citizens. The Holocaust literature brings the experience that it is impossible to give accurate testimony when writing about traumatic events. With the passage of time, stereotypes that bring newspeaks full of clichés are gaining ground. The traumatic core of events remains deeply hidden in memory. In the current Holocaust literature, the term *traumatic realism* (Michael Rothberg) appears in this context, trying to name the language and imagery responsibly representing the traumatic memory (mainly in the works of Ruth Klüger and Charlotte Delbo). Rothberg deals with the description and specificity of this depiction, which is in contrast to the current dominant narrative. The traumatic event either depicts the means of literary clichés or marginalises them. In his book, Špitzer chooses the middle way. He places facts (names, dates, locations, events) that are proven and evoked by memory in a linear narrative. The author thus provides the readers with “live images”, composed scenes that he completes with distance and reflection. This is manifested mainly in the composition procedures (devices) and the text structure.

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# It Happened on the First September (or Whenever) (Stalo sa prvého septembra [alebo inokedy])

**Author:** Pavol Rankov

**First Published:** 2008

**Translations:** Czech (*Stalo se prvního září [nebo někdy jindy]*, 2010); Croatian (*Dogodilo se prvoga rujna [i ne samo tada]*, 2011); Hungarian (*Szeptember elsején [vagy máskor]*, 2011); Bulgarian (*Sluči se na prvi septemvri [ili v drug den]*, 2013); Polish (*Zdarzyło się pierwszego września [albo kiedy indziej]*, 2013); German (*Es geschah am ersten September [oder ein andermal]*, 2014); Macedonian (*Se sluči na prvi septemvri [ili nekoj drug den]*, 2014); Romanian (*S-a intamplat la intai septembrie [sau altcandva]*, 2016); Italian (*Accadde il primo settembre [o un altro giorno]*, 2017); French (*C'est arrivé un premier septembre*, 2019).

**Theatre Adaptation:** Slovenské národné divadlo (Slovak National Theatre), Bratislava (2010); Divadlo v Dlouhé (Theatre in Dlouhá Street), Prague (2011).

**About the Author:** Pavol Rankov (1964) is a Slovak writer and scientist. He was born in Poprad and studied library science at Comenius University in Bratislava, graduating in 1987. He worked at the Slovak National Library in Martin and at the Slovak Pedagogical Library in Bratislava. In 1993, he joined the staff of the Comenius University in Bratislava where he researches mass communication and media.

**Further Important Publications:** *S odstupom času* (1995, Over the Distance of Time; short stories); *My a oni / Oni a my* (2001, Us and Them; short stories); *V tesnej blízkosti* (2004, Close Up; short stories); *Matky* (2011, Mothers; novel); *Povedky* (2012, Short Stories; all three short stories books).

## Content and Interpretation

Rankov's novel describes three decades of Slovakia's and Central Europe's past, from 1938 to 1968. It is divided into 31 chapters, always named after one year, the first is Episode 1938 and the last one Episode 1968. The events begin on September 1st, 1938, a year before World War II, and they are often concentrated on the first of September.

In 1938, the four main characters are 13-year-old. There are three boys and one girl living in the small town of Levice in south Slovakia. They belong to different ethnicities: the Hungarian Peter Rónai, the Czech Jan Bízek, the Jew Gabriel Rosenberg and the Slovak girl Mária (Mary) Belajová. All the boys fall in love with Mária and compete for her favour.

Political events significantly affect the lives of the characters. In November 1938, Levice becomes a part of Hungary and Jan's family moves to the Moravian city of Brno. During the war, Peter and his brother must enlist in the Hungarian army. His brother is killed on the Eastern front, and Peter deserts. Gabriel is deployed into forced labour. He manages to escape but his mother perishes in a concentration camp. Jan's parents die during an air raid. His sister becomes a lover of several German soldiers and disappears after the war. All three friends survive, nevertheless no one gets Mária.

After the war, political circumstances continue to complicate the existence of the characters. All three friends want to win and marry Mária, nevertheless, something always happens that prevents it. Levice becomes a part of the restored Czechoslovakia once again. Peter becomes an enthusiastic communist and works as a journalist. Gabriel and Jan emigrate to Palestine but later both return to Slovakia. Jan graduates with a degree in Chemistry and Technology in food studies and works in the military food institute. He is blackmailed because of his sympathy to "Zionism" and must report to the secret police. Mária graduates with a degree in Pedagogical Studies and is a teacher. In 1950, Mária and Jan arrange to get married, but Mária's father, a communist, is arrested and imprisoned, so the wedding is canceled. The second date of their wedding is in 1956. However, Jan is sent on a trip abroad and is involved in the uprising against the Communist regime in Budapest. He flees to the United States without knowing that Mária is pregnant and will give birth to his daughter. In the 1960s, Jan becomes a rich businessman due to his invention of dried scrambled eggs, used by the U. S. Army in Vietnam.

Gabriel is treated for tuberculosis and works in the Tatra Mountains as a clerk and later as a guide. In 1961, Gabriel visits Berlin in East Germany and wants to emigrate to the West. However, at this moment the Berlin Wall is being built and he must return to Czechoslovakia.

All of the friends meet again in the last chapter in the summer of 1968, during the Prague Spring. This chapter is narrated by Mária while all the others by an impersonal narrator. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Jan, Peter and Gabriel leave to the West, and Mária stays in Bratislava with her daughter.

The whole plot is fictional but the novel presents historical events and real historical figures (the regent of Hungary Miklós Horthy, the Slovak president Jozef Tiso, poets Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Andrei Voznesensky, the liberal Communist politician Alexander Dubček etc.), often in grotesque situations connected with the main characters. So the everyday and intimate life (for instance erotic scenes), is depicted in a similar way to major political events (World War II, the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, the Hungarian Uprising in 1956...). The plot is full of paradoxes that also illustrate changes of the characters' names. Jan Bízek is called Honza in Brno, Ján in Slovakia and Ian in America. After the war, Peter changes his Hungarian name Rónai to Slovak Ronaj and in the time of Stalinist antisemitism Gabriel gives up his Jewish name Rosenfeld for Slovak Ruževič.

### Main Topics and Problems

The topic of the Holocaust is connected in particular with Gabriel. Immediately after the war, he interprets for the special Soviet military unit Smersh fighting against “subversive elements”. They also investigate the massacres of Gypsies or Jews during the war. One of the Hungarian “nyilasi” (arrow-cross, Nazi party) reports:

“How did you kill the Jews?”

[...]

“We put them on the river-bank and shot them in the chest. Their bodies fell straight into the water, we didn’t have to bury them. Later, the commander said, we had to save ammunition. So we tied the Jews up in twos or threes. We shot one but all three fell into the water. They drowned immediately”.

[...]

“Why did you do it?”

“The Jews are the Jews”, answered the nyilas. (Rankov, 2008, p. 19)

Gabriel does not feel like he is a Jew, but is affected by antisemitism, during the war and after it “He hasn’t been in a synagogue, for some years, he hasn’t respected Jewish customs or hold any Jewish feasts. In fact, he doesn’t know any Jews in Slovakia. He only felt like a Jew whenever someone cursed the Jews”. (p. 242) While he is in the hospital due to tuberculosis in the 1950s, Gabriel speaks with another patient, a young Catholic girl named Zuzka (Susanne) about God:

“If God would be good and merciful, he wouldn’t have allowed the murdering of the Jews, His chosen nation... My mum also perished”.

“I know, Gabriel, I’m sorry”.

“It’s possible that God didn’t create this murdering. But He could have stopped it”, Gabriel continued. “If He is omnipresent, as you say, he had to see it. He was present and did nothing?” (p. 141)

This motif of helplessness of God is frequently found in Holocaust literature, see Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, Viktor Fischl’s novel → *Court Jesters*, Otto Weiss’ short story → *And God Saw It Was Bad*, Emil Knieža’s novel → *The Sixth Battalion, On Guard!* or Hana Bořková’s novel → *A Private Conversation*. Pavol Rankov’s nontraditional image of Slovak history aroused critical discussions. The novel *It Happened on September the First (or Whenever)* also using fantastic devices, like the author’s short stories, belongs to the so-called posttraumatic literature, similar to Hertha Müller, Olga Tokarczuk, Radka Denemarková’s → *Money from Hitler*, Peter Krištúfek’s → *Emma and the Death’s Head Hawkmoth* or Zyta Rudzka → *Doctor Josef’s Beauty*.

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JH

# Italian High Heels (Włoskie szpilki)

**Author:** Magdalena Tulli

**First Published:** 2011

**Translations:** Lithuanian (*Itališkos špilkos*, 2014); Slovenian (*Italijanski salonarji*, 2017); Catalan (*Sabates de taló italià*, 2018); Spanish (*Zapatos de tacón italiano*, 2018).

**About the Author:** Magdalena Tulli (1955) is a Polish writer and translator of French and Italian literature, including such authors as Marcel Proust and Italo Calvino. Her father was Italian, and her mother came from a Polish-Jewish family. Tulli made her literary debut in 1995 with the novel *Dreams and Stones* (Sny i kamienie).

## Content and Interpretation

*Italian High Heels* is a collection of seven autobiographical stories about traumatic adolescence in postwar Poland. The main plot follows the daughter's dysfunctional relationship with her compassionless mother, whose experience of the Shoah has rendered her incapable of empathy. Tulli is primarily interested in the topic of human subjectivity, and with characters who believe themselves to be masters of their own fate – a belief that can only ever be an illusion since their lives are shaped to a great extent by their backgrounds as well as their parents' past. The girl's mother, a Polish Jew and survivor of Auschwitz who now works as a sociologist, struggles in silence with the trauma of the Holocaust, isolating herself from her past experiences in the camps. Maintaining a chin-up attitude at all costs, concealing the traumatic memories behind a façade of normality, she believes she has found a way to keep the past from affecting the present, to keep her experiences from impacting the child. Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, the mother unknowingly transmits her postwar trauma to her daughter, where it grows into contempt and hatred – an infinite recursion between one individual and another, usually weaker, individual. The mother does not realise that the main source of her child's problems is her own unprocessed, unspoken past. When the girl begins to suffer from the typical symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including insomnia, sleep disorders, and recurring nightmares, she finds that she is perpetually tired and has difficulty concentrating. Eventually, overcome by the endless feelings of exhaustion and powerlessness, she begins to display antisocial behaviour. Her inability to deal with her emotions results in outbursts of rage.

The effects of past trauma are also reflected in the language of the narration. Tulli's prose has been dubbed linguistic literature: a technique by which, with the aid of numerous metaphors and symbolism, the author presents the drama of Jewish origins as a flaw, and otherness as a dead weight, a secret of the past that conveys its burden of suffering to the present. As she writes, "the past weighs most, it lies in the body heavy like a boulder" (Tulli, 2003, p. 32). This notion of the burden which weighs on

the body runs as a motif throughout Tulli's literature. Born into a post-Holocaust reality, the protagonist finds she is already "burdened", and that, even if her mother carries the greatest weight, it is a weight – a "considerable burden" (Tulli, 2014, p. 27) – the mother has inadvertently placed on her shoulders:

The main character in the story wishes the war finally ended for her, too. But once begun, the war has no end. [...] The story's main character [...] did not know any battle in her part of the inheritance. Instead of battles, it contained something much more troublesome. Let's say, a locked casket, not too large, but weighing, say, a couple of tons. With no key – it got lost somewhere. Maybe it was thrown away out of compassion, in order to lift at least a few grams off her burden? Great compassion, thank you very much. If it were me, I'd know that I would be spared nothing, that I had to find a way to break the casket open this way or another – and see my legacy. (pp. 64–65)

The unwanted "casket" she has inherited is unimaginably heavy, as heavy as the girl's fate, even heavier than the perpetrators' crimes. Considerations regarding the oppressors and their victims likewise follow the opposition of heavy and light. Tulli asks: "isn't it better to inherit from the extras who used to wander about the square and crack their canes against the legs of their boots? The heaviest crime seems lighter than such a casket with no key" (p. 75).

The writer's style reflects moreover the chaos and confusion of the story she is telling. The short, often unfinished sentences depict the disorder in the girl's life:

I marshalled the words according to their sound only. This was usually enough. Sometimes, I had to insert in a sentence a word I wasn't certain of, and I waited anxiously for what would happen. [...] Even the most shameless word doesn't reveal too much if it is taken from the right box. That is why so much depended on the order. In the meantime, I gained new words, and new sources of confusion appeared. Wrong words came into sentences time and time again. (p. 80)

The atypical family situation has marked the girl's school years with the trauma of alienation from the group of her peers. Her childhood is filled with humiliation. She is a laughing stock. She is late for school almost every day, and experiences a lack of understanding, a coldness and rejection, a complete lack of empathy – not only at home, but also from her teachers, who often resort to corporal punishment. They humiliate the girl, instil in her a sense of guilt and accuse her of misdeeds she has nothing to do with, thus ridiculing her in front of the whole class. The girl's problems at school are additionally augmented by her difficulties with reading and writing. Tulli shows the loneliness and powerlessness of a child confronted with a hostile world, against which she fights heroically for her own subjectivity.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

*Italian High Heels* is the author's tale not only of herself, but also of a damaged society which continues to struggle with the pain rooted in the Shoah. This pain has to be concealed, since allowing it to show amounts to showing one's weakness. Weakness in turn is something inappropriate, something to be ashamed of, because the narrator of

*Italian High Heels* keeps repeating over and over again “you have to be tough, not soft.”

The girl is troubled by a “black cloud” (Tulli, 2014, p. 140), a metaphor of her family’s unsaid traumatic past. A great number of families can identify with that black cloud and see their own story in the image painted by Tulli: the parents’ silence and coldness, the hidden aggression. This is how Tulli depicts the Polish trauma, which is still far from resolution.

Tulli’s writing shows Shoah’s direct impact on the generation brought up by the survivors, illustrating how detachment and maladjustment are an inherent element of the second generation’s post-catastrophic existence. Living in the shadow of their parents’ grief and suffering over the loss of loved ones, in the shadow of mounting fears, mutual grievances, and above all a lack of intimacy and empathy, has caused the children as much as their parents to be unable to free themselves from the Shoah. The second generation shares many characteristics with the first “descendants” of the Shoah. The legacy of Auschwitz is thus depicted as a curse, but also as the most profound building block of the second generation’s identity.

In Tulli’s novel, it is not only biological traits that are passed down from parents to children, but everything that existed before their birth: “with a strange expression on her face, the girl ... asked me during the first break who I inherited those black eyes from” (p. 137). The children inherit not only the trauma of the war, but also the interpretation of those “black eyes”, a social and cultural perception of a physiognomy that cannot be refuted.

In *Italian High Heels*, Tulli borrows from the notion of postmemory defined by American literary historian Marianne Hirsch, presenting a story that shows how the postwar generation inherits their parents’ trauma. Like others deformed by the Shoah, Tulli speaks up too late: it is only after her mother’s death that she is able to revisit her post-traumatic childhood. The return to difficult and ambivalent experiences is accompanied by anger towards her parents’ generation with the result that she loses a part of her own life. This anger, however, is intertwined with compassion. Although the protagonist of Tulli’s novel is aware that her suffering is disproportionate to that of her mother’s, as the latter was hurt more profoundly, the need to comprehend becomes too great a burden to lift. Other literary testimonies touching upon the subject of postmemory include *A Family History of Fear: A Memoir* (Rodzinna historia lęku, 2005) by Agata Tuszyńska, → *A Piece about Mother and Fatherland* by Bożena Keff, → *Frascati* by Ewa Kuryluk, *Confession* (Wyznanie, 2012) by Roman Gren, *Noise* (Szum, 2014) by Magdalena Tulli, and the collection of interviews *I Accuse Auschwitz* by Mikołaj Grynberg.

Yes, we died. This is why I live but at half-steam, every minute questioning the ground under my feet, the clouds, the grass, and everything else. Hence the concealed reluctance to make long-term plans. Hence the irony – the last resort. Hence the wariness of reality, which – as it can turn out at the least expected moment – appears to be solid yet is made of flammable cardboard. The

thing that disturbs me most is the lack of sufficient faith that the world exists. It's a disease which is transmitted to one's progeny by looks, by sighs, and by touch. (p. 73)

*Italian High Heels* also confronts the events of March 1968 and the antisemitic repressions initiated by the Communist authorities, as well as the anti-Jewish campaign of the late 1960s. When the protagonist discovers that Jews, dubbed “double-dealers” by the ruling Communist Party, intend to sell the country to the enemies, she has a hard time imagining what such a transaction might look like: “With all of us included? Yes, with all of us and all our possessions, with banners and placards, with factories where state-owned industry products were manufactured, with dingy staircases and windowless kitchens. With notebooks made of class V paper, with pencil cases” (p. 132).

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ABZ

# The Jewish War and The Victory (Żydowska wojna, Zwycięstwo)

**Author:** Henryk Grynberg

**First Published:** 1965

**Translations:** Dutch (*De Joodse Oorlog*, 1968); Hebrew (*Hamilhama Hayehudit*, 1968); English (*Child of the Shadows*, 1969; *The Jewish War and The Victory*, 2001); German (*Der jüdische Krieg*, 1972; *Der Sieg*, in: *Drei Erzählungen*, 2016); Italian (*La guerra degli ebrei*, 1992); French (*La Guerre des Juifs*, 1994); Czech (*Židovská válka. Vítězství*, 1996).

**Film:** *Miejsce urodzenia* (Birthplace, 1992), documentary film by Paweł Łoziński on Grynberg's return to his birthplace in Poland and the discovery of his father's grave, murdered by Polish neighbours.

**About the Author:** Henryk Grynberg, born in 1936 into a Jewish family in Warsaw, survived the Holocaust with his mother by hiding with Aryan identification papers (under the name Krzyżanowski). His father was killed by Polish villagers as a victim of distrust. In 1959, Grynberg received an MA degree in journalism from Warsaw University, after which he worked as an actor (at Teatr Żydowski) and translator, making his literary debut with his collection of stories *The "Antigone" Crew* (Ekipa Antygona, 1959). In 1967, while on a tour of the U. S. with the Jewish State Theatre Company (Warsaw), Grynberg applied for political asylum on the grounds of the antisemitic campaign in Poland. He studied in the Department of Slavic-Russian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, graduating in 1971 with an M. A. in Russian literature. After moving to Washington D.C., Grynberg cooperated with the monthly *Ameryka* (1971–1983), the U. S. Information Agency, and *Voice of America* under the pseudonym Robert Miller. He was also a contributor and translator for the literary magazines *Kultura* (Paris), *Wiadomości* (London), and Russian-language magazine *America Illustrated* (later *Amerika*). The books he wrote after emigrating would not be published in Poland until after 1987.

**Further Important Publications:** *Ekipa „Antygona“* (1963, Antigone's Crew; short stories); *Antynostalgia* (1971, Anti-Nostalgia; poems); *Życie ideologiczne* (1975, Ideological Life; novel); *Życie osobiste* (1979, Personal Life; novel); *Życie codzienne i artystyczne* (1980, Every-Day and Artistic Life; novel); *Kadisz* (Kaddish, 1987; novel); *Prawda nieartystyczna* (1984, The Non-Artistic Truth; essays); *Szkice rodzinne* (1990, Family Sketches; stories); *Wróciłem. Wiersze wybrane z lat 1964–89* (I Have Returned; poems); *Dziedzictwo* (1993, Heritage; prose); *Dzieci Syjonu* (1994, The Children of Zion; stories); *Rysuję w pamięci* (1995, Sketching in Memory, poetry); *Drohobycz, Drohobycz* (1997, Drohobycz, Drohobycz; stories); *Ojczyzna* (1999, Motherland; stories); *Memorbuch*

(2000, Memorbook; memories); *Szmulglerzy* (2001, Smugglers; novel); *Monolog polsko-żydowski* (2003, Polish-Jewish Monologue; essays).

### Content and Interpretation

*The Jewish War and The Victory*, an autobiographical novel, introduced Grynberg to the public as a chronicler of the Holocaust experience and post-Holocaust trauma. The war time reality reflected in Grynberg's novel raised controversy and "success was hindered by antisemitic pressures during the mid-sixties, followed by an openly anti-Jewish campaign of the late sixties, [which] interrupted any decent publications on the Jewish theme." (Grynberg, 2001, p. VII)

After initial interference by the censors, publication of the novel was finally permitted thanks to the prominent Polish writer Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Grynberg stated that, as a function of self-censorship, he was compelled to use various fictional elements in an otherwise purely autobiographical story about the tragic fate of a Jewish family living in the Warsaw countryside. "*The Jewish War* [...] became the subject of controversy because it differed from official prescriptions for depicting the Nazi occupation and the fate of the Jews. All reviews were held up by the censorship" (Grynberg, 1979, p. 127). First published in English as *Child of the Shadows* (1969), a completed edition of the novel was published in 2001 under the title *The Jewish War and The Victory*.

Narrated from the perspective of a young Jewish boy, *The Jewish War and The Victory* tells the tragic story of a Polish-Jewish family which goes into hiding in the countryside with the help of forged Aryan papers, adopting the false identity of a Polish Catholic officer captured by German soldiers. The first section of the novel, "Father", ends with the father's separation from his wife and son Henryk. Looking back at his father's life, the first-person narrator proceeds in the next section ("Mother") to present a heroic image of his mother, who every month "wrote my father, an officer of the cavalry [...] We also had his photograph: a fair-haired, smoothly combed man in uniform" (Grynberg, 2001, p. 43). The young Henryk is aware that his Jewishness makes him a danger to himself, his mother, and those hiding them – as he writes, "Because I was circumcised" (p. 34). His younger brother, left behind with a Polish peasant family, is eventually captured by German soldiers when they discover he is circumcised. The sequel to *The Jewish War and The Victory*, picks up the family story with the advance of the Soviet Red Army and the "liberation" of the Jews in 1944, which was not seen as "an end but as a sequel to their sufferings" (pp. vii-viii). In this way the question is raised: "So how did the war end?" (p. 150). Given that resettlement in the former shtetl Dobrze would be impossible, Henryk and his mother move to the "exotic, stony landscape" of war-torn Lodz (pp. 103). After leaving the city he moves to a sanatorium for Jewish children in the Sudet Mountains, where the novel ends.

With the help of realistic observations made by the young protagonist, Grynberg portrays the despair and agony of Polish Jews during World War II and the immediate postwar years in Communist Poland.

### Main Topics and Problems

Henryk Grynberg's whole literary work presents stories based on real events that follow the efforts and strategies of Jewish protagonists to survive their ordeal. In the field of Holocaust literature, Grynberg's works on "Holocaust-children" are gaining importance, as the genre undergoes a gradual "withdrawal from literature" towards a more authentic documentation of historical events. His stories of the Holocaust as seen through the eyes of its child survivors are seen as the founding works for a swell of Holocaust stories from a similar perspective, with novels like Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, Arnošt Lustig's *Dita Sax* and *Night and Hope*, Bogdan Wojdowski's → *Bread for the Departed*, Louis Begley's *War Time Lies*, Michał Głowiński's → *Black Seasons*, and Wilhelm Dichter's → *God's Horse*. The Polish language serves here as a source of inspiration for the author in exile: "I fear to part from Polish words and places, which I cherish so much. [...] I will go on being a Polish writer and a Pole" (Grynberg, 1968, p. 1).

Questions posed by children about their identity (or Jewishness) constitute one of the main problems in Grynberg's writings, which feature a continuous struggle between adopted and concealed identity. "But who were we? And especially who was I?" (Grynberg, 2001, p. 63). The concealment of identity is thus framed as a kind of childhood game, which then serves as a metaphor for Jews forced into hiding, as well as the perpetual performance of life and death. It is a game that one must learn to survive, which is why so many were compelled to study Christian practices and imitate (Catholic) Poles – a forced masquerade. In Grynberg's works such masquerades are closely linked with another crucial problem, the often taboo topic of Polish antisemitism. "My original writing is inspired by my being one of the very few child survivors of the Jewish Holocaust in Eastern Europe and recently by the revival of Jewish prosecution in my homeland" (Contemporary Authors, 2020).

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HCT

# The Land of Forgetting (Krajina zabudnutia)

**Author:** Anton Baláž

**First Published:** 2000

**Translations:** Hebrew (*Eretz Hashichecha*, 2015); Hungarian (*A feledés földje*, 2016).

**About the Author:** Anton Baláž (1943) is a Slovak prose writer, television and film screenwriter, radio playwright and publicist. After 1989 he started to work as the editor-in-chief of *Slovenský denník*. In the first year of the independent Slovak Republic (1993) he worked in the office of the President of the Slovak Republic. Baláž's work is very varied, but one important trend can be observed – it is preoccupied with less known topics of Slovak history. In the second half of the 1990s, Baláž returned thematically to the Jewish past, specifically to the Holocaust of the Slovak Jewish community. His work focuses on the first postwar years. It concentrates on the fate of the Jews who survived the horrors of concentration camps and then tried to reintegrate into ordinary life and to find a new sense of life. He followed the fates of Jews since the 1960s, but decided to write about this topic only in the second half of the 1990s.

**Further Important Publications:** *Tábor padlých žien* (1993, The Camp of Fallen Women; novel); *Ofélia nie je mŕtva* (2003, Ophelia Is Not Dead; radio play); *Transporty nádeje* (2010, Transports of Hope; nonfiction); *Prehovor, Ezachiel* (2012, Speak Out, Ezechiel; novel); *Portréty prežítia* (2014, Portraits of Survival; short stories); *Povedz slovo čisté* (2017, Say It Clearly; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The novel is set in the first years after World War II. The plot of the novel mainly takes place in Bratislava, in a Jewish quarter, but also in Vienna, where one of the main characters (Miriam) regularly goes to equip groups of Jews emigrating to Israel. On the basis of the description of the events, it can be assumed that it is in 1949. In retrospect flashbacks, the author described the war and Holocaust memories of Erna and Miriam which these two characters personally witnessed. That is why, they have to deal in the postwar years with the traumas they still carried from the war trauma of survivors.

The main characters are Erna and Miriam, two young Jews who survived the horror of the Holocaust in the concentration camp Auschwitz. Miriam survived thanks to Erna. During the Holocaust, Miriam lost her entire family and the flat they had lived in before the war. Miriam got employed by the Palestinian Office to help the surviving Jews find a new home in the new land of the Jews in Israel. She tries to justify her own survival, to get rid of her guilt towards her dead family members. Erna decides to leave Slovakia in the postwar period when the population between Hungary a Slovakia is

being exchanged, and she moves to Hungary. Now she is trying to escape from Hungary to Vienna through Slovakia, because she was forced to testify against the former Hungary minister László Rajk. In the trial with Rajk she had to testify that she was receiving information from him which she handed over to the Israeli Secret Service.

The other character is Albert Kalina (Aaron Katz) who is the head of the Palestinian Office. Although he is a character inspired by the real person Ľudovít Kalina, the novel is a fictitious depiction of his destiny. Baláž devised his story on the basis of the probable fate of Jews, who were threatened by a long-term prison sentence for Zionism. Therefore the fictional Kalina ended his life by suicide. In the novel Kalina lost his family in a concentration camp where he advised them to go, because he did not know that the camps were the camps of death.

The novel begins at the Palestinian Office where a photographer named Jakub brings photographs of a Jewish wedding for Miriam. However, the Palestinian Office is already being watched by the State Security at that time. But it is already at a time when the Iron Curtain is starting to emerge across Europe, and emigration is becoming more and more complicated. Jakub soon finds out that he is under surveillance by the State Security after the inspectors and cultural consultants appear in his flat, an open studio, and warn him about topics that are banned.

Miriam meets Erna with whom she had spent eight months in Auschwitz, while working with Hungarian Jewish refugees. They have been separated during the death march. Erna suffers from a phobia of dirt after being in Auschwitz. Miriam decides to help her with her emigration to America. Erna spends a night in Jakub's flat and between Jakub, Erna, and Miriam, a kind of love triangle merges.

Jewish transports to Israel begin to be complicated by the fact that people were convinced that the Jews were exporting gold and jewellery from Slovakia, so they are cruelly checked at the border. It means yet another dishonour and degradation for them.

After Jakub accepts a position as a government photographer, in addition to the humiliation of Jews, he feels resistance against the state and himself, because he had contributed to the decial of Jews. After destroying this state order, he decides to escape from Slovakia. Jakub and Miriam join the German transport from Slovakia to Germany. Miriam does not leave to Erec Israel like the other Jews, but stays in Germany, which might remind her of the horrors of the Holocaust. But she realises that Auschwitz would go with her anywhere. "I will still bring Auschwitz with me..." (p. 152). Kalina decides to end his life by suicide.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

The author's books with the topic of Jewry were based on the archival documents of Ministry of the Interior, personal experience of those who survived and who he personally met, as well as the case files of some participants in the Zionist Trial. The Zionist Trial was a political trial with the employees of the Ministry of Interior and Palestinian Office who were involved in organising *aliyah*. They were prosecuted in the

years 1952 and 1953 in the trials against bourgeois nationalists, accused of treason and other crimes against the socialist regime. They were imprisoned for nine to eighteen years.

The novel *The Land of Forgetting* is, according to the literary scientist and critic Mária Bátorová, unique to its kind in the Slovak literature, whether from the point of view of Jewish history in Slovakia, or describing the practical life of Orthodox Jews, their customs, traditions, the status of men and women.

Balázš's novel was inspired by the story of sisters Pavla and Eugenia Schreiber who survived Auschwitz. Pavla Schreiber, later Rodan, was the mother of Martin Rodan, one of his classmates at the Comenius University in Bratislava. The sisters were taken in the first transport from Slovakia (Poprad) on 25th March 1942. Their personal experience from the death camp was also reflected in the trauma of nudity, a topic that is an important part of the novel.

The sisters were the first ones who managed to report from Auschwitz what was happening in the camp. As a part of a propaganda event for the Red Cross in 1943, they could send gifts to relatives. The sisters made a wooden box with a secret bottom into which they put a report about the camp. The gift was sent to Budapest, where they understood their message and read the report in the main Budapest synagogue.

The author also deals extensively with the traumas that the surviving Jews had taken with them from the concentration camps. In the case of Miriam, it is a phobia of nudity, in the case of Erna it is a phobia of dirt. Miriam's phobia of nudity prevents her from being a full-fledged woman, preventing her from touching a man. Her phobia stems from the forced nudity she was exposed to in Auschwitz. With the help of Erna, in Auschwitz she learned to use her naked body only as a tool for survival.

Her own irrational fear of being nude is in strong contrast to the voluntary nudity of willing prostitutes she sees on the streets of Bratislava after the war. After the night spent with Jakub, she feels she is out of her trauma and phobia of nudity, she is a strong woman again.

Erna suffers from a different trauma, she does not care about her nudity because she did not experience the abhorrent nudity when she arrived in Auschwitz when only the skeletons of women were waiting. And she did not experience the mocking and abhorrent views of the German guards. However, Erna suffers from a phobia of dirt that prevents her from sleeping under her blanket. Again and again, she felt the horror of touching unclean things. After the war in Budapest, this fear was partly overcome, but her subsequent visit to Tel Aviv convinced her that dirt was not just about Auschwitz but it was related to culture, especially to the culture of the East. Under the influence of this trauma she is afraid of emigrating to Israel, it would be the death of her to live in such dirt. She decides to move to America. She overcomes her phobia in Jakub's flat when she is forced to cover herself with a blanket which is dirty in her opinion after the arrival of the inspectors, because she has to pretend she is his mistress. Then she finds out that if she decides to touch the dirty thing herself, it is not too bad, she can overcome it.

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MA

# The Land without God (Země bez Boha)

**Author:** Ota B. Kraus

**First Published:** 1948

**Translation:** Hebrew (*Adama l'lo elohim*, 1953).

**About the Author:** Ota B. Kraus (1921–2000), originally Otto B. Kraus, a poet, writer, teacher and graphologist, was born into a family of assimilated Jews in Prague. His father was the owner of a factory. Kraus, his parents and his younger brother were deported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto in May of 1942 and from there to Auschwitz-Birkenau in December of 1943, to the so-called Family Camp where the Czechoslovak Jews were located. Kraus was at first forced to work manually, later he became an educator in the Children's Block. In July of 1944, he was deported to the Schwarzhilde concentration camp. His father was killed in the gas chamber, his mother and brother died in other camps. Kraus survived the death march to Theresienstadt at the end of the war where he was liberated. After the war he married Dita Polach, a Jewish survivor. In 1949 they emigrated to Israel. They spent a year in the village Shaar Chefer. From there they moved to Givat Chaim kibbutz, next to the Children's Village of Hadassim, and finally they settled in Netanya. In Israel, Kraus first worked as a day labourer, then began farming privately and eventually became a teacher and graphologist. He and his wife visited Prague regularly from 1989 until his death.

In most of Kraus' works, the narratives, motifs as well as the figures are inspired by his friends' and the author's own recollections. After his emigration, he had to change from his native Czech to writing English and therefore most of his works were written in English. This is why his later style was not as brilliant as in *The Land without God*. Nevertheless, at the same time, it gained a new dimension of detailed descriptions of events (such as in *The Painted Wall*) and thanks to his life in Israel there is also a broader variety of themes (mainly kibbutz life, mysticism, conversion, assimilation and the Arab-Israeli conflict). Kraus was one of the first Czech authors who introduced Czech readers to the closed world of a kibbutz, the life of the newly settled pioneers and the problems of the new State of Israel (*The Wind Blowing from the Mountains* and *Dispute of Pigs*).

**Further Important Publications:** *The Dream Merchant and Other Galilean Stories* (1991, Czech 2009; short stories); *Vítr z hor* (1991, *The Wind Blowing from the Mountains*, novel); *Můj bratr dým* (1993, literally *My Brother, the Smoke*, in English translated as *The Painted Wall*, 1995; novel); *Vepři ve při* (1993, *Dispute of Pigs*; novel); *My Cancer* (2012; autobiography); *Cesta pouští* (2014, *Desert Years*; novel).

### Content and Interpretation

Kraus' major work *The Land without God* was written within a few months after the end of the war (from autumn of 1945 to July of 1946). A fragment of the manuscript was published, titled *Auschwitz*, in 1947. The narrative takes place in Auschwitz chronologically, with short retrospective episodes, mainly within the Family Camp, between the 23rd of December, 1943 and July of 1944. The muddy Hell on earth is ruled by the devil Beelzebub and his helpers have turned his face away from this place, where spiders with machine guns, and their caps decorated with death skulls, spin their hellish nets. Filth, sludge and the clay of the earth are overcast by heavy clouds, by wind, rain and snow; the action often takes place at dusk, in darkness, or before sunrise. In the descriptions of the place, where people are dying every day, grey, black or the crimson colours are used, referring to the colours of Hell (black walls, the black Prince Beelzebub, black fear, crimson railway station roof, blood-coloured sun, crimson moon, grey mornings, orange flames etc.). The life span of the people is limited and cannot be extended, they have been granted a period of six months, after which they are expected by Death in the gas chambers.

The narrator's descriptions are interspersed with many dialogues and inner monologues. A lot of characters appear in the novel, most of them are assimilated Jews. They are only minimally characterised (often, only the eyes are described, unfavoured people are "well fed", sometimes their former profession is mentioned). They find themselves caught in an extreme situation, where their survival depends on chance, on their will for life and on rejecting usual social conventions under the conditions dictated by Beelzebub. The degradation and the extreme conditions cause squabbles among the characters. The main hero is a young man named Daniel, who at the end of the novel is selected for deportation to another "Hell" with a group of other prisoners, while the remaining prisoners are led to their death. The strongly negative character is the hangman Maxa, described in more detail.

The author used his own experiences as a prisoner as well as those of his close friends. In the novel, the writer utilised metaphors, expressive words, poetic similes and personifications to describe the "undescrivable" (see also → *Colors* written by Jiří Weil). To these devices also belong allusions to the *Hebrew Bible* in the novel.

Some decades later Kraus returned to the same events in the novel *The Painted Wall* (1993), formerly titled *The Diary*. However, it was written in a different literary style (impersonal descriptions, a more distant view, stark language without poetic ornamentation). On the contrary, in the novel *Desert Years* the author used metaphoric and symbolic devices again.

In *The Land without God*, author's play with the names of characters can be found, mainly from the Bible. It was later utilised also in *The Dream Merchant and Other Galilean Stories* as well as in *Dispute of Pigs*.

*The Land without God* contains a wealth of descriptions of strong emotions – anger, doubt, fear, loss of integrity, betrayal, hate, despair. There is also sarcasm and irony. People face their imminent death not with pride and with a song, but with lamen-

tation, dread and helplessness (compare also Jiří Weil's → *Elegy for 77 297 Victims*). The characters in the novel are prototypes who speak for the thousands of others whose fate is similar. Their position in the hierarchy of the concentration camp, higher or lower, is not the result of their own volition, but of pure chance and a change of values, which is dictated by the circumstances. For instance, a humiliated dancing girl passes the selection and is sent to work in Germany, although she has neither the training nor the strength for physical work.

Kraus' ability to interpret his personal experiences of the Holocaust horrors in an original literary form, with distance, in symbolic scenes, yet imbued with emotional intensity, preceded its time in many ways. It put Kraus on a level of experienced belletrists, such as Jiří Weil, or later the younger talented Arnošt Lustig, who like Kraus was himself interned in Auschwitz.

### Main Topics and Problems

The dominant topics in the novel *The Land without God* are the Shoah in Auschwitz, and the loss of identity, or rather loss of human decency in extreme situations.

Kraus also focused on the theme of the Shoah in the above mentioned *The Painted Wall*, in the poem *The Window (Okno)*, composed while he was on a hunger march, and in part in the novel *Desert Years*. This work takes place predominantly in prewar Czechoslovakia, dealing among others with the persecution of the Czech Jewish population.

The topic of identity, or rather the search for identity, can be found throughout almost the entire body of the author's work. It appears in all his literary genres and often is connected with the traditional literary plot, such as the clashing opinions between father and son. In Kraus' work it is often connected to religion – leaving home due to religious conflicts (the desire to work in the Holy Land), conversion (a Jew becoming a Catholic and *vice versa*), abandoning of Jewish orthodoxy, joining a kibbutz, loss of faith, or in reverse, becoming religious. It is also sometimes connected with a visionary theme, the notion of building the Jewish state. A possible reason might be the fact that the author himself lacked the feeling of being anchored in a national and religious identity.

In *The Land without God* Kraus describes a change of identity not in individual characters, but also in crowded scenes (for instance, a group of women whose behaviour changes due to circumstances and sinks to animal instincts). People react in different ways to the extreme inhuman conditions of suffering, to the impossibility of escaping horrific confinement, to the loss of human rights and dignity, to imminent death. Some react by denying, others by hoping for a quick end of the war, seeking strength from God. Some reflect on the meaning of life, beauty and goodness, others resign to their fate or try to organise a resistance, to plan an escape, search for intimacy without love. Some spin fantastic solutions while others wallow in tears and desperation. Some characters become indifferent to their fate or the death of others and do anything to survive (they steal from the newcomers and from the dead). The

animal instinct of survival prevails over moral precepts, or even family bonds. Children also are marked by Satan and lose their innocence.

A prominent aspect of the novel is laughter – bitter or relieving laughter eventually the liberating laughter after some stress, laughter of kindness and laughter that hides the true state of mind. The author often uses images of roads in connection with hope and death (as well as in his other works). *The Land without God* begins and ends with transports, “the road to the unknown”, building the road in Auschwitz is part of the narrative, and its completion leads to the selection and dismantling of the camp.

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# The Last Cyclist (Poslední cyklista)

**Author:** Karel Švenk

**First Published:** 1961

**Theatre Adaptations:** Theresienstadt (1944); Prague, Theatre Rokoko (1961); Cedar Grove, Temple Shalom of West Essex (1995); St. Paul, Czech and Slovak Cultural Centre (2009); Mexico City, Theatre Thespis (2012); New York, The West End Theater (2013); Scotch Plains, NJ, Congregation Beth Israel (2014); Milwaukee, Nancy Kendall Theater (2019).

**About the Author:** Karel Švenk, written also Karl Schwenk (1917–1945), came from a Czech-Jewish family, his father was a tailor. Švenk took part in the musically dramatic avant-garde group “Club of Unrecognised Talents” (Klub zapadlých talentů) in Prague from 1934 to 1938. In November 1941, he was deported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto, and was among the young Jewish men sent to prepare the previously non-Jewish camp for the Jewish prisoners (so-called *Aufbaukommando*). He was the initiator of cultural activities in Theresienstadt, as a cabaret artist, comedian, songwriter and playwright. He wrote and staged the satirical plays *Long Live the Life!* (1943) and *The Last Cyclist* (1944). The song Anything Goes! also called Theresienstadt March (Všechno jde! or Tereziňský pochod), his best-known music composition, became a secret ghetto anthem. Another of Švenk’s songs Why Does the White Man Sit in the Front of the Bus was preserved by the musician and Theresienstadt survivor George Horner (it was later arranged by David Post and recorded by the Hawthorne String Quartet). In October 1944, Švenk was sent to Auschwitz, then briefly to a factory, and later died in a cattle wagon on a subsequent transport to Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp. A different source stated that he was shot by a Nazi soldier on a forced march.

## Content and Interpretation

The play was written in the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1944 and Švenk with his collaborators (among others, the stage designer František Zelenka and the actor Jiří Süßland Cajlajs) prepared its performance. Nevertheless, after its dress rehearsal, the play, full of satirical hints at the Nazis and Nazi ideology, was forbidden by the Jewish self-administration for fear of persecutions. According to witnesses, it was secretly performed in the attics of Theresienstadt barracks (Jedličková, 2014, p. 185).

The manuscript of the play has only been preserved in fragments. *The Last Cyclist* was officially premiered in 1961 (Theatre Rokoko in Prague) while the play was reconstructed by witnesses (the actor Jana Šedová that participated in the Theresienstadt performance) and newly adapted (Darek Vostřel). New songs were written by Ivo Rožek, Ivan Vyskočil and Darek Vostřel.

The plot is inspired by the anecdote according to which the Jews and the cyclists cause everything that is bad. “The Jews and the cyclists are responsible for all of our misfortunes!” “Why the cyclists?” “And why the Jews?”

The work takes place in an unknown land where the inmates of a mental asylum escape and take over the outside world. Because the head of the madhouse rides a bicycle, they hound, oppress or kill everyone who rides a bicycle and anyone who has ever had anything to do with cyclists for many generations back. The main character is the Jew Bořivoj Abeles, a small shopkeeper and Chaplinesque anti-hero. (In the original version in Theresienstadt, he was played by Karel Švenk.) Due to being the last remaining cyclist, he is chased. He escapes several times but is caught in the end. When citizens rebel against hunger, Abeles is charged as a culprit and sentenced to being shot in a rocket to the Moon. His last wish is to smoke a cigar and to see his girlfriend Mánička (Mary). While smoking his last cigar, he unintentionally ignites the rocket thereby launching the dictator as well as all the lunatics to the Moon. Bořivoj Abeles runs out and tells the spectators, “Go home! You are free!” but Mánička adds: “Only on the stage is there a happy ending. Out there, where you are, our troubles continue”.

### Main Topics and Problems

*The Last Cyclist* mocked the Nazi propaganda and the traditional antisemitic stereotypes. It was probably the most courageous production written and performed in Theresienstadt.

Dictator Ms Narcissus: All bikes owners will wear a C on their coats. [...] They are forbidden under the penalty of death to eat, drink, read, write or to sleep. (Švenk, 1961, p. 38)

Krysa (The Rat): Brothers! You are rightly embarrassed by the lack of food. [...] Whose fault is it? The common cyclist! Just look at him! His devilish brain has been making plans about how to enslave and destroy you. Whose fault is it that a bloody fight is unleashed? The common cyclist! His greedy hands have gambled on the Stock Exchange and he has secretly hoarded huge piles of provisions. Whose fault is the lack of smokes? The common cyclist. His protruding ears have listened to hostile speech and his blubbery lips have spreaded these bunks. [...] The cyclists have been riding in our country and their perverse eyebrows have seduced our girls. Whose fault is it that marriages have been broken and families have been wrecked! The common cyclist! (Šormová, 1973, p. 48)

Today it is impossible to know how closely Jana Šedová and Darek Vostřel reconstructed the script in accord with Švenk’s original. In any case, in 1961, the play was also adapted and updated, for instance the ending. Abeles is caged in a zoo as the last specimen of a cyclist. A rebellion against the violent regime breaks out in the country. The Rat is arrested and sentenced to death. It seems Bořivoj Abeles is finally free. Nevertheless, the danger of racism and xenophobia does not disappear.

Abeles: Well, tell someone else about this. Would it be possible that I, an exemplary loser, could be such a lucky man? Could this lunacy be over in the eleventh hour? I'm not ready for such a happy ending. [...]

Voice: Anyway, everything was caused by the Jews!

Voice: Well, I'm not biased against the Gypsies but to donate schools and flats to them –

I can't help it but the Negroes stink nastily –

I'm not a fascist at all, but hobnobbing with the Mongols?

(Švenk, 1961, p. 74)

The American adaptation was created by Naomi Patz in collaboration with Lisa Peschel who is a published editor and critic of plays and cabarets from the Ghetto Theresienstadt (Peschel, 2014). The work became a play within a play. The open dress rehearsal ended abruptly with the announcement of an impending deportation to the East. This adaptation also included Švenk's The Theresienstadt March. This is how the "spiritual resistance" of Jews in Theresienstadt to the Nazis was emphasised.

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JH

# The Last Thing (Posledná vec)

**Author:** Leopold Lahola

**First Published:** 1968

**Translations:** Czech (*Poslední věc*, 1969); Hungarian (*Véletlen ismeretség*, 1970); Serbian (*Poslednja stvar*, 1998).

**Theatre Adaptation:** Slovenské národné divadlo, Bratislava (2004, Peter Pavlac's adaptation of the story Facing the Enemy), directed by Ľubomír Vajdička.

**Film Adaptations:** *Návrat domov* (Return Home, based on short story Like a Dog), feature film; screenplay Leopold Lahola and Martin Frič; film director Martin Frič, premiered 28th of January, 1949; *Rozhovor s nepriateľom* (Facing the Enemy), feature film; screenplay Peter Pavlac, Patrik Lančarič and Marko Igonda; film director Patrik Lančarič, premiered 8th of March, 2007.

**About the Author:** Leopold Lahola, whose real name was Leopold Arje Friedmann (1918–1968), was a Slovak prose writer, poet, playwright, screenwriter, director and translator of Hebrew. He belongs to the second generation of World War II among Slovak prose writers. Even though he was a talented painter, as a Jew he was not allowed to complete his studies at the Faculty of Arts in Bratislava after the establishment of the Slovak State. He went through dramatic events of military labour service in the Slovak army (see Emil F. Knieža's → *The Sixth Battalion, On Guard!*). He volunteered to be interned in a labour camp for Jews in Nováky to share the fate of his mother and brother. After the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising, he participated in the resistance. When he was injured, at the end of the war he served as a war correspondent. He began as a playwright who expressively interpreted the experience of war events. He initially had success in theatre (*The Four Sides of the World*, 1947), and worked as a screenwriter (*White Darkness*, 1948; *Wolves' Lairs*, 1948). After the Communist coup in February 1948, he was criticised and misinterpreted. In 1949, he emigrated to Israel where he worked as a director, then eventually settling in Munich in West Germany. At the end of the 1960s he was able to implement his work projects in Czechoslovakia. He died suddenly while filming *The Sweet Time of Kalimagdora* (1968).

Before the war he devoted himself to writing his own poetry and translating Hebrew poetry. Abroad, he engaged in screenwriting and directing. Shortly after the war, his only prosaic book, a collection of short stories, *The Last Thing*, came into being but it could not be published. Lahola's prose brought a deep and expressive focus on suffering, violence, as well as the absurdity of the war and the Holocaust. The author placed both events in a historical context, placing emphasis on depicting existentially motivated violence and dehumanised images of man.

**Further Important Publications:** *Štyri strany sveta* (1949, premiered 1947, The Four Sides of the World; play); *Atentát* (1949, premiered 1949, Assassination; play); *Škrvny na slnku* (1967, Sunspots; play); *Inferno* (1968, Inferno; play); *Ako jed škorpióna* (1995, Like a Scorpion's Poison; poetry); *Päť hier* (2005, Five Plays, ed. D. Kročanová-Roberts); *Posledná vec a iné* (2007, The Last Thing and Others, ed. J. Paštéková, contains short prose, poetry, the play Assassination, essays, interviews, letters, comments and critical reviews).

### Content and Interpretation

The set of fourteen short stories of *The Last Thing* was created according to the time-frame of the individual pieces of prose from 1949 to 1956. It immediately reflects Lahola's biographical experience with the internment labour camp in Nováky and the resistance. The dominant theme is the experience of the war, although it is not always present. What matters is not historical, temporal circumstances, but universal human experience, events of death and threat, staged in various ways. The narrative is intentionally expressive, often brutal and distancing. Beyond that, one can find a reference to the mechanism of Judaism's metaphysics that attempts to approach evil in its "invisible" form. "There is only one way to escape the abyss: to explore, measure, determine its depth and descend into it" (the motto of the book by Cesare Pavese; Lahola, 1994, p. 22). The prose, which can be divided into four headings, bears witness to this "descent into the abyss": 1) intimate stories, which often take place indoors; relating to death and humiliation in the liquidation camps, like *Twenty-Five Lashes of a Cane* (*Dvadsaťpäť palíc*) or *The Open Door* (*Otvorené dvere*). 2) Anecdotal stories about Jewish nature, character and fatal destiny with a point – with explicit reference to the events of the pogroms and persecution of the Jewish ethnicity, see *Birdsong* (*Vtáčí spev*), *The Funeral of David Krakower* (*Pohreb Dávida Krakowera*) or *God's Lane* (*Božia ulička*). 3) Short stories – depicting cruel blasphemy of situational scenes from military and guerrilla actions partisans, *The Last Thing* (*Posledná vec*), *The Shot Man* (*Zastrelený*), *Salvo* (*Salva*) or *Fontentieri*. 4) Short stories that have a dialogic core which thematise conversation or verbal reflection on guilt, complicity, responsibility for the death and humiliation of another person: *About the Body and Soul* (*O tele a duši*), *Narration in the First Person* (*Rozprávanie v prvej osobe*), *Like a Such Dog* (*Ako taký pes*), and *Facing the Enemy* (*Rozhovor s nepriateľom*). Thanks to the author's autobiographical experience and his proximity to Judaist metaphysics, Lahola's stories appeal to readers differently than other Slovak prose on this topic. It is possible to recall a partial similarity with Ladislav Grosman's → *The Shop on Main Street*. Rather, Lahola's works remind more of the Czech, Polish or Italian literature. Arnošt Lustig's → *Diamonds of the Night*, Bruno Schulz, Paul Celan, Jean Améry, Zofia Nałkowska's → *Medallions*, Primo Levi, Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, Tadeusz Borowski's → *A Farewell to Maria*, and *The World of Stone* as well as Curzio Malaparte.

In the case of Lahola, this is not exclusively "concentration camp literature"; its scope is broader. The internal symmetry used in the construction of stories is remark-

able. Many times Lahola copies the five-member structure of the construction of a dramatic text, beginning with an exposition and ending with a disaster. Within the heart of Lahola's stories, there are dramatic situations at the plot level with implicit elements of distancing. They refer to an environment and mentality that the reader cannot know from his or her own experience. Also, there are points in the narrative that are remarkable and reminiscent of drama. The conclusions of the amendments are typically sharp or semantically open. They are "overlapped" with the use of paradox, nonsense, extreme examples or black humour. The stories only have a general sense of timing, and the setting is only roughly and generally defined: "Once a hundred thousand years ago, during the ice age or immediately after the world began to melt from below, this mountain valley had to be engraved by a glacial body like a large scaly reptile when dragging his tail behind him" (Lahola, 1994, p. 111). The stories thus become parables and allegories on the subject of endangered humanity. Lahola's interpreter Jozef Felix wrote about the prose: "If Lahola's characters feel anxious, they get it from the basic feeling of a dehumanised world [...]. In all his characters we find anxiety, but it is the anxiety of the author who loves mankind and life above everything else and who, through the images of the dehumanised world, wants to humanise mankind and the world, and to warn of the 'abyss' into which mankind has entered." (Felix, 1994, p. 303)

### **Main Topics and Problems**

In Lahola's prose, the reader will find references to the impossibility of immediately naming the events which are happening. The language assumes the function of the medium used for the purpose. The "abyss" into which the reader and the author descend is also the abyss of language and the possible naming of the complicated events. In the midst of these events, the victim and the witness are the same person. The language is also related to expressing the search how to call the event of death, which is deprived of all the traditional deposits of culture. The fact of extinction here is represented by the term liquidation, which lacks the context of adequate naming. The author thus addresses readers from the unknown world to a completely different experience, "in a special way of talking", as the protagonist of Lahola's play *Inferno* comments. There is a gap between the theme, accompanied by high moral expectations, and its "low" (protocol, elementary) aesthetically not stylised transcription. In the short stories, the source of the authentic possibility of being very close to the event; the language seemed not to be spoken for us, but spoken directly within us. The theme of the body and corporeality is a frequent accompanying motif for presentation the event of liquidation. The thematisation of the body at risk, the stories of violence, destruction and death provoke a reflection on the relationship between body and soul in Lahola's prose. This is exemplified in the short stories *About Body and Soul*, *Twenty-Five Lashes of a Cane*, *Accidental Acquaintance* (Náhodná známosť) and *The Last Thing*. In the last story, the dead body is a prop of the plot, a source of the plot for telling the truth about the limits of mankind's humanism. The extraordinarily large,

frozen corpse of a comrade is a source of conflict between two men who want to “save” it from ritual dishonour by the enemy. Also the religious duty to bury dead body in Judaism can play a role. The idea is to smash the hard-frozen corpse into pieces, or to preserve its integrity, symbolically also understood as being the last chance to preserve the integrity of a world broken into pieces. In the spirit of Lahola’s desire for absurdity and nonsense, the first alternative prevails, the corpse is smashed up, and the scene closes with an epilogue that comments on the absurd decision. “Melius brought his half of Joc to the other half that lay near his bearded comrade. He lay on the frozen ground, leaned up on his elbow, waiting for what was going to happen next. It was impossible for him to go with one half or the other. Bearded as the devil was, he was right, he thought. Half a person is not a human, even if he is lying there in pieces or whatever” (Lahola, 1994, p. 134).

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# Lessons in Love and Dancing (Hodina tance a láskey)

**Author:** Pavel Kohout

**First Published:** 1989

**Translations:** Danish (*Dansetimen*, 1989); Finnish (*Saksalainen romanssi*, 1989); German (*Tanz- und Liebesstunde*, 1991); Norwegian (*Danse- og kjærlighetstimen*, 1990); Swedish (*En dans- och kärlekslektion*, 1990); Japanese (*Ai to shi no odori*, 1993).

**Film Adaptation:** *Hodina tance a láskey* (Lessons in Love and Dancing), TV film, screenplay Jelena Mašínová, Pavel Kohout and Viktor Polesný; film director Viktor Polesný, premiered 2003.

**About the Author:** Pavel Kohout (1928) is a Czech novelist, playwright and poet. He was born in Prague. In the 1950s he worked as a journalist and dramaturg and in the 1960s he directed at Vinohrady Theatre in Prague. Though his early poetry praised socialism, he was expelled from the Communist Party in 1969 as a prominent representative of the Prague Spring. Oppressed during the so-called normalisation by the secret police and banned from public life, Kohout organised “house theatre” events in which performances of plays by banned authors were given in private flats. Kohout was a co-author and one of the first signatories of Charter 77. In 1978, he started working at the Burgtheater in Vienna, while his Czech citizenship was revoked. From 1979, he lived in exile, mainly in Austria. After 1989, he divided his time between Vienna and Prague. He became famous as the author of more than forty plays, novels, and autobiographical writings.

**Further Important Publications:** *Z deníku kontrarevolucionáře* (in German 1969, Czech original 1997, *From the Diary of a Counterrevolutionary*; autofiction); *Amerika* (with Ivan Klíma, in German 1970, in Czech 1991, theatre adaptation of Franz Kafka’s novel); *Katyně* (samizdat 1978, in German 1978; *The Hangwoman*; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The first nineteen chapters of the novel, which is subtitled “A German Romance”, describe June fifth through sixth, 1944, and the final chapter takes place on June fourth, 1966. It is set in Theresienstadt/Terezín in North Bohemia, originally a fortress from the 18th century, in which a Gestapo prison was established during the German occupation of Czech lands. Its fictional commander is Karl Kleinburger, who holds the rank of *Obersturmbannführer* in the Waffen-SS. When Kleinburger’s daughter Kristina flees the ruins of the heavily bombarded Berlin to join her parents, she falls into the clutches of the young SS officer Wolfgang Weissmüller. Both of them have been indoctrinated with the Nazi worldview from an early age, and Kristina’s blind faith in Nazi ideology is further

amplified by Wolfgang's fanaticism. Then, as a gift for Kristina's eighteenth birthday, Kleinburger arranges for his daughter to have dance lessons under a Hungarian Jewish prima ballerina, whom he fetches for this purpose from the Theresienstadt Ghetto, a staging area for deportation to the death camps. The dance instructor tells Kristina that she was previously scheduled to be sent to Auschwitz and now longs for her family. As a result, the naive Kristina arranges for her instructor to be deported, imagining that her family has now been happily reunited in their new homeland of "East Israel" (Kohout, 1994, p. 35). Weissmüller is sent to bring the dancer back to the ghetto. Instead, he rapes her on the way back and lets her drown in a moat.

The final chapter retrospectively recounts what happens next: After the war, the dancer's death is pinned on commander Kleinburger, who has been portrayed as a fundamentally punctilious bureaucrat, and Kleinburger receives the death sentence. His daughter survives, marries an American changing her name, and follows her new husband to the United States. After her husband's death, she remarries. Her new husband is a Jewish man named Isaac Feuerstein. Yet once again, the (retrospective) point of view remains in Theresienstadt, which is now a memorial to the former fortress-prison. While Kristina proves stubbornly defensive of her Nazi political views and unwilling to give them up, a postcard from Paraguay points to the survival of Weissmüller.

