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Yelling into the Silence and its Echos. Czech Shoah Poetry Written till 1960s and its Reception

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The literary reflection of the Shoah in Czech war and post-war poetry is very limited. Only a few non-Jewish poets have ever returned to this theme (e.g. František Halas, Jiří Kolář, Jaroslav Seifert, Jan Skácel, Karel Křepelka, Radek Malý). Additionally, literary "testaments" of Jewish authors (Karel Fleischmann, Pavel Friedmann etc.) resulted in only two collections of poems entirely dedicated to the suffering of the Jews during the Nazi oppression (Ota Reich and Michal Flach). On the other hand, there are several books of poetry about Lidice and suffering of the Czech people during the World War II by Viktor Fischl, Karel Šiktanc, Libuše Hájková, Miloš Vacík and others. After the war there were only Jaroslav Seifert and Jiří Kolář among well-known poets who referred to the Shoah in a more significant way. Seifert created a figure of a Jewish girl, Hendele, in his collection of poems *Koncert na ostrově* (Concert on the Island), which develops the literary narration of the Shoah. Jiří Kolář referred to the Shoah repeatedly, however, he only had a limited chance to publish his work. As a result of this fact, the reception of Czech post-war poetry about the Shoah is almost absent. In my article, I concentrated on some reviewers' remarks that have already been published since the war-time and other reflections of this kind such as editions of books by Jiří Orten, Hanuš Bonn, Jiří Daniel. A hypothetical reaction on the Shoah verses by Pick's cabaret audience or Halas's anonymous poetic obituary paying tribute to Jiří Orten are rather specific sorts of reception. The critical reflection of Kolář's work in the context of the mass murder committed during the WW II is exceptional. However, the specific motifs of the Shoah were significantly focused on only in recent years by three foreign reviewers (Leszek Engelking, Hanna Marciniak and Anja Golebiowski). Czech Shoah poems printed or reprinted in Jewish periodicals (e.g. annual "Židovská ročenka", published since 1954) represent a commemorative function, even though sometimes with informative commentaries. They miss any analytical aspect.

KEYWORDS: Czech poetry; the Shoah; Reception; Czech martyrdom; Jewish martyrdom

In comparison with the Polish literary context¹, there are just a few poems about the Shoah in the Czech poetry. Only few well-known poets write about the theme repeatedly (e.g. František Halas, František Gottlieb, Jiří Kolář, Jaroslav Seifert, Jan Skácel, Karel Křepelka or Radek Malý). Most of the poets published only a single poem about the Shoah (e.g. Josef Hiršal, František Hrubín, František Branislav, Konstantin Biebl). Some of the authors could be called occasional writers, who create a piece of art in order to resist the Nazi oppression and the vision of a possible forthcoming violence or death (Ota Reich, Pavel Friedmann etc.). The work of Jewish poets – written also after World War II – might be interpreted as a result of prisoners' art therapy (e.g. Karel Fleischmann, Pavel Fischl, Dagmar Hilarová).

The only two collections of poems devoted to the Shoah are *Květy terezínského ghetta* (Blossoms of Terezín) and *Ohlednutí z veliké dálky* (A Look Back from a Faraway Place). The author of the first collection Ota Reich (1914–1942/1943) could not receive a degree in law due to the Nazi closing down the Czech university system (autumn 1939). The poems were written in Terezín in 1942, and before Reich was deported with his parents to Auschwitz, he managed to send them to his sister, who lived outside the ghetto. After the WW II, the book of poems was published posthumously by writer, translator and collector of art Emanuel Lešehrad (1877–1955), who edited the received collection of poems, created the title and added some information on the personal and literary context (Reich 1946).

