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The Holocaust in Slovak Drama*

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The article discusses several Slovak plays with the theme of the Holocaust; namely *Ticho* (Silence) by Juraj Váh, *Holokaust* (Holocaust) by Viliam Klimáček, and *Rabínka* (The Woman Rabbi) by Anna Grusková. It also briefly refers to *Návrat do života* (Return to Life) and *Antigona a tí druhí* (Antigone and Those Others) by Peter Karvaš, both mediating traumas from concentration camps. Two plays (*Ticho* and *Návrat do života*) were written and staged immediately after the Second World War. Karvaš's *Antigona* is a rare occurrence of the theme in Slovak drama during the Communism (in the early 1960s), whereas Klimáček's and Grusková's plays are recent, both staged in 2012. The article focuses on several aspects of these five plays: on dramatic characters representing "victims", "witnesses" and "culprits" (Panas, quoted in Gawliński 2007: 19); on references about and/or representation of the Holocaust in dramatic texts; and on the type of the conflict(s) in the plays. It also mentions specific approaches of respective authors when dealing with the theme of the Holocaust, as well as with the relevance of their reflection of the theme for Slovak society in respective periods.

Keywords: 20th century Slovak drama; contemporary Slovak drama; Juraj Váh; Peter Karvaš; Viliam Klimáček; Anna Grusková; dramatic characters; dramatic conflict

1. Introduction

The article discusses several Slovak plays with the theme of the Holocaust and/or concentration camps. It analyzes dramatic characters and conflicts; it shows variations and transformations in mediating the theme of the Holocaust in Slovak drama and theatre from the 1940s until the present day; it also focuses on changes in the perception of the Holocaust in Slovak society mentioning motivations and approaches of playwrights, as well as the reception of the plays. Wheareas Váh's and Karvaš's experience with

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measures that deprived Jewish citizens in Slovakia of their civil rights, property and lives was direct and personal[1], Grusková and Klimáček – representing the generation of "grandchildren" – have a mediated experience of the Holocaust and no family ties with its victims or survivors. They do not only face the challenge of taking part in the discourse that still causes mixed reactions in the society; they also face the challenge of coping with the established iconography of the Holocaust and difficulties of its theatre representation.

2. The Holocaust as a mirror and an echo, or who has the right to speak

Juraj Váh's (1925–1976) almost forgotten play *Ticho* (Silence) is a rare piece on the Holocaust in Slovak drama from the late 1940s. Váh was probably inspired by facts, documents and films about the Holocaust that appeared after the war. Nevertheless, when *Ticho* was staged in 1949, critics remarked that it was not particularly topical and original any more (Rozner 1949: 4).

The conflict of the play set in 1943 in Slovakia begins as a discussion between adherents of neutrality (Father, Mother, Gentleman, and Lady) and anti-Fascists (son Adam), and sounds like an academic discussion on the Existentialist choice until a Jewish person appears in the house and asks for help. The "Jewish question" eventually results in an open conflict between Adam and his father. Adam's former classmate that claims to have escaped from a concentration camp is named Spiegel (*nomen omen*). He not only serves as a *deus-ex-machina* in the plot but also functions as a mirror, giving the Slovak society an access to "parallel time and space". The stage only shows Slovak reality (a comfortable house of a well-to-do family). A contrasting space of concentration camps is mediated by

[1] Juraj Váh's real name was Henrich Herzog (however, he only started using his literary pseudonym around 1948), and he came from a mixed, Protestant-Jewish family. The family adhered to the Evangelical Church during the war. Due to this fact and also due to his age, he and his family were not deported. Peter Karvaš came from a Jewish family, and during the war he published his early works under various pseudonyms. Towards the end of the war, when transports were resumed, he was hiding.

