



Willy Mahler's *Theresienstadt Diary* and Arnošt Goldflam's Play *Sweet Theresienstadt (Sladký Theresienstadt)*

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1.

The play *Sladký Theresienstadt* was premiered in Prague's Theatre Archa in November 1996. The Archa Theatre cooperated over the preparation of the play with the New York non-profit organization En Garde Arts. The project began early in 1993, when a group of American theatre directors, led by Anne Hamburger, the executive producer of En Garde Arts, travelled to Prague in search of an idea for a play (cf. Fuchs 1997, 5). The play was directed by an American, Damien Gray. The composer, set designer and light designer were also Americans, John Hodian (Emmy winner 1992), Richard Dennis and Christian Method. They confessed they had never heard of Theresienstadt before.

The writer of *Sladký Theresienstadt*, author, playwright and novelist Arnošt Goldflam (1946), has very often used Jewish topics in his works. His father was born in Vienna in an assimilated Jewish family, before World War II he lived in Brno in Czechoslovakia and soon in the autumn of 1939 was transported to a „Judenreservat“ (Jewish reservation) in the area east of Nisko on the River San along the frontier of the Polish „Generalgouvernement“. The Jews from Nisko were chased over the German-Soviet demarcation line while warning shots were being fired. Most of these deportees asked the Soviets to help them, where upon the NKVD, the Soviet Secret Service, categorised them as „unreliable“ and sent them to forced labour camps. In Lemberg (today Львів in Ukraine) this young man who would one day become Goldflam's father, met a young Orthodox Jewish girl from Poland. Both survived the war, Mr. Goldflam as a soldier in the Czechoslovak army which joined the Red Army in the fight against Nazi Germany, the girl in a secret hiding place with a Polish family. After the war they married and moved to Brno in Moravia. Arnošt Goldflam was born soon after. Most of their relatives had died under Nazi persecution. Both the cultural habits and languages of Goldflam's parents were different. „My early childhood took place in a multilingual stew“, wrote Arnošt Goldflam (2006, 11). The native language of his father was German, his mother and grandmother spoke Yiddish and Polish. The family celebrated both Jewish and Christian holidays but also Communist festivities. One of his uncles was in exile, the other uncle was imprisoned in the fifties, during the time the Communist regime led campaigns against Zionism. Arnošt Goldflam's father was investigated by the State Security (Státní tajná bezpečnost), but remained a member of the Communist Party.



Jewish topics can be found in Goldflam's plays and short stories. In the first part of his play *Písek (Sand)*, directed by himself (Hadvadlo Theatre, 1987), the characters are suddenly packing their things and boarding the train. Smoke rises over them, they undress and disappear, only their shoes remain. It is an obvious allusion to the Holocaust. Very soon after the premiere of *Sladký Theresienstadt*, the radio play *Budou vyvoláni jménem* (1998; *They Will Be Called by Name*, directed by J. A. Pitínský) was broadcast. It is set in Theresienstadt too. Most of the motifs are similar to *Sladký Theresienstadt*. In 1999 Goldflam collaborated with the Prague National Theatre for the first time. He wrote the dramatic text *Smlouva (The Contract)*, which is loosely based on the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. It is set in present day. The main character Antonín decides to follow the biblical Abraham and sacrifice his son Ignác to test God. Antonín starts the ritual by tying up his son and putting him on top of a pile of broken up furniture, which he has prepared in the middle of his living floor. He is interrupted by a Messenger, who denies that the sacrifice is the will of God. Antonín breaks an unwritten contract with God. His wife Stáza and his son leave him. He becomes a lonely and desolate man; a nihilist. Years later his adult son Ignác comes back, but at first they do not recognize each other. Then Ignác accuses his father of wanting to sacrifice him because of his pride. Ignác decides to sacrifice his father in the same way. Antonín accepts it and repents. Eventually, Ignác frees him and begins to take care of his father.

Also in Goldflam's short stories, especially in the Standa-cycle, the main character has Jewish roots and other autobiographical features: *Pořád o jednom a jiné* (2003; *Still about the Same and Others*), *Osudy a jejich pán* (2005; *The Fates and their Master*) and *Tata a jeho syn* (2012; *The Father and his Son*). In these stories, realistic scenes of everyday life are side by side with grotesque scenes as well as dreams. Goldflam was inspired by Jewish authors such as Franz Kafka, Bruno Schulz and Karel Poláček. In his later play *Z Hitlerovy kuchyně* (2007; *From Hitler's Kitchen*), six mini-stories linked by the character Adolf Hitler add up to a slightly unorthodox perspective of Hitler. Goldflam's grotesque reconstructions of Hitler's life and death remove any demonic qualities and present him as a completely private, bookish and slightly bizarre person. In the first scene Hitler and Stalin meet (by coincidence sometime before World War I) at a train station in Brno. They hope the trains will take them off to meet their dreams. At the same station, a little Jewish boy from Hungary is lost; his name is Georg Tabori.