The poems from the aforementioned collection *Ohlédnutí z veliké dálky* (A Look Back from a Faraway Place), which was prepared to be published by the author and the Shoah survivor Michal Flach (1920–2008) in 1946, was not published until 1997. Surprisingly, there is no

¹ In the book *Poeci i Szoa. Obraz Zagłady Żydów w poezji polskiej* (*Poets and the Shoah. Picture of the Holocaust in Polish Poetry*), Natan Gross argues, that the Polish Holocaust literature is the third richest one following the Yiddish and Hebrew literature. Moreover, he claims there is no other national literature, which introduces five anthologies of the Shoah poetry, no fewer than thirty collections of poems almost entirely with this theme and several dozens of single poems (Gross 1993: 7). Further on, Gross's enumeration does not involve pieces of art and poetic "documentary" published in the compiled anthology of Jewish-Polish non-professional poets *Tango leż śpiewajcie muzy. Poetyckie dokumenty Holokaustu* (Sing the tango of tears, muses. Poetic documentaries of the Holocaust; Keff 2012).

critical reflection of his work in any literary magazines. Only Markéta Hošíková in her bachelor's paper analysed mainly the formal aspect of Flach's poetry, which deals only with the persecution of Jews during the WW II and its aftermath (Hošíková 2009). She noticed the variation of verses in a poem called *Terezín* and *Čekání* (Waiting) from the Auschwitz part (Hošíková 2009). It is these variations which are present in the poem *Terezín* in the annual "Židovská ročenka" in the 1980s. However, the verses are ascribed to an unknown Jewish boy ("Báseň neznámého židovského chlapce z r. 1944") ([Flach] 1987/1988: 137). Flach's authorship is not mentioned for political reasons as he lived in emigration in the USA from 1946.

Another noteworthy example is the poetry of Dagmar Hilarová (1928–1996), who was interned under her maiden name Dagmar Berzetti in the Terezín Ghetto from March 1943 until May 1945. Her collection of poems *Sto barev má duha* (The rainbow has hundred colours) written probably in the 1960s, is still in the manuscript². Paradoxically, in the form of a book, only the German translation *Hundert Farben hat der Regenbogen: Gedichte* (Hilarová 1966) was published thanks to the cooperation of the then representative of Jewish community Rudolf Iltis and East German poet Günther Deicke. Several poems from the collection became a part of her prose *Nemám žádné jméno* (I have no name), published posthumously thanks to her son (Hilarová 2010³; Hilarová 2012). In the 1980s her verses were published in the Dutch version in the cooperation with the well-known writer Miep Diekmann, whose artistic contribution to this project is nevertheless very small (Hilarová, Diekmann [1980]). Hilarová herself explained the genesis of the book in her testament to make sure future Czech literary historiographers would understand her work properly⁴:

První kapitola knížky „Nemám žádné jméno“ vznikla už v roce 1962, kdy jsem se psaním začala profesionálně zabývat, ale materii k tomuto tématu jsem nosila v hlavě už od konce druhé světové války. Poznala jsem, co je fašismus a začala jsem se touto tematikou literárně zabývat, hlavně v poezii a drobných prózách. Z mozaiky příběhů s autobiografickými prvky vzniklo dílo, které se mi podařilo dokončit až těsně před

²The database of the National Library refers to it, but it is not available (v: <www.nkp.cz>).

³It was published in a limited number of copies as a facsimile of the manuscript.

⁴Technical translation of the extracts by Alexandra Šípová.

vydáním [tj. holandským v roce 1980 – Š.B.]. Dávala jsem je paní Krijtové k překladu po částech (Hilarová 2012: 86–87)⁵.

In the artistic work of both authors Reich and Hilarová, the severe life conditions in the ghetto are emphasized. Reich's Jiří Wolker-like poetry is rather traditional and could be handled as an art document. Hilarová's verses reveal thinking of a young girl and they express the attitude of defiance and even revenge in the future. Although the verses of Hilarová and Reich were published in "Židovská ročenka" (Hilarová 1968–1969: 117–118; Reich 1982–1983: 87) and some Hilarová's poems were also put to music, both authors are almost completely unknown to the Czech literary historiography.

Another fact that deserves attention is the absence of books of poetry referring to this theme in the Czech literature written after 1945, and consequently the lack of reception regarding single poems that were included in either literary or Jewish periodicals. In addition, some pieces of art were not published because they were not suitable for the post-war policy or they were allowed to be printed in a marginal minority annual called "Židovská ročenka", which is a very valuable source of material of this kind.