In the end, the multiple viewpoints of a third-person voice are disrupted by the first-person narrator who introduces himself as the author of the account. He contemplates his life, his own (Communist) blindness, and asks why "zealous patriots and believers transform into base executioners" (pp. 214–215). He concludes: "Couldn't any of us, in certain circumstances, become an executioner's assistant, and isn't it true that those who don't become one, owe more of that to their lucky star than to their strong character?" (p. 215). Viktor Polesný directed a 2003 film adaptation where the last chapter of the novel was not included.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Kohout's novel, framed as a romance, aims to contemplate the perversion of ideals, but goes beyond this to become a "banalisation of brutality" itself (Pynsent, 1990, p. 130). This is significantly compounded by the fact that the narrative exclusively adopts the perpetrators' perspectives while the victims remain mute or even invisible; at best. Culpability is bound up with cliché experiences of victimisation, as when Weissmüller's rape of the dancer is linked to his own childhood trauma of abuse by a man.

The subtitle "A German Romance" is manifested on two literal levels. First, it can be seen in the flirtation between Kristina and Wolfgang, which supplies the virtual prolepsis of the dutiful marriage between the *Kommandant* and his wife, a prolepsis later lost with the war. Second, it is a reference to the protagonist's romantically exalted devotion to Adolf Hitler and Nazism that she perceives as Messianic. It is about doomed idealism.

This corresponds to a chiasmic presentation of motifs: the recurring Biedermeier-style of gender cravings, kitschy intimacy, idyllic descriptions of landscapes, and Kleinburger's eclectic autodidacticism, all juxtaposed against the overall horror of the Nazi regime. They both descend into stereotypes to the point of ridiculousness, as when Kristina describes the SS officer as a gold-headed "angel" and her second husband, the American Jew, as a black-eyed "Lucifer." Other German-Jewish love affairs are likewise trivialised, each romance embedded in ideologically coloured reasoning.

In Wolfgang Benz's view, this structural chiasmus divides the topos of Theresienstadt into the prison world, "ruled" by Kleinburger with "military correctness" and into the "corrupt and slovenly administered world" of the ghetto. Benz further writes that the spacial opposition reflects the faulty premise of a conflict between an idealistic Nazism with "integrity" with that of a Nazism of "excess" (Benz, 2015, p. 483). On one side lies Kleinburger, a "white raven" (Kohout, 1994, p. 28) and "decent Nazi" (p. 30); on the other side lies the "monster" Weissmüller, who is sadistic and clearly scarred by his childhood.

Other critics particularly stress a "cheap Freudianism" and a "feeble, often amoral, philosophising" (Pynsent, 1990, p. 133 and 135) and note that, on the level of craft, the "boundary between the narrator's and the characters' perspective repeatedly blurs" (Becher, 1990, p. 129). Finally, the stylistic failures included the pornographic voyeurism in his treatment of hypersexualised physicality, sociological templates including the choice of the half-denunciatory, half-exculpatory name "Kleinburger" (German for "petty-bourgeois") and the remarkably trivialising voice of the retrospective section.

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## Life with a Star (Život s hvězdou)

**Author:** Jiří Weil

**First Published:** 1949

**Translations:** Polish (*Życie z gwiazdą*, 1965); Japanese (*Hoshi no aru seikatsu*, 1967); German (*Leben mit dem Stern*, 1973), Dutch (*De ster van Josef Roubíček*, 1989, as *Leven met de ster*, 2012); English (*Life with a Star*, 1989); Hebrew (*Hayyim im kokhav*, 1990); French (*Vivre avec une étoile*, 1992); Italian (*Una vita con la stella*, 1992); Swedish (*Liv med en stjärna*, 1998); Finnish (*Tähti sydämellä*, 2002); Catalan (*Viure amb una estrella*, 2017).

**About the Author:** Jiří Weil (1900–1959) was a Czech writer, poet, journalist, translator and scientist. He was born into an assimilated Czech-Jewish family in Praskolesy in Central Bohemia. His father owned a small factory. Weil studied comparative literature and Slavonic philology at Charles University. He became a member of the Communist Party and worked as a journalist, translator from Russian language and critic of Soviet literature. In 1933, Weil went to Moscow as a translator. In 1935, he was denounced as a detractor of the Soviet Union and sent to Interhelpo, a Czech cooperative in Kyrgyzstan (see his novels *From Moscow to the Border* and *The Wooden Spoon*, both with autobiographical features). After a few months, he travelled to Central Asia as a reporter. At the end of 1935, he returned to Moscow and then he was allowed to return to Czechoslovakia. Weil's first novel *From Moscow to the Border* (1937) became one of the first true testimonies about the situation in the Soviet Union in the middle of 1930s. During the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands, Weil was persecuted for his Jewish origins. He tried to save himself by marrying Olga Frenclová, an Aryan woman, and worked in the Jewish Central Museum from 1943 to the beginning of 1945. In February of 1945, he was summoned for deportation to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. He staged his own suicide by pretending to drown himself in the Vltava river and went into hiding. His parents were transported to Auschwitz and his sister to Treblinka; none of them survived. His brother died after returning from Theresienstadt to Prague in May 1945.

After the war, Weil worked again in the Jewish Museum until the end of 1945. In 1946 he began working for the Prague publishing house ELK. His literary works concentrated on Jewish topics and mainly on the Holocaust. He published short stories on this topic → *Colors* (1946) and the novel *Life with a Star* (1949). Nevertheless, after the Communist coup in 1948, this book was sharply criticised as formalistic and damaging, and Weil was excluded from the Writer's Union. He focused on his professional activity in the Jewish Museum in Prague again, for instance, he pushed through a collective presentation of children's drawings and poems from Theresienstadt and the book *Children's Drawings on the Way to Death: Terezín 1942–1944, 1951–1957*, publish-

ing houses and studios returned his works for rewriting. The novel *The Harpist* and the short text → *Elegy for 77,297 Victims* were both published in 1958. In 1959 Jiří Weil died of leukemia. His last novel *Mendelssohn Is on the Roof* was published posthumously.

**Further Important Publications:** *Barvy* (1946, → *Colors*; short stories); *Žalozpěv za 77 297 obětí* (1958, → *Elegy for 77,297 Victims*; short prose); *Dětské kresby na zastávce k smrti. Terezín 1942–1944* (1959, ed. Hana Volavková, introduction Jiří Weil; in English as *Children's Drawings and Poems: Terezín 1942–1945*; children's paintings and poems); *Na střeše je Mendelssohn* (1960, *Mendelssohn Is on the Roof*; novel).

### Content and Interpretation

Weil began writing the first version of his novel *Life with a Star* in March 1945, while living in hiding. His original intention was to write his memoirs. The second version of the book was also autobiographical, entitled *From a Book of Memoirs "Maskir"*. Weil later decided to convert these memoirs into a novel.

The main story follows the life of Josef Roubíček, a Czech Jew and former bank clerk. He lives alone in a dilapidated family house in the suburbs of Prague from 1940 to 1942, according to the context. The novel, which is divided into 23 chapters, is told by Roubíček in the first-person narrative.

Roubíček can be classified as the Central European literary archetype of the “man” against a backdrop of “major historical events”. → *The Shop on Main Street*; → *The Menorah*. Urs Heftrich points out a possible connection of the hero's name with the *Old Testament* Joseph (Heftrich, 2000, pp. 379–383). At the beginning of the story, Roubíček tries to cope with persecution through passive resistance. However, he is soon drawn back to reality by external events. He is deemed fit for work and after a short period of auxiliary service in the Jewish community, he is transferred to the cemetery as a gardener. His gradual mental and physical collapse is brought on by contradictory orders, the incredible complexity of bureaucratic authority and the hostile environment, combined with an inability to live with dignity. When he is ready to fall down, he is given a helping hand by Materna, a Czech labourer and communist. He urges Roubíček to resist his imposed fate. However, Roubíček encounters resignation, denial of problems and unrealistic plans from others (his friend Robitschek, uncle and aunt) in the Jewish community. His decision to resist the “circus” that is Nazi manipulation, hastens further events – information about the death of Růžena, who was executed following the assassination of Heydrich, and the killing of Roubíček's cat Tomáš. Only then does Roubíček cease to be a “number”, find his identity and become human again. This moment of reverting back to a human being, determined to defy the Nazis and his humiliating removal to “somewhere”, is the most difficult moment for him. At the end of the novel, Roubíček burns the last evidence of his memories of the role the Nazis gave him and of his past in his house. He accepts Materna's offer to go into hiding.

In Roubíček's eyes, the setting of the novel is broken down into several "permitted" micro-worlds connected by mutual paths. The first group of micro-worlds exists in a legally-confined prison – Prague (which is only mentioned once in the novel; street names are fictitious). Roubíček hides from the hostile outside world in his house and at the cemetery where he works with other Jews. The second group of micro-worlds in the novel is strange and dangerous, linked to feelings of fear, humiliation and loss. This is the Jewish community and the dreaded villa, the seat of the Nazi Office for Jewish Affairs. The bureaucratic machinery Roubíček experiences, as well as the lack of clear individual areas with large numbers of mysterious and often imprecisely labelled doors, mimics the descriptions in Kafka's *Process* or *Castle* (Kafka is directly mentioned in the second manuscript of the novel). The third group consists of places Roubíček visits at the instigation of other characters – flats and the hospital premises. They serve as reflections on the meaning of life, to discuss the possibilities of escaping the Nazi tyranny and a look into family relationships often distorted by Nazi persecution. At the same time, they illustrate the ever-smaller room to live, as in the case of some of Kafka's short stories. The last place mentioned in the novel is the "fortress city", which refers to Theresienstadt, where most of the transports of Czech Jews were headed. No one knows what to expect there and therefore it becomes a place of last hope before the "long journey" into the unknown.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

All motifs pertaining to the Holocaust in the novel *Life with a Star* are linked to the theme of the journey. The journey through the city represents constant peril, suffering and humiliation. This ubiquitous fear is reinforced by the motif of darkness – hours of darkness, when people rush from work to work, to and from visiting acquaintances in complete darkness. It is only a matter of fortuitous chance whether or not they arrive home safely. Therefore, Jews only leave their homes when absolutely necessary.

In addition to the motif of travelling through the city, the motif of darkness is also associated with the motif of death or evil; darkness is often linked to the setting of the novel – the description of a dark alley, a dark room, a dark underground flat where an informer lives. It brings questionings, summons from the authorities. It marks the beginning of the journey into the unknown, and last but not least, it is the friend of Death. The motif of death is present in the story in several variations, and death is also personified. At the moment of the Jewish community's greatest suffering, Roubíček ceases to be afraid of death. He begins to see death as an equal, as a dishevelled and pitiful woman. The journey by transport train is associated with fear, but also vague hope and illusion. The motif of chance is a significant compositional element in the novel. It is chance that saves Roubíček from starvation. It is chance that his name falls out of the file of Jews and he is not sent to the transport with other Roubíček. Given the closeness of motifs and form, it can be concluded that *Life with a Star* was probably the inspiration for Ladislav Fuks when writing his novel → *Mr Theodore Mundstock* and that it became the impetus for other Czech authors writing about the Shoah.

See Jiří Kolář's → *The Liver of Prometheus* and Josef Škvorecký's → *The Menorah*. In the context of Holocaust literature, the use of elements of grotesque and black humour was unusual.

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## The Lilies of Erika (Erikine ľalie)

**Author:** Vincent Šikula

**First Published:** 1996 in: *There Is No Pub on Every Hill and New Short Stories* (Nebýva na každom vřšku hostinec a z nových poviedok).

**About the Author:** Vincent Šikula (1936–2001) was born in the village Dubová near Trnava in Western Slovakia. He studied at the Music Pedagogical School in Bratislava, later at the State Conservatory. For a short time, he worked at Folk Art School in Modra near his birthplace. Later he was the editor of the literary review *Romboid*. At the same time, he worked as a screenwriter in Slovak film production. His first books, based on natural narrative, provide an entertaining way to the authentic experiences of sensitive heroes where a strong relationship with humans, nature and lasting values of life dominate. Musical motifs are a significant component of his prose. He wrote poetry and prose, his works for children and youth are also important. Several of his works were also filmed, for instance *With Rozárka*, *There Is No Pub on Every Hill* and *Holiday with Uncle Rafael*.

**Further Important Publications:** *Majstri* (1976, Masters; first part of the novel trilogy Masters); *Muškrát* (1977, Geranium, second part of the novel trilogy Masters); *Vilma* (1979, Vilma, third part of the novel trilogy Masters); *Ornament* (1983, Ornament; novel); *Z domu na kopci* (1983, From the House on the Hill; poetry).

### Content and Interpretation

*The Lilies of Erika* is a short story about the life of a Jewish family who stayed in a small village Dubová and who was the victim of the Holocaust. The author deals with the theme of their lives during World War II before they were transported to the concentration camp. None of them came back after the war.

The plot of the novel is situated in this village Dubová (author's birthplace) and it is a time of year 1942 (and before) when the Jews from this village were transported to Auschwitz. The main character of the story is a Jewish girl Erika. Except from her, also her family and a priest Viliam Hořka are mentioned. It was the priest who tried to save this family from deportations by accepting Christian baptism.

The author in this story appears as a narrator, as a little boy who had played with little Jewish girl Erika in his childhood. Erika loved flowers a lot, especially lilies, and even though she was a Jew, she always enjoyed the Christian feast of *Corpus Christi*, during which the field altars are decorated with flowers. When the persecution of Jews started, Erica begun to avoid people, a gate of her house was still locked. Until when the uniformed guys came from the district town and took the whole family to the concentration camp. Only Erika's grave is still at the cemetery in the village, despite she was not buried there. She died in Poland and she has probably no grave. And there are

still a lot of flowers in the village, especially lilies, which she planted there. “Till nowadays in Dubová there grows and blooms every year, grows and blooms the lilies of fourteen-year-old Erika Grossová...” (Šikula, 2006, p. 50).

The whole story is written from the point of view of a small boy who, in his naive, childish way describes the events in the village in connection with deportations of Jews to concentration camps. The author, as a little boy, did not understand what was going on around his friend, a Jewish girl. Why she did not meet him anymore, despite they had been friends before. He explained it in his childish way. “She started to avoid me. And I thought, that it is because she is more godly than me and she does not want to meet me anymore”. Later he wrote: “Was she forbidden to meet me by the priest Hoľka? People said that he had wanted to save her! I’m just guessing not against me” (p. 49). This motif of saving the Jews by baptism during the war can be found in Slovak literature i.e. in Dominik Tatarka’s → *The Clerical Republic* or Rudolf Jašik’s → *St. Elizabeth’s Square*.

The short story *The Lilies of Erika* was published in the book *The Is No Pub on Every Hill and Other Short Stories* (1996) as well as in the children stories *The Fairy Tales and Stories* (1996), later in 2006 in the magazine *Bibiana*. The author tried to describe the tragedy of the Holocaust to a child reader in this naive way, in a childish point of view on the Shoah.

### Main Topics and Problems

The short story *The Lilies of Erika* tells the real story of the Gross family (see below), mainly the story of their daughter Erika who loved flowers a lot, especially lilies. According to the life of Erika, lilies can be understood as a symbol of the purity, the purity of a small (or rather teenage) Jewish girl who was a victim of the Holocaust. Her soul and her life were clean. Her only fault was that she was born as a Jewess. Lilies are a traditional symbol in Christianity. Since the Baroque period they have been associated with the Virgin Mary. They are a symbol of purity of the Virgin Mary, and they are associated with the Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus Christ. In Vincent Šikula’s books, Christian symbols often appear, including the symbol of lily, what can mean innocence, purity as well as death.

The story about Erika and her family is a true story of the family who lived in the author’s native village. The father Samuel Gross, the mother Elza and their two daughters Laura and Erika were transported to the concentration camp Auschwitz in 1942. Samuel was killed in 1942 as fifty one-year-old man, Elza died probably the same year, but the year of her death was impossible to be presumed. Laura was murdered in 1942 as nineteen-year-old. Erika, according to the official documents, was killed in 1942 as thirteen-year-old. Nevertheless, according to the testimony of one of the Jew living in the barrack with her, Erika died just before the camp was liberated in 1945. In the village Dubová the memorial stones *Stolpersteine*, which commemorate the tragedy of Gross family, were placed in the sidewalk on the Main Street in August 2015.

In 1996, the story was included in the book *God's Lane: The Anthology of Slovak Literature about the Holocaust*, edited by Milan Richter.

The child's view of the Holocaust is frequently used in literature, because children, one of the main symbols of the Holocaust and synecdoches for all the innocent victims of World War II, are often ideal narrators of these events. See Arnošt Lustig's → *Diamonds of the Night*, Henryk Grynberg's → *The Jewish War*, J. R. Pick's → *Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* or Wilhelm Dichter's → *God's Horse*, Ota Pavel's → *Death of the Beautiful Deer* or Michał Głowiński's → *Black Seasons*.

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# Lily of the Valley: Rudolf Dilong's Forbidden Love (Konvália: Zakázaná láska Rudolfa Dilonga)

**Author:** Denisa Fulmeková

**First Published:** 2016

**About the Author:** Denisa Fulmeková (1967) studied journalism at the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava (1985–1989). She has worked as an editor in cultural reviews, from 1997 to 2004 she was editor-in-chief in the esoteric magazine *Orientácia*. She has been a freelance writer since 2004. She has published poems, reports, short stories and novels. Fulmeková's works use devices of popular literature and often focus on the lives of contemporary Slovakian women, their hopes and illusions.

**Further Important Publications:** *Doktor Mráz* (2018, → Doctor Mráz; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The work describes a strange love affair, the relationship between Valéria Reiszová, a Jewish girl who was interested in poetry, and Rudolf Dilong, a Franciscan monk and poet. The author depicts a true story in Slovakia during and after World War II (Valéria was her grandmother). At that time, Jews were being persecuted and Valéria and her family were in danger of being transported to a forced labour camp and following that, to concentration camps. In 1942, Valéria gave birth to a daughter. Dilong, who had engaged in the clerofascist regime of the Slovak Republic managed to protect Valéria and her brother from transports. She did not have to wear a Jewish star. He supported Valéria, provided her with "Aryan papers" and a flat in Bratislava. Dilong enlisted as a military chaplain on the Eastern front, where Slovakia fought as an ally of Germany. It was probably for that reason to have enough finances for Valéria. Nevertheless, after the war, he emigrated to Italy and two years later to Argentina for fear of punishment. From 1965, Dilong lived in the Franciscan monastery in Pittsburgh in the United States. Valéria was left with a small child without any support. Moreover, she was thought of as the mistress of a poet, who was both involved in clerofascist politics, and was later active in the exile movement against the Communist regime. "Dilong's name was no longer a guarantee of her protection, but a danger" (Fulmeková, 2016, p. 65). She was interrogated, her house was searched, the police confiscated Dilong's and her poems, photos and letters. She met Jozef Krivda, a laboratory technician, and married him in August 1948. Jozef officially proclaimed himself as the father of her daughter Dagmar, and in 1950 their son was born. At that time, Valéria wrote new poems but they were not published because of her past. She concealed her Jewish origin. (Denisa Fulmeková writes that she was 10 years old when she learned who was her mother's father and what happened in the family during the war. It was dangerous to talk about her grandmother's Jewish background.)

Rudolf Dilong kept correspondence with his daughter as well as with Valéria. However, they couldn't meet personally until 1969 in Vienna and then in Bratislava, 24 years after his emigration. Rudolf thought about returning to Slovakia, but in the end he remained in the U. S. He died in Pittsburgh in 1986, Valéria died in Bratislava in 2000 and her husband Jozef in 2015.

The title *Konvália* (Lily of the Valley) hints at Dilong's collection of poems of the same name (1941) where his secret love for Valéria is suggested. The word is an encrypted name of her: Konvália – Valéria.

Denisa Fulmeková's novel belongs to the genre of family novels which depicted the fates of Central European Jews in the 20th century – for instance Hana Andronikova's → *Sound of the Sundial* (2001), Joanna Olczak Ronikier's *In the Garden of Remembrance* (2001), Agata Tuszynska's *A Family Story of Fear* (2005) or Simon Mawer's *The Glass Room* (2009). Experiences from the war and the Holocaust are often in the foreground as well as traumas underwent after the war. Stories, often inspired by the life of relatives, are frequently completed by photographs and documents.

This is also the case of *Lily of the Valley*. Here the author describes her search for facts, her relationship to her characters et cetera: "...this story stands in the background of my own life" (p. 63). Besides reconstructing the past, she also records current events. Among other things, she includes her confrontation with the grandson of the former Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach (Mach was responsible for the persecution of Slovak Jews; after the war he was sentenced to 30 years in prison) who reminds everyone that it is the "Führer's birthday today" (p. 32). She feels threatened also in the current "democratic society".

### Main Topics and Problems

The novel depicts an "unbalanced love", the relationship of two young people, disturbed by the brutality of the external world, the war and the Holocaust. It resembles many other stories, for instance the love of Czech Pavel and Jewess Esther in Jan Otčenášek's → *Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness* (1958), the love of Slovak Igor and Jewess Eva in Rudolf Jašík's → *St. Elizabeth's Square* (1958) or the Jewish boy and the Czech girl in Ludvík Aškenazy's short story *Romeo* in his collection *The Egg* (1963). The prototype of these stories is Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), and also Romain Rolland's *Pierre et Luce* (1920) set in World War I. Unlike all these works, *Lily of the Valley* doesn't have a tragic end. Nevertheless, both main characters, Valéria and Rudolf, are traumatised and their lives are deeply disrupted.

The word "forbidden" in the subtitle of this work can carry different meanings: the violation of celibacy by the Roman Catholic priest, the love of an Aryan man and Jewish girl during the period of the so-called "Jewish Codex" (antisemitic regulations) in Slovakia, or the rescue of the Jewess and her child at the time of deportations.

Rudolf Dilong (1905–1986) an important poet of Slovak Catholic Modernism, is the most controversial figure of the story. On the one hand, there is Dilong's love for Valéria and for his daughter Dagmar, and his effort to help them. The title of his mem-

oirs *The Rose Dagmar* (2000, Ruža Dagmar) testifies his cordial relationship with his daughter. On the other hand, there is Dilong's involvement in the clerofascist Slovak Republic whose laws persecuted the Jews, confiscated their property and sent them to concentration camps. According to Peter Getting, Rudolf Dilong was one of the most productive and significant authors cooperating with the clerofascist regime (Getting, 2009, pp. 155, 168). Dilong continued to hold this ideology also after the war. Even in 1981, the poem *Fatherland* (*Otčina*) celebrates the establishment of Slovakia in March 1939 (it was a satellite of Hitler's Germany) and praises its President and priest Jozef Tiso (who was executed after the war as a Nazi flunkey). Denisa Fulmeková asks in her book

...how was possible that [Valéria] never asked him why he did not write any word about the tragedy of the Slovakian Jews, about their terrible fate during World War II? The reality of the Holocaust touched him painfully in connection with the fate of his beloved Vali and especially his own daughter. However, I search in vain for any self-reflection in connection with this chapter of Slovak history in the work of this prominent poet and priest (Fulmeková, 2016, p. 98).

She states that love, goodness, humanity, sincerity, trust, and willingness to help are more than a devotion to an ideology in life. For that reason, she expresses respect and admiration to Jozef Krivda who supported Valéria in the hard times and whom her mother considered as her true father and she as her true grandfather.

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TŽ–JH

# The Liver of Prometheus (Prometheova játra)

**Author:** Jiří Kolář

**First Published:** 1979 (in samizdat), 1985 (exile publishing house in Toronto)

**Translations:** French (*Le Foie de Prométhée. Journal 1950*, 1985); Italian (*Il fegato di Prometeo*, 2009); German (*Die Leber des Prometheus*, 2019).

**Music Adaptation:** *Prometheova játra* (The Liver of Prometheus), symphonic poem inspired by Jiří Kolář, composer Jan Kučera, 2002.

**About the Author:** Jiří Kolář (1914–2002) was a graphic artist, poet, essayist and translator. He started his creative career in the early 1930s with surrealist poems. Kolář belonged to the left-oriented artistic and literary Group 42. Due to the Communist coup in 1948, he could not publish from 1949 to 1957. He spent eight months in prison in 1953 for the “subversive” manuscript of *The Liver of Prometheus*. At the end of 1950s, he gradually turned away from writing and concentrated on artistic work. His visual poetry and collages won him world fame with dozens of exhibitions. His entire work was exhibited in the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1975 and in other major Western museums of modern art. In the 1970s and 1980s, again, he could not publish except in samizdat or exile. In 1977, Kolář signed the human rights manifesto Charter 77 and while on a scholarship to West Berlin, the Czechoslovak government decided to force him to emigrate with no permission to return to Czechoslovakia. He lived in Paris from 1980 to 1989, and afterwards, he regularly travelled between Paris and Prague.

**Further Important Publications:** *Ódy a variace* (Odes and Variations, 1946; poems); *Dny v roce* (Days in a Year, 1948; poems); *Roky v dnech* (1949, all copies of the book were confiscated, samizdat 1975, Years in Days; diaries and poems); *Očitý svědek* (written 1949, samizdat 1975, Munich 1983, Eyewitness; diaries and poems); *Náhodný svědek* (1964, Accidental Witness; anthology of poems); *Básně ticha* (1965, Poems of Silence, visual poems); *Mor v Athénách* (1965, → *Plague in Athens*; play); *Návod k upotřebení* (1969, A User’s Manual; poems).

## Content and Interpretation

*The Liver of Prometheus*, written in 1950, is a collection of poems, diary entries, reflections, aphorisms and quotes. Deeply experimental and fragmentary in its nature, it assumes the form of a literary collage (a technique using various sources and forms which are subsequently assembled into a new whole) that characterises Kolář’s work in general. The collection is divided into three parts: A Real Occurrence (Skutečná událost), A Cheerful Cemetery (Jásající hřbitov) and Everyday Comedy (Každodenní

komedie). The first and third part are all tied together under the subtitle The Genor Clan, which signals a certain generational development, in the case of Kolář, a decline or degradation stemming from the totalitarian regime.

This article will primarily discuss the first part of the collection that explicitly deals with the topic of the Shoah. The text opens with a quote from Ladislav Klíma Czech nonconformist writer and philosopher, and continues as a variation on Klíma's story A Real Occurrence that Happened in Postmortalia (1932) and a deconstruction of Zofia Nałkowska's short-story By the Railway Track → *Medallions* (whose translation into Czech is reprinted as a part of *The Liver of Prometheus*). Kolář merges these two writings through a process he describes in the afterword (*samobáseň*; Kolář, 2016, p. 32). Accordingly, it is an intertextual poem constructed as a literary *prollage* – where multiple artworks are being reproduced in parts which are reassembled in a new artwork as intermingling and complementing each other. It demonstrates a multiplicity of perspectives and a sense of contingency. In the fashion of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the poem echoes those written before, its voice recalling the voices of the past, signifying the entanglement of the past with the present that inevitably shapes our perception of everyday reality. Consequently, it is possible to identify this entanglement as a ghostly presence; an invisible remnant of the past affecting the present.

In the poem, the lyrical subject finds Genor in a pub, at the table with the ghost of his wife. The invisible acquires not only a name – Mařenka (nickname for Mary in Czech), but also a voice and a background story, becoming almost tangible since Genor acts as if her body is present, thereby acknowledging the existence of the absent. The invisible woman overlaps with Nałkowska's Jewess, who attempts to escape from the train while it is on the way to the concentration camp, but is shot in her leg. She is therefore forced to stay by the railway track and soon, she is surrounded by a group of onlookers from the Polish village. Because of the strict rules and prohibitions considering the Jews, the onlookers are afraid to offer assistance with her injury. There is only one man who stays by her side, provides her with vodka and cigarettes and finally shoots her to save her from suffering. An opposition arises here between the inability to act due to physical obstacles and due to the ones that are mental. The Jewess being completely unable to move is linked to animalistic imagery and accordingly reflects the conflict of the human with the dehumanised and inhuman that is played out in the story.

Simulating a conversation in a pub, Kolář's verses present Genor's story which at first comes across rather as discontinuous bits told by a drunken madman. These seemingly nonsensical utterances in fact contain quotes from Nałkowska's text that is being dissected within the poem. Kolář provides the reader with three different versions of the poem, editing his lines, twisting and adding information. Therefore, the verses are gradually expanding, simultaneously becoming more coherent. What initially appears to be unstable in regard to the lack of meaning, gradually grows rather comprehensible, albeit still intertwined with moments of silence and ellipses.

It is possible to interpret Kolář's effort to undermine meaning as mimicking the inability to understand the Holocaust in its totality and its significance for society. This is already indicated in the opening of the first part presenting Klíma's quote, "But what about that horrendous comedy? What was the reason for all of that? What does it all mean?" (Kolář, 2016, p. 7).

In the other two parts of his collection, Kolář mainly focuses on the oppressive Communist regime, alluding to the Shoah and its aftermath as a marking point of enormous cruelty and brutality that can be done at the hands of humankind. Here, Kolář expresses personal responsibility for the damage done to the victims and the need to act against the evils of the totalitarian regime.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

The text is inseparably intertwined with the notion of a haunting past. The Holocaust spectre originates in the frequent references to that which is absent, stimulating the form of an absent presence. The disastrous consequences of the Holocaust are deeply embedded in human history and collective memory. Memory is therefore crucial for the collection as a tool that shapes our consciousness, transfers experience and preserves images of the past.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that in regard to the trauma caused by the past events, these images are transformed, filtered and edited to be bearable and comprehensible for the witness and for the receiver. This occurrence is also reflected in the fragmentary, disrupted form of Kolář's writings.

Restricted by the Communist regime, Kolář is constantly being reminded of the Shoah, reliving the trauma, remembering the victims and their suffering. Unable to think separately of the past and the present, Kolář interprets the events of World War II as showing the limits of human atrocity and evil, in fact showing that the limits are much greater than anyone can imagine. One of the main thoughts of the work thus can be summarised by Kolář's statement that, "any form of totalitarianism always leads towards inhumanity, always leads towards beastly behaviour" (p. 54). Kolář defines his existence as conditioned by totalitarianism that requires the citizens to identify with its ideology, forces them to repress their individuality, dehumanises them and oppresses them through various forms of terror such as censorship, surveillance or physical violence.

At the same time, *The Liver of Prometheus* represents Kolář's way to confess and to repent as he contemplates the meaning of good and evil and describes his guilt surrounding his passivity in the past in relation to the victims. In a strong contrast to this determination stands the author's anxiety bordering on hopelessness, which can be detected especially in the passages examining the immoral behaviour and brutal acts of men. Comparably to Nałkowska's *Jewess*, Kolář ultimately finds himself and indeed the entire society in a position in which the will to act is repressed, paralysed by fear and forcibly transformed into passivity.

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## Medallions (Medaliony)

**Author:** Zofia Nałkowska

**First Published:** 1946

**Translations:** Croatian (*Medaljoni*, 1948); Slovak (*Medailóny*, 1949); Czech (*Medailóny*, 1950); Italian (*I ragazzi di Oswiecim*, 1955); German (*Medaillons*, 1956); Romanian (*Profesorul Spanner. Medalioane*, 1956; *Medalioane*, 1999); Esperanto (*Medalionoj*, 1957); Slovenian (*Medaljoni*, 1963); Vietnamese (*Nhũ'ng bú'c phũ điũu*, 1964); Hungarian (*Vallomás*, 1965); Russian (*Medaljony*, 1974); Macedonian (*Medaljoni*, 1978); Dutch (*Medaillons*, 1994); Turkish (*Madalyonlar. Öykü*, 1998); English (*Medallions*, 2000); Spanish (*Medallones*, 2009); French (*Médaillons*, 2014); Japan (*Medarion*, 2015); Hebrew (*Medalionim*, 2017); Swedish (*Medaljonger*, 2017).

**Film Adaptations:** *Przy torze kolejowym* (By the Railway Track), feature film, adapted and directed by Andrzej Brzozowski, premiered 1963 (adaptation of the short story By the Railway Track); *Sprawa profesora Spannera* (The Case of Professor Spanner), TV film, adapted and directed by Adam Hanuszkiewicz, premiered 1965 (adaptation of the short story Professor Spanner); *Medaliony* (Medallions), feature film, adapted and directed by Andrzej Brzozowski, premiered 1966.

**Radio Adaptations:** *Medaliony* (Medallions), Polskie Radio, adapted by Lech Budrecki and Ireneusz Kanicki, directed by Ireneusz Kanicki, premiered 1965; *Medaliony* (Medallions), Polskie Radio, adapted by Kazimierz Strzałka, directed by Zofia Rakowiecka, premiered 1979.

**About the Author:** Zofia Nałkowska (1884–1954) was born in Warsaw. Her father, Wacław Nałkowski, was an eminent scholar, pedagogue, and publicist. Her debut novel was *Women* (Kobiety), published in 1906. Nałkowska was a prose writer as well as a playwright. She kept a diary for most of her life. In 1927, she wrote the novel *Choucas* (the French word for “jackdaw”), which takes as its main theme the Turkish genocide of Armenians in 1915. Residing in Warsaw during World War II, she took part in the underground literary movement. In 1945, in her capacity as a member of the Commission for the Investigation of German-Nazi Crimes in Auschwitz (and then of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes), she took part in field inspections and hearings of witnesses. Drawing from this experience, Nałkowska’s collection of short stories *Medallions* is one of the most notable contributions to Polish literature on the subject of World War II and the Holocaust. These themes appear as well in various posthumous works, including short stories collected in *Old and Recent Characters*, her diary, and – most notably – *Wartime Diaries*.

### Content and Interpretation

*Medallions* open with the motto “People dealt this fate to people” (Nałkowska, 2000, p. V). The collection comprises eight short prose texts, most often classified as short stories, with a pronounced historical nonfiction aspect.

Thus the author identifies herself as the narrator, while the characters are made up of real-life people, some of whom Nałkowska explicitly identifies, others who may be identified with reference to her diaries or other writings. The narrative style in *Medallions* is pushed to the background, and it is typically a victim or witness who tells each story, often in a crude, fragmented, and awkward manner. Among them are two German professors and a laboratory assistant – a Pole from Gdansk, who testifies in the case of Professor Spanner, accused of producing soap from human corpses and processing human skin for subsequent use (Professor Spanner). In one episode, the story is told by a woman the author has met in a cemetery, a witness to the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto. In another, an unnamed man recounts the tragic story of a young Jewish woman who is shot after jumping off a train bound for a death camp and than finished off by a young Pole with a revolver (By the Railway Track). This story inspired Czech author Jiří Kolář to create a deconstructed version of the story in connection with another of his texts → *The Liver of Prometheus*. In another story, the witness, Michał P., who is also clearly a victim, gives an investigative commission a tour of the former extermination camp in Chełmno, in which his loved ones were murdered and from which he managed to escape (The Man is Strong). In yet another, the victim is a Polish woman, a former prisoner of the Pawiak prison, the Ravensbrück camp, and a *Kommando* (working unit) that manufactures ammunition – a woman who “lived through [what] no one would believe” (p. 11), as she looks back on the events of the concentration camp, including acts of cannibalism (The Hole). Yet another story is told by a Jewish woman, a former prisoner of the Międzyrzec Ghetto and Majdanek camp, kept alive by the sole desire to see the world learn what the Germans did to the Jews (Dwojra Zielona). The protagonist of the story *The Visa*, who witnessed the murder of Greek Jewish women, converted the Catholicism already at the beginning of the war, “when the many injustices and cruelties she witnessed caused her so much suffering” (p. 36).

Even the accomplices and witnesses to these crimes, in *Medallions*, are depicted essentially as victims, at least in the moral sense. A telling example of this – and a testimony to the moral desensitisation caused by the war – is the perspective of the laboratory assistant, Spanner’s co-worker, who apparently fails to realise that producing soap from human fat is a crime, and who is even impressed that “In Germany [...] people know how to make something – from nothing” (p. 9). Another instance of this kind of desensitisation can be found in the attitude of the eponymous heroine of the story *The Cemetery Lady*, who may be professing her compassion for the Jews murdered in the ghetto, but still feels compelled to convince the narrator that “they despise us more than they do the Germans. [...] If the Germans lose the war, the Jews will kill us all. You don’t believe me? Listen, even Germans say so... and the radio, it

says so too” (p. 20). What is arguably the most telling and shocking depiction of desensitisation appears in *The Adults and Children of Auschwitz*, which is more of an essay or afterword than a short story. It concludes with the following scene: “Doctor Epstein, a professor from Prague, was crossing the street between the barracks in Auschwitz on a pleasant summer day when he noticed two young children sitting in the sand and poking at something with a stick. He stopped and asked, ‘What are you doing?’ He received in reply: ‘We’re playing at burning Jews’” (p. 49). *Medallions* is an indictment of the perpetrators not just for murdering “immeasurable human masses” (p. 45), but also for wreaking moral destruction on the survivors, who have been left by the atrocities with a crippled ethical disposition and no ability to tell right from wrong. By harming people, they have done the same to culture and civilisation.

### Main Topics and Problems

The main issue raised in *Medallions* concerns the physical and moral damage caused by World War II, and by crimes perpetrated by the Germans in particular. Nałkowska naturally sympathises with the victims, but she does not vilify the perpetrators, writing, “Such a meticulously planned and executed spectacle was the work of people. They were its executors and its victims. People dealt this fate to people” (p. 47). While recognising the unique character of the fates of Jews, she also acknowledges the other victims: Poles, Gypsies, Russians, Germans, and the mentally ill. In departure from a common trend in the Polish literature of her time, she avoids reminding us again and again that the Germans were the perpetrators. Rather, she finds the roots of evil in drives that are universally human, in particular our propensity for aggression, which German fascism sanctioned and – by means of “painstaking selection and brilliantly conceived and executed system of education” (p. 48) – adopted as its *modus operandi*. Even in the case of the most brutal violence, the real trigger is economic and ideological in nature, and the author describes these dimensions as much in Marxist as commonsense terms: “This constant dividend flowed from human suffering and human fear, from human degradation and crime, and it became the essential economic rationale for the spectacle of the camps. The ideological postulate of exterminating races and nations served this goal, became its justification. [...] we are struck by the fact that the system and camps were established in order to carry out a twofold task: political and economic, that is, ideal and practical” (pp. 46–47).

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# The Menorah (Sedmiramenný svícen)

**Author:** Josef Škvorecký

**First Published:** 1964; the second edition in J. Š.: *Hořkej svět* (Bitter World, 1969), in a different order

**Translations:** Basque (*Mundu mingotsa*, 1996); English (five stories in: J. Š.: *When Eve Was Naked*, 2000); Dutch (*De zevenarmige kandelaar*, 2004); Bulgarian (in: *Bassaksofon*, 2010); Serbian (*Gorak svet*, 2016).

**About the Author:** Josef Škvorecký (1924–2012) was born in the North-Eastern Bohemian town of Náchod, where he attended school and did his A-levels in 1943. During the war years, he was compelled to do forced labour. After the war he studied English philology and philosophy in Prague at Charles University and received a doctoral degree. Having finished his military service at the beginning of the 1950s, Škvorecký started working as an editor in the publishing house SNKLU. In 1958, his first – and most famous – novel *The Cowards*, written already by the end of the 1940s, could finally be published. A vast number of novels, stories, dramas, essays etc. followed over the next decades. Many of them are based on biographic experiences, such as life in a Czech provincial town before and during the war from the perspective of a local teenager, the political difficulties of a young intellectual in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist era, the love for jazz and American culture as a form of resistance in totalitarianism etc. After the end of the Prague Spring, Škvorecký and his wife, the writer Zdena Salivarová, left Czechoslovakia and took up residence in Canada, where they founded the best known publishing house for Czech exile literature, 68 Publishers. At the University of Toronto Škvorecký held a chair for Anglophone Literature until his retirement in 1990.

**Further Important Publications:** *Zbabělci* (1958, *The Cowards*; novel); *Lviče* (1969, *The Lioness*; novel); *Obyčejné životy* (2004, *Ordinary Lives*; novella).

## Content and Interpretation

*The Menorah* is a cycle of altogether eight stories which was published as a book in 1964 (Ibler, 2012). One of these stories, an untitled text, is a kind of frame narration being presented throughout the cycle in short fragments, between which the seven titled stories are placed (Špirit, 2011, p. 237). The frame narration originates from the story *Rebecca* already written by Škvorecký in 1947 and textually revised by him for the cycle. Whereas in the titled stories the first-person narrator Danny reminisces about the life of the Jewish inhabitants of the Czech town K. in the time before and during the Nazi occupation and about their tragic end in the Holocaust, the frame story is located in Prague in 1952 and consists for the most part of Danny's dialogues

with his girlfriend Rebecca. As the only surviving member of her family, Rebecca returned from Theresienstadt to Prague after the war. The cycle's title *The Menorah* refers to the Jewish topic, whereas the two epigraphs at the beginning of the book prefigure the pivotal problem of suffering and death:

For those who died a long time ago, for those who have been forgotten a long time ago (Škvorecký, 1996, p. 143).

I saw the tears of the oppressed – and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors... (Ecclesiastes 4;1) (p. 144; quoted according to *The Book of Ecclesiastes*).

From the temporal background of the frame story, the apogee of the Stalinist era in Czechoslovakia, the time before and during the war as well as the Holocaust, outlined in the seven single stories, are remembered and valued. Despite the relatively short span of time, a radical change has taken place. There is a form of coexistence between Czechs and Jews also in the postwar years, the conditions for this are, however, no longer the same as before. This can be seen in the case of Rebecca and Danny, the main characters of the frame story. Although they have a love affair, their relationship is tainted by the things that happened notwithstanding the fact that they are not only devoid of any guilt, but that both are victims in many respects. After Rebecca's surviving and returning, she had not only to realise that people met her with hostility, but that all of her family's and relatives' homes were already occupied by Czechs (Holý, 2011b, p. 178). Rebecca's present life is characterised by her efforts to get along with all of her bad experiences and with her hopeless situation. Her general disorientation also finds its expression in numerous fleeting erotic contacts. Danny, on the other side, feels ashamed of Rebecca's former and present humiliation by the Czechs, but also speaks for a more nuanced view: "But not all of us were indifferent. After all, there is no one who is absolutely indifferent" (Škvorecký, 1996, p. 174). Danny, using examples, tries to convince Rebecca of his way of looking at Czechs' behaviour, but she disagrees with him. The story (and with it the whole cycle) is open ended, the final scene offering a pessimistic vision. During a boat trip on a lake, the lovers become witnesses to the fight between two catfish, one of them devouring the other, but perishing by choking. This complex motif can be interpreted as a symbol of mankind's hopeless and paradoxical situation.

By putting the Holocaust and the subsequent coping with it during the time of Stalinism into a higher historical, philosophical and existential context, the frame story in a sense bears the cycle's central message, whereas the seven integrated stories rather appear as single episodes exemplifying and amplifying this message. These stories present tangible insights into a time which at first, in the late 1930s, still shows idyllic features, but soon reveals increasing flaws and breaches heralding the catastrophe. There are several Jewish characters, partly with odd and quirky traits, who all have to suffer different trials. All of them, in some way or other, are connected with Danny. Besides a distant relative (My Uncle Kohn) Danny narrates about his family doctor (Dr Strass) and his private tutor (My Teacher, Mr Katz). The fact that Danny is

taught by a Jew, which is the subject of the last-mentioned story, spelt doom for his father who was deported to a concentration camp, where he perished. But also Danny's brother and sister do not belong to the indifferent Czechs: they take part in a dangerous resistance campaign (see *A Story for Rebecca*). Also in the following texts various aspects of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews at the time of occupation and Holocaust are presented. So, for example in *Mifinka* and *Bob the Slaughterer* the marriage of a Jewish girl and a Christian boy is prohibited by the latter's antisemitic father. A Jewish newborn is provided with an Aryan identity and thus saved with the help of a German woman (*The Cuckoo*). *Eine kleine Jazzmusik*, one of Škvorecký's most famous narratives, develops as a complex love story against the backdrop of Danny's jazz band and its problems with the German occupiers.

### Main Topics and Problems

*The Menorah* is a work without a homogenous, linear plot. The different plot elements and motifs are rather assembled in a mosaic-like way and subjectively perceived by the first-person narrator (Danny). Over the course of the narration, the macrohistory, major historical events, proceeds in the background, being only briefly indicated. This is also true for the mostly tragic personal events such as deportation or death in a camp. Instead, there are scenes from everyday life in the foreground evoking a feeling of normality or even idyll, a feeling that appears all the more depressing, considering the fact of the catastrophe drawing near or even already happening. Every story of the cycle has its own, independent plot. But, of course, all the texts are interconnected both by the general topic, i.e. the fate of the Jews in a Czech town during the time of occupation and Holocaust, and the fact that all the stories are narrated by the same person and that certain characters and motifs recur in other stories. In this process, the function of the frame story is not only to create the basis of remembrance, but also to unify the individual stories on the level of meaning.

The cycle's title refers to one of the most important religious symbols of Judaism, the menorah or seven-branched candlestick, which is used in important religious rituals (Voß, 1993). According to Jewish numerology, the number seven represents perfection and completeness: the connection with the seven days of biblical creation is evident. We can assume that the construction of a menorah is, in a sense, reflected in the work's structure – the seven titled stories representing the menorah's seven candleholders, the frame story, i.e. the "eighth" text, its base and stem. Despite the pessimistic tone at the end of the cycle, these religious associations make us aware of the work's true concern: to bow to the sufferings of the Jewish people during the Holocaust and also after the war and to show that there once was a well-functioning common existence of Jews and non-Jews.

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# Miracle in the Darkhouse (Zázrak v černém domě)

**Author:** Milan Uhde

**First Published:** 2012

**Translations:** English (*Miracle in the Darkhouse*, 2008); Croatian (*Chudo v kući jada*, 2009); Russian (*Čudo v černom dome*, 2009); Spanish (*Miracle a la casa negra*, 2010); Bulgarian (*Čudo v chernata kyshta*, 2011); Hungarian (*Csoda az elátkozott házban*, 2017; *Csoda a fekete házban*, 2018).

**Theatre Adaptations:** Theatre Na Zábradlí, Prague (2007); Moravské divadlo, Olomouc (2008); Bohemian National Hall, New York (2008); Quatre per Quatre Teatre, Granollers, Barcelona (2011); Katona József Theatre, Budapest (2017); Národní divadlo – Reduta, Brno (2018); Západočeské divadlo, Cheb (2018).

**About the Author:** Milan Uhde (1936 in Brno) is a playwright, writer and politician from a Czech-Jewish assimilated family of lawyers. After graduating in Czech and Russian studies (1958), he became an editor for the prominent review for literature and art *Host do domu*. In the 1960s, he started his literary career writing three collections of stories and the satirical anti-regime play *King Vávra* (premiered 1964), followed by the play *The Bitch of Thebes* (1967). After the Soviet occupation in August of 1968, during the so-called normalisation, he was forced to publish either in samizdat or under assumed names. He was one of the first signatories of Charter 77. Just after the Velvet Revolution he became editor-in-chief of the publishing house Atlantis as well as a lecturer at Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno. In 1990 he was appointed to the position of Czech Minister of Culture; he also represented ODS (Civic Democratic Party) in the Czech National Parliament and, after the division of Czechoslovakia in 1993, he became the speaker of the House of Deputies of the Czech Parliament. In 1998 he decided to give up active politics and returned to writing and publishing. His earlier work was also republished by Atlantis.

**Further Important Publications:** *Velice tiché Ave a jiné hry* (samizdat 1986, Toronto 1988, Ave Maria Played Softly and Other Plays; six plays); *Desítka her* (1995, Ten Plays; plays); *Balada pro banditu a jiné hry na zapřenou* (2001, Ballad for a Bandit and Other Denied Plays; 11 theatre adaptations, played in 1970s and 1980s under assumed names).

## Content and Interpretation

The play starts when Dušan Pompe, the elder son of the owners of the “Darkhouse”, arrives with his wife Viřka for a family gathering in June of 1992. Dušan is coming to visit his despotic father Eduard, Jewish mother Heda, catatonic sister Šárka and

brother Ivan who had cooperated with the Communist police. Relationships among family members are tenuous. Everyone starts to quarrel, old grievances and illusions come to the surface. In a mysterious way, the roots of the family's problems lead to the circumstances of building the Darkhouse. It was conceived as an impressive family residence by at the time young lady (mother), as a sign of her success and aspirations. It was also a way to put pressure on young Dr Eduard Pompe (father), who had avoided marriage for some years. He was afraid of his family's tendency to mental instability, but eventually, he offered to marry the Jewish lady lawyer. The Darkhouse – named this way because of its black elevation and simple functionalistic block – has left its mark on the whole family. Dr Pompe is attached to it so strongly, that he refused to take his Jewish wife and her parents abroad when the danger of World War II appeared. Later he also refused to sell the house, which would have enabled him to pay for his brother-in-law's flight to escape the Nazis. Dr Pompe's strategy was to falsify documents that could prove that his wife was in fact not her parents' daughter and did not have Jewish blood. Denying her Jewishness caused her long-lasting feelings of guilt. Later in the 1970s, his son Dušan became an anti-Communist dissident. Dr Pompe disinherited him being afraid the family would lose the Darkhouse. For the same reasons, the father tried to prevent his daughter Šárka from being committed to a psychiatric clinic. He was afraid, that if Šárka's husband divorced her, she couldn't keep their daughter and this would cause the granddaughter's share of the house would pass to a "foreign" family.

The microhistory of Pompe family in the 1990s is strongly connected with so-called macrohistory, major historical events. Within a family just as within a society ex-dissidents (Dušan) and ex-informers for the Communist regime (Ivan); tolerant women (mother) and despotic men (father Eduard Pompe) all meet with each other. And they all have some skeletons in their closets.

Like in absurd theatre, everybody talks but nobody listens and no one understands each other. The problems with communication seem to be the most important topic here and they are responsible for building the atmosphere of tension and intensifying frustration in the play.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Milan Uhde's play contains autobiographical threads which he has developed in an artistic and universalising form (for instance symbolic names: Pompe refers to "pomp", Dušan is connected with „duše“, soul; Dušan calls his siblings Sarah and Joseph). Finding a root and a solution to the cursed heritage of the family memory is both painful and grotesque. The Darkhouse symbolises this aggravating heritage as well as the impossibility of getting rid of it.

Dušan: The question is whether we are Jews.

Ivan: Everyone thinks we are.

Dušan: What everyone thinks isn't always right. Proof? Ma survived the entire war at home.

Ivan: Because Dad stood by her. He didn't divorce her. He acted like a man.

Mother: Change the subject, will you?

Ivan (to mother): Is it still taboo? Excuse me then.

Dušan: We are Jews after mother. Not after father. But there is one other version that says we're not Jews even after mother. There are documents.

Ivan: What kind? And when?

Dušan: Ask about them. Only watch out. I tried to. It's been almost two years to the day. He threw me out of the house.

Mother: Any other father would have half-killed you.

Dušan: And what did I say? That he sent his brother-in-law to the firing squad. Wasn't that right? It was. (Uhde, 2012, pp. 49–50; Tomáš, 2015, 222)

The very beginning – the circumstances of building the house – are connected with sin, bad intentions and such is the foundation of Pompe family.

The play shows sick relationships, problems and traumas in the family: the poisoning mixture of bourgeois morality, feeling guilty and the psychological traces left by Communist regime. The conserved illusions and injustices float to the surface, but the unbearable problems with communication make understanding and reconciliation impossible.

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# Modern Nativity Play (Jasełka-moderne)

**Author:** Ireneusz Iredyński

**First Published:** 1962 (staged 1965)

**Translations:** German (*Krippenspiel modern: Stille Nacht*, 1974; *Modernes Krippenspiel*, 1986); English (*Native Modern*, 1980).

**Theatre Adaptations:** Forum-Theater, Berlin (1963); Teatr Nowy, Poznań (1965); Teatr Ludowy, Warsaw (1971); Teatr Dramatyczny, Wałbrzych (1972); Teatr im. Stefana Jaracza, Olsztyn (1976), Teatr Polskiego Radia (2009).

**About the Author:** Ireneusz Iredyński was born in 1939 in Stanisławów (today Ukrainian Ivano-Frankivsk). His mother of Jewish origins left the family in 1942 for fear of discovery. Iredyński left his parental home early and without finishing school in order to avoid his father's influence. In 1959, he published his first poetry collection *Everything Is Near* (*Wszystko jest obok*). He also published crime novels under the pseudonym Umberto Pesco. Nevertheless, Iredyński became famous especially for his dramas, although critics referred to him as a “doubtful example for the youth” (Müldner-Nieckowski, 2009, p. 297). In German-speaking countries his plays quickly became well-known and enjoyed a high reputation. Two of the best-known, *Farewell, Judas* (written 1965, premiered 1971, Żegnaj, Judaszu) and *The Third Breast* (1973, Trzecia pierś), were premiered in Zurich. *Farewell, Judas* was translated into several languages. His collaboration with Polish Radio also resulted in several radio plays. Additionally, he wrote some scripts for renowned directors of his time (such as Krzysztof Kieślowski). In 1966 he was sentenced to three years in prison for attempted rape. Some argue that this was an attempt to silence the uncomfortable writer. In the 1980s, his dramas were brought to the country's big stages without much delay. Iredyński died in Warsaw in 1985 (Majchrowski, 2014).

## Content and Interpretation

At the age of 23, Iredyński caused a sensation with this play, as it mixes historical reality with existentialist aspects of power and powerlessness. The setting is a concentration camp on the eve of its liberation. A group of prisoners tries its hand at rehearsing a modified nativity play, which is constantly interrupted by the camp security guard appearing to choose persons for execution. The theatre director and the guard know each other from their earlier days in cabaret where the latter was often given particularly good roles. After having shot the director, the remaining actors turn to the next new leading figure, the guard. It turns out that he was the originator of the modern nativity play, which now (in view of the approaching liberation army) gives him the powerful feeling of being able to determine his last day himself. After his suicide, only

Herod remains alive. He is actually the only person of the ensemble without a clear conscience since he used to be a procurer and killed a human being in his life before the camp. After the camp guard's death, the Herod actor empowers himself with the guard's helmet and observes his mirror image with satisfaction.

In the world of hierarchy and tyranny depicted by Iredyński, moral principles lose their validity; the distinction between good and evil seems secondary since the cycle of tyranny will prevail and constantly renew itself (Hiemer, 2012, p. 88). Iredyński considered himself as author whose main topic was violence (particularly clear in *Farewell, Judas*, 1971). But Iredyński's protagonists are first and foremost changeable characters which have a dark past or psyche that comes to the surface in the key scene in the third act. In this declamatory speech, the guard explains that a young boy once inspired him to write this script. The boy presented the nativity play as a solo performance right on people's doorsteps with homemade figurines and a child's heart-rending voice. It is remarkable how the guard adopts this naive scenery and concludes:

I understood what it meant to be God [...] if the other [people] are only voices of God, his intonations. It has nothing to do with the notion of power, the notion of materialism, I would say, mechanical, oh, no. To adore power is something completely different, power is the exaltation of one individual among others, an individual equal to them, after all. The concept of divinity, when everything is the voice of God, the unification with the whole world, the absorption of it.... So I shot that former manager of a left-leaning cabaret. One of my tones just disappeared... Please, have a cigarette. (Iredyński, 2014, pp. 171–172)

Instead of building the world, like the boy did, the guard exterminates it. In the view of the narcissistic guard, the notion of evil is not banal, as Hannah Arendt put it, but demonic.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

According to Kowzan, the text is based on the notions of divinity in great world theatre, as could be seen in Hofmannsthal, Shakespeare, Calderón and Panizza (Kowzan, 2000, p. 57). In fact, the text itself often refers to historic theatre conventions but the most obvious parallel can be seen in the topics Iredyński prefers to depict. Like Panizza, Iredyński's characters doubt moralistic world views by contrasting them with the evil that finally conquers the good. Evil is produced by profanation of the biblical story since the relation between Mary and Joseph gets partially an erotic but also an ordinary character (Mary: "Do want me to tell that I will have children with you, that I will prepare lunches for you, and you will read newspapers in the armchair, or what?", p. 149). Additionally, the newborn Jesus – acted in this case by a 16-year-old boy – is treated like an annoying teenager in order to underline the "modern" conception of the Nativity. First and foremost, the piece is an observation of psychosocial behaviour between devotees and rulers, frustration, disappointment and complexes that turn into a source of violence and are regarded as the threat of our times. Iredyński's

attitude towards politics at the time was also marked by deep mistrust. So it is not surprising that the play itself contains some references to the lack of content and arbitrariness of socialist cultural politics: “[t]he Sing-Sing Award for an outstanding prose debut. The four-year-old prize-winner demonstrates her point of view about the Brahmin and the control of the Amazon” (p. 161). At the same time, we find ironic references to commonplaces of Polish identity like the Catechism of Polish Children: “‘Who are you?’ ‘A little servant’” (p. 164), instead of “‘Who are you?’ ‘A little Pole’” as in the original. Although, the piece is set in the realities of a concentration camp, the reader does not get any information about the background of the characters, so their past, religion or reason for being arrested do not seem relevant. The title *Modern Nativity Play* bears witness to the cynical twisting of original Christian motifs: the existence of Christ is made impossible by Herod’s survival; the repressive outside world of the concentration camp stands in contrast to the salvific intention of the Christmas story. The Jewish topics are set very subtly: the *New Testament* reference to the Massacre of the Innocents when Herod ordered to kill every boy under the age of two is a legend which is abused as an anti-Jewish argument in religious confrontations up until today. By confirming it in the play, Ireduński deconstructs the myth of Herod paradoxically. The action is situated against the backdrop of the organised murder of Jews in camps which became a crucial moment for Christian identity and self-representation after World War II. The play doubts the existence of moral constants and reveals them as an illusionary worldview to humankind – a humankind of staffage while the bad continues ruling the world (Jarzębowski, 2002, pp. 28–29).