Spiegel's narration and description. Images of the camp narrated[2] by him are strong yet stereotypical (gas, chimneys of crematorium, dogs biting people and innocent people being killed when somebody escaped). A dialogue between Spiegel and Adam in the second act is an exchange of experience between those who "have been there" and those who try only to imagine it. Adam has access only to one side of reality (peace, life) whereas Spiegel (like a Biblical Lazar) encompassed both polarities. Eventually, Spiegel's guilt (for wanting to stay alive when it meant that others die) is brought up. Adam states that Spiegel's desire and decision was selfish: he sacrificed dozens who could have survived the war. It implies that an individual struggle is inferior to a collective, mass interest.

> Adam: (...) You saved yourself. But you are only one. You redeemed yourself for a very high price, Spiegel. For an astonishing price. Compared to which everything that you want to do and perhaps you will have done is miserably small (Váh 1948: 36)[3].

In the third act, Father takes into consideration both possibilities: if Spiegel is a spy, then he has no respect for him, and he derogatively calls him "Židáčik" (Jewbrew, Heeb); what is more, he adds:

> (...) if you do not play, if you tell the truth, in that case you are old. Very old. Older than me. Because every day of yours meant a year. And in that case you are on the very threshold, as we say nicely. You have very little ahead of you. A tiny bit (Váh 1948: 53).

The protagonist of the play is not meant to be Spiegel but Adam (sic!), a new man (Communist) born out of the revolt against the old (bourgeois) world of fathers. Spiegel is not portrayed as a hero; vice versa: in Adam's home, he shows fear and submissiveness (he accepts Father's money and humbly leaves the house); and when mentioning the camp, he admits that he was enjoying some privileges since he did not protest against homosexual abuse, and that his escape probably caused death of innocent people. Spiegel only functions as a catalyst for the split with the old world: the Holocaust serves a teleological interpretation of history. Whereas Adam is the force of the future, Spiegel is both victim and witness. He represents

[2] Some theatre critics considered the prevalence of words over actions a sign of inexperienced or weak playwright who exploited techniques appropriate for fiction and radio plays rather than for the stage (Smrčok 1949: 97).

[3] All translations from Slovak to English are mine.

the past that is not to be denied but honoured; nevertheless, the past is to be overcome and eventually exploited, modified, or even abused.

Like the reality (the experience or even the space) of the concentration camp is not (cannot) be presented on the stage, any further reference to the Holocaust is only a partial reproduction delayed in time (echo). The Holocaust functions as a "mirror" and "echo" – one is unable to look at it directly[4] and to reproduce it faithfully by words.

Besides the atmosphere of Adam's home, contrasted to a brute noise of the camp, the title of the play, *Ticho* (Silence), implies the silence about the "parallel" reality of the Holocaust in Slovakia during the war. The disappearance of any imprint, sound, image and persons evokes vacancy, emptiness, also associated with the end of the old world. While Fathers disappear by (a revolutionary and sudden) force and must be annihilated (by the Marxists version of history), Spiegels of the past disappear like shades, gradually, by acts of forgetting or remembering. This, however, implies a persistent dialectic struggle of forces in history; and deprives the Holocaust of exceptionality, placing it along with other genocides. "(...) It would be a major mistake to consider Váh's *Silence* a play that wants to deal with the Jewish problem during the occupation or even to solve it" (keb 1949: 5) Instead, in critic's perception, it is a play about the future.

3. A digression: overlooking the Holocaust

Another drama from the same period, Peter Karvaš's (1920–1999) play *Návrat do života* (Return to Life), also emphasizes future. As the title indicates, the play discusses how to "find the gate to life" (Karvaš 1949: 27) after the war. The protagonists, a doctor of medicine Martin Hora denounced for distributing leaflets, his wife Mária and his comrade, a former thief Vincko Dráb, returned from concentration camps which meant a border-line situation. The camps are not represented on the stage, and not much is said to describe them: Karvaš assumed that the audiences were familiar with facts. He focused on characters, on their current feelings and

[4] As if a (camera) lens (or a mirror glass) was needed in order to look at it.