In conformity with Czech martyrdom, there are more books of poetry that show suffering of Czech people in WW II. Viktor Fischl and Karel Šiktanc published *Mrtvá ves* (The Dead Village; 1943 during emigration in England and 1945 in Czechoslovakia) and *Heinovské noci* (Heine Nights, 1960) about Lidice⁶. The same point of view is represented in the post-war edition of revolutionary leaflets of poetry *Dech davu* (Breath of the Crowd). Paradoxically, one of the leaflets *Bratr Jan* (Brother John, 1946) written by Nora Fried (Norbert Fried, after 1946 Frýd) included no hints of Jewish context; however, Frýd and his murdered brother were affected by racial

⁵"The first chapter of *I have no name* was created as early as in 1962, when I started to write professionally, but I had been thinking about this subject since the end of WW II. I got to know what fascism is and started to write about it, especially poems and short prose pieces. The mosaic of stories with autobiographic elements became the base for a book that I managed to finish just before its publication [i.e. the Dutch publication of 1980 – Š.B.]. I handed it over in parts to Mrs Krijt to have it translated".

⁶The village was chosen to be destroyed and people killed or sent to camps by the Nazi due to a false suspicion that one of Reinhard Heydrich's assassins was connected with the place.

persecution. The emphasis on this perspective is also evident in Libuše Hájková's *Balady zatracenců* (Ballads of the Damned, 1946)⁷ and Miloš Vacík's *Malá kalvárie* (Little Calvary, 1946), both collections of poems.

Oldřich Kryštofek in his review *Další z koncentračních táborů* (Another one from the Concentration Camps) is very harsh to such authors in general, however, the strongest criticism is targeted on naive Hájková's poetry:

Nemine ani týdne, aby pohotová nakladatelé nevychrtili další dávku publikací o koncentračních táborech a věznicích. Žel se tak děje přečasto bez kritického uvážení a porady. (...) To, co spáchala perem (...) zaslouží nejpřísnějšího odsouzení. Jen a jen popisnost, snadná a laciná rethorika, nadužívání silných výrazů. Do nemožných věřů nacpala koncentrační tematiku, které předeslala silácké věnování s řečnickými tirádami – jsme přesvědčeni, že o takové verše se jí nikdo neprosil – stoudnost autorky i nakladatelského lektora byly by spíše na místě. A k tomu to vyšlo na křídovém papíře s ilustracemi – je v těch Adlerových kresbách opravdu všechno – od muslimanů až k plačícím matkám – což opravdu u nás cudnost v těchto věcech je neznámou pevninou? (Kryštofek 1946: 4)⁸.

Dealing with the Shoah literature from 1939, i.e. from the Nazi occupation, I could name several authors, who thematized the strengthening prohibitions (Orten's *Zákazy* in the diary *Žihaná kniha* – 27.10.1940) (Orten 1993: 225), feelings of insecurity, closeness of possible death in their sometimes very general lyrical verses. Hints of the Shoah could be seen in the writings of Jiří Orten (Jiří Ohrenstein, 1919–1941), Hanuš Bondy (1913–1941), Jiří Daniel (František Schulmann, 1916–1945).

The best known Jiří Orten, the leader of his poetic generation, published his last works under the pseudonyms Jiří Jakub or Karel Jílek. In the

⁷The collection of poems was rediscovered and described by Reinhard Ibler (Ibler 2014: 25–35), however, the book is devoted to the Czech martyrology and the Holocaust attributes (e.g. musliman) play role of a mere staffage.

⁸“Not a week passes before ready publishers bash out another publication on concentration camps and prisons. Unfortunately, it's happening too often without any critical consideration and consultation. (...) What she did with her pen (...) deserves the strongest rejection. Mere descriptiveness, simple and cheap rhetoric, overuse of strong expressions. She stuffs the concentration subject in her impotent verses introduced with a swaggering dedication in her rhetorical rant – we are convinced that nobody asked her for such verses – the author's and the proofreader's shame would be more suitable. On top of that it was printed on glossy paper – in those Adler's drawings there is almost everything – from Muslims to crying mothers – don't we really have any modesty in these things here in our land?”

war-time, reviewer Jaroslav Červinka assessed his poetry very positively. Shortly after a “review” *Žid vede mladé básníky* (A Jew is leading young poets) in the pro-Nazi periodical “Árijský boj”, which contained a part called “Reflektor” (“Spotlight”) based on reports denouncing Jews, was published. This humiliating text focused on revealing the author’s name (Jews were not allowed to publish anymore at that time) and his family background (cf. Brabec 2009: 170, 173).