Tabori was a Hungarian-Jewish writer and dramatist who survived World War II in exile and was famous for his provocative plays about the Shoah. So the premiere of Tabori's *Ich wollte meine Tochter läge tod zu meinen Füßen und hätte die Juwelen in den Ohren. Improvisationen über Shylock* (1979; *I Would My Daughter Were Dead at My Foot, and the Jewels in Her Ear. Improvisations about Shylock*), inspired by Shakespeare's *Merchant of*



Venice, had been planned to take place in the former concentration camp Dachau near Munich. However, it finally took place in the cellar, in the rehearsal room of the Munich Kammerspiele Theatre. The play was conceived as a jazz-session. Thirteen actors in black hats and caftans played thirteen Shylocks. Small dolls with Jewish stars were hanging on the heating pipes. There was a silent prelude at the beginning of the play. During this prelude the dolls were brutally stripped, torn or stabbed. This scene possibly inspired Arnošt Goldflam in his *Sweet Theresienstadt* (see below).

Goldflam's interest in the life of the Jewish community in Czechoslovakia was expressed in documentary films shot for Czech TV in the mid-nineties: *Ztracený domov* (*Home Lost*) and *Domov nalezený* (*Home Found*). These two documentaries contain Goldflam's interviews with Czech, Slovak and German Jews who emigrated from Czechoslovakia to Israel. Older interviewees recall their lives before World War II and the Nazi persecution. They also describe Czech and especially Slovak antisemitism. Among them are celebrities such as the writers, journalists and researchers Viktor Fischl, Erich Kulka, Ruth Bondy and Joab H. Rektor.

2.

The play *Sladký Theresienstadt* subtitled *Vůdce daroval Židům město* (*The Fuehrer Gave a Town to the Jews*) is based on documents about life in the Theresienstadt ghetto, the biggest Nazi concentration camp in Bohemia. The main inspiration for the play was the Theresienstadt diary of the former journalist and secretary of the football club AFK Německý Brod in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, Willy Otto Mahler (1909 – 1945, called Willy Mahner in the play). Willy Mahler was a distant relative of the well-known composer Gustav Mahler (cf. Kamp 2007).

This diary has not been published yet for ethical reasons (cf. Kryl 1994). Mahler had a relatively privileged position among the prisoners in Theresienstadt. He worked at the post office, was a member of the Jewish administration in Theresienstadt and he was a so-called ‚grupouš‘ (from ‚Gruppenältester‘, head of the group of prisoners), the head prisoner of Block B in the Hannover Kaserne (Hannover Barracks). He had a separate room from May 1944, which was a luxury in Theresienstadt, where there were only two square meters per prisoner. He could participate in various cultural events and, in contrast to the other prisoners, he was never hungry. As the excerpts I will quote will make clear, the language of Mahler's diary is somewhat clichéd and self-consciously literary, and Goldflam has reproduced that feature of Mahler's writing style in the script.



...přátelský večírek. Zábava byla velmi příjemná a při harmonice jsme pilně tančili. Že nám potom večeře obzvláště dobře chutnala, je samozřejmé.¹ (13.2. 1944)

K večeři jsem jedl bramborovou polévku, jež byla velmi chutná, a trochu opečených brambor [...] byli jsme potom v kavárně. Káva byla teplá, chutná² a chléb s povídky k ní donešený dobře chutnal.³ (5.11. 1943)

Most Jews in Theresienstadt were always hungry, some of them died of malnutrition. They were rarely able to visit the café, maybe once every few months.

Mahler narrates, often sardonically, many events in his diary including his egoistic behavior and his erotic adventures.

Za svého zdejšího pobytu poznal jsem mnoho žen, nejrůznějších typů a charakterů. Čtyři z nich jsem pak poznal intimněji. [...] K Schuře mě váže vděčnost, koná pro mě neocenitelné služby, jako skutečná moje hospodyně [...]. V Terče nalezl jsem inteligentní ženu a náš styk je skutečně velmi přátelský. [...] Marta upoutala mě svými neřestmi a myslím, že můj styk s ní byl trochu mužská vášeň. A konečně je zde Truda, jejíž poddávání je čistě milenecké, působí rozkoš a dává zapomenout na dny zde ve vyhnanství [...].⁴ (2.9. 1943)

Truda je roztomilá milenka, která mě dovedla dokonale upoutati [...]. Skutečně v jejím náručí zapomínám na svět, v němž žiji.⁵ (1.7. 1944)

Girls who fell in love with him had privileged positions in Theresienstadt. However, each acquaintance with a new girl only lasted a few months as they were destined to be transported. Only his last girl remains in Theresienstadt while he leaves on one of the last transports. His last journal entry is on September, 26th 1944.

