





Česká republika se zotavila z otřesu rozdělení dobře a byla schopna ustavit stabilní a demokratický systém a položit i základy tržní ekonomiky západního typu. Na konci devadesátých let se však ekonomické ukazatele zhoršily, začala se vyslovovat obvinění z korupce, a to způsobilo pád Klausova režimu. Přišla první politická krize nového systému a mnohým se zdálo, že je pro český stát fatální. Jak ale upozornil Václav Havel, jednalo se stěží o víc než běžnou výměnu vlády, která otevřela cestu jiné a snad lepší politice nového vedení. Slovensko, kde se zřetelně uplatňují autoritářské metody vlády, nemělo takové štěstí. V obou zemích lidé i jejich představitelé stále nesou trpké následky komunismu a budou muset vynaložit hodně času a práce, aby je překonali a ustálili politicky stabilní demokracii a tržní ekonomiku. Oba státy jsou ale poprvé ve své historii zcela nezávislé. Přijetí České republiky a možná posléze i Slovenska do Evropské unie a NATO nezmenší podle mého názoru jejich samostatnost, ale naopak ji posílí a ochrání.

Tento krátký nárys bouřlivé historie dvou malých národů v srdci Evropy nechce předstírat nalezení historické pravdy. Nejde o nic víc než silně osobní zprávu o mém vlastním životě v kontextu československé historie. Je třeba mnoha dalších studií a vědecké práce mnoha jiných badatelů, kteří mají na výběr z různých hledisek - např. třídy, národa, generace nebo gender. V minulosti byly otázky společenského rodu, gender, často zanedbávány a opomíjeny a až nyní se stávají kritickým hlediskem analýzy. Sally i já jsme si byli vědomi důležitosti ženského hnutí v české historii před rokem 1918 i v období republiky; uvědomovali jsme si jak pokroky, tak trvající nerovnost v postavení žen. Viděli jsme, že v komunismu docházelo ke zrovnoprávnění žen a mužů v práci - v zaměstnávání a v konkrétních profesích, ale stejně tak jsme cítili i tíhu nadměrného břemene, které komunistický systém ženám ukládal. Otázky gender ovšem nikdy nebyly těžištěm našich zkušeností, nestrukturovaly naši paměť ani mé sociálně politické uvažování. Můj nárys československé historie, či spíše jejích obrysů v posledním století, má na tomto místě pomoci vytvořit všeobecný kontext pro texty, které následují a které se výslovně zabývají sociálně rodovými aspekty této historie. Při rekonstrukci pravdy o minulosti plné nerovnoprávnosti, násilí a lidského utrpení je nanejvýš důležité nalézt a probádat vzpomínky odlišné a specifické stejně jako ty, které jsou společně sdílené.

## Narrative/Archive/Trace: The Trial of Milada Horáková

Marci Shore

*My very dear, very good father,*

*I kneel at your old knees and I can do no more than to kiss your honest hands. Fate could not have given me a better father than you were to me. You gave me so much, everything you possibly could and did: physical strength and a warm home in my childhood and youth, you raised in me an honest person and you took more than painstaking care. Your life was only a means by which we could live. And yet fate was mercilessly hard on you. First your two, much-loved children died, then Mama, afterwards my and Slavek's arrest and five more years of anxiousness and uncertainty, and now in your blessed old age I strike another blow to your too good heart. Father, Daddy, forgive me, understand me, don't harden your heart towards me! As I grew there grew in me so many of your qualities, even though otherwise directed. I know that this should not afflict your eighty-one years. I know that I should stand by you and kiss your dear hand, before the time of your departure to Mother arrives. It happened otherwise. Nevertheless I will stand by you just the same and with Mother I will wait for you. Perhaps the journey to us will go easier for you. Overcome even this harsh strike of fate, Father! To be sure you are a fighter! It was not for nothing that you went down the mountain of Krivosij and fought in Boka Kotorska. How I would like to listen today a thousand times to your tales of those times. There is something else, however, that I need from you - I want you to live, for once again you have more to worry about. Janička must not have any greater sadness! For her you must live now - I did not have time to impart to her the annals of our strong and honorable family. You must do that for me. You will not, will you, refuse to hear me and you will tell your granddaughter the story of where we come from, how strong and healthy our family was - like an iron oak, our grandpa from Hodkov, and how people loved that smiling old woman from the countryside with such a very good, very human heart. You will tell also about your own dear wife, about grandma, whom Janička never met, about how they blessed your marriage at the church of Saint Vojtěch and how our family began. Grandpa, tell! My daughter will tell it again to those who come after her. This is that eternity in which lies our continuation. She will preserve us, Father, even though we will be no longer. Tell her also about how you had beautiful ideals in your precocious youth and then about the struggle of your active years. To be sure, Father, you aspired to wider and*