Vracíme se k našemu článku „Pěvci národa na rozcestí“, otisknutém v 30. čísle „Árijského boje“. Článek končili jsme citátem z úvahy šéfredaktora dr. Jaroslava Křemena, který apeloval na mladou generaci básnickou, aby opustila chmurnou meditativní poesii a vrátila se k činorodému životu. [...] Věc je skutečně velmi trapná pro naši básnickou generaci! V době, kdy se vede velký zápas proti Židům zjišťuje se, že v čele českých básníků stojí Žid, který přirozeně není nadšen novými poměry, a který proto by se nejráději vrátil do lůna mateřského, aby tam přečkal světovou konflagraci. Aféra Žida Ohrensteina je však především aférou oficiálních českých kritiků. Jak je možné, že oficiální česká kritika se nezmínila o židovském původu Karla Jílka, a že nechala ho stát v čele mladé básnické generace?!? (Anonymous 1941: 5)⁹.

Shortly after that, Jiří Orten was accidentally hit by a car in Prague street and he died soon (1.09.1941). In the literary magazine “Kritický měsíčník”, firstly, a famous poet František Halas published a cryptonymical poetic mourning paying tribute to the poet *Za básníkem* (Mourning for the Poet)¹⁰, secondly, Václav Černý wrote the anonymous obituary *Torzo...* (Torso...; Černý 1941: 293–296).

V měsíci sklizně
bled a natažený

⁹“We are returning to our article *Singers of the nation at a crossroads* published in the 30th edition of “Aryan fight”. We finished the article with the quotation from the reflexive essay of the chief editor, dr. Jaroslav Křemen, who appealed to the young generation of poets for abandoning sombre meditative poetry and returning to an active life. (...) The whole thing is very embarrassing for our poetic generation indeed! In the time of a great fight against Jews it has been found out that the leader of Czech poets is a Jew, who, certainly, is not happy about the new situation, and who therefore would rather go back to his mother’s womb where he could wait out the global conflagration.

The affair of Ohrenstein the Jew is above all the affair of the official Czech critics.

How come the official Czech critics have not mentioned the Jewish origin of Karel Jílek, and allowed him to be the leader of the young generation of poets?!?”

¹⁰After the war the poem was published under the changed title *Za Jiřím Ortenem* (Mourning for Jiří Orten; Halas 1957: 374–376).

ztracen pro utrpení
 leží ten básník sotva olistněný
 a Musa cuká křídlem třícím
 (...)
 Až v katedrálách plouti budou ryby
 tento básník vyvolán jménem bude
 (Halas 1941: 264, 266)¹¹.

However, in 1942 the magazine was discontinued by the Nazi authorities, and was renewed only after the occupation. In the post-war time, Václav Černý wrote a literary portrait of Jiří Orten *Básnický profil Jiřího Ortena* (Černý 1945: 196–206), which is supplemented with several his poems from still unpublished collection of poems. Apart from publishing their poems in periodicals, works of Hanuš Bonn (1947) and Jiří Orten (1947) were published posthumously by Václav Černý in a form of a book. Although Jiří Daniel's contribution was also appreciated shortly after the war (Daniel 1947: 35; Červinka 1947: 50–52), the publication of his poems, correspondence, diary etc. was delayed for more than fifty years (Daniel, Toman 1998; cf. Toman 2002: 139–160). Orten's work could be published in the less oppressive times. A critical edition of his entire work was completed only after 1989.

František Gottlieb (1903–1974), who was a member of Czechoslovak foreign army and then a clerk of the exil Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Great Britain, released his collection of poems *Dvojjí nástup* (*Double line-up*) under pseudonym Josef Goral in London in 1942. The extended version came out in Czechoslovakia in 1946. Both editions mostly focus on two Jewish homes of the lyrical subject: Palestine and Czech lands, however, there are a few hints at the Shoah.

Návrat
 Až vrátíme se, budem procházet
 chvějícím sloupořadím stínů
 a krví budem zardělí
 těch, které nepotkáme.