Nevertheless, Mahler stresses that he was mentally faithful to his old love Marie (diminutive forms are Máňa, Mařenka) who as an Aryan remained in Německý Brod.

¹ „... a friendly party. The entertainment was very pleasant, and we danced a lot accompanied by an accordion. It is obvious that we very much enjoyed our dinner afterwards.“ (All quotations from the diary translated by Sterling Thompson and Jiří Holý.)

² Of course, it was just a coffee substitute.

³ „For dinner I ate potato soup which was very tasty, and some fried potatoes [...] then we were in the café. Coffee was hot and tasty and the bread with jam which was brought to us was good.“

⁴ „During my stay here, I had met many women, of various types and characters. Four of them I knew intimately. I really have to be grateful to Schura, she performs an invaluable service to me, as a real housekeeper [...]. In Terča I found an intelligent woman, our intercourse is actually very friendly. [...] Marta attracted me with her vices, I think that my contact with her was a bit of masculine passion. Finally, there is Truda, who yields to me like a lover; she gives me great pleasure and makes me forget the days in exile here [...].“

⁵ „Truda is an adorable lover who has perfectly captivated me [...]. Really, I forget the world in which I live when I'm in her arms.“



3.

In Goldflam's play Mahner's character is the same. After a moving farewell between Mahner and Mařenka (with an allusion to Bedřich Smetana's famous opera *Prodaná nevěsta* [*The Bartered Bride*]), we can follow him a year later in Theresienstadt with Schura.

(Schura [Šura] a Mahner vstávají z postele, oblékají se. [...])

Schura: Já se pomalu budu muset chystat na cestu.

Mahner: Vždyť máš čas, stejně o nic nejde.

Schura: Prosim tě, copak bude transport čekat zrovna na mě? [...]

Já to neznám... Birkenau... Březinka... tam budou lesy, voda... jako na prázdninách... to vypadá dobře. Pojedeš?⁶

Mahner: Nemůžu přece. [...] A nezlob se, víš přece... Mařenka... při tom všem... moje srdce a moje vnitřní já, zůstalo a zůstává mému... šuntílkovi... nedotčeno. [...] jsem jí věrný [...] Však nemysli si, mně je líto, že jedeš, nikdo se o moje věci nepostará jako ty. [...]

Schura: Všechno jsem ti vyprala, vyžehlila, všechno máš zašité. (Goldflam 2001, 176-177)⁷

Later, the real Willy Mahler participated in Kurt Gerron's filming in Theresienstadt in 1944 (see below), as did Willy Mahner in *Sladký Theresienstadt*. Mahner dances with his new lover Terča (Tercha) and looks at the singing girl, who reminds him of Mařenka (Maria). This vision appears again in the seventh scene of the play. Mahner approaches her in the belief that she is Maria and tries to explain his situation to her using almost the same words as in Willy Mahler's diary.

⁶ A similar allusion to the extermination camp Treblinka can be found in the radio play *Budou vyvoláni jménem*. „Rudy: I was assigned to the transport. In the morning I'll go. [...] Eliška: And where to? Rudy: Treblinka... I don't know anything about it. Eliška: That's good, I was scared that it was Auschwitz...“ Cf. the manuscript from Arnošt Goldflam's personal archives, p. 20.

⁷ „(Schura and Mahner getting out of bed and getting dressed.) [...] Schura: I've got to start getting ready for the trip. Mahner: But there's still time, it doesn't matter anyway. Schura: Think the transport'll wait just for me? [...] I don't know the place... Birkenau... Březinka... There'll be a forest there... it's by the water... like a holiday... It looks good. Will you come?

Mahner: I can't. [...] Don't be angry, you know why... Maria... in spite of everything... my heart, my inner being, is and shall stay intact for my... kiss keeper. [...] I am faithful to her. [...] But don't think, I am really sorry that you're leaving. No-one can take care of my things like you do. [...] Schura: I washed and ironed everything, and did the mending for you.“ Ewan Mc Laren's translation into English is being used with some corrections here in the preceding excerpt as well as in the following one. This translation is stored in the archives of the Archa Theatre. Many thanks to Arnošt Goldflam and to the theatre's director Ondřej Hrab for their help and consideration, as well as Sterling Thompson of www.englishintheoffice.cz/ for his help and proofreading



Mahner: Šestnáct měsíců! Za šestnáct měsíců nenašlaš jedinou možnost, abys napsala!
Je to možné? [...]

