

Frances Jackson

# Faith, Truth, Fidelity

Věrnost in Post-Munich Czech Poetry





# Schnittstellen

Studien zum östlichen und südöstlichen Europa

Herausgegeben von  
Martin Schulze Wessel und Ulf Brunnbauer

Band 24

Frances Jackson

# Faith, Truth, Fidelity

*Věrnost* in Post-Munich Czech Poetry

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

The printing of this book was made possible with support provided by the *Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies* at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

Diss., Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 2020

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;  
detailed bibliographic data available online: <https://dnb.de>.

© 2023 by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Theaterstraße 13, 37073 Göttingen, Germany,  
an imprint of the Brill-Group  
(Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA;  
Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn, Germany,  
Brill Österreich GmbH, Vienna, Austria)  
Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Hotei,  
Brill Schönigh, Brill Fink, Brill mentis, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Böhlau,  
Verlag Antike, V&R unipress and Wageningen Academic.

Cover: Photo © Tobias Melzer  
Cover design: SchwabScantechnik, Göttingen  
Typesetting: textformart, Göttingen

**Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | [www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com](http://www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com)**

ISSN 2566-6614  
ISBN (Print): 978-3-525-36430-7  
ISBN (PDF): 978-3-666-36430-3  
<https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666364303>



Dieses Material steht unter der Creative-Commons-Lizenz Namensnennung – Nicht kommerziell – Keine Bearbeitungen 4.0 International. Um eine Kopie dieser Lizenz zu sehen, besuchen Sie <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

# Inhalt

Introduction . . . . .	7
Narrative Beginnings (9) Historical Background (12) Why Poetry? (19) Keeping the Faith (23) The Poets (30) The Poetry (35) Room for Improvement (38)	
1. Poetic Events and Eventfulness . . . . .	43
The Event as an Analytical Category (44) Incomplete and Outside Events (47) Pomp and Circumstance (51) (Do Not) Expect the Un- expected (56) Badiou's Category of the Event (65) Poems as Events in Their Own Right (67)	
2. Figural Show and Tell . . . . .	71
Homeward Bound (74) Theories of the Allegoric Mode (79) Allegory, Allegoresis or Something More? (83) The Stuff of Nightmares (89) Swarms of Swabians (96) Metaphorically Speaking (101) When Disas- ter Strikes (103) <i>Fictio Personae</i> (107) Let Them Speak or Forever Hold Their Peace (109) Personifying Prague (114)	
3. Shaping a Poetic Past and Future Present . . . . .	121
Differing Approaches to Memory (122) Language Issues (127) Mem- ory Studies and Literature (129) The Speaker Recalls (131) Looking Forward to Looking Back (137) Poetic Monuments to the Past and Present (140) Repurposing the Past (143) Places of Memory (149) (Grand-)Mother of the Nation (153) Formal Differences (155) Seifert's Maternal Vision (157) Halas' Němcová: All Things to All Men (162)	
4. Rhetorical Authenticity . . . . .	167
The Art of Rhetoric (170) The Rhetorical Situation (171) An Air of the Authentic (177) Paradox and Artificiality (182) Fluctuating Forms of Authenticity (186) Authenticity of Expression, Experience and Execu- tion (190) <i>Věrnost</i> : When Rhetoric Met Authenticity (193) The Speaker as One Who Remembers (196) The Speaker as One Who Mourns (198) The Speaker as One Who Speaks On Behalf of Others (206) The Speaker as One Who Tells the Truth (219) History in the Making (222) Competing Truths (225)	

5. A Break with the Past? . . . . .	229
Where to Draw the Line? (232) History Relived and Rewritten (235)	
Cracks, Fissures and Shifting Planes (240) A Feast For All of the	
Senses (242) Longing For What is No More (But Might Be Again) (251)	
6. Late Modernism – Not an End but an Alternative . . . . .	257
W.H. Auden and Louis MacNeice (264) Birds and Books of a Fea-	
ther? (266) Auden's <i>Another Time</i> (270) MacNeice's <i>Autumn Journal</i> (274)	
War on the Wireless (283) The Case of the Missing <i>Věrnost</i> (286)	
Conclusion . . . . .	289
Bibliography . . . . .	293
Archival sources (293) Primary sources (293) Secondary sources (294)	
Acknowledgements . . . . .	305
Index . . . . .	307

# Introduction

For Václav Černý, it was a great period of Czech poetry, “the *last* great period” in fact; a time when readers still valued poets for their contribution to the nation and its moral standing. “Hora, Halas, Palivec, Holan, Kolman-Cassius, Orten, Bednář, how boundlessly they were loved by the Czech readers of that age,” he declared in his memoirs.<sup>1</sup> According to Albert Pražák, it even gave rise to a new form of expression, one that was immune to the restrictions of the day, or at least capable of getting round them: “When they could no longer call things by their true names, they found a language of hints and symbols.”<sup>2</sup> We are talking here, of course, about the late 1930s and early 1940s, the era that was ushered in by the Munich Agreement – that of the short-lived and much-disparaged Second Czecho-Slovak Republic and the hated Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

From these two assessments – both of which were written with hindsight, looking back at those difficult years, safe in the knowledge that the Czech people did, by and large, survive and that the territorial losses brought about by the accords drawn up between Messrs Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini were, for the most part, recouped<sup>3</sup> – one detects a certain desire to cast the period and its literary works in a specific light. There is a hint of past heroism, of daring-do, a golden age, now lost; a sense of poets as revered activists perhaps, rallying the masses, unafraid to tell the truth, or at least their version of it, to all who will listen. But to what extent does this account really tally with the poetry written and published against the backdrop of rising fascism? Are we not perhaps dealing more with a kind of mythologisation of the power of poets and poetry, the subsumption of the lyric output of this period into the rather nebulous, although undoubtedly emotive and highly appealing category of *cultural resistance*? Just as Jiří Fukač has asked in relation to the role played by music in the Protectorate “Was music really such

- 1 Černý, Václav: *Křik koruny české. Paměti II (1938–1945). Náš kulturní odboj za války*. Brno 1992, 89 f.: “*poslední* veliká doba [...]. Hora, Halas, Palivec, Holan, Kolman-Cassius, Orten, Bednář, jak nesmírně je český čtenář těch dob miloval.”
- 2 Pražák, Albert: *Národ se bránil. Obrany národa a jazyka českého od nejstarších dob po přítomnost*. Praha 1946, 391: “Když nemohli [*věrní a stateční synové*, “faithful and brave sons”] již vlastním pojmenováním věci, našli si řeč náznaků a symbolů.”
- 3 Carpathian Rus, which partially awarded to Hungary in accordance with the Munich Agreement before being fully occupied by that country during the Second World War, was annexed by and then ceded to the Soviet Union in 1945. Today it forms the western-most point of Ukraine.

an effective weapon for the people in their struggle? Was it not merely a case of illusion?”<sup>4</sup>, so too must we consider the possibility that much of what has been written about the works of the late 1930s and early 1940s may have been coloured by a desire to compensate for the general lack of effective military opposition to Nazi aggression, so as to prove that the Czechs did not merely sit by and allow both allies and foes to walk all over them. Certainly, it is worth noting that at the time, attitudes towards overtly patriotic works appear to have been rather more mixed. Writing in *Kritický měsíčník* in the autumn of 1938, Robert Konečný was not, for example, prepared to let artworks off the hook simply because they contained an expression of love towards the Czech lands that might chime with audiences looking for comfort during a troubled and troubling chapter of the nation’s history:

Even the average sixth-former knows how often, as they say, “a battle has waged” between patriotism and cosmopolitanism here. It is back again now. This or that play, this or that opera is nowadays very good because it is patriotic. I read one music critic, who once evaluated a patriotic play very harshly, now positively stammering with enthusiasm as a result of the “altered situation”. Yes the situation has changed. The political situation has changed a great deal and every one of us is happy to admit that a fortifying word can offer relief. But careful there! If in these evil times a sincere word is enough to fortify us, we must be aware that that does not necessarily make it into art. [...] We must, after all, assume that a critic best serves his country when he does not betray the function that is most his own: that of being critical. And it must also be clear to him that bad art remains bad art, even when it is highly patriotic.<sup>5</sup>

Although literary criticism is not our only aim here, Konečný’s comments offer a useful warning about the dangers associated with exalting the poetry of this period and being blinded by outside circumstance.<sup>6</sup>

4 *Fukač, Jiří*: Musik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren. Was wissen wir schon? Was wollen wir eigentlich wissen? In: Wehrmeyer, Andreas (ed.): Musik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren (1939–1945). Fakten – Hintergründe – Historisches Umfeld. München 2008, 56: “War also die Musik tatsächlich eine wirksame Waffe des sich wehrenden Volkes? Ging es nicht bloß um Illusion?”

5 *Konečný, Robert*: Kulturní soběstačnost. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 464: “Každý průměrný oktáván ví dobře, kolikrát se u nás, jak se říká, ‘probojoval boj’ mezi vlastenectvím a kosmopolitismem. Dnes jej máme u nás nanovo. Ta a ta hra, ta a ta opera je dnes velmi dobrá, protože je vlastenecká. Četl jsem hudebního kritika, který kdysi hodnotil vlasteneckou operu přísně, ale zajíká se samým nadšením ‘za změněné situace’. – Ano, situace se změnila. Změnila se velmi situace politická a každý rád dozná, že slovo posily bylo posilou. Ale ouha! Jestliže snad stačí v dobách zlých na posilu slovo upřímně míněné, musí být jasno, že není proto ještě nutně uměním. [...] Máme však za to, že kritik slouží národu nejlépe tím, že nezrazuje svou funkci nejvlastnější: kritickou. A tak mu tedy musí jasné také to, že špatné umění zůstane špatným umění, i kdyby bylo sebevlastenečtější.”

6 As shall become apparent as this study progresses, it is also interesting to note Konečný’s choice of words in talking about critics *betraying* their profession since this suggests a sense of their work being bound up with issues of faith(fulness) and loyalty.

Indeed, over the course of this study we shall in fact aim to dismantle some of the myths surrounding post-Munich Czech poetry. Rather than placing it upon a pedestal, we shall take a slightly less obsequious approach, sensitive to some of the more recent theoretical developments in literary studies and the humanities more generally. Amongst other things, we shall examine what scenes from contemporary life the poets of this era depict, asking ourselves what tales their compositions tell and what aspects they conceal. Are there any recurring motifs or surprising parallels drawn? Has the world been turned upside-down or does life go on, doggedly? At what point does recent history turn to legend? Can any guiding principles or a shared internal logic be identified? How do the poets seek to represent what was going on in real life? To what extent can they be seen as responding to the events of the day? And indeed what form(s) do those possible responses take? Are they elegiac or outraged, filled with hope and stoicism or rage and grievance? We are interested not only in modes of expression, but also in what is being expressed and how this might relate to larger conceptions of Czech national history and experience. Such deliberations are not of course wholly novel<sup>7</sup>, but by combining them with ideas from other fields, we hope to gain a more shrewd understanding of and new insights into the poetry of this period.

## Narrative Beginnings

As perhaps befits a study that is to some extent concerned with what might loosely be termed poetic narrativisation – with the purported documentation or at least representation of external events, forming them into a certain order, a sequence that makes a kind of sense, a story we know and can recognise and comprehend<sup>8</sup> – the shape that it has ultimately assumed was influenced, or at least informed somewhat, by anecdote. There is a scene in the second half

7 Cf. e.g. rather similar questions raised by Konečný in the introduction to his 1938 anthology of recent Czech poetry. In: *Konečný, Robert: Slovo k Básnickému kalendáři*. In: *Konečný, Robert (ed.): Básnický kalendář let 1918–1938*. Praha 1938, 5: “Jak reagovali naši lyrikové na vážné události své doby? Za čím šli? Co chtěli?” (Engl. “How did our lyric poets react to the serious events of their era? What did they go out on a limb for? What did they want?”)

8 Cf. *Erl, Astrid: Erinnerungshistorische Literaturwissenschaft: Was ist ... und zu welchem Ende...?* In: Nünning, Ansgar/Sommer, Roy (eds.): *Kulturwissenschaftliche Literaturwissenschaft. Disziplinäre Ansätze – Theoretische Positionen – Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven*. Tübingen 2004, 119: “Erst die Narrativierung von historischem Geschehen oder prä-narrativer Erfahrung zu einer Geschichte ermöglicht deren Deutung.” (Engl. “It is only through the narrativisation of historical events or pre-narrative experience into a story that makes its interpretation possible”). This understanding of narrativisation affords it a very prominent and important function, one which imparts and influences meaning.

of Petr Zelenka's genre-defying comedy *Ztraceni v Mnichově* (CZ 2015, Engl. "Lost in Munich"), when one troubled character – very much in the role of a Czech everyman, a symbol of the nation as a whole – explains to another that he has come to realise that all of his personal problems are a direct result of what happened in the Bavarian capital on that fateful night in September 1938; that the Munich Agreement has cast such a long shadow over his entire family that it darkened his childhood and is now insinuating itself into just about every aspect of his life. When the film was shown one autumnal afternoon in the Art Nouveau pearl that is Prague's Lucerna cinema, the voice of an elderly woman could be clearly heard whispering loudly to her companion in response to these onscreen revelations, "It was just the same in my family!" The woman in question may have missed the satirical thrust of this scene – the miracle cure of the unfortunate collective ailment being, after all, to read Jan Tesař's provocative essay *Mnichovský komplex* (Engl. "The Munich complex"), which deconstructs the myths surrounding the Agreement – but her reaction only serves to make Zelenka's point about his compatriots and their neuroses all the more salient.

Though informal conversations with Czechs born in the latter decades of the last century would suggest that the Munich Agreement no longer holds sway over the younger generation in quite the same way that it evidently once did for their parents and grandparents, it does not seem to be in danger of fading into obscurity either.<sup>9</sup> This is, one suspects, at least in part thanks to popular culture. Besides the aforementioned *Ztraceni v Mnichově*, a star-studded period drama based on Jan Masaryk's role in the Munich Crisis was released in late 2016 and there have been countless films set in the Protectorate, thus dealing with its aftermath.<sup>10</sup> A neutral term for the Munich Agreement does exist in Czech in the form of *mnichovská dohoda* (quite literally "the Munich Agreement"), but in common or more expressive parlance it is frequently referred to as *mnichovský diktát* ("the Munich diktat") or, especially, *mnichovská zrada* ("the Munich betrayal"). These monikers home in on the fact that

9 The sheer number of subsequent upheavals, from the communist coup to the crushing of the Prague Spring or indeed the Velvet Revolution, not to mention the rocky transition to free-market democracy and Europeanisation that followed, each of which has, arguably, had its own equally disquieting consequences, means that for the generations born after 1938, the Munich Agreement is not necessarily the ultimate grievance. For an overview of contemporary attitudes and the commemorative events held to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Munich Agreement, see Jackson, Frances: *Verrat, Diktat, Mythos. Zum 80. Jahrestag des Münchner Abkommens*. In: *Erinnerungskulturen. Erinnerung und Geschichtspolitik im östlichen und südöstlichen Europa*, 28.9.2018. URL: <https://erinnerung.hypothesen.org/3335> (on 1.6.2022).

10 Cf. e.g. Jan Hřebejk's *Musíme si pomáhat* (CZ 2000, Engl. "Divided We Fall") or Marek Najbrt's *Protéktor* (CZ/DE 2009, Engl. "Protector").

the Munich Conference took place and the decision to cede the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany was made without the participation of emissaries from Czechoslovakia. This feeling of imposition, of being told what to do and having no choice in the matter but to obey, has been popularised by the phrase *o nás bez nás* (“about us without us”), which still continues to rear its head today, whenever there is a sense that foreign powers are sealing the fate of the Czech lands.<sup>11</sup>

If this really is a national trauma, it is certainly an unusual one, the memory of which is not repressed by our authors, but rather seems to have given way to a veritable outpouring of mixed emotions. Scenes of anger and frustration, not to mention desire, willingness and calls for action, are as much a part of the poetic response to the Munich Agreement as evocations of Czech innocence and victimhood. And all of it is very much verbalised, put down in words for all to see, incorporated into a grand narrative of subjugation and tenacity.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, one cannot help but wonder if the true psychological trauma associated with the Munich Agreement is to be found – if at all – in the fact that Czechoslovakia did not defend itself militarily, that it was “betrayed” by its own elites. This point has been eloquently made by Jan Patočka in his post-war essay *Was sind die Tschechen?* (Engl. “What are the Czechs?”)<sup>13</sup> and the matter does not in fact feature especially prominently in the poetry of this period, which could suggest that it is something that was found difficult to talk or write about. More recently, Czech president Miloš Zeman stoked the debate anew by claiming, in a 2015 speech about the apparent failure of the Establishment to respond appropriately to the threats of the day, that Ferdinand Peroutka, an inmate of the Buchenwald concentration camp during the Second World War, published an article in the journal *Přítomnost* in the late 1930s entitled “Hitler je gentleman” (Engl. “Hitler is a gentleman”). The matter soon deteriorated into farce when it became apparent that said article was not only elusive, but, in fact, in all likelihood non-existent and that not even a reward promised to the person who managed to find it would be able to change this. So, before we

11 Cf. comments made by the then deputy prime minister Pavel Bělobrádek about EU-wide refugee quotas when interviewed by the German weekly newspaper *Die Welt*: “Der Streit um die Quote erinnert uns Tschechen an ein historisches Moment, nämlich dass ohne uns über uns entschieden wird. Da sind wir sehr empfindlich.” (Engl. “For us Czechs, the quota dispute is reminiscent of another historical moment, namely that something is being decided about us without us. That is something we’re very sensitive about.”), in *Kürschner*, Mareike: Deutschland und die Kanzlerin haben den Balkan gerettet. In: *Die Welt*, 5.5.2016. URL: <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article155051406/Deutschland-und-die-Kanzlerin-haben-den-Balkan-gerettet.html> (on 1.6.2022).

12 On Czech self-definition through martyrs, see *Pysent*, Robert B., *Questions of Identity. Czech and Slovak ideas of nationality and personality*. Budapest 1994, 147 f.

13 Cf. *Patočka*, Jan: *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Vol. 5: *Schriften zur tschechischen Kultur und Geschichte*. Stuttgart 1992, 102 f.

go any further and run the risk of making our own historical blunders, it is probably worth taking some time to establish what exactly did happen to the Czech lands in 1938 and beyond.

## Historical Background

Up until that point, Czechoslovakia had been enjoying a relatively prosperous and democratic interwar period.<sup>14</sup> The First Republic was founded in 1918 by the deeply charismatic Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk – half stern grandfather, half benevolent emperor<sup>15</sup> – on the wave of enthusiasm for self-determination that followed the end of the First World War. Czechs and Slovaks made up the majority of the population, but there were other ethnic groups in the fledgling sovereign state, including a large and vocal German minority. As the National Socialists consolidated power next door, this minority grew increasingly restive and the flames of discontent were actively fanned from Berlin.

With the death of Masaryk in late 1937, Czechoslovakia not only lost an important symbol of its national unity, but also a man who appeared to have had the ear of many an important figure in the democratic West. Following the annexation of Austria in March 1938, calls for Sudeten German autonomy and the German-speaking population's right to join the Reich grew louder, something which the Czechoslovak government was not prepared to grant. The mood was tense and by the summer, the prospect of war seemed almost inevitable. Czechoslovakia may have had an alliance with France, but that country – and its ally Great Britain – was at that time still pursuing a policy of appeasement, keen to avoid armed conflict at all costs. The Czechoslovak army was twice mobilised during this period; once – although only partially – in

14 Andrea Orzoff has, of course, cast doubt on the democratic credentials of the First Republic, noting, for example, that its “constitutional checks and balances were few and were relatively easily subverted by the executive branch”, but certainly in comparison to other increasingly autocratic Central European states, it was at least a beacon of relative freedom. Cf. *Orzoff, Andrea: Battle for the Castle. The myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe 1914–1948. Oxford 2009, 59.*

15 As his conversations with Karel Čapek show, Masaryk did not appear to think terribly highly of all of his fellow countrymen, believing them to be politically immature and in need of (civic) education: “Opravdu, náš sedlák, náš dělník jsou z nejlepších, městské a intelektuální vrstvy jsou ještě nehotové [...] Potřebujeme padesáti let nerušeného vývoje, a budeme tam, kde bychom chtěli být už dnes.” (Engl. “Truly our farmers, our workers are some of the best, but the urban and intellectual strata are still not fully-fledged [...] We need fifty years of undisturbed progress and we will be at that point where we would like to be today.”) In: *Čapek, Karel: Hovory s TGM. Praha 1990, 339.*

May 1938, before the general mobilisation of 23 September 1938, but did not engage in active combat. A solution to the crisis was finally brokered at the end of September with the convening of a Four Powers meeting in Munich, where it was agreed that Czechoslovakia should submit to German demands and relinquish its territorial claim to the Sudetenland. The Czechoslovak government did not put up a fight. Edvard Beneš, Masaryk's designated successor, resigned as president on 5 October 1938 and went into exile. He was replaced as head of state by Emil Hácha, who now presided over the much reduced Second Czecho-Slovak Republic. Incidentally, it is important to note the hyphen here, since this is indicative of greater autonomy for the Slovaks, one of the defining features of the Second Republic.<sup>16</sup>

Although officially mollified by the Munich Agreement, Nazi Germany still had designs on the so-called *Rest-Tschechei*. As Josef Hanč, a former Czechoslovak diplomat who had emigrated to the USA, put it in October 1939 "Germany never for a moment made any more than a pretense of keeping hands off."<sup>17</sup> All that was needed was a pretext to invade and this presented itself on 14 March 1939, when – following German prompting – Slovakia declared its independence. As a result of this, Hácha was summoned to Berlin and obliged to agree to the occupation of his country. Such was the shock and strain of this meeting with Hitler that Hácha is said to have fainted several times during it.<sup>18</sup> So it was that the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia came into being and for the first time a non-German-speaking area was subsumed into the Reich.

On paper, the Czechs continued to enjoy autonomy in their internal affairs, even after the foundation of the Protectorate; however, this was undermined in two fairly obvious ways. On the one hand, by the fact that the Reichsprotektor was granted absolute authority and permitted to impinge upon the government of the Protectorate in all matters.<sup>19</sup> On the other, by the fact that the population was split into two groups – citizens of the Reich (*Reichsdeutsche*) and citizens of the Protectorate, i. e. mainly Czechs – for whom different rules were in place. The former were, as Moses Moskowitz noted in 1942, effectively citizens of a "state within a state",<sup>20</sup> a situation that had both its perks and its downsides. For instance, they received more rations than normal citizens of the Protectorate,

16 For a detailed account of political and social affairs in the Second Republic, see e.g. Procházka, Theodor: *The Second Republic: The Disintegration of Post-Munich Czechoslovakia* (Oct. 1938 – March 1939). New York 1981.

17 Hanč, Josef: *Czechs and Slovaks since Munich*. In: *Foreign Affairs* 18/1 (1939), 102.

18 *Ibid.*, 106.

19 Cf. Brandes, Detlef: *Die Tschechen unter deutschem Protektorat*. Teil I. München 1969, 38.

20 Moskowitz, Moses: *Three Years of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia*. In: *Political Science Quarterly* 57/3 (1942), 355.

but, at the same, they also had to face possibility of being conscripted into the German army.<sup>21</sup>

It goes without saying that the foundation of the Protectorate led to a number of profound changes in the very fabric of Czech society, many of which had a detrimental effect on cultural and artistic freedoms. Firstly, bilingualism in public life became law. All official notices, signs, posters etc. that concerned both sections of the population had to be printed in Czech and German, with the stipulation that the German always appear first.<sup>22</sup> Something akin to Germanisation also took place across the country, with many towns and villages acquiring an artificial equivalent name in German, and street upon street being renamed.<sup>23</sup> Not just the words in public life changed, but also for a time at least the way that they were written, their appearance, with efforts to introduce Gothic script for German-language documents.<sup>24</sup>

21 *Bryant, Chad: Prague in Black. Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism. Cambridge, Massachusetts 2007, 53 f.*

22 *Bryant, Chad: The Language of Resistance? Czech Jokes and Joke-Telling under Nazi Occupation. In: Journal of Contemporary History 41/1 (2006), 141. That such measures would not necessarily go down well with the Czech population appears to have been perfectly well known to the new authorities. Cf. an excerpt from the XVI. A. K. chief administrator's daily report dated 27 March 1939 [i. e. shortly after the invasion]. Národní archiv České republiky [henceforth NA], f. Úřad říšského protektora [henceforth ŮŘP], box 261, sig. I 1 a: "Erneut zur Aussprache stand die Frage, ob Bekanntmachungen in rein tschechischen Gebieten nur in tschechischer oder auch in deutscher Sprache erfolgen sollen. Es soll bei der tschechischen Bevölkerung, die immer noch mißtrauisch ist, Argwohn erregen, wenn die Bekanntmachungen zweisprachig erfolgen." (Engl. "The question was raised again as to whether public notices in purely Czech areas should be published only in Czech or also in German. It apparently raises the suspicions of the still mistrustful Czech population, when public notices appear in both languages.")*

23 Some caution with regards to renaming streets was advised, however, with politically-motivated names being those judged most necessary to eradicate. Cf. a draft letter from the office of the Reichsprotektor dated 14.4.1939. NA, f. ŮŘP, box 261, sig. I 1 a – 1101: "Ich mache darauf aufmerksam, dass es zunächst nicht erwünscht ist, in großem Umfange Strassen und Plätze umzunennen; lediglich in den Fällen, in denen Namen von Strassen und Plätzen eine tschechische politische Parole oder eine Kampfparole gegen das Deutschtum bedeutet, wird ihre Umbenennung bei den zuständigen tschechischen Stellen beschleunigt angeregt werden müssen. / z. B. Masarykplatz, Strasse des 28. November, Fochstrasse, Wilsonstrasse usw. / 'Wilde Umbenennungen' [...] sind auf jeden Fall zu verhindern." (Engl. "I call attention to the fact that it is not for the moment desired that streets and squares be renamed on a grand scale; only in such cases as where the name of the street or square signifies a Czech political slogan or a slogan of war against German culture will the relevant Czech body have to be induced to rename forthwith. / e.g. Masaryk Square, 28 November Street, Foch Street, Wilson Street etc. / 'Frenzied renaming' [...] is to be avoided at all costs.")

24 The success of such efforts appears to have been rather mixed, however. Cf. a letter from the office of the Reichsprotektor dated 11.2.1941. NA, f. ŮŘP, box 261, sig. I 1 a – 1100: "Bei der Durchführung der sprachrechtlichen Maßnahmen wurde bisher wiederholt darauf hingewirkt, daß die deutschen Worte möglichst in gotischer Schrift erscheinen. [...]"

Secondly, a large portion of the intellectual elite were identified as enemies of the Reich. Through a mixture of imprisonment, untimely death, exile and execution, Czech society was ultimately robbed of a great many of its cultural leading lights, including the multi-talented Čapek brothers, the playwrights Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich, and the journalist Milena Jesenská. Heavy restrictions were placed on the media, publishers and the book trade. The press was brought to heel in such a way that in April 1939, the American diplomat George F. Kennan commented

The Czech press, in particular has been “gleichgeschaltet” in no uncertain way. Its columns, aside from the sports and business sections, are nine-tenths filled with material on foreign affairs provided by the Reich Propaganda Ministry.<sup>25</sup>

Many newspapers and journals, including the venerable *Lumír*, were shut down, and countless books and authors that were not felt to be compatible with Nazi ideology were banned.<sup>26</sup> One year after the outbreak of war, the list

Der häufige Mangel einer eingehenden Kenntnis der gotischen Schrift und das ungleichartigen Schriftbild, das sich bei der Verwendung verschiedener Schriftarten nebeneinander ergibt, veranlasst mich Sie zu bitten, künftighin auch bei deutschem Text die sogenannte Antiqua-Schrift (Normalschrift) zu verwenden. Dies gilt besonders von Urkunden, Anschlägen und Veröffentlichungen von Behörden, Bahnhofsnamen und dgl. . . .” (Engl. “As part of the implementation of language policy measures, it has, up until now, been the case that efforts be made to ensure that German words appear in Gothic script as far as possible. [...] Owing to the frequent lack of a comprehensive knowledge of Gothic script and the uncongenial effect created by using two different typefaces next to one another, I ask that so-called Antiqua script (standard typeface) also be used for text in German. This applies in particular for certificates, official notices and publications, railway station names and so on and forth.”)

25 Kennan, George Frost: *From Prague After Munich. Diplomatic Papers 1938–1940*. Princeton 1968, 114f.

26 It should be noted, perhaps, that not all censorship measures were taken lying down, though. When, during an early raid on the offices of the publishing house Čin, some of the books seized included works by Masaryk, for example, Alois Eliáš, then prime minister of the Protectorate was moved to submit a written complaint to the Reichsprotektor. Cf. a letter dated 16.10.1939. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 1144, sig. IV – 2 s 7373: “Ich will dieses Einschreiten nicht im geringsten berühren, soweit es hinsichtlich jener Bücher erfolgt ist, die einen Inhalt beinhalten, der die Befreiungskämpfe des tschechischen Volkes direkt oder indirekt tangiert, weil das Verhältnis zu diesen Ereignissen, als historischen Faktum, durch die Zeitgeschehnisse und deren Leitgedanken bestimmt wird. Ich erachte es jedoch für meine Pflicht, Eure Exzellenz darauf aufmerksam zu machen, dass diese behördliche Maßnahme auch bei 14 Büchern Tomáš G. Masaryks erfolgt ist. Es hat sich hierbei um die Wiedergabe seiner lange vor dem Kriege herausgegebenen philosophischen und politischen Studien, ja sogar um seine bedeutsame Habilitationsschrift ‘Der Selbstmord als soziale Massenerscheinung der modernen Civilisation’ v.J. 1881 in tschechischer Übersetzung gehandelt.” (Engl. “I do not wish to allude to this intervention in any way where it concerns those books, the contents of which directly or indirectly touches upon the Czech struggle for independence since the relationship to those events, as historical fact, is determined by

of banned books ran to 1,352 authors and 1,894 titles; by 1941, it even included Beneš and Josef Hašek<sup>27</sup>. Banned books could be neither printed nor sold and also had to be removed from libraries; Charles University in Prague lost approximately 500,000 volumes in this way, Brno's Masaryk University around 250,000.<sup>28</sup> The universities were themselves closed down a few months after the creation of the Protectorate in retaliation for civil disobedience.

In addition, censorship was rife and self-censorship became inevitable, if difficult to identify. Not even classics of Czech literature were immune. The sentence "Němec je bit"<sup>29</sup> was, for example, according to Jan Lehár, removed from new editions of Božena Němcová's *Babička* (Engl. "The Grandmother") since it was perceived as being inappropriate, while the line "Vůdce zhyň"<sup>30</sup> was replaced in Karel Hynek Mácha's *Máj* (Engl. "May") with "Pán náš zhyň"<sup>31</sup>, presumably to prevent its being applied to the Führer.<sup>32</sup> The censor

current events and the principles thereof. I consider it my duty, however, to draw Your Excellency's attention to the fact that this measure taken by the authorities also related to 14 of Tomáš G. Masaryk's books. The books were reproductions of his philosophical and political studies, all of which were published long before the war, and even included the Czech translation of his important professorial dissertation 'Suicide as a Mass Social Phenomenon of Modern Civilisation' from 1881 amongst their number.")

27 Doležal, Jiří: Česká literatura za protektorátu. Školství, písemnictví, kinomatografie. Praha 1996, 113.

28 Ibid., 118.

29 Engl. "The German has been beaten".

30 Engl. "The leader perished".

31 Engl. "Our lord perished".

32 Lehár, Jan: Česká literatura od počátků k dnešku. Praha 1998, 678. The question of how to refer to Hitler in Czech in fact caused considerable problems for the authorities in the Protectorate. Cf. e.g. a letter from the office of the Reichsprotektor to the Governor General of the occupied Polish territories dated 15.12.1939. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 261, sig. I 1 a – 1100, which demonstrates how leaving words such as Führer in the original German was viewed as ill-advised on the grounds that "dass vor allem die Deklinationsendungen im Tschechischen unschön wirkten und zur Herabwürdigung der Worte führten: z. B. Reichsprotektora, Führerovi, Reichsregierungu." (Engl. "that above all the grammatical endings came across as ugly and resulted in the degradation of the words themselves: e.g. Reichsprotektora, Führerovi, Reichsregierungu.") As an alternative it was recommended that the Czech word *vůdce* ("leader") be used, but strictly controlled; cf. a letter from the office of the Reichsprotektor to councillor Dr. Gies dated 28.10.1939. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 261, sig. I 1 a – 1100: "Als Sicherungsmassnahme gegen Missbrauch könnte ja die gesamte tschechische Publizistik auf die Anwendung des Wortes 'vůdce' überwacht werden." (Engl. "As a protective measure against abuse, one could always police all Czech journalism for use of the word 'vůdce'.") and a memorandum from the same office dated 3.4.1941. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 261, sig. I 1 a – 1100: "Um einen Mißbrauch des in der tschechischen Sprache für den Führer Adolf Hitler eingelebten Begriffs 'Vůdce' zu verhindern und gleichzeitig die Einzigartigkeit des Begriffs herauszustellen, bitte ich dafür Sorge zu tragen, daß allgemein das Wort 'Vůdce' (stets mit großem Anfangsbuchstaben) nur zur Bezeichnung des Führers verwendet wird. Der anderweitige Gebrauch des Wortes 'vůdce' ist soweit wie möglich einzuschränken." (Engl. "So as to avoid any abuse of the word 'Vůdce', which has come to

was also quick to withhold permission to publish new volumes whenever the opportunity presented itself, for instance when a publishing house had yet to deliver a previously sanctioned edition.<sup>33</sup> That said, it is very much worth noting that particularly in the early years of the Protectorate, it was possible to circumnavigate the censor in some respects. For linguistic reasons, not all subversive content would necessarily be obvious to the German authorities and the subtleties of the Czech often had to be explained for non-native speakers. The author of one report for the Office of the Reichsprotector on Czech poetry was so concerned by this that he was moved to state

Moreover I might remark that, even in the case of such strict editorial control, only so much can be achieved by censorship measures / censorship of books / when this is not led by a German with a truly perfect command of the Czech language, and not just what is generally regarded as perfect.<sup>34</sup>

stand for the Führer Adolf Hitler in the Czech language, and to emphasise its singularity, I ask that it be ensured that the word ‘Vůdce’ (always with the first letter capitalised) be in general only used to refer to the Führer. Other use of the word ‘vůdce’ is to be limited as far as possible.”) For further indication of the pettiness involved in the language policies of the Protectorate, it is also perhaps worth noting that Hora’s request for a new flat appears to have been turned down on the grounds that he had submitted it in Czech rather than German. Cf. a letter dated 13.1.1941, Dr. Wuch (Hauptstadt Prag Präsidium) to Josef Hora. Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví [henceforth LA PNP], f. Josef Hora, sig. 2699–2704, 91/67: “Ihrem obigen Wohnungsansuchen vom 24.11.v.J. kann leider nicht stattgegeben werden. Wenn Sie jedoch dringend eine Wohnung benötigen, so wollen Sie hier ein neuerliches Ansuchen in deutscher Sprache, woraufhin Ihnen eine solche umgehend zugewiesen wird.” (Engl. “We must unfortunately turn down your above-mentioned application for a flat dated 24/11 of this year. If however you urgently require a flat, we request that you resubmit your application in German, whereupon a flat will be allocated to you promptly.”)

33 Cf. a letter from the publishers Fr. Borový to Vladimír Holan dated 1.10.1942. LA PNP, f. Vladimír Holan, sig. 5725–5763, 29/92: “Zbývá nám ještě jen jedno jediné povolení a sice to, které se týká Tvé sbírky ‘Havraním brkem’. Protože tiskárna Polygradie nemá co čeho, jak se říká píchnout, odvažují se Tě dotázat, co s rukopisem máme dělat. Censura nám žádné další povolení nechce dát, odvolávajíc se při tom na to, že musíme mít dost práce, když jsme během několika měsíců nemohli vytisknout poměrně malou knihu, jako je básnická sbírka.” (Engl. “We only have one permit left, namely the one for your collection ‘With the raven’s quill’. Because the printers Polygradie don’t, as the saying goes, have anything to get stuck into, I’m turning to you to enquire what we should do with the manuscript. The censor’s office doesn’t want to give us any further permits on the grounds that we must have an awful lot of work going on here if over the course of several months we weren’t even able to print a relatively small book like a collection of poetry.”)

34 Report addressed to Dr. von Gregory, dated 15.5.1940 and entitled Tschechische Lyrik 1939. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 1142, sig. IV – 2 S 7300: “Weiter darf ich bemerken, dass mit Zensurmassnahmen / Buchzensur / auch bei einer noch so straffen Zensur nur wenig auszurichten ist, wenn dies nicht von einem Deutschen geleitet wird, der natürlich das Tschechische wirklich perfekt beherrschen muss, nicht was im allgemeinen als perfekt angesehen wird.”

Besides the problems caused by the language barrier, it would also appear that a number of overtly political texts, which had in fact failed to make the grade, were allowed to slip through the cracks thanks to a sympathetic employee at the censor's office. According to Seifert's memoirs, a man named Vilém Kostka, who was a dab hand at forging signatures, would simply reverse some of the decisions made by his superior von Hopp, allowing provocative material to continue to circulate in spite of official restrictions:

Nezval's book *Pět minut za městem*, Hora's *Jan houslista*, Cassius' *Hromnice hoří* felt the beneficial caress of Kostka's hand too! How many beautiful lines from those books would have been swept under the carpet! Many of the books would not have been published at all and others would have been published in such a garbled and mutilated form that they would have been enough to make one cry. But they were all published and all of them in the form that we still read in new editions today.<sup>35</sup>

In this way, the flood of national pride and defiance amongst the now occupied Czechs was able to retain a certain momentum. Indeed, it is one of the paradoxes of the Protectorate that especially in those first few months of its existence, a veritable blossoming of Czech literature and culture could be witnessed against the backdrop of the Nazi take-over.

Performances of patriotic music such as Bedřich Smetana's *Má vlast* (Engl. "My homeland") garnered large and enthusiastic audiences and there was renewed interest in literary classics from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which were republished in huge print-runs. Between 1939 and 1940, 37 different reprints of works by Jan Neruda appeared<sup>36</sup> and in 1940, the year that marked the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her birth, 70,000 copies of Němcová's *Babička* were printed.<sup>37</sup> The great Romantic poet Mácha, who had begun his career writing in German, but switched to Czech and posthumously helped to establish it as a literary language on the world stage, was reburied in the spring of 1939 at a cemetery associated with the great and the good of the Czech nation. His coffin was carried by the poets František Halas, Vladimír Holan, Josef Hora and Jaroslav Seifert<sup>38</sup>, and the funeral turned into a mass demonstration against the occupation. According to Pražák though, the very burial itself was already a protest, not just the part that came afterwards: "We protested straight away

35 Seifert, Jaroslav: *Všecky krásy světa*. Praha 1985, 541: "Blahodárné pohazení rukou Kostkovou pocítila i kniha Nezvalova *Pět minut za městem*, Horův *Jan houslista*, Cassiova *Hromnice hoří!* Kolik krásných veršů z těchto knih bylo by těch dobách spadlo pod stůl! Mnohé z knih by vůbec nevyšly a jiné by vyšly tak zkomolené a zmrzačené, že by byly jen k pláči. Ale vyšly všechny a všechny v takovém znění, v jakém je čteme dnes v nových vydáních."

36 Doležal: *Česká literatura za protektorátu*, 131.

37 Ibid., 136.

38 Demetz, Peter: *Prague in Danger*. New York 2010, 49.

in May by ceremoniously burying Karel Hynek Mácha in Prague<sup>39</sup>. A similar demonstration also occurred during commemorations to mark the execution of Jan Hus on 7 July 1939, turning another historical figure into a focal point of national – and anti-German – feeling.<sup>40</sup>

## Why Poetry?

It was from this context, coupled with the months of uncertainty that preceded the annexation, and the anger and despair at what had happened at the Munich Conference that the poetic response to the political and social turmoil of the late 1930s emerged. The flurry of verse – defiant, plaintive, hopeful and stoical by turns, and often positively filled with patriotic sentiment – that appeared at this time is not only remarkable because of its commercial success<sup>41</sup>, but also because of its provenance. We find inventive, cosmopolitan, left-wing writers like Jaroslav Seifert and František Halas – writers whom one might well have expected to show what Tara Zahra has termed “national indifference”<sup>42</sup> – returning to more traditional forms and cloaking their compositions in national symbolism. Suddenly, it even becomes possible – and indeed productive – to compare the works of authors who had previously seemed to be incompatible given their diametrically opposed world views, such as Vítězslav Nezval and Jaroslav Kolman Cassius.<sup>43</sup> These developments will not have escaped the German authorities, who commissioned a report on Czech literature in the First Republic shortly after the creation of the Protectorate and received a fair account – albeit not entirely to their taste in terms of its assessment<sup>44</sup> – that concluded:

39 *Pražák*, Albert: *Národ se bránil*, 389: “Protestovali jsme hned v květnu tím, že jsme pohřbili v Praze slavně Karla Hynka Máchu”.

40 For a detailed account of both days’ events, cf. *Demetz*: *Prague in Danger*, 47 f.

41 On the record sales figures of collections such as Seifert’s *Zhasněte světla* (Engl. “Turn out the lights”) or Halas’ *Torzo naděje* (Engl. “Torso of hope”), both of which continued to be reprinted well into the first years of the Protectorate, see *Doležal*: *Česká literatura za protektorátu*, 136.

42 See *Zahra*, Tara: *Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis*. In: *Slavic Review* 69/1 (2010), 98.

43 Kolman Cassius was a right-wing conservative who had little interest in the avant-garde and its experiments. He is generally viewed as the literary heir of Viktor Dyk, but in the late 1930s his poetry underwent a similar transformation to that of many of his left-wing contemporaries. For an analysis of his works *Železná košile* and *Hromnice hoří* see *Jackson*, Frances: *Stín národního ohrožení v lyrice Jaroslava Kolmana Cassia*. In: *Antošiková*, Lucie (ed.): *Zatměno. Česká literatura a kultura v protektorátu*. Praha 2017, 190–197.

44 Cf. a letter from the SD Sonderkommando in Prague dated 24.5. 1939. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 1142, sig. IV – 2 S 7300: “Die Ausarbeitung stammt von einem Tschechen, der zwar über

As one can see, the ideological fronts of Czech literature had very sharp contours. In opposition to the nationalistic front, to which the ruralists and the Catholics belonged, there stood the humanists' front (concentrated around K. Čapek), the front of the modern hyperrealist and pure poets (Nezval, Halas, Seifert, etc.) and the socially-aware contemporary novelists' front. [...] Nowadays the two fronts are gradually reconciling and in both cultural and political life there are calls for spiritual unity on the basis of an independent Czech national existence.<sup>45</sup>

To focus on the poetry of this time is not to deny the significance or quality of other genres. However, when trying to gauge the literary response to the upheaval in the Czech lands of the late 1930s and early 1940s, poetry, as opposed to other forms of literature such as the novel or drama, is particularly well suited to the task owing to two main reasons. Firstly, because of its typical brevity. If need be – and the Muses are kind – a poem can be rattled off in a matter of minutes. There is no imperative to spend page upon page setting the scene or introducing nuanced, psychologically convincing characters. Just a couple of lines will suffice – in theory, at least. It does not even have to rhyme. There will also be no need for rehearsals or costume design. The path from pen to publication is thus much shorter for a poem than the path from pen to performance that awaits a play. This means poetry has the potential to respond much more quickly to the events of the day. It is capable of encapsulating a mood or scene almost at the drop of a hat, distilling things down to the bare essentials and making them available to the reader without delay. With collections such as Vladimír Holan's *Září 1938* (Engl. "September 1938") we find exactly that: poetry composed in the immediate aftermath of the Munich Agreement, very much in its shadow, and published before the year was out. It would be foolish to try to black out all of the historical context, to ignore the obvious links to the respective speakers' – and their empirical authors' – present. Indeed, as Milada Souckova noted in the 1950s, these deep-seated connections are one of the things that make the poetry of this period so notable in the first place:

eine sehr umfassende literarische Kenntnis verfügt, in seinen Wertungen jedoch reichlich liberal ist." ("The report was written by a Czech, who, though very knowledgeable about literary matters, is decidedly liberal in his judgements.")

45 Report entitled *Die tschechische Literatur in den Jahren 1918–1938*. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 1142, sig. IV – 2 S 7300: "Wie ersichtlich waren in der tschechischen Literatur die weltanschaulichen Fronten scharf geprägt. Gegen die nationalistische Front, zu der die Ruralisten und die Gruppe der Katholiken gehört, stand die Front der Humanisten (um K. Čapek), die Front der modernen überrealistischen Lyriker und der reinen Lyriker (Nezval, Halas, Seifert, usw.) und die Front der Zeitromanschriftsteller mit starkem sozialem Empfinden. [...] Heute söhnen sich beide Fronten allmählich aus und sowohl im kulturellen als auch im politischen Leben ruft man nach einer geistigen Einigkeit auf der Grundlage des nationalen tschechischen Eigenlebens."

Except for Russia at the time of the Revolution, no other nation has produced in modern times a poetry so spontaneously and directly related to contemporary historical events.<sup>46</sup>

Secondly, poetry has the advantage of naturally tending to veer towards the metaphorical and the symbolic. Indeed, these figures of language are often viewed as being “poetic” in character. In a situation where – as described above with regards to the Protectorate – artistic freedom is under threat and an author must use cunning to smuggle political messages past the censor, poetry comes into its own. Indeed Urs Heftrich has gone as far as to suggest that “If one were looking for a literary genre to outfox the censor, and poetry didn’t exist, one would have to invent it!”<sup>47</sup>

Besides these two key aspects, it is also perhaps worth noting the important social role and status that poetry enjoyed in the Czech lands at the time. Though perhaps unimaginable now, many of the poems of this era did in fact first appear in daily newspapers before they were published in collections of verse. Examining the poetry of this period, we are not dealing with an ivory tower pursuit, but rather with something that evidently played an intrinsic part in everyday life.<sup>48</sup>

46 Souckova, Milada: *The Critical Years in Czech Literature*. In: *Books Abroad*, 30/1 (1956), 23.

47 Cf. Heftrich, Urs: “Der gerupften Vögel Sang klingt nicht wie Geigen”. *Die nationalsozialistische Bedrohung im Spiegel des tschechischen Gedichts*. In: Grüner, Frank/Heftrich, Urs/Fischer von Weikersthal, Felicitas/Löwe, Heinz-Dietrich (eds.): “Zerstörer des Schweigens”. *Formen künstlerischer Erinnerung an die nationalsozialistische Rassen- und Vernichtungspolitik in Osteuropa*. Köln 2006, 212: “Suchte man eine literarische Gattung, um das Auge eines Sensors zu überlisten, und es gäbe das Gedicht nicht – man müsste es erfinden!”

48 For an indication of the significance attached to poetry at the time, see e.g. Bednář, Kamil: *Chvála obrazotvornosti*. In: *Panorama* 19 (1939), 120f.: “Poesie je nesmírně jemným ukazatelem seismografických otřesů, jež se dějí pod povrchem denního života. [...] Nikdo jiný nemohl lépe prorokovati boj o novou tvářnost světa, než poesie. [...] Národní zdraví, jehož je poesie ukazatelem, lze měřit mírou dokonalosti poesie.” (Engl. “Poetry is an incredibly subtle indicator of the seismographic tremors that occur beneath the surface of daily life. [...] Nobody could be better at foretelling the fight for the new appearance of the world than poetry. [...] The health of the nation, the indicator of which is poetry, can be measured on the basis of the excellence of its poetry.”) On the rather special status afforded to poets within Czech(oslovak) society, see also Blackwell, Vera: František Halas: *The Rock and the Roots*. In: *Books Abroad* 43/1 (1969), 13: “[...] the unique position held by the intellectual and artist (who, for the most part, are one) in Czechoslovak society. A poet, a man of letters, is still for the Czechs what he once was for Emerson: a Doer, a Maker, a man of action, a pioneer who from the virgin wilderness of the spirit conquers and cultivates new soil. It would be hard to find another country, East or West, where the voice of the intelligentsia, of art, of poetry, has such a wide and truly popular resonance. The almost sacrosanct position of the intelligentsia in Czechoslovak society has important

For the purposes of this study, we shall focus upon five poets, all of whom were prominent members of the Czech avant-garde: František Halas, Vladimír Holan, Josef Hora, Vítězslav Nezval and Jaroslav Seifert. They are by no means the only poets to have penned poems worthy of our attention during this period, but in the interests of scale and manageability, it is necessary to draw the line somewhere and this cross-section of the literary scene has three major advantages to recommend itself. Firstly, all five poets were already established writers by the time of the Munich Agreement with a large body of work behind them. The existence of earlier work enables us to compare the poetry of this period with that which preceded it and ask ourselves to what extent these lyrical compositions truly mark a break with the past or whether significant continuities persist. This would not be possible in the case of a younger poet such as Jiří Orten – however noteworthy his poems may be – since his professional poetic career only really began in 1939 with the publication of *Čítanka jaro* (Engl. “Spring reader”). Moreover, there are also pleasing parallels between many of the collections by these authors, which positively cry out for comparative investigation, ranging from similarities in imagery and themes to the fact that in 1940, both Halas and Seifert published volumes inspired by

historical reasons. Modern Czechoslovakia was virtually founded by the intellectuals (and in particular the writers) through their deliberate decision in the early nineteenth century to resuscitate the Czech nation (dormant since the Battle of White Mountain in 1620), through the sustained energy with which they proceeded to do so, and through the enthusiastic response their efforts received. Culture and the arts became the chief political weapons in the struggle for emancipation. And this is why, ever since, the intellectuals and artists have felt themselves to be, and have been looked upon as being, traditionally responsible for the very existence of the nation.” There are, of course, some who would disagree with her. Cf. e.g. *Schlamm*, Willi: *Cizinec o Čechách*. In: *Přítomnost*, 15/1 (1938), 10: “Ačkoli česká literatura oplývá přesvědčivou, milou a často dokonalou dovedností – přece nezažila dosud výjimečný případ ohromujícího, světového genia. Ovšem příčina je také v tom, že čeština není světová řeč. [...] Životní teplotura národa určuje křivku jeho literatury. V tomto století byl největším tvůrčím mužem Čechů (pro jejich štěstí a pro štěstí Evropy) nikoli básník, nýbrž státník a vychovatel národa T. G. Masaryk. To znamená: tvůrčí síla českého národa nenašla nejvelkolepější výraz v literárním, nýbrž v reálním ovládnutí života.” (Engl. “Although Czech literature abounds in compelling, pleasant and often often exquisite craftsmanship, it has to date never experienced an exceptional case of staggering, world-class genius. Of course one of the reasons for that is the fact that Czech is not a world language. [...] The temperature of a nation’s life determines the curve of its literature. In this century, the greatest Czech creative (fortunately for them and for Europe) was not a poet, but rather the statesman and educator of the nation T. G. Masaryk. This means that the creative strength of the Czech nation did not find its most magnificent expression in literary mastery, but in the mastery of real life.”) However, when we consider the fact that one of the hallmarks of the poetry of this period is engagement with real-life events, his criticism begins to lose its bite and we can see how the necessary “creative strength” of which he speaks could conceivably be ascribed to our poets.

Božena Němcová.<sup>49</sup> Last but not least, all of the poets selected were signatories of the manifesto *Věrní zůstaneme* (Engl. “We shall remain faithful”) from May 1938. Reminiscent of the 1917 *Manifest českých spisovatelů* (Engl. “Manifesto of Czech authors”), the document was signed by many key figures from the Czech literary scene, and avowed to fight to defend the principles of democracy, freedom, self-determination and social justice upon which the First Republic was founded, calling upon all loyal citizens to do the same.

## Keeping the Faith

Armed with this knowledge, one cannot help but wonder if the poets in question did indeed remain faithful. Are the collections of patriotic poetry that they published perhaps evidence of their having “kept the faith”? A sign of the poets’ own loyalty or more a call for loyalty in others? Loyalty is said to be infectious<sup>50</sup>, after all, so it is, of course, perfectly possible that they are both. The terms *věrnost* and *věrný* certainly appear with great frequency at this time and are deeply bound up with notions of being faithful or loyal. Though the Czech vocabulary does also contain the loanword *loyalita*, or nowadays more commonly *loajalita*, and its associated adjective *loyální* / *loajální*, these are not terms that we encounter in the poetry of this period.<sup>51</sup> Instead, it is

49 For an account of how this coincidence came to pass, see *Seifert: Všecky krásy světa*, 539. In Seifert’s recollections it was not, as some apparently tried to portray it at the time, a sign of any sort of competition between the two poets.

50 *Royce, Josiah: The Philosophy of Loyalty*. New York 1908, 137.

51 Interestingly, the word *loyální* does, however, crop up in relation to the behaviour apparently expected of Czechs following the creation of the Protectorate; cf. *Vůdce ujistil primátora hl. města Prahy: Českému národu při loyálním chování kyné šťastná budoucnost*. In: *Večerní České slovo*, 17.3.1939, 2. One wonders if here an intentional distinction is being made between indigenous and natural *věrnost* towards one’s native land and alien *loyalita* towards a foreign power. A couple of weeks later, a piece in *A-Zet ranní* written by a certain Dr. K. and calling for cooperation with the occupiers, also appeared to make a similar distinction; cf. *Národ věří ve své síly*. In: *A-Zet ranní*, 29.3.1939, 3: “Národ věří sobě. Tato víra je ve vědomí či v podvědomí každého z nás. Proto jdeme od 15. března poctivě a loyálně po nové cestě, spojení s Říší. Spojuje nás víra, že svou zdatností, pracovitostí a ukázněností si zajistíme v rámci Říše místo čestné a důstojné. A jaký bude osud národa, takový bude osud každého jednotlivce, který k němu svou krví a svým jazykem patří.” (Engl. “The nation has faith in itself. This faith is in the consciousness or the sub-consciousness of each of us. For that reason we go, as of the 15 March, dutifully and loyally along a new path, bound to the Reich. We are bound by the belief that with our competence, diligence and discipline we shall secure an honourable and dignified place for ourselves within the Reich. And whatever the fate of the nation, it will also be the fate of every individual who belongs to that nation by virtue of blood and language.”)

those words of Slavonic origin, etymologically related to the noun *víra* (“faith”, “trust”, “confidence”, “belief”) and to the verb *věřit* (“to believe”, “to trust in”, “to hope”) that take centre stage. They bring with them both religious and romantic connotations, not to mention many further positive associations. It is difficult to translate the terms with a single word in English. Besides signifying devotion and faithfulness within a relationship, whether towards a partner or towards God, being *verný* can also mean to be staunch, true-hearted, dutiful in other aspects of life. *Věrnost* is not only characterised by fidelity, but also by fealty; it involves promises both to be and to do. The German *Treue* and *treu* probably come closest to capturing the semantic breadth of the words *věrnost* and *věrný* especially since they too have a link to mediaeval concepts of love and service alongside notions of truth. They lack, however, the inherently optimistic connection to believing in something that the Czech includes.<sup>52</sup> The English translation of “faith” or “faithfulness” is able to provide this. However, employing such terms runs the risk of dwelling excessively on a sense of religiosity, which, while undoubtedly present to some extent, should not be overstated, not least because, as Martin Schulze Wessel has noted, “In political language, ‘loyalty’ and ‘faith(fulness)’ are among the words that Carl Schmidt said were to be understood as *secularised* theological terms.”) [emphasis added].<sup>53</sup> For these reasons, we shall allow ourselves the luxury of maintaining the words *věrnost* and *věrný* in the original Czech.

A brief look at a few verses from Nezval’s *Historický obraz* rather neatly illustrates what is at stake when we talk about *věrnost* in the poetry of this period:

A ten malý národ, jenž byl před nedávnem zrazen,  
věří, věří ve dne v noc, věří jako blázen,  
věří, že z té potopy vyvázne nevyhlazen.

Věří, že to neštěstí, ty všechny oběti  
přežije a přeťpří, přeťpří pro děti,  
že zas vstane jako Lazar z hrobu, z podsvětí.

Věří mužům, kteří pro něj šli zas do exilu,  
věří jejich slovům, která dávají mu sílu,  
věří v spravedlivý Východ jako v dobrou vílu.<sup>54</sup>

52 Only indirectly, via the related verb *vertrauen* (“to trust [in]”) and its noun form *Vertrauen* (“confidence”, “faith”, “trust”, “belief”) do we get a sense of that hopefulness in German.

53 Schulze Wessel, Martin: *Loyalität als geschichtlicher Grundbegriff und Forschungskonzept*. In: Schulze Wessel, Martin (ed.): *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918–1938. Politische, nationale und kulturelle Zugehörigkeiten*. München 2004, 3: “‘Loyalität’ und ‘Treue’ gehören in der politischen Sprache zu den Begriffen, von denen Carl Schmidt sagte, daß sie als *säkularisierte* theologische Begriffe aufzufassen seien.” [emphasis added].

54 Nezval, Vítězslav: *Dílo*. Vol. 9: *Historický obraz*. Praha 1955, 40. Engl. “And that small nation, which was betrayed not long ago / It believes, it believes in the day in the night,

The passage blends hopes, fears, tenacity and more than a hint of real-life events. Here the speaker does not – on the face of it, at least – appear to be giving voice purely to his own feelings, but rather purports to be documenting those of a whole country – a small nation and one that is immediately recognisable as Nezval’s own. One particularly striking aspect, besides the anaphora, is the early mention of betrayal, since this sets up an important opposition between the faithful and the faithless; those whose words we may believe and those whose words have been proven worthless. As we shall see, in other poems, individual references to betrayal, and especially to the comportment of the British and French, are even used as a way of broaching the issue of *věrnost* without having to do so explicitly. Besides this, there is also a sense of the apocalyptic, of natural disasters that must be weathered, something that we shall observe in detail over the course of Chapter Two, plus a connected vein of religious imagery, implying faith in the Biblical sense. The nation will not, it is seems, merely endure and survive, but overcome, could be resurrected even – such is the strength of its convictions.

Naturally, it could be argued that the speaker is alluding more to *víra* than to *věrnost* per se here. However, not only can his words be ascribed to a fundamentally *věrný* outlook, one which refuses to give up on the nation, though the cards may be stacked against it, but could also be seen as contributing to the construction of *věrnost* within the poem as a whole by lionising certain forms of behaviour, implicitly chastising others and demonstrating a steadfastness, an unwillingness to fall prey to the despair that is shared by many. Moreover, it is possible to view the tercets as indirectly articulating the aforementioned dual nature of *věrnost*, its connection to both *being* and *doing*. On the one hand, the excessive repetition of *věří* (“believes”, “trusts”) has the effect of rather transforming the word from an action, which grammatically of course it is, into a state. On the other, through the mass of further verbs – *vyvázne* (“will escape”) *přežije*, (“will survive”) *přetrpí* (“will endure”), *vstane* (“will rise”), *davají* (“they give”) – we are reminded of the fact that being *věrný* can also require action on the part of the supposedly *věrný* subject. What is more, since these verbs are mostly perfective, and thus in the present tense have a future meaning, the passage underscores the importance of future behaviour to *věrnost*. It is not enough that someone has been *věrný* in the past. We have to trust that they will continue to be and do so in the future. The only aspect that is not perhaps especially representative about these lines is the

it believes like a madman / It believes that it will escape this flood unobliterated. / It believes that this misfortune, all those sacrifices / will be survived and endured, endured for the sake of the children / that it will emerge like Lazarus from the grave, from the underworld. / It trusts the men who went back into exile on its behalf / it trusts their words, which give it strength / It believes in the just East like in a good fairy.”

concluding emphasis on the East (i. e. the Soviet Union presumably). Although the question of whether the Soviet Union would really have kept its promise of offering military assistance to Czechoslovakia has become a common feature of discussions arising from the myths and frequent assumptions made about the Munich Agreement, it is not something that is given much consideration in our selection as a whole.<sup>55</sup>

Incidentally, if we are interested in finding a prominent forerunner to our poets' preoccupation with ideas of *věrnost* and what it means to be a *věrný* Czech, we perhaps need look no further than the man who could be easily viewed as the father of modern Czech poetry, Karel Hynek Mácha, even if his reasons for broaching such matters were probably in fact rather different.<sup>56</sup> In the patriotic and – when compared to the rest of the composition – somewhat incongruous dedicatory opening verses of his most famous work *Máj* (Engl. “May”), which draw on earlier choral songs and echo the refrain of František Čelakovský's *Společné písně*<sup>57</sup>, the matter is broached enthusiastically and with a great deal of pathos:

Čechové jsou národ věrný,  
věrnost jejich první čest;  
vlasti své i svému králi  
Čech i v smrti věrný jest.<sup>58</sup>

The word *věrný* appears no fewer than thirteen times over the space of just 41 short lines. It is held up as a trait that is somehow inherently Czech, a default position that cannot be shaken even in death. It is bound up with notions of

55 That said, if one examines *Rudé právo* articles from the autumn of 1938, it was clearly something that was much discussed elsewhere. Cf. e.g. the article *Jediný, kdo nezradil, je Sovětský svaz přes to, že musel počítat s válkou proti Polsku a Rumunsku*. In: *Rudé právo*, 2.10.1938, 2.

56 A leading reference work on Czech poetry will certainly brook little or no argument on this point. Cf. *Červenka*, Miroslav/*Macura*, Vladimír/*Med*, Jaroslav/*Pešat*, Zdeněk (eds.): *Slovník básnických knih*. Praha 1990, 137: “Začlenění těchto zcela cizorodých veršů do Máje se stalo předmětem mnoha výkladů; zdá se však, že není důležitý obsahový vztah dedikace k básni, rozhodující byl sám záměr věnovat Máj průměrnému úspěšnému vlastenci [...]. Stylová odlišnost dedikace od dedikovaného díla samozřejmostí.” (Engl. “The inclusion of these entirely heterogeneous lines in May has been interpreted in many ways; it appears, however, that there is no important thematic relationship between the dedicatory verses and the poem, what is crucial is the decision to dedicate May to a run-of-the-mill prosperous patriot [...]. The stylistic dissimilarity between the dedication and the work itself was a matter of course.”)

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Mácha*, Karel Hynek: *Básně*. Praha 1997, 12. Engl. “The Czechs are a faithful nation, / faithfulness is their first honour. / To his king and to his country, / a Czech is faithful even in death.”

identity and eternity, as if to be a Czech means to be faithful<sup>59</sup>, that it was always thus and shall always be so, for ever and anon. Though it may not stand up to all too vigorous investigation<sup>60</sup>, there is at least superficially the possibility of a kind of continuation or earnest renewal of this nineteenth-century sentiment, a sense of the poets' being in good company alongside Máchas if and when they speak in such terms.

Coming back to more theoretical terrain, it is worth pointing out that while still relatively unknown in the field of literary studies, the concept of loyalty or faith(fulness) as an analytical category has been gaining ground in the humanities over recent years.<sup>61</sup> When one examines the idea more closely, it is not hard to see why. There is no need to talk of unhelpful notions such as "hybrid identities" whenever two aspects of a person's background seem at odds with one another, since it is acknowledged that a person may have multiple or changing loyalties. These can overlap and cause friction, or, at a crucial moment in a person's life, one loyalty may definitively trump another. This dynamic interplay is to be expected. It is not a problem, but, as Martin Schulze Wessel explains, the very crux of the matter.<sup>62</sup> Just as we have discussed

- 59 Seifert's recollections of the aforementioned Kostka would appear to support this, albeit inadvertently. He ends the chapter about getting round the censor on the words "Vilém Kostka byl statečný český člověk." (Engl. "Vilém Kostka was a stalwart Czech person.") as if the two adjectives were somehow one and the same. In: *Seifert: Všecky krásy světa*, 543.
- 60 As Urs Heftrich has noted in relation to the 1936 poem *K. H. M.*, Holan at least does seem to have been aware of the danger involved in blindly casting Máchas as a Czech patriot. Cf. *Heftrich, Urs: Höhlen tief im Wörterbuch: Tschechische Lyrik der letzten Jahrzehnte*. München, 2006, 352: "Vladimír Holan protestiert gegen alle Versuche, ausgerechnet einen Dichter, dem man zu Lebenszeiten mangelnden Patriotismus vorwarf, nun postum als vaterländische Ikone zu vergötzen" (Engl. "Vladimír Holan protests against all attempts to idolise a poet, who was in fact accused of a lack of love for his homeland when he was alive, posthumously as a patriotic icon"). Peter Demetz is similarly full of praise for the stand taken by Karel Polák in *Kritický měsíčník* about the coopting of Máchas by ill-informed patriots. Cf. *Demetz: Prague in Danger*, 50.
- 61 Among German-speaking scholars, the term *Loyalität* appears to have won out over *Treue*. On the specificities and advantages of the term, see e.g. *Schulze Wessel: Loyalität als geschichtlicher Grundbegriff und Forschungskonzept*, 1 f. Even some of those historians attempting to make the case for *Treue* have found themselves admitting that loyalty may be the more helpful concept after all. Cf. *Buschmann, Nikolaus/Murr, Karl Borromäus: "Treue" als Forschungskonzept? Begriffliche und methodische Sondierungen*. In: *Buschmann, Nikolaus (ed.): Treue. Politische Loyalität und militärische Gefolgschaft in der Moderne*. Göttingen 2008, 36.
- 62 Cf. *Schulze Wessel: Loyalität als geschichtlicher Grundbegriff und Forschungskonzept*, 10: "Der Begriff der Loyalität(en) erscheint dem Identitätsbegriff insofern überlegen, als er dessen in der Tat problematische Konnotationen nicht hat und ihnen nicht durch paradoxe Begriffsbildung entgegenwirken muß. Während Identität suggeriert, daß ein essenzieller Kern herausgeschält werden könnte, in dem das Individuum mit sich selbst identisch ist, legt der Begriff der Loyalität nahe, nach den Beziehungen des Individuums

and the Czech words *věrnost* and *věrný* indicate, being loyal or faithful is both an act and a condition. Loyalties are generally built up over the years, but can be tested in a single instant. They are strengthened – and also brought into question, or broken – via interaction.

In the case of our poets, we can readily imagine a number of loyalties or potential objects and recipients of such feelings, a willingness to devote oneself to one cause over another, which might be vying for the upper hand: loyalty to one's country, to one's political ideals, to oneself, to one's fellow writers. The signing of the manifesto gives us a useful way of framing these issues within a larger public context, encouraging us to look afresh at the poetry of this period and re-evaluate its possible effects and functions. What influence might the Munich Agreement have had on a sense of personal duty and how, if at all, is this reflected in our authors' works? Are their speakers faithful subjects? To whom do they direct this positive energy?

One way of investigating the issue of *věrnost* would of course be to consider to what extent our poets' works can be seen as remaining *věrný* towards the prevailing national narrative of the time, their ability to incorporate contemporary events into existing stories already told about the Czech nation. If we take a look at Andrea Orzoff's account of the nation-building myth propagated by the so-called Castle – the political elite of the interwar period as clustered around Masaryk and Beneš – a number of striking parallels immediately become apparent:

The story goes like this: under Habsburg rule, the innately democratic, peace-oving, tolerant Czechs were viciously repressed by bellicose, authoritarian, reactionary Austrians, under whose regime the Czech language and national consciousness almost died out. Czech identity was rescued by a heroic, devoted group of intellectuals, dubbed the Awakeners, who brought the dormant nation back to life by recrafting literary Czech, retelling Czech history, and making political claims on behalf of a "Czech nation." Jan Hus, the one-eyed Hussite general Jan Žižka, the Union of the Czech Brethren, the Battle of White Mountain: these fifteenth- and sixteenth-century historical figures and events were emotionally resonant signs within a coherent narrative of moral rectitude, victimization by aggressive Germans (or the Catholic Church, embodied in the Habsburgs), and persistent attachment to presumed Czech

zu fragen. In diesem Konzept läßt sich der Wandel von Bewußtsein eher als ein Wechsel von Bindungen, von Loyalitäten – im Plural – begreifen denn als Wandel einer identitären Essenz." (Engl. "The terms loyalty and loyalties appear superior to the notion of identity inasmuch as they do not share its frankly problematic connotations and do not have to combat these via paradoxical conceptualisation. While identity suggests that an essential core could be laid bare, in which the the individual is identical to itself, the term loyalty urges us to examine the individual's relationships. In this concept, any transformation of consciousness is to be understood more as a change of / in allegiances and loyalties – in the plural – than a transformation of some identitarian essence.")

national values, particularly that lodestar, the Czech language. After 1918, the myth continued, Czechoslovakia made itself an island of democratic values, rationalism, and fair mindedness amid a Europe falling quickly into the thrall of authoritarianism and fascism.<sup>63</sup>

Much of this description will be recognisable to anyone familiar with the Czech poetry of the late 1930s and early 1940s – the connection to both the nineteenth century and the 30 Years' War, the sense of victimisation, the “island mentality”, with its implicit need to band together. Furthermore, as Orzoff has noted, the Munich Agreement itself could be even seen as a kind of confirmation of this narrative<sup>64</sup>, with the result that “For some observers, the myth seemed close enough to fact to be mistaken for it.”<sup>65</sup>

One key element does not feature, however, in the poetry of our poets from this period, and that is democracy. There is evidence of distaste at authoritarian practices and the West's turning of a blind eye towards the rise of fascism in certain quarters<sup>66</sup>, but no alternative political system or real set of values is put forward – other than the need to stand together and the importance of being a *věrný* Czech. Though his point is another<sup>67</sup>, it should be acknowledged that Jan Tesař has homed in on exactly this oversight:

I contend that the fact that all Czechoslovak literature since 1938 to the present day, whatever its stance on the idiotic “national” issue, is consistent in terms of animosity and ridicule towards the West, without at least being able to recognise the real and serious problem of democracy as such, is proof of an insincere attitude towards democracy, of moral inferiority even.<sup>68</sup>

63 Orzoff: *Battle for the Castle*, 11.

64 *Ibid.*, 12.

65 *Ibid.*, 13.

66 Cf. e.g. Halas' 1938 poem *Deset ran egyptských* (Engl. “Ten plagues of Egypt”), which takes aim at the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War and amongst others those standing by and doing nothing to prevent or even condemn them.

67 Primarily the perceived failure of Czech intelligensia to respond appropriately to the Munich Agreement and all that followed over the course of the Second World War; cf. Tesař, Jan: *Mnichovský komplex: jeho příčiny a důsledky*. Praha 2000, 70: “Kdyby se naši intelektuálové místo ponižujících, nedůstojných básniček o zradě byli zaměřili na tento skutečný problém, možná mohli včas pochopit něco o technice tvorby veřejného mínění a manipulování davem.” (Engl. “If our intellectuals had focussed on the actual problem at hand, rather than on a few humiliating, undignified little poems about betrayal, they might have understood something about the art of creating public opinion and manipulating by the multitude at the time.”)

68 *Ibid.*: “Tvrdím, že je důkazem neupřímného postoje k demokracii a vůbec mravní inferiority, když veškerá československá literatura od roku 1938 až dodnes, at si zaujímá jakékoli stanovisko k idiotské ‚národní‘ otázce, shoduje se v nepřátelství a posměchu vůči Západu, aniž by byla schopna aspoň zpozorovat opravdový a vážný problém demokracie jako takové.” In this respect, the poetry in our selection can even be seen as being somewhat

Whatever one's view on Tesař and his essay on the legacy of Munich, and regardless of whether one feels that a lack of reflections on democracy should be taken as a sign of disloyalty towards the Czech national myth, it becomes clear that examining the poems on the basis of such notions will only us take so far. An approach of this kind does have its merits and will inevitably play some part in the present study, but it elucidates only the relationship between the poems and existing external constructs, adding little to our understanding of their inner-workings. It is for that reason that we shall opt to take a slightly different tack.

So as to ensure that we also do not run the risk of pursuing too much of a biographical line of enquiry when it comes to matters of *věrnost*, we shall focus in particular on the way in which the notion and lionisation of remaining true often acquires slightly paradoxical status within the poetry of this period. It is simultaneously both an obviously rhetorical gesture and a signal for something more than that, an expression of sincerity and genuine feeling. It does seem to be part of a grand narrative, an endless cycle of testing times and the overcoming of repeated obstacles, and yet also represents a rather static position, a means of maintaining a particular stance, battenning down the hatches, almost.<sup>69</sup>

## The Poets

That said, at least some small consideration of biographical details is necessary in order to gain sufficient understanding of the social and historical context. Examining the lives and works of the authors selected, one is struck by many

at odds with another important form of (cultural) resistance at the time – namely the Czechoslovak government-in-exile's radio broadcasts. Cf. *Harrison*, Erica: Broadcasting by the Czechoslovak exile government in London, 1939–1945. In: *Media History* 21/4 (2015), 464: "In the wartime context, when the Czechoslovak state had been destroyed and its return was not yet guaranteed, much of the exile government's broadcasting was dominated by a projection of their interpretation of Czechoslovak history and national identity. [...] (T)his interpretation relied strongly on the historical narrative popularised in the interwar period, on the memory of the first Czechoslovak president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, and on the understanding of democracy as an inherently Czech characteristic as listeners were repeatedly told that, 'the Czech spirit is principally the ideal of freedom, the ideal of moral integrity, the ideal of humanity, of democracy'". Radio as a communicative medium is something we shall deal with in more detail in Chapter Six.

69 For a contemporary take on this somewhat immobile persistence, cf. *Hanč: Czechs and Slovaks since Munich*, 115: "The watchword of the Czechs in Bohemia and Moravia is to remain faithful to their national tradition, not to waste energy in futile dissensions, to stand firmly by whatever minimum rights are left to them, and to be prepared for any emergency."

similarities, but there are also, of course, significant differences, especially as far as style and diction is concerned, not to mention the varying degrees of dedication to the socialist cause. We shall now consider a few of these points, those most pertinent to our investigations.

The first poet, František Halas, was born in Brno in 1901. His debut *Sépie* (Engl. “Cuttlefish”) was a collection of Poetist verse, but, on the whole, his poetry did not sit especially well with the buoyancy of the movement, distinguished, as it was, by an often tragic, introspective tone. Particularly during the 1930s, Halas’ work shifted more in the direction of existentialism. Under the Nazi occupation, Halas published both officially sanctioned collections and poems for illegal newspapers such as *Rudé právo* and *V boj*. Had it not been for his ill-health and a stint at a sanatorium in Tišnova, it is believed likely that he too would have fallen victim to the purge that took place following the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich.<sup>70</sup> He was also called up during the general mobilisation of the Czechoslovak army in September 1938. Judging by comments made in a letter to Jíří Mahen, the experience does not appear to have been particularly inspiring, even if the idea of serving elsewhere was not wholly unthinkable to him<sup>71</sup>:

I did three weeks of military service and marched between Břeclava and Mikulov, made abatisses, lost a few pounds and took a final look at the “homeland”. The next day there were Germans at those sites. [...] If I were a younger man and didn’t have a wife and child, I’d probably deal with it in a tremendously simple way and disappear somewhere, I probably wouldn’t be afraid of some foreign legion.<sup>72</sup>

70 Forst, Vladimír (ed.): *Lexikon české literatury. Osobnosti, díla, instituce*. Vol. 2/I: H–J. Praha 1993, 37f.

71 Similarly unenthusiastic sentiments can also be found in a letter to Karel Michl from 11 November, where Halas writes “taky jsem vojákoval na jižní Moravě, tělu to dělalo dobře, ale jinak, však víš!” (“I also did some soldiering in southern Moravia, it was good for the body, but apart from that, well you know!”) In: *Halas, František: Dílo*. Vol. 6: *Dopisy*. Praha 2001, 149.

72 *Ibid.*, 147f.: “Byl jsem 3 neděle na vojně a pochodoval mezi Břeclavou a Mikulovem, dělal záseky, ztratil pár kilo a díval jsem se naposled na ‘vlast’. Druhý den na těch místech byli Němci. [...] Kdyby člověk byl mladší a bez ženy a děcka, tak bych to asi řešil náramně jednoduše a zmizel někde, asi bych se nebál nějaké cizinecké legie.” The fact that Halas performed military service while others, especially Seifert, did not, was not missed by the commentators of the day. The first edition of the journal *Kritický měsíčník* included a cartoon that depicted a sweating Halas performing an act of staggering bravery (“Svobodník Halas odnáší raněného gen. Medka z líté bitvy”; Engl. “Lance corporal Halas carries an injured Gen. Medek from the fierce battle”), while Seifert is shown at leisure, his rifle leant up against the tree he is sitting under (“Jaroslav Seifert píše na přední stráží další báseň do zítřejšího Práva lidu.”; Engl. “Jaroslav Seifert writes another poem for tomorrow’s edition of *Právo lidu* during the first watch.”); cf. *Bidlo, Fr.: Válečná kronika*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 287. Halas’ personal experiences also appear to have been viewed as a selling point for his first post-Munich volume of poetry. Cf. an advert for *Zhasněte světla* and *Torzo*

In the same letter, he also expresses a feeling of helplessness, of the need and his desire to *do* something:

I would also like to do something, but I do not have the standing. I wanted to write a “play about futile virtues” – the Mobilisation, but E. M. Burian advised against doing so since it wouldn’t stand a chance of getting past today’s censor, so perhaps I’ll embark on something else. These poems somehow aren’t enough.<sup>73</sup>

It is interesting to note here that Halas was apparently dissatisfied with poetry as a vehicle of expression and protest. The question of whether collections of verse are an adequate response to the threat of rising fascism is one that will occupy us time and again over the course of this study. It all comes down to what we expect of literary and cultural figures at times of crisis. Is it enough for them to entertain and console us or should they be leading the fight? Can words truly become weapons? And if their poems are not confiscated by the censor, are they doing something wrong? Burying their heads in the sand or retreating into “internal exile”<sup>74</sup> perhaps?

The second is Vladimír Holan, a great, but rather solitary and inscrutable figure of the Czech avant-garde. Born in Prague in 1905, Holan was the son of a civil servant and between 1927 and 1935 did in fact himself work at the

*naděje* entitled “Dvě knihy aktuálních veršů” (Engl. “Two books of topical verse”), which promotes the latter on the grounds that it contains “Verše zachycené osudné chvíle r. 1938, viděné zrakem básníka, jenž sám stál jako voják na hranicích” (Engl. “Poems caught up in the fateful moment of the year 1938, seen through the eyes of a poet who himself stood as a soldier in the border lands”). In: *České slovo*, 5.1.1939, 3 and *Večerní České slovo*, 11.1.1939, 5.

73 *Halas: Dopisy*, 147: “Taky bych rád něco dělal, ale nemám stání. Chtěl jsem psát ‘hru o marných ctnostech’ – Mobilizace, ale E. F. Burian mne z toho zrazoval, že by to vůbec při dnešní cenzurní praxi neprošlo, a tak snad se pustím do něčeho jiného. Ty básně nějak nestačí.”

74 The term and its cousin “internal emigration” may be more commonly associated with the post-war period and the constraints of communist rule, but they were in use in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement, cf. *Černý, Václav: Ještě o básnicích ve dnech krise, a ještě k básníkům*. In: *Kritický měsíčník 2* (1939), 5: “Žádný útěk do snů, žádná emigrace vůbec, a tedy také ne vnitřní emigrace” (Engl. “No escape into dreams, no emigration at all, and for that matter no internal emigration either”). This issue is also explicitly broached within the poetry of our period; cf. e.g. the second stanza of Hora’s *Jan houslista*: “Druzí jen v duch utíkají / ze země deště, mlh a zim / za zlatým rounem snů a bájí, / z nichž nové jaro dýchá jim” (Engl. “Others only flee into the mind / away from the land of rain, mists and winters / behind the golden fleece of dreams and fables, / from which a new spring breathes to them”). In: *Hora, Josef: Kniha domova*. Praha 1958, 84. When considered within the full context of the poem – which, as we shall discuss in Chapter Two, heroises its protagonist for choosing to return to his endangered homeland from relative safety in exile – it becomes clear, however, that internal emigration is not depicted in positive terms here either. The character of Katy, in particular, seems to typify the dangers of retreating into oneself.

pensions office in the capital, before retiring on health grounds.<sup>75</sup> If a taste of the gaiety of Poetism could be found in his debut collection of verse *Blouznivý vějíř* (Engl. “Delirious fan”), this was but a passing fancy, and the cerebral works that followed took a very different path, setting Holan firmly apart from his contemporaries due to the masterful, if oft opaque use of language. His works are, quite simply, a challenge to digest, even for the most well-versed of readers. In addition, Holan was a prolific and talented translator, bringing authors as varied as Reiner Marie Rilke, Charles Baudelaire, Mikhail Lermontov and William Wordsworth to a Czech audience. Together with Halas, he also edited a volume of folk poetry called *Láska a smrt* (Engl. “Love and death”), which was first published in 1939. He spent most of the war in the countryside, away from Prague, working on epic compositions such as *Terežka Planetová* and *Cesta mraku* (Engl. “Path of the cloud”), which would set the tone for his post-war poetry.<sup>76</sup>

Our third poet, Josef Hora, is the eldest of the group, having been born in Dobřín in 1891. His career began in the editorial offices of the newspaper *Právo lidu* and he later worked for a time as the editor-in-chief of *Rudé právo*'s cultural section.<sup>77</sup> Hora was a member of the Communist Party, but like a number of other left-leaning writers and artists, became unhappy when Klement Gottwald became leader and set a Stalinist course for the movement. He was expelled alongside Seifert in 1929 in retaliation for having signed the *Manifest sedmi* (Engl. “Manifesto of the Seven”). In the context of the Czech avant-garde, Hora also stands a little apart, since he was not directly associated with Poetism or the artistic group *Devětsil* that developed the movement, although he did write several proletarian collections in the 1920s. His poetry is invariably melodic, musical even. As chairman of the *Obec československých spisovatelů* (Engl. “Association of Czechoslovak Authors”), Hora played a leading role in efforts to drum up support for the Czech cause amongst foreign cultural organisations following the Munich Agreement, something which will be discussed more closely in Chapter Six. His untimely death in June 1945, just weeks after the liberation, was a cruel blow to the Czech literary scene, which had already lost so many key figures over the previous six and a half years. Posthumously he was awarded the title *národní umělec* (Engl. “national artist”).<sup>78</sup>

Like Halas before him, Vítězslav Nezval was another Moravian author, and an important theoretician in the Czech avant-garde. Born in 1900, he enrolled as a law student at the university in Brno in 1920, but soon switched to the

75 *Forst*: Lexikon české literatury. Osobnosti, díla, instituce: H–J, 231.

76 *Ibid.*, 232.

77 *Ibid.*, 260.

78 *Ibid.*

Faculty of Arts in Prague, before deciding to dedicate himself to literature without graduating.<sup>79</sup> His poem *Abeceda* (Engl. “The Alphabet”), which in its second edition also included graphic design by Karel Teige, photography by Karel Paspá and choreography by Milča Mayerová, is one of the most famous examples of Poetist art. Its associative, intermedial playfulness is very much in keeping with the Poetists’ desire to create poetry for all of the senses. Nezval’s lively, joyous essay on poetry *Papoušek na motocyklu* (Engl. “Parrot on a motorbike”) was also a decisive text within the movement. Unlike several of his peers, Nezval was not expelled from the Communist Party in 1929 and appears to have been relatively unmoved by the excesses of Stalinism. Over the course of the 1930s, he was heavily involved in Surrealism, influenced by a meeting with André Breton in 1934. Nezval was in correspondence with leading figures from the Surrealist movement in France and founded a Czech counterpart, the *Skupina surrealistů* (Engl. “Surrealist group”), which he disbanded in 1938 due to internal disagreements.<sup>80</sup> Besides poetry, he also wrote a handful of plays, including the well-received *Manon Lescault*, which had its premiere in 1940.

Our fifth and final poet, Jaroslav Seifert is probably the most famous of the group on the world stage by virtue of the fact that he is the only Czech to date have received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Seifert began writing proletarian poetry in the early 1920s and much has been made of his family background in this respect, probably since it differs from that of the perhaps most famous proponent of Czech proletarian poetry, Jiří Wolker. Edward Mozejko has, for example, described Seifert as being “genuinely working class”<sup>81</sup>, while Wilma A. Iggers disputes this, pointing out “Although he is regularly referred to as coming from a working class family, his father was actually an unsuccessful businessman.”<sup>82</sup> However, if we examine the issue in keeping with the spirit of the times, it becomes clear that both are rather missing the point here. For the Czech avant-garde of the 1920s, artists were workers in their own right<sup>83</sup>, meaning that the chosen profession of the son is surely of far more significance than the business success – or lack of it – of the father. Building on his proletarian phase, Seifert became one of the founding members of the artistic group *Devětsil* and later an important figure within Poetism, dazzling readers with his virtuosity and daring. Even in his more sober, reflective poetry of the

79 *Opelík, Jiří* (ed.): *Lexikon české literatury. Osobnosti, díla, instituce*. Vol. 3/I: M–O. Praha 2000, 527.

80 *Ibid.*

81 *Mozejko, Edward*: *Between Dream and Reality: The Poetry of Jaroslav Seifert*. In: *Scando-Slavic* 33 (1987), 64.

82 *Iggers, Wilma A.*: *The World of Jaroslav Seifert*. In: *World Literature Today*, 60/1 (1986), 9.

83 Cf. *Neumann, Stanislav K.*: *Spisy*. Vol. 9: *Stati a projevy V (1918–1921)*. Praha 1971, 436: “Umělci jsou jen jiný druh dělníků.” (Engl. “Artists are just another type of worker.”)

1930s and 1940s, Seifert's speaker – more often than not a stylised version of the poet himself – tends to be something of a ladies' man, and matters of the heart are a frequent vehicle for social and political commentary.

## The Poetry

Now that we have met the protagonists, we may turn our attention to the collections of verse that will form the basis of our analysis. The main works to be examined in one way or another over the course of this study are as follows: Halas' *Torzo naděje* (Engl. "Torso of hope"), *Naše paní Božena Němcová* (Engl. "Our Lady Božena Němcová") and *Ladění* (Engl. "Tuning up"); Holan's *Září 1938* (Engl. "September 1938"), *Odpověď Francii* (Engl. "Reply to France"), *Sen* (Engl. "Dream") and *Terezka Planetová*; Hora's *Domov* (Engl. "Home"), *Jan houslista* (Engl. "John the violinist") and *Zahrada Popelčína* (Engl. "Cinderella's garden"); Nezval's *Pět minut za městem* (Engl. "Five minutes behind the town") and *Historický obraz* (Engl. "History painting"); and Seifert's *Zhasněte světla* (Engl. "Turn out the lights"), *Vějíř Boženy Němcové* (Engl. "The fan of Božena Němcová") and *Světlem oděná* (Engl. "Clad in light").

This selection covers the years 1938 to 1942, although some works, in particular Holan's *Odpověď Francii* and much of Nezval's *Historický obraz* did not receive a green light from the censor and were only published in full after the end of the Second World War.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, such collections are still of interest to us, even if they did not reach their intended audience until after the event, as it were, since they give an indication of what constituted overstepping the mark in the eyes of the German authorities. Our analysis will focus especially upon the reverberations of the Munich Agreement and also the experience, or rather, depiction of life under occupation. Where appropriate, poems that were written at the time, but not included in any of the collections listed above, or which appeared in other contemporary anthologies, such as the 1940 tamizdat *Hlasy domova* (Engl. "Voices of home"), will also be given due consideration. The list of works is by no means exhaustive and cannot be viewed as wholly representative. It does, however, include at least a cross-section of leading figures from the interwar avant-garde and their works during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Though heterogenous in terms of style, length and substance, there are a number of overlaps on both the thematic level and with regards to the language and imagery used. Whether in the

84 Two poems from *Odpověď Francii* (II and IV) did, however, appear in a journal; cf. *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 358 f. The first part of *Historický obraz* also appeared before the creation of the Protectorate.

form of stand-alone verses, longer epic compositions or cycles of thematically linked short poems such as *Odpověď Francii*, time and again we come across depictions and tales of homelands and homecomings, of changing times and disturbances to the everyday, of mutual fate and common purpose. Each poet obviously has his own thematic preferences and distinct manner, but certain shared characteristics still shine through.

The cut-off point of 1942 has been chosen since that was the year when things took a definite turn for the worse in the Protectorate. In the period leading up to the botched, though ultimately successful assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, there was, as we have heard, still a certain and perhaps surprising degree of cultural and artistic freedom available in the Czech lands. However, as Seifert wrote in his memoirs: “The assassination attempt on the road beneath Bulovka on Wednesday 27 May 1942 appeared to split the occupation of our country into two halves. The second was the more terrible”<sup>85</sup> A clamp-down had already begun when Heydrich took the reins from Reichsprotektor Konstantin von Neurath in September 1941, but it was his death and the violent backlash it caused that marked the real turning point. The subsequent execution of celebrated author Vladislav Vančura was particularly keenly felt by his peers, with Seifert later remarking “Vladislav Vančura! In that name our whole generation was stricken, in it was the fate of each and every one of us. In that name the whole of our country was bloodily wounded”<sup>86</sup>, and thus binding the fate of the nation to that of its writers. As we are most interested in the lively poetic response to the events of the day, it makes sense to focus on the era *before* the poets in question were effectively muzzled.

What is particularly intriguing about these collections is that although they did often enjoy a strong critical response in contemporary journals, this interest did not carry over into the post-war era.<sup>87</sup> Especially when held up against earlier works by their authors, many seem to have been strangely overlooked by most literary scholars. In fact, besides the obvious entries in the standard reference book for Czech poetry *Slovník básnických knih*, which provide a good, if terse introduction to many of the collections, highlighting key features and offering a little background information, the bulk of the modern critical response to this branch of poetry has been made in passing. These fleeting

85 Seifert: *Všecky krásy světa*, 512: “Atentát v ulici pod Bulovkou ve středu 27. května 1942 rozdělval zdánlivě okupací našich zemí na dvě části. Ta druhá byla hroznější.”

86 *Ibid.*, 513: “Vladislav Vančura! V tom jméně byla zasažena celá naše generace, byl v něm osud nás všech. V tom jméně byla krvavě zraněna celá naše země.”

87 It is only in the last few years that the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences has made efforts to redress this imbalance. Cf. e.g. the international symposium *Česká literatura a kultura za protektorátu* which took place on 24 and 25 November 2016 in Ostrava and the subsequent book publication *Zatemněno. Česká literatura a kultura v protektorátu*.

insights have mostly been provided either over the course of larger surveys of the history of Czech literature<sup>88</sup> or as part of overviews of the authors' works as a whole<sup>89</sup>, leaving little room for close textual analysis. Though Urs Heftrich covers a lot of ground in his useful article on the lyrical compositions of this era and their relationship to the threat from Nazi Germany, he is hampered by issues of space, relying on extensive footnotes that give a hint of more to come, but simply cannot go into sufficient detail.<sup>90</sup> There has also been an unfortunate tendency at times to take the poems of this period rather too literally and ignore their status as *literary* texts and constructs.<sup>91</sup> The one more substantial study available – František Valouch's *Česká poezie v období Mnichova (Hora, Seifert, Halas, Holan)* – does provide in-depth analysis of several prominent collections; however, it shows its age somewhat and lacks any real theoretical sophistication<sup>92</sup>. Theoretical sophistication abounds in Jonathan Bolton's discourse analysis *The Ruins of Modernity. Czech Modernism after Munich, 1938 – 1939*, but with the exception of one brief, if not uninteresting reference to Halas, he steers clear of poetic analysis, preferring instead to focus on newspaper and journal articles.<sup>93</sup>

Moreover, while there appears to be general agreement that the collections mark an important moment of poetic defence of the Czech lands and a return to many historical and mythological motifs, it remains unclear to what extent this represents a true turning point within the authors' work. Zdeněk Pešat, for example, noted a fair amount of continuity, both thematic and technical between *Torzo naděje* and Halas' earlier works<sup>94</sup>, whereas Vera Blackwell argues that Halas "discarded his private voice and in the best Czech literary traditions became the spokesman of the nation"<sup>95</sup>, something which one would

88 E.g. *Brabec*, Jiří: *Poezie*. In: *Skálová, Růžena* (ed.): *Dějiny české literatury*. Vol. 4: *Literatura od konce 19. století do roku 1945*. Praha 1995, 380 f.

89 E.g. *Pešat*, Zdeněk: *Jaroslav Seifert*. Praha 1991, 143 f., or *Pešat*, Zdeněk: *František Halas*. In: *Skálová* (ed.): *Literatura od konce 19. století do roku 1945*, 529 f.

90 See *Heftrich*: "Der gerupften Vögel Sang klingt nicht wie Geigen", 211 f.

91 Cf. e.g. comments on Seifert's poem *Píseň o vlasti* in: *Pražák: Národ se bránil*, 384 "Seifert navštívil v červenci pohraniční a viděl tu naši zemi v korsetu 'ze strašného betonu'" (Engl. "Seifert visited the border in July and saw there our country in a corset 'of terrible concrete'"). Not only does *Pražák* mistake the empirical author for his lyric persona here, but he also manages to misquote him. The line from the poem *Píseň o vlasti* (Engl. "Song about the homeland") to which he is referring actually reads "ze strašlivého betonu" (Engl. "of dreadful concrete"). Cf. *Seifert*, Jaroslav: *Dílo*. Vol. 5: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*. Praha 2012, 192.

92 See *Valouch*, František: *Česká poezie v období Mnichova (Hora, Seifert, Halas, Holan)*. Olomouc 1970.

93 See *Bolton*, Jonathan: *The Ruins of a Republic. Czech Modernism after Munich, 1938–1939*. In: *Hell, Julia / Schönle, Andreas* (eds.): *Ruins of Modernity*. Durham, North Carolina, 121.

94 See *Pešat*: *František Halas*, 542 f.

95 *Blackwell*: *František Halas: The Rock and the Roots*, 16.

certainly be hard-pushed to claim he was before. Nevertheless, without a more complete understanding of the mechanics of the collections and consideration of their precursors, it is difficult to judge who is correct.

As far as research into the cultural life of the Second Republic and the Protectorate is concerned, the period has, until now, been most comprehensively approached from a historical point of view – more often than not from the perspective of German *Kulturpolitik* – with literary sources generally included purely as illustrations of, or evidence for, specific trends in society, rather than objects of investigation in their own right<sup>96</sup>. This is not, of course to say that such works are of no interest for the purposes of this project – indeed, Peter Demetz’s interpretation of the singing of the Hussite hymn *Ktož jsú boží bojovníci* during the aforementioned Jan Hus Day protest in the summer of 1939 as a recourse to a tried and tested manner of instilling fear into German hearts, offers a helpful means of viewing the appropriation of historically-loaded imagery within contemporary poems<sup>97</sup> – merely that the main focus has tended to lie elsewhere. An invaluable resource for understanding the state of Czech literature after the Munich Agreement also exists in the form of Jiří Doležal’s *Česká literatura za protektorátu. Školství, písemnictví, kinematografie*. Again though, his aim is different from ours, given that he primarily seeks to give an impression of the situation at the time and elucidate the institutional and practical constraints imposed on authors, rather than scrutinise their works. Similarly, Jaroslav Med’s *Literární život ve stínu Mnichova*, which deals largely with the Second Republic, is rich in information about developments in the literary scene at that time, but short on textual analysis.<sup>98</sup>

## Room for Improvement

All in all, when one examines the research currently available, it becomes painfully clear that, in the case of much of the poetry published in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement, not only must the gap between historical endeavour and literary criticism be bridged, but the latter also sharpened up to bring it into line with that of other works by the authors in question. With this in mind, we can perhaps begin to consider what the following study can bring to the fore. Its primary innovation obviously lies in the sustained focus on issues

96 E.g. *Fauth*, Tim: *Deutsche Kulturpolitik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren 1939 bis 1941*. Göttingen 2004 or *Mohn*, Volker: *NS-Kulturpolitik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren: Konzepte, Praktiken, Reaktionen*. Essen 2014.

97 *Demetz*: Prague in Danger, 51.

98 See *Med*, Jaroslav: *Literární život ve stínu Mnichova (1938–1939)*. Praha 2010.

surrounding the matter of *věrnost*, something which will accompany us at all times, always simmering away in the background and assumes particular importance in Chapter Four. There is, however, another slightly unusual theoretical aspect of this study – namely, that we assume a broad conception of narrative, one which does not automatically exclude lyric poetry.<sup>99</sup> Simply because a story is truncated or veiled in metaphorical language does not mean that it ceases to exist. Yet, in spite of the narrative turn that has been widely proclaimed within the humanities and beyond, there has been only a sluggish uptake of narratological tools amongst scholars of poetry and many narratologists have continued to overlook the genre in their analyses, upholding the long-held binary opposition between the lyric and the narrative.<sup>100</sup> There is, however, no good reason to assume that poets are unaffected by the storytelling instinct that marks us out as *Homo narrans*<sup>101</sup> and it seems foolish to pass up the opportunity to examine their work with increased rigour and alternative methods merely because of questionable conventions of text classification. We shall try not to belabour the point too much. It goes without saying that there are major formal differences between a long and purely narrative text and a poem, just a few lines in length, but taking narrative aspects into account may help us to find a common denominator between some of the more disparate works in our selection and certainly provides a useful structuring device for the first four chapters of this study, in particular – a new way of thinking about the various layers of expression on show.