¹¹“In the month of the harvest / pale and stretched out / lost for suffering / the poet lies freshly covered in leaves / and the Muse twitches her sticking wing / (...) / Once fish swim in cathedrals / the poet's name will be called”.

Až vrátíme se, budem vzpomínkou.
I k sobě dojdem z minulosti
(Gottlieb 1946: 63)¹².

Despite the fact that the Jewish motifs were reflected by the well-known Czech reviewer Antonín Matěj Píša, he concentrates on different issues of Gottlieb's poetry, e.g. formal level.

Lyrík židovského rodu a nadto sionistického smýšlení, prožíval Gottlieb od počátku s neobyčejnou intenzitou – blízek v tom uctívanému Ot. Fischerovi – problematiku svého původu a jeho údělu, která se mu arci za uplynulých let nově utvářela jednak tragickým losem jeho souvěrců, jednak vzdáleností od české domoviny a jejím osudem (Píša 1946: 4)¹³.

A very similar attitude appeared twenty years later. In Jaroslav Seifert's (1901–1986) *Koncert na ostrově* (*Concert on the Island*) Jewishness and the Shoah theme is represented by the figure of a little girl Hendele. Reviewers mentioned the theme of Jewish suffering, however they are more interested in the sudden change of Seifert's poetic language. Hence, his harmonic verse was substituted by a more prosaic expression, which is more suitable for the theme of WW II (Brabec 1966: 5; Kostroun 1966: 145–146; Píša 1966: 266–270; Pešat 1991: 190, 195–196).

Seifert's collection is 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. Both Karel Kostroun and Zdeněk Pešat stressed the phenomenon of human transiency (*lidská dočasnost*) in *Koncert na ostrově* (Kostroun 1966: 145–146; Pešat 1991: 191).

In the part called *Šňůrkami oprátek* (*Through the strings of nooses*) the theme of the Shoah culminates. It is demonstrated in the poem *Píseň o Hendele* (*The Song of Hendele*) by a quoted nursery rhyme and a dry

¹²“Homecoming / When we come back, we will walk / along the shaking colonnade of trees / flushing in blood / of those we will not ever meet. // When we come back we will be a memory. / We can find even ourselves through the past”.

¹³“A lyricist of a Jewish origin and moreover of a Zionist thinking, from the beginning Gottlieb experienced with an extraordinary intensity – in this respect he was close to admired Ot. Fischer – the issues of his origin and its fate, which had been forming over the past years partly by his fellow-believers drawing the short straw, partly by the distance from his Czech homeland and its destiny”.

commentary added to it. The verses at the end of the poem show a picture of traumatised post-war mind of the lyrical subject.

(...)
na koho to slovo padne,
ten musí jít pryč

A padlo na ni
 (...)

Po tolika létech
 někdy se vracívá,
 ale musím být sám
 a musím se přidršet židle.

Protože pojednou zmizí,
 a v dálce se ozve pláč,
 pak zoufalý výkřik
 a nakonec hrobové ticho
 (Seifert 1965: 74–75)¹⁴.

Kostroun argues that *The Song of Hendele* is a suitable example of Seifert's ability to create something out of nothing (Kostroun 1966: 146). According to Píša, "the motif of Jewish destiny at that time, either agonizingly incarnated in a particular creature of a girl called Hendele, or wholly uttered in a visionary note of master lamenter's lament"¹⁵ appears for the first time in Seifert's work.

¹⁴“(…)
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”.

¹⁵“(…) motiv tehdejšího židovského údělu, ať rozdíravě vtěleného v konkrétní bytůstku dívčí Hendele nebo úhrnně vysloveného vizionářskou notou žalmistrova žalozpěvu” (Píša 1966: 267).