Mařenka: Koliks tam měl ženských, v tom tvém Terezíně?

Mahner: Nemiloval jsem nikdy žádnou, jen tebe!

Mařenka: A co Schura?

(Přivádí Schuru, už nachystanou do transportu.)

Mahner: Schura! K Schuře mě váže vděčnost. Konala pro mě neocenitelné služby, jako skutečná hospodyně. [...]. Náš styk byl hospodářsko-přátelský. [...] I když jsme měli také styk intimního rázu, nestali jsme se milenci v pravém slova smyslu. [...]

(Schura zůstává sedět na zavazadle a Mařenka přivádí nebo vyvolává další ženu. [...])

Mahner: Terča! V Terče jsem našel inteligentní ženu a náš styk je... byl... velmi přátelský a srdečný. [...] Však to Mařence řekni. Je to tak?

Terča: Je, opravdu, můžete mu věřit.

Mahner: Ty si totiž vůbec nedovedeš představit, jaké to tady je!

(Mařenka přivádí další.)

Mahner: No jo, Marta...! Jak to říct... zkrátka Marta mě upoutala svými neřestmi. Myslím, že naše styky, hlavně můj s ní, byl veden vášní. Pozor... byl, abychom tomu dobře rozuměli... byl! Ovšem! Někdo by to mohl odsoudit. Ale kdo by nechtěl žít? A když jsme zde zavřeni a plyne den za dnem za stejných, navíc úmorných okolností... [...] Bylo symbolické, že jsme každý dostali transportní číslo. To je teď náš charakteristický rys, to je první a nejdůležitější známka naší existence. Vytlačilo to oficiálně moje jméno a vnitřně to hrozí vytlačit i mě samého jako člověka. To je duševní boj, ve kterém člověk musí pokračovat, aby v sobě samém a ve svém bližním vůbec viděl člověka, a ne transportní číslo. (ibid., 198-200)⁸

⁸ „Mahner: Sixteen months! In sixteen months you didn't find any opportunity to write to me! How is that possible? [...] Maria: How many women have you had in that Terezín of yours?

Mahner: I never loved any of them, only you! Maria: And what about Schura? (She brings Schura who is ready for the transport.) Mahner: Schura! My bond with Schura is gratitude. No amount of money could pay for the services she performed for me, she's a real housekeeper [...]. Our relationship was one of business and friendship. [...] Even though we had a relationship of an intimate nature, we never became lovers in the real sense of the word. [...] (Schura remains seated on her luggage. Maria calls for another woman. [...]) Mahner: Tercha! In Tercha I found an intelligent woman and our relationship is... was... very friendly and warm. [...] Tell Maria! It is so? Tercha: It is, really, you can believe him. Mahner: You see, you can't imagine at all what it's like here! (Maria brings in another woman.) Mahner: Well, Marta!... how shall I put it... in short, Marta fascinated me with her vices. I think that these meetings, especially mine with her, it was driven by passion. Mind you... it was, to understand it correctly... it was! Of course! Some would condemn it. But who doesn't want to live? And when we're locked up here, and day after day flows by under these same mortifying conditions... [...] It was symbolic that each of us received a transport number. That is our most important characteristic, it is the first and most important sign of our existence. It officially ousted my name and inside, it threatens to oust me as a human. It is a spiritual fight in which a person must continue to see within himself, as well as in those close



Here we come to another component of Goldflam's play: the life of illusions that the protagonists create for themselves.

The last line in the previous quote resembles ambiguities in Václav Havel's plays. On the one hand Mahner describes the situation of Jewish prisoners in Theresienstadt truthfully. On the other hand these general proclamations disguise his own responsibility and his illusions. Both the character of Mahner as well as the real life Willy Mahler show that he believes not only in Maria's love for him but also in an early end to the war and liberation.

It can be seen in another scene, closely inspired by Mahler's diary. This scene was published in the book form of *Sladký Theresienstadt* but was not staged. It is a further dialogue of Mahner with the vision of Mařenka:

Mahner: Několik dní po odjezdu Schury do Birkenau jsem se sešel se svojí bývalou přítelkyní Martou. [...] A... a... když jsem pak učinil dotaz, zdali stává zde ještě možnost... intimního styku, překvapila mě Marta návrhem, že mi namluví jednu ze svých známých, jistou Vídeňáčku, Trudu, která prý hledá pro Terezín přítele. Tak jsem čekal, že mi v nejbližších dnech předvede svoji vzorkovou nabídku... no a to je tady... Truda (obrací se k Trudě). Tvoje oddání se je čistě milenecké, působí rozkoš a dává zapomnění na dny, prožívané zde, ve vyhnanství. [...] připomínáš mi po této stránce trochu mou Mařenku [...]. (ibid., 208)⁹

Then Mahner sings the aria about Maria from *The Bartered Bride*. He seems to be in great pain, he is „theatrically suffering“. In the prompt script written by Arnošt Goldflam and Damien Gray, Maria might be in an SS uniform or similarly unlikely costume. During the song, she disappears flying away into the sky.