This approach would not necessarily have been to the taste of our poets. In fact, Seifert himself claimed not to be a very good storyteller and to have tended to stick to writing verse for exactly that reason.<sup>102</sup> However, in

- 99 Cf. *Schmid*, Wolf: *Elemente der Narratologie*. Berlin 2003, 11 f. For a general introduction to main issues surrounding the narratological approach to poetry, see e.g. *Hühn Peter/Sommer*, Roy: *Narration in Poetry and Drama*. In: *the living handbook of narratology*. URL: <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/40.html> (on 1.6.2022).
- 100 On the reluctance to embrace the narrative potential of the lyric and the instrumentalisation of poetry as the Other in narrative study, see e.g. *Müller-Zettelmann*, Eva: *Poetry, Narratology, Meta-Cognition*. In: *Olson*, Greta (ed.): *Current trends in narratology*. Berlin 2011, 232 f.
- 101 On the use and meaning of the term see e.g. *Koschorke*, Albrecht: *Wahrheit und Erfindung*. *Grundzüge einer Allgemeinen Erzähltheorie*. Frankfurt am Main 2012, 9 f.
- 102 *Seifert*: *Všecky krásy světa*, 438: “Nejsem dobrý vypravěč. Když vypravuji, příliš spěchám. Slova i věty se mi hrnou a pospíchají, abych užuž dobral se konce a měl to za sebou. Jako bych měl něco zmeškat. Nezmeškám nic. Je to jen nezkušenost, či spíše neumění. Nemám smysl pro detail, u kterého je možno spočinout, provést pár slovních piruet, abych pak pokračoval pomalu a klidně a nedočkavý čtenář nabral dech. Nemám smysl pro záměrnou retardaci i dějovou zámlku. Neodvažuji se digresi, které zhusta vyprávění dramaturgizuje. Neumím to prostě. Proto jsem psal většinou jen verše. Zdály se mi snazší. Psáním povídek nevydělal bych si ani na sodovou vodu.” (Engl. “I am not a good storyteller. When I tell stories I hurry too much. Words and sentences spill out of me and

this study, we shall contend that his poetry – and that of the other authors examined – does contain clear narrative elements. These range from accounts of past occurrences and recent events, depictions of everyday scenes and recollections of how things used to be, to the recapitulation and remoulding of existing myths and legends. They may vary in terms of their significance and indeed superficiality, but issues such as chronology and causality still play a part and a sense of change is often paramount. If we recall E. M. Forster's famous if not uncontroversial examples to illustrate the difference between a story in its barest form (“The king died and then the queen died”) and its plot equivalent (“The king died and then the queen died of grief”)<sup>103</sup>, we could easily come up with our own paraphrases to help understand some of the narrative patterns and underlying structures involved in the poetry of the period – “Munich happened and everything changed”, perhaps, or “Munich happened and then we all went into mourning”. The causality may only be implied here, but that too is surely even appropriate given the propensity of poets to employ non-literal devices, to look at things askance, to mask and mystify when putting pen to paper.

Indeed, having chosen such a path, we shall not by any means ignore characteristically “poetic” aspects, such as rhyme, metre and stanzaic form, which do, of course, impart and enhance meaning, but neither shall we content ourselves with viewing lyric compositions as somehow completely removed from the world of storytelling. We seek in particular to lay the speaker bare, to show that he does not merely speak from the heart with his head in the clouds, but can also have an intrinsic narrative function and effect, one that is closely entwined with issues of rhetoric. As Eva Müller-Zettelmann explains “In witnessing the speaker, we witness the fundamental human endeavour to use language and storytelling to make meaning”<sup>104</sup>. His perspective, the slant that he puts on things – and the potential discrepancies that ensue<sup>105</sup> – is, after all, our gateway to understanding.

In order to investigate the poetic techniques and narrative strategies employed by our authors to convey what happened to the Czech lands in the

make haste so that I finish it and put it behind me as soon as possible. As if I were going to miss something. I don't miss anything. It is just lack of experience, or rather a lack of skill. I don't have a good sense of detail that can be relied upon to implement a couple of verbal pirouettes so that I can then continue slowly and calmly and the impatient reader can catch his breath. I don't have a good sense of purposeful retardation or scenic silences. I daren't make the sort of digressions that greatly dramatise storytelling. I simply don't know how to do it. For that reason I mostly only wrote verse. It seemed easier to me. I wouldn't have made a penny out of writing stories.”)

103 Forster, E. M.: *Aspects of the Novel*. London 1961, 82.

104 Müller-Zettelmann: *Poetry, Narratology, Meta-Cognition*, 244.

105 Cf. the notion of the implied author, whose voice can be heard in ironic lapses.

late 1930s and early 1940s as fully as possible and with due sensitivity for the peculiarities of the genre, we shall examine a variety of different aspects, ranging from the use of figural language to the invocation and (re)construction of national myths. We shall begin, however, with the concept of the event, that indispensable feature of any narrative, and ask ourselves whether the Munich Agreement might possibly be just such a thing.



# 1. Poetic Events and Eventfulness

To suggest that the Munich Agreement was a significant moment in the history of the twentieth century is hardly going out on a limb. Depending on one's perspective it could be viewed as the finest or most ignoble hour of the politics of appeasement, a laudable and last-ditch attempt to achieve "peace for our time" that was to prove so disastrously ineffective, evidence of a remarkable disregard for the small nations of the world, even. Its newsworthiness – both then and now<sup>1</sup> – is beyond dispute. The ceding of the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany may be colloquially referred to as one of the key events leading up the Second World War, but what exactly do we mean by an "event" here? And how might such a thing be depicted and reflected poetically?

In its purest and most expressive form, lyric poetry is, after all, a genre that has in the past, at least, faced not infrequent accusations of being impervious to momentous outside events and dismissed as mere *poésie de circonstance* when it bucks this trend.<sup>2</sup> The matter is obviously somewhat different in the case of the epic, but that too brings with it certain conventions and expectations. It may put us more in the mind of the Classical poets writing verse histories long after the events in question have slipped into the realm of myth and legend. Regardless of how strong the narrative currents may be in the individual poems or whether the speakers focus more on an evocation of states and feelings, there is one issue that we cannot get around: when our poets broach the subject of what was happening in their country at the time, they do so *in*

- 1 Consider, for example, the unveiling of a plaque in the Bavarian capital to commemorate the signing of the Munich Agreement in early 2016, which was hailed in the local press as a significant and long overdue moment. Cf. e.g. *Wetzel, Jakob*: Späte Erinnerung. In: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23.2.2016. URL: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/ns-vergangenheit-spaete-erinnerung-1.2877382> (on 1.6.2022), which begins with the words "Es ist kein Jahrestag, aber es wurde Zeit" (Engl. "It is not an anniversary, but it is about time."). A visit to the site by the Czech Prime Minister a few days later, the first of its kind by anyone of that office, did not go unnoticed by the Czech press either. Cf. e.g. *Český premiér poprvé v dějinách navštíví místo podpisu mnichovské dohody*. In: *Lidové noviny*, 5.3.2016. URL: [https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/cesky-premier-poprve-v-dejinach-navstivi-misto-podpisu-mnichovske-dohody.A160305\\_115100\\_in\\_domov\\_ELE](https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/cesky-premier-poprve-v-dejinach-navstivi-misto-podpisu-mnichovske-dohody.A160305_115100_in_domov_ELE) (on 1.6.2022) or *Sobotka coby první český premiér navštíví místo podpisu mnichovské dohody*. In: *Hospodářské noviny*, 6.3.2016. URL: <https://domaci.ihned.cz/c1-65194080-sobotka-coby-prvni-cesky-premier-navstivi-misto-podpisu-mnichovske-dohody> (on 1.6.2022).
- 2 For an attempt to provide a more nuanced view on the matter, see e.g. *Jeffreys, Mark*: Introduction. *Lyric Poetry and the Resistance to History*. In: *Jeffreys, Mark* (ed.): *New Definitions of Lyric. Theory, Technology, and Culture*. New York 1998, vii f.

*medias res*, without the benefit of hindsight or even any meaningful distance between themselves and those goings-on. We have before us something very current, very raw.<sup>3</sup>

Over the course of this first chapter, we shall examine the relationship between the Munich Agreement as an event and contemporaneous works of Czech poetry, with particular reference to five prominent collections: František Halas' *Torzo naděje*, Vladimír Holan's *Září 1938* and *Odpověď Francii* Josef Hora's *Domov* and Jaroslav Seifert's *Zhasněte světla*. With the exception of *Domov*, all were published against the backdrop of the sudden disintegration of the First Republic and include poems penned in direct response. Though Hora's volume of poetry was released several months before the meeting at the Führerbau, it is nevertheless still of interest to us because this earlier work allows us to consider more fully to what extent its outcome could be seen as having been in some way anticipated or foreshadowed.

## The Event as an Analytical Category

Coming back to the central term of this chapter, one could be forgiven for assuming that events are all around us nowadays. They can be planned. They can be hosted. They fill the news and regularly clog up our diaries too. Their guise is myriad, encompassing just about everything from weddings and film premieres to academic conferences and assassination attempts. A vague sense of something out of the ordinary taking place unites them, but little else. If the everyday usage of the term smacks of imprecision and an unthinking

3 On the subject of shifting perspectives and getting caught up in history, see e.g. *Navrátil, Václav: O patetických nacionalismech*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 369: "Ještě před několika lety jsme měli historický blahý pocit, že se díváme na historická dramata jako divák na drama v divadle. Žádná další historie nebyla očekávaná, dějiny jsme považovali za vyřízené. [...] Náhle však byla v historickém divadle stažena opona a my jsme hlediště přešli za kulisy jeviště. Z diváka se stal herec, ze čtenáře hrdina románu." (Engl. "A few years ago we still had the historic and blissful sense that we were watching the dramas of history like a member of the audience watches a drama at the theatre. Nothing more was expected to happen, we considered history to be all over and done with. [...] But suddenly the curtain came down in that that theatre of history and we crossed the auditorium onto the stage and behind the scenes. Audience members became actors, readers the heroes of novels."). Jan Tesař has also observed – albeit disapprovingly and as evidence of what he sees as the inappropriate handling of the Munich Agreement by the Czech intelligentsia – a strong degree of theatricality in responses to it, not least in the poetry of this period: "Tvrdím, že český prožitek roku 1938 je falešný: je to 'prožívání' ve smyslu divadelním. Češi se přehrávají ve svém úžasném zármutku." (Engl. "I maintain that the Czech experience of the year 1938 is false: it is 'experiencing' in the theatrical sense. The Czechs are overacting in their prodigious sorrow."). In: *Tesař: Mnichovský komplex*, 113.

subservience towards buzzwords – we have all met the self-proclaimed *event manager* who does not merely manage events, but *event manage* them – this is perhaps offset in philosophical and narratological circles, where a sustained debate about the nature of the event as an analytical category rumbles on.

Jacques Derrida, in particular, has questioned its fundamental applicability, comparing the event with such phenomena as forgiveness, which, in his post-structuralist eyes, can only take place when something truly unforgivable has occurred. If such an act were to be forgiven though, it would no longer be unforgivable, giving rise to his notion of forgiveness as an *impossible possibility*: “The unforgivable must remain unforgivable in forgiveness, the impossibility of forgiving must continue to haunt forgiveness”<sup>4</sup>. By the same token, an event – for all of its unexpectedness and singularity – must also, according to Derrida, be recognisable as such: “the event cannot appear to be an event, when it appears, unless it is already repeatable in its very uniqueness.”<sup>5</sup> Again, impossibility is crucial here: “What comes to pass, as an event, can only come to pass if it’s impossible. If it’s possible, if it’s foreseeable, then it doesn’t come to pass.”<sup>6</sup>

Within the field of narratology, events tend to be rather less ephemeral, less paradoxical perhaps, than in Derrida’s understanding of the term. Indeed, they are often viewed as being key to the tellability of a narrative, as being its bread and butter even.<sup>7</sup> Definitions vary; however, there seems to be some consensus on the idea that only a specific type of change of state can represent an event. Changes of state do, of course, abound in written narratives, distinguishing them from purely descriptive compositions, but these changes cannot all be perceived as the *raison d’être* of a given text. Jurij Lotman has put forward a spatial concept of the event, famously describing changes of state that do, as it were, go that extra mile as “the shifting of a persona across the borders of a semantic field”<sup>8</sup>. He notes the importance of perspective in such cases since “An occurrence, a meaningful departure from the norm [...] depends on one’s concept of the norm”<sup>9</sup>, and that not all figures within a text are able to transgress, drawing a line between what he calls mobile and immobile personae.

4 Derrida, Jacques: A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event. In: Critical Inquiry 33 (2007), 452 f.

5 Ibid., 452.

6 Ibid., 451.

7 Cf. Schmid, Wolf: Ornamentales Erzählen in der russischen Moderne. Čechov – Babel’ – Zamjatin. Frankfurt am Main 1992, 104: “Das Ereignis, Kernstück jeglichen Sujets” (Engl. “The event, centerpiece of any sjužet”) or Lotman, Jurij M.: The Structure of the Artistic Text. Ann Arbor 1977, 232: “We take an event to mean the smallest indivisible unit of plot construction”. The authors’ wording is important here. In both examples we are given to understand that something fundamental is being discussed.

8 Ibid., 233.

9 Ibid., 234.

Lotman also accords this border crossing a high degree of contingency: “An event is that which did occur, though it could also not have occurred.”<sup>10</sup>

Wolf Schmid, by contrast, has taken a more prescriptive route. According to his model, a true event must without fail fulfil two conditions: that the change be real within the context of the fictional world, not merely imagined or dreamed, and that it reach a conclusion, not just be caused or set in motion<sup>11</sup>. A catalogue of five further criteria, ordered according to their importance, measures the relevance, unpredictability, consecutivity, irreversibility and non-iterability of a change. The higher a change scores here, the more eventful it is. Schmid’s inclusion of non-iterability obviously sets him at odds with Derrida, but his definition does have the advantage of being scalable.

The Munich Agreement certainly has the makings of an event much to the taste of both Lotman and Schmid. Neville Chamberlain and Édouard Daladier’s decision to renege on a promise to safeguard the independence of Czechoslovakia could easily be seen as moving from the position of oath-keepers to oath-breakers; a transgression in both senses of the word. Moreover, although many Czechs at the time would have doubtless hoped that what happened in September 1938 was just a bad dream, we are in fact dealing here with a very real change that reached a swift conclusion (the incorporation of the Sudetenland into the German Reich) and had serious consequences for those involved, including the loss of Czechoslovakia’s defensible border with Germany, the internal displacement of non-ethnic Germans from the region, not to mention the sense of having been greatly let down by the Allies. Naturally, betrayals of other nations can be found throughout history, but it would be a pessimist indeed who assumes that every promise is made to be broken. Thus a question mark hovers over whether the outcome of the meeting proposed by Mussolini could have been predicted with any accuracy. Indeed, in the final appeal sent out by the *Obec československých spisovatelů* to hopefully sympathetic international cultural associations, much emphasis was placed on the apparently unprecedented nature of the resolution:

The faith that we had had in France and England was once again dashed in a manner that has no precedent in history. [...] Decisions about the fate of our nation were made with an unprecedented ignorance and indifference towards the fates of tens of thousands of citizens of a cultured nation.<sup>12</sup>

10 Ibid., 236.

11 Schmid, Wolf: *Elemente der Narratologie*. Berlin 2003, 20f.

12 Quoted in: Čeští a slovenští spisovatelé v dnech krise. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 459: “Důvěra, kterou jsme měli ve Francii a Anglii, byla znovu zklamána způsobem, jenž nemá v dějinách příkladu. [...] O osudech našeho národa se rozhodovalo s bezpříkladnou neinformovaností a lhostejností k osudu statisíců občanů kulturního národa.”

Something that is so peerless would not only be difficult to foresee, but also surely difficult to repeat. With hindsight, we may note that the annexation did not last and that the Sudetenland was returned to Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of the Second World War, but in the late 1930s there could have been little way of knowing how fluid the new borders would prove.

So far, so Schmid. Nevertheless, when we take a closer look at the works of our poets, it becomes apparent that the Munich Agreement does not exactly assume the role of an event as understood by narratologists. Many of the poems are certainly steeped in upheaval and changes of state – most notably the changes that have overcome the Czech lands and also formerly France as a result of the Agreement, changes which are particularly memorably encapsulated in the inverted parallelism of the lines “Francie, stud tvých několik / je stejně hluboký jak ponížení nás”<sup>13</sup> from Holan’s *Odpověď Francii*. What is more, there are even examples of something close to a veritable *prozrenie*, the sudden flash of insight or understanding that was one of the characteristic forms of the event in Russian realism.<sup>14</sup> When, for example, the speaker in the title poem of Seifert’s *Zhasněte světla* declares with respect to the period leading up to the Munich Agreement, especially the blackouts during the second general mobilisation of Czechoslovakia, “Já vím, já vím, že líp by tenkrát bylo / zaslechnout dunění”<sup>15</sup>, we get a sense of dissatisfaction with how things have turned out; a realisation or admission perhaps that the Czechs themselves ought to have behaved differently, possibly ought to have seen this coming.<sup>16</sup>

## Incomplete and Outside Events

However, there is no initial state with which to compare this end situation. We know that the speaker appears to have shed tears (“Jen potichu, tak abych nestrásl rosu / jež zachvěla se na konečcích řas”<sup>17</sup>), that his stance has changed

13 Holan, Vladimír: Spisy. Vol. 6: Dokumenty. Praha 2001, 15. Engl. “France, your multiple disgraces / are as deep as our humiliation”.

14 On this topic, see e.g. Schmid: Ornamentales Erzählen in der russischen Moderne, 104f.

15 Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 206. Engl. “I know, I know that at the time it would have been better / to listen to the thunder”.

16 On the continued preoccupation of the Czechs with the question of whether and how the country might have altered the course of events by not simply accepting the stipulations of the Munich Agreement, cf. e.g. Bartošek, Karel: Could We Have Fought? – The “Munich Complex” in Czech Policies and Czech Thinking. In: Stone, Norman/Strouhal, Eduard (eds.): Czechoslovakia: Crossroads and Crises, 1918–88. New York 1989, 101 f.

17 Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 206. Engl. “But quietly so that I wouldn’t jolt the dew / that trembled on the ends of my eyelashes”. The desire not

on certain matters (“ten strašný křik, jež podnes kdekdo slyší, / ten zní mi dnes jak sladké volání”<sup>18</sup>), but the poem is simply not sufficiently psychologically motivated that we might ascertain how these final lines really measure up. Direct references to the Munich Agreement taking place are also few and far between – one possible example can be found in Holan’s *Boj s ničím* (Engl. “Fight with nothing”), which refers to a “noc s týdnem tím, jež následoval”<sup>19</sup>, but it is left ambiguous, a passing allusion to an external event that has been cut down to size, and not an event in its own right. Even the *Anschluss* or *anšlus* as it is known in Czech, the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in March 1938 is approached with not inconsiderable reticence in Seifert’s *Vlajka na hradě* (Engl. “Flag on the castle”). “Ten jarní měsíc nebyl hezký / nebudem si to vyprávět”<sup>20</sup>, is all that the speaker will be drawn upon. Instead the focus tends to be on the consequences of these historical changes, rather than the processes directly involved.

Halas’ *Zpěv úzkostí* (Engl. “Song of anxiety”) is a case in point. Its action is fragmentary and layered, with repetitions that build to a crescendo of rage. The speaker is not directly involved in the happenings described, but he does observe, record, denounce and question, putting his own particular narrative spin on things. Many of the changes of state, and with them, those potential events that the poem harbours, are merely hinted at, not witnessed in full, such as the significant body language of those around the speaker that suggests an altered mood, but without recounting the occurrence in its entirety; what we read is only the result: “Viděl jsem slzy v očích žen / Viděl jsem pěstě

to disturb also features in Halas’ *Mobilisace* (Engl. “Mobilisation”) with an expression of the need for the womenfolk left behind when their husbands are called up to weep without noise so as avoid waking the young: “Jen tiše tiše ten malý už zas spí / pod špalírem zbledlých hvězd” (Engl. “Only quietly quietly the little one has gone back to sleep / beneath the wall of faded stars”). In: *Halas, František: Dilo. Vol. 2: Časy. Praha 1981, 103*. The motif of undisturbed sleep is afforded a prominent position in Seifert’s *Noc* (Engl. “Night”) too, with peaceful slumber wished upon women and children: “Jen děti smějí se, když spí a v spánku / pod lehkou poduškou je schoulen jejich smích / [...] Ať spí! [...] / Jen ženy smějí se, když spí a spánku / úsměvy vidí malých dětí svých / [...] Ať spí!” (Engl. “Only children laugh while they are sleeping and while asleep / their laughter is nuzzled beneath a light pillow / [...] Let them sleep! / [...] Only women laugh while they are sleeping and while asleep / they see the smiles of their little children / [...] Let them sleep!”) In: *Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 196*. There is something deeply protective about all of these images, an innocence that should, it would seem in the eyes of the respective speakers, be preserved at all costs.

18 Ibid. Engl. “that terrible cry, which everyone continues to hear up to this day, / now sounds to me like a sweet calling”.

19 Holan: *Dokumenty*, 32. Engl. “night and a week of that, which followed”.

20 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 224*. Engl. “That spring month was not pretty / we’re not going to recount it”.

zataté”.<sup>21</sup> There is also an implication in the words “a my jsme je milovali”<sup>22</sup> that this is no longer the case, but the point actually remains unmade and thus the change incomplete within the context of this fictional world. Schmid’s approach is not of much use here; there is simply too much upon which we can only speculate. Even Lotman comes up short when we examine the lines “Zvoní zvoní zrady zvon zrady zvon / Čí ruce ho rozhoupaly”<sup>23</sup>. Besides the progression from silence to noise that the tolling of the bells sets in motion, the reference to betrayal positively calls out to be examined in terms of crossing a forbidden boundary, and yet the speaker pointedly refrains from identifying outright this mobile persona. Naturally, the implication is crystal clear, not least because the following line does introduce the names of the two perceived culprits (“Francie sladká hrdý Albion”<sup>24</sup>), but it remains just that: an implication, nothing more.

There is only one aspect that might satisfy the requirements of a Schmidian event and it is introduced right at the beginning of the poem: the change that has or is to overcome the lyric compositions of the speaker, evidently a poet just like Halas. Where once his lines danced or stumbled in private heartbreak, now they are to march “krokem zbrojným”<sup>25</sup>. If one takes the subsequent

21 Halas: Časy, 100. Engl. “I saw tears in women’s eyes, / I saw clenched fists”. His *Mobilisace* is similarly fragmentary and one of its most powerful images is that of the absent father who has been called up to serve his country: “Tatínek je pryč” (Engl. “Daddy is gone”). The statement of fact is child-like – indeed it may even be the voice of a child – and devastating in its simplicity. Again, it is the result we see, rather than the complete process that led to the situation now described. Snapshots of the events of the general mobilisation, the mechanisms involved, are provided as well, but they are just as understated and unassuming: “Děti si hrály” (Engl. “Children were playing”), “Šly dny a odcházela sláva” (Engl. “Days went by and glory departed”). The anaphoric depiction of the drafted men is also rather striking: “Jak se cpali do vagonů / Jak se cpali u prohlídky / Jak se cpali se drali první být [...] Jak se cpali pro helmice / Jak se cpali pro munici / Jak se drali pro pušky” (Engl. “How they crowded into the carriages / How they crowded at the inspection / How they scrambled to be the first” [...] How they crowded for helmets / How they crowded for ammunition / How they scrambled for rifles”). In: *ibid.* 102 f. In a way, this feels almost celebratory, joyful. The use of repetition suggests eagerness and even excitement, nervous energy on the part of the soon-to-be soldiers. Equally though, one cannot help but note that the speaker ducks out of providing any details. It is entirely up to the reader to imagine how indeed all of these activities were carried out. All we hear is that it happened. The lines may be an account of specific processes connected to the mobilisation, but on closer inspection they too prove to be somewhat incomplete.

22 *Ibid.* Engl. “and we loved them”.

23 *Ibid.*, 101. Engl. “It rings it rings the bell of betrayal the bell of betrayal / whose hands set it in motion”.

24 *Ibid.* Engl. “sweet France proud Albion”.

25 *Ibid.*, 100. Engl. “with an armed step”. A similar level of poetic self-reflection and awareness, the hint of changes to the kind of work being produced, albeit without the militaristic undertone, can be found in Holan’s *Uražení a ponížení* (Engl. “The insulted and humiliated”, an obvious nod to Dostoevsky’s novel of the same name), where the

stanzas as evidence of this profound change of tone, then there can be no doubt of the reality and consecutivity of this movement from triviality and frivolity to engaging in active cultural resistance, nor indeed of the fact that the change has reached a conclusion, since we have the words before us. If one assumes that a poet does not take such decisions lightly, then the relevance of the change also seems assured. A decision of this kind is not, admittedly, irreversible – in his very next poem, our speaker might decide to change tack again – but if it were, that would certainly deal with the issue of non-iterability in one fell swoop. The question of unpredictability is the one potential sticking point. We know nothing about the speaker's inner life, but is it surprising that a self-styled poet take to verse to react fiercely to the events of the day? When all is said and done, probably not. This weaponising of words is in fact not only in keeping with the mood expressed at the 16<sup>th</sup> PEN International Congress in Prague in June 1938<sup>26</sup>, which has been described by Jaroslav Med as “One of

speaker declares “*má píseň mění / žal pouze v nás* a opakuje / uražení a ponižení” (Engl. “my song changes / grief *only in us* and repeats / villification and debasement”). In: *Holan: Dokumenty*, 33.

- 26 Cf. *Pujmanová, Marie: Sjezd P.E.N. klubu a dnešní literatura*. In: *Literární noviny*, 20.7.1938, 5: “Politická apatie byla by dnes hřích; je svatá povinnost každého spisovatele zasahovat do politického dění, jak dovede, ať už přímo výzvou, a nebo nepřímo, obrazem. Pero je zbraň a tou zbraní bojovali o naši svobodu Havlíček, Neruda, Čech, Jirásek, Machar už před světovou válkou.” (Engl. “Political apathy would be a sin today; it is the sacred duty of every writer to intervene in political affairs, however he can – whether directly, via an appeal, or indirectly, with the help of an image. The pen is a weapon and it was with this weapon that the likes of Havlíček, Neruda, Čech, Jirásek and Machar fought for our freedom before the World War.”) Nezval is also quoted as having expressed similar views at an international meeting that took place in Paris in the summer of 1938; cf. *Na obranu kultury*. In: *Panorama* 16/7 (1938), 209: “My českoslovenští spisovatelé, dnes konáme svou povinnost právě tak jako voják koná svou povinnost před nepřítelem” (Engl. “We Czechoslovak authors are today carrying out our duty just as a soldier carries out his duty in the face of the enemy”). Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of the Munich Agreement, the motif can be found in the daily press. Cf. e.g. *Co dnes číst. Kniha se musí stát zbraní*. In: *Rudé právo*, 1.10.1938, 3: “Události současných hodin a dnů dávají velmi málo času a klidu k četbě, velmi málo možností zabývat se uměním a kulturou. [...] Avšak nesmí se zapomínat, že i v dnešních dobách je dobrá četba, dobře volená a hlavně dobře pochopená kniha neméně účinnou zbraní, jako puška, lopata a krumpáč. [...] Žít – to dnes znamená bojovat. A dobře bojovat je možno jenom s vědomím vnitřní jistoty a víry, se sebevědomím a odvahou, které může i dobrá kniha zvýšit a upevnit. Naučte se bojovat dobrou knihou.” (Engl. “The events of the present hours and days allow for very little time and calm for reading, very few opportunities to concern oneself with art and culture. [...] Nevertheless, one must not forget that in today's times, good reading matter, a well-chosen and above all well-understood book can be a no less effective weapon than a rifle, shovel or pickaxe. [...] Living today means fighting. And fighting well is only possible with a sense of internal certainty and faith, with self-confidence and fortitude, which a good book can heighten and strengthen. Learn how to fight with a good book.”) Obviously, these are all metaphors, but it still worth noting how widespread the sentiment appears to have been.

the most significant events in contemporary literary life"<sup>27</sup>, but also with Halas' own views on the new combative role of poetry at the time, as remembered by Seifert in the latter's memoirs:

Halas, once he'd read the little book, said to me glumly "It's lovely, I like it, but nowadays I don't think that lines of poetry should sing so sweetly and deceptively. In this day and age, poetry ought to howl like an autumn storm, bark like dogs let off the chain and shriek like birds of prey."<sup>28</sup>

The speaker's statement in *Zpěv úzkosti* suggests not only poetic self-reflexivity, but also a pronounced social and political dimension. Throughout the poem, one is very much aware that there is a real event beyond the confines of the text. That Halas' speaker is alluding to something that has happened elsewhere and caused all of this havoc. That this is a response and not an opening gambit. It cannot be fully understood without some knowledge of this external context.

## Pomp and Circumstance

Examining other poems such as Seifert's *Nad mapou* (Engl. "Over the map"), which sees the speaker sadly, yet stoically redrawing national borders in response to the loss of the Sudetenland ("Tu mapu, která vzruší, / žár slzy neskrápi / a pevně černou tuší / kreslíme do mapy."<sup>29</sup>) or Holan's *Návrat Máchův* (Engl. "Mácha's return"), which relates, albeit in a fairly abstract, almost mythological way, the moving of Romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha's mortal remains ("hrstka kostí, obrys šerý"<sup>30</sup>) from Litoměřice to Prague as a result of the annexation, it becomes only too obvious how conspicuous the historical background can be in the lyrical compositions of this era. Even the poems written before the Munich Agreement acquire new meaning or additional significance when they are republished in collected volumes during the autumn of 1938. František Valouch has, for example, pointed out the importance of *Zpěv rodné země's* place within Hora's *Domov*, noting that

27 *Med*: Literární život ve stínu Mnichova, 105: "Jednou z nejvýznamnějších událostí soudobého literárního života".

28 *Seifert*: Všecky krásy světa, 123: "Halas, když si knížku přečetl, řekl mi zachmuřeně: 'Je pěkná, líbí se mi, ale myslím si, že dnes by neměly verše zpívat tak sladce a mámivě. V dnešní době měla by poezie kvílet jako podzimní vichřice, štěkat jako psi puštění ze řetězu a vydávat skřeky jako draví ptáci.'"

29 *Seifert*: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 207. Engl. "That map, which disquiets, / is not dampened by the ardency of a single tear / and resolutely with black ink / we draw on the map".

30 *Holan*: Dokumenty, 40. Engl. "a handful of bones, a grey outline".

“The very position of this poem at the end of the collection shows us that we are dealing with a kind of capstone, that this is what *Domov* has been building up to”<sup>31</sup>, while Seifert himself admitted in the afterword to the first edition of *Zhasněte světla* that the volume was greatly altered by what happened in the Bavarian capital as day broke on 30 September 1938:

This collection and its more important pieces arose and were set in type in the days of hope and resolve. The events of September made its publication impossible. In this form it is only a torso. Some of the poems were eliminated by events, others I omitted and then I supplemented the collection with two concluding pieces.<sup>32</sup>

It would seem that we cannot get around the issue of *poésie de circonstance*, that much-maligned genre; for some, as Marian Zwerling Sugano explains, “no more than literary prostitution”<sup>33</sup>. There may not be a wealthy patron to be flattered here, but we can certainly often make out an historical event or occurrence beyond the text and a reaction to it within, a commemoration or condemnation even. According to Predrag Matvejević, we can in fact speak of three broad subcategories of *poésie de circonstance*: ceremonial poetry, socially or politically engaged poetry, and poetry inspired by private or subjective events in the poet’s life, comparable with Goethe’s notion of the *Gelegenheitsgedicht*.<sup>34</sup> One suspects that in the case of the post-Munich poetry, we are primarily dealing with the second form, and perhaps also the third, not least because, as Robert Konečný put it back in the spring of 1938 “Real poetry simply does not grow in a glass hothouse, it comes from life itself.”<sup>35</sup>

The poets themselves appear to have had a slightly ambiguous relationship towards poetry written for a particular occasion, though. On the one hand, both Seifert and Halas declined the invitation to compose verse to go with a series of drawings of scenes from Božena Němcová’s *Babička*<sup>36</sup>, and Holan

31 Valouch: *Česká poezie v období Mnichova*, 35: “Už postavení této básně na konci sbírky ukazuje, že jde o jakési vyvrcholení, o pointu Domova”. A similar point could also be made about the position of Halas’ poem *Praze*, right at the end of the 1938 anthology *Básnický kalendář let 1918–1938*. It is not the final poem in *Torzo naděje*, but it is here and surely means something, even if was a decision made by the editor rather than the author.

32 Quoted in *Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 459 f.: “Sbírka tato ve svých závažnějších číslech vznikla a byla vysázena ve dnech víry a odhodlání. Záříjové události znemožnily její vyjití. V této podobě je torzem. Některé verše vyraženy byly událostmi, jiné jsem vynechal a sbírku pak doplnil dvěma čísly závěrečnými.”

33 Zwerling Sugano, Marian: *The Poetics of the Occasion. Mallarmé and the Poetry of Circumstance*. Stanford 1992, 8.

34 *Matvejević, Predrag: La poésie de circonstance. Étude des forms de l’engagement poétique*. Paris 1971, 85 f.

35 *Konečný: Slovo k Básnickému kalendáři*, 6: “Skutečná poesie přece neroste v skleníkovém paňišti, roste ze života.”

36 *Seifert: Všecky krásy světa*, 539.

did not comply with the request of the publishing house Českomoravský kompas that he write an ode to the National Theatre in Prague for publication in the commemorative edition *Srdce vlasti. Praha očima básníků a umělců* (Engl. “The Heart of the Homeland. Prague Through the Eyes of Poets and Artists”).<sup>37</sup> However, on the other, Hora and Halas did both produce works for that very collection of celebratory verse<sup>38</sup> and Seifert’s poetic farewell to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk *To kalné ráno* (Engl. “That cloudy morning”), although by no means officially commissioned, did achieve such prominence as to take on an almost ceremonial role itself within the public outpouring of grief at the time.

Couching a poem within historical facts or contemporary controversies and debates may detract a little from the autonomy of the word, but it opens up opportunities for political or social engagement, something which can, in turn, have its own rewards and intrinsic value. Not long before the Munich Agreement, Konečný suggested that “A poet, beneath whom the earth does not shake and who is not a sufficiently good seismograph to let that earthquake etch itself into the soul of the reader, is not a real poet.”<sup>39</sup> and Jiří Wolker went even further in the early 1920s, declaring “*Tendentious poetry* is, however, better than non-tendentious in every respect because it means more: it is *poetry* first and foremost, and then something more than that.”<sup>40</sup> In this context, *poésie de circonstance* is therefore not necessarily a dirty word, solely synonymous with bad poetry and lyric opportunism. Indeed, entwinement with an historical situation does not have to mean that a poem is in thrall to it, that a poet cannot bend the circumstances to his will, hold up a mirror to the outside world or enter into a dialogue with it, perhaps even try to confront it. When we read that Seifert, though generally left cold by the idea of war and weaponry, did sometimes envy those who were able to take up arms against fascism<sup>41</sup>, his comments about the inaccuracy of the phrase *Inter arma silent*

37 Letter dated 14.5.1940, Českomoravský kompas to Vladimír Holan. LA PNP, f. Vladimír Holan, sig. 5768–5772, 29/92.

38 Their poems were entitled *Praha ve snu* (Engl. “Prague asleep”) and *Vyšehrad* respectively. Cf. *Grmela*, Jan (ed.): *Srdce vlasti. Praha očima básníků a umělců*. Praha 1940, 157 and 162.

39 *Konečný*: Slovo k Básnickému kalendáři, 6: “Básník, pod nímž se nechvěje země a jenž není dost citlivým seismografem, aby toto zemětřesení vryl do duše čtenářovy, není skutečným básníkem.”

40 *Wolker*, Jiří: Proletářské umění. In: *Dílo*. Vol. 1. Praha 1947, 360: “Na každý způsob jest ale *tendenční poesie* lepší než netendenční, protože je víc: je totiž předně *poesie* a pak ještě něco víc.”

41 *Seifert*: Všecky krásy světa, 535: “Nikdy v životě jsem netoužil po zbraní. Řemeslo vojáků bylo mi cizí. Na vojně jsem nebyl a zabíjet se tedy neučil. Také nepatřím k těm, kdo uznávají jen tento druh hrdinství. Přece však zažil jsem chvíle, kdy jsem upřímně záviděl našim lidem, kteří unikli včas a měli v rukou zbraň. Jaký to byl pro ně asi závatný okamžik,

*Musae* and the new perceived role or duty of poetry<sup>42</sup> are cast in a new light. His speaker too in *Jednou, ach, jednou* (Engl. “Someday, oh, someday”) professes to have come to realise that poets do not just exist “pro líbání / a pro skládání serenád”<sup>43</sup>.

Engaged poetry can become a vehicle for criticism, for contempt, be a vent for feelings of helplessness, an expression of optimism or defiance at a key moment in history. So it is with the aforementioned *Návrat Máchův*. The hurried “repatriation”<sup>44</sup> of Mácha’s bones in real life is simply a spring board, the inspiration or lyric impulse that leads Holan on to other things. Mácha is depicted as a hero returning home after a long absence in the poem and thanks to the comparison with the Furies from Greek mythology, there is a sense that he may have come to wreak vengeance. The reference to his having slept and not just been dead for a hundred years, also catapults him into the ranks of such figures as King Arthur or Barbarossa, national heroes, whose triumphant return at the hour of darkest need was foretold.<sup>45</sup> This is a rallying cry to the nation if ever there was one, transforming an act born of

když mohli sevrít pušku. Byla naděje i jistota. Bylo to křídlo svobody v tom zlém čase, kdy pocit bezbrannosti byl zoufalý.” (Engl. “Never in my life have I longed for a weapon. The soldier’s trade was foreign to me. I did not do military service and accordingly I did not learn how to kill. I am not one of those people who only acknowledges that form of bravery. But all the same I experienced moments when I wholeheartedly envied those Czechs who escaped in time and had a weapon in their hands. What a dizzying instant it must have been for them, when they were able to clasp a rifle. Hope and certainty, it was. A wing of freedom during that terrible time, when the feeling of helplessness was desperate.”)

42 Seifert, Jiří: Doslov. In: *Konečný: Básnický kalendář let 1918–1938*, 274: “Již dávno jsme poznali, že latinská věta o zbráních a muzách není pravdivá. Ba téměř naopak v těchto dobách stává se báseň zbraní” (Engl. “Long ago we realised that the Latin saying about weapons and the Muses was not true. Indeed, almost quite the opposite, at times like these a poem becomes a weapon”). In this respect, the following lines uttered by the speaker in Seifert’s poem *Země chudých* take on a slightly different meaning and do not necessarily undermine his otherwise apparently peaceful nature: “Já vím, ty volalas, / já tě měla před očima / a rychle zbraň jsem zdvih / v tom okamžiku zlém / vždyť přece v tento čas, / ty krásná země, jsi má” (Engl. “I know, you called, / I had you before my eyes, / and I quickly picked up a weapon / in that terrible moment / after all at this time / you beautiful land, you are mine”). In: *Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 189. The speaker’s way of answering the call of his homeland could, after all, have been to compose the very poem we have before us.

43 Ibid. 195. Engl. “For kissing / and for composing serenades”.

44 Litoměřice was, after all, in the Sudetenland and thus part of the German Reich as of 1 October 1938.

45 Within the Czech context, there is also an implicit comparison with St. Wenceslas, who, according to legend is also said to be sleeping and waiting to return to aid his compatriots at their hour of need. We shall discuss this motif in more detail and with regards to poems such as Halas’ *Praze* (Engl. “To Prague”) in Chapter Three.

necessity (the transportation of the poet's remains) into a symbol of unity and the prospect of deliverance.<sup>46</sup>

With all of this in mind, we are in better position to continue on our way. However, having established that the narratological approach to the event is not especially well-suited to the study of our poems, we shall have to look

46 For an indication of Máchá's wider cultural significance beyond purely literary circles, see e.g. Domů a doma. In: Nedělní České slovo, 19.3.1939, 1: "Nikoliv Jungmannův překlad Miltonna, ale Máchův Máj tvořil českou literaturu." (Engl. "It was not Jungmann's translation of Milton, but Máchá's Máj that created Czech literature.") Though Máchá's first poetry was in fact published in German rather than Czech, in the literary criticism of the late 1930s we can find evidence of attempts to de-germanify him, to portray him as an intricately Czech poet. Cf. Ort, Jan: Máchova truchlorouška. In: Kritický měsíčník 2 (1939), 208: "Musíme si proto ty německé básně Máchovy přeložit do dikce Máchy českého, t.j. Máchy skutečného" (Engl. We must therefore translate Máchá's German poems into the diction of Máchá the Czech, that is, the true Máchá"). It would be wrong, however, to assume that the Czech literary scene completely turned its back on all forms of German culture during this period. In September 1938 at the height of the Sudeten Crisis, we can still find signs of openness towards both native German speakers within Czechoslovakia and the literature of the neighbouring country in general. Cf. e.g. Na obranu kultury, 208: "Nemyslím, mluvě o československé kultuře, jen na české a slovenské spisovatelé. Naši demokratičtí spisovatelé německé a maďarské národnosti jsou naši bratři. [...] Naše věrlá láska k národu Goethovu, Beethovenovu, Heineovu nám, československým spisovatelům, vždy ukládala a ukládá, abychom bojovali za jejich kulturu, za kulturní práva všech národů Československa, za jejich nejhoroucnější sbratření." (Engl. "When talking about Czechoslovak culture, I am not only thinking of Czech and Slovak authors. Our democratic authors who have German and Hungarian nationality are our brothers. [...] Our fervent love for the nation of Goethe, Beethoven, Heine, always entailed and entails us, Czechoslovak authors, fighting for their culture, for the cultural rights of all of the nations of Czechoslovakia, for their most ardent fraternisation.") It is also perhaps worth noting that Nezval, in the second part of his *Historický obraz*, points out that by birth Hitler was in fact Austrian, rather than German, addressing him directly to him as "zaslepený Rakušane" (Engl. "blinded Austrian"). In: *Nezval: Historický obraz*, 47. There may have been calls for fewer translations and a focus instead on autochthonal Czech works following the Munich Agreement; cf. Čtenáři, pojd a uč se moudrým býti. In: *Panorama 17* (1939), 76: "Stále častěji a častěji se v poslední době opakovaly v tisku výzvy k nakladatelům i čtenářům: Méně překladů! Více původní literatury!" (Engl. "There have been more and more appeals in the press recently to publishers and readers: Fewer translations! More original literature!") However, we still find a translated passage from Goethe's *Faust* offered up to readers in the December edition of that very journal; cf. *Panorama 17* (1939), 189. Much the same can also be noted of the journal *Kritický měsíčník* with its publication of an article by Zdeněk Matouš on Heinrich Mann's prose and the inclusion of works by Christian Hoffmann v. Hoffmannswaldau and Andreas Gryphius in a selection of Baroque works in Czech translation. Cf. *Kritický měsíčník 1* (1938), 311 f. and 419 f. Moreover, Holan himself translated a number of Rilke's letters into Czech for the publishing house Melantrich, receiving a fee of 2875 crowns for his trouble. By way of comparison, his contemporaneous original work *Záhřmotí* garnered him a fee of 3000 crowns based on a print run of 1000 copies. Cf. letters to Holan dated 12.2.1940 and 5.2.1940, respectively. LA PNP, f. Melantrich, sig. 135, 10/97.

elsewhere for means to assess their relationship with the Munich Agreement. Derrida is a possible point of reference in this respect. As mentioned earlier, in his notion of the event, there are two issues in particular that need to be scrutinised: whether a prospective event is entirely unforeseen, unlooked for, and whether it also is entirely repeatable in its singularity and unexpectedness.

## (Do Not) Expect the Unexpected

We shall begin with the second of these two aspects as this is something that is probably best judged with hindsight. If one considers comparisons made between the Munich Agreement and the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops in the summer of 1968<sup>47</sup> or the permanent exhibition of the Prague museum *Národní památník na Vítkově* (Engl. “National monument at Vítkov”), which casts the Munich Agreement as one of four crossroads at which the Czech lands stood during last the century, it would indeed seem to be an eminently iterative event. There is even a word in Czech *mnichovanství*, which is used to describe, decry and deride policies reminiscent of appeasement and periodically rears its head in political commentary, for example in 2014 in connection to the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine, another crisis that caught Europe and the wider world unawares.<sup>48</sup>

As far as the first aspect is concerned, it is the poems written before the Munich Agreement that are particularly useful, since they can provide us with an indication as to what extent what happened in September 1938 was anticipated by the poets. These earlier poems certainly do paint a picture of a country ill at ease, lamenting the loss of recently-deceased titans of cultural

47 Cf. e.g. *Khol*, Radek: Srpen 1968 – druhý Mnichov, nebo snad Březen?! In: *Mezinárodní politika* 17/8 (1993), 22. Other international events, such as the ceding of parts of Romania to Hungary and the the Soviet Union during the Second World War, have also been compared to what went on in the Bavarian capital and the consequences thereof for the Czech nation. Cf. e.g. *Hronek*, Jiří L.: Balkanský Mnichov. In: *Čechoslovák*, 7.9.1940, 2: “Všechny naše sympatie patří nešťastnému Rumunsku, které je dnes v podobné situaci jako naše republika po Mnichově.” (Engl. “All of our sympathy belongs to unhappy Romania, which today finds itself in a similar situation to our republic after Munich.”)

48 Cf. *Dobrovský*, Luboš: Mnichovanství premiéra Sobotky. In: *iDNES*, 31.8.2014. URL: [http://zpravy.idnes.cz/komentar-k-chovani-eu-k-rusku-a-ukrajine-f00/domaci.aspx?c=A140831\\_151839\\_domaci\\_jav](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/komentar-k-chovani-eu-k-rusku-a-ukrajine-f00/domaci.aspx?c=A140831_151839_domaci_jav) (on 1.6.2022). Mixed comparisons were also drawn outside of the Czech Republic in relation to the Munich Security Conference 2022, which took place shortly before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Cf. e.g. *Applebaum*, Anne: There Are No Chamberlains in This Story. In: *The Atlantic*, 21.2.2022. URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/02/munich-security-conference-chamberlain/622872/> (on 1.6.2022).

life such as F. X. Šalda, and beset with mounting fears.<sup>49</sup> Thus it seems that if the Munich Agreement did indeed befall the Czechs vertically as Derrida holds that an event should<sup>50</sup>, it must have done so from already darkening skies. In his *Píseň o rodné zemi*, for example, Seifert tempers images that attest to the beauty and serenity of the Czech lands with scenes of unexpected violence that shock and disconcert the reader: “sladká jako střída dalamánku / do něžž nůž jsi vnořil k rukojeti<sup>51</sup>”. Similarly, in the second part of Hora’s *Dvokrát nad Prahou* (Engl. “Twice over Prague”), the dangers of the day manifest themselves all around the speaker, both in nature and in love:

Krásný, ale hrozivý je čas,  
 jez na řece nějak hlouběj hučí,  
 nějak silněji se do náručí  
 berou milenci v tmách laskavých.<sup>52</sup>

The speaker, apparently addressing himself, is quite shaken by the behaviour of his fellow men, although he does not give up: “Zmaten lidskou krutostí, jdeš dál<sup>53</sup>”. In *Noc* (Engl. “Night”), Seifert’s speaker gives us an indication of the need for increased watchfulness (“dnes muži nesmí spát, a spí-li / ať spí jen lehce jako na přilbicích!”<sup>54</sup>) and this outside threat is depicted even more clearly in *Vlajka na hradě*, when the speaker has to reassure himself that the Czechoslovak flag is still fluttering atop Prague Castle: “Vlaje tam vlajka? Ano, vlaje!”<sup>55</sup> Seifert’s speakers note that change is afoot, little of it for better. Prague is now unrecognisable to the lyric persona of *Praha v černém* (Engl. “Prague in black”) (“ne, já tě nepoznal, / ne já tě nepoznával!”<sup>56</sup>) and in *Píseň o vlasti*, the speaker, who describes his homeland like a lover, finds that it has acquired a corset made of concrete (“ze strašlivého betonu”<sup>57</sup>), presumably an

49 For similar indications in another genre of a deep-seated unease and dangerous mood in Europe, see e.g. Karel Čapek’s plays *Bílá nemoc* (1937, Engl. “The white disease”), which deals with the emergence of dictator called the Marshall and *Matka* (1938, Engl. “Mother”), which is set in a thinly-disguised contemporary Spain, ravaged by civil war.

50 Cf. *Derrida: A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event*, 451 f.

51 *Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přilba hlíny – Dodatky* (1939–1948), 185. Engl. “sweet like the crumb of a bread roll / into which you’ve plunged a knife up to the handle”.

52 *Hora: Kniha domova*, 29. Engl. “Beautiful, yet threatening is time / somehow the weir on the river roars more loudly / somehow more intensely lovers embrace / in the obliging darkness.”

53 *Ibid.*, 30. Engl. “Confounded by human cruelty, you go on”.

54 *Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přilba hlíny – Dodatky* (1939–1948), 196. Engl. “Today men must not sleep and if they do / let them only sleep lightly as if on headpieces!”

55 *Ibid.*, 224. “Engl. “Is the flag flying there? Yes, it’s flying!”

56 *Ibid.*, 199. Engl. “no, I did not recognise you, / no, I was not able to recognise you anymore!”

57 *Ibid.*, 192. Engl. “of dreadful concrete”.

allusion to the militarisation of national frontiers. In Hora's *V osamění* (Engl. "In solitude"), the subject of war is broached directly, but cloaked in fear and empathy: "Myslím na ubohé ženy, / jež se bojí války."<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the most obvious source of foreboding, though, are the references to the Spanish Civil War, for example in Halas' *Deset rán egyptských*, which expresses boundless disappointment, outrage even, at the lack of a proper reaction from Europe towards the atrocities being committed on the Iberian peninsula ("tváře bez zardění / před zemí španělskou"<sup>59</sup>) and wishes Old Testament vengeance upon all those who are too cowardly to speak up or attempt to do something about it.<sup>60</sup> Other examples of poems dealing with this topic can also be found in earlier collection such as Halas' *Dokořán* (Engl. "Wide-open") and Holan's *Kameni, přicházíš...* (Engl. "Stone, you are drawing near..."), published in 1936 and 1937, respectively. The war figures as a kind of prelude to the Munich Agreement, an image of yet more innocent people left behind, forsaken by international politics.

In Derrida's terms, therefore, we cannot hope to find any eventful credentials of the Munich Agreement in the annexation of the Sudetenland itself, however great and traumatic a change this may have represented, since it was in fact in keeping with the rising threat of German aggression and the general destabilisation of Europe and thus not exactly unpredictable. It is only the betrayal that led to it that might be seen as the unexpected, unforeseen element that could make this potential event worthy of the name. Though, as Černý has rather disdainfully pointed out, there were some Czechs at one end of the political spectrum, who claimed to have been unsurprised by what happened<sup>61</sup>,

58 Hora: *Kniha domova*, 38. Engl. "I think of the poor women, / who are afraid of war."

59 Halas: *Časy*, 96. Engl. "cheeks that do not blush / in front of the land of Spain".

60 Assuming he is referring to *Deset rán egyptských*, when he observes that "Závada erinnert das Verhalten der Besatzer an den Turmbau zu Babel, Halas und Zahradníček an die biblischen Plagen." (Engl. "The behaviour of the occupiers reminds Závada of the building of the tower of Babylon, Halas and Zahradníček of the Biblical plagues."), Heftrich is mistaken to suggest that the poem was a comment on the Nazi occupiers. It was in fact published in *Torzo naděje* several months before the creation of the Protectorate and contains multiple allusions to war-torn Spain and the rest of Europe's sluggish to non-existent response. Cf. Heftrich: "Der gerupften Vögel Sang klingt nicht wie Geigen", 225.

61 Cf. Černý: *Křik koruny české*, 72: "To vpravdě hrůzné na demagogii těchto svárlivých, nenávislných intelektuálních všekazů bylo, že volky či nevolky, vědomě, nebo aniž si to přiznali, cítili Mnichov jako svoji satisfakci: sem to došlo proto, že nikdo tak dlouho nedbal na jejich varování, nedbal jejich receptů národní 'obnovy', neukájel jejich ctižádosti, nekonejšil jejich nadřuzující se vztek!" (Engl. "The really awful thing about the demagogy of those cantankerous, spiteful intellectual termites was that they willy-nilly, wittingly or without admitting to it, derived satisfaction from Munich: it happened here because for so long no-one had paid attention to their warnings, no-one had paid attention to their recipes for national 'renewal', no-one had catered for their ambitions, no-one had soothed the anger they were bottling up!")

and the issue of the Czechoslovak government's own capitulation remains somewhat contested<sup>62</sup>, in the poems of this period, it is above all foreign treachery that takes centre stage. Indeed, Heftrich has identified *zrada* as one the most commonly-used words in post-Munich Czech poetry, commenting

The prevailing reaction in the disenfranchised, blindsided country can be formulated as follows: nothing better was to be expected of the Germans – but of the French, the British? The disappointment in the treacherous Allies is so great that it almost overshadows the impotent rage about the neighbours, and it persists for a long time.<sup>63</sup>

He is right in the essentials, with Halas going as far as to depict even the natural world in discordant, resounding uproar at the affair in *Zpěv úzkosti*, voices rising and falling as outcries of betrayal and shame alternate with one another:

Pole naše křičí Zrada  
 Lesy naše hučí Hanba  
 Řeky naše šumí Zrada  
 Hory naše bouří Hanba<sup>64</sup>

62 One of the most prominent critics in this respect is obviously Jan Patočka. As mentioned in the Introduction, his essay “Was sind die Tschechen” includes a damning indictment of the political elite and Beneš in particular, whom he accuses of having broken the moral backbone of the nation “nicht nur für den Augenblick, sondern für lange Zeit” (Engl. “not just for that moment, but for many years to come”). In: *Patočka: Schriften zur tschechischen Kultur und Geschichte*, 102. For a summary of the changing historical accounts of the Munich Agreement in the Czech lands, see also *Zacek*, Joseph Frederick: *The Czechoslovak View*. In: Latynski, Maya (ed.): *Reappraising the Munich Pact. Continental Perspectives*. Washington D. C. 1992, 47f.

63 *Heftrich*: “Der gerupften Vögel Sang klingt nicht wie Geigen”, 217: “Die vorherrschende Reaktion in dem entrechteten, überrumpelten Land lässt sich auf die Formel bringen: von den Deutschen war schließlich nichts Besseres zu erwarten – aber von den Franzosen, den Briten? Die Enttäuschung über die treubruchigen Alliierten ist so ungeheuer, dass sie die ohnmächtige Wut auf den Nachbarn beinahe in den Schatten stellt, und sie hält lange an.”

64 *Halas*: Časy, 101. Engl. “Our fields shout Betrayal, our forests murmur Shame, our rivers whisper Betrayal, our mountains rave Betrayal”. This quatrain is particularly interesting since the choice of verbs appears to echo lines from the Czech national anthem *Kde domov můj* (Engl. “Where is my homeland?”): “Voda hučí po lučinách, / bory šumí po skalinách” (Engl. “Water *murmurs* over the meadows, / the pine woods *whisper* along the rocks”) [emphasis added]. Where in the anthem, the images are positive ones, things of beauty, in Halas’ poem the personification is much more dramatic, menacing even. It is almost as if he were rewriting the national anthem – making its sentiments more fitting for the changed and changing circumstances within the country, turning mere scenery into wardens of the land, defenders against injustice. That said, Halas was not the only poet at the time to make use of Josef Tyl’s famous and patriotic composition to pass comment on contemporary events. Cf. the celebrated Russian writer Marina Tsvetaeva’s *Stikhi k Chekhii* (Engl. “Poems to Bohemia”) also from the late 1930s. For an interesting, although somewhat flawed – owing to the author’s obvious lack of familiarity with the finer points

However, he appears to have missed a salient point: it is France, and not Great Britain that is the main focus of the poets' ire.

Holan's speakers do not mention Britain by name at all; there is, for example, only one moment in *Odpověď Francii* when we get any real indication that France may not have been acting alone: "Jen zradili jste, a už trest se žene / a začne vaší podlostí"<sup>65</sup>, a warning, which stands in contrast to the rest of the cycle's direct addresses to the country, all of which are rendered in the second-person singular, rather than the plural. Seifert's speaker does refer to Chamberlain as well as Daladier and French foreign minister Georges Bonnet in *Písnička o Páříži* (Engl. "Little song about Paris"), but it is the French capital and one of its most famous landmarks, the Arc de Triomphe (a monument incidentally erected to mark the Battle of Austerlitz, a celebrated Napoleonic victory on modern-day Czech territory) that is deformed by the consequences of the Munich Conference, not London or Trafalgar Square: "a oblouk triumfální / se trochu nahrbil"<sup>66</sup>. Likewise, Halas' speaker homes in much more on France's infamy than on Britain's in *Zpěv úzkosti*, depicting the allegorical Marianne, that great symbol of the French nation, as dishevelled and disgraced, slatternly even:

kde je tvá čapka Marianno  
Sluneční štít tvůj prasklý je  
a hanbou čpí tvé ano<sup>67</sup>

His choice of address when it comes to Britain is also particularly telling. By referring to "hrdý Albion"<sup>68</sup>, he taps in to the long-standing associations of that name with perfidy. That such a nation might prove treacherous is therefore hardly surprising; the real shock is that "Francie sladká"<sup>69</sup> should be just as duplicitous. Yet where does this chagrin, this particular sense of betrayal come from? Alfred French is probably being a little unfair<sup>70</sup> when he writes:

of Czech literature and culture – account of the connections between Tsvetaeva's work and the Czech national anthem, see *Lemelin*, Christopher W.: *Homeland and Exile in Marina Tsvetaeva's "Poems to Bohemia"*. In: *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 52/1–2 (2010), 95 f.

65 *Holan*: *Dokumenty*, 12. Engl. "All you did was betray, and retribution is already pushing on and will begin with your villainy".

66 *Seifert*: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 203. Engl. "and the triumphant arch / stooped a little".

67 *Halas*: *Časy*, 101. Engl. "where is your cap Marianne, / your sun shield is cracked / and your yes reeks of shame".

68 *Ibid.*, 100. Engl. "proud Albion".

69 *Ibid.* Engl. "sweet France".

70 For an indication of a more reciprocal relationship between intellectuals in the two countries, see e.g. Černý's account of his May 1938 lecture trip to Strasbourg in *Černý*: *Křik koruny české*, 72.

France had long been the Mecca of Czech artists and the darling of the avantgarde; now at last this one-sided and rather pathetic affair ended in disillusion and humiliation.<sup>71</sup>

However, he is certainly correct about the high esteem in which the Czech avant-garde held the country and its cultural output.<sup>72</sup> The debt owed to the likes of Guillaume Apollinaire and André Breton is enormous, as was the influence of Karel Čapek's seminal translation *Francouzská poezie nové doby* (Engl. "French poetry of the new age") on the interwar generation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Munich Agreement was surely politically, tactically motivated, not exactly culturally, purely to spite the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia.<sup>73</sup> In the eyes of our poets, France's betrayal is therefore perhaps to be viewed equally or indeed more as a betrayal of her own values, of the motto *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. This assessment can be found especially in *Odpověď Francii*, where the speaker declares "Dost slov o bratrství"<sup>74</sup>, and in *Pochybnosti* (Engl. "Doubts") from *Září 1938*, where doubts are raised "o bratrství těch na Západě... / Svoboda-nutnost, řeklí prostí."<sup>75</sup> In

71 *French*, Alfred: *The Poets of Prague*. London 1969, 117.

72 A line in the second part of Nezval's *Historický obraz*, rendered in the second person plural and addressed to the French capital on behalf of a wider collective of writers, supports this idea of a special relationship between the two nations: "Stříbrošedé město, kam jsme věčně putovali" (Engl. "Silver-grey city, to which we always and evermore travelled"). In: *Nezval: Historický obraz*, 43. There is clearly something deeply familiar about the place for the speaker and his peers; he does not have to refer to it by name, a description suffices.

73 On the sympathetic international response of writers and other creative artists to the fate of the Czech lands following the Munich Agreement, including outraged voices from France and Britain, see *Černý: Křík koruny české*, 44f. Copies of a number of letters of and seeking support sent and received during this period are held in the Czech literary archives amongst the papers of the *Obec československých spisovatelů*. They range from organisations such as the *Comité Mondiale contre la Guerre et le Fascisme* (Engl. "World Committee against War and Fascism"), the League of American Writers and the Association of Writers for Intellectual Liberty. Cf. e.g. translations of various replies. LA PNP, f. *Obec československých spisovatelů*, sig. 264, 36/82. The declaration *K svědomí světa* was also translated into a full eight languages, including English, French and Spanish. Cf. various translated documents. LA PNP, f. *Obec československých spisovatelů*, sig. 257, 36/82. It is also interesting to note that in a piece that relates to a new anthology of French poetry, Černý was keen to make a distinction between poets and politicians. Cf. *Černý, Václav (vč): Má Francie*. In: *Kritický měsíčník 1 (1938)*, 463 f.: "Svou Francií nazývá Hanuš Jelínek Francii básníků, kterou nepřestal milovat a které nepřestal a bohdá nepřestane sloužit, v opak Francie pánů Daladierů a Bonnetů, která jemu i nám zpropadeně zhořkla. [...] Jeho antologie je významným činem" (Engl. "Hanus Jelínek calls the poets' France his France, the one that he has not stopped loving or serving and God willing won't stop serving, as opposed to the France of Messrs Daladier and Bonnet, which both for him and us took on a confoundedly bitter taste. [...] His anthology is a significant act").

74 *Holan: Dokumenty*, 17. Engl. "Enough talk of fraternity".

75 *Ibid.*, 23. Engl. "about the fraternity of those in the West... / Freedom-necessity, the simpletons said".

this respect, one could, following Derrida, even begin to wonder whether the poets are perhaps not saying or showing the event that we believe the Munich Agreement to have been, but “in fact *making* it, interpreting and producing it.”<sup>76</sup> This would certainly call for a radical overhaul of our thinking so far on the relationship between poetry and the event, with the latter coming to be seen as a product of the former, and not the other way around.

But is that really what the poets are doing? At other times, there seems namely to be a concerted effort to undermine the eventfulness of the late 1930s, to relativise it, to put the events of the day firmly in their place. As hinted at in the Introduction, the occurrences described are frequently depicted as being part of a much larger narrative, in which the Czech lands continue to bloom and prosper despite recurrent outside threats.<sup>77</sup> This set-up has been noted previously by a number of critics, including Heftrich, who put it thus:

76 Derrida: *A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event*, 447.

77 This tendency to draw parallels with earlier historical events is by no means exclusive to the poetic works of the late 1930s. Writing in *Rudé právo* on 15 May 1938, the day that the manifesto *Věrní zůstaneme* was also published in the newspaper, journalist Jan Šverma noted, for example: “Ano, zdá se, že historie se opakuje. Ale i dnes – jak před dvaceti lety – cítíme bojovné odhodlání dělnictva a lidu a slyšíme pevný hlas spisovatelů. A věříme, že se historie i dále bude opakovat.” (Engl. “Yes, it appears that history is repeating itself. But today we also – just as was the case twenty years ago – feel the combative determination of the proletariat and the people and the resolute voice of the writers. And we believe that history is also going to continue to repeat itself.”) The Ruralist prose writer Václav Prokúpek also saw similarities between the contemporary literary situation and that of the National Revival period during the nineteenth century; cf. Prokúpek, Václav: *Vážený příteli české knihy!*, quoted in Chitnis, Rajendra A.: *Zbraně slabých? Představa rolnického odporu v díle a životě Václava Prokúpeka*. In: *Česká literatura* 61/5 (2013), 678: “Dobrá česká kniha znovu se stává – podobně jako v době obrozenské – velikou posilou a záštitou našeho národního života a duchovní svobody.” (Engl. “Good Czech books are again becoming – just as during the Revival period – a great support and shelter for our national life and spiritual freedom.”) Moreover, it is a tendency that continues to this day, if not always in quite such an overtly patriotic manner. At the height of the first coronavirus lockdown in April 2020, the Czech Centre New York, for example, took the opportunity to highlight a literary series by Radio Prague International, casting it in the light of an important and indeed necessary return: “In a time when the world has been brought to a standstill due to a global pandemic that calls for social distancing, the literary project of Radio Prague International is a welcome endeavor that the Czech Center New York hopes will encourage readers to rediscover their inner bookworm selves and any literary gems hidden within their libraries – Czech or otherwise.” In: *Time to Return to the Classics – Czech Books We Want You To Know*. URL: <https://new-york.czechcentres.cz/en/program/czech-books-we-want-you-to-know> (on 1.6.2022). The weekly magazine *Respekt* drew on the nineteenth-century phrase and indeed movement *národ sobě* (Engl. “the nation unto itself”) for its cover story on the community-led surge in making homemade face coverings for oneself and others in response to the introduction of compulsory mask-wearing in public at the start of March 2020. Cf. *Národ sobě. Občané vzali pomoc do svých rukou*. In: *Respekt* 13, 23.3.2020. Although her point was another,

Historical memory reaching far back into the past brings the [Czech] people comfort in their existential tribulation. Many poems measure the passage of time in notably large periods and point out that the Czechs have already outlasted no small number of catastrophes.<sup>78</sup>

It did not escape the attention of contemporary commentators either.<sup>79</sup> Such historical precedents are particularly striking in a poem such as Hora's *Zpěv rodné země*, which recounts the trials and triumphs of the nation, all the way back to the mythological past. Just as in *Historický obraz* where Nezval's speaker refers to the hard lot that the Czech lands have had over the centuries ("Dosud nikdy nebyl žádný národ proklet víc"<sup>80</sup>), so too do the repetitions of *kolikrát* ("how many times") in Hora's poem help to detail all of the times that the Czech lands have suffered but survived throughout history. They also have an additional effect though, calling for a certain stoicism, a refusal to despair. In effect, it is as if we are being informed outright "This has happened before and we got over it; there is no reason to think we cannot do that again."<sup>81</sup> There is something deeply uplifting about the speaker's words here. They even echo the stalwart sentiments of earlier poems like Josef Sládek's *Byli jsme a budem* (Engl. "We were and shall be") from the 1892 collection *České písně* (Engl. "Czech songs").<sup>82</sup> One might go as far as to say that we find ourselves at

homing in on a perceived parallel between reactions to coronavirus restrictions and to the limitations placed upon civil liberties under communism, author Kateřina Tučková also used the phrase in a digital feuilleton for the Adalbert Stifter Verein. Cf. *Tučková, Kateřina: Národ sobě*, 30.4.2020. URL: <https://www.stifterverein.de/napsano/fejtony/feuilletons/30-dubna-2020/?L=2> (on 1.6.2022).

78 *Heftrich*: "Der gerupften Vögel Sang klingt nicht wie Geigen", 223 f.: "Das lange historische Gedächtnis gereicht dem Volk in seiner existenziellen Bedrängnis zum Trost. Viele Gedichte rechnen in auffallend großen Zeiträumen und verweisen darauf, dass die Tschechen schon so manche Katastrophen überdauert haben."

79 Cf. e.g. comments made former diplomat Josef Hanč in 1939: "On the whole the Czech people take a broad view of history. They have themselves suffered long periods of subjugation, as well as periods of freedom and prosperity. They know that in politics nothing is eternal. They have watched empires rise and fall; they have seen conquerors come and go; they know that what has been done can be undone. Friends of a former day can become friends again. Enemies may weaken. In the meantime they are taking whatever stops are possible to preserve their national identity." In: *Hanč: Czechs and Slovaks since Munich*, 114.

80 *Nezval: Historický obraz*, 38. Engl. "No nation up until now was ever more accursed".

81 See also comments made by Pražák shortly after the end of the Second World War: "Síla nás jen víra, že za každé násilí přichází trest a za každou zradu zase jen zrada." (Engl. "It was only the belief that no act of violence goes without punishment and that every betrayal is followed by betrayal that gave us strength.") In: *Pražák: Národ se bránil*, 385.

82 Sládek's poem may have a very different form, made up, as it is, of just four quatrains, each rhyming abab, but in its unwavering attitude and focus on both the past and the future, it could easily be viewed as a forerunner of Hora's *Zpěv rodné zemi* and indeed his later

something of a junction between what historian Timothy Snyder has referred to as the *politics of inevitability* and the *politics of eternity*:

The collapse of the politics of inevitability ushers in another experience of time: *the politics of eternity*. Whereas inevitability promises a better future for everyone, eternity places one nation at the centre of a cyclical story of victimhood. Time is no longer a line into the future, but a circle that endlessly returns the same threats from the past. Within inevitability, no one is responsible because we all know that the details will sort themselves out for the better; within eternity, no one is responsible because we all know that the enemy is coming no matter what we do.<sup>83</sup>

Though the cyclicity of the Czech view is clear, as is the sense of victimhood, it lacks the pessimism that Snyder associates with the politics of eternity. Indeed there is something deeply resurrectory about this notion of the passage of time, messianic even. The threats may be eternal, but so too is the nation's ability to recover. The idea that any dire situation will ultimately rectify itself is never far from the surface, bringing with it certain features of Snyder's politics of inevitability. As previously discussed, what is perhaps most new and remarkable here is the emphasis placed upon a sense of betrayal, something that is brought into even sharper focus by the frequent recourse to matters of *věrnost*.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that within many of the poems of this period there is also a strong sense of the seasonal, another kind of cycle, raising the possibility that in spite of the – at the time – bleak outlook, nature will eventually take its course, just as the spring ultimately continues to prevail over winter, bringing new life back to a desolate world. Even the two mobilisations of the Czechoslovak army in May and September 1938 are described by Seifert in *Jednou, ach jednou* in terms of seasonal compulsions

poem *Rekviem*: “Byli jsme a budem, / jak jsme byli dosud, / ranami a trudem / nezlomí nás osud. [...] bili jsme se věky, / bít se budem dále! [...] vzdorní, nezlomeni, / byli jsme a budem!” (Engl. “We were and shall be / as we have been so far, / fate will not break us / with blows and grief. [...] we have fought across the ages / we shall continue to fight! [...] defiant, unbroken / we were and shall be!”) In: *Sládek*, Josef Václav: *Spisy básnické*. Vol. 2. Praha 1907, 136 f. Besides being a possible source of inspiration for contemporary poets, it was also seized upon by the journalists of *Rudé právo* and quoted as part of an article from October 1941 promising vengeance for those who had died for the country: “Národ se sklání před svými národními mučedníky a při jejich památce přísahá, že nezlomen, semknut jako nikdy, vytrvá ve svém spravedlivém boji. Smrt Vaše, naši drazí, bude strašlivě pomstěna!” (Engl. “The nation bows down before its national martyrs and in remembrance of them swears that it will persevere in its just fight, unbroken, united like never before. Your deaths, dear ones, will be avenged terribly!”) In: *Kalvínská*, Blažena (ed.): *Rudé právo 1939–1945*. Praha 1971, 225.

83 Snyder, Timothy: Vladimir Putin's politics of eternity. In: *The Guardian*, 16.3.2018. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/16/vladimir-putin-russia-politics-of-eternity-timothy-snyder> (on 1.6.2022).

(the movement from “rozkvětélé větve jabloní”<sup>84</sup>, which whipped soldiers into their helmets, to the “již prázdné větve jabloní”<sup>85</sup>), while Halas uses images of thawing, ripening, shedding leaves and hibernation in *Časy* (Engl. “Times”), the four-part conclusion to *Torzo naděje*.

## Badiou's Category of the Event

Having reached something of an impasse with Derrida's view of the event, we might also like to consider the reflections of philosopher Alain Badiou as an alternative. For Badiou, an event is essential to the process that allows the human animal to become a subject. In his words, it brings forth “a *new* way of being”<sup>86</sup> and the need for what he refers to as fidelity: “To be faithful to an event is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by *thinking* [...] the situation ‘according to’ the event”<sup>87</sup>, he writes. His examples of such events include the French Revolution, Galileo's invention of physics and the Cultural Revolution in China. To this list, we could perhaps propose an addition in the form of the Munich Agreement. As has been noted by Walter Schamschula, the Agreement, much like the Battle of White Mountain before it, certainly represents a major turning point in Czech historiography with its own terminology to boot: the *předmnichovská doba* (“pre-Munich age”) and *pomnichovská doba* (“post-Munich age”).<sup>88</sup> It marks not only the moment that various long-held dark suspicions about German designs on the Czech lands were proven not unfounded, but also when the nation's relative inconsequentiality in the eyes of the democratic West became all too obvious. When the behaviour of the First Republic's former allies begins to be decried in verse, and symbols of Czech nationhood come to the fore, where once cosmopolitanism and Francophilia were all the rage, this could well be evidence of thinking “according to” to the event. The prevalence of words such as *věrný* and *věrnost* within the poems, the high status accorded to behaviour that can be described in such terms, might even be paving the way for the fidelity of which Badiou speaks.

The most important implication of this notion of the event for our poems is probably the idea that it might enable the poets or their speakers to become

84 *Seifert*: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 195. Engl. “the blossoming branches of the apple trees”.

85 *Ibid.* Engl. “the already empty branches of the apple trees”.

86 *Badiou*, Alain: *Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. London 2001, 41.

87 *Ibid.*

88 *Schamschula*, Walter: *Geschichte der tschechischen Literatur*. Vol. 3: Von der Gründung der Republik bis zur Gegenwart. Köln 2004, 371.

subjects. We note that although the Czechs are to a certain extent seen as the object of German aggression and, especially, the victims of Franco-British betrayal<sup>89</sup>, the poems also accommodate or even become entities capable of denouncing these ignominies, refusing to be cowed. In Seifert's *Praha v máji* (Engl. "Prague in May"), for example, which, in a rather audacious flourish of wordplay, sees the Czech lands crucified upon a swastika ("Dnes na tom kříži strašlivém / zem česká přibita visí"<sup>90</sup>), this – at first glance deeply pessimistic – image is in fact subversive and life-affirming. While the speaker does not shy away from depicting the Czechs in an unenviable position at the hands of German executioners, the post-figuration of Christ raises the possibility of a resurrection. Therein lies faith and hope for the future; the prospect of salvation at a later date. In particular, though, it is striking how many of the poems of this era take on a collective dimension and use the first person plural to convey the sense of something akin to a shared fate, of solidarity perhaps at an uncertain time when, as Holan puts it in *Pochybnosti*, "Co bude dnes, co zítra asi / ptají se nové perspektivy"<sup>91</sup>. The tendency is perhaps most obvious in the work of Seifert, which includes poems such as *30. IX. 1938*, written entirely in the form of a *lyrisches Wir*, but it can in fact be found across the board to a greater or lesser extent. Indeed, Vera Blackwell has commented of Halas:

When the Czech nation was disgraced, betrayed, humbled, he started an uphill struggle for the renewal of its dignity. He discarded his private voice and in the best Czech literary traditions became the spokesman of the nation, of its resistance, its fierce yet tenuous hopes, its anxieties and its anger.<sup>92</sup>

There is, of course, in her assessment something of an unthinking conflation of the empirical author and the speaker, yet the possibility of a subject which not only transcends both, but also reaches out to others being brought forth by remaining faithful to the Munich Agreement certainly fits in with Badiou's understanding of the subject, since as he puts it in one of his examples of an event:

The subject induced by fidelity to an amorous encounter, the subject of love, is not the "loving" subject described by the classical moralists. [...] The lovers as such enter into the composition of one loving subject who exceeds them both.<sup>93</sup>

89 On the unsurprising nature of this view, cf. *Badiou: Ethics*, 10: "man is the being who is capable of recognizing himself as a victim".

90 *Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 229. Engl. "Today on that terrible cross / the Czech land hangs nailed to it".

91 *Holan: Dokumenty*, 22. Engl. "What will today bring, what about tomorrow / new perspectives ask".

92 *Blackwell: František Halas: The Rock and the Roots*, 16.

93 *Badiou: Ethics*, 43.

The matter is, however, somewhat complicated by the fact that the Munich Agreement is a product of the rise of Nazism – Badiou’s false event or simulacrum *par excellence*.<sup>94</sup> Could a truth process, the forcing of knowledge, really be set in motion under such circumstances or would the falsehood of its origins inevitably win out, calling forth nothing but misplaced fidelity to yet another simulacrum? It is clear that we shall have to tread carefully here, but perhaps Badiou’s belief that “Evil is that from which the Good is derived, not the other way around”<sup>95</sup> offers the possibility that something positive could still emerge from the Munich Agreement despite the unfortunate context. The debatable universality of the Agreement as an event (i. e. whether this is to be viewed as an event purely for the Czechs or for all of mankind) is another potential bone of contention, since, as Badiou reminds us, “Every invocation of blood and soil, of race, of custom, of community, works directly against truths”.<sup>96</sup> The emphatic, patriotic reaction of Czech poets to the threat of Nazi Germany, the solace they appear to have found in national myths and tradition, their renewed sense of a discrete and innate cultural identity, all of the things designed to protect the Czech people against one form of totalisation, might in turn have their own totalising effects, their own terror to unleash. In this light, Vítězslav Nezval’s banned poem *Šváby* (Engl. “The cockroaches”) from 1939, which revels in the dual meaning of its title<sup>97</sup>, effectively, as has been tentatively noted by Heftrich, stooping to the same dehumanising vermin comparisons that the Nazis used to justify their *Rassenpolitik*<sup>98</sup>, makes for no less uncomfortable reading, but it does begin to make a sort of sense. It is a sobering thought, but a useful one, reminding us that we should not always be so quick to lionise all forms cultural resistance; that a critical examination never goes amiss.

## Poems as Events in Their Own Right

Last, but by no means least, it is also worth considering the possibility that the poems of this era do not just relate to, build upon, polemicise or remain faithful to external events, but that they themselves might also constitute events of one sort or another. This interpretation gains credence when we consider the

94 Cf. *Ibid.*, 72 f.

95 *Ibid.*, 9.

96 *Ibid.*, 76.

97 The word *šváb* can signify in Czech both a cockroach and a Swabian, i. e. a German, giving lines such as “Jaký hnusný tvor je šváb! / Nikdy jsem ho nezašláp” (Engl. “What a disgusting creature the cockroach is! / I’ve never not stamped on him”) quite another meaning as might appear at first glance.

98 Cf. *Heftrich*: “Der gerupften Vögel Sang kling nicht wie Geigen”, 225.

decidedly perlocutionary nature of much of the language used.<sup>99</sup> It is often the gesture, the very act of speaking out that is the most remarkable, most potent aspect of the poems, for that is where their ability to inspire, to unmask and to convince comes from. As John L. Austin has discussed:

Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them.<sup>100</sup>

Halas in combative mode is a particular master of this kind of undertone. In *Zpěv úzkosti*, for example, we find an apparent, if rather hyperbolic statement of fact (“za tebe světe za tu Evropu / stydí se voják poslední”<sup>101</sup>), but the intended meaning and effect obviously goes a lot further, since the speaker seems to be attempting to elicit a sense of shame or a recognition of misdeeds from the

99 We might even be tempted to identify to the odd example of illocutionary language too, but closer examination tends to undermine such analysis. Seifert’s *Zhasněte světla* is a case in point. As an imperative, an instruction to do something, this title, which is also shared by one of the poems in the collection, may initially feel like a fairly clear-cut example of an illocutionary speech act. On the face of it, we would, to use John Searle’s terminology, be dealing with a directive aimed at multiple recipients, as indicated by the use of the second person plural. Though we are aware of the historical significance of the phrase “Turn out the lights”, the connection to the blackouts that were ordered during the general mobilisation of September 1938 and indeed Seifert himself acknowledged this in his memoirs (cf. *Seifert: Všecky krásy světa*, 538: “Tato dvě slova byl totiž poplašný výkřik, který se ozýval v pražských ulicích v prvních dnech nařízeného zatemnění.”; Engl. “These two words were namely the alarm signal that could be heard in the streets of Prague during the first days of the compulsory blackout.”), we do not seriously believe that either Seifert or his lyric persona is assuming the role of an ARP warden, nor that the collection is any way intended as a contribution to an official public information campaign. In this narrow understanding of the words, the title feels, at best, like a quote, an allusion to the outside world. That said, if we cast our net a little wider and examine possible non-literal interpretations of the title, then we find ourselves on much more productive ground. There is a sense of pragmatism or perhaps stoicism, of battenning down the hatches, but it is clear that collective action is required – not just that of one individual. The title may even convey the idea of an inversion or perversion of the Biblical imperative “Let there be light”, heralding not creation, but, one suspects and fears, destruction, the loss of life. The act of extinguishing need not put out inner light, though. It is a call for a move against external sources of illumination – the kind that give away positions to enemy bombers on a clear night – but light as hope may continue to burn brightly from within. In this reading, everything starts to feel much more like an exercise in warning and persuading, an attempt at bringing us round to look at matters in a particular way – in short, the triumph of the perlocutionary effect over the illocutionary meaning. A serious performative does therefore appear to be present, after all, just not perhaps the one we were first expecting.

100 Austin, John L.: *How To Do Things With Words*. Oxford 1971, 101.

101 Halas: Časy, 101. Engl. “For you world for this Europe / the last soldier feels ashamed”.

outside world, possibly even cajoling that world into changing its stance or putting things right. Likewise, the contemptuous address to certain elements of Czechoslovak society in *Praze* (“Myslete na chorál / Malověrní / Myslete na chorál”<sup>102</sup>), not only brings their *věrnost* into question, but also implies that they have forgotten a component of their own cultural identity, and that they should perhaps seek to mend the error of their ways by paying more heed to such things.<sup>103</sup> It is this performative element that could be viewed as effectively supplanting an event such as the Munich Agreement within many of the poems; stealing its thunder, one might say, and allowing the poems to emancipate themselves to a certain extent from the historical context after all. There are even those who would contend that such a use of language is also the very means by which a text becomes a narrative. As David Rudrum has put it:

The argument that narrativity is a performative force amounts to a re-orientation of the way we think narrativity, for it aligns narrativity not so much with formal, structural, or textual features, but with particular sets of conventions and expectations located in the linguistic community, and with the specific roles that narratives play in our lives.<sup>104</sup>

He goes on: “a successful narrative can be conceptualised as a successful performative. In suggesting this, I am effectively identifying narrativity with Austin’s ‘perlocutionary effects’”<sup>105</sup>. This is something that we shall deal with in rather more detail in Chapter Four.

Bearing all of this in mind, it is clear that the relationship between the poems of 1938, as particularly exemplified by the works of Halas, Holan, Hora, Nezval and Seifert, and the Munich Agreement is fraught indeed. Its contours and power structure vary greatly according to one’s definition of the event, with the poems capable of both undermining and underscoring the eventfulness of the accord reached in the Bavarian capital, or even creating it in the first place. The matter is further complicated by the awkward nature of so-called *poésie*

102 Halas: Časy, 98. Engl. “Think of the chorale / Ye of little faith / Think of the chorale”.

103 For an indication of the contemporary cultural significance of the St. Wenceslas chorale, to which Halas speaker is referring when he makes mention of the *chorál*, cf. Hora, Josef: Básník a mateřský jazyk. In: Naše řeč 22 (1938), 165. For evidence of the apparent success of Halas’ perlocutionary language in influencing readers, cf. a letter dated 31.12.1938, Josef Florian to František Halas. LA PNP, f. František Halas, sig. 1 – 31, 136/70: “Za ‘Torso Naděje’ vzdávám díky. Ta sloka o koni Václavově se Vám věru podařila. Za sebe mluvě nejsem jen na chorál myslící, ale jej často (a myslím že účinně) zpívající a to k plnosti Naděje” (Engl. “I give thanks for ‘Torso Naděje’. That stanza about Václav’s horse is a real achievement on your part. Speaking for myself, I can say that I’m not only thinking of the chorale, but often (and I think it is very effective) singing it for the sake of Hope”).

104 Rudrum, David: Narrativity and performativity: From Cervantes to Star Trek. In: *Pier, John / Garcia Landa, José Angel* (eds.): *Theorizing Narrativity*. Berlin 2008, 253.

105 *Ibid.*, 268.

*de circonstance*, a label that is arguably applicable here. However, given the frequently negative connotations of the term, we might almost be tempted to abandon it altogether so as to avoid any prejudice, and speak instead of *poésie de l'événement* or rather an *événement de la poésie*, should we decide to focus on the poems' potential status as events in their own right.

Narratologically speaking, the Munich Agreement is, like war and other cataclysmic occurrences, relatively unproblematic as an event, but this does not translate into eventfulness as understood by Lotman and Schmid in the poems, and is thus not a particularly helpful approach. When we apply Derrida's concept of the event, the betrayal element of the Munich Agreement comes to the fore and we begin to appreciate how the poets' narrative strategies, for example the absorption of the *národní ohrožení* into a larger story of Czech humiliation and recovery throughout the ages, may colour our understanding of this apparent event. With the help of Badiou, we gain an insight into possible mechanisms behind the faithful and collective posturing of the speakers in many of the poems; however, at the same time we are forced to question whether the Munich Agreement can truly represent the kind of paradigm-altering moment that Badiou has in mind when he talks of an event, given its origins in the false event of Nazism and its own totalising potential.

We have evidently come a fair way, but several important questions regarding the poetic depiction and rationalisation of the Munich Agreement and other related historical events remain unanswered. We need to delve more deeply into the nature of the poems of this era, into the specific characteristics of the lyric form that shape and also perhaps limit its ability to construct and bolster a narrative, not to mention the issue of how they measure up to earlier works by the authors in question. As we shall see in the next chapter, the propensity to rely upon figural language, possibly veering at times into the realm of allegory, is perhaps the most obvious place to start.

## 2. Figural Show and Tell

Figural language can and frequently does, of course, assume countless guises and fulfil many very different functions within a text. It is at least as old as the written word itself. Indeed, in his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, Rousseau famously suggested that figural language actually came into existence before its referential or literal counterpart since denomination is dependent on conceptualisation, which in turn inevitably involves the substitution of things according to properties that are similar.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere are the likes of metaphor or synecdoche perhaps more at home than in the world of poetry. Indeed, such figures of speech are often described as being *poetic* by their very nature, able to give the plainest prose a lyrical edge. They have the power both to enlighten and obscure; to dazzle, setting our hearts aflutter by way of unexpected comparison or the striking use of imagery, and to leave us mystified, baffled even.

Non-literal devices of this kind always bring with them the potential for intricacy and convolutedness. We may require some time before we feel that we have grasped the full thrust a particular trope and it may be that we never truly get to the bottom of it. Over the centuries, there have, however, been repeated attempts to systematise and qualify our understanding of the various forms of figural language that exist, often resulting in fairly heated debates between scholars from such disparate fields as philosophy, linguistics and literary studies. One trope that has tended to cause particular headaches for readers and critics alike, and has experienced huge variations in its popularity and general standing, is allegory.

In the context of Czech literature, there is certainly one very obvious and fine example of the allegoric mode: Comenius' *Labyrinth světa a ráj srdce* (Engl. *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*). In it, a pilgrim narrator, led by two emblematic guides – Všudybud and Mámení – explores the world in all of its chaos and vanity. The narrator is disgusted by what he sees, but eventually realises that by accepting God into his heart, that is, embracing the paradise of the title, he is able to come to terms with his existence on this planet. The seventeenth-century didactic text, which is viewed as one of the pearls of the European Baroque movement, even has its own special brand of figural language, something which Dmitry Čiževsky has dubbed “negative

1 For a useful discussion of this essay and its implications, see *de Man*, Paul: *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven 1979, 144f.

allegory”<sup>2</sup>. With this term, he refers to a device found throughout *Labyrint světa* that exchanges one thing for another. However, it does not do so in order to unveil the true meaning of the thing being depicted, but instead, according to Čiževsky, aims to achieve the opposite; “things are to be shown in their plain physical existence, stripped and drained of any meaning”<sup>3</sup>, he writes.

A little more recently, we can also note an apparent upsurge in texts with an allegorical bent in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement and during the Second World War. Writing in the journal *Česká literatura*, Jiří Pavelka has gone as far as to describe allegorical works as the last option available to authors wanting to articulate their loathing of fascism while still publishing legally.<sup>4</sup> The fate of the Czech lands during this period is certainly a rather peculiar one, with its mixture of increased control and at the same time a huge rise in and hunger for deeply patriotic works of literature, especially poetry. Such texts appear to have struck a chord with contemporary readers, keenly articulating the mix of rage, helplessness, hope and stubborn tenacity felt by many, and also providing an account – however truncated and reflective – of what was going in the country that was very different from what appeared in the *gleichgeschaltete* daily press.

This commercial success will have owed much, one suspects, to the ability of poetry to respond more quickly to the events of the day than other genres and its typically opaque use of language, more capable of masking certain aspects from the untrained eye. The Nazi authorities were evidently very much aware of this possible source of rebellion. Indeed, as briefly alluded to in the Introduction, we can find evidence of calls having been made to ensure that evaluations of potentially subversive works of literature be carried out only by those who possessed a truly native understanding of the Czech language. Nevertheless, one cannot help but wonder if the idea of language being used at this time to conceal a “hidden message” might be something of an oversimplification – a form of critical evasiveness even, a sign that readers have not grappled sufficiently with the aesthetic implications of the texts involved.

In the following chapter, we shall aim to explore in more depth the means by which certain tropes are employed to achieve a figurative way of relating or recounting events and moods, while attempting to avoid some of the more common pitfalls associated with interpretation and close-reading of this kind. We shall begin to illustrate this issue by way of reference to Hora’s 1939 composition *Jan houslista* (Engl. “John the violinist”), which, at first glance, and

2 Cf. Čiževsky, Dmitry: Comenius’ Labyrinth of the World: Its Themes and Sources. In: Harvard Slavic Studies 1 (1953), 117 f.

3 Ibid., 120.

4 Pavelka, Jiří: Alegorie v legálně publikované poezii let 1939–1945. In: Česká literatura 31/4 (1983), 349.

based on certain critical responses, might well appear to be a prime example of the ostensible trend towards the non-literal. Certainly, in popular culture, the poem does indeed have a reputation for being allegorical.<sup>5</sup> Although some critics avoid the term, talking instead of its symbolism<sup>6</sup> or its ambiguous and polymorphic nature<sup>7</sup>, there remain other scholars, such as Alfred French, who has remarked “The return of the exile to his home, the poet to his roots, is a poetic allegory which closes a chapter in Czech literary history”<sup>8</sup>, and the aforementioned Pavelka, who appear have no qualms about its use with regards to the poem. And even in the case of those who do shy away from the word *allegory* in their assessments, one nevertheless gets the impression that they are still talking about some additional, veiled meaning within the text that needs to be deciphered, laid bare for all to see.

*Jan houslista* was written at the start of the Czech national ordeal – over the period between the Munich Agreement and the creation of the Protectorate – and published during the first months of the Nazi occupation. It is a broadly narrative poem, made up of 60 twelve-line strophes in iambic tetrameter. Though not quite long enough for Onegin stanzas, this tightly controlled form is certainly reminiscent of Aleksandr Pushkin’s novel in verse.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Hora

5 Cf. e.g. the Czech Wikipedia article on Josef Hora, which states that “básně byly nutně alegorické, protože nemohl tvořit svobodně a vše muselo projít nacistickou cenzurou” (Engl. “the poems were necessarily allegorical because he could not create freely and everything had to pass by the Nazi censor”). URL: [https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef\\_Hora](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Hora) (on 1.6.2022).

6 Cf. Götz, František: *Lyrický návrat k domovu*. In: *Literatura mezi dvěma válkami* (Výbor z díla). Praha 1984, 188.

7 Cf. *Píša*, Antonín Matěj: Josef Hora. In: *Třicátá léta. Kritiky a stati*. Praha 1971, 307, originally published in *Národní práce* on 24 December 1939: “Horova poezie se tu, ve skladbě motivicky mnohoznačné a mnohotvárně laděné, rozechvívá do křehkých polotónů a vzdušných odstínů” (Engl. “Here Hora’s poetry, in a composition that has motifs with many different meanings and is polymorphically tuned, vibrates into flimsy half-tones and gauzy shades”). Of all of the accounts, this is the one that appears to tally mostly closely with the poem itself.

8 French: *The Poets of Prague*, 119.

9 Incidentally, Onegin stanzas can also be found in Holan’s narrative poem *Terežka Plánetová*, which was written in 1942 and published the following year. By that time, one could even argue that the chosen poetic form had acquired something of a subversive undertone given that the performance and transmission of Russian works had been banned in 1941. Cf. a letter dated 4.7.1941, Reichsprotektor to all Oberlandräte. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 1144, sig IV – 2 S 7310: “Bis auf Weiteres dürfen Werke russischer Autoren wie Komponisten, Schriftsteller, Theaterdichter usw. ohne jegliche Ausnahme nicht aufgeführt werden”. (Engl. “Until further notice works by Russian authors such as composers, writers, playwrights etc. are not allowed to be performed under any circumstances”). An earlier memorandum went even further, barring even the discussion of and any reference to works by Russian authors in newspapers or magazines; cf. report nr. 69, dated 1.6.1941, Dr. Lang to the Reichsprotektor. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 1144, sig IV – 2 S 7310: “ferner ist die presse

actually published an extremely well-received translation of that novel just two years before *Jan houslista* was released, so will undoubtedly have been familiar with its famous stanzaic arrangement.<sup>10</sup>

## Homeward Bound

The poem tells the story of Jan, a talented violinist working in the United States, who, having lost his American wife, decides – after several years of success and recognition abroad – to return to his homeland. Re-evaluating his experience and accomplishments on the other side of the world up until now, he is forced to conclude that it all feels rather hollow. He is not even sure whether his wife ever truly loved him. His return to the land of his birth coincides with a difficult period in the nation’s history – analogous, one assumes, to contemporary events and the turmoil caused by the Munich Agreement and beyond. The welcome that Jan receives is not particularly warm and most of those whom he once loved here are dead. He struggles to orientate himself in the capital since so much has changed, but moving away from Prague towards the countryside of his youth, a landscape of memory, things do begin to fall into place. He comes across an old friend Katy, who has suffered grief too, but who, unlike Jan, has retreated into herself, rather than continuing to seek understanding and fulfilment. A ragged group of children ask Jan to play for them in the graveyard where his family are buried and this he does with great pleasure, realising that here at last his music is meaningful, uplifting and worthwhile.

anzuweisen, von besprechung oder erwachnung von werken russischer herkunft ab sofort abstand zu nehmen” (“moreover the press is to be instructed to avoid discussing or referring to works of russian origin starting immediately”).

- 10 The poetic form is not, in fact, the only parallel between the two texts. There are also potential cross-overs as far as certain themes are concerned, in particular when it comes to issues of memory, exile and return. It would go beyond the scope of this study to examine these matters in the necessary detail, but a quote from a minor thematic study of Pushkin’s work may give an indication of the direction that such an endeavour would be required to take; cf. *Downey*, Nancy E.: *The garden in the graveyard: Memory in Pushkin’s “Evgeny Onegin”*. Ann Arbor 1995, 141: “Among the lessons that *Life’s Novel* teaches its characters and readers is how to be more than one person, when to don our masks and when to doff them, and the necessity of planting the gardens of our future in the graveyards that are our past.” As we shall see, the idea of our futures and our pasts, our roots and our potential for growth, being tangled up in the places we come from – quite literally in the sense of a graveyard as a site that is nourished by death and able bring about new life as a result of it – is central to *Jan houslista*.

Pavelka may have remarked that

Josef Hora stylises himself into the figure of the violinist and his journey home, the problems and questions that he allows Jan to solve are his own problems and questions; for this reason the whole poem is composed as Jan's monologue."<sup>11</sup>

However, this is in fact incorrect. The poem does not take the form of a monologue spoken by its eponymous protagonist. The question of voice is much more complicated than that in the text. Although at times we are party to direct insights into Jan's mind and memories, there are many more moments when a narrator figure, evidently quite distinct from Jan, comments on or describes what is going on for us. Lines in the third person such as "I vyšel si Jan na zahradu, / kam hučel vzhůru labský jez."<sup>12</sup> and "Jdou ze hřbitova Jan a Katy."<sup>13</sup> simply have to stem from a separate entity. This, combined with the inconsistent use of speech marks, gives rise to the impression of a polyphonic composition, with voices overlapping, becoming on occasion indistinguishable from one another. When, for example, we read the words "Nefilosofuj, Jene, Jene, / dost veliký už byl tvůj žal"<sup>14</sup>, it is unclear as to whether Jan is talking to himself or whether he is being chided by the narrator for his speculative contemplation. There is something almost orchestral about its structure.

Throughout *Jan houslista*, two major themes crop up again and again: art, especially music, and one's home- or native land, *domov* in Czech. These two notions are not just closely intertwined, but, as gradually becomes apparent to both Jan and the reader over the course of the poem, directly dependent on one another, since the former cannot be created without the latter, nor the latter maintained without the former. There is often something organic or tangible about the depiction of art within the poem. It is something that can grow within the artist, associated with both physical touch and acoustic perception ("Ach ne – dnes nerostla by ve mně / v úzkostech píseň rodné země / jak polibek, jak tón a rým."<sup>15</sup>), something that can be used to pass on messages to others ("Řekněte, komu jenom, komu / co chcete dát svým uměním?"<sup>16</sup>), an image that is compounded a few stanzas later by the description of music

11 Pavelka: *Alegorie v legálně publikované poezii let 1939–1945*, 351: "Josef Hora se stylizuje do postavy houslisty a jeho putování k domovu, problémy i otázky, které nechává Jana řešit, jsou jeho vlastními problémy a otázkami; proto je také celá skladba komponována jako Janův monolog."