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EMH

# Money from Hitler (Peníze od Hitlera)

**Author:** Radka Denemarková

**First Published:** 2006

**Theatre Adaptation:** Praha, Švandovo divadlo (Švanda Theatre), 2010.

**Translations:** Polish (*Pieniądze od Hitlera*, 2008); English (*Money from Hitler*, 2009); German (*Ein herrlicher Flecken Erde*, 2009); Hungarian (*Hitler pénze*, 2009); Slovenian (*Denar od Hitlerja*, 2010); Italian (*I soldi di Hitler*, 2012); Bulgarian (*Pari ot Chitler*, 2013); Spanish (*El dinero de Hitler*, 2015); Macedonian (*Parite od Chitler*, 2016); Swedish (*Pengar från Hitler*, 2016); Serbian (*Novac od Hitlera*, 2018); Croatian (*Novac od Hitlera*, 2018).

**About the Author:** Radka Denemarková (1968) is among the most prominent authors of contemporary Czech literature. She is known as a novelist, playwright, translator and essayist. After Czech and German studies, she graduated from the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague and holds a Ph.D. (1997). From 1998 to 2004, she was employed at the Institute of Czech Literature at the Academy of Sciences and simultaneously as a dramaturg at Prague Theatre Na zábradlí (Theatre on the Balustrade). Since 2004 she has been a freelance writer and translator. She translated from German into Czech, e.g. Herta Müller's novels or Georg Tabori's and Thomas Bernhard's plays.

**Further Important Publications:** *A já pořád kdo to tuče* (2005, *The Devil by the Nose*, novel); *Kobold* (2011, *Kobold*, novel); *Spací vady* (2012, *Sleeping Disorders*, play).

## Content and Interpretation

The novel is comprised of six chapters, so-called “returns”, surrounded by a prologue and a short epilogue. Denemarková brings together two chains of events which have a traumatic impact on the main character Gita Lauschmannová. She has survived the Holocaust, but is no longer accepted at her former home in the Czech village of Puklice which she comes back to in her first return in “Summer 1945”, as a 16-year-old girl. Not only that Gita, the daughter of a German speaking Jewish landowner, lost her parents and sister in the Holocaust, and she has no trace of her brother. The prologue however, leads the reader to suppose that her wish to find him alive will be brutally disappointing. As Jews – even though they were “assimilated” Jews (Denemarková, 2006, p. 64) – her family was deported to Nazi ghettos and concentration camps (Theresienstadt and Auschwitz are mentioned, p. 55). By the end of the war, the Lauschmanns' estate had been confiscated (p. 71). The Czech inhabitants who have taken over the land and houses and divided them among themselves, treat Gita hatefully like the child of an old adversary and do not shy away from mistreating her in or-

der to rid themselves of her. Eventually, she is able to escape (pp. 30–54) to a collecting camp, and from there to her aunt Ottla in Prague. Gita's rescue from Puklice is due to the unexpected help by a – up to that point unknown to her – pregnant young woman („Žena“, pp. 43ff.), who acts as a kind of paradoxical *deus ex machina*, at the same time saving Gita's life and executing her expulsion.

The second return, in “Summer 2005”, shifts the storyline to the now 76-year-old doctor (Gita) Lauschmannová, a retired physician. In the meantime, the Czech government has rehabilitated her parents (p. 82–83). Seeking reconciliation, she plans to build a museum and a monument for her father (which might be supported by grants from the German-Czech Fund for the Future). This in mind, she returns to Puklice (like Dürrenmatt's “Old Lady” in a luxury limousine; cf. his play *The Visit*, 1956), accompanied by her granddaughter Barbora and a lawyer. But there, the prejudices and false insinuations are still alive, and she is confronted with the old hate. The village people refuse mediation; any attempt at a solution is futile.

But some hope seems to sprout, when Denis, the son of the woman who had once taken the risk to let Gita escape, appears. Over the course of the next four chapters (“returns” 3–6), he understands the incredible injustice that has come upon Lauschmannová more and more (Strebel, 2014). Both become friends and Denis supports her fight for justice. She still suffers from horrible flashbacks recalling her suffering. Trying to cope with the flood of traumatic memories and the still unfortunate situation in Puklice, all of sudden she passes away while writing of her memories. Denis and Barbora organise her burial in Prague. In the epilogue, Denis' mother dies of a stroke. He is left with Lauschmannová's manuscript and the Lauschmann's unsettled legacy.

Denemarková's novel is a tragedy in prose. In the end, the conflict is still smouldering after the death of the main protagonist, and “catharsis is kept in suspense, handed over to future.” (Schwarz, 2014, p. 170)

### Main Topics and Problems

The story was inspired by the life of Eliška Fábryová whose Jewish father Richard Fischmann, murdered in Auschwitz, owned the castle and manor farm in Puklice village near Jihlava. After the war, the family was designated as Germans despite the fact they declared Jewish nationality and Czechoslovak citizenship. The estate was confiscated. In the 1990s, Fischmann was rehabilitated and Eliška Fábryová, almost 80 years old, demanded to restore her parents possessions. The villagers refused to hand over this property, and the whole case was not decided until 2012, six years after Eliška Fábryová's death (Koumar, 2018).

The novel deals with the fate of a “twofold victim” (term from Laruelle, 2015, p. 149). Reconstructed chronologically, Lauschmannová is first a victim of the Holocaust, and then she has to suffer from displacement in consequence of the expropriation according to President Beneš's “decree nr 12” (Denemarková, 2006, p. 216).

[...] Here is no *haus* which belongs to you. [...] In the name of the President of the Republic the whole estate of your family was transferred to the state. [...] The guilt of your *famílije* [family] is irrefutable. The essential point was and is the language people use among themselves. And *ausger-echnet* [just] at your home, behind closed doors *se šprechtílo* [they spoke] one hundred percent German. (p. 34; germanisms in italics)

Ironically, the accusation that Gita's family spoke German, is uttered in a local common Czech idiom, interspersed with germanisms. Displacement has more than just a spacial dimension: It begins and happens by discrimination, be it through language, by racial (antisemitic) prejudice and social exclusion or marginalisation, nourished by missing cultural empathy and nationalistic chauvinism. The novel exposes conjunction of trouble spots: the conflict-clusters of postwar expulsions, German-Czech-Jewish history and the Holocaust. This connection appears quite often in Czech literature in the last decades, see Josef Urban's novel *The Mill of Habermann* (2001) or Miroslav Bambušek's play *Porta Apostolorum* (2004). All over the narrative, the reader can trace the idea of a hard-to-cope-with presence of the past (comp. e.g. the serious documentation of the crimes committed during the end of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (Padevět, 2015), or in a wider frame, the reports about the *Ghosts of Europe* (Porter, 2010). The events in *Money from Hitler* reach up to 2005 in their consequences, thus letting the reader discover a prolonged chain of injustice.

Another notable point is the special aesthetic design which gives the protagonist in this conflict-ridden historic constellation her literary voice. The attempt to penetrate into her traumatic world, into this "holocaust after the Holocaust" (term by Zajac, 2010), generates sequences of surrealistic images. What happens in the "returns" is conveyed through Gita's, later doctor Lauschmannová's, mind, and is realised as something immediately experienced. She persists as an unmasked central reflector. The main narrative instance is remarkably folded: While the narration runs in third-person, there is another voice interfering in first-person (as *I/my* or *we/our*). For contrast, the first-person elements in the next example are put in italics:

They found the woman [...] in an oak locker [...]. And they raped her. With a machine gun. [...] *I am* grinning, and pictures are flickering before *my* eyes. The woman gets pregnant, she puffs up and bears a tiny machine gun, a whole family of small trembling machine guns pushing their way out of her, like little frozen metal snakes. They are tawing in *our* hands and at her breasts, and glittering bullets are dropping down from her nipples. (Denemarková, 2006, p. 66)

With its hard-edged imagery opening the narration to the grotesque, this work explores a method to show how traumatising historical events and apories are inscribed into a literary person's mind, body and life. It stands to mention that Michal Lang's stage adaptation of *Money from Hitler* was a success, too. At Prague Švanda Theatre, it ran for two years (2010–2012).

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WFS

# More Gas, Comrades! (Więcej gazu, Kameraden!)

**Author:** Krystian Piwowski

**First Published:** 2012

**About the Author:** Krystian Piwowski was born in 1956. He graduated in Polish philology at the University of Silesia in Katowice. He is a journalist, playwright, novelist, and reporter in local media. He lives in Częstochowa.

**Further Important Publications:** *Marlowe, Mann i Superman* (1989, Marlowe, Mann and Superman; novel); *Klaun* (2012, The Clown; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The collection consists of fifteen stories about World War II and the Holocaust seen through the eyes of its perpetrators and accomplices. While an exact time and place are not given, most of the stories take place in Nazi-occupied Poland. Because it lacks a thoroughly prepared timeline, Piwowski's literary representations seem disconnected from history, and the author plays liberally with the relationship between fact and fiction. In the afterword *The Imperative of Remembrance*, Piwowski described his literary agenda with regard to the commemoration of the Holocaust. It arises, he argues, from a need to fill the gaps in fiction, which is unable to sufficiently grasp the issue of the Holocaust. What is needed in particular is to develop a perspective that approaches this issue from the outside, without recourse to direct experience. These beliefs are connected to the writer's concern about the general lack of knowledge concerning the Holocaust, and his ideas on how literature should be written in order for remembrance to continue (Piwowski, 2012, pp. 267–269).

In the opening story *Women in the Meadow and I*, a Nazi gives air to his erotic fantasies. Train conductors in *A Misunderstanding* mock Jews who are dying while being transported to camps:

“So Stypka and Ratay dragged bodies into the steam engine. At first, they tried to throw them one by one into the furnace, but it was so high, and they were downstairs in the red snow, and even light girls with mouse tails bounced off the black oily sheet and fell on their necks. The corporal was impatient, the escorts were chattering, Dorsz moaned, holding his face, giving the corporal a look of reproach. The corporal praised the good work. He glanced at his watch. He asked when they would move. He looked at the material for the suits and did not say whether they were nice or not. The feet smoked, the corporal fumbled and groaned. He said that he must have cat fur on his knees because he had rheumatism”. (pp. 133–134)

*Peasants in People and Jews* promise to help the Jews they meet, who are nearly dead with exhaustion, only on the condition that they will be paid. According to Tomasz Mizkiewicz: “The SS-men are still on family matters, like normal soldiers, they miss

this or that beloved left behind at Heimat, they plot against their superiors, they make jokes to each other, they make friends and talk incessantly to relieve their boredom. It is no different for the Poles, who lie to their friends, steal Jewish property, flirt and drink” (Mizerkiewicz, 2013, p. 157).

Piwowski reflects on borderline situations that illicit conflicting reactions from the reader, from a moral reluctance to engage with the material to denial and disagreement. The reader is unable to assess the position or indeed *positions* of the author, which appear by design to tangle and blur, to resist all efforts to make them clear. Some critics have expressed misgivings about an outsider who imitates the perspectives of the perpetrators, asking whether Piwowski’s work qualifies as Holocaust literature at all, or if an approach that draws so heavily on fiction should not be deemed inadequate to the task.

### Main Topics and Problems

Favourable reviews of Piwowski’s stories, on the other hand, have praised his descriptions of the daily lives of perpetrators for their realism, as well as his ingenuity in illustrating Hannah Arendt’s thesis about the banality of evil. In describing Piwowski’s view, Mizerkiewicz thinks of it rather as the evil of banality. Critics of *More Gas, Comrades!*, however, consider it as an example of the pornographication of the Holocaust, or as a form of Holocaust kitsch. Sławomir Buryła, meanwhile, describes the collection of stories as bizarre, criticising its lack of moderation and tendency towards extreme perversion, as in the episode where Jewish children are incinerated in a furnace, and the erotic observations of SS personnel in the extermination camps (Buryła, 2016, p. 101). Mizerkiewicz reminds us that the Holocaust requires an attitude of restraint, sometimes even silence, of the kind demonstrated by Piotr Szewc’s novel → *Annihilation*. Yet Piwowski wanted, first and foremost, to define the limits of the invention of the Polish witnesses to the Holocaust (Mizerkiewicz, 2013, p. 159), referring to the ambiguous stories of Tadeusz Borowski → *Farewell to Maria*. His main goal was to elucidate a certain tendency in the contemporary Polish imagination to insert oneself into the Holocaust as participant, and from that position to evaluate the society and social roles of an earlier time. If the author fails in this project, it is because he has not clearly delineated where his stories draw from the imagination and where from the historical past – it is on these terms, in any case, that his critics have denounced his immorality and inappropriate use of history. One may argue that the blurring of fact and fiction in *More Gas, Comrades!* has further resulted in a mixture of anti-Polish and antisemitic sentiment. While drawing on the model of such short stories as *Farewell to Maria* by Tadeusz Borowski and Professor Spanner by Zofia Nałkowska (→ *Medallions*), Piwowski tends to simplify and muddy the gesture, and even while his aim may be to “re-write the Holocaust,” in the words of James E. Young, Piwowski’s ethical and aesthetic missteps in *More Gas, Comrades!* tend to thwart his intention. The result, as his critics point out, is a work that shows ignorance towards the representation of victims. Contrary to the thoughts he ex-

presses in the afterword, Polish literature has repeatedly addressed the Holocaust and in so doing created one of the richest collections of Holocaust stories in the world.

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MT

# The Most Important Particle (Ta najważniejsza cząsteczka)

**Author:** Stanisław Benski

**First Published:** 1982

**Translation:** English (*Colored Drawings, Missing Pieces, Snapshots and The Tzaddik's Grandson* in *Missing Pieces*, 1990).

**About the Author:** Stanisław Benski (1922–1988) was a Polish writer of Jewish origin. In 1939–1943, he lived in the Soviet Union, and later, in 1943–1946, he served in the Polish People's Army (Ludowe Wojsko Polskie). After World War II he studied law at the University of Warsaw. He worked for many years as director of the State Social Welfare Home for the Aged.

**Further Important Publications:** *Zwiadowcy* (1965, Rangers; short stories); *Tyle ognia wokół* (So Much Fire Around, 1979; short stories); *Jeden dzień* (One Day, 1980; novel); *Cesarski walc* (Caesarean Waltz, 1985; short stories); *Ocaleni* (Survivors, 1986; novel); *Strażnik świąt* (A Guard of the Feast, 1987; short stories).

## Content and Interpretation

*The Most Important Particle*, like other works by Benski, focuses on Holocaust survivors whose lives in postwar Warsaw consist of an everyday and often unbearable struggle to regain their lost identity. The cast of characters includes a group of Polish Jews who managed to survive or escape the ghettos and camps, although they remain prisoners of a past burdened with many traumatic experiences.

The collection consists of thirteen stories, each one narrating a deceptively ordinary incident involving the sick and mostly elderly residents of the Welfare Home for Holocaust Survivors (→ *The Boarding House*, → *Dr. Josef's Beauty*). Those incidents and events, however, provide a pretext for returning to life before the war, before the Nazi occupation and resulting trauma, typically involving the loss of family members and other loved ones. This last theme can be found in all thirteen stories, but is most striking in *The Tzaddik's Great-Grandson* (*Prawnuczek cadyka*) where it appears in a discussion between one of the residents named Fajwel and guests from America who are descendants of Polish-Jewish immigrants. They have come to Poland to visit the tomb of their ancestor, a *tzadik* (or “holy man”), in order to pray for his great-grandson's recovery. Their visit to the Welfare Home is similarly motivated, as they expect to meet a man named Chaim who is considered to be a contemporary saint or *tzadik* and remains a symbol of lost heritage for the rest of the residents. The discussion that follows the arrival of the guests revolves around the figure of the God-fearing Jew and a notion of identity for American Jews that is defined by faith. In response to this topic, an irate Fajwel exclaims that there is no God, adding later that if God existed he

would have saved his wife and son from the ghetto. The guests cannot understand Fajwel's attitude, highlighting the futility of putting one's experiences into words.

The titular *The Most Important Particle* (translated elsewhere as "Missing Pieces") raises an especially important issue, presenting the tragicomic story of a Polish-Jewish couple that did not directly experience the war, the German occupation, or the Holocaust. Gabriel Lewin, along with members of his immediate family, spent the period in question at his brother's home in New York, while his wife Róża spent it in Uzbekistan. After meeting again in postwar Poland, the two got married. In contrast to the victims and survivors of mass extermination, the Lewins are in a special situation that they find increasingly uncomfortable, one that sets them radically apart from most other European Jews. This difference gradually becomes a burden for them, which they decide to cope with by creating their own fictional wartime biographies, drawing on facts and events typical of the Polish-Jewish wartime experience: the bombardment of 1939, the resistance, life in occupied Warsaw (not in the ghetto, but on the Aryan side), and so on. The sham lives they write in this way, both grotesque and immoral, rooted in a deep need for being full members of their home community, but also prove a tragic lack of identification with other people of Jewish origin. Nevertheless, the effort helps them recall their friend Janeczka, whose individual tragedy consists in having no information about her early childhood. Knowing neither her mother nor her father, she roamed the streets of the occupied capital among strangers and in shelters, and in this way managed to survive. Now, absorbed in the quest for her own beginnings, Janeczka walks the streets of Warsaw in search of resolution and "the first and most important particle" of her life.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Focused on the lives of Holocaust survivors, Benski presents their dramatic fight for lost identity, a fight in which many characters sustain themselves on a form of memory that spans two different temporal streams: one characterised by a prewar Arcadia, the other the dark times of war. The survivor's memory is necessarily in conflict with itself, presenting the characters, on the one hand, with a way to mentally reconstruct the years before the war (its therapeutic function), and on the other, with destabilising mental shocks as the recourse to memory brings back former traumas. With Benski, the destructive force of war and the Great History returns endlessly to his characters' personal histories, so that it becomes the most important topic of the survivors' daily conversations.

Benski's style oscillates between a traditional realism reminiscent of the nineteenth-century novel, which serves as a medium for his literary portraits and depictions, and a parable poetics that enhances the overtones of his short stories. He also makes use of the aesthetics of farce, which allows him to avoid excessive pathos. By using the resources of a "transparent language", Benski is able to render his existential metaphors with evident clarity. The author concentrates on the theme of orphaned and disappearing communities, juxtaposed with well-developed character relations.

He places special emphasises, moreover, on those relations characterised by selfless care, friendship, respect, etc. While far from idealising his characters (their frailty, defects, addictions), Benski uncovers the real value of their common activities, interests, and conversations.

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AMS

# Mr Theodore Mundstock (Pan Theodor Mundstock)

**Author:** Ladislav Fuks

**First Published:** 1963

**Translations:** German (*Herr Theodor Mundstock*, 1964); Hungarian (*Mundstock úr*, 1965); Spanish (*El Señor Theodor Mundstock*, 1965); English (*Mr Theodore Mundstock*, 1968); Romanian (*Domnul Theodor Mundstock*, 1973); Bulgarian (*Gospodin Teodor Mundštok*, 1986); Nederland (*Meneer Theodor Mundstock*, 1986); Croatian (*Gospodin Theodor Mundstock*, 1988); Slovak (*Pán Theodor Mundstock*, 1988); Italian (*Il signor Theodor Mundstock*, 1997); French (*Monsieur Mundstock*, 2004).

**Theatre Adaptations:** Činoherní studio, Ústí nad Labem (1984, adaptation and director Jaroslav Achab Haidler); Théâtre de l'Eldorado de Lyon (1993, adaptation and director Bruno Boëglin); New York, Theater for the New City and JCC Manhattan (adaptation and director Vít Hořejš, Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theater, under the title *Mr. M*; 2011); Divadlo hrdinů, Prague (adaptation and director Miloš Horanský, 2016).

**Film Adaptation:** *Kartka z podrózy* (A Postcard from the Journey), feature film, screenplay Waldemar Dziki; film director Waldemar Dziki, premiered 1984.

**Comics:** Nikola Logosová: *Pan Theodor Mundstock*. Prague 2012.

**About the Author:** Ladislav Fuks (1923–1994) was born in Prague as the son of a high ranking police officer. In high school, he witnessed the Nazi persecution of his Jewish friends. In 1942 he was forced to work on a farm in Moravia. After World War II, he studied philosophy, psychology and art history at Charles University in Prague. He became a professional writer in the 1960s, after his successful debut of *Mr Theodore Mundstock*. Jewish figures and the Holocaust play an important role in his works from the 1960s.

**Further Important Publications:** *Variace pro temnou strunu* (1966, Variations on a Dark Chord; novel); *Spalovač mrtvol* (1967, → *The Cremator*; novel); *Smrt morčete* (1969, Death of the Guinea Pig; short stories).

## Content and Interpretation

The novel, divided in 21 chapters, is set in Nazi-occupied Prague (1941–1942). Its protagonist is a shabby man about fifty, a Jew named Theodore Mundstock, a former accountant. Now he is forced to work as a street sweeper. He awaits his summons for the transport to a concentration camp. Like many other Fuks's characters, Mund-

stock exists in a world that bears much fear and he does not recognise the boundary between reality and imagination. He creates his own ideas of time and space. He lives alone except for a pet pigeon and his own “shadow” and *doppelgänger* Mon whom he talks to. Mundstock doesn’t think of any active resistance to the occupier; he follows all German anti-Jewish orders. He comforts his friends, the Stern family, but he realises the hopelessness of his situation. He tries to commit suicide, however, is saved by his neighbour Čížek, a communist, and the pigeon at the cost its own life. Later Mundstock visits a rabbi and seeks for advice. The old rabbi tells him, that the Jews must accept suffering as part of the deal for the chosen nation.

After few days, Mundstock is reminded of Rabbi Yehuda bar Elai’s words, that the Jews are likened to the dust and likened to the stars. Mundstock who as usual was sweeping the dirty street, still felt the dust. Now he “felt himself begin to rise to the stars” (Fuks, 1968, p. 104). It is the breaking point for him. He is convinced to find his “road to salvation”, and thus he creates a “method” of overcoming. He tries to find his hope by thinking out and perfecting strategies for endurance and surviving the transport and camps. At this moment, his shadow Mon disappears. Mundstock prepares for things that are very different from his usual existence. For instance, for getting into a convoy, training for hunger and starvation, heavy work in a quarry, uncomfortable sleeping (he practises by using an ironing board as a bed), for being shouted and beaten by Nazis, and by losing his teeth so that the soldier will feel that the beating has produced a good result. He even practices his own death, by shooting or in a gas chamber.

Further transports go on, and Mundstock’s former girlfriend Ruth Kraus as well as the Stern family (except little Simon) must leave. Mundstock takes care of Simon and teaches him about his method. At last, Mundstock and Simon are both also summoned for transport. On the way, Mundstock keeps his prepared strategy. He stops and changes his little suitcase from one hand to the other. He spots Simon on the platform and calls his name. But then Mundstock is knocked down and killed by a German lorry. Mundstock knows that life has a very unpredictable nature. At that moment, Simon comes to him and merges with Mon. Pictures of “dust” and a “star” appear again: “The yellow Jewish star on his dark blue coat was covered in dust, but strange to say there was not a speck of blood on it” (p. 214).

### **Main Topics and Problems**

In *Mr Theodore Mundstock* the author tries to depict the tragic, absurd situation of the Jews during the Holocaust, and at the same time to give a picture of the plight of man in general. The main character is a Jew who, through no fault of his own, finds himself under extreme threat and is trying to defend himself. Ironically, in the end he is killed in a traffic accident; he dies as a victim of the Shoah. Nevertheless, the novel also reproduces the destruction of human rights (not as arbitrary violence, but as a regular system), an atmosphere of mutual and accepted deception, where the truth is a taboo.

The novel contains many details from Jewish cultural and religious life. For instance, Jewish feasts (Pesach, Shavuot, Hanukkah, Rosh Chodesh) and biblical figures (Rebecca, Judith). Mundstock sings Hanukkah's prayer in Hebrew and the rabbi quotes an Early Medieval Jewish scholar, Judah Halevi.

Fuks' novel is in many aspects similar to Jiří Weil's → *Life with a Star* (1949), in part also Ladislav Grosman's → *The Shop of Main Street* (1965). All of them blend tragedy and the grotesque. Also Weil's Roubíček as well as Grosman's Brtko are little men, non-heroes, almost comic figures. Nevertheless, while Tono Brtko is a Slovak, Josef Roubíček is a Jew waiting alone in the suburbs of Prague to be taken to a concentration camp. Also he has a former girlfriend, and now a pet cat, whom he talks to. Also neither Nazi brutality nor heroic resistance are mentioned in Weil's book. Both characters are concerned with trivial everyday things. The horror and even the absurdity of the situations depicted come from the "usual" way of Nazi totalitarianism, from the acceptance of the degradation of human relationships as a matter of course – in some respects, the stories are told in a very Kafkaesque manner. However, the ends are very different: Roubíček decides not to go into the transport and to move to a hiding place, with the help of Czech labourers, while Mundstock dies on the way to the transport gathering place.

Unlike *Life with a Star*, the story of Mundstock is told in the third person narration. But almost everything is seen – as well as in Fuks' → *The Cremator* – through the eyes of the main character. Both characters, Mundstock and Kopfrkingl are disturbed. Similar to Mundstock, Kopfrkingl believes that phantoms and mirages do, in truth, exist. In Mundstock's internal world his imagined *doppelgänger*, Mon, becomes a reality; Kopfrkingl thinks, a Tibetan monk visits him. However, Mundstock is an outsider and introverted character, Kopfrkingl turns into an aggressor and a murderer.

Like other of Fuks' novels and short stories, the novel *Mr Theodore Mundstock* is based on stylisation and complicated construction. The entire text is full of allusions and symbols; a network of anticipations and hints is created. So the death of Mundstock is anticipated in the third chapter:

As he crossed the road he almost got in the way of a truck. For a split second people on the pavement stiffened, but the driver went on... (p. 30)

[...] "was it so bad going along the street, after all?"

"Well, I wouldn't want to get run over", he said, "but I've got eyes in my head". (p. 36)

The words "dust" and "star" (see above) play an important role. Both of them have several meanings, direct as well as transmitted and religious. Mundstock has a lamp in his room. There is a picture of Columbus's ship on the lampshade. In the first half of the story, this boat stays in place. After Mundstock had invented his "method", "the ship [...] sailed out of the darkness and began to move" (p. 132). It suggests hope. Later, in the chapter 20, Columbus's ship sailed calmly nearer to its goal. Mundstock thinks that this goal is his rescue. But it turns out that it is his death. Mundstock invents his method on a Friday and a Friday is also the day when he dies. He believes he

can be chosen. I could be a hint to Jesus Christ and his death on a Friday. Also the names Mon and therefore Simon are symbolic.

*Mr Theodore Mundstock* was the first edited book of Ladislav Fuks. It became well-known and was translated into many languages. It was also supposed to be filmed; at first by Charlie Chaplin, and later Roman Polanski considered working on the adaptation, however, refused perhaps due to Fuks' particular nature (Poláček, 2013, pp. 140–142). The adaptation was not made until 1984 when the Polish director Waldemar Dziki created the film version of *Mundstock* under the title *A Postcard from the Journey*. It was situated in a ghetto in Poland and characters were Polish Jews.

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JH

# Night of the Living Jews (Noc żywych Żydów)

**Autor:** Igor Ostachowicz

**First Published:** 2012

**Theatre Adaptation:** Teatr Dramatyczny, Warsaw (2014).

**Translations:** French (*La nuit des Juifs-vivants*, 2016); Slovenian (*Noč živih Židov*, 2019).

**About the Author:** Igor Ostachowicz (1968) is a writer and former specialist in international relations. During 2007–2014 he was undersecretary and secretary of state in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

**Further Important Publications:** *Zielona wyspa* (2015, *The Green Island*; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

Igor Ostachowicz's novel has caused fierce discussion among scholars of Holocaust literature, just as it has polarised and divided the broader public. This is due in large part to the author's strategy in presenting the subject, considered by many to be controversial, offensive, and inappropriate. *Night of the Living Jews* presents the fictional story of a Warsaw resident who becomes entangled in the history of the Holocaust as he is visited by living corpses of Jews exterminated during the war. By the conceit of the novel, they have remained all these years under the rubble and in the cellars of modern-day Warsaw, the inhabitants of an underground city. The story culminates with a scene set in Warsaw's biggest shopping mall, Arcadia, where the main characters must fight for their lives. In this way, Ostachowicz's strategy for representing history takes its cues from popular culture, most explicitly from the horror film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), but there are also allusions to Tarantino's *Inglorious Bastards* (2009) (Sobolewska, 2012).

The motif of living corpses is thus linked to the notion of Jews who want not so much to avenge themselves (as in Tarantino's film) as to change their future fate. The ludic aspect of the plot is reinforced by comic portrayals of Jews who cannot find their way in the everyday reality of a world dominated by commercial culture. Gradually, however, they give in to its charms (they go shopping, for instance). The writer does not shy away from the use of slapstick: in one scene, for example, a Jewish boy on a shopping spree loses his hand. The controversy generated by the novel is due primarily to its rejection of the prevailing form of Holocaust memorialisation, which is to say, the serious approach that people are accustomed to. It is this aspect of Ostachowicz's novel, on its surface, that has elicited reactions of disgust and even outrage. On the other hand, by provoking readers in this way, the novel focuses our attention pre-

cisely on these negative reactions (as anticipated by the writer), and on those who fail to go further than a superficial reading. Seen from a different perspective – combining these facts in a different way –, we find a very different story: the Jews who inhabit the underground city are those who have not been mourned, who were never mentioned, and who are not missed.

It is this hidden challenge within the novel that most defies the living, forcing us to change our reading habits. Similarly, the grotesque nature of the contemporary world as depicted in the novel, in relation to the deceased Jews, does violence to our sense of reality, and undermines all references to the real-world situation. Considering that the Warsaw district of Muranów was erected on the ruins of the ghetto and on other neighbourhoods destroyed by the Germans at the close of the war, the absence of Jews takes on new meaning. Namely, it calls attention to a certain perspective from which it made better financial sense to build on the rubble of the ghetto than to excavate the bodies – the dead really were left behind beneath the foundations of the new buildings (Chomałowska, 2012, p. 169). From this perspective, Jews may be absent from the streets of Warsaw, but their living corpses have brought them back into plain view. The plot of *Night of the Living Jews* unfolds according to its provocative premises: the arrival of Jews is met with hostility, in particular from a group with Fascist roots that does not want Jews in Poland. The protagonist takes up a fight with this belief and its adherents:

The moment has come, there's no way to hide from it, you have to face the truth. Tell my aunts, uncles, neighbours, my whole Polish family, who have been sitting comfortably on the couch in front of the TV: Yes, it's true, corpses are walking around the city, and I wonder what the sanitary service will say about it, and it's possible that they'll be looking for their cutlery and paperwork, not to mention their real estate, and I don't even know if they like you. But they have shown some degree of tolerance, and because the situation makes me nauseous, and in light of this truth, which you already know, I intend to fight for the fallen, for their right to come and go as they please, to do what they wish. You don't like it? I'll smack you with my pipe (Ostachowicz, 2012, p. 235).

However, it is difficult to consider the protagonist's fight as a straightforwardly idealistic gesture. He too is caught up in an attitude of self-defence, he too is concerned for the protection of his image and privileges. The question then is: will he be capable, in spite of all, of giving aid to others? Does the gesture only count when it is based on idealistic motivations? These are the questions the reader is left with at the end of the novel. The writer directs the emotions of his readers in the manner of a critical artist, arousing feelings of discomfort, or refusing to resolve them, confronting his audience with the meaning of their own reactions. Horror is not just a popculture convention. In the right hands, it tells the terrifying story of a story that forgets the dead. Horror is the absence of memory (Przymuszała, 2016).

### Main Topics and Problems:

*Night of the Living Jews* is an excellent example of the way a certain dispute plays out between the perception of popular culture and the presentation of topics of exceptional importance to history. The provocation at the heart of Ostachowicz's gesture was so strong that many readers felt he had gone too far, and while the success of the novel was all but guaranteed by this carefully calculated scandal, it seemed to come at the expense of more substantive reflections on the author's purpose. Over time, however, interpretations have gone much further, and researchers have increasingly pointed to the purposeful semantic play of Ostachowicz's approach. Reception has turned now from the preliminary aesthetic problem posed by the novel to the Polish-Jewish relations, historical and contemporary, that underlie it. Justyna Kowalska-Leder, for example, sees the *Night of the Living Jews* as a kind of projection of Polish fears and phobias connected with the Shoah, suggesting that the generic conventions of horror are a veiled reference to the return of repressed guilt, just as the murdered return in their dreams.

At the same time, the figure of Jewish zombies will remind us of the myth of the Jewish vampire ritual murder, so that the depiction of Jewish corpses becomes highly ambivalent, at once evoking and contradicting stereotypical notions about Jews (Kowalska-Leder, 2014, pp. 779–780). Other research has pointed to the great potential presented by the figure of “animated dead bodies” in their relation to the burial place. Roma Sendyka notices, above all, a gesture in Ostachowicz's work that engages with the unclear status of the Jews who died in the ghetto during and after the uprising, and who were not given a burial but merely absorbed by the rubble. In this sense, the spectral presence of the dead could be seen as an extension of lingering guilt concerning the lack of proper treatment of the corpses, and the protagonist's actions as a kind of redress (Sendyka, 2014, p. 296). Czaplinski points out how Ostachowicz's images of Jews marked by corporeal violence function as disgusting literal representations of their suffering. He thus proposes reading *Night of the Living Jews* as an example of the expansion of an image – circulating in the literature of recent years – of the Shoah as an “abomination” from which we want to distance ourselves and which, by attacking all our senses, does not allow us to reduce the topic to theoretical deliberations. This in turn highlights the necessity of reworking our ideas about ourselves, and about our perception of the community (Czaplinski, 2016, p. 392-394). The reception of the *Night of the Living Jews* as a novel that aims only to scandalise, as we see by these examples, has thus significantly evolved – and will probably continue to evolve.

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BP

# The Old Man and Fate (Starý pán a osud)

**Author:** Peter Karvaš

**First Published:** 1979 (in: *The Night in My Town*)

**About the Author:** Peter Karvaš was born in 1920 in Banská Bystrica. He graduated his study on the Faculty of Philosophy in Bratislava. As a Jew, he was interned for a year in a labour camp during the war years. During the Slovak National Uprising, he worked in the Free Slovak Broadcasting Company and published his works in insurgent press. His parents were executed by the Nazis in Nemecká at the beginning of January, 1945. After World War II he worked as a dramatist in the New Scene of the National Theatre in Bratislava, in 1949–1951 he was a cultural attaché in Bucharest. He worked on the Ministry of Education, was an editor in the review *Kultúrny život* and also a secretary of the Union of Slovak Writers. In the 1970s and 1980s, he had limited opportunities to publish because of his political attitudes to the Soviet invasion in August of 1968. He returned to literary life after 1989. From 1968 to 1974 he was an associate professor of Theatre Studies, after 1974 a researcher at the Research Institute of Culture in Bratislava. He died in 1999 in Bratislava. In his plays and radio plays, he described his own experiences with totalitarian regimes – reacted to the Nazi persecution mainly in *The Midnight Mass* and *Antigona and the Others* – but also a social struggle for justice.

**Further Important Publications:** *Polnočná omša* (1959, *The Midnight Mass*; play); *Antigona a tí druhí* (1961, *Antigona and the Others*; play); *Jazva* (1963, *The Scar*; play); *Absolútny zákaz* (1970, *The Absolute Forbiddance*; play); *Velikán alebo Život a dielo profesora Bogoviča* (1992, *The Great or The Life and Work of Professor Bogovič*; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

Despite Peter Karvaš had a Jewish origin, and his family was affected by the Holocaust, he did not deal with this topic in his works. He paid a greater attention to the theme of Slovak National Uprising during World War II. He displayed the area of concentration camp in his play *Antigona and the Others*, but the main characters were not Jews and the main topic is not the mass murder of Jews. The main characters of this play are political prisoners interned in the camp. However, in 1979 he published a book of short stories *The Night in My Town* (Noc v mojom meste) where a short story *The Old Man and Fate* with the theme of the Holocaust can be found.

The main characters of the short story are the watchmaker (also called as the old man), his wife and their seventeen-year-old daughter Marianna. The plot is situated in the time when the persecution of Jews in Slovakia begins. All the family members know about it, they have heard about it in a different way. But they think that the other family members know nothing about it and so they keep it secret. They try to protect each other from the fear of the future.

So the father tries to save the daughter from the truth. He is afraid of her reaction, that she would be angry about her Jewish origin which will cause the end of her peaceful life of a teenage girl. The watchmaker has presumed for a long time that he has no enemies until he has received a phone call one night and has heard an unknown man recite to him a nasty poem about Jews. Despite he thinks that it was just a mistake, it had to be explained. But he changes his mind when the priest Máder comes into his shop. They used to play cards, together with a teacher Klačanský, but now the priest tells him that in the future they could not meet and talk anymore. He says him about the decision to make out of the Jews the citizens of the second category. They would take up their stores, property. Jews would not be allowed to enter a cinema and public places. He advises him to escape from Slovakia, because no one can help them, even a Christian baptism does not will make them safe. The watchmaker realises that the priest does not say anything to him that he would not have known.

For a long time, the watchmaker has been trying to save his family from the fear of the upcoming events. However, the dialogue with his daughter and his wife convince him that they have known about everything. The wife knows about the phone call the unknown had at night because they have called about thirty Jews. And his daughter Marianna was hit by antisemites at school, she was excluded from school. But she has pretended to attend school every day. She also knows about the transports of Jews to concentration camps. In this way the watchmaker realises that he lost his daughter by losing her childhood and adolescence. In contrast with her parents who are only passively waiting for what will happen to them, Marianna stands on the side of the resistance. At the end of the story there is a hint at her leaving parents: “The old man came to the flat and stayed in the kitchen. He thought for himself that he hears his daughter breaths regularly” (Karvaš, 1979, p. 282).

### **Main Topics and Problems**

The short story *The Old Man and Fate* is a view into the life of a Jewish family during the Holocaust, whose individual members are trying to protect their beloved relatives from the cruel reality. At the same time, the author describes the gradual persecutions in relation to the citizens of Jewish origin – exclusion from the public life, aryanisation of their property, the exclusion of Jewish children from schools. The non-Jewish citizens change their behaviour against the Jews. Firstly, there appear antisemitic attitudes (night calls to the Jews), secondly, there is the fear of friendship and contact with the Jews (the priest).

In the story, there is also a psychological survival of the Jews before the upcoming events presented. Feelings of fear, consciousness of their own bad status and an even worse future are expressed here. Most of these feelings are reflected in the character of the watchmaker: “He persuaded himself persistently that everything would explain in some way [...] and already a familiar feeling, that he was standing on a trap-door, the lever of which someone clenches in his hand, was becoming stronger and multiplied as an echo” (p. 267).

The author also deals with the topic of children and lost childhood. See Lustig's → *Diamonds of the Night*, Wojdowski's → *Bread for the Departed* and Grynberg's → *The Jewish War*. The Jewish children became adult person under the influence of fear of upcoming events. In the story, the watchmaker is aware that with losing his daughter's childhood he also loses his daughter. He feels even guilty of her, and at the same time he thinks that his daughter blames him for his Jewish origin.

Just as parents protected their children from the future cruel reality, even before the loss of their childhood, *vice versa*, the children tried to protect their parents. Marianna in the story continues to pretend to visit her school, although she was excluded, only to protect her parents from the reality, before feeling that they did not protect her enough.

The narrator uses the clock as a symbol of the flowing time left to the Jews. At the beginning of the story, the author writes: "Dozens of watches were ticking in a small room, as if it were a little frosty" (p. 262). Thereafter, the watches indicate the upcoming end of the peaceful life of the Jews: "Yes, a few days passed and nothing happened, but the ticking of the watches now sounds like rain of drops falling into the tank, which at some time necessarily overflows" (p. 268).

In 1996, the story was included in the anthology *The God's Lane: The Anthology of Slovak Literature about the Holocaust*, edited by Milan Richter.

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MA

# Our Class: XIV Lessons from History (Nasza klasa: historia w XIV lekcjach)

**Author:** Tadeusz Słobodzianek

**First Published:** 2009

**Translations:** English (*Our Class*, 2009); German (*Unsere Klasse*, 2012); Czech (*Naše třída*, 2012); French (*Notre Classe*, 2015); Swedish (*Vår klass*, 2012) and many other languages.

**Theatre Adaptations:** Reading premiere: Theatre Confrontations Festival (Konfrontacje Teatralne), Lublin (2008). World premiere: London National Theatre (2009). Polish theatre premiere: Na Woli Theatre, Warsaw (2010). Other theatre adaptations (selected): Studio 189 Theatre, Toronto (2011); Lliure de Gràcia Theatre, Barcelona (2011); Katona Theatre, Budapest (2011); Bungaku-za Theatre, Tokyo (2012); Son of Semele Ensemble, Los Angeles (2013); PICT Theatre, Pittsburgh (2013); Galeasen Theatre, Stockholm (2013); Núcleo Experimental Theatre, São Paulo (2013); Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, Vilnius (2013); Cameri and Habima Theatres, Tel Aviv (2014) and many others.

**About the Author:** Tadeusz Słobodzianek (1955) was born in Yeniseysk (Krasnoyarsk Krai, Siberia, Russia), where his parents were deported during World War II. After the war his family moved to Białystok, Poland, a city whose multicultural climate has had a decisive influence on Słobodzianek's work. Słobodzianek's family was bi-religious: his mother was an Orthodox Jew and his father an anti-clerical Catholic. The author studied theatre at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, the most important theatrical centre in Poland of the 1970s and 1980s. In those years Słobodzianek wrote theatre reviews for the weekly *Polityka* under the pseudonym Jan Koniecpolski. His career as a drama writer began in 1981 with the production of his children's play *Autumn Tale* (Baśń jesienna) in Wojciech Bogusławski's Theatre in Kalisz, and would make his debut as a director in the same theatre with Miron Białoszewski's drama (*The Chagriners* [Osmędeusze]). In the years that followed, he collaborated with theatres in a number of cities, including Warsaw, Cracow, Lodz, Poznan, Gdansk, and (with the city's puppet theatre) Białystok. In 1991, Słobodzianek founded the Wierszalin Theatre in Supraśl, near Białystok. He was also a lecturer in the Department of Journalism at Warsaw University. In 2003, Słobodzianek founded the Drama Laboratory in Warsaw, which has produced more than forty premieres, and is the first drama school in Poland with an emphasis on new playwrights.

**Further Important Publications (all plays):** *Obywatel Pekosiewicz* (Citizen Pekosiewicz, 1989); *Turlajgrostek* (Rolling Peas, 1991); *Prorok Ilija* (Prophet Ilya, 1991); *Merlin – inna*

*historia* (Merlin, *The Secret History*, 1993); *Kowal Malambo* (The Blacksmith Malambo, 1993); *Sen pluskowy czyli towarzysz Chrystus* (Bedbug's Dream, or Comrade Christ, 2000); *Śmierć proroka i inne historie o końcu świata* (The Prophet's Death And Other Stories about the End of the World (2012).

### Content and Interpretation

*Our Class* is inspired by the incidents in Jedwabne village on 10 July 1941, at the beginning of World War II, when a group of forty Polish villagers murdered nearly 1,600 of their Jewish neighbours. The play is also influenced by Tadeusz Kantor's works, in particular *The Dead Class*. *The story of Our Class*, which is told from a child's point of view combined with adult commentary, follows a group of Polish and Jewish schoolmates as they head to class, only to end as victims and perpetrators of the massacre.

As the play opens, the setting is a school room with five school benches, but the pupils are dressed in adult outfits – the same outfits in which they will later die: Dora in a dress from the forties, Menachem in the uniform of an Israeli soldier, Heniek in a cassock, etc. Each character tells the story of her/his life and death: a rape scene, a wedding night, a military engagement, scenes of torture, the loss of children, antisemitic stereotypes, and finally their own collective murder. The stories are told candidly and without self-censorship – Dora, for example, reveals that she experienced some sexual pleasure while being raped –, but also without drama or emotion. It is a work that challenges common patterns of social behaviour, as well as the prescribed ways of remembering Shoah victims and perpetrators, presenting an example of the end of *communicative memory*, according to Jan Assmann's definition, when the last participants of the events are dead and their story belongs to the area of common cultural memory (see Lumír Čivrný's → *The Black Tree's Memory*). If a central mechanism of the play is *catharsis*, we are compelled to ask: on what basis does this *catharsis* play out? Is it the mechanism of identification and emotional purification, or merely a relief that the story has been told, so that there is no longer any need to think about it? As Myron Meisel writes in *The Hollywood Reporter*,

What begins as the mawkish loyalties of schoolmates degenerates into such a deep moral morass that even noble actions have base motifs, and in fact what everyone shares is not the bonds of affection but the imperatives of survival and the malice of greed. If the story of the Exodus must be told annually at Passover, there is little reason not to retell that of the Shoah at least as often, and to have it explored by a Polish writer has particular value as expiation. (Meisel, 2013)

### Main Topics and Problems

*Our Class* belongs to a group of dramas written by Słobodzianek after the Drama Laboratory workshop in Nasutów near Lublin (July 2007). The main topic of the workshop was the history of Lublin Jews. The play was first presented to the public at a reading during the Konfrontacje Theatre Festival in Lublin in 2008, which was also

devoted to Jewish themes and Polish-Jewish relations. From the very beginning, *Our Class* has been interpreted as a historical or even political drama, referring primarily to the history of Polish-Jewish relations and their place in the collective memory. But it can also be interpreted more universally as a work on the individual and collective psychological mechanisms that underlie the gamut of human prejudice: from arguments at the school academy to pogroms and wars; from hate speech to torture and murder; from (not only antisemitic) stereotypes to mass dehumanisation. The connection between the story told by Słobodzianek and the discussion around Jan Tomasz Gross' book was obvious for the readers and the viewers of the play, and it strongly influenced its reception. Anna Bikont, a Polish journalist who has written several books reconstructing the events in Jedwabne, took exception with Słobodzianek's portrayal of the historical figures involved in the massacre, in particular Zygmunt Laudansky, who was one of the most active participants. According to Bikont, the portrayals were too approximate, and in some cases too positive, criticisms not uncommon to the critical reception of plays based on the massacre of Jews committed by Poles during the war. *Our Class* might be seen as an example of theatre as ritual, in which collective memory and confrontation with death play a major role. It is also a theatre of "semiotic obsession", as Grzegorz Niziołek describes it: "everything here is a sign, everything means something, everything is interwoven with everything, it combines, complements and counterpoints everything" (Niziołek, 2013, p. 542).

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## The Peasant (Sedliak)

**Author:** František Švantner

**First Published:** 1947

**Translations:** Czech (in: *Tvář v rose*, 1966); Romanian (in: *Joc omenesc*, 1972); German (in: *Die Dame und andere Erzählungen*, 1976); Polish (in: *Piargi*, 1980); Russian (in: *Izbrannoe*, 1984).

**Film Adaptation:** *V hodine strachu...* (An Hour of Fear), TV film; screenplay Ján Medveď and Milan Růžička, film director Milan Růžička, premiered the 5th of November, 1968.

**About the Author:** František Švantner (1912–1950) was born in Bystrá in the Slovakian mountains Low Tatras. His works were often inspired by the highland region of the upper Hron river dominated by the peaks of Ďumbier and Chopok. His father was a railway worker. Švantner graduated from the Teaching Institute and taught at schools near his birthplace. After the war, he worked in Matica slovenská and film studio in Banská Bystrica. He died prematurely of a brain tumour. Švantner's novels and short stories are considered to be the best works of Slovak literary Naturism (other authors of this were Margita Figuli, Lubo Ondrejov and Dobroslav Chrobák). Their rudimentary characters were placed in the settings of a primeval world of nature and mystery, and preferred irrational feelings. Sources of Naturism were folk magic tales, ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche or Henri Bergson and French regionalists (Giono, Ramuz, Pourrat). These works often stressed elementary narrative situations such as sensual love, friendship, fighting as well as death.

**Further Important Publications:** *Malka* (1942, Malka; short stories); *Nevesta hôľ* (1946, Upland Bride; novel); *Život bez konca* (A Life without End, posthumously, censored version 1956; original text 1974; novel); *Dáma* (The Dame, posthumously, 1966, edited by Ján Medveď and Ján Števček; short stories).

### Content and Interpretation

According to the context, the story is situated in the mountains of Slovakia during the winter of 1944/1945. All the figures are unnamed. In the foreground of the plot are a young peasant and his wife who live in a lonely cottage separated from the world. The married couple does not care about public events, they have only a vague idea of a terrible war going on somewhere in the east. Suddenly groups of armed men begin to appear in their mountains. At first some men (= partisans) “came without permission [...] to scare the peasant and his farm” (Švantner, 1976, p. 457). He has to provide food for them and their friends who stayed in the woods. Later the second group of soldiers (= Germans) settle in a nearby village. They do not want food, but they

screamed at him, beat him, and searched his house and barn. They threaten to hang him when he supplies food to the first group. Nevertheless, the partisans return and take the food again.

The peasant hopes both groups of enemy soldiers will resolve their conflict in a fight and finally, his house will be quiet. However, in the night partisans bring an injured fellow and his little boy to the cottage. They order the peasant and his wife to take care of the wounded man and leave with the child giving them a precious ring as a compensation.

It turns out that the man is a doctor and a Jew. The peasant decides to take him to the hospital to get rid of him even as the wounded man begs him not to do so. The Jew even says, he has some hidden gold that he will give the peasant after the war. The peasant hitches horses to a wagon and goes to the hospital in the town. But the gate of the hospital is closed and a doctor declares there is no free bed there. Moreover, the wounded man calls out that he has lice and is hungry, and therefore they are harshly rejected.

The desperate and confused peasant believes that the Jew threatens his and his wife's lives. On the way back, a snow storm breaks out. The peasant takes the blanket and clothes off of the wounded Jew. Coming around a wayside shrine, the peasant is overcome with fear of sin and wraps the wounded man in his fur coat. When he returns home, he is convinced that the man is dead. He and his wife dig a grave for him, but they finally realise that the man is still alive. He even thanks the peasant for his help, because he has gotten rid of lice due to the cold. He is only hungry and wants to warm up. The peasant sends his wife to the cottage to prepare everything. When she returns, she sees her husband as he is filling up the grave. She begins to help him. The final sentence reads "That night, the peasant slept peacefully" (p. 478).

The whole plot of the story is narrated in hints. It is not said that the story is situated in the time of the Slovak National Uprising (see Jarunková's → *A Black Solstice*) when partisans are fighting with Germans. These episodes are perceived from the point of view of the peasant, who does not know the situation and sees everything from his naive mind. Similarly, it is not directly stated that the peasant kills the injured Jew, because the reader perceives this situation through the eyes of the peasant's wife.

### **Main Topics and Film Adaptation**

The text was published for the first time in the review *Slovenské pohľady* in 1947, in book form posthumously in the extended edition of Švantner's collection *Malka* (1965). One year later, it was included in his collection of his short stories *Dáma* (1966, The Dame). The plot was based on a true story told by the author's friend, the evangelical pastor Štefan Kátlovský (Kuzmíková, 2012, p. 184).

The short prose with dramatic events and tragic end, situated in the remote mountains, has balladic features. Also a perspective of the naive narrator and some motifs

like the golden ring (gold as a temptation) or the wayside shrine (Jesus Christ as betrayed and sacrificed like the injured Jew) belong to it.

Gold appears in connection with figures of the Jews in literature very often. Mostly it indicates their greed, desire for property. When the Jew offers his hidden gold to the peasant, the peasant refuses it: “The man wants to destroy him. [...] what insolence, could be life redeemed by gold?” (Švantner, 1976, p. 467).

Similarly in *A Black Solstice*, the Jewish woman offers money and gold for hiding her. However, while Berta Malatincová in *A Black Solstice* honestly rejects the payment of gold, here the peasant is secretly greedy for it.

The film version is more concrete (i.e. the main characters have names, Matúš and Pavlína), on the other hand some figures are depicted differently (i.e. the peasant is an older man) and also new scenes are added. The partisans take away the peasant's hens, the Germans confiscate one of his horses. The Germans behave more roughly. The peasant's wife wants to leave to the village, however, her husband decides to stay to protect his house and property. The biggest change comes at the end of the film. The Jew promises he will leave the next day at dawn. Unexpectedly the peasant sees that German soldiers accompanied by dogs are coming to his cottage. He assumes they are looking for the Jewish partisan. He hands him clothes and asks the Jew to flee. “You must leave.” “I can't”, the Jew answers, “hide me somewhere”. “For God's sake, leave, please”. The situation is very similar to the scene in Grosman's → *The Shop on Main Street* where Tono Brtko convinces Mrs Lautmanová to go out to the square and join the deportees in transport. The filmgoers can see, what happens later (killing of the Jew), only indirectly, from the face of the horrified woman. The German soldiers pass the cottage. After the wife finds out that her husband has killed the Jew, she desperately flees leaving him. So the film version stresses the inhumane behaviour of the peasant.

In the presentation of the Holocaust, Švantner's short story and even more its film version depict the Slovak peasant not as an innocent bystander or a Jew's helper. On the contrary, he becomes a guilty bystander which was unusual in Slovak literature, except for *The Shop on Main Street*. It is a paradox that at last, the peasant does not feel any guilt – although the statue of Jesus on the way home from the hospital seemed to revive his conscience. His animalistic, natural being does not know it. After killing the Jew he “slept peacefully”.

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JH

# A Pending Matter (Nevybavená záležitosť)

**Author:** Jana Juráňová

**First Published:** 2013

**Translations:** German (*Eine unerledigte Angelegenheit*, 2016); Hungarian (*Rendezetlen ügy*, 2016).

**About the Author:** Jana Juráňová (1957) studied Russian and English philology at Comenius University in Bratislava. She worked as a manager in the theatre in Trnava, as an editor in the review *Slovenské pohľady* and a commentator for Radio Free Europe. In 1993, she co-founded the feminist educational and publishing organisation Aspekt. This association edited the feminist cultural review *Aspekt* in Slovak and Czech (1993–2004). Also functioning as a publishing house, since 1996, Aspekt has published more than 100 fiction and nonfiction books which mainly focus on gender sensitive education and gender stereotypes (for instance Irena Brežná, Elfriede Jelinek, Olga Tokarczuk, Judith Butler, Carole Pateman and also the publications of Jana Juráňová).

Jana Juráňová has published 15 novels or short stories collections, five books for children and several plays for theatre or radio. The main topic of her works is the position of women in Slovakia in the past as well as in contemporary time and the efforts of women for equality and emancipation. Her works have demasked Slovak myths, famous figures of Slovak writers (Pavol Orságh Hviezdoslav) and gender prejudices. She has translated several books from English into Slovak, among others those of Virginia Woolf, Margaret Atwood and Judith Butler, as well as letters between Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger and she has co-translated the volume *An Anthology of the Israeli Plays* (Antológia izraelskéj drámy, 2017).

**Further Important Publications:** *Mojich 7 životov. Agneša Kalinová v rozhovore s Janou Juráňovou* (My Seven Lives: Agneša Kalinová Interviewed by Jana Juráňová, 2012); *Hry* (Plays, 2014; the volume contains five plays and three radio plays); *Cudzie príbehy* (Strange Stories, 2016; short stories).

## Content and Interpretation

The novel is set in West Slovakia in the present time. The narrator and main character of the story is Zita Kubalková. She and her husband bought a small house in the village near Bratislava hoping to spend their old days after retirement calmly there. However, her husband unexpectedly died of a heart attack, and she is left alone.

Zita is a city woman and an intellectual. Now she is confronted with a different way of life in the village. Her neighbours seem rude and intrusive and so she becomes reclusive. She works in the garden, feeds a wandering cat and thinks about her life, her husband and her children. She accidentally finds a painting in the attic of her

house. It is the portrait of a young girl dated 1927. Zita also discovers letters and notes which belong to this woman. Gradually, it turns out that her name was Edita (Dita) Zöllner, she came from a rich and noble Jewish family and lived with her parents and her husband somewhere near the village. Zita attempts to find out something about Dita and her life. In the village, nobody knows anything. The Jewish cemetery is neglected and overgrown. Zita asks an elderly woman who answers:

Do you mean that old kike cemetery? It has been decaying for a long time, nobody cares about it. All of them were probably deported during the war, you know after all. There's a lot of talk about it, today. However, I grew up here and I never heard of it. There was no talk about it after the war. They weren't our people but they were also people after all. (Juráňová, 2013, p. 91)

There is a half ruined synagogue in the nearby town. Local citizens took bricks from it to build their houses. Zita remembers that a neglected Jewish cemetery is also in the village where her grandparents lived. Zita's grandmother spoke with gratitude about the Slovak Republic during the war, because due to the war their family was better off. As a young girl, the grandma had been a servant for a Jewish family. But she had never spoken what had happened to the Jews during the war.

Zita meets her older friend Soňa who owns a small cottage in the village. Soňa is still very active and establishes a song circle in the local church. Zita tries to help her, nevertheless is disappointed when Soňa hesitates to accept two Gypsy women into the circle.

Later Zita finds notes and letters of Mária (Marika), a young Slovak girl who was a servant of the Zöllner family. She learns that the whole family was deported in 1943. Immediately after their departure, the Slovak village mayor began to confiscate (to steal) property in the house and ordered Marika to disappear. Marika could only save Ms. Zöllner's painting and her papers. At the end of the war, Marika found out, that both spouses were killed by Germans in Hungary in 1945. She took the suitcase with the portrait and papers in the house where she was staying and where now Zita lives.

Marika's naive notes show a contrast to the almost racist mentality of most of the villagers:

The Jews are taken and slaughtered. I don't know the reason. I went to confession and cried. The parish priest said I don't need to be afraid, it doesn't concern us Catholics. And what have the Jews perpetrated? Allegedly, they let Christ be crucified. And just right now, somebody remembers it? The parish priest sighed and absolved me. I think, he was sad too. (p. 123)

At the end of the novel, a certain reconciliation is brought into play. Zita makes up with Soňa and the Gypsy women remain in the circle for the time being. Zita begins to get used to village life.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

The novel was inspired by the book interview with Agneša Kalinová who came from a affluent Jewish family in Slovakia and was hiding in a monastery during World War II (Juráňová, 2012). Similar to other Jana Juráňová's works, *A Pending Matter* is centred

on the stories of women, Zita, Soňa, Marika, Dita and her women friends, even the cat is female. The men, Zita's unnamed husband and her son Peter or Dita's husband Tibor, play only minor roles. Nevertheless, a feminist rhetoric in the novel can't be found. Women are not oppressed or manipulated by men and gender stereotypes are not argued against. The plot is based on a secret, the portrait of a unknown woman, found by chance. The narrator Zita is attracted to the picture, and her life is interwoven with the life of the portrayed woman (Zita – Dita). The mystery is gradually solved and explained. In this sense *A Pending Matter* has a romantic plot.