greater things than only those personal and family-related. Do you remember, how we children did not want to let you go to the demonstrations on the streets of Prague? Forgive us, it might have ended badly for you. And for that reason tell your granddaughter. Give her as well instruction, and may you be more successful than myself. The two of us loved each other so, somehow without words, and when we argued and exchanged different opinions and were frustrated with each other, just at those times we loved each other the most. Father, keep in very good health. Do this according to my will that you will live until your nineties; but as you see, we do not part for long. I kiss your dear hand, with all my being I say: thank you for everything that you gave me as a father, and I beg you to forgive the pain that I am causing your old heart. Underneath the hundred year-old limetree, at the Hodkovský graveyard by the wall, there someday all will speak about what ancestors we had, those royal people from the mill under the castle. Daddy, father, you were among the loves of my heart. Do you have any idea about that, my dear old man? I kiss your head, your hand, you are the king from Hodkov. You will endure. Until we meet again! I kiss your hand, Milada.<sup>1</sup>

You were the last one hanged that morning, but on the days that came afterwards many people died on those gallows. The Party chauffeur scattered some of their ashes on the snow when the driving became slippery in the Bohemian winter.

In the days before your execution you wrote to ask your mother-in-law for forgiveness:

*I know that you will prevail over your own Golgotha, because you have faith, the most powerful shield. Mother, I have faith as well. For that reason maybe you more than anyone else will believe if I say the words of the Biblical psalm: 'And though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me.'*<sup>2</sup>

Many of the others who came to the gallows, like you, forgave their executioners. They did not say, though, as you did, "I am departing without hatred." They said, "Long live the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia!" They did not believe that God would walk with them through the valley of death. They were believers, but of a different kind. Would you have been as willing to die if you had known that all that awaited you was nothingness? (Nihilism. Why does everyone refuse to see that at the core of the experience was only nothingness, an abyss? I think of the Chassidic Jews singing as they walked towards the gas chambers, declaring their faith in the coming of the messiah. I find such faith unbearable - *nesnesitelný*. I find it

<sup>1</sup> Milada Horáková, *Dopisy Milady Horákové* (Praha: Lidové Noviny, 1990), pp. 22-24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

pathetic, obscene. To face nihilism would seem to instill upon their memory more dignity.) They were willing to die as a last service to the Party. They loved their country, too! They also wrote letters, and like your letters, their letters did not go to those to whom they were addressed, but rather to the archives where the paper yellowed and the door was locked.

I imagine the prison warden receiving the letters. Your hands giving them to him. Your fingers are long and your skin is dry. Does he read them? I try to imagine his stature, bulky like a security guard, like a man who might have been once a college football player, a centerpiece in a local gym - no, this is certainly not him. The well-built guard with the large biceps belongs in an American story. This man, rather, is smaller, definitely smaller - but what does that mean? thin? short? - somehow slimy with greasy hair. Greasiness, why do I fixate on this greasiness? I see grease dirtying the letters, staining the paper, the letters that I cried over when I read them, even though they were not addressed to me. I want him to be ugly, unattractive because he is cruel, the enemy. Yet of course in reality this is often not the case. Often the fascists are the most attractive. Sylvia Plath once wrote that "every woman adores a fascist." She was speaking perhaps about her father. *Daddy*. This was before she put her head in an oven and turned the gas on. And this slimy man, he is not a fascist, for at the moment I am gazing at the other side of the red barricade.

I try to conjure up in my mind the Stalinist security apparatus. I want to sift through it, focus, there must have been an archivist. Where is he? He (again he?) is the one I am interested in, not the warden. He is the one who saw the letters. I understand why he did not give them to those to whom they were addressed. This would have been an impossibility (truly?). But my question is this: why does he not destroy them? It would be so easy, a few letters, one match from the package he uses to light his cigarettes, for I am quite sure that he smokes. He smokes a lot. Does he feel a sense of historical consciousness, a sense of the need for posterity? He marks them for the archives. Perversity. The Leninist touch.

My friend comes by, sees me crying over the photocopies, takes me for coffee.

*Here quite spontaneously in the middle of applause erupted the slogan: We want peace! Here young people speaking about the future of our children, our pioneers - and there are the condemned who were speculating about war, who desired war, who helped to foment war.*

*And this, too, is the whole difference. We love mankind, we believe in mankind, we know that the most precious thing in the world is human life. We are fighting so that the dreams of our parents not only become reality, but also so that they become small for us - we are fighting so that all of human life blossoms like an exquisite flower, so that our children do not rec-*



ognize and our grandchildren forget the sense of the words poverty, war, fascism.

They love nothing except themselves. They are willing to murder thousands of people so that the factories will be returned to them. They hate mankind, they despise mankind, they want to return to the past. (- Stanislav Neumann)<sup>3</sup>

...You must, my little girl, find your own path. Search for it independently, do not let anything deter you, not even the memory of your mother and father. If you really do love them, you will not hurt them by seeing them critically - only you must not find yourself on a path which is dishonest, untruthful, false and unsuited to life. I have reconsidered many things, changed my mind about a host of values- what however has remained for me as unchanging, that without which I cannot imagine my life, is the freedom of my conscience. You, my little daughter, think about whether or not I was right<sup>4</sup>...