12 Hora: *Knih domova*, 122. Engl. "And Jan went to the garden for a walk, / where the weir on the Elbe droned upwards."

13 Ibid., 133. Engl. "Jan and Katy walk from the graveyard."

14 Ibid., 86. Engl. "Do not philosophise Jan, / your grief was already great enough."

15 Ibid., 117. Engl. "Ah no, – in me today there would not grow / a song of the native land in the anxieties / like a kiss, like sound and rhyme."

16 Ibid., 130. Engl. "Tell me, just to whom, to whom / what do you want to give with your art?"

as a golden ball, an object that can be passed literally from one person to the next (“hudba jako zlatý míč / se v klíně chvěje jim.”<sup>17</sup>). Playing music is even compared to taking one’s life into one’s own hands, mastering a situation, seizing the initiative: “Hrát... Bráti život do svých rukou”<sup>18</sup>. This vigorous understanding is contrasted sharply by the description of how Jan’s music was received in America. Here music is monetised, a commodity to be consumed: “Jak ostrý drink mou hudbu pili.”<sup>19</sup> This synesthetic, macaronic image is not a positive one; it suggests distaste, sensory overload. There is an obvious gulf between music performed by a guest in a foreign land that is perceived as “exotic”, unfamiliar by its audience, and music that is at home, back where it belongs.

Though concerned with all manner of journeys – from the transatlantic voyage that brought Jan back from exile (“vy obeplul jste zeměpás”<sup>20</sup>) and the daily commute of neighbourhood women on their way to work (“Dělnice v modrém s bandaskami / jdou ráno podle oken mých. / A večer zpátky, nikdy samy.”<sup>21</sup>), to the stated desire to return to childhood (“Oh, býti zase dítětem”<sup>22</sup>), which is apparently achieved by Jan in one of the final stanzas when he plays his impromptu concert, (“sám hoch zase”<sup>23</sup>), *Jan houslista* is not poetic travel writing by any means and certainly not a leisurely stroll down memory lane either. The protagonist is both an outsider (due to his long years abroad) and a local; a traveller *and* a travellee, one might say<sup>24</sup>. He is sensitive to some of the changes that have overcome his homeland while he was away, and yet perhaps the most telling comment about the state of affairs in the Czech lands at the time actually comes from an old acquaintance in the form of veiled warning, suggesting that there are certain things that Jan may no longer be quite so capable of understanding<sup>25</sup>:

17 Ibid. 137. Engl. “music like a golden ball / quivers in their laps.”

18 Ibid. 129. Engl. “To play... To take life into one’s hands”.

19 Ibid., 96. Engl. “Like a bitter drink they drank my music.”

20 Ibid., 126. Engl. “you circumnavigated the globe”.

21 Ibid., 116. Engl. “Female labourers in blue with milk cans / walk beneath my windows in the morning. / And back again in the evening, never alone.”

22 Ibid. 134. Engl. “Oh to be a child again”.

23 Ibid., 89. Engl. “himself a boy again”.

24 The term *travellee* was coined by Mary Louise Pratt to refer to those to whom the travel writer describes meeting while on his travels. Cf. *Pratt, Mary Louise: Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London 1992, 7.

25 This would be in keeping with a mnemonic phenomenon described by Michael Basseler and Dorothee Birke in which change is experienced spatially. Cf. *Basseler, Michael / Birke, Dorothee: Mimesis des Erinnerns*. In: *Erll, Astrid / Nünning, Ansgar* (eds.): *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft. Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektive*. Berlin 2005, 131 f.: “Zum einem hat sich der Ort selbst verändert; zum anderen – fast noch entscheidender – kann durch die Kontinuität des Raums aber auch die Entwicklung des den Raum wahrnehmenden Subjekts herausgestellt werden. Nicht

„Přišel jsi do vzrušené doby,  
kdo ví, co zítřek přinese,  
co roztrhá, co odnese...“<sup>26</sup>

Here we see contemporary events through a prism of uncertainty, violence and helplessness. There is an implication that Jan should not have come, but in actual fact the direction of his travels, his decision to complete the journey on which he set out so long ago and return home, is one of the most striking things about the poem. This is because he travels in exactly the opposite direction from the route taken by others at the time, those who, in the face of rising fascism in Europe, saw no option but to go into exile on the other side of the Atlantic.<sup>27</sup> Jan's own reasons for originally leaving are hinted at in verse XII, when he remembers the words of his old teacher:

nur der Raum ist dem Subjekt fremd geworden, sondern vor allem ist auch das Subjekt dem Raum fremd geworden.“ (Engl. “On the one hand the place itself has changed; on the other – almost more crucially – the development of the subject perceiving that space can be exposed too by means of spatial continuity. The space has not only become unfamiliar to the subject, but rather the subject has, above all, become unfamiliar to the space.”) In this understanding, Jan is a kind of liminal figure at this stage, still searching for his place in the world.

- 26 *Hora*: *Kniha domova*, 105. Engl. “You’ve arrived at a frenzied time / who knows what tomorrow will bring / what it will tear asunder, take away...” A rather similar sentiment and even phrasing can also be found in Nezval's *Ubrus na operační stůl* (Engl. “Cloth on the operating table”) from the 1938 collection *Matka naděje* (Engl. “Mother of hope”): “Matko nevíme co všechno může nám přinést zítřek” (Engl. “Mother we do not know all that tomorrow can bring us”). In: *Nezval, Vítězslav: Dílo. Vol. 6: Matka naděje. Praha 1953*, 233. Although in that poem and the collection as a whole, the primary focus is on the speaker's unwell mother and the uncertainty surrounding her health and recovery, there is, one suspects, an additional undercurrent of more general unease regarding contemporary life and a growing sense of helplessness, the inability to control one's future.
- 27 For an indication of unflattering contemporary views about those living in exile, it is worth considering comments made by Ferdinand Peroutka in an article from November 1938: “Milí přátelé, všechno jsem dostal, všemu jsem porozuměl. I tomu jsem porozuměl, že mezi námi je teď možná velký rozdíl: My jsme Češi, kteří zůstali zde, doma; vy jste Češi v cizině. Vzduch, který dýcháme, není stejný. Váš, o tom není pochyby, je čistší. [...] Vy jste snad na tu chvíli šťastnější, protože se na všechno nemusíte dívat tak zblízka. My však jistě žijeme skutečnější český život. Ve vašem postavení je něco umělého. Sedm milionů českých lidí nemůže žít jako vy, nemůže se vystěhovat.” (Engl. “Dear friends, I have received everything, I have understood everything, I have also understood that now there is perhaps a large difference between us: we are Czechs who stayed here, at home; you are Czechs abroad. The air that we breathe is not the same. Yours, there's no doubt about it, is cleaner. [...] You are perhaps for the moment happier because you don't have to watch everything at such close quarters. We, however, are living more genuine Czech lives. There is something artificial about your situation. Seven million Czech people cannot live like you, cannot emigrate.”) In: *Peroutka, Ferdinand: Odpověď na vzkaz z ciziny. In: Přítomnost 15/44 (1938)*, 689. That said, there were those who specifically looked to exiled Czechs for strength and backing at the time of the Munich Agreement, so the

„Co doma, Jene? Jenom bída...“,  
 se vrací profesorův hlas,  
 „tu každý druhův úspěch hlídá,  
 tak mnoho, mnoho je tu nás.  
 A z orla za chvíli je plaz.  
 Plaz mistrem zve se. Zvou ho mistrem.  
 A brzy v mozku jeho bystrém  
 umění řídne jako vlas.“  
 Jan slyší profesorův hlas  
 i přízvuk, jenž mu napovídá:  
 „Odejdi! Doma je jen bída.  
 Jsem plaz. I z tebe by byl plaz.“<sup>28</sup>

The implications of the stanza are mixed. On the one hand, the regressive image of an eagle turning into a reptile is immediately reminiscent of the changes made to the *Reichsadler* coat of arms to convert it among other things into the *Parteiadler* of the Nazis, and thus possibly indicative of the transformation that took place in neighbouring Germany during the 1930s following Hitler's seizure of power (the reptile calling himself the master). On the other, there also seems to have been an internal danger lurking in Jan's former situation. Artistic integrity appears to have been at risk, an unhealthy obsession with success rife. The professor is remembered as having warned Jan to leave, encouraging the violinist to place himself and his music above any thoughts of solidarity with his native land.

Coming home at a moment when that home is under imminent outside threat, returning to the fold of the nation in spite of the personal peril associated with doing so, should therefore perhaps be viewed as a steadfast act of devotion to one's country, a rejection or reversal of earlier egotistical behaviour. Loyalty and faith are indeed important motifs within *Jan houslista*, and Hora's decision to write on the topic in this way might also be seen a sign of his own *věrnost* toward the Czech lands. Even the poem's form reflects and reinforces this idea of return, since the final stanza repeats lines from the opening, allowing the story to come full circle, while the reference to raining down and seeping into

issue is obviously not quite as clear-cut as Peroutka would have us believe; cf. *My a naši*. In: *České slovo*, 12.10.1938, 1: "Největší naší oporou v dnešní těžké době mohou však být naši krajané v zahraničí" (Engl. "Our countrymen abroad can be our greatest support in today's difficult times").

28 *Hora: Kniha domova*, 94. Engl. "What's at home Jan? Only misery... / the professor's voice returns, / "Here everyone watches over the success of others, / so many, there are so many of us here. / And it doesn't take long for an eagle to become a reptile. / The reptile calls himself a master. / They call him a master. / And soon in his sharp brain / art thins out like hair." / John hears the professor's voice / and the emphasis, which prompts him: / 'Leave! At home there's only misery. / I am a reptile. You would become a reptile too.'"

the ground (“Jak kapky jsme se rozpršeli / a jako dešť jsme vsákli v zem”<sup>29</sup>) brings to mind the idea of the never-ending water cycle and suggests that the *lyrisches Wir* of this stanza is very much part of the natural order of things, a component of its perpetual existence.<sup>30</sup> We might well wonder why a tale of this kind should be told at a time of war and existential insecurity, and it is not difficult to identify an implicit moral or didactic message, to interpret Jan as a figure whose behaviour we ought to emulate, even if Hora does not directly say this, but is that really enough to warrant calling the poem an allegory?

## Theories of the Allegoric Mode

In order to answer this question, it is perhaps worth first taking some time to examine what exactly is meant by the word. Much like *poésie de circonstance*, allegory frequently gets a rather bad press. Even those scholars, who have scaled its heights with great aplomb and sought to unmask its vagaries, deftly demystifying the inner workings of allegorical texts, are often moved to write rather disparagingly of the mode. In an essay on Pascal’s *Pensées*, Paul de Man, for the most part a great defender of allegory, particularly against the charges

29 Ibid., 142. Engl. “Like drops we scattered all around / and like rain we soaked into the earth”.

30 At this point and while on the topic of return, it may be worth taking a brief, but closer look at Holan’s aforementioned *Terežka Planetová* which, if not quite, the twin of *Jan houslista*, is at least its opposite number in terms of outlook. From a formal point of view, with its Pushkin-esque 10-line stanzas in iambic tetrameter, it obviously has much in common with Hora’s earlier work and also touches upon similar topics – childhood, change, one’s native land, musicality, love on unequal footing. At the poem’s heart, though, is the realisation after years of exile by the protagonist of the embedded narrative that the girl – the titular Terežka – whom he had placed upon pedestal rather like Don Quijote did to Dulcinea in Viktor Dyk’s *Zmoudření Dona Quijota*, is not remembered by any one else when he returns to the village of their youth: “však nikdo už, ach, nikdo více / ji nepamatoval – – –” (Engl. “but no one, oh no one at all / could remember her any more”). In: *Holan*, Vladimír: Spisy. Vol. 7: Příběhy. Praha 2002, 80. This is an acknowledged echo of a sketch by Leoš Janáček and raises three intriguing possibilities: either Terežka never really existed at all, and was merely a figment of the doctor’s imagination, or she did exist, but was not as remarkable as the doctor imagined, or, rather like Lot’s wife in the Bible, who looked back when she should not have done so and was turned to stone, perhaps she ceased to exist in the moment the doctor returned to find her. This latter interpretation is in keeping with Heraclitus’ famous adage *panta rhei*, that is the idea that it is impossible to step into the same river twice, and suggests that the kind of cyclical return put forward by Hora is not in fact attainable. The doctor’s apparent life motto during his vagabond existence supports this (“Kamkoli jinam, jen ne zpátky!”; Engl. “Anywhere else just not back!” Ibid., 75), as does Terežka’s own surname, being derived from the Ancient Greek *planētēs* (“the wanderer”).

levelled at it by the Romantics, cannot help but describe it as being “lopsided”<sup>31</sup>. From Cicero’s continuous stream of metaphors, and the phrase *quid credas allegoria* found in the Latin verse representation of the fourfold meaning of the Scriptures, to Angus Fletcher’s famous comment that “allegory says one thing and means another”<sup>32</sup>, the device has been defined variously over the centuries. There seems to be some agreement that it is a deeply self-referential and self-aware mode, but its other hallmarks are, to a certain extent, still up for discussion. According to Steven R. Levin, the use of personification, which he describes as its “staple”<sup>33</sup> is key, whereas Maureen Quilligan sees puns and their polysemic potential as the crux of the matter<sup>34</sup>. We would also undoubtedly do well to consider Hans Robert Jauß’ groundbreaking study of Baudelaire’s 1858 work *Le poème du haschisch*, in which, he argues, we first witness a modernist take on allegory, quite removed from the trope’s perhaps more well-known or recognisable incarnations during the Middle Ages. Jauß notes, in particular, its disrupting or destabilising function, the new-found ability of allegory to cause an about-turn in our conventional perceptions of the world around us, one that is more open to coalescence between apparent opposites:

31 *de Man*, Paul: *Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion*. In: Greenblatt, Stephen (ed.): *Allegory and Representation*. Baltimore 1981, 2.

32 *Fletcher*, Angus J. S.: *Allegory without Ideas*. In: *Machosky*, Brenda (ed.): *Thinking Allegory Otherwise*. Stanford 2010, 2. That said, the phrase was in fact employed some years earlier by Owen Barfield in relation to the use of symbols in poetry rather than allegory. Cf. *Barfield*, Owen: *Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction*. In: *Lewis*, C. S. (ed.): *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*. London 1947, 110 f.: “It will be observed that when we started from the simile and moved towards the symbol, the criterion or yard-stick by which we measured our progress was the element of *comparison* – paramount in the simile and very nearly vanished out of sight in the symbol. When, on the other hand, we move backwards, starting from the symbol, we find ourselves with another yard-stick, viz. the fact of saying one thing and meaning another.”

33 *Levin*, Steven R.: *Allegorical Language*. In: *Bloomfield*, Morton W. (ed.): *Allegory, Myth and Symbol*. Cambridge Massachusetts 1981, 24.

34 *Quilligan*, Maureen: *The Language of Allegory. Defining the genre*. Ithaca 1979, 26: “The ‘other’ named by the term *allos* in the word ‘allegory’ is not some other hovering above the words of the text, but the possibility of an otherness, a polysemy, inherent in the very words in the page; allegory therefore names the fact that language can signify many things at once. It does not name the many other things language means, or the disjunction between saying and meaning, but the often problematical process of meaning multiple things simultaneously with one word. [...] Like the word ‘pun’, the term ‘allegory’ defines a kind of language significant by virtue of its verbal ambidextrousness. What is radical about this redefinition is the slight, but fundamental shift in emphasis away from our traditional insistence on allegory’s distinction between word said and meaning meant, to the simultaneity of the process of signifying multiple meaning.” In a way, Quilligan is on similar terrain to Barfield here, when he discusses symbolism and figurative language more generally, taking a poem by Christina Rossetti as his starting point; cf. *Barfield*: *Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction*, 108 f.

Allegory as a vehicle of reversal (a “shifter” in modern terminology), of the reciprocal reshuffle of external and internal reality that befalls Baudelaire’s speaker so unexpectedly and against his will, seems to me to make tangible a crucial difference between the modern and mediaeval use of allegory. In the allegorical poetry of the Middle Ages external and internal, sensuous and spiritual reality – often via the threshold of dreaming – are intended to remain separate from one another as realms that exist for themselves.<sup>35</sup>

One thing is for sure, though: wherever there is allegory, the reader is paramount, since it falls to him to listen out for double entendres, to fill in the gaps where something is left unsaid. In light of this, one might even conclude that the reader is also complicit in any “crimes” committed by the author since it is he who really enables that jump in meaning by recognising latent ambiguity for what it is. This close involvement may not have been entirely appreciated by the Nazi authorities, but in the context of censorship within the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, it certainly increases the subversive potential of a text. Furthermore, given what Jonathan Bolton has written about the prevalence and significance of ruin imagery in Czech writing in the late 1930s, the fact that they can, as he puts it, be “a symbol of both victory and defeat, depending on who is doing the ruining; [...] herald the creation of a new order or confirm the destruction of an old one, as well as recording its stubborn persistence in truncated form”<sup>36</sup>, we may also be intrigued to read Walter Benjamin’s claim that “Allegories are to the realm of thoughts what ruins are to the realm of things.”<sup>37</sup> The very use of allegory could thus perhaps be seen as representing, for example, the tenacity of spirit of the First Republic and its artists, the refusal to be cowed into complete submission, despite being surrounded by destruction. Last, but by no means least, it is imperative that we bear in mind, as Quilligan has pointed out, that *allegoresis*, that is the critical interpretation of texts as allegory, should not be mistaken for allegory itself.<sup>38</sup> This is, one fears, all too often the case, and should not be left unquestioned.

35 Jauß, Hans Robert: Baudelaires Rückgriff auf die Allegorie. In: Studien zum Epochenwandel der ästhetischen Moderne. Frankfurt am Main 1990, 184: “Das Allegorische als Vehikel des Umschlags (‘shifter’ in moderner Terminologie), der wechselseitigen Umbesetzung von äußerer und innerer Realität, die dem lyrischen Ich bei Baudelaire so unversehens wie unfreiwillig geschieht, scheint mir einen wesentlichen Unterschied zwischen dem modernen und dem mittelalterlichen Gebrauch der Allegorie faßbar zu machen. In der allegorischen Dichtung des Mittelalters bleiben äußere und innere, sinnhafte und geistige Realität – oft durch die Schwelle des Traums – als für sich bestehende Bereiche streng voneinander zu trennen.”

36 Bolton: The Ruins of a Republic, 118.

37 Benjamin, Walter: Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels. Frankfurt am Main 1963, 197: “Allegorien sind im Reiche der Gedanken was Ruinen im Reiche der Dinge.”

38 Cf. Quilligan: The Language of Allegory, 15 f.

If we ask ourselves why an author might choose to use language which does not, as it were, do exactly what it says on the tin, that is, by employing allegorical elements or writing in the allegorical mode, a number of reasons – some very obvious, others perhaps a little less so – readily spring to mind. Firstly, such devices can act as a kind of shorthand since they are able to convey multiple ideas and images simultaneously. Especially in the case of poetry, where, due to the constraints of common features such meter, rhyme scheme and regular line length, words and space in general are at a premium, this ability is of huge advantage. What is more, writing concisely, that is to say without the need for the lengthy exposition of specific notions, can render an author's output far more effective, more memorable, pithier in its sentiments. Secondly, providing one feels no inherent snobbery towards it, the allegorical mode can provide an unparalleled opportunity for an author to demonstrate his erudition, his subtle and sophisticated command of language. If the reader feels proud at having "decoded" a layer of the text, his or her sense of achievement can be nothing compared to what the author must feel at knowing that their text demands and exacts a high level of thoughtful contemplation from its readers. Following on from this, the state of having, as it were, a captive audience, hanging onto one's every word, always on the look-out for alternative meanings, creates additional scope for influencing or guiding the reader in a particular direction. Allegorical manoeuvring on the part of the author – the oblique, indeterminate way of describing things so frequently associated with it – might, for example, therefore challenge readers to look at their own lives afresh, to re-evaluate a situation or question the apparent "truth" of a state of affairs. At the same time, however, the challenge posed by such a text may also prove too great for some readers, for example as a result of differing cultural experience and references. On the one hand, this may help strengthen the perceived bond between the author and those readers who do feel that they have grasped what the text was really getting at, creating a sense of community based on shared understanding.<sup>39</sup> On the other, as briefly alluded to in the Introduction, it raises the possibility that in times of censorship or limited artistic freedom, the author may intentionally exploit the ambiguity of language, so as to hoodwink the authorities and allow subversive content to slip through the net.

39 With regards to the use of allegory in Václav Prokúpek's prose works, Rajednra Chitnis speaks of a "dojem tajné solidarity mezi autorem a čtenářem" (Engl. "impression of secret solidarity between author and reader"), which could very easily also be applied the poetry of this period. Cf. *Chitnis: Zbraně slabých?*, 687.

## Allegory, Allegoresis or Something More?

With this in mind and looking at *Jan houslista*, it is not hard to understand why allegorical interpretations of the poem are so alluring. If we seek allegorical elements in terms of saying one thing and meaning another, then the first option that springs to mind is the possibility that the whole poem is to be read as a journey of self-discovery, of personal progression on the part of Jan towards a state of creative synergy with the world, as exemplified by some of the closing lines. In this respect, we would be dealing with something that verges on a parable, with all of the pedagogical baggage that such a narrative entails. Alternatively, one might prefer, as certain critics have done, to view the text more as an allegory of Hora's own life.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, it is true that over the course of the 1930s his poetry began to change in such a way as to suggest that he too had come to realise the importance of one's homeland within one's art. It is, therefore, at least conceivable, if not necessarily hugely helpful, that the work could be seen as giving poetic expression to this notion.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, using the language of de Man, one might like to ask whether Jan is supposed to be a figural abstraction – a Czech everyman, for instance, or maybe simply a small man from a small country for whom the American Dream did not work out. In his positive transformation of grief and loss into music, an idea that is also evoked by the image of tears moistening the ground and allowing roses to grow (“a slzy roztavují hlínu / a v země nastaveném klínu / zas pučí růže”<sup>42</sup>), one could equally view Jan as standing in dialectical opposition to

40 Cf. e.g. *Pavelka: Alegorie v legálně publikované poezii let 1939–1945*, 351: “Celá skladba má vyhraněně autobiografický charakter, je alegorie básníka života.” (Engl. “The whole composition has a pronounced autobiographical character, it is an allegory of the poet's life.”) Though the word allegory does not crop specifically, a similarly biographical reading is also offered in the standard reference book for Czech poetry. Cf. *Slovník básnických knih*, 77: “Často zde mluví autor sám za sebe: vyrovnává se se svými úspěchy a omyly, se zklamáními a bolestmi, připomíná si dávnou sociální víru mladí a objevuje v sobě sílu věřit v budoucnost.” (“Here the author often speaks for himself: he faces up to his successes and his mistakes, to disappointments and hurts, he remembers the far-off social faith of youth and discovers within himself the strength to believe in the future.”) There is an implication that much that we read in the poem can be mapped directly onto the empirical author, detracting from the sovereignty of the words themselves.

41 In this respect, the aforementioned lines “Ach ne – dnes nerostla by ve mně / v úzkostech píseň rodné země / jak polibek, jak tón a rým.” are particularly intriguing since they indicate that a change has come over the speaker due to outside events. The reference to a song of one's homeland is highly reminiscent Hora's 1938 composition *Zpěv rodné země*, and could be taken as suggestion that this poem is to be read in a different way; that it is not an ode or hymn to the nation, but something else.

42 *Hora: Kniha domova*, 121. Engl. “and the tears thaw the loam / and in the set womb of the land / a rose buds again”.

the fossilised, disheartened Katy. Certainly, he attempts – albeit to no obvious avail – to snap her out of her depression, declaring her sorrowful view of the world to be illusory:

To jenom trýzeň osamění  
vám předstírá, že nic je vším,  
že mimo vás už světa není,  
krom barvy smutku.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, there ought to be enough grammatical personification within the text to satisfy Levin of its allegorical credentials. The poem is dotted with addresses to abstract ideas and peopled with lively topological elements that can act of their own volition. The landscape that Jan visits has a distinct vitality about it; not even the peaks can sit still (“A za řekou vrch jediný / se houpal v slunci”<sup>44</sup>) nor the lightning refrain from playing with the clouds (“v dálce blesk si s mraky hrál”<sup>45</sup>). This second example is an unusually optimistic, innocent take on a storm, robbing it of any violence that we might expect. Likewise, the wind, which is described as rocking the treetops (“Rozložitými korunami kolébá vítr”<sup>46</sup>), has an almost maternal air due to the connotations of rocking a cradle.<sup>47</sup> Time also becomes something gentle and unobtrusive; not a destructive force, merely one that is unceasing: “Tak usínají ruce žen, / čas jenom zvolna dýchá na ně”<sup>48</sup>. It is not hard to see the Czech lands in a positive light here, to appreciate their mild, nurturing spirit. At times though, in particular in the case of the depiction of the violin, which Jan asks on a number of occasions to whom it played (“Komu jste, housle moje, hrály?”<sup>49</sup>) and even suggests it may have been the one that made Jan’s wife fall in love with him (“Tajemné srdce, srdce ženy, / čím, čím jsem se ti drahým stal? / Mé housle, nebyly jste vy to? / Či jenom já, jenž na vás hrál?”<sup>50</sup>), this use of language surely goes further than the mere endowment of a non-human entity with human characteristics, possibly even straying into the realm of what Levin refers to

43 Ibid., 131. Engl. “That is only the agony of loneliness / pretending to you that nothing is everything, / that outside of you there is no longer a world, / apart from the colours of grief.”

44 Ibid., 112. Engl. “And beyond the river a single peak / see-sawed in the sun”.

45 Ibid. Engl. “In the distance lightning played with the clouds”.

46 Ibid., 105. Engl. “The wind rocks the wide-branched tree tops”.

47 The Czech word for “cradle” *kolébka* is derived from the verb “to rock” *kolébat*, making the semantic connection much stronger than in English.

48 Ibid., 109. Engl. “That’s how women’s hands fall asleep / time only breathes on them slowly”.

49 Ibid., 141. Engl. “To whom, my violin, did you play?”

50 Ibid., 93. Engl. “A mysterious heart, the heart of a woman, / with what, with what did I become dear to you? / My violin, was it not you? / Or just me, playing upon you?”

as *dispersonification*<sup>51</sup>. Certainly, the violin seems to have acquired powers beyond our comprehension, and, in the process, effectively emasculates its owner. Perhaps this is indeed Hora's way of asking how making music really feels for the musical instrument involved. An attempt at deconstruction in the style of de Man might also be possible here given that the musician becomes instrumentalised by his own instrument, the artist suddenly finding himself to be nothing but a tool in the process of bringing forth art. This not only raises important questions about creation and the nature of authorship, but also significantly blurs the lines between subject and object. We might even ask ourselves if this is, in turn, reflected in the aforementioned polyphonic nature of the text as a whole. After all, it is difficult to tell whether Jan is the true subject of the poem, or merely the object of the narrator's observations. Furthermore, it would not be entirely preposterous to wonder if Jan is to be viewed as an extension of narrator, or, conversely, the narrator as an extension of Jan. In this, we may well be reminded of Jauf's comments about the way in which allegory in its modern form can be seen as obliterating the lines between traditional contrasts. As he explains in relation to *Le poème du haschisch*:

Speaking about experiences of being high justifies for Baudelaire above all the analogy with poetic activity. When all is said done, for the great poets and philosophers, what is at stake is the aim of regaining the paradise that was lost: to create "à notre usage un jardin de vraie beauté" and attain a state in which "cause et effet, sujet et objet, magnétiseur et somnambule" are one and the same. The suspension of these antitheses is at the heart of his interest in the experience of taking hashish.<sup>52</sup>

Though in *Jan houslista* there, are no drugs in play, apart from the occasionally intoxicating influence of music, there can be little doubt that in the graveyard, where Jan finally reconnects fully with his roots, he appears to find exactly that, a "jardin de vraie beauté", the place from which he stems and is destined one day to return.

That said, as readers we must not overlook the fact that all of these examples are, in essence, *allegoresis* – that is, interpretation on our part – rather than clear-cut evidence of the allegorical mode in action within the text. Though much is made of Jan's perceptions and view of his life and work up until now, the text itself is neither especially self-reflexive nor especially self-aware. There

51 *Levin*: Allegorical Language, 28f.

52 *Jauf*: Baudelaire's Rückgriff auf die Allegorie, 174: "Von den Erfahrungen im Drogenrausch zu sprechen, rechtfertigt für Baudelaire vor allem die Analogie zur poetischen Tätigkeit. Denn es geht den großen Dichtern und Philosophen letztlich um nichts anderes als um das Ziel, das verlorene Paradies zurückzugewinnen: (créer) 'à notre usage un jardin de vraie beauté' und in einem Zustand zu gelangen, in welchem 'cause et effet, sujet et objet, magnétiseur et somnambule' in eins fallen. Die Aufhebung dieser Gegensätze steht im Mittelpunkt des Interesses an der Haschischerfahrung."

is also precious little word play. Indeed, most of the time, when the stanzas take a turn for the ambiguous, one actually gets the impression that the speaker is merely being vague or detached, intentionally distancing him- or herself from events, rather than being linguistically arch. When, for example, Katy declares that she does not wish to think of the autumn (“Na podzim myslet? Nechce se mi.”<sup>53</sup>), this can be readily accepted by the reader on the grounds that the memory of that time is simply too painful. Technically speaking, of course, one could argue that the use of the word *podzim* (“autumn”) is polysemic, in that it could refer both literally to the season of mellow fruitfulness, and metonymically to the events of the autumn of 1938, when Czechoslovakia was forced to cede the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany. However there is nothing playful about this allusion, it does not thematise language itself, as all true allegory should. It is also striking that when it comes to figural language, similes far outweigh the metaphors in this poem; we can find anaphoric stanzas with four separate similes across just a few short lines, pelting the reader with a barrage of disparate images of duality and togetherness:

A slyšeti, když nejhlob zniš,  
 jak z echa srdcí rozumí ti  
 i jejich smích i jejich kříž –  
 a s oběma si rozumíš  
 jak noc, jež noci odpovídá,  
 jak bídu líbající bída,  
 jak oči dvou žen v naději,  
 jež v příštích dětech mizejí<sup>54</sup>

This is significant because similes are not an especially ambiguous rhetorical or poetic technique. The referential counterpart is not left for the reader to piece together themselves, but is clearly stated, rather reducing the suggestiveness of any intended comparison. As Donald Davidson has put it “a simile tells us, in part, what a metaphor merely nudges us into noting.”<sup>55</sup>

What is more, much of the residual ambiguity of the text can in fact be traced back to its structure rather than its use of language. Though the poem is guided by the principle of return, one often has the impression – particularly in the opening verses – of ever more images being constantly piled on top of one another, overlapping, possibly even contradicting or negating one another.

53 *Hora*: *Kniha domova*, 127. Engl. “To think of the autumn / I don’t feel like it.”

54 *Ibid.*, 140. Engl. “And to listen, when you resound most deeply / like an echo from your heart / even their laughter and their cross understands you / and you understand both of them / like night, answering to night / like misery kissing misery / like the eyes of two women in the hope / which fades away in future children”.

55 *Davidson*, Donald: *What Metaphors Mean*. In: *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978), 38.

The narrative oscillates rapidly between memories of the past and snapshots of the present, not to mention hopes for the future and imaginative flights of fancy. The reader can be forgiven for struggling to find a foothold or orientate themselves, but a tortuously complex structure should not be mistaken for deliberate opacity of language or multifariousness of meaning.

In short, over the course of these deliberations, it has become painfully clear that to refer to *Jan houslista* simply as an allegory, without reflecting on the issues associated with that device, smacks of lazy literary criticism and terminological imprecision. Such an approach even runs the risk of skewing our understanding of the poetic reverberations of the Munich Agreement as a whole, since if this apparently shining example of an allegorical poem can be shown to be, on closer inspection, so decidedly tarnished, what hope do we have of finding evidence of the mode within works that are not held up as its epitome? On balance, in this case it might be more productive to abandon the term altogether and consider instead the text from the perspective of mythologisation. Could Jan be a prodigal son returning to his land at its hour of need, willing, at last, to serve in a way that he was not before?<sup>56</sup> He may be a modest, unobtrusive figure – not a hero in the traditional sense – but that in itself perhaps speaks volumes about the mood at the time that Hora was writing, the needs and wishes for which he may have wanted to cater.

In light of this and using categories delineated by Aleida Assmann, we might even ask ourselves whether *Jan houslista* is perhaps more akin to a cultural text than a literary one. For Assmann, cultural texts are characterised by their timelessness, their canonisation, the fact that they speak to the reader as a representative of a collective, rather than as an individual, and the way that they are received not primarily as reading material, but instead as something that is to be appropriated and identified with:

If literary texts are intended for pleasure, then cultural texts are intended for appropriation, for unconditional identification. They depend upon being conveyed in a living fashion to readers who identify themselves *with* the text and at the same time acquire and safeguard their identity *through* the text. Such a text is not just to be read and contemplated, but moreover to be inhabited.<sup>57</sup>

56 If this reading is correct, then it is perhaps also confirmation of a prediction made by Kamil Bednář back in 1938. Cf. *Bednář*, Kamil: Projev k situaci nejmladší české poezie. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 120: “Bylo třeba tmy tam venku za okny, aby oči rozeznávaly zářivé světlo všeho, co se pojmenovává domovem. Příběh ztraceného a nalezeného syna brzy se stane znovu oblíbeným.” (Engl. “It was necessary that it be dark outside the window, so that eyes might discern the bright light of all that is called home. The story of the son who was lost and found will soon become popular once again.”)

57 *Assmann*, Aleida: Was sind kulturelle Texte? In: *Poltermann*, Andreas (ed.): *Literaturkanon – Medienereignis – Kultureller Text. Formen interkultureller Kommunikation und Übersetzung*. Berlin 1995, 242: “Wenn der literarische Text zum Genuß bestimmt ist,

The clearest example of such a text that she names is the Bible.<sup>58</sup> While it would, of course, be foolish to argue that *Jan houslista* has achieved the cultural clout and perceived wide applicability of that central text of Christianity, there are a few aspects of the poem and its subsequent reception that might give credence to the suggestion that it too fits into the broader category of the cultural text. Certainly, if the reading lists compiled for Czech grammar school pupils preparing to sit their *maturita* (school leavers' exams) are anything to go by, *Jan houslista* has indeed experienced canonisation since it was published some eighty-odd years ago.<sup>59</sup> What is more, given the frequent and ambiguous use of the first person plural, there is also room for the reader to feel that he or she is being addressed directly by the speaker and invited to become part of a larger community, to join the ranks of those Czechs who, like Jan, have returned to the fold and been able to find a sense of harmony with the world around them. The reader, therefore, could be viewed far more as a potential member of a collective, than as an individual – provided they follow Jan's example, that is. Even the rather epic form of the poem, its lofty air and sweeping account of Jan's replicable long road towards a state of being both contented in and at one with his native land, may support this interpretation since according to Assmann:

With the help of their own cultural texts, individual national cultures created independent traditions. The pre-eminent medium for the creation of indigenous traditions is the genre of the national epic.<sup>60</sup>

Though, as we have seen, the time-frame of the poem's main action appears to correspond to the historical period during which Hora was writing, its dominant messages about the cyclical nature of time and tribulation, about the need for unison between art and its origins, the places from whence it stems, are surely universal. They transcend the contemporary situation and offer models of behavior and understanding that could be applicable in a far wider context. Issues of cultural memory and national identity related to this will be

dann ist der kulturelle Text zur Aneignung, zur vorbehaltlosen Identifikation bestimmt. Er ist angewiesen auf die lebendige Vermittlung an Leser, die sich *mit* diesem Text identifizieren und zugleich *durch* diesen Text ihre Identität gewinnen und sichern. Diesen Text gilt es nicht nur zu lesen und zu kontemplieren, sondern obendrein zu bewohnen.”

For a full summary of the distinctions between literary and cultural texts according to Assmann see *ibid.*, 241 f.

58 Cf. *ibid.*, 237.

59 Cf. e.g. that of the Gymnázium Opatov in Prague, which includes *Jan houslista* as the only work by Hora. URL: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/18Y9XB4mqghBT8yGLFy4\\_Ox-sVD5rHt5Z/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/18Y9XB4mqghBT8yGLFy4_Ox-sVD5rHt5Z/view) (on 1.6.2022).

60 Assmann: Was sind kulturelle Texte?, 238: “Mithilfe eigener kultureller Texte schufen sich die einzelnen Nationalkulturen selbstständige Traditionen. Das hervorragende Medium zur Schaffung indigener Tradition ist die Gattung des nationalen Epos.”

discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, but already we can see how fruitful such considerations may prove, giving rise to new potential interpretational frameworks.

## The Stuff of Nightmares

Leaving *Hora* to one side, for the time being, it may also be helpful to consider another poem identified by Pavelka as being allegorical, namely Holan's *Sen* (Engl. "Dream"). The highly allusive composition, which is made up of 36 ten-line stanzas, recounts the arrival of many black-clad men into a city: "Všichni jsou v černém..."<sup>61</sup> Its tightly-controlled rhyme scheme *ababccdeed* is a variation on the *décima* or *espinela*, a poetic form that originated in sixteenth-century Spain. Given that it is dated "April 1939" – that is, one month after the Nazi invasion and creation of the Protectorate – and members of the SS famously wore all-black uniforms, the poem is generally interpreted as a veiled account of contemporary events. Indeed, Walter Schamschula has gone as far as to describe it as containing "a coded attack on the Nazi occupiers"<sup>62</sup>, while Jiří Brabec refers to its as "a phantasmagorical picture of the first moments of the occupation"<sup>63</sup>.

The choice of form is also perhaps significant since it could be seen as a sign of solidarity with the Spanish people and thus other victims of fascism. Certainly, Holan's slightly earlier poem *Zpěv tří králové* is explicitly dedicated to the memory of those who died in Abyssinia, Spain and China at the hands, we assume, of Italian, Spanish and Japanese aggressors, respectively.<sup>64</sup> While *Sen*, on the other hand, bears a dedication to the Russian Futurist and one of the fathers of Zaumism, Velimir Khlebnikov, the appropriation of such a traditional form as the *décima* would allow for an additional show of unity and common purpose on a level beyond that of the paratext.

*Sen* offers the reader a night-time vision of a place in danger, its citizens caught unawares. Even the fortune tellers of the city – those whom we might expect to have inkling of what awaits, and indeed they are described as being conscious of something – are heading to bed and thus unable to make any

61 *Holan*: Dokumenty, 91. Engl. "They are all in black..."

62 *Schamschula*: Geschichte der tschechischen Literatur, 103: "enthält einen verschlüsselten Angriff auf die Nazi-Okkupanten".

63 *Brabec*, Jiří: *Holan*. In: *Opelík*, Jiří (ed.): *Jak číst poezii*. Praha 1969, 166: "fantasmagorický obraz prvních chvil okupačních".

64 *Holan*: Dokumenty, 43: "Památce mrtvých v Habeši, Španělsku a Číně" (Engl. "To the memory of the dead in Abyssinia, Spain and China").

warnings (“Toť chvíle, kdy dřavé baby, / kartářky, vědmy, jdou už spat.”<sup>65</sup>). The poem begins with a gritty, not unrealistic account of the way in which night normally unfolds in the city, but it does not take long before it becomes apparent that things are not as they should be. The initial cries and tears of the people soon turn to groans, as grief and shock give way to a kind of submission, a horrible realisation, perhaps, of the full implication of events:

A zatímco město, touto dobou  
už vždycky spící, jak by byl zvyk,  
boří se náhlou nepodobou  
ve zdrcující pláč a křik,  
jenž příliš hmotně slábne v steny<sup>66</sup>

The use of the word *hmotně* (“materially”, “tangibly”) in relation to the petering out of those first vocalisations of emotions is particularly intriguing, since it gives the impression of a physical or visceral reaction. The speaker appears to disapprove of this, finding it to be excessive as indicated by the adverb *příliš* (“too”), but it is possible that such a reaction cannot be helped, that it is an inevitable reflex, like the way some people faint at the sight of blood or gag at a noxious odour. It falls to the natural world to tell this shocking story, to make sure that it is not forgotten as the place described seems to have been forsaken by its god who is no longer fulfilling his duty to enact revenge:

Jen paprskům a větrům zbylo  
ležatým písmem psáti v zem  
o všem, co nebe nepřijímá,  
z čeho je boží ruce zima,  
té ruce, jež má polití  
benzínem dějin blízké časy  
a lupou hněvu sžehnout asi  
hlad, lup a krveprolití.<sup>67</sup>

Holan also uses anaphora and an abundance of nouns to emphasise the way in which death has infiltrated every imaginable corner of the city:

65 Holan: Dokumenty, 86. Engl. “These are moments, when perforated old women / fortune-tellers, aware, are already on their way to bed.”

66 Ibid., 88. Engl. “And meanwhile the city, during this time / always already sleeping, as if it were a habit / suddenly and uncharacteristically breaks down / into tears and cries / which too palpably weaken to groans”.

67 Ibid., 84. Engl. “It was left only to the rays and the winds / to write into the ground with horizontal letters / about everything, which heaven does not take in / that which makes the hand of a god cold / that hand with which he is supposed pour petrol / on to the recent times of history / probably using a magnifying glass of rage to set fire / to hunger, spoils and bloodshed.”

V kdejakém krámku plném sámků,  
 v pekařství pýchy, v hrozbách jam,  
 v sladovných příštích opojení,  
 v cukrárnách, jež půst dlouhý plení,  
 a ve všech krocích jdoucích sem  
 lze vidět mrtvých umírání  
 a jiných mrtvých jedno přání:  
 tupit a luskat pod nosem.<sup>68</sup>

As the final line of this stanza shows, however, there is still a certain amount of defiance around, if even the defiance of the dead and dying is not especially effective against a living enemy.

Within the poem, there is an indication of both isolation, as suggested by questioning lines “Proč žádná telefonistka / nás nespojí s tím přes-naproti?”<sup>69</sup>, which in their reference to modern technology situate us firmly within the middle of the twentieth century, even if other references feel rather more timeless, and of new-found community, strength in numbers. We are provided, for example, with an image of marginalised members of society banding together:

Žebráci, slepci, hluchoněmí  
 a jednoocí jdoucí s těmi,  
 již mají druhé oko zas,  
 pak dívky, jež si odvíjely  
 z přadýnka úst, co tušit směly  
 a co teď vědí bez příkras.<sup>70</sup>

Again, there is a sense of, if not exactly resignation, then at least an understanding of what is going on, a grim appreciation of the severity of the situation – the kind that can set a chin in determination. The machines of war are clearly on the move. Interestingly though, while military conflict is typically depicted as a masculine domain, here there are decidedly feminine connotations, the idea of giving birth to something monstrous:

68 Ibid., 82. Engl. “In all kinds of little shops full of pleats, / in the bakery of pride, in the threats of collieries, / in the malt-houses of future intoxication, / in sweetshops, which maraud a long fast, / and in all the steps coming here / it is possible to see the dying of the dead / and the sole wish of others who are dead: to vilify and snap their fingers under the nose.”

69 Ibid. 96. Engl. “Why won’t a single telephonist / connect us with that opposite number over there?”

70 Ibid., 90. Engl. “Beggars, blind men, deaf mutes / and the one-eyed walking with those / who already have a second eye again, / then the girls, who unwound / from the skein of their mouths what they were allowed to suspect / and what they now know without embellishments.”

Studené zvuky s nimi plují  
 a každý, každý ví, co ty:  
 to nástroje si připravují  
 porodní baby nicoty.<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, throughout *Sen*, there are, in fact, a number of rather negative depictions of womanhood and femininity. We meet prostitutes (“Nějaká kurva v mraku kytic / punčošné v duchu počítá”<sup>72</sup>), wonder if nefarious pixies might be behind the incursion (“Co to jen bylo?... Osudenky?...”<sup>73</sup>) and are disturbed by a hypothetical image of women forced to breastfeed puppies rather than children (“by matky poražených zemí kojily za trest štěnata”<sup>74</sup>). Perhaps the most striking example, though, can be found in a spot of wordplay:

Vzdor ze sobectví rád v nich mlsá  
 sám sebou dvojně opojen,  
 zatímco muže smrtky ženou<sup>75</sup>

The final line here exploits a number of grammatical peculiarities. The Czech word *smrt* (both “death” and “Death”, as in the Grim Reaper) – and its diminutive form *smrtka* as used here, which can also refer to an effigy burned to mark the end of winter – is a feminine noun, something which poets have frequently taken advantage of in order to provide sexually-tinged descriptions of mortality.<sup>76</sup> In this case, the potential for such interpretations is maximised by the use of the final word *ženou*. Though in truth nothing more than the third person plural of the verb *hnát* (“to chase”, “to drive”), *ženou* is a homonym of one of the inflections of *žena* (“woman”). It therefore mirrors the earlier word *muže* (accusative form of *muž*, “man”) and emphasises once again the idea of dangerous feminine power.

There is, however, one female figure or rather image, which by virtue of both grammatical gender and certain conventions of referring to one’s native

71 Ibid., 92. Engl. “Cold noises float with them / and everyone, everyone knows what that means: / the instruments are being prepared / by the midwives of nothingness.”

72 Ibid., 85. Engl. “Some whore in a cloud of flowers / counts her garter-money in her head.”

73 Ibid., 88. Engl. “What on earth was it?... Pixies?...”

74 Ibid., 84. Engl. “The mothers of betrayed lands would / breastfeed puppies as punishment”.

75 Ibid., 87. Engl. “Defiance born of selfishness likes to satiate its sweet tooth in them / itself doubly intoxicated / while little Deaths chase after the man”.

76 Cf. e.g. the nineteenth-century poem *Přišla...* by the Decadent author Karel Hlaváček. Coincidentally, there appears to be a faint nod to this poem in *Jan houslista*. Cf. *Hora: Kniha domova*, 108: “A vlny tekou, vlny tekou / syn přišel. Smrt však přišla dřív.” (Engl. “And the waves flow, the waves flow / the son arrived. But Death death arrived earlier.”)

county as one's motherland, is depicted in a positive light, namely, the land of the speaker's birth:

Zem bédná, bédná, bédná, bédná  
ale zem pouze jednou jedna  
a jako jednu zřít ji chci<sup>77</sup>

Poverty or deprivation, while judging by the repetition hugely significant in the overall depiction, apparently means nothing here and the speaker exhibits remarkable devotion. He seems to wish for no other [land] than the one that he already has, a sentiment that blurs the line between patriotism and romantic love. Given how starkly this contrasts with other depictions of femininity and with the unflattering description of other nations (“Národy dupou... Zříš je pádit / a čistit obě misky vah”<sup>78</sup>), the message of affection for the speaker's homeland is rendered all the more forceful.

When it comes to working out what exactly the poem before us represents, Pavelka has no doubts as to its allegorical credentials. Without much ado, he informs us that

Here Holan articulates his brave, but civilian standpoints via the allegorical form, without concealing the true, ill-boding face of reality. [...] The mimicry of allegory allows Holan to describe the coming of the Germans to Prague almost as if in a newspaper report, to express his deep aversion to fascism.<sup>79</sup>

Given Holan's use of frankly ever more bizarre imagery as the poem progresses, this notion of its being report-like is perhaps a tad far-fetched.<sup>80</sup> A little later, however, Pavelka further expands on the theme of allegory: “The allegorical

77 Ibid., 95. Engl. “Woeful, woeful, woeful, woeful land / but only one once / and I the only one ever I want to see”.

78 Ibid., 85. Engl. “Nations are tramping... You see them fall / clean both bowls of a set of scales”.

79 Pavelka: *Alegorie v legálně publikované poezii let 1939–1945*, 352: “Holan zde vyslovuje alegorickou formou svá občansky statečná stanoviska, aniž zastíral skutečnou, zlověstnou tvář reality. [...] Mimikry alegorie dovolují podat Holanovi bezmála reportážní záznam příchodu Němců do Prahy, vyjádřit jeho hluboký odpor vůči fašismu.”

80 That said, Pavelka is not the only one to employ such terminology. Cf. e.g. comments on *Sen* from the the 1939–40 edition of the journal *Akord* as quoted in Málková, Iva: *Obraz českého poezie v časopisu Akord v době protektorátní*. In: *Antošiková* (ed.): *Zatemněno. Česká literatura a kultura v protektorátu*, 176: “Tady se Holanovi vskutku podařilo zachytit podobu naší doby a jeho báseň je *dokumentem*, na který by se nemělo brzo zapomenout.” (Engl. “Here Holan really succeeded in capturing the likeness of our age and his poem *documents* something that should not be forgotten in a hurry.”) The Czech word *dokument* has a number of meanings in English, including the idea of a journalistic report and even a documentary film. However one translates it, expectations and notions of accuracy, believability and authenticity are paramount.

language of his poetry combines the classical rigidity of the rhythmical ground plan with figurativeness that mirrors the disjointed world order.”<sup>81</sup> As with his assessment of *Jan houslista*, however, Pavelka does not provide any definitions of his terminology or problematise the issues at hand. While no-one would deny that throughout *Sen* there is much ambiguity and moments of uncertainty that cause us to re-read again and again in the hope that the meaning will become more apparent, many enigmatic thoughts that we struggle to decipher, this is in fact true of the great majority of Holan’s work. He is a master of the mysteries of language, evasive, suggestive, at times almost hermetically sealed.<sup>82</sup> The only real difference here is that we feel certain that there are real-life parallels to or models for what is being depicted, that the text must in some way correspond to the outside world. The fact that we may choose an allegorical interpretation does not make the text itself inherently allegorical.

Moreover, Pavelka does not pay any attention at all to the poem’s title, though this is surely significant and has implications for any understanding of the work’s contents.<sup>83</sup> Upon seeing the word *sen* (“dream”) we cannot help but ask ourselves whether the vision we have before us is the fruit of that dream. There is, of course, a long tradition of divining meaning from our reveries, of viewing them as potentially prophetic, as containing concealed messages, in much the same way that allegory has often (and, as we would argue, inaccurately) been depicted. With dreams there is no expectation that things be straight-forward or immediately comprehensible. We naturally tolerate a degree of impenetrability or mysteriousness. Moreover, as Davidson has noted, there are certain similarities between the way in which dreams and non-literal forms of language work:

81 Pavelka: *Alegorie v legálně publikované poezii let 1939–1945*, 353: “Alegorický jazyk jeho poezie spojuje klasickou přísnost rytmičkého půdorysu s obrazností odrážející vykloubený řád světa.”

82 The speaker even at one stage passes comment on the special right of the poet to treat language in a different way from that of the common man’s use: “Ach, čas a obraz, obraz, slovo: / troseční právo básnikovo / sbírat k nim rámy na hrázi” (Engl. “Oh, time and image, image, word: / the poet’s right to salvage from wrecks, / to collect frames for them on the dike”). In: *Holan: Dokumenty*, 95.

83 The matter is given some consideration by Černý in his contemporary review of the poem, but used to emphasise the ironic relationship between the poem as a dream and the nightmarish reality of life in the Czech lands at that time. Cf. Černý, Václav: Průhled do nové belletrie. Vladimír Holan: “Sen”. In: *Kritický měsíčník 2* (1939), 232: “Zcela patrné, že tento ‘Sen’ je, v dnešním světě, snem o skutečnostech velmi skutečných; dosti málo snový, což!” (Engl. “It is very apparent that this ‘Dream’ is, in today’s world, a dream about very real realities; hardly very dreamy, don’t you think!”)

Metaphor is the dreamwork of language and, like all dreamwork, its interpretation reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator. The interpretation of dreams requires collaboration between a dreamer and a waker, even if they be the same person, and the act of interpretation is in itself a work of the imagination.<sup>84</sup>

In light of this, we might well wonder if it is our job as readers to interpret the dream, or whether the speaker has already done so. Is he dreaming as he speaks or does it stem from his waking hours, his attempt to make sense of and come to terms with the night-time images?

In this case, rather than trying to apply potentially misshapen models of allegory to the poem, it might be more productive to consider Holan's work from the point of view of two well-known forms of cognitive schemata: *frames* and *scripts*. This possible method has been expounded upon, among others, by Peter Hühn and Jörg Schömert. According to the two German literary scholars

Frames provide thematic or situational contexts or frames of reference for the reading of a poem. [...] Scripts, on the other hand, embody model sequences – they refer to natural processes or developments, to convey conventional courses of action or stereotypical procedures, usually in close connection to the relevant frame.<sup>85</sup>

Following this, we could argue that the frame for interpreting *Sen* is the historical background, the knowledge of what did indeed take place on 15 March 1939 in Prague, while the script is its dreamlike form. This would not only help to explain certain flights of fantasy within the poem, since dreams rarely make sense in the cold light of day, but could also be seen as having been quite a clever method on Holan's part for getting around the censor. On the one hand, it is merely a poetic account of a dream, and therefore harmless in the real world. On the other, though, and far more importantly, it could also be taken as a surreptitious message of dissatisfaction with the way things turned out for the Czech lands and Europe as whole in the late 1930s: "If only this all *were* all a dream! If only we could wake up and make it all go away!"<sup>86</sup> This is not an insight at which we would have necessarily arrived, had we clung to some of the more flawed notions of allegory we discussed in relation to *Jan houslista*.

84 Davidson: What Metaphors Mean, 31.

85 Hühn, Peter / Schönert, Jörg: Introduction: The Theory and Methodology of the Narratological Analysis of Lyric Poetry. In: Hühn, Peter / Kiefer, Jens (eds.): The Narratological Analysis of Lyric Poetry. Studies in English Poetry from the 16th to the 20th Century. Berlin 2005, 6.

86 The contemporary situation is also depicted in Halas' poem *Prošba* from the collection *Ladění* as being nightmarish, a evil dream from which one cannot wake: "dnes ve snu zlém" (Engl. "today in a bad dream"). In: *Halas: Časy*, 222.

## Swarms of Swabians

One poem that does, however, perhaps come closest to satisfying many of the expectations placed upon the allegorical mode is Nezval's banned work *Šváby*. In it, we are party to a vision of Prague infested by pests<sup>87</sup>:

Je jich sta a tisíce ...  
Zamořili strážnice  
[...]

Svět je jimi zamořen<sup>88</sup>

The polysemic potential of the poem is clear from the outset given that the very title is a pun on the word on *šváb*, which means both cockroach and Swabian in Czech.<sup>89</sup> Throughout, we sense that the speaker (and in this case, one suspects, Nezval himself) is revelling in this wordplay, in the apparent freedom the ambiguity affords. The tone is sometimes almost pantomimic. There are moments of dark humour, of knowing disgust. The speaker even wryly wonders whether his abhorrence of these creatures will be his undoing, surely a comment on dangers of writing too openly in the Protectorate if ever there was one: “Je to hloupá fobie / Věř mi snad mě zabije”<sup>90</sup>.

It is clear that he is talking about the Nazi occupation, and yet he does not have to state it outright. Our attention is drawn to the words themselves, to what else they might mean. When, for instance, the speaker mentions

87 The image is not without real-life precedent, however. Contemporary news reports suggest that this was indeed a problem in the Czech capital and surrounding area at the time, cf. e.g. *Statistika z Velké Prahy: 75 % bytů s hmyzem*. In: *A-Zet ranní*, 1.2.1939, 5: “Odborníci odhadují počet pražských bytů, kde nejsou štěnice, na pouhých 25, nejvýše 30 ze sta. To znamená, že tři čtvrtiny Prahy jsou zamořeny tímto hmyzem.” (Engl. “Experts estimate that only 25 or at most 30 out of every hundred flats in Prague are free of bed bugs. This means that three-quarters of the city are overrun with the vermin.”) Rats and cockroaches are also mentioned in the article, though it is noted that they only affect places where enough food is available, such as bakeries and hospitals. While these findings should in no way detract from the intentional double-meaning of the poem, it is certainly worth observing that in his repetition of variations of the word *zamořit* (“to infest, overrun”), Nezval mimics sensationalist language found in the press at the time.

88 *Nezval, Vítězslav: Dílo*, Vol. 8: *Pět minut za městem*. Praha 1954, 49f. Engl. “There are hundreds of them and thousands / They have overrun the guardhouses [...] The world is overrun with them”.

89 Incidentally, this pun would also more or less work in German, the language from which the word *šváb* derives; cf. *die Schabe* (“the cockroach”) / *die Schwabe* (“the Swabian”). Only in the English translation is much of the edge lost.

90 *Ibid.*, 53. Engl. “It’s a silly phobia / Believe me perhaps it will kill me”.

the destruction wrought by the cockroaches (“Ničí vše i knihovny...”<sup>91</sup>), we immediately think of Nazi book burnings, of the lists of forbidden literature that they produced, the closure of so many places of learning and independent thought. We also home in on lines such as those about reading a tabloid newspaper “Čtli jsme spolu České slovo / (I to někdy musí být)”<sup>92</sup> because the name of that publication *České slovo* (“The Czech word”) reminds us that another Czech word, the eponymous *šváby*, and how a pun is at the heart of this poem.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the work leaves a rather unpleasant aftertaste for the modern reader due to the fact that it at times echoes Nazi rhetoric about the need to eradicate the Jews.<sup>93</sup> The speaker alludes to foulness of the interlopers all around him, the filth they leave behind, and contrasts this with the cleanliness and civility of his beloved Charlotte, who merely wishes to enjoy a glass of wine in peace:

Na všem lpí ta lidská špína  
 Lpí i na sklenici vína  
 Kterou zvedáš k přípitku  
 Ve svém čistém přibytku<sup>94</sup>

This distinction is also reflected in the sounds of the stanza, with the hissing and hushing sibilants of the first couplet giving way to less harsh-sounding trills and affricates in the second.

The poem itself takes the form of eight untitled sections, each containing five quatrains made up of two rhyming couplets. The rhymes themselves are varied, ranging from the grammatical (“Nejvíc je jich u pekáren / Vnikli ba i do kasáren”<sup>95</sup>) and the clever, if almost identical (“Na lavičky do všech parků / K tomu deset tisíc párků”<sup>96</sup>) to half-rhymes (“Rozpínává touha žít / Dotud nebudem mít klid”<sup>97</sup>), and couplets that consciously emphasise the semantic contrasts they contain. When, for instance, we read the lines “Průvod smuteční

91 Ibid., 50. Engl. “They destroy everything even the libraries...”

92 Ibid., 51. Engl. “We read *České slovo* together / (Sometimes that just has to be too)”.

93 A comment in the aforementioned news article about vermin also makes for somewhat uncomfortable reading in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even if the journalist who wrote it could not at the time have known about the Nazi gas chambers that were to come: “Nejúčinnější zbraní proti hmyzu je ‘plynová válka’” (Engl. “The most effective weapon against vermin is a ‘gas war’”). In: *Statistika z Velké Prahy: 75 % bytů s hmyzem*, 5.

94 *Nezval: Pět minut za městem*, 55. Engl. “That human filth clings to everything / It even clings to the glass of wine / which you raise for a toast / in your clean home”.

95 Ibid., 49. Engl. “They are most numerous at the bakeries / They’ve even infiltrated the barracks too”.

96 Ibid., 59. Engl. “Onto the benches in all of the parks / And ten thousand sausages on top of that”.)

97 Ibid., 57. Engl. “An expansive desire to live / Until then we are not going to have peace”.

a černý / Rozleze se pod lucerny”<sup>98</sup>, we are struck by the juxtaposition of dark and light. Likewise, the rhyme “Pod pražskými paláci / Vylézají tuláci”<sup>99</sup> highlights an antagonism between the upstanding and indomitable buildings of the city and the surreptitious movements of figures whose right to be there is questionable (the *tuláci* or vagabonds presumably standing here for the cockroaches / Swabians). The focalising preposition *pod* (“under”) is also strengthened by the order of the words within this stanza, with the reference to the vagabonds appearing *beneath* the mention of the palaces. It is clear that we are seeing events through the eyes of one who also looks down upon them – both literally, and most likely figuratively too.

The eight sections represent a mixture of depictions of the changed circumstances within Prague and the wider landscape (I, III, IV, V), memories of encounters with cockroaches (II, VIII), and fantasies about getting rid of them (VI, VII). In a rather daring, if entertaining passage, the speaker calls for the extermination of the cockroaches, suggesting black beer as the poison of choice and imagining a celebratory and community-led drive to destroy them:

Ať je na ulicích živo!  
Dejte švábům černé pivo  
Všecky sudy celý sklep...  
Pak jim půjdem na pohřeb!

Všecky sudy na ulice!  
Pivo na stříbrné lžíce!  
Na talíře ze zlata!  
Před kanály! Za vrata!<sup>100</sup>

These lines are remarkable for their exclamatory nature and comparative lexical simplicity. There are only three verbs in the two stanzas. Everything else is conveyed via punctuation, repetition – both semantic and in the form of sound patterning, such as the practically onomatopoeic accumulation of plosive Ps, which give an impression of expressive repugnance on the part of the speaker – and the combined use of prepositions and quantifiers such as *všecky* and *celý* (“all”, “whole”) to totalising effect. There does not seem to be any escape for the cockroaches. They are intended to be surrounded, overrun in just the same way that they themselves swamped the city. Although in the

98 Ibid., 59. Engl. “A procession funereal and black / crawls in all directions under the street lamps”.

99 Ibid., 49. Engl. “From beneath the palaces of Prague / Vagabonds creep out”.

100 Ibid., 59. Engl. “Let the streets come alive! / Give the cockroaches black beer / All of the barrels the whole cellar... / Then we’ll go to their funeral! / All of the barrels onto the streets! / Beer onto silver spoons! / Onto plates of gold! / In front of the canals! Behind the gates!”

following section, the speaker is forced to concede that black beer is not an effective agent against the cockroaches (the Germans, as a nation, are generally said to be able to hold their drink, after all), this does not dampen his desire to get rid of them and he recommends a general change of tack instead, rooting out the problem from below: “Nutno změnit základy”<sup>101</sup>. In particular, the speaker focusses on the novelty of such an idea (“Nové domy”<sup>102</sup>, “Nový kámen z nových lomů”<sup>103</sup>, “nová města”<sup>104</sup>) and presents it as a sort of fairy-tale utopia: “Města bez hladomoren / Jaká krása! Jaký sen!”<sup>105</sup> In doing so, he adds a clear social dimension to the issue of eradicating the cockroaches – the suggestion that life would be infinitely better without them, that all of the hardship associated with modern life would be over. Here too, the reader is struck by the similarity of logic associated with this example of scapegoating and that employed by the Nazis.

There is also an erotic undercurrent to the poem, which gives rise not only to a number of direct addresses to the aforementioned Charlotte – whose name, the speaker admits, may well be a pseudonym (“Snad je to jen krycí jméno...”<sup>106</sup>) – but also to a degree of poetic self-reflexivity:

Jak bych mluvil o tvé kůži!  
Moje básně čtou i muži  
Nesvléknu tě před nimi  
Zůstaň skryta za rýmy<sup>107</sup>

There is an awareness of form and content on the part of the speaker. He knows full well what is being said here, and what is left unspoken. He is protecting her from prying eyes – the censor’s included, one is inclined to conclude. The speaker’s physical attraction to his beloved offers a counterpoint to his much described revulsion at the cockroaches. However, it is interesting to note that in the very final stanza of the poem, the speaker appears to compare himself to a cockroach that crossed his and Charlotte’s path during a heavy downpour:

Třeba prchal jak já prchám  
švábům přeludům a mrchám  
Jež se rodí z obláčeků  
K tobě k tobě miláčku!<sup>108</sup>

101 Ibid., 61. Engl. “It is necessary to change the foundations”.

102 Ibid. Engl. “New houses”.

103 Ibid. Engl. “New stone from new quarries”.

104 Ibid. Engl. “new cities”.

105 Ibid. Engl. “Cities without famine! / What beauty! What a dream!”

106 Ibid., 51. Engl. “Perhaps it’s only a code name”.

107 Ibid. Engl. “How I would speak of your skin! / Men read my poems too / I won’t undress you in front of them / Remain hidden behind the rhymes”.

108 Ibid., 64. Engl. “Perhaps it fled like I flee / from cockroaches delusions and carcasses / Which are born of little clouds / To you to you my love”.

This is preceded by a series of musings on what might have led the cockroach to them and is striking in its use of self-irony. Perhaps it is the speaker's way of problematising his own depiction of the Nazis, of acknowledging the parallels between his use of exterminatory language and theirs. Equally though, one might be tempted to see it also as a way of humanising the individual soldiers involved in the occupation of the Czech lands. A kind of reverse anthropomorphism, as it were – using an extended animal metaphor in order to first make a comment about the beastly behaviour of a group of people, before turning this on its head and possibly highlighting an aspect of their humanity after all. It is interesting to note that it is a female figure that precipitates this apparent change, but it remains unclear whether *eros* or *agape* is at work here. It could be a noble calling, the age-old idea that love for an honourable woman can have an uplifting effect on those who seek to become worthy of her. Yet at the same time we could be merely witnessing animal urges, the baser instincts that compel and compound certain actions. Is it the Madonna or the Whore who inspires such admiration, we might well ask.

Anthropomorphism is in fact a feature that can be found throughout the poem when it comes to the depiction of cockroaches. We are told, for example, that there is something rather urban about these creatures: “Žádný z nich však nespí u stohu / Zdržují se u brlohů”<sup>109</sup>. They eschew the more natural setting of a haystack in favour of the slums, a phenomenon brought about by aimless human expansion and often seen as a sign of moral degeneration. The verb *zdržovat se* (“to hang around”) also implies a lack of purpose unusual in animals. The couplet feels almost like shorthand for denouncing the cockroaches as good-for-nothing layabouts, a drain on society. Moreover, lines such as “Švábi jsou hned všude doma / Ať je rád či nerad kdo má”<sup>110</sup> imply a sense of imperiousness and domineering behaviour, a wilful disregard for the feelings of others that transports the portrayal of the cockroaches out of the animal kingdom and into the realm of man.

However, if the cockroaches are indeed intended to represent the German occupiers, then this trope is as inevitable as it is banal. They have to have human-like agency, they have to be able to behave in a recognisable way, otherwise the whole premise of the poem would fall flat, its bite blunted, the force of protest curtailed. This is clearly not a case of trying to imagine in the fashion of the Romantics what it might feel like to be a cockroach, but rather an attempt simply to map the characteristics of one set of beings onto another based on perceived similarities of nature – i. e. the belief that the Nazis are just as foul and ghastly as household pests. And it is this single-mindedness,

109 Ibid., 49. Engl. “Not one of them sleeps in the haystack / They hang around in the slums”.

110 Ibid., 57. Engl. “Cockroaches make themselves at home straight away / Whether one likes them or not”.

the predictability of the conceits, the ease with which we see through them, that begins to erode the allegorical credentials of the text. To paraphrase both Fletcher and Barfield, we forget what it *says*, and focus only on what we believe it to *mean*. The parallels with the contemporary situation in the Protectorate, the allusions to the Nazi occupation, are so thinly veiled, so obvious, that the poem stops being truly polysemic. Its figurative significance outweighs and overshadows the literal. The multiplicity of meaning that according to Quilligan we ought to seek and find in texts written in the allegorical mode recedes to the point of becoming irrelevant.<sup>111</sup> For that reason, the term *allegory*, while arguably somewhat more applicable here than in the other poems discussed so far, still ultimately feels faintly redundant.

At this point, it therefore seems prudent to turn our attention to other conspicuous forms of figural language evident at the time. We shall focus on two aspects in particular – the use of metaphor and personification, both of which have already provided us with a number of thought-provoking impulses over the course of this chapter and which we seek to examine as distinct from allegory, not merely two of its constituent parts.

## Metaphorically Speaking

As far as metaphor is concerned, we shall steer clear of the so-called elliptical simile definition – that is, the idea that every metaphor can be restated as a simile, a claim which would see no difference between the sentence “The moon was like a ball in the sky” and its metaphorical counterpart “The moon was a ball in the sky”. Instead, we shall primarily follow David Davidson, who has remarked that “The most obvious semantic difference between simile and metaphor is that all similes are true and most metaphors are false.”<sup>112</sup> He draws a very useful comparison between employing metaphors and telling lies: “The parallel [...] is emphasised by the fact that the same sentence can be used, with meaning unchanged, for either purpose.”<sup>113</sup> If we consider our ball in the sky, it could indeed be seen as both a metaphor for the moon and a lie about the moon’s true nature, depending on the context, the way it is used. It is here – in

111 A similar criticism has of course been levelled by Barfield at Christina Rossetti’s poem *Up-Hill*, albeit without referring to the concept of allegory. Cf. *Barfield: Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction*, 109: “if A is too obvious and could be equally or almost as well expressed by other and more direct means, then the mind jumps straight to A, remains focussed on it, and loses interest in B, which shrinks to a kind of dry and hollow husk.” This description of B would be equally applicable to Nevzal’s *Švábý*.

112 *Davidson: What Metaphors Mean*, 41.

113 *Ibid.*, 43.

the mode and method of the trope's employment – that Davidson situates the main thrust of his argument:

Metaphor runs on the same familiar linguistic tracks that the plainest sentences do [...]. What distinguishes metaphor is not meaning but use – in this it is like assertion, hinting, lying, promising or criticizing. And the special use to which we put language in metaphor is not – cannot be – to “say something” special, no matter how indirectly. For a metaphor *says* only what shows on its face – usually a patent falsehood or an absurd truth. And this plain truth or falsehood needs no paraphrase – it is given in the literal meaning of the words.<sup>114</sup>

Davidson's definition – though originally formulated with everyday rather than specifically poetic speech in mind<sup>115</sup> – also enables us to move away from the idea of hidden meaning that proved so troublesome and overly simplistic in our earlier examination of allegory:

A metaphor does its work through other intermediaries – to suppose it can be effective only by conveying a coded message is like thinking a joke or a dream makes some statement which a clever interpreter can restate in plain prose. Joke or dream or metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact – but not by standing for, or expressing, the fact.<sup>116</sup>

Associations and perceived similarities or areas of potential overlap that we as readers might otherwise have overlooked can begin to take centre stage here. This account of metaphorical language is not polysemic, but it emphasises the way in which metaphor can lead to a new manner of seeing things, of looking at the world through different eyes.

A prominent example of this kind of technique from the late 1930s and early 1940s is the metaphorical use of scenes of natural catastrophe. Rajendra Chitnis has, for example, noted how such images were employed by novelist Václav Prokúpek in order to convey a particular view of the political and social situation of the time:

Here we register a cyclical vision of the countryside, which is depicted in Prokúpek's novels above all in elderly characters, the vagabond Linka or the chronicler Kazda in

114 Ibid.

115 Barfield has, of course, to a certain extent argued that the two are, when all is said and done, if not quite one and the same, then at least more worthy of comparison as one might imagine. Cf. *Barfield: Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction*, 107: “I do not say that these particular methods of expression [simile, metaphor and symbolism] are an absolute *sine qua non* of poetic diction. They are not. Poetry may also take the form of simple and literal statement. But figurative expression is found everywhere; its roots descend very deep, as we shall see, into the nature, not only of poetry, but of language itself.” Following this, it does not seem too much of a great leap to avail ourselves of Davidson's work for the purposes of this study.

116 *Davidson: What Metaphors Mean*, 46.

*Nebi nad námi*. They mirror the collective memory of the area and are able to relativise every catastrophe because they know what came before it and that nothing better awaits in the future. This view of the German occupation of course fundamentally diverged from that which cast the fight against Nazism and fascism as a decisive battle between good and evil.<sup>117</sup>

The notion of cyclicity in relation to the poetry of this period is a subject that we discussed in the previous chapter. It helps to put contemporary events within a larger – and thus somehow more manageable, less inherently frightening – context. However, we would argue that much of our poetry in fact represents a third way of looking at the occupation of the Czech lands and other related national calamities, distinct from the two mentioned by Chitnis. The knowledge that there have been similar disasters in the past can also be a source of hope, of the belief in the potential for renewal, as opposed to the pessimistic view represented by Prokúpek's curmudgeonly old men. In short: if nature can spring back then so too might the Czech nation.

## When Disaster Strikes

From the retelling of the Biblical plagues in Halas' *Deset ran egyptských* to the portentous rolling of thunder in the title poem of Seifert's *Zhasněte světla*, depictions of irrepressible natural phenomena play an important role in allusions to contemporary events. Perhaps the most obvious example, however, of this kind of metaphorical use of language and imagery can be found in Nezval's *Malá Atlantida* (Engl. "Little Atlantis") from the 1939 collection *Pět minut za městem*. Here, it is not so much tempestuous weather or cataclysmic crop failure that interests the poet, but rather the idea of a flood, of a place that has been inundated and left to moulder.<sup>118</sup>

- 117 *Chitnis: Zbraně slabých?*, 686: "Zaznamenáváme zde cyklické vidění venkova, které Prokúpek ve svých románech zobrazuje především v postavách starých lidí, tuláka Linky nebo kronikáře Kazdý v *Nebi nad námi*. Ti představují jakousi kolektivní paměť kraje a každou katastrofu dokážou relativizovat, protože vědí, co bylo, a budoucnu nečekají nic lepšího. Takováto představa německé okupace se ovšem zásadně lišila od té, která boj s nacismem a fašismem viděla jako rozhodující boj dobra se zlem."
- 118 Similar imagery, can also be found in Halas' *Pod Zvičinou* and *Březen 1939* from the collection *Ladění*. In the former, the speaker addresses a "krajino vidin" (Engl. "landscape of hallucinations") and refers to the "kotva archy kraje ztraceného" (Engl. "anchor of the ark of a lost region") and how the River Elbe "hučí skrytou povodní" (Engl. "roars with a hidden flood"), while in the latter the idea of the occupation as an inundation is amplified against a backdrop of confusion and violence. A reference to an imminent flood can equally be found in his earlier poem *Mobilisace* (Engl. "Mobilisation") from the 1938 collection *Torzo naděje*, when the speaker addresses the world around him and

The work is made up of twenty-four sestets with a regular *aabbcc* rhyme scheme. Initially, the speaker remains primarily in the background, describing the scene, how things used to be and what they have become. The former bedroom of the innkeeper has become a daytime roosting spot for creatures of the night:

Tam kde spával  
Hostinský jenž tropil kravál  
Lítá výr  
Mezitím co netopýr  
Visí na zdi pod diplomem  
V síňce jež se stala lomem<sup>119</sup>

The place of man seems to have been usurped or rather reappropriated by nature and many other things have been transformed here, given a new purpose, albeit rarely for the better: “Lomenice / Proměněné v šibenice”<sup>120</sup>. We are also shown the ruins of farmsteads (“Kostrý dvorů”<sup>121</sup>). In light of Bolton’s aforementioned work on ruins and their symbolic status, this is obviously a significant reference. Interestingly though, the ruins here are described in organic terms, as that which is left behind when something dies. The farmsteads have not just fallen into disrepair, they have perished or been struck down, a far more hyperbolic way of looking at things. Deterioration, dereliction and, above all, death are in fact all around, and more is on the way:

Trosky žlabů  
Plné svinek krys a švábů  
Páchnou tak  
Že se vyhne jim i mrak  
Jenž se právě strojil k dešti  
Pluje dál a vraždu věští<sup>122</sup>

presciently suggests that its doom is just around the corner: “Ty světe před potopou” (Engl. “You world before the flood”). Moreover, beyond the world of poetry, it worth noting that an image of a flood is afforded a prominent place in journalist Milena Jesenková’s obituary of Karel Čapek since this indicates that the trope is not merely poetic in nature, but very much rooted in contemporary experience: “Like a flood, the year 1938 washed away the rocks that had previously seemed so firm.”, quoted in *Bolton: The Ruins of a Republic*, 125.

119 *Nezval: Pět minut za městem*, 24. Engl. “Where once the innkeeper / who made a racket / used to sleep / there flies an eagle owl / While a bat / Is hanging on the wall beneath the diploma / In the hall which has become a quarry”.

120 *Ibid.*, 26. Engl. “A gable / Transformed into a scaffold”.

121 *Ibid.*, 23. Engl. “Skeletons of farmsteads”.

122 *Nezval: Pět minut za městem*, 26. Engl. “The wreckage of mangers / Full of woodlice rats and cockroaches / Smells so bad / That even the cloud / which had just conspired to rain avoids them / It floats on and portends murder”.

Stairs that are presumably no longer in use are referred to as being now deceased (“Mrtvé schody / Po nichž se šlo do hospody”<sup>123</sup>). Even the usual decay of natural materials is given violent connotations, reminiscent of extreme punitive measures, the heavy hand of the law, or perhaps the depths of despair that lead to suicide: “Mezitím co loňský věnec / Černá jako oběšenec”<sup>124</sup>. Either way, the impression is not a positive one and does little to lift our spirits. The poem is also characterised by an emphasis upon signalling location. There is a huge number of prepositions of place and it is almost as if things are being fastened down, put in a better position to withstand a second flood, should the waters rise again.

There is only one moment here when the speaker’s narration takes on a more personal note and that is in the second stanza, when he refers to the effect of seeing this devastated place, comparing it to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, as depicted in the Old Testament: “Při nichž myslíš na Gomoru / [...] Při nichž myslíš na Sodomu”<sup>125</sup> Though in the form of the second person singular, it feels more like a self-address or a generalising statement than a direct articulation to another. In the final third of the poem, however, the speaker does come to fore, and brings someone else with him too, an unnamed beloved, whom he addresses openly.

He recalls an earlier visit to this place and reminds her of the fact, how beautiful the day was – such a contrast to the present situation – and how they found their way by accident:

Loni v létě  
Byli jsme tu na výletě  
Miláčku  
Nebe bylo bez mráčku  
V den kdy jsme sem zabloudili  
Cestou z osamělé vily<sup>126</sup>

There is something deeply and almost impossibly idyllic about his memories, bordering at times on the blinkered. It does not apparently matter what is around the speaker in physical terms because it is always heavenly when his beloved is with him:

Nikdy dosud  
Nedaroval lidem osud  
Víc než nám

123 Ibid., 24. Engl. “Dead stairs / Which used to lead to the pub”.

124 Ibid., 26. Engl. “While last year’s wreath / Is black like a hanged man”.

125 Ibid., 23. Engl. “At which you think of Gomorrah / [...] At which you think of Sodom”.

126 Ibid., 27. Engl. “Last year in the summer / We were here on a trip / My love / The sky of clear of clouds / On the day when we found our way here by accident / On the way from the lonely villa”.

Štěstí že jsem nešel sám  
 Štěstí že jsem šel tím krajem  
 S tou s níž jít je pro mne rájem<sup>127</sup>

That said, the first three lines quoted here, may also have a sarcastic undercurrent. When taken alone, and word *nám* (“to us”) understood in the sense of a larger collective such as the inhabitants of the drowned setting of the poem (which, as we shall discuss, may well to a certain extent stand for the Czech lands) as opposed to merely the speaker and his beloved, then the gift that has been given by fate does not necessarily have to something positive. Thus, instead, it could imply that in fact never before has fate been so cruel.

The sense of the impossibility of the couple’s experiences becomes more and more pronounced as the poem draws to its close. The speaker implies that the paradise that they found on their day out may have only been a phantom, and reproaches his beloved for playing along:

Proč sis sedla  
 Proč jsi se mnou pila jedla  
 Vidinu  
 Víc než celou hodinou  
 V tomto domě plném jasu  
 V domě v kterém není času<sup>128</sup>

This timeless place is said to have remained dry even when the landscape became a lake (“na dně kraje jenž se mění / V jezero”<sup>129</sup>). As we learn in the very last stanza, it is a house of ghosts and yet it is where the couple are most at home:

V domě duchů  
 V kterém zůstalo vše v suchu  
 Pod vodou  
 Tam je domácnost nás dvou  
 Nás kdož žijem při vši bídě  
 V Atlantidě v Atlantidě<sup>130</sup>

127 Ibid. Engl. “Never before / Had fate gifted people / More than us / Good fortune that I did not walk alone / Good fortune that I went through the landscape / With the one with whom for me it is heaven to walk”.

128 Ibid., 28. Engl. “Why did you sit down / Why did you drink eat with me / The phantom / For more than a whole hour / in that house full of radiance / In the house where there is no time”.

129 Ibid., 29. Engl. “On the floor of the landscape which is changing / Into a lake”.

130 Ibid. Engl. “In the house of ghosts / In which everything stayed dry / Beneath the water / he household of the two of us is there / We who live next to all the misery / In Atlantis in Atlantis”.

The poem thus ends with the idea of a conscious retreat away from reality, from the hardships of everyday life, towards a mini-utopia, a temporary sanctuary that is surely – just like Atlantis – still ultimately doomed.

If, following Davidson's understanding of the concept, we assume that the flood depicted in *Malá Atlantida* is a metaphor for the events of late 1938 and early 1939, then we are probably being encouraged to notice certain similarities between what befell the Czech lands and the workings of a natural disaster – its immense power, its transformative effect, the unpredictability of its occurrence. After all, it is only in retrospect that the speaker can state that he was there the week *before* the flood, at the time this would not have been apparent (“Šli jsme opuštěnou stopou / V ráji týden před potopou”<sup>131</sup>). If we home in on the Biblical references and the allusion to the mythical destruction of Atlantis<sup>132</sup>, then questions might be raised as to the issue of collective guilt, of the calamity having been brought about by the actions of those living in this place. This could correspond to recriminations among the Czech people in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement, to accusations of failure levelled at the political elite. It begs the question of whether such things might have been avoided, had another course of action been undertaken, had people behaved differently. If, however, we focus instead on the flood as a naturally-occurring phenomenon, then the answer to this would be a resounding no. The sudden onset of rushing water – and with it the growing tide of Nazi aggression – would be taken as something inexorable, inevitable, something that could not be held back and that was quite simply destined to be. This thought might offer a kind of absolution and a degree of comfort, too. We are aware that such things have happened before, and that they will happen again, but we also know that nature always rights itself in the end.

### ***Fictio Personae***

Turning our attention away from the strictly metaphorical, to a trope that can equally have its basis in metonymy or synecdoche, it may also be helpful to our enquiries into the non-literal narrative and representational techniques employed by our poets to consider the use of personification. This figure of speech has already cropped up on several occasions over the course of the chapter, but we have yet to give it its theoretical due. As mentioned during our

131 Ibid., 27. Engl. “We went along the abandoned trail / In paradise the week before the flood”.

132 The use of the word *malá* (“small”) in the title is also perhaps significant here given that the Czechs are renowned as a *malý národ* (“small nation”), since this would strengthen the idea of an analogy between the Czech lands and Atlantis.

discussion of notions of allegory, the two terms are often employed in close conjunction to one another, sometimes even used almost interchangeably. Such a conflation is, however, imprecise, if not indeed downright erroneous.<sup>133</sup> Like allegory, personification has experienced major fluctuations in popularity over the centuries and has received precious little scholarly attention. Only rarely has it been the subject of serious attempts at codification. Perhaps one of the most prominent exceptions to this rule is James Paxson's trail-blazing study from the early 1990s *The poetics of personification*. In it, he sketches a convincing taxonomy of the trope, which may serve as a useful jumping-off point for further investigation.

Although he views personification as a "compound entity"<sup>134</sup>, this is not exactly meant in a polysemic sense as is the case with allegory. Instead, Paxson depicts personification as a form of translation that in its semiotic structure shares certain similarities with Ferdinand Saussure's notion of the signifier and the signified as the foundation stones of all language:

The personification figure is the material translation of one quality (often ideational or abstract) into another (usually a person). But the abstract ontological status of "translation" is figured in terms of a strong material metaphor: containment. Given this conception, we can see the hierarchical inner / outer form of the personification figure resembles that of the sign understood by structuralists.<sup>135</sup>

The case for regarding personification and allegory as two separate figures of speech is made even more strongly by Jeremy Tambling, who argues that

Where allegoresis draws attention to hidden or abstract meanings, and allegory stresses that the surface meaning is not the ultimate quarry of interpretation, personification emphasizes the face which appears, which is, by definition, the surface meaning. In this way, allegory and personification work, characteristically, in opposite modes.<sup>136</sup>

Echoing the efforts of earlier scholars of rhetoric such as Bede and Quintilian, Paxson identifies six potential sources and objects of translation: *humans, non-human life forms, inanimate objects, places, abstract ideas* and *deities*. "A member of any one of these six categories can", he writes, "be figurally translated into a member of any other."<sup>137</sup> This mixing and matching may, according to Paxson, lead not only to personification, but also to other lin-

133 Cf. *Melion*, Walter S./*Ramakers*, Bartholomeus A. M.: Personification: An Introduction. In: *Melion*, Walter S./*Ramakers*, Bartholomeus A. M. (eds.): Personification. Embodying Meaning and Emotion. Leiden 2016, 2f.

134 *Paxson*, James J.: The poetics of personification. Cambridge 1994, 39.

135 *Ibid.*, 38 f.

136 *Tambling*, Jeremy: Allegory. London 2010, 171.

137 *Paxson*: The poetics of personification, 43.

guistic and rhetorical phenomena such as reification. Indeed, Paxson takes pains to delineate the true contours of the tropes involved. He is dissatisfied with much of the identification of personification that has gone before him and seeks greater classificatory rigour:

Lending speech to mute things (animals or objects) can be seen as a figural maneuver distinct from lending “a definite form” to something without physical contour, something insubstantial<sup>138</sup>.

In particular, he calls for acknowledgement of the distinction between anthropomorphism (“the figural translation of any non-human quantity into a character that has human form”<sup>139</sup>) and personification, which he describes more specifically as “the translation of any non-human quantity into a sentient human capable of thought and language, possessing *voice* and *face*.”<sup>140</sup> At other stages in the book, Paxson is a little less rigid in his definition, but still maintains that not all personifications are created equally. They do not, he suggests, always exhibit the same degree of agency or ability to influence the diegetic world around them:

A personification figure, in simplest terms, must at least be a *local* rhetorical ornament. Personification characterization refers specifically to employment of the trope in the narratological invention of actual characters, objects, or places that occupy the material space-time of the fabular or “story” level of a narrative text. To paraphrase Hillis Miller, there are two personifications. The first is for the most part self-contained in a phrase or line. The second is an extension of the first into a complete narrative world.<sup>141</sup>

This we would not dispute, but we must recognise that in the poetry of our period, personifications that walk and talk with the speaker do not really put in an appearance. Rather, for the most part, we find ourselves looking at a grey area, poised somewhere between anthropomorphism and the lesser forms of personification. *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce* this is not.

## Let Them Speak or Forever Hold Their Peace

We can, however, find at least one poem – Halas’ *Loutna* (Engl. “The lute”) from the collection *Ladění* – which appears to give a fairly accurate account of what it means to personify: “Předzpívám neživé zhaslé věci / dobrotu hlasu

138 Ibid., 14.

139 Ibid., 42.

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid., 35.

jim dám”<sup>142</sup>. The nature and demands of the poetic arts are indeed one of the overarching topoi of that collection and this allusion may well emphasise the importance of personification within the craft as a whole, the poet’s special ability to bring about such transformations. In Halas’ earlier poem *Zpěv úzkosti*, we are shown, as briefly mentioned in Chapter One, the upshot of giving a voice to something non-human, namely topographical elements – fields, forests, rivers and mountains.<sup>143</sup> Even if we do not hear the exact words, the message of unbridled outrage is clear. This is particularly the case because the onomatopoeic verbs involved (*křičet* “to shout”, *hučet* “to murmur”, *šumet* “to whisper”, *bouřit* “to rave”) suggest either raised voices and emotions out of control or at least an inability to remain silent, a need to speak up. Halas also renders certain abstract concepts such as folly in human terms, capitalising the word to distinguish it from its everyday counterpart: “Pošetilost má ta spanilá”<sup>144</sup> This may be a mute depiction, but it does at least have a face and not just a form, for how else could this vision of the vice be fair?

For the most part, however, figures of speech of this sort refer primarily to the Czech lands and, in particular, the capital Prague, as opposed to more general abstractions. In Hora’s *Jan houslista*, for example, we meet the city in a more rather more intimate way than a conventional or literal account of its architecture and varied quarters would allow:

I kámen zní tu, dýchá, zpívá,  
a znepokojuje náš sen.  
Kde je tvá duše, Praho živá,  
kde věků duch spí zabořen?  
Spí v přítmi svatovítských stěn?  
Či na hřbitovech Vyšehradu?  
Ve čtvrtích béd a polohladu,  
v trezorech bank a záložen?  
Spí v tónech, které vylákala  
tvořivá ruka z noci v den?  
V melodiích, jimž vroucnost dala  
mateřská ústa mrtvých žen?<sup>145</sup>

142 Halas: *Časy*, 173. Engl. “I sing to lifeless, extinguished things / I give them the goodness of a voice”.

143 Ibid., 101: “Pole naše křičí Zrada / Lesy naše hučí Hanba / Řeky naše šumí Zrada / Hory naše bouří Hanba” (Engl. “Our fields shout Betrayal, our forests murmur Shame, our rivers whisper Betrayal, our mountains rave Betrayal”).

144 Ibid., 183. Engl. “my Folly, that fair one”.

145 Hora: *Knih domova*, 103. Engl. “Even the stone rings out here, it sings / and troubles our dreams. / Where is your soul, living Prague, / where does the spirit of the ages sleep buried? / Does it sleep in the gloom of the walls of St. Vitus? Or at the cemetery of Vyšehrad? In districts of woe and half starvation, / in the vaults of private banks and savings banks? Does it sleep in notes that were lured out / by a creative hand from the

We get a sense of the many parts which make up the city – its building blocks, the stones, and its many landmarks such as the cemetery at Vyšehrad or the St. Vitus Cathedral, not to mention the people who live and have lived here, the melodies of their songs or at least the echoes thereof. Since stone too is said to sing in the first line of the stanza, the final four lines not only pick up again on this motif, but also make us wonder about the true nature of music – whether it is something of organic origin or more inanimate provenance, whether it blurs the line between that which is living and that which is not. Much is seen here through socially conscious eyes, sensitive to deprivation and inequality, the efforts of hard-working hands, standing in *pars pro toto* for the lower classes. At the same time though, we are also given to believe that the city itself is alive (“Praho živá”) and has a soul that is slumbering somewhere. It may not respond verbally to the speaker’s questions (or at least we are not privy to the reply), but the very fact that he poses them indicates that he regards Prague as a specific entity with its own personality, not merely a conglomeration of buildings.<sup>146</sup>

Moreover, by viewing the city in faintly human terms, a potential conversational partner, its history also takes on possible new meaning. Such a place is not merely the site of historical events, a location from the past and still in use in the present, but offers a certain continuity between the two. In personified or at least anthropomorphised form, Prague is more than just the physical record of what has gone before, but may have its own faculties of memory, the ability to recall. Any violence or crimes committed against it are therefore doubly significant, an attack with increased moral consequences that will not be hushed up or swiftly forgotten.

When it comes to such depictions, it is also worth noting that there is a particular emphasis upon the feminine. Though the words all appear with considerable regularity, it tends to be the *vlast* or the *rodná země*, rather than the *domov*, which are treated as if they were human characters, female by virtue both of their grammatical gender and the connotations they evoke.<sup>147</sup> The

night into the day? / In melodies that were given fervency by / the maternal mouths of dead women?”

146 If we add to this the idea of reading a city as a text, then any personification thereof is likely to be in a privileged position to tell the story of its existence, not least because, as Paxson reminds us: “Narration comprises yet another category of speech that is possible among prosopopoetic characters.” Cf. *Paxson: The poetics of personification*, 58.

147 An exception to this is Halas’ poem *Loučení* (Engl. “Taking leave”) from the collection *Ladění*, which includes a brief, if direct address to the speaker’s native land and a simile that, while not exactly transforming the place, does at least hint at a form other than what one would expect from a geographical location: “Jako ta kapka slunce / v slupce hroznové / takový byl jsi domove / domove můj a kamarádů” (Engl. “Like that drop of sun / in grape skin / that’s how you were homeland / my homeland and that of friends”). In: *Halas: Časy*, 177. It is, however, very much in the minority when we examine our corpus of texts as a whole.

very adjective *rodný* (“native” in both senses of the word) is, of course, related to *rodit* (“to give birth”) and therefore to motherhood as well. This focus on traditionally feminine attributes is in keeping with standard rhetorical and representational practice within the world of personification<sup>148</sup>, yet nevertheless still has some intriguing implications.

If we consider the portrayal of the speaker’s native land in Seifert’s *Píseň o vlasti*, for example, we find ourselves dealing not with a mother, but with a lover or at least an object of the speaker’s utmost affections. Here we may even be tempted to see this depiction as evidence of what was once called *passionate personification* as opposed to *descriptive*; that is, figures brought about due to a surfeit of emotion on the part of the speaker<sup>149</sup> – in this case primarily a mixture of both romantic love and patriotism, together with tenderness, nostalgia and fears about the current situation, not to mention the future. The land is represented as having human form and a face, albeit one that appears to be veiled:

Já spatřil jsem ji z okna vlaku,  
ta ňadra, oči, obojí!  
Láska ji vyznal bez rozpaků.  
Sníh první ležel na chvoji  
a byla jako v závoji.<sup>150</sup>

There is no doubt as to this figure’s womanliness, but according to speaker, when the desire he feels towards her begins to stir anew during the train journey, it is pure, organic even, as the use of the word *klíčit* (“to sprout”) indicates: “Zas nové touhy v srdci klíčí / a je to láska nevinná”<sup>151</sup>.

Again, this is, of course, a mute personification as far as the reader is concerned, but the fact that it and others of its kind do not tend to be given the power of speech within the text may – far from disqualifying them from being viewed as valid examples of the trope – in fact have its own additional significance. In this particular case, given that the land is initially described as a rather chaste figure, it is not perhaps surprising that she demurs, that she is not overly forward in public or seen to be encouraging his affections. It would be unseemly for her to do otherwise. The later description of her concrete

148 As Gombrich has noted, the most well-known examples are almost invariably female figures. Cf. *Gombrich*, Ernst H.: Personification. In: *Bolger*, R. R. (ed.): *Classic Influences on European Culture A. D. 500–1500*. Cambridge 1971, 248.

149 Cf. *Paxson*: The poetics of personification, 26.

150 *Seifert*: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 192. Engl. “I saw her from the window of the train / those breasts, eyes, all of them! / Without embarrassment I confessed my love to her / The first snow lay on the branches / and she was as if in a veil.”

151 *Ibid.* Engl. “New desires sprout again in my heart / and it is an innocent love”.

corset, which, as mentioned in Chapter One, appears to be an allusion to the necessary militarisation of the Czech(oslovak) borderlands in the build-up to the Munich Agreement, may have rather more erotic undertones, but its constricting nature would also offer an explanation for her lack of response. Above all, though, such silence could be construed as being indicative of the sudden impotence of the Czech lands, the loss of that former voice and of any political power on the world stage. These places may have fallen silent in shock or grief, be at a loss for words, speechless with rage. They may well also stand synecdochially for the Czech people as a whole, and thus represent their experience of a newly restricted and restrictive society. Allowing only the speaker to pass comment or to articulate specific feelings dramatically augments his influence, and with it the rhetorical reach of both the implied and empirical author. What is at stake here is therefore perhaps, most of all, the perception of the contemporary poet as being in a unique position to speak the truth, to say – and, owing to his singularity and social standing, with some authority – what others cannot.

Over the course of the poem, the speaker draws an implicit parallel between his feelings for his homeland and those he felt towards earlier sweethearts, but, at the same time, is equally keen to make an important distinction between them. He addresses the land directly and indicates that it – unlike those fleeting former infatuations – is unforgettable, a constant in his life, his ardour for which will not be dampened by time or changed circumstance:

Na každou člověk zapomíná,  
 ať na tu nebo na onu,  
 ale má země, ty jsi jiná<sup>152</sup>

As before in the case of Hora's depiction of Prague, we can see the many advantages to be had in using a form of personification here. By virtue of gender stereotypes, the speaker's homeland as a female figure acquires an innocence and fragility that it might not otherwise have had. It becomes something both to protect and to revere. Patriotism is cast in a new light, framed as something as uplifting and worthy as *eros* and *agape* combined.

152 Ibid. Engl. "A man forgets them all / whether this one or that / but you my country, you are different".

## Personifying Prague

Another poem where we might expect to find a similar use of personification is Seifert's three-part composition from 1940, *Světlem oděná*<sup>153</sup>. The work focusses upon Prague, upon some of the city's most famous sites and certain figures from its chequered past, most notably poet Jaroslav Vrchlický, an incarnation of whom the speaker encounters in the final section:

Jednoho dne neznámého roku  
šel jsem Ostruhovou ke Hradu  
potkal jsem tam muže v haveloku<sup>154</sup>

Vrchlický is instantly recognisable because of the nicotine stains on his hand ("jeho prst byl střísněn nikotinem"<sup>155</sup>). Although the speaker refers to him as a prince among poets ("tento básník kníže"<sup>156</sup>), Vrchlický does not make the speaker feel inferior: "ten, jemuž se každý pokoří, / přece jen mě nepokořil"<sup>157</sup>. The speaker asks Vrchlický for direction(s) "zda zná cestu k hvězdám, / kde je možno skrýt se před smrtí"<sup>158</sup>, but the great poet does not seem to be able help: "Ale básník zavrtí hlavou / aby tiše řekl mi: tu neznám."<sup>159</sup> The meeting is still valuable for the speaker, however, because it brings him to an important conclusion of his own about the cyclical nature of life, one that relativises the devastation wrought by death: "umíráme, aby jiní žili"<sup>160</sup>. The very idea of giving those, who – like Vrchlický – are no longer with us, a recognisable form and a new way of speaking harks back to certain classical conceptions of personification<sup>161</sup>, but it is not by any means the only example to be found here.