In a deeper meaning, it is a story about memory and forgetting. The woman in the painting represents the world of the educated and cultivated Jews that does not exist anymore in contemporary Slovakia. The Jews were deported and killed, their property was stolen, their cemeteries were ravaged and synagogues ruined. They were displaced and forgotten by their former neighbours, the Slovaks. Zita, on the other hand, tries to reconstruct Dita's life and the whole seemingly forgotten world of the Jews. She finds support in Dita's letters and notes and also in a simple Slovak woman Marika who didn't share prejudices against the Jews and saved mementos of them. Quotes from the *Book of Psalms* read by Zita also refer to this train of thought:

You made us retreat before the enemy,  
and our adversaries have plundered us.  
You gave us up to be devoured like sheep  
and have scattered us among the nations. (Psalm 44, p. 102)

By confronting the lot of another woman, Zita ceases to deal with her own troubles. At the same time, she begins to better understand her life up to now and to consider her future.

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# The Pianist (Śmierć miasta)

**Author:** Władysław Szpilman, pseudonym Al Legro

**First Published:** 1946

**Translations:** among others German (*Das wunderbare Überleben – Warschauer Erinnerungen 1939–1945*, 1998); English (*The Pianist: The Extraordinary Story of One Man’s Survival in Warsaw, 1939–45*, 1999); French (*Le Pianiste: L’extraordinaire destin d’un musicien juif dans le ghetto de Varsovie, 1939–1945*, 2000); Czech (*Pianista*, 2003); Portuguese (Brazil) (*O Pianista*, 2007); Spanish (*El Pianista del Gueto de Varsovia*, 2000); Russian (*Pianist. Varšavskije dnevniki 1939–1945*, 2003).

**Film Adaptation:** *Miasto neujarzmione* (Unvanquished City), feature film, screenplay Jerzy Andrzejewski, Jerzy Zarzycki, film director Jerzy Zarzycki, premiered 1950; *Le Pianiste* (The Pianist), feature film, screenplay Ronald Harwood, film director Roman Polanski, premiered 2002.

**About the Author:** Władysław Szpilman (1911–2000) was a Polish pianist and composer of Jewish descent who received worldwide renown when Roman Polanski adapted his work *The Death of a City* – an autobiographical account of his survival – for the film *The Pianist* (2002). Szpilman, who was a musician by profession – and a composer and pianist by heart –, did not consider himself a writer. Indeed, he had already become a celebrated pianist following his stage debut in 1932, and subsequently made a name for himself as a composer of classical and popular music. From 1935 until the outbreak of World War II, he worked for Polish Radio performing popular music for piano. By chance, and with the help of an unknown Jewish policeman, Szpilman was able to avoid deportation, unlike the other members of his family, who were deported to Treblinka and did not survive. Szpilman was then conscripted for forced labour in construction work, during which he also helped smuggle weapons to the Warsaw Ghetto for the imminent uprising. After his escape from the ghetto in 1943, he lived in hiding until the end of July 1944, receiving assistance from Poles (including the composer Witold Lutosławski). In November, 1944, *Wehrmacht* Captain Wilm Hosenfeld discovered him hiding in the ruins of Warsaw, close to starvation, and helped him to survive. After the war Szpilman continued his career at Polish Radio and served as head of the Popular Music Department (1945–1963). In 1961, Szpilman created the prestigious International Song Festival in Sopot, and in 1963 founded the famous Warsaw Piano Quintet. Szpilman is buried in Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw. Polish Radio’s Studio 1 was named after him, and on 4 December 2011 a commemorative plaque to Szpilman was unveiled in Warsaw.

### Content and Interpretation

Szpilman's book – a picture of life in the Warsaw ghetto on a broad canvas – gives the reader a deeper understanding of what was going on behind ghetto walls, including a Jewish resistance movement that sought to protect the dignity of ghetto inhabitants and that culminated in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Densely written in plain, diaristic, almost emotionless prose, Szpilman's autobiographical narrative evokes a strange mix of despair and hope. Notably lacking any tone of indignation or anger, Szpilman's writing demonstrates a sharp eye for detail, and for characters who refuse to give in to self-pity or sanctimonious behaviour, recording life rather as a function of his inquiry into human dignity and dispassion.

The diary is chronologically structured with concise, highly evocative, often touching descriptions, from the creation of the Warsaw Ghetto and life within the ghetto, to the *Umschlagplatz*, the Warsaw Uprising, and the death of the city: "a city of rubble and ashes under which [...] the bodies of hundreds of thousands of murdered victims lay buried, rotting in the warmth of these late autumn days and filling the air with a dreadful stench" (Szpilman, 1999, p. 167). Szpilman's diary is characterised by realistic descriptions, of the Polish-Jewish pedagogue Janusz Korczak, for example, who had been given an opportunity to escape deportation to Treblinka, but instead chose to stay with the children of his orphanage all the way to the gas chambers. According to his account, "Korczak told the orphans they were going to the countryside, so they ought to be cheerful. [...] The little column was led by an SS man who loved children, as Germans do, even those he was about to see on their way to the next world. He wanted to ease things for them" (p. 95). In another episode from the diary, Szpilman describes his encounter with his rescuer, Wilm Hosenfeld, telling him it is music that has helped him survive – or as Szpilman tells him, "I am... I was a pianist" (p. 96). "With Chopin's 'Ballade m 1 in G minor, Op. 23,' the pianist 'disarms' the Nazi, so moved by his playing" (Kerner, 2011, p. 73). In spite of surviving his ordeal, Szpilman declines to conclude his memoir on a happy note. The protagonist walks the streets of an abandoned and totally devastated city: "A stormy wind rattled the scrap-iron in the ruins, whistling and howling through the charred cavities of the windows. Twilight came on. Snow fell from the darkening, leaden sky" (Szpilman, 1999, p. 221).

Szpilman's diaries became the basis for Roman Polanski's renowned film adaptation *The Pianist*. The Film Academy "appreciated the fate that befell my father, the total degradation of a well-known artist under war conditions," said Szpilman's son Andrzej. The film won three Oscars: for Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Adapted Screenplay.

### Main Topics and Problems

The first edition of Szpilman's diary, *The Pianist: The Extraordinary True Story of One Man's Survival in Warsaw, 1939-45*, underwent extensive censorship and expurgation, removing all references to the participation of Ukrainians and Lithuanians in

the persecution and extermination of Jews, as well as specific aspects of Szpilman's language, including any expressions deemed to be anti-Polish (the pejorative epithet *shmaltsownik*, for example). In the original introduction, Jerzy Waldorff states that he himself had "written the story as told by Szpilman" (Kuhiwczak, 2007, p. 70), and the decision to credit Szpilman directly as the author was made by the publishing house. An excerpt of the diary preceded the publication of the book edition as *Szpilman's Memoirs* (Pamiętnik Szpilmana) in a 1946 issue of the weekly magazine *Przekrój*. "Directly after the war it was impossible to publish a book in Poland which presented a German officer as a brave and helpful man", writes Wolf Biermann in his epilogue to the German edition, and "Szpilman found himself obliged to pretend that his rescuer Wilm Hosenfeld was Austrian" (Biermann, 2011, p. 211). Later the diary was ignored, or assigned out of print status by its publishers, because it "contained too many painful truths about the collaboration of defeated Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Latvians and Jews with the German Nazis" (p. 211). Polish writers Jerzy Andrzejewski and Czesław Miłosz wrote a screenplay named *Warsaw Robinson* (Robinson Warszawski), based on the book, which, like the diary itself, faced extensive censorship and expurgation. Szpilman's story was also the basis for an early film adaptation, a censored version of which was finally released in 1950 as *Unvanquished City* (Miasto nieujarzmione).

For decades, Szpilman's account of his traumatic wartime experience and miraculous survival did not gain acceptance outside Poland, although Szpilman was known to be an accomplished pianist and chamber musician, with more than two thousand concert appearances in the West. It was his friend, the famous pianist Artur Schnabel, who first sought the interest of Western publishers in the 1970s, but his efforts were unsuccessful. Finally Szpilman's son Andrzej asked the East German dissident singer and songwriter Wolf Biermann to support an edition of his father's diary in Germany, which would eventually be released in 1998 with an epilogue by Biermann. The English edition of Szpilman's work, translated by Anthea Bell, was probably based on the German, and includes excerpts from Wilm Hosenfeld's diary (1942–1944), as well as Biermann's epilogue. A new Polish edition, *Pianista: Warszawskie Wspomnienia 1939–1945*, was published in 2000 without Waldorff's stylistic interventions. The novel remained at first place 2001–2003 on the bestseller list of the Polish newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*. At the Manchester International Festival in 2007, passages from Szpilman's books were recited to accompaniment by pianist Mikhail Rudy. It was only in 1950 that Szpilman discovered the name and identity of his "good enemy", Wilm Hosenfeld, who died two years later in a Stalingrad prisoner of war camp.

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HCT

# A Piece about Mother and Fatherland (Utwór o Matce i Ojczyźnie)

**Author:** Bożena Keff (Umińska-Keff)

**First Published:** 2008

**Translations:** German (*Ein Stück über Mutter und Vaterland*, 2010); Italian (*Madre, Patria*, 2011); French (*De la mère et de la patrie*, 2017); English (*On Mother and Fatherland*, 2017).

**Theatre Adaptations:** Teatr Miejski, Gdynia (2010); Teatr Polski, Wrocław (2011).

**About the Author:** Born in Warsaw in 1948, Bożena Umińska-Keff is a poet, publicist, film critic, and essayist who publishes her literary works under the name Bożena Keff. She holds a PhD in Polish literature from the University of Warsaw where she is currently a lecturer in the Department of Gender Studies. Her essays and polemical articles have been published in literary journals and newspapers, including *Res Publica Nova*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Twórczość*, *Kresy*, *Midrasz*, and *Zadra*. Umińska-Keff creates narratives based on a combination of oneiric motifs and sharply sketched depictions derived from social and historical contexts (Dąbrowska, 2008). Her poetic style might be defined as lyrical-philosophical wandering in time (Maliszewski, 2006) by which the writer attempts to identify herself with her feminine and masculine characters. In 2013, Umińska-Keff published another collection of essays with the title *Antisemitism: Unclosed History* (Antysemityzm. Niezamknięta historia), which is meant as a sort of textbook for students.

**Further Important Publications:** *Razem osobno* (Together in Separation, 1986; poetry); *Sen o znaczeniu snów* (A Dream about the Meaning of Dreams, 1994; poetry); *Nie jest gotowy* (He Is Not Ready, 2000; poetry).

## Content and Interpretation

Considered an interesting mosaic of opera, tragedy and oratorio (Czapliński, 2008), *A Piece about Mother and Fatherland* (also translated as *On Mother and Fatherland*) is striking for its extraordinary formal aspects, which Umińska-Keff draws in part from Menippean satire. The work brings together a host of mutually conflicted voices, tones, and styles: the weeping and gnashing of teeth in the biblical prophecies of Jeremiah, for example, persecuted by his own ministry, can be heard in the mother's lamentation over her individual suffering. Where Jeremiah proclaims, "Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart" (4:19), the words from The Song of Meter (Pieśń Meter) echo: "I am sitting here alone in four walls in four walls alone" (Keff, 2008, p. 14). Juxtaposed to intertextual motifs evoking the canon, *A Piece about Mother and Fatherland* features numerous references to everyday life in contem-

porary Poland, highlighting the internal conditions of “cultural polarisation”. Drawing from her mixed Polish and Jewish background (as reflected in the two parts of her hyphenated surname), Umińska-Keff suggests that issues of cultural heritage and cultural memory are essentially different from those faced by her narrator, in the figure of the adult daughter Usia, characterised instead by a kind of “identity-in-progress”.

*A Piece about Mother and Fatherland* consists of eight parts, starting with a prologue dominated by the mother’s terrifying monologue, and ending with a grotesque epilogue entitled “A Song From the Medical Clinic” (reminiscent of a songbook). Written in italics, the initial monologue illustrates how the Holocaust continues to haunt the mother’s dreams, where she finds herself on a railway platform, pressing a mysterious bundle to her chest. What she discovers inside the bundle, however, is not an infant child, but a screaming hairy mass of lint and blood. The life of this thing demands its protection, with a burning stench and scream of terror. It is worth considering the mother’s reflection: “I thought I would only hold on to it for a while / but now I can see, no one will take it from me” (p. 5). The enigmatic contents of the bundle serve as an apt symbol both of the Jewish fate and of a burden deposited in the past that continues to weigh on the future, in this case the future of the narrator Usia.

Umińska-Keff’s mother is a Polish Jew and the only member of her family to survive the Holocaust. In this way she appears at the convergence of two tragedies, one concerning her personal history and the other her nation’s. Preoccupied with the theme of the extermination of Jews, the character of the mother dominates the text. Standing in for the homeland itself, she considers herself above all criticism, demanding absolute respect and deference to authority. As a consequence, the daughter’s efforts to describe her mother put her in a precarious position, stylistically represented by the multiplication of literary forms and historical references. References to the theatre of Greek antiquity, for example, suggest that the mother’s complaint both transcends time and is located in a specific historical context. She preaches endlessly about “the history of her history during the war” and “the Jewish fall to the subhuman” (p. 9). Another important point of reference is *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Inspired by Spiegelman’s experiments with form, Umińska-Keff assigns all responsibility for the narrative to the figure of the daughter, in this way illustrating the mechanisms of “postmemory”. Taking these formal aspects of the work into consideration, Maria Janion and Izabela Filipiak propose reading it through the structure of oratorio, recalling the motifs that characterise the ancient Greek goddesses Demeter, Persephone, and Hecate. Deprived of her own identity, the daughter is reduced to the sense of hearing. Because she is expected to do nothing but listen to her mother’s stories of trauma and survival – experiences she is unable to face – the daughter has no way of playing the role of partner in any real dialogue. As the mother herself points out, “If your life were as tragic as mine was / sometimes I could speak with you as with someone / who has a legitimate existence” (p. 58). After suggesting that Usia stops reacting to her narrative, she starts threatening her with suicide, and composes crude scenes in front of her daughter. The mother continuously exalts herself through her suffering, revealing

her messianic attitude – an attitude founded on her guilt towards those who died (as she confesses abandoning her mother to save herself), and giving her privileges *vis-à-vis* the dead from which her daughter is excluded.

### Main Topics and Problems

Themes that determine the central issue of this work are a derivative of the worldview of the daughter, who dares to describe her titular relationship with her mother and fatherland as one that is toxic and oppressive to her identity and personality. In the struggle with her mother and their common homeland, the narrator can do nothing more than become a victim whose existence is controlled by the conditions imposed by the titular forces at work in the story. Umińska-Keff's work engages with difficult dichotomies that cause the reader to lose their bearing, while the postmemory narration serves ambiguously as both positive and negative transgression of the established Holocaust experience. In the final analysis, the patriarchal mother figure in rivalry with her daughter is not so different from the Oedipus complex in its classical, Freudian formulation, so that it gives the narrative an almost cannibalistic character. Moreover, its multilayered structure of canonical genres in collision with various manifestations of contemporary popular culture results in a trivialisation of ancient myths and literary cultures while at the same time attesting to their ongoing life and relevance.

Umińska-Keff's wide-ranging experiments with style allow her to combine elements of high and low culture, most notably, perhaps, with regard to such recognizable products of commercial cinema as *Alien*, *Lara Croft*, and *Nosferatu*. The titular alien that hides among the crew of the *Nostromo*, for example, is identified by the narrator as her mother ("Alien Meter"), while she identifies with the character of Ripley. This image of the mother as an alien parasite nestling inside Ripley-Usia speaks above all to the mother's need for the daughter's body in order to survive – a motif that entails the obsessive exploration of bodily topics and animal aspects of human life.

The figure of the Holy Mother who can be easily replaced by the Fatherland highlights another important topic, and leads to the question whether it is a civic duty to lament over the torment experience by both of them. Claiming to be an atheist, the mother like the daughter weakens her ties with Poland, and in this way with a community typically defined by religion. Usia's atheistic attitude seems more unshakable than her mother's, since the latter is devoted in her way to the cult of the Holocaust, and demands that it be considered as a living relic. Usia ultimately frees herself from her mother's narrative, yet she finds herself unable to deal with concepts and formulas generated by the Fatherland – especially with its national myths.

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AMS

## Plague in Athens (Mor v Athénách)

**Author:** Jiří Kolář

**First Published:** 1965

**Theatre Premiere:** 1972 (the non-verbal first part of the play, Light of the World, Studio DEX 72, Brno).

**Translation:** French (*La Peste d’Athènes*, 1986).

**Theatre Adaptations:** Theater Brett, Vienna (in part, 1978, under the title *Die Grube* [The Pit]); Theater Brett, Vienna (1991, under the title *Alibis*); JAMU, Studio Marta, Brno (1998).

**Radio Adaptation:** Czech Radio, Brno (1993, under the title *Mor* [The Plague]).

**About the Author:** Jiří Kolář (1914–2002) was a graphic artist, poet, essayist and translator. He came from Kladno, and he called himself “a simple worker”. He started his creative career in the early 1930s with surrealist poems, later belonged to the left-oriented artistic and literary Group 42. Due to the Communist coup in 1948, he was banned from 1949 to 1957. In 1950, he wrote one of his substantive books of poetry → *The Liver of Prometheus*. He spent eight months in prison in 1953 for this “subversive manuscript”. For which, among others, he used the text by the Czech writer Ladislav Klíma and the short story *By the Railway Track* (→ *Medallions*) by Zofia Nałkowska. At the end of 1950s, he gradually concentrated on artistic work and visual experiments. His visual poetry and collages won him world fame with dozens of exhibitions. His entire work was exhibited in the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1975 and in other major Western museums of modern art. In the 1970s and 1980s, again, he could not publish except in samizdat or exile. In 1977, Kolář signed the human rights manifesto Charter 77 and while on a scholarship in West Berlin, the Czechoslovak government decided to force him to emigrate with no permission to return. He lived in Paris from 1980 to 1989, and afterwards he regularly travelled between Paris and Prague. From the late 1990s, due to his declining health, he stayed in Prague and spent his last years in a Prague hospital.

**Further Important Publications:** *Očitý svědek* (written in 1949, samizdat 1975, Munich 1983, Eyewitness; diaries and poems); *Prometheova játra* (written in 1950, samizdat 1979, Toronto 1985, → *The Liver of Prometheus*, French 1985, Italian 2009, German 2019; diaries, dreams and poems); *Mistr Sun o básnickém umění* (1957; Master Sun on the Art of Poetry, poems); *Básně ticha* (1965, Poems of Silence, visual poems); *Chléb náš vezdejší* (1965, Our Daily Bread, play).

### Content and Interpretation

Jiří Kolář wrote only two theatre plays in his life: *Our Daily Bread* in 1959 and *Plague in Athens* in 1961. Their form is analogous to the author's artistic collages and prollages; they are rather “constructed” than “written” by the author. As Vladimír Karfík remarked: “The breakage of the traditional dramaturgic form corresponds with a destruction of the world” (Karfík, 1994, p. 70). Each play is doubled – it has a pre-play, seemingly not tied with the main play. The concept of the author, as he said himself, was as follows: “Each play should have two versions: the first straight, as it is written, and the second one oneiric, crazy, on the stage or on the screen, it doesn't matter” (Bauer, 2001, p. 6). Some of the props – for example a bone in the analysed play – are common for the pre-play and the main play.

The work begins with the pantomime named *Light of the World* (there are two “actors”, the Woman and the Arm of a Man). In the play, grotesque and tragic situations come into sight demonstrating the evil and villainy in the history of mankind in its variable forms. *Plague in Athens* only has one scene, changing from time to time to a prison. The play uses excerpts from *The Conquest of Mexico* by William H. Prescott, Holocaust memories Otto Kraus's and Erich Kulka's in the book *The Death Factory: Document on Auschwitz*, reports from South America colonisation, pieces of the sixteenth century treatise of a Spanish friar Bartolomeo de las Casas *La Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, old Egypt texts, the documentary book by Václav Kočka *Lidice, the History and the Last Days of the Cottage*, history of Russian sects, pieces of biography of Ladislav Klíma, the Czech nonconformal writer and philosopher, and the ending of the ancient *De rerum natura* by Lucretius.

The aforementioned list proves that the main topic of the drama is human malice. The collage form is visible in quotations from other sources inserted in the characters' conversation or in the textual stylisation associated with various discursive forms easy to be distinguished. This intertextuality serves the project of combining of seemingly distant threads into a composition, which – like in a plastic collage – joins decontextualised pieces in a new entity.

A few times Kolář uses authentic testimonies concerning the Holocaust in his plays. He also introduces stories indirectly pertaining to terrifying pictures of genocide and through this manner shows, thanks to the deliberate omission of hard facts about place and time of the events he talks about, a universal character of the horrible repertoire: loud dance music, shooting people above the pit, burying victims in mass graves. The play is purposefully void of concrete details (where, when, who). Through such solution it activates the memory or cultural connotations of the audience and by eliminating a factual layer that could become a psychological safety valve and distraction. The play forces the audience to focus on the event itself. A collage, in different shapes and variants, as an artistic method, both: discursive and ethical, ties Kolář's output with the literary and theatre activity of the Polish author Tadeusz Rózewicz → *An Excursion to the Museum*. Both authors search for their way of creating literature in non-literary times: non-literary in a sense of the previous understanding of

literature (seen, according to Bertolt Brecht, as a field that was not ready for concentration camps and crematorium chimneys).

### Main Topics and Problems

In the mid 1950s, Jiří Kolář, who had no Jewish origins, visited Auschwitz Museum. He later wrote about this experience: “For me, it was one of the biggest shocks I experienced: a great glass room full of hair, shoes, suitcases, clothes, prostheses, dishes, glasses, toys etc. Everything marked with a terrible fate, marked with something the art did not comprehend and will not comprehend. Here my skepticism reached its peak in regards to everything that used and uses artificial shock, to everything that ever wanted to provoke, to irritate, to shock, in regards to whatever exhibitionism” (Kolář, 1965, p. 6).

This reflection in connection with the author’s doubt in a word, rejection of the discursive role of literature as a reservoir of symbols feeding demagogical speeches of ideologists, led him to the idea of the creating or the reprocessing of works from pieces and leaving in them, as he called it, a rift of understatement (or a field of action for the recipient). It can be said that the creative path of Kolář is in a way *pars pro toto* of an artistic and literary search of many authors reacting to the experience of the Shoah and to many texts describing this hecatomb. Doubt in the previous aesthetics and in the polyphonic load of words is one of the most common experiences in the second half of the 20th century – until now.

Kolář’s dramas and a volume *Poems of Silence* were created in the same time, when the artist started to treat a word not only as a semantic unit but first of all as a graphic and iconoclastic one.

Kolář was the artist who, along with Josef Hiršal, Josef Škvorecký (→ *The Menorah*) and other young Czech authors, was one of Jiří Weil’s (→ *Life with a Star*; → *Elegy for 77,729 Victims*) closest friends, and inspired by his output he doubted in the possibility of a verbal presentation of the war (Shoah). Memory, as Kolář remarks in his diary, is a phenomenon that should be understood as a way of communication. It aspires to be impossibly full and unique. A valued reflection comes later; at the beginning there is only chaos and the tangle of items that are arranged in seemingly coherent sequences, but they contain the seeds of non-obvious inconsistencies. Jiří Kolář sought adequate language, not necessarily woven with words, for artistic expression after the Holocaust.

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# Pocket Atlas of Women (Kieszonkowy atlas kobiet)

**Author:** Sylwia Chutnik

**First Published:** 2008

**Translations:** German (*Weibskram*, 2011); Lithuanian (*Kišėninis moterų atlasas*, 2011); Russian (*Karmannyj atlas ženštin*, 2011); Slovak (*Vreckový atlas žien*, 2011); Serbian (*Džepni atlas žena*, 2013); Czech (*Kapesní atlas žen*, 2014); Hungarian (*Női zsebatlasz*, 2015).

**Theatre Adaptation:** Teatr Powszechny im. Zygmunta Hübnera, Warsaw, directed by Waldemar Śmigasiewicz, premiered on 6 March 2009.

**About the Author:** Sylwia Chutnik (1979) holds a Ph.D. in humanities and is a graduate of cultural studies and post-graduate of gender studies at Warsaw University. She is also a writer, journalist, city guide in Warsaw, social activist, and co-founder and chairwoman of MaMa Foundation, a Polish organisation that advocates for women's rights. She is the co-author of the documentary *The Uprising in a Paisley Blouse: The Everyday Life of Women During the Warsaw Uprising*, as part of the Virtual Museum of the History of Women. In her prose she tends to combine subjects related to women, history and the city. Warsaw, with its historical and cultural trauma, holds a special place in Chutnik's work.

**Further Important Publications:** *Dzidzia* (Diddums, 2009; novel); *Warszawa kobiet* (Female Warsaw, 2011; essays); *Cwaniary* (Cunning Girls, 2012; novel); *W krainie czarów* (In Wonderland, 2014; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

Military Courier (Łączniczka) is one of four short stories included into *Pocket Atlas of Women*, a debut collection by Sylwia Chutnik. The protagonists of the book share the address: they are all inhabitants of a tenement house built before World War II in Warsaw's district of Ochota, 104 Opaczewska Street. The female characters of the book also share their Christian name – or, to be more precise, different variations in the name Maria. We first meet the eighty-two-year-old Maria Wachelberska in an out-patient clinic before picking up the thread of her life during the war, starting at the age of fifteen when she spent a year in a cellar, and was later forced to move to the ghetto. Her narration is characterised by understatement, as we see for example in her comments on the ghetto uprising and loss of her father: “She returned later to Opaczewska Street only with her mother” (Chutnik, 2013, p. 75). In August 1944, in the cellar at Opaczewska Street all her neighbours were killed while Maria and her mother miraculously survived – a trauma from which she never recovered: “From that time on, all

she was waiting for was death” (p. 75). At the end of the Warsaw Uprising, the two women were expelled to Zieleniak (vegetable market place in Ochota) where the protagonist was exposed to more “collateral damage” (p. 78) of the war, namely her mother’s rape and death in the course of saving Maria’s life (p. 78). Maria never stopped blaming herself for that. In the Warsaw Uprising, she was a military courier in the city’s canals and went every day to Zieleniak market place in Ochota: “The visits to the market are reminiscent of picking at your scab [...] ‘Look, remember!’” (p. 78). She shares her memories with the other patients in the clinic: “The uprising breaks my back, all that patriotism makes my legs ache” (p. 79). Even now she never mentions her Jewish identity: “My name is Maria Wachelberska, never Wachelberg. During war I lived in Żoliborz in Warsaw, never in the ghetto. On the nineteenth of April 1943, my neighbours and I kept saying: ‘Oh, the poor Jews are burning’. I did not fight.” (p. 80). Ubiquitous manifestations of antisemitism elicit feelings of fear and terror, and she knows that anyone could carry out an attack. The most good-natured saleslady in a vegetable shop, for example, a woman who has always set aside the best apples for Maria, may one day say, “This is all because of the bloody Jews” (p. 80). Maria tries to conceal her Jewish identity. Memories of the uprising in the ghetto bring about a sense of loss as well as complications in Polish-Jewish relations, primarily with regard to inequality and familiarity:

Back there, in the ghetto? What did I gain? The whole area was levelled, the few who survived were executed. Besides, it seems like nobody in Warsaw believed in that uprising. There is only room for one heroic spurt in this city – it has its museum, its martyrdom, a place of remembrance. I have also contributed to creating this history. I even offered my red and white armband for the collection when souvenirs were requested. Where could I donate my Star of David armband? I kept them together, one next to the other. Touching each other like two lovers. [...]. When I was running from the ghetto through canals, I forgot to take the Star off. Only upon leaving a canal, did a friend pull it off and put it in his pocket. If Poles had noticed it... I am not ‘that’ canal rat, I am a military courier from 1944. (pp. 81–82)

On the one hand, she has hidden her Jewish origin, always running away from it and, on the other, she denied the widespread evidence of antisemitism in everyday Polish life. She has lived in fear – irrationally – of being exposed. At the same time, she feels compelled to explain the reasons for her patriotism, for her service in the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*), as a military and canal courier: “I knew the canals, I used them to leave the ghetto. I wanted to do something” (p. 87). After the war, it was difficult for Maria to start life over from scratch. She vegetated, suspended between life and death. The discrepancy between what was going on in Maria’s conscience and other people’s evaluation of reality intensified her sense of exclusion. Her traumas turned her into a living dead: “Do not get involved with life again. [...] Do not commit or get excited. Wait it out” (p. 93). Waiting for death gave sense to her existence. “Is there a penalty worse than survival?” (p. 87). As a teenager, her life was overridden by feelings of dread, always in fear of other people’s cruelty, always hiding her Jewish identity, always living in the past. These feelings culminate in her return to the cellar where she

hid with her mother and neighbours during the war. It is yet another confrontation with death. The gesture remains unnoticed. It is a call for respect and a dignified life: the old heroes have slipped into oblivion and stagnation under inhuman conditions. She dreams one night that people killed in the war have come back and she sees herself among them. A bleeding body becomes a symbol of sacrifice to a life which she could not live to the full. She decides to act: to go down to the cellar in order to die, to help death to catch her there where others have already perished. She is returning to her roots, as if walking down to Dante's inferno. She waits for death, united with the dead: "A woman merged slowly with the walls of an old house. Bandages, sticky with blood, stuck to the wall and connected with an umbilical cord of memory" (p. 105). She has a single ambition: "To die together with the tenants from 1944. Even so long after the war. [...] She has already understood that her life, spared by fate so many times, needs to end here: in the past" (p. 108). Maria fails to distinguish reality from dreams, through which she is guided by her mother. Her mystery play about death pulls the curtain from the stereotypes seething in society: she is backbitten, insulted, called a skimpy Jewish woman, a madwoman. Whatever she was afraid of has come back but she is above it all now. Meetings with her mother are of greatest importance: "I want to lie down here like a small embryo, put me back into your womb. Give me death, not birth" (p. 111).

### Main Topics and Problems

In *Pocket Atlas of Women*, the author draws attention to the narrative and literary patterns that characterise her subsequent works. The issues she tackles include urban space, the war narrated from the perspective of women, and social exclusion. She returns to the motifs of the war and the post-Shoah trauma in her novel *Diddums* and in her short stories *Muranoo* and *Anna* as well as in a one-act play *The Cellar* (Piwnica, 2014). The novel's protagonist has been interpreted as "Warsaw's denied past and identity" (Uniłowski, p. 174). Warsaw, or – more precisely one of its neighbourhoods – might be seen as one of the main characters of the novel. Chutnik is most interested in whatever falls outside of the official discourse: old districts, market places, venues marked by the war, a world of the excluded, people on the margins of social life (Kozicka, p. 137). The author tells the history of the war, especially that of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Warsaw Uprising, from the point of view of women (*herstory*) that has been marginalised in Polish historical memory. The theme of Maria's identity and her war history pose questions about memory, the long absence of the Ghetto Uprising in the national memory, and evaluation of the uprising in the context of the history of Warsaw. Her depiction of Poland equivocates between an open and multicultural society and one that is nationalistic, racist and antisemitic.

Chutnik also brings attention to the traumas faced primarily by women – depicting rape and murder as an aspect of war marked by shame and stigma (Nadana-Sokołowska, p. 66). Chutnik claims memory of forgotten, individual and non-heroic tragedies. She reconstructs places of gang rapes and canals leading from the ghetto

and the Warsaw Uprising alike. She fills the pages of women's war history, female insurgents. The author also re-interprets the psychoanalytical theories concerning separation from the mother (Lacan, Kristeva). The writer also offers up some sort of a litany made up of epithets describing Maria and her world: Mother of all mothers, Windowsill Madonna, Witches guarding the world, Custodians, etc. – inscribes the figure of Maria into the context of Marian devotions in all their implications regarding women's role and duties. Chutnik provokes a dispute over Marian devotions in Poland. How has Virgin Mary come to be a symbol of Polish women? How much does she inspire them? To what extent is the model of a Polish mother still of significance in Polish culture? This raises further questions concerning the treatment of women in Poland, the sense of reverence that surrounds them, and the respect for their boundaries. Like other protagonists in the collection of short stories, the main heroine is governed by laws of human fate manifested through types and allegories (Uniłowski, p. 176). Chutnik also makes references to the world of romantic ballads (p. 178) making use of the social function of the ballad, moreover, as a voice of the marginalised (Kozicka, p. 138). She deals with other, frequently conflicting conventions: biased prose, stories, critical realism, reportage, magical realism, and parable (Uniłowski, pp. 178, 179, 181–182). Juxtaposed to these loftier literary conventions, there are also references to A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (Uniłowski, pp. 179, 180), and – in the conceptual aspect of her work – the works of Elfriede Jelinek. The novel's language is informal, it is a spoken language which registers the reality around without judging or stigmatising; and drawing at times on bricolage, combining heterogeneous types of language (Korczyńska-Partyka, 2015, p. 246). Her writing is characterised by distance, irony, close attention to the protagonists, and anthropological sensitivity. Chutnik also tends to subvert stereotypical meanings and to cross the boundaries of excluded worlds. The text's virtue is its social and ideological impact which reinforces the mythopoeic function of a story; its drawbacks include simplifications, bias and black and white clichés.

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## Postscriptum (Postscriptum)

**Author:** Maria Nurowska

**First Published:** 1989

**Translations:** German (*Postscriptum für Anna und Miriam*, 1991); Dutch (*Postscriptum voor Anna en Miriame*, 1992); French (*Post-scriptum pour Miriam et Anna*, 1993); Spanish (*Post-scriptum*, 2009).

**About the Author:** Maria Nurowska (1944) graduated from the Polish philology and Slavonic studies at the University of Warsaw (1974). She made her debut in *Literatura* magazine in 1974; in 1975 she published *Do Not Shoot the Organist* (Nie strzelać do organisty), a collection of short stories. She has written novels and short stories as well as plays, film scripts and radio dramas. She represents the so-called women's prose where she tackles life stories of women, relations between people against a historical background which she approaches in a liberal way. Her works revolve around important social and political issues, centring on psychological problems. She often draws on the formula of stories told by others. The female protagonists typically come from the intelligentsia and, one way or another, they do not connect with the world around them. Narration is usually spun from their perspective. The novels oscillate between the poetics of a psychological novel, a classical novel and a romance novel with elements of a social and political novel. Nurowska's works have been translated into many languages.

**Further Important Publications:** *Po tamtej stronie śmierć* (1977, Death on the Other Side; novel); *Kontredans* (1983, Quadrille; novel); *Innego życia nie będzie* (1987, There Will Be No Other Life; novel); *Hiszpańskie oczy* (1990, Spanish Eyes; novel); *Rosyjski kochanek* (1996, A Russian Lover; novel); *Miłośnica* (1998, Lover; belletrist-style biography); *Mój przyjaciel zdrajca* (2004, My Friend – Traitor; belletrist-style biography); *Sprawa Niny S.* (2009, The Case of Nina S.; novel); *Nakarmić wilki* (2010, Feed the Wolves; novel); *Bohaterowie są zmęczeni* (2016, The Heroes Are Tired; belletrist-style biography).

### Content and Interpretation

The novel starts in Cologne, Germany. Journalist Hans Benek intends to present the story of Anna Łazarska, a very talented violinist who committed suicide by jumping from the ninth floor of a department store. The readers have at their disposal recordings of conversations, Benek's and Łazarska's notes, the diary of Witold Łazarski, a lawyer and the protagonist's foster parent. These diverse sources reveal a dramatic history of the forty-year-old artist. She found out about her past when her father was ill; she discovered his records suggesting that she was not his biological daughter.

He found her at the wall of the Warsaw Ghetto and took care of her in order to, in her opinion, “prove to himself that he was not an antisemite” (Nurowska, 1989, p. 91). Her name was Miriam Zarg, daughter of Samuel, an established artist; her family died in the ghetto. Anna-Miriam could not cope with her double identity. Her Polish identity was undermined while she failed to adopt her new identity of a Jewish woman. Her experience was extreme. “I would wake up as Anna Łazarska but, somewhere near, the other one would loom. [...] I did not like her very much or, should I say, I was afraid of her. She made her appearance too late and only to make my life more complicated” (p. 105). She left her stepfather on his deathbed to sort out her life and find her true self. She left for Germany from where she planned to visit her sister in the United States. However, the thoughts of her dying father haunted her and she wanted to go back to Poland where martial law had been declared making her abandon her plan. She stayed in Cologne where Hans Benek found her. They met and talked for two months. Once telephone connections with Poland were re-established, Anna found out about her father’s death. Before she took her life (she died symbolically just like her mother), she left a farewell letter which she signed with both family names.

Presenting the story of Anna and her foster father, the author presents the reader with Poland’s dramatic history: the war, the Warsaw Uprising (a story of Witold and his wife Irena who died in Auschwitz), life in the ghetto (letters from Chaja, sister of Anna-Miriam), the Communist regime (Witold was arrested and went to prison, Anna was sent to an orphanage; the time of her puberty, and coming of age), the Kielce pogrom in 1946 (Witold’s conversation with strangers), March 1968 (Anna’s memories) and martial law in 1981. Anna found out about her life story also from her grandfather, a writer whom she met in an extraordinary way. The readers learn about the history of the Jewish family mainly through the letters of Ewa, Anna’s sister who survived the war and lived in the United States.

These facts, combined with fictitious documents aimed at adding credibility to the story, produce a background used by the author to create the illusion that the presented story is true; she applies “a documentary writing strategy” (Krupa, 2013, p. 73). By commenting on the collected documents, the narrator wants to make the developments and the protagonist more believable. This is reinforced by the ending where the problems with publishing the text are described. In fact, it is a semi-narrator’s perspective because the narrator does not participate in the events, only provides an account of them (Kęsicka, 1990, p. 128; Kraskowska, 2015, p. 107; Krupa, 2013, pp. 72–75; Żórawska-Janik, 2019, p. 178). The events unfold in a non-chronological order, like elements of a mosaic forming the twisted history of Anna-Miriam. This is a novel modelled on reportage, with elements of a psychological study (Kęsicka, 1990, p. 128; Żórawska-Janik, 2019, p. 178).

In Polish literature, it was one of the first novels to pave the way for interiorisation of the Shoah in the society’s awareness. Its form has attracted numerous readers (Krupa, 2013; Kraskowska, 2015, p. 109).

In 2010, the book was reprinted by Wydawnictwo W.A.B. with the amended title, *Anna's Choice* (Wybór Anny) clearly referring to William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* (1979) which, in turn, refers to a "Hobson's choice", popular in English culture, regarding a situation where a person seemingly has two options while in fact neither of them is acceptable. There is another connection between *Postscriptum* and *Sophie's Choice*: namely, the narrative assumption coupled with elements of literary structure, the lack of the author's or first person narration. In both novels, suicidal death is the price of making the choice (Kraskowska, pp. 106, 109).

### Main Topics and Issues

Among the most important issues in the novel is the relationship between the protagonist's foster father, Witold, and Anna or Miriam, a Shoah survivor. Witold saved the life of a Jewish child, cared for her and raised her which required courage, humanity and integrity. He did not explain to anyone where the child came from and had identification papers forged for her. He was a single father. Anna reciprocated his kindness when he was old and she took care of him during his illness. While their relation was very restrained with the father maintaining emotional distance, they both depended on each other emotionally (Krupa, 2013, pp. 73–74). All his life, Witold kept secrets, experiences and emotions behind a veil of silence: "He never uttered a single word too many" (Nurowska, 1989, p. 15). They could not talk to each other: "Jokes were our legal tender" (p. 17). Anna never heard Witold call her "daughter" (p. 20); in his notes he referred to her as "the little Jew" (Nurowska, 1989, p. 19).

The novel contains the first description of the Kielce pogrom in a work of literature (Nurowska, 1989, pp. 67–84; Krupa, 2013, p. 73; Kraskowska, 2015, pp. 109–110). There is also an element of antisemitism on the part of representatives of the Polish intelligentsia revealed in Witold's notes during his conversations with Z., his alter ego. Witold realised the problem: "Our intellectuals [...] try to prove that antisemitism does not exist in Poland or, better still, it has never existed. [...] Well it has, even without the Jews. Even now when they are no longer here" (Nurowska, 1989, p. 103). Anna evaluated antisemitism in the following way: "The attitudes towards Jews are not results of self-awareness or intelligence. Antisemitism is like a mental disease, it can affect anyone" (p. 63).

In the novel, the author touches upon relations between Poles, Jews and Germans. She has also introduced other topics common to the Shoah literature, e.g. silence, trauma, Jewish eyes, Umschlagplatz.

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# A Prayer for Katerina Horovitzova (Modlitba pro Kateřinu Horovitzovou)

**Author:** Arnošt Lustig

**First Published:** 1964

**Translations:** Slovak (*Modlitba pre Katarínu Horovitzovú*, 1965); Bulgarian (*Molitva za Katerina Chorovic*, 1967); Estonian (*Hingepalve Katarzyna Horowitzi eest*, 1967); Hebrew (*Tefilá 'al Káteriná Hóróbis*, 1967); Japanese (*Shojo Katezina no tame no inori*, 1967); Norwegian (*En bønn for Katarina*, 1967); Croatian (*Molitva za Katarinu Horovic*, 1971); English (*A Prayer for Katerina Horovitzova*, 1973); German (*Ein Gebet für Katharina Horowitzová*, 1991); Dutch (*De reis van Katharina Horowitz*, 1994); Serbian (*Molitva za Katarinu Horovic*, 2002); French (*La danseuse de Varsovie. Prière pour Katarzyna Horowitz*, 2012); Spanish (*Una oración por Kateřina Horovitzová*, 2012).

**Theatre Adaptations:** Tereziňské divadlo, Theresienstadt (2011); Divadlo pod Palmovkou, Prague (2012).

**Film Adaptation:** *Modlitba pro Kateřinu Horovitzovou* (A Prayer for Katerina Horovitzova); TV film, screenplay Arnošt Lustig and Antonín Moskalyk, film director Antonín Moskalyk, premiered 1967.

**About the Author:** Arnošt Lustig (1926–2011) was born into a middle-class Czech-Jewish family in Prague. In 1941 he was expelled from secondary school because he was a Jew. In 1942, his family was sent to the Theresienstadt Ghetto, from where in September 1944, they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. His father was gassed there. Arnošt, his mother, and sister survived. Lustig was taken to Buchenwald and then, in April 1945, he escaped from a train carrying him to the Dachau concentration camp. This experience inspired his short story *Darkness Casts No Shadow* in the book → *Diamonds of the Night*. He returned to Prague in time to take part in the May Uprising against the Nazi occupation in 1945.

After the war, Lustig became a member of the Communist Party. He studied at the School of Political and Social Sciences in Prague (completing his studies in 1950) and worked as a journalist in newspapers, magazines and at Radio Prague. He reported on the Arab-Israeli War from 1948 to 1949. From 1961 to 1968 Lustig was a scriptwriter for the state Barrandov Film Studio. In June 1967, Lustig and other Czech writers supported Israel in the Six-Day War against Egypt and Syria, and so they came into conflict with Communist leadership which condemned Israel as the “aggressor”. Following the Soviet-led invasion in August 1968, he left Czechoslovakia, first to Israel, and later in 1970, to the United States where he taught, mostly in Washington D.C. at the

American University, giving lectures on creative writing, film and literature. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, he divided his time between Prague and the U. S.

Apart from a few stories, the Holocaust was the subject of Lustig's writing the whole time. His first works were among his best. They included the short stories *Night and Hope*, and → *Diamonds of the Night*. Lustig's stories often thematised the fate of beautiful Jewish girls or young women in prison camps (*A Prayer for Kateřina Horovitzová*, *The Unloved*, *Colette*, *Lovely Green Eyes* etc.). It is typical for his later works that the author adapted and expanded his earlier texts, their original introspective and laconic character changing to a contemplative, verbose style.

**Further Important Publications:** *Noc a naděje* (1958, *Night and Hope*; short stories); *Démanty noci* (1958, → *Diamonds of the Night*; short stories); *Dita Saxová* (1962, *Dita Saxová*; novella); *Z deníku sedmnáctileté Perly Sch.* (1979, *From the Diary of Perla Sch., Seventeen Years Old*; later under the title *Nemilovaná*, *The Unloved*; fictional diary); *Colette: Dívka z Antverp* (1992, *Colette: A Girl from Antwerp*; novella); *Krásné zelené oči* (2000, *Lovely Green Eyes*; novel).

### Content and Interpretation

The novella was inspired by actual events which took place in Auschwitz in October of 1943 – the murder of a group of rich Jews whom the Nazis had promised safe passage across the border for a high price. A young woman among these Jews, the Polish-Jewish dancer Franciszka Rosenberg-Manheimer (artistic name Lola Horowitz), shot the German SS *Rapportführer* Josef Schillinger who was known for his cruelty and who had humiliated her. This true story (see Müller, 1979; Amman, Aust, 2013), which was disseminated among Auschwitz prisoners, was adapted by several authors, among others, Tadeusz Borowski (→ *A Farewell to Maria*) in the short story *The Death of Schillinger* in his *The World of Stone* (1948).

Arnošt Lustig learned about the story from the former Auschwitz prisoner Erich Kulka, a co-author of the historical account, *The Death Factory* (in Czech 1946, in English 1966). In Lustig's novella, the protagonists are 20 wealthy Jews with American passports who have returned to Europe after the Allied invasion of Italy in 1943. They were captured by German soldiers and transported to an unnamed concentration camp. High Nazi officer Friedrich Brenske offers to exchange them for captured German officers, if the Jews pay for all the costs. The Jewish prisoners agree. Then they hear a young girl screaming outside: "But I don't want to die..." (Lustig, 2003, p. 119). The group's leader, Herman Cohen, asks Brenske to add the girl, Katerina Horovitzova, to their group. While travelling on a train, Brenske informs Cohen that the authorities do not want to add the girl's name to Cohen's passport because they are not married. Cohen agrees with the formal marriage and they have to return to the camp, which is, according to Brenske, the only place a proper Jewish wedding can be conducted. After the ceremony, they all once again board the train, which takes them to Hamburg where they are supposed to board a ship, named the *Deutschland*.

The members of the group have already drained their bank accounts, having transferred their money to the Germans' accounts. But now the Germans state that they need more money and demand that their American relatives send more. When their relatives refuse, Brenske claims that they will now have to take the train to the Swiss border where the exchange will take place. First, however, they must return to the camp, supposedly to be disinfected. Here they receive a towel and a cheap piece of soap; the men begin to disrobe, but Katerina refuses to do so. Schillinger, an arrogant SS officer, insists that she undress and humiliates her. The young woman begins to disrobe, and after she takes off her bra, she hits him with it, takes his gun and shoots him. Then on Brenske's command, the Jewish *Sonderkommando*, made up of prisoners, forces them all up against the wall where Nazis shoot all the men and Katerina. Rabbi Dajem, imprisoned in the camp, prays for Katerina and the narrator compares her to Judith from the *Hebrew Bible*.

### Main Topics and Problems

The prose is structured in an extremely complicated way, foregrounding the intelligent Nazi Arthur Brenske who acts like the devilish Mephisto. He does not dominate his victims with brute force, but rather uses sophisticated double-edged talk and promises. For example, he talks about "the final solution" (pp. 161, 213) and the "sundown will take care of everything" (pp. 155–156). The rich Jews gradually prepare their finances saved in American banks for handing-over, hoping that this will help them survive.

The final solution is at hand. You'll see for yourselves. Your worries will all go up in smoke and burn away like a brush fire. From my own personal experience, I can testify that people often don't believe things which concern them in the most fundamental way until they feel them on their own skin. [...] We want to liquidate this exchange operation in the best possible way. You must listen to what I'm telling you. Until we've reached a destination which will be satisfactory to everybody and about which you'll have no fault to find, I'm doing my level best to make this trip as pleasant as possible for each and every one of you. (p. 218)

The perspective set in the novella is remarkable, since the majority of the situations are viewed through the eyes of the naive American Jews who take a long time to realise that they are nearing their downfall. Meanwhile, the reader, who is receiving additional information, awaits the mercilessly tragic end.

Katerina Horovitzova belongs to a series of young Jewish girls and women in Lustig's works (e.g. Dita Saxová in the novella of the same name; Perla Sch. in *The Unloved; Colette*). Their beauty, youth and courage form a moving contrast to the horrors of the Shoah. The film version directed by Antonín Moskalyk reduced the number of American Jews down to only six, and stressed the moral dilemma and responsibility of the main characters (Sladovniková, 2018).

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JH

## A Private Conversation (Soukromý rozhovor)

**Author:** Hana Bořkovcová

**First Published:** 2004

**About the Author:** Hana Bořkovcová (born Knappová, 1927–2009) came from a Prague Czech-Jewish family. Her father worked as a businessman selling dental supplies. When the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia, she was expelled from high school and attended a Jewish school. In 1942, Hana and her family were deported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. She worked as an assistant teacher there. In the autumn of 1944, the family was transported to Auschwitz where her father and the younger brother were killed. Hana and her mother survived the selection and were taken to the labour camp in Kurzbach. Near the end of the war, they were sent on a death march. In the summer of 1945, they returned to Prague. After the war, Hana got married and raised five children. She converted to Catholicism. In 1964, some of Bořkovcová's short stories were published in literary journals. She published her first book in 1971 at the age of 44 and became a professional writer. In the 1970s and 1980s, she wrote novels and short stories for teenagers. After 1989, she returned to her Jewish roots and her experiences with the racial persecution during World War II.

**Further Important Publications:** *Světýlka* (Little Lights, 1971; short stories); *Zakázané holky* (1995, Forbidden Girls; novel for teens); *Pišu a sešit mi leží na kolenou: deníky 1940–1944* (I'm Writing and the Notebook Is Lying on My Knees, ed. M. Kosák, 2011; diaries); *Proč jsem nepsala všemi směry: výbor textů z let 1944–2009* (Why I Didn't Write in All Directions, ed. H. Kosáková, 2015; short texts and poems).

### Content and Interpretation

The story is based on autobiographical motifs. It describes the fate of an assimilated Jewish family from Prague starting from the 1930s. The unnamed narrator is the female protagonist of the story, the girl, later the young woman, mother and grandmother. The novel has an untraditional construction, a dialogue between the old and the young subjects of the narration.

"I'm the old woman sitting in the armchair here and now, you the girl on the bench somewhere far away in time..." (Bořkovcová, 2004, p. 5)

In the Polish literature, the same device is used in Wiesław Myśliwski's book *The Needle's Ear* (2018, Ucho igielne).

The novel of Bořkovcová presents two perspectives. The teenage girl describes actual experiences in her life: the well situated family in prewar Czechoslovakia, the persecution of the Jews during the Nazi occupation, Theresienstadt, Auschwitz (where her father and younger brother David are killed), labour camp, liberation and finally

the beginning of her postwar life. The old narrator comments on these situations from a distance and concisely adds her later life events: her wedding, conversion to Christianity, children and grandchildren, and her literary writing.

The naive young girl depicts her childhood worries and troubles. She wishes her family were poor and did not have a housekeeper or cook and lived in a small one-room flat where they would all be together. Her wish paradoxically comes true, after Adolf Hitler comes to power. For a young girl, Hitler's incomprehensible shouting on the radio embodies evil:

“Screaming horribly”, you say so quietly. [...] “It was in German, but I still understood that he was yelling at us and he wanted to do something to us, even if I didn't know what it was and whether he could do it. Maybe he's crazy and they'll shut him up in a madhouse. But what if not?” (pp. 23–24)

Just as naive is her satisfaction at the beginning of the war. She knows that from now on, nobody can go abroad and the family will stay together.

A change in her mentality occurs after the deportation to Auschwitz and a few days later to a labour camp where women have to work in inhumane conditions. She becomes dazed and numb, she has frostbite on one of her feet and can't walk. From a thousand women, only a few survive, among them the girl and her mother.

Some hints are present in the novel, which are not clear for readers at first sight. For instance, before the war, her little brother David had surgery, they removed his adenoids. “He'll breathe well again”, says his little sister happily (p. 65). Nevertheless, in Auschwitz in the gas chamber David's father is helpless, “Dad couldn't help him breathe” (p. 159).

Among other things, the narrator's relationship with her mother is of a great substance. Her mother helped her survive during the war, saving her life several times in the camps. She rescued her and other girls from being raped by Russian soldiers. After the war, they grew apart, the narrator gave up her Jewish faith and converted to Christianity.

### Main Topics and Problems

Topics of the Holocaust and Jewish identity appear in some of Hana Bořkovcová's works. Nevertheless – except from the short stories in *Little Lights* (1971) – they were all published after 1989 or posthumously: besides of *A Private Conversation*, the novel for teens *Forbidden Girls* (1995) about the friendship of Jewish and Czech girls in the time of the Nazi occupation, Hana Bořkovcová's diaries from the war (2011) as well as some short texts and poems (2015).

One of the discriminatory orders for Jews during the war was the duty to wear a yellow star on their clothes (ordered in the Czech lands in the beginning of September, 1941). It is interesting that the girl narrator does not perceive it as a persecution. The Jewish star and Jewishness become an element of her identity of Jews and solidarity.

We're all friends together. Also due to the stars. So we're going to the Jewish graveyard and if someone joins we will be certain belong to us, even if he or she is not from our class or from our school at all. With that star on their coat, they can't belong to another place. (p. 94)

The following motifs can often be found in Holocaust literature. See Jiří Weil's → *Life with a Star*.

Other events and situations known from literary works or memories are also depicted in the Theresienstadt Ghetto: rats and lice, the hard fate of old people, census of ghetto inhabitants in Bohušovice Basin, theatre performances or the children of the Białystock Ghetto in Poland which are taken to Theresienstadt and are afraid to take a shower believing that these are gas chambers. See Josef Bor's → *The Tereziín Requiem* or Norbert Frýd's *A Message in the Bottle*.

Key motifs in *A Private Conversation* are the belief in God and attitudes toward the Jews in society. During her experiences in the ghetto and the concentration camps, the girl narrator begins to be sceptical about God, His omnipotence and His existence at all. She asks the question how is it possible that God allows brutal killing and death of so many innocent victims, especially the Jews, his chosen people. See also Otto Weiss's → *And God Saw That It Was Bad*, Viktor Fischl's → *Court Jesters*; Emil Knieža's → *The Sixth Battalion, On Guard!*; Pavol Rankov's → *It Happened on the First September (or Whenever)*. "After all, God cannot wish all of us to be shot. Or can He?" (p. 143) She refuses the blind obedience of some Orthodox Jews who declare it is God's will. Also the adult narrator asks these questions, with a distance of time and with new experiences of persecutions and genocides:

"I can only ask: Are You here? And more often: Where were You? Where are You? Because it continues the same what has been already. And it repeats. Even if we are not these who have to be finally solved now, by chance." (p. 92)

The story captures the growing pressure on the Jews at the time of Nazi occupation. Along with it, the antisemitic behaviour of Czech people appears more often. On the other hand, other Czechs support their Jewish fellow citizens. For instance the school janitor or the classmate Mirka who is a Protestant. Even a German soldier who has to guard Jewish prisoners is moved by their appearance and helps Jewish women to carry heavy blocks of wood. Nevertheless, he is not present the next day, he has probably been punished and sent to the frontline.

After the war, on their way home, Jewish prisoners encounter an antisemitic Polish woman:

"– From a concentration camp? Jewesses? – she asks and you agree. – A few of you are coming back. The seemingly sympathetic woman shakes her head and adds: – And they could have left you all there." (p. 201)

On the contrary, the welcome at the Czech border is very nice. Czech friends return all their belongings they have left with them before the deportation and help them in the hard beginnings.

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JH

# Proofs of Existence (Dowody na istnienie)

**Author:** Hanna Krall

**First Published:** 1995

**Translations:** German (*Existenzbeweise*, 1996); Italian (*Il dibbuk e altre storie*, 1997); Swedish (*Existensbevi*, 1997); French (*Preuves d'existence*, 1998); Slovak (*Dôkazy jestvovania*, 1998); Hebrew (*Hokhatot le-kiyum*, 1999); English (Proofs of Existence: The Dybbuk; The Chair, A Fox, The Tree; Salvation, Hamlet, A Decision. In: *The Woman from Hamburg and Other True Stories*, 2005); Czech (*Důkazy pro...*, 2011).

**Theatre Adaptation:** *Dybuk. Między dwoma światami* (Dybbuk. Between Two Worlds), director Krzysztof Warlikowski, screenplay based on works written by Hanna Krall and Szymon An-Ski, premiered the 2003 in Teatr Rozmaitości (Warsaw).

**About the Author:** Hanna Krall (between 1935 and 1937) is a writer and journalist of Jewish origin. Her works revolve around the Shoah and the fate of Polish Jews. She has a degree in journalism from the Warsaw University. In 1955, she started to work as an editor for *Życie Warszawy* daily; later she also cooperated with *Polityka* weekly and “Tor” film studio. She made a name for herself for an interview with Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, entitled *Shielding the Flame* (1977).

**Further Important Publications:** *Zdqżyć przed Panem Bogiem* (1977, Shielding the Flame; reportage with the elements of documentary novel and interview); *Sublokator-ka* (1985, → *The Subtenant*; novel); *Hipnoza* (1989, Hipnosis; reportages); *Taniec na cudzym weselu* (1993, Dancing at Someone Else’s Wedding; documentary stories); *Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki* (1998, There Is No River There Anymore; reportages); *To ty jesteś Daniel* (2001, So You Are Daniel; documentary stories); *Wyjątkowo długa linia* (2004, An Exceptionally Long Line; novel); *Król kier znów na wylocie* (2006, Chasing the King of Hearts, novel).