At the end of September 1944, Willy Mahler was transported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. During the selection in Auschwitz, he was chosen for forced labour and sent to the concentration camp in Dachau where he died in January, 1945. In *Sladký Theresienstadt*, after a conflict with Gerroldt (see below), Mahner converses in the sixteenth scene in a dialogue with Eppstern (in real life, the head of the Jewish Council in Theresienstadt, Paul Eppstein), the firefighter Holtzner (also a real person in Theresienstadt) and the left-oriented Neumann about the future and the potential for survival. The dialogue is fittingly interspersed

to him, a human and not a transport number.“

⁹ „Mahner: A few days after the departure of Schura to Birkenau, I met with my former friend Martha. [...] And... and... when I made an inquiry whether there is still the possibility... of intercourse Martha surprised me with her suggestion that she would find me a girlfriend, Truda, a Viennese, one of her acquaintances. Truda was apparently looking for a boyfriend in Theresienstadt. So I expected that she would soon offer me a sample of her wares ... and now is the time ... Truda (he turns to her). Truda, you yield to me like a lover; you give me great pleasure and make me forget the days in exile here [...] you remind me a little of my Maria in this way [...].“



with news of a football match between two teams in Theresienstadt – the Cooks versus the Youth Care workers – and questions about Mahler's quality shoes. Mahner is proving to be the most optimistic. At the very end of the play Mahner tells Truda that he will be going for transport, while he accepts it as a given fact, his illusions remain.

Mahner: Jdou dva transporty, po dvou a půl tisících, sami muži od osmnácti do padesáti let. Proč by pro mě měla být výjimka? [...] Cítím, že můj odchod z Terezína je také osudem určen pro náš rozchod. Jestli se ale pak shledáme, ať je to brzy a na svobodě. Já tipuji konec války za tři měsíce. Sedmnáctého prosince 1944. [...]

Truda: Tak to už není dlouho, ani tři měsíce to nejsou, to je tak dva a půl.

Mahner: No! Tak vidíš. Nebyl tak špatný ten Terezín. Prožili jsme tady krásné chvíle. [...] Ale proč mě posílají pryč?... Hm, asi potřebují zdravé chlapy... něco repre... Uvidíme. (ibid., 237-239)¹⁰

4.

Goldflam originally wrote the play inspired only by Mahler's diary. In the second version of the play there was also another source of inspiration: the story about the filming of a propaganda documentary in Theresienstadt. The film was prepared after the so-called 'beautification' (Verschönerungsaktion) of Theresienstadt, which was associated with the visit of a Red Cross delegation in June 1944. Unlike the first attempt to create a film in 1942, called *Theresienstadt Ghetto*, which featured some shocking scenes (therefore it was never completed or shown in cinemas) the 1944 *Theresienstadt* film, also known as *The Fuehrer Gave a Town to the Jews*, completely falsified the situation of Jews in Theresienstadt. Their life was arranged to give the appearance of a happy, idyllic community: work in workshops and gardens, along with concerts, a café, library, bank, football matches and swimming in the river... The famous Jewish German actor Kurt Geron (Kurt Gerroldt in Goldflam's play), who was also a prisoner in Theresienstadt, was chosen as the film's director. Geron had been arrested in exile in the Netherlands and deported to Theresienstadt in February 1944. The Nazis promised him that both he and his family would live. However, shortly after he finished the filming in October 1944, Geron, his family and the other film actors were transported to

¹⁰ „Mahner: There are two transports, each with two and a half thousand people, all men between the ages of eighteen and fifty. Why should I be an exception? [...] I've got a feeling that my departure from Theresienstadt is destined to mark the parting of our ways. But if we meet again, let it be soon and when we are free. My guess is that the war will end in three months' time. December 17th, 1944. [...] Truda: So it won't be long, not even three months, just two and half. Mahner: Right! There you go. It wasn't that bad, this Theresienstadt. We've had some good times here. [...] But why did they send me? Maybe they need good men... or repre... We'll see.“



Auschwitz and gassed.¹¹ The film was edited and produced in a Prague studio at the beginning of 1945 but the rapid progress of the war made it impossible to use it for propaganda. It was destroyed. Only about 30 minutes remained today.