their evolution in the play. The characters realize that their past experience cannot be shared, and that they live in a different time dimension: their trauma makes them remain in the past. They feel despair and anger when they meet former colleagues; and they feel guilty when they think of people who did not survive. Being unable to find the "meaning" to their lives, they think of suicide. The major conflict of the play is a sort of a modern dispute between life and death. Death is felt as universal, omnipotent and omnipresent: it is different from dying in peace times in hospitals:

> Vincko: Yes. You are saving from death patients from rooms fifteen, eighteen and thirty. You prevent them from dying privately and once. But death that we saw is not a private death of the head doctor Hora and Mr. Dráb!
>
> Martin: (…) it was the death of the world. Expansive like air and vast like time. Our skin pores are full of it, and we will smell it for eternity (Karvaš 1949: 20).

Discussing types of death in the play sounds like an Existentialist literary cliché, whereas the idea of society developing towards an ideal future reminds one of a Marxist concept of history. The cathartic force that returns both male characters to life is work, namely, work for "future generations", whether it be healing (Martin) or constructing houses (Vincko). A sick child that has to be operated on urgently, a pregnant woman, and a house for new families are remedies for the camp. In spite of a secular tone of the play (related to the author's Communist background), the concept of "a child"[5] that redeems the past and guarantees life, as well as the idea of "return" have a religious background.

Karvaš's historical and social optimism is based on vitalism (life and procreation defeat death), and on the acceptance of shared values (activity and community). Karvaš in this play interpreted camps as a sort of *gulags* used to punish those who did not obey the regime or who were against it. None of the concentration camp survivors in either version of the play is Jewish. The Holocaust experience is silenced; instead, the anti-Fascist resistance and political struggle are put into the foreground. This gives one the impression that history needs "heroes" more (or just longer) than "victims".

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[5] A sick child to be urgently operated on in Karvaš's play is named Ivan (sic!). He is only mentioned in the text and never appears on the stage.

Antigona a tí druhí (Antigone and Those Others), written by Karvaš in 1962, is set in a concentration camp[6]. Alluding to Sophocles' tragedy implies a theme of human dignity, as well as (dis)obeying authorities. Karvaš's Antigone carries out the same mission[7] as Sophocles' heroine; and the play, similarly to the Greek tragedy, shows a clash between principles[8]. However, the emphasis in Karvaš's play is on a rise of a tragic collective hero that overcomes collective guilt (a failure of a military operation during the Slovak National Uprising of 1944–1945). It is important that one person, a mysterious Johannes (sic!), survives and carries on a mission while all other prisoners agree to protect him even if they do not know him and even if they die. Setting the play in a concentration camp enabled Karvaš to create a gloomy atmosphere in which characters had to strive hard for their dignity and freedom. The reality of the camp was mediated by soldiers' uniforms and prisoners' clothes, by constant violence

[6] On the stage, there were ruins of an ancient building and above it, a barbed wired fence with sharp points facing upwards that created an impression of a large electric crown of thorns. Lights were organized in a circle above. We refer to the first Slovak performance in the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava in February 1962. A Czechoslovak premiere was in the National Theatre in Prague in January 1962. In 1960s, *Antigone* was staged in other Czech and Slovak theatres, as well as in the former GDR, Hungary, former Yugoslavia, former USSR, Romania and Austria. For a complete list of performaces, v. Hudec R., 2011: *Krátky sprievodca Archívom Divadelného ústavu v Bratislave*.

[7] In a modern version, Antigone strives to bury the body of a German political prisoner left frozen in the middle of the camp. Other prisoners are Slovaks caught during the anti-Nazi uprising. However, Antigone is not the central character of the play.