A different type of reception can be seen in Jiří Robert Pick's (1925–1983) *7 kytic pro buvola* (7 Bunches of Flowers for the Buffalo, 1966). This book probably reflected the author's activity in a cabaret. Pick founded the cabaret Paravan and in the late 1960s the cabaret Au. Some of his pieces play with words, use puns and even deliberately sound silly. Thus, the presence of gallows humour is very shocking. However, it could be seen as a way how he coped with the personal and family experience of the Holocaust survivor. (He was a teenage prisoner of ghetto Terezín and his father was murdered in Auschwitz.) An extreme example is the following poem *Nedávno jsem byl v bratrském Polsku* (Recently, I Have Been to Brotherly Poland; incipit), in which silence and banality make the background for the non-accented, but, omnipresent theme of the Shoah. The consternated cabaret audience play the role of the perceiver and thus the potential reviewer.

Navštívil jsem mimo jiné také Osvětim (dříve Auschwitz).
 Je to menší město s velkým chemickým závodem, vybudovaným
 z větší části za Němců.
 S několika nepříliš zajímavými obchody.
 S průměrným polským hotelem.
 A upřímně řečeno na ulicích mají dost bláta.
 Ale přesto na Osvětim nikdy nezapomenu.
 Koupil jsem tam totiž v jednom obchůdku ženě mřížkové
 punčochy.
 Ovšem přese všechnu radost, kterou jsem z toho měl, zůstal
 ve mně tak trochu hořký pocit.
 Není to poněkud hloupé, když musím jezdit kupovat
 mřížkové punčochy do Osvětimi, městečka
 ležícího 60 kilometrů západně od Krakova?
 A to ještě v soukromém obchodě! (Pick 1966: 103)¹⁶.

This Pick's prosaic writing in verses reminds the reader of the style of Jiří Kolář (1914–2002), who described the collection *Černá lyra* (The Black

¹⁶“Besides other places I visited Osvětim (former Auschwitz). / It is a smaller town with a big chemical plant, whose biggest part was built under the German rule. / With a few quite uninteresting shops. / With an average Polish hotel. / And, to be honest, their streets are rather muddy. / Yet I will never forget Osvětim. / It is because I bought / lattice tights for my wife in one of the shops. / Nevertheless, no matter how happy I was about it, / a bitter feeling remained. / Isn't it a bit stupid if I have to go shopping / for lattice tights to Osvětim, / a town 60 kilometres west of Krakow? / In a private shop on top of that!”

Lyre), which is a part of his book *Vršovický Ezop* (Aesop from Vršovice), in the author's postscript as an attempt to write "the history of human wickedness, finished with the evidence from concentration camps" (in the original: "Celá sbírka měla být dějinami lidské podlosti, ukončenými svědectvími z koncentračních táborů"; Kolář 1966: 182). As I have already written about the motifs of the Shoah in Kolář's work in *Czech Bystanders Writing Poetry about the Shoah. Different Ways of Poetic Languages in the First Post-War Literary Reactions* (Balík 2016: 139–143), I will limit myself here to the critical reflection which relates to the Jewish extermination.

Jan Grossman, a friend of Jiří Kolář's, analysed his work in several texts. In the afterword *Horečná bdělost Jiřího Koláře* (Jiří Kolář's Feverish Watchfulness) to Kolář's book *Náhodný svědek* (An Accidental Witness) in 1964, Grossman explained the author's prosaic style (*prozaizace*) he used in the description of the "undescribable" experience gained during the war (Grossman 1991: 369). He even commented on Kolář's verses-reports about a concentration camp, known by Grossman from his diaries, which had not been published yet. He stated that its quality might be questionable, but we could not call it non-poetry. It was not a bare formal modification of a prosaic text. Moreover, he defined this poet's creative act as "an extreme edge of an experiment, which is not formal, but it concerns the very essence of poetry" (in the original: "krajní meze experimentu, který není formální, ale který se týká samotné podstaty poezie"; Grossman 1991: 373). Grossman also underlined Kolář's litanic style, which is so significant for his work in general. In his opinion, Kolář's litany has two features: firstly, the enumerative style, conjoined with variations of authentic facts, which reveal new meanings and relations allowing them in this way to become saint, monumental; secondly, the aggressive and domineering pathos (Grossman 1991: 366–367).