153 According to his memoirs, this was a poem of which Seifert was particularly fond and always glad to recall, not least because of the difficult circumstances of its composition in the middle of the war and the fact that it was spared censorship thanks to Vilém Kostka. Cf. *Seifert: Všecky krásy světa*, 540.

154 *Seifert, Jaroslav: Dílo. Vol. 6: Vějíř Boženy Němcové – Světlem oděná – Kamenný most. Praha 2005*, 63. Engl. "One day in an unknown year / I walked along Ostruhová Street [actually Nerudova Street by then] to the Castle, / there I met a man in a great coat".

155 *Ibid.* Engl. "his finger was stained with nicotine".

156 *Ibid.* Engl. "this poet prince".

157 *Ibid.* Engl. "he, to whom everyone submits / nevertheless then did not make me feel small".

158 *Ibid.*, 64. Engl. "whether he knew the path to the stars, / where it is possible to hide from death".

159 *Ibid.* Engl. "But the poet wags his head / in order to tell me quietly: I do not know it."

160 Engl. "we die so that others may live".

161 Cf. *Paxson: The poetics of personification*, 12: "For Demetrius, prosopopeia can be the apostrophic 'making present' of a dead ancestor as well as the anthropomorphizing and lending of speech to a conceptually abstract, geopolitical state. [...] The summoning of

A long walk taken by the speaker provides the structuring narrative for the poem. He is obviously familiar with his surroundings, passing on greetings to particular places as if they were old friends:

Pozdravujte lesy kolem Týna,  
padající měkce do rovin.  
Pozdravujte ještě Karlův Týn,  
pozdravujte stráně plné vína.<sup>162</sup>

He is also physically affected by being at home:

V světě nikde žížeň neuhášíš,  
jenom doma, tam ti jedinež  
chutná v studni voda po víně  
silnější než opium a hašiš.<sup>163</sup>

The water here is not merely the only kind that can quench his thirst, but also has an intoxicating side-effect, assuming the role of wine and drugs. Much is made of the beauty of the city around him. Initially we are told that “Praha byla krásnější než Řím”<sup>164</sup>, but as the stroll continues, the speaker corrects himself, declaring Prague to be even more beautiful than before as it becomes half-shrouded in silvery mist:

Praha byla krásnější než dřív,  
stříbro mlhy s nebe splývající  
zakrylo ji zpola do tkaniv.<sup>165</sup>

Alexandr Stich may have expressed some surprise at the limited geographical scope of the poem, its focus on the historic centre of Prague, which he suggests sets it apart from the rest of the author’s oeuvre.<sup>166</sup> However, if we see *Světlem*

ancestors is an elementary kind of ‘apostrophic’ prosopopeia, and it requires no actual ‘invention’ or materialization of a character who has never before possessed a human form. Unlike an abstraction or a piece of land, the ancestor has indeed enjoyed human form. He is only currently ‘removed’ in a temporal sense, not an ontological sense.” Vrchlický may not have been an actual ancestor of Seifert or his speaker, but they may still perhaps be described as being of the same kin, as poetic brethren, even.

162 *Seifert: Vějíř Boženy Němcové – Světlem oděná – Kamenný most*, 43. Engl. “Say hello to the forests around Týn, / falling softly onto the plains. / Say hello to Karlštejn as well, / say hello to the hillside full of vines.”

163 *Ibid.*, 60. Engl. “Nowhere in the world can you quench your thirst / only at home, solely there does / the water in the spring taste like wine to you / stronger than opium and hashish.”

164 *Ibid.*, 43. Engl. “Prague was more beautiful than Rome”.

165 *Ibid.* 45. Engl. “Prague was more beautiful than before, / the silver of the mist merging with the sky / half covered her down to the fibres”

166 Stich, Alexandr: *Seifertova Světlem oděná*. Interpretace: pokus a výzva. Praha 1998, 29.

*oděná* as an attempt to encapsulate something of the essence of the city, to lay bare both its literal and figurative heart, then the emphasis upon central places such as Prague Castle and the Vltava makes a good deal of sense. What is more, it is worth noting that that this interest in the centre as opposed to the periphery can be found in several of Seifert's shorter compositions from the period.<sup>167</sup>

The city is filled with the sort of translations described by Paxson. Not only are abstract concepts of time, such as moments, treated as if they are capable of conscious movement and possessed of the ability to listen, but the speaker himself expresses a desire to transform into a non-human creature that might be camouflaged among the trees:

Stůj a stůj, můj sladký okamžiku,  
chtěl bych znít jak vzpomínka a smích  
a pak obléci se do hadříků  
ptačích per a zmizet ve větvích.<sup>168</sup>

The physical statues of the city are referred to both in organic terms, able to propagate and expand, and as communing, becoming one with the non-physical notion of darkness: "Sochy srostly s tmou"<sup>169</sup>. There is even also a brief reference to the Golem:

Do tmy vejde stín a člověk v hlínu,  
milost tmy buď přána oběma,  
ale já se děším Golema  
jemuž by se chtělo pomstít vinu.<sup>170</sup>

This is not only an allusion to one of the most famous myths of Prague, but equally represents an extreme form of anthropomorphism – the successful transformation of inanimate matter into a human-like being, something that can walk, but not talk. There is a sense of indistinguishability – where in

167 Cf. e.g. individual poems such as *Vlajka na hradě, Česká modlitba* (Engl. "Czech prayer"), *Nad hrobkou českých králů* (Engl. "Above the crypt of the kings of Bohemia"), all of which allude to significant locations in the centre of the city rather than on its outskirts. A notable exception to this trend is his *Podzimní vzpomínka* (Engl. "Autumnal memory"), though, which refers to the peripheral site of Bilá hora and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

168 *Seifert: Vějíř Boženy Němcové – Světlem oděná – Kamenný most*, 46. Engl. "Stand still and stand still, my sweet moment / I would like to ring out like a memory and laughter / and then dress myself in rags / of birds' feathers and disappear in the branches."

169 *Ibid.*, 61. Engl. "Statues grown together with the darkness".

170 *Ibid.*, 47. Engl. "A shadow enters the darkness and human goes into the clay / let the mercy of the darkness be wished for by both, / but I am afraid of the Golem / who would like to avenge the guilt."

the dark do the shadows end, where does life begin and matter end – not to mention a corruption of the Biblical story of the Creation.

Some self-contained allusions such as “Řeka svoji píseň nevymění / za sto let”<sup>171</sup> may initially appear to have an obvious and fairly simple metaphorical meaning – one that draws a personifying parallel between the noises produced naturally by a river and the man-made sounds found in song (since singing requires a voice, Paxson ought to be satisfied that we are indeed dealing here with personification rather than mere anthropomorphism). However, in this particular case, where the river in question is the Vltava, there is, in fact, a secondary meaning that may prove more significant. There can, after all, be only one true song of the river and that is Bedřich Smetana’s *Vltava*, the most famous of the six symphonic poems that make up his magnum opus *Má vlast*, sometimes also referred to in English by its German name *Die Moldau*. In this reading, the lines go far beyond simply expressing the longevity and constancy of the natural world. Instead, they become a promise of tenacity and a refusal to turn one’s back on the past. They articulate a kind of cultural continuum, an ever-flowing river of symbols and artefacts which help to keep alive a sense of Czech national identity in spite of contemporary threats.

The title of the poem indicates that quite aside from the aforementioned figuratively charged elements and scenery, the very notion of Prague here is one that affords the city a form that can be clad or robed, i. e. a human form. It marks something of a departure from the earlier collection *Zhasněte světla* and in particular the poem *Praha v černém*. We have clearly moved beyond the sombre need for a city-wide blackout of the late 1930s and experience a frisson of optimism at the idea that Prague – the Golden City – is illuminated once again. Such an image has obvious symbolic significance, but since the speaker refers to being out and about not only in the evening (“Jednoho dne šel jsem pozdě k šeru”<sup>172</sup>), but also in the early morning (“Jednoho dne šel jsem časně zrána”<sup>173</sup>), the source of this light could equally be rather more prosaic – either the sunset or the sunrise. The unusual turn-of-phrase *pozdě k šeru* (“getting on for dusk”) is reminiscent of Karel Hlaváček’s Decadent masterpiece *Pozdě k ránu* (Engl. “Getting on for morning”), however this moment of intertextuality is by no means an isolated case. The aforementioned reference to Rome echoes an earlier address of Prague by Svatopluk Čech (“jsi vábný Neapol, jsi hrdý Řím!”<sup>174</sup>), ultimately providing an even more flattering view of the city thanks to the comparative, which suggests superiority, while the use of the word *zmaten* (“confused”, “confounded”) provides

171 Ibid. 56. Engl. “The river will not change its song / in a hundred years”.

172 Ibid., 43. Engl. “One day I was walking as it was getting on for dusk”.

173 Ibid. Engl. “One day I was walking early in the morning”.

174 Engl. “you’re a seductive Naples, you’re a proud Rome!”

a connection to Hora's much more recent poem *Dvakrát nad Prahou*, briefly discussed in the previous chapter<sup>175</sup>:

Zmaten stojím blízko majestátu,  
k žebrákům se tisknu do rohu,  
nepřišel jsem plakat do achátů,  
neboť dávno plakat nemohu.<sup>176</sup>

As with Hora's poem, there is an admirable degree of stout-heartedness on show here, despite the apparent confusion or bafflement, the unpleasantness of the situation described, though in this case, the use of verb *stát* ("to stand") as opposed to *jít dál* ("to go on") indicates a kind of tenacious stasis more than any activity. These are only a handful of examples, but already we can see how Seifert criss-crosses through the literary generations, seeking and finding inspiration from what feels like a veritable *Who's Who* of Czech poetry.

Furthermore, there is something frankly erotic about the speaker's depiction of Prague. The city, represented at first by one of its many hundreds of towers, is linked to the idea of a lissom dancer and, in particular, her feet, part of the body most frequently fetishised:

Se střevíčkem pružné tanečnice  
špička věže k mrakům vylétla,  
a když kaštan rozsvítil své svíce,  
oděla se Praha do světla<sup>177</sup>

The phallic symbolism of the tower and the chestnut tree gives way to the feminine. In the final line we bear witness to the scene that the title of the poem pre-empts: the enrobing of Prague. Yet if it is only now that the city's modesty is covered, then up until this moment she must have been in a state of undress and our gaze, and that of the speaker, becomes a somewhat voyeuristic one.

As part of the personification of Prague, Vrchlický's poetry concerned with the city is also indirectly likened to the work of the *Minnesänger*, and thus the topos of adoration of the female form is maintained: "Ten, který se tolik Praze dvořil / lehkým krokem přešel nádvoří"<sup>178</sup>. The use of the words *dvořit se* ("to court") and *nádvoří* ("courtyard") foregrounds the idea of ritualised courtship and its mediaeval origins on a semantic level since both are derived

175 Cf. "Zmaten lidskou krutostí, jdeš dál" (Engl. "Confounded by human cruelty, you go on"). In: *Hora: Kniha domova*, 30.

176 *Seifert: Vějíř Boženy Němcové – Světlem oděná – Kamenný most*, 44. Engl. "Confused I stand close to the majesty / I huddle into the corner with the beggars / I did not come to cry into the agates / for I have long been unable to cry".

177 *Ibid.*, 46. Engl. "With the slipper of a lissom dancer / the tip of the tower soared up to the clouds / and when the chestnut tree lit up its candles / Prague clad herself in the light".

178 *Ibid.*, 63. Engl. "He, who so courted Prague, / crossed the courtyard with a light step".

from the term *dvůr* (“court”, in the sense of an extended royal household or retinue). If verse composed to sing the praises of Prague is taken as a form of wooing, then logic dictates that, again, we find ourselves confronted with a personified image of the city, one that is able to receive such public expressions of affection. As was the case in *Píseň o vlasti*, the fact that we are not shown the response to such outpourings does not necessarily mean that this notion of a womanly Prague has no voice, merely that it might be inappropriate for her to respond in such a setting for fear of her reputation. Above all though, if Prague is alive, if her waters can intoxicate and her statues grow, if her sweet nature is deserving of our affections, then any attack on the city takes on new meaning and becomes an infinitely worse, more heinous crime. It is an affront to decency, to decorum, a violation of an innocent being, undeserving of such treatment.

Having examined a variety of texts from the late 1930s and early 1940s – both from different authors and from the point of view of different poetic and rhetorical techniques – there can be little doubt that the use of figural language at this time was not merely a cover for expressing sentiments that would not otherwise have made it past the censor. The term allegory, in particular, is, we have seen, a problematic one and should be approached with caution. Metaphor and its polite – and indeed sometimes rather less than polite – nudging of the reader to notice certain similarities, most notably the catastrophic nature of contemporary events, is probably a more fruitful avenue to pursue. Personification and its lesser cousin anthropomorphism are certainly both rife, but, rather than viewing them as simply precursors to or signals of full-blown allegory, we ought to consider them on their own merits. The humanising – and, perhaps more significantly, feminising – depictions of the Czech lands and their capital Prague are remarkable. They point towards a strong tradition from the nineteenth century and impart important messages about fidelity, trust, devotion and beauty. Love – whether in its patriotic or romantic incarnation – is shown to be equally desirable and worthy. Objects of such sentiment are to be protected at all costs, kept safe from harm.

One thing is for sure, whatever additional effects the use of non-literal language may ultimately have, whatever higher purposes it may serve, it certainly always renders the poetic works of this era memorable. As we shall see in the following chapter, however, mnemonic practices in fact run far deeper than mere figurative manoeuvring on the part of the author.



### 3. Shaping a Poetic Past and Future Present

As the cultural scholar Jan Assmann has reminded us, there is a long tradition of poets as the keepers or caretakers of memory.<sup>1</sup> Especially – although by no means exclusively – in oral societies, the public recitation of poetry can provide a means of fixing the stories we wish to tell about ourselves within a particular framework, allowing now faded recollections, mere whispers of memory, the hint of former glory or previous humiliations to take root and propagate. Myths, legends, fabrications – all these and more can potentially stand the test of time provided that they are rendered in a sufficiently memorable way and passed down across the generations. Typical aspects of the poetic form such as rhyme, meter and sound patterning can be powerful tools in such an endeavour since they act as *aides-mémoire*, facilitating easier recollection by appealing to us on multiple levels, for example both semantically and acoustically at the same time. In Seneca's account of the invention of so-called *loci memoriae*, it was even a poet – Simonides – who first employed the mnemonic practice that uses spatial awareness to trigger memory.<sup>2</sup>

When it comes to the world of academia, there has been – as many scholars have already noted – a large and unmistakable upsurge in interest in memory studies across the disciplines over the last few decades. Such efforts provide us with a means of dealing with the past and our relationship to it, without all of the methodological constraints of historical investigation. We are able to approach nations, peoples and other social groups from quite another vantage point than that of conventional historiography, discovering and re-telling new, previously unheard or long forgotten stories about them. If, as Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins have argued “Memory is a central, if not the

- 1 See e.g. Assmann, Jan: Communicative and Cultural Memory. In: Erll, Astrid/Nünning, Ansgar (eds.): Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook. Berlin 2008, 114: “The preservation of the cultural memory of a group was originally the task of the poets. Even today African griots fulfil this function of guardians of cultural memory.” Similar comments can also be found for example in Assmann, Aleida/ Assmann, Jan: Das Gestern im Heute. Medien und soziales Gedächtnis. In: Merten, Klaus/Schmidt, Siegfried J./Weischenberg, Siegfried (eds.): Die Wirklichkeit der Medien. Eine Einführung in die Kommunikationswissenschaft. Wiesbaden 1994, 133.
- 2 For a general introduction to *loci memoriae* and their connection to the more modern conceptual counterpart *lieux de mémoire* see den Boer, Pim, *Loci memoriae – Lieux de mémoire*. In: Erll/Nünning (eds.): Cultural Memory Studies, 19f. On the connection between *memoria artificialis* and allegory / personification, see Melion/Ramakers: Personification: An Introduction, 5.

central, medium through which identities are constituted”<sup>3</sup>, then this boom is perhaps unsurprising, given the current general fascination with matters of identity. However, it would, of course, be wrong to assume that the terms and tools associated with memory are employed in the same way and to the same ends in every field or indeed that its methods have met with universal approval<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, a number of key figures have emerged and left distinctive marks upon wider contemporary thought – perhaps most notably Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora and the aforementioned Jan Assmann, alongside his wife Aleida.

## Differing Approaches to Memory

It was Halbwachs who moved away from earlier approaches to memory that had relied heavily on a psychological understanding of the cognitive mechanisms involved in remembering, and instead turned to its social function and permutations, popularising the term “collective memory”. As Astrid Erll has put it:

Unlike his contemporaries Bergson, Sigmund Freud or Marcel Proust, whose use of the term memory focussed on individuals’ memory processes, Halbwachs was the first to conceptualise memory consistently as a social phenomenon. The term *mémoire collective* is not a metaphor when he uses it.<sup>5</sup>

His emphasis on the social aspects of memory and remembering highlights the importance of interaction, the way in which our memories are influenced by those around us. This understanding runs so deep that for Halbwachs even amnesia caused by severe head injury can be explained in social terms:

it could equally be said that what is damaged is the general capacity to enter into relationships with the groups making up society. The individual becomes separated

3 Olick, Jeffrey K./Robbins, Joyce: Social Memory Studies: From “Collective Memory” to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices. In: American Review of Sociology 24 (1998), 133.

4 For judicious criticism of the wide field of memory studies, see e.g. Kantsteiner, Wulf: Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies. In: History and Theory 41/2 (2002), 179 f.

5 Erll, Astrid: Literatur und kulturelles Gedächtnis: Zur Begriffs- und Forschungsgeschichte, zum Leistungsvermögen und zur literaturwissenschaftlichen Relevanz eines neuen Paradigmas der Kulturwissenschaft. In: Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch 4 (2002), 252: “Anders als seine Zeitgenossen Bergson, Sigmund Freud oder Marcel Proust, deren Gedächtnisbegriffe auf individuelle Erinnerungsprozesse ausgerichtet sind, konzeptualisiert Halbwachs das Gedächtnis als erster konsequent als soziales Phänomen. Der Begriff *mémoire collective* ist bei ihm keine Metapher.”

from one or more groups and only from these. The whole body of remembrances that we share in common with them suddenly disappears. To forget a period of one's life is to lose contact with those who surround us.<sup>6</sup>

Although narrativisation is clearly not insignificant to Halbwachs and his understanding of memory<sup>7</sup>, literary texts, as Erll has pointed out, do not themselves feature prominently in his work. That said, she nevertheless notes that

Author and reader form a social group, after all, one which is linked via the knowledge of a particular text, from which, in turn, schemata for the reception of further texts or for the perception of reality outside the text are derived.<sup>8</sup>

So perhaps it may still be productive to include or at least consider his concepts in any attempts to take a mnemonic approach to literature. We may bear this idea of inescapable connectedness and mutual influence in mind when examining our selection of post-Munich poetry. Moreover, we must also be aware that Halbwachs views history as being deeply at odds with memory, and that he is not especially complimentary of the concept as a whole. He compares it to “a crowded cemetery” that is chronically short of space<sup>9</sup> and is disarming of its use to us as social creatures:

Were the past social milieu to live for us only in these historical notations, and, more generally speaking, were the collective memory composed only of dates, arbitrary definitions and reminders of events, then it would most assuredly remain external to us.<sup>10</sup>

For Halbwachs, the fundamental problem lies in history's – or, rather, perhaps more specifically, its proponents' – pretensions to universality and totality, the dogged quest for sequentiality, forever dividing up time into periods and ages, and the pronounced focus on momentous ruptures and change, often at the expense of recognising similarities and continuity in the everyday. This he contrasts with memory's sensitivity to time and space and its status as a “current of continuous thought”<sup>11</sup>, which pushes resemblances to the fore. As

6 *Halbwachs, Maurice: The Collective Memory. Trans.: Ditter, Francis J./Yazdi Ditter, Vida. New York 1980, 29 f.* A very similar explanation is also provided for our lack of memories from early childhood; cf. *ibid.*, 35.

7 Cf. e.g. his examination of childhood remembrances as based on written accounts: *ibid.*, 35 f.

8 *Erll: Literatur und kulturelles Gedächtnis, 257*: “Autor und Leser bilden schließlich eine soziale Gruppe, die die Kenntnis eines bestimmten Textes verbindet, aus dem wiederum Schemata für die Rezeption weiterer Texte oder für die Wahrnehmung der außertextuellen Wirklichkeit abgeleitet werden.”

9 *Halbwachs: The Collective Memory, 52.*

10 *Ibid.*, 53.

11 *Ibid.*, 80.

we shall observe when we examine poems such as Seifert's *Stará knížka* (Engl. "The little old book") in greater detail, notions of such an opposition between the two ways of approaching our ongoing connection to what has gone before are not limited to purely theoretical works.

Nora, who has been described as the "true heir to Halbwachs"<sup>12</sup>, also conceptualises memory in opposition to history, in constant danger of being devoured by it, even: "What we take to be flare-ups of memory are in fact its final consumption in the flames of history."<sup>13</sup> In his view, expounded at length in his seven-volume magnum opus *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, there has been a crucial – and, it seems, for Nora, regrettable – shift in our relationship to the past, as exemplified by major changes to the way that collective memory is embodied and expressed. "Modern memory is, above all, archival," he writes. "It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image."<sup>14</sup> We have lost our natural, unmediated connection to what went before us and it is in this context, Nora argues, that *lieux de mémoire* have emerged, offering an opportunity for (re-)connection to a nation's heritage via representational means that remains ultimately artificial<sup>15</sup>. His definition of such *lieux de mémoire* is broad indeed and can take in anything from monuments to iconic figures or works of literature:

*a lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community.<sup>16</sup>

Nora situates his *lieux de mémoire* at an important, but at times almost contradictory crossroads between the present and the past, between remembrance and forgetfulness, the tangible and the intangible:

For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial – just as if gold were the only memory of money – all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.<sup>17</sup>

12 *Olick/Robbins: Social Memory Studies*, 121.

13 *Nora, Pierre: Between Memory and History: "Les Lieux de Mémoire"*. In: *Representations* 26 (1989), 13.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Cf. *ibid.*, 12.

16 *Nora, Pierre: Preface to the English-Language Edition: From "Lieux de mémoire" to Realms of Memory*. In: *Kritzman, Lawrence D. (ed.): Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past. Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions*. New York 1996, xvii.

17 *Nora: Between Memory and History*, 19.

Although Nora is not without his critics<sup>18</sup>, this emphasis on saturated meaning and the possibility of transformation may prove helpful when it comes to understanding the wider implications of the poetry of our period. It strongly reminds us of what Werner Wolf has referred to as “the ability of the lyric to maximally semanticize all possible elements and usages of language in the service of creating a surplus of meaning”<sup>19</sup> and suggests perhaps a certain structural kinship between the two phenomena. We may also wish to interpret particular poetic compositions as paying homage to or as a revitalisation or perhaps reworking of existing Czech *lieux de mémoire* or even view them as *lieux de mémoire* in their own right. Certainly, in the case of some of the more well-known post-Munich poems, such as Halas’ *Zpěv úzkosti*, one could argue that it has come to stand in for all of the anger and disgust associated with the 1938 agreement, needing only a limited number of signifiers – most obviously the eminently quotable, and indeed frequently quoted, six-fold alliterative tongue-twister “Zvoní zvoní zrady zrady zvon”<sup>20</sup> – to do so.

Another important – and for us potentially rewarding – clarification or rather enhancement of Halbwachs’ socially-grounded concept of memory was first introduced by Jan Assmann in the form of what he termed *cultural memory*: “Just as collective memory is characterised by its closeness to everyday life, cultural memory is characterised by its distance from it.”<sup>21</sup> Assmann proposes dividing memory into three distinct, but nevertheless to a certain extent interrelated segments – individual, communicative and cultural. The final two both reflect aspects of what Halbwachs referred to as collective memory, but work on very different temporal horizons and to quite specific effect. While communicative memory is bound up with human interaction and particular generations, tending to die out when there are no more representatives of those generations left around to remember and to pass on the memories<sup>22</sup>, cultural memory is conceived as being neither so fleeting, nor so dependent upon living carriers:

18 For an overview of the criticism that has been levelled at Nora over the years, see e.g. Legg, Stephen: Contesting and surviving memory: space, nation and nostalgia in “Les Lieux de Mémoire”. In: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23 (2005), 481 f.

19 Wolf, Werner: *The Lyric: Problems of Definition and a Proposal for Reconceptualisation*. In: Müller-Zettelmann, Eva/Rubik, Margarete (ed.): *Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*. Amsterdam 2005, 25.

20 Halas: Časy, 101. Engl.: “It rings it rings the bell of betrayal the bell of betrayal”.

21 Assmann, Jan: Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität. In: Assmann, Jan/Hölscher, Tonio (eds.): *Kultur und Gedächtnis*. Frankfurt am Main 1988, 12: “Ebenso wie das kollektive Gedächtnis durch seine Alltagsnähe ist das kulturelle Gedächtnis durch seine Alltagsferne gekennzeichnet.”

22 Cf. Assmann/Assmann: *Das Gestern im Heute*, 119.

Cultural memory is a kind of institution. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent.<sup>23</sup>

According to Jan and Aleida Assmann, in order for that which is contained within communicative memory to avoid the inevitable, it must undergo a form of materialisation.<sup>24</sup> That said, not everything that is stored in this manner, can be considered an active part of a group's cultural memory. For this reason, they have put forward the idea of further splitting cultural memory into the *Funktionsgedächtnis* ("working memory") and the *Speichergedächtnis* ("storage memory"), home to the *canon* and the *archive*, respectively. The former is dynamic and forceful, bringing the past into the present, whereas the latter leaves material for which there is no current use languishing passively – overlooked at present, but not quite gone from this world:

At the other end of the spectrum, there is the storehouse for cultural relicts. There are not unmediated; they have only lost their immediate addressees; they are decontextualized and disconnected from their former frames which had authorized them or determined their meaning.<sup>25</sup>

Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Aleida Assmann ascribes to the archive the latent power to influence future attitudes, arguing that "The archive is the basis of what can be said in the future about the present when it will have become the past."<sup>26</sup> and situates its contents within an "intermediary state of 'no longer' and 'not yet', deprived of their old existence and waiting for a new one."<sup>27</sup>

Over the course of this chapter, we shall examine how memory and memories permeate the poetic works of our authors, both on a thematic and functional level. We shall see that three forms of memory, analogous to those categorised by the Assmanns, can be found here: something akin to individual memory in the personal recollections of the various speakers and the figures depicted within the poems<sup>28</sup>, a kind of communicative memory in

23 Assmann: Communicative and Cultural Memory, 110f.

24 Cf. Assmann / Assmann: Das Gestern im Heute, 120.

25 Assmann, Aleida: Canon and Archive. In: Erll / Nünning (eds.): Cultural Memory Studies., 99.

26 Ibid., 102.

27 Ibid., 103.

28 Though this is not strictly relevant to our study, individual memory can also play a role in the reception of poetry too. Cf. a postcard dated 6.10.1938, Jaroslav Jarouch to Jaroslav Seifert. LA PNP, f. Jaroslav Seifert, box 28, sig. 2/1/1/596: "Četl jsem v poslední době některé Tvé básně a nějak dojatě jsem si na Tebe vzpomínal" (Engl. I've been reading some of your poems recently and was moved by my memories of you.") Given the date of the

the speakers' attempts to engage with and convey a particular view of recent history, and a reliance on what appears to be cultural memory in the many intertextual references that take advantage of the wealth of Czech literature and mythology.

## Language Issues

Since memory studies have enjoyed particular prominence among German-speaking scholars, it is probably worth bearing in mind – as both Dietrich Harth and Pim den Boer have pointed out – that the words associated with the field may have conflicting or at least divergent undertones due to their differing etymological derivations. Harth, for example, homes in on the specifics of the term *kulturelles Gedächtnis* and the apparent difference in meaning between *memory* and *Gedächtnis*:

Already the words “*kulturell*/cultural” have different semantic connotations in German and in English, as a glance at any common dictionary of standardized language use will show. Anglo-American usage locates “culture” as a collective term for ideas, customs, and art in the contexts of society and civilisation, while the lexeme “*Kultur*” stands for the intellectual, artistic and creative achievements of a community and is used to express the advanced development of humanity. In addition, “*Gedächtnis*” and “memory” are not only very different morphologically and etymologically, but also their standard semantics signal subtle differences which can only be hinted at here: “memory” as force, process or repository, primarily refers to the reproducing and recalling of learned knowledge. “*Gedächtnis*”, however, stands for the capacity to store not just what is learned but also sensory impressions and “mental processes”, which can then at an opportune moment be allowed to “enter one’s consciousness” again.<sup>29</sup>

While this may be true in the essentials, one could equally argue that because Jan and Aleida Assmann, the scholars who first put forward the concept of the *kulturelles Gedächtnis*, have so written extensively in English as well as German on the topic, describing exactly what they mean by the term and what they do not, any potential confusion resulting from the words themselves is irrelevant and possibly even indicative of a failure on the part of the reader

correspondence (shortly after the Munich Agreement), we might also infer something of poetry’s ability to comfort at times of crisis.

29 Harth, Dietrich: The Invention of Cultural Memory. In: *Erll/Nünning* (eds.): *Cultural Memory Studies*, 87. For further criticism of the word *memory* – albeit in its meaning as the product of an act of remembering – see also *Rigney*, Ann: Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory. In: *Journal of European Studies* 35/1 (2005), 17.

to engage precisely with the terminology employed<sup>30</sup>. What is more, given that the English word *memory* can also simply denote the singular form of *memories* (that is *Erinnerungen* in German), which certainly can have a sensory dimension and move well beyond the mere parroting of information learned by rote, the distinction that Harth makes is not perhaps quite as clear-cut as he would have us believe. If, for example, we consider a perfectly commonplace statement like “My memory of that day is a little hazy”, we can plainly see how the two meanings of the word overlap and coalesce, complementing each other in English in a way that would not be possible in German: the speaker can be simultaneously referring to both his cognitive ability to remember the past (i. e. his *Gedächtnis* or rather its patchiness) and the things which he does still recall about the day in question (his *Erinnerungen*). For ease and in light of this, we shall therefore continue to use the expression *cultural memory* in this study, albeit in the knowledge that the original German may have additional implications that are compensated for elsewhere in English.

Den Boer draws our attention to another peculiarity of the language associated with memory studies in German, namely the equivalent of the verbs *to remember* or *to recall*:

The more forceful German word – *erinnern*, “to internalize”, from an older word *inneren* – has a didactic connotation and can even mean “to learn” or “to teach”. Martin Luther, for example, used *erinnern* frequently in his Bible translation.<sup>31</sup>

Modern German usage has moved on somewhat since the days of Luther and the didactic connotations of which den Boer speaks are scarcely perceptible anymore, but the notion of remembering as a form of internalisation is certainly important.<sup>32</sup> It marks the German out as distinct from other Western European languages where the equivalent term is derived from the late Latin

30 Cf. e.g. the definition of the word “Kultur” explicitly provided by the Assmanns in an article on social memory and media: “Kultur wird in diesem Sinne verstanden als der historisch veränderliche Zusammenhang von Kommunikation, Gedächtnis und Medien.” (Engl. “Culture is understood in this sense as the historically variable relationship between communication, memory and media.”). In *Assmann/Assmann: Das Gestern im Heute*, 114.

31 *den Boer: Loci memoriae – Lieux de memoire*, 22.

32 Here, it is worth recalling what Olick and Robbins have referred to as “a historical shift of memory from the mind to external loci”. In: *Olick/Robbins: Social Memory Studies*, 113. In light of this apparent shift and given the aforementioned importance of the materialisation, that is, the physical manifestation of cultural memory as conceptualised by Jan and Aleida Assman, one could even perhaps argue that the connection to the idea of internalisation inherent in the German term *Erinnerung* is, in fact, just as problematic – if not indeed more so – than the previously discussed shortcomings associated with the English word *memory* since the development appears to run contrary to the very term itself.

*rememoror* (“to call to mind (again)”), especially since there is nothing of the sense of repetition that can be inferred from verbs such as the English *to remember*. When we consider the Czech case, not a language mentioned by either den Boer or Harth, and words such as *páměť* (the cognitive faculty of memory) or *vzpomínat* (the verb “to remember”), which are derived from a common Old Church Slavonic root meaning “to think of something again”, we also find the idea of something happening over and over. The prefix *po-* / *pa-* signifies repetition here, after all.<sup>33</sup>

## Memory Studies and Literature

Turning away from etymological matters, it is equally important that we give due consideration to issues of applicability, examining in more detail the opportunities and potential pitfalls associated with using social concepts of memory and remembrance in relation to works of literature. As Erll has pointed out, not all of the cornerstones of current memory studies have in fact been fully embraced by the wider community of literary scholars<sup>34</sup>, and although at times we may be tempted to see literary texts as merely an illustration of how things are remembered in a particular social group, this is a fallacy:

Literature does not depict cultures of remembrance. Rather it is an active force – structuring and restructuring memory – within the culture and must be examined as such, in line with the characteristics of its symbolic system.<sup>35</sup>

It is this idea of structuring and restructuring that will prove particularly relevant to our study here. If, as Renate Lachmann argues, “All texts participate, repeat and constitute acts of memory; all are products of their distancing and surpassing of precursor texts.”<sup>36</sup>, then we can immediately see the renewed significance of intertextuality – something, which does, of course, play a prominent role in the poetry of this period – within literature that is being analysed in terms of its memorial credentials. In this chapter, we shall direct

33 *Machek*, Václav (ed.): *Etymologický slovník jazyka českého a slovenského*. Praha 1957, 351.

34 Cf. *Erll*: *Literatur und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, 250.

35 *Erll*: *Erinnerungshistorische Literaturwissenschaft: Was ist ... und zu welchem Ende...?*, 124: “Literatur bildet Erinnerungskulturen nicht ab. Sie ist vielmehr eine aktive – Gedächtnis strukturierende und restrukturierende – Kraft innerhalb der Kultur und muß als solche, gemäß den Eigenschaften ihres Symbolsystems, untersucht werden.”

36 *Lachmann*, Renate: *Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature*. In: *Erll/Nünning* (eds.): *Cultural Memory Studies*, 305.

our attention in particular to the so-called dynamics of cultural memory<sup>37</sup>, the way in which texts “continuously morph into the many other cultural products that recall, adapt, and revise them in both overt and indirect ways”<sup>38</sup>, since this vigorous approach affords additional insight into narrative effects and tools, which will doubtless be of considerable help to our investigation into the poetic narrativisation of contemporary events in the Czech lands during the late 1930s and early 1940s. We shall be guided by the idea that

The stories told about certain events also provide a cultural framework for remembering them, and just as actual locations serve to attract topographically unrelated memories, so too certain narratives provide a cultural framework for other stories.<sup>39</sup>

Following Ann Rigney, we might examine to what extent the works of our poets do indeed function as *relay stations*, *stabilisers*, *catalysts*, *objects of recollection* and *calibrators* of cultural memory<sup>40</sup>. However, unlike Rigney, who has focussed more on the cultural afterlife of works of literature, most memorably that of Walter Scott’s nineteenth-century novel *The Heart of Midlothian*, in the case of our post-Munich poetry, we are inevitably less concerned with the reception and (re-)appropriation of the works following their publication than with the way the texts themselves draw upon earlier texts, situating contemporary events within existing narratives.

Lachmann’s comments about the predilection among literary writers “to explicate their own memory concepts. Some develop intricate ‘mythopoetic’ theories which betray the assimilation of philosophy or literary theory”<sup>41</sup> are also important, not least because, as Raoul Eshelman has noted, stark traces of Bergsonian thought can certainly be found in Hora’s poetry of the 1930s<sup>42</sup>. This could add an additional mnemonic layer to works such as *Jan houslista*, where issues of memory are already so prominent – it is after all, a re-assessment of the titular violinist’s past experience in America that precipitates his timely return to the homeland.

Though the term *counter-memory* has gained a great deal of currency within the field of memory studies since it gives voice to marginalised groups within

37 On the advantages of such an approach and parallel process-oriented developments in other fields, see e.g. Erll, Astrid/Rigney, Ann: Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics. In: *Erll, Astrid/Rigney, Ann* (eds.): *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*. Berlin 2009, 1–11, especially 3.

38 *Rigney, Ann*: The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing. In: *Erll/Nünning* (eds.): *Cultural Memory Studies*, 349.

39 *Rigney*: Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory, 19.

40 Cf. *Rigney*: The Dynamics of Remembrance, 349 f.

41 *Lachmann*: Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature, 307.

42 See *Eshelman, Raoul*: Josef Horas Bergsonismus. In: *Kliems, Alfrun/Raßloff, Ute/Zajac, Peter* (eds.): *Spätmoderne. Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts in Ost-Mittel-Europa*. Berlin 2006, 345 f.

a society, it is unlikely to be of much use to us. The poets of this period may well have taken to verse in part in an attempt to challenge hegemonic foreign discourse about the nature of the Munich Agreement, to refute the notion that it was a stroke of strategic brilliance or a necessary sacrifice, the fruits of which Europe would reap for decades to come, but their sentiments were, in fact, broadly in line with contemporary attitudes among liberal-minded Czechs. Thus at best, this would be a case of posturing to instil a pre-emptive form of counter-memory on the European stage. After all, as Birgit Neumann has reminded us “Literature is therefore never a simple reflection of pre-existing cultural discourses; rather, it proactively contributes to the negotiation of cultural memory.”<sup>43</sup> However, at home, it very much represented the mainstream view, with hegemonic potential of its own.

## The Speaker Recalls

Having familiarised ourselves with some of the potential mnemonic elements of literature, we can perhaps now turn to the texts themselves. When it comes to so-called individual memories, the issue of change is paramount. This can assume both an internal and external guise and the former may well be brought about by the latter, possibly creating what Birgit Neumann refers to as a “biographical break”<sup>44</sup>. In the case of internal change, we are dealing with the speaker and his altered view of the world. Seifert’s poetry provides a particularly large number of examples of such apparent transformations. Works like *U jednoho hrobu na Olšanech* (Engl. “By a grave at Olšany”) indicate a speaker growing up, maintaining certain interests and yet losing others to the passage of time:

Já vždycky chodil jsem rád na hřbitov,  
nejprve hrát si, sbírat kaštany,  
pak nápisy číst srdcervoucích slov,  
jež všechny jsem chtěl mít opsány.<sup>45</sup>

43 Neumann, Birgit: The Literary Representation of Memory. In: Erll/Nünning (eds.): Cultural Memory Studies, 335.

44 Ibid., 337. See also Manfred Koch’s assessment of the increased importance of notions of the self and selfhood in modernist depictions of memory. In: Koch, Manfred: “Memotechnik des Schönen”. Studien zur poetischen Erinnerung in Romantik und Symbolismus. Tübingen 1988, 16.

45 Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 220. Engl. “I always enjoyed going to the graveyard / at first to play, to collect conkers, / then to read the inscriptions of heartrending words / all of which I wanted to copy down”.

The poem is made up of six quatrains, each rhyming *abab*. Its first three stanzas are a reminiscence, memories of the speaker's youth, of his fondness for visiting Olšany cemetery in Prague. There is an innocence to what he remembers, a focus on the simple things, and a purity of heart that is connoted equally by the blamelessness of his youthful pursuits – he appears to fall in love, after all, not with another person, but with one of the figures depicted on a grave – and by the whiteness of the snow in his favourite inscription (“Zejména verše míval jsem tam rád / o něžném květu, který zmrazil sních”<sup>46</sup>) and the colour of his imaginary beloved's dress (“a na obrázku měla bílý šat”<sup>47</sup>). There is both a sense of repetition, as indicated by the use of the iterative verbs *chodit* (“to go on a regular basis”) and *mívat* (“to have often”), and, in the talk of many firsts and new experiences (*nejprve* “at first”, *prvních* “from the first”, *poprvé* “for the first time”), of novelty. In the final three stanzas, however, though the location remains the same, the timeframe is different, and we find ourselves in the speaker's present, something which is demonstrated not only thematically, but also grammatically, with a shift in tense. The speaker – now evidently a grown man – is back at the cemetery, but while it has not changed, and still offers ample opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of autumn (“na hrobky klepou hnědé kaštiny”<sup>48</sup>), he has. Disappointed by love outside of the cemetery, he no longer reads the inscriptions on the gravestones and has no real desire to chase after anything that falls from the horse chestnut trees around him. The speaker wonders what has become of the boy, the conker enthusiast he once was: “ach, kde je chlapec, by šel za nimi”<sup>49</sup>. This physical absence of his former self marks a clear distinction between the person being remembered, and the one doing the remembering. He has, quite clearly, become another. Nevertheless, there is still one grave that holds meaning for the speaker. He is led there as if by the past (“tam, kde stará zeď / provází cestu jako z dávných dob”<sup>50</sup>), but it is the present, it seems, that urges him on, as the final stanza demonstrates:

A tváří k hrobu jako osudu,  
jenž znovu drtí dneska naši zem,  
slibuji tiše: Zrádцем nebudu,  
tak jak to řek ten pod tím příkrovem.<sup>51</sup>

46 Ibid. Engl. “There I particularly liked the lines / about the tender flower, which was frozen by the snow”.

47 Ibid. Engl. “and in the picture she had a white garment”.

48 Ibid. Engl. “brown conkers rap at the tombs”.

49 Ibid. Engl. “oh, where is the boy, he would have gone after them.”

50 Ibid. Engl. “there, where the old wall / escorts the path as if from times long ago”.

51 Ibid. Engl. “A facing the grave like fate, / which is once again crushing our land, / I promise quietly: I will not be a traitor / just like the man beneath the shroud said.”

In these closing lines, we immediately get a sense of the perceived outside threat to the speaker's homeland. Death (represented here by the grave) and fate are not just linked syntactically, but also in acoustic terms, as a result of the proliferation of dark vowels in the words "hrobu jako osudu", pronouncing a deeply dangerous situation for the Czech lands. As is so often the case in the depiction of contemporary events in the poetry of this period, the current predicament is cast as yet another blow to the country. This can be seen via the use of the adverb *znova* ("again") and implies similar beleaguerment in the past. The grave the speaker visits is that of the radical but celebrated nineteenth-century writer Karel Havlíček Borovský. His whispered promise never to betray is an echo of Havlíček Borovský's declaration "Make me a promise, command me, threaten me, still I will not be a traitor"<sup>52</sup>. The speaker takes a phrase that he clearly remembers and associates with Havlíček Borovský – one that was already an important part of Czech cultural memory<sup>53</sup> – and reinvigorates it, supplying new significance in and for the present. It becomes a sign of continuity of purpose and allows the speaker – though he may have lost the link to his childhood self – to connect with the forebears of his nation. Ultimately therefore, though change in the individual is at the heart of the poem, it is constancy that wins out in the end – even across the (literary) generations – reinforcing the idea of a collective, a community spanning the ages, ever ready to withstand, to remain *věrný*.

The set-up is a little different in Seifert's aforementioned *Stará knížka*, but certain commonalities can still be found when it comes to the depiction of individual memory. In the poem, the speaker remembers learning about history from a little old book:

52 Quoted in *ibid.*: "Přislibujte si mně, poroučejte si mně, vyhrožujte si mně, přece zdrácem nebudu!"

53 A monument to Karel Havlíček Borovský bearing the famous words was erected in Žižkov in 1911. It was hidden from the Nazi authorities during the occupation and reinstalled in 1946. Seifert appears to have had no doubts as to Havlíček Borovský's continued significance to the nation. In a newspaper article from the summer of 1939 he called for the author's personal papers to be published along with many other as yet unreleased works by key figures from the nineteenth century. Cf. *Seifert, Jaroslav: Národ a jeho kultura*. In: *Národní práce*, 16.7.1939, 1. In his memoirs, Seifert also refers to visiting Havlíček Borovský's grave on a regular basis; cf. *Seifert: Všecky krásy světa*, 129: "Tam jsem stával dojat a vždy dlouho. Na jeho hrobě bývaly často čerstvé věnce a kytice a uprostřed nich zhaslé svíčky. Svíčky jsem zapálil a jejich plamen jsem hlídal a z věnců jsem si lámal smetličku na památku." (Engl. "I used to stand there, moved and always for a long time. On his grave there often used to be fresh wreaths and bouquets and in their midst candles that had burnt out. I would light the candles and watch over their flame and tear a scrap from the wreaths as a souvenir.") Without wishing to conflate speaker and empirical author, there does seem in this case to be a strong biographical background to the poem.

A byla bitva tam a tam,  
ještě mám paměť bdělou  
a ještě v duchu nahmatám  
tu knížku ošumělou.<sup>54</sup>

Though he claims to have a good memory and to be able to recall what was written in the book, the speaker does not appear to have been a particularly assiduous student, having apparently preferred to chase after girls (“s tím jsem si hlavu nelámá, / kráčeje po dívčím boku”<sup>55</sup>) and to scribble poetry between the lines of the titular little book (“psal jsem v ní verše o jaru / nad řadky letopočtů!”<sup>56</sup>). He describes himself literally overwriting the record of the past, using the history book much like a wax tablet, which of course Harald Weinrich identified as one of two central metaphors for memory as a whole.<sup>57</sup> The form of the poem even to a certain extent reflects this idea of interspersing historical detail with thoughts of the spring since the second half of each quatrain often deviates wildly from the first, injecting a degree of levity:

Král přišel, válčil a král pad,  
na hlavě péra pštrosí  
– A venku květy voněl sad,  
čekals tam na kohosi.<sup>58</sup>

There is a stark contrast here between the warmth and liveliness of the speaker’s personal memories of his youth, and the staid, rather dry nature of history as taught from textbooks that failed to spark his imagination or that of his companions at the time (“A každý z nás to tenkrát čet / studeně, bez účasti”<sup>59</sup>). Towards the end of the poem, just as in *U jednoho hrobu na Olšanech*, the focus shifts from the past to the present and patriotism takes the place of romantic love. The speaker acknowledges that his one-time passion

54 Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 214. Engl. “There was a battle there and there / I still have a wakeful memory / and in my soul I still find / that shabby little book.”

55 Ibid. Engl. “I didn’t worry my head about it / wandering, as I was, along a girl’s waist”.

56 Ibid. Engl. “I wrote verses about the spring in it / above the rows of eras.”

57 The other being the storeroom or warehouse (*Magazin* in German); cf. Weinrich, Harald: Typen der Gedächtnismetaphorik. In: Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte 9, 23f. For an elaboration of this topology that differentiates between subtypes of spatial and temporal metaphors of memory, see Assmann, Aleida: Zur Metaphorik der Erinnerung. In: Assmann, Aleida (ed.): Mnemosyne. Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung. Frankfurt am Main 1991, 13f.

58 Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 214. Engl. “A king came, waged war and a king fell / ostrich feathers on his head / – And outside the orchard smelled of flowers / you were waiting there for someone.”

59 Ibid. Engl. “And each of us at the time read it / coldly, without sympathy”.

described in the earlier verses has long since fallen victim to transience (“Tu lásku čas už rozmetal”<sup>60</sup>) and retreated from him, but this is not the case for a Czech king of yore (“mrtvý český král / ještě tam dodnes leží”<sup>61</sup>). As the concluding lines show, the speaker has at last found a way to synthesise history and poetry, his past and his present, and all the memories in between:

Dnes je tak blízký, jak by mi  
před zrakem ležel i s koněm,  
jak by krev padala na rýmy,  
které tu píši dnes o něm.<sup>62</sup>

He still continues to write, but it is now very much under the influence of his national heritage. His fundamental outlook has changed dramatically from that which he remembers having as a boy and young man. The image of blood dripping may suggest violence and danger at hand, but it also reminds us of blood feuds and the bonds we inherit from our forefathers, the need for or prospect of revenge. There is a closeness to the historic past that was not there before; it has a new and much more personal meaning for the speaker though it is not directly part of his individual (biographical) pool of memories in the sense that he himself experienced it.

Moreover, there are speakers who *do* experience momentous change themselves, or at least appear to have borne witness to historic moments like the surrender of the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany or the country-wide blackouts in anticipation of war. The memory is evidently still very raw for such figures, and they react viscerally – for example with tears as in *Zhasněte světla* and *Nad mapou* – or with complete incomprehension, having apparently lost their ability to recognise the place they once knew so well, as is the case in *Praha v černém*:

Když nad tebou jsem stál,  
já, který tě tak znával,  
ne, já tě nepoznal  
ne, já tě nepoznával!<sup>63</sup>

Here the repetition of *já* (“I”), *tě* (“you”) and *ne / ne-* (“no” or “not”) is particularly telling. The speaker and his home town of Prague, as represented by the personal pronouns, are typographically surrounded by negative particles and prefixes. The speaker may describe himself as having been situated *above*

60 Ibid. Engl. “Time has already torn apart that love”.

61 Ibid. Engl. “a dead Czech king / who to this day still lies there”.

62 Ibid. Engl. “Now he is so near, as if he were / lying along with his horse in front of my eyes / as if blood were dripping onto the rhymes / that I write about him today.”

63 Ibid., 199. Engl. “When I stood above you, / I, who had know you so / no, I did not recognise you / no, I was not able to recognise you!”

Prague in the first line quoted here, but the subsequent build-up of negatives is such that as the lines conclude, his superior position is threatened, and he seems almost likely to go under, submerged in a rush of negatively-connoted grammatical and peripheral change. However, for the most part, major external change, though frequently broached, remains merely the backdrop for the poems. While it represents a potential source of individual memory, it is not always especially dynamic or meaningful in itself, only when combined with poetic techniques. This is perhaps comparable to the fact, already discussed in Chapter One, that contemporary events are not generally transformed into narratological events in the poetry of this period, but instead often simply lurk in the background, creating an uncomfortable framework for the texts without necessarily impinging on their inner workings.

At this stage, it is also probably worth taking into account the fact that remembering is an activity carried out more or less exclusively by men in the poetry of our authors. Female figures appear primarily as objects of individual memory, rather than subjects in their own right. Seifert, for example, has his speaker referring to old sweethearts, not just in *Stará knížka*, but also in poems such as *Píseň o vlasti*:

Na ty, které jsem měl rád kdysi,  
vždycky se časem vzpomíná  
ať ta to byla, ať to ty jsi!  
A jako jiskra z komína  
vzpomínka rychle zhasíná.<sup>64</sup>

The memories here are fleeting and intangible. Only trifling mementos of these relationships remain (“Tu zbyl jen dopis, stužka z vlasů, / sponka, jež spadla do klína”<sup>65</sup>), a physical reminder of what once was, standing in almost metonymically for various women of the speaker’s past. Memories of women also function in Seifert’s work as a way of emphasising how things have changed with the Czech lands. His poem *Verše o Praze* (Engl. “Verses about Prague”) is a prime case in point:

Tak kdysi do divadla  
jezdily v kočáře  
  
půvabné mladé dámy  
– ach, dnes již nejezdí.<sup>66</sup>

64 Ibid., 192. Engl. “Those, whom I once loved / I always remember with time / whoever she was, whoever you are! / And like a spark from the chimney / the memory quickly burns out.”

65 Ibid. Engl. “Here remained only a letter, a hair ribbon / a pin that fell into a lap”.

66 Ibid. 200. Engl. “Thus there was a time when to the theatre / winsome young ladies / rode in carriages / – alas, today they no longer ride.”

The speaker recalls a more joyous, care-free time, typified for him by the memory of charming young ladies off to the theatre, and contrasts this with the new sober reality of post-Munich society, where such frivolity seems out of place. At no point, though, is any space given over to the memories of the women in question and Seifert is not alone in this oversight. In *Šváby*, for instance, Nezval's speaker asks his beloved three times if she remembers particular scenes connected to encounters with the infamous cockroaches ("Pamatuješ jak nám bylo..."<sup>67</sup>, "Lásko vzpomínáš si ještě..."<sup>68</sup>, "Pamatuješ na ten kvap..."<sup>69</sup>) – raising the possibility of two sets of individual memories entering into a dialogue with one another, moving closer to the realm of communicative memory, even, in the sense of two contemporaries discussing and reminiscing about the recent past. However, we never hear her response. We do not know how her recollections tally with those of the speaker. We must make do with his account of past events or none at all.

Obviously some of this will be simply down to the fact that the speakers of these poems are invariably male and that only a relatively small number of female figures are introduced in anything more than just a passing fashion. But even in Hora's *Jan houslista*, when a female character capable of acting – the disheartened and disheartening Katy – is finally given the opportunity to remember, she is shown to be unwilling to do so: "Na podzim myslet? Nechce se mi."<sup>70</sup> Presumably still suffering from the effects of various losses (her son, husband and homeland all within a short space of time) and thus in thrall to the past, Katy does not wish to assert herself over it by articulating her own memories, creating her own personal narrative out of what has gone before. Whatever recollections she may have, they remain inside her – the epitome of the German *Erinnerung*, one might say. It is only Jan and the narrator who externalise individual memory, allowing the reader to partake, and thus memory remains a strikingly male domain.

## Looking Forward to Looking Back

Particularly – although not only – in Seifert's poetry, we can also find space for the present being made in the future. In the poem, *Jednou, ach, jednou*, which deals with the two Czech military mobilisations of 1938, the speaker imagines a time when he will be able to look back at and speak more freely

67 Nezval: *Pět minut za městem*, 52. Engl. "Do you remember how we felt..."

68 Ibid., 63. Engl. "Love, do you still recall..."

69 Ibid. Engl. "Do you remember that haste..."

70 Hora: *Kniha domova*, 127. Engl. "To think of the autumn / I don't feel like it."

about what has occurred: “Jednou, ach jednou povíme si více, / až řeknem loni, předloni”<sup>71</sup>. A comparable sentiment is evident in Halas’ *Nástup 1938* (Engl. “Roll-call 1938”) from the multi-author collection *Křik Koruny české* (Engl. “The cry of the Bohemian crown”), where the speaker is convinced that contemporary events (again, as with Seifert, the mustering of Czech soldiers as a result of the Sudeten Crisis) will be discussed for years to come: “Takový nástup se už neuvidí / o tom si budou věky vykládat”<sup>72</sup>. Similarly, in Seifert’s *Až budeš o nás číst*, (Engl. “When you read about us”) the speaker purports to address a future reader, one who will learn about the speaker’s present only from the history books and no longer be emotionally moved by it:

Až budeš o nás číst  
pár řádek v historii  
a již tě nedojme  
lesk slávy, smutku stín<sup>73</sup>

Here we find a situation that brings to mind the multidimensional mechanisms of memory, as described by Jan Assmann: “The distinction of different forms of memory looks like a structure but it works more as a dynamic, creating tension and transition between the various poles. There is also much overlapping.”<sup>74</sup> In the first example, individual memories move from the private to the more public sphere of what the Assmans termed communicative memory, with two contemporaries sharing the burden of the past and taking comfort in their communion with one another. In the third, knowledge of speaker’s present is expected to have already passed out of living memory. The generations that might have handed down their recollections will have departed from this world and all that remains will have to be mediated by the written word – either via the aforementioned history books or the poem itself that lies before us. The speaker’s present will have either been canonised or archived, subsumed as part of a larger tale of the nation. Though distant, the speaker as now a figure from the past still has – in his eyes, at least; we may find it a little shallow or banal owing to the rather *bon vivant* undertones – an important message for the imagined reader of the future<sup>75</sup>, one that may help him, in turn, better

71 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 195. Engl. “Someday, oh someday we’ll talk more, / once we can say last year, the year before last.”

72 Halas, František: *Dílo. Vol. 3: A co básník. Praha 1983*, 45. Engl. “The likes of this mustering will never be seen again / they’ll go on about across the aeons”.

73 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 216. Engl. “When you read about us / a couple of lines in history / and it’ll no longer touch you / the sheen of glory, the shadow of grief”.

74 Cf. Assmann: *Communicative and Cultural Memory*, 113.

75 Cf. Rigney, Ann: *Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans*. In: *Poetics Today* 25/2 (2004), 381: “It is important to recognize that certain things are remembered not because they are actually true of the past (which may or may

understand the changes that necessarily overcame his homeland, appreciate his own luck and embrace the idea of continuity across the ages:

tu jenom vzpomeň si:  
Tak trochu bezstarostný  
já chtěl jsem tehdy být,  
i dívky milovat<sup>76</sup>

This vicarious participation in or rather engagement with the past has, of course, been hailed by Rigney as one of the hallmarks of cultural memory<sup>77</sup> and enables the imagined reader to experience an emotional response after all. The second example – that of Halas’ poem – is less specific than those taken from Seifert’s work. Although the verb *vykládat* (“to expound upon”) emphasises the communicative element of the transmission of the memory, the imagined timeline (as indicated by the use of the word *věky*, “ages” or “aeons”) makes it impossible for witnesses or those personally involved to still be alive. Thus we must assume that the memory is expected to have made the transition into cultural memory, to have become, quite literally, the stuff of legend – why else would the speaker be so sure that the mustering was a peerless occurrence, never to be surpassed?

Although on the one hand this looking to the future and imaging the present as the past is simply a positive and defiant act, affirming a conviction that – however hopeless the current situation may feel – there will *be* a future and descendants or at least future selves, who will be able to view matters retrospectively. Nevertheless, there may also be a second explanation that is less connected to faith. If Stephen Greenblatt’s so-called “fifty-year effect”<sup>78</sup>, the time apparently required to pass before a culture is fully able to engage creatively with painful episodes from its past, is correct, then this technique could offer a means of speeding up the process, side-stepping the need for the actual passage of time. The temporal logic is such that the present is, in Alex-

not be the case), but because they are somehow meaningful in the present.” Given the existential threat faced by the Czech lands at the time of writing, it certainly stands to reason that this would indeed be an aspect of particular contemporary importance. The future reader imagined by the author or invoked by the speaker can also exist on different timescales. Even when not envisioning a reader in the far-off future, there is always at least a slight lag between composition and publication that separates originator and recipient.

76 Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 216. Engl. “just remember this: / at the time I too wanted to be / a little carefree / and to love girls”.

77 Cf. Rigney: *Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans*, 366 f.

78 Greenblatt, Stephen: *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton 2002, 258. As Alexander Etkind has pointed out, Greenblatt is not the only critic to have put forward this idea, with Dmitry Bykov also reaching similar conclusions in his work on Russian historical prose writers. Cf. Etkind, Alexander: *Warped Memories. Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied*. Stanford 2013, 2 f.

ander Etkind's words, "estranged"<sup>79</sup> and becomes the past ahead of its time, paving the way for its effective narrativisation to begin early. The technique is not, in fact, limited to poems dealing with the threat from Nazi Germany; even *To kalné ráno*, Seifert's heartfelt response to the death of Masaryk, seems to accelerate time with a vision of the future that emphasises the supreme significance of the first Czechoslovak president's demise within the history of the Czech lands as a whole:

Za sto let možná děti našich dětí  
svým dětem budou teskně vyprávěti  
o šedém ránu čtrnáctého září,  
navěky označeném v kalendáři.<sup>80</sup>

It is envisaged as a red-letter day, almost, indelibly marked on the calendars of Masaryk's countrymen, now and for forever.

## Poetic Monuments to the Past and Present

Another way of approaching the mnemonic qualities of the verse of this period is to regard certain poems as monuments. Following Rigney, we can view such text-based monuments as being portable, both in the sense that they are not tied to a particular geographical location and because they can be reworked and adapted, their meaning transferred to other circumstances.<sup>81</sup> Seifert's *Píseň o rodné zemi* is a useful illustration of this point. In it, much praise is heaped upon the Czech lands owing the perceived beauty, sweetness and immaterial riches thereof. Right at the outset, the speaker, in what appears to be a self-address, informs us "Krásná jako kvítka na modranském džbánku / je ta země která vlastní je ti"<sup>82</sup>, before reiterating the first line of this evaluation twice more over the course of the poem. Holding up flowers as objects of beauty and comparison is obviously nothing new, but the refrain-like parallel, which is drawn here with the help of repetitive sound patterning, is a little more

79 Cf. *ibid.*, 3.

80 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 167. Engl. "In a hundred years' time perhaps the children of our children / will sorrowfully tell their children / of the grey morning of the fourteenth of September / forever marked in the calendar." Just as in *Až budeš o nás číst*, the speaker also gives specific directions as to what should be remembered: "To kalné ráno, to si pamatuj, mé dítě" (Engl. "That clouded morning, remember that, my child"). *Ibid.*

81 Cf. Rigney: *Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans*, 383.

82 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 185. Engl. "Beautiful like a flower on a Modra jug / is the country, which is your homeland."

complicated and more significant than it may seem at first glance. It is not a mere flower growing in a field to which the speaker's homeland is compared, but one that has been painted onto a specific type of ceramic jug. Pottery from Modra, in modern-day Slovakia, is something of a Central European institution and the brightly coloured designs would have been found in homes the length and breadth of the region in the 1930s and 40s. Thus the simile itself represents the speaker's native land by way of reference to a particular aspect of that land's everyday culture, amplifying the sense of domesticity, while at the same time decreasing the objectivity of the correlative. This is an image that only a Czech(-oslovak) could have conjured up, so to speak. It alienates outsiders due to the specificity of its point of reference.

Although the poem was written and first published several months before the fateful meeting of the Great Powers at the Führerbau, its inclusion in the post-Munich collection *Zhasněte světla* sets it in a decidedly new context and results in its taking on additional significance. Suddenly the fragility of the aforementioned image comes to the fore, the worry that such a jug might shatter. Against the threat of military destruction, the poem preserves a rather more innocent time, a view of the present that might very soon become the past. We can witness a similar situation in Hora's *Zpěv rodné země*. Here we are treated to a potted history of the Czech lands, which, while it does not hush up less edifying chapters such as the hard-fought Hussite Wars ("krutí k sobě, bratr bratra bili, / rozdělení evangeliem"<sup>83</sup>), emphasises far more the nation's ability to bounce back from ignominy, its flower-like oneness with nature ("Celá v nás, / stokrát k slunci rozkvetla jsi zas"<sup>84</sup>). Though ostensibly addressed to the Czech lands, towards the end of the poem, it becomes apparent that it in fact speaks to, or at least on behalf of all Czechs – past, present and future:

A tak jdem  
mrtví, živí, nezrození,  
nekonečné pokolení.<sup>85</sup>

The poem marks and celebrates the past while also looking ahead and identifying a necessity of vigilance and preservation, the need to "držet stráž"<sup>86</sup>. It dates from before the dissolution of the First Republic, but again, as with *Píseň o rodné zemi*, in the context of what happened in September 1938, its message seems particularly timely given the perceived existential threat. It comes to represent both a reminder, and a warning – a record of the past and a promise

83 Hora: *Kniha domova*: 57. Engl. "cruel to one another, brothers beat brothers / divided by the Gospel".

84 Ibid. Engl. "Entirely in us / a hundred times you've bloomed again towards the sun".

85 Ibid., 58. Engl. "An so we go, / the dead, the living, the unborn, / an endless generation."

86 Ibid. Engl. "keep watch".

or obligation to the future. Even a poem such as Seifert's *Nad mapou* is also a memorial of sorts. Though in its portrayal of the speaker in melancholic cartographical mode, redrawing the borders of the Czech lands following the Munich Agreement, it purports to document the simple delineation of territory, the poem also serves as a poignant reminder that the frontiers were not always thus, that land has been lost, people displaced. Had the Sudetenland not been regained following the end of Second World War, it might have stood as one of the last lyric depictions to articulate the Czech claim on the region, the memory of a now by-gone era.

However, perhaps the clearest example of a textual monument is Seifert's composition *30. IX. 1938*. The very title draws upon memorial conventions – the practice of marking down dates of birth and death, and other significant milestones, in this case the date of the signing of the Munich Agreement. Like *Nad mapou* before it, the poem is particularly concerned with the ceding of the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany and explicitly bids farewell to the well springs that are now part of another country:

Prameny sbohem, kolikrát  
nad vaší vodou jsme se nakláněli  
a pili dlouze jenom bez sklenky  
tu vůni hor, ten opojivý chlad,  
když dotýkali jsme se svými čely  
studené trávy, bledé pomněnky.<sup>87</sup>

The speaker's only connection to this landscape now is through memories and these are unusually rich in sensory detail. There is an unexpected, almost synaesthetic shift mid-verse from the gustatory to the olfactory; we assume the speaker is about to describe the taste of water, but instead he refers to drinking in the scent of the mountains. The experience is said to be overwhelming and appears to cause sensations to blur and merge. Changing tense, but sticking with his sensory theme, the speaker declares in the following stanza that the sound of the water falling will now only be heard elsewhere ("vodopád / už bude zvonit v ticho noci jiné"<sup>88</sup>). At the same time, though, he notes that this noise is eternal, as is the current, and polysyndeton and repetition are employed to underscore the idea of incessant rhythmical movement ("a vody věčný šum a vody věčný spád, / ten věčný proud, jenž nikdy neuplyne"<sup>89</sup>). Gradually it

87 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 205. Engl. "Farewell springs, how many times / did we bend down over your waters / and only take a long drink without a glass / from the scent of the mountains, that intoxicating cold / when with our foreheads / we touched the cold grass, the pale forget-me-nots."

88 Ibid. Engl. "the waterfall / is already going to ring out in the silence of a different night".

89 Ibid. Engl. "and the ceaseless murmur of the water and the ceaseless fall of the water / and the ceaseless current, which never slips away".

becomes clear that the loss of the border region will be felt by humans, but not by nature.<sup>90</sup> Larks will not alter their song, nor moss cease to grow on the boulders by the water simply because of what has happened. In this way, the poem can be seen as both a wistful testament to the interaction between man and nature, the Czechs and their countryside, as once was – before politics got in the way, a memorialisation of a more innocent past, one might say – and an admiring expression or celebration of the majesty of nature, the way that way it stands loftily above the affairs of mankind. Of course, depictions of this sort should not be regarded as an empirical representation or a true snapshot of the real-world state of affairs at the time of writing. Nor may we assume that these are necessarily “true” memories, experienced by Seifert himself and presented to the reader by his poetic persona. Rather, they seem to offer something closer to a specific image or view of how things might – or perhaps ought to – be remembered; a kind of poetic insurance policy, as it were, taken out as a guarantee against the forgetfulness of future generations and historical or politically-driven amnesia.

## Repurposing the Past

Besides assuming the form of textual monuments, something which can help to stabilise particular memories or visions of the past, not quite setting them in stone, but at least giving them an identifiable shape, many of the poems also allude to and subvert existing monuments and other symbols of collective identity, reworking them to often novel or surprising effect. Here we can witness the dynamics of cultural memory in action, its malleability and openness to new interpretations and adaptations. An obvious example of such modification can be found in Halas’ *Praze*, where a well-known physical monument – the statue of St. Wenceslas at the southeastern end of Wenceslas Square in Prague – is described as having come to life the previous night:

Kůň bronzový kůň Václavův  
se včera v noci třás  
a kníže kopí potěžkal<sup>91</sup>

90 A similar sentiment can also be found in Seifert’s *Pokoj lidem* (Engl. “Tranquility to the people”) from December 1938: “Ty lesy, hory, kde dnes tiše sněží, / kde noc své hvězdy syne na spící, / ty lesy, hory již nám nenáleží, / jen ptáci nám dnes kreslí hranici.” (Engl. “Those forests, mountains, where it is snowing quietly today, / where the night sprinkles its stars on the sleeping, / those forests, mountains which do not belong to us / today only birds draw the border for us.”) *Ibid.*, 208.

91 Halas: *Časy*, 98. Engl. “The bronze horse Wenceslas’ horse / shook last night / and the duke shifted the weight of his lance”.

This draws upon and fulfils the promise of a famous legend that one day the patron saint of Bohemia would return to rout the enemies of his homeland. The implication is that *this* – the time of the Sudeten Crisis and the growing threat to European stability from Nazi Germany – is the moment that for centuries the Czechs have been waiting for; their true hour of need, that – despite previous great trials and tribulations – they have never quite required a saviour like they do now. The so-called *národní ohrožení* is cast in frankly apocalyptic terms here (“a strašní jezdcí Zjevení / mávají praporem”<sup>92</sup>), but with St. Wenceslas a glimmer of hope and salvation emerges. The legend has been reactivated and recalibrated for the modern day – Wenceslas is quite literally revived and should be able to defend the nation and its moral integrity once again.<sup>93</sup> The legend, which includes a sleeping army of Wenceslas’ soldiers hidden under the mountain Blaník, awaiting his orders, is also the subject of Halas’ poem of the same name. In *Blaník* we do not find St. Wenceslas himself, but the idea of salvation through biding one’s time and waiting for the right moment to strike is instead transferred to the whole of the Czech lands:

Jak jeden Blaník je česká zem.  
Teď konec budiž spaní,  
Věřte jen sobě v čase zlém!  
Věřící srdce je zbraní.<sup>94</sup>

The old legend is expanded and updated, made relevant for a new audience – contemporary Czechs living under the Protectorate – but the underlying mes-

92 Ibid. Engl. “and the terrible horsemen from the Book of Revelation / wave the flag”.

93 Besides the parallels to other western European legends such as those of King Arthur or Barbarossa discussed in Chapter One, one might also wonder if Halas’ poem and its treatment of St. Wenceslas is also something of a nod to Pushkin’s *Mednyy vsadnik* (Engl. “The Bronze Horseman”, literally “The Copper Horseman”). Obviously there are notable differences – not the least the fact that Pushkin’s statue is a rather malign force rather than Halas’ implied saviour – but both poems certainly blend contemporary exigence and older myth and share certain apocalyptic undertones – the great flood in the Russian poem, the four horsemen from the Book of Revelation in the Czech. Moreover, in both poems, city and legend-come-to-life are very much intertwined, with the Pushkin text bearing the subtitle *Peterburgskaya povest’* (Engl. “A Petersburg Tale”) and Halas’ title expressly dedicating the composition to the the Czech capital. It is worth noting, however, that while in Pushkin’s epic, the remarkable occurrence is recounted at great length, in Halas’ poem it is only hinted at. Just as Pražák talked of the development of a finely-tuned language of allusions and symbols during the *národní ohrožení* (“řeč náznaků a symbolů”), as was mentioned in the Introduction, so here is much of the subversive and incendiary potential of the scene left pointedly unsaid. It is up to the reader to recognise the underlying threat to Nazi Germany and other belligerents.

94 Halas: A co básník, 117. Engl. “The Czech lands are like Blaník / Now let it be the end of sleep, / believe only in yourselves in evil times! / A heart that believes is a weapon.”

sage about the importance of faith and steadfastness, the belief that patience will be rewarded in the end, remains the same.<sup>95</sup>

With this in mind, it is perhaps also worth reconsidering images such as that of a hunchbacked Arc de Triomphe (“a oblouk triumfální / se trochu nahrbil”<sup>96</sup>) from Seifert’s *Písnička o Páříži*, briefly alluded to in Chapter One. Here we have an historic monument, a potent symbol of victory and of the military prowess of Napoleon’s France, being overwritten, invested with new meaning. It is transformed into something distasteful, disfigured, a blight on the landscape, just as the Hunchback of Notre Dame alienated Paris society due to his physical appearance in Victor Hugo’s nineteenth-century novel. There is, in fact, a double connection to the celebrated French author, since his body lay in state at the foot of the Arc de Triomphe before being interred on 1 June 1885<sup>97</sup>; however, we cannot of course be sure whether Seifert was aware of this fact. Either way, though, the image remains an affront to French cultural and historical sensibilities. A similar device can also be observed when we revisit Halas’ *Zpěv úzkostí*. In it, the poet plays with negative tropes associated with the fair sex – the image of the ageing whore, the unfaithful lover – and transposes them onto one of the most recognisable symbols of the French Republic:

kde je tvá čapka Marianno  
Sluneční štít tvůj prasklý je  
a hanbou čpí tvé ano<sup>98</sup>

There is something shameful, almost indecent about this Marianne; she has lost her *bonnet rouge*, she can no longer defend herself properly, her words

95 Halas is not the only poet to have played with this famous folk tale during this period. In part three of Nezval’s *Historický obraz*, which relates to the end of the Second World War in the Czech lands, this idea of a contemporary return for the sleeping knights is taken even further, as the fulfilment of the Blaník legend is suggested to have been achieved by the activities of Czech resistance fighters: “Tak se vyplnila stará báje o Blaníku, / budete zdraví bojovníci z partyzánských šiků! / Český lid vám tiskne ruce na znamení díku” (Engl. “Thus the old legend about Blaník was fulfilled / be well fighters from the ranks of the partisans! The Czech people will grasp you by the hand in thanks.”) In: *Nezval: Historický obraz*, 70. The timely arrival of the Red Army to liberate most of the country is also cast in rather mythic terms: “Přišli včas jak legendární vojska z dávných kronik.” (Engl. “They arrived in time like the legendary forces from the chronicles of old.”) *Ibid.*, 71.

96 *Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Příbla hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 204. Engl. “and the triumphant arch / stooped a little”.

97 For an account of Hugo’s state funeral, see e.g. *Garval*, Michael D.: “A Dream of Stone”. *Fame, Vision and Monumentality in Nineteenth-Century French Literary Culture*. Newark 2004, 13 f. A brief description of the event or rather a childhood memory thereof can also be found in Halbwachs’ work; cf. *Halbwachs: The Collective Memory*, 56.

98 *Halas, Časy*: 101. Engl. “where is your cap Marianne, / your sun shield is cracked / and your yes reeks of shame”.

tainted. If the Marianne still represents France, then her obvious fall from grace can be seen as reflecting upon the whole of the country. Our expected condemnation will carry far and extend well beyond mere disapproval at a suddenly wretched figure of femininity.

Doubts can, of course, be raised as to the longevity of such images – whether a Czech today upon seeing the Arc de Triomphe or the Marianne is truly still influenced by Seifert’s and Halas’ words and would associate them with the perceived betrayal by the French government and subsequent moral “debasement” of that country – or perhaps, to put it another way, whether they themselves have indeed made the transition from communicative to cultural memory.<sup>99</sup> However, it nevertheless remains worth noting that the material that can be mined in the way described by Rigney and repurposed to provocative or accusatory effect is not limited to that which originates from one’s own cultural heritage, but that also foreign pasts may harbour useful emblems and symbolically-loaded landmarks, ripe for reinvention.<sup>100</sup>

Furthermore, it is not only symbols and legends that are referenced and repurposed in the works of our poets. Other literary texts, too, assume an important role within many of the poems. The authors do not only borrow from those who have gone before them, but also use particular works as a springboard, positioning their own texts within a specific context and, in doing so, one might argue, help to ready them for their subsequent absorption into cultural memory by virtue of correspondence to or affinity with earlier works. The intertextual links vary in the level of their intensity. Some are mere allusions that, for the most part, remain in the background, yet may still colour or at least have a certain bearing on our understanding and appreciation of the work in question. Such is the case with Hora’s *Popelka přebírá hrách* (Engl. “Cinderella picks peas”) from the 1940 collection *Zahrada Popelčína*. The titles of both the poem and the collection clearly point the reader towards the fairytale originally popularised by the Brothers Grimm. However, anyone hoping for a lyrical re-telling of that tale is likely to be sorely disappointed by Hora’s poem. In it he grapples with weighty existential questions – issues of

99 Cf. *Erll/Rigney*: Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics, 5: “It is the public arena which turns some remediations into relevant media versions of the past, while it ignores or censors others.” In this case, therefore, it was not for Halas and Seifert to decide, but rather for their audience.

100 Indeed, towards the end of the war, the Nazis themselves attempted to subvert and re-focus the symbolic significance of St. Wencelas in the Czech lands by creating the so-called *Svatováclavská orlice* or *Wenzelsadler* (“Wenceslas eagle”), which was awarded to selected Czechs for their cooperation with the Reich. According to historian Jaroslav Šebek, however, their efforts met with little success. Cf. *Šebek*, Jaroslav: *Der hl. Wenzel und die mentalen und gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen in den böhmischen Ländern der modernen Zeit*. In: *Samerski*, Stefan (ed.): *Wenzel: Protagonist der böhmischen Erinnerungskultur*. Paderborn 2018, 177.

life and death and the relationship between the collective and the individual. Cinderella is only referred to on a handful of occasions and, at her very first introduction, it becomes apparent that she is not really there as the downtrodden character from the fairytale, but rather seems to symbolise somebody else for the speaker:

Popelko, Popelko má  
kytičko bdělá, vodo bedlivá,  
budeme spolu přebírat hrách doma?<sup>101</sup>

The use of the word *spolu* (“together”) is particularly significant here since it suggests the idea of a shared fate between the speaker and his “Cinderella”, of sticking together through the good times and the bad. The fairytale girl’s famously lonely chore of picking up peas maliciously cast down by others suddenly stops being solo pursuit in this allusion and becomes an act of communion and community. If it is artistic influences that we are after, then, as Václav Černý pointed out in a review shortly after publication, we would probably do better to look to the early nineteenth-century English Romantic Percy Bysshe Shelley.<sup>102</sup> But, at the same time, it would also be wrong to overlook the connection entirely. Indeed, the original story – which ultimately promises an escape from subjugation and retribution for those who do wrong – may have had noteworthy contemporary implications, or at least offer pleasing hints of a potential parallel if we wish to anchor the poem a little more firmly in its historical context. We do not have to start allegorising things, interpreting everything as a reference to external events, merely be open to the suggestion that for readers in the Protectorate, this “background narrative”, as we might call it, may have been one that instilled a degree of hope for the future if they cared to recall what happened to Cinderella and her step-sisters.<sup>103</sup>

Holan’s poem *Noc z Íliady* (Engl. “Night from the Iliad”) is another case in point. By explicitly likening the mobilisation of Czech forces in the late

101 *Hora: Kniha domova*, 191. Engl. “Cinderella, my Cinderella, / wakeful posy, attentive water, / are we going to pick peas at home together?”

102 Cf. Černý, Václav: *Průhled do nových knih*. Josef Hora: “Zahrada Popelčina” – Kamil Bednář: “Veliký mrtvý” – Vladimír Holan: “První testament”. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 3 (1940), 30: “z celé té Horovy knihy slyším zvonit stříbrné hrany Shelleyova loučení s mrtvým Keatsem v ‘Adonisu’” (Engl. “throughout the whole of Hora’s book I can hear the silvery knell of Shelley’s farewell to the dead Keats in ‘Adonis’ tolling”). Though Černý speaks of the entire collection, it seems likely that he is thinking of *Rekviem* in particular, where Hora’s speaker bids poetic farewell to two literary figures.

103 Incidentally, Cinderella also gets a very brief mention in another, somewhat earlier poem from this period – Nezval’s *Ubrus na operační stůl* from the collection *Matka naděje*. Although a rather ambiguous reference, here too the figure is broadly associated with hope: “Přichází soumrak a na jeho černém plátně se zmítá naděje s očima Popelky” (Engl. “Nightfall arrives and upon its black canvas / hope writhes with Cinderella eyes”). In: *Nezval: Matka naděje*, 227.

summer of 1938 to the celebrated Greek composition (“Taková noc, noc z Íliady, / v níž stromy jdou a kráčí hory”<sup>104</sup>), he casts the military manoeuvre in an epic light. It is clear that he is being hyperbolic, but in this respect, Holan could also be seen as building a new poetic mythology for the Czech lands based on his present, one that is worthy of the ancients, and suggesting that the mobilisation is an event of Homeric proportions, an incident that should be passed down across the ages. What is more, the comparison may also awaken memories of the main themes of the *Iliad* in the reader, not least the fact that it famously begins with the word *μῆνιν* (accusative form of “wrath”). Given the general tone of *Září 1938*, the collection from which the poem is taken – its undisguised anger, the way that it rages at the Western powers – this surely cannot help but bolster the vehemence of the emotional response contained within, guiding the reader’s own reaction too.

Other intertextual references are even more pronounced, however. Perhaps the most striking example is Seifert’s poem “*Písně otroka*” (Engl. “Songs of a slave”). The quotation marks here are deliberate. The title is taken directly from Svatopluk Čech’s nineteenth-century lyrical composition of the same name. The speaker refers explicitly to Čech’s text as an object within the poem, declaring not to have seen it for the past twenty years (the exact length of time for which the First Czechoslovak Republic existed):

Tu drobnou knížku  
pohodil jsem v chvatu  
a neviděl jsem ji  
celých dvacet let.<sup>105</sup>

He explains his not having picked up the volume in all that time on the grounds that its contents are too sad (“Kdopak by tenkrát / smutné písně čet!”<sup>106</sup>), but something has evidently changed suddenly in the speaker’s outlook. He seems to regret having ever cast the book aside and now seeks to breathe new life into it:

Na stolek knížku  
s výčitkou si kladu  
a šeptám si v ní  
smysl časový.<sup>107</sup>

104 Holan: *Dokumenty*, 26. Engl. “A night like that, a night from the Iliad, / in which the trees walk and the mountains march”.

105 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 218. Engl. “That dainty book / I flung down in haste / and haven’t seen it / these past twenty years.”

106 Ibid. Engl. “Who on earth back then / would have read sad songs!”

107 Ibid. Engl. “On the table / I put down the book with a reproach / and whisper into it / topical meaning.”

We may even wish to consider the poem itself the result of an “update” of Čech’s most famous work. The repeated allusions to the original *Písně otroka* and the borrowing from their title certainly indicate a strong sense of parity between the two texts. If the version from the 1890s railed against foreign rule and the Habsburg yoke, depicting the Czechs as slaves under German-speaking overlords, then logic dictates that another national enslavement is being intimated here, one that must surely refer to the contemporary situation in the Czech lands. In this way, Seifert can be seen as using intertextuality, the knowledge and memory of earlier texts, to present a particular narrative of recent events, one that emphasises the helplessness of the Czechs, their subjugation, and implies that history has once again come full circle for the nation.

Last but not least, we must also consider the issue of place in relation to memory, though of course if Lachmann is to be believed, we have in fact, already been doing this in our discussion of the intertextual aspects of our poetry given that “As a collection of intertexts, the text itself is a memory place”<sup>108</sup>. When it comes to the spatial influence on memory, we can note in particular the importance of a feeling of proximity to the past. As the following lines from Seifert’s *Česká modlitba* demonstrate, so long as the timing is right, one does not even have to have a concrete physical place in mind, merely a sense of closeness for there to be a positive effect: “ty mrtvé, skryté v mlhách listopadu / ať dneska opět stojí blízko nás!”<sup>109</sup> Mist may shroud the location of the dead authors whom the speaker addresses, draping their exact coordinates in mystery, but the moral certainty, the support afforded by the reconnection with the past remains the same. The knowledge that they are there – somewhere or other – appears to suffice.

## Places of Memory

Throughout the poetry of this period, we can in fact find frequent allusions to sites that have a bearing on the various guises of memory and mnemonically-charged material. On the one hand, there are locations of former importance in the past, which now have symbolic value to the present; these are perhaps closest to Nora’s *lieux de mémoire*. On the other, there is also a proliferation of places of personal significance and consistent pragmatic use, most obviously graveyards.

108 *Lachmann*: Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature, 305.

109 *Seifert*: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky* (1939–1948), 210. Engl. “the dead, hidden in the mists of November, / today let them again stand by us!”

When it comes to potential *lieux de mémoire*, we note striking references to places such as Bílá hora or White Mountain, the location of a fateful battle in 1620 that put paid to the prospect of Czech sovereignty for several centuries, for example in Seifert's *Podzimní vzpomínka*:

Taky byl podzim; po prostře  
plouží se mlhy do alejí  
kams až k Bílé hoře<sup>110</sup>

Of course Bílá hora is also the name of a district on the outskirts on the Czech capital and the final destination of one of Prague's many tramlines, so it does have perfectly everyday associations. However, in the context of a reminiscence, which this poem explicitly claims to be if the title is anything to go by, we cannot help but also take into account the memorial connotations of such a place, its symbolism as the perceived source of one of the most painful chapters of Czech history – the years of Habsburg rule. We inevitably ask ourselves if this might be a timely reminder of things to come, a warning for the future. The sense of the past and its continued significance for the present is even more compelling in the poet's *Říp v okně* (Engl. "Říp in the window", originally published in the newspaper *Národní práce* at the beginning of May 1939 under the title *Říp z okna*, "Říp from the window"). Here the speaker directly addresses the famous mountain, which is said to be the site where Čech, the mythical forefather of the Czech people, founded the nation: "tak dlouho jsem tě nespátřil / tak dlouho. Od podzimku."<sup>111</sup> Říp represents the origin of Czech lands, their genesis. It is significant that the speaker claims not to have seen the mountain since the autumn, that is, the time of the Munich Agreement. It suggests having lost sight of an important aspect of his culture, but now presumably being back on track, as it were. Říp is not the only mnemonically-charged site alluded to in the poem, however. In the last stanza, the speaker declares

Sůl nám dnes padá do vína,  
když člověk na vše vzpomíná  
a myslí na bastily.<sup>112</sup>

The memory of what has happened is distasteful, ruinous even to the enjoyment of some of the pleasures in life, but more significant here is use of the

110 Ibid., 190. Engl. "It was autumn too, all around / mists drift into the avenue / somewhere up towards Bílá hora".

111 Ibid., 226. Engl. "I've not seen you for so long / so long. Since the autumn."

112 Ibid. Engl. "Salt falls into our wine / when one recalls everything / and thinks of the bastilles."

word *bastily* (from the French *bastilles*, “fortresses”). The term can of course signify a prison in Czech, so on one level, the allusion could relate to those taken into custody as a result of the crack-down on dissent following the creation of the Protectorate. More frequently, though, it is employed in the sense of the Bastille in Paris. Upon seeing the word, we are immediately reminded of the storming thereof, the overthrow of a detested regime, and thus the reference can also be seen as obliquely raising the prospect of armed resistance or rebellion, using a strand of European cultural memory to stoke contemporary hopes of salvation. This is certainly the case in the second part of Nevzal’s *Historický obraz*, where the speaker describes those who took part in the mass protests on 28 October 1939, the day that marks the creation of an independent Czechoslovak state, with reference to the event that fanned the flames of the French Revolution:

Oči rozzářené hněvem ukazují sílu  
jako oči těch, kdož kdysi táhli na Bastilu,  
je to jako náhlá vzpoura v nepřátelském týlu.<sup>113</sup>

There is much figurative language in play here, but it is also tempered with non-figurative double meaning. The Bastille has both a literal and a metonymic function, while the enraged eyes stand in *pars pro toto* for the demonstrators. The word *týl* might initially appear to be used broadly metaphorically, in the military sense of the enemy’s rear, but since the earlier focus on the protesters’ eyes puts us firmly in the mind of body parts, we might equally think of the nape of the neck, of attacking while somebody’s back is turned and thus the threat of sedition becomes all the more insidious as the soldierly figure of speech is given back its original anatomical denotation. Though the protests are not successful, but rather put down in a most aggressive fashion and reported matter-of-factly by the speaker, who seems at first deadened to the violence he is describing, this section of the poem does not end on a wholly pessimistic note:

Rána do davu, jenž zpívá. Rána do břicha.  
Kdo bezbranně se skácel. Kdosi nedýchá.  
Rána do bezbranných těl, pak rány do ticha...

113 *Nezval: Historický obraz*, 42. Engl. “Eyes lit up with anger show strength / like those, who once tugged at the Bastille / it’s like a sudden revolt at the enemy’s rear”. A few lines before, we also find further revolutionary imagery that takes advantage of the fact that both the French and the Czech(oslovak) flags are made up of red, white and blue: “ulice jsou plny kokard, plny trikolor.” (Engl. “the streets are full of cockades, full of tricolours.”) *Ibid.*, 41. The parallel being drawn with the rising up of the French people against the *Ancien Régime* cannot be overseen.

Rána do těch, kterým zbyly jenom holé ruce,  
 rána, jako když se vykonává exekuce,  
 rána nelítostně potlačené revoluce!<sup>114</sup>

Again there is a focus on body parts, a reminder of the human costs of any uprising, but equally also of people's ability to withstand, to keep on singing. Whatever blows rain down, the spirit of the revolution cannot be wholly crushed, not least because the speaker is there to give an account of what has happened and to pass it on to others.

From Hora's *Jan houslista* and *Rekviem* (Engl. "Requiem"), to Halas' *Dušičky 1938* (Engl. "All Souls' Day 1938") or Seifert's *Nad hrobkou českých králů*, we also struggle to get away from final resting places. Their significance to the realm of memory cannot be overstated. They are among the sites where societies most commonly remember the dead, where public mourning takes place and private grief need not be hidden from sight. Marked graves give back to the dead a certain materiality or physicality that they do not, in fact, possess anymore, having simply ceased to exist. The dead receive a new and ostensibly now permanent place in space and time, recording the date upon which they entered this world, and the date upon which they left it. Standing by a grave, we feel closer to the past, to that which was, and those who were, yet are no longer. There is little sadness in these poetic references to burial sites; instead the speakers seem to draw more strength than anything from their proximity to the dead, the knowledge that they are not alone, that they walk along a path that many have trodden before them. Even the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, that famously *empty* monument to war dead, which can be found in so many countries, is imbued with hope and envisioned as a source of help and salvation. In Seifert's *Nad hrobem neznámého vojína* (Engl. "Above the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier"), the speaker appeals directly to the soldier he visualises within and beseeches him to support the Czechs:

Ty mrtvý, spravedlivý  
 a jména neznámého,  
 bran plamen, který živí  
 víru národa mého<sup>115</sup>.

Halas goes even further in his *Hrob neznámého vojáka* (Engl. "Tomb of an unknown soldier") with his speaker exclaiming "Neznámý voják a prach jeho

114 Ibid., 42. Engl. "Blows into the crowd, which is singing. Blows to the stomach. / Someone tumbles defencelessly. Someone is not breathing. / Blows to defenceless bodies, then blows into the silence... / Blows to those, who have only their bare hands left / blows, like when an execution is carried out / blows to the ruthlessly suppressed revolution!"

115 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 222. Engl. "You dead, just / and nameless one / defend the flame that keeps alive / the faith of my nation".

kostí / je dynamitem v nás!”<sup>116</sup>, using the soldier’s death and imagined decay to foment sedition. It seems that ceremonial remembrance and memorialisation are much less important here than what the symbolic location can offer to the present and the future.

## (Grand-)Mother of the Nation

We may also examine this relationship between memory and specific locations a little more comprehensively with reference to other longer poems or collections by those authors. Seifert’s *Vějíř Boženy Němcové* and Halas’ *Naše paní Božena Němcová*, represent two volumes of poetry with a strong sense of place that are linked by their devoted focus on a much-loved nineteenth-century writer, the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of whose birth was celebrated in 1940. They are both examples of portable monuments that operate at a critical junction between elements reminiscence of (pseudo-) biographical, communicative and cultural memory, deftly combining the personal with the national. In our analysis, we shall engage in more detail with Nora’s idea of the *lieu de mémoire*, and also be guided by more recent spatial concepts, in particular Michelle Balaev’s notion that “Place is not only a location of experience, but, significantly, a facet of perception that organizes memories, feelings, and meaning at the level of the physical environment.”<sup>117</sup>

Quite aside from the anniversary celebrations and commemorations, when one considers her standing within Czech literary history as a whole, it is not exactly surprising that Božena Němcová proved to be a figure of sufficiently far-reaching cultural currency to tempt both Seifert and Halas to put pen to paper simultaneously. Her novel *Babička*, a fictionalised account of her own childhood and memories of her real-life grandmother, Magdalena Novotná, is one of the most popular and enduring works of Czech literature that emerged under Habsburg rule.<sup>118</sup> It is a rather nostalgic look at a more innocent and

116 Halas: *A co básník*, 48. Engl. “The unknown soldier and dust of his bones / are dynamite in us!”

117 Balaev, Michelle: *Trends in Literary Trauma Theory*. In: *Mosaic*, 41/2 (2008), 160.

118 For a contemporary reading of *Babička* and its cultural or rather national(ist) significance, cf. *Navrátil: O patetických nacionalismech*, 366: “Kdyby šlo jen o soukromý poměr příbuzenský, nemohla by *národní spisovatelka* oslaviti tuto babičku, přes veškerou lidskou lásku k ní i k tomu typu, onou mytizující apoteosou. Za láskou k babičce se u Boženy Němcové skrývá se láska k vlasti.” (Engl. “If it were only about a private familial relationship, the *author of the nation* would not be able to celebrate the grandmother, all of the human love for her and people like her notwithstanding, with that mythologising apotheosis. In the case of Božena Němcová, behind the love for the grandmother there is hidden a love for the homeland.”)

decidedly bucolic world, a world that even as Němcová was writing no longer really existed, and perhaps never did. The eponymous grandmother is a fountain of good sense and traditional country values, very much in harmony with the seasons and other natural cycles, and keenly aware of the importance of staying true to one's homeland, especially when it comes to language. In conversation with another character, and recalling her early widowhood, for example, the grandmother explains her headstrong decision to leave Prussian-ruled Nysa and return to Bohemia with her three young children in the following terms:

Kdo by je tam byl učil milovat svoji otčinu a mateřskou svoji řeč? – Nikdo. Byly by se cizé řeči, cizím mravům naučily a konečně zcela zapomněly na svoji krev. Jak pak bych se mohla z toho před Pánembohem zodpovídat? Ne, ne, kdo z české krve pochází, ať zůstane při českém jazyku.<sup>119</sup>

At a time of enforced Germanisation in public life, as was the case in the Protectorate, being reminded of such sentiments – even just in passing or by way of indirect association – is a powerful message indeed and one that may help to strengthen readers' resolve. Moreover, it may also be productive to consider possible parallels between Němcová's life story and the fate of the Czech lands in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Though in life she faced poverty and misfortune, in death she was celebrated as one of the key architects of the Czech National Revival and is seen as living on in her own writing and in the recollections of her compatriots. This too has useful implications for the relationship between our poets' work and contemporary events since it reminds us of the power of both literature and memory to immortalise and even in some respects resurrect. Němcová may therefore have been a lesson unto both the empirical authors behind the works and their intended readers. As briefly mentioned in Chapter One, it was sheer coincidence, rather than an attempt to compete with one another, that saw both Seifert and Halas grappling with the same protagonist and similar themes; however, it remains to be seen how much overlap there truly is between the two compositions.

119 *Němcová*, Božena: *Babička*. Praha 2008, 74; Engl. "Who would have taught them there to love their fatherland and their mother tongue? – No-one. They would have learned foreign tongues and foreign customs and in the end they would have completely forgotten their own blood. How could I have answered to the Lord God for that? No, no, those who are of Czech blood should stick to the Czech language."

## Formal Differences

From a formal point of view, the works certainly have relatively little in common. Seifert's poem, which, at 280 lines, is unusually long for the generally pithy poet, consists of five numbered parts. There is a certain symmetry to be found within the stanzaic structure of these parts. The first and the last contain only quatrains – albeit varying numbers thereof<sup>120</sup> – all rhyming *abab*, while the three middle sections are each made up of eight octets. They also follow the same rhyme scheme, in this case *ababbcbc*. There is something almost relentless about this pattern given the predominance and repetition of the *b* rhymes, and also the frequent re-use of particular rhyming words in the body of a stanza to emphatic effect. In the second stanza of part II, for example, the words *zpátky* (“back”) and *křižovatky* (“from the crossroads”) are tempered with two counts of the word *matky* (“of the mother”), leaving little doubt as to where the focus lies in this octet. The word *matku* (“mother” in the accusative), is also repeated within the stanza itself, albeit not in a rhyming function.

Owing to the imbalance of verses between the first and final sections, the top-heaviness of the poem as it were, we cannot exactly speak of mirroring, even if the third part does assume the role of a structural centre-piece, around which the others are draped. Rather, one is left with the impression of the poem having come full circle, returned to its origins. As we shall see, form and content are, as a whole, very much aligned here since, thematically, the poem places a strong emphasis upon motherhood and thus the source and the bringing forth of life, and upon the dead, that is, those who have already returned from whence they came.

Halas' collection, on the other hand, exhibits considerably more formal and stanzaic variety across its seventeen individual poems. It begins with a series of four epigraphs, quotations taken from Němcová's personal correspondence and marked as such:

“Moje srdce bažilo být velmi milováno...”<sup>121</sup>

“Tělo moje jste měli, činy moje, moji upřímnost, ale touhy moje šly do dále, kam, tomu jsem já sama nerozuměla...”<sup>122</sup>

120 Fifteen in the case of part I, making it by far the longest section within the poem, compared to just seven in part V.

121 Halas: Časy, 120, Engl. “My heart craved to be loved a great deal...”

122 Ibid. Engl. “You have had my body, my deeds, my sincerity, but my desires travelled into the distance, wither, not even I understood...”

“Zimu jsme měli – čím zatopit nebylo...”<sup>123</sup>

“Prosím, poskytněte mi kousek božího dárku...”<sup>124</sup>

These set a tone of private longing, of resilience – the ability and desire to withstand. It is especially important to note the use of ellipsis since this gives the impression of unfinished business and of things left unsaid. In other words, the past may yet have bearing on the present. When it comes to the poems themselves, the most common form – found in eleven of the compositions – is the quatrain, always rhyming *abab*. Other poems exhibit octets (*U hrobu naší paní*, Engl. “At our lady’s grave”), septets (*U hrobu naší paní*), quintets (*Oslovení*, Engl. “Salutation”; *Podobizna naší paní*, Engl. “Likeness of our lady”), tercets, (*Žena a muž*, Engl. “Woman and man”; *Smrt naší paní*, Engl. “The death of our lady”, *Chvála naší paní*, Engl. “Praise for our lady”), couplets (*Podobizna naší paní*, *Naše paní bojuje s drakem*, Engl. “Our lady battles the dragon”; *Smrt naší paní*) and stand-alone lines (*Podobizna naší paní*; *Svatební*, Engl. “Bridal”), often mixing multiple different forms within a single poem. The final and longest poem in the collection, *Chvála naší paní*, is of particular interest from a stanzaic point of view. It is made up of 21 tercets, but because the first line of each verse consists of just one word, *paní* (“lady”), the poem puts us more in the mind of a series of rhyming couplets, which, were it not for the fact that they are addressed directly to the dead nineteenth-century author, could be viewed as at times bordering on the epitaphic, as the opening lines show:

Paní

o Vaši smrt vyrostla naše sláva  
kdo chudý je ten vždycky dvakrát dává<sup>125</sup>

In this terse account, death does not stop Němcová from giving back to the nation.