[8] Nazis represent oppression, aggression, violence and superiority whereas prisoners defend humanism and freedom. Nazis are presented rather stereotypically by officers Krone (ideology; Krone resembling Kreon) and Storch (dumb military obedience), as well as by Krone's wife Erika (culture and good manners). Prisoners stand for various parts of anti-Nazi resistance – among them, there is a member of the regular army, a partisan-individualist, a humanist (semi-blind Professor that resembles Teireisius), and finally, an exemplar, a Communist, a character named Lieutenant, as well as two females, Antigone and Ismena, who are abused by German soldiers. Antigone denies any feelings for Storch, who protected her, and her refusal to show affections causes her death. Motifs of sexual attraction, abuse and eventual revolt between a Slavic woman and a German man can also be interpreted from the gender and/or imperial perspectives.

Karvaš introduced contrasts on various structural levels of the play – in theme, characters, composition and dialogue (Nazis and prisoners; principles embodied by respective characters; individual characters-choir; violence and tenderness, political and personal, hope and despair etc.; lengthy and elliptic sentences, words-silence, words-gestures and movements, whispering-machine gun shooting, sharp light-dusk, etc.).

and danger of death, and also by mentioning chimneys, dogs, lighthouse, shooting, bombarding, Russian prisoners singing, and visits of the Red Cross. The only reference to the Holocaust in the play was a remark about a Jewish barrack in the camp. *Antigone* brings a message about the "light in the darkness" – about subversive, invisible forces that challenge visible authorities, which can also be perceived as Karvaš's dialectic interpretation of history. In spite of Karvaš's reputation as a playwright and theatre researcher, his "revolutionary" or "Socialist" tragedy (cf. Dedinský 1962; Hirš 1962) lacked the central conflict and the central character. "(...) not every dramatic character is a tragic hero, and not all well-constructed plays are necessarily tragedies" (Vrba 1962). However, in *Antigone* Karvaš revived the Existentialist drama.

The fact that Karvaš who witnessed the tragedy of the Holocaust in Slovakia but did not write much about it, might be explained either by his trauma or by fear, but also by overlooking or neglecting it. He might have seen other historical events, for example, the anti-fascist Slovak National Uprising of 1944, as more important for the ultimate goal namely, the victory of Communism.

4. A document of some brave woman, or the Holocaust cannot be comprehended

In 2012 the theme of the Holocaust appeared in Slovak theatre again, to commemorate transports from Slovakia that began in 1942. Anna Gruskoová's (b. 1962) theatre play *Rabínka* (The Woman Rabbi) is a part of author's project on a real historical person, on a Jewish activist killed in Auschwitz, Gisi (Gisela) Genendel Fleischmann, born Fischer[9] (1892–1944). The first version of the play from 2006 was more "gender oriented", centring on Gisi

[9] An American historian Joan Campion wrote a book on Fleischmann in the 1980s, and a Slovak historian Katarína Hradská published two books on Gisi Fleischmann in 2003 and 2012. Grusková collaborated with historians in Slovakia and in Israel, made her own research in the archives in both countries, and interviewed members of Fleischmann's family. She first wrote a radio play, then a theatre play in 2006 (which was completely rewritten for the Slovak National Theatre in 2011–2012), she made a photo exhibition, a documentary film (<www.rabinka.sk>), and has been considering a novel.

Fleischmann as an outstanding woman. It showed Fleischmann's personality, her determination, her leadership qualities, her ability to negotiate with German officials (real persons, Wisliceny and Brunner), her personal life[10] (her complicated relation to her mother and two daughters, as well as her brief affair with a Swiss journalist Benno Weiser Varon), and her tragic fate[11]. The second version written in 2011–2012 contained more background information on historical and political contexts of the Jewish question in Slovakia. Grusková's project on Fleischmann contained yet another important aspect – the one related to cultural memory of the space (in this case, of Gisi's birthplace[12], today's Slovak capital Bratislava that almost completely effaced traces of its former Jewish quarter and Jewish inhabitants).