Several quotes from this film appear in Goldflam's play. For example, in the scene where Truda and Mahner are filmed in the café and a voice from the loudspeakers comments:

Zatímco Židé v Terezíně sedí u kávy s bábovkou a tančí černošský swing pro filmovou kameru, nesou naši vojáci na svých bedrech veškerou tíhu strašlivé války, bídu a odříkání, aby bránili svou vlast, svou domovinu. (ibid., 235)¹²

Kurt Gerroldt and his film crew appear soon in the second scene of the play.

Gerroldt: [...] No, když mě i dnes potřebují, když se beze mě neobejdou... když po mě toužíte, máte mě mít, já vám to teda udělám. (ibid., 173)¹³

This monologue did not appear in the theatrical production but it is essential for the illusion in which Gerroldt lives. Later he speaks more eloquently:

Gerroldt: Člověk je vězeň, jsme vlastně vězni... a přece, když můžu teď dělat svou práci, připadám si jako... stvořitel, nic, nic tu není, a já z toho nic udělám svět, pestrý, barvitý. Lidi tady umírají hladem, a já vykouzím bohaté hostiny, zábavu, tanec... plný život. Taková je moc umění! (ibid., 182-183)¹⁴

Gerroldt's quote is an ambiguous monologue, like in Mahner's case. Art can certainly enrich and humanize the world. But Gerroldt doesn't want to see the fact that his work serves evil and lies. In the same scene, paradoxically, Mahner recalls it: „To, co se tady děje, je lež. Něco si namlouvají, a pak půjdou do transportu nebo kam“ (ibid., 183).¹⁵

The perversity of Gerroldt's filming is even more pronounced in subsequent scenes. In a scene that should be reminiscent of slapstick, the prisoners kick each other on the backside.

¹¹ Kurt Gerron's life and fate inspired two films, *Kurt Gerrons Karussell* (Ilona Ziok, 1999) and *Kurt Gerron – Prisoner of Paradise* (Malcolm Clarke and Stuart Sender, 2003), and also the novel *Gerron* (Charles Lewinsky, 2011).

¹² „While Jews in Theresienstadt sit in the café with their coffees and cakes, dancing the Negro's swing for the film camera, our soldiers carry on their shoulders the entire burden of this terrible war, misery and self-sacrifice to defend their country, their homeland.“

¹³ „Gerroldt: [...] Yes, today, when they need me, they cannot live without me... when they long for me, they have to have me. I will definitely make it.“

¹⁴ „Gerroldt: Man is a prisoner, we'll all prisoners in fact... but now when I can do my own work, I feel like... a creator, there's nothing, nothing here and I made from this nothing a world, bright and colourful. People here are dying of hunger, and I conjure up rich feasts, entertainment, dances... life at its fullest. That's the power of art!“

¹⁵ „What's happening here is a lie. They're fooling themselves, but soon they'll go to the transport, or wherever.“



Gerroldt's assistant is not satisfied with their performance, and he kicks one prisoner so hard, that he stays on the ground. The assistant laughs, while the prisoner is pulled away and replaced by another man. In the seventh scene there are shots of the children's opera *Brundibár*, which was really played in the Theresienstadt Ghetto and recorded in Geron's film. There is a baker and a milkman in the opera. Child actors who are starving, become sick to their stomach. Later Gerroldt and his crew film in a hospital ward. Mahner's father is also there. Gerroldt films the „visiting the sick“ scene and does not stop, even when Mahner's father dies.¹⁶

Gerroldt [...] (zastaví se u Mahnerova otce): Trochu víc barvy mu dejte, aspoň na tváře.

Nevypadá to dobře. [...]

Mahner: Donesl jsem ti trochu omáčky.

Matka: Pst... Otec odchází.

[...]

Mahner: Jak se máš, tatínku?

(Otec neodpovídá, je náhle mrtev, matka a Mahner mu líbají ruku. Truda upravuje jeho tělo a váže mu ručník kolem skrání.)

Mahner: Sbohem, tatínku.

Gerroldt: Umíte se někdo modlit?

[...]

Truda: Jenom něco.

Gerroldt: Zkuste to... a vy říkejte po ní. Stačí jen kousíček, to je krátký záběr. (ibid., 203-204)¹⁷

Later Gerroldt also expresses doubt about his filming. In a conversation with the fireman Holtzner, he admits that his film might be a lie. But this work has helped him to overcome his plight: he has ceased to be an anonymous number.

Holtzner: [...] a lidi, jestli nějací zbudou, se budou ptát, až uvidí ten váš film... [...]

Kdo to vymyslel, takovou... zručnost? No dobře, tak se řekne, Němci... a dál? Kdo to dělal? [...] Slavný Gerroldt? [...]

Gerroldt: Na to se sám sebe denně ptám. Je to lež, není to lež... [...] Ale pro co chcete žít? Práce dává životu smysl. (ibid., 232)¹⁸

¹⁶ Mahler also mentions his father's death in his diary.

