

Since 2011, the Faculty of Arts at Palacký University in Olomouc has been holding the annual international interdisciplinary symposium Art and Cultures of Central Europe. At these symposia, scholars have focused on selected themes via which they have attempted to locate cultural, social or artistic specifics of the Central European region, or conversely to overturn preconceptions concerning some kind of essence of 'Central Europe', reflected upon the possible boundaries of the Central European space, and debated the purpose (or lack thereof) of seeking out and delineating such boundaries. The individual themes thus formed the prisms through which the scholars viewed certain distinctions of 'Central Europeanness' in relation to the West, East or Balkans (e.g. the role of the intellectual at watershed moments in history, censorship, the consequences of the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian empire for Central European literature and so on). Some prisms accentuated or intensified certain distinctions, while others by contrast obscured them or showed them to be of little relevance for a contemplation of the specificity of the given region. At times the choice of themes led to disputes among the co-organisers, while at others they were accepted smoothly and unanimously. Some of the themes proved themselves to be inspiring for academic debate, others less so.

For the 10th anniversary of the symposium, I prepared a theme which I was convinced we could all easily agree on together with our co-organisers from Prague and České Budějovice, namely that of Jewish literature and culture in Central Europe. The literary work of Jewish authors, as well as Jewish culture and thought in general, which have developed over the course of centuries within the territory of Central Europe and become an integral element of the Central European space, have contributed indisputably and to a substantial degree to the specific traits and simultaneously to the differences of that space, and cannot be overlooked in any reflection upon what Central Europe has been or could have been.

The pandemic unfortunately made it impossible for us to hold the symposium, but the theme remained. This is certainly not a theme that has been confined to the periphery of scholarly attention at Central European universities. It has been the focus of systematic exploration on the part of the Centre for the Study of the Holocaust and Jewish Literature, part of the Department of Czech and Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, which among other matters recently produced



the extensive publication *Handbook of Polish, Czech, and Slovak Holocaust Fiction* (2021), edited by Elisa-Maria Hiemer, Jiří Holý, Agata Firlej and Hana Nichtburgerová. However, it is a theme of such fundamental importance for understanding the Central European region that we decided to utilise the potential of the scholars attending our symposia, and called upon them to help prepare their academic texts for this special issue of the journal *Slovo a smysl* (and I hereby thank the scientific board of *Slovo a smysl* for accommodating this idea). Through the prism of the destinies of Jewish authors, their works and the reception thereof in Central Europe, this edition once again (and certainly not for the last time) inquires into the specifics of Central Europe and the role that has been played in that region throughout history by Jewish literature and culture.

The current tragic events in the eastern parts of the Central European space further illustrate the sense of engaging with the historical memory and culture of the Jewish nation. Indeed, the specific and purely individual testimony on the history of the Jewish nation is and remains also a universal testimony about cultural and religious differences, about otherness, the search for possibilities of coexistence in a multicultural society within a single geographical space, cultural and intellectual crossovers, but also about hate, mass murder, genocide, and the abuse of history and historical narratives by the powerful for the purpose of destroying individual human beings.

Ludwig August Frankl, Herman Broch, Franz Kafka, Franz Werfel, Joseph Roth, Arthur Schnitzler, Bruno Schulz, Stefan Zweig, Paul Celan, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Ota Pavel, Egon Hostovský, Danilo Kiš, Rose Ausländer, Henryk Grynberg, Arnošt Lustig, Ilana Shmueli, Imre Kertész... The long list of these and other names of authors — whether world famous or at least relevant within the framework of a certain national cultural tradition — who were associated with the Central European space for the whole or only a certain part of their lives, and for whom Central Europe became a fateful territory, either due to the influence of historical circumstances or for private reasons, clearly affirms that traces of Jewish literature and culture have made an indelible impression on both the history and the current form of Central European society and culture.

A considerable number of Jewish authors interconnected the diverse Central European space through their life and work, since they pertained — either through their origin or due to their subsequent destinies in life — to more than one national culture and more than one language. Does it therefore make sense to contemplate Jewish literature within the framework of the whole Central European space, or should we rather speak at most about the literary output of authors of Jewish origin within individual national literatures? The activities of the Jewish minority and the endeavour to maintain Jewish religious and cultural traditions by joining associations, publishing periodicals, holding cultural events etc. were manifestly projected into the shaping and development of the national literatures and cultures within the territory of Central Europe, and their mutual coexistence.

This publication is composed of studies by seventeen Central European scholars (from Germany, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic). We have divided the studies into two blocks: I. Central European Jewish authors, their work and its reception, and II. Representations of Jewishness and Jews in Central European literatures. Nev-

ertheless, the individual studies are linked together by a very fine fabric: personally, thematically and historically, the literary representations which are the focus of the studies included in the second section are frequently not unrelated to the life stories and literary output of the authors themselves, who are the focus of the studies in part I.

We will be gratified if this special issue of *Slovo a smysl* magazine can make a contribution to the contemplation and study of Jewish literature and culture, not only in Central Europe, and at the same time to a reflection upon the meaning of the term 'Central Europe' in the contemporary world.

This publication would not have been possible in its present form without the invaluable work of Natálie Trojková and Josef Šebek, who have had the lion's share in its preparation, and the translator Ashley Davies. Last but not least, I would naturally like to thank all the authors who have contributed to this joint project.

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