Gisi Fleischmann was an active member of Women's International Zionist Organization in the interwar period and a member of the Slovak Centre of the Jews in Bratislava during the war. The Centre, in collaboration with Slovak authorities, first organized legal relocations of Slovak Jewish citizens abroad, especially to Palestine. When Slovakia started deporting its Jewish citizens in 1942, the Centre was supposed to help to organize them but its members also used their contacts to stop them, often bribing German and Slovak officials. In the play, Gisi's mother rebukes her for her behaviour that might be seen as her "tragic flaw": "Your husband died, you did not care about him, you were constantly in all those associations of yours, you sent your children away so that they do not interfere (…), you want to be above, to be a boss, to have power, you would be nobody abroad" (Grusková 2012: 73). The play also shows Gisi's contacts with

[10] Gisi Fleischmann was married and had two daughters. When the war broke out, she sent both daughters to Palestine. Her husband and mother died during the war. Both daughters died childless but Gisi's nephew and niece still live in Israel. Bibliographical information is based on Hradská K., 2012: *Gizi Fleischmannová: návrat nežiaduci*.

[11] Fleischmann overlooked a detail while negotiating with German and Slovak officials, and this cost her life, or she might have been sacrificed. In exchange for a favour, she arranged schooling of a Slovak official Kos' son in Switzerland. Her letter of recommendation was discovered when Koses were crossing the border. They were denounced by Kos' eager maid who had been asked to sow the letter into a lining of Ms Kos' fur-coat. Discovering clandestine contacts between the Centre for Jews and Slovak top authorities caused that Fleischmann was sent to Auschwitz with a note "Rückkehr unerwünscht" (return undesirable).

[12] *Stolperstein*, a stumbling rock in the pavement to commemorate victims of the Holocaust (an initiative that a German artist Günter Demnig had carried out in numerous towns), was also placed in front of Fleischmann's house in Bratislava in 2015.

a German advisor for the Jewish question in Slovakia Dieter Wisliceny. Fleischmann negotiates with him about a transport to save Jewish children, and about possibilities to bribe Germans to stop transports from Slovakia completely. Their conversation is an obvious manifestation of political power that also includes a traditional gender aspect.

In both versions of her play, Grusková experimented with a dramatic form. She combined documentary and fictional approaches; she inserted film script into the dramatic text; and mixed several languages reproducing different layers of experience. For example, Gisi's lines are based on her correspondence, and other documentary materials are cited in the text and the performance. The text is complemented by fictive dialogues. The Biblical story of Ester and a traditional play performed during Jewish festivities are also included in the play (stories in the story). It also contains Gisi's dream on a mighty and handsome Iron Man, who is wearing metallic armour and a crown from barbed wire while getting closer and closer to her house; this dream might be a metaphor of her life violated by power.

Even though the plot evolves towards Gisi's tragic end, the story is constantly interrupted by comments of a character named Guide who narrates facts from Fleischmann's life and describes historical context, as well as by film projections. The projections include historical images of the town, photographs of people who became dramatic characters, as well as comments of historians and memories of Fleischmann's family and friends. The play finishes by several monologues judging Gisi's life which creates an effect of distance.

When staging[13] *Rabínka* in the Slovak National Theatre in 2012, a complex nature of the original dramatic text was used "not to serve Gisi Fleischmann's story understandably and easily; obviously, not to make it easy for spectators…it is logical: to narrate about something so incredible, as the Shoah was, in a more difficult language" (Kollárová 2012). All characters, including males, were played by three female actors, Gisi being a blue-eyed blond. Casting itself, as well as acting denied realistic and psychological approach. The performance emphasized distance and alienation, and avoided emotions. It did not wish to reproduce a story of

[13] A female and not a Slovak director (Czech Viktorie Čermáková) was chosen to direct the performance.

the heroic character but to reproduce gloomy and absurd reality. Spectators were exposed to a pressure of acoustic and visual incentives in a set of heterogeneous scenes. An autonomous theatre reality referred distantly to distorted, bizarre and grotesque historical reality. One was supposed to remain perplexed by the performance, as one is necessarily perplexed by the nature of historical reality[14]. This theatre representation of the Holocaust gave up on the possibility of rational understanding of the historical tragedy, and did not necessarily offer emotions either: it more likely provoked discomfort and disgust with any power machine. The Holocaust experience was mediated through a metaphorical figure of a grotesque Iron Man[15] from Gisi's dream, dressed in an oversize costume, walking on stilts, and speaking a language of computer mastered sounds of German.