There are paradoxes, inexplicable. Milada ends this letter to her daughter with a reading list. Here are some books I've read recently. Read some of them. When you read them, you'll certainly think of me... She lists Gottwald (*With the Soviet Union for Time Eternal*), Stalin (*Writings, The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Short Course*), Pujmanová. Does anyone remember her today? She was once at the vanguard of a new literary genre, Stalinist court poetry. She was among the wizards who, out of the dust of war, conjured up a new language with the power to ensorcell. For a brief time there was a battle, a battle of the languages, and then the language in which Milada wrote to her father disappeared forever.

And so my only daughter, my little girl Jana, new life, my hope, my projection into the future, live! Grasp life with both hands! Until my last breath I will pray for your happiness my dear child!<sup>5</sup>

Oh, but we should start at the beginning, we should return to that moment in February 1948. Oh, this is not really the beginning? No, of course not, we should begin with the war, before the war, perhaps with the French Revolution when ideology itself was invented and the calendar began anew. Modernity meant ecstasy and execution.

<sup>3</sup> Stanislav Neumann, "Rozdrtili jsme bandu zrádců, rozdrtíme každého nepřítele lidu!" *Rudé Právo* 30 (11 June 1950), p.4

<sup>4</sup> *Dopisy*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

And so it happened that in February 1948 the Communists took power not in bloodshed and violence, but to the cheers of about half the population. And please note: the half that cheered was the more dynamic, the more intelligent, the better half.<sup>6</sup>

Yes, it was the better half who prepared the noose, for how can one be dispassionate about revolution? To deny reason is to betray conscience, another young Stalinist wrote in a much later time. Now I am hesitating - needlessly - for it has all already occurred and I can change nothing. I do not want - no, that is not true; I am tempted to but I will not - to discuss abstractly. Rather I - we - must, should return to the trial, to that moment when the curtain was raised in the theatre of horrors, with the best and brightest as the avant-gardist directors. It is an exercise in imaginative projection into the past, into a time and place where I was not. There is no way around it but to go inside. It is voyeurism, objectifying, perhaps pathological.

Prosecutor: *Paní obžalovaná...*

I must confess that these are my favorite words from this trial, this refrain, such a surreal juxtaposition of refined bourgeois formality and barbarian bloodiness. Throughout the trial the prosecutor never departs from the formal form of address. The words are like a motif: *Paní obžalovaná, Madame Accused...*

Prosecutor: *Madame Accused, you are confessing then, that you worked in a criminal way against the state... against the people's democracy of the Czechoslovak Republic?*

Milada: Yes - of that I feel guilty.<sup>7</sup>

I want to know only one thing: where did those words come from? To whom did they belong? Another question has been on my mind. By what means did they persuade you to confess? I speculate, yet... I do not know for certain. Did they torture you? I refuse to envision the torture. There are limits to the imagination. I will not. (Yet the Nazis tortured you, too, and still they could not break you.) This is too primitive, and I am interested in modernity. I want to immerse myself in your times - such a cataclysmic moment of modernity - and not think about blood. An impossibility? But there was no blood! They hanged you... Besides, I do not want to speak to you about the

<sup>6</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p.8.

<sup>7</sup> Milada Horáková a společníci, *Proces s vedením záškodnického spiknutí proti republice* (Praha: Ministerstvo spravedlnosti, 1950), p.30.



hanging. I want to speak to you about the words.

For these were the words which gave impetus to an orgy of bloodlust:

The working people are attentively following the trial against the grand traitors and with outrage demand just, strict and harsh punishments for the evil-doers.<sup>8</sup>

Milada: The object of this meeting was to agree on whether it was necessary to create a social organ, which would coordinate and direct antistate activity of these various movements...

Prosecutor: Directed towards what kind of goal?

Milada: Directed towards a change of the regime.

Prosecutor: And all of you agreed on that?

Milada: In essence, yes.

Prosecutor: You all concurred that it was necessary to get rid of the people's democratic order and that you would endeavor to do that. You thus fomented here some kind of fundamental counterrevolution, is it so?

Milada: Yes.

Prosecutor: Could you also tell me what kind of concrete changes were supposed to attend the destruction of the people's democratic order? For instance, were factories, nationalized factories to be turned over to their former owners?

Milada: We did not yet have any concrete solution in that direction.

Prosecutor: Speak clearly.<sup>9</sup>

Have courage and clear goals - and you will prevail even over life. Today your young head is still very much unclear and there no longer remains for me time to give you an explanation for that which you would still like to ask me.<sup>10</sup>

Outside the courtroom in the city of Prague, people listened to the live broadcast on the radio.