## Content and Interpretation

Nine journalistic stories collected in the book *Proofs of Existence* are devoted to the problem of Jewish identity and the compulsion for recovering, finding, or confirming it. Other more common themes can be found throughout the collection: a Jewish childhood marked by the experience of the Holocaust, for instance. These are ethical dramas, revolving around unimaginable choices, and the moral “burdens” so difficult to bear after the war is over.

The protagonists of Krall’s reportages often experience some combination of post-war amnesia, especially those who are Holocaust witnesses and survivors (A Regret), and difficulties long into the postwar period remembering their roots (Amnesia).

As Adam Krzemiński writes, Hanna Krall “holds in her arms an infinite number of shadows” (1993, p. 20). The imperative to record the memory of certain people and their lives leads the author in one episode to a street in Leżajsk that “did not want to hear any questions” (A Regret, Krall, 2019, p. 557). Krall’s listing of addresses and names that are no longer present (“They do not have gravestones, let them be in a book”) has provoked anxiety and resentment among today’s residents of former Jewish homes.

The subject of *The Dybbuk*, which opens the book and is probably the best known text in the collection, is Adam S., an American scientist born in France after the war. He is visited (or perhaps possessed) by the spirit of his younger stepbrother, who probably died in the Warsaw Ghetto and who has come to remind him of his Polish-Jewish roots (in the Jewish tradition, a dybbuk is the soul of a dead acquaintance who lives on in a living man). The protagonist is forced by the *dybbuk* to carry the burden of his family history, but at the same time, he does not allow his stepbrother to leave.

Krall’s tales commemorate very different people and cases – Eastern European Jews, Jewish children who went missing (or were secretly hidden), a woman who avenges her husband many years after he was murdered by roommates, the love story of Mrs Miecia and Mr Waldemar against the backdrop of the war, full of betrayal and romance, and a silver-fox fur bought as an apology for a marital indiscretion. Some stories deal with Jews who died in anonymity, whose memory Krall means to save by writing down their names. Other stories deal with living characters – the famous pianist Andrzej Czajkowski, for example, who spent the war in the wardrobe and then “had to prove that he deserved to live” (Hamlet; Krall, 2019, p. 619). Catching “shreds” or “crumbs” of this or that fate becomes a method for preserving the memory of those who “had no chance to reach old age” (Kot, 2000, p. 90), and of those who were compelled to live a double life in the postwar period, between their Jewish and non-Jewish identity. Yet these fragments of biographies, combined in unexpected ways, speak to something universal, the missing pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that is the fate of 20th-century Jews.

Krall’s protagonists in *Proofs of Existence* lead lives marked by fortune and absurdity, by a fate that is difficult to control, and by no-win situations. The events that are most decisive are also the most illogical – a characteristic that on the other hand seems to confirm the existence of some *force majeure* or act of God – or, as Hanna Krall prefers, the Great Screenwriter.

However, the title also refers to the survivors themselves and to a recurring question regarding the purpose and reason for their survival. Attempts to reconstruct individual stories lead to the discovery of new traces of identity belonging at times to other survivors, at other times to those who died. According to Wiesław Kot, “fate is complicated by the fact that the war biographies of Jews are perpetually tinged with a sense of the improbable” (p. 102). The absurd becomes a full-fledged fragment of historical truth, as for example in the story of Andzia and her daughter Lina, who are replaced by unknown women on their way to the Umschlagplatz (Salvation).

### Main Topics and Problems

*Proofs of Existence* raises an issue that concerns nearly all of Krall's writing: a certain incompatibility of the term "reportage" in relation to her work. Literary techniques close to reportage can be found elsewhere – in Borowski's → *A Farewell to Maria*, Nalkowska's → *Medallions*, and Rudnicki's cycle *Age of the Ovens* (→ *The Escape from Yasnaya Polyana, Shakespeare*), for example. In the case of *Proofs of Existence*, however, it seems reasonable to create a new category, after Ryszard Krynicki's notion of "metaphysical reportage" (Krall herself once claimed that every reportage "should include a metaphysical surplus"). Yet another term was suggested by Michał Cichy, who describes *Proofs of Existence* as "documentary tales". As he claims "the poetics of fairy tales are particularly well suited to the story of the Holocaust [...]. A fairy tale always has one hero, so we can identify with him... Fairy tales may speak to the existence of terrible things, but they are also optimistic, in the sense that they allow you to finally overcome terror and regain trust in the world" (Cichy, 1999, p. 16).

Paradoxically, thanks to Krall's "compaction of the text" – a term coined by the author herself to describe the reduction of a literary text to its subject matter – these reportages acquire the character of literature, constituting parabolic images of human existence. Krall herself, as usual, remains in the shadow of the memories of her heroes, but it is also not difficult to see autobiographical threads in several stories.

Like two other collections by Krall from the 1990s – *Dancing at Someone Else's Wedding* (1993) and *There Is No River There Anymore* (1998) – *Proofs of Existence* advances a belief in the existence of an "indelible" Jewish identity, to which many of Krall's protagonists return again and again, until it becomes something of an obsession or compulsion. By contrast, one also finds stories where it is precisely a hidden or displaced identity that is at stake, as in *Amnesia*, about a doctor in the postwar period who expurgates uncomfortable facts from her biography – her Jewish origin and mother in Israel – in order to save her career.

Some stories deal with identity recently found, others with an identity not yet found. Małgorzata, for example, works in the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, helping to rewrite the life stories of Jewish children of Polish parents who, after many years, are looking for the truth of their origins (*Amnesia*). In still other stories, identity is the object of desire – the case of Peter Schok, for example, a homosexual dying of AIDS who adds Jewish elements to his non-Jewish biography (*A Decision*). These individual narratives come together in a multi-voiced and diverse memory dialogue, with a separate story behind each existence (Kot, 2000, p. 102). In Krall's reportages, however, there is a metaphysical, supernatural element behind which stands – or through which shines – the Great Screenwriter: "The work of a reporter taught me that logical stories, without puzzles and gaps in which everything is understandable, can be untrue. And the opposite: things that could not be explained are very often real" (Krall, 2019, p. 583).

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## A Reading of Ashes (Odczytanie popiołów)

**Author:** Jerzy Ficowski

**First Published:** 1979

**Translations:** English (*A Reading of Ashes*, 1981); French (*Déchiffrer les cendres*, 1981); Hebrew (*Kri'at efer-mikle*, 1985); German (*Aus der Asche gelesen*, 1986); Swedish (*Att läsa i aska*, 1987); Yiddish (*Dos leyenen di ashen*, 1992); Portuguese (*A leitura das cinzas*, 2018).

**About the Author:** Jerzy Ficowski (1924–2006) was a poet, children’s author, songwriter, essayist, prose writer, translator, and expert on Romani culture (in 1948–1950 he wandered with Polish Romani people). During the Nazi occupation, he stayed mainly in Warsaw and continued to study in clandestine schools. As a soldier of the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) he fought in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and was held prisoner in Gestapo jails and war camps. After the war, he studied philosophy and sociology at the University of Warsaw. He started writing in 1942, making his literary debut in a 1946 issue of the magazine *Dziś i Jutro* with the poem *To Blue Birds* (Ptakom niebieskim). However, he had previously written about the Holocaust as an eyewitness. Manuscripts of his poems from 1943–1948, including the cycle *Seven Poems* (Siedem Wierszy), *In the Former Ghetto* (W byłym getcie), *Jehovah*, and *Smile in the Oratory*, are kept at the Krasieński Library in Warsaw (Kuczyńska-Koschany, 2017, pp. 338–350). His first volume of poems, *Tin Soldiers*, was published in 1948. As a signatory of *Memorial 59* (1975, against changes in the Constitution of the Polish People’s Republic), and a member of the opposition Workers’ Defence Committee, Ficowski was officially banned as a writer in 1976–1980.

**Further Important Publications:** *Ołowiani żołnierze* (Tin Soldiers, 1948; poems); *Moje strony świata* (My World Directions, 1957; poems); *Makowskie bajki* (Makowski’s Tales, 1959; poems); *Cyganie na polskich drogach* (Gypsies on Polish Roads, 1965; reflections); *Regiony wielkiej herezji. Szkice o życiu i twórczości Brunona Schulza* (Areas of Great Blasphemy: Sketches about Life and Output of Bruno Schulz, 1967; essays); *Ptak poza ptakiem* (Bird out of a Bird, 1969; poems); *Czekanie na sen psa* (Waiting the Dog To Sleep, 1970; prose); *Errata* (1981; poems); *Śmierć jednorożca* (The Death of an Unicorn, 1981; poems); *Pantareja* (2006; poems).

### Content and Interpretation

Jerzy Ficowski’s most famous collection of poetry, *A Reading of Ashes*, which has gone through seven Polish editions and is one of the most highly regarded volumes of Polish Holocaust poetry, was first published by the Association of Jews of Polish Origin in Great Britain in 1979, and in 1980 in Warsaw by the Independent Publishing House

NOWA. The title evokes an activity that is both impossible and necessary: impossible, because the Holocaust cannot be fully understood and the victims do not have individual graves; necessary, because the Holocaust is a turning point in human history, a measure of all other genocides, and because it is only by attempting to represent and understand the mass extermination of European Jews that one is able to imagine the future of the world. *A Reading of Ashes* is an attempt to invent a language to describe completely new things, as well as an expression of helplessness and genuine repentance.

The author claimed he wrote the poems collected in this volume because, while he did not belong to the “doomed species”, he was an eyewitness to the genocide (Kandziora, 2017, p. 21). Ficowski wrote them over a period spanning more than a quarter century, starting in 1952 with (one verse of) the poem *Both Your Mothers*. A thorough demonstration of Ficowski’s poetic idiom and human sensitivity (pp. 35–36), the collection is widely regarded in critical circles as one of the greatest poetic testimonies of the Holocaust. According to the poet’s monographer, Ficowski builds two important artistic concepts here based on what he calls the “subject to silence”. Firstly, he places someone else’s words (quotes from survivors’ statements) at the centre of the poem. Secondly, he does not look for words that are adjacent to reality, words that are more or less precise, more or less adequate, as he has lost all trust in this aspect of language in the face of Shoah (pp. 39–40). He renounces the poetic act of naming, the expression of pathos, preferring the rule of “fewest words” (p. 46) – a state of silence which is also a function of the unspeakable, and that everywhere characterises the Holocaust (*A Six-Year-Old-From the Ghetto, Begging on Smolna Street in 1942*). These two rules are most visibly at work in *A Reading of Ashes* where Ficowski traces the wartime fate of Jewish characters, his story of Rose Gold, for example (*Letter to Marc Chagall*), who survived 18 months trapped in a forest bunker (p. 40). But it is also at work in the terrifying language of those who pilfer “post-Jewish” property, ruthlessly and without reflection, as if to rescind the very fact of the people who formerly owned it, along with their memory – “post-Jewish” thus becoming synonymous with “post-human”. There are likewise certain locations, such as the Muranów towers, that seem to be susceptible to the act of erasure.

Another group of poems – *A Reading of Ashes, The Way to Jerusalem, What Is, Posthumous Landscape, Execution of Memory, and Ending the Rite* – can be seen as “images of murdered arcadia” (p. 46). As Leonard Neuger has observed (Neuger, 1989, pp. 75–89), the title of Ficowski’s collection has come to signify a broader effort in Polish poetry to renew the memory of Jewish victims of the Holocaust – in the works of Miłosz, Kamińska, Szymborska, and Różewicz, for example – by recalling Jewish words and characters (Jankiel, Korczak). In *A Reading of Ashes*, this tendency is most pronounced in such poems as *An Epitaph for the Dead Alive*, and *The Assumption of Miriam from a Winter Street, 1942, In Memory of Janusz Korczak*. In addition to the imperative to remember, there is also an effort – here at the very epicentre of the Holocaust – to safeguard the names of victims, even if this effort is only made “behind-

hand”. In this way, Ficowski’s narrative of Shoah oscillates between “I remember” and “I save” (Kandziora, 2017, pp. 50–53).

### Main Topics and Problems

The expression “reading of ashes” has proven so apt that it has entered the post-Holocaust Polish language, becoming one of the most important formulations regarding the memory of the extermination of Jews. The same is true of the formulation “post-Jewish”. The poet thus consciously revises the Mediterranean and Polish “topos”, recalling people and places both real and symbolic, metaphorical and geographic: Jerusalem and the Wailing Wall, the Assumption of Miriam/Mary, the contradictory figure of the “dead alive” or “living corpse”, the metonymous treatment of Janusz Korczak and the orphans he accompanied to the Treblinka extermination camp, a vision of the Warsaw district of Muranów (built on the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto), the figure of the Jewish mother (Both Your Mothers), and finally Jew Jankiel, transformed into a Polish national topic as jankiel (the appellativum in the place of the nomen proprium thus conveying the multitude of Holocaust victims in Jankiel’s image).

In Ficowski’s poetry, as M. Sprusiński points out (1971), “The world has been transformed into a memorial site.” *A Reading of Ashes* has had a significant influence on the way other poets (Henefeld-Ron, 1979, p. 68) as well as artists (J. Marciniak, for instance) deal with the commemoration of the Holocaust.

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KKK

## Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness (Romeo, Julie a tma)

**Author:** Jan Otčenášek

**First Published:** 1958

**Translations:** Translated to more than 20 languages, French, English, German, Russian, Spanish and others.

**Theatre Adaptations:** Východočeské divadlo, Pardubice (1959); Disk, Prague (1959); Divadlo Jiřího Wolкера, Prague (1959); Divadlo Petra Bezruče, Ostrava (1959); Divadlo Petra Bezruče, Ostrava (1970); Západočeské divadlo, Cheb (1978); Divadelní Studio V, Brno (2003); Disk, Prague (musical, 2011); Severské Pradivadlo, Rýmařov (musical, 2012); Divadlo Jesličky (Crib Theatre), Hradec Králové (2017); Divadlo v Dlouhé, Prague (2019).

**Film Adaptations:** *Romeo, Julie a tma* (Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness), TV film; screenplay Eva Sadková; film director Eva Sadková, premiered the 9th of October, 1958; *Romeo, Julia und die Finsternis* (Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness), TV film; film director Otto Dierichs, premiered the 29th of October, 1959; *Romeo, Julie a tma* (Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness), feature film; screenplay Jan Otčenášek and Jiří Weiss, film director Jiří Weiss, premiered the 15th of April, 1960; *Romeo, Julie a tma* (Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness), TV film; screenplay Petr Zikmund (= Jan Otčenášek jr.), film director Karel Smyczek, premiered 1997.

Operas: *Romeo, Julie a tma* (Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness, author Jan Frank Fischer, National Theatre in Brno, premiered 14 September 1962, National Theatre in Prague, premiered 12 October 1962); *Romeo, Džul'jetta i t'ma* (Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness, author Kirill Molchanov, Little Opera Theatre, Leningrad, 1963).

**About the Author:** Jan Otčenášek (1924–1979) was a Czech writer and screenwriter. His father was a joiner. He studied Business Academy. Then from 1944 to the end of World War II he was forced to work in an aircraft factory in Prague. At this same time he was also a member of the illegal Communist resistance group against the Nazis. From 1945 to 1947 Otčenášek studied aesthetics at Charles University but without graduating and from 1947 to 1951 he worked as an accountant. Later he held important positions in the Czechoslovak Writers' Union. From 1960 until his death, he was a professional writer and in the 1970s a producer at the Prague Film Studio Barrandov.

**Further Important Publications:** *Občan Brych* (1955, The Citizen Brych; novel); *Kulhavý Orfeus* (1964, The Limping Orpheus; novel); *Když v ráji pršelo* (1972, When It Was Raining in Paradise; novel); *Pokušení Katarina* (1984, Temptation Katarina; unfinished novel).

### Content and Interpretation

The novella is set in Prague in May and June of 1942. It is introduced with the quotation from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and the story hints of this play. It is framed with a short prologue and a short epilogue where the main character Pavel is in despair after his love Esther has died.

The work is divided in 13 chapters and is narrated in the third person from Pavel's point of view, from time to time interspersed with Esther's point of view and the author's narrative. Pavel, the 18-year-old student of a high school, meets a young Jewish girl Esther in a park.

She tells him that she did not board the transport for the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Pavel decides to protect her in his "study", a room next to his father's tailor shop, a few buildings away from Pavel's home. The following day Reinhard Heydrich is assassinated. Martial law is declared, mass executions and house searches begin. Pavel and Esther fall in love with each other and plan a future together. Nevertheless, both are overcome with fear. One of the inhabitants of the tenement house where Esther is hiding, a painter, probably a communist, is arrested and shot. Pavel wants to take the girl away to his aunt's house in the countryside. They should leave but at night the Nazis capture Heydrich's assassins hiding close to Pavel's home. People are woken by artillery fire. Pavel wants to run to protect Esther, but the building caretaker will not let him out because the Nazis are shooting outside. Esther awakes, frightened and abandoned in her room. The drunk collaborator of the Nazis, Rejsek, who knows about the girl, tries to intrude into her hiding place. She flees to the tailor shop, where Čepeck, the tailor's helper, hides her and throws Rejsek out of the workshop. The terrified girl, however, wants to keep Pavel and his family out of danger; so she runs outside in the street and is killed.

The epigraph to the book recalls the barriers between the two young lovers in *Romeo and Juliet*. Also in dialogue between Pavel and Esther, Pavel jokingly alludes to Shakespeare's play: "Well, Miss Capulet? And how is your respected father? Still angry with the Montagues?" (Otčenášek, 1960, p. 58) However, he realises it is ill spoken, because Esther answers: "No, he can't be. He's in Theresienstadt – I hope so, anyway..." (p. 58). In Otčenášek's novella, the gap between Pavel and Esther is evidenced by the inexorable Nazi racial laws, but not by the hostility between the families. Nevertheless, only Esther dies. Pavel survives and repeats Esther's words in the epilogue "You must go on living" (p. 182) while the author comments "He must go on" (p. 183). That is why, the novella can be interpreted as Pavel's search for meaning in his life.

Rudolf Jašík's Slovak novel → *St. Elizabeth's Square* was published 1958, in the same year as *Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness*. It also depicts the love between an Aryan (in Jašík's work Slovak) boy and a Jewish girl in the time of the war and the Shoah with the death of the girl. Both authors focus on personal stories and the feelings of their male protagonists, in the setting of that horrible time (Forst, 1974).

In 1959, in the second edition of his novella, Otčenášek added two scenes in Chapter Eight. First Esther throws a dice hoping to roll a six, a lucky sign. She fails. Then Pavel rolls a six. This hints at the fates of each protagonist (Všetička, 2018, p. 77).

### Main Topics and Problems

Fear and darkness are important motifs in the novella. Almost all of the characters are paralysed by fear, see → *Without Beauty, without a Collar*. Images of darkness present the time of the war, terror and martial law after the assassination on Heydrich. Esther's father while leaving to Theresienstadt says to her: "This is a time of darkness, these days, fight against it..." (Otčenášek, 1960, p. 116). Pavel and Esther, as well as Čepecký express courage and fight against the darkness, but they are too weak and too few.

In dialogues between Esther and Pavel are depicted some stereotypes about the Jews:

"You're really just like other girls..."

"What do you mean? [...] You mean – because I'm Jewish?"

"No, of course not. [...] I've never really thought about it. People always said..."

"What did people say? I know very well what they say! We're different from other people, aren't we? We've got great big noses and..."

He interrupted her with an angry gesture and ran his fingers through his hair.

"All kinds of things... you know how stupid people are sometimes. And unkind..."

(p. 59)

Persecutions of the Jews and antisemitism are described through Esther's personal experiences:

"How could she wipe out from her memory the words chalked up on their fence? She saw them when she went out one morning: Out with the filthy Jews! Big, awkward white letters. They rushed at her, their eyes were full of them." (pp. 113–114)

The novella *Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness* has had a major influence on the cultural scene in Czechoslovakia and abroad. Four film adaptations and many performances in theatres have been produced, two operas have been composed, the book has been translated into more than 20 other languages.

Jiří Weiss' film adaptation was well-renowned. Here the main female protagonist is named Hanka, not Esther. The filmmakers added several new scenes. For instance, it is the Jewish Wurm family at the beginning. They board the transport to Theresienstadt and Pavel accompanies them. In the Wurm's flat he meets Hanka. Also Kubiasová and Bubník are both new. She is the mistress of a German Nazi officer. He is Pavel's classmate. His father was hiding someone and the entire Bubeník family is executed.

Originally, Weiss's film ended with the scene where the inhabitants of the house look on in silence as Hanka leaves, to her certain death. No one is willing to help her. Mainly this ending was criticised by Communist Party leaders. Weiss has been accused of having made a "Zionist film". The Deputy Prime Minister Václav Kopecký ordered the end of the story to be refilmed. (Weiss, 1974, p. 69; Sladovnicková, 2018, pp. 30–31)

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JH

# Samson (Samson)

**Author:** Kazimierz Brandys

**First Published:** 1948; first edition of the fragments, *Kuźnica* 1947

**Translations:** Czech (*Samson*, 1950); Slovak (*Samson*, 1950); Russian (*Samson*, in: *Mezdu vojnami*, 1957); Swedish (*Simson*, 1957); Yiddish (*Shimshn*, 1958); Croatian (*Samson*, 1961); Italian (*Sansone*, 1961); Bulgarian (*Samson*, 1962); Latvian (*Samson*, 1965); Italian (*Sansone*, 1994).

**Film Adaptation:** *Samson*, feature film; screenplay Kazimierz Brandys and Andrzej Wajda; film director Andrzej Wajda, premiered 11th of September, 1961.

**About the Author:** Kazimierz Brandys (1916–2000) was a Polish writer, essayist, and screenplay writer whose work was translated into many languages. Due to his Jewish background, he spent the war years on “Aryan papers” in Warsaw and Cracow. He made his debut as a writer after the war, joining a group of writers committed to the poetics of socialist realism as officially sanctioned by Communist authorities. He would later abandon this poetics in favour of the essay form and his own invention of “self-stories”. Brandys was able to thwart the censors by working through the *dru-gi obieg* (underground publishing; literally, second circulation). He lived in New York and Paris. When martial law was declared in Poland in 1981, he decided to stay in Paris.

**Further Important Publications:** *Drewniany koń* (1946, The Wooden Horse; novel); *Miasto niepokonane* (1946, The Invincible City; novel); *Nierzeczywistość* (1977, Unreality; novel); *Rondo* (1982, Rondo; novel); *Zapamiętane* (1995; Remembered; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

This is the first novel in Brandys’ tetralogy *Between the Wars*, followed by *Antigone*, *Troy Open City*, and *A Man Does Not Die*, all of them written in the socialist realist style. The work presents an account of fascism during the years of war and occupation, followed by the victory over fascism and birth of a new mankind.

The story begins in 1934 and ends after the outbreak of World War II. The main character of the novel is Jakub Gold, a Jew living in Warsaw.

The first part of the novel takes place before the war. Jakub attends junior high school, where he develops a close friendship with a Pole, Tol Pankrat (who will be the main character of the subsequent novels in the series). They later study together at the university, where Jakub falls victim to antisemitic riots. During one riot, Jakub accidentally kills one of his attackers and is sentenced to three years in prison. The outbreak of World War II results in his early release.

The plot then follows Jakub's escape from the ghetto, his years of wandering and misery, including a period in hiding in a basement and his decision to join the socialists. The story ends as Jakub is ambushed and killed during a guerrilla action.

### Main Topics and Problems

*Samson* touches on a key for understanding Brandys' prose in the context of his Jewish background.

With the rise of antisemitism during the years leading up to World War II, we see how it increasingly affects the protagonist. Insofar as his appearance and background lead to his stigmatisation, his life is shaped by a series of painful experiences that teach him what it means to be Jewish. He does not feel his Jewishness directly, but rather becomes a Jew through the actions of others, namely as a consequence of their name-calling and aggression (Błoński, 2006, p. 23; Czyżak, 1998, p. 43).

The issue of being aware of one's Jewish fate can be found throughout Brandys' work. His protagonists face difficult experiences (or "hits") which underscore the exclusion of Jewish characters from the rest of the community, and which are manifest in various ways, including verbal and physical aggression and ostracism. This problem is most striking in *Samson*, where the main character is attacked in the university courtyard and, acting in self-defence, ends up killing one of his attackers with a stone.

In the world depicted by Brandys, aggression and antisemitism lead inevitably to killing, but it is significant that the entire sequence takes place in a university courtyard, which is to say, in the kind of place where one would expect such values as tolerance and understanding to be protected and upheld. Interestingly, the courtyard is also invoked as an arena for student skirmishes in *Unreality* (*Nierzeczywistość*) and *Rondo*, in which a protagonist is beaten by a nationalist militant while trying to help someone lying on the ground, and winds up getting struck unconscious himself.

Like the other novels in the *Between Wars* series, written in the socialist realist style, *Samson* does not tend to sustain contemporary readers' interest, and has not survived the test of time. However, it is still important for understanding the Jewish thread that runs through the writer's work. What is most striking in this novel is that it features a protagonist who finds connection through his own stigmatisation by others, a motif which will return in subsequent works by Brandys, including *Little Book* (*Mała księga*), and *Postal Variations* (*Wariacje pocztowe*), to become a signature of his work as a whole (Bikont, Szczęsna, 2006, p. 120; Foltyniak-Pękala, 2019, p. 234).

The theme of Jewishness recurs in various ways throughout Brandys' writings. The identity of the protagonist (but also of the writer) is constructed in the conceptual space between the obvious fact of being Polish and the experience, wrought with difficulty, of one's Jewish origin (Wolk, 1999, p. 104). Brandys draws on the concept of "Jewish-Polishness" while describing such experiences. He emphasises that both Polish and Jewish origins are important for him, or as he puts it in his novel *Months* (*Miesiące*): "Writing. Marriage. Country. Eroticism. Smart Jewry. My dreams. Everything

stuck together. Reality started hurting a long time before I started hurting it in my books. I write about it. I come back to it over and over again. How to separate and enumerate it?" (Brandys, 1988, p. 448).

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AFP

## A Scrap of Time (Skrawek czasu)

**Author:** Ida Fink

**First Published:** In Hebrew 1974 (originally written in Polish but not published until 1987).

**Translations:** Hebrew (*Pisat zeman: sipurim*, 1974; the new translation *ha-Gan ha-mafliḡ la-merḡakim*, 1988); German (*Eine Spanne Zeit*, 1983); Dutch (*Een klein ogenblik*, 1985); English (*A Scrap of Time and Other Stories*, 1987); French (*Le jardin à la dérive*, 1991), Italian (*Frammenti di tempo*, 1995); Russian (*Uplyvajuščij sad*, 2019) and others.

**Film Adaptations:** *Le Jeu de la clé* (The Key Game), directed by Michel Hassan; based on The Key Game. France, 1995.

**About the Author:** Ida Fink (1921–2011) was born as Ida Landau in Zbarazh, East Galicia (after the war USSR, now Ukraine) to a family of secular Jews that was integrated into Polish culture. In 1938 she started studying at the Lviv Conservatory, but the German invasion of USSR in 1941 interrupted her studies. Ida Landau was confined to the Zbarazh Ghetto with her family until 1942, when she and her younger sister Elsa acquired “Aryan papers” and travelled to Germany as Polish forced labourers. A fair haired, blue-eyed young Ida did not look identifiably Jewish, quite the opposite of her sister. They both survived. A fictionalised account of the war years appears in her novel *The Journey* (1990). Ida and Elsa spent almost a year in the Displaced Person Camp Ettlingen where she made her writing debut with an essay in the camp newspaper *Nasz ęłos*. In 1946, they came back to Poland and stayed in Silesia. In 1948 Ida married Bruno Fink, a survivor of four camps. In 1957, the whole family moved to Israel and settled in Holon. Ida Fink immediately started to publish her short stories in various Polish language periodicals in Israel and the UK. In the 1960s she worked for the Yad Vashem Institute as a testimony recorder, in the 1970s as a librarian in the music section of the Goethe Institute in Tel Aviv. Since the late 1980s, her prose has gained great popularity and won many important literary awards. All her life Fink wrote in Polish.

**Further Important Publications:** *Podróż* (1990, The Journey; autobiographical novel); *Ślady* (1996, Traces; short stories and three one-act dramas); *Odplywajęcy ogród* (2001, The Floating Garden; collected works); *Wiosna 1941* (2009, The Spring 1941; short stories).

### Content and Interpretation

Ida Fink started to write her short stories in Polish shortly after the war. Her first story *Doorstep* (Próg) was published in 1948 written under the pseudonym Elza (the name of Ida Fink’s sister) in the Swiss magazine *Action*. In the 1950s and 1960s, the author

regularly published in Israeli Polish-language press, especially in weekly *Od Nowa*. In turn, the aforementioned collection of her short stories called *A Scrap of Time* appeared for the first time in 1974 having been translated into Hebrew. The original Polish émigré edition of the London Annex from 1987 was just one of several publications (after the German edition of 1983 and the Dutch edition of 1985) of this collection. In the same time (1988) three samizdat editions were published in Poland. The second Polish edition was published in 1992 in London. All of the short stories from this collection later became part of the main, almost complete Polish edition *The Floating Garden. Gathered Stories* (2002). It contains 28 short stories. In the writer's archive in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem, a list of projects with numerous strike-throughs and changes can be seen, which proves that the stories in the collection are fully consciously arranged.

The first short story *The End* (Koniec) repaints the tension between two characters who are only referred to as She and He. They are both standing on the balcony in a quite big city (Lviv). He wants tenderness from her, but she rejects this in the premonition of a catastrophe. They recall a happy past while the war is starting right in front of their eyes. The most important and powerful story, *A Scrap of Time*, combines veristic details of the first action in Zbarazh and the death of Fink's cousin David with reflection over receiving various time planes and languages – before and after the annihilation. One of the main inspirations is probably Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. As Ewelina Kotarska wrote: “The concept of time in Ida Fink's works [...] bears traces of three temporal perspectives: the past, the presence, and the future, and therefore result in being temporal hybrids” (Kotarska, 2010, p. 304).

One of the most well-known and widely used works in high school and academic education in Israel, Poland and the United States is the story *The Key Game*. The use of the work at the Polish maturity exam (the equivalent of the British A-levels) in 2005 was symbolic. It is a story of Ida Fink's husband and his lost family – his first wife and son. Both parents are teaching their three-year-old blue-eyed son a game in order to take as long as possible to unlock and open the door at the moment the Germans come. They call it “the key game”, because the son has to pretend that he is looking for the key to the door. The extra time is needed for the “bad-looking” father to hide in the bathroom.

Most of the stories talk about Ida Fink's own experiences (*The Floating Garden*), her family (esp. her father, e.g. in the story *The Pig*), people she knew and who were killed (*Death of Tsarina*) or her friends (*Jump!*). Polish-Jewish relations are shown clearly and with incredible irony-lined force in *The Shelter*. After the war, Jews are visiting a Polish family who had hidden them in their home during the time of the occupation. The Polish family shows the Jews the new house they had built after the war from money which the Jews had given them to hide them. The new house also contains a new shelter:

“What are we supposed to make of that?” asked the man. “Sentenced to a hiding-place, sentenced to death once again? And by whom? By good people who wish us well. It’s appalling. To build a hiding-place out of the goodness of one’s heart! That’s what’s so horrible.” (Fink, 1995, p. 34)

The stories *Splinter* and especially *The Tenth Man* are about the direct consequences of the Holocaust. After the war, the Jews slowly return to the town from their hiding places. They look for their loved ones and they want to say the Kaddish prayer but they are unable to achieve a minyan – which means the presence of ten male adults.

### Main Topics and Problems

One of the most important subjects of Fink’s short stories is the individual experience and psychic effects of the Shoah. First of all, Fink evokes a sense of isolation and abandonment. She writes about this in most of her stories from this collection, which is crucial if one treats her work as a testimony. As one of her early critics stressed: “the author emphasises the autobiographical nature of her work. *A Scrap of Time* is a collection of stories based almost exclusively on her own experience and the experience of her loved ones and friends. There are no fictitious events and characters” (Gorczyński, 1987, p. 465). The action of most of her stories is situated in a small town in which we recognise as Zbarazh. On the other hand, the writer abbreviates topographical names, i.e. Zbarazh is called “city Z.”, which gives the stories a more universal character. But generally Ida Fink presents the image of the Shoah as if from below. She avoids any generalisations, since her gaze is attached to details. A very important metaphor of her writing is the trace (see Krupa, 2016). Other important figures are nature (river, spring, time of day, e.g. morning) and animals who are more human than the humans. The animals can be found in various stories and take on the role of protecting the Jews (Krupa, 2017). Very often her heroes and narrators present the female experiences of the Holocaust. Sometimes their experience is completely unique and touches specific traumas. For example, the story *Aryan Papers* talks about sexual violence (see Calderón Puerta, 2015). A Polish man demands sex from a young Jewish girl in return for false documents.

What is visible at a glance is the very specific, individual, immediately recognizable language of Fink’s prose. She combines the full tension and dramatic events of the Shoah with clear and compact sentences. Her stories are short and very often end with an expressive punch line. Critics often characterised it as a “silent scream”. Her method can be called minimalism or “impeccable economy of words” (Sillitoe, 1989). In one of the interviews she said: “I write about experiences taking place not only in the geographical landscape, but also in spiritual and linguistic” (Szewc, 2003, p. 5). In her personal copy of the book there are numerous modifications, deleted words and changes. They testify to the fact that the writer continuously, up until her death, worked on her literary prose and they are also a testimony to her incredible verbal care.

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## Selected Poetry (Poezje wybrane)

**Author:** Władysław Broniewski

**First Published:** 1943

**Translations:** Mongolian (*Ench tajvy toloo!*, 1951); Russian (*Pečal i pesnja*, 1951; *Izbrannoe*, 1961; *Izbrannaja lirika*, 1968; *Stichi*, 1968; *Stichi*, 1986); German (*Hoffnung*, 1953); Hungarian (*Válogatott versei*, 1954); Czech (*Nepokořená píseň*, 1955; *První motýlek*, 1956; *Naděje*, 1973); Romanian (*Versuri alese*, 1960); Belorussian (*Darogaj džën. Veršy i paemy*, 1961); Bulgarian (*Lirika*, 1961); English (*Ballads and Romances*, 1964); Moldavian (*Poeziji ši poeme*, 1971); Estonian (*Kevadest ja surmast*, 1972); Slovak (*Dve krídla verša*, 1973; *Červený kalich*, 1976); Spanish (*Poemas y versos*, 1979); Ukrainian (*Poezii*, 1983); Vietnamese (*Tho*, 1984).

**About the Author:** Broniewski (1897–1962) came from a family of intellectuals and patriots. He was a poet, translator, essayist, diarist, revolutionary, Stalinist prisoner, and soldier on the fronts of World War I and II. Early in his life, Broniewski was a member of local shooting teams, earning him the nickname “Orlik”, and at the age of seventeen he dropped out of school to join Piłsudski’s Legions, where he would remain fighting in their ranks for two years. At the end of 1918, he returned to the army, leaving the university career he had just begun. As an officer of the Legions, he took part in the Polish-Bolshevik war. In April 1942, as a member of the Polish Army in the USSR, Broniewski deployed to the Middle East, working at the Polish Information Centre in Jerusalem and for the magazine *On the Road*. In Jerusalem, he listened avidly to news of the Holocaust and closely followed the Warsaw Uprising. One could even make the claim that he was the first Polish poet to write about the gas chambers (Tramer, 2015, p. 19). In 1945, after a short stay in London, he returned to Poland, living first in Lodz then Warsaw, where he would spend the rest of his life.

**Further Important Publications:** *Bagnet na broń* (Fix Bayonets, 1943; poems); *Drzewo rozpaczające* (The Despairing Tree, 1945; poems); *Nadzieja* (Hope, 1951; poems), *Anka* (lamentations written after the tragic death of poet’s daughter; 1956; poems).

### Content and Interpretation

This edition of Broniewski’s selected output includes only those poems closely related to the Holocaust, starting with the collection *Fix Bayonets* (1943): *Wailing Wall* (*Ściana płaczu*, 1943), *Via Dolorosa* (1943), *To Polish Jews* (*Żydom polskim*, 1943), which is dedicated to the memory of Szmul Zygielbojm, *Bodies* (*Ciała*, 1945), *Ballads and Romances* (*Ballady i romanse*, 1945), *My Darling* (*Moja miła*, 1946), *Auschwitz Stories* (*Opowiadania Oświęcimskie*, 1949), *Auschwitz* (*Oświęcim*, 1949), *To My Grandson* (*Wnukowi*, written in 1951, published 1961), and *Song About the Holy Land* (*Pieśń o*

Ziemi Świętej, 1967). Poems about war and occupation in the broader sense have been omitted. It is the poems from another collection, *The Despairing Tree*, that most directly convey Broniewski's reflections on the mass extermination of Jews. Unlike *Fix Bayonets*, which was an example of "appellative poetry in which [...] the poet carried out 'patriotism for the reluctant' according to romantic duties" (Piotrowiak, 2009, p. 49), the title of *The Despairing Tree* is a reference to the poet's mental condition. The poetic language might be described here as "woody", consisting in false information about death, imprisonment in Auschwitz on charges of helping Jews, references to the poet's beloved wife Maria Zarebińska, and a growing feeling of estrangement in Palestine among non-Polish Jews. In each of these collections, one finds a poetic masterpiece concerning the Holocaust: To Polish Jews in *Fix Bayonets*, and Ballads and Romances in *The Despairing Tree*. The first, written in the Homeric hexameter, has been described as a "beautiful psalm", a tribute to "the Warsaw defenders of the ghetto", and a "poetic commentary on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" (Tramer, 2010, p. 233). The poem speaks of the loneliness of those dying during the Ghetto Uprising, written in June 1943, when most people had no idea about the existence of the gas chambers. This explains the poet's allusions to the Sons of the Maccabees, which is to say, to the desperate fight for a dignified death. Broniewski locates the Jewish struggle in Polish martyrological history (September 1939), which can be understood as a poetic gesture against the symbolic/semiotic isolation of the Jewish Uprising in the Polish narrative (pp. 233–239). It is worth adding that the suicide of Szmul Zygielbojm (1895–1943) was a turning point in the (un)awareness of the Holocaust in Europe: a Bund Party member, who was also a councillor of interwar Warsaw and Lodz and member of the Judenrat in the Warsaw Ghetto, managed to escape to Belgium and then to England, where he became a representative within the London Government of the Jewish population. Broniewski's essay *Stones for Earthwork: On the Third Anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising*, first published in the literary weekly *Kuźnica* (1946), should be seen as a complement to the poet's dedication and homage to Zygielbojm in his poem *To Polish Jew*. It begins with the words "The criminal and frantic theory of Nazi racism from the beginning has threatened all nations of the world; its blade, however, was directed against the Jewish nation the most" (Broniewski, 2015, p. 313).

The poem *Ballads and Romances* was written on 8 October 1945 and refers to the "canon of canons", that is, to the ballad Romanticism that opens Adam Mickiewicz's first collection of poetry and that establishes the Polish romantic paradigm. As in Romanticism, Broniewski's poem begins with the chiasmic incipit "Listen, she doesn't listen", which – unlike in Mickiewicz's poem – appears once more at the end (Tramer, 2010, p. 242). Karusia becomes Ryfka, whose death is echoed by that of Christ-as-Jew. The poem thus features two qualities characteristic of Messianic Polish culture: one connected to the figure of Christ, the other to the romantic tradition, which come together in Broniewski's lamentation over the red-haired orphan Ryfka and her lonely death in the ruins of the ghetto. In Romanticism as in *To Polish Jews* we find a very Polish reaction to – and paradigm for poetic reflection on – the Holocaust, based on

unreserved empathy. The title of a two-volume anthology of poetry from Auschwitz, *Auschwitz Was on My Land* (Na mojej ziemi był Oświęcim) is a quotation of Broniewski, as is Mordechaj Canin's *Through Ruins and Ashes* (Przez ruiny i zgliszczca, posthumously 2018), taken from Broniewski's poem *The Polish Soldier* (Żołnierz polski).

### Main Topics and Problems

The story of Ballades and Romances is a literary representation of the martyrdom of Polish Jews. The role of the girl from Mickiewicz's poem is taken over by "naked, red-haired Ryfka, a thirteen-year-old child." Her insanity is completely different from the insanity of the heroine of Mickiewicz's Romanticism. Broniewski replaces the fantastic plot of Mickiewicz's ballad with a realistic sketch of the reality of occupation, which at the end of the poem transforms into a symbolic scene – though one saturated with the reality of occupation – depicting the shooting of Ryfka and Christ. (Bujnicki, 2014, pp. XCIX-C)

Broniewski thus violates the generic form of the ballad (according to Mickiewicz's model) in two ways: "in the construction of the poetic image and in the apocryphal nature of its structure" (p. C). In the two collections of Broniewski's poems mentioned here, we find biblical topics – Wailing Wall and Via Dolorosa, the Passion of Christ as the archetype of all suffering, and the Maccabees as model of heroism –, as well as poems about the Holocaust (in *statu nascendi!*) as in poems about the image of the ghetto and Auschwitz (as *pars pro toto* camp). To Polish Jews can be read both as a metonymic epitaph of the exterminated community (based on the dedication In Memory of Szmul Zygielbojm), and as a symbolic combination of two messianisms – Polish and Jewish – which had to this point remained mutually estranged.

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## Selected Poetry (Poezje wybrane)

**Author:** Czesław Miłosz

**First Published:** 1943

**Translations:** (in selection) German (*Lied vom Weltende*, 1966; *Zeichen im Dunkel*, 1979; *Gedichte 1933–1981*, 1982); English (*Selected Poems*, 1973; *Bells in Winter*, 1978; *The Collected Poems. 1931–1987*, 1988); French (*Enfant d'Europe et autres poèmes*, 1980; *Poèmes 1934–1982*, 1984; *Terre inépuisable*, 1988); Hebrew (*Wezarah ha-shemesh uwa ha-shemesh wesrihim aherim*, 1981); Russian (*Poetičeskij traktat*, 1982; *Tak malo i drugije stichotvorenija. 1934–1990*, 1993); Spanish (*Antologia poética*, 1984; *Poemas*, 1984).

**About the Author:** Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004) was a poet, prose writer, essayist, translator, lecturer on literature, and winner of the 1980 Nobel Prize in Literature. He spent his childhood in Russia (1914–1918), including a period in Siberia. While studying law at Vilnius University, Miłosz also belonged to Żagary, a group of Polish poets based in Vilnius whose work was characterised by a fascination with catastrophe (*żagary* in the local Vilnius dialect means “brushwood”). His first collection of poetry, *A Poem on Frozen Time*, was published in 1933. Oskar Miłosz, a French-language poet and distant relative, had a decisive influence on his development as a poet. During the Nazi occupation, Czesław Miłosz participated in the underground literary and cultural life in Warsaw. After the war, he published the collection *Rescue* (1945) – widely considered to be one of the most important volumes of Polish poetry of the 20th century –, followed by *A Treatise on Morality* (1948). In the postwar years, following a period of diplomatic work in New York, Washington, and Paris, he sought political asylum in France, and worked with the Paris opposition magazine *Kultura*, where he first published the essay *The Captive Mind* (1953). In 1960 he moved to Berkeley, California, where he worked as a professor at the University of California. Under the Communist regime in Poland, Miłosz’s writings were only available in foreign editions, and – starting in 1976 – the underground *samizdat*. Miłosz’s 1980 Nobel Prize led finally to the publication of many of his works in Poland that had previously been banned. He returned to Poland for a visit in 1981, and returned to live there on a part-time basis starting in 1989.

**Further Important Publications:** *Traktat moralny* (1948, *A Treatise on Morality*, poem); *Dolina Issy* (1955, *The Issa Valley*; novel); *Traktat poetycki* (1957, *A Treatise on Poetry*; poem); *Ziemia Ulro* (1977, *The Ulro Land*; essay); *To* (2000, *It*; poems); *Druga przestrzeń* (2002, *The Second Space*; poems); *Wiersze ostatnie* (2006, *The Last Poems*; poems).

### Content and Interpretation

In the collection *Rescue* (1945), Miłosz initiates a reflection on the Holocaust he would carry on for many years, not only in his poetic works but also in essays and journalism, as well as public activity – as he did in 1946, for example, when he informed his American counterparts at the Polish Consulate in New York of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (Franaszek, 2011, pp. 288–289). *Rescue* remains one of the most important works of Holocaust poetry in the Polish language, and includes such masterpieces as *Campo dei Fiori* and *A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto*. As the poet comments elsewhere, “under such circumstances where those who help the victims of persecution themselves face capital punishment, judgment is not easy. [...] Religious motivation...personal courage, neighbourly bonds and self-enrichment collide with physical inability, fear, or lack of interest” (Kuczyńska-Koschany, 2013, pp. 142–143). Both *Campo dei Fiori* and *A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto* were reprinted in an anthology edited by M. M. Borwicz (1947, pp. 121–123) → *The Song Will Survive...* Yet they are very different poems: “The poems [...] are juxtaposed to one another as order is to chaos, or as beauty, which we are also accustomed to consider as good, is to evil – the ugliness of chaos” (Łukasiewicz, 2000, p. 142). *Campo dei Fiori*, as Miłosz himself defined it, is a work of “moral journalism” (Miłosz, Gorczyńska, 2002, p. 67) from which one may draw certain conclusions: “first of all, the horror of Nazism, and secondly, an attitude of indifference on the streets of Warsaw. [...] The question is: is this really how it was on the streets of Warsaw? It was and it wasn’t. It was, on the one hand, because carousels really were turning just outside the periphery of the ghetto. It wasn’t, because in other areas of Warsaw the streets were different. So it’s not an accusation. On the other hand, it is a poem written as an ordinary human impulse in the spring of 1943” (pp. 67–68). Other works of note selected for this edition include *The Journey*, which closes with the words “Night Continues” (“Dalej jest noc”, used as the title of one of the most shocking collections of documents about Shoah in Poland; compare: Engelking, Grabowski, 2018), *Christmas Eve*, and *The Waltz*, as well as *Song on Porcelain* (1953), fragments of *A Treatise on Morality* (1948), and *A Treatise on Poetry* (1957). It is also worth mentioning *The Spirit of History*, which gives a shocking account based – as Miłosz himself confirmed – on real events (Kuczyńska-Koschany, 2013, p. 134): “In the suburb all night / An old Jew dies, thrown into a clay pit pond / His roar only stops in the early morning”. A later poem, “It”, which is the title poem from a collection published in 2000, seems to refer to the same incident: “similar to when a trapped Jew sees the approaching / heavy helmets of German gendarmes”.

### Main Topics and Problems

Miłosz’s place among the writers and luminaries whose works have kept the memory of the Holocaust alive – or more broadly, the memory of twentieth-century totalitarianism – is evident not only in his poems, essays, and interviews, but also in his dialogues with Jewish artists (Awrom Suckewer, David Weinfeld; see Szymaniak, Szyba, 2011), as well as his long-running dialogue with Tadeusz Różewicz (→ *An Excursion to*

*the Museum*), who asked what possible form remains for Polish poetry after Shoah. Among the most important problems raised by Miłosz are: the topos of the carousel at Krasieński Square in Campo dei Fiori (next to the burning ghetto in 1943 – a symbol of Polish indifference towards the persecution of Jews); the figure of self-accusation, guilt and shared responsibility in “the helpers of death / The uncircumcised” in *A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto*; numerous visions of the fragility of a single person pitted against the violence of totalitarian systems; above all Nazism and the metaphysical question *unde malum?* in relation to sources of culture – the character of Job, for example, in all of its existential, theological, and philosophical aspects; and finally, the testimonial power of poetry in confrontation with totalitarianism – both Nazism and Stalinism –, as in his poem *You Who Wronged*. The situation in Miłosz’s poem *A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto* is echoed by Bohdan Zadura in *A Matter of Time* (*Kwestia czasu*, 2006) when he writes, “A poor Christian / looking at the ghetto // And it serves him right”. Observations like these convey the difficulty of any kind of self-critical assimilation of the memory of the Holocaust in Poland.

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KKK

## Selected Poetry (Wiersze wybrane)

**Author:** Wisława Szymborska

**First Published:** 1945

**Translations:** English (*Sounds, Feelings, Houghts*, 1981; *Selected Poems*, 1986; *Poems: Poezje*, 1989; *People on a Bridge: Poems*, 1990; *View with a Grain of Sand*, 1995; *Nothing Twice*, 2006; *Poems New and Collected 1957–1997*, 1998; *Miracle Fair*, 2001), and many other translations in various languages.

**About the Author:** Wisława Szymborska (1923–2012) was a poet, columnist, translator, collage artist, and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996. She studied Polish philology (from 1945) and sociology (from 1946) at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. In 1948, she married poet Adam Włodek (whom she divorced in 1954), and in 1967 she became involved with prose writer and poet Kornel Filipowicz. After Filipowicz' death in 1990, Szymborska wrote one of her poetic masterpieces, the poem-lamentation *Cat in an Empty Flat* (*Kot w pustym mieszkaniu*). Starting in 1950, Szymborska belonged to the Polish United Workers' Party, quitting again in 1966 as a gesture of solidarity with Leszek Kołakowski, a philosopher and reformer who had been expelled from the party. In 1975 she signed the *Memoriał 59*, an open letter by dissenting intellectuals against proposed changes in the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic.

**Further Important Publications:** (all poems) *Dlatego żyjemy* (1952, That's Why We Live); *Pytania zadawane sobie* (1954, Questioning Myself); *Wołanie do Yeti* (1957, Calling Yeti); *Sól* (1962, Salt); *Wszelki wypadek* (1972, In Case); *Wielka liczba* (1976, Huge Amount); *Ludzie na moście* (1986, People on the Bridge); *Koniec i początek* (1993, End and Beginning); *Chwila* (2002, Moment); *Dwukropek* (2005, Colon); *Tutaj* (2009, Here); *Wystarczy* (2011, Enough); *Czarna piosenka* (2014, Black Song).

### Content and Interpretation

Szymborska described her work in a Nobel lecture: “any knowledge that doesn't lead to new questions quickly dies out: it fails to maintain the temperature required for sustaining life. In the most extreme cases, cases well known from ancient and modern history, it even poses a lethal threat to society”. The poetic works by Szymborska that deal directly with the Holocaust are few but significant, the most important of which are *Transport of Jews '43* (*Transport Żydów '43*) and *Still* (*Jeszcze*). *Transport of Jews '43* was first published in *Dziennik Literacki*, a literary supplement to the Cracow daily newspaper *Dziennik Polski*, and subsequently reprinted with the simplified title *Transport of Jews* in the collection *Black Song* (*Czarna piosenka*, 2014; prepared in 1944–48). Szymborska's decision to remove the date from the title would appear to shift fo-

cus from the historiography of the Holocaust to the dehumanisation of Jews – the transport of things, not of people. (If so, the poem *Still* would fall between these two categories, posing as its central issue the transport rather of names – an example of synecdoche that tends towards both reification and metaphor.) The poem is written in free verse, yet returns at intervals to a kind of refrain in distich form: “By custom of the first [second, third] night, the train / stood long – he did not wait for all of them”. This feature – the only, terrifying, regularity in the poem – might be interpreted as a reference to the three nights after Christ’s death, leading to the resurrection. By contrast, the three nights in Szymborska’s poem lead only to death, and it closes with the line “no one was forgiven” (Kuczyńska-Koschany, 2019, p. 168). The second poem, *Still*, has been aptly described as “the ballad of the Holocaust”, one that can be summarised in terms of the poet’s knowledge: “That’s why the poet says ‘I don’t know’ that she knows too much” (Głowiński, 2007, p. 351). The title suggests a compromise position between the endless recurrence of Shoah (manifest in the postwar pogroms) and a reference to the poet’s assertion “It’s not time yet”, which appears in the second verse of the fifth strophe. Not time for what? Suicide? To save oneself – blindly? Whoever jumped from the death trains was casting their lot with chance; some were shot, others managed to escape (Kuczyńska-Koschany, 2019, p. 167). Cattle wagons in *Still* refer once more to the Bible (the Jewish names serve as afterimages of people transported in the wagons), but also to the masterpiece of children’s poetry *Locomotive* (*Lokomotywa*, 1936) by Julian Tuwim (→ *We, Polish Jews*). According to one scholar, “the poet plays with the form of an optimistic prewar poem for children”, but then shifts in the second part to a tone that is “very emotional, with direct reference to the victims and reflections on antisemitism, which was still widespread after the war, in the very country where the Holocaust took place”. The tone in the third part changes once more: “there is a calming effect” and “a more general reflection on the collective forgetting of war victims” at the same time as a “lasting memory of the murdered Jewish nation despite this general forgetfulness, the memory which gives birth to nightmares (‘Awakened in the night I hear / cor-rect, cor-rect, crash of silence on silence’)” (Cieślak, 2004, pp. 38–40). If *Still* is one of the most important contributions to Polish Holocaust poetry, Szymborska’s *Innocence* (*Niewinność*) from the collection *100 Happinesses* (*Sto pociech*, 1967) is the most overlooked.

### Main Topics and Problems

In addition to their references to biblical topics, both *Transport of Jews* and *Still* present the theme of the Holocaust in its most recognizable form, the form of collective memory. Janina Abramowska states: “Yes, A TRAIN transporting Jews would be closest to what I call a topos. [...] This is the TRAIN. The early postwar poems have very clear references to the Holocaust” (Abramowska, 2016, pp. 17–18). Perhaps Szymborska’s most distinctive contribution to the topic of the Shoah is her formula “a cloud made of people” (*chmura z ludzi*), which appears in the poem *Still*. It is an image that will recur, for example, in the collection *The Cloud Returns* (*Ta chmura powraca*, 2005)

by Piotr Matywiecki (→ *Boundary Marker*). Of equal note, the poet presents the image of cut hair in *Innocence* as a material symbol of memoriam.

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KKK

# The Shop on Main Street (Obchod na korze)

**Author:** Ladislav Grosman

**First Published:** 1965

**Translations:** German (*Der Laden auf dem Korso*, 1967); Hebrew (*Chanut be rehov harsh*, 1969); English (*The Shop on Main Street*, 1970); Swedish (*Butiken vid storgatan*, 1981); Polish (*Sklep przy głównej ulicy*, 1993).

**Film Adaptation:** *Obchod na korze* (The Shop on Main Street/The Shop on the High Street); feature film, screenplay Ladislav Grosman, Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos; film directors Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, premiered the 7th of October, 1965.

**About the Author:** Ladislav Grosman (1921–1981), came from a Slovak Jewish family, went through various labour camps during World War II and eventually, escaped before being transported to the extermination camps and thus had to hide-out for the rest of the war. After 1945, he studied in Prague and worked as an editor and screenwriter, publishing in both Slovak and Czech. In October 1968 Grosman emigrated to Israel where he taught at Bar-Ilan University. Jewish and especially Holocaust topics played an important role in his works.

**Further Important Publications:** *Nevěsta* (1969, The Bride, short stories); *Hlavou proti zdi* (1976, Head against the Wall, short stories); *Z pekla štěstí* (1994, The Devil's Own Luck); *Povídky* (2018, Short Stories, ed. J. Opelík, summary edition).

## Content and Interpretation

The geographical setting of the story is an unspecified provincial city in Eastern Slovakia. The author took this image from his hometown of Humenné. The temporal setting seems to be the summer of 1942 when the first wave of Jewish transports from Slovakia was organised, but the novel doesn't have any precise historical date. The main figure is a small and naive man that is not overly interested in politics or in public events – called Tono Brtko, a carpenter. He instinctively resents the Slovak fascists and the war and keeps himself away from this ruling group. But he is not active and brave enough to fight against the regime. He wants “to survive and stay out of trouble” (Hames, 2005, p. 38). He likes walking his dog and chatting with neighbours. Brtko's brother-in-law, Markus Kolkocký, is the leader of the local Hlinka Guard (the Slovak Fascist organisation) and Brtko's simple wife Evelína is very greedy and pushy. Therefore, Brtko involuntarily becomes the so-called Aryaniser. He acquires a small, worthless and insolvent haberdashery store on the main street belonging to the old Jewish widow Rozálie Lautmanová. Brtko is a good person at heart and does not like conflicts, therefore he helps the old Jewess serve customers. He pretends

to be her shop assistant, while at home he makes out to be a strict and ruthless Arya-niser.

Mrs Lautmanová seems completely unaware of anything around her. The almost 80-year-old and near-deaf Jewish woman doesn't perceive the outside world any more. She doesn't know that Jews are being persecuted. The novel presents for a long time an idyllic life of a small town: the colourful local market, the fire-brigade and its concerts on the main square, walking people on Sundays on the promenade. The Jewish Mutual Aid Society supports Tono Brtko financially, because Mrs Lautman's shop doesn't bring anything in. Tono befriends a little neighbour boy, Danko (Daniel) Eliáš, and teaches him carpentry. The name has a symbolic meaning (Jewish prophet Daniel protected by an angel in the lions' den). Danko is also saved at the end of the story.

But this lovely idyllic and relaxed mood comes to an end in the last chapter of the novel. The Jews from the city and neighbouring regions are lined up for a transport. Brtko's friend Kucharský, who is involved in the resistance, is labelled as a "White Jew" (someone who helps and protects Jews). He is brutally beaten, arrested and deported. Moreover, Brtko's wife Evelína isn't satisfied with the money that Tono Brtko brings in. She knows the Jews should be transported and she wants more Jewish jewellery and gold.

From now on, Brtko's dual existence can't continue. He decides to save Mrs Lautmanová and shelter her. However, Čarný, the fascist, starts shadowing Brtko, who finds himself under increasing pressure. The next morning Kolkotský manages the gathering of the Jews on the square close Brtko's shop. The idyllic square becomes an *apelplac* (Šmatlák, 2008, p. 89). Rozálie Lautmanová is forgotten due to a bureaucratic error. Nevertheless, Brtko assumes that this is really just a clever move on the part of his hated brother-in-law who will then designate him also as a Jew lover and exponent and thus permanently get rid of him. Thus he convinces the old lady to go out to the square and join the deportees in transport. He argues, that is the law: "Mrs Lautman! The world is run this way now... there are special laws for Jews" (Grosman, 1970, p. 117).

