



# The Representation of Jewishness in the Work of Viktor Fischl

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## SYNOPSIS

This contribution presents the author's representation of Jewishness as it was formed from the beginnings of his artistic output, first of all in his early poetry from the 1930s and subsequently after the Second World War, when he elaborated upon the theme of Jewishness in his prose texts. His poetic texts reveal how the historical events of the second half of the 1930s affected his as yet unbalanced poetics, inclining towards the depiction of a timid and tender subject, and shifted his work towards the construction of a suprapersonal Jewish identity (*Hebrejské melodie* — Hebrew Melodies, *Kniha nocí* — The Book of Nights, *Sonáta z konce tisíciletí* — Sonata from the End of the Millennium, *Když* — When, *Variace na téma z Kiplinga* — Variations on a Theme from Kipling). At the same time it is necessary to state that his work also accentuates images referring generally to the oppressive existential or marginal situation of humanity (*Kniha nocí*, *Litanie k času* — Litany to Time). In his post-war prose output Fischl first of all thematised the search for an obliterated Jewish identity (*Píseň o lítosti* — Song of Pity), and in later texts (*Jeruzalémský triptych* — Jerusalem Triptych) he then focused on a presentation of the Holocaust as a memento of the Jews, which was intended to refer not only to Jewish victims, but rather to impel us all to search for the traditional values of humanity. This theme corresponds with his post-war conception of humanising the world, in which literature is to play an important role in restoring order in the world.

## KEYWORDS

Jewish literature; Viktor Fischl; Avigdor Dagan; Holocaust; Zionism.

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Viktor Fischl was a poet and prose writer, as well as a journalist and diplomat, who professed his Jewish origin and was an adherent of Zionism. From the very outset, he produced his literary output alongside journalistic and cultural-historical texts, in which he pondered the role of art and literature within the context of events in society during that period. In the Epilogue to his unpublished novel *The Man Who Believed in Angels* or the postscript to his novel *Vy, soudci athénští* (Thee, Judges of Athens), he dealt with the issue of whether it is possible to reflect the 'truth' about the world in which we live in a literary text. He sought the possibility of contemplating the current world within a literary narrative, and also that of influencing the world of real-

ity by this means, as he clarified in further detail in his typescript text *The Poet and the Cage*, which shall be referred to in the conclusion of this article.

It is therefore appropriate to view his artistic and non-artistic texts as acts of speech, which not only communicate but also perform something. As John L. Austin noted, the illocutionary power of speech is related to the context within which the words are spoken, and the success of an ‘accomplished’ act of speech depends on a certain generally accepted convention.<sup>1</sup> From the beginning of the 1930s, when he embarked upon his literary and journalistic practice, Viktor Fischl engaged in public affairs, and his rhetoric within the field of journalism was frequently delivered with the aim of influencing current events. We can find articles written by him, especially during his period of exile in London during the Second World War, when the illocutionary power of his performative output was evidently intended to lead to a desirable interpretation of the presented material. In his journalistic articles or lectures, Czech culture was presented as being to the benefit of the national ideas of the time.<sup>2</sup> After all, collective intentionality means taking part in collective action and also sharing common stances, desires and intentions.<sup>3</sup> Fischl’s artistic texts, created within a close linkage to the pragmatic context of his work, will therefore be ‘read’ within this contribution as representations of the author’s thinking of the time.

Fischl’s first attempts at poetry from the late 1920s remained in manuscript form, and are stored in the literary archive of the Museum of Czech Literature in Prague. It is evident from these texts that the author felt an affinity for poetism, and imitated its motifs, poetological approaches and poetic forms. However, his embryonic intimate poetry, capturing the lyricism of the moment, which can be found in his first published collection *Jaro* (Spring), was affected by the historic events of the 1930s, which shifted his work towards the construction of a suprapersonal Jewish identity (*Hebrejské melodie* — Hebrew Melodies, *Kniha nocí* — The Book of Nights, *Sonáta z konce tisíciletí* — Sonata from the End of the Millennium). The author began writing *Hebrejské melodie* and *Kniha nocí* in the summer of 1933, and both were published in 1936. In their date of origin and publication, the books enter a historical context in which Jews felt obliged to protect their roots and their identity.<sup>4</sup>