Even in the case of the ubiquitous four-line stanzas, there is still also a fair amount of deviation as to the number of verses concerned – ranging from seven in *Řeč naší paní* (Engl. “Our lady’s speech”) to just one in *Poutníkovi* (Engl. “To the pilgrim”). However, there are no examples in this volume that can really complete with the stanzaic irregularity of poems such as *Praze* or *Mobilisace* from Halas’ earlier collection *Torso naděje*. While admittedly not as unfettered as works from the Poetist or Surrealist movements, such compositions are, undoubtedly, to some extent unencumbered by strict conventions

123 Ibid. Engl. “We have had the winter – and with it there did not come a flood...”

124 Ibid. Engl. “Please, give me a piece of God’s gift...”

125 Ibid., 139. Engl. “Lady / our fame grew with your death / those who are poor always give twice”.

of versification. We can therefore perhaps note something of a continued shift towards more traditional forms of verse within Halas' writing at this time.

Like Seifert, Halas repeats rhymes, both at the ends of lines and in their midst, but in the case of *U hrobu naší paní*, for instance, the effect is even more relentless, almost overpowering; an inexorable torrent of sound patterning that is well suited to a poem concerned with both tears and rain, that is, two potential sources of streaming liquid. The first and final stanzas, which are replete with the rhyming words *deště* ("rains", "of the rain") *češte* (imperative form of *česat*, "to comb") and *ještě* ("still", "yet"), share the rather repetitive rhyme scheme *aaaabaab*. The middle stanza, which sees the initial raindrops transformed into teardrops, has a slightly different rhyme scheme in *aaabbba* and also introduces other rhyming words, most notably *kapličku* ("small chapel" in the accusative), *kapičku* ("droplet" in the accusative) and *babičku* ("grandmother" in the accusative). Even the internal rhymes exhibit recurring acoustic features, as the following lines demonstrate: "jedna slza za babičku / druhá slza za babičku"<sup>126</sup>. Not only do we have distinctive sound patterning in "slza za", reinforcing the idea of the tears being shed for one particular person, but the two lines could even be viewed as a holorhyme in their own right, albeit one that relies almost exclusively upon identical sound, distinguished only by the disparate opening syllables ("*jedna*" / "*druhá*"), and with a tail rhyme that spans several words. It has an almost deadening effect, drumming into us, like water falling onto a hard surface.

## Seifert's Maternal Vision

Having identified some of the more salient formal similarities and differences between the two works, we may now turn to matters of theme and content. Seifert's *Vějíř Boženy Němcové* is told from the perspective of a single speaker, who finds himself drawn to the notion of the author as a woman, focussing in particular on her tattered lace fan, a thing of transient beauty, and who is unafraid to acknowledge Němcová's frequent sorrows and desires in real life, yearnings that went far beyond mere matters of the heart: "Jsou větší touhy, než je lidská láska / a než jsou ženské slzy v krajce"<sup>127</sup>. She becomes a source of resilience and moral certitude from beyond the grave, miraculously transformed by time and shifting circumstance, an oxymoron of hope:

126 Ibid., 134. Engl. "a tear for the grandmother / a second tear for the grandmother".

127 Seifert: *Vějíř Boženy Němcové – Světlem oděná – Kamenný most*, 14. Engl. "There are greater longings than human love, / and than female tears in the lace of a fan."

Jde mrtvá k nám a všechny lásky její  
čas proměňuje znovu ve vzácnější kov,  
co je nám láska v naší beznaděje<sup>128</sup>

The titular physical relic from her youth is similarly potent. “Je vetchý již”<sup>129</sup>, we are told on numerous occasions, and yet the fan still has the power to evoke particular memories, to recreate the past almost: “ten, který jej mívá / už sotva postřehne její pláč tkanině”<sup>130</sup>. The object may occasionally stand for brief moments of feminine happiness and frivolity (“Ach šťastná doba písní, lásky, vznětu / a jak je krátká pro srdíčka žen”<sup>131</sup>), but the memory thereof is an uncomfortable one for the speaker, it seems, bordering on a *momento mori*: “Ach hořká doba, k vzpomínce se druží / jen úzkost, úzkost, že je člověk stár”<sup>132</sup>. There is a clear change of mood – signaled by the simultaneous repetition and progression, or perhaps *regression*, from *šťastná* (“happy”) to *hořká* (“bitter”) – between the joyful past, as remembered or rather imagined, and the dolorous present, where the remembering is purported to take place. For the speaker, the fan symbolises a lot more than just its material form and provides a way of communing with Němcová:

Ten vějíř, který vznesl políbení,  
je pro mne něčím víc než pouhým vějířem,  
snem hovoříme s tím, co vlastně není,  
a já se dneska potkal s jejím snem.<sup>133</sup>

Indeed, as the following quatrain, with its opening parallelisms, shows, the speaker claims to have a very intense and intimate relationship with the dead author, sharing both her burdens and her bliss, a relationship that is achieved solely via recollection and memory:

A slza její je i slzou mojí  
S úsměvem jejím je i úsměv můj

128 Ibid., 13. Engl. “Dead, she walks towards us and time turns / all of her loves into more precious metal once again / which is love to us in our hopelessness”.

129 Ibid., 13. Engl. “It is already shabby”.

130 Ibid., 14. Engl. “he, who passes it by, / can almost catch sight of her weeping in the cloth”.

131 Ibid., 15. Engl. “Oh, a happy time of songs, love, animation / and how short it is for the little hearts of women”.

132 Ibid. Engl. “Oh, a bitter time, with the memory mingles / only anxiety, anxiety that one is old”.

133 Ibid., 17. Engl. “This fan, which raised a kiss / is more to me than a mere fan / in dreams we talk to that, which is not / and today I met with her dream.” These lines from the first section are also repeated right at the end of part V, reinforcing the aforementioned sense of the poem’s having come full circle.

do noci dlouho chodím po pokoji  
a říkám sobě stokrát: pamatuji!<sup>134</sup>

The speaker also describes himself visiting Němcová's grave at Vyšehrad cemetery and wanting to knock on the stone, trying to catch her attention: "Však chtěl jsem přec, když stál jsem před Slavínem / na desku zaklepat, zda dole uslyšíš"<sup>135</sup>. He expands on this theme in the following stanza, declaring "Ach, země má, pro opojivé krásy / tvých májů kvetoucích je v hrobě těžko spát"<sup>136</sup>. The idea that the dead are not really dead, but merely sleeping, is, of course, nothing new, but it is significant in relation to the nineteenth-century author. It brings Němcová into line with such legendary characters as King Arthur, Barbarossa and, above all, St. Wenceslas, rendering her a potential saviour-in-waiting. A kind of mythology is woven around Němcová, borrowing and revitalising tropes from other stories and cultures. She becomes more than merely a beloved figure from the past and now appears to have something to offer the present too.

As the previous lines illustrate, the speaker addresses both Němcová and his native land directly. At times it is almost difficult to distinguish the intended addressee. This, in turn, strengthens the bond between author and nation, and raises the possibility of reading and writing as patriotic acts. It is the songs of home on mothers' lips that are dearest to the speaker, though he may have travelled far and wide:

Z těch písní, které slyšel jsem,  
když poznával jsem cizí kraje,  
nejdražší jsou, jež naše zem  
na ústech lidu rozehraje.  
Když děcko zbožně poslouchá je,  
jich slova, něhu, tklivý spád,  
řeč na rtech matky rozehraje  
tu nejkrásnější ze sonat.<sup>137</sup>

The use of the word *zbožně* ("piously") is particularly striking here given its religious connotations. There is a sense that love for one's native land may

134 Ibid. Engl. "And her tear is my tear / and my smile is with her smile / long into the night I walk about the room / and tell myself a hundred time: remember!"

135 Ibid., 16. Engl. "But nevertheless, when I stood before Slavín [a tomb at Vyšehrad cemetery], I wanted / to knock on the slab to see whether you would hear down there".

136 Ibid. Engl. "Oh my land, because of the intoxicating beauties / of your blossoming Mays it is difficult to sleep in the grave".

137 Ibid., 26. Engl. "Of those songs which I heard / when visiting foreign parts / the dearest are those that our land / starts up on the lips of the people. / When a child piously listens to them / their words, tenderness, touching cadence / the language on the lips of the mother starts up / that most beautiful of sonnets."

have a similarly uplifting effect to love for God. We are even given a glimpse of a kind of *unio mystica* between the speaker (speaking not just for himself, but also for his compatriots, as indicated by the use of the first person plural *splyneme*, “we will join” or “merge”) and his native land:

vpila ji hlína země mé,  
té země, s kterou v políbení  
na konec věrně splyneme.<sup>138</sup>

The image of clay is, of course, reminiscent of the Biblical account of the creation of man, a connection that is compounded in the next stanza:

Co dal jí osud do věna  
je mé, je mé, jsem z její hlíny,  
je má, je má a nesněná,  
s údělem rodné mateřštiny  
i s hořkostí ukrytou v blíný;  
a v horečce a vidinách  
já slovem rodné mateřštiny  
volal jsem ji, když přišel strach.<sup>139</sup>

It is unclear whether the female figure, to whom the speaker alludes, is intended to be his homeland (*země*, “country”, is grammatically feminine, after all) or Němcová herself, or perhaps both. In the previous stanza, it was undoubtedly simply the former. However, if the speaker is indeed, as Seifert’s poetic persona, also a writer himself, then the statement “jsem z její hlíny” does not only have to mean that he is a native Czech, but also that he views Němcová as a kind of spiritual mother, one who paved the way for what he is doing now. In this reading, the final two lines would, furthermore, take on additional possible meaning. The fear described could be a reference to contemporary events, the uncertainty experienced in the Czech lands in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement and following the creation of the Protectorate, while the whole poem itself might feasibly represent the speaker’s apparent call to Němcová, a request for help at a time of need.

Besides the strong identification of Němcová with the Czech lands and an emphasis upon her maternal characteristics, the reader is also treated to a few glimpses of important scenes from her life. Whether imagined or true makes little difference, they nevertheless contribute richly to the “mythology” of

138 Ibid., 29. Engl. “The clay of my land drank it up / of that land, with which, kissing / we will join together loyally in the end.”

139 Ibid., 30. Engl. “What fate gave to her as a dowry / is mine, is mine, I am of her clay, / she is mine, she is mine and not a fantasy / with the inheritance of the native mother tongue / and the bitterness hidden in nightshade; and feverishly and hallucinating / I with a word in the native mother tongue / called her, when the fear arrived.”

the woman. In part III, for example, the speaker conjures up an image of her wedding day:

Kdo vplétal snítky ve tvůj šat,  
 kdo trhal je pro štěstí tvoje,  
 abys ses mohla vyplakat,  
 když přioděli do závoje  
 to srdce plné nepokoje  
 vibrující jak tetiva?<sup>140</sup>

She is depicted here as an innocent – a charmingly nervous bride, for whom, as contemporary readers with the benefit of hindsight would have known all too well, a happy marriage did not await. The repetition of *kdo* (“who”) highlights her lack of agency. Things are done for, not by her. The only activity that she is shown to be capable of doing is to burst into tears. Even her heart is somehow separate from the rest of her body, an object that can be manhandled by other unnamed figures. As an example of synecdoche, this emphasises the strength and depth of her emotions, since by virtue of *pars pro toto* she is represented by the organ most commonly associated with romantic and altruistic feeling.

A little later in the section, there is a reference to an incident that is said to have taken place at Karel Havlíček Borovský's funeral, with Němcová placing a crown of thorns onto the roof of the coffin to symbolise Havlíček Borovský's martyrdom:

korunu ruka neznámá  
 – tu, již jsi dala Havlíčkovi,  
 jako by kladla v naše krovy,  
 jako by v tichu žalostném  
 z trní, jež dalas Havlíčkovi,  
 bodal nás ostem za ostnem.<sup>141</sup>

Although the speaker does not specifically thematise this as a memory, it is nevertheless important to note that the anecdote, which was obviously still recollected in literary circles in 1940, may well have an external impetus, since the speaker visits the cemetery where the event is supposed to have occurred. In keeping with Balaev's spatial theories, the speaker's perceptions can perhaps be viewed here as having been heightened by his location, the place guiding what

140 Ibid., 25. Engl. “Who braided sprigs into your dress, / who pulled them for your good luck / so that you would be able to weep / when into the veil they arrayed / that heart full of turmoil / vibrating like a bowstring?”

141 Ibid. Engl. “as if an unknown hand / has put a crown on our shrouds / the one that you gave to Havlíček / as if in the sorrowful silence / from the thorns that you gave to Havlíček / barb after barb stabs us.”

it is that he remembers, while his current situation reinvigorates and recasts the associated images. If the speaker and his fellow country are pricked by thorns, then perhaps they too have become martyrs to a cause – most likely, given the patriotic overall bent of the poem, that of the Czech nation. In this way, we can once again see the dynamics of cultural memory at work, the taking a well-known – if not necessarily conclusively verifiable – scene from the past and remoulding it to suit present-day needs.

## Halas' Němcová: All Things to All Men

In Halas' collection, by contrast, there is no real overarching setting or specific common timeframe. The poems span the whole of Němcová's life, and also go beyond it, examining her wider cultural impact. *Naše paní Božena Němcová* begins with what appears to be a direct address to the writer herself that comes in the form of the poem *Oslovení*. The speaker is a writer too, but one who is a little uncertain of himself, tongue-tied even, unsure how to describe the key events of her life: "Pobledlý vážím slova / jak to nejlíp říci"<sup>142</sup>. He shows deference towards Němcová, addressing her with the polite *vy*-form. There is a marked disparity between her sovereign, assured approach to language ("Vy bosky v Jordán materštiny"<sup>143</sup>) and his bashfulness and concerns about the future or the consequences of his actions ("já plaše Co se stane"<sup>144</sup>).

In the poems that follow, however, the speaker – assuming it is the same figure, of course – appears to have well and truly got over this initial reticence and found a voice with which to depict Němcová. She is examined from many angles and at different points in time. They are even two contrasting verbal portraits of the woman. The first *Podobizna naší paní*, which looks back at her youth, underlines her beauty, repeating the line "Byla krásná až k víře není"<sup>145</sup> like a refrain, but also adds a touch of mystery to her smile, rather like that of the Mona Lisa: "Trochu posmutnělá touha za úsměvem / písnička ne ještě a už za předzpěvem"<sup>146</sup>. The second *Podobizna z roku 1856*, set six years before Němcová's death, shows her in a state of decline and poverty, having lost her femininity, no longer her former self: "Už odchází z ní žena"<sup>147</sup>. The figure

142 Halas: Časy, 121. Engl. "Rather pale I weigh the words / how best to say it".

143 Ibid. Engl. "You barefoot in the Jordan of the mother tongue".

144 Ibid. Engl. "I shyly What will happen".

145 Ibid., 122. Engl. "She was beautiful in a way that cannot be believed".

146 Ibid. Engl. "A slightly gloomy longing behind the smile / a song not yet and already after the prologue".

147 Ibid., 130. Engl. "The woman in her is already departing".

we meet is thus not completely frozen in time, but shown to be progressing, growing older and more mature.

Indeed, over the course of the collection, we encounter Němcová at various important stations in her life, depicted in almost tableau-like fashion. In *Svatební*, for example, we bear witness to her marriage at a troublingly young age<sup>148</sup>. She is referred to by her childhood name and shown to be still playing with dolls, or at least unburdening herself to them for want of other confidantes: “Barunka ještě s panenkou si šeptá”<sup>149</sup>. This poem also includes what may well be a euphemistic allusion to the loss of her virginity (“dvířka zámku rozlámána”<sup>150</sup>). There is another poem that – judging by the title, at least – purports to take us even further back into her childhood and document her first words (*První slova naší paní*, Engl. “The first words of our lady”). However, when we examine the poem itself, it becomes clear that it is not an account of the author’s infancy by any stretch of the imagination, even if it does exhibit a childlike lexical simplicity. Rather, it is peopled with fairytale characters such as Cinderella and the rascally Smolíček, both of whom Němcová wrote about early on in her career<sup>151</sup>. One suspects, therefore, that the title refers instead to her finding her own literary voice, taking those important first steps on the road to becoming a writer. Later on in the collection, we stumble across Němcová as she lies dying, and are present at her death, though this, as in Seifert’s poem, is compared to sleep (“Nebožka spí”<sup>152</sup>), again raising the possibility that she may yet wake and serve her nation once more.

Throughout the collection, one is reminded somewhat of the now outmoded literary form of the saint’s life. There is even a poem – *Naše paní bojuje s drakem* – that evokes images of the kind of valour and steadfastness so highly praised in mediaeval literature. Although in the structuring references to the Ennead, a group of nine deities from Ancient Egyptian legend, the poem mixes different mythological traditions, the central idea of representing the many facets of poverty and deprivation (“Kousek chleba není [...] Jak zaplatit byt [...] Nemoc v útrokách”<sup>153</sup>) as a dragon, transposes Němcová’s personal struggles onto another, much more heroic plane, one that is as far removed from everyday want as one could possibly imagine. It becomes something to emulate, rather than to fear or look down upon. Moreover, the very title of the collection

148 In real life, Němcová was seventeen when she married Josef Němec, so not quite the child bride she appears to be in the poem.

149 Ibid., 123. Engl. “Barunka still whispers to the doll”.

150 Ibid. Engl. “the door of the castle is broken in pieces”.

151 Cf. the fairytales *Tři oříšky pro Popelku* (Engl. “Three nuts for Cinderella”) and *O Smolíčkovi* (Engl. “On Smolíček”).

152 Ibid., 133. Engl. “The deceased is sleeping”.

153 Ibid., 127. Engl. “There isn’t a morsel of bread. [...] How to pay for the flat [...] Illness in the guts”.

as a whole suggests a Virgin Mary-like status for its protagonist, drawing as it does on the Christian term “our Lady”, and this is backed up within the poems themselves. At times, Němcová is referred to in the third person, but with a capital letter normally reserved for divinities (“a tak vdali Ji”<sup>154</sup>), and in *Kdo viděl*, she is described as deeply benevolent, always intervening on behalf of the poor: “Chudáci Po věčné časy / ta paní bude za vás orodovat”<sup>155</sup>.

While in *Vějíř Boženy Němcové* external landscapes, objects and circumstances play an important role in the speaker’s perceptions and ability to remember, in *Naše paní Božena Němcová*, Němcová herself, or rather her life story, provides the landscape of the collection, changing with the passing of the years and fluctuations of fortune. Even the illness that eventually kills her has its own topology, as the following lines show: “Dere se paní houštím horečky [...] Dal bloudí paní lesem agónie”<sup>156</sup> [emphasis added]. The potential connection, therefore, between space and memory is of quite different a nature here than in Seifert’s volume of poetry. Although Černý was not especially complimentary of the collection at the time of its publication, commenting “his pathos at times sticks out like an elaborate garment, ostentatious drapery, sewn for someone other than the one he has draped in it”<sup>157</sup>, there is an immediacy evident in *Naše paní Božena Němcová* that is lacking in *Vějíř Boženy Němcové*. It gives the impression of a direct or perhaps organic memorialisation of the celebrated novelist, instead of one that only comes about due to external stimuli. The memorialisation in Halas’ collection is of course by no means unmediated – indeed, as the opening poem demonstrates, the speaker is very much aware of his literary pursuit and attempts to find the right words – but it emerges from within rather than without. We are put in mind of Nora’s concept of a *lieu de mémoire*. Němcová is both place and person here, the woman and the legend. Seifert concentrates above all on Němcová’s maternal side and her deep connection to the Czech lands and especially the language thereof, but for Halas, she is so much more than merely a mother and national symbol.<sup>158</sup> She is

154 Ibid., 123. Engl. “And so they wed Her”.

155 Ibid., 129. Engl. “Paupers Across time eternal / this lady will intercede for you”.

156 Ibid., 131. Engl. “The lady pushes through the undergrowth of fever [...] The lady continues to rove through the forest of agony”.

157 Černý, Václav: Průhled do nových knih. František Halas: “Naše paní Božena Němcová” – Jaroslav Seifert: “Vějíř Boženy Němcové”. In: Kritický měsíčník 3 (1940), 128: “jeho patos chvillemi odstává jako nákladný šat, honosná draperie, jež byla ušita na postavu jinou než tu, kterou jí přioděl.”

158 Černý of course praised Seifert at the time for the relative simplicity of his conception of Němcová. Cf. *ibid.*: “Ne svěťce, ne Ochraniťelka, ne ‘matka naší velikostí’; u Seiferta prostě: matka. Ba, ještě lépe: miminka. Z ničeho vskutku lépe nevysvitne ten nejvládnější seifertovský ráz ‘Vějíře Boženy Němcové’ i rozdíl mezi jeho a Halasovou koncepcí jako právě v tom: jeho píseň je ve všech třech zpěvech, které tvoří samo jádro lyrické meditace ‘Vějíře’, dominována představou milující a milované matky. Matky, k jejíž vzpomínce

both the blushing bride and the sickly invalid, the hero and the Madonna, and just about everything and everyone in between. It is this profusion of different meanings and interpretational possibilities that particularly fits in with Nora's suggestion that *lieux de mémoire* "capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs"<sup>159</sup>. There is a window of opportunity for further transformation within the collection, the prospect that Němcová's cultural significance might evolve yet again, just as a saint's work is never done even after their death, whereas in *Vějíř Boženy Němcové* the process already feels complete. For Seifert's poem, the Ancient Roman term *locus memoriae* is perhaps more appropriate, since it emphasises the significance of the outside world and our surroundings upon what it is that we are able to recollect.

In this respect, we have come more or less full circle and returned to the poet Simonides. It has been a long and fruitful journey. We have been aided and abetted by such prominent minds as Maurice Halbwachs, Jan and Aleida Assmann, and of course the aforementioned Pierre Nora. We have examined the various guises that memory assumes within the works of our poets and identified one particularly striking peculiarity – namely the tendency to imagine the future as if it had already come to pass and to depict the present as the past, that is, in effect, to underscore the survival capabilities of the Czech nation in spite of contemporary real-world threats. Intertextuality has provided a means of tapping into the huge body of work and cultural artefacts that preceded the volumes in our analysis and ample scope to reinvigorate and recast them according to more present-day needs. We have met new potential saviours – most notably St. Wenceslas and Božena Němcová – and a host of other noble-hearted figures, whose example, it is implied, we would do well to follow. We have seen legends become reality – at least in the poetic worlds that we have explored – and existing monuments buckle under the weight of collective guilt.

se utiká poraněné dítě; matky, jež k nám mluví ze slov rodné řeči; matky – naší vlasti.” (Engl. “Not a female saint, not a female Saviour, not ‘the mother of our greatness’; in Seifert’s case simply: a mother. No, better still: a mummy. In fact, no where does the that most innately Seifertian characteristic of ‘The Fan of Božena Němcová’ and the main difference between his conception and that of Halas shine through better than in that fact: in all three of the cantos that form the very core of the lyrical meditation of ‘The Fan’, his song is dominated by the notion of a loving and beloved mother. A mother, to whose memory an injured child flees; a mother who speaks to us with the words of our native language; the mother – of our homeland.”) However, one cannot help but wonder somewhat if it is not more the connection to the Czech lands of which he approves. If this might perhaps be an example of contemporary mores being allowed to shape critical analysis. It is a matter that will be given more general consideration in the following chapter.

159 Nora: *Between Memory and History*, 19.

We can plainly see that in the poetry of our period, the speaker frequently assumes the role of one who remembers, who has the power to transform or convert existing mnemonic currency, to give it new meaning and significance for the present day, overwriting the past and appealing to the future. This is not, however, by any means the only function that is carried out. As we shall discuss more comprehensively in Chapter Four, there is much rhetorical and to a certain extent potentially performative material bound up with the utterances of the respective speakers. Unlocking it will help to deepen our understanding of the many forces at work in the poetic expression of life and experience in the build up to and aftermath of the Munich Agreement.

## 4. Rhetorical Authenticity

Without wishing to fall into the trap of overstating the problematic and indeed arguably irresolvable matter of authorial intentionality, when examining the poetry of this period, we cannot help but feel that in many cases efforts are being made to tell us something about the contemporary situation, actively casting it in a specific light. The authors do not merely depict certain scenes nor rely on particular recurring motifs for poetic effect. Rather, their works appear to be part of a larger cultural stand taken to combat perceived threats and preserve a sense of tradition and inherent “Czechness”.

Borrowing terms employed by M. Jähnichen, who in turn took them from a poem by Stanislav K. Neumann, we might observe they often tend to hover somewhere between two main functional modes, seemingly assuming either the role of a weapon or of a testimony, or indeed both simultaneously.<sup>1</sup> We spoke at some length about the possibility of words as weapons in Chapter One, but although we have mentioned the way in certain poems purport to document particular historical events – albeit usually in a highly stylised, abstract or figurative manner – we have not yet plumbed the depths of this second issue and fully examined the testimonial credentials of our selection of poetry. In particular, it will be important to consider how the impression of what Holan’s speaker from *Odpověď Francii* at one stage and in a moment of

1 Cf. Jähnichen, M.: Literatur als Zeugnis und Waffe. Zur Kontinuität der tschechischen kämpferischen Poesie zwischen 1935 und 1955. In: Zeitschrift für Slawistik 21/1 (1976), 582f. It should perhaps be noted, however, that Jähnichen’s use of the word *Zeugnis* (“testimony”) is primarily figurative, employed in the sense of being evidence of something. Cf. *ibid.*, 583: “In Halas’ ‘Zpěv úzkosti’ aus der Sammlung ‘Torzo naděje’ von 1938 hat dieser für Dichter der Halasschen Ausgangskonzeption bedeutende Wandel in folgenden Versen dichterisches Zeugnis gefunden” (Engl. “The following lines in Halas’ ‘Zpěv úzkosti’ from the 1938 collection ‘Torzo naděje’ stand as a poetic testament to this – for poets who followed the original Halasian doctrine – significant transition”). Here, we shall focus instead on the potentially testimonial character of the poems, the idea of bearing witness to something and choosing to speak out about it. In doing so, we thrust the speaker more firmly into the spotlight and are able to examine his role in shaping what we read and the effect it has upon us. That is not, of course, to suggest any of the poems should be viewed as eyewitness accounts; indeed, it cannot be stressed enough that they are all literary constructs and must be understood as such. However, what is possible, is that some of the techniques which can be employed to make a witness statement seem more credible – appeals to the senses or to the emotions of the audience, an array of very specific details, including both temporal and spatial markers – may also be in play in our authors’ works.

poetic self-awareness and reflexivity refers to as a *svědek-píseň* or witness-song is created and maintained. Moreover, we suggest that the texts which result from this nexus of testimony and weaponry are required to perform certain actions – persuading us, fuelling our emotions, jolting us into action – as their influence extends beyond the purely written form and into the realm of engaged literature.<sup>2</sup> This, in turn, may add to the narrative power of the works in question. It certainly renders them more memorable, more effective and affective.

This idea was another aspect that we touched upon in Chapter One with our discussion of the often perlocutionary nature of many of the early poems from this period in particular. Our deliberations, were not, however, exhaustive and since Austin famously excluded poetic works from his theory of speech acts due to what he saw as a lack of “seriousness” and the inherent “hollowness” associated with poetic utterances<sup>3</sup>, it now seems prudent to change tack and

- 2 As was briefly alluded to at the beginning of Chapter One, Jan Tesař has, albeit without specifically referring to notions of performativity, gone as far as to declare theatricality as one of, if not the, defining feature of the poetic reaction to the Munich Agreement; cf. *Tesař: Mnichovský komplex*, 112: “Rozbor českého prožitku roku 1938, jak se odráží například ve verších nejznámějších básníků, které jsou od té doby stále znovu vydávány a citovány jako nejdokonalejší vystižení českého vlastenectví, přivede střizlivého badatele k základní charakteristice: teatrálnost.” (Engl. “An analysis of the Czech experience of the year 1938 as depicted for example in the works of the most famous poets, which have been reprinted over and over again since that time and are cited as the most perfect portrayal of Czech patriotism, leads the prosaic scholar to one central characteristic: theatricality.”) He has a point, but neglects the fact that any showmanship on the part of the speaker is almost always tempered with moments of banality, mundanity, insights into the everyday. Hyperbole is found nestled alongside understatement, pathos may give way to bathos. It is an oversimplification to focus only on the dramatic side of the poetry of this period.
- 3 *Austin: How To Do Things With Words*, 22: “a performative utterance will be *in a particular way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem”. Many scholars have objected to this view, however, suggesting that Austin fundamentally misunderstood the nature and mechanics of poetry. Cf. e.g. *Mole*, Christopher: *The Performative Limits of Poetry*. In: *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 53/1 (2013), 55 f., *de Gaynesford*, Maximilian: *Incense and Insensibility: Austin on the “Non-Seriousness” of Poetry*. In: *Ratio* 22/4 (2009), 464 f., and especially *Johnson*, Barbara: *Poetry and Performative Language*. In: *Yale French Studies* 54 (1977), 140 f. Heinz Schlaffer has gone as far as to identify around a dozen distinct speech acts that can indeed be found in lyric poetry, ranging from extolling and lamenting, to welcoming and bidding farewell. They differ from Austin’s speech acts only really in the fact that their communicative model has three participants rather than the usual two. Schlaffer focusses on pre-modern poetry, arguing that they have all but disappeared from twentieth century poetic discourse, but in actual fact we can undoubtedly also find frequent examples of comparable lyrical speech acts in our selection of post-Munich poetry. The implications of such an apparent recourse to earlier poetic conventions are something that we shall discuss in greater detail in Chapter Five. Cf. *Schlaffer*, Heinz: *Sprechakte in der Lyrik*. In: *Poetica* 40 (2008), 21 f.

consider the issue from another point of view, namely that of rhetoric. This is in keeping with insights provided by Barbara Johnson in her astute rebuttal of Austin's sweeping remark that "If the poet says 'Go and catch a falling star' or whatever it may be, he doesn't seriously issue an order"<sup>4</sup>:

In the context of Donne's poem, this order is not only not serious: it is explicitly impossible. It is a *rhetorical* imperative, whose function, like that of a rhetorical question, is to elicit an impasse without naming it. The very non-seriousness of the order is in fact what constitutes its fundamental seriousness: if finding a faithful woman is like catching a falling star, according to Donne's poem, this is apparently very serious indeed.<sup>5</sup>

What is more, such a focus may also help to sharpen our understanding of the relationship between the lyric output of our poets and the contemporary events to which they so often allude, since, as Lloyd F. Bitzer has noted

Rhetorical works belong to the class of things which obtain their character from the historical context in which they occur. [...] An act is moral because it is performed in a situation of a certain kind; similarly, an act is rhetorical because it is a response to a situation of a certain kind.<sup>6</sup>

Bitzer's understanding of rhetoric is, by his own admission, pragmatic – "it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task"<sup>7</sup> – and one that shares certain similarities with our earlier characterisation of the poetry of this period as persuasive and engaged, not merely entertaining. His view of the rhetor as one who "alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change"<sup>8</sup> could easily be applied to our poets and many of their speakers. Indeed, one could argue that up to three potential rhetors may be present in our poetry at any one time – the speaker, the implied author and the empirical author – and each is required to appear in some way credible and perhaps even exhibit a certain degree of authority so as to ensure that their verses have the desired effect of moving its reader(s). We shall come back to Bitzer shortly, but first, it is perhaps worth taking a little time to acquaint ourselves with some of the fundamentals of rhetorical discourse.

4 Austin, John L.: Performative Utterances. In: *Urmson, J.O./Warnock, G.J.* (eds.): *Philosophical Papers*. Oxford 1970, 241.

5 *Johnson*: Poetry and Performative Language, 150.

6 *Bitzer, Lloyd F.*: The Rhetorical Situation. In: *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1/1 (1968), 3.

7 *Ibid.*, 3f.

8 *Ibid.*, 4.

## The Art of Rhetoric

In rhetoric, the listener or audience is key.<sup>9</sup> This may not always be so in every form of poetry – especially when it comes to poetry for poetry’s sake – but certainly, as mentioned at the beginning of the current chapter, with works such as those of our authors during this period, much the same central role can also be attributed to the reader in our case. Without a reader to bring around to a particular way of seeing things, without someone who has passions to be inflamed or grudges to nurse, then the work of the poet is left half unfinished. How can literature be said to be engaged, if it does not engage its readers, its audience too? In light of this, it stands to reason that some of the insights gleaned from rhetorical analysis, some of the descriptive tools employed by scholars of rhetoric may be useful to our study, providing new categories and ways of looking at things.

The classical art of persuasion can – and indeed should – bring about both a rational and/or an emotional change within the mind of the audience. Rhetoric can teach us (*docere*), prove something to us (*probare*) and move us, appealing to our passions and underlying potential fervour (*movere*). It may please and delight us (*delectare*) or it may goad us into something, garnering our support along the way (*conciliare*). Many of these effects can be found within the poetry of our period, either standing alone or, more often than not, in combination with one another. In Halas’ *Praze*, for example, we are struck by the lines

Myslete na chorál  
Malověrní  
Myslete na chorál<sup>10</sup>

Their power seems at first to derive from the technique *monere* in the sense that they represent a kind of deictic admonishment, showing the way to those who have lost their faith in the nation or forgotten their past – an appeal to reason and good sense. Though addressed directly here, the faithless are not necessarily, however, the main intended audience of the poem. It also has a message for the faithful, for those who *have* remained true-hearted, in spite of adversity: in the (presumably fictional) account of the statue of St. Wenceslas having come to life, we have before us the symbolic fulfilment of a well-known prophecy and thus rhetorical proof that help is at hand if we know where to look for it (i. e. in ourselves and our history). The method here feels more akin

9 Cf. Plett, Heinrich F.: Einführung in die rhetorische Textanalyse. Hamburg 2001, 2.

10 Halas: Časy, 98. Engl. “Think of the chorale / Ye of little faith / Think of the chorale”.

to *probare*, then, even if the route is a little circuitous. Furthermore, there is something quite disarming about the way that the poem foregrounds the importance of having faith and remaining true, without explicitly stating the need for it. We too are won over and heed the warning given to the faithless, though we may not feel that it applies to us specifically. In this way, it becomes clear that *conciliare* is also in play to some extent.

## The Rhetorical Situation

A more modern aspect of the study of rhetorical discourse that may prove helpful to us is the notion of the rhetorical situation, as put forward by Bitzer in the late 1960s. His work was a response to what he saw as a lamentable lack of engagement with the outside situation that informs and elicits rhetoric utterances compared to the attention that has been paid to matters such as the rhetor's methods and the discourse itself that he produces.<sup>11</sup> This situation is of particular importance to Bitzer because, in his view, it

controls the rhetorical response in the same sense that the question controls the answer and the problem controls the solution. Not the rhetor and not persuasive intent, but the situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity [...].<sup>12</sup>

According to Bitzer, the rhetorical situation is made up of three constituent parts – exigence, audience and constraints – and supplemented by the rhetor and his speech once this has been uttered.<sup>13</sup> He defines exigence as “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be.”<sup>14</sup> Though we may view many aspects of life as problematic and in want of alteration, Bitzer is careful to distinguish between rhetorical exigences and their non-rhetorical counterparts, which do not form part of such a situation, stating that “An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse.”<sup>15</sup> In his view, the need for discourse will be immediately recognisable by the rhetor and spur him into action since “Rhetorical discourse is called into existence by situation; the situation which the rhetor perceives amounts to an invitation to create and present discourse.”<sup>16</sup> This invitation is not, however, according

11 Cf. *Bitzer: The Rhetorical Situation*, 2.

12 *Ibid.*, 6.

13 *Ibid.*, 6f.

14 *Ibid.*, 6.

15 *Ibid.*, 7.

16 *Ibid.*, 8.

to Bitzer a guarantee for the inevitable success or efficacy of any associated discourse.<sup>17</sup> Rather, he argues that the rhetorical situation “invites a *fitting* response, a response that fits the situation.”<sup>18</sup> In the case of our poetry, we might well wonder if the less than flattering reviews that Nezval received for the first part of his *Historický obraz*<sup>19</sup> were – leaving aside issues of poetics and technical skill – also possibly motivated by the fact that reviewers may not have considered the poem a “fitting response” to what was going on in the country at the time, that they may have felt that it could not have been co-opted or appropriated, made to stand for more than the sum of its parts.

Although, for the most part, Bitzer excludes works of literature from his deliberations, he does allow that

the fictive rhetorical discourse within a play or a novel may become genuinely rhetorical outside the fictive context – if there is a real situation for which the discourse is a rhetorical response.<sup>20</sup>

It is through this concession that his notion of the rhetorical situation becomes applicable to the output of our poets during the late 1930s and early 1940s. As reiterated at the beginning of this chapter and mentioned many times

17 Cf. *ibid.*, 10.

18 *Ibid.*,

19 Cf. e.g. comments made by Václav Černý in the article *Průhled do nových knih: Konstantin Biebl: “Zrcadlo noci” – Vítězslav Nezval: “Historický obraz” – František Nechvátal: “Bezručův hlas”; “Mateřské znamení” – Kamil Bednář: “Rok”; “Kamenný pláč”*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 3 (1940), 76: “*‘Hrůzu i velikost oněch dní monumentalizovali korovým slovem už Halas, Holan a Cassius-Kolman, jejich naději a víru vyzpívali Seifert, Hora. [...] Nic nevádí, že Nezval přichází dlouho po nich a jiných. Ale jeho báseň nemá jejich pádnosti, naléhavosti, zjiřtenosti. Není to zařatá pěst, není to vroucná hudba. [...] Vítězslav Nezval, významný druh jmenovaných, měl jistě plné právo na to, mít svůj triumf nového českého patosu básnického, chtěl-li jej. Nemá jej.*” (Engl. “*Halas, Holan and Cassius-Kolman have already monumentalised the horror and magnitude of those days with cortical words, their hopes and faith have been sung by Seifert and Hora. [...] It does not matter that Nezval has come along well after them and others. But his poem does not have their vigour, their vehemence, their agitaton. There is no clenched fist, no ardent music. [...] Vítězslav Nezval, prominent confrere of the aforementioned, has every right to have his own triumph of newfound Czech poetic pathos, if he so desired it. But he does not have it here.*”) Incidentally, Černý was also rather uncomplimentary about many of the poems from the 1939 collection *Pět minut za městem*. Cf. Černý, Václav: *Průhled do nových knih: Vítězslav Nezval: “Pět minut za městem”*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 3 (1940), 174: “*Co nového dovedl říci Nezval v ‘Odě’, jak po svém, nově a osobitě, pojal smysl návratu mrtvého Máchy do Prahy? Nic a nijak! Jakou neznámou hloubku citu národní solidarity objevil se ve ‘Veliké poui’? Žádnou!*” (Engl. “*What new things did Nezval manage to say in ‘Oda’, how in his own way, innovatively and personally, did he conceive the return of the late Mácha to Prague? Nothing and in no way! What unknown depths of feeling of national solidarity appeared in ‘Veliká poui’? None!*”)

20 *Bitzer: The Rhetorical Situation*, 11.

over the course of the study as a whole, we would argue that the collections and individual lyric works from the period fulfil more than just an aesthetic function. Indeed, we have and would go as far as to suggest that in the vacuum left by the First Republic, the restrictions placed upon freedom of expression and opinion, they acquired remarkable social, political and above all rhetorical significance, articulating views and visions of the present or the future that would not otherwise have been permitted on the public stage.

Bitzer's conception and assessment of the rhetorical situation has sparked a great deal of discussion and debate since its original formulation. While some scholars, such as Arthur B. Miller, have primarily sought merely to clarify or elaborate on certain points<sup>21</sup>, for others the very notion appears to have acquired the status of an exigence in its own right, sorely requiring overhaul or at least rethinking. In 1973, Richard E. Vatz famously took issue with Bitzer's handling of the relationship between rhetor and situation, pouring scorn on the idea that the rhetor recognises and articulates something that is innate to the situation and over which he has no real control, such is the compulsion to respond that he experiences. For Vatz, this is nonsense since he regards rhetorical utterances as bound up in a highly creative process that relies heavily upon individual interpretation and plays the audience into the hands of the rhetor: "To the audience, events become meaningful only through their linguistic depiction. [...] Therefore, meaning is not discovered in situations, but *created* by rhetors."<sup>22</sup> He calls in particular for the power, obligations and accountability of the rhetor to be acknowledged:

To view rhetoric as a creation of reality or salience rather than a reflector of reality clearly increases the rhetor's moral responsibility. [...] In short, the rhetor is responsible for what he chooses to make salient.<sup>23</sup>

Though not necessarily in agreement with Vatz about other matters, Scott Consigny has also come to broadly similar conclusions about the way that the rhetor cooperates with and relates to the situation, arguing that

The rhetor's task is not to answer questions and solve well-formulated problems, but rather to be able to *ask* good questions and to formulate or *discover* relevant problems in an indeterminate situation.<sup>24</sup>

21 Cf. Miller, Arthur B.: Rhetorical Exigence. In: Philosophy and Rhetoric 5/2 (1972), 117: "A speaker who hopes to bring his intentions and his hearers' expectations into agreement must lead hearers to believe that they and he share essential constraints."

22 Vatz, Richard E.: The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation. In: Philosophy and Rhetoric 6/3 (1973), 157.

23 Ibid., 158.

24 Consigny, Scott: Rhetoric and Its Situations. In: Philosophy and Rhetoric 7/3 (1974), 177.

He too notes in particular the selective and creative role played by the rhetor, the way that such a figure must contrive to construct something that can be received favourably by the audience:

The rhetor discloses issues and brings them to resolution by interacting with the situation, revealing and working through the phenomena, selecting appropriate material and arranging it into a coherent form.<sup>25</sup>

In recent years, scholars have tended to have more bones to pick with the (illustrative) conceptualisation of the model, drawing on new theoretical insights and offering alternative methods of looking at the situation from which rhetoric appears to emerge. Donna Gorrell, for example, has suggested that it might be more helpful to visualise the situation as a Venn diagram, so as to draw attention to the way in which certain aspects are linked and have considerable bearing on one another.<sup>26</sup> Such visualisations are, she argues, especially useful when it comes to determining when and why rhetoric is sometimes not successful. Gorrell emphasises the importance of the relationship between rhetor and audience, the need for mutual understanding and the fact that the two must always be on the same wave-length, as it were, to ensure success of any rhetorical utterances:

A true rhetorical situation has an intrinsic audience; a text produced without consideration of that audience is doomed to failure. This is not to say a rhetor must be acquainted with an audience or even know who that audience is; the rhetor can even *create* an appropriate audience. However, there must be shared constraints: experiences, values, beliefs, and so on.<sup>27</sup>

Jenny Edbauer has taken the idea of interconnectedness even further and ultimately suggests doing away with certain aspects of the terminology originally supplied by Bitzer:

The exigence is not properly located in any element of the model. Instead, what we dub *exigence* is more like a shorthand way of describing a series of events. The rhetorical situation is part of what we might call, borrowing from Phelps, an ongoing social flux. Situation bleeds into the concatenation of public interaction. Public interactions bleed into wider social processes. The elements of rhetorical situation simply bleed.<sup>28</sup>

25 Ibid., 179.

26 Cf. Gorrell, Donna: The Rhetorical Situation Again: Linked Components in a Venn Diagram. In: Philosophy and Rhetoric 30/4 (1997), 400.

27 Ibid., 405.

28 Edbauer, Jenny: Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies. In: Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 35/4 (2005), 6 f.

As an alternative, Edbauer proposes viewing the conceptual space from which rhetoric emerges as a restless, living ecology, rather than a fixed situation. Her rhetorical ecologies have just as many variables and as much potential for change and transformation as natural habitats do. They too can be brought out of kilter or experience the ascendancy of one dominant factor. Everything is linked and in motion, constantly affected and influenced by the dynamics of other aspects within the set-up as a whole:

To say that we are connected is another way of saying that we are never outside the networked interconnection of forces, energies, rhetorics, moods and experiences. In other words, our practical consciousness is never outside the prior and ongoing structures of feeling that shape the social field. At the same time, life-as-network also means that the social field is not comprised of discrete *sites*, but from events that are shifting and moving, grafted onto and connected with other events.<sup>29</sup>

Edbauer's work is rather more process-oriented than that of many of her predecessors and reflects a number of wider trends within the humanities and related fields over the last couple of decades.<sup>30</sup>

These often very different conceptions of the rhetorical situation also provide us with different ways of looking at the poetry of our period. If we follow Bitzer, then we must accept that the Munich Agreement, while undoubtedly in the eyes of most Czechs at the time an exigence in the sense that it represented "a thing which is other than it should be"<sup>31</sup>, is not a rhetorical exigence since it cannot really be modified or overcome by purely rhetorical means. Rhetoric might have helped to drum up support for the Czech cause and indeed we could view the activities of the *Obec československých spisovatelů* as trying to do exactly that, but it would not have changed the facts of the matter nor brought about the immediate return of the Sudetenland, only perhaps gone some small way to influencing public opinion in the West.

That said, in keeping with Edbauer's notion of interconnected rhetorical ecologies, we may identify certain other related exigences, which do come closer to fulfilling the conditions placed upon the so-called rhetorical exigence by Bitzer. The perceived need for a hero in light of the danger posed to the nation is an obvious example. Through their rhetorically-charged poetry, our authors offer a range of different possible candidates for the role, most notably

29 Ibid., 10.

30 Cf. e.g. the general upsurge in interest in questions of performativity, an area which derives its insights from an emphasis on the *doing* of things rather than merely the fruits of those labours, or the shift, mentioned in Chapter Three, within memory studies towards focusing on the *dynamics* of cultural memory – the way in which mnemonically-significant elements mutate and are adapted.

31 *Bitzer: The Rhetorical Situation*, 6.

St. Wencelas<sup>32</sup>, Božena Němcová<sup>33</sup> and Karel Hynek Mácha<sup>34</sup>. Besides such existing historical figures – persons who have already shown their mettle in one way or another, serving the nation in an exemplary fashion – we could also take a character like Hora’s titular protagonist from *Jan houslista* as a counter-proposal, a blueprint for an alternative way of quietly, but nevertheless in some sense still heroically, selflessly paying one’s debt to the one’s homeland. Furthermore, if we recall Gorrell’s point about the frequent transience of both exigences and the constraints that bind them, their time-sensitivity and the way that they can morph into or be superseded by other more pressing issues<sup>35</sup>, it comes as no surprise that in the aftermath of the defeat of Nazism in 1945, a new strand of *poésie de circonstance* emerged, inspired by a subsequent, but ultimately equally significant twist of fate. Though the Sudetenland was still yet to be returned, the consequences of the Munich Agreement, the sense of betrayal and the perceived need for a renewal of hope and faith, appear to have lost their salience by that stage and may well have been overtaken by another exigence: the matter of how one might give appropriate thanks to Stalin and the Soviet Union for their part in the liberation of Czechoslovakia.<sup>36</sup>

Edbauer’s concepts of *shared contagion* and *viral spread*<sup>37</sup> may also be useful here to help better understand the sudden prevalence of what we termed the *lyrisches Wir* in Chapter One across the poetry of this period. We clearly recognise the sense of a collective coming-to-grief articulated by the popular contemporary phrase *o nás bez nás* (“about us without us”) in relation to the Munich Agreement and every use of the first person plural, every occasion of speaking on behalf of a wounded collective, reminds us of this phrase and gains, by virtue of association, an additional emotive force from it. In Edbauer’s understanding, since rhetorical utterances do not exist within a bubble, independent of one another, there is much potential for “cross-contamination”. The poetry that we have been examining here may not only have been influenced by non-poetic sources, such as the aforementioned phrase, but may also have had infectious power of its own, popularising certain views and turns of phrase and allowing the genre to coalesce around certain main themes, as different poets attempted both to react to the events around them and to their

32 Cf. e.g. Halas’ poems *Praze* and *Blanká*.

33 Cf. in particular Halas’ *Naše paní Božena Němcová* and Seifert’s *Vějíř Boženy Němcové*, but also perhaps in its allusions to one of her most famous fairytales, Hora’s *Popelka přebírá hrach*.

34 Cf. e.g. Holan’s *Návrat* (Engl. “Return”) and *Zpěv tří králové* (Engl. “Song of three kings”) or Neval’s *Oda na K. H. Máchu* (Engl. “Ode to K. H. Mácha”).

35 Cf. Gorrell: *The Rhetorical Situation Again: Linked Components in a Venn Diagram*, 407.

36 For possible solutions put forward to solve this problem see e.g. Neval’s *Stalin* or Holan’s *Děk Sovětskému svazu* (Engl. “Thanks to the Soviet Union”).

37 Edbauer: *Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies*, 18.

peers' variations on such matters.<sup>38</sup> In this respect we are equally reminded of Vatz's argument about the central importance of the rhetor in producing the situation to which he refers by presenting it in a specific way: "No situation can have a nature independent of the perception of its interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it."<sup>39</sup> Though our poets were not necessarily the first to speak of betrayal in relation to the Munich Agreement, by repeatedly portraying the British and French as treacherous, and the Czech people and lands as the injured party, it does not seem impossible that their work may have helped to spread such perspectives, allowing them to take root and become endemic. This view is certainly supported by Joseph Frederick Zacek's assessment of early Czech(oslovak) attitudes towards the events of 1938.<sup>40</sup>

## An Air of the Authentic

Though it may colour perspectives, the kind of rhetoric that we encounter here does not give the impression of being consciously deceitful and neither is it used in a cynical manner. It does not, we feel sure, set out to manipulate the audience in a way that might bring them harm. Rather, for the most part, it appears to be overtly earnest, openly concerned with bringing the reader round to a particular way of seeing things and imploring him neither to lose heart nor to forget what has happened and who he is. Especially when it comes to the notion of this poetry as a kind of testimony, rhetoric alone is not enough to explain its emotive force or its apparent success. It is clear that we must temper the rhetorical side of things with another analytical framework. Since we find ourselves dealing with questions of credibility, trustworthiness and sincerity, an obvious candidate presents itself in the concept of authenticity.

38 Cf. *ibid.*, 19.

39 Vatz: *The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation*, 154.

40 Cf. Zacek: *The Czechoslovak View*, 47 f.: "Beneš has stated that, during the last ten years of his life, Munich was his *idée fixe*. Whether or not he made the correct decision during the terrible crisis and the way in which posterity would judge him for it were questions that plagued him. [...] The final rationale and personal self-justification he worked out during the war were not published until 1968. But long before then, during World War II, his close collaborators, Táborský, Smutný, Opočenský, Feierabend and Ripka [...] had made the basic scenario public. Fundamentally they insist on the inescapability of Czechoslovakia's capitulation, and place the blame for it squarely on the governments of its allies – France and Britain." In spite of decades of communist historiography, which according to Zacek sought to blame both Beneš and the whole of the bourgeoisie for the debacle, he also notes that attitudes emphasising the Czechs' lack of culpability still hold sway over much of the population (or at least they did in the early nineties). Cf. *ibid.*, 49.

Though on the face of it, one might expect the concept to be fairly easily navigable – after all, people often like to pride themselves on their abilities to recognise authenticity, their keen and discerning understanding of the world around them, their confidence in the version of themselves that they project outwards and perceived skill at spotting inconsistency in others – authenticity is in fact a complex phenomenon, riven with paradoxes. Relatively little can be and indeed has been said about its exact nature. As Antonius Weixler has put it “Perhaps nothing more certain can be said about ‘authenticity’ than that it is a decidedly positive term.”<sup>41</sup>

At the heart of the problem lies the troublesome issue – referred to by Wolfgang Funk as “a very fundamental contradiction, its gate-keeper paradox”<sup>42</sup> – that authenticity invariably relies upon external attribution. It cannot make itself known on its own merits, but is in constant need of an adjudicator. In this respect, it even bears a certain structural resemblance to rhetoric, with parallels in the way that the two phenomena are perceived and received. Rhetoric is, after all, in need of a positive listener or reader response in order to be viewed as successful, as having performed its intended function. We alluded to the key role of the recipient in our opening remarks on rhetoric and following Weixler it would appear that a similar situation is in play when it comes to the reader of texts with authentic aspirations since

on the one hand, complex narrative techniques that are geared towards authenticity problematise the authority of the author, on the other, a significant function is assigned to the reader in the sense that authenticity is understood as a phenomenon which is *attributed* to a text on the basis of certain structures and constructs<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, one could argue that the role of the adjudicator in authenticity is even more central than that of the recipient in rhetoric, since rhetoric still exists without an audience, it is merely unclear whether it would have had the

41 Weixler, Antonius: Authentisches erzählen – authentisches Erzählen. Über Authentizität als Zuschreibungsphänomen und Pakt. In: Weixler, Antonius (ed.): Authentisches Erzählen. Produktion, Narration, Rezeption. Berlin 2012, 1: “Vielleicht lässt sich nichts sicherer über ‘Authentizität’ sagen, als das es sich um einen dezidiert positiven Begriff handelt.” Wolfgang Funk has bemoaned this lack of critical engagement with the term, noting “A cursory survey of various attempts to define the concept shows that authenticity is often approached or explained *ex negativo*. Rather than asserting what the word actually refers to, it is circumscribed by what it does not refer to.” In: Funk, Wolfgang: The Literature of Reconstruction. Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium. London 2015, 16.

42 Ibid., 13.

43 Weixler: Authentisches erzählen – authentisches Erzählen, 3: “einerseits wird in komplexen Erzählverfahren, die auf Authentizität abzielen, die Autor-Instanz problematisiert, andererseits kommt der Leser-Seite insofern eine bedeutende Funktion zu, als Authentizität als ein Phänomen verstanden wird, das vom Rezipienten aufgrund bestimmter Strukturen und Konstruktionen einem Text *zugeschrieben* wird.”

desired effect, whereas without an adjudicator, there can be no confirmation of authenticity.

In the case of the authentication of *objets d'art*, that is, the verification of their genuineness by so-called experts, this external attribution may be relatively unproblematic, but when it comes to the notion of the authentic self, for whom, as Funk explains, there can be no better expert than that very self in search of authentication, we quickly become lost in a never-ending cycle of self-confirmation and thus invalidation.<sup>44</sup> Literary works that set their sights upon authenticity run into similar difficulties. Weixler notes, for example, that

A text, a work of art cannot be authentic per se, an ontological quality of that nature cannot be achieved in mediated communication. It is merely possible to ascribe authenticity to a text in relation to an author / creator or to credit it as authentic by way of reference to that which it depicts.<sup>45</sup>

In order for its essence to reach the reader-adjudicator, a text requires mediation and yet if it is mediated then it may no longer appear pure and natural, but constructed, full of artifice, and thus doubts can be raised as to its authenticity. Funk has expounded on this by way of reference to a point made by noted French author André Gide and emphasises the centrality of the matter to any notion of authenticity:

The essence of authenticity and its representation cancel each other out; it is, in André Gide's ageless adage, impossible to be authentic and seem authentic at the same time. More to the point, one might even argue that authenticity can only properly signify in and through this paradoxical configuration, through its oscillation between essence and construction, between experience and representation, between artlessness and mediation.<sup>46</sup>

Elsewhere, but still grappling with the same essential problem, he comes to the conclusion that

Authentic narration therefore resides in the attempt to capture an echo of human experience in art, while at the same time constantly representing the impossibility of such an endeavour via aesthetic means.<sup>47</sup>

44 Cf. Funk: *The Literature of Reconstruction*, 18.

45 Weixler: *Authentisches erzählen – authentisches Erzählen*, 12: "Ein Text, ein Kunstwerk kann nicht authentisch *per se* sein, eine derartige ontologische Qualität ist in medialen Kommunikation nicht erreichbar. Man kann einem Text lediglich *zuschreiben*, dass er authentisch in Relation auf einen Autor beziehungsweise Urheber oder dass er authentisch durch die Referenz auf das Dargestellte ist."

46 Funk, Wolfgang: Review of "Paradoxes of Authenticity: Studies on a Critical Concept". In: *Anglia – Zeitschrift für englische Philologie* 130/3 (2012), 452. Similar comments can also be found in more recent works by Funk; cf. Funk: *The Literature of Reconstruction*, 17.

47 Funk, Wolfgang: *Reziproker Realismus. Versuch einer Ästhetik der Authentizität*. In: Weixler, Antonius (ed.): *Authentisches Erzählen. Produktion, Narration, Rezeption*.

A similar phenomenon is discussed by Paul de Man in relation to the truth-telling abilities of poetry: “In conformity with a paradox that is inherent in all literature, the poetry gains a maximum of convincing power at the very moment that it abdicates any claim to truth.”<sup>48</sup> To illustrate how such insights might be applicable to the poetry of our period, it may be useful to recall Holan’s *Odpověď Francii*. The performatively-charged title of the eight numbered poems, which indicates that this is an answer to something, a formal response, brings to mind the idea of entering into a dialogue with a partner on a public stage. The first act of this drama – unseen by the reader – is, we assume, the act of signing the Munich Agreement, and thus France’s breaking of promises made previously to Czechoslovakia, but we join the performance mid-way, arriving only in time to witness the reaction to this opening parry. There are no serious diplomatic channels being engaged here. Rather, Holan and his speaker can be seen as confronting politics with poetry.<sup>49</sup> It is clear that the battle is mismatched, but that in itself is significant when we consider the notion of the Czechs self-identifying as a fundamentally *small* nation, surrounded by larger, more powerful neighbours, enemies and erstwhile friends.

The speaker has a strong, authoritative voice, exuding moral uprightness, and seems to be proud of his status as a poet, cognisant of its implications:

Sto let je nic mně, básníkovi.  
Povídám nic, a tedy: ber kdo ber,  
můžeme počkat.<sup>50</sup>

The speaker’s turn of phrase is important here. Given the Czech language’s acceptance of double negatives – *Nepovídám nic* (“I do not say anything”) – his words *Povídám nic* (“I say nothing”), when taken on their own, are really rather striking. He is not merely repeating a word from the previous line; more than that he appears almost to be homing in on the very idea of nothingness when he makes his declaration, turning the expected or rather potential negative into

Berlin 2012, 136: “Authentisches Erzählen besteht also in dem Versuch, einen Widerhall menschlicher Erfahrungen in der Kunst aufzufangen, nicht ohne fortwährend die Unmöglichkeit dieses Unterfangens ästhetisch zu repräsentieren.”

48 de Man, Paul: *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven 1979, 50.

49 In this respect, the collection must have been very much to the taste of another influential figure of the time, Kamil Bednář. Cf. *Bednář*, Kamil: *Projev k situaci nejmladší české poezie*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 120: “Co zabíjí revoluční poesii, je váhání. Ta potřebuje jasnou nenávisť a jasnou lásku, příkré rozvržení světla a stínu. A k tomu něco chiliasmů, hodně obhroublosti, potlesk. *Diplomacie* jí musí být neznámým slovem.” (Engl. “What kills revolutionary poetry is hesitancy. It needs clear-cut hatred and love, a sharp distinction between light and shadow. Plus something of chialism, a great deal of coarseness, applause. Diplomacy must be an alien concept to it.”)

50 Holan: *Dokumenty*, 12. Engl. “A hundred years is nothing to me, a poet / I say nothing, and thus: take it who will, / we can wait”.

a positive. This refusal to elaborate is also more than simply an example of the age-old topos of the ineffable, the inexpressible, a rhetorical show of deference or reticence, perhaps. The absence is acknowledged; it makes its presence felt, albeit paradoxically. Holan's speaker is prepared to wait, to take things slowly, to leave the reply announced by the title as yet in part unarticulated. This is an active form of being silent on a subject, a conscious decision – *schweigen* as opposed to *still sein*, one would say in German. It can also be found in the speaker's terse account of his exact grievance against France: "Mně přece nejde o cár domoviny. Můj žal je jiný, neroztrhán v stíny."<sup>51</sup> Although Jiří Pavelka has had no trouble reading fears about the safety of all of the Czech lands – as opposed to just those primarily inhabited by Sudeten Germans – into these lines<sup>52</sup>, the text itself is somewhat vague on the matter. The allusion to the Sudetenland (*cár domoviny*, "a scrap of homeland") is actually rather dismissive and all that we are really told is that the speaker is bothered by something other than that. What that might be is not specified beyond the fact that it is *not* in tatters. Of course this could be a reference to the territorial integrity of what remained of Czechoslovakia following the Munich Agreement, but as far as the logic of the poem is concerned, what matters is that something is left unsaid, that it is not a complete response and that no effort is made to conceal the fact or pretend otherwise. Similarly, the rather cryptic reference to the Holy Alliance between Russia, Austria and Prussia that was signed in Paris after the defeat of Napoleon tails off before too much can be given away:

My ovšem víme cos o Svaté  
alianci

a víme, *proti komu* svíjí  
se bezmocně a v hanbě leží ...<sup>53</sup>

The drawing of a parallel with the meeting between the Four Powers in the Bavarian capital seems implicit, as does an allusion to France once again finding itself in an unfortunate international situation – but nothing is stated

51 Ibid., 14. Engl. "I'm simply not bothered about a scrap of homeland / my grief is another, not shredded into the shadows / you can go, you can".

52 Pavelka: *Alegorie v legálně publikované poezii let 1939–1945*, 353: "Vladimír Holan zůstává věren svým názorům ze Září 1938, kde prohlašuje, že nestojí o cár domoviny. Nyní mu jde nejen o Sudety, ale o samou existenci české země" (Engl. "Vladimír Holan remains true to his views from Září 1938 where he declares that a scrap of homeland is not what's at stake. Now what matters to him is not only the Sudetenland but the very existence of the Czech lands"). Quite why Pavelka attributes the phrase "cár domoviny" to the collection *Září 1938*, when it in fact stems from the fourth poem in *Odpověď Francii* is unclear.

53 Holan: *Dokumenty*, 16. Engl. "We of course know something about the Holy / alliance / and we know, *against whom* it wriggles / helplessly and lies in shame".

outright. Again and again in *Odpověď Francii*, we find the notion of speaking out, of responding directly to something, ultimately turned on its head. Following the central paradox of authenticity according to Funk, we might say that this is an authentic response to contemporary events precisely because it does not answer everything, does not even say all that it might, and because it thematises the very fact that it does not enact everything that its title appears to promise. The reply or answer that Holan's speaker gives to France is perhaps true because it is not that which we expect it to be – a full and frank response –, because it is only half-formed and left to some extent unsaid.

## Paradox and Artificiality

Returning to more theoretical matters, it is important to note that in the search for authenticity, conundrums of logic can be found not only on the structural level, but also on its formal counterpart, for instance what Weixler describes as “the apparent paradox that it is exactly those storytelling techniques that are particularly artificial, which can appear ‘authentic’”<sup>54</sup>. He also highlights one of the paradoxical characteristics inherent in all fabulated narration:

In fictional storytelling we are famously faced with a two-fold communicative situation: the real author produces real, but inauthentic sentences, while the fictional narrator produces imaginary, but authentic sentences.<sup>55</sup>

In the case of poetry, where the speaker often assumes the form of the lyric persona of the respective author, and may be even be taken as his mouthpiece, the line between authenticity and inauthenticity becomes even more blurred. The speaker is a construction, that much is clear, but he or she may also be an attempt to represent a more authentic version of the poet in question. Such a figure can be made to speak a kind of truth in literature that in life the empirical author may struggle to articulate, helping him bring *Sein* and *Schein* into alignment by allowing him to don a particular mask and open up his inner world to its outside counterpart. There is obviously no way of verifying whether or how closely a lyric persona tallies with its author's “true self”, but the basic idea is perhaps comparable with Funk's comments on the way a sense of authenticity is created in autobiographical works:

54 Weixler: Authentisches erzählen – authentisches Erzählen, 3: “das vermeintliche Paradox, dass gerade besonders artifizielle Erzählverfahren ‘authentisch’ wirken können”.

55 Ibid., 18: “Im fiktionalen Erzählen haben wir es bekanntlich mit einer doppelten Kommunikationssituation zu tun: Der reale Autor produziert reale, aber inauthentische Sätze, der fiktive Erzähler produziert dagegen imaginäre, aber authentische Sätze.”

The authentic self of autobiography depends on a credible textual enactment / fictionalisation of the real self of the author by the “I” of the *discours* to create the “I” character of the *histoire*.<sup>56</sup>

When it comes to poetry that is published anonymously – as was the case with some of our authors’ works, for instance certain pieces that appeared in the daily press after the creation of the Protectorate or as part of *tamizdat* collections such as *Hlasy domova* – it may also be helpful to consider a point made by Timothy Bewes in an early discussion of cyberspace, and quoted by Funk, namely that it is “a zone of anonymity and therefore authenticity, where people can set free pure ‘selves’ unencumbered by their physical, worldly baggage”<sup>57</sup>.

A poem such as Seifert’s provocative *Praha v máji* may well have benefitted from having been left unsigned in the sense that its author was free(r) to express dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the Protectorate, to unmask and decry the crimes committed against the Czech lands, without fear of reprisal. The poem recounts an initially mundane, if beautiful walk through Prague on a Sunday in spring. As the speaker and his female companion make their way up the hill towards Prague Castle, however, they pass by army barracks and spot a group of what are described as Prussians being drilled in the park. Wherever the couple go, they are said to fall under the sidelong gaze of SS men. When the girl asks the speaker why the men are there, he – much like the father in *Vlajka na hradě* before him – is reticent about replying, but eventually seems to answer that they are hangmen.<sup>58</sup> *Praha v máji* operates

56 Funk, Wolfgang: Reziproker Realismus. Versuch einer Ästhetik der Authentizität, 134: “Das authentische Ich der Autobiographie lebt von einer glaubwürdigen Vertextung / Fiktionalisierung des realen Autor-Ich durch das Ich des *discours* in die Figur des Ichs des *histoire*.”

57 Bewes, Timothy: *Cynicism and Postmodernity*. London 1997, 62.

58 Owing to the lack of punctuation to denote direct speech and the fact that it is preceded by a snatch of the speaker’s internal monologue (“Co jí mám povídati?”; Engl. “What am I to tell her?”), a slight question mark hovers over whether the explanation “ach, slečno, to jsou kati!” (“oh, Miss, those are hangmen!”) is indeed verbalised or simply remains an unspoken thought. The use of the vocative “slečno” supports the former interpretation, but is not absolutely conclusive. Cf. Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přilba hlíny – Dodatky* (1939–1948), 228. Incidentally, Seifert is not the only poet at this time to describe the occupiers in this way, though. In the second part of *Historický obraz*, Nežval’s speaker uses similar language, declaring, in relation to the morning after the invasion, “V ono jitro na ryncích, kde straší cizí tváře, / tváře katů, šklebící se na popravčí káře” (Engl. “That morning at the markets, where strange faces strike fear / executioners’ faces, jeering at the tumbrel”). In: *Nežval: Historický obraz*, 34. His stanzas on the topic of the invasion are rather more blunt, however, than Seifert’s, with little room for ambiguity or double meaning, and no sense of the need to tread carefully. Hitler, for example, is baldly – if obliquely – referred to as the Devil incarnate: “Na Hradčanech, na nichž vztyčil potupný svůj kříž, / v starém pražském Hradě, jenž prý nepatří vám již, / spí dnes Satan, spí dnes Satan, ztiš se srdce,

primarily on the basis of contrasts, both static and dynamic. The former are to be found above all in elements that pertain to the poem's setting, such as the disparity between the delicate colours of Prague in bloom and the stark hue of the swastika flag fluttering atop the Castle, which is not simply referred to as being red, but bloody, and thus steeped in the implication of violence. The most obvious dynamic contrast, on the other hand, is a temporal one: the change that has overcome the Czech lands between the past (*kdysi*, "then") and present (*dnes*, "today") as a result, the reader infers, of the so-called *Erledigung der Rest-Tschechei*. There are also moments of transformation and transgression to be found. One such moment is set in motion by the speaker and primarily affects his companion. By explaining to the girl the dark purpose behind the presence of the soldiers, he could be seen as enlightening her, allowing her to move beyond her originally innocent state to one of more understanding. If considered within the historical context of the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, this recounted act of branding German soldiers executioners might equally be viewed as the crossing of a kind of prohibition boundary because the speaker is attacking one of the tenets upon which the Protectorate was founded, namely that the troops came in peace, and not with the intention of liquidating the Czech people.<sup>59</sup>

ztiš!" (Engl. "In the Castle District, where he has hoisted his insulting flag, / in Prague Castle, which apparently no longer belongs to you, / Satan is sleeping today, Satan is sleeping today, quiet yourself heart, quiet!"). *Ibid.*, 35.

- 59 The agreement that was signed by Emil Hácha on 15 March 1939 to sanction the disbandment of the Second Czecho-Slovak Republic, bore the title *Abkommen über den Schutz des tschechischen Volkes durch das Deutsche Reich* (Engl. "Agreement about the protection of the Czech people by the German Reich", emphasis added), casting any soldiers involved in a safeguarding, rather than occupying or exterminatory role. Nezval plays with exactly this irony in *Historický obraz*, when his speaker uses the word *ochránit* ("to protect", "to safeguard") in relation to what the "Devil" has in store for the Czech lands: "Zítřa budou krákat s věží všichni havrani, / že jste na tisíce roků ďáblu upsáni / vlastní krví ... Ďábel prý vás za to ochrání." (Engl. "Tomorrow all of the ravens are going to caw from the tower / that you've been sold to the devil for a thousand years / by your own blood ... Apparently the Devil will protect you in return.") *Ibid.*, 36. The duration of time that the speaker's fellow countrymen are said to have been indentured for is a clear allusion to the promised thousand-year reign of the Third Reich. Nezval's religious rhetoric here also mirrors the fire and brimstone tone of a speech given on the radio by Jan Masaryk's in reaction to the deaths that resulted from clashes on 17 November 1939: "při čerstvých hrobecích našich mučedníků slibují, že půjdeme nezadržitelně vpřed až do konečného znovuoúvoření svobodné Evropy a úplného rozdrčení nevzdělaných Antikristů." (Engl. "by the freshly dug graves of our martyrs I promise that we shall move relentlessly towards the eventual restoration of freedom in Europe and the complete annihilation of the ignorant Antichrists"), quoted in *Slib nad hroby mučedníků*. In: *Čechoslovák v Anglii*, 24.11.1939, 2. Again, we may well wonder if we are looking at an example of a kind of rhetorical cross-contamination, that is, *shared contagion* as described by Edbauer.

Such is the forthrightness of sentiment in this poem, coupled with the presumable degree of comparative security afforded by leaving a work unsigned that the reader can be forgiven for surmising that *Praha v máji* might represent an authentic response to the situation in hand, one that is honest, candid, unfettered by worry or the need to protect an identity. That said, if an anonymous poem is not recognisable as stemming from a particular author, then one might equally contend that it is not an authentic example of his work, that he has compromised himself in some way, not been completely true to himself and his oeuvre. This does not of course apply to *Praha v máji*, which, in spite of its ostensible anonymity bears unmistakable Seifertian hallmarks – an easy-going, *bon vivant* speaker; virtuoso rhymes that underscore the meaning of the lines they adorn; flourishes of daring that make us smile, even as we gulp in surprise or sadness – but of course that in itself raises questions as to whether it can really be described as anonymous when the identity of its originator is so painfully clear.

On the lookout for further signs or signals of authenticity in the poem beyond the fact that Seifert does not appear to shy away from calling a spade a spade when it comes to the Nazi occupation, we might note the use of geographical indicators and landmarks to evoke a believable, even verifiable sense of the titular city or the way that he keeps alive the idea of a distinct Czech identity, quite separate from its German counterpart. It is surely no coincidence that he uses the term *máj*, a word that has inescapable connotations of the celebrated Romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha, who began to compose verse in German but switched to Czech and only achieved recognition in that language, rather than *květen* to refer to the month in which the poem is set. Since the speaker appears to be Seifert's poetic persona, his lyric self, then we might – provided that biographical interpretations do not bother us unduly – even be tempted to ascribe a certain level of authenticity on the grounds that Seifert himself may have undertaken such a walk as narrated in the poem and witnessed the same or similar scenes as his speaker did. Appraisals of this kind may have fallen out of fashion and be frowned upon by critics and scholars nowadays, but as we have seen, it is ultimately down to the reader to adjudicate upon authenticity in literature and if that is the basis that he or she wishes to use to come to a decision, it should probably not be dismissed completely out of hand. Indeed, it is worth noting that all of our authors did live through the turbulent events of the late 1930s and early 1940s and thus their evocations of the mood and day-to-day challenges of the period cannot be subject to accusations of inauthenticity as based on a lack of first-hand or personal experience. As briefly alluded to in the Introduction, in the case of Halas this aspect was in fact utilised as a selling point for his *Torzo naděje*.

Taking a slightly more sophisticated approach, one that is sensitive to the insights regarding the typically paradoxical nature of authenticity, perhaps the

best gauge of the poem's authentic credentials is, however, its artificiality. The action is tightly choreographed; it feels staged, too good to be true almost. In a moment of confluence between form and content, plot and story, the highest geographical point reached by the speaker and his young lady friend – Prague Castle – is also the site of the poem's discursive *Höhepunkt* or *Pointe* – the final, punning image of the Czech lands crucified upon a swastika: “Dnes na tom kříži strašlivém / zem česká přibita visí”<sup>60</sup>. We know exactly what Seifert is doing here, we can see the mechanisms in action, the cogs turning, as it were, and yet we forgive him the lack of opacity. Somehow, the poem feels all the more true because it is so false, so minutely, painstakingly constructed, each image weighed up against the others. Yes, it is contrived, but without manoeuvring the speaker into precisely the right position, effectively forcing him to express the views he does, Seifert's poem would not strike the required chord. There is a rueful grin that hovers over the work. The speaker and his originator may be playing with us, but only because they have to, because to do otherwise would not impart the necessary narrative of the innocence and unfair persecution of the Czechs. It is authentic because it is not, because it wears its artificiality on its sleeve, just as the speaker is unafraid to “speak truth to power” and condemn the hegemony and brutality of the Nazi occupiers.

## Fluctuating Forms of Authenticity

As the above discussion illustrates, an impression of authenticity can assume many guises and make itself known on myriad levels, particularly in relation to literature. In recent years, a number of attempts have been made to systematise the diverse forms of authenticity that seem to exist – to varying levels of success. Perhaps the most prominent among them can be found in the work of the aforementioned Funk. A long-time scholar of authenticity, Funk has put forward eight theses on the subject in an effort to at last do it justice and embrace the riddles and idiosyncrasies entailed.<sup>61</sup> Besides obvious aspects already mentioned such as its paradoxical bent, circular mode of operation and the need for someone else to pass judgement, to decide whether the label “authentic” is apt<sup>62</sup>, Funk also suggests other slightly more novel criteria, such

60 *Seifert*: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 229. Engl. “Today on that terrible cross / the Czech land hangs nailed to it”.

61 Cf. *Funk*: The Literature of Reconstruction, 13 f.

62 Here Funk makes an important distinction between different forms of authentication, noting that the reader, who adjudicates on the authenticity of a work of literature, does not usually enjoy the status of an expert, but instead must acknowledge that his assessments are relative; cf. *ibid.*, 65: “Authenticity always entails a degree of attribution. Contrary to

as viewing authenticity as a black box. In this, he draws upon the poststructuralist idea of the undecidable and embraces the notion of oscillation as a key feature of the authentic:

Like other instances of the undecidable put forward by Derrida, such as the spectre, the gift or the trace, the authentic likewise is literally neither here nor there. It evades and resists binary and exclusionary structures of absence and presence, of essence and constructedness, of possibility and impossibility, and thus foregrounds the paradoxical simultaneity of the absence of compulsory regulations and the consequent call for and obligation to individual responsibility.<sup>63</sup>

According to Funk, this idea of oscillation is particularly evident in the often fraught relationships between fakes or copies and originals since there are occasions when authenticity can be attributed to both.<sup>64</sup> Seifert's poem "*Písně otroka*" is a useful case in point. On the one hand, it is clearly an original work by the Nobel Prize-winning author, with a few fairly typical flourishes. It is also steeped in contemporary malaise and offers insights into the speaker's happier past and now endangered present, explaining his new-found use for or rediscovery of a former part of his (collective) identity. Its *Objekt-Authentizität* ("object authenticity"), as Weixler has put it, would therefore – at least at first glance – appear to be relatively unproblematic. So too would speaker's *Individual-Authentizität* ("individual authenticity"), since we do find what he has to say credible; there is an honesty associated with his claims; they are, we feel, to use Weixler's terms, the "utterances of an apparently integrated self, as often implied by the synonyms genuineness, veracity, originality"<sup>65</sup>. Certainly is easy to believe that his needs and wants might change, that shifting outside circumstances could have brought about a development within his person, without compromising his former self. And yet, as the title and especially the quotation marks make clear, this poem also, as we mentioned in the previous chapter, consciously echoes Svatopluk Čech's older anti-Habsburg composition *Písně otroka*.

traditional forms of subject and object authenticity, however, the arbitrator, which in the case of literature means the reader, is not invested with absolute powers of ascription." Broadly similar comments can also be found in *Funk: Reziproker Realismus. Versuch einer Ästhetik der Authentizität*, 140.

63 *Funk: The Literature of Reconstruction*, 56.

64 Cf. *Funk, Wolfgang/Krämer, Lucia: Vorwort: Fiktionen von Wirklichkeit – Authentizität zwischen Materialität und Konstruktion*. In: *Funk, Wolfgang/Krämer, Lucia* (eds.): *Fiktionen von Wirklichkeit. Authentizität zwischen Materialität und Konstruktion*. Bielefeld 2011, 15.

65 Cf. *Weixler: Authentisches erzählen – authentisches Erzählen*, 12: "Äußerungen eines vermeintlich ganzheitlichen Ichs, wie sie oftmals in den Synonymen Aufrichtigkeit, Wahrhaftigkeit, Ursprünglichkeit impliziert sind."

In our previous discussion of the poem, we spoke in terms of intertextuality, but there is an argument for being more forthright and homing in critically on the issue of appropriation of other authors' works. Plagiarism is, of course, probably too strong a word here – not least because of the quotation marks in the title which acknowledge that it has been taken from another source. Moreover, Čech's volume of poetry is itself an object within the poem, recreated here in textual form: "Tu drobnou knížku / pohodil jsem v chvatu"<sup>66</sup>. The connection to a precursor text is by no means concealed, but at the same time it does raise certain questions – both as to the *Autor-Authentizität* ("author authenticity") of the work, and the two other forms of authenticity identified by Weixler. To what extent can the poem really be viewed as being authentically "Seifertian" if it simultaneously mimics or emulates aspects of another's literary efforts? The tone and diction may be very different, but Seifert's poem is certainly clad in some of the trappings of Čech's longer work and benefits from its polemical slant in the sense that criticism of new German-speaking overlords is implicit, but left safely unspoken. In this apparent act of appropriation, we are strongly reminded of a point that Seifert himself made in a journalistic article from the summer of 1939: "The changes that the Czech nation went through over the last few months have forced us to latch on vehemently and passionately to all that is Czech."<sup>67</sup> There is something paradoxical at work here. If the poem is indeed evidence of latching on to all that is Czech, then it also shows that in the quest to be "authentically Czech", not all that is brought forth will necessarily be wholly original or bear only the hallmarks of its creator.

Are we dealing, we might ask, with a copy of *Písně otroka* or a novel work in its own right? Could it exist without the earlier text? Could it perhaps surpass Čech's composition? What is more, even in quotation marks, the title "Songs of a slave" is doubly challenging because it may also be seen as problematising the position of the speaker. If he is indeed – as one could so easily conclude – the slave to which the title alludes, then it becomes difficult to imagine him being true to himself while at the same time under the thumb of another. The spectre of falsity, the prospect of finding oneself having to do someone else's bidding, is difficult to escape when ideas of enslavement are in play. We might even regard Seifert as being in thrall to Čech, dependent on the oeuvre of his predecessor to make his own work sing. That said, the aforementioned image of the speaker apparently casting his old edition of *Písně otroka* away suggests

66 Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 218. Engl. "That dainty book / I flung down in haste".

67 Seifert, Jaroslav: Národ a jeho kultura. In: Národní práce, 16.7.1939, 1: "Změny, kterými prošel český národ v uplynulých měsících, přinutily nás, abychom se připjali prudce a vášnivě ke všemu českému."

some kind of mastery over the original text after all, the authority to put it to one side. Just as Funk intimated with his talk of oscillation, it becomes clear that Seifert's poem is indeed – and depending on which level we choose to focus upon – sashaying before our very eyes. “*Písň otrocka*” veers between the purported poles of fakes and originals, blurring the line that divides them beyond almost all recognition. We may not quite be in the territory of what Funk, drawing on Eric Cohen's notion of *emergent authenticity* that can be found in unashamedly artificial places such as Disneyland, describes as “commodified simulations of originals, which paradoxically achieve authentic status in spite of their intended purpose”<sup>68</sup>, but we are not all that far off.

Since Funk is particularly interested in using the concept of authenticity as a way of getting a better handle on the contemporary literary and cultural phenomenon sometimes referred to as post-postmodernism, not all of his theses are especially relevant to our poetry. However, they do still provide a thorough overview of the many issues surrounding the concept and may offer us some useful pause for thought, possibly even a couple of potentially interesting avenues for further investigation. He notes, for example, that

authenticity cannot be attributed solely to the contribution of artist, object, medium or audience, but is dependent on a unique and incidental interplay of those factors. The role played by all of these constituent factors in the formation of the effect of authenticity is clearly discernible and desirable. Yet under the given circumstances these individual contributions generate in their combination an additional value of signification which cannot be ambiguously defined or attributed.<sup>69</sup>

Owing to this, as he puts it, “excess of signification”<sup>70</sup>, Funk surmises that authenticity should be viewed as a *phenomenon of emergence*, one that always brings with it the possibility – however faint – of transcendence.<sup>71</sup> In light of our earlier discussion of rhetoric, though, we cannot help, when reading this, but be reminded of the notion of the rhetorical situation, which is equally dependent on the interplay of a series of factors and also struggles with a degree of indefinability. Two options appear to be available to us. Either we regard the rhetorical situation as an emergent phenomenon as well, or we contemplate the prospect of an *authentic situation* as the framework from which to regard texts that aspire to authenticity. Given the controversial nature of the rhetorical situation as a concept, the former is probably the more sensible option, not least because it may help to put an end to the dispute between Bitzer and Vatz regarding the relationship between rhetor and situation. If we take the

68 Funk: *The Literature of Reconstruction*, 54.

69 Ibid., 52.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., 54f.

discourse that is elicited by a rhetorical exigence as an emergent effect, then the fact that it is difficult to unravel where the situation begins and the influence of the rhetor ends would be entirely unsurprising. As Funk puts it

the relationship of the constituent part and emergent effect is one of reciprocity and mutual interference. It is not only the *outcome* of the interaction which is predicated on the interaction of the constituent parts. A process can only be designated as truly emergent when the components themselves are subject to unaccountable changes in the process. [...] Consequently one of the side-effects of emergent processes is an irrevocable tangling of the epistemological hierarchy of cause and effect.<sup>72</sup>

Since both the rhetor may be moved by a situation, and the situation cast in a specific light by the rhetor, this idea of binding entanglement is extremely apt and may even suggest a certain kinship between rhetoric and authenticity that goes beyond the fact that the two are reliant upon audience perception and reception to ensure their success and appreciation.

Moreover, Funk's foregrounding of issues of ethics within his understanding of authenticity<sup>73</sup> may also go some way towards helping us to articulate our sense of unease and disquiet when it comes to a work such as Nevzal's *Šváby*. It may be helpful to see the poem as being out of kilter, as having allowed aesthetic features – most notably the problematic imagery used to depict the German occupiers – to gain the upper hand and leave associated ethical considerations in disarray. In this respect, *Šváby* could be viewed as an inauthentic work and therefore one with unsurprisingly negative connotations.

## Authenticity of Expression, Experience and Execution

Funk and Weixler are not the only theoreticians whose thinking on the matter may be useful to us, however. For example, music scholar Allan Moore expressly links the notion of authenticity to the idea of appropriation by an audience, creating a strong bond between the two, one that reinforces a sense of shared experience and communal values:

The music we declare to be “authentic” is the music we “appropriate”. This recognises that the process of authentication is one of transfer, from a situation in which the “naïve” individual, secure in her subjecthood, authenticates her actions and experience simply by undergoing them, to a situation whereby others are allotted the same vividness of experience such that their actions ground the first individual's security.<sup>74</sup>

72 Ibid., 53 f.

73 Cf. *ibid.*, 62.

74 Moore, Allen: Authenticity as authentication. In: *Popular Music*, 21/2 (2002), 219.

It would not be difficult to exchange the word “music” for “poetry” in this understanding and thus acquire a new model for regarding the relationship between the reader and the speaker.

In his study of contemporary rock and folk music, Moore highlights the different forms of “truth” that may be spoken by an authentic artist: that of their own situation, that of the situation of their audience, and that of the wider culture in which the artist and his creations are rooted.<sup>75</sup> From this, he seeks to illustrate the mechanisms involved in the construction of authenticity by developing a three-part typology. His trio of distinct varieties of authenticity are ordered according to the object of authentication, giving rise to the terms “first-person” authenticity or *authenticity of expression*, “second-person” authenticity or *authenticity of experience* and “third-person” authenticity, also referred to as *authenticity of execution*. Moore identifies first-person authenticity as coming about

when an originator (composer, performer) succeeds in conveying the impression that his / her utterance is one of integrity, that it represents an attempt to communicate in an unmediated form with an audience.<sup>76</sup>

It is all about the artist and their outward projection of emotion and sentiment. Second-person authenticity, by contrast, places much more emphasis on the audience and is described as arising “when a performer succeeds in conveying the impression to a listener that a listener’s experience of life is being validated, that the music is ‘telling it like it is’ for them.”<sup>77</sup> Here not only external perceptions of the artist come into play, but also the internal perceptions of the audience, what they themselves have experienced to date. In the context of our study, we can immediately see the advantage to such a conception of authenticity since it allows us to examine not only function but also effect, the bearing that authentic texts have upon others. Third-person authenticity casts the net even further and provides a cultural anchor for the concept, occurring in Moore’s eyes “when a performer succeeds in conveying the impression of accurately representing the ideas of another, embedded within a tradition of performance.”<sup>78</sup> Though formulated with music in mind, all three guises of authenticity could easily be argued to be applicable to a poem such as Seifert’s “*Písň otrocka*”, helping us to unravel the way in which authenticity is constructed within it. To begin with we can use the term first-person authenticity to describe what is evoked by the speaker himself through his utterances – our sense that he is, by and large, an upstanding figure, worthy of our trust and

75 Cf. *Ibid.*, 209.

76 *Ibid.*, 214.

77 *Ibid.*, 220.

78 *Ibid.*, 218.

not about to deceive. When we consider the unspoken presumed message of the poem – the implication that the Czechs have been once again enslaved by Germanic overlords<sup>79</sup> – the idea of second-person authenticity comes into its own. We can ask ourselves to what extent this assessment of the situation is likely have resonated with contemporary readers or tallied with their perceptions. Providing the response is favourable, which seems a perfectly plausible result, another source of authenticity is laid bare. Last but not least, with the help of third-person authenticity, we are perhaps better equipped to deal with the issue of the relationship between the text and its precursor, between Seifert and Čech. We might see it in terms of non-aggressive appropriation and a representation of earlier ideas put forward by a respected poetic forebear, entrenching the poem within a particular literary context and endowing it with a certain gravitas born of that context. Any questions of inauthenticity on the grounds of slavish emulation begin to lose their bite here.

Over the course of his discussion, Moore also homes in on possible moral or ethical concerns involved in the reception of music, perceived antagonisms and incompatibilities which may preclude attributions of authenticity. He notes that “The opposition between “authentic” and “commercial” is [...] not a new one.”<sup>80</sup>, an insight that our study seems to confirm, at least in part. If, for example, we recall both Seifert’s and Halas’ apparent reluctance to write to order, their refusal to produce poetry to accompany commemorative images of Božena Němcová for the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her birth, as mentioned in Chapter One, we cannot help but ask ourselves whether this might have been down to fears that such a thing would have been “inauthentic”, would

79 For an indication of the contemporary brisance of the word *otrok* (“slave”), it is perhaps worth taking a look at the Nazis’ handling of the renaming of the town of Otrokovice / Otrokowitz; cf. an in-house letter from the department of transportation in Prague dated 15.2.1940. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 261, sig. I 1 a: “Wie mir jetzt bekannt geworden ist, haben die Protektoratsbahnen im Dezember 1939 den Bahnhof in Bařov umbenannt. Otrokowitz bedeutet in der Übersetzung der darin enthaltenen Wortstämme Sklavendorf. Die Protektoratsbahnen schlagen als deutsche Bezeichnung des Bahnhofs Batiow oder Batiau vor. Ich bitte um Prüfung, ob der Umbenennung des Bahnhofs in Batiow politisches Bedenken entgegenstehen und welche deutsche Bezeichnung des Bahnhofs gewählt werden soll.” (Engl. “As has come to my attention, the Protectorate Railways renamed the station Bařov in December 1939. When one translates the root words contained in the name Otrokowitz it means ‘village of slaves’. The Protectorate Railways suggest that the station be designated either Batiow or Batiau in German. I request that you examine whether there are any political reasons why the station should not be renamed and which German name should be selected.”) It is certainly interesting to note that the author of the letter feels the need to point out the etymological root of the name, implying somewhat that this is a connection that ought to be avoided and making no mention of the namesake of the new place name – Tomáš Bařa.

80 Moore: Authenticity as authentication, 211.

have placed commercial considerations, the desires of publishing houses, above artistic integrity. We might equally wonder whether Holan's decision not to co-operate with a request to submit something for an anthology on Prague – also briefly discussed in that chapter in relation to distaste for *poésie de circonstance* – could have stemmed from similar concerns. As Moore points out, though, “Dispassionately speaking, of course, this commercial/ authentic polarity is illusory, since all mass-mediated music is subject to commercial imperatives.”<sup>81</sup> The same could doubtless be said of poetry too; there has to be some expectation that the publisher will receive a return – however small – on his investment, a hope that the work will be well-received by readers, that they will want to go out and buy a copy. Moreover, we know all too well by now that some collections from the late 1930s such as Seifert's *Zhasněte světla* and Halas' *Torzo naděje* did in fact sell extremely well, clocking up unusually high circulation figures. If it really were impossible to be both authentic and commercially successful, then grave doubts might have to be raised as to the integrity of those volumes of verse.

### **Věrnost: When Rhetoric Met Authenticity**

If we now rein in our theoretical considerations, it becomes clear that we have arrived at an important juncture, and need to find a way of balancing the rhetorical with the authentic so as to gain a better understanding of how the poems and their speakers move and persuade us. Coming back to the earlier categories borrowed from Jähnichen, it would be easy to imagine that where rhetoric dominates, the sense of poetry as a weapon comes to the fore, whereas when the notion of authenticity has the upper hand, we are more receptive to the idea of poetry as a testimony. We might even contrast the idea of an “authentic” response with one that is purely rhetorical, full of hot air, one might say. However, in truth, things are not as clear-cut as that. After all, the impression of authenticity can be created and undermined via rhetorical means and a credible testimony can be a powerful weapon in its own right.

One aspect where this interplay between rhetoric and authenticity is particularly prominent is in matters of faith – that is, the issue, construction and transmission of *věrnost*. On the one hand, public avowals of faith (fulness) and the condemnation of betrayal can help arm the speaker, giving him both ammunition against his foes and acting as a rallying cry for those who are sympathetic to his cause. On the other, if we believe the speaker to be false or

81 Ibid., 218.

disingenuous – in short, inauthentic – then his words will feel hollow and we may doubt the veracity of his claims. Since a faithful account is also one that is plausible, one that we designate as being “true”, then the testimonial character of a poem might be called into question if it appears in some way “unfaithful”.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, though, we know that all of the poetic depictions of this era are just that – depictions, (re)presentations. There is something of a paradox at work here when the truest evocations of a difficult period are also those which are by their very nature false, a fiction, albeit in poetic form. If we believe them, if we are prepared to ascribe to them a certain degree of truth, then surely we do so primarily because of Moore’s second-person authenticity; because we believe that the speakers are indeed *telling it like it is*, or rather was, or at least might have been.

Any successful show of *věrnost* requires a level of presumed integrity and credibility comparable with that which is involved in the construction of authenticity. This is not, however, the only structural similarity between the two concepts.<sup>83</sup> Although in real life, loyalty and faith are often demonstrated purely by actions, in the choices that we make and the behaviours we adopt, when it comes to the literary or rather poetic depiction and construction of *věrnost*, external articulation (i. e. by way of rhetorical gesture) is required and it falls to the reader to pass judgement as to whether the speaker does indeed seem to be *věrný*. The possible and, we would argue more often than not, intended consequences of an evocation of *věrnost* – sympathy, fellow feeling, raised hackles, inflamed passions, a desire to conduct oneself in a similarly exemplary manner – are also experienced solely by the reader. Contrary to Gide’s aforementioned comment about the impossibility of both appearing and being authentic, though, it is not impossible to appear and to be *věrný*, but it is possible to appear *věrný* while in fact being *nevěrný* or *malověrný*. Nezval’s *Šváby* is a prime example of this. In it, the speaker makes a very good show of being a *věrný* Czech. He is willing to defend his homeland, to fight against the interlopers that have overrun the city. Yet, as has been discussed, while demonstrating this, he betrays certain expected principles, stoops to the

82 The idea of faithful accounts was certainly part of the contemporary vocabulary. Cf. an advertisement for Vladislav Vančura’s *Obrazy z dějin národa českého*. NA, f. ÚŘP, box 1143, sig. IV – 2 S 1939: “Věrná vypravování o životě, skutcích válečných i duchu vzdělanosti” (Engl. “Faithful narratives of life, military deeds and the spirit of erudition”). The book is also described as holding up a mirror to Czech history in all of its glory, another claim of its accuracy and veracity: “Kniha zrcadlíci na svých stránkách slávu českých dějin od jejich počátků” (Engl. “On its pages, the book reflects the splendour of Czech history from the very beginning”).

83 On the affinity, or at least lack of mutual exclusivity between loyalty and originality, one of the terms most closely associated with authenticity, see also *Royce: The Philosophy of Loyalty*, 102.

level of his enemy by using a deeply problematic conceit to portray them. The punning calls to exterminate the cockroaches / Swabians run dangerously close to Nazi propaganda used to dehumanise the Jewish population and thus the implied condemnation of the occupation of the Czech lands is undermined, along with the speaker's moral authority and integrity. If, as it seems, he turns out to be "no better than the Germans", then the speaker cannot really be a *věrný* Czech after all.

In the Introduction, we mentioned the idea that many of the poems from this period could be seen as exhibiting a degree of *věrnost* towards a particular conception of national history, frequently taking the form of deference to and an apparent confirmation of a narrative of repeated humiliation and perseverance. In short: an on-going refusal to give up on the part of the Czechs. However, as the above example indicates, a renewed focus on the respective speakers and the postures and attitudes that they assume may shed further light on the matter, helping to sharpen up *věrnost* as an analytical category.

When we examine our cross-section of poetry, we come across four main roles performed by the speaker to elicit an impression of his own *věrnost* and possibly also to inspire such feelings and behaviour in others – either in the poem's stated addressee, implied reader or indeed its empirical reader. He is portrayed and appears variously as one who remembers, one who mourns for what was but is no more, one who speaks for more than just himself – either for all, or at least for the many – and as one who speaks the truth, who offers a vision of the world that is presented as in some way definitive. In all of these cases, issues of authenticity are tightly bound up with rhetorical gesture. Indeed, we would argue that we often in fact find ourselves dealing with something that might be referred to as rhetorical authenticity, that is, an attempt to convey a genuine sense of emotion and understanding of what the events of the late 1930s and early 1940s represent for the Czech people via rhetorical means. Incidentally, this is not to be confused with authentic rhetoric. After all, given the huge influence of classical models and the way in which rhetoricians emulate others while learning their craft, one might even ask if such a thing is truly possible to achieve since it inevitably involves a degree of copying and a reliance upon existing forms of expression. What are tropes if not blueprints for how one might approach specific issues, casting them in one particular light or another? Why else would *imitatio* be, alongside *ars* and *exercitatio*, one of the cornerstones of rhetoric as it used to be taught in schools?<sup>84</sup>

84 Cf. Plett: Einführung in die rhetorische Textanalyse, 4f.

## The Speaker as One Who Remembers

By remembering and – perhaps more importantly – giving the reader an insight into these memories, the speaker creates the impression of first-hand experience. It would seem that he knows what he is talking about; his words have a certain authority, one might say. When, for example, as is the case in a number of Seifert's poems such as *U jednoho hrobu na Olšanech*, *Stará knížka* or even *Praha v černém*, the speaker looks back and considers his former situation, his subsequent comparisons with his current lot gain weight and become more credible or persuasive. The speaker's apparent knowledge of an earlier period colours his view of the present, but it also suggests familiarity and understanding. He is not an outsider looking in, but one who is vested in the transformed places he is describing, one for whom they mean something, one for whom the loss or degradation of which would be a personal blow. If he says that things have changed for the worse, that the world around him was once a happier, more care-free place, then of course on one level he is simply indulging a little *laudatio temporis acti*, but all the same we may still feel inclined to believe him, particularly if his assessment tallies with our own feelings, because his recollections help to create a backstory, justification for any unflattering comparisons. In short, they make the speaker appear more authentic. The act of externalising those ostensible memories, of stating how things used to be and have now changed may be a largely rhetorical technique – we have all come across orators who invoke their childhoods to make a point, trying to demonstrate their close affinity to a particular issue, after all, and there is a well-known topos, that of *oblivionis remedium*, which places remembering firmly within the potential scope of rhetoric – but it is nevertheless an important element in the creation of an authentic impression. Its possible artificiality is not an obstacle to this. Rather it necessarily adds to the underlying paradoxes that characterise authenticity. Often though, a sense of changed circumstance is not just indicated by the literal utterances of the speaker, but also marked by semantic, rhythmical or acoustic shifts. Such devices can be used to bolster and underscore the message and impression of transformation, with poetic form coming to reflect content.