Later he regrets this and tries to save her. At first, Rozálie Lautmanová does not understand anything. But then she realises what is happening and is scared. Tono Brtko tries to hide her in a backroom by force and accidentally kills her while shoving her into her hiding place. Then he goes completely insane and commits suicide by hanging himself.

### **Main Topics and Film Adaptation**

The novel depicts the drama of a person (Brtko) who is roped into a dilemma, an oppressive, irresolvable position through no fault of his own. Brtko is a bystander who is forced to reveal his attitude and has to act. He is not a hero, but a desperate little man. Consequently, he reacts in a chaotic way. At first, he wants to get rid of Mrs Lautman. At second, he tries to rescue her.

The other protagonist, the old widow Lautmanová, lives in isolation and is turned to her past. Annette Insdorf expresses her opinion that Lautmanová's "deafness is symbolic of the Jewish victims who are either unable to or refuse to comprehend what is happening to them" (Insdorf, 2003, p. 165). A part of the text depicts not only dramatic and grotesque but also imaginative scenes with hints of images of paradise. The last night before their death, Tono Brtko dreams Rozálie and he are walking on the main street promenade. Both of them are youthful, happy and carefree.

In this dream sequence, the idyllic mood returns, at least in Tono Brtko's mind. In the novel, this scene precedes the final situation in the shop, the death of Lautmanová and the suicide of Brtko. At the end, it is noted, "so it's quite possible they are both up there now, promenading along the Main Street of Heaven" (Grosman, 1970, p. 122).

The novel *The Shop on Main Street* was made world-famous by the film adaptation directed by Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, which apart from other things won the American Academy Award for the best foreign film in 1965 (in the U.K. it was released as *The Shop on the High Street*). Unlike Grosman's novel, the film presents important new motifs (storks over the town, the city prison and military trains) that symbolise the atmosphere and tension of the time. Prisoners walking in the dark prison yard become people promenading in the sunshine on Main Street. In the film, Brtko's vision at the end repeats twice. The second time is a long scene at the very end of the film. After Brtko takes his own life, the door of the shop opens. Rozálie and Tono appear, both gracefully dressed in white. They smile at each other. They slowly walk Main Street, they almost float and dance across the square.

Both leading actors, Jozef Kroner (Brtko) and Ida Kamińska (Lautmanová), won international awards (for instance in Cannes). Kroner underlined the farcical aspects of the story. Sixty five-year-old Ida Kamińska was the manager, producer and leading actress at the State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw. It was her first important film role. *The Shop on Main Street* where she was speaking both Polish and Yiddish and praying in Hebrew, made her famous. After Grosman emigrated to Israel and Kadár to the U. S. at the end of the 1960s, the novel as well as the film were accused of "Zionism" and banned in Czechoslovakia.

Despite its tragic end, the important parts of the novel are the comic and grotesque scenes. Tono Brtko is a clownish figure resembling Charlie Chaplin. Dialogues between Brtko and the half-deaf Lautmanová cause comic misunderstandings. So the novel is a mixture of dramatic and comic situations. Similar to Jiří Weil's → *Life with a Star*, Josef Škvorecký's → *The Menorah* or Arnošt Goldflam's → *Sweet Theresienstadt* where grotesquerie and black humour are present. Such literary devices are a part of the Czech(oslovak) as well as the Central European and Jewish cultural tradition of the subversive comic and Jewish jokes that were presented in the fictional world create a vision of non-reality, which liberates the reader. So through the integration of comic modes, a more complicated and effective fictional world is able to be created, distant from the traditional representation of this topic.

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## Sidra Noach (Sidra Noach)

**Author:** David Jan Novotný

**First Published:** 2010

**Translations:** Slovenian (*Noetova sidra*, 2013).

**About the Author:** David Jan Novotný (1947) comes from a Protestant family, his father was a graphic designer and cartoonist. Novotný studied at the Film Academy in Prague and worked as a screenwriter in the Film Studio in Barrandov. He has published short stories and novels. In the 1990s he began to teach at Film Academy as well as at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, both in Prague. In 2001 he was appointed as a professor. As a screenwriter, he took part among others in films like *How a Man Gives Birth* (1979), *Shy Stories* (1982, Karel Čapek's short stories adaptations) and TV series *Motel Anathema* (Motel Anathema, 1998, horror).

### Content and Interpretation

The novel begins with the dedication "For those who survived, for their children and their children's children..." (Novotný, 2010, p. 5) It suggests the topic of the Holocaust, nevertheless, the Holocaust is only in the background as a reminiscence of several characters. The actual story takes place in Prague during the great flood of August 2002. Some areas of the city near the Vltava river including a part of the Old Town are flooded and the inhabitants must be evacuated. The Jewish Council organises assistance mainly for old Jewish citizens providing them alternative accommodation. For that reason, ten Jewish men meet in one large flat in Prague's Vinohrady district for a few days. The narration depicts their behaviour, their mentality and coexistence but also their memories of the past. On the whole, each of the characters represents a different kind of Czech Jewishness after 1989.

The three oldest of them are Avigdor (Avi) Kolman, Egon Hruška and Leo Klein who survived World War II. Avi, his brother and his parents escaped from Czechoslovakia in 1939 but the Nazis detained them in Hungary and sent them to Auschwitz. Only Avi survived. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968, Avi, his wife and their two sons fled to the U. S. Later the younger son Danny emigrated to Israel and was killed there during a terrorist attack. The rest of the family returned to Czechoslovakia after the Velvet Revolution 1989. After some time Avi's wife Róza died. At night, Avi leads dialogues with her and Danny.

Egon Hruška survived the war with false "Aryan papers". He had to work in Berlin sewing uniforms for Nazi soldiers. His wife Eva survived the camps but suffers from traumas, for instance, she cannot stand showering because all showers remind her of the gas chambers. In the 1950s, Egon was sentenced by the Communist justice system as a "Zionist" and spent ten years in uranium mines, where he befriended another

prisoner, Jakub Kolář, who had been arrested for his Catholic faith. Later Egon's daughter Anna and Jakub's son Petr fell in love and married each other. Nevertheless neither Anna nor Petr believe in God, neither Jewish nor Christian.

As a teenager Leo Klein fled with his brother to Britain in 1939. They fought in the British Army against the Germans. After the war they returned but found that their parents and all relatives had been murdered during the Holocaust. Eduard Černý, a communist of Jewish origin, saved them from depression. In August 1948, after the Communist takeover, the Klein brothers fled to Britain again. After 1989, Leo and his family visited Prague and the Czech Republic every year in August. In August of 2002, just before leaving for Prague, Leo learns that his wife left him for another man. So Leo goes to Prague for the first time alone and witnesses the catastrophic flood.

The Jewish men from the younger generation temporarily living in the Vinohrady flat, are also marked by the past. The parents of Rudolf Reich survived the Holocaust. While his father often visited the Theresienstadt Ghetto with him after the war, his mother suppressed all memories from the war. Eliáš Szalai whose grandparents survived Nazi camps, learned about his Jewishness when he was fifteen. During the Communist regime, his parents were afraid of admitting it. Miloš Katz, a student, experienced anti-Jewish skinhead riots. The youngest Jewish boy in the Vinohrady flat is the fifteen-year-old Petr Klimeš. At first he doesn't care about the past.

When Petr Klimeš was ten, he heard about the Holocaust for the first time. He didn't want to believe that something like this could have happened. However, his eighty-year-old great-grandfather showed him a faded but still legible number that was tattooed on his left forearm. His great-grandfather told him hard-to-believe stories that had simply really happened. [...] But Petr didn't want to deal with it. The past is the past. Now is over and it is the twenty-first century. (p. 363)

Gradually Petr realises that the past of the Jewish community can also be important for him.

On Friday, 16th August 2002, ten Jewish men and one woman (Rudolf Reich's wife Milena Reichová) meet together at a festive Shabbat dinner. Despite all the differences among the generations and their opinions, this event indicates their mutual understanding and solidarity. The following day the flood culminates and the water begins to recede. The men leave the flat one by one.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Sidra Noach, the title of the novel, is a part of the *Torah* that is regularly read in synagogues. It tells the story of the Flood of the World and Noah and his ark. Noah's ark. Most mottoes of the twelve chapters in the novel (in Hebrew and Czech) refer to Noah's story. The whole of Novotný's novel can be understood as a parallel to this disaster – and also other disasters of the Jewish folk, like the Shoah or persecution during the

Communist regime – and rescue from them. The numbers twelve (chapters in the novel) as well as ten (number of Jewish men in the flat) also refer to the Jewish tradition. For instance, twelve months are in the Jewish year, twelve are the tribes of Israel. Ten adult Jewish men constitute a *minyán* for public prayer or other religious obligations.

All of the main characters in *Sidra Noach* are fictional. But some of the other characters or mentioned figures are real people, as a part of the fictional world. The authentic background of the story also includes a grotesque event, which was experienced by Egon Hruška. In August of 1978, he wants to visit his old friend Jakub Kolář in the town of Příbram in Central Bohemia. Kolář only tells him he can find his house behind the statue of Klement Gottwald on the square. Klement Gottwald was the first Communist president in Czechoslovakia, a symbol of the regime. On Wednesday, 23rd of August Hruška comes to Příbram and can't find the statue. He has no idea and asks a policeman where Gottwald's statue is. He is immediately beaten up and arrested as a provocateur. Moreover the police find out Hruška is a former political prisoner. All this happens, because during the previous night someone has blown up the statue. This scene is based on real events. The bronze statue of Klement Gottwald in Příbram was really blown up during the night from the 22nd to the 23rd August, 1978.

Vít Kremlička wrote in his article in the review *Tvar*, that D. J. Novotný had plagiarised Kremlička's own novella *Manael* published in 2005 (Kremlička 2010). Both works combine motifs of a flood and the Holocaust. Nevertheless, in Kremlička's novella there are many other motifs and allusions that can't be found in *Sidra Noach*, and *vice versa*, *Sidra Noach* contains many situations which are not in *Manael*. Moreover, Kremlička's style and language are full of symbols and hints while *Sidra Noach* having been narrated more or less in a traditional realistic way.

*Sidra Noach* begins and ends with scenes that are similar to each other. In both Avi Kolman, a survivor of the Holocaust, speaks to himself:

Avi Kolman was seventy-six. Someone thought it was too much, someone thought to little. According to some he should not exist at all. He himself felt just right. [...]

"Yeah, yeah, I shouldn't have even been here for sixty years. Where are you [the Nazis, J.H.] and where am I?" he said in a half-voice. He looked up at the ceiling and sighed. "And where are the others?" (Novotný, 2010, p. 16)

"Yeah, yeah, I shouldn't have even been here for sixty years", declared Avi Kolman. He looked around the room, watched the Old Jewish Cemetery through the half open window and saw the cloudy sky. He waited if he could see someone up there. "None from us should have been here for sixty years ..." (p. 381)

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JH

# The Sixth Battalion, On Guard! (Šiesty prápor, na stráž!)

**Author:** Emil F. Knieža

**First Published:** 1964

**Translations:** Czech (*Košer rota*, 1966); German (*Jankel Tannenbaums Kompanie*, 1975); in part English (Chapter XII To Eat or Not to Eat? In: *An Anthology of Slovak Literature*, 1976, pp. 297–304).

**About the Author:** Emil F. Knieža's (1920–1990) original name was Emil Fürst (the German Fürst means Knieža in Slovak). He came from a Slovak-Jewish family in Eastern Slovakia (Nacina Ves near Michalovce). During World War II, he was forced to serve in the 6th Battalion of the Slovak Army, in the so-called “labour company” (see also Leopold Lahola). From 1943 he fought in the Jegorov Partisan Brigade against the Nazis. After his graduation from high school in Bratislava (1945), he worked as a journalist in daily newspapers and as an editor in a publishing house. Later he was the director of the Municipal Library in Bratislava. His first short stories were published in 1957. In 1962, he became a professional writer. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, 1968, Knieža emigrated to Switzerland where he lived in Benglen and worked in a bookstore.

Knieža published articles about Jewish culture, antisemitism and Zionism in Slovak as well as in other languages. He translated two of Sholem Aleichem's literary works, *Tevye, the Dairyman and his Daughters* (1959) and *Wandering Stars* (1962, in cooperation of Marta Ličková) from Yiddish into Slovak.

**Further Important Publications:** *Mušketieri žltej hviezdy* (Musketeers with the Yellow Star, 1967; novel); *Zvalte všetko na mňa* (Blame Everything on Me, 1976; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

The novel is divided into 37 chapters. It is set in Slovakia from March of 1941 to June of 1943. The phrase “On guard!” („Na stráž!“) in its title was a military salute of the Slovak Army and Hlinka Guard (the Slovak Fascist organisation) during World War II. Paradoxically, it was also the salute of the Jewish “labour squads” that were a part of the army. Their members were Slovak Jews, taken away into military service, but without being armed with weapons.

The main characters are three young men from the small village Suchá-Dlhá near Michalovce in East Slovakia: Jankel (Jacob) Tanenbaum, Josel (Joseph) Hopkovič and Mikolaj Gerebľa. Jankel and Josel are Jews and are included in the “kosher company” for Orthodox Jews, Mikolaj as a Slovak in the “Aryan company” in the same battalion. They serve and labour first in Eastern Slovakia and later in Western Slovakia.

There are different kinds of individuals in Jewish companies. Poor Orthodox Jews from Eastern Slovakia, speaking Yiddish and the Slovak Zemplín dialect (Jankel Tannenbaum). Then liberal and assimilated Jews from Bratislava, speaking German and Hungarian (Walter Kahan). Finally they are communists (Šaňo Schön) and Zionists (“Barcelona” Suchý) there. Often they don’t understand each other. Their Slovak commanders are usually incompetent and the Jewish soldiers make a mockery of them. Jews also meet German units getting ready for the invasion of Russia and the Jews scoff at them:

“You’re splendid fellows! It’s go swimmingly! You’re taking land by land if on a walk”.  
 “Now London and Moscow, and it will be the end”, the German gave a faint smile.  
 “And something else”, added Grün, “M’pole”.  
 “We’ll take it too, cha cha”, said the German and everybody laughed with taste at the rebbes joke.  
 (Knieža, 1964, p. 100) [“M’pole” means destruction, plague.]

Nevertheless, the situation of the Jews in Slovakia step by step becomes more complicated. Officers’ behaviour towards Jewish soldiers becomes tougher, mainly after the “Jewish Codex” in Slovakia is declared (September, 1941) that restricts the rights of the Jews substantially. In March, 1942 transports of Slovak Jews to labour camps and to death camps begin. Many relatives, friends or girlfriends of Jewish soldiers are deported and they themselves are also in danger. Jankel gradually loses his faith in the omnipotence of God. His friend Josel asks “Where is God?” and Jankel can’t answer (p. 280). This motif often appears in Holocaust literature, see → *Court Jesters* (Viktor Fischl), → *A Private Conversation* (Hana Bořkovcová) or → *It Happened on the First September* (Pavol Rankov). He looks for hope in the idea of communism but is also not completely satisfied with it.

Some of the Jewish soldiers try to run away and desert, joining partisans in the mountains, some of them save themselves with “Aryan papers” (Šlojme Mendlovič) or flee to Hungary. Heinz Schaler commits suicide. Walter Kahan joins voluntarily his family in the transport to the camps.

The fate of Slovak soldiers is also tragicomic. Mikolaj Gerebl’a reports for the Eastern front as a volunteer, to have cigarettes and an additional payment of 10 crowns daily. He experiences rough situations there, such as the mass killing of the Jews in Ukraine. He meets Timotej Pukanič, the former commander of the “Jewish company” there. Pukanič is a primitive alcoholic and hoarder who is finally sent to a madhouse at last. (However, he appears in Slovakia again, in the second and third parts of the trilogy.)

The Slovak society is divided in relation to the persecution of the Jews. Government officials and Hlinka Guards support the deportation of the Jews mainly to take possession of their Jewish property. On the other hand, many Slovaks help the Jews. So the villagers in Suchá-Dlhá stand up for the Jews when the authorities confiscate their cows and goats. The local Orthodox Catholic priest Fedorčák baptises Jews to save them. He is arrested but the villagers protest against it.

The illegal Jewish “Working Group” in Bratislava, led by Irena Altmannová, tries to rescue the remaining Jews in Slovakia. They bribe the Slovakian government officials and the German official responsible for the “Final Solution” in Slovakia Vysletschenski, using money from foreign Jewish organisations. Transports are stopped and everyone believes they will not be continued.

At the end of the novel, in June, 1943, the Sixth Battalion is disbanded. Most of the Jewish soldiers disappear.

### Main Topics and Problems

The novel exploits various narrative devices: the personal perspectives of characters, dialogues but also author’s comments, and “documents” (reports from newspapers and decrees as well as fictive letters). Many Yiddish or Hebrew words are used in dialogues or reflections of characters, for instance “chóchem”, “chochmes” (wise, wisdom), “Jeke” (Germans or German speaking Jews) and liturgic terms: “dajen” (reeve, judge). Also the East-Slovak Zemplín dialect is often exploited. A glossary of these terms is added at the end of the book.

News from the official newspapers and decrees present the ritual ideological jargon. Tiso, the Slovak President, declares war against the Soviet Union as a “crusade against the Jewish-Bolshevik plague” (p. 154). A comic effect often arises due to the contrast between the Slovak governments’ official narrative and documents included the letters and statements of direct witnesses.

Some of the characters, mentioned in the novel, are authentic: for instance the mentioned Tiso or the Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka. Other characters allude to obviously real people, like the Interior Minister Aladár Mak (Alexander Mach), the editor-in-chief of the newspaper Belo Durman (Milo Urban), the leader of the Bratislava Working Group which rescued Jews Irena Altmannová (Gisi Fleischmannová), the German official responsible for the “Final Solution” in Slovakia Vysletschenski (Dieter Wisliceny), the Slovak general Tichomír Čontoš (Ferdinand Čatloš) etc. Also the main plot, Jewish companies in the Slovak Army (men born in 1920 and 1921), is authentic. The author knew these units from his own experience.

The novel *The Sixth Battalion, On Guard!* is the first volume of the trilogy. In 1967 follows the novel *Musketeers with the Yellow Star* that narrates the fate of the main characters and other figures in the last years of World War II (1943–1945). Their post-war life in the Communist society until the Soviet invasion in the August, 1968 is described in the novel *Blame Everything on Me* (1976) edited in the exiled publishing house Poľana in Zürich. All these novels use the same narration and composition combining “documents” and “fiction”, authentic and fictive characters. Nevertheless, in the second and third parts of the trilogy, the story breaks down into a series of free episodes.

Comic and grotesque scenes in the novel can be inspired by Jewish humour, for instance the works of Sholem Aleichem that the author translated. To some extent, these scenes are close to the another Slovak Jewish writer Ladislav Grosman (→ *The*

*Shop on Main Street*). Another source of inspiration can be Jaroslav Hašek and his novel *The Good Soldier Švejk* from World War I. Jankel is a figure similar to Švejk, the villain Badinský hints at Biegler in this novel, Pukanič at dull Austrian officers etc.

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JH

# Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Spolek pro ochranu zvířat)

**Author:** Jiří Robert Pick

**First Published:** 1969

**Translations:** Hungarian (*Állatvédő liga*, 1986); German (*Der Tierschutzverein*, 2013); Polish (*Towarzystwo opieki nad zwierzętami*, 2015), English (*Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*, 2018).

**About the Author:** J. R. Pick (1925–1983) came from a Czech-Jewish family, his father was a chemistry engineer. In 1939, after the Nazi occupation, Pick had to interrupt his studies at high school. In 1943 he and his family were transported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. His father was killed in 1944, Pick, his mother and his sister survived. Returning from the ghetto in 1945, Pick was treated for lung disease. In 1948 his mother and his sister emigrated to Argentina. Later his sister Zuzana Justman (born 1931) gained reputation as a documentary filmmaker and writer also with the topics of the Shoah. After World War II, J. R. Pick studied at the School of Political and Economic Sciences in Prague. In this time he began to write texts for theatre scenes and cabarets. In 1959 he founded the Paravan Theatre in Prague. He was its chief author and artistic director.

Due to the suppression of the Prague Spring, during the so-called normalisation in the 1970s, Pick was not allowed to publish again until 1980. At the beginning of 1980s two his plays were staged: *A Dream about Distant Lakes* and *The Unlucky Man in the Yellow Cap*. They are set in the Theresienstadt Ghetto and their black humour continues in tragicomic scenes of the novella *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (1969).

**Further Important Publications:** *Sen o vzdálených jezerech* (1981, premiered 1980, A Dream about Distant Lakes; play); *Smolař ve žluté čepici* (1982, premiered 1982, The Unlucky Man in the Yellow Cap; play); *Pickanterie. Koláž ze života a díla J. R. Picka* (Picquancy: A Collage from J. R. Pick's Life and Work, 1995, ed. E. Světlík); *Příliš mnoho příbuzných* (1996, To Many Relatives; novella).

## Content and Interpretation

The story, divided in eleven chapters, takes place in the Theresienstadt Ghetto in the autumn of 1944. At that time, in September and October, the last big wave of transports from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz was going on. The story is narrated in the third person mainly from the point of view of the main character, the fourteen-year-old boy Tony (Toni in the Czech original). He is lying in a hospital with a mild form of tuberculosis. Tony is placed in a room with some older men. Sometimes his mother Líza visits

him; he had lived with her in the ghetto for two years. He also often meets Líza's friends, young people about twenty.

Tony is bored in the hospital and gets excited with an idea to establish the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in the ghetto. However, there are almost no animals here. It is forbidden for Jews to keep pets. Tony's friends think up the plan that they will take care of the dog of the Nazi SS-*Sturmbannführer*, a commander in the ghetto. They kidnap the dog and nevertheless, against Tony's expectations, they kill and eat it. They want to help Alba Feld who has gotten a summons to the transport to the East. Later another one of Tony's friends, Ledecký, brings him a mouse into the hospital. Ledecký announces that he and Jenda Schleim are also leaving with the transport. The ghetto is more and more depopulated, almost all of Tony's friends, as well as most of the patients receive summons to the transports. Ernie Jelínek decides not to enter the transport and to escape from the ghetto. Tony wants to flee with him but he is too late, because the nurse didn't let him out of the hospital. Ernie is shot by a German guard. Eventually the transport threatens Tony and his mother Líza. Tony pretends to spew blood and so they are both saved. The novella ends with Tony's first love experience with the nurse Lili.

The book's specific feature is just humour – it manifests itself in situations and in language. Tony is naive, he does not realise the seriousness of the circumstances. His interest in animal protection is in contrast to the harsh, often tragic existence of the Jews in the ghetto. Irrespective of it, many situations in Theresienstadt are absurd or grotesque.

Comic and curious characters are also inmates in the ghetto. For instance the German teenager and unwavering Nazi Horst Munther, a former member of *Hitlerjugend*. He was sent to the ghetto because it was found out his grandfather was a Jew. Or Mr Kohn who articulates antisemitic opinions.

Nevertheless, not only Tony is naive, but also many adult Jews in the ghetto. So professor Steinbach, a patient in the hospital, declares that Theresienstadt is just a transfer station to travel to the Promised Land. He is assured that everyone will soon reach Palestine. He plans to teach Czech literature at Tel Aviv University without being able to speak or understand Hebrew or Yiddish. This situation is on the border of black humour because Steinbach is transported within a few days to Auschwitz.

The atmosphere of the Theresienstadt Ghetto is presented in many slang expressions indicating life, customs and institutions in Theresienstadt. The author explains some of them in the footnotes.

### Main Topics and Problems

J. R. Pick is one of the first authors to use the perspective of a child in Czech Holocaust literature. See Arnošt Lustig's → *Diamonds of the Night*, Josef Škvorecký's → *The Menorah* or Ota Pavel's → *The Death of the Beautiful Deer*; in the Polish literature see Henryk Grynberg's → *The Jewish War* and Wilhelm Dichter's → *God's Horse*; in the Slovak literature Vincent Šikula's → *Lilies of Erika* or Peter Krištúfek's → *Emma and the*

*Death's Head Hawkmoth*. Children are generally considered to be naive, innocent, honest and unburdened by the value judgements of adults. On the other hand, child narrators are often incapable of understanding and putting things into a broader context. He or she distorts facts, focuses on detail instead of essential things. All this is visible in *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*. Tony's thinking seems to be often too naive in view of his age of fourteen (Sladovnicková, 2016, p. 807), because it is also known that children grew up prematurely in ghettos and camps.

From time to time, the author exchanges Tony's childish perspective for the perspective of an adult narrator.

Some of the topics in *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* are erotica and sex. The historian Anna Hájková researched the sexual behaviour of Jewish inhabitants in the Theresienstadt Ghetto. She came to the conclusion that young prisoners in Theresienstadt perceived romantic erotic relationships and sex as a beautiful, relevant and legitimate way to spend time there (Hájková, 2013). Also some diaries from Theresienstadt testify to it (Hana Bořkovcová, Eva Rodenová or the unpublished diary of Willy Mahler, see Arnošt Goldflam's → *Sweet Theresienstadt*).

The walk to the Catholic church in the ghetto that ends with a "little party" can serve as an example. Tony is sent back to the hospital and so he learns about everything a few days later during Jenda Schleim's visit:

"Ledecký served as priest", he said, "and every ten minutes he paired off another two couples. Almost everyone there got a chance to be married to all the girls".

"But a priest can only do weddings, not divorces", Tony said.

Clearly he picked up some knowledge from the learned gentlemen in room 26.

"No one really took it that seriously", said Jenda. "Then, at the end, I took over from Ledecký, so he could –"

"So he could what", Tony asked.

"So he could get married too", Jenda said with some hesitation.

(p. 70)

The open presentation of erotic and sexual situations was in the Holocaust literature in the 1960s – unlike contemporary literary works in last decades – very rarely. Compared for instance with late novels of Arnošt Lustig, *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* depicts this topic gently and only in hints.

J. R. Pick used his own experience from the Theresienstadt Ghetto. The story about Tony continues in the early 1950s in Prague in his novella *Too Many Relatives* (written 1971, edited 1996) where as a student Tony is confronted with the Stalinist antisemitism and is expelled from university. All of these works mix tragic, comic and erotic situations. In comparison with other literary works about the Theresienstadt Ghetto, Pick's works are unconventional, close only to Arnošt Goldflam.

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JH

# The Song Will Survive... An Anthology of Poems About Jews Under the German Occupation (Pieśń ujdzie cało... Antologia wierszy o Żydach pod okupacją niemiecką)

**Author/editor:** Michał M. Borwicz (Boruchowicz)

**First Published:** 1947

**About the Author:** Michał Borwicz (1911–1987) was a Polish writer of Jewish origin. He graduated from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and in his twenties joined the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). During World War II, he was imprisoned in the Janowska camp in Lviv and conducted underground activity there, which – after escaping the camp with the help of his PPS colleagues – he continued in the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) hiding his Jewish identity. After the war, he chaired the Cracow chapter of the Jewish Historical Commission and published texts written by Jews and Poles during the Holocaust, including his own poems. He also wrote on the cultural life of the camps, the resistance movement, and the situation of Jews after the Holocaust, especially the issue of antisemitism. Due to the increasingly repressive measures of the Communist regime, he immigrated to France in 1947, where he would spend the rest of his life collecting and studying literary works and other writings from the Holocaust period. He defended his doctoral dissertation on this subject at the Sorbonne in 1953.

**Further Important Publications:** *Miłość i rasa* (1938, Love and Race; novel); *Ze śmiercią na ty* (Bruderschaft with the Death, 1946; poems).

## Content and Interpretation

The anthology features poems by Jewish and Polish authors, both famous and lesser-known. As Borwicz himself emphasised, his intention was not to collect the most celebrated poems and authors, but to bring together the whole gamut of Jewish experiences and problems during the war. And so, in addition to his own works, the anthology includes poems by Roman Bratny, Władysław Broniewski (→ *Selected Poetry*), Adela Fruchtmann, Mordche Gebirtig, Zuzanna Ginczanka, Janka Hescheles, Mieczysław Jastrun (→ *A Human Matter*), Ila and Henia Karmel, Henryka Łazartówna, Czesław Miłosz (→ *Selected Poetry*), Halina Nelken, Stefania Neyken, Tadeusz Różewicz (→ *An Excursion to the Museum*), Henryk Safrin, Władysław Szlengel (→ *What I Read to the Dead*), Julian Tuwim (→ *We, Polish Jews*), Helena Wielowieyska, Rysia Weinreb, and Witold Zechenter, as well as various texts by anonymous authors. Borwicz stresses that he was less interested in artistic criteria than a certain testimonial quality *vis-à-vis* the wartime period – a way of writing that signals a change in thinking about literature in times of crisis. It is at such times, he points out, that writing tends towards approximations – towards “the closest words” – which is to say,

well-known phrases and forms that best facilitate communication with the recipient. Borwicz's idea of reading literary works in the sociological and psychological context was an innovation at the time, defined recently by Polish literary researcher Piotr Mitzner as "the law of Borwicz". The immediate reception of Borwicz's work on the Holocaust would suggest that such an approach was ahead of its time; the anthology was considered to be a collection of texts without greater artistic value. In his introduction to the book, Borwicz builds an argument about the power of creativity in times of crisis – namely, that it plays a role in building psychological resistance. He goes on to explain how literary accounts tend to omit much of what happened during the war, largely due to Nazi efforts to obliterate the facts of the occupation, but also because of a general lack of knowledge about everyday life at that time. *The Song Will Survive...* thus plays an important role in documenting those experiences, from the loneliness faced by Jews in hiding to the fear of denouncement by one's neighbours, and from the persecution of Jews by the German occupiers to Polish indifference towards their fate, or even approval of the degradation of Jewish lives and systematic theft of their property. These and other topics can be found in poems by Władysław Szlengel (→ *What I Read to the Dead*), Mieczysław Jastrun (→ *A Human Matter*), Hadassy Estera Weiss, Gebirtig Mordche, and Czesław Miłosz (→ *Selected Poetry*). In a separate section, the anthology presents accounts of the pogrom in Kielce. These texts are of particular importance as they illustrate how the Holocaust continued after the war (Przymuszała, 2019).

### Main Topics and Problems

The anthology presents a cross section of wartime Jewish experience, from the perspective not only of life in the ghettos, but also of those in hiding, and of those deported to the camps. It shows the perspective of children as well as adults, of Jews as well as Poles, and of those who chose to rise up against the occupiers as well as those just trying to survive. Particularly noteworthy are the texts belonging to thematic cycles, such as the selection of poems by Władysław Szlengel (his collection → *What I Read to the Dead* survived the war, while Szlengel himself died during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), and texts by Stefania Ney (Stefania Grodzieńska) on the topic of children living in the ghetto. There are also larger selections from such works as *Bruderschaft with Death* (*Ze śmiercią na ty*) by Michał Borwicz, *Ghetto Dirges* (*Pieśni żałobne getta*) by Izabela Gelbard (under the pseudonym Czajka), and *The Guarded Hour* (*Godzina strzeżona*) by Mieczysław Jastrun, as well as his *Human Matter*. Szlengel's poems present the most extensive history of everyday life during the Holocaust, speaking to the experience of absolute loneliness but also the strength of those trapped behind the ghetto wall. His poems also highlight the contrasting experiences of Jews and Poles living under similar circumstances, deprived of elementary things that they need to survive or that they plan to trade in exchange for "Aryan papers". In *The Guardian's Key* (*Klucz u stróża*), Szlengel recalls seeing a Pole dressed in his own fur coat, a story that serves as an example of the way, in the new order, Poles were

able to enrich themselves at the expense of their Jewish neighbours. Equally important are texts that speak to uniquely Jewish experiences: *Conversation With a Child*, for instance, where a mother does not know how to present the picture of normal life to her child who has grown up in the ghetto. Szlengel also illustrates the reality of everyday death. In *Monument*, for example, a father returns with his son to an empty flat after an action in which his wife was taken: an empty pot around which they focused their shared life (literally and metaphorically) becomes her “monument” and also a sign of her absence. The texts of lesser-known authors also deserve our attention: *Two Jewish Women, Five of Them* (*Dwie żydówki, ich pięcioro*) by Hadessa Estera Weiss, for example, tells the heart-wrenching story of Jewish women who wander the streets in search of shelter, and about the girls handed over to the mayor. *To Mummy* (*Bełzec*) by eleven-year-old poet Janka Heschel describes the fear, anxiety, loneliness, and despair of life in the camps with an immediacy that can still be difficult to read. Some texts present the Jewish fate from the point of view of the guilt-ridden outsider: well-known poems such as *A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto and Campo dei Fiori* by Czesław Miłosz (→ *Selected Poetry*), for example, but also a poem by Stanisław Marczak-Oborski dedicated to the memory of Zuzanna Ginczanka, Warsaw in April 1943, in which he grieves “Here is the dying man / for whom I was not a brother”. In the final bitter lines of the poem the lyrical subject justifies the hatred that dying ghetto inhabitants may feel towards him, since he remains outside the ghetto walls – perhaps one of the strongest confessions of guilt in poetry.

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# The Sound of the Sundial (Zvuk slunečních hodin)

**Author:** Hana Andronikova

**First Published:** 2001

**Translations:** Belarusian (*Guk sonečnaga gadzinnika*, 2005); Hungarian (*A napóra hangja*, 2005); Bulgarian (*Zvucite na slánčevija časovnik*, 2006); English (*The Sound of the Sundial*, 2015).

**About the Author:** Hana Andronikova (1967–2011) was a Czech author and playwright. She was born in Zlín in Moravia, studied Czech and English at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, graduating in 1992. She worked as a personal manager, in 1999, she started devoting most of her time to writing, travelling and life coaching. She came down with cancer and unsuccessfully underwent natural treatment in the jungle in the Amazon Rainforest (see autobiographical motifs in the novel *Heaven Has No Bounds*). Her characters are usually depicted in exceptional situations withstanding the pressures of difficult life circumstances.

**Further Important Publications:** *Srdce na udici* (2002, A Man's Heart Is in His Fishing Tackle; short stories); *Nebe nemá dno* (2010, Heaven Has No Bounds; autobiographical novel); *Vzpomínky, co neuletí* (2014, Memories That Will Not Fly Away; collection of short stories).

## Content and Interpretation

The author remarks in the introduction: "This novel is fiction. It deals with historical documents (records from archives, old newspapers and reports, testimonies of witnesses) as well as with real characters which are modified and fade into fictional characters" (Andronikova, 2008, p. 4). At the end of the book, the literature concerning the Holocaust, World War II and mythology is listed (p. 301).

The novel is divided into 18 chapters. It begins with the background story in December of 1989 located in Breckenridge (Colorado in the U. S.). The main narrator of the story is Daniel Keppler, a Czech who has lived four decades in America. Now 68 years old, he is spending his winter holiday here with his family. By chance, the older owner of the small hotel, Anne Vanier, is also a Czech. It turns out that Anne was the best friend of Daniel's mother, Rachel during World War II when they both were imprisoned in Theresienstadt, in Auschwitz and in the forced labour camp in Hamburg. Daniel and Anne tell each other about their past. Their stories blend together and the background story of 1989 returns from time to time.

Daniel is the son of a construction engineer Thomas (Tomáš) Keppler who came from a half Czech and half German family and his wife Rachel from a Czech-German Jewish family. Thomas is hired by Baťa, a company, founded in the Moravian town of

Zlín that has become the largest shoe producer in the world. At the beginning of the 1930s, Thomas is charged with the building of a new production complex for Baťa near Calcutta, in India. After two years, Rachel and the little Daniel also move to India. They are shocked but also fascinated by the completely different climate, culture and mentality of Indian people. In February of 1939 Rachel receives a message that her parents in Prague are both seriously ill. Although Thomas doesn't want to visit the land threatened by the Nazis, Rachel insists on returning. Her parents die, the family moves back to Zlín. Thomas gets a new job in Argentina. Nevertheless, it is too late, the war breaks out and everyone must stay in the occupied Czech lands.

In January of 1944 Rachel, officially living in a "mixed marriage", is transported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Now in 1989 Daniel learns about her from Anne who had been Rachel's fellow prisoner and a younger friend. In Theresienstadt Rachel cares for old and sick people and gives lectures about history and mythology. Thomas intervenes with his German relatives and it is promised to him, his wife would not leave Theresienstadt. However, Rachel accompanies Anne to the transport to Auschwitz and so she is also incorporated into it. In Auschwitz, the living conditions of the prisoners are much worse. Anne has sex with a Polish prisoner-kapo to gain food and shoes. Later she is raped by an SS-guard. Both, Rachel and Anne, are able to leave Auschwitz for a labour camp in Hamburg. In April of 1945, they are transported to Bergen-Belsen that is soon liberated by the British army. Nevertheless, Rachel is too exhausted and weak, to make it home, so she dies on the way to Prague. Anne, like Rachel, is on the threshold of death but is saved by the American soldier Pete Vanier, her future husband. They move together to the U. S.

Also David as a *mischling* (half-breed) is threatened with deportation to Theresienstadt. His father fakes David's death from typhus, his old friend doctor Bartošík makes a death certificate out and David survives the rest of the war in hiding. After the war, Thomas Keppler, desperate about the death of his wife as well as the power of the communists, emigrates with his son David to Toronto, Canada. David studies law and marries a Canadian girl. Only after many years he learns about the last months of his mother's life.

The novel can be interpreted as a typical postmodern work. Various narratives, levels of time and genres are blended here: the exotic novel about India, the Holocaust novel and the stories of romance and tragic love (Thomas and Rachel, Anne and the musician Gideon Klein in Theresienstadt, the SS-man Pestek and the Jewess René in Auschwitz). The novel contains many documents about the war and the Shoah. Some of these are real actual documents, some are fictional creations of the author's imagination (for instance news from Czech newspapers proving the Nazi persecution of the Jews or the diary of Pete Vanier, the American soldier fighting in Europe).

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Hana Andronikova wrote her novel from 1998 to 1999, shortly after the genocide in Srebrenica in Bosnia (July 1995) and during the war in Kosovo (1998–1999). So both

main themes of the work, the clash of civilisations and cultures in India on the one hand and the Holocaust in Europe on the other hand, can be seen as a parallel to these contemporary events.

The sundial from the title of the book and the Sun appear several times in the text. Rachel who is interested in fairy tales and myths, tells her son the Aztec story about the origin of the Sun (pp. 51–52), about the tribe of Mixtecs in Mexico and the Sun (pp. 67–68) and the love of the Sun for a human girl, that she remembers later in Auschwitz (pp. 185–186). At the end, David similarly recalls the sundial in Jantar Mantar in India, the biggest sundial in the world. According to Olga Zitová, these images present a paradox of the period of time during the war. These and other tales intend to instill hope, that the story of Keppler family and the Holocaust in general will be not forgotten (Zitová, 2014, p. 310). While depicting Rachel's dying, the narrator (or the author) comments: "We are stories. We are myths and fairy tales. We are poetry. Our lives are books" (Andronikova, 2008, p. 281).

Many real characters, mainly in Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, appear in the novel, like the SS officers and guards Karl Rahm, Josef Mengele and Maria Mandl, the Jewish prisoners Egon Redlich, Rafael Schächter, Karel Švenk and Gideon Klein in Theresienstadt, René Neumann or Alma Rosé, niece of Gustav Mahler, in Auschwitz.

In *The Sound of the Sundial* some important topics and motifs of Holocaust literature can be found. For instance, it is naivety of Rachel who does not believe that the Nazi persecution of the Jews will be so brutal. It is in contrast with her pragmatic husband Thomas refusing to return to the Czech lands in 1939. Another motif is scepticism about God, his omnipotence and his existence at all. While her Orthodox Jewish parents prohibit Rachel her relationship to the "goy" Thomas, she is convinced God must be thickheaded and dogmatic. Later Anne, Pete and Rachel ask the question how it is possible that God allows the brutal killing and death of so many innocent victims. See Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Viktor Fischl's novel → *Court Jesters*, Otto Weiss' short story → *And God Saw That It Was Bad*, Emil Knieža's novel → *The Sixth Battalion, On Guard!* or Hana Bořkovcová's novel → *A Private Conversation*. Also the traumatic return of survivors and their feelings of guilt (Anne) is a common motif in Holocaust literature. Not so frequent are the characters of the "good Germans", who meet Rachel and Anne mainly in Hamburg (pp. 190 and 233) → *Death Is Called Engelchen* (Ladislav Mňačko).

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JH

## St. Elizabeth's Square (Námestie svätej Alžbety)

**Author:** Rudolf Jašík

**First Published:** 1958

**Translations:** Czech (*Náměstí svaté Alžběty*, 1960); English (*St. Elizabeth's Square*, 1964); French (*Place Sainte-Elisabeth*, 1966); Ukrainian (*Majdan svjatoji Alžbety*, 1971); German (*Die Liebenden vom St. Elisabeth Platz*, 1974).

**Film Adaptation:** *Námestie svätej Alžbety* (St. Elizabeth's Square), feature film, screenplay Štefan Sokol; film director Vladimír Bahna, premiered the 28th of January, 1966.

**About the Author:** Rudolf Jašík (1919–1960) was born in Turzovka in the Northwestern Slovakian region of Kysuce. He grew up in a poor family without a father. He studied at high school, but he had to interrupt his studies for financial reasons. He worked as a labourer in Zlín (1935–1938). In 1938–1940, he was unemployed and imprisoned for Communist agitation. From 1940 he had to serve in the Slovak army. 1941 he was taken to the Eastern Front where Slovakia, as an ally of Germany fought, against the Russians (he served in Crimea and Caucasus, these experiences are reflected in his unfinished trilogy *The Dead Don't Sing*). The Slovak army sentenced him to death in Russia for sabotage, but then he received amnesty. From 1943 to 1944 he worked for the Slovak radio. In 1944, he participated in the Slovak National Uprising against the Nazis and the collaborationist government. After World War II, he worked as a journalist in Slovakia, museum inspector in Nitra etc. He held important positions in public and in the Communist Party. In his prose, he often returned to his childhood in Kysuce and to the war.

**Further Important Works:** *Mŕtvi nespievajú* (1961, *The Dead Don't Sing*; novel); *Čierne a biele kruhy* (1961, *Black and White Circles*; short stories).

### Content and Interpretation

The novel is set in a small town in Slovakia during World War II. The town “under the hill with a vineyard” suggests Nitra in Southern Slovakia. The temporal setting of the story is from the summer to autumn of 1941 .

In the foreground of the novel is a tragic love story of two young people, the eighteen-year-old Slovak Igor Hamor and seventeen-year-old Jew Eva Weimannová. There are presented the pure love of two young people on the one hand, and “rusty time” of Slovak clerical Fascist regime supported by the Nazis on the other hand.

Igor and Eva stay close to each other at the edge of the town and like to meet in the tower of the church at St. Elizabeth's Square. Igor comes from a very poor family, he lives with his sick mother and survives on occasional side jobs, for instance for the

barber Flórik, that becomes the officer of the local Hlinka Guard (the Slovak Fascist organisation). He admires his school fellow "Yellow Dodo" (wearing a yellow cap) from the underworld, but feels disgust about his dishonesty. Eva's father Samko and his partner Maxi, the Jews, own a little carriage. The situation changes when the Slovak government declares hard anti-Jewish regulations. Jews are marked with a yellow star, they lose their civil rights and the "aryanisation" begins, the expropriation of Jewish property.

Because Igor is a good person at heart and loves Eva, he tries to save her. He wants to marry her, but laws prohibit "mixed marriages". The Roman Catholic priest is willing to give her confirmation that Eva has been baptised. Nevertheless, he demands a bribe of 10 thousand crowns.

"Yellow Dodo" becomes an informer. He denounces wealthy Jews, which allegedly don't wear the yellow star. The secretary of the guard acquires their property.

The desperate Igor is looking for a big amount of money. He attempts to get money by stealing some jewellery. However, the bracelet that he has taken is only from gypsum. The young rich woman Erna Summerová that once seduced Igor, refuses to help him, as well as Eva's father Samko who is too stingy. After Igor's mother dies, Maxi, Samko's business partner, sells his two horses, and helps Igor. But now the priest refuses to baptise Eva. Shoemaker Maguš, a socialist, advises the young couple to escape into the mountains where Maguš's brother will provide housing and where no one knows them. However, it is too late, the first 300 Jews from the town are gathered for the transport and Eva is among them.

Most Slovak guards try to avoid this action, therefore the Jews are watched by the German SS-men. Igor can only look helplessly on, as the German Major shoots a little Jewish boy to whom the officer has cunningly offered chocolate. Eva and two young Jewish men decide to take the boy's body away. They are also all shot dead. (This scene is not in the film version. In the film Igor pulls Eva out of the closed wagon. They run away and Eva is shot by the guards.)

Flórik cheats the rich Jew Heller with a promise to take him across the border. Flórik murders him and his family to take possession of their house and property. Eva's desperate father Samko, his wife and their son poison themselves with the strychnine. Igor wants to avenge Eva's death and kills Flórik with an iron rod. He then intends to kill himself, but the shoemaker Maguš saves him.

The novel is based on a romantic stylisation. It can be labelled as a ballad or a tragic romance. That's why the characters are quite clearly divided into positive and negative. Igor, Eva, Maguš and also Maxi on the one hand, the Slovak guards and German soldiers, Yellow Dodo, the rich Jews like Heller as well as the stingy Samko (who likes money more than his own daughter) are on the other hand. The Jews except for Maxi wear their stars humble like sheep. "The outcasts had learnt obedience. There was no resistance over there, in the corner, in the sheep-fold" (Jašík, 1964, p. 244). Most Slovaks laugh at guards and Hitler, but they behave passively. Igor did the only act of rebellion by killing the repulsive collaborator Flórik.

### Main Topics and Problems

The novel was inspired in part by an autobiographical experience. In September of 1941, the so-called “Jewish Codex” was declared in Slovakia. The rights of the Jews were substantially restricted. The figure of Yellow Dodo could be based on many different informers who reported Jews to the Slovak authorities to get money and property (Lônčíková, Nižňánsky, 2016). After the first edition of the novel in 1958 in Slovak, the author shortened and modified the text for the Czech edition in 1960.

The story is presented by an authorial narrator. The narrator knows everything about the past and future events in the fictional world, he comments on situations and behaviour of the characters, asks rhetorical questions and anticipates the development of the story.

The inner voices of the characters are also used. Unlike dialogues, they are clarified by only single quotation marks ( , ‘ ). Non-living objects and things are often personified, like the tower and bells on St. Elizabeth’s Square: the tower “slim and wise” is happy “to harbor the lovers”. On the other hand, people are frequently compared to animals. So Yellow Dodo has “snake eyes“, is similar to a wolf; also Erna has “snake green eyes”; Flórik has “devilish black” hair. Germans are spiders, wolves, insects. Jews resemble sheep; Eva is similar to a caught small mouse. The whole town is depicted as ugly, black and dangerous. It seems to be a jungle where it is impossible to hide from the hunters. Against all this, the pure, exalted and glorified love of both protagonists is presented.

The novel was successful with critics and readers, because it overcame the schematic images of World War II depicted as a heroic struggle against fascism. Some critics have pointed out that the imaginative symbolism of the novel is often conventional and only decorative (Mráz, 1969, pp. 210 and 213). Flórik’s triple robbery murder and burying of bodies at the end of the novel is inconsistent with his cowardly and cautious nature. Also the sneaky murder of a small Jewish child by the German Major is not believable. Nevertheless, it can be a part of the romantic balladic nature of the story.

St. Elizabeth’s Square continues the topic of some previous Slovak novels, mainly Dominik Tatarka’s → *The Clerical Republic* (1948). However, Jewish characters don’t play such an important role in Tatarka’s work. Jan Otčenášek’s Czech novella → *Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness* was published 1958, in the same year as *St. Elizabeth’s Square*. It also depicts a love between an Aryan (Czech) boy and a Jewish girl in the time of the war and Shoah with a tragic end: the death of the girl (Forst, 1974). Compared to Otčenášek, Jašík emphasises the important role of Jewish property and aryanisation. While in the Czech lands the Germans gained through aryanisation, in Slovakia the Slovaks did the same.

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JH

# The Stein Brothers Are in Town (Ve městě jsou bratři Steinové)

**Author:** Věra Kalábová

**First Published:** 1967

**About the Author:** Věra Kalábová (1932–1993) was born in New York City. She spent her childhood in Slovakia. In 1958, she started working at the Prague Film Studio Barrandov as a producer and screenwriter. In the 1960s she took part in the production of well-known films, also with the Holocaust topics, like *The Fifth Horseman Is Fear* (1964; → *Without Beauty, without a Collar*), *I, Justice* (1967) or → *The Cremator* (film 1969, novel 1967).

The novel *The Stein Brothers Are in Town*, which was positively accepted by critics, was her debut. Her second novel *The Present Time of Past Things* (1969, Přítomný čas věcí minulých) presents topics of guilt and responsibility, similar to *The Stein Brothers Are in Town*. Kalábová also wrote TV dramas and radio plays.

## Content and Interpretation

The novel is set in a small unnamed town in West of Slovakia on the border with Moravia. The actual time of narration is situated about 20 years after World War II. Nevertheless, the key events have happened during the war and readers learn about them in flashbacks. The novel is narrated in the third person with alternated and limited points of view. There are two main characters, Hřebíček and Benčo.

The first one is Jozef Hřebíček, a decent but restrained man, an opponent to fascism and the clerofascist Slovak regime. Up until the local Jews' deportation, he was friendly with two of the Jewish inhabitants of the town, the Stein brothers. Imrich Stein was a butcher, his younger brother Hans a medical student. In December 1942, during the night when the Jews from the town were transported to Auschwitz, Hřebíček saw the preparation of this deportation from a distance. The next day he found a witness, a Hungarian woman Néryová, who had a bad reputation of being a “troll”. From her window, she watched the Slovak guardsmen bringing the Jews to the square, searching them for their valuables and also brutally beating and stabbing both of the Stein brothers. She recognised eight Slovak Hlinka guardsmen from the town. After the war, nobody from the local Jews returned home. Hřebíček swore revenge and testified against the guardsmen in court. However, only one of the eight men was convicted, the others fled or avoided the punishment. Mrs Néryová refused to testify. Public opinion condemned Hřebíček because he testified against “our people”, he was sarcastically called the Avenger.

The second of the two main characters is Ferdinand Benčo. He is Hřebíček's antagonist, an ambitious teacher who became an important official of the Hlinka Guard and director of the school during the clerofascist regime. He was involved in the beating and robbing of deported Jews. Thanks to Hřebíček's testimony, he has been sen-

tenced to four years in prison. After his release, he is bitter and hates the current Czechoslovak regime. He has endured several heart attacks, is almost helpless, and dependent on his wife.

Now, at the time of narration in the 1960s, a message comes that both Stein brothers are returning to town. The past is unexpectedly coming back to haunt them. Some inhabitants of the town are afraid, because they have stolen Jewish property. See Jana Juráňová's → *A Pending Matter* or Radka Denemarková's → *Money from Hitler*. They have brutally beaten and almost even killed both brothers to learn where they had had their gold and valuables. On the other hand, Hrebíček and a few others expect the Stein brothers to bring justice at last.

Finally, the message of the Steins' arrival turns out to be false. The alleged Steins will prove to be distant relatives of the town's inhabitants coming from Australia.

### Main Topics and Problems

At the beginning of the novel, there is a motto, the quote written by the Italian political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli in the 16th century: "If an injury has to be done to a man, it should be so severe that his vengeance need not be feared" (Kalábová, 1967, p. 5).

The themes of the novel are crime, guilt, revenge and justice. The first sentence (as well as the title of the work) reads "The Stein brothers are in town" (p. 5). Hrebíček and everybody in town assume the Steins will seek revenge for the injustice done to them. So a dramatic story unfolds. The use of this narrative device can be similar to adventure novels or films, mainly to so-called revenge stories (*The Mark of Zorro*, 1920; American or Italian westerns like *High Noon*, 1953; *Once Upon a Time in the West*, 1968 etc.). Here, a lonely honest man is fighting against villains who have committed a crime.

However, unlike adventure films or westerns, Věra Kalábová's story does not end with the retribution, victory of justice and defeat of criminals. One of the last scenes can even be seen as an ironic allusion to westerns' quick-draw duels: while Hrebíček is riding a bicycle he meets his opponent Benčo who wants to hide, but has a heart attack. Benčo's wife asks Hrebíček for help and he brings Benčo to the hospital.

Also the distribution of positive and negative characters is not as clear as in westerns or criminal stories. Hrebíček, the "Avenger", is an honest man but he doesn't have courage enough to hide a radio which the Steins entrust him, or to go to the mountains to fight against the fascists. The only one who defends the innocence of Jews in public, is the Catholic chaplain Majer. After the deportation of the Jews, he preaches about Cain and Abel, and compares Abel's killing with the fate of the Jews. Majer is punished, and sent to the Eastern Front. He later gives up his priesthood and leaves town.

After the war, former guardsmen and fascists, apologise for their inhuman actions: "We didn't invent the transporting of the Jews. That was the law. Today there are different laws, we obey them again, that's all what a little man can do..." (p. 51).

This argument about the powerlessness of a little man appears often in Czech or Slovak novels about the Holocaust, e.g. Dominik Tatarka's → *The Clerical Republic*, Hana Bělohradská's → *Without Beauty, without a Collar* or Ladislav Grosman's → *The Shop on Main Street*. As the narrator of *The Stein Brothers Are in Town* states, guilt slowly moves from the muddy small Slovak town to Nuremberg.

After the war, the little men mostly adapted to the new standards. People argued, the Jews were rich and exploited poor Slovaks. Former fascists have prominent offices and positions again. So Janek Klapáč, a member of the Fascist Hlinka's Youth, denounced his neighbours during the war, for instance Hrebíček because he did not contribute to *Winterhilfe* for Nazi soldiers. Klapáč later made a career for himself in the Communist regime.

The author knew the Slovak society and mentality very well. It is also manifested in some Slovakisms in the Czech text ("hradská" / road; "hladný" / hungry).

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JH

# The Subtenant (Sublokatorka)

**Author:** Hanna Krall

**First Published:** 1985 (exile edition in Paris); re-print Cracow 1985, Lodz 1987, official edition: Warsaw 1989.

**Translations:** German (*Die Untermieterin*, 1986); Dutch (*De Onderhuurster*, 1987); English (*The Subtenant*, 1987); Hebrew (*Dayeret mishneh*, 1989); French (*Le sous-locataire*, 1994).

**Theatre Adaptations:** Kluby Inteligencji Katolickiej, directed by Zofia Kucówna, monodrama based on *The Subtenant* (Poland, 1983); Teatr Śląski im. Stanisława Wyspiańskiego, directed by Jan Maciejowski 1989; Staatstheater, Hannover (Germany, 2004), *Macbeth*, directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, Katowice (Poland, 1989), fragments of *The Subtenant* were used.

**Film Adaptation:** *Blind Chance* (Przypadek; 1981, directed by Krzysztof Kieślowski, a figure from *The Subtenant* was used [Werner]).

**Further Important Publications:** *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* (1977, Shielding the Flame; reportage with the elements of documentary novel and interview); *Hipnoza* (1989, Hypnosis, reportages); *Taniec na cudzym weselu* (1993, Dancing at Someone Else's Wedding; documentary stories); *Dowody na istnienie* (1995, → *Proofs of Existence*); *Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki* (1998, There is No River There Anymore; reportages); *To ty jesteś Daniel* (2001, So You Are Daniel; documentary stories); *Wyjątkowo długa linia* (2004, An Exceptionally Long Line; novel); *Król kier znów na wylocie* (2006, Chasing the King of Hearts, novel).

**About the Author:** Hanna Krall (born between 1935 and 1937) is a writer and journalist of Jewish origin. Her works revolve around the Shoah and the fate of Polish Jews. She has a degree in journalism from the Warsaw University. In 1955, she started to work as an editor for *Życie Warszawy* daily; later she also cooperated with *Polityka* weekly and "Tor" film studio. She made a name for herself for an interview with Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, entitled *Shielding the Flame* (1977).

## Content and Interpretation

Hanna Krall's novel *The Subtenant* was to be published in 1984 but it was intercepted by censors. The novel's plot starts in Warsaw in 1939, during the German occupation, and finishes during martial law imposed in 1981.

The novel starts with an account of a meeting. The book's protagonist does not have memories, documents or graves of her ancestors. She realises her sense of defi-

ciency. She reminisces a pang of jealousy when she receives a letter written by a soldier who accompanied her father, Major Krall, in his last moments. She started to create a new identity, narrating various stories reflecting her father's heroism and patriotism.

The narrating protagonist ponders the meaning of brightness and darkness. She looks for other examples like Cain and Abel, Mary and Martha and popular literary figures. To her, the difference between the definition of brightness and darkness has become obvious. The protagonist's friend opposes the distinction between the bright and the dark. The protagonist asks if the bright are uncomfortable when they pretend to be dark. This is a reference to individuals with a soft spot for Jews and their culture, who miss it. However, the narrator whose name appears to be Maria, attempts to create an alternative bright lineage. From that moment on, various hypothetical scenarios of the Major's life are presented. In the course of spinning the yarn about her family, she comments on the apartment: "There is really no way to avoid this apartment and the meeting between me, the Major's daughter, and the other one" (Krall, 1992, p. 16). The other one, the protagonist's "dark" *alter ego* is a Jewish girl hidden by a Polish family during the German occupation behind a closet. The narrator describes the rules of the house and the girl's harrowing experience.

Every year, on 5 May, the narrator and the subtenant travel to Majdanek concentration camp. Through this repeated ritual, the protagonist intends to restore the memory of people deprived of it in the Shoah (Wołk, 2005, pp. 296–299; Tatar, 2016, pp. 40–45).

The tenant and the subtenant went their separate ways during the Warsaw Uprising. It turns out that this dramatic moment in Polish history poses the only opportunity for the Polish and the Jewish fates to unite. They met again after the war. The tenant visits the subtenant in an orphanage near Warsaw. For a moment, the subtenant actually has a name: Marta.