Milada: That would mean at the least to resolve compensation and reparations for these people.

Prosecutor: Madame Accused, I am asking you again, given that, did your program mean the return of the businesses which were nationalized to the mill owners?

<sup>8</sup> František Němec, "Třináct vlezrádců," *Práce* VI (4 June 1950), p.1.

<sup>9</sup> *Proces*, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> *Dopisy*, pp. 44-45.

Milada: The return of the ownership of these factories.

Prosecutor: Thus a program for millionaires - not for the people.

Milada: It was a program for the bourgeois strata.

Prosecutor: Hence by that road there was supposed to have been here a renewal of capitalism. What do you think, how would perhaps the workers of a factory which has been nationalized accept their former master - being aware that he would exploit their work further?

Milada: I have a different position towards that matter.

Prosecutor: If you supposed that the workers were not willing to turn over their factories to the capitalists, in what circumstances did you assume this could happen?

Milada: Under the conditions of a reversal of the regime.<sup>11</sup>

Do not be frightened and sad from the thought that I will no longer return. Learn, my child, right away from your youth to take life seriously...<sup>12</sup>

And the people, the workers responded.

'We miners' - they write from the mine Barbora-Union in Old Tichov by Duchcov- 'are following with our rage the trial against the band of grand traitors and spies, who shrunk from nothing not even the spilling of the blood of their own people and their own nation only in order that their golden capitalist times might be returned to them. To their attempts at overturning the people's democratic order we, miners, answer, that we will expand still more our socialist competition in our mine and by so doing will provide new tons of coal and a new life to our industry. We demand of the state judge that he consider the great guilt of the saboteurs and hand down a just and strict sentence.'<sup>13</sup>

Prosecutor: And how was it supposed to come to that?

Milada: The circumstances under which it could have come to that we saw concretely in three possibilities: in the possibility of a war, in the possibility of a diplomatic agreement, which would be forced by economic pressure...

Prosecutor: We will remain with the first possibility, the possibility of war. What kind of wars, with whom, against whom?

Milada: Wars of the Western powers against the East, that means against the people's democratic countries and the Soviet Union.

Prosecutor: And on whose side would stand the former SS-men of

<sup>11</sup> *Proces*, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> *Dopisy*, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> "V tisících rezolucí odsuzuje náš lid bandu špiónů a vlezrádců," *Rudé Právo* 30 (7 June 1950), p.1.



Western Germany and on whose side in such a case would stand you and your co-conspirators?"

Milada: ... - I cannot answer that.

Prosecutor: You cannot? Thank you.

....

Milada: The aim was a change of the political situation.

Prosecutor: You also said, in what kind of way. You said that you envisioned a war. You were saying that in connection with a war you counted on a change in the political situation, that you were focusing on foreign emigration, that there would be a war and I am asking you, what were people from your network supposed to do in the time of war?

Milada: Mister Prosecutor, in the time of war it would follow logically from the whole of our activities that we would stand on the side of the enemy.

Prosecutor: Simply create a fifth column?

Milada: I myself personally would not call it that, but I cannot object if you so name it.

Prosecutor: Why would you not want to call such an activity, such a saboteur's activity, the activities of a fifth column in such a way as I have called it?

Milada: I imagine a fifth column as a foreign hostile element, someone of a different nationality.

Prosecutor: Madame Accused, when the entire republic is working constructively and when against that a handful of people assist in preparing a war against their own republic, is not that a foreign and hostile element?

Milada: (she is silent)

Prosecutor: Thank you, that is also an answer.<sup>14</sup>

The intellectuals respond:

Every common man trembled with horror when Horáková declared that of course she was counting on a war, that of course she envisaged the fact that in that war women and children would be murdered.

...All of our people, who with satisfaction accepted the notes of the just verdict, express their deep disgust for them. Our workers, our peasants, our intelligentsia, our women and our youth, who in the struggle with the great powers of yesterday are working for the establishment of a beautiful future, express their deep disgust for them.<sup>15</sup>

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Prosecutor: ...The only real conception was war, Madame Accused, war against the republic, as the single condition in order for your plans to be realized. Is it so?

<sup>14</sup> Proces, pp. 34-35, 42-43.

<sup>15</sup> Ivan Skála, "Logická cesta k zradě", Rudé Právo 30 (11 June 1950), p.5.

Milada: We in the committee also thought about - with which I myself of course did not then agree, because from an international perspective I did not regard it as somehow practical - about the possibility of a diplomatic road, about international elections, under international control, etc.

Prosecutor: Do you recall a certain act of international control which we paid for in 1938?

Milada: I do recall. And just for that reason in these conceptions, as I have here stated, we envisaged a war.

Prosecutor: You envisaged a war and to war belongs the atomic bomb. At least they so threaten us.