The speaker's awareness of and focus on the past provides a key component involved in imparting a sense of his *věrnost*, grounding it in personal experience. If the speaker could not remember how things used to be, had no understanding of the changes that may have overcome both him and his homeland, then any decision to behave in a faithful fashion on his part could be questioned, viewed as being ultimately meaningless, an empty gesture. *Věrnost* requires endurance, long-term interaction; it is found and flourishes in relationships built up over time. Without an appreciation of what has gone

before, we cannot really speak of loyalty or faith; at best we would be dealing with a one-off show of support or solidarity. This is an issue that is also reflected in our selection of poetry from the late 1930s and early 1940s.

The speaker's promise in *U jednoho hrobu na Olšanech* ("slibuji tiše: Zrádcem nebudu / tak jak to řek ten pod tím příkrovem."<sup>85</sup>), for example, has a particular resonance not only because, as we discussed in Chapter Three, it echoes the words of Karel Havlíček Borovský, but also because it is uttered against a backdrop of change and personal development. It is a moment of constancy in a fickle and transitory world. It is only through and thanks to memory, though, that the speaker arrives at this point; he remembers how he was as a boy and considers how he has changed, remembers what Havlíček Borovský is supposed to have declared in an act of defiance and tries make it hold true once again.

In addition, the *věrnost* exhibited by a speaker is sometimes dependent on the object of that *věrnost*. In *Píseň o vlasti*, for instance, Seifert's speaker indicates that he has not been an especially faithful lover in the past. Though he has retained certain mementos from these relationships ("Tu zbyl jen dopis, stužka z vlasů, / sponka, jež spadla do klína"<sup>86</sup>) and does still call the women to mind from time to time, they ultimately appear to be interchangeable for him, as suggested by their near metonymical depiction through objects that used to belong to them and the repeated use of the emphatic participle *ať* (in this context roughly "whoever"):

Na ty, které jsem měl rád kdysi,  
vždycky se časem vzpomíná  
ať ta to byla, ať to ty jsi!<sup>87</sup>

Just like his memories of the women, which are said to be as short-lived as sparks ("A jako jiskra z komína / vzpomínka rychle zhasíná"<sup>88</sup>), so too do the speaker's relationships with them seem to have soon fizzled out. However, when it comes to the speaker's other love – that which he experiences for his homeland – then his feelings are shown to be strong and unwavering. In spite of the dramatic changes that have overcome the country, her newly acquired corset "ze strašlivého betonu"<sup>89</sup>, the speaker's love for her shows no signs of abating, but instead goes from strength to strength: "Zas nové touhy

85 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přilba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 220. Engl. "I promise quietly: I will not be a traitor / just like the man beneath the shroud said."

86 Ibid., 192. Engl. "Here remained only a letter, a hair ribbon / a pin that fell into a lap".

87 Ibid. Engl. "Those, whom I once loved / I always remember with time / whoever she was, whoever you are!"

88 Ibid. Engl. "And like a spark from the chimney / the memory quickly burns out".

89 Ibid. Engl. "of dreadful concrete".

v srdci kličí / a je to láska nevinná”<sup>90</sup> With the right object of his affections, the speaker is shown to be capable of being a faithful lover after all and the sense of his *věrnost* towards his endangered homeland is heightened by the earlier acknowledgement of his shortcomings in the past. Remembering these failings also reminds the speaker that his relationship to the Czech lands is different, purer. The notion of *věrnost* towards one’s native land is confirmed as something noble, long-lived and uplifting, releasing the speaker from the indiscretions of his youth, his formerly flighty behaviour.

## The Speaker as One Who Mourns

As far as our second category is concerned, we encounter speakers in mourning, trying to find an appropriate way to say farewell or to bring back the dead and departed – or at least give them a renewed, tangible presence on the page – in many quarters. Rhetoric looms large in attempts of this kind, as does the need for the results to appear heartfelt, honest – in a word, authentic. The performative bent of such actions has been ably demonstrated by Alexander Etkind<sup>91</sup> and in our case it is an especially important consideration since if we can “see through” the speaker’s performance and cast doubt upon the sincerity of his utterances, then the authenticity of the text will be in tatters. Etkind’s approach provides a very productive means of avoiding such problematic concepts as trauma, in particular when it comes to the intergenerational transmission thereof. It is also clear that he did not choose his words lightly. By focussing on mourning, as opposed to grieving, Etkind ensures that the public dimension of an otherwise potentially purely private phenomenon of coming to terms with the past is brought to the fore. Although in our case, we are dealing with only one generation that did indeed personally bear witness to the events of late 1938 and early 1939, the use of the term *trauma* in relation to this period tends to be figurative, experienced at best vicariously by those simply involved by virtue of their nationality. The wrongs perceived as having

90 Ibid. Engl. “New desires sprout again in my heart / and it is an innocent love”.

91 Cf. in particular *Etkind: Warped Memories*, 13: “Two barely compatible metaphors – theater and digging – reveal the problem of mourning. A man who digs into his own past is also a performer who plays his role in public. Whether he performs digging in the soil, in the archive, or in popular culture, this is a practical activity, the work of mourning. But this work does not end once the past has simply been dug up and revealed. Only when they become public, as in a theater, do these excavations of the past, buried and unburied, complete the work of mourning.” We would argue that publishing poetry also fulfils a similarly public function to performing on the stage.

been committed by the Four Powers in Munich against the Czech people are not generally of a physical nature, the losses incurred primarily abstract.

An especially striking example of a public demonstration of the kind of hurt, sadness and regret often associated with mourning, its attempts to return the dead to the living via imaginative means or at least afford them in some way the dignity they are due, is Hora's 33-stanza poem *Rekviem* from the 1940 collection *Zahrada Popelčina*. Not long after publication, it was hailed as a "poetic afterword" to Hora's long narrative poem from the previous year *Jan houslista*.<sup>92</sup> Certainly as far as its form is concerned, this is a fair point, since the work does indeed exhibit the same stanzaic and metrical structure and there is a certain degree of thematic overlap. However, it is worth pointing out that the poem is not peopled by any characters capable of speech other than the speaker. Though so full of addresses to different figures as to make it at times difficult to be sure exactly to whom the speaker is speaking, it is not a polyphonic piece. The speaker may to a certain extent travel back in time via his memories, but the journey motif is far less prominent than in the earlier poem. Where in *Jan houslista* it was art and one's native land that took centre stage, here the spotlight falls upon death.

In one of the first stanzas, the speaker remembers burying a blackbird as a child, adding an authentic note from the start – personal experience of death and of bidding farewell. His memory of the event is still clear. He recalls the sights and sounds of that day ("Vím, byla neděle, hlas zvonů / od města k zahradám se táh"<sup>93</sup>) and how, in an act reminiscent of the ancient ritual of giving burial gifts to the dead, the blackbird received bread and water, albeit in the form of dew drops, to help him on his way:

Položili jsme k němu chléb,  
s trav sebrali jsme pro něj rosu  
a růvek jeho hliněný  
jsme osázeli semeny,  
jež vítr svíval po záhonu.<sup>94</sup>

As this example demonstrates, the conception of death put forward in the poem is one that is strongly bound up with life and eternal return – the *věčný koloběh* ("eternal cycle"), as it is referred to later, over which Death keeps

92 Černý: Průhled do nových knih. Josef Hora: "Zahrada Popelčina" – Kamil Bednář: "Veliký mrtvý" – Vladimír Holan: "První testament", 29: "básnický doslov".

93 Hora: *Kniha domova*, 150. Engl. "I know it was Sunday, the voice of the bells / carried from the town to the gardens".

94 Ibid. Engl. "We put bread down with him / from the lawns we collected dew for him / and his little clay mound / we sowed with seeds / which the wind scattered about the flower-bed."

watch.<sup>95</sup> Here though, things are a little more prosaic and the body of the dead blackbird is simply returned to the earth and will help provide nutrients for seeds to grow.

Throughout *Rekviem*, particular emphasis is placed on the idea of death as something unceasing and inescapable, both our origin and our fate: “Vždy se smrtí jsi, nikdy sám, / syn nebo utečenec její.”<sup>96</sup> Adverbs and adjectives to that effect dominate (*nepřetržitý*, “continual”; *ustavičně*, “incessantly”; *bez konce*, “without end”, to give just a handful of examples), but we can also see the notion reflected in the frequent use of enjambment and the repetition of certain words and phrases: they literally come back to haunt us once more. Death is all around, turning the countryside into a great big graveyard: “Krajino do nedozírna, / hřbitove ptáků, zvířat, lidí!”<sup>97</sup> It is evidently so commonplace as not even always to warrant specification:

Zas umřel kdos, kdos umírá,  
kdos šátkem oči utírá  
a kdosi opuštěn bdí zase.<sup>98</sup>

Though the portrayal of Death in personified form is not especially flattering – it is described variously as “ta černá paní beznadějí”<sup>99</sup> and a “nelítočná kuběna”<sup>100</sup> – for the most part the poem is actually fairly ambivalent about death as an abstract, lower-case idea.

On the one hand, death is shown to be cruel and indiscriminate, ultimately taking everything from every one of us – “hoch, žena, muž a stařena”<sup>101</sup>. Though a list of four rather than a classic tricolon, here the line is rendered more forceful, more persuasive and memorable, via the use of internal rhyme (“*žena* [...] *stařena*”) and sound patterning, in particular the abundance of fricatives, which take the form of velars, sibilants and trills. The death of the young, of children, is depicted in especially negative terms: “Na pohřbech dětí dospělí / sčítají bez konce své ztráty.”<sup>102</sup> The speaker’s early, and at this stage apparently rhetorical question “Co bere nám? Co vzala nám?”<sup>103</sup> receives

95 Ibid., 154.

96 Ibid., 152. Engl. “You’re always with Death, never alone / her son or her fugitive”.

97 Ibid., 154. Engl. “Boundless countryside, graveyard of birds, animals, people!”

98 Ibid., 151. Engl. “Again someone died, someone is dying / some is drying their eyes with a scarf / and someone left behind lies awake again.”

99 Ibid., 175. Engl. “that black lady without hope”.

100 Ibid., 179. Engl. “coldblooded concubine”.

101 Ibid., 153. Engl. “boy, woman, man, old woman”.

102 Ibid. Engl. “At the funerals of children adults / count their losses endlessly”.

103 Ibid., 152. Engl. “What does she [death] take from us? What does she take from us?” This line is reminiscent of an important moment in *Jan houslista* when the titular hero is warned upon his return to the Czech lands about the dangerous situation his homeland

a fairly definitive answer later on: “Vše bere nám, vše vzala nám.”<sup>104</sup> At the same time though, it is also suggested that death and the loss of life can give something back, can even help us to learn: “a život, teprv když se tratí, / nás učí nehloub milovati”<sup>105</sup>. Since these are the final lines of the poem, it can be seen as ending on a positive note, with the implication that the speaker has come to some understanding that he perhaps did not possess before. He may even be viewed as having overcome the exigence of death via rhetorical means.<sup>106</sup> He has named it, brought it to task for all to see, and, in doing so, seems to have found a certain peace, a way of coming to terms with loss as a phenomenon that we too might follow. The speaker acknowledges, for example, that, for some, death can be a release:

I došuměl strom bolesti  
v statečném hrdém jeho těle.  
Ne jeho – naše neštěstí  
se smrtí stálo u postele.<sup>107</sup>

Passing away is described here in very natural terms – with the organic metaphor of a tree that has finally finished rustling with its branches, the dropping of the wind, we presume, signalling the end of a struggle with ill health. Only for those still on this earth is it a source of grief. In short, we encounter the speaker both railing against the unfairness of death, and being forced to concede that it is not all bad, that death is a necessary part of life. This represents the central tension of the poem. Ultimately, one might say, the speaker finds himself in the unfortunate position of having have to play not only the role of the prosecution, but also – rather reluctantly – that of a counsel for the defence, bringing out certain witnesses who might shed a different light on the case. Those working on behalf of the judiciary represent one

finds itself in: “kdo ví, co zítřek přinese, / co roztrhá, co odnese...” (Engl. “who knows what tomorrow will bring / what it will tear asunder, take away...”) *Ibid.*, 105. In it we may read a certain pessimistic progression from one poem to the next: where before uncertainty was king, now it is clear what tomorrow will bring – death, nothing more.

104 *Ibid.*, 175. Engl. “She takes everything from us. She took everything from us.”

105 *Ibid.*, 179. Engl. “and life, when it disappears / teaches us to love most deeply”.

106 According to Bitzer, death is not, of course, a rhetorical exigence *per se*, since rhetoric cannot bring people back to life; cf. *Bitzer: The Rhetorical Situation*, 6: “An exigence which cannot be modified is not rhetorical; thus, whatever comes about of necessity and cannot be changed – death, winter, and some natural disasters, for instance – are exigences to be sure, but they are not rhetorical.” However, as this case demonstrates, the related exigence of grief and sorrow, the need to come to terms with loss, is something that can be assuaged by ritualised and, perhaps more importantly, verbalised acts of mourning that are very much bound up with rhetorical discourse.

107 *Hora: Kniha domova*, 166. Engl. “And the tree of pain finished rustling / in his gallant brave body. / Not his – our unhappiness / stood with Death by the bed”.

of the oldest primarily rhetorical fields, but of course if the words of such professional rhetors are not viewed by their audience (usually the judge and jury) as being believable, as having some modicum of truth, a kind of authenticity amongst all of the artifice of courtroom convention, then they are unlikely to succeed.

Besides this faintly legalistic bent, if we take the title of the poem into account, then we may well wonder following Gérard Genette and his notion of the *illocutionary force* of the paratext<sup>108</sup>, whether we are being called upon to view the work as a kind of requiem in its own right, that is, as either a re-imagining of the liturgical rite itself or of the music that accompanies such a mass for the dead.<sup>109</sup> Either way, it is clear that we are on highly performative soil here and dealing with a prominent facet of ritualised mourning that has its origins in Catholicism and seeks to honour the dead and departed, while providing comfort for those left behind. One question looms large, however: for whom is this requiem intended?

Alongside its generalisations about the incessant train of death that is part and parcel of life, the text presents us with two obvious candidates: either the young poet Jiří Wolker who died of tuberculosis in 1924<sup>110</sup> or the literary

108 Cf. Genette, Gérard: *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Trans.: Lewin, Jane E. Cambridge 1997, 10f.: “a novel [as written on the title page of a book] does not signify ‘This book is a novel’, a defining assertion that hardly lies within anyone’s power, but rather ‘Please look on this book as a novel’”. Moreover, though Genette does not mention poetry in his examples of genres that make a commitment to tell the truth such as autobiography, history and memoir, based on our earlier discussion of authenticity, we would argue that exactly that kind of pact is indeed being entered into by the authors or at least their speakers.

109 Since Dvořák, a composer held in particularly high esteem at the time due to the patriotic outlook of much of his oeuvre, also wrote a *Requiem*, there is even the possibility, albeit difficult to prove, that the title is a quote. The contents of the poem thus might conceivably be construed as an imitation of some kind, an attempt on the part of Hora to recreate in words Dvořák’s musical mannerisms. This too would heighten the composition’s performative credentials by framing it as an enacted re-imagination or re-interpretation of an existing performance piece. However, such a reading is somewhat on the speculative side, and therefore it seems prudent to stick to the more general understanding of the word *requiem* for the purposes of this analysis. The idea of re-imagining or re-interpreting something that already exists still holds true, though.

110 Hora was not the only one with Wolker on his mind in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement. Even amid the turbulence of the Second Republic, the opportunity to commemorate the anniversary of Wolker’s death was not missed by the press; cf. *Vzpomínka na Jiřího Wolkeru*. In: *A-Zet ranní*, 3.1.1939, 4: “Dnešek patří vzpomínce básníka Jiřího Wolkeru, jenž zemřel před patnácti lety uprostřed největšího tvůrčího rozletu ve věku 24 let. Jméno Wolkerovo bude navždy spjato s bohatým poválečným literárním obdobím, zejména s historií naší sociální poesie. Wolker je básníkem mládeže, jeho bojů a víry.” (Engl. “Today belongs to the memory of poet Jiří Wolker, who died fifteen years ago at the age of

critic F. X. Šalda who died in 1937 after decades of ill-health.<sup>111</sup> If, as in the case of his aforementioned somewhat lawyerly behaviour, we also view the speaker as a rhetor here, then it is not difficult to ascribe to him a eulogising function. We note, however, following Vatz<sup>112</sup>, that in this particular implied rhetorical situation, there is much picking and choosing of appropriate details, the creation of a stark and deliberate contrast between the manner of the two men's deaths.<sup>113</sup> The speaker's allusions to Wolker are characterised by the perceived injustice of his untimely death – his lack of agency, his inability to fight against it – and by pondering what might have been, what the poet might yet have become:

Básníku Jiří, byl jsi mlád  
a byl bys výše rostl snad,  
když zmrzlá alej topolová  
nás vedla do hřbitovních vrat,  
kde je ti usouzeno spat  
za branou města Prostějova.<sup>114</sup>

The death of Šalda, by contrast, is presented more matter-of-factly: “Byl konec životu a létu”<sup>115</sup>. The reference to the summer makes it, as before, feel more natural, like something that was always bound to come to an end after a certain length of time. The speaker recalls less the critic's funeral, than all the things he taught the younger literary generation (“Do zítřku hleďte, radil nám”<sup>116</sup>). The speaker clearly wishes to follow in Šalda's footsteps, but is worried that

24 while at the height of his creative prowess. The name Wolker will forever be associated with the rich post-war literary period, in particular with the history of our social poetry. Wolker is a poet of the young, of their struggles and faith.”)

111 Hora's 1938 collection *Domov* is of course dedicated to Šalda's memory with the words “Tolik nám chybí v těchto chvílích” (Engl. “How much we miss him at a time like this”).

112 Cf. Vatz: *The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation*, 156.

113 Hora's speaker is in good company here. A similar contrast was also famously made by the great Roman orator Cicero in his treatise *On Old Age*: “Death at an early age seems to me to be like a fire that has been suddenly swamped by a bucket of water; but death in old age is like a fire that has not been extinguished but has gone out of its own accord, because it has used up all of its fuel. When an apple is not yet ripe, it takes some work to tug it off the branch; but when it is fully ripe it simply falls to the ground. In the same way, though some act of violence may snatch life away from the young, the old are ready to die.” In: *Cobbold*, G. B. (trans.): *The Red Flare. Cicero's On Old Age*. Mundelein, Illinois 2012, 57.

114 *Hora: Kniha domova*, 156. Engl. “Poet Jiří, you were young / and you would have grown taller perhaps / when the frozen avenue of poplars / took us to the entrance of the graveyard / where you are condemned to sleep / past the gates of the town of Prostějov”.

115 *Ibid.*, 165. Engl. “It was the end of a life and of summer”.

116 *Ibid.*, 167. Engl. “Look to tomorrow, he advised us.”

he and his peers will not achieve this: “Najdeme most, na němž jsi stál / Přejdeme praskající ledy?”<sup>117</sup> His words may be taken either as evidence of (false) modesty – perhaps even bordering on the *mea parvitas* topos – and a desire to demonstrate deference to and reverence of the dead, or as a somewhat veiled allusion to contemporary events, to the fact that circumstances have fundamentally changed since the critic’s death. Such a reading is particularly borne out by the image of shattering ice, which brings to mind the idea of suddenly finding oneself on uncertain terrain, in constant danger of putting a foot wrong, of things collapsing all around.

This, in turn, leads us to another possible interpretation of the poem, since knowledge of the historical context, plus the aforementioned connection to *Jan houslista*, also provides a third figure no longer with us in the way that it used to be, one that straddles the divide between Wolker and Šalda and might conceivably be the true object of the requiem: the speaker’s homeland. On the one hand, the First Republic was indeed cut down in its prime – at just twenty years old, it can be seen as having been even younger than the consumptive proletarian poet Wolker. On the other hand, though, as a geographical region, if not always a sovereign state, the Czech lands can look back upon a rich and varied history, a life well lived, one might say, just like Šalda. Knowing the restrictions that had been placed on Czech authors by 1940, the institutional limits to artistic freedom, one could be forgiven for wondering whether this might even be a roundabout, unobtrusive means of expressing regret and sorrow at the breakdown of the former political and social order, a method that would not immediately occur to the censor as being problematic or undesirable.

In light of all of this, it is perhaps fair to say that *Rekviem* occupies a rather tense space between rhetoric and authenticity. Although we can only speculate as to whether the speaker is really grieving inside, whether or not he – or indeed the empirical author behind him – is trying to come to terms with some traumatic bereavement, either the actual death of his literary friends, or

117 Ibid. Engl. “Will we find the bridge you stood upon / will we get across the ice that is cracking?” In a public speech given on Wenceslas Square directly following the signing of the Munich Agreement, Hora also used a bridge metaphor to articulate the idea of one generation – albeit now his rather than that of Šalda – needing to lead the way: “Jsme mostem, po němž jdou mladé generace života, Budme pevným mostem.” (Engl. “We are the bridge upon which new generations of life walk. May we be a strong bridge.”), quoted in *Budme mostem nové generace!* In: *Večerní české slovo*, 1.10.1938, 3. Similar imagery is also employed by Halas in the poem *F. X. Š.* from the collection *Ladění* to relate to the recently deceased critic, only this time it is a ford rather than a bridge which is being sought and prospect of success seems bleak: “Kterak my živí tam najdeme brod / Nenajedem nenajdem Jen slova osiřelá / a verše v smuteční kápi tam kráčí” (Engl. “How on earth shall we living find the ford there / We won’t find we won’t find Only orphan words / and lines walk there in mourning cape.”) In: *Halas: Časy*, 216.

a rather more figurative loss sustained by his native land, we do not feel that he is trying to dupe us. There is something deeply earnest and to a certain extent verifiable too about the sentiments expressed – at least as far as the circumstances of Wolker’s and Šalda’s deaths are concerned. The work has a notably ritualised and symbolic form; it enjoys the status not only of a poetic text, but also that of an outward gesture, a public act of lamentation. However, although it may be a reasonably original notion to take the idea of a liturgical rite and place it in a new literary setting, profiting from the associated gravitas, the poem is also false and inauthentic in the sense that while it mimics and even arguably purports to be an example of that existing genre, it still remains first and foremost a poetic text, and not a genuine requiem. Here we can see how layers of authenticity can be undermined; how a text can – through attempts to bolster the impression of sincerity by way of appropriation of and allusion to another form, to something alien, but at the same time so very dignified and honourable – both succeed in creating the impression of speaking candidly, of opening up in front of an audience, and be hampered by the tools employed to so. The poem is authentically inauthentic, we might say; inauthentic but not malicious; inauthentic, but with the very best intentions.

When we take a step back and consider what wider implications this text and the rhetorical – albeit seemingly heartfelt – posturing contained within has for the narrativisation of the Czech national ordeal as a whole, then we are struck by the focus on the inevitable and unceasing nature of matters of death. As we have seen so many times before in other poems from this period, there is a suggestion of cyclicity that may help soften the blow afforded by the loss of sovereignty. While not exactly broached explicitly by the speaker, in this depiction, the dissolution of the First Republic would also be every bit as grievous and deserving of our tears and attention as the passing of a dear friend, but equally we may take comfort in the knowledge that we are not alone in experiencing loss, and that it affects us all at one time or another. As the speaker puts it towards the end of the poem:

V průvodu nepřetržitém  
vcházíme denně do bran smrti,  
my, rod a vše [...] <sup>118</sup>.

Though the word does not appear in the text, there is much evidence of *věrnost* to be found here. So long as we have faith, do not turn our back on our brethren or break ranks, all will be well, it seems. In particular, the act of mourning affords a means of maintaining a relationship beyond the grave, publicly demonstrating that the bonds of friendship and loyalty are still intact, even

118 Ibid., 173. Engl. “In an unceasing procession / we enter the gates of death daily / we, our kin and all”.

if the recipient of that loyalty no longer walks among us. The speaker does not speak ill of his departed peers, but honours their memory and expresses regret at their demise, refusing to forget who they were and what they stood for, restating it for all the world to hear. In the case of Šalda, there is even an implication that the speaker intends to do his best to continue the older man's work, staying true to his vision and ideals.

When such sentiments are transferred to speaker's native land, the associated *věrnost* acquires a patriotic tinge. Mourning becomes a way of continuing to serve the country as a faithful subject in spite of its now truncated form and much reduced circumstances. If our reading of the poem is valid and there is indeed a third possible object of the requiem, then the speaker can be seen as indirectly giving his homeland the send-off it deserves with all the implied pomp and ceremony of a liturgical rite, while at the same time reminding us not lose heart since this is all part of the natural order of things. His feelings endure; they are given shape and meaning in the context of a public demonstration of hurt and loss. The transient is set within the eternal and through the speaker's sustained *věrnost*, his on-going show of solidarity with the Czech lands and its people – in particular, but not only, his friends – the idea that the nation might live to see another day, might survive current adversity, is strengthened. The poem is both a testimony of one who believes – not necessarily in the religious sense of the word, but rather inasmuch as the speaker can see that death is a fate that we share, that binds us together, that he can rest assured that he is not alone – and a symbolic defence of all that is good in this life. Not exactly a call to arms, but at least a call to endure, we might say.

## The Speaker as One Who Speaks On Behalf of Others

A third feature of much of our selection of poetry through which a sense of *věrnost* is able to shine is tied up in the way that the speaker is often to be found speaking for more than just himself. In passing, we have referred to this characteristic as speaking on behalf of a *lyrisches Wir*, but it is important to note that the “we” that the speaker refers to is not always the same. We can identify three main possible constellations: the speaker and his beloved, the speaker and his fellow Czechs, and the speaker and other poets.

The first variant is primarily found in works by Seifert and Nezval. It tends to inject more of an impression of a story being told since the speaker's words relate not only to his own subjective feelings and insights, but are also involved in the depiction of a shared experience. The beloved may not play an active role in events or be responsible for their representation, but she is present, ever at the speaker's side. Her being there means that the speaker was

not the only witness to whatever it is that he is now describing, is not the only one threatened by change, by what is going on in his homeland. Furthermore, since, as discussed in Chapter Two, the speaker's homeland is often personified and portrayed with distinctively feminine connotations, sometimes even assuming the role of his beloved, the idea of their two fates being connected or entwined can also be emphasised by way of recounting things in the first person plural. The prospect of entwinement is particularly strong in Nezval's *Ubrus na operační stůl* from the 1938 collection *Matka naděje* where the speaker expresses a desire for a return to the kind of symbiotic life enjoyed in the womb: "Kdyby se mohla nějakým zázrakem navázat pupeční šňůra / mezi mým a tvým životem"<sup>119</sup>. Although ostensibly about and for the most part addressed to the speaker's ailing and aged mother (and indeed written as Nezval's own mother lay dying), the volume of verse also appears to play at times with the notion of the nation as a mother, often contrasting maternal love and dedication with the fickleness of *eros*<sup>120</sup>:

Matka  
 Ó národy  
 Nač klnout jen stále ženám  
 Milence jež nás zradila  
 Ó národy<sup>121</sup>

From here, it is not too much of a leap to the idea of the speaker speaking on behalf of all Czechs because if the nation is a mother, then all who have sprung from her loins are related, brothers and sisters bound by their common origin.

- 119 Nezval: *Matka naděje*, 222. Engl. "If by some miracle an umbilical cord could be fastened / between your life and mine".
- 120 It is perhaps worth noting that the one collection from this period which emphasises the masculine *domov* as opposed to the feminine *rodná země* or *vlast* through personification – Halas' *Ladění* in the poem *Loučení* – is also the one collection to focus in any real detail on father-son relationships. Especially in the early poems such as *Poučení otcovské* (Engl. "A father's lesson"), *Poučení synovské* (Engl. "A son's lesson"), *Před usnutím I, II and III* (Engl. "Before falling asleep I, II and III"), *Hádanka první* (Engl. "First riddle"), *Hádanka druhá* (Engl. "Second riddle") and *Hádanka třetí s rozřešením* (Engl. "Third riddle with the solution"), Halas creates the impression of a dialogue or conversation between father and son. The poems do not only feature childish language and have a playful, nursery rhyme-like air, but are also spoken alternately by son and father figures – either from poem to poem or across the stanzas – and consciously evoke the mood of procrastination and distraction familiar to all who have tried to put young children to bed. There is something rather touching about the way that father and son are shown to be able to teach and learn from one another, in much the same way that one poem informs and enhances the previous in the series.
- 121 Nezval: *Matka naděje*, 223. Engl. "Mother / Oh nations / What's the point of spitting out to women / to a lover who has betrayed us / Oh nations"

In this conception there can be no major conflict of loyalties. Loyalty to one's family, to those one knows best, need not automatically trump loyalty towards one's nation since here they are effectively one and the same.<sup>122</sup>

Speaking at a reading organised by the *Kolektiv mladých* (Engl. "Collective of the young") on 17 December 1938, critic Václav Černý was keen to stress his view that the country's poets were not writing about the Munich Agreement and associated occurrences as if from an ivory tower, but in a way that would be recognisable to other Czechs; not quite verifiable perhaps, but certainly plausible, a "fitting response" as Bitzer would say:

If I examine the portrayal and the reverberations of the month of September 1938 in our poetry, I do not get the impression Czech poets experienced its terrible reality any differently from our people<sup>123</sup>

Their evocations of the period tally with the general consensus, it is suggested, neatly summing up the mood of the country. They are, we might even surmise, felt to be authentic, at least as far as Moore's second-person authenticity is concerned. Although we would not wish to conflate the speaker with the empirical author, it is fair to say that a great many of our speakers emphasise the way in which they are experiencing something alongside others, alongside their countrymen. In Halas' *Novoroční* (Engl. "New Year's") for example, first published under a pseudonym in the illegal journal *V boj*<sup>124</sup>, the speaker, while describing Czechs who have presumably fallen foul of the Nazi authorities and articulating a desire for revenge at their maltreatment, uses the first-person plural and other signals of commonality to striking effect:

- 122 For a contemporary take on the matter, which considers in particular the nineteenth century, a key source of inspiration for our poets, cf. *Navrátil: O patetických nacionalismech*, 366: "Metafora 'vlast jakožto matka' nemá význam jen rétorický. Jest to určitá skutečnost. Snad bychom tuto skutečnost vystihli lépe, kdybychom mluvili spíše o matce jako vlasti, než o vlasti jakožto o matce. V adoraci vlasti a národa hledali buditelé svět, ze kterého vyšli, svět jejich matky." (Engl. "The metaphor of the 'homeland qua mother' does not only have a rhetorical meaning. It is to some degree a matter of fact. We would perhaps do more justice to this reality if instead we were to speak of the mother as a homeland, rather than of the homeland qua mother. In their adoration of the homeland and the nation, the revivalists were looking for the world from which they came, the world of their mother.")
- 123 A transcript of the speech was published in the second volume of *Kritický měsíčník*; cf. Černý: *Ještě o básnících ve dnech krise, a ještě k básníkům*, 1: "Sleduji-li obraz a odraz měsíce září 1938 v naší poesii, zdá se mi, že jeho strašlivou skutečnost nezažíval český básník jinak než náš lid".
- 124 For a convincing account of why the poem, which is signed *Jan Víra* ("John Faith"), a name that of course speaks volumes, should be attributed to Halas, see *Pešat, Zděnek: František Halas a ilegální časopis V boj*. In: *Česká literatura* 30/3 (1982), 264f. It is included in Halas' collected works among the selection of texts published only in journals and anthologies; cf. *Halas: A co básník*, 118.

Však bratry které postavili ke zdi  
 my slyšíme a nechcem žít  
 bez pomsty strašně zúročené<sup>125</sup>

He is not the only one who can hear what is happening; there are additional witnesses, others who might corroborate his account and who apparently feel exactly the same as he does with regards to the thirst for vengeance. He does not deign to name who is responsible, merely stating “postavili ke zdi” without so much as a personal pronoun, while those on whose behalf he seems to be speaking (the persecuted, who can evidently no longer speak, and those left behind, whose voices can join with his) are clearly marked and brought closer together. Those who have been hauled up against the wall are not only referred to as brothers, that is, the speaker’s kin through nationality if not blood, but the use of internal rhyme between the first and second lines (“zdi/my”) strengthens the connection still further. It is almost as if the “we” of that second line were up against the wall too, and of course syntactically it is. Enjambment also assumes an important role here, allowing the speaker to pause for effect, or at least that is how we imagine him delivering the lines based on their position on the page. Our initial sense of likely despair evaporates as it becomes apparent in the run-on line that what is being put forward is not a statement of truly suicidal feeling, but rather a hyperbolic call for revenge, portrayed as something that the speaker and those whom he seeks to represent cannot live without. This sentiment is confirmed in the final three lines of the poem, when the speaker articulates a collective New Year’s wish for violence against those who have wronged his “brothers”:

A přejeme si k roku novému  
 v kalendáři datum označené  
 kdy pěst dopadne na helmu<sup>126</sup>

The reference to a calendar heightens the sense of anticipation regarding the desired retribution. It becomes a red-letter day, something for everybody to look forward to, something that they must await – patiently or impatiently, it matters not – as one. It is also worth noting that the envisaged day of reckoning is not an equal fight, not steel on steel, but bare skin on steel. It is depicted as a clash like that between David and Goliath – the plucky brave Czechs pitted against a far better equipped foe, and the implications is that they, like young

125 Ibid. Engl. “But all the brothers they put against the wall / we hear and don’t want to live / without revenge bloated terribly with interest accrued”.

126 Ibid. Engl. “And for the new year we wish for / a date marked in the calendar / when a fist will strike the helmet”.

David before them, will prevail against the odds. It is an image of shared expectation and hope.

Many other poems of our period frequently exhibit a similarly collective mode of speech and address. Hora's *Zpěv rodné země* is an obvious example, but Halas is also a regular proponent of this device. In his 1942 collection *Ladění*, for example, the speaker can be found posing (rhetorical) questions not just for himself, but on behalf of all; "Ágnes Ágnes ze země Sedmíhradů / kam jenom zavádíte nás"<sup>127</sup> we hear him ask in *Krysař* (Engl. "The rat-catcher"), a poem clearly inspired by Viktor Dyk's novella of the same name, and that mixes Greek mythology and Germanic legend, implying that the masses are being led not to the Promised Land but to death, to the Underworld of old. He also requests that the Virgin Mary intercede for the benefit of everybody in *Chudáci* (Engl. "The hard up"): "Panno Maria mář Panno Maria mář / rač zbaviti nás strachu"<sup>128</sup>. The fear to which he alludes is not peculiar to him and his view of the world, but to all of those encompassed by that *lyrisches Wir* of his. In both of these examples, the language used is somewhat religious – the language of prayer or an echo of the Lord's Prayer, of being led into temptation. Just as a believer asks things of God not only for himself but above all for those around him, those whom he holds dear or about whose welfare he is concerned, so too does the speaker appear to be trying to help others as well as himself.

Time and again, the speaker also demonstrates empathy, the ability to recognise what others are feeling. Moreover, he knows that he not alone in experiencing certain things, asking, for example, "Radosti co ze mne učiníš a z nás"<sup>129</sup> in the poem *Radosti* (Engl. "Happiness"). Although not referred to or thematised directly, it often feels as if there is an implicit "commission" topos (*Auftragstopos*) to be found here, a sense that the speaker is discharging a necessary duty, doing something on behalf of and in the name of others. That he feels duty-bound to speak up, to perform this role as the mouthpiece of the people may be taken as a sign of the speaker's good character, his integrity. Though the rhetorical technique of drawing in the audience by speaking as if one came from their ranks can be used cynically – most obviously by manipulative orators and cunning, disingenuous politicians – here is the speaker's earnestness such that it does not feel as if the reader is being taken for a fool. In fact, the speaker's moral authority grows because he has taken on this duty; he has the means with which to convey certain messages and sentiments and

127 Halas: Časy, 199. Engl. "Agnes Agnes from Transylvania / where is it that you're leading us".

128 Ibid., 190. Engl. "Oh Virgin Mary on the bier Virgin Mary on the bier / be so kind as to liberate us of fear".

129 Ibid., 186. Engl. "Happiness what will you turn me into and us".

he does not shirk the task.<sup>130</sup> This impression of selfless dedication is helped perhaps by the fact that the speaker often modestly invokes the aid of other cultural figures, whether through intertextuality or indeed direct address. Though generally cast as a poet figure himself, the speaker is not conceited or above himself, afraid to admit that the works of others may be beneficial and edifying at a time like this. In *Karlu Tomanovi* (Engl. “To Karel Toman”), for example, the craft of the poet is compared to that of the goldsmith and we are told that the speaker and his fellow Czech readers are always able to rely on Karel Toman’s rich jewel-like works for comfort whatever the mood in the country, treating them as if they were rosary beads:

zatímco štihostí šperků tvých  
otáčíme stále  
v časech dobrých a zlých  
se srdcem pohněvaným trochu  
že mlčíš už<sup>131</sup>

The speaker seems to regret the fact that Toman published his final collection in 1926 and thus has not taken it upon himself to pass lyrical comment on contemporary events. Despite this gentle chiding, there is obvious deference here, a community of loyal admirers, headed up by the speaker. Similarly, in the final lines of *Bedřich Smetana*, it appears to fall to the speaker to elicit the support of the eponymous composer: “Stůj při nás stůj / Ty všemohoucí hudby”<sup>132</sup>. He does so in part via flattery, giving Smetana a grand epithet to emphasise his musical prowess. It may be rhetorical, but this not a selfish request, one that will benefit only the speaker, and it does not elevate him either. All Czechs might take comfort in the music of one of the country’s most famous composers, the speaker merely articulates the desire.

The first line of this concluding couplet is reminiscent of Seifert’s earlier poem *Česká modlitba*, where the speaker directly addresses the poets and kings of yore – which exactly it matters not<sup>133</sup> (“Jak blízko byli jste, ať básníci, ať

130 Referring to the empirical author, the man behind the speaker, Černý at the time highlighted this fulfillment of a poetic duty, the need not to fall silent but rather to speak up, as something commendable, something for which contemporary poets were to be lauded; cf. Černý: Ještě o básnících ve dnech krise, a ještě k básníkům, 2: “český básník v tomto podzimním čtvrtletí roku 1938 neumkl, nezmizel, nezradil.” (Engl. “in that autumnal season of the year 1938, Czech poets did not hold their peace, did not disappear, did not commit betrayal.”)

131 *Halas*: Časy, 195. Engl. “meanwhile the slenderness of your jewellery / we keep turning over in our fingers / in good times and bad / with hearts a little annoyed / that you are already silent”.

132 *Ibid.*, 208. Engl. “Stand by us stand / You musical almighty”.

133 In fact when first published in the newspaper *Právo lidu*, the poem was printed alongside photographs of Masaryk’s and Šalda’s graves, two figures who, in a way and within their

kníže / v tmách svých hrobů<sup>134</sup>) – and emphatically expresses an ardent wish that they might stand once again with the Czech people: “ať dneska opět stojí blízko nás”. The physical closeness that the speaker used to experience when standing and looking through the barrier towards the resting place of the kings of Bohemia (“Tenkrát na čele / míval jsem stopy zaprášené mříže<sup>135</sup>) becomes a symbolic closeness at the end of the poem, the desire to derive support and succour from the past, from one’s forefathers. Here too the speaker uses a *lyrisches Wir*, binding his fate to that of the whole nation, sharing in both its happier days and its current tribulations. “Tak klidně, jako chodí oráči, / šla potom šťastná léta naší zemí<sup>136</sup> he declares in the fifth stanza, inviting all of his countrymen to join in this reminiscence and indicating that this period is now over. The reference to ploughmen is particularly significant since it reminds us of the founder of the Přemyslid dynasty – humble Přemysl the Ploughman, mythical husband to Libuše, the seeress said to have brought about the establishment of Prague as the Bohemian capital. This memory of the collective past is thus fused to a notion that stretches all the way back to the very genesis of the Czech people, to the legendary origins of their permanent settlement of the Bohemian lands.

The *lyrisches Wir* of this period can also be implied, but left unspoken, as is the case in Halas’ *Mobilisace*. There the speaker addresses impoverished Czechs (“Vy chudí země mé<sup>137</sup>) and indicates that they share the same hopes without explicitly stating so:

Hle žezlo veršů  
které básník odkázal  
Naději vaší Naději mé<sup>138</sup>

It is up to the reader to fill in the gap, to continue the line and hear the implicit “Naději naší<sup>139</sup>. The lines of poetry that the speaker depicts as a mace, that

separate fields of influence, assumed the status of contemporary kings among men; cf. Dva hroby. In: Právo lidu. Příloha, 31.10.1937, 1.

134 Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 210. Engl. “How close you were, whether poets or kings / in the darkness of your graves”.

135 Ibid. Engl. “On my forehead in those days / I used to have traces of the dusty lattice”.

136 Ibid. Engl. “And so it was that peacefully, like ploughmen walk, / went the happy years of our country”.

137 Halas: Časy, 106. Engl. “You poor of my country”.

138 Ibid. Engl. “Behold the mace of the lines / which the poet bequeathed / To your hope To my hope”.

139 Engl. “To our hope”. A similar sentiment is also on show in Halas’ *Voják* (Engl. “Soldier”), with the speaker declaring in the final stanza “Každý z vás každý z nás / polituj toho vojáka” (Engl. “Each of you each of us / should feel sorry for that soldier”). Ibid., 107. Here the connection between the speaker and his addressees is explicitly stated rather

is a weapon, read “*Dost v zemi železa na dobré meče / i v krvi železo – jen dál, jen dál!*”<sup>140</sup> and thus thematise weapons themselves, playing with the meaning of iron as a physical object, chemical element and a symbol of strength and fortitude. They are taken from Jan Neruda’s *Jen dál!* (Engl. “Only onwards!”), the final poem in his last, posthumously published collection *Zpěvy páteční* (Engl. “Friday songs”)<sup>141</sup> and quoted in full in the previous stanza. Though imbued with the potential for violence, the call to carry on is ultimately a positive message, just as the stanza in which the speaker glosses the Neruda quote ends with a repetition of the word hope, which reinforces it as a guiding principle for contemporary life. The poet Neruda has, the speaker implies, bequeathed this message to the whole nation and by including it here, he too helps it to spread, to continue on its way.<sup>142</sup> In this respect, *Mobilisace* may even be seen as demonstrating a certain *věrnost* to the earlier work, an ability and willingness to ensure that the past – lessons learned from literature and history – is remembered, honoured, preserved with care.

Speaking on behalf of more than just himself adds rhetorical and numerical clout to the speaker’s words. This may be a single voice, but it is implied to represent the feelings, needs and wishes of many. Others stand behind the speaker, we are to infer, and any weapon-like quality that his words may have is amplified, wielded by all who see themselves and are seen to be reflected in his *lyrisches Wir*. As readers, there is also something rather comforting in the knowledge that there is somebody looking out for us, ready to speak up for our rights as well as his own – providing we feel included in his use of the first person plural, that is. The “we” of our texts may be reasonably inclusive in the sense that it certainly encompasses all faithful Czechs, and on occasion all right-minded, courageous people too, but it inevitably also excludes others.<sup>143</sup>

than being left unsaid. In this respect – and given their shared themes – the poem may or indeed should perhaps be considered a kind of continuation of *Mobilisace*, an evocative, fragmentary depiction of the situation that awaited the soldiers who had been called up, their helplessness and ultimate inability to make a difference.

140 Ibid. 106. Engl. “Enough iron in the land for good swords / iron even in the blood – only onwards, only onwards!”

141 Neruda, Jan: *Knihy básní*. Praha 1951, 526.

142 The motif of continuation is afforded particular prominence in Halas’ *Ladění*; cf. e.g. the poem *Hřejme dál* (Engl. “Let us keep on playing”; also the name of the section in which it appears), where the titular imperative becomes a refrain, a repeated call not to give up, issued in the form of a *lyrisches Wir* and thus applicable to many. Halas: *Časy*, 217 f.

143 Halas’ *Deset ran egyptských*, which thematises the horrors of the Spanish Civil War and rails against the lack of a wider European response, includes, for example, a *lyrisches Wir* in its final stanza that is not necessarily purely Czech: “Pobití prvorození nám peklo připravují” (Engl. “The slaughtered first-born sons are preparing hell for us”). Ibid., 96. All of Europe is suggested to be complicit here, in moral and possibly even literal danger as a result, and the speaker has seen it all first hand: “Jsem svědek” (Engl. “I am

This may take the form of an “us” versus “them” situation, as is the case in Halas’ *Zpěv úzkosti*, where the speaker uses soft sound patterning (“a my jsme je milovali”<sup>144</sup>) to emphasise the innocence of the Czechs compared to the duplicity of their Western allies<sup>145</sup>, or an even more confrontational “we” versus “you”, such as can be found in Holan’s *Odpověď Francii*: “Francie, stud tvých několika / je stejně hluboký jak ponížení nás”<sup>146</sup>. In both cases, the contrast strengthens the feeling of belonging and togetherness experienced by the in-group, the speaker’s we, while forcing his opposite number onto the back foot.

In so many of the poems of this period, the use of a *lyrisches Wir* that also refers to the speaker’s countrymen helps to create the impression of a *věrný* speaker because it suggests that he thinks of more than just himself, that he places the needs and desires of others on a par with his own. He could speak just for himself, but he does not. He could be concerned purely with the lot that awaits him, but he is not.<sup>147</sup> He appears neither egotistical nor excessively

a witness”). Ibid. An implicit distinction is drawn between those who, like the speaker, are prepared to call out the crimes for what they are, and those who will cravenly sit by, and do nothing. For them “všem zbabělým” (Engl. “to all cowards”), the poem has a very stern message: all of the calamities that symbolise what is going on in Spain should plague them, as well, one thousand times over. Ibid. In a message to members of the German-speaking population of Liberec (Reichenberg) in 1938, Halas may have quoted Schiller and invoked the idea of fraternity across the nations; cf. “Poselství účastníkům ‘Dnu lidové kultury’ v červnu 1938 v Liberci”, quoted in *Halas: A co básník*, 380: “A jestliže jste vytýčil své manifestaci heslo sbratření německého a českého lidu, budiž mi doplniti je heslem bratrství všelidského objímajícího milióny, jak je vyzpíval váš největší básník a váš největší skladatel: *Alle Menschen werden Brüder!*” (Engl. “And since you have laid out your battle cry for the coming together of the German and Czech peoples as friends and brothers, allow me to add to it with a slogan of brotherhood for all of mankind that embraces millions, just as was extolled by your greatest poet and your greatest composer: *Alle Menschen werden Brüder!*”). However, this inclusive vision does not exactly find its way in to his contemporary poetry, and even in the speech, a clear distinction is still made between the Czech and German people and emphasis placed upon both Schiller and Beethoven as belonging to the Germans, rather than to all men, as indicated by the use of possessive adjectives.

144 *Halas*: Časy, 100. Engl.: “and we loved them”.

145 In this poem, it is also worth reminding ourselves that the natural world is implied to be on the Czechs’ side, equally outraged at the behaviour of the French and British.

146 *Holan*: Dokumenty, 15. Engl. “France, your multiple disgraces / are as deep as our humiliation”.

147 In this respect it may do well to recall the care taken by the speaker in Nevzal’s *Šváby* to protect the identity of his beloved by casting doubt as to whether her name really is Charlotte (“Snad je to jen krycí jméno...”; Engl. “Perhaps it’s only a code name”), even as he plays a dangerous game with his own safety: “Je to hloupá fobie / Věř mi snad mě zabije” (Engl. “It’s a silly phobia / Believe me perhaps it will kill me”). In: *Nezval*: Pět minut za městem, 53 f.

wrapped up in personal tragedy.<sup>148</sup> He does not give up on those around him nor leave them to face their fate on their own. While it is, of course, clear that a rhetorical device is at work here – that is, something artificial, something expressly designed to have a specific effect upon the audience – we may even feel that the speaker is rendered more outwardly authentic, more genuine, in touch with the common man, as a result of his use of the first-person plural. He will not, it seems, desert his compatriots or go it alone, but instead remains stalwart, true-hearted and unshaking in his dedication to the task at hand. He documents collective heartbreak, mutual desires and grievances, shared hopes and fears in such a way as to render them recognisable to the contemporary Czech reader, accurate in the essentials, in the mood created, if not in factual veracity.<sup>149</sup>

148 Even in Nezval's *Matka naděje*, which explicitly deals with the ill-health of the speaker's mother, i. e. a private cause of grief and sadness, in the background there always flickers an additional collective dimension, a national source of disquiet that can be felt by all, not least because the speaker's homeland is also viewed in maternal terms.

149 On the somewhat blinkered nature of the insights provided by the respective speakers and the fact that they often ignore the “true” victims of the Munich Agreement as opposed to those merely perceived to have been injured most disgracefully, cf. *Tesař: Mnichovský komplex*, 112f.: “Základní rekvizitou ‘Mnichova’ jsou slzy [...]. Zkoumal jsem, nad čím vlastně tak kanou: nenašel jsem jedinou, jež by byla věnována skutečným lidským tragédiím – v té chvíli především tragédií sudetských Židů a demokratických Sudetoněmců [...]. Hlavním důvodem nářku jsou ztracená města, ztracené chaloupky.” (Engl. “Tears are the central accoutrement of ‘Munich’. [...] I have investigated for what exactly they are shed: I did not find a single one that was dedicated to the *actual* human tragedies – at that moment in time above all the tragedy of the Sudeten Jews and the democratic Sudeten Germans [...]. The main causes for lamentation are *lost towns, lost cottages*.”) Tesař is presumably thinking of poems such as Seifert's *Nad mapou*, but it is clear that he is no literary scholar. He does not entertain the possibility that such depictions might have a figurative function or represent a symbolic gesture of *pars pro toto*. What is more, in perhaps the most famous poem of this period to mention tears – Halas' *Zpěv úzkosti* – it is worth noting that the object of those tears is left entirely unspoken: “Viděl jsem slzy v očích žen” (Engl. “I saw tears in the eyes of women”). In: *Halas: Časy*, 100. Indeed, the tears are left uncried, remaining in the eyes of unnamed women, a sign of sadness and grief no doubt, but also arguably a certain fortitude. The women's background is not specified either, they are in fact, one could argue, merely described as being human, no more, no less. The poem as a whole may encourage a more Czech reading, but it is not made explicitly clear at this stage that that is the case. A similar point about the unrepresentative nature of post-Munich Czech poetry has also been made more recently by Václav Petrbok in relation to the poems included in the contemporary anthology *K počtě zbraň praporu!* as edited by Kamill Resler; cf. *Petrbok, Václav: Der Flagge präsentiert! Tschechische Poesie zum September 1938. In: Sudetenland. Europäische Kulturzeitschrift* 60/3 (2018), 327f.: “Es fällt auf, dass [...] das Schicksal der ‘anderen’, auch derjenigen, die gegen die Nationalsozialisten kämpfen wollten, wie sudetendeutsche Sozialdemokraten, Kommunisten, Katholiken, Juden, nicht thematisiert wird. Diese wirklichen, unsichtbaren Heldinnen und Helden sind unter den Autoren der Anthologie Reslers nicht zu finden, auch nicht als Gegenstand der Texte. In

At times, though, we may ask if the intended subject of those lines which are provided in the first person plural is always so broadly conceived as to encompass the whole of the Czech nation. This is particularly the case with Halas in *Ladění*. In *Za Jiřím Ortenem* (Engl. “Remembering Jiří Orten”), for example, while it seems clear that the speaker is referring to the comfort that can be provided by the words and works that remain after a poet dies, it is not entirely obvious who is meant by the “us” of the lines “mrtvý hlas / beze slov těší nás”<sup>150</sup>. From *Dnes zrovna tak* (Engl. “Today just as much”), we know that the speaker, stylised here and in many other places as a poet himself, claims to draw special and unchanging strength from the poetry of contemporary writers, in this case that of Hora (“Tvůj verš tiší mé nepokoje / dnes zrovna tak jak zastara”<sup>151</sup>), and a letter from Halas to Josef Zejda, the man to whom he dedicated the poem *Velikonoční* (Engl. “Easter”), dated November 1941 indicates that he was particularly troubled by Jiří Orten’s untimely death<sup>152</sup> – perhaps because he shared the younger poet’s profession and dedication to the art. Could this use of the first-person plural therefore perhaps relate more specifically to the feelings of his fellow writers, we might well wonder. *Smrt Jiřího Mahena* (Engl. “The death of Jiří Mahen”), a poem in which the speaker

diesen erscheinen auch keine wirklichen Opfer der Sudetenkrise – etwa ermordete oder gefallene tschechoslowakische Gendarmen, Finanz- und Zollbeamte oder Polizisten.” (Engl. “One is struck by the fact the fate of the ‘others’, including those who wanted to fight against the National Socialists, such as Sudeten German social democrats, communists, Catholics, Jews, is not thematised. These real and invisible heroines and heroes do not figure among the authors in Resler’s anthology, not even as the subject of any of the texts. None of the real victims of the Sudeten Crisis – for example murdered or fallen Czechoslovak gendarmes, tax and customs officers or policemen – are mentioned either.” With regards to the matter of not thematising certain aspects of current events, Halas’ *Voják* is an interesting case in point, though. On the one hand, the line “šli utečenci kam šli nepovíš” (Engl. “the refugees left where they went you will not say”) could be taken as an indication that the speaker is fairly open about the fact that some things are being left unsaid. Furthermore, the apparent refusal or unwillingness to divulge information could even be seen as something noble and praiseworthy – helping to protect the refugees by not giving away their location. In this the soldier – assuming that is indeed the figure to whom the speaker is talking – would be in rather good company, behaving in a similar way to the Bohemian saint John of Nepomuk who refused to betray the confessional secrets of his queen and was martyred for his troubles. On the other hand, the speaker’s comment that the soldier will not say where the refugees have gone could equally be viewed as criticising the man for this lapse. Certainly the poem as a whole is much more concerned with the inaction of the soldier, even if this is not due to his own fault. Either way, the line maintains a degree of ambiguity that is not uncommon within the poetry of this period, but appears to have been overlooked somewhat by Tesař.

150 Halas: Časy, 203. Engl. “the dead voice / comforts us wordlessly”.

151 Ibid., 193. Engl. “Your verse calms my turmoil, / today just as much as before”.

152 Halas: Dopisy, 177: “Na Ortena myslím s hrůzou. Kunštát mám stále před očima.” (Engl. “I think of Orten with horror. I see Kunštát before me all the time.”)

attempts to come to terms with the loss of someone he knows, unembarrassed about betraying his emotions (“Dnes podruhé za pláč se nestydím / a zuby nezatínám”<sup>153</sup>), certainly seems to confirm this hypothesis.<sup>154</sup> When we read the words “Křik smrti Tvé nás alarmuje / zmučený Janošíku”<sup>155</sup>, it not only becomes clear from the use of familiar terms of address that he is closely acquainted with the dead man, but that he is speaking on behalf of others who evidently knew the author too. Rather than assuming that the “us” of this statement refers to the Czech people in general, it seems more likely the speaker is alluding to other writers, to those whom Jiří Mahen left behind when, in May 1939, he chose suicide over life under Nazi rule. If, as before, we assume that this speaker is indeed a poet figure, then it stands to reason that he would be capable of acting as the mouthpiece of his (real-world) peers. Moreover, the dangers faced by wordsmiths in the Protectorate were very specific, not just the more general threats perceived and experienced by everyday citizens. As the speaker puts it in Holan’s *Návrat Máchův*, “a básník, mrtev nebo živý, / už neví, kde má spočinouti”<sup>156</sup>.

In a similar vein, *Variace na Nerudovské téma* (Engl. “A variation on the Neruda theme”), the title of which is a knowing nod to the fact that the topic was one that had been dealt with on many separate occasions by a number of different poets by the time of this poem’s writing, ends on the words “Pane Nerudo máte nás trošku rád”<sup>157</sup>. Again, it is conceivable that this is an address on behalf of the nation to one of most famous and esteemed authors, but far more probable is that this “us” refers to the speaker and his fellow writers.<sup>158</sup>

153 *Halas*: Časy, 201. Engl. “Today for the second time I am not ashamed of tears / and I do not clench my teeth”.

154 For an indication of the real-life relationship between Mahen and his peers, cf. *Seifert*: *Všecky krásy světa*, 231: “Sotva jsme se poznali, seznámil mě Halas s Mahenem. Halas Mahena miloval. A mě, musím přiznat, okouznil Mahen hned napoprvé a přitom navždycky.” (Engl. “We’d hardly known each other for long before Halas introduced me to Mahen. Halas loved Mahen. I must admit that Mahen charmed me right away and forever.”)

155 *Halas*: Časy, 201. Engl. “The cry of your death alarms us / tortured Janošík”.

156 *Holan*: *Dokumenty*, 41. Engl. “a poet, dead or living / no longer knows where he ought to rest”.

157 *Halas*: Časy, 209. Engl. “Mr. Neruda are you just a little bit fond of us”.

158 Neruda appears to enjoy a comparable position in this collection to that of his contemporary NĚmcová in *Naše paní Božena NĚmcová*. Father-son relations are raised not only in the playful opening poems in the section entitled *Do usínání...* (Engl. “Falling asleep”), but the one poem expressly dedicated to Neruda’s memory is entitled *Otec a syn* (Engl. “Father and son”). If NĚmcová is the mother of modern Czech literature, then Neruda might also be fairly regarded at least as a, if not indeed *the* father. Even the polite enquiry as to how Neruda feels about the speaker and his colleagues quoted above echoes a child’s quizzing of his father regarding his affections following some sort of misdemeanour – “Daddy do you still love me and my brothers?”

There is deference on show, feelings of inferiority (“Mé modré oči pitomé Můj hlase hanbou bezhlasy”<sup>159</sup>) and the speaker is clearly comparing himself with the nineteenth-century novelist and poet. The apparent desire for approval, recognition even, may be taken as evidence of the speaker’s and his contemporaries’ continued *věrnost* towards their predecessor, a deep-seated hope that they have not disappointed or failed him. At the same time though, the very fact that the speaker appears to raise this on behalf of other authors as well as himself suggests a certain loyalty on his part towards them. He is not solely trying to inveigle his own way into Neruda’s affections, but doing so for the benefit of a whole collective, a group with shared needs and interests.<sup>160</sup> The sense of a brotherhood or community of poets is further strengthened by paratextual elements, most obviously dedications to writers both living and dead. No fewer than ten poems include a subtitle dedicating them to a particular person<sup>161</sup> and another eleven make it clear in the very title that this is the case.<sup>162</sup> The collection as a whole is dedicated to the memory of

159 Ibid. Engl. “My wretched blue eyes My voice voiceless with shame”.

160 The notion of a real-world collective represented here in verse is supported by comments found in Seifert’s memoirs. Cf. *Seifert: Všecky krásy světa*, 199: “V osobnosti Tomanově dohořívaly nám životy i legendy prokletých básníků. Milovali jsme ho. Ztělesňoval nám romantickou svobodu umělců a pokoušeli jsme se ho napodobit. [...] Říkám *my*, ale opravdu jsem nebyl sám. I Halas měl rád Tomanovy verše, i když si do náručí s Tomanem nepadli.” (Engl. “In Toman’s person the lives and legends of the cursed poets seemed us to us to be still smouldering. We loved him. To us he embodied the romantic freedom of artists and we tried to emulate him. [...] I say *we*, but truly I was not alone. Even Halas liked Toman’s verses, even if he didn’t exactly fall into Toman’s embrace.”) or *ibid.*, 329: “Politické údalosti a nebezpečí fašismu nás všechny sblížilo” (Engl. “Political events and the threat of fascism brought us all together”). Writing on Holan’s *Sen*, Hora also noted a new-found proximity and unity amongst peers: “Samota básníková umřela v těchto časech.” (Engl. “The isolation of the poet has died in these times.”) (Engl. in: *Holan, Vladimír: Noční hlídka srdce*. Praha 1963, 35. Not all symbols of such closeness appear to have been sacred to the poets involved, though, with more pressing everyday matters taking precedence, cf. *Seifert: Všecky krásy světa*, 384: “O literární ceně korespondence jsem se však přesvědčil za války, kdy přítel N. zprostředkoval mi se Slováci, kteří v té době dleli v Praze, výměnu korespondence za cigarety. Za korespondenční lístek, kde mě Wolker upomínal o honorář, dostal jsem stovku cigaret. A tak jsem prokouřil za války pár dopisů. Dnes mě to mrzí. Ale tenkrát měly cigarety cenu zlata.” (Engl. “I learned the value of correspondence during the war, when my friend N. put me in contact with the Slovaks in Prague who at the time exchanged correspondence for cigarettes. I got a hundred cigarettes for a correspondence card in which Wolker reminded me about a fee he was owed. Today I feel bad about it. But in those days cigarettes were worth their weight in gold.”)

161 Cf. *Velikonoční, Děšť v dubnu, Přes paletu, Radosti..., Hledání, Chudáci, Dnes zrovna tak, Vypravěč, Krysář, Otec a syn*.

162 Cf. *Petru Bezručovi, Karlu Tomanovi, Pro Antonína Procházku, Smrt Jiřího Mahena, Za Jiřím Ortenem, Na Hrob Hanuše Jelínka, In memoriam, Bedřich Smetana, Za básníkem, F. X. Š., Památce K. H. M.*

proletarian poet Jindřich Hořejší, who died in May 1941. One section, where a large proportion of the dedicated poems can be found, is also entitled *Stisky* (Engl. “Handshakes”), compounding the sense of familiarity and mutual respect between peers.

## The Speaker as One Who Tells the Truth

The final major potential means of conveying an impression of *věrnost* is enabled when the speaker assumes the role of one who appears to tell the truth. This gives him a certain authority and moral standing.<sup>163</sup> He becomes someone to whom we might defer, whom we can trust. If the speaker were felt to be mendacious, then it would be difficult to imagine him being able to purport to represent the views of his peers in the way described above. As fellow Czechs, we would most likely want to see in him a figure with a certain dignity, gravitas, one whom we would be happy to have speaking on our behalf.

The seeds of our impression of the speaker as one who tells the truth are sown by the frequent use of intimate details regarding his feelings and past behaviour. Admissions of personal flaws and inabilities – for instance the speaker’s acknowledgement in Seifert’s *Píseň o vlasti* that up until now he has not always been the most faithful lover, or the way that the speaker admits in *Praha v černém* that he is no longer capable of recognising his beloved city, so changed is she by recent events – are not vainglorious or self-agrandising, but disarming; they invite us to trust the speaker, to listen to what he has to say. Since he is prepared to put his weaknesses on display, then we are more likely to feel confident that he is being “straight with us” in other respects, that he has the strength not to bow to pressure to depict things in a particular way, to sweep more painful aspects under the carpet or be silent on the great injustices that are perceived to have befallen the Czech lands.<sup>164</sup>

Often, the speaker can be found varying the scope and manner of his focus, homing in on the mundane, the little things, before broaching the

163 Cf. *Funk*: The Literature of Reconstruction, 14: “Whenever authenticity is called upon, a notion of truth is also invoked. This notion of truth can take very different shapes depending on whether it is applied to human beings or inanimate entities like works of art or linguistic utterances. [...] What unites these disparate truth claims is that they represent, almost in the manner of performative speech acts, absolute and apparently incontestable statements about the genuineness and / or facticity of the person, object or value judgement thus ennobled.”

164 In this, we must of course recall the complaints of Tesař and Petrbok about the oversights in the poetic depiction of the aftermath of the Munich Agreement and acknowledge that this perception is just that – a perception – and not necessarily supported by fact or what has been subsequently unearthed and pointed out by historians.

more momentous, as a way of easing us in to his view of events and their consequences and making us more likely to give credence to his claims. In Halas' *Zpěv úzkosti*, for instance, we get both a glimpse of what seems to be the banality of everyday citizens' physical reactions towards the Munich Agreement ("Viděl jsem slzy v očích žen / Viděl jsem pěstě zařaté"<sup>165</sup>) and a loud, harsh-sounding condemnation of what happened in the Bavarian capital ("Zvoní zvoní zrady zvon zrady zvon"<sup>166</sup>). The speaker decries it as terrible breach of trust and dishes out some home truths for the wider world: "za tebe světe za tu Evropu / stydí se voják poslední"<sup>167</sup>. He is not afraid to be bombastic and because we have witnessed him talking earlier in more measured tones, we feel inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt here, to assume that he has good reason to exaggerate now. In short, we are still prepared to believe him, to accept the underlying "truth" of his narrative of betrayal, even if its depiction is somewhat hyperbolic. When he calls out the French and the British for their disloyalty, our sense of the speaker's *věrnost* towards his native land also increases; we can see that he is not about to roll over, to accept the humiliation and hurt inflicted upon the country without putting up a (rhetorical) fight. They might have betrayed the Czech lands, but he most certainly will not, we feel sure.

Similarly, in Seifert's poem *Zhasněte světa*, we are initially treated to a rather gentle admission that the speaker has been crying, presumably as a result of the events that took place in the late summer and early autumn of 1938: "Jen potichu, tak abych nestrás rosu / jež zachvěla se na konečcích řas"<sup>168</sup>. He may describe his tears somewhat euphemistically, comparing them to the morning dew, but he does not deny their presence. The speaker is unapologetic about his feelings and we as readers are touched and emboldened by his forthrightness. This is a figure who evidently wears his heart on his sleeve, who does not always feel the need to put on a brave face, but is prepared to display his emotions even if they may be construed as "unmanly". We feel reasonably confident that he is telling the truth here – why would he lie, why would he expose himself in such a way<sup>169</sup> – and so when in the final lines he looks beyond his private grief

165 Halas: Časy, 100. Engl. "I saw tears in women's eyes, I saw clenched fists".

166 Ibid. Engl. "It rings it rings the bell of betrayal the bell of betrayal".

167 Ibid., 101. Engl. "For you world for this Europe / the last soldier feels ashamed".

168 Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 206. Engl. "Only quietly so that I wouldn't jolt the dew / that trembled on the ends of the eyelashes".

169 The answer, of course, may be quite simple – for rhetorical effect – but as has been mentioned on several occasions, one of the hallmarks of the poetry of this period is its earnestness. Seifert may have a slightly different agenda here, may well indeed be manipulating us to a certain extent and playing with our feelings, but his speaker does not actively engage in such games himself. There is a simplicity, a naïveté to him almost. He did not realise at the time what was about to happen. Only in retrospect has he seen the error of his ways, or at least that is how it is presented in the poem.

and considers the matter more globally, we are more prepared to accept his interpretation of events. “Já vím, já vím, že líp by tenkrát bylo / zaslechnout dunění”<sup>170</sup> he declares, seemingly acknowledging that there were warning signs – here depicted in natural terms, as rolls of thunder, rather like the flood imagery found Nezval’s *Malá Atlantida* – that might have been heeded. The repetition “Já vím, já vím” even suggests that this is something that is in fact widely known, if not always admitted. We wonder if this is an inward address to himself, or directed more towards the contemporary reader, cajoling him or her into acknowledging that they too know that the speaker is right. He is certainly emphatic and appears to regret not having done anything sooner, but now at least he has a chance to get the truth out, to set the record straight and ensure that the prospect that the Czechs might also bear some responsibility for the turn of events is not swept under the carpet.<sup>171</sup>

Paratextual elements represent an additional means of shoring up the truth-telling credentials of the speaker. If, for example, we consider the subtitle of the collection from which the above mentioned poem is taken, then we are suddenly confronted with an intriguing interpretational framework. The words *Lyrické glosy* (Engl. “Lyrical glosses”), themselves a clarification of title and the volume as a whole, raise the possibility that what the speaker is doing is providing an explanation of things that he has witnessed, comparable with the supplementary glosses provided by scholars and theologians of the past. In relation to the outside world, to what was indeed going on the Czech lands at the time, the poems may be in the margins, as it were, an after-thought, a reaction to something which went before them, but that should not detract from their implied explanatory function. Neither should the qualifying adjective *lyrické* stand in the way, even if it is generally associated with high levels of abstraction and figural language. It affects the form, but not the content, one might say. If the speaker is “glossing” current events, helping to make them more comprehensible, clearing up potential misunderstandings, then he wields a certain authority, has the apparent right to adjudicate over the facts. That which he depicts ought to be accurate, incontrovertible – the annotated “truth”.

170 Ibid. Engl. “I know, I know that at the time it would have been better / to listen to the thunder”.

171 Slightly paradoxically, one could of course argue that, in this case, Seifert’s speaker is being disloyal towards his homeland by not portraying it solely as the victim of foreign machinations, but instead hinting that he (and presumably others, his fellow Czechs, though the wording used is conspicuously subjectless) might have been to avert certain things, had the warning signs been recognised. This does not necessarily render him one of the unfaithful or treacherous though. He is simply showing *věrnost* to something else – specifically what he considers to be the truth. Here then, we can see that one form of *věrnost* may come at the price of another.

## History in the Making

Nezval's *Historický obraz* is another case in point. The title, after all, suggests not only something that is momentous, worthy of note and preservation for the sake of posterity, but also implies a definitive depiction of events, enough to grace the walls of a gallery and not all that dissimilar to what we expect to find in the history books.<sup>172</sup> Given its written form, Nezval's speaker is, we might assume, here given a new and important role to play: that of both the artist and the chronicler of old, capturing and charting the course of events, the shifting tides of time. We, as readers, would or could therefore become his pupils, his apprentices or even just his admirers, eager to learn, to expand our horizons. There is certainly a sense of trust associated with the way that historians are treated, a belief that they will unravel the mysteries of the past and tell us the truth, help us to understand, just as the creator of a successful history painting can cement his vision of the past into public consciousness.

The poem is made up of 35 sets of seven tercets, each rhyming *aaa bbb ccc ddd eee fff ggg*, and spread across three sections that were written between 1939 and 1945. As before with Halas and Seifert, there are frequent allusions to the banalities of life under occupation, the small but significant changes taking place:

dnes se nechce hospodyním jísti, ani vařit,  
není času, není času, škoda je ho mařit,  
dnes se nechce otcům s dědy o dědictví svářit.<sup>173</sup>

These realia-like moments help provide a more credible basis for the speaker's grander claims. The second line of this stanza reads almost like a truism and makes it clear that the speaker's words are also more reminiscent of the oral tradition, of the kind of wisdom and good sense we might learn from our grandmothers.

Is the speaker to be seen as painting with words here, or is it more a case of ekphrasis, we may well ask. Are his words perhaps a verbal recreation of certain

172 This is further evidence of a phenomenon we discussed at some length in Chapter Three: if this poem is indeed, as the title appears to suggest, intended as a kind of written history painting of the speaker's present, created for the benefit of later generations, then there is an implicit assumption that there will be a future that will look back on this time once it has become the past. This is an intrinsically hopeful outlook and also provides a means of creating distance between the speaker and what he is describing, a certain objectivity even, one might imagine.

173 *Nezval: Historický obraz*, 20. Engl. "today housewives do not feel like eating or cooking / there isn't time, there isn't time, it's a shame to waste it / today fathers do not feel like arguing with grandfathers about their inheritance."

existing “historic” images – a tableau of many significant events piling on top of one another, for example? Repetition – like multiple brushstrokes, layers of paint – is certainly one of the guiding poetic and rhetorical principles found in Nezval’s composition as it hurries from day to day, year to year, taking in matters as varied as the execution of Vladislav Vančura, the struggles of the partisans and the debt of thanks perceived to be owed to the Soviet Union.

We can find a great deal of anaphora within the poem, which strengthens the idea of synchronicity, of many things happening all at once and requiring simultaneous depiction. This is especially the case when the word *mezitím* (“meanwhile”) is employed, as occurs so frequently at the beginning of the poem. If this were indeed a painting, we would hardly know where to look, so much is going on. The speaker also regularly repeats one word or phrase within a single line. At times, these up to seven-fold repetitions, which are most common in the first part of the poem, seem purely for emphasis, to ensure that the speaker’s feelings on certain matters – and also those of the figures and voices that people his account – cannot be misunderstood. Such is the case with lines like “neštěstí se blíží, blíží, blíží, blíží, blíží”<sup>174</sup>, which conveys a pounding sense of impending danger, “běda, běda, běda, běda, běda, běda, běda!”<sup>175</sup>, which is also repeated again in the second part<sup>176</sup> and reads like the wails of a broken man, or “zrada, zrada, zrada, zrada, zrada, zrada, zrada!”<sup>177</sup>, which occurs twice in the first part of the poem and fits into Halas’ narrative of betrayal as discussed above. As the mood improves in the third section of the poem, which was written towards the very end of the war, the repetitions become more jubilant, though; they are cries of excitement, encouragement and anticipation, rather than mournful chants: “sláva, sláva, sláva, sláva, sláva, sláva, sláva!”<sup>178</sup>, the speaker declares at one point.

On other occasions, however, these repetitions assume a more onomatopoeic function, for instance helping to mimic the sound of a raven, while still getting across a message of ill-omen:

V hloubi noci před branou šest drsných hlasů kleje  
na hravana, jenž tu kráká slova beznaděje  
zle je, zle je, zle je, zle je, zle je, zle je, zle je.<sup>179</sup>

174 Ibid., 10. Engl. “misfortune is getting closer, closer, closer, closer, closer”.

175 Ibid., 14. Engl. “woe, woe, woe, woe, woe, woe, woe!”

176 Ibid., 38.

177 Ibid., 18, 30. Engl. “betrayal, betrayal, betrayal, betrayal, betrayal, betrayal, betrayal!”

178 Ibid., 62. Engl. “glory, glory, glory, glory, glory, glory, glory!”

179 Ibid., 16. Engl. “In the dark of the night in front of the gate six rough voices curse / the raven that is cawing words of hopelessness / it is bad, it is bad, it is bad, it is bad, it is bad, it is bad, it is bad”.

Here, one cannot help but be reminded of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven* and the eponymous creature's famous cry of *nevermore*. In a similar vein, repetition is also used to represent the noise of an echo:

Umíráček zastírá svůj ochraptělý hlas  
Pod ním ptá se národ mužů, co teď bude z nás  
Ozvěna mu odpovídá: čas, čas, čas, čas, čas<sup>180</sup>

The corrupted sounds of the question reverberate an answer that is not entirely satisfactory, but which may be read as an important message to the contemporary reader: the need to sit tight and bide one's time.

A more general sense of recurrence, of history and events repeating themselves is also expressly broached by the speaker at one stage:

Zrezivělá péra skřípou, skřípou jednotvárně,  
bratři, naše stará čest je opět v zastavárně,  
marně jste se shlukli v šicích, marně, marně, marně.

Havran z knihy vašich dějin opět zakrákal,  
žena třikrát omdlela, muž třikrát zaplakal,  
běda tomu, kdo vás zradil, kdo vás vylákal!<sup>181</sup>

This is in keeping with the overarching narrative of the Czech nation as one that has suffered greatly in the past, but always managed to bounce back, to which we have alluded on many occasions over the course of this study. If this is one of the main "truths" that the speaker wishes to impart then he is in luck, since *Historický obraz* is the one poem in our selection that was added to during the war and enables its speaker to witness and document the full course of events, from the beginning of the occupation of the Czech lands to their liberation in 1945 – the terrible lows and the giddy highs. Although the third part of the poem falls out of the main scope of our study, it is nevertheless important to note that it ends on a positive image of the truth ultimately always emerging victorious, for this is, one could argue, exactly what has happened here: "pravda vždycky zvítězila, pravda zvítězí!"<sup>182</sup> The speaker has been proven right, one might say, *his* version of the truth – the one

180 Ibid., 32. Engl. "The funeral bell disguises its hoarse voice. / Beneath it a nation of men asks, what will become of us now? / An echo answers them: time, time, time, time, time!"

181 Ibid., 28. Engl. "Rusty pens grate, grate monotonously / brothers, our old honour is in the pawn shop once again / in vain you clustered in lines, in vain, in vain, in vain. / The raven from the book of your history crowed again, / a woman fainted three times / a man cried three times / woe to him that betrayed you, that defrauded you!"

182 Ibid., 78. Engl. "truth has always prevailed, truth will prevail!"

that acknowledged such things had happened before and been overcome – has indeed prevailed.<sup>183</sup>

## Competing Truths

Leaving poetic interpretation to one side, when examining our works and the potential truth-telling capabilities of its speakers, it is important to distinguish between the different forms of “truth” that seem to be on show. Based on the aforementioned implications of titles and subtitles such as *Historický obraz* or *Lyrické glosy*, we might assume that the speaker in those works is to be viewed as imparting a kind of objective truth, the real facts of the matter, albeit in a form that embraces artificiality, that is contrived and at best a (re-) construction of things, rather than those things themselves.<sup>184</sup> If we focus instead on individual utterances such as the speaker’s declaration in Holan’s *Odpověď Francii* that “Mně přece nejde o cár domoviny. / Můj žal je jiný, neroztrhán v stíny.”<sup>185</sup>, then we find ourselves on more subjective ground. The syntactical precedence given over to the pronoun *mně* – itself more emphatic than the short form *mi* – and the possessive adjective *můj* leaves us in little doubt as to the personal nature of the assertion of fact. This example and others like it are a case of the speaker assuming the guise of one who is at least being honest with himself – and, we hope, with us as his readers, even if his statements are not necessarily objectively verifiable, let alone intended to represent the feelings of a wider collective or a full narrative of events. There does exist a third possibility, though, that is, intersubjective truth – a truth that is appreciated primarily by the reader, who sees their own experience

183 The words *pravda vítězí* or in Latin *veritas vincit* (Engl. “truth prevails”) are of course an existing and extremely well-known phrase, attributed to Jan Hus and closely associated with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. They have assumed the function of a kind of national motto, appearing on the presidential standards of both Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. Given the general heroisation of the Soviet war effort and of Stalin in particular that can be found in the poem, though, one cannot help but wonder if the fact that the official newspaper of the Communist Party in the USSR was also called *Pravda* and can be construed as having emerged victorious in 1945, may have been another motivating factor, or at least a happy coincidence for Nezval and his speaker here.

184 It is, of course, important to note, however, that what we are dealing with here are merely attempts to give the impression of a kind of objective truth, helping to provide “evidence” of the validity of certain viewpoints or interpretations of events, and should not be mistaken for the real thing. It is, one might say, the *Schein*, rather than the *Sein* that is of importance in such cases. Indeed, we can almost hear the implicit sermonising or hectoring of the reader: “As any *right-minded* individual can see...”

185 Holan: *Dokumenty*, 14. Engl. “I’m simply not bothered about a scrap of homeland / my grief is another, not shredded into the shadows”.

reflected in the speaker's words. In such cases we are again effectively dealing with the kind of situations that Moore referred to as when performers (i. e. the speaker) are viewed as *telling it like it is* in the eyes of their audience. This form of communication does not have to be strictly factual or verifiable, and certainly not necessarily realistic, true to life, but the reader does need to be able to latch on to the essential message, to see past figurative posturing and fragmentary snatches of dialogue or description, and feel in some way understood, vindicated. He or she should be able to sense a certain kinship with the speaker, shared concerns. In its iterations as a representation of the whole of the Czech nation and a brotherhood of poets, the *lyrisches Wir* mentioned above may also be regarded as being bound up with the notion of intersubjective truth since it derives its rhetorical power from the idea that what the speaker claims is valid for many, not just himself. In this, we may do well to recall the contemporaneous Anglo-Irish poet Louis MacNeice and his explanation of the thinking behind the 1939 poem *Autumn Journal*:

I am aware that there are overstatements in this poem [...] There are also inconsistencies. If I had been writing a didactic poem proper, it would have been my job to qualify or eliminate these overstatements and inconsistencies. But I was writing what I have called a Journal. In a journal or personal letter a man writes what he feels at the moment; to attempt scientific truthfulness would be – paradoxically – dishonest. The truth of a lyric is different from the truths of science and this poem is something half-way between the lyric and the didactic poem. I trust that it contains some “criticism of life” or implies some standards which are not merely personal.<sup>186</sup>

These standards are, in other words, presumably akin to what we referred to above as intersubjective truths – able to be appreciated by many, not just the person who expresses them.

Within a single poem, the different conceptions of “truth” may appear at odds with one another, and one may ultimately trump the other forms. In Halas' *Praze*, for instance, the speaker describes how the previous night St. Wenceslas came to life:

Kůň bronzový kůň Václavův  
se včera v noci třás  
a kníže kopí potěžkal<sup>187</sup>

Though the composition obviously has a strong connection to contemporary events, to the mood in the country at the time of its writing, objectively speaking, we cannot really believe what the speaker says here. However, it does not

186 MacNeice, Louis: *Autumn Journal*. London 1963, 7.

187 Halas: Časy, 98. Engl. “The bronze horse Wenceslas' horse / shook last night / and the duke shifted the weight of his lance”.

irredeemably undermine our faith in him. Certainly, we are not about to call the speaker a liar or even an unreliable narrator. Instead, we can read the claim on the level of intersubjective truth and recall a point previously discussed in Chapter Three: when the speaker makes his outlandish statement about St. Wenceslas, he is in fact alluding to a famous legend and above all suggesting that the Czech lands have need of their saviour like never before. It is a conceit that belies a kind of “truth” that could only be appreciated by someone who has the same cultural background, who knows what St. Wenceslas was foretold to do at his country’s greatest hour of need, namely to return.

When it comes to eliciting the impression of *věrnost*, there are two main possibilities as to where this might be directed. On the one hand, the speaker can be seen as demonstrating *věrnost* towards the “truth” of the contemporary situation – whether portrayed in its purportedly objective or (inter)subjective forms. This is roughly comparable with the signs of *věrnost* towards a particular national narrative or view of history as discussed in the Introduction. Alternatively though, we can also perceive the speaker as being *věrný* towards his reader(s) by apparently telling the truth. It would be disloyal of him to lie to or mislead us and undermine his credibility, our sense of his being genuine, upstanding, a helpful and trustworthy adjudicator in an uncertain world, at a time when so many other figures of moral authority had fallen silent or been forced to do so. Again, MacNeice may be useful here, since he argued in his preface to *Autumn Journal* that “poetry [...] must be honest before anything else and I refuse to be ‘objective’ or clear-cut at the cost of honesty.”<sup>188</sup> While he does not use the word, something of authenticity’s paradoxical nature can be found in MacNeice’s thinking here – the idea that something can be simultaneously both true, in the sense of its being honest, and arguably also for all intents and purposes untrue inasmuch as it cannot be objectively verified.<sup>189</sup> We shall discuss parallels between his work and that of our poets more closely in the final chapter, but for the time being it is perhaps enough that the view put forward by MacNeice helps us to return to one of our opening considerations – Bitzer’s suggestion that “An act is moral because it is performed in a situation

188 *MacNeice*: *Autumn Journal*, 8.

189 On other lies that a poet might need to tell and in particular the relationship between poetry and propaganda at the time, see also *MacNeice*, Louis: *The Poet in England To-Day: A Reassessment*. In: *Heuser*, Alan (ed.): *Selected Literary Criticism of Louis MacNeice*. Oxford 1987, 113: “Systematic propaganda is therefore foreign to the artist in so far as it involves the condoning of lies. Thus, in the Spanish Civil War, some English poets were torn between writing good propaganda (dishonest poetry) and honest poetry (bad propaganda). [...] This means that in the long run a poet must choose between being politically inefficient and poetically false.” One suspects that this is a dilemma that was also faced by our poets in the Czech lands.

of a certain kind; similarly, an act is rhetorical because it is a response to a situation of a certain kind.<sup>190</sup> – and build upon it.

Though honesty does not always have to be moral, dishonesty surely tends towards the immoral or at least amoral. Rhetoric can be dishonest and cynical, but it does not have to be thus. We have seen that very clearly in what we termed the rhetorical authenticity of the poetry of this period, that is, the impression of authenticity, truthfulness, believability or genuineness created by primarily rhetorical means. Although in Bitzer's statement, moral and rhetorical acts are viewed as similar, but somehow separate, we would emphasise not only the fact that rhetorical acts are also *performed* in response to certain situations, but equally, and perhaps even more importantly, that a rhetorical act can just as easily be seen and appreciated as a moral one, as something that is, at heart, honest, after all – providing it submits to or embraces the necessary paradoxes associated with the representation of authenticity, that is. In this and with all of their posturing and gestures that impart a sense of *věrnost*, our poets' speakers can be held up as prime examples and are very much able to toe a careful line between delivering poetry that assumes the role of a (mainly rhetorical) weapon and poetry with an ostensibly testimonial character that resonates deeply with its readers. To what extent this phenomenon might represent the beginning of a new era within Czech poetry or the last throes of an old one, remains to be seen, however, and will form one of the key issues up for discussion in the following chapter.

190 Bitzer: The Rhetorical Situation, 3.

## 5. A Break with the Past?

We have, by now, examined our selection of poetry from a number of very different perspectives, gaining an insight into the relationship between the texts and the outside events to which they allude and at times even seek to depict, between the speaker and the reader, the speaker and those whom he seems to claim to represent. We have seen at close quarters how figurative language can be used to pass comment on contemporary life, how poetry can become a monument, can seize aspects of a nation's cultural memory and re-form them, generating new meaning and symbolism. We have got to know our speakers as rhetorically canny, but not, by and large, we feel, dishonest creatures. Though we realise that authenticity is a tricky concept, we do not balk at the prospect of ascribing it – with the necessary caveats – to much of our poets' output during this period. Yet one question still looms large: what, if anything, is novel and unexpected about all of this?

In Chapter One, we alluded to the fact that the Munich Agreement is often dealt with in Czech historiography as a kind of caesura, as indicated, for example, by the existence of the terms *předmnichovská* and *pomnichovská doba* (“pre- / post-Munich age”). Such an assessment also seems to be in line with contemporary attitudes towards what happened.<sup>1</sup> But the question of whether the Munich Agreement was also responsible for a turning point within Czech poetry is rather more complicated. Although the years that followed are frequently treated as a separate period within Czech literary history, which would support the idea of the Munich Agreement as a watershed moment in both political and creative terms, and some critics describe the whole of the so-called *národní ohrožení* as a fairly discreet era, others, particularly Jähnichen, have made a strong case for viewing the lyric output within the larger context of inter- and post-war political poetry.<sup>2</sup> Bolton too has noted a discrepancy in the way that this period is dealt with – the Munich Agreement

1 Cf. e.g. *Kalista*, Zděnek: Dny, kterými jsme prošli. In: *Lumír* 65/1 (1939), 25: “Nebylo větší porážky od Bílé hory nad konec září a počátek října roku 1938!” (Engl. “There has been no bigger defeat since White Mountain than the end of September and the beginning of October 1938!”)

2 In his hefty *Geschichte der tschechischen Literatur* Schamschula, for example, deals with the ten-year period between the Munich Agreement and the communist coup of 1948, in one single chapter entitled “Die Zeit der Plagen – A. Von München zum Februarputsch” (Engl. “The time of plagues – A. From Munich to the February putsch”), noting the similar effects of two historical events or rather chains of events: “Die beiden Eckdaten 1938/39 und 1948 markieren also tiefe Einschnitte im tschechischen kulturellen Leben.” (Engl.

and thus the end of the First Republic effectively coming to represent a mental or conceptual block for scholars of Czech literature and culture: “Discussions of Czech literary and artistic modernism often end here as well, as if the culture of the Second Republic were hermetically sealed off from that of the First.”<sup>3</sup>

Over the course of this chapter, we shall ask ourselves to what extent the poems in our selection truly signal a break with the past or whether it would be more helpful instead to look to the continuities, the obvious recourse to existing literary and cultural traditions, the fact that, for the most part, we do still recognise our authors as those great and inventive poets of the 1920s. After all, the past with which might conceivably be broken does not only have to be understood in historical or cultural terms, but can also refer to the respective authors’ earlier work, previous outings for their poetic personas. An undercurrent of patriotism, the apparent need or compulsion to express deep-seated feelings of love and devotion towards the land in which they were born, does not necessarily prevent us from identifying Seifertian flourishes or the inherent musicality of Hora’s words.

There are of course exceptions to this, moments when we are indeed surprised to discover the author behind a particular composition, though. A striking example of this is Holan’s 1939 poem *Procházka v parku* (Engl. “A walk in the park”). The 12-line poem is characterised by a remarkable lexical and grammatical simplicity. Over just three stanzas we are presented with a full twenty sentences, many of which are made up of unassuming one- or two-word phrases: “Jsou slova. Je křik. Je mlčení / Jsou letouny. Jsou clippery.”<sup>4</sup> The description of the situation is detached, matter-of-fact. It is clear that much has changed, that the world around the speaker is not what it once was: “Jsou opuštěná zápasště ... / Jsou vynucená tajemství ...”<sup>5</sup> The speaker seems relatively unmoved by all of this, though, and keeps looking to the future:

Jsou nadpisy: Je zakázáno!  
Nevadí ... Počkáme,  
až bude ráno.<sup>6</sup>

He is prepared to wait, to bide his time, and the deployment of the first person plural *počkáme* (“we shall wait”) suggests that he is not alone in this. Although

“The two milestones of 1938/39 and 1948 thus mark decisive turning points within Czech cultural life.” In: *Schamschula: Geschichte der tschechischen Literatur*, 380.

3 *Bolton: The Ruins of a Republic*, 120.

4 *Holan: Noční hlídka srdce*, 43. Engl. “There are words. There is shouting. There is silence / There are aeroplanes. There are clippers.”

5 *Ibid.* Engl. “There are abandoned arenas... / There are involuntary secrets...”

6 *Ibid.* Engl. “There are inscriptions: It is forbidden! / It doesn’t matter... We shall wait / until the morning.”

the use of ellipsis is not uncommon in Holan's work, there is precious little of his usual inscrutability on show here. To put it simply, the poem does not leave us all that baffled. Its presumable central message about the need for patience and fortitude, as reiterated in the last line that allows the final words to echo on too ("A tedy až příště, příště"<sup>7</sup>), seems remarkably clear, and is left unshrouded by reference to mythology or arcane lore. The one slightly less pedestrian image of the poem – that of plucked birds that continue to sing in spite of their handicap ("Zpěv oškubaných ptáků zní. / Zní. Bude znít, byť tříperý."<sup>8</sup>) – reinforces this idea of resilience and determination, and could easily be interpreted as a metaphor for the reduced circumstances of the Czechs following the Munich Agreement, their sudden exposure, but at the same time their refusal to be cowed. The word *tříperý* ("three-feathered") may represent something of a Holanesque neologism; however, ultimately it may also serve to emphasise the previous point by way of intertextuality. The Grimm Brothers' fairy tale *Die drei Feder* (Engl. "The Three Feathers") is, after all, another example of a story where perseverance (and admittedly also a certain amount of good fortune in the form of a magical toad) prevails over adversity, and bullying does not lead to success.

We may be a little taken aback at finding such an easily comprehensible and non-demanding poem among Holan's works, but its use of a *lyrisches Wir* and the fundamentally hopeful, or at least steadfast outlook is certainly in keeping with much of the lyric output of this period, as are the rather dead-pan references to the newly imposed restrictions of the day. It may be a slight turn out for the books compared to Holan's earlier works but we also know that it did not mark a particular turning point within his oeuvre and in slightly later works such as *Cesta mraku* or *Terežka Planetová* we find him on more ruminative, obscure terrain once again. Rather than breaking with the past, it seems perhaps fairer to say that Holan is merely embracing the present, revelling in the moment here.

It is of course clear that the works under discussion are not guided purely by contemporary issues. They do have, after all, a demonstrable literary value beyond the circumstances to which they allude. They are – for the most part – fascinating examples of lyrical dexterity and technical skill. And it is not as if the poets in question had no reason for writing other than responding to the events of the day. These were established and hugely well-respected figures in the Czech literary scene. In many ways they were simply doing their job and then history rather got in the way. But for that very reason it is particularly

7 Ibid. Engl. "And so until the next time, the next time."

8 Ibid. Engl. "The song of plucked birds resounds. It resounds. It will resound, three-feathered or not."

important that we try to ascertain in what kind of relationship the poems and the wider trend(s) they appear to represent stand in regards to that which preceded them.

## Where to Draw the Line?

Besides the general sense of recognising our authors on the basis of tone or rhyme, the audacity of the respective speakers or their quiet reflective nature, we also find poetic techniques and themes in the works under investigation that were highly characteristic of earlier periods, and which could therefore be taken as evidence of certain continuities, or at least of a re-appropriation of the past. Moreover, it becomes evident that some of the apparent developments as a result of events such as the Munich Agreement may well have begun prior to September 1938.

It would, for example, be tempting to imagine that one way in which the dissolution of the First Republic and the subsequent creation of the Protectorate could have brought about a perceptible change in the nature of Czech poetry of this period is through the reintroduction of censorship. However, as Heftrich has noted, the original constraints with which writers had to come to terms actually predate this:

So as to avoid providing Goebbels' atrocity propaganda with any additional ammunition, restrictions were placed upon Czech authors by their own government prior to the Munich Agreement. For that reason, 15 March 1939 did not signify a complete breach of artistic freedom, but rather a gradual (if huge) tightening.<sup>9</sup>

By the same token, however, it would be wrong to assume that the fierce interest in the Czech language of this period only emerged after the invasion of the Czech lands, something which Heftrich himself seems to do, when he writes

With the occupiers having nothing more important to do than providing all Bohemian and Moravian place names with bilingual designations and naturally giving precedence to the German, the Czech language once again inevitably became the central national symbol that it had been during the Revival era.<sup>10</sup>

9 Heftrich: "Der gerupften Vögel Sang klingt nicht wie Geigen", 217: "Um Goebbels' Gräuelpropaganda keine zusätzlichen Vorwände zu liefern, wurden den tschechischen Autoren schon im Vorfeld des Münchner Abkommens von der eigenen Regierung Beschränkungen auferlegt. Der 15. März 1939, der Tag des Einmarsches, bedeutete für die künstlerische Freiheit somit keinen absoluten Bruch, sondern eher eine graduelle (wenn auch massive) Verschärfung."

10 Ibid., 221: "In einer Situation, da die Besatzer nichts Dringenderes zu tun hatten, als alle böhmischen und mährischen Ortsnamen zweisprachig auszuweisen – und zwar mit

Here as well, it is in fact worth noting that a renewed interest in the Czech language was in evidence some time before the occupation began. Indeed, both Nevzal and Hora published articles in 1938 based on lectures in which their mother tongue took centre stage. For Nevzal, there is something inherently special about one's native language:

I know a saying, "a language is spoken". It's not a bad saying. If only because it cannot be transformed into the following: "a mother tongue is spoken". No no! That doesn't work at all! A mother tongue is sung, not spoken.<sup>11</sup>

It is irreplaceable: "We may have a flawless command of a foreign language in its written or literary form," he acknowledges. "But a foreign mother tongue will never become our mother tongue."<sup>12</sup> Nevzal is not calling for isolationism, though. As he puts it, "there would be no greater curse than to become for one's mother tongue a prisoner, isolated from the people, culture, thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards life of other nations."<sup>13</sup> He even takes the time to offer up a warning about the way in which the German language was being debased by the Nazis:

The ideology of the Third Reich has even laid its hands upon language. German, the celebrated mother tongue of Goethe, is to stop being a universal language, a language of understanding between all peoples.<sup>14</sup>

Hora too is not altogether unstinting in his praise, even if he does admit that the role played by the Czech language has not always been a purely unifying one:

Our language is a part of communal understanding, human life and the providential design that rules it. It has unified nations, taught them to love those around them, created fellowship, but also strife and rivalry.<sup>15</sup>

Vorrang des Deutschen – wurde die tschechische Sprache unweigerlich wieder zu dem zentralen nationalen Symbol, das sie in der Ära der Wiedergeburt gewesen war."

11 Nevzal, Vítězslav: *Mateřská řeč jako nástroj básníkův*. In: *Slovo a slovesnost* 4/1 (1938), 29: "Znám přísloví, 'řeč se mluví'. Není to špatné přísloví. Už proto, že by se nedalo pozměnit takto 'mateřská řeč se mluví'. Ó ne! Tak to nepůjde! Mateřská řeč se spíše zpívá."

12 Ibid., 40: "Cizí spisovný jazyk si můžeme osvojit bezvadně. Cizí mateřská řeč však nikdy nebude naší mateřštinou."

13 Ibid.: "Ale nic by nebylo větší kletbou než státi se pro mateřskou řeč zajatcem izolovaným od lidí, od kultury a myšlení, citění, životního pocitu jiných národů."

14 Ibid.: "Ideologie Třetí říše vztáhla svou ruku i na jazyk. Němčina, ta slavná Goethova mateřská řeč, má přestat býti řečí universální, řečí všelidského dorozumění."

15 Hora: *Básník a mateřský jazyk*, 165 "Naše řeč je kus společenské dohody, lidské přírody i zámyslu prozřetelnosti, jenž jí vládne. Sjednotila národy, naučila je milovati blízké, vytvořila družnost, ale i zápas a rivalitu."