¹⁷ „Gerroldt [...] (he stops at Mahner's father): Give him some more colour, on his face at least. It doesn't look good like that. [...] Mahner: I brought you a bit of sauce. Mother: Shh... Father is leaving us. [...] Mahner: How are you, dad? (Father doesn't answer, presently he is dead. Mother and Mahner kiss his hand. Truda repositions father, binds a towel over his temples.) Mahner: Goodbye, dad. Gerroldt: Does anyone know a prayer? [...] Truda: Just a bit of one. Gerroldt: Try it... and you repeat it after her. A little bit is enough, just a short scene.“



The fourteenth scene of the play shows a conflict between Gerroldt and Mahner. Gerroldt reproaches Mahner for his fickleness in love. Mahner was filmed two different times with a different woman.

Gerroldt: [...] Mám vás tam ještě v kavárně, zůstaňme prosím u některé z těch dam.
[...]

Mahner: Ona ta minulá šla do transportu. [...] Tak ji přiveďte a já budu v té kavárně s ní.

Gerroldt: To nemohu, já jsem jen... také jako vy... terezínský...

Mahner: Tak co se staráte o morálku? Proč točíte v kavárně? Transport natočte... třeba! To budete mít svědectví!

Gerroldt: Ale pochopte, pane Mahnere, scénář je dán a schvalován předem [...].

Mahner: Tak proč to děláte? Tady chcete určovat množství partnerek, na tom vám záleží. A na tom, že lidi odvázejí kdoví kam [...] na tom nezáleží? O tom se může lhát?

Gerroldt: Ale já jsem prosím jen režisérem toho filmu.

[...]

Mahner: Každý nějak přežíváme. Já jenom honím ženský, spím s nima, dávám jim, a sobě taky, pocit, jakože jsme doma, jakože žijeme [...]. Ale nelžu! Víte? Nelžu celému světu.

Gerroldt: Pane, pane! Víte, jak se ten film má jmenovat!? Vůdce daroval Židům město! [...] Takový významný film točím! Chápete to? [...] Osobní mravnost je něco jiného než, než... veřejná... prezentace! (ibid., 222-224)¹⁹

¹⁸ „Holtzner: [...] and people, if there are any left, when they see your film, they will ask... [...] Whose idea was it, such a monstrosity? All right, they might say... the Germans... and then? Who filmed it? [...] The famous Gerroldt? [...] Gerroldt: I asked myself the same question, everyday. Is it a lie, is it not... [...] but what is life for? Work gives us the semblance of living.“

¹⁹ „Gerroldt: [...] I'm filming you once again for the café scene, this time please let's keep the same lady. [...] Mahner: The last one went to the transport. [...] So you bring her back and I'll sit in the café with her. Gerroldt: I can't do that. I'm only... just like you... a Theresienstadt prisoner... Mahner: So why make such a big deal about morality? Why film in the café? Film the transport... for instance! Then you'll have some testimony! Gerroldt: Try to understand, Mr. Mahner, that the script is given to us and pre-approved before we get it [...]. Mahner: So why make it? Here you are, trying to dictate the number of my partners, this is important for you. But the fact that people are taken away [...] isn't important? It is permitted to lie about these things? Gerroldt: Please, I am only the director of this film. [...] Mahner: All of us are trying to survive. I just pick up women, I sleep with them, give them and myself the feeling, that we're at home, the feeling we're living [...]. But I'm not lying, you know. I'm not lying to the entire world. Gerroldt: Sir. Sir! You know what the title of the film will be? The Fuehrer Gave a Town to the Jews! [...] It's such an important film I'm making! Do you understand this? [...] Personal morality is something completely different from... public... presentation!“



Paradoxically, the Nazi commander of the Ghetto, Ruhm (the real prototype was SS-Sturmbannführer Karl Rahm), also interprets the separation of personal and public morality. He doesn't argue, however, about the meaning of the artwork, but for the national historical necessity. He had „nothing personally against the Jews.“

Ruhm: Vy si stále myslíte, že my Němci vás nemáme rádi. Ale to vůbec není osobní. [...] Ne, to není nějaké nepřátelství, ale historická nutnost. [...] Tady nejde o mě nebo o něj, ale o poslání, zodpovědnost vůči úkolu, vůči národu! [...] Myslíte si, že to nic není, když na hromadě leží třeba sto, pět set, tisíc mrtvol? [...] To byste se divil... A zůstat přitom slušným člověkem... a řádným člověkem! [...] Těžké je to. A proto já mám rád, když se tady dělají tyhle kulturní akce, a také se někdy rád podívám a poslechnu si třeba pěknou hudbu. To povznese. A člověk si od té těžké práce odpočine. (ibid., 216-217)²⁰

This reference to an allegedly higher moral duty can be understood as the wider and more general sense of Goldflam's play. Impersonal responsibility which refers to „higher interests“ – it is a danger that threatens not only the executors of power and violence in a totalitarian society, but to a certain extent, every citizen in every society. According to the U.S. reviewer Elinor Fuchs, Goldflam's play „lacks noble victims and obviously brutal persecutors“ (Fuchs 1997, 5).