Milada: I am, Prosecutor Sir, really about matters of war...<sup>16</sup>

The children respond:

...Pioneer Doležal from secondary school in Hradec Králové also listens to the radio. He has already created for himself an image of what kind of people are standing here before the judge: 'I know what kind of people these are. They are those who want back their millions in profits, their factories so that they can exploit the working people. When they don't succeed in their plans, they make new plans, for example for a new war. They want to gain their lost advantages at the price of murdered children. But they will not succeed. Just as adults respond by their work, so we pioneers, we will try harder to contribute to the building of our strong republic.'<sup>17</sup>

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Prosecutor: You were counting on the fact that in the case of war perhaps Prague as well would be struck?

Milada: If there were to be a war, we would have to count on striking all targets.

Prosecutor: Among them even Prague? Is your sixteen year-old daughter in Prague?

Milada: Yes.

Prosecutor: Thank you. That is enough.<sup>18</sup>

The women respond:

We, women from Vimperk, from a border town, we, who are devoted co-builders of socialism in our country, demand for all of the accused the highest punishment!<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Proces, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> "Proces proti veležrádcům a špiónům - škola bdělosti a ostražitosti," Rudé Právo 30 (6 June 1950), p.1.

<sup>18</sup> Proces, p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> "Pracující žádají přísné potrestání zrádců," Práce VI (6 June 1950): 1.



One day, when you have grown up, you will think much about this, about why your mother, even though she was loving and even though you were her greatest gift, conducted her life so strangely.<sup>20</sup>

Oh, but wait, I have forgotten those who have suffered. They are not silent either:

I have already lived through much in life. Mainly during the First Republic, when my husband was let go from the factory Auto Praga because he was a communist. For three years he was without employment. He tried to find a position wherever it was possible. When that was no longer possible, he went to claim support. At that time I went myself to serve "masters" so that we could at least somehow survive. One day the controller came and when he had determined that I worked as a cleaning lady, they no longer gave my husband even that alms voucher.

Dr. Horáková, who today stands before the state judge in Prague, certainly did not live such a life as did myself and thousands of others. But she is also a wife and a mother, and for that reason I cannot comprehend how she could have supported such a goal that would again return the factories to individuals, so that again the feasting minority would rule over the majority, dying of hunger, how could she desire and work so that there would be another war. I am sitting by the radio during each reportage from the trial. I am listening intently and I cannot believe how calmly and cynically a woman can admit to such crimes.<sup>21</sup>

In the late 1960s two Czech film makers made a black and white film about the medieval witchcraft trials in Bohemia. It was a film about the confessions extracted through torture. The turning of the screw. The breaking of the priest. The burning at the stake. At certain moments I closed my eyes in the movie theatre. Such inexcusable weakness. *Kladivo na čarodějnice*, a hammer on the witches, a vile film.

The wall behind which people were imprisoned was made of verse. There was dancing in front of it. No, not a danse macabre! A dance of innocence. Innocence with a bloody smile.<sup>22</sup>

Have I mentioned that sometimes I come home from the archives and vomit? And it is not even my language, there is a veil between myself and the words.

And at the trial, on the stand, whose language was that? I

<sup>20</sup> *Dopisy*, p. 45

<sup>21</sup> S. Dufková, "Dopisy Rudému Právu," *Rudé Právo* 30 (7 June 1950), p.7.

<sup>22</sup> Milan Kundera, *Life is Elsewhere*, trans. Peter Kussi (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), p.270.

watched you on the tapes preserved at the national film archives in Prague. In black and white. I wrote a letter and asked very politely if I might come and see your trial. I was quite surprised when the archivist answered me and said, yes, please, come and watch. You appeared composed, resigned. You seemed to speak calmly. To whom did those words belong, your final statement.

I think that the only courageous thing I can still do is this, when I say entirely nakedly, truthfully, without embellishment to everyone: Do not do what I have done...<sup>23</sup>

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A person does not live in the world alone - in this there is great happiness, but also an enormous obligation.<sup>24</sup>

Many telegrams arrived at the Ministry of Justice, demanding that those who had betrayed their country be given the highest punishment.

Here, before the faces of the working people, on the bench of the accused concludes the shameful path of the bourgeoisie, concludes the path of criminals who have united against the people of this republic in order to thrust a dagger into their backs!<sup>25</sup>

The former parliamentary representative for the National Socialist Party Horáková confesses this with cynical openness: of course, I envisaged the atomic bomb. Of course I envisaged the fact that in the war all targets alike will be hit. Prague as well. And Czech and Slovak mothers and children. All of this belongs to Horáková's plan - a plan which failed.<sup>26</sup>

...This woman and mother demonstrated her own cynicism when to the state prosecutor's question of whether she was aware of the fact that a war with all its horrors would hit Prague as well, answered that she is aware of that and that war does not choose its victims. She answered so cynically, despite the fact that the prosecutor reminded her of her sixteen year-old daughter who lives in Prague. So great is the hatred of these traitors against the people's democracy and against the working people, that even a mother in the interests of capitalism can sacrifice her own child. For that reason we, working people, remember today the words of Julius Fučík: 'People, be vigilant!' Yes, we will be vigilant...<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Proces*, p. 264.