Although he acknowledges that as a poet he is not exactly impartial given the importance of language to his trade (“There is no need for a poet to praise and recommend his mother tongue to others. It is his only tool, of course, but it is more than that too: it is his only aim,”<sup>16</sup> he explains at one point), Hora nevertheless emphasises the need to remain loyal to one’s native tongue without losing one’s head and the political significance of such an act:

We are living in difficult times, falling for domestic fetishes with the same ape-like adoration that once we felt for foreign fetishes. It will be more helpful if we all endeavour to be worthy of our language. If we do not betray all of the great things that have been articulated with it. If we realise that speaking Czech well means above all thinking freely in Czech.<sup>17</sup>

The focus on the Czech language may have become more widespread in the aftermath of the Nazi invasion<sup>18</sup>, but that does not mean that there was no groundwork done beforehand, no precedents set in the latter years of the 1930s.

Moreover, this quote from Hora may indicate a shift in orientation from the foreign to the domestic, which could, of course, be taken as a break with the *recent* past, but it needs to be stressed that the poet gave his lecture on 29 April 1938 and thus was evidently observing a change in his work and that of others several months before the Munich Agreement took place. Again, it seems likely that we dealing with a gradual process and not a clear turning point of the kind we might hope to find in the history books.<sup>19</sup> What is more, this re-orientation,

16 Ibid.: “Je pro básníka zbytečně, aby chválil a doporučil svou mateřštinu těm druhým. Je jeho jediným nástrojem, ovšem, ale je víc: je jeho jediným cílem.”

17 Ibid.: “Žijeme v těžkých dnech, kdy se zamilováváme opičí láskou do domácích fetišů, stejně jako jsme někdy zamilovávali do fetišů cizích. Užitečnější bude, když se přičiníme všichni, abychom byli své řeči důstojní. Abychom nezrazovali tv všechno veliké, co jí bylo vysloveno. Abychom si uvědomili, že dobře česky mluvit znamená především svobodně česky myslit.”

18 Cf. e.g. frankly rather hyperbolic front-page articles such as Chvála českého jazyka. Naše řeč je z nejbohatších. In: Večerní České slovo, 31.3.1939, 1: “Český jazyk nemusí ustupovat před žádným jiným jazykem světa, neboť svými vyjadřovacími možnostmi jej žádný z nich nemůže a nikdy nebude moci předstihnout. Naši největší básníci poctivě uznávají tuto neomezenou a věčně omlazující sílu našeho jazyka a vděčně se mu kofí, jako jeho oddaní služebníci.” (Engl.: “The Czech language does not have to give way in front of any other language of the world because in its expressive possibilities not a single one can or ever will outdo it. Our greatest poets faithfully acknowledge the boundless and perpetually rejuvenescent power of our language and as devoted servants they idolise it gratefully.”)

19 Noting that “Die Katastrophe von 1938/39 wirft einen langen Schatten voraus.” (Engl. “The catastrophe of 1938/39 casts forth a long shadow.”), one possible date is given by Heftrich in the form of a year (1936), but this too certainly long predates the alleged watershed moments of the late 1930s and supports the idea of a slow, but steady change. Cf. Heftrich: Höhlen tief im Wörterbuch: Tschechische Lyrik der letzten Jahrzehnte, 353.

though it may be somewhat at odds with the cosmopolitan spirit of the 1920s and early 1930s, also represents a return, a renewed embrace of things that had for some time been confined to the past. Continuity is possibly not quite the right word to describe this – it is perhaps more a resumption.

## History Relived and Rewritten

As we have seen over the course of this study, our poets make frequent use of a wide variety of earlier texts and legends – whether stories derived from both Czech mythology and history or motifs and figures we recognise from another age. Seifert's *Domek v psím víně* (Engl. “The little house covered in Virginia creeper”) from 1940 is a useful reminder of how this works with its allusions to St. Wenceslas and his martyred grandmother St. Ludmila:

z okna je vidět Tetín  
šeptám si: Svatý Václave,  
hle, jaké vinobraní  
Ale já vidím bílý šál  
na hrdle Lidmilině<sup>20</sup>

The reference to Tetín is perfectly understandable since it is believed to have been the site of Ludmila's murder, but it too has a history that goes back even further than that and is mentioned in the Cosmas Chronicle as having been named by the legendary Krok (father of Libuše, foundress of Prague) after his second daughter Teta. Here there is both a sense of connectedness, a desire to share things with the past, and the possibility of learning from it, recognising warning signs as and when they appear. After all, though Ludmila's white scarf might seem like innocent enough image, those versed in Czech legends will know that Ludmila was said to have been strangled with her own veil.

Moreover, in Nezval's *Historický obraz*, people are depicted as having turned to the stories of the ancient past as a way of blocking an unpleasant present:

Zabedněné vozy táhnou po zděšených krajích,  
od západu na východ a od severu na jih,  
lidé čtou si kronikách a v dávnověkých bájích<sup>21</sup>

20 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 233. Engl. “Tetín can be seen from the window / I whisper: St. Wenceslas / behold, what a vintage / But I see the white scarf / at Ludmila's neck”.

21 Nezval: *Historický obraz*, 37. Engl. “Slow-witted vehicles trek through terrified regions / from the west to the east and from the north to the south / people take to reading chronicles and ancient legends”.

Seifert goes even further in *Česká kniha* (Engl. “Czech book”) and has his speaker explicitly thematise the idea of returning to the past as it can be found in the pages of the nation’s books:

Tak vracíme se k stránkám našich knih  
jak k rukám matek pohnutlivým dějem –  
a do těch stránek krví ztřísněných  
padáme prudce celým obličejem<sup>22</sup>

The scene described not only intimates the bloody struggles that the nation has previously gone through, but is simultaneously reverential towards that history, with the speaker and his fellow countrymen apparently prostrating themselves before it, and shot through with a vein of the maternal (the comparison with motherly hands). Even the Czech language is cast in a rather caring role here: “Řeč rodná, která kolébala nás”<sup>23</sup>. Likewise, Seifert’s *Pokoj lidem*, a legend is depicted as not only sustaining the speaker and those on whose behalf he is speaking, but also providing guidance and direction at a time of uncertainty and existential threat:

Snad zdálo se, že se nepřezijem náraz  
a že se národ zhroutí pod patou.  
Legenda něžná, která živila nás,  
ukazuje nám cestu zavátou.<sup>24</sup>

In both cases there is a clear sense of what heritage can and indeed evidently already has offered to the present. This motif of the nourishing and nuturing effect of earlier works is something that we also find featuring strongly in newspaper articles of the same period.<sup>25</sup>

22 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky* (1939–1948), 243. Engl. “So we return to the pages of our books / like to the arms of mothers moved by events / and onto those pages stained with blood / we vehemently fall headlong.”

23 Ibid. Engl. “The native language, which rocked us in the cradle“.

24 Ibid., 208. Engl. “Perhaps it seemed that we would not survive the jolt / and that the nation would be crushed under the heel. / The gentle legend, which sustained us, / shows us the snow-bound path.”

25 Cf. e.g. *Kepka*, Rudolf: *Knihou proti zemlení duší. Útočiště do jistoty a klidu domova*. In: *Večerní České slovo*, 17.2.1939, 1: “Národu v jeho stesku a úzkosti je projev české národní duše – kniha, píseň, hudba, výtvarné dílo – horlivou útěchu. [...] Knihy domova dají útěchu, sílu, jistotu a uklidnění. Jsou takové jako pecen chleba uhnětený rukama našich maminek.” (Engl. “Manifestations of the Czech soul – books, songs, music, art – are a great comfort to the nation in its longing and anxiety [...] The books of our homeland offer succor, strength, certainty and comfort. They are like a loaf of bread kneaded by our mothers’ hands.”), *Rutte*, Mir.: *Aby kniha byla živým chlebem...* In: *Panorama* (1939), 70: “Na knize, která se stane znovu nejdůvěrnějším poutem národa, budeme nezbytně požadovati, aby nebyla pouze kulturním přepychem, ale živným chlebem lidu, jeho posilou a jeho vyznáním víry. [...] V jazyku je uložena tisíciletá zkušenost našeho kmene, jeho

Another aspect that can be found not only in our poetry, but was also given a good deal of attention in critics' circles at the time is the Baroque. In the first volume of *Kritický měsíčník* (1938), for example, we find both a selection of Baroque poetry in Czech translation, including works by Christian Hoffmann von Hoffmannswaldau, Andreas Gryphius, John Donne and Henry Vaughan, and no fewer than five articles focussing on the period from a number of different perspectives, ranging from its contemporary relevance and attraction for the modern reader to its specific characteristics within the Czech lands. The authors include prominent critics, such as Arne Novák and E. F. Burian.<sup>26</sup>

Though according to Jiří Brabec, it was more the preserve of the Catholic writers of this period, “now with an emphasis on national characteristics”<sup>27</sup>, there are also thematic elements in the works of our left-leaning poets that rather remind us of the Baroque – the cruelty of fate and its twists and turns, the ubiquity of death and reminders thereof, the inconstancy and unpredictability of the contemporary situation, the belief that the might of the Czech army had been mustered in vain.<sup>28</sup> We might even go as far as to argue that

moudrost i láska, jeho obraznost i houževnatost; proto je nezbytné, aby naši spisovatelé milovali se zdvojenou horoucností svou řeč, která je zástavnou našeho osudu a bytí.” (Engl. “Of books, which once again will become the most faithful bond of the nation, we are going to have to demand that they be not merely a cultural luxury, but the *living bread of the people*, their succour and profession of faith. [...] A millennium of our stock's experience is stored in language, its wisdom and love, its figurativeness and tenacity; for that reason it is imperative that our writers love their mother tongue with extra ardour since that is the guarantor of our fate and being”), or the unsigned article mentioned in Chapter One Co dnes číst, 3: “Jiráskův román ‘Proti všem’ z velkého románového cyklu o husitských bojích mluví přímo k dnešku. Kapitoly o husitských bojích v Palackého ‘Dějinách národu českého’ se staly aktuální napínavou četbou.” (Engl. “Jirásek's novel ‘Against everyone’ from his cycle of novels on the Hussite Wars speaks directly to the present day. The chapters on the Hussite Wars in Palacký's ‘History of the Czech Nation’ have become a topical and thrilling read.”)

26 Novák, Arne: Zápas o české baroko; Černý, Václav: Kniha o českém baroku katolickém; Burian, E. F.: Jak vidím české lidové baroko a proč je mám rád; Jirátko, Vojtěch: Barokní divadlo a dnešek; Kovárna, Fr.: Náš výtvarný barok. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 289 f.

27 Brabec, Jiří: Česká literatura v letech 1939 – 1945. In: Skálová (ed.): *Dějiny české literatury*. Vol. 4: Literatura od konce 19. století do roku 1945, 445: “nyní zdůrazňovány zejména nacionální rysy”.

28 The following stanza from Halas' *Voják* bring together many of these aspects over the space of just a few lines: “Zbytečný voják v krajině / kterou mu kdosi bral / děti se ptaly po vině / a voják stal” (Engl. “A superfluous soldier in the countryside / that someone took from him / the children asked about guilt / and the soldier stood there”). In: Halas: *Časy*, 107. The topos of *vanitas* is primarily broached by use of the adjective *zbytečný* (“redundant”, “futile”, “superfluous”) while the fact that the soldier has lost something that used to belong him – the land – reminds us of the fickleness of life, the way our position on the Wheel of Fortune can suddenly take a tumble. The scene is by no means apocalyptic, but it is not edifying either. The natural curiosity of the young is contrasted by the solemnity of the motionless soldier figure. He stands there like a scarecrow, his *Sein*

the emphasis placed on *věrnost* is reminiscent of the Baroque maxim *sola fide*, and view it is a continuation or at least resumption of the suggestion that any salvation can only be achieved through faith, and faith alone. In the case of this period and our poets we would obviously need to tone down the overt religiosity of the statement somewhat, but there is certainly an intriguing parallel there. Furthermore, if we recall the backdrop of catastrophic strife that was the Thirty Years' War against which many Baroque authors were writing, add in the brewing conflicts of the 1930s and the popular tendency to look for repetition within Czech history, then a resurgence of the style at exactly this time seems in many ways only natural. The much referenced Battle of White Mountain was, after all, one of the first major clashes of the Thirty Years' War and its effects on the status of the Czech lands are well known.

It is the nineteenth century, though, which proves to be an especially fertile and popular source of inspiration for our poets. From the Neruda lines in Halas' *Mobilisace* or the echoes of Sládek's *Byli jsme a budem* in several of Hora's poems, to Holan's preoccupation with the reburial of Mácha's bones in *Návrat Máchův* and the appearance put in by Vrchlický (or at least his ghost) in Seifert's *Světlem oděná* or the "quoting" of Svatopluk Čech in "*Písně otroka*", not to mention the homage paid to Němcová in both *Vějíř Boženy Němcové* and *Naše paní Boženy Němcové*, one does not have to look far to find evidence of the previous century and its cultural heritage. This interest has been pointed out by many scholars, but, as Heftrich has explained, based on the low regard in which the avant-garde had previously held many of the sentiments associated with the era of the National Revival, it is perhaps somewhat surprising:

The lyric poets who set the tone in the mid-1930s in Bohemia and Moravia owed much of their rank and self-confidence as poets to the fact that they had succeeded in becoming part of the European avant-garde. And that meant not least that they had done away with the national pathos of the nineteenth century and the founding years of the Czechoslovak Republic.<sup>29</sup>

In his eyes, such a rapprochement with the past is potentially problematic, however, not least because at the time the Nazis were also busy reimagining the history of the Germanic world for political gain:

and *Schein* out of kilter – a soldier is defined, after all, by action, not inaction. We wonder where his comrades are, why he is alone. Did Death claim them, perhaps? The soldier is not seizing the day, but rather seems to have been seized *by* it, frozen in time.

29 Heftrich: "Der gerupften Vögel Sang klingt nicht wie Geigen", 212f.: "Die Lyriker, die in der Mitte der dreißiger Jahre in Böhmen und Mähren den Ton angaben, verdankten viel von ihrem Rang und ihrem Selbstbewusstsein als Dichter dem Umstand, dass ihnen der Anschluss an die europäische Avantgarde gelungen war. Und das hieß nicht zuletzt: sie hatten das nationale Pathos aus dem 19. Jahrhundert und aus der Gründerzeit der Tschechoslowakischen Republik von ihrer Palette gewischt."

Given what the First Czechoslovak Republic at its most distinctive contributed to the artistic modern age in Europe, a recourse of this kind undoubtedly represents a regression. The nineteenth century gone-off, gone savage – that is, in no small part, National Socialism. How to respond appropriately to this without falling back on old clichés – that is the challenge that the Czech poets faced.<sup>30</sup>

On the basis of the insights gleaned in Chapters Three and Four, in particular, we would suggest that our poets primarily approached this challenge by either treating figures, motifs and works from the nineteenth century as portable monuments and *lieux de mémoire*, ever ready to be remoulded and overwritten, or by situating them somewhere between the poles of rhetoric and authenticity, and allowing them a central role in the construction of *věrnost*.

The one poet in our selection who is perhaps least successful in responding to this challenge is Nezval. His *Historický obraz* may potentially have aspirations to be as grand and authoritative as the Old Masters' paintings, if not also Vladislav Vančura's *Obrazy z dějin národa českého* or even František Palacký's *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě*, but with its repetitive refrains it is frequently merely tiresome. Moreover, as we have discussed, his subversive poem *Šváby* actually seems to fall prey to some the dangerous clichés of which Heftrich speaks – casting foes of the nation as vermin and thus fit only to be exterminated – and places him on worryingly xenophobic terrain. It is a re-embracing of the past that has gone rather too far, one might say.

30 Ibid., 213f.: “Angeichts dessen, was die Erste Tschechoslowakische Republik am Eigensten zur künstlerischen Moderne in Europa beigetragen hat, bedeutet ein solcher Rückgriff aber zweifellos einen Rückfall. Schlechtes, wildgewordenes 19. Jahrhundert – das ist zu beträchtlichen Teilen der Nationalsozialismus. Ihm eine gebührende Antwort zu geben, ohne selbst in die alten Klischees zurückzugleiten – das ist die Herausforderung für die tschechischen Dichter.” This issue was also highlighted by Milada Souckova in the 1950s, albeit less in the sense of its being something problematic. Cf. *Souckova: The Critical Years in Czech Literature* 24: “In general, literature sought an escape either into a remote historical past that preserved encouraging examples of great exploits of the Czech nation or into the Victorian age, which on its side offered the soothing atmosphere of things harmless and innocent. Strangely enough, Czech literary interest in history was paralleled by an analogous tendency in Germany. For opposite reasons, both literatures explored their medieval history – the Germans for symbols supporting German ideology, the Czechs for symbols to fight it.” Either way, it is clear that this phenomenon is not a purely Czech one and should not be viewed in isolation.

## Cracks, Fissures and Shifting Planes

If we are still determined to identify at least some evidence of our authors and the literary movement(s) to which they belonged having turned their backs on specific aspects of the (recent) past, it may be more helpful – given that the preoccupations of the late 1930s were undoubtedly different from those of previous years – to think in terms of shifting and slight breaches rather than dramatic breaks. The speaker’s comment in *Jan houslista* that “dnes nerostla by ve mně / v úzkostech píseň rodné země / jak polibek, jak tón a rým”<sup>31</sup>, a clear reference to Hora’s 1938 poem *Zpěv rodné země*, is, for example, not a rejection or disavowal of the earlier work, merely an acknowledgement that things have changed, that the situation is now another.

It is also the case that certain terms and poetic motifs appear to have acquired new meaning and significance in the run-up to and aftermath of the Munich Agreement. This has been noted by Heftrich in relation to darkness, which, as he explains can be taken as both a reference to the blackouts of September 1938 and to the alleged cultural dark-age that followed the Battle of White Mountain.<sup>32</sup> The original symbolism is not completely overwritten, but it is overlaid with an additional contemporary connotation. Given the way in which tropes of impoverishment were employed post-Munich in the press in more than just the pecuniary sense of the word<sup>33</sup>, we might also wonder if the term *chudý* (“poor”, “poverty-stricken”, “penniless”, “underprivileged”) might have similarly taken on new shades of significance in the poetry of our authors. This would mark a departure or progression from the socially-aware poetry of the 1920s. Where once the left-leaning avant-garde would have spoken of the poor in the sense of the proletariat, a show of solidarity with the downtrodden, those left behind by modern society, in poems such as Seifert’s *Země chudých*, the title of which casts the whole land as impoverished in some way, one suspects that the word may have taken on a wider meaning. As victims of

31 *Hora*: *Kniha domova*, 117. Engl. “in me today there would not grow / a song of the native land in the anxieties / like a kiss, like sound and rhyme.”

32 *Heftrich*: “Der gerupften Vögel Sang klingt nicht wie Geigen”, 227.

33 Cf. e.g. Do další práce. In: *Panorama* (November 1938), 234: “Jsme *ochuzeni* o mnoho ilusí, bohatší však o jednu nesmírnou zkušenost, která nám říká: Nemůžeme, nesmíme věřit nikomu, než sobě. Nikdo nám nepomůže, nepomůžeme-li si sami!” (Engl. We have lost many illusions, but have gained one immense experience which tells us that we cannot, we must not believe anyone but ourselves. No-one will help us if we do not help ourselves.) or *Bušek*, *Vrat.*: *Náš národní program*. In: *České slovo*, 1.3.1939, 1: “Jsme *chudší* o mnoho skutečných vlastních národních statků a ještě *chudší* o mnoho ilusí.” (Engl. “We have lost many of the nation’s houses and lands and have lost even more of our illusions”) [emphasis added].

international politics, the “poor Czechs” must, we suspect, come to terms with their metaphorically reduced means. Although Halas’ speaker in *Mobilisace* specifically mentions not wishing to disparage or offend through his choice of adjective (“ne neznevážím vás / já jménem přídavným”<sup>34</sup>) when he addresses the needy of his country (“Vy chudí země mé”<sup>35</sup>), such a word inevitably invites a degree of pity. It could emphasise the perceived blamelessness and impotence of the Czechs at this time, their hard lot in life. As before, the term still retains all of its conventional connotations, but it also takes advantage of and expands on them, bringing the idea of loss and deprivation on the national scale to the fore.

Equally, it is perhaps worth noting that when it comes to matters of nationality, the poetry of this period is adamantly Czech and not Czechoslovak. It would, of course, be tempting to imagine that this “phasing out” of the Slovaks was as a result of their part in the dissolution of Czecho-Slovakia and the creation of the Protectorate, with our poets turning their back on twenty years of shared statehood by way of punishment. However, for two reasons, this cannot be. Firstly, we can find evidence of poems exalting “Czechness” well before Jozef Tiso declared independence from Prague.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, before they began praising the Czech lands as their homeland, our poets did not really go in for patriotism at all. It is certainly not as if they once extolled the virtues of their joint state and then suddenly stopped. What we can do, though, is at least pin-point a moment when this tunnel vision could be seen as coming to an end. It may be outside of the main scope of our study, but when Nezval’s speaker declares in the 1945 finale of *Historický obraz* “Pražané! Můj český lid! Čechoslováci!”<sup>37</sup>, we see him at last re-embracing the other half, as it were. His exclamation expands outwards from neighbours to countrymen to fellow citizens. Once again, the idea of any definitive break with this aspect of the past is thus rather problematic. We can neither conclusively identify when the shift began, nor indeed claim that it was a particularly long-lasting or permanent change.

34 Halas: Časy, 106. Engl. “No I do not belittle you / with an adjective”.

35 Ibid. Engl. “You the poor of my country”.

36 Cf. e.g. Seifert’s *Česká modlitba*, which was first published in 1937, or indeed any of the poems from Hora’s *Domov*.

37 Nezval: *Historický obraz*, 65. Engl. “Residents of Prague! My Czech people! Czechoslovaks!”

## A Feast For All of the Senses

Another surprise for us may be in store when we realise that even the perceived aesthetic break with the recent past is not as decisive as one might expect. After all, traces of literary trends that were characteristic of the Czech avant-garde in the 1920s can still be found in our selection of post-Munich poetry. Two aspects stand out especially: appeals to multiple senses at once, often in something akin to a synaesthetic manner, and a blending of different artistic forms, reminiscent of intermediality. We might recall, for instance, the orchestral nature of Hora's *Jan houslista*, the competing voices in a tightly controlled whole. Equally, time and again, we come across sounds being matched with taste<sup>38</sup> and colours given particular prominence, symbolic significance even. Halas' pink or rose-coloured wind, which is said to have picked up speed in his poem *Voják* ("růžový vítr nabíral"<sup>39</sup>) is a case in point. Wind is a phenomenon not usually experienced visually, but as a physical sensation, a kind of touch as air rushes past us. Here though, the focus is on its apparent colour and we have to wonder why. Pink as a hue has a delicateness to it. It is generally a rather more gentle shade than red and has become – even if this was not always the case – associated with femininity. All of which feels somewhat incongruous given the wider context of the poem, the fact that it concerns a soldier who has been called up and what appears to be his struggle to come to terms with the failure of the general mobilisation to prevent the ceding of the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany.

Instead of homing in purely on conventions of colour symbolism, we would probably do well to cast our associative net a little wider and might therefore ask ourselves what could have caused the wind to turn pink and a possible explanation – albeit a rather gruesome one – is the spray of blood rising like mist. Although we know, of course, that no battles were fought over the borderlands, the loss was, in a metaphorical sense at least, felt to have been a deathblow to Czech(oslovak) territorial integrity and to the viability of the country. The lines that follow certainly support this interpretation, depicting the land as being in a terrible state, and the titular soldier unable to do anything about it: "kraj zdrčen byl a bez dechu / a voják stal"<sup>40</sup>

38 Cf. e.g. the title poem of Seifert's *Zhasněte světla*, in which the speaker describes a cry in terms of sweetness ("ten strašný křik, jež podnes kdekdo slyší, / ten zní mi dnes jak sladké volání"; Engl. "that terrible cry, which everyone continues to hear up to this day, now sounds to me like a sweet calling". In: *Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky* (1939–1948), 206) or the account of the US reception of the protagonist's music in *Jan houslista* ("Jak ostrý drink mou hudbu pili"; Engl. "Like a bitter drink they drank my music". In: *Hora: Kniha domova*, 96).

39 *Halas: Časy*, 107. Engl. "the pink wind picked up speed".

40 *Ibid.* Engl. "the land was crushed and not breathing / and the soldier stood there".

There are many other examples across our corpus, but nowhere are they quite so apparent as in Nezval's texts. We only need to recall the title of his longer poem *Historický obraz* to see the potential for mixing genres – in this case poetry and painting, the idea of creating images with words.<sup>41</sup> This meeting of disparate forms is, of course, by no means as pronounced as in a work such as *Abeceda*, which combined sounds, images, typography and in later editions also dance choreography as captured through photography, but it does at least point towards there being overlap between the poet's earlier works and those from the late 1930s and beginning of the 1940s. In spite of the obvious progression from the halcyon days of the 1920s, during which Nezval cheerfully described the poetic form as “A miraculous bird, parrot on a motorcycle. Risible, cunning and miraculous. A thing like soap, a mother of pearl knife and an aeroplane”<sup>42</sup> to more sobering, arguably even somewhat conservative themes from the late 1930s onwards, the poet and his speaker(s) can be shown to have not completely done away with all that went before.

Perhaps the most obvious example of not having wholly turned away from some of the techniques popularised within the Poetist movement or indeed Surrealism's *écriture automatique* is Nezval's *Pět minut za městem* from the 1940 collection of the same name. Ostensibly about a meeting between the speaker and his beloved that is to take place five minutes beyond the city and

41 Another intriguing title in this respect is Halas' *Torzo naděje*, itself an nod to Karel Toman's collection from 1902 *Torzo života*. On the one hand, a torso, that is, the headless and armless trunk of a body, might suggest violence, decapitation, mutilation – something that is no longer whole, flesh that has been torn asunder. But equally, as Bolton has pointed out, it also has a second meaning and implication, shepherding us into the world of sculpture. Cf *Bolton: The Ruins of a Republic*, 121: “The metaphor of ruins appears often in writing from the fall of 1938 on. One of the most well-known poetry collections from this period was František Halas's *Torzo naděje* (Torso of Hope), the word ‘torso’ here evoking an unfinished or broken statue.” Bolton's focus on the idea of ruins provides us with a deeply ambivalent image of persistence or continuity, a past that will not go away, but it is not in fact the only one evoked by the title. The connection to Toman's much earlier work – something of which Bolton makes no mention – is another since it allows Halas to acknowledge what preceded his volume of poetry rather than turning his back on its genealogy, while the apparent allusion to sculpture could be seen as placing *Torzo naděje* on almost intermedial terrain in that one artistic form is brought in to help to shape our understanding of another. The collection may not have anything of the playfulness of Poetism about it, but one of the movement's guiding principles could still be viewed as having put in an appearance in the title. This too would indicate that the relationship to the recent aesthetic past is rather more lively than certain accounts of Czech literary history would have us believe.

42 *Nezval, Vítězslav: Papoušek na motocyklu čili o řemesle básnickém*. In: *Kubín*, Václav (ed.): *Avantgarda známá a neznámá*. Vol. 1: *Od proletářského umění k poetismu 1919–1924*. Praha 1971, 569: “Zázračný pták, papoušek na motocyklu. Směšný, prohnáný a zázračný. Věc jako mýdlo, perleťový nůž či aeroplán.”

presented in a kind of stream of consciousness, the poem also touches upon a number of aspects familiar to us from other poems of this period, not least transformation and change (alas, almost always for the worse), notions of home, of the *rodná ves* (“native village”) that is not what it once was, a sense of hardship or privation and a profound, pervasive sadness.

The latter is something that is shared, not shouldered by a single individual, but nevertheless couched here in rather ambivalent terms: “Má slza pramení z tvých očí zpod tvých řas / Je tvá je tvá i má a prozrazuje nás”<sup>43</sup>. The use of the verb *prozrazovat* taps into the language of betrayal evident in so much of the lyric output of the late 1930s and inevitably brings to mind the *mnichovská zrada*, if only in passing and by way of loose lexical association. However, it is worth noting that the betrayal to which the speaker refers is not one that was inflicted upon him and his beloved, a figure upon whose behalf he speaks, by another party (as in the real-life case of the French in particular reneging on earlier promises made to Czechoslovakia), but in fact comes from within them since they are “betrayed” by their own tears. Is it weakness, then, that is being alluded to here, we might wonder? A belief in the need to be more steadfast, not to give in to one’s emotions, but rather to hold true, maintain a degree of composure, even? Certainly, such a conviction would fit in with a number of other sentiments expressed within the poem. Right at the outset, for instance, emphasis is placed upon the idea of a collective and perennial burden:

Potůček unáší a proměňuje kříž  
 Už byl tak daleko a teď je zase blíž  
 Omýván vlnami běží však neubíhá  
 Ten měnící se kříž je naše věčná tíha<sup>44</sup>

Although not stated outright, the *lyrisches Wir* on display here could well be an example of the speaker making a declaration on behalf of his fellow countrymen when he refers to “naše věčná tíha”. Viewed in relation to its water imagery, the idea of things being in constant flux, moving away and then returning once more, this passage is very much in line with the notion of Czech history as having a somewhat cyclical nature – a chain of repeated degradation and humiliation that is always endured. Though undoubtedly long-suffering, such an outlook is ultimately hopeful since it assumes that any present difficulty can be outlived. A positive attitude of this kind is in fact explicitly set out in the poem, with the speaker looking forward to a day “Kdy

43 *Nezval*: Pět minut za městem, 10. Engl. “My tear springs forth from your eyes beneath your lashes / It is yours it is yours and mine and it betrays us”.

44 *Ibid.*, 9. Engl. “The little brook carries away and transforms the cross / It used to be so far away and now it is close again / Lapped by the waves it rushes but does not progress / That changing cross is our eternal burden”.

člověk nebude člověku už jen sok / Kdy vina dá se smýt anebo napravití”<sup>45</sup>. His vision for the future is marked by fellow feeling and a much less black-and-white approach to guilt than we have arguably become accustomed to, especially in relation to the works of Halas and Holan in the immediate aftermath of the Munich Agreement.

That said, before the speaker is in a position to express this desire with conviction, a number of rather nasty revelations must first be laid bare. In a similar vein to Hora’s violin-playing protagonist in *Jan houslista* or indeed Nezval’s own speaker in *Malá Atlantida*, the lyric subject in *Pět minut za městem* is treated to a rather sobering homecoming. Though it is a place in which he usually finds solace (“Pět minut za městem kam v duchu utíkám”<sup>46</sup>), nothing is as it was; there is no one here to greet him:

Toužíte usednout pod křížem v rodné vsi  
 Žel ani jeden pes už nevítal tě  
 Krčmářka k níž jdeš spát zemřela na úbytě<sup>47</sup>

He compares himself to a ghost as he wanders about the place (“Jsi jako strašidlo jež bloudí po statku / Se zpěvem kohouta vždy mizí beze stopy”<sup>48</sup>), one who is caught between the world of the living and the world of the dead, unable to find any real repose in either.<sup>49</sup> He still remembers how things were, though, looking back on his former self – the sights and sounds that he held most dear: “Točíš se po kraji jenž ti byl s dětstvím vzat / Milovals nade vše bouchání pump a vrat”<sup>50</sup>. There is a sense of danger associated with the changes that have overcome his homeland, one that casts a potentially positive transformation – the creation of a dance hall – in a very different light from what one might expect: “Ten pokoj změnili teď na taneční sál / Žel netančí se v něm jak byla by zas válka”<sup>51</sup>. These war-like conditions, as they are described by the speaker, bring the outside world and all of its perils into what ought

45 Ibid., 14. Engl. “When a person won’t just be an opponent to another person / When guilt can be washed away or made amends for”.

46 Ibid., 13. Engl. “Five minutes beyond the city where I flee in my soul”.

47 Ibid., 10. Engl. “You long to sit down beneath the cross in your home village / Unfortunately not even a dog would welcome you anymore / The barmaid you sleep with died of consumption”.

48 Ibid. Engl. “You are like a ghost that roves over the farmstead / With the cockerel’s call always disappearing without a trace”.

49 On the use of such liminal spaces and states in other contemporary works, see also *Jackson: Stín národního ohrožení* v lyrice Jaroslava Kolmana Cassia, 195 f.

50 *Nezval: Pět minut za městem*, 14. Engl. “You meander through the region which was taken from you along with your childhood / Above all you loved the banging of the pumps and the gates”.

51 Ibid., 10. Engl. “They’ve now turned that room into a dance hall / Unfortunately there’s no dancing in there as if there were another war on”.

to be a rural idyll. The city from which he seeks to flee in coming here is also presented as a fraught, precarious place, one that might explode at any time:

To město za námi je sud jenž stále třaská  
 To město na sopce již je i naše láska  
 Ležíme chroptíce v zasutých Pompejích<sup>52</sup>

This is not, of course, the first use of the imagery of natural disasters to represent the contemporary situation that we have come across, but is a particularly volatile and potent example, one that does not so much sweep away inexorably like a flood, as bury in ash all that is not consumed by flames. However, the end result of such an occurrence – a civilisation left in ruins – is of course still much the same and offers a pleasingly sidelong or roundabout way of alluding to real-life misfortune.<sup>53</sup>

When reading *Pět minut za městem*, thoughts of the so-called *narodní ohrožení* are thus never far away,<sup>54</sup> but what is particularly striking, though, and indeed most interesting for us, is the fact that the poem is positively teeming with synaesthetic images and toys almost with intermediality at times because this, as mentioned previously, suggests a certain continuity of language and forms of expression between Nezval's earlier works and those written under the shadow of the Munich Agreement and beyond. The very title mixes the spatial and the temporal, measuring distance in minutes rather than metres or miles. There are also vaguely ekphrastic moments, for example the line “Šest sedm zašlých soch tu zobrazuje týden”<sup>55</sup>. Here statues are not only seen as taking on new representational meaning, but equally are then rendered not in stone, but in words. The curt rhythms of the first half of the line, in particular, may echo the careful tapping of a sculptor at work, but there

52 Ibid., 12. Engl. “The city behind us is a barrel constantly exploding / The city on a volcano which is our love too / We lie wheezing in buried Pompeii”.

53 Similar imagery was also used by Marina Tsvetaeva in the 1939 poem *Pepelishche* (Engl. “Cinder pit”) from her collection *Stikhi k Chekhii*, demonstrating that it was not purely within the purview of Czech poets at that time, but perhaps a more universal trope or comparison: “Так зола засыпает зданья: / – Отзовитесь, живые души! / Стала Прага – Помпеи глуше...” (Engl. “This is how ashes cover buildings: / – ‘Respond, if anyone’s alive!’ / Prague has become – more muffled than Pompeii...”, translation taken from: *Lemelin: Homeland and Exile in Marina Tsvetaeva’s “Poems to Bohemia”*, 105). In: *Tsvetaeva, Marina: Gde moi dom? Stikhi k Chekhii. Dokumenty, pis'ma, fotografii. Moskva 2000*, 99 f.

54 Even a line such as “Pět minut za městem je malá křižovatka” (Engl. “Five minutes beyond the city there is a small crossroads”) invites an additional reading beyond its status as a description of the locality and its landmarks, when we consider the metaphorical notion of being at a crossroads and its ready applicability to the very real contemporary sense of having a choice to make as nation – deciding which path to take at an uncertain time.

55 *Nezval: Pět minut za městem*, 9. Engl. “Six seven statues depict the week here”.

is also something deeply pictorial about the scene. The statues are described as depicting (*zobrazuje*, as derived from the word *obraz*, “picture”, “painting”, “image”) the days of the week, after all, meaning that we find ourselves dealing with three different art forms all at once – sculpture, painting and poetry. Notions of music too play a part in the lyrical language on show here. The night is portrayed as a conductor, ensuring that the noises heard in the dark are pleasant to the ear, fitting, harmonious even, if rather quiet: “Noc ladí orchestr svých přitlumených hlasů”<sup>56</sup>.

While not quite in keeping with Karel Teige’s maxim from the 1920s that poetry be written for all five of the senses<sup>57</sup>, two forms of sensory impression are nevertheless particularly prominent in the poem – the visual and the acoustic. Physical sensations may be placed within an emotional context, for example, “Ty pláčeš viděním já slepotou a přece / Tvůj pláč se obráží v mém jako nebe v řece”<sup>58</sup>, becoming rather heady and intoxicating. Here both sight and blindness seem to be on one level interchangeable given that each causes tears to be shed. While not entirely indistinguishable from one another, both the sense and its absence are shown to have ultimately the same effect. Through the use of pairs of opposites or at least contrasts (*vidění ≠ slepota; ty ≠ já; nebe ≠ řeka*, i. e. high vs. low and indeed air vs. water) and mirroring, both literal, as indicated by the use of the verb *obrazit* (to reflect) and figurative (the parallel drawn between the reflected tears and the reflection of the sky in a river), Nezval weaves a complicated web of appeals to the senses. As readers, we begin to lose our perspective, become unsure where one image begins and another ends. Sensory overload threatens when we can no longer tell what is up and what is down, what is the difference between sight and blindness. This idea of merging and interchangeability is also reflected in the forms of address that the speaker employs. He frequently makes use of second-person constructions, but is not consistent as far as the object of his speech is concerned. At times, it is clear that he is addressing his beloved, but at others – particularly when it comes to his reminiscences, the memories of how the village used to be – he can only be addressing himself.

One sense can also be found rendering another almost redundant or at least compensating for the lack of another, for example the sound of mills in the distance: “Vzdálené klapání neviditelných mlýnů”<sup>59</sup>. Here, it does not matter

56 Ibid., 15. Engl. “The night tunes the orchestra of its dampened voices”.

57 See Teige, Karel: Poesie pro pět smyslů. In: *Kubín*, Václav (ed.): Avantgarda známá a neznámá. Vol. 1: Od proletářského umění k poetismu 1919–1924. Praha 1971, 191 f., first published in *Pásmo* in November 1925.

58 *Nezval: Pět minut za městem*, 10. Engl. “You cry with vision I with blindness and still / Your crying is reflected in mine like the sky in a river”.

59 Ibid., 11. Engl. “The distant clatter of invisible mills”.

that the mills are not visible; the noise they make reassures us that they are there though they cannot be seen. At other stages, sounds overlap in this vision of the world and drown each other out in allusive cacophony:

Hluk pilky tesaře za hlukem promenády  
 Hluk písňe skřivánka za hlukem elektrik  
 Hluk lopat za hlukem katedrálových klik  
 Hluk zelných bělásků na čerstvém listí plotu  
 Pět minut za hlukem aut kin a kamelotů<sup>60</sup>

The comparative peace and quiet of life outside the city is shown to be just as noisy as within. The acoustic hierarchy that Nezval depicts brings with it a few somewhat unexpected results, however. Although with some sounds, it does stand to reason that they could indeed be louder than their counterparts – the sound of the carpenter’s saw, for example, or that of shovels, if one were standing close enough – others are rather more surprising. The reference to the sound made by cabbage whites, for example, is, at first glance at least, something of a non-sequitur given that butterflies are not noted for being particularly audible creatures. It only makes sense if we take it as an indication of the stillness elsewhere. Through this emphasis upon details that we might otherwise overlook, or rather, one feels tempted to say, overhear, it becomes clear that a change of perspective occurs in the poem when we leave behind the bustle of the city; our senses are sharpened, more receptive to external stimuli. There is a sense of returning to nature somehow, of going back to one’s roots and finding some kind of solace or comfort there, albeit one that is flawed, marred by unpleasant developments.

Nezval’s speaker plays with the idea of “behindness” too, of having not only turned one’s back on something, but also retrained one’s ears to focus on something else. He takes advantage of the multiple meanings of the preposition *za* (in particular “behind”, “beyond”, “over”, and in the case of sound even on occasion “above”) to create a kind of audio topography that gives the aural an unusual spatial aspect. In this, he is aided by the use of anaphora since the technique piles words or phrases upon each other over and over again, creating a tower of repetition on the page. As with *Historický obraz*, one is even put in mind of an artist working with oils and layering up his brushstrokes to add an extra dimension to his otherwise flat painting.

60 Ibid., 16. Engl. “The noise of the carpenter’s saw above the noise of the concourse / The noise of the skylark’s song above the noise of the trams / The noise of shovels above the noise of the cathedral latches / The noise of cabbage whites on the fresh foliage of the hedge / Five minutes behind the noise of cars cinemas newsboys”.

The semantic layering serves as a kind of analogy for the speaker's and our own relationship to the past since the present inevitably builds upon that which has gone before it; indeed, it can only exist by virtue of its precursor. This notion also finds expression on the lexical level and may give an indication of continuities within Nezval's oeuvre as a whole. The allusion to *kameloti* ("newsvendors" or "paperboys"), quite aside from its associations with the sounds commonly found in urban spaces, harks back namely to his earlier poem *Podivuhodný kouzelník* (Engl. "The marvellous magician"), one of the major texts of the Poetist movement. In it, Nezval's speaker weaves the tale of an exceptional figure that spans the ages and combines classical mythology with Arthurian legend and a revolutionary, almost salvational vision of communism. The titular magician is implied to be a variation on the figure of Merlin and the poem itself is sprinkled liberally with both overt and rather more coded, at times even playful references to figures and places familiar to us since at least the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Even if the name Merlin does not crop up and Nezval's magician is not strictly speaking a cambion, sired by an incubus, they certainly share similarly otherworldly origins, with an anemone here as the key to life: "V jejím břiše se narodil muž / z té květiny kterou mi dala"<sup>61</sup>. Elsewhere, the speaker describes an evening walk "podél nábřeží, / jež bylo ponuré a světélkující jak fatamorgana"<sup>62</sup> and although on level one this is simply a comparison with a mirage, we cannot help but also spot the connection to Morgan le Fey. Later we come across Viviane too – that is, the Lady of the Lake. She features in the subtitle of the third canto, *Jezerní dáma a kouzelníkovo mládí* (Engl. "The lady of the lake and the magician's youth"), and is given a backstory that draws upon Roman myths associated with Venus, thus emphasising her erotic powers:

a večernice rázem  
do vody seskočila  
a jak vlna jedním skokem  
v ženu se proměnila  
Tenkráté ponejprv uzel kouzelník  
jezerní dámu s rybím okem<sup>63</sup>

At another point in the poem, the speaker depicts his younger self in a manner that is rather reminiscent of Merlin's protégé Arthur:

61 Nezval, Vítězslav: *Dílo*. Vol. 2: *Básně noci (1921–1929)*. Praha 1952, 21. Engl. "In her belly there was born a man / of the flower that she gave to me".

62 Ibid., 20. Engl. "along a riverbank / that was as murky and phosphorescent as a mirage".

63 Ibid., 26. Engl. "and all of a sudden the evening star / jumped down into the water / and in a single wave-like bounce / transformed into a woman / That was the first time that the magician / saw the lady of lake with the fish eye".

Já chudý sirotek  
 na břehu jezera jsem si hrál  
 Marie Vojtěch a lodníkůvic Jiří  
 bývali moji kavalíři  
 a já jejich král<sup>64</sup>

Although in itself not conclusive proof of recourse to Arthurian legend, in the context of the other allusions, the reference to a king and the gallant men who serve him immediately brings to mind the notion of the Knights of the Round Table, another famous feature of many versions of the tale.

Much the same can be said of the use of the aforementioned Czech word *kamelot*, which of course has an English homonym *Camelot*, the fabled court of King Arthur, in the fourth canto: “Podivuhodný kouzelník v šatech kamelota / Kamelot nespustil oči z Manifestu”<sup>65</sup>. Just as the lines quoted above about behaving like a king with his knights could, in theory, be about any king and his retinue, but against the backdrop of conjurers and lake-dwelling beauties invite an Arthurian interpretation, so too are we inclined to take the image of the magician dressed as a paperboy with a pinch of salt and recognise that on one level, at least, it simply serves to reinforce the mythical foundations of the poem and allow the story of Merlin to permeate more deeply.

Returning to the *kameloti* of *Pět minut za městem*, there is no clear vein of Arthurian legend running through the poem, as there is in *Podivuhodný kouzelník*, and yet at the same time – and knowing what we do about that work – it seems foolish to ignore the connection altogether. After all, if we consider the implications of the name Camelot, we find ourselves faced with a place at the heart of a lost kingdom, synonymous with a golden age, now over and confined to the past. It would not be a huge leap to draw a parallel here with Prague. We might note its much reduced status within Central Europe as part of the Protectorate compared to its former position as the capital of Czechoslovakia, might look back upon the years of the First Republic as a kind of golden age that has passed into the realm of memory, destined one day perhaps to become a legend, nothing more. All of this could be taken as evidence of the perennial nature of Nezval’s poetics, the continued relevance of certain themes, techniques and points of reference in spite of altered outside

64 Ibid., 27. Engl. “I a poor orphan / played at the edge of the lake / Marie Vojtěch and the boatman’s son Jiří / were my knights / and I their king”. A king can indeed also be found in *Pět minut za městem*. Cf. Nezval: *Pět minut za městem*, 13: “Král sedí na mezi” (“A king sits at the boundary”).

65 Engl. “The astonishing magician in the clothes of a paperboy / The paperboy did not take his eyes off the Manifesto”.

circumstances.<sup>66</sup> Using the language of the previous chapter, we might even suggest that the object authenticity of *Pět minut za městem* is strengthened by its connection to earlier works and literary movements since these could be interpreted as the hallmarks of its maker.

## Longing For What is No More (But Might Be Again)

One final aspect, evident on both the thematic and formal levels, which has ramifications for the relationship to the past, is the issue of nostalgia. On the face of it, the matter appears to be fairly straightforward: had our poets truly broken with the past, it would be difficult to explain the seemingly nostalgic bent of many of their texts, the way their speakers appear to mourn the loss of a simpler, more carefree time, not to mention the widespread return to more traditional poetic forms and the very publication of works such as *Láska a smrt*, an anthology of traditional folk verse edited by Hora and Holan. The emotions on display in wistful and frankly rather bucolic poems such as Seifert's *Česká modlitba* or *Píseň o rodné zemi* are very much in keeping with Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's assertion that

In much of the literature on nostalgia, [...] the feelings associated with “looking back” to a place or time in the past generally reflect a bitter-sweet, affective, positive relationship to the “lost”. They express a contrast between “there” and “here”, “then” and “now”, in which the absent/gone is valued as somehow better, simpler, less fragmented, more comprehensible, than its existent alternative in the present.<sup>67</sup>

The binary opposites they describe are certainly something we have come across on countless occasions. Moreover, as Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw have remarked, “The home we miss is no longer a geographically defined place but rather a state of mind”<sup>68</sup>, meaning that our speakers and poets do not, for example, have to have lived in the Sudetenland and lost their houses as a result of the Munich Agreement, to experience a sense of nostalgia for

66 In this respect and besides the semantic and associative connections to *Podivuhodný kouzelník*, it is also perhaps worth noting that *Pět minut za městem* shares certain formal aspects with another earlier poem – *Edison* from 1927 –, most notably the use of trochaic hexameter. Cf. *Opelik* (ed.): *Lexikon české literatury. Osobnosti, díla, instituce: M–O*, 529.

67 Hirsch, Marianne / Spitzer, Leo: “We would not have come here without you”. Generations of nostalgia. In: *Hodgkin, Katherine / Radstone, Susanne* (eds.): *Memory, History, Nation. Contested Pasts*. New York 2017, 82

68 Chase, Malcolm / Shaw, Christopher: *The Dimensions of Nostalgia*. In: *Chase, Malcolm / Shaw, Christopher* (eds.): *The imagined past: history and nostalgia*. Manchester 1989, 1.

what once was. It suffices that they feel as if the world that they once knew and understood has departed, leaving them behind, a point of which Tesař might do well to take note. However, on closer examination, the matter proves to be somewhat more complicated and, in order to illustrate this, we need to delve a little more deeply into the concept of nostalgia.

Though scholars are not always in complete agreement as to how best translate the two constituent parts of the term – *nostos* (“return home”) is reasonably unproblematic, but *algia* is, for example, rendered by Svetlana Boym as “longing”<sup>69</sup>, while Hirsch and Spitzer opt for the more medical “painful feeling”<sup>70</sup>, it is clear that it involves a state or sensation that puts the experiencing subject in some discomfort, whether physical or emotional. It is also important to note, as Boym has pointed out, that

Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationships between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.<sup>71</sup>

This collective aspect is obviously something that we have witnessed before when examining our selection of poetry. We only need to recall the mnemonic manoeuvring described in Chapter Three, the recourse and references to both communicative and cultural memory, to say nothing of the much discussed matter of the *lyrisches Wir*, for that to become apparent. If a speaker is put out or dissatisfied by the changed and changing world around him, he need not necessarily fall into purely private despair. By evoking instead a sense of nostalgia, putting forward the notion that life used to be so much rosier for all of those who are or who feel included by his use of the first person plural, then he can strengthen the bonds between himself and his fellow countrymen, and add to the relatability and recognisability of the common situation he seeks to portray.

Although David Lowenthal, homing in on nostalgia’s predilection for skewing visions of the past and focussing only on the good, may have argued that the phenomenon “tells it like it wasn’t”<sup>72</sup>, given the insights we gained in the previous chapter, we feel compelled to take issue with this assertion, even if we would not wish to dismiss it entirely out of hand. Our deliberations have, after all, indicated that providing the speaker’s words strike enough of a chord with his audience and / or those upon whose behalf he purports to be speaking, the actual veracity of his claims is ultimately something of an irrelevance. In light of this, it may be more helpful to consider Boym’s separation of nostalgia

69 Boym, Svetlana: *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York 2001, xii.

70 Hirsch/Spitzer: “We would not have come here without you”. 82.

71 Boym: *The Future of Nostalgia*, xvi

72 Lowenthal, David: *Nostalgia tells it like it wasn’t*. In: *Chase/Shaw* (eds.): *The imagined past: history and nostalgia*, 18

into two distinct forms – restorative and reflective – and in particular her suggestion that “Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition.”<sup>73</sup> The latter are, after all, concepts that have been our frequent companions over the course of this study. When, for instance, the speakers are found to be exhibiting second-person authenticity, they generally do so by offering some kind of “truth” to the reader, even if it is not an objective one. And one way of bolstering this impression is, of course, to couch it within a supposedly Czech “tradition” of truth telling.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, when Boym notes that “Restorative nostalgia is at the core of recent national and religious revivals; it knows two main plots – the return to origins and the conspiracy”<sup>75</sup>, we are struck by two issues of major relevance to our study. Firstly, if we recall the reliance upon figures and motifs from and popularised during the nineteenth century, that is, the time of the National Revival, and the fact, as noted by Heftrich, that in mentioning darkness, our poets also invoke the period of *temno* and perceived cultural oppression that followed the Battle of White Mountain, then in a way it stands to reason that the rhetorical groundwork could be seen as being laid for another national fightback. Secondly, her two “plots” are a surprisingly accurate summing up of many of the narrative currents and constraints at work in our poems. From Hora’s *Jan houslista* to Nezval’s *Pět minut za městem* and even Halas’ *Ladění* in the sense that its early poems celebrate and reappropriate the simple pleasures of childhood, allowing the speaker to assume the role of both man and boy simultaneously (i. e. both past and present in dialogue with one another), we observe speakers confronting their origins, whether via return to a geographical place or by way of more imaginative means, a foray into the realm of memory. Likewise, what greater conspiracy can there be but a betrayal on the national scale – the ever-present, if not always openly acknowledged, outside event of the Munich Agreement, which precipitates so much of what is said and left unsaid in the poetry of this period.

73 Boym: *The Future of Nostalgia*, xviii

74 Cf. e.g. the national motto *pravda vítězí* (Engl. “truth prevails”), as used to striking effect at the end of Nezval’s *Historický obraz* or the way in which Seifert’s *U jednoho hrobu na Olšanech* echoes Karel Havlíček Borovský’s famous declaration *zrádce nebudu* (Engl. “I will not be a traitor”). What better and more effective way does a speaker, that figure who deals, above all, in words and verbal images, have to avoid committing betrayal than to continue to speak and tell the “truth” – as he sees it, at least? Music too may offer an artistic “truth” and non-verbal insights into the way things really are. As we have seen in Hora’s *Jan houslista*, a poem with decidedly orchestral under- and indeed overtones, so long as the artist remains true to himself, he is able to access the wealth of experience that has gone before him (another potential source of “tradition”) and become one with his forebears.

75 Boym: *The Future of Nostalgia*, xviii.

Evidence of reflective nostalgia, which according to Boym “dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity”, casting doubt upon truth in its absolute form<sup>76</sup>, is rather more scarce, but there is at least one notable example from this period, namely Holan’s *Terežka Planetová*. The main protagonist of this complex narrative composition appears trapped by his past, hopelessly in love with a girl from his youth, and yet doomed to wander for decades, afraid to return home. His memories of his younger days are golden-hued and idyllic and yet when at last he plucks up the courage to head back and asks after the girl he once knew, no one in the village can even remember her. Here issues of “longing and belonging”, as Boym has put it<sup>77</sup>, remain problematic and open-ended. The poem raises rather more questions than it answers about the perils and temptations involved in placing one’s past upon a pedestal. If nostalgia is indeed at work in this poem, it is not given free, indulgent rein and left in what Fred Davies referred to as its first-order form, but rather fits far better into his categories of second- and possibly even third-order nostalgia.<sup>78</sup> There is an additional contemplative layer hardwired into *Terežka Planetová* that many of our other poems lack.

However, when we leave aside the possible differing forms of nostalgia, and focus instead on the conditions generally required for it to make an appearance, cracks begin to appear in the phenomenon’s applicability to our poetry. “Outbreaks of nostalgia often follow revolutions”, Boym tells us, citing the French, Russian and so-called Velvet Revolutions of the late 1980s by way of example.<sup>79</sup> Lowenthal too makes reference to the bloody end of the *Ancien Régime* in his remarks on nostalgia, arguing that “The French Revolution sundered past from present; after the guillotine and Napoleon the previous world seemed irretrievably remote – hence to many doubly dear.”<sup>80</sup>

If we take the Munich Agreement as another such a watershed moment, then it stands to reason it too might elicit a comparable response from within both Czech society as a whole and the poetry of this period. In this understanding, evidence of nostalgia could even be seen as a *věrný* reaction to the structural and political changes that overcame the Czech lands in the late 1930s inasmuch as it implies a degree of regret at what happened and a refusal to let the past slip away unnoticed – a posture of insistence, constancy, the digging in of one’s heels. It would also be more or less akin to Bolton’s previously discussed imagery of ruins. After all, it was, as he noted, only those in favour of the creation of the Second Republic who cast it as a positive

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Davies, Fred: *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York 1979, 16 f.

79 Boym: *The Future of Nostalgia*, xvi

80 Lowenthal: *Nostalgia tells it like it wasn’t*, 20

new beginning, rather than the lamentable end of an era.<sup>81</sup> Things get more complicated, though, when we consider to what extent the Munich Agreement and its ramifications might indeed be considered a revolution. We find ourselves in a broadly similar situation to Chapter One, where we pondered the applicability of Badiou's and Derrida's notions of the event. The former in fact even held up the French Revolution as a prime example of his understanding of the term. Given the arguable inefficacy of political and social opposition to Nazi aggression in 1930s Czechoslovakia and the rump state it became, we would be hard-pushed to portray the period convincingly as revolutionary in the sense of an uprising. At best, we might consider the Latin root of the word – *revolvere* (“to roll back”) – and note the widespread and multi-generic return to the nation's “cultural roots”. In this reading, we might have cause to regard it as a revolution in the original sense of the word, but therein also lies the main problem associated with the nostalgic credentials of our poetry. Such an interpretation would certainly sit well with the view of Czech national history as a series of repetitions (or rather perhaps we should say revolutions), whereby the Czech lands and people are humiliated or betrayed over and over again, but still manage to bounce back every time. However, according to Chase and Shaw “a cyclical perception of time makes nostalgia unattractive: eventually time lost will be instituted once again. No time has passed in such a view of history.”<sup>82</sup>, something which obviously undermines the credibility of any potential nostalgic posturing from such quarters.

Another stumbling block is introduced by Lowenthal in the form of his explanation of the logical reasoning behind the sway that the past may hold over us:

We have to interpret the on-going present as we live through it, whereas we stand outside the past to view its more finished forms, including its *now* known consequences for what was *then* the unknown future. For all its strangeness, the past thus looks more definitive and magisterial than the present.<sup>83</sup>

81 *Bolton*: *The Ruins of a Republic*, 121 f.: “We might expect the new authoritarian regime to invoke the ruins metaphor as well: calling the First Republic a ruin was one way of discrediting it. But in fact the opposite was the case. For the government that took charge after Munich, the First Republic was an unwanted heritage that had to be denied. The metaphor of ruins was less appropriate for this denial, because it might suggest that, even if the old republic had disappeared, its legacy was still present. Indeed, we should remember the homology between the metaphor of ruins and that of heritage or legacy; both metaphors emphasize the remains of an older order, raising issues of loyalty and betrayal. By contrast, many supporters of the new authoritarian Second Republic were heavily invested in the image of a *new* beginning and a total break with the past.” Following the logic of our poets and the respective speakers, the behaviour described by Bolton could of course be seen as evidence of a *nevěrný* or *malověrný* reaction to contemporary events.

82 *Chase/Shaw*: *The Dimensions of Nostalgia*, 3.

83 *Lowenthal*: *Nostalgia tells it like it wasn't*, 30.

This makes a good deal of sense, but when we consider the slightly warped temporal logic of poems such as Seifert's *Až budou o nás číst or Jednou, ach jednou* – the looking back upon the present as if it already were the past, the clear expectation that there will be a future from which to survey things in retrospect (informed, it would not be too great a leap to surmise, by the aforementioned cyclical view of Czech history, perhaps) – then the present, as we know it, also becomes rather more definitive and magisterial in its own right. Armed with such certainty about what is to come, nostalgia's function as a kind of emotional support in uncertain times begins to feel a little obsolete.

Moreover, when we read comments by Chase and Shaw that “The closer societies have comprehended the biological finality of death – or that the hereafter happens, if at all, outside of historical time – the greater their capacity for nostalgia”<sup>84</sup>, additional alarm bells start to ring. After all, in poems such as Hora's *Jan houslista* or *Rekviem*, one could feasibly argue that the biological finality of death is to some extent called into question since members of the Czech nation, whether living or dead, are shown as one, as a great, unending procession across the generations. This is not, of course, to suggest that we are in some way dealing with a primitive society, one that has failed to comprehend what death truly signifies, but instead serves to illuminate the way in which the notion of cyclicity can become so deeply ingrained in poetic and rhetorical terms in works from this period as to disrupt expected modes of dealing with the past.

In short, it becomes apparent that the matter of nostalgia (at least in the sense of an expression of collective dissatisfaction at the present, particularly when held up against an apparently happier, but now by-gone earlier age) is undoubtedly relevant across our selection of poetry, which, in turn, reinforces the idea that we are not dealing with a complete break with the past during this period. However, as with so many aspects of our study – from the category of the event to the issue of authenticity – it is ultimately mired in paradox. If our speakers really believe in and our poets are indeed putting forward a cyclical understanding of Czech national history, then they have no real reason to indulge in nostalgia because that lost era of the First Republic could very well still return. And if they do mourn and pine in earnest, then surely doubts can be raised as to the seriousness of the belief that deliverance will yet come for the Czech people as it has in the historical past. It is not quite a dead-end that we have reached, but rather more a suburban cul-de-sac – one of those so-called “frying pans” with just enough space for us to turn around our analytical vehicles, go back a little on the way we have come before striking out one last time in a slightly different direction.

84 Chase/Shaw: *The Dimensions of Nostalgia*, 5f.

## 6. Late Modernism – Not an End but an Alternative

Whether we look at the relationship between our authors' poems and the nineteenth century, the mythological past or more recent developments, there is always overlap, continuation, re-evaluation. Wherever this occurs – be it lexical, semantic, formal or even paratextual in nature – it is a constant reminder of an inescapable connection to the past, both historical and literary, to say nothing of the personal. With this in mind, the notion of the poetry of this period as marking a kind of caesura becomes, as we have seen, in many, if not quite all respects, somewhat untenable. Up until now, though, we have tended to examine the works within our selection from deep within the Czech context, often focussing on a number of cultural, historical and linguistic specifics. Such an approach has its place and merits, but of course no national literature exists within a vacuum and when current affairs are reflected within art, this can occur from many different perspectives and points or places of origin. After all, the Czech lands were not the only part of Europe to have world events suddenly encroach on the lives of individuals in the late 1930s.

Moreover, we know that the Czech avant-garde of the 1920s was a decidedly European affair<sup>1</sup> and movements such as Nezval's *Skupina surrealistů* have an obvious origin elsewhere. However, with the possible exception of the interest in the Spanish Civil War, the developments of the latter years of the following decade are rarely viewed in the pan-European context or dealt with in a comparative manner that also includes a transnational component. We have seen what effect this can have on the scholarly understanding of and engagement with the poems of this period. They become the epitome of the “national tragedy”, caught between being set on a pedestal and condemned for their lack of political clout, their part in the perceived societal failure to combat the threat posed by Nazi Germany effectively.

Rather than trying to provide a definitive answer on whether it is appropriate to regard the works in this study as part of a discrete chapter within Czech literary history, it may be more prudent to look for an alternative analytical framework instead, one that also enables us to scrutinise our authors' poems

1 For a particularly good account of the Poetist movement and its continental context, see e.g. *Fabian*, Jeanette: *Poetismus. Ästhetische Theorie und künstlerische Praxis der tschechischen Avantgarde*. Wien 2013.

from a broader perspective. There is one fairly new addition to the scholarly toolkit of those who study twentieth-century art and literature that may prove particularly helpful – namely, late modernism. This is not, it must be stressed, to be confused with postmodernism. Indeed, as Charles Jencks has pointedly put it “To call a late modernist a postmodernist is tantamount to calling a Protestant a Catholic because both practise a Christian religion”<sup>2</sup>. In order to underscore this, it is probably especially worth mentioning Ernő Kulcsár-Szabós’ four-part theoretical model of twentieth-century poetry, which does not allow for an apparently seamless transition between the avant-garde and postmodernism, or a complete discontinuity between high modernism and the avant-garde, but rather places another phase in their midst. In the Hungarian scholar’s view, the progression in fact runs thus: modernism – avant-garde – late modernism – postmodernism. As he puts it

the more closely one engages with the characteristics of post-avant-garde modernism’s linguistic / poetic ways of looking at things, the more plausible the hypothesis that a profound change of paradigmatic significance did not so much occur between turn-of-the-century classical modernism *and* the avant-garde, as between those two movements on the one hand and post-avant-garde modernism (or, using other possible terms, “posterior” or late modernism, “second-wave” modernism) on the other.<sup>3</sup>

Putting us in mind somewhat of Bitzer’s suggestion that the rhetorical situation always requires a *fitting* response<sup>4</sup> and the possible relevance of this to less well-received works such as Nezval’s *Historický obraz*, as discussed in Chapter Four, Kulcsár-Szabós also notes that

The predominance of the new paradigm will be detectable in the fact that the ability of the individual poetic / poetological variants to address the reader more intensively can differ greatly: their power to appeal and cry out can – under the very same circumstances – be elementary, partial or even completely irrelevant.<sup>5</sup>

2 Jencks, Charles, quoted in Miller, Tyrus: *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts Between the World Wars*. Berkeley: 1999, 9.

3 Kulcsár-Szabó, Ernő: Subjekt und Sprachlichkeit. Das “spätmoderne” Paradigma und Umriße einer integrativen Geschichte der literarischen Moderne. In: *Kulcsár-Szabó Ernő/Szegedy-Maszák Mihály* (eds.): *Epoche – Text – Modalität: Diskurs der Moderne in der ungarischen Literaturwissenschaft*. Tübingen 1999, 56: “je tiefer man sich auf die Charakteristik der sprachlich-poetischen Betrachtungsformen der nachavantgardistischen Moderne einlässt, desto plausibler wird die Annahme, dass sich ein tiefgreifender Wandel paradigmatischer Bedeutung nicht so sehr zwischen der klassischen Moderne der Jahrhundertwende *und* der Avantgarde, sondern vielmehr zwischen diesen beiden einerseits *und* der nachavantgardistischen Moderne (mit anderen möglichen Termini ‘zweite’ oder Spätmoderne, ‘zweite Welle’ der Moderne) andererseits vollzog.”

4 Bitzer: *The Rhetorical Situation*, 10.

5 Kulcsár-Szabó, Ernő: Subjekt und Sprachlichkeit, 59: “Die Prädominanz des neuen Paradigmas wird jedoch daran zu bemerken sein, daß die Fähigkeit der einzelnen dichter-

Following this theory, it is our belief that many of the apparent peculiarities and characteristics of the Czech poetry of this period can be best appreciated when the texts are understood as examples of late modernism. Since literary periods do not suddenly spring into existence, but emerge gradually, in dialogue and response to what has gone before and what is currently going on, such an understanding removes some of the need to look for a definite break that can be pinned down to a particular historical moment and allows us to acknowledge shifts and changes that took hold before the Munich Agreement or the annexation of Austria had even been imagined. What is more, it is also worth noting that although, of course, we do know that there is a good deal of thematic overlap amongst our poets' works, Kulcsár-Szabós does not locate the primary manifestation of any new dominant paradigm in the topics frequently addressed by the author, but instead elsewhere:

New epochal thresholds do not so much make themselves known in the reconfiguration of thematic preferences or the objects of literary speech, but rather in a change to the relationship to their verisimilitude. Thus it is in the manner in which the how of having been said reflects (and interprets) the object of a message *poetologically* that the horizon of primarily verbal integratedness is opened up to the relationship between man and the world around him.<sup>6</sup>

In this respect and in light of what we established about the truth-telling pretensions and possibly even credentials of our poetry in Chapter Four, it is perhaps aspects such as the *lyrisches Wir* that could be most significant here when it comes to identifying late modern traits.

Certainly, as we shall see over the course of this final chapter, the darkening of the literary skies as the 1930s progressed and the advent of new or at least different modes of expression as compared to what had been typical of the preceding years was not by any means a purely Czech phenomenon. Although Alfons Kliems, Ute Raßloff and Peter Zajec, editors of a multi-author volume on twentieth-century Central European poetry have suggested that “On the face of it, a term such as ‘late modernism’ is non-existent in the research

isch-poetologischen Varianten, den Leser intensiver anzusprechen, recht unterschiedlich ausfallen kann: Ihre Appellkraft kann unter den gleichen Umständen elementar, partiell oder sogar völlig irrelevant sein.”

6 Ibid., 64: “Neue Epochenschwellen kündigen sich nicht so sehr in der Umgestaltung von Themenpräferenzen oder von Gegenständen der literarischen Rede an, sondern vielmehr im Wandel des Verhältnisses zu ihrem Wahrheitsgehalt. Dadurch also, auf welche Art und Weise das Wie des Gesagteins den Gegenstand einer Mitteilung *poetologisch* reflektiert (und interpretiert), öffnet es gerade den Horizont der primären sprachlichen Integriertheit auf die Beziehung von Mensch und Welt.”

landscapes of Anglo-American and Slavonic studies”<sup>7</sup>, we shall in fact take our cues from a number of British and American scholars and use their findings regarding the English-language literature of this period to further our own endeavour. According to Tyrus Miller, for example,

the works of late modernist literature should not be viewed simply as cultural curiosities salvaged from time, aesthetic souvenirs that exert their unsettling fascination by reviving an already moribund modernism. Rather, they mark the lines of flight artists took where an obstacle, the oft-mentioned “impasse” of modernism, interrupted progress on established paths.<sup>8</sup>

In such an account, the catalyst is not an outside event such as the Munich Agreement, but rather originates in the very literary milieu of the era. He chooses to situate this way of writing within what he calls the

early twentieth-century context of shifting hierarchies within the arts, intensive development of the mass media, and traumatic events of social and political history – historical trends that were incipient for high modernist writers, yet not so ineluctably part of the “weather” as they would become during the 1930s.<sup>9</sup>

Immediately we can see how this could be applicable to our poetry as well.

Elsewhere, Miller remarks that “The cultural products of this period both are and are not ‘of the moment’”<sup>10</sup> and that too might help to explain within the Czech context why a poem such as Halas’ *Praze* still resonates so strongly, its simultaneously timely and timeless nature. What is more, it is difficult to read that “In the empty spaces left by high modernism’s dissolution, late modernists reassembled fragments into disfigured likenesses of modernist masterpieces: the unlovely allegories of a world’s end”<sup>11</sup>, without being reminded by works such as Nezval’s *Malá Atlantida* or Holan’s *Sen*. Likewise, when C. D. Blanton talks of a “precarious blend of urgency and ironic resignation”<sup>12</sup> in relation to a poem by W. H. Auden, we cannot help but find that a rather more fitting description of Halas’ *Zpěv úzkostí* than Petrbok’s label “defeatist yet vicious”<sup>13</sup>.

7 *Kliems*, Alfred/*Raßloff*, Ute/*Zajec*, Peter: Vorwort: Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts in Ost-Mittel-Europa. Eingrenzungen und Abgrenzungen. In: *Kliems/Raßloff/Zajac* (eds.): Spätmoderne. Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts in Ost-Mittel-Europa, 13: “In der angloamerikanischen und slawistischen Forschungslandschaft ist ein Terminus wie ‘Spätmoderne’ auf den ersten Blick nicht existent”.

8 *Miller*: Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts Between the World Wars, 12 f.

9 *Ibid.*, 24.

10 *Ibid.*, 13.

11 *Ibid.*, 14.

12 *Blanton*, C. D.: Epic Negation. The Dialectical Poetics of Late Modernism. Oxford 2015, 216.

13 *Petrbok*: Der Flagge präsentiert! Tschechische Poesie zum September 1938, 328: “defätistisch-bösartiges”.

Where is the defeatism in an image such as that of an anchor of hope ringing out (“už řinčí kotva naděje”<sup>14</sup>) or the oft-quoted suggestion that the natural world is in uproar at what happened in the Bavarian capital (“Pole naše křičí Zrada...”<sup>15</sup>)? What is vicious about a description of having seen tears in women’s eyes (“Viděl jsem slzy v očích žen”<sup>16</sup>)? The attack on the Marianne (“Sluneční štít tvůj prasklý je / a hanbou čpí tvé ano”<sup>17</sup>) is surely rather more snide and scornful than vicious, not least because the speaker is castigating a mere emblem, not a real person. The clenched fists seen by the speaker (“Viděl jsem pěsti zaťaté”<sup>18</sup>) could arguably be viewed as menacing, but equally someone might ball their fists in frustration or so as to actively prevent themselves from lashing out physically. The speaker may talk of the need for patience (“Počkejte málo málo jen”<sup>19</sup>), but it can hardly be claimed that he is advocating inaction on the grounds that failure is inevitable. Moreover, it may be true that the poem ends on the following lines

Geni Genie země naší  
v hodinách zlých  
meč tvůj ať zvoní brzy<sup>20</sup>

However, it would be a stretch to claim that this is an incitement of violence in earnest. It is a gesture, a rhetorical flourish, and again, it is not addressed to any living person, but rather a symbolic figurehead. There are, of course, other poems by Halas where we may feel inclined to take some of the speaker’s appeals and imperatives more seriously. The unpublished *Když* (Engl. “When”) is an obvious case in point, with its rallying call and also warning to the reader “chyť tu zbraň co *zatím* máš”<sup>21</sup> and its progressive pattern of references to the need for sabotage (“ať žije sabotáž”<sup>22</sup> → “a dělej sabotáž”<sup>23</sup> → “Ať roste sabotáž”<sup>24</sup>). But *Zpěv úzkostí* is not one of them.

Existing work on late modernism and the English-language poetry ascribed to it can provide us both with useful warnings about how to approach the period and evidence of certain parallels with our own corpus. Thomas S. Davies, for

14 Halas: Časy, 100. Engl. “the anchor of hope is already clanging”.

15 Ibid. Engl. “Our fields shout Betrayal...”.

16 Ibid. Engl. “I saw tears in women’s eyes”.

17 Ibid., 101. Engl. “your sun shield is cracked / and your yes reeks of shame”

18 Ibid., 100. Engl. “I saw clenched fists”.

19 Ibid. Engl. “Wait a little just a little”.

20 Ibid., 101. Engl. “Oh Genius, Genius of our lands / in these evil hours / may your sword ring out soon”.

21 Halas: A co básník, 219. Engl. “seize the weapon while you *still* have it”

22 Ibid. Engl. “long live sabotage”.

23 Ibid. Engl. “and commit sabotage”.

24 Ibid. Engl. “May sabotage grow”.

instance, cautions us that “late modernism should not be misconstrued as either a retreat from modernist aesthetics *tout court* or a return to realism”<sup>25</sup>, while Andy Croft recounts a situation in which poetic action and political inaction were treated as though they were one and the same that is strongly reminiscent of Tesař’s previously discussed and arguably unfounded criticism of much of post-Munich Czech poetry:

Orwell deliberately confused the political history of a decade with its literature, narrowed that literature down to the work of one poet, and, moreover, a single poem, a single stanza, a single line – and then wilfully misread it. The political events of the 1930s were thus condemned on the grounds of literary weakness in a line of poetry that was criticised for its politics.<sup>26</sup>

Although an equivalent term does exist in Czech (*pozdní modernita*) and Raoul Eshelman has made a convincing case for viewing Hora’s works of the 1930s as late modernist<sup>27</sup>, this is not a concept that crops up with any frequency in relation to the period as a whole. Heffrich does not employ it at all in his writings on the period and Bolton is very cautious about its possible applicability to the works and views of Karel Čapek<sup>28</sup>. A fascination with the avant-garde might, as Kliems, Raßloff and Zajec have argued, go some way to explaining this oversight within Czech scholarly circles<sup>29</sup>, but it is somewhat surprising that it is not afforded more consideration by Bolton given the importance of a sense of modernity and its decay or descent into something else to his perceptive deliberations on the motif or rather metaphor of ruins.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that it is not only the English-language poetry of the late modernist period that can represent a helpful point of reference. Prose works too have something to offer. Davies, for example, writing about Elizabeth Bowen’s war-time short fiction notes – just as our poets’ works are often decidedly low-key and free of great drama – that

Her readers will find no harrowing portrayals of air raids and no heroism from the civilians of the so-called People’s War; instead Bowen recreates the “war climate” of a besieged city where the routines, habits and affective dimensions of everyday life are turned inside out.<sup>30</sup>

25 Davies, Thomas S.: *The Extinct Scene. Late Modernism and Everyday Life*. New York 2016, 11.

26 Croft, Andy: Forward to the 1930s: the literary politics of anamnesis. In: *Chase/Shaw* (eds.): *The imagined past: history and nostalgia*, 149

27 Cf. *Eshelman*: Josef Horas Bergsonismus, 345 f.

28 Cf. *Bolton*: *The Ruins of a Republic*, 130.

29 Cf. *Kliems/Raßloff/Zajec*: Vorwort: Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts in Ost-Mittel-Europa, 17.

30 *Davies*: *The Extinct Scene*, 1.

In Davies' eyes, "late modernism's engagement with the everyday cannot be explained as either the defamiliarization or the preservation of the ordinary"<sup>31</sup>. Instead, he suggests that "late modernism's encounter with everyday life is not primarily aesthetic or ethical: it is simultaneously aesthetic *and* political"<sup>32</sup> and surely that is exactly what we also find in poems such as Seifert's *Vlajka na hradě* and *Praha v máji* or Nezval's *Historický obraz* and even to a certain extent Holan's *Sen*. Daily routines are depicted as having been disrupted, but not completely impeded. Halas' vision of the realities of camp-life in *V táborech* (Engl. "In the camps") is a particularly eloquent illustration of this. A certain veneer of normality still remains amongst the displaced, though it may be only evident by virtue of habit, memory and a willingness to make do with that which is available, however unsatisfactory:

Zas bude všechno po staru

V táboře utečenců  
narodil se synek  
v táboře utečenců  
vlaje prapor z plínek

zástava věčná trpícího lidu  
ať vlaje vlaje přes tu všechnu bídu<sup>33</sup>

Thus everyday scenes may be marred by change, yet still recognisable, and in their seemingly stubborn ordinariness they provide ample opportunity for the articulation of more politically-charged sentiments – be it an expression of the collective fear that invasion is not far off, a comment on the perceived martyrdom of the nation or a sign of persistence and a refusal to be cowed.

Lastly, according to Miller,

"Late modernism", like "modernism", refers to a significant set of family resemblances between writers during a certain period of time. It is a construction of the work of analysis, which allows these resemblances to be disclosed and judged. As a historical category it stands and falls on the persuasiveness with which it helps bring these resemblances to light.<sup>34</sup>

This is precisely what we wish to attempt in this final chapter. Through a comparative analysis, we hope to demystify the works in our selection further

31 Ibid., 5.

32 Ibid., 6.

33 Halas: Časy, 112. Engl. "Everything thing will go back to normal again / In the refugee camp / a little son was born / in the refugee camp / a flag made of nappies flutters / eternal banner of a suffering people / let it flutter flutter across all of this poverty".

34 Miller: Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts Between the World Wars, 22.

and ascertain what, if anything, truly makes them stand out from other examples of poetry from this period.

## W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice

For reasons of scale and practicality, we propose to focus on only two volumes, which will be held up as particularly noted examples of late modernism: W. H. Auden's *Another Time*, as published in 1940, and Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal* from early 1939. These two socially aware poets, both of whom – rather like Halas – visited war-ravaged Spain in the latter years of the 1930s and were deeply troubled by what they saw, would not – from a political or, as we shall see, even aesthetic point of view – have looked much out of place in the Czech avant-garde of the time. What is more, they were both personally involved in the public condemnation of the Munich Agreement in Britain.

Auden was, along with other prominent figures such as H. G. Wells and A. A. Milne, a signatory of a statement released by the Society of Authors that pledged support to the Czech(oslovak) cause and noted the country's blamelessness in the matter ("We recognise that the issue which threatens to plunge the world into war has arisen through no misdemeanours of the Czechoslovak people or Government"<sup>35</sup>). The text stresses in particular the need for all cultural figures to take a stand, a belief in the close relationship between art or creativity and political freedom, but also a sense of undeniable and mutual responsibility:

Not Czechoslovakia alone, but democracy and the peace and civilisation of the world are menaced. These are the very soil from which culture springs. Therefore, as writers, we cannot but declare ourselves in their defence, and in defence of their threatened representatives, the Czechoslovakian people.<sup>36</sup>

Although not listed amongst the undersigned of the declaration of the Society of Authors, MacNeice was on the committee of the Association of Writers

35 Untitled document beginning "We, the undersigned British authors". LA, PNP, f. Obec československých spisovatelů, sig. 265, 36–82. Auden's name does not appear on this version, but he is included among the signatories of the Czech translation, cf. an untitled press release beginning "Asociace britských spisovatelů zaslala Obci československých spisovatelů v Praze projev toto znění". LA, PNP, f. Obec československých spisovatelů, sig. 267, 36–82. The above mentioned quote is here rendered in the Czech as follows: "Vidíme, že záměr, který hrozí uvrhnout svět do války, nevznikl žádným nesprávným jednáním ani československého národa ani jeho vlády."

36 Untitled document beginning "We, the undersigned British authors". LA, PNP, f. Obec československých spisovatelů, sig. 265, 36–82.

for Intellectual Liberty London<sup>37</sup>, which also published a forthright statement following the Munich Agreement, condemning the event and its wider implications:

We are well aware that with the betrayal of Czechoslovakia, our own freedom is all the more threatened. Our admiration for the steadfast hearts and the clear heads of the Czechoslovak authors who realised the need for unity before it was too late only increases our feelings of shame and indignation. We are gravely concerned about your future fate and ask you to keep us abreast of your situation, which we care about just as much as we do our own. We endeavour to live and work in the spirit of your message, and, with your example ever before us, wish to redouble our efforts in the struggle that is common to us all.<sup>38</sup>

This response is remarkable not only because it embraces the use of the language of betrayal – a trope we are already familiar with from contemporary Czech discussions on the nature of the Munich Agreement – and acknowledges obvious misgivings about British diplomatic policy, but also because it taps into the idea of a brotherhood of writers.<sup>39</sup> Again, there is a sense of the central role to be played by literary figures in the defeat of fascism. The message to which the text alludes will have been sent by the *Obec československých spisovatelů* under Hora's chairmanship. It is presumably a reference to the second iteration of the declaration *K svědomí světa* (Engl. "To the Conscience of the World"), which promised that "Even in the difficulties of our present position, we remain and shall remain in the forefront of humanity's common struggle for truth and justice"<sup>40</sup>. Although such biographical aspects should

37 *Dinsmann*, Melissa: *Modernism at the Microphone. Radio, Propaganda, and Literary Aesthetics during World War II*. London 2015, 79.

38 Translation of a letter from the Association of Writers for Intellectual Liberty London dated 7.10.1938. LA, PNP, f. Obec československých spisovatelů, sig. 264, 36–82: "Uvědomuje si dobře, že tím, že bylo zrazeno Československo, je tím více ohrožena naše vlastní svoboda. Náš obdiv pro pevná srdce a jasné hlavy československých spisovatelů, kteří pochopili včas potřebu jednoty, zvyšuje ještě naše pocity hanby a rozhořčení. Máme vážné starosti o váš budoucí osud a prosíme vás, abyste nás informovali o své situaci, která nám leží na srdci stejně jako situace naše. Snažíme se žít a pracovat v duchu vašeho poselství, a majíce před sebou váš příklad chceme zdvojnásobit své úsilí v společném boji." The original English-language version is unfortunately not held by the Czech literary archives and has yet to be viewed by the author of this study.

39 This is of course something that we discussed in Chapter Four particularly in relation to Halas and his 1942 collection *Ladění*, but where Halas' poetic brotherhood of writers seems to be have been limited to those who originated from the Czech lands, this version has the potential to go far beyond that and embrace all authors, regardless of their nationality.

40 English translation of *K svědomí světa II*, dated 30.10.1938 and signed "Czechoslovak Authors Association". LA, PNP, f. Obec československých spisovatelů, sig. 259, 36–82. The short text also harks back to the manifesto *Věrní zůstaneme*, declaring "We stand by our

not be overstated, they do provide a useful context in which to frame the poetic works of Auden and MacNeice from this period, an indication of feelings of social responsibility transcending national borders and proof perhaps that not all inhabitants of the British Isles saw the Sudeten Crisis as “a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing”<sup>41</sup>.

## Birds and Books of a Feather?

Turning away from the immediate historical background to more literary matters, we can begin by noting that there are a number of striking similarities between both *Another Time* and *Autumn Journal* and the works that we have been examining over the course of this study. Some are fairly banal or superficial – for instance, the titular focus on the season of mellow fruitfulness in the case of MacNeice. Many Czech authors of this period did, of course, do the same<sup>42</sup> and, as we have discussed, such an emphasis not only highlights the simple fact that certain key events leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War took place in the autumn, but can also have a symbolic meaning, one that is ultimately positive in outlook. If it is autumn now, then we know that dark days are ahead, that the bleak winter is coming. However, we can also take comfort in the knowledge that the spring too will come again one day and therefore we need not lose all hope, but instead place our trust in the natural order of things and adopt a rather more stoical approach.

Likewise, if we consider the treatment of the aforementioned Spanish Civil War in a poem such as MacNeice’s, we find ourselves dealing with a depiction that is broadly comparable with the attitudes and postures mentioned in Chapter One in relation to Halas’ *Deset ran egyptských*. As the following lines demonstrate, there is a shared sense that while Spain may be far-off and still somehow separate, events there affect us all and, perhaps most importantly, ultimately foreshadow much worse to come closer to home:

And next day took the boat  
For home, forgetting Spain, not realising  
That Spain would soon denote  
Our grief, our aspirations;

President and without despair we fix our eyes on the tasks of the future and still remain faithful to the moral and spiritual ideals of our nation.”

41 Speech by Neville Chamberlain made on 27 September 1938, quoted in: Prime Minister on the Issues. In: *The Times*, 28.1.1938, 10.

42 Cf. e.g. Seifert’s poem *Podzimní vzpomínka*, or *Básník opadává*, the second part of Halas’ *Časy*, not to mention the noted anthology from 1939 *Československý podzim*.

Not knowing that our blunt  
 Ideals would find their whetstone, that our spirit  
 Would find its frontier on the Spanish front  
 Its body in a rag-tag army.<sup>43</sup>

Other similarities, such as the frequent use by Auden and MacNeice of what we have previously termed the *lyrisches Wir*, a collective way of speaking as opposed to the more common *lyrisches Ich* of standard poetic verse, are perhaps more specific, but, as we shall see, equally offer more scope for divergence from trends that can be found within Czech poetry at this time.

Making such observations about parallels and commonalities should not be mistaken for suggesting that the British and Czech poets in any way directly influenced one another, but rather it is an attempt to point out that faced with more or less the same set of outside circumstances, albeit two different sides of history from the point of view of national fate, the Czechs were not the only ones to react in this manner. MacNeice's own assessment of his long poem *Autumn Journal* is certainly startling in its ready applicability to the works of our authors:

It contains rapportage, metaphysics, ethics, lyrical emotion, autobiography, nightmare. There is a constant interrelation of abstract & concrete. Generalisations are balanced by pictures. [...] The writing is direct; anyone could understand it. I think it is my best work to date; it is both a panorama and a confession of faith.<sup>44</sup>

There is nothing in this description that cannot also be found to some degree in the works of the likes of Seifert and Holan, Hora, Nezval or Halas. On the issue of faith, the potential overlap is clear, but we are also reminded straight away of the nightmarish, but panoramic vision that is *Sen*, the almost blow-by-blow account of selected events that makes up much of *Historický obraz*, the apparent glimpse into the speaker's own past in works like *U jednoho hrobu na Olšanech*, not to mention the deeply poetic articulation of uncontrollable and heartfelt emotion in a piece such as *Zpěv úzkosti*.

Moreover, at times, when reading Blanton's careful analyses of the two English-language volumes, it is almost as if he were indeed talking about the works of the authors in our main selection. "The result is a historical event that happens without happening – or rather, that happens primarily in mediated fashion, as an attenuated but somehow universal fact"<sup>45</sup>, we are told at one stage in relation to *Another Time*, and swiftly recall the way, as discussed in Chapter One, that the Munich Agreement too stands somehow outside of the

43 *MacNeice*: *Autumn Journal*, 29.

44 *MacNeice*, Louis, quoted in: *Blanton*: *Epic Negation*, 251 f.

45 *Ibid.*, 243.

action of the poetry inspired by it in the Czech lands. Its status as a historical event is never converted into a narratological one. The consequences thereof are all that we are party to; there is no attempt at a direct representation of the act that sealed the fate of Czechoslovakia. We only know that it has happened and what it is felt to signify through indirect means, for example the bodily mediation of the fact via tears and clenched fists in Halas' *Zpěv úzkosti*.<sup>46</sup> Likewise his description of the way that in MacNeice's work "the apparent language of pastoral slides into sudden complication, exposing a violence underneath the conventional image"<sup>47</sup> could easily also be applied to a poem such as Seifert's *Píseň o rodné zemi*, which memorably tempers images of the rural idyll of the speaker's homeland with moments of viciousness ("sladká jako střída dalamánku / do nějž nůž jsi vnořil k rukojeti"<sup>48</sup>).<sup>49</sup>

46 Cf. *ibid.*, 274: "In principle, MacNeice's own mediated experience of Munich has nothing to do with MacNeice at all." Much the same could be – and indeed if we recall Tesař and his comments about his countrymen's "theatrical" experience of Munich to a certain extent already has been – argued about his Czech counterparts too. Obviously, we know that Halas was involved in the general mobilisation, but given that the consequences of the Munich Agreement were not opposed militarily and had most bearing on the border regions, it is hard to imagine our Prague-based poets experiencing what happened more than just vicariously through newspaper articles, radio broadcasts and the machinations of the rumour mill. The later invasion is another matter, but Munich will surely have been almost as removed and distant for the likes of Seifert and Holan as it was for MacNeice. Indeed, one might even suggest that works such as *Pisnička o Paříži* or *Odpověď Francii* are attempts to broach that distance, to make it personal, allowing the authors, or at least their speakers, to become in some small way actors in the affair, rather than merely bystanders.

47 *Ibid.*, 260.

48 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 185. Engl. "sweet like the crumb of a bread roll / into which you've plunged a knife up to the handle".

49 Other conventional images turned violently upon they heads can also be found in works not included in the primary corpus of this study, such as Kolman Cassius' *Ještě jaro* (Engl. "Still spring") which provides a somewhat brutal depiction of the coming of the spring, one that also draws upon Christian ideas of the Sacred Heart: "Pohnulo se jaro v srdci mém / jak nůž, který se v ráně obrací: / jsem láska, ale víc než láska rána jsem, / jež krvácí." In: *Kolman Cassius, Jaroslav: Stesk stráže*. Praha 1995, 146. ("Engl. Spring stirred within my heart / like a knife turning in a wound: / I am love, but more than love I am a wound / which bleeds.") By the time of the assassination of Heydrich, violence appears to have gained the upper hand over the pastoral, though. In Holan's *Terezka Planetová*, for example, there is no soft side to the landscape left. "Kraj nemluvný, kraj kamenitý / a do dřene až bídou zrytý, / kraj bez možností, ale kraj / nucený stále tvrdší pěstí [...]" (Engl. "A taciturn land, a stony land / and cut down to the marrow by poverty, / a land of no possibilities, but a land / forced by an ever harder fist [...]"). begins the poem, setting a tone of hopelessness and fierce external forces. In: *Holan: Příběhy*, 57. In this context, the death of the young woodcutter felled by a falling tree ("Dvacetiletý! ... Sražen kmenem ...", Engl. "Twenty years old!... Knocked down by the trunk..."), which precipitates the meeting between the narrator and the mysterious doctor, whose extended reminiscence forms the main body of the poem, is not, in fact, so much a violent reimagining of an aspect of normally placid country life, as a logical extension of the cruel order that has become established in the region. In: *ibid.*, 59.

Blanton's remarks about what he calls Auden's "most familiar and chiasmic thesis" are also highly pertinent to much of our poetry: "public crisis replicates the effects of private trauma, while intimate experience registers the larger dislocations of political history."<sup>50</sup> This assessment immediately puts the reader in mind of many of our deliberations from Chapter Three, the way in which Seifert's speaker, for example, charts the political changes that have overcome his homeland with reference to how its – and, it seems, by extension also his own – social life has been altered in *Verše o Praze*:

Tak kdysi do divadla  
jezdily v kočáře  
půvabné mladé dámy  
– ach, dnes již nejedí<sup>51</sup>

Much the same can be said of Seifert's *Píseň o vlasti*, where, as we have discussed previously, the speaker is only able to make sense of his love for the Czech lands by way of comparison to the inconstancy of past love affairs that soon fizzled out just as the memory of them does ("A jako jiskra z komína / vzpomínka rychle zhasíná"<sup>52</sup>). In *Jan houslista* too, the political is inescapably tied to the personal. Though, as mentioned in Chapter Two, there is a sense that the rise of Nazism is being alluded to in connection to the protagonist's original decision to quit his homeland and move abroad ("A z orla za chvíli je plaz. / Plaz mistrem zve se. Zvou ho mistrem."<sup>53</sup>), this is mixed in with matters of artistic integrity ("tu každý druhův úspěch hlídá, / tak mnoho, mnoho je tu nás"<sup>54</sup>) and the dangers that threaten the individual – in this case Jan's ability to flourish as a musician. Thus he is counselled by his old teacher "Odejdi! Doma je jen bída. / Jsem plaz. I z tebe by byl plaz."<sup>55</sup> and both we and Jan himself are left to appreciate the political turmoil of Central Europe in the 1930s through the prism of private upheaval.

Last but by no means least, Blanton raises an important point in relation to *Another Time* that may prove crucial for our continuing discussion and final

50 Blanton: *Epic Negation*, 212.

51 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 201. Engl. "Thus there was a time when to the theatre / winsome young ladies / rode in carriages / – alas, today they no longer ride".

52 Ibid., 192. Engl. "And like a spark from the chimney / the memory quickly burns out".

53 Hora: *Kniha domova*, 94. Engl. "And it doesn't take long for an eagle to become a reptile. / The reptile calls himself a master. / They call him a master."

54 Ibid., Engl. "Here everyone watches over the success of others, / so many, there are so many of us here."

55 Ibid., Engl. "Leave! At home there's only misery. / I am a reptile. You would become a reptile too."

conclusions about the nature of the Czech poetry of this period – whether it does indeed represent a kind of watershed moment:

The question, then, is not whether Auden’s work changed. It did. The critical issue is whether history changed as well, whether the shape of the relationship between internal and external demanded some new strategy of historical representation in the face of an altered political reality – and what formal solution Auden devised in response.<sup>56</sup>

This we shall return to in due course, but meanwhile, it is high time that we take a closer look at the two English-language volumes themselves. Just as the Czech poems in our selection display not inconsiderable variety of form, so too do the works by MacNeice and Auden represent differing modes and methods of poetic expression. MacNeice’s *Autumn Journal* is a single long poem split up into cantos rather like Nezval’s *Historický obraz*, whereas Auden’s *Another Time* is, in a similar vein to Halas’ *Ladění* and its disparate named sections, separated into three parts: “People and Places”, “Lighter Poems” and “Occasional Poems”. Given our previous deliberations on the issue of *poésie de circonstance*, the latter are of particular interest to the present study.

### Auden’s *Another Time*

Reading *Another Time*, we are stuck time and again by parallels with much of the Czech poetry we have examined so far – the use of dates in titles (*Spain, 1937, September 1, 1939*), the dedications to both the dead and the living (*Four Cabaret Songs for Miss Hedli Anderson, In Memory of Ernst Toller, In Memory of Sigmund Freud*). There are lines such as “The unmentionable odour of death / Offends the September night.”<sup>57</sup> in *September 1, 1939* that could have easily been lifted straight from Nezval’s *Malá Atlantida* or even Holan’s *Sen* in the way that they appeal to both the senses and to moral judgements at the same time. The poem itself from which these lines are taken also appears to have wormed its way into the English-speaking public consciousness in a similar way as Halas’ *Zpěv úzkosti* has into the Czech, coming to represent the general mood and unease at the outbreak of the Second World War, just as *Zpěv úzkosti* is often viewed as standing for all of the contemporary feelings of anger and betrayal at the Munich Agreement. Auden’s poem was even appropriated and much shared in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks,

56 *Blanton: Epic Negation*, 193 f.

57 *Auden*, Wystan H.: *Another Time: Poems*. London 1944, 112.

further demonstrating its longevity and malleability.<sup>58</sup> It has clearly become what Rigney describes as a *portable monument*, which in her words and as discussed in Chapter Three “can be carried over into new situations.”<sup>59</sup> One could, in fact, even argue that this situation is anticipated by Auden. After all, in *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*, his speaker remarks “The words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living.”

In *Epithalamion*, we not only find a dedication to a newly married couple on the occasion of their wedding as preface to the poem – “For Giuseppe Antonio Borgese and Elizabeth Mann (Nov. 23, 1939)” – but also a reference to a number of deceased cultural greats, who according to the speaker still watch over him and those on whose behalf he is speaking:

Mozart with ironic breath  
 Turning poverty to song,  
 Goethe innocent of sin  
 Placing every human wrong,  
 Blake the industrious visionary,  
 Tolstoi the great animal,  
 Hellas-loving Hoelderlin  
 Wagner who obeyed his gift  
 Organised his wish for death  
 Into a tremendous cry,  
 Looking down upon us, all  
     Wish us joy.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, this cross-section of figures is much more culturally and linguistically diverse than those generally invoked by our Czech poets, but nevertheless we are reminded of moments such as when Seifert's speaker in *Česká modlitba* asks of his lyric forebears that they stand by him and his fellow Czechs (“ty mrtvé, skryté v mlhách listopadu / ať dneska opět stojí blízko nás!”<sup>61</sup>) or Halas' speaker's in *Variace na Nerudovské téma* wondering what the nineteenth-century novelist would make of him and his peers (“Pane Nerudo

58 Cf. e.g. *Steinfels*, Peter: Beliefs; After Sept. 11, a 62-year-old poem by Auden drew new attention. Not all of it was favourable. In: *The New York Times*, 1.12.2001. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/01/us/beliefs-after-sept-11-62-year-old-poem-auden-drew-new-attention-not-all-it-was.html> (on 1.6.2022) or *Simon*, Scott: Thoughts On Sept. 11 From “September 1, 1939”, 10.11.2011. URL: <https://www.npr.org/2011/09/10/140359337/thoughts-on-nine-eleven-from-september-1-1939?t=1537543433627> (on 1.6.2022).

59 *Rigney*: Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans, 383.

60 *Auden*: *Another Time*, 124f.

61 *Seifert*: *Jaro, sbohem – Přilba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 210. Engl. “the dead, hidden in the mists of November, / today let them again stand by us!”

máte nás trošku rád”<sup>62</sup>). Interestingly though, Auden’s speaker appears to be certain of the support on offer from the likes of Goethe and Tolstoy – his is a statement of fact, rather than a question or a wish, whereas both Halas’ and Seifert’s speakers seek to reassure themselves.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, there is a strong sense of change having overcome the lands that Auden’s speaker surveys, an initially stark contrast now between past and present, that is tempered with the prospect of a more positive future:

Yesterday the belief in the absolute value of Greek;  
The fall of the curtain upon the death of a hero;  
    Yesterday the prayer to the sunset,  
And the adoration of madmen. But to-day the struggle.<sup>64</sup>

[...]