In the 1960s, also other reviewers as Zdeněk Heřman (Heřman 1967: 92), and above all Jan Trefulka (Trefulka 1968: 62–63) and Miloš Vacík, who both wrote a short article taking in consideration the whole author's work (Vacík 1969: 5), analysed Kolář's experimental poetry style in the context of the experience of mass killing and concentration camps. Kolář's authentic poetry was mentioned as an appropriate tool in his rewriting the authentic documents (e.g. related to the Nazi atrocities) by Karel Milota in his imaginary interview with the poet (Milota 1967: 98). In a set of

four short reviews on the aforementioned book of poetry *Vršovický Ezop*, only Karfík's remark is noteworthy. In the very last sentence, he compared Kolář's contribution to the theme of the Shoah with a work written by the member of literary group *Grupa 47* Peter Weiss: "Skutečnost, že Kolář psal Černou lyru deset let před tím, než šokoval svým oratoriem Peter Weiss¹⁷, by námi mohla otrást, ale to by si jí byl musel alespoň dnes někdo všimnout"¹⁸ (Burda, Moldanová, Steklač, Karfík 1967: 50).

In Frynta's afterword of *Prometheova játra* (Prometheus's liver), published first abroad in the 1980s, but written already in 1969, the critic focused on formal novelty of the "hearkening poet" ("naslouchající básník") in the context of the Czech literary tradition imparting to the theme of the Shoah a marginal meaning (cf. Frynta 1990: 215).

After 1989, Kolář's work in the context of the Shoah was commented on in other critical texts. Vladimír Karfík, who later wrote a book *Jiří Kolář*, emphasized the moral attitude of the subject, which is present in Kolář's work in general. Paraphrasing final verses of *Mistr Sun* (Master Sun) Karfík stressed that the task of a poet is thus "to read from the darkest signs of the fate" ("číst z nejtemnějších znamení osudů"), to be "where the life is the cruellest" (být tam, "kde je život nejkrutější"), and "with those, whose life is the cruellest" ("s těmi, jejichž život je nejkrutější" (Karfík 1994: 60). This attitude can be found in all Kolář's poems, where he wrote about the Shoah, i.e. *Dny v roce* (Days in a Year), *Prométheova játra* (Prometheus's Liver), *Očitý svědek. Deník z roku 1949* (The Eye Witness. The Diary of 1949), *Černá lyra* (The Black Lyre), for the first time partly published in the book of poetry *Vršovický Ezop* (Aesop from Vršovice), and also in his last text *Záznamy* (Records; cf. Balík 2016: 139–143), however, verses devoted to the theme of the Shoah are always presented in the context of cataclysms, genocides and cruelties occurring in the history of the whole world.

¹⁷Weiss's theatre play *Die Ermittlung. Oratorium in 11 Gesängen* (1965) was already translated into Czech under title *Přelíčení. Oratorium o jedenácti zpěvech* by Bedřich Becher in 1966. About motifs of the Shoah in Kolář's theatre plays, v. Agata Firlej's article *From Report to Mythos. Jiří Kolář's Plays as Creative Transformation of the Shoah Testimonies*.

¹⁸"The fact that Kolář wrote *Černá lyra* ten years before Peter Weiss shocked with his oratorio could have given us the shivers, but only on understanding that there must have been someone today who had noticed it".

In Michal Bauer's study *Kolářovy dějiny lidstva jako dějiny bolesti a hravosti* (Kolář's History of the Human Kind as a History of Pain and Joy; Bauer 2005: 33–55)¹⁹, which is a part of a book interview *Z každého z nás postupem let něco mizí. Rozhovor s Jiřím Kolářem* (Something of Each of Us Will Vanish with Every Passing Year. The interview with Jiří Kolář), or in Jiří Holý's literary survey *Židé a šoa v české a slovenské literatuře po druhé světové válce* (Jews and the Shoah in Czech and Slovak Literature after the Second World War (Holý 2011: 19), the theme of the Shoah sticks to the statement already mentioned by Jiří Kolář himself about "the history of human wickedness" (Bauer 2005: 38, 46, 49; Holý 2011: 19). In addition, in the context of Kolář's textual and visual art, Bauer stressed the therapeutic and autotherapeutic dimension of his work (Bauer 2005: 41). The crisis of literature after the world has experienced the cruelties of the WW II is – according to Bauer – solved by Kolář's oscillation between words and silence (Bauer 2005: 55).