On 28 June 1956 she found herself in Poznan when demonstrations of workers started. Just like during the Warsaw Uprising, she felt one with the protesting crowd. The narrator came back in March 1968. Delighted with communism, she stood up for Jews, expressing herself in the only form acceptable at that time: "This is not the Marxist way [...] Antisemitism is at odds with our ideology" (Krall, 1992, p. 96). At night, she talked with the subtenant, and the sense of fright from childhood made its way back. The subtenant confessed: "Fear is the only thing I am afraid of" (p. 96).

The narrator was admitted to doctoral studies in victimology in order to explore and understand the concepts of brightness and darkness. The narrator saw the subtenant for the last time on 13 December 1981 when martial law was introduced in Poland.

The author describes the relations between Poles and Jews, the issue of their co-existence after the Shoah, the experiences of individuals of Jewish origin in Communist Poland (Mandziej, 1998, pp. 87–90). The novel's narrative is fragmentary, takes many courses with numerous plots and episodes supplemented with narrative com-

ments. The conditional mood is frequently used in order to depict the diverse scenarios of the events (p. 93). As the summary shows, the stories are superimposed while the numerous plots create a sense of chaos. The author is unwilling to talk about herself, entrusting the protagonists with her story (Wołk, 2005, pp. 294–296; Kowalska-Leder, 2009, p. 244; Tatar, 2016, p. 30). She breaks the novel's structure, subordinating it to the categories of brightness and darkness (Tatar, 2016, pp. 29–58). The narrator is a survivor of the Shoah and she received the author's name. She suggests that she is a person from another world, a bright person. The author designates her to speak. The subtenant has not been offered this opportunity. Her biography is subjected to de-privatisation (Wołk, 2005, p. 298). The history of the Shoah survivor is contrasted with a Polish life story. The narrator attempts to modify her father's biography to ensure that it belongs to the world of the bright. The author works on her theory of brightness and darkness according to which brightness is associated with a better part of fate, with being Polish (Maria, Major Krall) while darkness symbolises the inferior part, being Jewish (Marta, Bernard Rajnicz). In fact, the narrator is split into two different persons: she is the tenant (Maria) who belongs to the world of the bright, and the subtenant (Marta) from the world of darkness. It is a “mark of internal decomposition of a survivor” (Wołk, 2005, p. 294). The relations between the tenant and the subtenant are asymmetrical, not equivalent. Their lives are variants of a biography which are subjected to the criterion of brightness and blackness – a better or a worse life (Krall et al., 2014, p. 16; Krall, 2021a, pp. 58–59) as it was the case of the Mary and Martha in gospels. This becomes obvious at the end of the text when the narrator writes about the subtenant as about herself. The protagonist's double identity illustrates split personalities of the Shoah survivors incapable of navigating between Polish and Jewish identities.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

The novel's genre is hard to qualify unambiguously because it is polymorphic, combining elements of a novel, a diary and an autobiography. The author drew on the techniques applied in the reportage. It seems that a traditional novel would not be able to contain the experiences related to the Shoah. To a large extent, the plot is based on real life stories: the author has used both her own biography and the stories of people she met through her profession. In her novel, Krall created the protagonists on the life stories of real people disguised as fictional characters. The boundary between reality and fiction remains unclear. The author uses numerous intrusions of meta-textual nature, irony and repetitions; she also skilfully shows a range of emotions faced by the protagonist. She uses a reporter's techniques, making accounts of the events, without commenting on them. She shows the details which make the world real, the adoption of the human perspective, immersion in the past and rescuing it from oblivion, looking to the future. It is also the author's reflection on the writing techniques and rules as well as an attitude to life: the girl saved from the Shoah “decides to survive”, “separate herself from the world and unnecessary sadness”,

“train herself for brightness, living through darkness through and through” and in this experience combine what is incompatible.

One of the issues presented in the novel is the life of people of Jewish origin after the Shoah and subjected to antisemitism in Poland. The author analyses the problem of being a Jew among Poles, confronting emotions and sensations. The novel is a “study of the Jewish heart” which wants to operate in the Polish society in a rightful way (Mandziej, 1998, p. 88). A sense of “being a subtenant” is palpable and accompanied by exclusion, alienation, lack of belonging. Only when everyone is stripped of their sense of safety, are they united. The readers are left with a question if Jews in Poland will always feel like subtenants.

In her novel, the author also touches upon the issue of children saved from the Shoah.

Equally interesting is the issue of Bernard Rajnicz, an avid communist and a Jew, probably persecuted in March 1968, a Solidarity movement activist arrested during martial law.

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# The Suitcase (Walizka)

**Author:** Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk

**First Published:** in *Dialog. Miesięcznik poświęcony dramaturgii współczesnej*, (9), 2008.

**Translations:** French (*La valise de Pantofelnik*, 2009); English (*The Suitcase*, 2011); Czech (*Kufr*, 2012); Romanian (*Valiza*, 2011); German (*Der Koffer*, 2015); Russian (*Če-modan*, 2015); Slovak (*Kufor*, 2012); Slovenian (*Kovocek*, 2015).

**Theatre Adaptations:** Polish Theatre in Poznań (2009); Jewish Theatre in Warsaw (2011); Rainbow Stage in Warsaw (2014).

**Radio Adaptation:** Polish Radio Theatre, 2nd Programme of Polish Radio (audioplay, 2008).

**About the Author:** Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk (1964) spent the first years of her life in Moscow, where she finished secondary school and started journalistic studies at Lomonosov University. She is a graduate of the Faculty of Journalism, political science and gender studies at the University of Warsaw, as well as the Screenwriting School at the Lodz Film School. She writes plays, film scripts, opera librettos, and musicals. The texts of her plays have been translated into many languages.

**Further Important Publications:** *Szajba* (The Crazyness, 2006; play); *Śmierć Człowieka-Wiewiórki* (The Death of Squirrel-Man, 2007; play); *Burmistrz* (The Mayor, 2009; play); *Zaginiona Czechosłowacja* (The Lost Czechoslovakia, 2009; play).

## Content and Interpretation

*The Suitcase* is based on the true story, described in the newspapers, of a French Jew who survived the war as a small child. François, the main character of the play, has never met his father, Leo Pantofelnik, a French Jew who was deported during the war to Auschwitz where he died in the gas chamber. Only a few years old, his son survived, but he has never seen a photograph of his father and his name has been changed. Already as an adult, he feels an acute and inescapable emptiness. He tries writing letters to his father, to engage him in dialogue, but there is nowhere to send them: “Where are you? Please come back immediately – writes the main character in one of the letters. – Tell me all the stories I’ve been deprived of. Please, also connect me to this pipe that pumps water from the source of our national culture” (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 2011, p. 102).

François was brought up by a loving stepfather who gave him his new name but was unable to fill the gap. A breakthrough comes when, at the instigation of his wife, Francois goes to the Holocaust Museum, where he discovers a suitcase on loan from

the museum in Auschwitz signed with his father's name Jewish property. This unambiguous trace of Leo Pantofelnik's existence gives a new direction to François' life, allowing him to understand who he is and begin to overcome the feeling that he is living a "deceived life".

The play is narrated by a character named simply "Narrator", assisted by his beloved Jacqueline, François' answering machine. Young, unconventional characters bring the story closer to the contemporary viewer, filling it with irony and a sense of the absurd, with dynamic shifts of tone and, in particular, black humour. At the beginning, Narrator warns the audience that though the story is intended as a serious gesture, it will be disrupted at times by humour, not to mention singing, at the most unexpected moments. Both Narrator and Jacqueline describe the Holocaust Museum as a marketing scheme, which might be construed as an ironic allusion to the stereotype of the huckster Jew. "What's *not* here! – they shout. – This is a museum of surprises" (p. 99), continuing in a sarcastic tone, "When the patron of the museum, the Holocaust, appears in the form of a suitcase, a shoe or a pair of broken glasses, then it is the safest form of 'surviving' the kind of Holocaust which is not in the Museum" (p. 99).

The path that François traverses is a metaphorical journey to his own identity, given in an expressionist, sometimes lyrical form that was favourably received by theatre critics and audiences.

François manages finally to free himself from the overwhelming emptiness when he decides to open the suitcase, filled as it is with memories of the past, and – for a brief moment, metaphorically – meet his father. He also meets himself as a whole person for the first time, with the prospect of continuing his life in its completeness, and no longer as "half a life". "I'm here, – he says. – My name is François Pantofelnik" (p. 107). However, the final scene is nothing like a happy ending. While getting to the truth about the past turns out to be a godsend for François, for other characters of the play the memory of the Holocaust is too heavy a burden. François' mother, appearing only in his narration, is not able to face the destructive memories and chooses to escape. Similarly, a "desperate guide" in the Holocaust Museum quits her job because constant contact with the belongings of the victims gives her a nervous breakdown. It is from her perspective that Sikorska-Miszczuk questions the role of museums dedicated to the Holocaust, which tend to preserve suffering in thousands of material exhibits – shoes, suitcases, glasses. "The bishop was right when he said: To forgive, one must forget," she blurts out. "Let's throw away everything in this museum! Bury and burn it [...] Let's stop remembering" (p. 107). "It is unbearable," she exclaims countless times. Paradoxically, the discovery of Pantofelnik's suitcase brings relief also to the desperate guide, because she can finally get rid of this item – one more thing not to remember –, and she hopes one day the other exhibition items will disappear in a similar fashion, releasing everybody from an unbearable situation. This though suggests a way for everyone to fulfil their destinies: if they opened their own suitcase of memories, perhaps everyone could live fuller lives.

### Main Topics and Problems

The play takes up the current problems of the psychological difficulties faced by second generation Holocaust survivors. As the Narrator claims, “The collapse is still going on, despite the fact that successive generations say that it is over and gone, and no longer concerns them” (p. 103). The play poses questions – but no clear answers – about how to memorialise the Holocaust, and how to deal with the feeling of emptiness. What are the consequences of avoiding the source of trauma? What are the consequences of facing it? As Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk herself commented:

*The Suitcase* is a play about the process of healing the baggage of memories, often unwanted but existing and living in us whether we like it or not, of healing everything we have inside. We can carry our suitcases without opening them, and so live in a kind of “half-life” and in incompleteness. *The Suitcase* is a story of a single man who cuts himself off from part of himself, although it is a part of his own identity. This play also concerns the topic of social memory. We do not want to discover the truth, to open suitcases full of painful facts. *The Suitcase* is about faith in the healing power of truth. (Dąbek, 2019)

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# Sweet Theresienstadt (Sladký Theresienstadt)

**Author:** Arnošt Goldflam

**First Published:** 1996, premiered 1996

**Theatre Adaptation:** Theatre Archa (1996), Prague.

**About the Author:** Arnošt Goldflam (1946) comes from a Czech-Austrian-Polish Jewish family, his parents survived the Holocaust. He is a playwright, theatre director, novelist and actor writing for children and adults. In 1977, he graduated from Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts (Brno). In 2007, he was appointed professor at the Theatre Academies in Prague and Brno. Jewish topics and the Holocaust play an important role in his works. For instance, he adapted several Franz Kafka's works for theatre (*The Metamorphosis*, 1989; *The Trial*, 1989; and *The Judgment*, 1991). He also took part as a screenwriter in two TV documentary films which contained his interviews with Czech, Slovakian and German Jews who had emigrated from Czechoslovakia to Israel, *Lost Home* (Ztracený domov) and *Found Home* (Domov nalezený), both 1996.

**Further Important Publications:** *Písek* (1986, Sand, play); *Smlouva* (1999, The Contract, play); *Osudy a jejich pán* (2005, The Fates and their Lord, short stories); *Doma u Hitlerů* (2007, → *At Home with the Hitlers. The Hitler's Kitchen*, play); *Standa a dům hrůzy* (2008, Standa and a House of Horror, stories for children).

## Content and Interpretation

The play consists of 17 scenes. Except for the first, all of them are set in the Theresienstadt Ghetto during World War II. The main character is a young Czech Jewish journalist Mahner. After a moving farewell between him and his Aryan girlfriend Maria (Mařenka), the play depicts Mahner's life in Theresienstadt. Because Mahner holds a prominent position in the ghetto, he has enough food and his own room. Therefore, he is an attractive partner for the young women. In the ghetto, Mahner lives first with Martha, later with Schura. Schura was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Mahner finds a new girlfriend, Tercha (Terča), and after Tercha's deporting he lives with Truda.

Mahner keeps telling each new girlfriend that Maria is his one true love, and "in spite of everything", he is being faithful to her in spirit. Maria appears to him as a vision and Mahner tries to explain his situation to her. At last Mahner is also deported from Theresienstadt Ghetto to a death camp. He leaves with the illusion he is going to a work camp, and believes in an early end to the war and that he will be liberated. He says that Theresienstadt "was not so bad" and he had had some "wonderful moments" there.

The second main figure in the play is Kurt Gerroldt, a German Jewish prisoner and actor who is filming a “documentary” in Theresienstadt under instructions of the Nazis. Gerroldt lives in the delusion that he has become an important and indispensable personality for the Nazis (“today, when they need me, they cannot live without me”). The life of delusions that the protagonists create for themselves connects both characters, Gerroldt as well as Mahner.

The perversity of Gerroldt’s filming is pronounced in some scenes. In a scene that should be reminiscent of slapstick, the prisoners kick each other on the backside. Gerroldt’s assistant is not satisfied with their performance, and he kicks one prisoner so hard, that he falls to the ground and does not get back up. The assistant laughs, while the prisoner is pulled away and replaced by another man. In the seventh scene there are shots of the children’s opera *Brundibár*, which was really played in the ghetto and recorded on film. There is a baker and a milkman in the opera. Child actors who are starving, become sick to their stomach. Later Gerroldt and his crew film in a hospital ward. Mahner’s father is also there. Gerroldt films a “visiting the sick” scene and does not stop, even when Mahner’s father dies.

The fourteenth scene of the play shows a conflict between Gerroldt and Mahner. Gerroldt reproaches Mahner for his fickleness in love. Mahner was filmed two different times each with a different woman.

Mahner: All of us are trying to survive. I just pick up women, I sleep with them, give them and myself the feeling, that we’re at home, the feeling we’re living [...]. But I’m not lying, you know. I’m not lying to the entire world.

Gerroldt: Sir. Sir! You know what the title of the film will be? The Führer Gave a Town to the Jews! [...] It’s such an important film I’m making! Do you understand this? [...] Personal morality is something completely different from... public... presentation!

(Goldflam, 2001, pp. 222–224)

Paradoxically, Ruhm, the Nazi commander of the ghetto also interprets the separation of personal and public morality. He doesn’t argue, however, about the meaning of the artwork, but about the national historical necessity. He had “nothing personally against the Jews”.

This reference to an allegedly higher moral duty can be understood as the wider and more general sense of Goldflam’s play. Impersonal responsibility which refers to “higher interests”, is a danger that threatens not only the executors of power and violence in a totalitarian society, but to a certain extent, every citizen in every society. According to the American reviewer Elinor Fuchs, Goldflam’s play “lacks noble victims and obviously brutal persecutors” (Fuchs, 1997).

Goldflam managed to connect the authenticity, the tragic hopelessness and the grotesque. The grotesque is often associated with brutality.

### Main Topics and Problems

The play *Sweet Theresienstadt* subtitled *The Führer Gave a Town to the Jews* (Vůdce daroval Židům město) is based on documents about life in the Theresienstadt ghetto, the biggest Nazi Jewish camp in Bohemia. The main inspiration for the play was the Theresienstadt diary of the former journalist Willy Otto Mahler (1909–1945, named Willy Mahner in the play). Willy Mahler was a distant relative of the well-known composer Gustav Mahler.

This diary has not yet been published for ethical reasons. Mahler had a privileged position among the prisoners in Theresienstadt. He had a separate room from May 1944, which was a luxury in Theresienstadt where there were only two square meters per prisoner. He could participate in various cultural events and, in contrast to the other prisoners, he was never hungry. Mahler narrates, often sardonically, many events in his diary including his egoistic behaviour and his erotic adventures.

Girls who fell in love with him had also privileged positions in Theresienstadt. However, each new girl only lasted a few months as she was destined to be transported. At the end of September 1944, Willy Mahler was transported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. During selection in Auschwitz, he was chosen for forced labour and sent to the concentration camp in Dachau where he died in January 1945.

Goldflam originally wrote the play inspired only by Mahler's diary. In the second version of the play there was also another source of inspiration: the story about the filming of a propaganda documentary in Theresienstadt. The film was prepared after the so-called "beautification" (*Verschönerungsaktion*) of Theresienstadt, which was associated with the visit of a Red Cross delegation to Theresienstadt in June 1944. It completely falsified the situation of the Jews in Theresienstadt. Their life was arranged to give the appearance of a happy, idyllic community: work in workshops and gardens, along with concerts, a café, library, bank, football matches and swimming in the river... The famous Jewish German actor Kurt Gerron (Kurt Gerroldt in the Goldflam's play), who was also a prisoner in Theresienstadt, was chosen as the film's director. Gerron had been arrested in exile in the Netherlands and deported to Theresienstadt in February 1944. The Nazis promised him that both he and his family would live. However, shortly after he finished the filming in October 1944, Gerron, his family and the other film actors were transported to Auschwitz and gassed. The film was edited and produced in a Prague studio at the beginning of 1945 but the rapid progress of the war made it impossible to use for propaganda. It was destroyed. Only about 30 minutes remain today.

Other figures also had real prototypes: the commander of the ghetto, Ruhm (Rahm), head of the Jewish Council in Theresienstadt, Eppstern (Paul Eppstein) etc. Ruhm's quoted speech is an allusion to Heinrich Himmler's addresses in Posen in October 1943 (Himmler 1974). Gerroldt's film hints at the Nazi propaganda.

While the Jews in Theresienstadt sit in the café with their coffee and cakes, dancing the Negro's swing for the film camera, our soldiers carry the entire burden of this terrible war, misery and self-sacrifice to defend their country, and their homeland on their shoulders. (Goldflam, 2001, p. 235)

In fact, it is a quote from the German film weekly added to shots from the café in Theresienstadt in autumn 1944 (Adler, 1958, p. 325).

*Sweet Theresienstadt* premiered in Prague's Theatre Archa in November 1996. Theatre Archa cooperated in the preparation of the play with the New York non-profit organisation *En Garde Arts*. The play was directed by an American, Damien Gray. The composer, set designer and light designer were also Americans, John Hodian (Emmy winner 1992), Richard Dennis and Christian Method. In the theatre performance the plot is shown with more brutality.

Unlike most plays which thematise the Holocaust, Goldflam's work doesn't present victim's suffering, resistance against Nazism or great conflicts. Goldflam's figures have no choice between good and evil. They want to survive. On the one hand, *Sweet Theresienstadt* is close to the so-called *docudramas* (e.g. Peter Weiss, Rolf Hochhuth and Anna Grusková's → *The Woman Rabbi*, to some extent Thomas Bernhard or Joshua Sobol). They put for the question of the responsibility not only of perpetrators, but also of the ordinary citizens or even of the victims. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Goldflam's play shouldn't be an indictment like these works. Common and bizarre situations, grotesque, exaggeration and irony are presented here. In this sense, Goldflam's presentation of the Holocaust is close to plays of George Tabori and his black, sardonic humour (*The Cannibals*, 1968). Among Czech authors with Jewish roots, J. R. Pick or in part Ota Pavel can be designated as Goldflam's predecessors.

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# The Terezín Requiem (Terezínské Rekviem)

**Author:** Josef Bor

**First Published:** 1963

**Translations:** English (*The Terezín Requiem*, 1963); German (*Theresienstädter Requiem*, 1963); Danish (*Theresienstadt – koncerten*, 1965); Dutch (*Requiem Theresienstadt*, 1965); French (*Le requiem de Terezin*, 1965); Hebrew (*Rekviem l'Teresienstadt*, 1965); Italian (*Il "Requiem" di Terezín*, 1965); Norwegian (*Rekviem i Terezín*, 1965); Portuguese (*Requiem em Terezín*, 1966); Swedish (*Requiem i Theresienstadt*, 1968); Polish (*Terezínskie rekviem*, 1978); Greek (*To Rékviem tis Terezín*, 1980).

**Radio Adaptation:** *Terezínské rekviem*, Czechoslovak Radio, recorded 1964, published 2016, dramatisation Karel Valtera and Dagmar Hubená, director Jiří Roll.

**About the Author:** Josef Bor (1906–1979), originally Bondy, was born into a Czech-Jewish family in Ostrava. He studied law and became a lawyer. His promising career came to an abrupt end after the beginning of World War II. In 1942, his whole family, among them his wife and his two little daughters, was deported to Theresienstadt and later, in 1944, to Auschwitz-Birkenau. There, Bondy witnessed his family being murdered in the gas chamber, whereas he himself was selected for forced labour in the concentration camps of Monowice and Buchenwald. In April 1945 he was liberated near Jena. After the war, Bor married again and took up a post in the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defence. In the beginning of the 1950s, in connection with the Slánský trial, Bor got into political trouble and lost his employment in the ministry. After several positions in Košice and Prague he started his literary career in the early sixties. In 1966, he retired due to his health. Up to his death, Bor devoted himself to the dialogue between Christians and Jews.

**Further Important Publication:** *Opuštěná panenka* (1961, → *The Abandoned Doll*; novel).

## Content and Interpretation

Compared with his novel → *The Abandoned Doll*, which is characterised by a vast richness of details Bor's second work, *The Terezín Requiem*, is a typical novella, narrowed down to a single plot line. The story is inspired by events that really occurred in Theresienstadt: the rehearsal and presentation of Giuseppe Verdi's *Messa di Requiem* (1874) by the Jewish conductor Rafael Schächter. Schächter belonged to a large number of intellectuals, artists, scientists and other prominent persons who were detained at the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Born in 1905, the renowned pianist and conductor, founder (1937) and head of the Prague Chamber Opera, came to Theresienstadt at the end of

1941. In the years up to his deportation to Auschwitz in 1944, where he was murdered by the Nazis, he realised several musical projects, among them the production of Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride* as well as Verdi's *Requiem*. Schächter's *Requiem*-project met with fierce resistance from the Jewish community. It was the very genre of a Medieval Catholic mass for the deceased that aroused opposition. But Schächter insisted on his intention, seeing in the requiem less of a religious work than a work of art, a masterpiece of high aesthetic and ethical values – values being diametrically opposed to the barbarism and primitivism of the Nazis and their ideology.

This notion obviously provided Schächter with the power to not get discouraged when faced with the numerous setbacks that he received in the process of the rehearsal and presentation of Verdi's *Requiem*. One of the performances was a special one organised for the members of the International Red Cross who should have been – as a diversionary tactic – led to believe that there was a flourishing, prosperous life among the Jews in the Theresienstadt Ghetto (see Goldflam's → *Sweet Theresienstadt*). Several Nazi officials also participated in this special performance. According to Bor's *Requiem*, Adolf Eichmann also took part at this performance but it was the author's poetic license.

After his success with *The Abandoned Doll*, Bor having been a Theresienstadt detainee at the same time as Schächter, was encouraged to write a literary work about this matter by Karel Berman. Berman was a Prague bass singer and Holocaust survivor who had been one of the soloists in Schächter's *Requiem* performance (cf. Dobeš, 1965, p. 4).

*The Terezín Requiem* is a novella presented by a non-diegetic narrator who mostly takes up the viewpoint of Rafael Schächter, the work's protagonist. The text focuses on the pivotal moments in the process of Schächter's artistic realisation of the *Requiem*, the action thus gaining density and dynamics. The connection of narrative objectivity and subjective perception of the protagonist, i.e. Schächter's thoughts and feelings, affects a characteristic tension between the work's descriptive and emotional level. According to the concept of selection and brevity, typical for the genre of the novella, in the beginning, the historical context is outlined in a few words. It is the summer of 1944, when Germany's defeat in the war was already clear, the *Wehrmacht* was retreating from all fronts, but Adolf Eichmann was stubbornly clinging to his plans for what he called the "Final Solution of the Jewish question" and even accelerated the Holocaust machinery. For Eichmann, Theresienstadt with its cultural life seemed like the perfect illusion to deceive the world about the proceeding genocide.

In the beginning of the narration a lot of people crowding into the sports hall of the former Theresienstadt school right before the première of the *Requiem* are seen. From here the perspective changes to the conductor, who, with the orchestra beginning to play, immerses himself in his memory recalling such steps like his decision to perform the *Requiem*, the assembly of the team (choir, soloists and orchestra) and the artistic and organisational problems connected with it, the difficult acquisition of the instruments (partly by smuggling), the interruptions and setbacks caused by the fact

that parts of the team were sent to the transports. Readers learn to appreciate Schächter as an assertive, strong-willed person who tenaciously manages to deal with all these problems, thereby always giving the highest priority to his maximalist artistic claims. When the premiere has come to its end the audience's answer is thunderous applause. Schächter, however, is not quite content, because he feels that the final part of the requiem called *Libera me* ("Deliver me") cannot be interpreted in the sense of the Christian promise of Salvation under the terms of a concentration camp and threatening extermination.

All the more, Schächter feels challenged to continue working on perfecting his interpretation of Verdi's *Requiem*. These efforts receive an additional stimulus by the plans of the camp commander to give a special presentation of the *Requiem* during the upcoming visit of Eichmann and other prominent Nazis. Under these premises Schächter tries a new interpretation of the *Requiem*: a manifestation of accusation and protest. When this special presentation takes place, the whole ensemble works itself up to an expression of wrath and anger, emotions they now can, in a sense, shout directly into their enemies' faces:

*Libera me!* Everywhere the bells pealed in answer. *Libera me!* resounded the voices of the choir. Deliver us! Deliver us! clamoured from all sides altos and tenors, sopranos and basses. We want liberty! the orchestra replied to them. And the kettle-drums rolled and thundered: *Libera nos! Libera nos!* (Bor, 1963, p. 81).

Here, Schächter's artistic efforts have fully achieved their goal. Eichmann and the other Nazis are impressed and baffled at once. But their ideology lacks the ability of self-reflection as well as ethical and aesthetic standards. This means that nothing changes, as true communication between the performers (the victims) and the audience (the perpetrators) it fails. Communication between artistic perfection and banality or degeneracy is simply impossible. The novella ends in disillusionment:

The summer drew to its close, and the time of the transports began again. The Command had promised that Schächter's company should not be separated. The promise was kept. All together they ascended into the first wagons of the first transport (p. 83).

### **Main Topics and Problems**

Bor builds his novella around a framework of situations which in a sense all refer to the perception, interpretation and understanding respectively non-understanding of art. The text is focused on Schächter's persistent struggle for the "right" interpretation of Verdi's *Requiem*. In doing so he comes to realise that it is not sufficient, under the extreme conditions of the Holocaust with its permanent presence of the degradation of human dignity and the proximity of death, to believe in the ethical power of art as a counterforce. The inhuman situation of the ghetto or camp requires instead the use of art for the expression of protest or even rebellion. This is the difference between Schächter's first interpretation of the *Requiem* which he was dissatisfied with, and his

second interpretation, to which he comes after recognising the potential hidden in the subtext of the work. He arouses this potential during the second performance in direct confrontation with the Nazi audience, although this can only function on a symbolic level, as the conditions for equal communication between artists and audience are not given. So, the complexity of the artistic process under extreme conditions is one of the dominant themes of the work.

A comparison of the novella with the real events around Schächter's *Requiem*-project having taken place in 1943 and 1944 shows that Bor considerably modified the real events in his text. For example, in the actual performances the choir was accompanied only by piano. In the novella's plot there is, however, an entire orchestra with instruments having largely been smuggled into the ghetto from outside. We actually know about such smuggling activities, but not in the context of Schächter's rehearsal and presentation of Verdi's *Requiem* (Ibler, 2016, p. 211). As one might say, Bor makes use of the authentic facts of Theresienstadt reality, from which he creates the artistic reality of his novella by means of selection and combination. This can also be seen in other parts of the work. In reality, Schächter had assembled his ensemble, due to the losses of members by transports, altogether three times with the last ensemble giving even 15 performances (pp. 211ff.). In the novella, however, there are only two ensembles with altogether two performances. The fact that in the last performance members of the International Red Cross were present, is never mentioned in the literary text, there is only talk of a special performance for the Nazi notables (p. 212). Such a literary motivated reduction focuses attention on the central concern of the work: to demonstrate the superiority of morality and beauty over banality and violence by the victims directly confronting the perpetrators. Thus, the modifications made by Bor are by no way a means to ignore or even manipulate historical truth, but they aim at focussing on a higher, moral and aesthetic truth created by the power of art.

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RI

# There Used to Be a Jewish Women, There Is No More Jewish Woman Now (Była Żydówka, nie ma Żydówki)

**Author:** Marian Pankowski

**First Published:** 2008

**Translation:** Italian (C'era e non c'era una volta un'ebrea, 2010).

**About the Author:** Marian Pankowski (1919–2011) was a novelist, playwright, and poet who was a prisoner at Auschwitz, Gross-Rosen, Mittelbau-Dora near Nordhausen, and Bergen-Belsen camps. After the war, he immigrated to Belgium, where he worked at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and collaborated with the Paris-based literary-political magazine *Kultura*.

## Content and Interpretation

Rather than writing about his own camp experiences, Pankowski's work consists in the writer's reflections on the stories of other survivors from a perspective of about sixty years after the war. In fourteen formally and materially diverse parts, Pankowski tells the story of the only survivor from the town of N., a Jewish girl by the name of Fajga Oberlender, who survived thanks to her mother's cleverness and the help of her neighbours. As Arkadiusz Morawiec points out, this is a story inspired by the wartime experiences of the writer's own wife, Regina Pankowska, who died in 1972. Regina Pankowska, née Fern, left Lviv in 1944 to take part in the Warsaw Uprising, marrying Marian Pankowski in 1950 (the name "Fajga" is ostensibly connected to Regina for sentimental reasons). The first part of the story concerns the protagonist's journey in 1950 to the fictional city of Azojville, U. S. – possibly a pseudonym for Asheville, North Carolina – where she is to present her survival story to members of the Association of Eastern European Jews. In this sense, Pankowski bases his story on a formula with universal appeal – or in any case, with an American audience in mind. She tells them how her mother saved her by dropping her from the railway embankment as she and other Jewish residents of their village were boarding a train to the death camps. Later, with the help of a Polish friend, she hid in a shed.

The essence of Pankowski's story is not the literary transposition of testimony, but a gesture that consists in problematising the manner in which stories of the Holocaust are told. It is a gesture that speaks not only to the narratives that circulate among American Jews, but to those about antisemitic pseudo-scholars, and to attitudes of Polish villagers towards the Holocaust: "For us Christians, the priest commands us to love thy neighbour as thyself. Anyway, Jews cannot become our fellow men. Jews are definitely alone" (Pankowski, 2008, pp. 29–30).

"On the Aging of Events and Jews Stripped of Their Humanity" is a pastiche of the attitude of the "typical" Pole who, despite the Holocaust, still considers Jews to be for-

eigners. Another section with the title “Welcoming of Fajga Oberlender in the Jewish Community” reveals the untranslatability of the Holocaust experience and questions its supposed transnational nature (the locals ask, for example, “What is a ‘szopa?’” [What is a shed?] p. 21). In another part, we find the “teachings” of a medieval entomologist, illustrated by reproductions of images depicting Jews as insects. One could argue that this tendency to compile a diversity of narrative material aims to demonstrate that Holocaust discourse today is not limited to the analysis of documents or oral history. Jakub Julian Ziółkowski’s pastiches of caricatures of Jews, for example, constitutes an important part of the book as a whole. Only the combination of various narratives – the nexus, or chain of causality between stories – can give us an adequate understanding of the Holocaust in both its historical and futural aspects.

### Main Topics and Problems

One of the main problems in *There Used to Be a Jewish Women* concerns Pankowski’s approach to constructing the story, which represents a significant departure from the works of Irit Amiel or Michał Głowiński (→ *Black Seasons*), for example, whose works resemble accounts by first-hand witnesses, presenting personal stories in the first person voice. Pankowski’s writing, by contrast, is a multi-voice, ironic pastiche of various genres, ranging from biblical narrative, through the poetry of Adam Mickiewicz, to eyewitness testimonies and philosophical stories. An important role is played by the author-narrator who comes to dominate the world he describes, guiding the course of events, and, as a character himself, introducing an element of artificiality into the story so as to compromise its sense of authenticity. This has much to do with the figure of the postmodernist narrator. In the novels of Raymond Federman, for example, the narrator is repulsed by literary pathos, and his digressions effectively introduce a space between himself and the events experienced by the protagonist. In this mode, the narration may have an informal quality, tending towards understatement, or resemble colloquial speech. In this way, we might consider Pankowski’s novel as an example of the “postmodernisation” of the Holocaust. In addition to deconstructing genres, Pankowski deconstructs the language of the stories told in Poland about Jews and the Holocaust, especially folk proverbs and sayings, which turn out to transmit antisemitic content. Like Zofia Nałkowska in → *Medallions*, Pankowski portrays children as perpetrators of anti-Jewish hate speech. In one episode, children reveal where Oberlender is hiding, all the while singing “There used to be a Jewish woman, and there is no more Jewish woman now” (p. 61) and playing a game that resembles blind man’s bluff.

According to Piotr Krupiński, the antisemitic behaviour of Poles in this novel takes part in the on-going process of dehumanisation that reduces Jews and Jewishness to the category of the inhuman. Borrowing from the ecological works of Konrad Lorenz and Karl Friedrichs, we note that the racial epithets used against the Jews in *There Used to Be a Jewish Women* tend to link them to those animals – cats, snakes, cockroaches, insects – most marked by cultural fear and contempt. In what is argu-

ably the most striking of these epithets – the comparison of Jews to insects –, we see what Pankowski refers to as “species chauvinism” according to which insects are at the bottom of the pyramid of existence. The “insecto-Semitism” of the story, according to Monika Żółkoś, is, on the one hand, based on the persecution of both Jews and insects; on the other, this insistence on the “insect” existence of Jews becomes a special way to escape the policies of the Third Reich (Żółkoś, 2017, pp. 51–53). In *There Used to Be a Jewish Women* escape is metaphorically depicted as the protagonist’s slipping away and suddenly disappearing, the insect’s most characteristic mechanism of defence.

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MT

# Trap with a Green Fence (Treblinka, slovo jak z dětské říkanky)

**Author:** Richard Glazar

**First Published:** in German 1992, in Czech 1994.

**Translations:** German (*Die Falle mit dem grünen Zaun*, 1992); Czech original (*Treblinka, slovo jak z dětské říkanky*, 1994); English (*Trap with a Green Fence*, 1995); Russian (*Ad za zelenoj izgorodju*, 2002); Polish (*Stacja Treblinka*, 2011); Dutch (*Ontsnopt uit Treblinka*, 2016).

**About the Author:** Richard Glazar (1920–1997), was born in Prague in a Czech Jewish family as Richard Goldschmid. He started studying economics until Czech universities were closed in November of 1939. Then he found a job in agriculture in the countryside. That did not save him from deportation to Theresienstadt first, and then to Treblinka, where he was assigned to work. He took part in the Treblinka Uprising and succeeded to escape together with Karel Unger. While walking across Poland they made up a story of a false identity in case they would be captured. Their story was believable enough to be sent as forced labourers to a steel industry in Mannheim, Germany. They remained there until the liberation. After the end of the war Glazar returned to Prague and reunited with his mother. All of his other relatives perished during the war. He went back to study economics and languages. He married and worked as a civil servant at a ministry. During Stalinist antisemitism (Slánský trial) 1951–1953, he quit his job and went to work in the steel industry again. In the 1960s he became a librarian in the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and published two books about urbanism. After the Prague Spring and during the Russian invasion in 1968 he fled to Switzerland and took a copy of the finished manuscript of his book *Trap with a Green Fence* with him. He became known through his appearance in the documentary *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann. In 1963 and 1971 he testified against Nazi perpetrators in Treblinka trials in Düsseldorf. In the 1990s he often spoke in public about his experiences in the concentration camp Treblinka and at one such lecture he was asked to publish his book. In 1995 he returned to Prague. After the death of his wife he committed suicide due to his traumatic experiences from the war.

**Further Important Publications:** *Veselý nebo Lustig* (2003, Veselý or Lustig; memories and Jewish anecdotes).

## Content and Interpretation

Richard Glazar writes from the perspective of his own autobiographical narrator. The story is divided into 34 chapters, starts with the school year of 1938, goes on to young adulthood, transport call to Theresienstadt, arrival and stay in the concentration camp Treblinka, planning the uprising, escape and survival till liberation in Germany as well as postwar years.

The book opens with the chapter *Fouling the Stars with the Dust of the Earth...* a phrase from a poem in a fictionalised memoir *The Grass Roof* by Y. Kang (1937). Glazar finishes his secondary education and spends two months at University in Prague until it is closed by the Nazis. In the spring 1940, his parents send him to a more secure place to work in agriculture outside of Prague. He lives there for two years, taking care of cattle and reading at night. Younghill Kang's book *The Grass Roof* about the Japanese occupation of Korea represents his idea that history is somehow repeating itself. In September of 1942, Glazar is first deported to Theresienstadt for a month. The overpopulation and hunger there strikes him and he encounters some members of his family for the last time. Soon he receives the order to go on another transport to Treblinka. His first idea upon arrival is that it is an agricultural farm and they will need farmers like him. But in fact, Treblinka is a death camp.

Eli, Eli – They have thrown us into the fire and flames, the title of the seventh chapter is a song sung by a Polish opera singer, while bodies are being burned in Treblinka. Glazar assumes it is an ancient Jewish song describing the fate of Jews from hundreds of years of antisemitic history starting with the Spanish inquisition. This is one of the strongest moments of the book.

In the chapter *The Uniformed Riders* Glazar mentions the myths about what happens with the prisoners' wealth collected in Treblinka, and Glazar is assigned to sort the property. Ancient jewellery passing through generations lies there in bundles and creates a black market between the inmates and the guards. Glazar supposes many years after the war that treasures are still buried there (see → *The Empty Field*). This part of the book questions the assumption that the world has not known about the killing sites and leads to assumptions of the world about who has forgotten the Jews and to a sentiment to restore the importance of Jews for the world.

To regain a sense of humanity and life, inmates in the camp unite to revolt, destroy the killing site and show their worthiness to the world. Following chapters depict the revolt. Symbolically the headquarters of the uprising are based in the latrines. The revolt is portrayed as a plan with ups and downs and carried out by improvisations. Glazar has a sense for situational humour and shows sarcasm about the looks, clothes, and mischiefs of inmates. One example is when they obtain the key to the munitions depot and steal the explosives but forget the igniter.

Finding their way through Poland after the successful escape is a matter of going "to the left and sometimes to the right". Their journey continues in a humorous way and the refugees reach the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Nevertheless, in fear of being discovered, they decide to hide in Germany as Czechs, employed in the war industry. In Mannheim, after the bombing by the Americans has started, they cannot find any food but discover a lot of wine that has been left behind, so they drink the wine and stay drunk until the moment of their liberation.

In 1948 the new Communist government built a fence around Czechoslovakia. Soviet occupation in 1968 made him recall the Russian and Ukrainian guards in Treblinka. He decides to escape from Czechoslovakia.

While German, English and other editions of the book have been published in abbreviated versions, the Czech edition presents the author's entire manuscript with the original title *Treblinka, Like a Word from a Children's Rhyme*. The third Czech edition from 2012 is accompanied by family pictures mostly from Glazar's book *Veselý or Lustig*.

### Main Topics and Problems

There are only a few sources about Treblinka, this is why Glazar's book is considered both a literary work for its style and a historical source for its information.

In the chapter called *The Name Treblinka* he discusses where this name comes from. "Treblinka – to people outside, in life, it may sound like a friendly name." (Glazar, 1995, p. 19) Upon arrival with the transport, he sees a boy in a forest. The boy "grabbed his neck with both hands, aped strangulation, rolled his wide-open eyes, and stuck out his tongue" (Glazar, p. 8). On the other hand the German and English titles refer to the green fence hiding a trap. Later during his time in the concentration camp it was Glazar's task to camouflage the camp by keeping the fence hidden behind fresh green branches.

The author's survival strategy is to appear strong and human: as the main character Glazar seems to carefully analyse and observe the German guards say that it is important to stand up straight and look in a good shape, this increases his chances of staying alive and decreases the probability of being punished. Another survival strategy expressed in the story is situational humour and a lack of willingness to subordinate oneself that is reminiscent of the strategies in Jaroslav Hašek's *Stories of the Good Soldier Švejk*.

Glazar is also intrigued by the Polish Jewish spirituality. He and his friends have non-religious backgrounds and a different mentality. Glazar depicts the clash of moral values and comradeship as well as religious obedience between the Polish Jews from the East and the Czech Jews.

Arrivals of transports are perceived as a paradox while the inmates should be sad, they are aware that the new arrivals will save them from starvation. Descriptions of grotesque situations about how they try to get a hold of the food follow.

The mixture of Slavonic languages with orders in German is used as a *lingua franca* to communicate with other inmates in the camp. The aspect of multilingualism is one of the reasons to believe the novel turns away from facticity to give way to literary style and humour. Glazar could not have remembered entire discussions in their proper dialect. On the other hand the recreation of the camp dialect gives an impression how people from different countries could communicate with each other.

Glazar has influenced authors like Jáchym Topol (→ *The Devil's Workshop*) for his usage of multilinguistic expressions in Czech and German.

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HN

## Tumult (Rejwach)

**Author:** Mikołaj Grynberg

**First Published:** 2017

**Translations:** Hebrew (*Balagan*, 2019); several short stories in English available at: <https://jewishcurrents.org/an-excerpt-from-rejwach/> [Accessed: 12.05.2020].

**About the Author:** Mikołaj Grynberg (1966) graduated in psychology but has been working mainly as a photographer, author, and reporter for three decades. His artistic work focuses on portrait photography, mainly monochrome, e.g. the exhibition *Many Women* (Dużo kobiet, 2005–2009) showed single shots from women all over the world at every age. Grynberg gains his inspiration mainly from his family history but claims that he “suffers from a sort of obsessive psychosis related with the topic of the Shoah” (Kowalska, 2017, p. 336). His mother survived the war in French orphanages as her parents were deported to Auschwitz and his father survived the Warsaw Ghetto (Grynberg, Titaniec, 2010, p. 117). His 2009–2010 exhibition *Auschwitz – What Am I Doing Here?* (Auschwitz, co ja tu robię?) gained a great deal of attention (Mazur, 2012). He combines the historical significance of the concentration camp with its contemplative meaning of Jewish fate (Grynberg, 2009) by showing the visitors’ reactions walking around the site of mass murder. The monochrome pictures are blurred which makes them more universal. These rather intangible pictures are accompanied by interviews. The text-image link represents the two main aspects of Holocaust remembrance: silence and conversation (Kowalska, 2017, p. 335). Grynberg’s technique of giving others a voice in order to understand his own struggle with his family history (Bye, 2020) can also be observed in his interview publications – such as *Survivors from the 20th Century* (Ocaleni z XX wieku, 2012) and *I Accuse Auschwitz: Family Stories* (Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne, 2014) – in which he transferred his portrait perspective to a textual level. The interviews focus on the memories of survivors and their descendants, often taking up Polish-Jewish relations during and after World War II.

**Further Important Publications:** *Ocaleni z XX wieku* (2012, Survivors from the 20th Century; interviews); *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* (2014, I Accuse Auschwitz: Family Stories; interviews); *Księga wyjścia* (2018, The Book of Exodus, biographies).

### Content and Interpretation

*Tumult* is thus Grynberg’s prose debut and continues the topic of Polish-Jewish relations after 1945. It contains 31 short stories resembling snapshots due to their narrative immediacy and brevity that does not leave much space for elaboration. In the story *Arkadia* (→ *Night of the Living Jews*), the narrator describes Jewish tourists looking despe-

rately for traces of the Jewish ghetto and brings up their attitude towards Poles. Guiding them to the places of interest, he keeps a safe distance and smiles nicely “so they can feel safe. I am wondering what their parents and grandparents told them about us, the Poles” (Grynberg, 2018, p. 11). Sometimes tourists underline especially: “ju are gud Pol” (p. 12) which confirms the narrator’s doubts about the contemporary image of Poles among the Jewish community abroad. Some stories are accounts from the (autobiographic) narrator’s past: *The German* is about the label given to him due to his last name on a holiday camp for teenagers. “During my short life, I was already the Jew who killed Jesus, so I thought that it might be better to be a defeated German” (p. 44). The action of *At Hitler’s* is set during a winter camp at Hitler’s former military headquarters, *Wolf’s Lair*. The narrator describes a young boy who was terrified of meeting the ghost of Hitler somewhere in the house and chose to lock himself in the room until departure, while the other boys played tricks on him, and teased him with his fear. The story ends with an unexpected direct address in second person singular mode: “This little boy with glasses that was so petrified by Hitler, was you. It took place in the middle of the seventies” (p. 77). In some stories the autobiographic notion becomes even more obvious, as in *The Common Good*, where he describes a discussion with the audience after a public lecture. Like in a stream of consciousness, the whole text is made of short statements by the audience expressing disapproval of the author’s view on Polish-Jewish history.

“You have to know the limits, for God’s sake! Do you want to convince the nation that Jews were Poles?” “To whom do you owe your life? To the Poles after all. We put the lives of our families at risk to save you, you may recall it, Sir. And you only about the Poles being worse than the Germans. If you want to go on living here, you’ll have to reconcile with the truth.” “Well, who accepted you, when nobody else wanted you? Casimir the Great – Praise him for that.” (pp. 87–89).

The latter statement refers to the fact that King Casimir allowed Jewish people to settle in Poland in the 14th century.

### Main Topics and Problems

The Polish Nobel Prize winner Olga Tokarczuk sums up: “These small, searing prose pieces are moving and unsettling at the same time. If the diagnosis they present is right, then we have a big problem in Poland” (Grynberg, 2018). As Tokarczuk shows, the main motif in Grynberg’s prose miniatures is the opposition of Us (the Poles) and Them (the Jews); he criticises the obsolete conviction of a binary identity model (as in the Polish-Catholic topos, *Polak katolik*) that excludes mixtures of faith, ethnicity, and emotional belonging to a group. According to Zajac, in Grynberg’s prose debut there are no dispensable words; instead of sophisticated poetry the reader gets a rough, awkward reality inspired by the author’s interviews or personal experiences but enlarged by the freedom of fiction. (Zajac, 2017, pp. 712–714) The author himself challenges the discussion about reality and authenticity since he primarily wants to pass on the feeling of sadness accompanying his life: “I’m sharing my arsenal of sorrow, so

if readers feel the sadness as I do, then I have succeeded” (Rybicka, 2018, n.p.). He describes his text as follows: “It’s edited like a movie: the stories are interwoven, but it’s really all about what happens to the reader after they finish reading the last story” (Rybicka, 2018, n.p.).

Another important subject of this prose collection is the topography of memory, which was widely investigated in both Polish and international research on places of Holocaust remembrance (e.g. Suchojad 2010; Ernst, Lamprecht, 2010; Lehrer, Meng, 2015). The disproportionately low number of Jewish (commemorative) spaces in contemporary Polish topography (esp. in the capital but also in smaller towns or the countryside) demonstrates the hierarchisation of the politics of memory, i.e. the lack of significance of the Jewish fate in the Polish notion of history. Although Grynberg is of Jewish origins, he never underlines this directly and identifies with Poland. In his short stories and artistic oeuvre, he takes up an observing position, detaching himself from the discussion (as seen in the last sentence of *At Hitler’s* when he applies the second person mode). This technique aims at making the stories less autobiographical and more inclusive or universal but also bears witness to the ongoing struggle of reconciling Polish and Jewish part of his identity.

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EMH

# Tworki (Tworki)

**Author:** Marek Bieńczyk

**First Published:** 1999

**Translations:** French (*Tworki*, 2006); English (*Tworki*, 2008); Spanish (*Tworki*, 2010); Persian (*Tovorki*, 2016); Bulgarian (*Psichiatrichna bolnitsa „Tvorki“*, 2017); Czech (*Sanatorium Tworki*, 2019).

**Theatre Adaptation:** Teatr Polski, Szczecin (2017, adapted by Marek Żerański, directed by Paweł Kamza).

**About the Author:** Marek Bieńczyk was born in 1956 in Milanówek. Between 1976 and 1980, he was a student of Romance studies at the University of Warsaw. Since 1987, he has been working at the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Aside from spending his time on research and translation work (from French), he writes literary criticism, novels, essays, “feuilletons”, and children’s stories. His first novel was *Terminal* (Terminal), published in 1994. His second book, *Tworki*, is his only piece dealing with the subject of the Holocaust, though he would further address the subject in his translation of the full transcript of Claude Lanzmann’s 1993 movie *Shoah*.

## Content and Interpretation

The story is set in German-occupied Poland – in the psychiatric hospital in Tworki near Warsaw, in Warsaw proper, and in Pruszków – between spring 1943 and spring 1945. The protagonists are young Poles and Polish Jews. The plot consists of a conventional love story set against the background of the Holocaust and other events.

The most prominent characters are Jurek and Sonia. Jurek, a Warsawian, takes up the post of accountant in the Tworki hospital administration. There he meets Sonia, also an accountant, with whom he falls in love, but she only treats him as a friend. Soon more young people arrive in Tworki to work as accountants, and Jurek’s friends from Warsaw also visit the site. The visits of the guests are idyllic: together with the young administrative workers (Sonia becomes infatuated with one of them, whose name is Olek, while Jurek eventually falls in love with Janka, an accountant, the feeling of being reciprocated this time), they play football, sing, recite poems, and celebrate Sonia’s birthday. The carefree atmosphere is ruined as Marcel, a newly appointed accountant, is visited by two *shmaltsovníks* (blackmailers), compelling him to leave the hospital and go into hiding at Jurek’s mother’s place in Warsaw. Soon after he goes to the Hotel Polski, together with his wife and her sister, where “diamonds or just money can buy you back the carefree life”. He realises however that it is “not Switzerland, but ovens [that] await” them (Bieńczyk, 2008, pp. 106–107). One

day, Sonia also disappears. Having revealed to the hospital's director her true (Jewish) identity, she has gone to the Gestapo headquarters in Pruszków. Jurek and Olek try but fail to secure her release, and it is soon revealed that the Germans have hanged her. Shortly afterwards, Jurek's friends (including Olek) and his mother die in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. In December of the same year, the German administration of the Tworki hospital leaves the site. In May 1945, Jurek and Janka also leave. As their train is approaching the city, they spot a sign which reads "Warsaw". At this point, the plot ends. It is followed by a recollection of Sonia's birthday as it was celebrated in Tworki. In the book's final sentence, Sonia hands Jurek flowers "without a word" (p. 174).

Unlike the plot, the narrative is rather unconventional. The narrator, who bears a resemblance to the author, is writing on a laptop while sitting on a bench in the hospital park in Tworki at the end of the 20th century, recounting the story. The author-narrator thus underlines his emotional attachment to the story he tells, and also to the broader story of the Holocaust. The eponymous town of Tworki serves as a metaphor of the world at war – a world that has gone insane. At the same time, Tworki, paradoxically, is the only normal place, and a refuge from the world of extreme violence.

No less paradoxical is the status of the novel's world, brought into being with the reader in attendance. The book's second sentence reads, "In the beginning, there was writing" (p. 7), which resonates with the opening of the Gospel of – and Derrida's questioning of – the metaphysics of presence, while also indicating the author's view that the meaning of the Holocaust (and of reality as a whole) is negotiated through the textual world: documents, artistic literature, and conventions. The ostentatiously conventional elements of the story are the idyllic love theme, Tworki as a realisation of the Paradise trope, the "good Germans" in charge of the hospital, and harmless "loonies" (Caesar, Cleopatra, or Napoleon). The only non-stereotypical "loon" is Anti-Plato, whose philosophical-poetic waffling contains as much the thought of Derrida as it does of Theodor W. Adorno that it is inappropriate to write poetry post-Auschwitz: "They don't write like that anymore in Tworki. That's how they wrote before Tworki" (p. 11). Anti-Plato should be seen as the author's porte-parole, or at least as the medium which regulates the reading of the novel. He is a weirdo rather than a loon, signaling to the reader that all meaning is negotiated by speech – or more aptly writing –, and pointing to the textuality of all interpretations of reality. But neither he nor the author suggests that attempts to capture reality are pointless. It is quite the opposite: writing is worth the effort, and verbalising loss a necessary. This applies not just in cases of bereavement, but also, in the broader context, to the pain originating from the void left by the Holocaust.

### **Main Topics and Problems**

*Tworki* is one of the most unique specimens of Polish literature concerned with the theme of the Holocaust, a genre which stands out for its documentary-like style and factuality (Maciejewska, 1992, p. 335). Bieńczyk addresses the issue of how to tell the story of the Holocaust, seeing as the topic has already been discussed in countless vo-

lumes, be it autobiographical, literary, or scholarly. *Tworci* is “a confrontation with war and with the discourses employed to speak about war” (Słowo w akcji, 2000, p. 50). Confronted with the impossibility of engaging directly with the discourse of the witness – and given his lack of first-hand knowledge of the Holocaust – Bieńczyk goes for ostentatious literariness. His focus is not on interpreting facts but on speaking the Holocaust.

*Tworci* discusses the Holocaust indirectly. The word “Jew” is never used in the novel, except as it figures in students’ jargon, in its archaic meaning of “inkblot”: “Olek had doodled a Jew [inkblot] over half a page in Jurek’s exercise book, eternally sully-ing Jurek’s beautiful, clean calligraphy and scribbling away any semblance of lesson” (Bieńczyk, 2008, p. 57). The inkblot sullies the “calligraphic” picture of the Polish-Jewish relations idealised in Communist Poland. This sense of sully-ing is accompanied by the equally important notion of absence. The novel discusses the Holocaust by means of Derridean, or more broadly postmodernist, concepts such as absence, difference, and trace, which tally well with the annihilation of millions of human beings. Somewhat in line with Frank Ankersmit’s suggestion (Ankersmit, 1997), Bieńczyk indexes the past but never tries to penetrate it. He juxtaposes the metaphorical appropriation of the Holocaust, in the style of the historian, with the ethically-marked discourse of remembrance, which works through metonymy. Instead of speaking directly of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the narrator merely hints at it: “the city, now flooded with sunlight, despite a couple of columns of smoke swirling over there behind those houses and that large carousel” (Bieńczyk, 2008, p. 67). No more is necessary than this image of the carousel, which the Polish reader will understand as a reference to the *Campo di Fiori* poem by Czesław Miłosz, to identify the referent. The novel’s style is highly figurative, being full of periphrases, metonymies, allusions, quotations, ellipses, puns, or homophones. This stylistic flamboyancy signifies “the disintegration of language in the face of a catastrophe and its helplessness against the impossibility of speaking annihilation” (Imię Soni, 1999, p. 3). At the same time, the author sees the “crisis of language” as the horizon rather than the absolute limit – as an ethical dimension that is equally prominent in the novel. Bieńczyk revives the dead (or the memory of them) by performing a ritual of mourning. He makes his book an engraving on the tombstone of those who were exterminated and calls on the reader to take note of this engraving.

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AM

# We, Polish Jews (My, Żydzi polscy)

**Author:** Julian Tuwim

**First Published:** 1944 *Gwiazda Polarna* (Toledo, USA)

**Translations:** Czech (*My, polští Židé*, 1944); Hebrew (*Anu Jehudej Polin*, 1944); Italian (*Noi Ebrei Polacchi*, 1946); Russian (*My, polskije Evreji*, 1945); Yiddish (*Mir, pojlisze Jiden*, 1984); English (*We, Polish Jews*, 1993).

**About the Author:** Tuwim (1894–1953) was a poet and translator from French and Russian, and, as author of *Locomotive* (*Lokomotywa*, 1938), the best known Polish children’s poet. He was born in Lodz in an assimilated family of Polish Jews. He made his debut as a translator in 1911, and as a poet in 1913. In the interwar period (1918–1939) he was the most famous among the poets of his generation, considered as a great artist of the Polish language. At the same time he was a victim of ruthless antisemitic attacks. Co-founder of the magazine *Pro Arte et Studio* (1916), the literary cafe *Pod Picadorem* (The Picador Café, 1918) and the poetic group *Skamander*, Tuwim was also a regular columnist for literary magazines, including *Wiadomości Literackie*. In September 1939, he escaped from Poland to Brazil and later to the United States. He co-worked actively with left-wing émigré circles; returned to Poland in 1946 and settled in Warsaw, coveted by the Communist authorities. He was the chairman of the Society of Friends of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Polish-Israeli Friendship Committee.

**Further Important Publications:** *Czyhanie na Boga* (1918, Lurking for God; poems); *Sokrates tańczący* (1920, Socrates Dancing; poems); *Słowa we krwi* (1926, Words in Blood; poems); *A to pan zna?* (1928, Do you Know This Joke?; Jewish jokes); *Biblia cygańska* (1933, Gipsy Bible; poems); *Treść gorejąca* (1936, Burning Content; poems); *Bal w Operze* (created 1936, published 1946, A Ball at the Opera; poem); *Kwiaty polskie* (created 1940–44, published 1949, Polish Flowers; poem); *Pomnik i mogiła* (1948, Monument and Grave; essay), *Nieznany rękopis Juliana Tuwima o antysemityzmie w Polsce. Od stosów do krematoriów – Fun szajterhojnfs biz krematorjes* (1974, An Unknown Manuscript of Julian Tuwim about antisemitism. From the Stokes to the Crematories; essay).