<sup>24</sup> *Dopisy*, p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> "Spravedlivé tresty velezrádcům," *Práce* VI (9 June 1950), p.4.

<sup>26</sup> Bedřich Rohan, "Galerie zrádců," *Rudé Právo* 30 (6 June 1950), p.5.

<sup>27</sup> Ladislav Šejbl, "Dopisy Rudému Právu," *Rudé Právo* 30 (7 June 1950), p.7.



God blessed my life as a woman with you. As your father wrote in a poem from a German prison, God gave you to us because he loved us. Alongside the magical, wonderous love of your father you were the greatest gift which fate has given me. Providence, however, has measured my life in such a way that I was by far not able to give what my mind and my heart had prepared for you.<sup>28</sup>

A Canadian professor once told me that he cried when Stalin died. It was winter in Toronto and outside the window behind the desk in his office the snow was falling. I was taking notes and I stopped. He had been a child at the time, a child from the Balkans raised in a Czech orphanage. It was March of 1953 and the somber social workers came to tell the children. And the girls, he told me, the girls were sobbing...

Stalin died in 1953 and there followed great mourning. Then after a long silence, Khrushchev began to speak, and I imagine that many were sorry that the silence was ever broken. The writers were accomplices in a carefully staged murder, and yet when I imagine how they had to meet in that spring of 1956, I feel pity for them. Such a sad story.

*My generation grew up with Stalin's name, and with his name, in 1944, as seventeen year-old boys, we came to the Party. My best friends went to their deaths in Terezín with this name. It personified our youth and our hope. It personified for us the Soviet Union. For that reason I wrote about him. I am not ashamed. (-Stanislav Neumann)<sup>29</sup>*

Do you remember him? He was one of those who commented so articulately on your trial, rallying support for your moment at the gallows. When I see him at that meeting in spring of 1956, I feel pity. I imagine his voice shaking. I am convinced that he is sincere. He will not apologize now, but he is a heartbroken man. His life is now over, his faith cruelly stolen. I believe that he meant no harm.

Neither would his fellow writers leave him in peace. Slowly, gradually over time, beginning with vague allusions and hints and progressing towards more and more pointed allegories impossible to ignore, they began to invent a new language and insist that all speak it. Or at least some began to insist that others speak. Finger-pointing. It was a question of guilt, a kind of a all-consuming, horrifying guilt that was beyond devastation. Some were stronger than others.

<sup>28</sup> Dopisy, p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> Stanislav Neumann, contribution to the 2nd Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers, *Literární noviny* 5 (16 May 1956), p.7.

All of us who are sitting here today... All of us - and I don't want here to ponder the reasons why, whether out of fear or out of blind faith or lack of knowledge - raised our hands in meetings in support of shameful resolutions which we ourselves formulated more than once. All of us, in whatever kind of frenzied ardor, shouted - stone them.<sup>30</sup>

This was the critical moment, when the writers, the directors, the magicians of language pulled back the curtain on themselves. And do you see what it engendered, what it had to engender? Faith was dead. In its place was only the terrifying abyss of anomie, angst. Nothingness.

*Since then, whenever I make new acquaintances, men or women with the potential of becoming friends or lovers, I project them back into that time, that hall, and ask myself whether they would have raised their hands; no one has ever passed the test: every one of them has raised his hand in the same way my former friends and colleagues (willing or not, out of fear or conviction) raised theirs. You must admit: it's hard to live with people willing to send you to exile or death; it's hard to become intimate with them, it's hard to love them.<sup>31</sup>*

This is, in a way, a eulogy. A funeral. The death of faith.

Milada has long been dead by the time the former young Stalinist writes this. I think about her trial. I picture her in black and white, as I saw her in the film footage. In a jacket and straight skirt, wire glasses, her hair pulled tightly into a bun. Long nails or short nails? I cannot imagine them painted, but perhaps this has something to do with the black and white film. It is difficult to think in colors now. (Although when I once spoke to the daughter of a high-ranking Stalinist - who did not want to speak with me but whom I cajoled and persuaded - she told me that she remembered that time, her childhood, as the time of the brightest colors.) She is not entirely devoid of femininity. They might have cut her hair, dressed her in slacks, made her look more like a man. This shocks me, still, that she appeared at the trial as a woman. The implications - imagine them! - of executing a woman. The first woman executed in Czechoslovakia. *Paní obžalovaná*. There were four executions that morning, and hers was the last.