An innovative perspective was presented by two Polish critics Leszek Engelking and Hanna Marciniak. Although they both point out the motifs of the Shoah in various texts and pieces of visual art by Jiří Kolář and Tadeusz Różewicz, their attitudes are slightly different. In his contribution *Laleczki na sprzedaż. Zabawa w Holokaust i handel z Holokaustem* (Puppets for Sale. The Holocaust Game and Business with the Holocaust), Leszek Engelking (Engelking 79–94) uses the term "holokaustowe *decorum*" ("Holocaust *decorum*"), which means a way of taboo writing about the Shoah. Since such a modus was misused in the economic, political and mass cultural sphere, Engelking stated that the artistic feature forced – sometimes with drastic means – by Kolář, Różewicz and also Václav Burian and Zbigniew Libera (LEGO) are chosen in order to reveal the manipulation with the experience of the Shoah and to enable the new perception regarding the commented problem.

In her study "*Piši tyto řádky a prosím Boha, aby se dostaly do pravých rukou...*". *Jiří Kolář – Tadeusz Różewicz: poetika sekundárního svědectví* („I Am Writing These Lines and I Am Begging the God so that They Reach

¹⁹This text is a modification of two Bauer's earlier articles *Kolářovy způsoby zachycení dějin bolesti a hravosti* (Bauer 2001a: 23) and *Jiří Kolář: Očitý svědek v zemi mrtvých / Očitý svědek ze země mrtvých* (Bauer 2001b: 6–7), which are connected here.

the Right Hands...”. Jiří Kolář and Tadeusz Różewicz: Poetics of Secondary Witness), Hanna Marciniak used a term “secondary witness”, which accentuates the phenomenon of artists, who did not experienced the Shoah personally, but it is the object of their work. Marciniak showed how Kolář and Różewicz modified the original records, testimonies along with the documentary photography. She also questioned the stable interpretation of archival materials or the narration in verses about an object, which was owned by the Holocaust survivor – a small knife (Różewicz). The shifts (“witness as the montage” or “rewriting the Shoah”) are interpreted as a deliberate artistic attempt to disrupt the passive and contemplative perception of the Shoah and to offer a provocation, which aims for affective excitement and reflection (Marciniak 2014: 214–239).

Another attempt to compare Kolář’s work with the Polish literature is an article written by German literary historiographer Anja Golebiowski. In her contribution *Der Holocaust und seine kulturellen Folgen. Reflexe des Holocausts im Oeuvre von Jiří Kolář und Marek Hlasko* (The Holocaust and Its Cultural Aftermath. Reflection of the Holocaust in Work of Jiří Kolář and Marek Hlasko), she pointed out that the motifs of the Shoah appeared in the work of both authors repeatedly, as though they did not represented the main theme. Despite the fact that Hlasko (1934–1969) was twenty years younger than Kolář, the trauma of war experience imposing on the writers need of literary raw style witness to the cruelties of WW II was common for both of them (Golebiowski 2014: 97–109).

The reception of the Czech post-war poetry about the Shoah is almost absent. It is due to the fragmentariness of the Czech Shoah poetry. The critical reflection of Kolář’s work in the context of the mass murder committed during the WW II is exceptional. However, the specific motifs of the Shoah were significantly examined only in recent years partially by Michal Bauer and especially by foreign reviewers: Leszek Engelking, Hanna Marciniak, and Anja Golebiowski.

The sources of the reception are partly period reviews (included antisemitic periodicals). It can have the form of a homage or obituary; exceptionally expressed by a (cryptic) poem (Halas about Orten). Another modus is critical, commemorative comments in editions. A contemporary witness (e.g. diary; exceptionally a memory of the audience – Pick) may also be plausible.

Very valuable sources of the reception of the Shoah literature – regarding not only the Czech writers – are Jewish periodicals. One of them, “Židovská ročenka”, which has been published since 1954, often introduces literary works of Jewish or non-Jewish authors writing about the Shoah (Ota Reich, Pavel Friedmann, Karel Fleischmann, Pavel Fischl, Dagmar Hilarová, Vladimír Kafka or František Halas, Jaroslav Seifert, Jan Skácel, Karel Křepelka etc.). However, one may usually find only poems published with a brief piece of information on the author’s life and work.

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