## Content and Interpretation

*We, Polish Jews* is a manifesto (variously known as a message, lamentation, Kaddish, letter, essay, and even a poem) regarding the complicated Polish-Jewish identity. Tuwim wrote it in New York as a reaction to the news of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (April–May 1943), and later published it in the London magazine *New Poland* (August 1944) with a dedication to his “mother in Poland or to her beloved shadow” – the poet

did not yet know that his mother had been murdered by the Germans two years earlier in the Otwock Ghetto. The text is composed in five parts, and in a rhythmic and expressive prose style. In the first part, the poet answers the question: “Where are WE from?” – “I am asked by Jews, whom I have always explained that I am Polish, and now I will be asked by Poles, because for the vast majority of them I am and I will be a Jew” (Tuwim, 1944, p. 491). In the second part, he explains that his Polishness derives from the simplest needs of existence: “To be a Pole – it is neither an honour, nor a boon, nor a privilege. The same is with breathing. I have not met a man who is proud to breathe.” Moreover, he argues, “my hatred for Polish fascists is stronger than my hatred for fascists of other nationalities” (p. 491). In the third part, he considers the notion of blood according to two definitions. It is merely “flesh juice”, he writes – and whoever considers it beyond this physiological reality is a racist. His second definition has a symbolic dimension: Hitler sheds it “to prove the triumph of his own spirit over my sauce”. The poet beseeches the Jews of the world for the title of Polish Jew: “This RANK – the rank of the Jew *doloris causa* – may it be granted to the Polish poet by the nation that brought him forth. Not for any merits, because I do not have them” (p. 492). In what is the most moving sequence of the fourth part, the poet acknowledges the merit of Polish Jews dying in the Holocaust, as a repository of future symbols: “On the armbands you wore in the ghetto the Star of David was painted. I believe in a future Poland in which this very star, the one from the armbands, will become one of the highest decorations given to the bravest Polish soldiers and officers” (p. 492). The fifth part enumerates the various Jewish martyrs of the Holocaust that make up the “we”, with many allusions to Jewish history and culture (pp. 493–494).

### Main Topics and Problems

Tuwim’s manifesto, which begins with the personal pronoun “we”, deals with numerous European cultural topics – the last of the Mohicans, torture chambers, the figure of Niobe (evoking Greek mythology) –, as well as Judaic and Christian topics, including the martyrdom of bloodshed, the topos of the heroic death, the figure of Job, the lamentation of Jeremia, the figure of Rachel, crying by the rivers of Babylon, and finally – through allusion to the Kaddish – the song *El mole rachmim*, the act of baptism in Jordan, the ghetto cross and Star of David decoration (he considers these stigmas as distinctions). There are also various specifically Polish references: the figure of Ursula, and the dead child mourned by renaissance poet Jan Kochanowski in his *Laments*. On the symbolic level, the poet evokes the distinction of *doctor honoris causa* in his formulation of the Jew *doloris causa*.

The reception of the text *We, Polish Jews* was immediate. Two months after its publication, a Hebrew translation appeared in Palestine. The text also circulated around the world and was published in many magazines. Jewish reception of the manifesto, however, was divided. Apolinary Hartglas and Abraham Gołomb (creator of the concept of “integral Jewishness”) took exception with Tuwim, asking where he was during the prewar pogroms, and whether the blood of the Jews shed then was less

red than that shed during the Holocaust. They also consider his idea of the “Jew doloris causa” to be unauthorised and overdue. On the other hand, Ilya Erenburg writes: “Tuwim’s words are written with blood.” Elsewhere the reception of Tuwim’s manifesto was contextualised specifically in issues of identity, and self-identification by Polish Jews (Halina Birenbaum, Stanisław Wygodzki). After years, the manifesto still arouses strong emotions. In a discussion about Tuwim published in the journal *Midrasz* (2013), Bella Szwarzman-Czarnota declares her belief that “postwar [Tuwim’s] choices seem to be just for show; in general, Tuwim seems to be ‘too much’: he screams too loudly, demonstrates too strongly”. Tuwim’s monographer Piotr Matywiecki answers polemically that the confessional tone of *We, Polish Jews* finds a kind of continuation in his essay *The Monument and the Grave*, inspired by Lévinas and written for the unveiling of the monument of the Ghetto Heroes (sculpted by Natan Rapoport). It is in this essay that Tuwim speaks of “a man without a homeland” (neither a Jew, a Pole nor a European), and about “human nudity” towards the event of the Holocaust. Michał Głowiński, in turn, considers *We, Polish Jews* to be “an embarrassing” text which begins “almost as a column” (“I am Polish, because I like it so much”) before shifting to the tone of the Kaddish – a lamentation, and in this case, a deeply incoherent one. Matywiecki considers this inconsistency to be “dramatic”, “extremely moving”, and “almost hysterical” on the existential level.

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KKK

## What I Read to the Dead (Co czytałem umarłym)

**Author:** Władysław Szlengel

**First Published:** 1977 (written from 1941 to 1943).

**Translations:** Hebrew (*Asher karati la-metim*, 1987); German (*Was ich den Toten las: Gedichte aus dem Warschauer Getto*, 1990; *Was ich den Toten las: Texte und Gedichte aus dem Warschauer Getto*, 2003); Italian (*Cosa leggevo ai morti: poesie e prose del ghetto di Varsavia*, 2010); English (*What I Read to the Dead*, 2012); French (*Ce que je lisais aux morts: poèmes du ghetto de Varsovie*, 2017).

**Film Adaptation:** *Okno na tamtą stronę* (The Window to That Side), TV film, Telewizja Polska, adapted and directed by Artur Hofman, premiered 2018.

**About the Author:** Władysław Szlengel (1912–1943?) was born in Warsaw to a family of Polish Jews. In 1930, he graduated from the Warsaw Economic School of the Merchant's Guild, and throughout the following decade published lyrical poems and satirical pieces in the press expressing his opposition to antisemitism, which was on the rise in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. He also wrote song lyrics and skits for Warsaw cabarets. After the Germans took Warsaw in September 1939, he got through to the Soviet-occupied Polish territories, staying first in Białystok then Lviv, returning to Warsaw in 1941. He soon ended up in the local ghetto, working at the Café Sztuka where he took the stage to perform his satirical account of ghetto life *Living Diary* (*Żywy dziennik*). In the final period of the ghetto's operation, when it already had been turned into a labour camp, he delivered his texts during literary evenings for a select few. His fate is unknown. He was last seen on 8 May 1943 during the Ghetto Uprising, and was probably killed when the Germans discovered the shelter where he was hiding, or after being transported to the Treblinka death camp or a concentration camp such as Bergen-Belsen.

**Further Important Publications:** *Władysław Szlengel: poeta nieznanym. Wybór tekstów* (2013, Władysław Szlengel: the Unknown Poet; selection of texts; poems, essays and short stories).

### Content and Interpretation

Many of Szlengel's wartime poems, including those written in the Warsaw Ghetto, have not survived. An incomplete collection of the extant material was first published in a 1947 anthology consisting of "poems about the Jews under the German occupation" with the title → *The Song Will Survive...* (*Pieśń ujdzie cało...*) edited by Michał M. Borwicz. A more complete collection, edited by Irena Maciejewska and released under Szlengel's name, was published in 1977 as *What I Read to the Dead: Poems from the*

*Warsaw Ghetto*, with a second enlarged edition appearing two years later. Today, more than 40 texts by Szlengel devoted to the fate of Jews under the German occupation are known. They are mostly poems.

While in the ghetto, Szlengel self-published his poems, binding them together in type-written booklets. Many of his writings first appeared in this form under such titles as *A Cry in the Night* (Wołanie w nocy), *A Poetic Denunciation* (Donos poetycki), and *The Bill, Please* (Zahlen bitte). The fifth and final volume prepared by Szlengel was *Counterattack* (Kontratak). Little has remained of these collections beyond their titles and the eponymous poems from the first, third, and fifth volumes. Works published by Maciejewska, which were originally supposed to make up the fourth volume, were composed in January 1943 during the liquidation of the ghetto and the month that followed. The title *What I Read to the Dead*, suggested by Maciejewska and also used in the foreign editions of Szlengel's works, can be attributed to the author, as it appears on the title page of one of the surviving sets of Szlengel's typescripts dated "September 1942 – February 1943". Additionally, Szlengel used the title as a foreword to a series of poems written during that period. He added three prose texts to the foreword: Epilogue (Posłowie), To The Polish Reader (Do polskiego czytelnika), and A Note to the Strict (Notka dla pedantów), in which he enumerates his literary accomplishments from the ghetto and the reasons why he decided against including some of his earlier poems in the forthcoming volume (*What I Read to the Dead*). One of the omitted poems, Key at the Concierge (Klucz u stróża), tells the story of a Polish janitor who proudly sports the fur coat of a poet, a Jew, which he "easily 'borrowed'". He also justifies his choice to include two poems – Things (Rzeczy) and Window to the Other Side (Okno na tamtą stronę) – which he thought might be troubling for a Polish reader.

### Main Topics and Problems

The arrangement of the poems in *What I Read to the Dead* was chosen by the editor, Maciejewska, based on a chronological order which she deduced from the events depicted in the poems. Szlengel's writings, which enjoyed popularity in the ghetto, typically dealt with topical themes or significant events. A Page From the Daily "Action" (Karta z dziennika "akcji"), for example, discusses the deportation of Janusz Korczak and the charges which sent him to Treblinka, while Near Warsaw (Okolice Warszawy) discusses the suicide of Judenrat chairman Adam Czerniaków. The poet's intention was that these poems form a chronicle. Some of them, however, do not present strictly historical accounts, and seem instead to capture the author's mood *vis-à-vis* the slow death with each passing day of the ghetto. We see this especially in Things, Window to the Other Side and The Telephone. The first of these, full of resentment, shows the history of the ghetto in the context of relocations – during the Germans' downsizing of the ghetto – and the diminishing wealth of its inhabitants, who on their final journey (to Treblinka) are only left with "a flask of water" and "a strong pill" (Szlengel, 2012, p. 186). The other two poems convey the poet's nostalgia for his beloved Warsaw, just

beyond the ghetto walls, and his sad reflection that no Polish friends live there for him to call upon. In *Two Gentlemen in the Snow* (*Dwaj panowie na śniegu*), the author tries to convince himself of a bond between “the toiling Jew” (p. 83) and the soldier who guards him, since, among other things, neither of them has a home. In *Top Hat* (*Cylinder*), he lifts his spirits, fantasising, “I’ll don a top hat, / a suit and tails, / walk up to the guard” (p. 167). But these fantasies are overshadowed by his bitterness, dark humour and blasphemy. The final verses of *Little Station Treblinka* (*Mała stacja Treblinka*) read “The station-sign is silent / and silent the three firs, / and silent the black sign which / ‘Treblinka Station’ bears. // A poster also hangs there / (it seems it always has) / with an old and faded message: / ‘Cook only with gas’” (pp. 131 and 133). In the poem *It’s Time* (*Już czas*), the poet, on behalf of the chosen nation, falls out with God and “sentences” him to death in a steam (!) chamber: “and when the agony of death’s no more, / they’ll drag and pitch You in that ghastly hollow / and tear Your stars out – Your jaw will be smashed / for those gold teeth. Burn. / And You shall be ash” (p. 181). The panoply of the attitudes which Szlengel encountered in the ghetto and describe in this volume is particularly rich, and typically laden with irony or sarcasm. The poems feature Jewish policemen, who will have to pay not just for the vodka they drank in a bar but also for their vile behaviour toward their compatriots (*The Bill, Please*), as well as scenes from the liquidation of the ghetto, smugglers, and lovers sentenced to annihilation. Among the heroes of the ghetto, Szlengel tells us of Korczak (a “proud soldier” and “the orphan’s good friend”), and an anonymous mother, memorialised by a cold pot she left on the stove before the Gestapo took her to the *Umschlagplatz*: “Was she so good then? No, not that, / often she’d quarrel and yell, / slam doors in anger, answer sharply... / But – she was there” (p. 135). The volume also touches upon the popular understanding of heroism. The poems, *Two Deaths* (*Dwie śmierci*) and *Five to Twelve* (*Za pięć dwunasta*), reflect the poet’s dream of a dignified death (→ *The Black Seasons*) – which is to say, armed combat, as in the armed response to the “displacement operation” that began on 18 January 1943. The poet reacts to this sudden eruption of violence with mutinous enthusiasm in *Counterattack*: “How happily one shoots at an eye! / This is the front, Little masters! / [...] / Hier man hat mehr kein Mut, / Blut, Blut, Blut. / [...] // holding a crowbar, or a steel lath, / we beg You, God, for one bloody affray, / for violent struggle and a sudden death. / Let our eyes see before we die / not the stretching steel rails [...] / ...let us see before our throats / croak their last death-rattle here, / in those smug hands, the dog-whip paws, / an ordinary human fear” (pp. 205 and 207).

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# White Elephants (O bílých slonech)

**Author:** Irena Dousková

**First Published:** 2008

**About the Author:** Irena Dousková (1964) graduated from the Faculty of Law in Prague (1989) but she has never practised law. She worked as a dramaturg and journalist for several years. Dousková made her literary debut in 1992 with the collective poetry volume *A Prague Miracle*. She is well-known for her tragicomical style, most famous in regard to her breakthrough novel *B. Proudew*, published in 1998. The novel has been later adapted for the stage and it has been running successfully ever since. Dousková's father was Jewish and emigrated to Israel in 1964, the year in which she was born. Dousková herself identifies as Jewish and, additionally to other societal and political themes, the topics of Jewish identity, Judaism and the Shoah also appear in her works.

**Further Important Publications:** *Goldstein píše dceři* (1997, Goldstein Writes to His Daughter; novella); *Hrdý Budžes* (1998, B. Proudew; novel); *Čím se liší tato noc* (2004, What Makes This Night Different; short stories).

## Content and Interpretation

*White Elephants* is a short prose work structured into eight chapters each named according to a classic Czech counting-out rhyme: luck (štěstí), bad luck (neštěstí), love (láska), marriage (manželství), a doll (panenka), a cradle (kolébka), a countess (hraběnka) and death (smrt). Because of this pattern, the text is endowed with an essence of fatality and each title simultaneously foreshadows the events of the following chapters.

The novella focuses on daily life in a village near the city of Beroun in the Central Bohemian Region in the 1970s, during the normalisation period, and it takes place over the course of seven days. Each chapter has a different narrator, a strategy depicting the village in a kaleidoscopic manner. In this way, Dousková not only portrays the characters through various lenses, but also demonstrates how people who are somehow bound to a specific place are likewise bound to each other. There is an emphasis on the importance of the local collective memory which contributes towards the maintenance of the place's history, tradition and culture and *vice versa*, with the place as the site of memory, into which history is being inscribed.

This realisation is crucial for *White Elephants* as the title itself already alludes to a local legend that explains the rocks in the village as a group of white elephants turned into a stone. According to the legend, a prince in the area wanted to marry a girl whom he captured in a battle in a foreign land far in the South. Since their cultures and religions were different, the prince could not marry her unless she underwent baptism first. However, before the priest could perform the ritual, some supernatural power

answered the girl's prayers and turned all the stones around them into white elephants, which helped her to escape. Nevertheless, the prince's God, who was "only one or perhaps three" (Dousková, 2008, p. 34), intervened and turned the animals into stone again, presumably together with the girl. In general, the legend can be read as an allegory of discrimination and oppression of minorities. Within the context of Dousková's text, the interpretation can be more specifically expanded in relation to the Communist regime that is shaping the story's background and also to another legend that is linked to the rocks.

Besides the tale about the white elephants, the villagers also think of the rocks in connection with Schwarz' (one of the villagers) Jewish wife, who was pregnant and supposedly hiding there during the war. They say that someone eventually found out about her hiding place and betrayed the couple as they were later captured and taken away. Nonetheless, unlike his wife, Schwarz survived the war and returned home in 1945. In the text, he is only present through the eyes and comments of others. This exclusion from direct participation in the narrative is analogous to his position as an outsider. He lives alone in the woods and spends his time drinking, delirious. Still, Schwarz represents an indivisible part of the villagers' lives as well as of the place's history. His existence is strongly tied to the memory of his wife and her tragic fate and as such, he is a living reminder of the injustice that has been done and should have been prevented. He embodies not only people's conscience, but also the repercussions of the dreadful events. This fact is exemplified in the conversation between the chimney sweep Kynšterk and the student Jarda. When Kynšterk explains that after Schwarz has come back, "He's gone crazy and isn't the same anymore" Jarda replies, "Just like we aren't the same anymore" (p. 65). This observation relates to the fact that the Shoah has deeply affected Czech society and its consequences have been felt by the witnesses as well as the generations after.

Dousková further elaborates on this idea in the main storyline in which the rocks are the place of a mystical occurrence. After learning about the legends and Schwarz' wife, Kamila Papadoulisová visits the cave in which she had been hiding and encounters a female ghost there, who apologises for her presence, saying that she should not be there. This is followed by a flash of light coming from the woman's eyes into Kamila's. The cave here is a timeless place manifesting the connection of the past with the present. It preserves the memory of someone who no longer exists, but whose existence is still very intensively felt not only on a personal level, but also within a wider historical context.

However, there is a fine line defining the story about the Jewess in hiding as a real-life event rather than just a legend comparable to the one about the white elephants. When Schwarz dies, the local Communist mayor Podzimek visits his cottage and finds a diary there written by his wife. He reads an excerpt from 1940 in which she reflects on the oppression that she is forced to face, but also on faith and its power. Afterwards, Podzimek burns the diary in a stove, thus disposing of the artifact that could have served as proof of her existence and the truthfulness of her story. Burning

the diary, Podzimek silences her voice and blurs the boundary dividing her story from the rest of the village folktales, thereby reinforcing its fictional status.

### Main Topics and Problems

Dousková explores life after the Holocaust, focusing especially on the generation that experienced the war as children. This explains her interest in the memory transmission, the importance of bearing witness and the differentiation between facts and fiction, in the case of *White Elephants*, particularly concerning oral tradition. She is well aware of the danger stemming from the mixing of history with imagination that might result in distortion of and manipulation with truth. Hence, the diary entry that Podzimek reads begins as follows, “We know about a number of things whose existence cannot be doubted, yet, people still doubt them” (p. 120). Similarly, Podzimek is unable to make out the last two lines of the entry. This image of illegible text signifies an absence of closure and at the same time, an invitation to speculation and deception. Within the current context when there is only a handful of Holocaust survivors left, while there are still cases of Holocaust deniers, this threat of turning facts into fiction appears even more alarming.

Regarding the story about Schwarz’ wife, the villagers already recount the narrative as if it occurred in a distant past. They are not entirely sure about its veracity, although they did witness the war and have been surrounded by adults who knew the particularities. Furthermore, the identity of the Jewess is defined by her ethnicity and marital status, which contributes towards her portrayal comparable to a mythological character. The only other piece of information that the reader learns is that, supposedly, she was very pretty – another fact reinforcing the myth due to its stereotype. The villagers also think and talk about her story in connection with other local legends, thus undermining its historicity. Given the circumstances, the displacement of the victim’s narrative from the realm of factuality to one of fictionality might be related to the repression of traumatic memories. This leads the readers back to the significance of place with respect to memory as illustrated with the local rocks in Dousková’s novella.

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# Without Beauty, without a Collar (Bez krásy, bez límce)

**Author:** Hana Bělohradská

**First Published:** 1962

**Translation:** French (*Docteur Braun, derniers jours*, 2001).

**Film Adaptation:** ...*a pátý jezdec je Strach* (...And the Fifth Horseman Is Fear), feature film; screenplay Hana Bělohradská and Zbyněk Brynych; film director Zbyněk Brynych, premiered 12th of February, 1964.

**About the Author:** Hana Bělohradská (1929–2005) was a Czech writer, playwright and translator. Both her parents were lawyers. She studied law at Charles University in Prague, from 1949 to 1961 she worked as an orderly, and later a laboratory assistant in a pediatric clinic in Prague. From 1961 to 1970 she was a professional writer. Due to her support of the liberal reforms in the Prague Spring in 1968 and 1969, Bělohradská was not allowed to publish her works until 1989. She also translated several books into Czech from the English (for instance Arthur Upfield and Edward Albee).

## Content and Interpretation

The novella is set in Prague in May of 1940, and its final scenes in October and December of 1941. The main character is a lonely Jewish intellectual Armin Braun, a doctor by profession, who is 72 years old. Many years ago, his wife left him; his son has emigrated to Portugal. Braun's neighbour in the tenement house is Šidlák, a worker and communist involved in the resistance against the Nazis. One day Šidlák asks Braun to treat a sick Czech resistance fighter, Pánek, who is hiding in his flat. Braun finds out that Pánek has severe pneumonia and needs some special medicine, sulphapyridine. To get this medicine, Braun looks for his former Jewish colleague and friend, doctor Wiener. Due to Nazi persecution, Wiener and his wife, once wealthy and satisfied people, are now demoralised. Helene Wiener had attempted suicide, her husband drinks heavily in a bar, the only one in Prague where the Jews are allowed to enter. At last, Wiener gets the medicine and Pánek's health condition becomes better.

Nevertheless, the German Gestapo receives an anonymous denunciation, invades the building and ransacks all the flats. Braun decides to bring Pánek into his flat and hide him under the bed. By chance, an old lady who is a music teacher, and a young boy named Honza see the situation and help Braun. The Germans do not think that an old Jew could hide someone and so they leave.

The owner of the building, Dr. Veselý, a Czech lawyer, seizes the opportunity and easily acquires one Jewish property. His mistress, Zdena Čádová, who has contacts with Gestapo officials tells him that the Germans know about Šidlák's resistance activ-

ity. Veselý undergoes an internal struggle and decides to warn Šidlák. However, at this moment Veselý is himself arrested for financial fraud. Veselý's wife visits his mistress and they manage his release. But Šidlák is detained and sent to a concentration camp. The desperate Veselý attempts suicide and is saved by Braun.

Later, in autumn of 1941, Braun must wear a yellow star on his coat. Transports of Czech Jews begin. Braun is on friendly terms with Honza and often lends him books. In December of 1941, Braun is ordered by the Germans to shovel snow. After working all day, he is drained of his strength, has a heart attack, and dies on the street.

Armin Braun is a little man who is involved in an extreme situation. These characters appear often in Czech literature thematising the Holocaust. Švenk's → *The Last Cyclist*, Weil's → *Life with a Star*, Grosman's → *The Shop on Main Street* or Fuks' → *Mr Theodore Mundstock*. He is old, desperate and exhausted, lives alone and loses not only his freedom but also his human dignity. "... the whole world became dread, loneliness, and recollections he didn't want to think about. [...] His person didn't exist anymore. From all that, it remained an absurd and decisive designation – a Jew, Saujude" (Bělohorská, 1962, pp. 8–9).

Braun's medical assistance for the sick Czech resistance fighter means a huge risk for him, but also a possibility to straighten up and to restore his inner freedom and dignity. It is a turning point in his life. Even if he eventually dies, the young boy Honza finds some sense of life and hope, mainly thanks to Braun.

### Main Topics and Problems

*Without Beauty, without a Collar* is the first published literary work of Hana Bělohorská. She uses her knowledge of the medical profession in this novella. Similarly to her following novels, short stories and plays, it is concentrated on the psychology of the characters. The narration of the story is presented as internal monologues of the characters interspersed with the author's narrative. The inhabitants of the tenement house in Prague represent various attitudes towards the Nazi regime (see also Otčenášek's novella → *Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness* or Andrzejewski's → *Holy Week*). Vochozka, an insurance clerk, the father of Honza, is cautious and timid. He wants "to survive in peace" (p. 14). Honza hates him for his cowardice. Veselý, the lawyer, is intelligent but hard-boiled. The most negative figure is the unscrupulous Zdena Čádová who informs Veselý about the surveillance of Šidlák hoping to blackmail the resistant movement. On the other hand, there are positive characters fighting against the Nazis or helping Braun, Šidlák, Dvořáček, a teacher at the high school, Jirák, a caretaker, Honza and the unnamed old widow music teacher. It is just her who is reminded of the words from the title. When she was young, she had read about the execution of Mary Stuart. It was "a unique, noble tragedy, the beautiful young queen with a big collar" (p. 68). Today, executions are usual, she herself could also imitate Mary Stuart – however without beauty and without a collar. A few days later, the image of the collar as the danger of the death is repeated when the narrator describes Armin Braun. Eventually, his death is not noble but ordinary and humiliating.

The film adaptation of the novella, in which Hana Bělohradská participated, is named *...And the Fifth Horseman Is Fear*. It is a nod to the biblical *Book of Revelation* (Apocalypse) where four horsemen appear on white, red, black, and pale horses which bring pestilence, war, famine and death. In fact, fear is the dominant topic of the prose as well as the film. Everyone is consumed by fear for their own lives. The adaptation was directed by Zbyněk Brynych who filmed Arnošt Lustig's stories from the Theresienstadt Ghetto two years before. The film omits several motifs from the book and adds some others. For instance, Braun's visit of the insane asylum where he looks for the necessary medicine is new. The sequences from the madhouse and from the Jewish bar evoke the bizarre and delirious situation of the Jews and the wartime in general. The biggest difference can be found in the final scene. In the novella Braun dies on the street after being forced to shovel snow. In the film, in contrast to it, he admits to the Gestapo officials that he has treated the resistant fighter. Then after taking off one glove, he swallows a cyanide pill, and dies. His suicide means a moral victory, he does not fall into the hands of the Nazis.

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## The Woman Rabbi (Rabínka)

**Author:** Anna Grusková

**First Published:** *Glosolália* (review), (2) 2013

**Translations:** Czech (*Rabínka*, 2008); English (*The Woman Rabbi*, 2008); Italian (*La Rabbina*, 2011); Polish (*Rabínka*, 2017).

**Theatre Adaptations:** Teatro Reon, Bologna (2010); Slovenské národné divadlo, Bratislava (2012).

**Public Readings:** Teatro di Roma (In altre parole), Rome (2011); Bohemian National Hall, New York (2014); Festival of the New Theatre, Rzeszów (2017); Teatr przy stole (Theatre at the Table), Sopot (2018).

**About the Author:** Anna Grusková (1962) is a theatre and film director, playwright, screenwriter, theatre scientist and curator. She graduated from the theatre and film science at the Charles University in Prague. Her doctoral studies took place at the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. She worked as a lecturer at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, then in the Bratislava Theatre Institute and as editor-in-chief of the review *Medzičasopis*. In 2001, she spent three months in India. After return she started focusing on art – theatre and television dramaturgy, acting, directing, writing radio and theatre plays, prose, poetry as well as translating. She has staged productions with mentally challenged actors, homeless people and social workers, she co-operates with professional theatres in Slovakia and abroad. In this way she has directed the play *The Bloody Key* (with Uršula Kovalyk, 2004), her adaption of Arthur Schnitzler play *Five Courses for Two Persons* (2009), as well as the collection of short international plays *Danube Drama or Ugly Coffee and Cheap Cigarettes* (2010). She has written plays for Slovak Radio, such as *A Turkish Fancy for Women* (1996) about the Austrian painter Gustav Klimt or *Almtraum* (2004) about Alma Mahler-Werfel; she has adapted the Indian fables *Panchatantra* (2002) and the Sanskrit epic poem *Mahabharata* (2004).

Grusková has initiated important Slovak and international social and theatre projects like *Brides* (2007–2009) or *Sarcophaguses and Cashpoints* (2008–2009) and she has written the core play for the Czech Project of the Archa Theatre Chance '89 (2009), with an intention to create theatre plays reflecting the life in Czechoslovakia and Slovakia before and after the Velvet Revolution. In 2012, she became a film director. She has directed, among others, the docufilm *The Woman Rabbi* (2012) and *A Return to the Burning House* (2014) dedicated to Haviva Reick who was one of the parachutists sent by the Jewish Agency on military missions in Slovakia in 1944. She writes both in Slovak and Czech language and translates from the German into Slovak (Arthur Schnitzler, Hans-Thies Lehmann).

### Content and Interpretation

The Slovak Republik (1939–1945) was formally independent but in fact it was a puppet state of Nazi Germany. In September of 1941 the so-called “Jewish Codex” was declared in Slovakia. The rights of the Jews were substantially restricted. In the spring 1942, the first wave of Jewish transports by Slovak authorities was organised. Within several months, 58,000 Slovak Jews were transported to Auschwitz and other extermination camps and ghettos. The second wave of Jewish transports followed from September 1944, when German troops invaded Slovakia to suppress the Slovak National Uprising. And another 13,500 Jews were deported and hundreds more were murdered in Slovakia. An estimated 68,000 to 71,000 Slovak Jews were killed, which was more than 80 percent of the prewar Jewish population.

The *Woman Rabbi* presents the brave efforts of a group of Slovak Jews to prevent these transports. The main character of all versions (see below) of *The Woman Rabbi* is Gisi (Gisela) Fleischmann, a real Jewish social activist (1892–1944). She was a member of the Slovak Jewish Council (Judenrat), appointed to the initiative of the German authorities in order to facilitate the deportations of the Jews. At the same time, she was one of the founders of the illegal Working Group that sabotaged the activities of the official Council. She tried in every possible way to influence Slovak and German officials to stop or at least to delay or diminish the deportations. It happened mainly through the bribery of high officials including the Nazi “advisor for the Jewish question in Slovakia” Dieter Wisliceny. The money for the effort was obtained from international Jewish organisations. Gisi’s illegal activities were finally betrayed, she was arrested and in October of 1944 sent to Auschwitz where she was killed.

Gisi talks with her mother, one of her daughters and two of her friends, and each scene shows the multilayered situation of the character. She is a daughter, mother and an activist and all these roles are impossible to connect. She is also shown as a reflective, highly moral and complicated person with many doubts and with normal human weaknesses.

Gisi: Sometimes I imagine that we are train stations and between us run fast trains and local trains. They carry to us desires, friendship, success and love... but also loss, hatred and anger. We may feel that they are on the way, some still far off, some closer, some just a few tens of meters away, but until they arrive, it’s as if they don’t exist at all.

We don’t know their schedules, and so we stand on the platform, and wait until their lights appear in the distance, and we try to guess which train will stop at our station and when we’ll hear the screech of their brakes... (Grusková, 2012, p. 79).

Gisi Fleischmann united the Slovak Jewish community and this is the reason that she is in the play called the *Woman Rabbi*: she acted as a spiritual leader, protector and an authority, but also as a servant who voluntarily gave up her own family life to serve the community. The content of the play mainly concerns all these difficult choices and decisions that Gisi Fleischmann had to make. The main character is entangled in the necessity to endure her mother’s allegations of neglecting the family, and her two

daughters' incomprehension and sorrow. On the other hand she is shown as a strong personality, who negotiates with German officials in a hard and determined way.

### Main Topics and Problems

Anna Grusková has elaborated three versions of the play as well as a radio trilogy and a documentary film, each under the title *The Woman Rabbi* (Rabínka), and all of them based on the author's first play from 2006 and subsequently enriched with new additional storylines and facts.

It is necessary to remember that Grusková's narrative has evolved over time: the first version from 2006, *firstly* concentrated on Gisi Fleischmann's choices, decisions and relations with her family while the following versions (radio play, theatre plays, film) were enriched with some background information regarding the historical and political context of the fate of Slovak Jews during the war.

In all three versions of her play, Grusková experimented with the dramatic form, combining facts and fiction, using some cinematic approaches and the "play within a play" device in order to enrich the story with an allusion to Queen Esther's story from the *Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)*. On the other hand, it is close to so-called docudramas (for instance Peter Weiss, Rolf Hochhuth and Arnošt Goldflam's → *Sweet Theresienstadt*, to some extent Thomas Bernhard or Joshua Sobol). They put for the question of the responsibility not only of perpetrators, but also of the ordinary citizens or even of the victims.

It is also indicated by theatre critics that in addition to the gender dimension of Grusková's story – considered as a way to show the female experience of the war and the Holocaust → *A Private Conversation*, → *Doctor Josef's Beauty*, → *Hannah*, → *The Land of Forgetting*, → *The Sound of the Sundial*. It also contains yet another aspect: the cultural memory of the space. The playwright restores the historical narrative of Bratislava, and of a forgotten episode and person, which deserves to be remembered.

The activities of Gisi Fleischmann as well as Grusková's play inspired the Israeli film director Natascha Dudinski to create her documentary film *Gisi* (2014).

### Cited Work

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# The Wrecked Temple in Me (Vo mne zbúraný chrám)

**Author:** Milan Richter

**First Published:** 2002

**Translations:** selected pieces in English and German (*Vo mne zbúraný chrám: The Wrecked Temple in Me: Der niedergerissene Tempel in mir*, 2002).

**About the Author:** Milan Richter (1948) was born into a Slovak-Czech-Jewish family in Bratislava. His parents had survived the Holocaust, nevertheless, his grandparents and aunts perished in concentration camps in Poland. Richter studied German and English at Comenius University in Bratislava. He worked in publishing houses and translated from English, German, Swedish and other languages (Ernest Hemingway's poems, J. W. Goethe's *Faust*, the theatre adaptation of which was premiered in Bratislava 2010, Franz Kafka's aphorisms, R. M. Rilke's poems among others). In the 1990s, he was the Slovakian chargé d'affaires in Norway and an editor in literary reviews and later in his own publishing house MilaniuM. He compiled the first anthology of Slovak literature about the Holocaust *God's Lane* (1998, Božia ulička). He published several collections of poems and is an author of several plays and radio plays, for instance the docudrama *Alfréd Wetzler, A Hero Against His Will* (2018, Nechcený hrdina Alfréd Wetzler).

**Further Important Publications:** *Korene vo vzduchu* (1992, Roots in the Air; poems); *Spoza zamatových opôn* (1997, From Behind the Velvet Curtains; poems); *Anjel s čiernym perím* (2000, An Angel with Black Feathers; poems); *Tajomstvá dokorán* (2008, Secrets Wide Open; poems).

## Content and Interpretation

The collection contains 33 poems, 11 of them also in English translations and 7 of them in German translations. In the majority of cases, they have been published in Richter's previous books, some of them are new. The poems are followed by explanations where the author clarifies historical and personal context, to which the texts refer. The book also contains a short testimony from Erika Richterová, born Grimm, the author's mother, about her internment in ghettos.

Almost all the texts present stories from the traditional Jewish past, especially from the Holocaust. Three poems evoke heroic characters from the *Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)* (Moses; Esther and three young men in the blazing furnace). The author's relatives appear in many of the poems, so do his grandmother, father, aunts, uncle, cousin and nieces. But particular attention is paid to the author's mother. The first part of the poem *Hopes (Nádeje)*, with the subtitle *February 1939*, presents his mother as a young girl before the war and the persecution of her family.

You know about it from encyclopedias, from history books,  
 from the memoirs of marshals, from Goebbels' diaries,  
 you know about it from your mother's tales,  
 told so intimately sometimes and in such detail  
 it seems as though you'd been that nineteen-year-old  
 whose hopes were frozen that early Spring. (p. 23)

In *Three Lives (Tri životy)* it is noted that she had escaped death three times when she was excluded from the transports to Auschwitz. Nevertheless, her parents and other people close to her have died. The poem *Meeting in the Courtyard of Death (Stretnutie na nádvorí smrti)* describes the first meeting of his mother and his father in Theresienstadt in October 1944.

Other poems also thematise the motifs of the Shoah. *Roots in the Air (Korene vo vzduchu)* utilises the motto of the world-known German-Jewish poet Paul Celan "In the air, that's where your roots are, / over there, in the air". It's the dialogue of two neighbours probably held on the Day of the Dead Honoring the Deceased. The first man had visited graves of his mother, brother etc. The second is running home. The neighbour asks "You've been to your graves then?" he answers: "I have no graves... [...] In the air about Auschwitz, over there, / in the air they lie" (p. 16).

The last and title poem *The Wrecked Temple in Me (Vo mne zbúraný chrám)* connects the history of Jews and the author's family history with the Holocaust. The author brings to mind the suffering of Joseph, thrown in the pit, the tribulation of Daniel and other Jewish figures. He recalls his grandfathers, the war and the harsh post-war fate of the Jews:

[...]  
 the wrecked temple in me  
 has tiles from the gas chambers of Auschwitz,  
 on the wood of its benches sat innocents  
 convicted of crimes by their own phrases learnt by heart,  
 behinds its Torah hid the benefactors, father's friends,  
  
 when under his coffin the temple suddenly collapsed  
 before the young face of my mother,  
 whom God left alone with three children  
 in that holocaust of the 1950s... (p. 67)

The verse "holocaust of the 1950" is more comprehensible from the afore mentioned poem *Meeting in the Courtyard of Death (Stretnutie na nádvorí smrti)*. Here, the author writes "the creeping Holocaust... did not drop in the camps, it settled like a louse / in the leather coats of informers, guardsmen, in the skin of the communists" (p. 37).

### Main Topics and Problems

Most poems are written in free verse and are epic, based on a story or event, with the author's comments and reflections. The author presents the Holocaust as a part of his

family history, but also as a part of Jewish history in general. According to him, the Holocaust is not something divergent and singular in history; it is only the event where the persecution of Jews continues and culminates here. So the author is inclined to stress a universal and collective representation of the Shoah. This corresponds to the symbol of the wrecked temple in the title. The author tries to “build quietly this temple” again (p. 87), but the contemporary world “that gives no joy / to those who do not shout and destroy” (p. 87) does not have a positive response to it.

The Holocaust, which was based on xenophobia and hatred, did not end with the defeat of Nazism. Even into the present, it has continued to reemerge in old as well as in new forms.

“Herr Richter!” they address you.

Or “You bastard!”

“They should all gasify you.”

“Do not play God here!” (p. 48)

“Hitler would sort this lot out!”

thundered an elderly worker

at the long-distance [inter-city] bus stop,

where four Gypsy teenagers were loitering. (p. 33)

Some poems respond to current events or documents. For instance, Small Jewish Blackboard (Malá židovská tabuľa) replies to revealing the memorial plaque of the President of the Slovak clerofascist regime Jozef Tiso in the summer of 1990. He was responsible for the persecution and deportations of Slovak Jews. Tiso was executed in 1947 for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The author is reminded of his relatives whom Tiso and his government had sent to death and of the fact that the Slovak government had paid Hitler’s Germany 500 marks for each Jew sent to a concentration camp in Poland.

In *The Wrecked Temple in Me*, many traditional motifs can be found which are common for Holocaust literature, i.e. a vision of God “who walked off in the gas / in the smoke of his children” (p. 51). It is similar to Ota B. Kraus’s vision → *The Land without God* or Otto Weiss’s story → *And God Saw That It Was Bad* where God can only helplessly watch the events in the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Another frequently used motif in Holocaust literature is a surviving trauma that is thematised here in the poem The One Who Survived (Ten, ktorý prežil). References to the *Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)* that recall the current situation of the Jews, are also often found (see afore). For example, in the poem At the Time of Leaving (Vo chvíli odchádzania), the author paraphrases *The Book of Ecclesiastes (Kohélet)* as well as the *Song of Songs*.

### Cited Work

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# Detailed Overview

## Entries Sorted Alphabetically by Author

English Title (Name of the entry)	Original Title	Author	Year of Publication / Premiere
The Sound of the Sundial	Zvuk slunečních hodin	Andronikova, Hana	2001
Holy Week	Wielki Tydzień	Andrzejewski, Jerzy	1945
The Land of Forgetting	Krajina zabudnutia	Baláž, Anton	2000
The Flytrap Factory	Fabryka muchołapek	Bart, Andrzej	2008
Without Beauty, without a Collar	Bez krásy, bez límce	Bělohradská, Hana	1962
The Most Important Particle	Ta najważniejsza cząsteczka	Benski, Stanisław	1982
Tworki	Tworki	Bieńczyk, Marek	1999
The Abandoned Doll	Opuštěná panenka	Bor, Josef	1961
The Terezín Requiem	Terezínské Rekviem	Bor, Josef	1963
A Private Conversation	Soukromý rozhovor	Bořkocvová, Hana	2004
A Farewell to Maria	Pożegnanie z Marią	Borowski, Tadeusz	1948
The Song Will Survive...	Pieśń ujdzie cało...	Borwicz, Michał	1947
The Day of Wrath	Dzień gniewu	Brandstaetter, Roman	1962
Samson	Samson	Brandys, Kazimierz	1948
Selected Poetry	Poezje wybrane	Broniewski, Władysław	1943–1945
Black Torrent	Czarny potok	Buczkowski, Leopold	1954
Pocket Atlas of Women	Kieszonkowy atlas kobiet	Chutnik, Sylwia	2008
The Black Tree's Memory	Černá paměť stromu	Čivrný, Lumír	1974
Money from Hitler	Peníze od Hitlera	Denemarková, Radka	2006
God's Horse	Koň Pana Boga	Dichter, Wilhelm	1996
White Elephants	O bílých slonech	Dousková, Irena	2008
A Reading of Ashes	Odczytanie popiołów	Ficowski, Jerzy	1979
A Scrap of Time	Skrawek czasu	Fink, Ida	1974
The Court Jesters	Dvorní šašci	Fischl, Viktor / Dagan, Avigdor	1982

English Title (Name of the entry)	Original Title	Author	Year of Publication / Premiere
A Box of Lives	Krabice živých	Frýd, Norbert	1956
Mr Theodore Mundstock	Pan Teodor Mundstock	Fuks, Ladislav	1963
The Cremator	Spalovač mrtvol	Fuks, Ladislav	1967
Lily of the Valley	Konvália	Fulmeková, Denisa	2016
Doctor Mráz	Doktor Mráz	Fulmeková, Denisa	2018
Trap with a Green Fence	Treblinka, slovo jak z dětské říkanky	Glazar, Richard	1992
The Black Seasons	Czarne sezony	Głowiński, Michał	1998
Sweet Theresienstadt	Sladký Theresienstadt	Goldflam, Arnošt	1996
At Home with the Hitlers	Doma u Hitlerů	Goldflam, Arnošt	2007
The Shop on Main Street	Obchod na korze	Grosman, Ladislav	1965
The Woman Rabbi	Rabínka	Grusková, Anna	2010
The Jewish War and The Victory	Żydowska wojna, Zwycięstwo	Grynberg, Henryk	1965
Tumult	Rejwach	Grynberg, Mikołaj	2017
The Empty Field	Puste pole	Hołuj, Tadeusz	1963
Modern Nativity Play	Jasełka-moderne	Iredyński, Ireneusz	1962
A Black Solstice	Čierny slnovrat	Jarunková, Klára	1979
St. Elizabeth's Square	Námestie svätej Alžbety	Jašík, Rudolf	1958
A Human Matter	Rzecz ludzka	Jastrun, Mieczysław	1946
The Elephants in Mauthausen	Slony v Mauthausene	Johanides, Ján	1985
A Pending Matter	Nevybavená záležitosť	Juráňová, Jana	2013
A Christmas Legend from the Ghetto	Vánoční legenda z ghetta	Kafka, František	1946
The Stein Brothers Are in Town	Ve městě jsou bratři Steinové	Kalábová, Věra	1967
The Old Man and Fate	Starý pán a osud	Karvaš, Peter	1979
A Piece about Mother and Fatherland	Utwór o Matce i Ojczyźnie	Keff, Božena	2008
The Holocaust	Holokaust	Klimáček, Viliam	2012
The Sixth Battalion, On Guard!	Šiesty praporek, na stráž!	Knieža, Emil F.	1964

<b>English Title (Name of the entry)</b>	<b>Original Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Year of Publication / Premiere</b>
Lessons in Love and Dancing	Hodina tance a lásky	Kohout, Pavel	1989
Plague in Athens	Mor v Athénách	Kolář, Jiří	1965
The Liver of Prometheus	Prometheova játra	Kolář, Jiří	1979
From The Abyss: Memories from the Camp	Z otchłani: Wspomnienia z lagru	Kossak, Zofia	1946
The Earth Under Your Feet	Zem pod nohami	Kováč, Mikuláš	1960
The Subtenant	Sublokatorka	Krall, Hanna	1985
Proofs of Existence	Dowody na istnienie	Krall, Hanna	1995
The Land without God	Země bez Boha	Kraus, Ota B.	1948
Emma and the Death's Head Hawkmoth	Ema a Smrtihlav	Křišťufek, Peter	2014
Frascati. An Apotheosis of Topography	Frascati. Apoteoza topografii	Kuryluk, Ewa	2009
The Last Thing	Posledná vec	Lahola, Leopold	1968
Diamonds of the Night	Démanty noci	Lustig, Arnošt	1958
A Prayer for Katerina Horovitzova	Modlitba pro Kateřinu Horovitzovou	Lustig, Arnošt	1964
Crow Songs	Vraní zpěvy	Malý, Radek	2002
Boundary Marker	Kamień graniczny	Matywiecki, Piotr	1994
Selected Poetry	Poezje wybrane	Miłosz, Czesław	1943
Death Is Called Engelchen	Smrť sa volá Engelchen	Mňačko, Ladislav	1959
Hannah	Hana	Mornštajnová, Alena	2017
Medallions	Medaliony	Natkowska, Zofia	1946
Sidra Noach	Sidra Noach	Novotný, David Jan	2010
Postscriptum	Postscriptum	Nurowska, Maria	1989
The Night of the Living Jews	Noc żywych Żydów	Ostachowicz, Igor	2012
Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness	Romeo, Julie a tma	Otčenášek, Jan	1958
There Used to Be a Jewish Women, There Is No More Jewish Woman Now	Była Żydówka, nie ma Żydówki	Pankowski, Marian	2008

English Title (Name of the entry)	Original Title	Author	Year of Publication / Premiere
The Death of the Beautiful Deer	Smrt krásných srnců	Pavel, Ota	1971
The Boarding House	Pensjonat	Paziński, Piotr	2009
Confession	Spowiedź	Perechodnik, Calek	1993/2004
Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals	Spolek pro ochranu zvířat	Pick, Jiří Robert	1969
More Gas, Comrades!	Więcej gazu, Kameraden!	Piwowarski, Krystian	2012
It Happened on the First September (or Whenever)	Stalo sa prvého septembra (alebo inokedy)	Rankov, Pavol	2008
The Wrecked Temple in Me	Vo mne zbúraný chrám	Richter, Milan	2002
An Excursion to the Museum	Wycieczka do muzeum	Różewicz, Tadeusz	1961
The Escape from Yasnaya Polyana, Shakespeare	Ucieczka z Jasnej Polany, Szekspir	Rudnicki, Adolf	1948/1949
Doctor Josef's Beauty	Šlicznotka doktora Josefa	Rudzka, Zyta	2006
The Final Station	Umschlagplatz	Rymkiewicz, Jarosław M.	1988
Death of a Liberal	Śmierć liberała	Sandauer, Artur	1947
Concert on the Island	Koncert na ostrově	Seifert, Jaroslav	1965
The Suitcase	Walizka	Sikorska-Miszczuk, Małgorzata	2008
The Lilies of Erika	Erikine ľalie	Šíkula, Vincent	1996
The Menorah	Sedmiramenný svícen	Škvorecký, Josef	1964
Our Class	Nasza klasa	Słobodzianek, Tadeusz	2009
Elegy for the Little Jewish Towns	Elegia miasteczek żydowskich	Stonimski, Antonin	1951
I Didn't Want to Be a Jew	Nechcel som byť Žid	Špitzer, Juraj	1994
The Peasant	Sedliak	Švantner, František	1947
The Last Cyclist	Poslední cyklista	Švenk, Karel	1961
The Beautiful Mrs Seidenman	Początek	Szczypiorski, Andrzej	1986
Annihilation	Zagłada	Szewc, Piotr	1987
What I Read to the Dead	Co czytałem umarłym	Szlengel, Władysław	1977

English Title (Name of the entry)	Original Title	Author	Year of Publication / Premiere
The Pianist	Śmierć miasta	Szpilman, Władysław	1946
Selected Poetry	Poezje wybrane	Szyborska, Wisława	1945
The Clerical Republic	Farská republika	Tatarka, Dominik	1948
The Devil's Workshop	Chladnou zemí	Topol, Jáchym	2009
Italian High Heels	Włoskie szpilki	Tulli, Magdalena	2011
We, Polish Jews	My, Żydzi polscy	Tuwim, Julian	1944
Miracle in the Darkhouse	Zázrak v černém domě	Uhde, Milan	2012
The Fourth Language	Štvrtá reč	Vilikovský, Pavel	2013
Colors	Barvy	Weil, Jiří	1946
Life with a Star	Život s hvězdou	Weil, Jiří	1949
Elegy for 77,297 Victims	Žalozpěv za 77 297 obětí	Weil, Jiří	1958
And God Saw That It Was Bad	I viděl Bůh, že je to špatné	Weiss, Otto	1997
Bread for the Departed	Chleb rzucony umarłym	Wojdowski, Bogdan	1971
Diary of Love	Pamiętnik miłości	Wygodzki, Stanisław	1948

## Entries Sorted by Year of Publication/Premiere

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Selected Poetry	Poezje wybrane	Broniewski, Władysław	1943–1945
Selected Poetry	Poezje wybrane	Miłosz, Czesław	1943
We, Polish Jews	My, Żydzi polscy	Tuwim, Julian	1944
Holy Week	Wielki Tydzień	Andrzejewski, Jerzy	1945
Selected Poetry	Poezje wybrane	Szyborska, Wisława	1945
A Human Matter	Rzecz ludzka	Jastrun, Mieczysław	1946
A Christmas Legend from the Ghetto	Vánoční legenda z ghetta	Kafka, František	1946
From The Abyss	Z otchłani	Kossak, Zofia	1946
Medallions	Medaliony	Natkowska, Zofia	1946
The Pianist	Śmierć miasta	Szpilman, Władysław	1946

English Title (Name of the entry)	Original Title	Author	Year of Publication / Premiere
Colors	Barvy	Weil, Jiří	1946
The Song Will Survive...	Pieśni ujdzie cało...	Borwicz, Michał	1947
Death of a Liberal	Śmierć liberała	Sandauer, Artur	1947
The Peasant	Sedliak	Švantner, František	1947
A Farewell to Maria	Pożegnanie z Marią	Borowski, Tadeusz	1948
Samson	Samson	Brandys, Kazimierz	1948
The Land without God	Země bez Boha	Kraus, Ota B.	1948
The Clerical Republic	Farská republika	Tatarka, Dominik	1948
Diary of Love	Pamiętnik miłości	Wygodzki, Stanisław	1948
The Escape from Yasnaya Polyana, Shakespeare	Ucieczka z Jasnej Polany, Szekspir	Rudnicki, Adolf	1948/1949
Life with a Star	Život s hvězdou	Weil, Jiří	1949
Elegy for the Little Jewish Towns	Elegia miasteczek żydowskich	Stonimski, Antonin	1951
Black Torrent	Czarny potok	Buczowski, Leopold	1954
A Box of Lives	Krabice živých	Frýd, Norbert	1956
St. Elizabeth's Square	Námestie svätej Alžbety	Jašík, Rudolf	1958
Diamonds of the Night	Démanty noci	Lustig, Arnošt	1958
Romeo and Juliet and the Darkness	Romeo, Julie a tma	Otčenášek, Jan	1958
Elegy for 77,297 Victims	Žalozpěv za 77 297 obětí	Weil, Jiří	1958
Death Is Called Engelchen	Smrť sa volá Engelchen	Mňačko, Ladislav	1959
The Earth Under Your Feet	Zem pod nohami	Kováč, Mikuláš	1960
The Abandoned Doll	Opuštěná panenka	Bor, Josef	1961
An Excursion to the Museum	Wycieczka do muzeum	Różewicz, Tadeusz	1961
The Last Cyclist	Poslední cyklista	Švenk, Karel	1961
Without Beauty, without a Collar	Bez krásy, bez límce	Bělohradská, Hana	1962
The Day of Wrath	Dzień gniewu	Brandstaetter, Roman	1962
Modern Nativity Play	Jasełka-moderne	Iredyński, Ireneusz	1962
The Terezín Requiem	Terezínské Rekviem	Bor, Josef	1963

<b>English Title (Name of the entry)</b>	<b>Original Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Year of Publication / Premiere</b>
Mr Theodore Mundstock	Pan Teodor Mundstock	Fuks, Ladislav	1963
The Empty Field	Puste pole	Hotuj, Tadeusz	1963
The Sixth Battalion, On Guard!	Šiesty prápor, na stráž!	Knieža, Emil F.	1964
A Prayer for Katerina Horovitzova	Modlitba pro Kateřinu Horovitzovou	Lustig, Arnošt	1964
The Menorah	Sedmiramenný svícen	Škvorecký, Josef	1964
The Shop on Main Street	Obchod na korze	Grosman, Ladislav	1965
The Jewish War / The Victory	Żydowska wojna / Zwycięstwo	Grynberg, Henryk	1965
Plague in Athens	Mor v Athénách	Kolář, Jiří	1965
Concert on the Island	Koncert na ostrově	Seifert, Jaroslav	1965
The Cremator	Spalovač mrtvol	Fuks, Ladislav	1967
The Stein Brothers Are in Town	Ve městě jsou bratři Steinové	Kalábová, Věra	1967
The Last Thing	Posledná vec	Lahola, Leopold	1968
Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals	Spolek pro ochranu zvířat	Pick, Jiří Robert	1969
The Death of the Beautiful Deer	Smrt krásných srnců	Pavel, Ota	1971
Bread for the Departed	Chleb rzucony umarłym	Wojdowski, Bogdan	1971
The Black Tree's Memory	Černá paměť stromu	Čivrný, Lumír	1974/1991
A Scrap of Time	Skrawek czasu	Fink, Ida	1974
What I Read to the Dead	Co czytałem umarłym	Szlengel, Władysław	1977
A Reading of Ashes	Odczytanie popiołów	Ficowski, Jerzy	1979
A Black Solstice	Čierny slnovrat	Jarunková, Klára	1979
The Old Man and Fate	Starý pán a osud	Karvaš, Peter	1979
The Liver of Prometheus	Prometheova játra	Kolář, Jiří	1979
The Most Important Particle	Ta najważniejsza cząsteczka	Benski, Stanisław	1982
The Court Jesters	Dvorní šašci	Fischl, Viktor / Dagan, Avigdor	1982
The Elephants in Mauthausen	Slony v Mauthausene	Ján Johanides	1985

English Title (Name of the entry)	Original Title	Author	Year of Publication / Premiere
The Subtenant	Sublokatorka	Krall, Hanna	1985
The Beautiful Mrs Seidenman	Początek	Szczypiorski, Andrzej	1986
Annihilation	Zagłada	Szewc, Piotr	1987
The Final Station	Umschlagplatz	Rymkiewicz, Jarosław M.	1988
Lessons in Love and Dancing	Hodina tance a lásky	Kohout, Pavel	1989
Postscriptum	Postscriptum	Nurowska, Maria	1989
Trap with a Green Fence	Treblinka, slovo jak z dětské říkanky	Glazar, Richard	1992
Confession	Spowiedź	Perechodnik, Calek	1993/2004
Boundary Marker	Kamień graniczny	Matywiecki, Piotr	1994
I Didn't Want to Be a Jew	Nechcel som byť Žid	Špitzer, Juraj	1994
Proofs of Existence	Dowody na istnienie	Krall, Hanna	1995
God's Horse	Koń Pana Boga	Dichter, Wilhelm	1996
Sweet Theresienstadt	Sladký Theresienstadt	Goldflam, Arnošt	1996
The Lilies of Erika	Erikine ľalie	Šíkula, Vincent	1996
And God Saw That It Was Bad	I viděl Bůh, že je to špatné	Weiss, Otto	1997
The Black Seasons	Czarne sezony	Głowiński, Michał	1998
Tworki	Tworki	Bieńczyk, Marek	1999
The Land of Forgetting	Krajina zabudnutia	Baláž, Anton	2000
The Sound of the Sundial	Zvuk slunečních hodin	Andronikova, Hana	2001
Crow Songs	Vraní zpěvy	Malý, Radek	2002
The Wrecked Temple in Me	Vo mne zbúraný chrám	Richter, Milan	2002
A Private Conversation	Soukromý rozhovor	Bořkovcová, Hana	2004
Money from Hitler	Peníze od Hitlera	Denemarková, Radka	2006
Doctor Josef's Beauty	Šlicznotka doktora Josefa	Rudzka, Zyta	2006
At Home with the Hitlers	Doma u Hitlerů	Goldflam, Arnošt	2007
The Flytrap Factory	Fabryka muchołapek	Bart, Andrzej	2008
Pocket Atlas of Women	Kieszonkowy atlas kobiet	Chutnik, Sylwia	2008

<b>English Title (Name of the entry)</b>	<b>Original Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Year of Publication / Premiere</b>
White Elephants	O bílých slonech	Dousková, Irena	2008
A Piece about Mother and Fatherland	Utwór o Matce i Ojczyźnie	Keff, Bożena	2008
There Used to Be a Jewish Women, There Is No More Jewish Woman Now	Była Żydówka, nie ma Żydówki	Pankowski, Marian	2008
It Happened on the First September (or Whenever)	Stalo sa prvého septembra (alebo inokedy)	Rankov, Pavol	2008
The Suitcase	Walizka	Sikorska-Miszcuk, Mał- gorzata	2008
Frascati. An Apotheosis of Topography	Frascati. Apoteoza topografii	Kuryluk, Ewa	2009
The Boarding House	Pensjonat	Paziński, Piotr	2009
Our Class	Nasza klasa	Słobodzianek, Tadeusz	2009
The Devil's Workshop	Chladnou zemí	Topol, Jáchym	2009
The Woman Rabbi	Rabínka	Grusková, Anna	2010
Sidra Noach	Sidra Noach	Novotný, David Jan	2010
Italian High Heels	Włoskie szpilki	Tulli, Magdalena	2011
The Holocaust	Holokaust	Klimáček, Viliam	2012
The Night of the Living Jews	Noc żywych Żydów	Ostachowicz, Igor	2012
More Gas, Comrades!	Więcej gazu, Kameraden!	Piwowarski, Krystian	2012
Miracle in the Darkhouse	Zázrak v černém domě	Uhde, Milan	2012
A Pending Matter	Nevybavená záležitost	Juráňová, Jana	2013
The Fourth Language	Štvrtá reč	Vilikovský, Pavel	2013
Emma and the Death's Head Hawkmoth	Ema a Smrtihlav	Krištúfek, Peter	2014
Lily of the Valley	Konvália	Fulmeková, Denisa	2016
Tumult	Rejwach	Grynberg, Mikołaj	2017
Hannah	Hana	Mornštajnová, Alena	2017
Doctor Mráz	Doktor Mráz	Fulmeková, Denisa	2018

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