*Paní obžalovaná*. I hear in my mind the sing-song inflection of Prague Czech, such a sweet, high-pitched language (I always have to raise my voice an octave when I speak it) full of affectionate diminutives and a unique, encoded absurdist humor. *Paní obžalovaná*.

<sup>30</sup> Ladislav Mňačko, "Boj teprve začíná," *Literární noviny* 12 (1 June 1963), p.9.

<sup>31</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Joke* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), p.76.



The hanging of the first woman. Transgression. And was not just this the essence of the system, the proof that the performance all had paid to attend was truly avant-garde and not merely an imitation?

Yet in their effort to prove that everything is possible, totalitarian regimes discovered without knowing it that there are crimes which men can neither punish nor forgive. When the impossible was made possible it became the unpunishable, unforgivable absolute evil which could no longer be understood and explained by the evil motives of self-interest, greed, covetousness, resentment, lust for power, and cowardice; and which therefore anger could not revenge, love could not endure, friendship could not forgive.<sup>32</sup>

I am departing without hatred, Milada Horáková told her executioners. She made a wish for them - *Přeji vám to, přeji vám to* - but suffocated before she could articulate it.

We are grateful to the judge for strictly and justly punishing the enemies of our republic, for protecting our people, our children and simply everything young and beautiful which is growing in our country from the wreckers of peace and freedom...<sup>33</sup>

Milada was born into a world in which Czechoslovakia did not yet exist. Her childhood was set in the Austro-Hungarian empire. She was not from the city, not from Prague. I picture her as in a black and white photograph from the interwar era, with her long hair pulled back and twisted on top of her head. Why, even then, can I not see her with her hair hanging down past her shoulders? She is walking elegantly into a literary salon (*Cafe Slavia*? Did it exist then? This was before Vaculík's time there, before *A Cup of Coffee with My Interrogator*), walking towards a table by the window, ordering black coffee. Black? Yes, for some reason it's black. Who is her companion? I want to say Milena Jesenská, because the image is tempting, sexy, Kafkaesque, but no, that was unlikely. I change her companion in my mind to see who fits, who is imaginable. I play with the images, with the dates. I want to imagine Milada with Rosa Luxemburg - this again is perversely tempting to me - but no, their timing is off, Milada was only four years-old when the 1905 Revolution subsumed Rosa's life. For a moment I see Gottwald, but I am immediately disgusted. No, he must go as well, for different reasons, because the scene is inherently too undignified, and I like to restore to the past a sense of dig-

<sup>32</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1976), p.459.

<sup>33</sup> Bohuslav Havránek, "Jednali z hluboké nenávisti k lidu," *Rudé Právo* 30 (11 June 1950), p.4.

nity, a dignity despite my own voyeurism, although I suppose these things are at odds with one another. So Gottwald cannot stay for coffee, but perhaps in his place I can put Julius Fučík. Most definitely a better choice. What might she say to Fučík? He was a victim of the Nazis as well, perhaps their common experiences...

The traitors got their deserved punishment. I have no regrets over any of those repulsive evil-doers. On the contrary I think that the traitors Hejda and Zemanová deserve still harsher punishment. We all must try to make it forever impossible for all of our enemies to take any action against the republic, which millions of honest people by their own work are transforming into a true paradise. (- Anna Vacková, Stakhanovite)<sup>34</sup>

And then the language in which Milada wrote to her father disappeared forever. A language, like an animal, became extinct and in its place appeared Paradise just around the corner. Here instead are the new words. The new words of the elite, a super-worker, a female Stakhanovite, the embodiment of the New Woman (who was, perhaps, only an imitation of the New Man?). Perhaps not everyone felt this outrage, *rozhořčení* - perhaps some rather felt terror. (Or were the two not, perhaps, inextricably intertwined?) But there was no space for them to speak, and so we do not know what they thought to themselves. Some of them are still alive. I could ask them, but... people often remember incorrectly.

I want to return to the beginning, to the story of Milada's father, the story of the man who did not receive the letter. What do we know about him? Now only what Milada's sister Věra, already an old woman, told a reporter from a young, hip Prague magazine after the revolution had come.

It was a horrible night. We knew that it would be at five in the morning. On the following day we went to my father. Even though he was very courageous, it was only with difficulty that we were able to calm him. He told us that all through the night he had gazed at the prison, at Pankrác. Then he sent us away, he wanted to be alone. In the afternoon, though, he came to see us and he appeared very calm: 'I was to see Mother at the cemetery and I have come to terms with everything. We will never speak about this again. Milada is always among us just the same and we must live life in a normal way.' Truly he never mentioned the matter again, although until the end of his life he wore a black tie.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Anna Vacková, "Rozsudek nad třinácti nepřáteli státu posílil republiku...", *Mladá fronta* 6 (10 June 1950), p.8.

<sup>35</sup> Zdeněk Procházka, "A nenoste smutek!" (interview with Věra Tůmová) *Mladý svět* XXXII (#9 1990), p.21



Have I mentioned that sometimes I come home from the archives and vomit?

