

Faith, Truth, Fidelity

Věrnost in Post-Munich Czech Poetry





Frances Jackson: Faith, Truth, Fidelity

Schnittstellen

Studien zum östlichen und südöstlichen Europa

Herausgegeben von
Martin Schulze Wessel und Ulf Brunnbauer

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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.¹ 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.”² 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, recouped³ – 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?”⁴, 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.⁵

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.⁶

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 novel⁷, 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 comprehend⁸ – 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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 80th 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 *Protektor* (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.¹¹

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.¹² 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?”)¹³ 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.¹⁴ The First Republic was founded in 1918 by the deeply charismatic Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk – half stern grandfather, half benevolent emperor¹⁵ – 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.¹⁶

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."¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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",²⁰ 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.²¹

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.²² 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.²³ 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.²⁴

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.²⁵

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.²⁶ 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. ŮŘP, 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 Hašek²⁷. 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 250,000.²⁸ 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"²⁹ 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"³⁰ was replaced in Karel Hynek Mácha's *Máj* (Engl. "May") with "Pán náš zhyň"³¹, presumably to prevent its being applied to the Führer.³² 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, kinematografie. 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, Reichsregierung." (Engl. "that above all the grammatical endings came across as ugly and resulted in the degradation of the words themselves: e.g. Reichsprotektora, Führerovi, Reichsregierung.") 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.³³ 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 Reichsprotektor 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.³⁴

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.³⁵

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 19th century, which were republished in huge print-runs. Between 1939 and 1940, 37 different reprints of works by Jan Neruda appeared³⁶ and in 1940, the year that marked the 120th anniversary of her birth, 70,000 copies of Němcová's *Babička* were printed.³⁷ 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 Seifert³⁸, 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 Prague³⁹. 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.⁴⁰

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 success⁴¹, 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”⁴² – 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.⁴³ 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 assessment⁴⁴ – 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.⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶

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!”⁴⁷

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.⁴⁸

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 teplota 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.⁴⁹ 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 infectious⁵⁰, 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.⁵¹ 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 loajálním 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 loajálně po nové cestě, spojeni 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.⁵² 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].⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

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.”