To-morrow for the young the poets exploding like bombs,  
The walks by the lake, the winter of perfect communion;  
    To-morrow the bicycle races  
Through the suburbs on summer evenings: but to-day the struggle.<sup>65</sup>

Most intriguing for us, however, are frequent allusions to past events that seem to be in some way connected to what is going on now and the fact that in *September 1, 1939* Auden’s speaker articulates common feelings of repetition, of having to go through something all over again<sup>66</sup>; specifically, another World War:

62 Halas: Časy, 209. Engl. “Mr. Neruda are you just a little bit fond of us”.

63 A similar conception of the poet as one who offers comfort and hope even in death can also be found in *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*, with the speaker imploring the recently deceased Irish writer: “Follow, poet, follow right / To the bottom of the night, / With your unconstraining voice / Still persuade us to rejoice”. In: *Auden: Another Time*, 109. It hardly need be pointed out that highly comparable sentiments can be found in contemporaneous Czech poetry, perhaps most obviously in Halas’ *Ladění*. Cf. e.g. *Za Jiřím Ortenem*: “mrtvý hlas / beze slov těší nás” (Engl. “the dead voice / comforts us wordlessly”).

64 *Auden: Another Time*, 103.

65 *Auden: Another Time*, 106.

66 It is perhaps worth noting that a certain sense of repetition is also implied in *Autumn Journal*, for example in the recollections of MacNeice’s speaker when it comes to war-torn Spain: “And I remember Spain / At Easter ripe as an egg for revolt and ruin / Though for a tripper the rain / Was worse than the surly or the worries or the haunted faces / With writings on the walls – / Hammer and sickle, Boicott, Viva, Muerra” His choice of imagery in relation to the mood in the country has a notably Irish bent. “At Easter ripe as an egg for revolt and ruin”, we read, and immediately think of the Easter Rising, of the Irish rebels’ failure to secure independence in April 1916, of their military inferiority compared to British Army, not to mention the calamitous number of civilian casualties, and draw inevitable parallels with the struggle between Communist and Fascist forces in Spain,

The enlightenment driven away,  
 The habit forming pain,  
 Mismanagement and grief:  
 We must suffer them all again.<sup>67</sup>

This is, of course, reminiscent of one of the main tenets of the prominent Czech national narrative of recurring hardship and ignominy, but survival nevertheless, as discussed in the Introduction. Here, Blanton's assessment of the situation in *Another Time* can be easily transferred over to much of our Czech corpus of poetry:

In the conflation of the earlier war with this one, however, and the recognition that the present arises from the past by deferral, Auden also postulates a different logical relation: past and present are in effect suffered together, as aspects of the same event.<sup>68</sup>

We are immediately reminded of works such as Seifert's "*Písně otroka*" and the implication that the events of the late 1930s are effectively just a continuation or reassertion of the restrictive Habsburg rule of the nineteenth century. In this realignment of the relationship between past and present, there also seem to be important ramifications for *poésie de circonstance* as a whole that we would do well to note:

The obvious excuse for an occasional poem lies always in the presumption that something distinguishes one event from another, that moments are different. [...] On this axis, however, even September 1 turns out to refer to a moment in January 1919, as does a wedding day almost three months later. [...] The simple point, of course, is that there is *nothing singular at all* about any of Auden's dates, that each is almost fully substitutable for any other at the level of logical implication, each confirming exactly the same overarching relation by a slightly different set of causal and allusive links.<sup>69</sup>

all of the innocent people caught up in the cross-fire. The slogan "Boicott", before the imperatives "Live" and "Die" (the latter misspelled in the original Spanish) also has an Irish connection, derived as it is from the controversy surrounding the treatment (and behaviour) of English land agent Charles Boycott in nineteenth-century County Mayo.

67 Auden: *Another Time*, 113.

68 Blanton: *Epic Negation*, 217.

69 Ibid., 227. Cf. also Blanton's comments about MacNeice's use of references and allusions to W. B. Yeats in a later book of war-time poetry. In: *ibid.*, 249: "What MacNeice does not quite explain, however is the persistent association that calls Yeats forward each time September 1st is recalled. In the strictest sense, no figure could have less to do with the invasion of Poland than one who had died months earlier." Roughly the same question could, of course, also be asked of a figure such as F. X. Šalda, and yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, there he is – afforded a highly prominent place in Hora's *Rekviem*, not to mention the dedication to and what is described as a panachida for him in the earlier work *Domov*.

Unwittingly, Blanton homes in here on one of the central tensions in relation to the poetic depiction of the Munich Agreement as an event in Derrida's sense of the word that we established in Chapter One: either what took place in the Bavarian capital was indeed wholly unprecedented and impossible to anticipate or it was merely part of a larger chain of calamities across the ages, but it cannot be both. It is hugely interesting to note that the Czechs were not the only ones struggling to come to terms with this issue at the time and to wrest it into a poetic form. However, since Auden does not make much direct reference to events in Central Europe over the course of *Another Time*, we shall now turn our attention to *Autumn Journal* instead.

### MacNeice's *Autumn Journal*

For our purposes, it is naturally of particular interest to see how exactly the situation in contemporary Czechoslovakia is presented within MacNeice's poem. Upon closer inspection, there prove to be four main allusions to the Sudeten Crisis and its resolution. The first mention of the Sudeten Crisis is overloaded with information:

But did you see  
 the latest? You mean whether Cobb has bust the record  
 Or do you mean the Australians have lost their last by ten  
 Wickets or do you mean that the autumn fashions –  
*No, we don't mean anything like that again.*  
 No, what we mean is Hodza, Henlein, Hitler,  
 The Magniot Line,  
 The heavy panic that cramps the lungs and presses  
 The collar down the spine.  
 And when we go out into Piccadilly Circus  
 They are selling and buying the late special editions  
 Beneath electric signs as crude as Fate.<sup>70</sup>

The news is unfiltered here; everything – from an ill-fated attempt to set a new land speed record and the most recent cricket score, to the threat of war – seems, at least to a certain extent, to be of equal importance, just as worthy of being remarked upon, being discussed out loud and in public. The juxtapositions that see the delightful mundanity and eccentricities of civilian British life contrasted with the increasingly *military* dangers emanating from Central Europe are disarming.

70 *MacNeice: Autumn Journal*, 22–23.

Though conversational – an imaginary dialogue of sorts, based, it feels likely, on typical scraps of speech – the passage is, at its heart, really rather unsettled and unsettling. There are competing voices and at least two subjects, possibly even three or four, depending on how one reads the lines: the “you” asking the opening question, the “you” that responds, that is unsure what is being referred to, the italicised “we” that appears to take the place of that first “you”, sweeping aside the more banal items of news, and then another “we”, which may or may not be the same as the previous one and which finally explains what or rather whom the speaker had in mind “No, what we mean is Hodza, Henlein, Hitler”, that is the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, one of the leading Sudeten German politicians and the Führer himself. Alliteration may provide a poetic reason to clump these three figures together (and explain the exclusion of someone like Beneš or Jan Masaryk), but of course just a rudimentary knowledge of the geopolitical struggles of the late 1930s makes the connection far more compelling and concerning. Their names clearly foreign to the English-speaking world – in Hodža’s case even misspelled, lacking its diacritic – and yet so horribly familiar. These men need no introduction, their surnames suffice. They function as a kind of short-hand for all of the tensions in the region at the time, while also emphasising the human or individual aspect, the fact that the decisions that shape a collective future are not exactly made abstractly, but by real men, who live and breathe the same air that we do. Although Blanton appears to suggest that this section of the poem is indicative of the way in which radio seeps into the public conscience<sup>71</sup>, it is worth noting that the lines themselves focus on the visual rather the aural (“But did you see / the latest?”, emphasis added) and make explicit reference to the sale of newspapers, another great source of information at the time.

In the second reference, matters are kept notably vague, with nouns swirling around and bandied about like newspaper headlines:

Conferences, adjournments, ultimatums,  
 Flights in the air, castles in the air,  
 The autopsy of treaties, dynamite under the bridges,  
 The end of *laissez-faire*.<sup>72</sup>

MacNeice creates a sense of being bombarded with information, fast-paced developments with which one cannot keep up, but the second line, with its reference to “castles in the air”, that is to visionary projects that will never see the light of day, also adds a degree of levity, playfulness even on the part of the speaker, or at least a refusal to ignore the absurdity of what is going on. This gives a strong indication of the perceived untenability of the situation at the

71 Cf. *Blanton*: Epic Negation, 273.

72 *MacNeice*: *Autumn Journal*, 30.

time. The macaronic rhyme “air / *laissez-faire*” would not look out of place in Seifert’s writing<sup>73</sup> and MacNeice also plays with ideas of high and low, using notions of space and position to connote both literal and figurative high- and low-points in international politics and diplomacy, just as we have seen Holan and Halas do in *Odpověď Francii* and *Zpěv úzkosti* respectively.

The third mention of the Sudeten Crisis does feature a radio, cast here in saviour-like terms, and situates the attempts to solve the crisis within a larger political and also, perhaps more importantly, social context, providing something of an indication as to the moral quandaries involved, the implications of giving in to Nazi demands:

And we who have been brought up to think of ‘Gallant Belgium’  
 As so much blague  
 Are now preparing to essay good through evil  
 For the sake of Prague;  
 And must, we suppose, become uncritical, vindictive,  
 And must, in order to beat  
 The enemy, model ourselves upon the enemy,  
 A howling radio for our paraclete.<sup>74</sup>

The half-rhyme “blague” / “Prague” may sound almost comical; however, the tone of the passage is anything but. The stakes are shown to be immensely high; there are grave imperatives at work, as suggested by the anaphoric repetition of the modal auxiliary “must”, and a kind of dance with the devil is underway. A change in attitude is implied to have taken place, but it is not certain what state the conscience of the collective upon whose behalf the speaker is speaking will be left in. Certainly, the use of the adjectives “uncritical” and “vindictive” does not cast those to whom they are to refer in a positive light. Although not broached directly, one question looms large – whether the end truly justifies the means – and judging by the talk of ultimately behaving no better than the enemy, one suspects that that is not perceived to be the case. What is more, since it is unclear whether the “we” of this section refers solely to Britain as a sovereign state and political actor on the world stage, or also to the British public, the speaker’s fellow citizens, there is a sense of being tarred with the same brush, of ending up guilty by association. There is more than a hint of resignation in the parenthetical “we suppose” of the passage’s fifth line, an acknowledgment of the need to submit to a necessary evil, but no enthusiasm, no pleasure to be taken in it. It is a deeply ambivalent picture of support for government policy that emerges here, great platitudes about implied sacrifice

73 Cf. e.g. the rhyme “v zadumání / SS-mani” (Engl. “lost in thought / SS men”) in his poem *Praha v máji*. In: Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Příklad hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 228.

74 MacNeice: Autumn Journal, 32.

("for the sake of Prague") and abstract concepts such as good and evil are undermined in an instant by the speaker's careful diction.

In the final reference to the Sudeten Crisis, the Munich Agreement is already a done deal, a *fait accompli*, and MacNeice's speaker, and those upon whose behalf he seeks to speak, must come to terms with what has happened:

But once again  
 The crisis is put off and things look better  
 And we feel negotiation is not in vain –  
 Save my skin and damn my conscience.  
 And negotiation wins,  
 If you can call it winning,  
 And here we are – just as before – safe in our skins;  
 Glory to God for Munich.  
 And stocks go up and wrecks  
 Are salvaged and politicians' reputations  
 Go up like Jack-on-the-Beanstalks; only the Czechs  
 Go down and without fighting.<sup>75</sup>

As before, ambivalence is the order of the day. On the one hand, the immediate prospect of war appears to have been removed; on the other, this has come not only at the cost of another nation, but also brings the integrity of the parties involved into question, and thus could be seen as sullyng the good name of the British people as a whole. It is worth noting that the speaker switches between the first person singular and plural within the passage, since this seems to be indicative of the way in which individual considerations and unilateral decision-making ("Save my skin and damn my conscience.") can affect a whole collective for both better and worse ("And here we are – just as before – safe in our skins").

The major issues associated with the Munich Agreement – negotiation, conscience, politicians and reputations – all share the same sound, the voiceless fricative /ʃ/ and are thus bound together even more firmly. Their phonetic connection raises the very real possibility of their having mutually influenced one another and above all the outcome of the meeting between the Four Powers. They are also the only words with three syllables in the entire passage, and thus stand out all the more in the sea of rather curt, pointed and predominantly monosyllabic sounds.

Through the use of polysyndeton, the repetition of the conjunction "and", MacNeice creates the impression of a chain of interconnected events, set in domino-like motion – a flood that cannot be stopped, perhaps. Everything seems to be in flux, and yet, at the same time, there is also a sense of having

75 *MacNeice: Autumn Journal*, 36.

been in this situation before. “Once again”, we are told, “the crisis is put off”. There is something almost cyclical about what is going on, strangely balanced, in fact. Once more, the speaker plays with notions of high and low, the ascendancy of one side inevitably accompanied by the fall of another, just as the Wheel of Fortune both elevates and humbles. However, that is not to say that he is indifferent to such twists of fates; that all he is capable of is reacting with Baroque constancy to an uncertain world. There is irony and possibly even sarcasm to be found here too and the reference to the fairy-tale *Jack and the Beanstalk* renders the image of reputational advancement wonderfully risible. Moreover, though at first glance the final line and a half may read a little like rubbing salt into the wounds of an innocent and hard-done-by people (“only the Czechs / Go down and without fighting.”), it is, all things considered, a fair point, and one which we know preoccupied many Czechs at the time, and indeed continues to do so to this day – the nagging and niggling doubts about the efficacy of the course of action chosen by the Czechoslovak government, the idea that perhaps they should have fought after all, even if it would have meant certain defeat, annihilation even.

In his analysis of MacNeice’s poem, Blanton makes an important and interesting point in relation to the Munich Agreement and its differing symbolic status, once again bringing us back to the category of the event which so dominated our deliberations in Chapter One:

For the western democracies, Munich signified something that had not happened, an event averted. But for Czechoslovakia, the purgatorial days of early October measured a stranger interregnum, awaiting the accomplished disappearance of the Sudeten region. In effect, October enshrined a separation in the experience of contemporary history. The war so narrowly missed in the West was stipulated as established fact elsewhere, not so much avoided as telescoped – treated not as though it need not happen, but as though it already had. If Munich rendered actual invasion unnecessary, it did so only by leaping onto the last page and assuming the inevitable in advance, side-stepping not war itself, but only its temporary tactical messiness of casualties, surrenders, occupations. Acknowledging that war had become inevitable, it chose to minimize battle instead. Logically too, then, Munich marked an alienation of causes from effects. By codifying the war’s outcome apart from the event, the conference pragmatically divided historical ends from means, inverting the causal sequence between conquest and the redrawing of maps. The fall of 1938 thus unfolds in a paradox: the war has not yet begun, and yet it has already ended.<sup>76</sup>

What Blanton understandably – as a scholar of English, rather than Czech literature – does not do, is to apply this insight to the poetry that emerged in the aftermath of the Agreement in the country most affected by its terms. Here we

<sup>76</sup> Blanton: *Epic Negation*, 277.

can readily pick up where he leaves off and point out that the peculiar temporal logic he describes – the sense of looking back upon something as if it were already long over – is a matter that is indeed, as we have discussed, afforded a prominent place in a number of poems from this period. Moreover, the idea of a predetermined outcome fits into a broader understanding of Czech history as a constant loop of defeat and ignominy from which the nation nevertheless always manages to recover. Equally, his reference to redrawing national borders immediately brings to mind Seifert's *Nad mapou*. There too, there is a certain inexplicability of the fact. An effect, but no outwardly stated cause.

Leaving the Munich Agreement to one side, it is also worth noting that a sense of national belonging is another aspect that plays a not insignificant part in *Autumn Journal*. The treatment of the topic may not be as overtly patriotic as in the works of our Czech authors, but once again there are similarities and overlapping implications, particularly when this notion is combined with concepts of time and the passage thereof. In MacNeice's poem, just as in Seifert's 30. IX. 1938 ("a vody věčný šum a vody věčný spád, / ten věčný proud, jenž nikdy neuplyne"<sup>77</sup>) or any number of the other works in our main selection, a strong emphasis is placed upon the cyclical:

[...] It is October,  
The year-god is dying on the destined pyre  
With all the colours of a scrambled sunset  
And the funeral elegance of fire  
In the grey world to lie cocooned but shaping  
His gradual return;  
No one can stop the cycle;  
The grate is full of ash but fire will always burn.<sup>78</sup>

In *Autumn Journal*, it is not only flames that are eternal, but also life itself, with space constantly being made for descendants, those who will carry on the line:

Sleep, my body, sleep, my ghost,  
Sleep, my parents and grand-parents,  
And all those I have loved most:  
One man's coffin is another's cradle.<sup>79</sup>

Reading this, we cannot help but think of the famous lines from the opening of Jan Kollár's *Slavy dcera* (Engl. "Daughter of glory") "někdy kolébka, nyní

77 Seifert: *Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948)*, 205. Engl. "and the ceaseless murmur of the water and the ceaseless fall of the water / and the ceaseless current, which never slips away".

78 MacNeice: *Autumn Journal*, 46.

79 *Ibid.*, 93.

národu mého rakev”<sup>80</sup>, which have become something of a recurring theme within Czech literature. Though here the connection to the speaker’s native land may not be immediately obvious, when viewed in conjunction with the following lines it becomes more apparent, with time being afforded a kind of nationhood, its own borders and geography:

Sleep, my fathers, in your graves  
 On upland bogland under heather  
 What the wind scatters the wind saves,  
 A sapling springs in a new country.  
 Time is a country, the present moment  
 A spotlight roving round the scene;  
 We need not chase the spotlight,  
 The future is the bride of what has been.<sup>81</sup>

In the case of MacNeice’s lyric persona, the matter of national belonging is naturally complicated somewhat by the fact that the poet himself was of Irish stock, but spent his adult life living and working in Great Britain. His Irish connection, however, provides a parallel to the Czechs in the sense that both countries are small nations, with a history of being overshadowed and exploited or oppressed by their larger neighbours. This is a point specifically made by the speaker:

Why do we like to be Irish? Partly because  
 It gives us a hold on the sentimental English  
 As members of a world that never was,  
 Baptised with fairy water;  
 And partly because Ireland is small enough  
 To be still thought of with a family feeling<sup>82</sup>

This somewhat familial understanding of the nation, a sense of brother- and sisterhood that is more than mere rhetoric, is of course something that we have previously come across over the course of this study. One is instantly reminded of the final lines of Hora’s *Zpěv rodné zemi*, with their talk of all Czechs, whether dead, living or as yet unconceived, being part of one single generation:

A tak jdem  
 mrtví, živí, nezrození,  
 nekonečné pokolení.<sup>83</sup>

80 Kollár, Jan: *Slávy dcera*. Praha 1971, 9, Engl. “once the cradle, now the coffin of my nation”.

81 MacNeice: *Autumn Journal*, 93.

82 *Ibid.*, 63.

83 Hora: *Kniha domova*, 58. Engl. “An so we go, / the dead, the living, the unborn, / an endless generation.”

However, rather than depicting his native land unthinkingly as a female figure, the speaker in MacNeice's poem problematises the perceived femininity of one's homeland, questioning the logic behind this reasoning, in a way that the Czech authors in our study do not:

[...] Why  
Must a country, like a ship or car, be always female,  
Mother or sweetheart?<sup>84</sup>

Seifert take note, one feels almost compelled to add. An abstract concept that MacNeice is prepared to feminise though, is the future:

I cannot drug my life with the present moment;  
The present moment may rape – but all in vain –  
The future, for the future remains a virgin  
Who must be tried again.<sup>85</sup>

This particular conception of what is to come has an innocence about it, a certain degree of hopefulness, or at least a lack of blemishes. It is untouched, untainted by the present and there is confidence on the part of the lyric persona (or is it merely naïveté, the starry-eyed expectations of a young couple, tapping into the traditional dream of a virginal bride on her wedding day?) that it will always remain thus, just as Seifert's and Halas' speakers in particular demonstrate a belief that there will be a future, an opportunity to look back upon the present day once it has faded into the past, in spite of contemporary threats.

Like a number of those of our Czech poets, MacNeice's speaker also thematises the issue of nostalgia, a longing perhaps to return to more innocent times, to the peace and security that he and his fellow citizens enjoyed as children, the simple pleasures of the past:

And as if through coloured glasses  
We remember our childhood thrill  
Waking in morning to the rustling of paper  
The eiderdown heaped in a hill<sup>86</sup>

His account is not uncritical though. The reference to remembering "as if through coloured glasses" must surely be a nod to the idea of rose-tinted spectacles and thus an acknowledgement of romanticising what has gone before. Indeed the speaker's general attitude towards memory is not quite as positive or as eager as much of what we can observe amongst our main authors.

84 *MacNeice: Autumn Journal*, 62.

85 *Ibid.*, 69.

86 *Ibid.*, 79.

“A faggot of useless memories”<sup>87</sup> he declares disdainfully, at one point, somewhat at odds with the lionisation of recollections that we can find in poems such as Seifert’s *Česká modlitba* – the suggestion that they are the only source of comfort available (“těšivali se jenom při vzpomínce”<sup>88</sup>).

Furthermore, just as there are certain banal similarities between works such as *Autumn Journal* or *Another Time* and the Czech lyric output of the time, there are also some fairly superficial, but not uninteresting differences as far as the motifs employed are concerned. While Auden’s deceased cultural greats are, as we have already discussed, depicted as being perhaps more immediately reliable than their Czech counterparts, with no uncertainty surrounding their support or need to request it of them, there is at least one aspect of British cultural life that is not as forthcoming in MacNeice’s poetic world, however – namely architecture and monuments, all that is constructed by human hands to survive the test of time:

To-day they were building in Oxford Street, the mortar,  
Pleasant to smell,  
But now it seems futility, imbecility,  
To be building shops when nobody can tell  
What will happen next. What will happen  
We ask and waste the question in the air;  
Nelson is stone and Johnnie Walker moves  
His legs like a cretin over Trafalgar Sqaure.<sup>89</sup>

There is a strong sense of fragility, of transience, and unlike the memorial to St. Wenceslas in Prague or the grave of Karel Havlíček Borovský as referred to in Halas’ *Praze* and Seifert’s *U jednoho hrobu na Olšanech*, respectively, there is no surfeit of meaning, no particular indication that we might be dealing with any significant *lieux de mémoire*. Admiral Lord Nelson is cut down to size, his statue viewed only in terms of the material from which it was created. He offers no succour, no useful assistance. The speaker is concerned solely with the present here, not with the past, with cultural symbolism or memorial politics, and certainly not with the future, since that does not bear thinking of, such is the perceived current danger. This, in turn, helps us to recognise how prominent a position the past and in particular collective history, is afforded within the Czech poetry of this period.

87 *Ibid.*, 65.

88 Seifert: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948), 210. Engl. “[we] only took pleasure in remembering”.

89 MacNeice: *Autumn Journal*, 23.

## War on the Wireless

An even more major difference between *Autumn Journal* and the works of our poets is the emphasis placed in the former upon the wireless, its importance in promulgating news from abroad or at least from places that are out of general view. As Blanton puts it “In a mundane sense, war happens, for MacNeice, on the radio. It is heard and overheard, reported and repeated, while remaining stubbornly invisible.”<sup>90</sup> Blanton’s account of the influence of radio broadcasts in MacNeice’s poem in fact presents them as being so powerful and pervasive as to assume a role similar to that ascribed to the daily newspaper in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*<sup>91</sup>:

Radio’s unique capacity to render the simultaneity of happenings over space, to link places where events occur with those places in which they are not occurring, comes to mark such a persistent disparity as a deep structure in MacNeice’s work. Without radio, in one sense, the problem would not exist: a history happening elsewhere would simply not happen in perception at all.<sup>92</sup>

Although Czech-language programming from the BBC in particular came to play an important part in mustering support for the Czech government-in-exile and keeping alive hopes of resistance and rebellion, the casting off of shackles, and transcripts of Beneš’ and Jan Masaryk’s broadcast speeches were frequently published in the exile newspaper *Čechoslovák v Anglii*, or just *Čechoslovák*, as it later became known<sup>93</sup>, radio is strangely absent from our works from this period.<sup>94</sup> There is, as discussed in Chapter Two, a brief mention of an associated modern technology in Holan’s *Sen* (“Proč žádná telefonistka / nás nespojí s tím přes-naproti?”<sup>95</sup>), but this reference to telecommunications serves more to create a feeling of isolation and abandonment, rather than the

90 *Blanton*: Epic Negation, 243.

91 Cf. *Anderson*, Benedict: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London 1983, 34 f.

92 *Blanton*: Epic Negation, 270.

93 Cf. e.g. the articles Dr. Beneš v rozhlase. In: *Čechoslovák v Anglii*, 8.12.1939, 3, or Jan Masaryk: “Musíme přispět ze všech sil!” In: *Čechoslovák v Anglii*, 23.1.1940, 5.

94 David Vaughan inadvertently highlights this lack by prefacing one of the chapters of his study of the way that European broadcasters responded to the events of 1938 with a quote from Nezval’s 1928 poem *Edison*. Cf. *Vaughan*, David: *Battle for the Airwaves: Radio and the 1938 Munich Crises*. Praha 2008, 19. There clearly *was* a time when this technical innovation played a part in our poets’ work – we all, of course, also recall Seifert’s *Na vlnách TSF* – but that time is over. There is no contemporaneous poem by Nezval that Vaughan could have used to introduce the chapter – only one from the 1920s will do.

95 *Holan*: *Dokumenty*, 96. Engl. “Why won’t a single telephonist / connect us with that opposite number over there?”

kind of shared experience and sense of an invisible collective evoked according to Blanton by MacNeice's use of references to the radio.

As Erica Harrison has observed, it is also important to take into account the status afforded to radio at the time:

While many recent theories on the nature of radio listening portray it as a background medium, generally listened to by an audience that is simultaneously engaged in another activity, the difficult conditions faced by those living under occupation demanded greater commitment to listening and brought the radio out of the background of daily life.<sup>96</sup>

Building on this, we could, in the case of the poetry composed during the war years, propose a fairly pragmatic reason for the lack of references to the radio: given the dangers associated with being caught listening to “enemy broadcasts”, such as those produced by the BBC Czech service, it stands to reason that it would have been equally perilous to allude to such things in poetry. In the months leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War, though, this would not necessarily have been the case and we must therefore perhaps look elsewhere for an explanation, at least for those poems that were published earlier. Tentatively, we might wonder if this omission is connected to the relative transience of radio content compared to its written counterpart. Broadcasts sent across the airwaves may cause ripples when they, as it were, make landfall, but equally, they swiftly dissipate, leaving no trace. Just like real waves they are constantly being overtaken, replaced; there is always a rush to fill the gap, whereas the written word moves at a more leisurely pace. It has time to ferment, to fester, to grow stronger. Its longevity is easier to guarantee. Halas' *Deset ran egyptských* is a case in point with its allusions to the way in which contemporary outrages are magnified by being written about (“Obludné žáby slov z úst novin vylézají”<sup>97</sup> or “štěnice zrady smrdí z listů knih”<sup>98</sup>), but even more compelling evidence can be found in Seifert's poetry from this period. As works such as *Stará knížka* or *Až budeš o nás číst* demonstrate, the written word also affords a certain security, a way of communicating with future generations, ensuring that not everything fades quietly into the increasingly distant past, forgotten and underexplored. Although radio transmissions can be and are often recorded for posterity, in this form they lose the universal accessibility afforded to them through the act of broadcasting that is apparently so important to MacNeice. Radio remains for the most part firmly anchored in the present, whereas books – whether of poetry or history – are subject to

96 Cf. Harrison: Broadcasting by the Czechoslovak exile government in London, 1939–1945, 465.

97 Halas, *Časy*, 94. Engl. “monstrous frogs made of words crawl out from the mouths of the newspapers”.

98 Ibid. Engl. “the pages of books reek of the bedbugs of betrayal”.

a rather different time frame. While enjoyed in the present, they are products of the past, composed for a reader who will, in fact, experience them in the future – at least as far as the author is concerned.

From this “imagined community” of readers and listeners, it is not much of a leap to the issue of the *lyrisches Wir* and again, in both *Another Time* and *Autumn Journal*, we find a rather different set-up to that of the Czech poetry we have been examining in this study. We may read a line such as “You were silly like us: your gift survived it all”<sup>99</sup> in Auden’s *In Memory of W. B. Yeats* and be reminded of the way that Halas’ speaker addresses Jiří Mahen in *Smrt Jiřího Mahena* or how Hora’s speaker approaches F. X. Šalda in *Rekviem*, but it is even less clear here than in those examples upon whose behalf the speaker is articulating his sentiments. The collective implied by such a form of address is evidently not as clearly defined or delineated as the three possible subjects of the *lyrisches Wir* identified in Chapter Four: the speaker and his beloved, a figure that may, at times, be one and the same with his homeland; the speaker and his fellow Czechs; or the speaker and other (more often than not Czech) poets. Indeed, Blanton has gone as far as to remark that “Unable to align public with private or to assume their mutual reflection, Auden is left with that ambiguous laureate’s ‘we’, no longer grounded in nation or class”<sup>100</sup>, while in MacNeice’s poem he sees radio as the root cause of the rather nebulous *lyrisches Wir* on display:

While the poet himself loses the ability to direct his own senses, he is simultaneously enfolded into the anonymity of the serial *we*, grafted onto a new collective and technologically mediated sensorium. In one respect, this effect is perversely democratic, closing the separation between poet and crowd. But that equality is purchased only at the cost of the poem’s literal authority, the conceit of authorship that secures its claim as a poem in the first place.<sup>101</sup>

This is not the case in any of our Czech poetry. Speaking on behalf of more than just themselves, in fact, as we have discussed, *adds* rhetorical clout to the respective speakers’ words, rather than taking away their authority, and helps to galvanise a sense of shared fate and responsibility along ethnic and linguistic lines. There is a very clear grounding in the Czech nation and, more often than not, the speakers find themselves drawn towards the lower classes, speaking out in particular on behalf of the poor, the weak, those unable to do so themselves. It is a fairly secure position from which the speakers tend to hold forth, one which allows for strong distinctions between notions of “us” and “them” to be drawn up.

99 Auden: *Another Time*, 108.

100 Blanton: *Epic Negation*, 191.

101 *Ibid.*, 274.

## The Case of the Missing *Věrnost*

Given the importance of the *lyrisches Wir* to the construction of *věrnost* that was established over the course of our discussion about the interplay between rhetoric and authenticity, it comes as perhaps no surprise to note that in *Another Time* and *Autumn Journal*, the issue – though surely just as relevant in Britain in the late 1930s as it was in the Czech lands – is not afforded a prominent position. *Věrnost* is not a term that crops up in any of its English equivalents such as loyalty, faith or fidelity in either Auden's or MacNeice's work, nor is the concept built into the very poems themselves in the way that we described in Chapter Four. Indeed, in the case of Auden's speaker, it may even be contended that his outlook borders on the *malověrný* at times.<sup>102</sup> Referring to the line "To-morrow, perhaps, the future", Blanton, has, for example, identified a "tension between past and present" in *Another Time* that refuses to go away and has serious ramifications for the matter of *věrnost* since it implies a lack of confidence and steadfastness:

The familiarity of that seemingly hopeful avowal has perhaps obscured its grammatical strangeness, naturalizing the intrusion of a "perhaps" between two terms that should remain synonymous. Auden's futural epode not only disclaims any utopian ambition; it threatens to revoke the future itself, ultimately reposing both the past's certainty and the present's struggle on a weak, even pessimistic, invocation of a day that might not arrive after all.<sup>103</sup>

Such an approach is at odds with that of our Czech poets, who are reliant upon both easy comings and goings between the past and the present<sup>104</sup> and an expectation that there will be a future to ensure that some spark of hope remains alive throughout their works and that they have objects towards whom their speakers can direct *věrnost*.

102 Following Blanton, we might even go as far as to suggest that there is scope for Auden's speaker to be construed on occasion as *nevěrný* as well, as having abandoned certain principles that we would expect him to hold. Cf. *ibid.*, 231 f.: "Each of the occasional poems, after all, testifies to an event that originated elsewhere, conscripting experience, systematically usurping the agency and even the consciousness of the poet. Auden's difficulty, then, lies in the fact that if he is right, he must be wrong: the underlying account of a structure of totalitarian experience leaves no possibility that the poem might do anything but mouth the language it would prefer to oppose." This predicament is strongly reminiscent of the one that we found ourselves faced with in Chapters One and Two when discussing Nezval's *Šváby*.

103 *Ibid.*, 197.

104 Cf. e.g. the symbolic help and comfort provided by historical figures such as St. Wenceslas, Božena Němcová or Jan Neruda, not to mention the physical return of Jaroslav Vrchlický described in *Světlem oděná*, his feet once again pounding the cobbles of Prague.

MacNeice's speaker certainly appears to have a rather less problematic relationship with the future than Auden's, but it remains to be seen whether this is translated into an expression of *věrnost* comparable with that of the Czech works in our study. The Anglo-Irish poet may have described his *Autumn Journal* as, amongst other things, "a confession of faith"<sup>105</sup>, but the textual evidence for this is not hugely forthcoming – beyond a biographical interpretation that views the poem as proof of everything that the empirical writer held to be true, that is. At best, and in an attempt to avoid the pitfalls and limitations of such a reading, we can perhaps argue that MacNeice's speaker demonstrates an abiding faith that there will be a future, an ultimately positive outcome to the current common predicament.<sup>106</sup> In the final lines, he shakes off any lingering uncertainty ("But you, my coward doubts, may go on sleeping; / You need not wake, not any more"<sup>107</sup>) and invokes Julius Caesar's famous quote about passing the point of no return:

To-night we sleep on the banks of Rubicon – the die is cast;  
There will be time to audit  
The accounts later, there will be sunlight later  
And the equation will come out at last.<sup>108</sup>

However, this does not automatically make him a *věrný* speaker in the manner of the Czech lyric subjects we have examined. It is *víra* after all that it is in play here, not *věrnost*. And it may be on display, but it is not constructed *per se* by the text itself. If we look for signs of this speaker's *věrnost*, we may well be disappointed. After all, just a few lines prior to those quoted above, we are treated to the following rather pessimistic, if pragmatic imperative: "If you have honour to spare, employ it on the living; / The dead are dead as 1938"<sup>109</sup>. This is not a conclusion to which any of our Czech poets seem to come. They continue to rely upon the dead, just as much as they do upon the living. They remain faithful to their forebears; seek to learn from them, to continue their work. In the end, MacNeice's speaker chooses to look only to the future ("Sleep, the past, and wake, the future"<sup>110</sup>), whereas our Czech poets, while they may

105 *MacNeice*, Louis, quoted in: *ibid.*, 252.

106 This is a rather more generous assessment than the one offered by Blanton. Cf. *ibid.*, 274: "Unable to impose any regular reference on 'we' or any reliable identity between 'who' and 'whom', the poem ends in a fit of seeming incoherence, attempting to establish an affirmation on the basis of systematic negation and to construct a system of logical necessity from an act of desperately unpersuasive belief." Although he does not specifically mention faith, it is interesting to note that he too appears to note the link between of a well-defined *lyrisches Wir* and an effective (convincing) display of personal convictions.

107 *MacNeice*: *Autumn Journal*, 96.

108 *Ibid.*

109 *Ibid.*

110 *Ibid.*

dream of a better future, do so facing backwards, always with an eye to past. Even their visions of the future, are, as we have noted, often subject to an unusual temporal logic, one which looks forward to a time when the present too can be looked back upon, having been consigned to history. All of this is very much bound up with the issue of *věrnost* and therein lies perhaps the most unique characteristic of the Czech poetry in our selection, the one thing that truly separates the works from other examples of late modern literature. Indeed it is, we would in fact venture to argue, coming back to the question posed by Blanton in relation to Auden, potentially even the “formal solution” put forward by our authors to combat the historical changes around them.

## Conclusion

Throughout this study, we have attempted to get to grips with an array of works that have not always been treated altogether kindly by those investigating them. Overlooked by some, mentioned merely in passing by others with only a short explanation – glossed over just as Seifert’s subtitle could be seen as indicating was being done to the historic events included in *Zhasněte světla*. For generations of Czech school children, poems such as Halas’ *Zpěv úzkosti* are simply part of the furniture of their national literature, to be memorised and held up in exams as shining examples of cultural resistance in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement, whereas for historians like Tesař, they are a sign and symbol of moral failure and the inadequacy of the response to what happened in the Führerbau at the end of September 1938. It is a rather heavy burden to bear and not necessarily conducive to nuanced scholarship.

In an effort to get away from excessively emotional, potentially even jingoistic assessments that seem to glorify and denigrate in almost equal measure, we have taken our cues from a number of different academics – theoreticians as varied as Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Pierre Nora and Wolfgang Iser – and each has helped us up to a point. There is no single analytical framework that allows us to appreciate fully the mechanics of every poem, but we have obtained new insights, alternative ways of looking at things. We have focussed in particular on works that reflect what was going on in the Czech lands in some way or other, and although this tendency may have receded as time went on, even in the poems that have moved beyond current affairs, that are not simply *poésie de circonstance*, certain continuities and commonalities remain. The immediately distinguishable references to contemporary events appear to have somewhat thinned out or disappeared completely by the time we get to works like Holan’s *Ladění*, Hora’s *Revkiem* or Seifert’s *Světlem oděná*, yet we still find recourse to figures from Czech mythology and the more recent past, frequent use of motifs such as darkness, the changing of the seasons, love for the land, myriad circumstances beyond our control. And of course in the context of life after Munich and knowing what we do, this all assumes additional significance, cannot be examined wholly in a vacuum, set apart from what preceded it.

If we come back to some of questions first raised in the Introduction, we now recognise that when not alluding to dramatic twists of fate and outside events by way of reference to metaphors of natural disaster, many of the scenes from contemporary life depicted by our authors are decidedly mundane and

commonplace. We have regularly encountered their speakers out and about, wandering around, taking a trip down memory lane – whether almost literally, by visiting a once familiar place, or more figuratively in the sense of recalling a book or quote that they have not given much thought to for some time. There may be an undercurrent of violence and change, something out of the ordinary, but a sense and perhaps need for the everyday still dominates. We know that our authors did not pay much attention to those who suffered most grievously as a result of the Munich Agreement; however we would not necessarily be so quick to condemn them for that as others have done. Certain omissions or oversights may, for example, be determined by poetic constraints, the dictum *less is more*, or a desire to be seen to be speaking on behalf of as many others as conceivably possible. As far as our bare narratives in the vein of E. M. Forster are concerned, the second (“Munich happened and then we all went into mourning”) seems to have been borne out by the results of our study, but the first (“Munich happened and everything changed”) is only partially true. It is perhaps a valid account in relation to the immediate present as depicted by our authors, but the moment we take a longer view and consider the idea of history as a chain of ignominy from which the Czech nation never fails to recover, then cracks begin to appear, just as they did when we examined more closely the issue of nostalgia in the poetry of this period.

Though it is no longer the most pressing or interesting consideration by any means – if indeed it ever was – we can still ask ourselves whether, on the basis of their poetry, the poets in question can be viewed as having remained faithful in the way that their signing of the manifesto *Věrní zůstaneme* implied that they intended to. We would not, for the most part, even find it difficult to say that they probably did. Of course, there are certain caveats to such an assessment. We note, for example, that this apparent devotion of theirs is not exactly directed towards the First Republic and the principles upon which it was built, but rather towards a more mythological and ethnolinguistic understanding of what it means to be a Czech. There may be some consternation expressed in their poetry about the loss of territorial integrity, a vague sense of the importance of freedom and social justice, but democracy, as has been discussed, is nowhere to be seen. We also recognise that it is possible to appear faithful, while in truth doing something that goes against all that the subject apparently stands for. Moreover, one might regard being *věrný* as a Czech as nothing more than what is to be expected of representatives of that nation – it was, after all, the characteristic hailed by Mácha, the father of modern Czech literature, as most inherent to his compatriots, even if the context of this poetic assertion in the dedicatory verses of *Máj* is, as mentioned in the Introduction, somewhat problematic.

What has proved far more productive and insightful when it comes to matters of faith is to examine not the *what* or *why*, but the *how*. By homing in

on *věrnost* as our leading category of analysis, and tempering it with notions of rhetoric and authenticity, we have been able to show the various ways in which such a concept can not only be harnessed and instrumentalised within poetry, but also constructed, brought forth by it. The idea of remaining faithful no longer feels quite so static as it perhaps did when we first introduced it. We are very much aware of the dynamic processes and tensions involved in creating the poetic impression of *věrnost* here – in particular the fact that it can involve the embracing of paradox, a willingness to accept both singularity and cyclicity, action and what is arguably inaction, continuance in one particular condition. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, we have identified *věrnost* as the one truly distinctive feature of our selection of poetry, the thing that would appear to set it apart both within the context of twentieth-century Czech literary history and from other examples of late modern poetry.

Inevitably, there are aspects that have not been dealt with in any detail, poets and poems that have been left out of our analyses. For various reasons, we have concentrated on only five authors and their works within a specific and limited timeframe. Probably the most obvious way of continuing the work that we have started here would therefore simply be to widen the net and include more authors. Our deliberations could also be extended further beyond the confines of Czech literature. We have compared selected poems of this period to some of their English-language counterparts, but what of the lyric output of the other Western Power present at that fateful meeting in the Bavarian capital? How did French poetry respond to the events of the day and the country's role in them? Equally, given the fact that the Spanish Civil War is employed by our authors as a means of effectively foreshadowing what is to come in the Czech lands, it would doubtless be interesting to examine its portrayal within Spanish poetry. There too, we might find parallels that help disabuse us of the widespread belief in the unqualified uniqueness of Czech poetry during this period. In time, it may even prove worthwhile to consider whether and how the current Russian-waged war of aggression is reflected in contemporary Ukrainian poetry, if the some of the superficial similarities between the events of 1938/39 and 2022 are also perhaps carried over to the nation's literature.

Moreover, we have by no means exhausted all that late modernism has to offer. Blanton's category of the negated epic, employed to refer to the way in which certain late modern authors included history in their poems, might, for instance, provide fruitful avenues for additional investigation. This is particularly conceivable in the case of Holan. As discussed in Chapter Four, we have seen in works such as *Odpověď Francii* the way that his speaker appears to embrace the negative ("Povídám nic"), making it just as, if not more

1 Holan: Dokumenty, 12. Engl. "I say nothing".

important than the positive, turning words and phrases upon their heads, forcing us to look at the shadows as well as the light. His later poem *Terežka Planetová* would be another obvious case in point, with Holan coining the terms *nelistí* (“non-foliage” or “unfoliage”, or perhaps simply the gaps between the leaves) to go with *listí* (“foliage”) and *nenota* (“non-tune” or “non-tone”) as foil to *nota* (“tune”, “tone”). Though the title would suggest that the poem is all about Terežka, her story, as has been remarked upon by Jiří Opelík, never really materialises: “the story of Terežka dwindles to a non-story.”<sup>2</sup> One might go further still and suggest that what we have before us is much more the tale of Neterežka, than it is of Terežka. Moreover, her very name is distinctly paradoxical, a confrontation between the earthly, as represented by *Terežka*, that is, a name possibly thought to be connected to the Ancient Greek *therizein* (“to harvest”), and the celestial, i. e. her unusual surname with its planetary and orbital associations.<sup>3</sup> Do these two aspects – the terrestrial and the, for want of a better word, extra-terrestrial – cancel each other out or does one hold the other in check? The possibility of negation is certainly never far away. That said, the term would probably not work in relation to a poem such as *Jan houslista*. Hora’s text just is too circular; rather than negating anything, it turns in on itself, returning to its opening stanza just as it returns its protagonist to his native land, allowing him to become part of a great cycle of life, anchoring him to his homeland, to his forebears. Nevertheless, it might still help to elucidate more of the differences amongst the poetry of this period, instead of looking for similarities and overlap, evidence of wider trends.

Last, but not least, one could equally reconsider the cut-off point of 1942 and trace the spectre of the Munich Agreement throughout the whole of the Second World War and into the post-war era. It certainly seems to be a perennial theme within Czech popular culture so perhaps it is worth examining more fully to what extent the Munich Agreement can be viewed nowadays as a fully-fledged *lieu de mémoire* and whether our poems have been transported to other situations and infused with new meaning, i. e. by investigating *their* legacies and reception under both communism and after the Velvet Revolution rather than the way in which they seem to have appropriated earlier works and motifs. Such reflections would naturally result in a very different study from the one that we have embarked upon, but they too could have a certain merit.

2 Cf. *Opelík, Jiří*: Holanovské nápovědy. Praha 2004, 66: “příběh Terežčin se ztrácí v nepřiběh.

3 This fundamental contradiction is of course even present at the first meeting between Terežka and the doctor whose heart unknowingly she conquered: “Bylo to o žních ... Při měsíčku...” (Engl. “It was at harvest-time ... In the moonlight”). In: *Holan: Příběhy*, 66. It is also reinforced throughout the poem via the repetition of the rhyme *kraj / ráj* (“land” / “paradise”, “heaven”).

# Bibliography

## Archival sources

*Národní archiv České republiky, Prague [NA]*

f. Úřad říšského protektora [ÚŘP]

*Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví, Prague [LA PNP]*

f. František Halas

f. Vladimír Holan

f. Josef Hora

f. Melantrich

f. Obec československých spisovatelů

f. Jaroslav Seifert

## Primary sources

Auden, Wystan H.: *Another Time: Poems*. London 1944.

Halas, František: *Dílo*. Vol. 2: *Časy*. Praha 1981.

–: *Dílo*. Vol. 3: *A co básník*. Praha 1983.

–: *Dílo*. Vol. 6: *Dopisy*. Praha 2001.

Holan, Vladimír: *Noční hlídka srdce*. Praha 1963.

–: *Spisy*. Vol. 6: *Dokumenty*. Praha 2001.

–: *Spisy*. Vol. 7: *Příběhy*. Praha 2002.

Hora, Josef: *Knih domova*. Prague 1958.

Grmela, Jan (ed.): *Srdce vlasti. Praha očima básníků a umělců*. Praha 1940.

Kollár, Jan: *Slávy dcera*. Praha 1971.

Kolman Cassius, Jaroslav: *Stesk stráže*. Praha 1995

Mácha, Karel Hynek: *Básně*. Praha 1997.

MacNeice, Louis: *Autumn Journal*. London 1963.

Němcová, Božena: *Babička*. Praha 2008

Neruda, Jan: *Knihy básní*. Praha 1951.

Nezval, Vítězslav: *Dílo*. Vol. 2: *Básně noci (1921–1929)*. Praha 1952.

–: *Dílo*. Vol. 6: *Matka Naděje*. Praha 1953.

–: *Dílo*, Vol. 8: *Pět minut za městem*. Praha 1954.

–: *Dílo*. Vol. 9: *Historický obraz*. Praha 1955.

- Seifert, Jaroslav: *Dílo*. Vol. 5: Jaro, sbohem – Přílba hlíny – Dodatky (1939–1948). Praha 2012.
- : *Dílo*. Vol. 6: Vějíř Boženy Němcové – Světlem oděná – Kamenný most. Praha 2005.
- : *Všecky krásy světa*. Praha 1985.
- Sládek, Josef Václav: *Spisy básnické*. Vol. 2. Praha 1907.
- Tsvetaeva, Marina: *Gde moi dom? Stikhi k Chekhii*. Dokumenty, pis'ma, fotografii. Moskva 2000.
- Wolker, Jiří: *Dílo*. Vol. 1. Praha 1947.

## Secondary sources

- Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London 1983.
- Applebaum, Anne: *There Are No Chamberlains in This Story*. In: *The Atlantic*, 21.2.2022. URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/02/munich-security-conference-chamberlain/622872/> (on 1.6.2022).
- Assmann, Aleida: *Canon and Archive*. In: Erll, Astrid/Nünning, Ansgar (eds.): *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin 2008, 97–108.
- : *Was sind kulturelle Texte?* In: Poltermann, Andreas (ed.): *Literaturkanon – Medienereignis – Kultureller Text. Formen interkultureller Kommunikation und Übersetzung*. Berlin 1995, 232–244.
- : *Zur Metaphorik der Erinnerung*. In: Assmann, Aleida (ed.): *Mnemosyne. Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung*. Frankfurt am Main 1991, 13–35.
- /Assmann, Jan: *Das Gestern im Heute. Medien und soziales Gedächtnis*. In: Merten, Klaus / Schmidt, Siegfried J./Weischenberg, Siegfried (eds.): *Die Wirklichkeit der Medien. Eine Einführung in die Kommunikationswissenschaft*. Wiesbaden 1994, 114–140.
- Assmann, Jan: *Communicative and Cultural Memory*. In: Erll, Astrid/Nünning, Ansgar (eds.): *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin 2008, 109–118.
- : *Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität*. In: Assmann, Jan / Hölscher, Tonio (eds.): *Kultur und Gedächtnis*. Frankfurt am Main 1988, 9–19.
- Austin, John L.: *How To Do Things With Words*. Oxford 1971.
- : *Performative Utterances*. In: Urmson, J.O./Warnock, G.J. (eds.): *Philosophical Papers*. Oxford 1970, 233–252.
- Badiou, Alain: *Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. London 2001.
- Balaev, Michelle: *Trends in Literary Trauma Theory*. In: *Mosaic*, 41/2 (2008), 149–166.
- Barfield, Owen: *Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction*. In: Lewis, C.S. (ed.): *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*. London 1947, 106–127.
- Bartošek, Karel: *Could We Have Fought? – The “Munich Complex” in Czech Policies and Czech Thinking*. In: Stone, Norman / Strouhal, Eduard (eds.): *Czechoslovakia: Crossroads and Crises, 1918–88*. New York 1989, 101–119.

- Basseler, Michael / Birke, Dorothee: Mimesis des Erinnerens. In: Erll, Astrid / Nünning, Ansger (eds.): *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft. Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektive*. Berlin 2005, 123–147.
- Bednář, Kamil: Chvála obrazotvornosti. In: *Panorama* 19 (1939), 120–121.
- : Projev k situaci nejmladší české poezie. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 120–121.
- Benjamin, Walter: *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. Frankfurt am Main 1963.
- Bewes, Timothy: *Cynicism and Postmodernity*. London 1997.
- Bidlo, Fr.: Válečná kronika. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 287.
- Bitzer, Lloyd F.: The Rhetorical Situation. In: *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1/1 (1968), 1–14.
- Blackwell, Vera: František Halas: The Rock and the Roots. In: *Books Abroad* 43/1 (1969), 13–17.
- Blanton, C.D.: *Epic Negation. The Dialectical Poetics of Late Modernism*. Oxford 2015.
- Bolton, Jonathan: *The Ruins of a Republic. Czech Modernism after Munich, 1938–1939*. In: Hell, Julia / Schönle, Andreas (eds.): *Ruins of Modernity*. Durham, North Carolina 2010, 118–132.
- Boym, Svetlana: *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York 2001.
- Brabec, Jiří: Holan. In: Opelík, Jiří (ed.): *Jak číst poezii*. Praha 1969, 158–177.
- : Česká literatura v letech 1939 – 1945. In: Skálová, Růžena (ed.): *Dějiny české literatury*. Vol. 4: *Literatura od konce 19. století do roku 1945*. Praha 1995, 441–457.
- : Poezie. In: Skálová, Růžena (ed.): *Dějiny české literatury*. Vol. 4: *Literatura od konce 19. století do roku 1945*. Praha 1995, 361 – 381.
- Brandes, Detlef: *Die Tschechen unter deutschem Protektorat. Teil I*. München 1969.
- Bryant, Chad: *Prague in Black. Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts 2007.
- : The Language of Resistance? Czech Jokes and Joke-Telling under Nazi Occupation. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 41/1 (2006), 133–151.
- Budme mostem nové generace! In: *Večerní české slovo*, 1.10.1938, 3.
- Burian, E. F.: Jak vidím české lidové baroko a proč je mám rád. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 323–333.
- Buschmann, Nikolaus / Murr, Karl Borromäus: “Treue” als Forschungskonzept? Begriffliche und methodische Sondierungen. In: Buschmann, Nikolaus (ed.): *Treue. Politische Loyalität und militärische Gefolgschaft in der Moderne*. Göttingen 2008, 11–35.
- Bušek, Vrat.: Náš národní program. In: *České slovo*, 1.3.1939, 1.
- Chase, Malcolm / Shaw, Christopher: The Dimensions of Nostalgia. In: Chase, Malcolm / Shaw, Christopher (eds.): *The imagined past: history and nostalgia*, ed. by Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw. Manchester 1989, 1–17.
- Chitnis, Rajendra A.: Zbraně slabých? Představa rolnického odporu v díle a životě Václava Prokúčka. In: *Česká literatura* 61/5 (2013), 661–696.
- Chvála českého jazyka. Naše řeč je z nejbohatších. In: *Večerní České slovo*, 31.3.1939, 1.
- Cobbold, G. B. (trans.): *The Red Flare. Cicero’s On Old Age*. Mundelein, Illinois 2012.
- Co dnes číst. Kniha se musí stát zbraní. In: *Rudé právo*, 1.10.1938, 3.
- Consigny, Scott: Rhetoric and Its Situations. In: *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 7/3 (1974), 175–186.
- Croft, Andy: Forward to the 1930s: the literary politics of anamnesis. In: Chase,

- Malcolm/Shaw, Christopher (eds.): *The imagined past: history and nostalgia*. Manchester 1989, 147–170.
- Čapek, Karel: *Hovory s TGM*. Praha 1990.
- Černý, Václav: *Ještě o básnících ve dnech krise, a ještě k básníkům*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 2 (1939), 1–5.
- : *Kniha o českém baroku katolickém*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 302–311.
- : *Křik koruny české. Paměti II (1938 – 1945). Náš kulturní odboj za války*. Brno 1992.
- : *Má Francie*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 463–464.
- : *Průhled do nové belletrie. Vladimír Holan: "Sen"*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 2 (1939), 321–323.
- : *Průhled do nových knih. František Halas: "Naše paní Božena Němcová" – Jaroslav Seifert: "Vějíř Boženy Němcové"*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 3 (1940) 126–128.
- : *Průhled do nových knih. Josef Hora: "Zahrada Popelčina" – Kamil Bednář: "Veliký mrtvý" – Vladimír Holan: "První testament"*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 3 (1940), 28–32.
- : *Průhled do nových knih: Konstantin Biebl: "Zrcadlo noci" – Vítězslav Nezval: "Historický obraz" – František Nechvátal: "Bezručův hlas"; "Matěské znamení" – Kamil Bednář: "Rok"; "Kamenný pláč"*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 3 (1940), 75–78.
- : *Průhled do nových knih: Vítězslav Nezval: "Pět minut za městem"*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 3 (1940), 173–175.
- Červenka, Miroslav/Macura, Vladimír/Med, Jaroslav/Pešat, Zdeněk (eds.): *Slovník básnických knih*. Praha 1990.
- Český premiér poprvé v dějinách navštíví místo podpisu mnichovské dohody. In: *Lidové noviny*, 5.3.2016. URL: [https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/cesky-premier-poprve-v-dejinach-navstivi-misto-podpisu-mnichovske-dohody.A160305\\_115100\\_in\\_domov\\_ELE](https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/cesky-premier-poprve-v-dejinach-navstivi-misto-podpisu-mnichovske-dohody.A160305_115100_in_domov_ELE) (on 1.6.2022)
- Čestí a slovenští spisovatelů v dnech krise. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 459
- Čiževsky, Dmitry: *Comenius' Labyrinth of the World: Its Themes and Sources*. In: *Harvard Slavic Studies* 1 (1953), 83–135.
- Čtenáři, pojď a uč se moudrým býti. In: *Panorama* 17 (1939), 76.
- Davidson, Donald: *What Metaphors Mean*. In: *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978), 31–47.
- Davies, Fred: *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York 1979.
- Davies, Thomas S.: *The Extinct Scene. Late Modernism and Everyday Life*. New York 2016.
- de Gaynesford, Maximilian: *Incense and Insensibility: Austin on the "Non-Seriousness" of Poetry*. In: *Ratio* 22/4 (2009), 464–485.
- de Man, Paul: *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven 1979.
- : *Pascal's Allegory of Persuasion*. In: Greenblatt, Stephen (ed.): *Allegory and Representation*. Baltimore 1981, 1–25.
- Demetz, Peter: *Prague in Danger*. New York 2010.
- den Boer, Pim, *Loci memoriae – Lieux de memoire*. In: Erll, Astrid/Nünning, Ansgar (eds.): *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin 2008, 19–25.
- Derrida, Jacques: *A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event*. In: *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2007), 441–461.
- Dobrovský, Luboš: *Mnichovanství premiéra Sobotky*. In: *iDNES*, 31.8.2014. URL:

- [http://zpravy.idnes.cz/komentar-k-chovani-eu-k-rusku-a-ukrajine-f00/domaci.aspx?c=A140831\\_151839\\_domaci\\_jav](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/komentar-k-chovani-eu-k-rusku-a-ukrajine-f00/domaci.aspx?c=A140831_151839_domaci_jav) (on 1.6.2022).
- Do další práce. In: Panorama (November 1938), 234.
- Doležal, Jiří: Česká literatura za protektorátu. Školství, písemnictví, kinematografie. Praha 1996.
- Domů a doma. In: Nedělní České slovo, 19.3. 1939, 1.
- Downey, Nancy E.: The garden in the graveyard: Memory in Pushkin's "Evgeny Onegin". Ann Arbor 1995.
- Dr. Beneš v rozhlasu. In: Čechoslovák v Anglii, 8.12.1939, 3.
- Dva hroby. In: Právo lidu. Příloha, 31.10.1937, 1.
- Edbauer, Jenny: Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies. In: Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 35/4 (2005), 5–24.
- Erl, Astrid: Erinnerungshistorische Literaturwissenschaft: Was ist ... und zu welchem Ende...? In: Nünning, Ansgar/Sommer, Roy (eds.): Kulturwissenschaftliche Literaturwissenschaft. Disziplinäre Ansätze – Theoretische Positionen – Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven. Tübingen 2004, 115–128.
- : Literatur und kulturelles Gedächtnis: Zur Begriffs- und Forschungsgeschichte, zum Leistungsvermögen und zur literaturwissenschaftlichen Relevanz eines neuen Paradigmas der Kulturwissenschaft. In: Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch 4 (2002), 249–276.
- /Rigney, Ann: Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics. In: Erl, Astrid/Rigney, Ann (eds.): Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory. Berlin 2009, 1–11.
- Eshelman, Raoul: Josef Horas Bergsonismus. In: Kliems, Alfrun/Raßloff, Ute/Zajac, Peter (eds.): Spätmoderne. Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts in Ost-Mittel-Europa. Berlin 2006, 345–367.
- Etkind, Alexander: Warped Memories. Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied. Stanford 2013.
- Fabian, Jeanette: Poetismus. Ästhetische Theorie und künstlerische Praxis der tschechischen Avantgarde. Wien 2013.
- Fauth, Tim: Deutsche Kulturpolitik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren 1939 bis 1941. Göttingen 2004.
- Fletcher, Angus J.S.: Allegory without Ideas. In: Machosky, Brenda (ed.): Thinking Allegory Otherwise. Stanford 2010, 9–36.
- Forst, Vladimír (ed.): Lexikon české literatury. Osobnosti, díla, instituce. Vol. 2/I: H–J. Praha 1993.
- Forster, E. M.: Aspects of the Novel. London 1961.
- French, Alfred: The Poets of Prague. London 1969.
- Fukač, Jiří: Musik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren. Was wissen wir schon? Was wollen wir eigentlich wissen? In: Wehrmeyer, Andreas (ed.): Musik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren (1939 – 1945). Fakten – Hintergründe – Historisches Umfeld. München 2008, 50–57.
- Funk, Wolfgang: Review of "Paradoxes of Authenticity: Studies on a Critical Concept". In: Anglia – Zeitschrift für englische Philologie 130/3 (2012), 452–455.
- : Reziproker Realismus. Versuch einer Ästhetik der Authentizität. In: Weixler,

- Antonius (ed.): *Authentisches Erzählen. Produktion, Narration, Rezeption*. Berlin 2012, 121–143.
- : *The Literature of Reconstruction. Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*. London 2015.
- /Krämer, Lucia: Vorwort: Fiktionen von Wirklichkeit – Authentizität zwischen Materialität und Konstruktion. In: Funk, Wolfgang/Krämer, Lucia (eds.): *Fiktionen von Wirklichkeit. Authentizität zwischen Materialität und Konstruktion*. Bielefeld 2011, 7–23.
- Garval, Michael D.: *“A Dream of Stone”. Fame, Vision and Monumentality in Nineteenth-Century French Literary Culture*. Newark 2004.
- Genette, Gérard: *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Trans.: Lewin, Jane E. Cambridge 1997.
- Dinsmann, Melissa: *Modernism at the Microphone. Radio, Propaganda, and Literary Aesthetics during World War II*. London 2015.
- Gombrich, Ernst H.: Personification. In: Bolger, R.R. (ed.): *Classic Influences on European Culture A. D. 500 – 1500*. Cambridge 1971, 247–258.
- Gorrell, Donna: *The Rhetorical Situation Again: Linked Components in a Venn Diagram*. In: *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 30/4 (1997), 395–412.
- Götz, František: *Literatura mezi dvěma válkami (Výbor z díla)*. Praha 1984.
- Greenblatt, Stephen: *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton 2002.
- Halbwachs, Maurice: *The Collective Memory*. Trans.: Ditter, Francis J./Yazdi Ditter, Vida. New York 1980.
- Hanč, Josef: *Czechs and Slovaks since Munich*. In: *Foreign Affairs* 18/1 (1939), 102–115.
- Harrison, Erica: *Broadcasting by the Czechoslovak exile government in London, 1939 – 1945*. In: *Media History* 21/4 (2015), 464–467.
- Harth, Dietrich: *The Invention of Cultural Memory*. In: Erll, Astrid/Nünning, Ansgar (eds.): *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin 2008, 85–96.
- Heftrich, Urs: *“Der gerupften Vögel Sang klingt nicht wie Geigen”. Die nationalsozialistische Bedrohung im Spiegel des tschechischen Gedichts*. In: Grüner, Frank/Heftrich, Urs/Fischer von Weikersthal, Felicitas/Löwe, Heinz-Dietrich (eds.): *“Zerstörer des Schweigens”. Formen künstlerischer Erinnerung an die nationalsozialistische Rassen- und Vernichtungspolitik in Osteuropa*. Köln 2006, 211–230.
- : *Höhlen tief im Wörterbuch: Tschechische Lyrik der letzten Jahrzehnte*. München, 2006.
- Hirsch, Marianne/Spitzer, Leo: *“We would not have come here without you”. Generations of nostalgia*. In: Hodgkin, Katherine/Radstone, Susanne (eds.): *Memory, History, Nation. Contested Pasts*. New York 2017, 79– 95.
- Hora, Josef: *Básník a mateřský jazyk*. In: *Naše řeč* 22 (1938), 161–166.
- Hronek, Jiří L.: *Balkanský Mnichov*. In: *Čechoslovák*, 7.9.1940, 2.
- Hühn, Peter/Schönert, Jörg: *Introduction: The Theory and Methodology of the Narratological Analysis of Lyric Poetry*. In: Hühn, Peter/Kiefer, Jens (eds.): *The Narratological Analysis of Lyric Poetry. Studies in English Poetry from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Berlin 2005, 1–14.

- /Sommer, Roy: Narration in Poetry and Drama. In: the living handbook of narratology. URL: <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/40.html> (on 1.6.2022).
- Iggers, Wilma A.: The World of Jaroslav Seifert. In: *World Literature Today*, 60/1 (1986), 8–12.
- Jackson, Frances: Verrat, Diktat, Mythos. Zum 80. Jahrestag des Münchner Abkommens. In: *Erinnerungskulturen. Erinnerung und Geschichtspolitik im östlichen und südöstlichen Europa*, 28.9.2018. URL: <https://erinnerung.hypotheses.org/3335> (on 1.6.2022).
- : Stín národního ohrožení v lyrice Jaroslava Kolmana Cassia. In: Antošíková, Lucie (ed.): *Zatemněno. Česká literatura a kultura v protektorátu*. Praha 2017, 190–197.
- Jähnichen, M.: Literatur als Zeugnis und Waffe. Zur Kontinuität der tschechischen kämpferischen Poesie zwischen 1935 und 1955. In: *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 21/1 (1976), 582–597.
- Jan Masaryk: “Musíme přispět ze všech sil!”. In: *Čechoslovák v Anglii*, 23.1.1940, 5.
- Jauß, Hans Robert: *Studien zum Epochenwandel der ästhetischen Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main 1990.
- Jediný, kdo nezradil, je Sovětský svaz přes to, že musel počítat s válkou proti Polsku a Rumunsku. In: *Rudé právo*, 2.10.1938, 2.
- Jeffreys, Mark: Introduction. Lyric Poetry and the Resistance to History. In: Jeffreys, Mark (ed.): *New Definitions of Lyric. Theory, Technology, and Culture*. New York 1998, vii–xxiv.
- Jirát, Vojtěch: Barokní divadlo a dnešek. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 333–341.
- Johnson, Barbara: Poetry and Performative Language. In: *Yale French Studies* 54 (1977), 140–158.
- Kalista, Zděnek: Dny, kterými jsme prošli. In: *Lumír* 65/1 (1939), 25–34.
- Kalvínská, Blažena (ed.): *Rudé právo 1939–1945*. Praha 1971.
- Kantsteiner, Wulf: Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies. In: *History and Theory* 41/2 (2002), 179–199.
- Kennan, George Frost: *From Prague After Munich. Diplomatic Papers 1938 – 1940*. Princeton 1968.
- Kepka, Rudolf: Knihou proti zemlení duší. Útočiště do jistoty a klidu domova. In: *Večerní České slovo*, 17.2.1939, 1.
- Khol, Radek: Srpen 1968 – druhý Mnichov, nebo snad Březen?! In: *Mezinárodní politika* 17/8 (1993), 22.
- Kliems, Alfred/Raßloff, Ute/Zajec, Peter: Vorwort: Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts in Ost-Mittel-Europa. Eingrenzungen und Abgrenzungen. In: Kliems, Alfrun/Raßloff, Ute/Zajec, Peter (eds.): *Spätmoderne. Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts in Ost-Mittel-Europa*. Berlin 2006, 9–22.
- Koch, Manfred: “Memotechnik des Schönen”. *Studien zur poetischen Erinnerung in Romantik und Symbolismus*. Tübingen 1988.
- Konečný, Robert: Slovo k Básnickému kalendáři. In: Konečný, Robert (ed.): *Básnický kalendář let 1918 – 1938*. Praha 1938, 5–8.
- : Kulturní soběstačnost. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 464.
- Koschorke, Albrecht: *Wahrheit und Erfindung. Grundzüge einer Allgemeinen Erzähltheorie*. Frankfurt am Main 2012.

- Kosellek, Reinhart: Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden. In: Marquard, Odo/Stierle, Karlheinz (eds.): *Identität*. München 1979, 255–276.
- Kovářna, Fr.: *Náš výtvarný barok*. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 342–349.
- Kulcsár-Szabó, Ernő: Subjekt und Sprachlichkeit. Das „spätmoderne“ Paradigma und Umriße einer integrativen Geschichte der literarischen Moderne. In: Kulcsár-Szabó Ernő/Szegedy-Maszák Mihály (eds.): *Epoche – Text – Modalität: Diskurs der Moderne in der ungarischen Literaturwissenschaft*. Tübingen 1999, 51–74.
- Kürschner, Mareike: Deutschland und die Kanzlerin haben den Balkan gerettet. In: *Die Welt*, 5.5.2016. URL: <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article155051406/Deutschland-und-die-Kanzlerin-haben-den-Balkan-gerettet.html> (on 1.6.2022).
- Lachmann, Renate: Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature. In: Erll, Astrid/Nünning, Ansgar (eds.): *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin 2008, 301–310.
- Lehár, Jan: *Česká literatura od počátků k dnešku*. Praha 1998.
- Legg, Stephen: Contesting and surviving memory: space, nation and nostalgia in “Les Lieux de Mémoire”. In: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23 (2005), 481–504.
- Lemelin, Christopher W.: Homeland and Exile in Marina Tsvetaeva’s “Poems to Bohemia”. In: *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 52/1–2 (2010), 95–111.
- Levin, Steven R.: *Allegorical Language*. In: Bloomfield, Morton W. (ed.): *Allegory, Myth and Symbol*. Cambridge Massachusetts 1981, 23–38.
- Lotman, Jurij M.: *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. Ann Arbor 1977.
- Lowenthal, David: Nostalgia tells it like it wasn’t. In: Chase, Malcolm/Shaw, Christopher (eds.): *The imagined past: history and nostalgia*. Manchester 1989, 18–32.
- Machek, Václav (ed.): *Etymologický slovník jazyka českého a slovenského*. Praha 1957.
- MacNeice, Louis: The Poet in England To-Day: A Reassessment. In: Heuser, Alan (ed.): *Selected Literary Criticism of Louis MacNeice*. Oxford 1987, 111–114.
- Málková, Iva: *Obraz českého poezie v časopisu Akord v době protektorátní*. In: Antošíková, Lucie (ed.): *Zatměno. Česká literatura a kultura v protektorátu*. Praha 2017, 169–189.
- Matvejevitch, Predrag: *La poésie de circonstance. Étude des forms de l’engagement poétique*. Paris 1971.
- Med, Jaroslav: *Literární život ve stínu Mnichova (1938 – 1939)*. Praha 2010.
- Melion, Walter S./Ramakers, Bartholomeus A. M.: Personification: An Introduction. In: Melion, Walter S./Ramakers, Bartholomeus A. M. (eds.): *Personification. Embodying Meaning and Emotion*. Leiden 2016, 1–40.
- Miller, Arthur B.: Rhetorical Exigence. In: *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 5/2 (1972), 111–118.
- Miller, Tyrus: *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts Between the World Wars*. Berkeley: 1999.
- Mohn, Volker: *NS-Kulturpolitik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren: Konzepte, Praktiken, Reaktionen*. Essen 2014.
- Mole, Christopher: The Performative Limits of Poetry. In: *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 53/1 (2013), 55–70.
- Moore, Allen: Authenticity as authentication. In: *Popular Music*, 21/2 (2002), 209–223.

- Moskowitz, Moses: Three Years of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In: *Political Science Quarterly* 57/3 (1942), 353–375.
- Mozejko, Edward: Between Dream and Reality: The Poetry of Jaroslav Seifert. In: *Scando-Slavic* 33 (1987), 63–79.
- Müller-Zetzelmann, Eva: Poetry, Narratology, Meta-Cognition. In: Olson, Greta (ed.): *Current trends in narratology*. Berlin 2011, 232–253.
- My a naši. In: *České slovo*, 12.10.1938, 1.
- Na obranu kultury. In: *Panorama* 16/7 (1938), 208–209.
- Navrátil, Václav: O patetických nacionalismech. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 363–369.
- Národ věří ve své síly. In: *A-Zet ranní*, 29.3. 1939, 3.
- Neumann, Birgit: The Literary Representation of Memory. In: Erll, Astrid / Nünning, Ansgar (eds.): *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin 2008, 333–344.
- Neumann, Stanislav K.: *Spisy*. Vol. 9: *Stati a projevy V (1918 – 1921)*. Praha 1971.
- Nezval, Vítězslav: Mateřská řeč jako nástroj básníkův. In: *Slovo a slovestnost* 4/1 (1938), 28–41.
- : Papoušek na motocyklu čili o řemesle básnickém. In: Kubín, Václav (ed.): *Avantgarda známá a neznámá*. Vol. 1: *Od proletářského umění k poetismu 1919 – 1924*. Praha 1971, 566–570.
- Nora, Pierre: Between Memory and History: “Les Lieux de Mémoire”. In: *Representations* 26 (1989), 7–24.
- : Preface to the English-Language Edition: From “Lieux de mémoire” to Realms of Memory. In: Kritzman, Lawrence D. (ed.): *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past*. Vol. 1: *Conflicts and Divisions*. New York 1996, xv – xlix.
- Novák, Arne: Zápas o české baroko. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 1 (1938), 289–301.
- Olick, Jeffrey K./Robbins, Joyce: Social Memory Studies: From “Collective Memory” to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices. In: *American Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), 105–140.
- Opelík, Jiří: *Holanovské nápovědy*. Praha 2004.
- (ed.): *Lexikon české literatury. Osobnosti, díla, instituce*. Vol. 3/I: *M–O*. Praha 2000
- Ort, Jan: Máchova truchlorouška. In: *Kritický měsíčník* 2 (1939), 202–208.
- Orzoff, Andrea: *Battle for the Castle. The myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe 1914–1948*. Oxford 2009.
- Patočka, Jan: *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Vol. 5: *Schriften zur tschechischen Kultur und Geschichte*. Stuttgart 1992.
- Pavelka, Jiří: Alegorie v legálně publikované poezii let 1939 – 1945. In: *Česká literatura* 31/4 (1983), 349–357.
- Paxson, James J.: *The poetics of personification*. Cambridge 1994.
- Peroutka, Ferdinand: Odpověď na vzkaz z ciziny. In: *Přítomnost* 15/44 (1938), 689.
- Pešat, Zdeněk: František Halas. In: Skálová, Růžena (ed.): *Dějiny české literatury*. Vol. 4: *Literatura od konce 19. století do roku 1945*. Praha 1995, 529–553.
- : František Halas a ilegální časopis *V boj*. In: *Česká literatura* 30/3 (1982), 264–269.
- : Jaroslav Seifert. Praha 1991.
- Petrbok, Václav: Der Flagge präsentiert! Tschechische Poesie zum September 1938. In: *Sudetenland. Europäische Kulturzeitschrift* 60/3 (2018), 326–329.

- Píša, Antonín Matěj: *Třicátá léta. Kritiky a stati*. Praha 1971.
- Plett, Heinrich F.: *Einführung in die rhetorische Textanalyse*. Hamburg 2001.
- Pratt, Mary Louise: *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London 1992.
- Pražák, Albert: *Národ se bránil. Obrany národa a jazyka českého od nejstarších dob po přítomnost*. Praha 1946.
- Prime Minister on the Issues. In: *The Times*, 28.1.1938, 10.
- Procházka, Theodor: *The Second Republic: The Disintegration of Post-Munich Czechoslovakia (Oct. 1938 – March 1939)*. New York 1981.
- Pujmanová, Marie: *Sjezd P.E.N. klubu a dnešní literatura*. In: *Literární noviny*, 20.7.1938, 5.
- Pysent, Robert B., *Questions of Identity. Czech and Slovak ideas of nationality and personality*. Budapest 1994.
- Quilligan, Maureen: *The Language of Allegory. Defining the genre*. Ithaca 1979.
- Radstone, Susannah: *Working with Memory: An Introduction*. In: Radstone, Susannah (ed.): *Memory and Methodology*. Oxford 2000, 1–22.
- Rigney, Ann: *Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory*. In: *Journal of European Studies* 35/1 (2005), 11–28.
- : *Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans*. In: *Poetics Today* 25/2 (2004), 361–396.
- : *The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing*. In: Erll, Astrid/Nünning, Ansgar (eds.): *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin 2008, 345–356.
- Royce, Josiah: *The Philosophy of Loyalty*. New York 1908.
- Rudrum, David: *Narrativity and performativity: From Cervantes to Star Trek*. In: Pier, John / Garcia Landa, José Angel (eds.): *Theorizing Narrativity*. Berlin 2008, 253–276.
- Rutte, Mir.: *Aby kniha byla živým chlebem...* In: *Panorama* (1939), 70.
- Schamschula, Walter: *Geschichte der tschechischen Literatur. Vol. 3: Von der Gründung der Republik bis zur Gegenwart*. Köln 2004.
- Schlaffler, Heinz: *Sprechakte in der Lyrik*. In: *Poetica* 40 (2008), 21–42.
- Schlamm, Willi: *Cizinec o Češích*. In: *Přítomnost* 15/1 (1938), 9–11.
- Schmid, Wolf: *Elemente der Narratologie*. Berlin 2003.
- : *Ornamentales Erzählen in der russischen Moderne. Čechov – Babel' – Zamjatin*. Frankfurt am Main 1992.
- Schulze Wessel, Martin: *Loyalität als geschichtlicher Grundbegriff und Forschungskonzept*. In: Schulze Wessel, Martin (ed.): *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918–1938. Politische, nationale und kulturelle Zugehörigkeiten*. München 2004, 1–22.
- Seifert, Jaroslav: *Doslov*. In: Konečný, Robert (ed.): *Básnický kalendář let 1918 – 1938*. Praha 1938, 272–274.
- : *Národ a jeho kultura*. In: *Národní práce*, 16.7.1939, 1.
- Simon, Scott: *Thoughts On Sept. 11 From “September 1, 1939”*, 10.11.2011. URL: <https://www.npr.org/2011/09/10/140359337/thoughts-on-nine-eleven-from-september-1-1939?t=1537543433627> (on 1.6.2022).
- Slib nad hroby mučedníků. In: *Čechoslovák v Anglii*, 24.11.1939, 2.

- Snyder, Timothy: Vladimir Putin's politics of eternity. In: *The Guardian*, 16.3.2018. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/16/vladimir-putin-russia-politics-of-eternity-timothy-snyder> (on 1.6.2022).
- Sobotka coby první český premiér navštíví místo podpisu mnichovské dohody. In: *Hospodářské noviny*, 6.3.2016. URL: <https://domaci.ihned.cz/c1-65194080-sobotka-coby-prvni-cesky-premier-navstivi-misto-podpisu-mnichovske-dohody> (on 1.6.2022).
- Souckova, Milada: The Critical Years in Czech Literature. In: *Books Abroad*, 30/1 (1956), 21–26.
- Statistika z Velké Prahy: 75 % bytů s hmyzem. In: *A-Zet ranní*, 1.2. 1939, 5.
- Steinfels, Peter: Beliefs; After Sept. 11, a 62-year-old poem by Auden drew new attention. Not all of it was favourable. In: *The New York Times*, 1.12.2001. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/01/us/beliefs-after-sept-11-62-year-old-poem-auden-drew-new-attention-not-all-it-was.html> (on 1.6.2022).
- Stich, Alexandr: Seifertova Světlem oděná. Interpretace: pokus a výzva. Praha 1998.
- Šebek, Jaroslav: Der hl. Wenzel und die mentalen und gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen in den böhmischen Ländern der modernen Zeit. In: Samerski, Stefan (ed.): *Wenzel: Protagonist der böhmischen Erinnerungskultur*. Paderborn 2018, 161–180.
- Tambling, Jeremy: *Allegory*. London 2010.
- Teige, Karel: Poesie pro pět smyslů. In: Kubín, Václav (ed.): *Avantgarda známá a neznámá*. Vol. 1: *Od proletářského umění k poetismu 1919 – 1924*. Praha 1971, 191–196.
- Tesař, Jan: *Mnichovský komplex: jeho příčiny a důsledky*. Praha 2000.
- Valouch, František: *Česká poezie v období Mnichova (Hora, Seifert, Halas, Holan)*. Olomouc 1970.
- Vatz, Richard E.: The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation. In: *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 6/3 (1973), 154–161.
- Vaughan, David: *Battle for the Airwaves: Radio and the 1938 Munich Crises*. Praha 2008.
- Vůdce ujistil primátora hl. města Prahy: Českému národu při loyálním chování kyne šťastná budoucnost. In: *Večerní České slovo*, 17.3.1939, 2.
- Vzpomínka na Jiřího Wolкера. In: *A-Zet ranní*, 3.1.1939, 4.
- Wehrmeyer, Andreas: Einführung. In: Wehrmeyer, Andreas (ed.): *Musik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren (1939 – 1945). Fakten – Hintergründe – Historisches Umfeld*. München 2008, 9–18.
- Weinrich, Harald: Typen der Gedächtnismetaphorik. In: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 9, 23–26.
- Wetzel, Jakob: Späte Erinnerung. In: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23.2.2016. URL: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/ns-vergangenheit-spaete-erinnerung-1.2877382> (on 1.6.2022).
- Weixler, Antonius: Authentisches erzählen – authentisches Erzählen. Über Authentizität als Zuschreibungsphänomen und Pakt. In: Weixler, Antonius (ed.): *Authentisches Erzählen. Produktion, Narration, Rezeption*. Berlin 2012, 1–39.
- Wolf, Werner: *The Lyric: Problems of Definition and a Proposal for Reconceptualisa-*

- tion. In: Müller-Zettelmann, Eva / Rubik, Margarete (ed.): *Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*. Amsterdam 2005, 21–56.
- Zacek, Joseph Frederick: *The Czechoslovak View*. In: Latynski, Maya (ed.): *Reappraising the Munich Pact. Continental Perspectives*. Washington D. C. 1992, 47–59.
- Zahra, Tara: *Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis*. In: *Slavic Review* 69/1 (2010), 93–119.
- Zwerling Sugano, Marian: *The Poetics of the Occasion. Mallarmé and the Poetry of Circumstance*. Stanford 1992.

# Acknowledgements

This book is a revised version of my doctoral thesis, which was written as a PhD candidate and scholarship-holder at the Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies and submitted at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. It is dedicated to the memory of the incomparable Dr. James Naughton of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, and was prepared for publication at a time when another European nation has found itself required to defend its very right to exist against the ruthless aggression and imperial designs of a larger neighbour.

Embarking on such a project is never purely a solo endeavour and I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of people. First and foremost, I should like to thank my supervisors Prof. Dr. Raoul Eshelman and Prof. Dr. Riccardo Nicolosi for their unceasing wisdom, insight and support. Likewise, thanks must be given to all of the members and staff of the Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies, particularly its speakers Prof. Dr. Martin Schulze Wessel and Prof. Dr. Ulf Brunnbauer. The opportunities afforded by being part of such an institution are immeasurable, as is my appreciation for my fellow Slavist\*innen, both in Munich and Regensburg. Mara Matičević and Philipp Tvrđinić are especially deserving of recognition for their unwavering friendship and good humour. I am also grateful to the Czech national and literary archives for allowing me access to and to quote from many invaluable sources, and to the GraduateCentre of the LMU Munich for the writing-up bursary. Outside of the world of academia, it would be remiss of me not mention Corinna Anton, Neil Cumming, Ed Hicks and perhaps most importantly my parents. And last, but by no means least, I must, of course, thank Tobi – *für alles*.



# Index

*References solely in the footnotes are italicised.*

- Abyssinia 89  
allegory 70–73, 79–87, 93–95, 101 f.,  
108, 119, *121*, 260  
allegoresis 81, 85, 103  
anthropomorphism 100, 109, 111, *114*,  
116 f., 119  
Apollinaire, Guillaume 61  
Arc de Triomphe 60, 145 f.  
Auden, W.H. 260, 264–274, 282, 285–288  
Austerlitz, Battle of 60  
authenticity 93, 177–196, 198 f., 202,  
204 f., 208, 215, 219, 227–229, 239,  
251, 253, 256, 286, 291
- Badiou, Alain 65–67, 70, 255  
Barbarossa 54, *144*, 159  
Baudelaire, Charles 33, 80 f., 85  
Baroque 55, 71, 237 f., 278  
Beethoven, Ludwig van 55, *214*  
Beneš, Edvard 13, 16, 28, 59, *177*, 275, 283  
betrayal 8, 10 f., 24 f., 29, 46, 49, 58–61,  
63 f., 66, 70, 92, 110, 125, 132 f., 146,  
176 f., 180, 189 f., 193–195, 207, 211,  
216, 219 f., 223 f., 234, 244, 253, 255,  
261, 265, 270, 284  
Bezruč, Petr *172*, 218  
Bilá hora see White Mountain  
Blake, William 271  
Blaník 144 f., *176*  
Bonaparte, Napoleon 60, 145, 181, 254  
Bonnet, Georges 60 f.  
Borgese, Antonio 271  
Breton, André 34, 61  
Brothers Grimm 146, 231  
Brno 16, 31, 33  
Boycott, Charles 273  
Burian, E. F. 32, 237
- Caesar, Julius 287  
Camelot 250  
censorship 15–18, 21, 27, 32, 35, 73,  
81 f., 95, 99, *114*, 119, 204, 232  
Chamberlain, Neville 7, 46, 60, 266  
Cicero, Marcus Tullius 80, 203  
Comenius, Jan Amos 71 f.  
Communist Party 33 f., *177*, 225  
Cosmas Chronicle 235  
cultural resistance 7 f., 30, 50, 67, 289  
Czech language 17, 28 f., 72, 154, 180,  
232–234, 236  
Czechoslovakia 11–13, 22, 26, 29, 46 f.,  
55, 61, 87, 176 f., 180 f., 225, 244, 250,  
255, 264 f., 268, 274 f., 278  
Čapek, Josef 15  
Čapek, Karel 12, 15, 20, *57*, 61,  
*104*, 262  
Čech, Svatopluk 117, 148 f., 187 f., 192,  
238  
Černý, Václav 7, 58, *60 f.*, 94, 147, 164,  
*172*, 208, *211*
- Daladier, Édouard 7, 46, 60 f.  
Děvetsil 33 f.  
Derrida, Jacques 45 f., 56–58, 62, 65, 70,  
255, 274, 187, 289  
Donne, John 169, 237  
Dostoevsky, Fyodor Mikhailovich 49  
Dvořák, Antonín 202  
Dyk, Viktor 19, 79, 210
- event 43–51, 56–70, 273 f., 283  
– ... external 9, 48, 51, 67, 136, 147,  
161, 268  
– ... narratological 45–47, 49–51, 136,  
268

- emigration 74, 77  
 – ... internal 74  
 exile 13, 15, 25, 32, 73, 76 f., 79, 283
- faith 8, 23–25, 27, 46, 50, 66, 78, 139,  
 145, 170 f., 176, 193 f., 197, 205, 208,  
 226 f., 238, 267, 286 f., 290
- faithfulness 8, 23–28, 30, 66 f., 70, 145,  
 170, 194, 196–198, 193, 206, 213, 219,  
 221, 287, 290 f.
- First Czechoslovak Republic 12, 19, 23,  
 44, 65, 81, 141, 173, 204 f., 230, 232,  
 250, 255 f., 290
- First World War 12
- fidelity 24, 65–67, 119
- France 25, 46, 59–61, 145, f., 151, 177,  
 214, 220, 244, 291  
 – ... Francophilia 60 f., 65  
 – ... French Revolution 65, 151, 254 f.
- Freud, Sigmund 122, 270
- Führerbau 44, 141, 289
- Geoffrey of Monmouth 249
- Germany 11, 13, 37, 43, 46, 48, 67, 78,  
 86, 135, 140, 142, 144, 239, 242, 257
- Germanisation 14 f., 154
- Golem 116
- Gryphius, Andreas 55, 237
- Hácha, Emil 13, 184
- Halas, František 7, 18–22, 29, 31–33, 35,  
 37, 44, 48–53, 54, 58–60, 65 f., 68 f.,  
 95, 103, 109–111, 125, 138 f., 143–146,  
 152–157, 162–165, 167, 170 f., 172, 176,  
 185, 192 f., 204, 207, 208–220, 222 f.,  
 226, 237 f., 241–243, 245, 253, 260 f.,  
 263 f., 265, 266–268, 270–272, 276,  
 281 f., 284 f., 289
- Havlíček Borovský, Karel 50, 113, 161 f.,  
 197, 253, 282
- Heine, Heinrich 55
- Henlein, Konrad 274 f.
- Heydrich, Reinhard 31, 36, 268
- Hitler, Adolf 7, 11, 13, 16 f., 55, 78, 183 f.,  
 274 f.
- Hlaváček, Karel 92, 117
- Hoffmann von Hoffmannswaldau,  
 Christian 55, 237
- Hodža, Milan 274 f.
- Holan, Vladimír 7, 17, 18, 20, 22, 27,  
 32 f., 35, 44, 47–54, 55, 58, 60 f., 66,  
 69, 73, 79, 89–95, 147 f., 167 f., 172,  
 176, 180–182, 193, 214, 217, 218, 225,  
 230 f., 238, 245, 251, 254, 260, 263,  
 267, 268, 270, 276, 283, 289, 291 f.
- Hölderlin, Friedrich 271
- Hora, Josef 7, 17, 18, 22, 32, 33, 35, 44,  
 51 f., 53, 57 f., 63, 69, 72–79, 83–89,  
 92, 110 f. 113, 118, 130, 137, 141 f.,  
 146 f., 152, 172, 176, 199–206, 210,  
 216, 218, 230, 233 f., 238, 240 f., 242,  
 245, 251, 253, 256, 262, 265, 267, 273,  
 280, 285, 289, 292
- Hořejší, Jindřich 219
- Hugo, Victor 145
- Hus, Jan 19, 28, 38, 225
- Hussite Wars 28, 38, 141, 237
- imagery  
 – ... Biblical 24 f., 29, 58, 66, 68, 79,  
 103, 107, 116 f., 144 f., 156, 160–162,  
 164, 183 f., 186, 210, 213, 268, 284  
 – ... childhood 76, 79, 131–135, 163,  
 245, 253, 281  
 – ... cyclical 30, 64, 79, 88, 102 f., 114,  
 154, 199 f., 244, 255 f., 278 f. 292  
 – ... darkness 47, 68, 57, 116 f., 135,  
 212, 240, 253, 289  
 – ... natural disasters 25, 102–107, 201,  
 221, 246, 289  
 – ... ruins 81, 104, 243, 246, 254 f., 262  
 – ... seasonal 32, 48, 51, 64, 86, 132,  
 134, 137, 150, 154, 183, 266, 268, 289  
 – ... sensory 76, 142, 167, 242–247, 270
- Jelínek, Hanuš 61
- Jesenská, Milena 15
- Jirásek, Alois 50, 237
- Khlebnikov, Velimir 89
- King Arthur 54, 144, 159, 249 f.
- Kollár, Ján 279 f.

- Kolman Cassius, Jaroslav 7, 19, 172, 245, 268
- Krok 235
- late modernism 258–264, 291 f.
- Lermontov, Mikhail 33
- Liberec 214
- Libuše 212, 235
- Litoměřice 51, 54
- loyalty 8, 23 f., 27 f., 78, 194, 197, 205 f., 208, 218, 255, 286
- lyrisches WIr* 66 f., 79, 176, 206–219, 226, 231, 244, 252, 259, 267, 285–287
- Mácha, Karel Hynek 16, 18 f., 26 f., 51, 54 f., 172, 176, 185, 238, 290
- MacNeice, Loius 226 f., 264–268, 270, 272 – 273, 274–287
- Mahen, Jiří 31, 216 f., 218, 285
- Manifest českých spisovatelů* 23
- Mann, Elisabeth 271
- Mann, Heinrich 55
- Marianne* 60, 145 f., 261
- Masaryk, Jan 10, 184, 275, 283
- Masaryk, Tomáš Garrigue 12 f., 14 f., 16, 22, 28, 30, 53, 140, 212, 225
- memory
- ... collective 103, 122–125, 252
  - ... communicative 125 f., 137–139, 146, 153, 252
  - ... counter-memory 130 f.
  - ... cultural 88 f., 121, 125–128, 130 f., 133, 138–140, 143–146, 151, 153, 162, 175, 229, 252, 271, 282
  - ... individual 40, 126, 131, 133, 136–138, 153, 196–198, 272, 282
  - ... lieu(x) de memoire 124 f., 149 f., 164 f., 153, 164, 239, 282, 292
  - ... loci memoriae 121, 128, 165
- Merlin 249 f.
- Milne, A. A. 264
- mobilisation 12 f., 31 f., 47 f., 49, 64 f., 68, 103 f., 137 f., 147 f., 242, 268
- Morgan le Fey 249
- mourning 40, 53, 152 f., 198–206, 251, 256, 290
- Munich Agreement 7, 10 f., 13, 19 f., 22, 26, 28–30, 32, 33, 35, 38, 40–44, 46–53, 55, 56–62, 65–67, 69 f., 72–74, 77 f., 87, 107, 113, 128 f., 131, 142, 150, 160, 168, 175–177, 180 f., 189 f., 202, 204, 208, 215, 219 f., 229, 231–234, 240, 245 f., 251 f., 253–255, 259 f., 264 f., 267 f., 270, 274, 277–279, 289 f., 292
- Mussolini, Benito 7, 46
- narratology 39 f., 45–47, 55, 136, 268
- Němcová, Božena
- Neruda, Jan 18, 50, 213, 217 f., 238, 271 f., 286
- Neumann, Stanislav K. 34, 167
- Neurath, Konstantin von 36
- Nezval, Vítězslav 18–20, 22, 24–26, 33 f., 35, 50, 55, 61, 63, 67, 69, 77, 96–101, 103–107, 137, 145, 147, 151, 172, 176, 183 f., 194 f., 206 f., 214 f., 221–225, 233, 235 f., 239, 241–251, 253, 257 f., 260, 263, 267, 270, 283, 286
- nostalgia 112, 153 f., 251–256, 281, 290
- Novák, Arne 237
- Nysa 154
- Obec československých spisovatelů* 33, 46, 61, 175, 264 f.
- Olšany cemetery 131–133, 196 f., 253, 267, 282
- Orten, Jiří 1, 22, 216
- Palacký, František 237, 239
- Paris 50, 60, 145, 151, 181
- Peroutka, Ferdinand 11, 77 f.
- personification 59, 80, 84 f., 101, 107–114, 117–119, 121, 200, 207
- Poe, Edgar Allen 224
- Prokúpek, Václav 62, 102 f.
- Pushkin, Aleksandr 73 f., 79, 144
- Poetism 31, 33 f., 156, 243, 247, 249, 257
- poésie de circonstance* 43, 52–55, 69 f., 193, 270, 273 f., 289
- Prague 10, 16, 19, 32–34, 50 f., 53, 56 f., 66, 68, 74, 88, 93, 95 f., 98, 110 f., 113 –119, 132, 135 f., 143, 150, 172, 193,

- 212, 218, 235, 241, 246, 250, 268,  
276 f., 282, 286  
– ... Castle 57, 183 f., 186  
Procházka, Antonín 218  
Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia  
7 f., 10, 13–19, 21, 23, 35, 36, 38, 58,  
73, 81, 89, 86, 101, 144 f., 147, 151, 154,  
160, 183 f., 192, 217, 232, 241, 250  
Přemysl 212  
  
Reichsprotektor 13–17, 36, 73 f.  
rhetorical situation 171–177, 189 f., 201,  
203, 258 f.  
Rilke, Rainer Marie 33  
Říp 150  
  
Schiller, Friedrich 214  
Second Czecho-Slovak Republic 7, 13,  
184  
Second World War 7, 11, 29, 35, 43, 47,  
56, 63, 72, 142, 145, 266, 270, 284, 292  
Seifert, Jaroslav 18–20, 22 f., 27, 31 f.,  
33–37, 39, 44, 47 f., 51–54, 57, 60,  
64–66, 68, 69, 103, 112–119, 124,  
126 f., 131–140, 142 f., 145 f., 148–150,  
153–162, 164 f., 172, 183–189,  
191–193, 196–198, 206, 212, 217 f.,  
220–222, 230, 235 f., 238, 240, 241 f.,  
251, 253, 256, 263, 266, 267–269,  
271–273, 276, 279, 281 f., 283, 284, 289  
Shelley, Percy Bysshe 147  
Sládek, Josef 63 f., 238  
Slovakia 176, 225  
Smetana, Bedřich 18, 117, 211, 218,  
Sobotka, Bohuslav 43  
Spanish Civil War 29, 57, 58, 89, 213 f.,  
227, 257, 264, 266 f., 270, 272 f., 291  
speech acts 67–69, 168 f., 219  
Stalin, Josef 176, 225  
St. Ludmila 235  
St. Vitus Cathedral 110 f.  
St. Wenceslas 54, 69, 143 f., 146, 159,  
165, 170, 204, 226 f., 235, 282, 286  
– ... chorale 69, 170  
Soviet Union 7, 26, 56, 176, 223, 225  
  
Sudetenland 11, 13, 43, 46 f., 51, 54, 58,  
86, 135, 142, 175 f., 181, 215, 242, 251  
Surrealism 34, 156, 243, 257  
Šalda, F. X. 57, 203 – 206, 211, 273, 285  
  
*tamizdat* 35, 183  
Teige, Karel 34, 247  
Teta 235  
Thirty Years' War 238  
Tiso, Jozef 241  
Toller, Ernst 270,  
Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich 271 f.  
Toman, Karel 211, 218, 243  
truth 7, 24, 67, 82, 102, 113, 180,  
182, 186, 191, 194 f., 202, 219–222,  
224–227, 253 f., 259, 265  
Tsvetaeva, Marina 59 f., 246  
Týl, Josef 59  
  
Vančura, Vladislav 36, 194, 223, 239  
Vaughan, Henry 237  
*věrnost* 23–30, 39, 64 f., 69, 78, 133,  
193–198, 205 f., 213 f., 218–221, 227 f.,  
238 f., 254, 255, 286–288, 290  
– ... manifesto *Věrní zůstaneme* 23,  
62, 265 f., 290  
Viviane, Lady of the Lake 249  
Vltava 116 f.,  
Voskovec, Jiří 15  
Vrchlický, Jaroslav 114, 118, 238, 286  
Vyšehrad 53, 110 f., 159  
  
Wagner, Richard 271  
Wells, H. G. 264  
Werich, Jan 15  
White Mountain 116, 150  
– ... Battle of 22, 28, 65, 229, 238, 240,  
253  
Wolker, Jiří 34, 53, 202 f., 205, 218  
Wordsworth, William 33  
  
Yeats, W. B. 271–273, 285  
  
Zeman, Miloš 11