...I am writing to you as to all the others and I do not even know if you are among the living and whether it will be at all possible that you will read these words. This is the greatest pain in my heart, that I do not know what has happened to you and that I have not even a sad certainty, and now there remain perhaps only a few hours of my life. It is the first time in the long years of our life together that I face without you the test which fate has determined for me. In my thoughts I am so alone, and I am not able to understand anything about this tragedy. Perhaps it will be explained to me in some other place, somewhere where our souls will meet again. I know and I feel only one thing, that in your great love you could not have abandoned me...

You are the only person in the world who I could believe understood me. I would like to be convinced, that I can count on that, rely on that, that you will understand me even today. There is, however, one thing that I am not able to understand: why did you abandon our child? In this question there is no reproach, only astonishment over something incomprehensible. I belong entirely to you, I am such as you have known me, I have remained faithful to our love, to you and to myself. If I depart before you do, it is only to wait for you patiently...<sup>36</sup>

After your death, no one spoke of you for nearly forty years. Oh, in 1968, when "faith" was being decomposed and reinvented and there were still some who remembered the past or who at least had rediscovered it, dust from the fossils of Masaryk's humanism floated into Prague. Once again people danced in the streets, like they did on the day after your execution. A young Stalinist wrote about this when he was a young Stalinist no longer:

And knowing full well that the day before in their fair city one woman and one surrealist had been hanged by the neck, the young Czechs went on dancing and dancing, and they danced all the more frantically because the dance was the manifestation of their innocence, the purity that shone forth brilliantly against the black villainy of the two public enemies who betrayed the people and its hopes.<sup>37</sup>

When the dancing began again in 1968, your family asked again for your letters. They were refused. Then came the Russian tanks and there was no appeal. Time stopped again for another twenty years.

Then the revolution came. No one believed it would, but it did. And when they repainted the street signs - as they do each time the

<sup>36</sup> Dopisy, p. 55.

<sup>37</sup> The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, p. 66.

revolution comes - they named one street after you. It is a big street, ulice Milady Horákové, one of the largest and busiest in Prague and quite close to the Castle.

The next year your letters found their way out of the dusty archives. They are personal letters, but you asked that they be published, and a new generation too young to have known you has published them.

Hence the voyeurism, hence the guilt.

## Vyprávění/archiv/stopa: Proces Milady Horákové

Marci Shore

Přeložila Daniela Šafránková

Můj předrahý, předobry tatíčku,

klečím u Tvých starých kolenou a nemohu víc než jen líbat Tvé poctivé ruce. Byl jsi mi tátou, jakého bych lepšího od osudu nemohla dostat. Dal jsi mi tolik, všechno, co jsi jen mohl a měl: pevnost tělesnou a teplý domov v dětství a mládí, vychovával jsi ve mně poctivého člověka a staral jsi se přepětlivě. Tvůj život byl jen prostředkem, abychom mohli žít my. A přece Tě osud krušil nelítostně. Nejprve dvě Tvé milované děti zemřely, pak maminka, nato zase mé a Slávkovo zatčení a pět let úzkostí a nejistoty a nyní ve Tvém požehnaném stáří jsem zasadila já další ránu Tvému předobrému srdci. Táto, tatíčku můj, odpusť mi to, pochop mne, nezavrž se ke mně! Vždyť jsem tak rostla a bylo ve mně mnoho z Tvých vlastností, i když jinak stát u Tebe a líbat Tvou drahou ruku, až přijde Tvá chvíle odchodu za mámou. Stalo se jinak. U Tebe však budu stát stejně a budu Tě s mámou čekat. Snad se Ti o to půjde za námi lehčeji. Překonej ještě i tuto ránu osudu, táto! Vždyť Ty jsi bojarský junák. Nadarmo jsi nepřelézal strmou Krivošíju a nevojančil v Boce Kotorské. Jak bych si dnes ráda poslechla třeba už potisícáté Tvé vypravování o těch časech. Já však od Tebe potřebuji něco jiného - chci, abys ještě žil, máš zase o starost víc. Janička nesmí už mít větší smutek! Pro ni teď musíš žít - neměla jsem čas ji svěřit anály našeho pevného a poctivého rodu. Musíš to udělat za mne. Vid, že mne neoslyšíš a budeš své vnučce vypravovat, odkud že my jsme, jak byl pevný a zdravý náš rod - jaký to byl ocelový dub, ten náš hodkovský dědek, a jak lidé milovali tu usměvavou panímámu s předobrym lidským srdcem. Budeš povídat také o své drahé ženě, o babičce, kterou už Janička nepoznala, o tom, jak Vám požehnali na cestu životem u sv. Vojtěcha a jak začala naše rodina. Dědečku, vypravuj! Ta má dcera to poví zase těm příštím. To je ta věčnost, v tom je naše troání.