Goldflam managed to combine the authenticity, the tragic hopelessness and the grotesque. The grotesque often associated with brutality is the third component of the play. The very first scene of Goldflam's text begins with the joyful chorus „Why shouldn't we be happy“ (Proč bychom se netěšili) from the famous Czech opera *The Bartered Bride* (see above). Mahner and Maria dance on the stage in folk costumes. The scene ends with the song from Franz Lehár's operetta *The Land of Smiles*. Later the storyline shows that both the funny and carefree songs are cruelly ironic. In the theatre performance directed by Damien Gray, the plot is shown with more brutality. It starts with a scene that is not in Goldflam's text.

Prologue

As the audience enters, we see a dead woman on the stage and in the centre is a box with a little girl reciting from the diaries of Theresienstadt children. The character of Hitler as a child enters and puts the dead woman into the box. The girl stops. The young Hitler pushes the box with the girl and dead woman off the stage.

²⁰ „Ruhm: You still think that we Germans don't like you. But it's nothing personal. [...] No, this is not animosity, this is a historical necessity. [...] ... it's about the mission, responsibility to our duty, to our Nation! [...] Don't think that it's easy when you see a pile of one hundred, one thousand corpses. [...] You'd be surprised ... And to stay an honest man in spite of it... and an upright man! [...] It's hard. And that's why I like it when these cultural events are organised here, and sometimes I also like to come and watch and listen to nice music. It's uplifting. A person can take a rest from his hard work.“



The young boy (Hitler) searches the body, steals her purse and earrings which he puts on his ears. This prologue is followed by a farewell scene between Mahner and Mařenka using different music (that is, without an allusion to Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*). And in the end we can hear the train whistle. Then a large dark gate closes behind Mahner.

This sinister gate appears again at the end of the performance. Both main characters, Mahner and Gerroldt, prepare for the transport to Auschwitz. Mahner undresses, down to his shorts, Truda stands by him, in the background there are also three other girls who repeat Truda's lines in unison. The dark gate opens, Mahner leaves, the half-naked Gerroldt in shorts accompanied by another girl leaves too. Smoke appears and floods the stage.

The figure of the commander of the ghetto, Ruhm, is also associated with terror and the grotesque. A verse by Czech poet Jiří Orten, which is recited by Maria in Goldflam's text, is sung by Ruhm in Damien Gray's performance.

[...]

Jsi ztracen. Nikdo nehledá tě.

Na hrdle tvém je obojek,

Chybí však šňůra. Toneš v blátě.

A to jsi ty. To je tvůj věk. (Goldflam 2001, 182)²¹

The commander becomes a grotesque figure. In the next scene in Gerroldt's filming, he stumbles around the stage blindfolded. In another filming scene, the head of the Jewish Council, Eppstern, reports on the situation in the ghetto. The commander thinks Eppstern is a little merry and optimistic.

Ruhm dává někomu pokyn, ten jde ke Gerroldtovi, ten [...] jde před pódium a ukazuje posunky Eppsternovi, že se má tvářit optimisticky. Eppstern zůstává vážný. [...] Je též možné, že uprostřed hovoru bude Eppstern vyměněn na pohyb velitele Ruhma někým, kdo bude totéž říkat optimističtěji. (ibid., 215)²²

In fact, the elder Paul Eppstein, Eppstern's real prototype, was removed from his office and on September 27th 1944 executed. In another filming scene in the theater production of Damien Gray, people dance but fall from exhaustion. They are loaded onto pushcarts, hauled away and replaced by others.

²¹ „[...] You're lost. No one is looking for you. / A collar round your throat, / no leash attached. In mud you drown. / And this is you. These are your times.“

²² „Ruhm gives a signal to someone, this person comes to Gerroldt, and Gerroldt goes up to the podium at the front of the stage. Gesturing, Gerroldt gives Eppstern various stage directions to be more optimistic. But Eppstern remains very serious. [...] It could be that in the middle of the speech, Eppstern is replaced by someone else, at the order of commander Ruhm. The new elder will read out the text more optimistically.“



Goldflam's play and its performance in the Archa Theatre combined three components: brutal authenticity of life in Theresienstadt, the topic of life in illusions and tragicomic grotesque.

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