5. "How far backwards do you want to look? Into prehistory?!" (Klimáček 2015: 425)

In his drama *Holokaust* (Holocaust), Viliam Klimáček (b. 1958) addressed the issues of the Slovak national identity and history, as well as culture, memory and morals[16], relating historical events to the presence. "After all, isn't that unreal lack of morals today only a natural continuity of our ancestors' failures?" (Pavlac 2013: 55). The past covers the period

[14] In spite of this expectation of play producers and some theatre critics, the audiences did not generally appreciate the formal complexity of the performance.

[15] Iron Man was originally a statue of a Buddhist king decorated with a swastika that was found in Tibet by a German expedition looking for roots of Aryan civilization.

[16] *Holokaust* was written for a "Civic Cycle" in a Bratislava based theatre Arena and premiered on 12 December 2012. The cycle included plays on Communism, on the Uprising of 1944, as well as on contradictory personalities of Slovak history – on Jozef Tiso (the President of the Slovak Republic during the Second World War) and on Gustáv Husák (who began his political career in the interwar period; was active in anti-Fascist movement during the Second World War; he was imprisoned in the 1950s in a fake lawsuit as a "bourgeois nationalist"; however, he became one of leading figures of "normalization" after 1968, and was the Czechoslovak President in the 1970s and 1980s). Among other recent performances with the theme of the Holocaust, we can mention *The Shop on Main Street* (v. also note 20) as a theatre adaptation (in Prešov) and as a musical (in Bratislava), both versions in 2014; as well as a new dramatisation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in 2016 (in Zvolen) and 2017 (in Košice): however, *The Diary* was already staged in Slovakia in the 1950s.

between 1929 and 1949. The play is a kaleidoscope showing a happy cohabitation of various nationalities and denominations in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period; followed by the war experience, the Slovak autonomy, the rise of Slovak National Socialism and the Holocaust; as well as the Communist *coup d'état* of 1948 and forced nationalization of the property. The presence focused on the post-1989 period which brought, on one side, a non-transparent privatization, and on the other side, restitutions of confiscated property (with a legislative problem whether to consider pre-1948, pre-1945, or pre-1939 conditions). Klimáček underlined economic and financial aspects of politics and history, including the Holocaust; and this connection was also expressed by the titles of two acts of his play, *Aryanisation* and *Holocaust*. As Jana Wild noticed, Klimáček placed the Holocaust in the context of changing sociological and cultural regulations, and showed it in everyday experience (Wild 2015: 484). However, there is a certain contradiction between a clear statement on the history in the play, and playwright's nostalgic fascination with the interwar culture and lifestyle. He playfully cites and re-writes languages of radio, advertisement, popular music, poetry, theatre, language, habits and leisure, etc.

Characters in Klimáček's drama were not written to be psychologically deep; instead, they represent model roles and model destinies. Female Jewish characters (such as a café owner Rosa Rosenfeld, her daughter Ester and her friend Lili Weiss) were partially modelled after a real person, Hilda Hrabovcová who was in the first transport of Jewish girls from Slovakia in 1942 and who shared her experience in a book of memoirs[17]. Besides Jews[18], characters include aryanizators (Slovaks who took over Jewish businesses), collaborators and opponents of the pro-Fascist regime, as well as those who wished to remain impartial. A character of Ambróz Králik

[17] Memoirs with a title *Ruka s vytetovaným číslom* (Arm with a Tattooed Number) were published in 1998.

[18] Rosa is first placed in a category of an "economically important Jew" but then deported, and she died; her daughter Ester returns from a concentration camp, becomes a Communist but eventually emigrates to Israel after 1948; Lili hides during the war but when, after the war, she finds out what happened to her family, she commits a suicide; Rosa's son Jacob joins the British air force but his plane is shot. Spectators who were meant to be "witnesses" of the (hi)story find themselves among "victims" and "culprits" after the interval when they are seated in the space of the former stage.

is a metonymy of an aspiring Slovak[19] whose poetry might paradoxically represent the peak of Slovak national culture of the era. In the early 1990s, Králik's daughter Anna returns from the exile in the Argentine to (Czecho) Slovakia to claim the property that the Communist regime "nationalized" in 1948. Ignorant of her deceased father's story, she encourages (readers, spectators) to forget the past: "How far backwards do you want to look? Into prehistory?!" This line also refers to a desire common after 1989 to start from the scratch (to draw "a thick line"). Klimáček's play has a subtitle *A story that Slovakia would rather forget*. *Holokaust* was written and staged to remember the tragedy of Slovak Jews, and to integrate it to Slovak history. However, it seems that Slovak history (the heritage of the war Slovak Republic), as well as nation's emancipation and potential nation's guilt matter more than the Holocaust – it is a catalyst in Slovak history.

6. Conclusion

Even though the Holocaust was represented in Slovak drama and theatre rather rarely, works mediating this historical tragedy offer a range of interpretations and artistic approaches. The Holocaust experience in Juraj Váh's play from the late 1940s, as well as traumas of concentration camps in Peter Karvaš's plays from the mid-1940s and early 1960s served a Marxist interpretation of history. The Holocaust was perceived as a sacrifice necessary for better future (Communism). The memory of the Holocaust was to be overcome quickly since trauma prevented people from feeling enthusiastic

[19] Originally a poet (his poems, written by Klimáček, imitate the Catholic Modern School in Slovak poetry during the interwar period), he becomes an owner of Rosenfeld's café, gets involved in politics, becomes a renowned poet of the regime, marries Rosenfeld's former servant Hana, and is able to keep Rosenfeld's property after the war, but he eventually emigrates when Communists get to power in 1948. His life story could be a story of the Slovak Catholic post-1945 and post-1948 exile in a nutshell.

As Jana Wild mentions, there is a possibility interpret psychoanalytically Králik's fear of Jewish women and his choice of Hana, whom he brings up and educates, as well as his sexual behaviour in marriage (violence as a suppression of desire, masochist and sadist features – v. Wild 2015: 485). Králik reminds one of another aryanizator, Tóno Brtko, a protagonist of an Oscar winning film of Jan Kádar and Elmar Klos *Obchod na korze* (*The Shop on Main Street*, 1965). Brtko, who aryanized a Jewish shop, is a humble and shy Slovak who, however, became a murderer.

about the future. In Váh's play, the Holocaust was represented as a parallel experience that can only be mediated through lenses (a reflection of reality in any representation) and that can only be echoed in witnesses' narration. However, silence also mediated the experience of the Holocaust that, actually, "mirrored" the situation in Slovakia for several decades.

The representations of the Holocaust in Slovak theatre in the 21st century by Anna Grusková and Viliam Klimáček were related to societal changes after the fall of Communism when it was felt necessary to cope with nation's past, when news facts were available and previous biased and distorted interpretations of history were abandoned. Dramatic texts often combined documentary drama with fictive, imaginary writing; and they used intertextuality, different languages and media. Experiments with the form enabled playwrights and performers to address various aspects of the Holocaust experience, and to facilitate different interpretations, reactions and emotions. Grusková's play, besides the gender aspect (women's history), communicated incomprehensibility and disturbing anaesthesia of the Holocaust experience. A performance based on her drama also emphasized grotesque dimensions of power. Klimáček's play inserted the Holocaust into Slovak history, and pointed at a connection between economic interests and political decisions. Both representations of the Holocaust in contemporary Slovak theatre also revived cultural memory of the space. Writing about the Holocaust experience contradicts attempts to "draw a thick line" that would separate the past from the presence and could produce a state of societal amnesia.

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