References to Jewishness in *Hebrejské melodie* are evident from the very title of the collection. Like the first poem, in which the lyrical subject stylises himself as the figure of Moses, the collection professes a collective Jewish identity. The image of Moses is evoked once more in the poem *Tys moře rozdělil* (You Parted the Sea). Of other striking motifs referring to Jewishness in the collection, we can find the motif of the Wailing Wall or the addressing of God (most pronouncedly in the poems *Modlitba o kázeň* — Prayer for Discipline and *Zed’ nářků* — Wailing Wall) and the search for the identity of the subject within the contradiction of Judaism versus Christianity: ‘I would never have accepted Christening / through which wrathful love perceives

1 For further details see Austin (2000), chapter ‘Conditions for successful performativity’.

2 For further details see Halamová (2012, pp. 275–280).

3 For further details see Halbwachs (2009), chapter ‘Individual and collective memory’.

4 This reality is reflected also in the Jewish press of the time — both in the Zionist *Židovské zprávy* and in the Czech-Jewish *Rozvoj*. See also Čapková (2005), Pěkný (2001), Soukupová — Zahradníková (2003).



guilt' (Fischl 1936a, p. 17). In the extensive poem *Prozatím* (For the Meantime), the subject is presented in a suprapersonal role. His acceptance of his historical role can be read within the context of Jewish motifs such as the time-honoured struggle of the Jews for freedom. Repeated resistance is conveyed in the poem through the anaphora 'and again' / 'again', or the collocations at the beginning of the first lines of the stanzas, which refer to the recurrence of events: 'one more time', 'how many times I shall return.' However, the emphasis on a suprapersonal perspective and the stylisation of the narrator into the role of a leader whom others are to follow is rather sporadic in the collection. The poems frequently depict a timid and tender subject:

*The petals of the first leaves  
in the breeze before spring  
tremble within me for you*

*Behold the timid footsteps of the rains  
on tiptoe they approach them  
and drop by drop*

*Now the stiff cheek of love  
bind the vine to the rods  
as tightly as you can*

*Those confluences  
when you forget until  
what's yours is hers*

*The petals of the first leaves  
in the breeze before spring  
it is I who tremble  
(ibid., p. 14).*

However, such an individual is at the same time predestined by the necessity to 'grow up' and 'clench his fist tightly' (ibid., p. 17). In his resolve we can see the author's intention to communicate with everyone who feels affected by historical events. Existential feelings are attributed to the lyrical subject, with whom the reader of the time is able to identify. The motifs expressed are those of gravity, sadness, the collapse of riverbanks and shifting of sands, the awaiting of tragedy or death, as documented by the temporal motif of the meantime. All has already been experienced — 'the butterfly has flown', 'the wine has fizzled out', 'turned to vinegar', 'the lace has gone limp', 'the silk has become worn', 'the boats have sailed', 'the horses have galloped away'.<sup>5</sup>

Connected with the aforementioned motifs of bygone happiness is the image of timelessness and night, which 'shakes off the breeze of eternal events' (ibid., p. 43). This motif is then developed further in the following collection *Kniha noci*, which the author completed at the beginning of 1934. In contrast with the depiction of the sub-

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5 These are motifs from the poem 'Tak motýl dolítal' (Fischl 1936a, p. 22).



ject, who in the collection *Hebrejské melodie* moved in a direction towards ‘growth’ and resolve, the motif of night is developed into images of fear and loss of options: ‘My age shrugs its shoulders / and shows the deserts of its palms’ (Fischl 1936b, p. 39). Similarly employed is the motif of the vine, which ‘dries without tendrils’ (ibid., p. 37), or the image of a bow which stretches over time (ibid., p. 17). The depicted subject loses his courage, as illustrated by the verse ‘Lord, if only I did not have to be a rebel’ (ibid.). The collection reveals a disturbed and uncertain relationship towards God: ‘My God, hidden behind the mountains / why are we today both so terribly alone / where am I now and where are you / my cruelly hidden God?’ (ibid., p. 12). Solitude and fear sap the power of his verses, motifs of powerlessness appear, of ‘the sound of my voiceless voice’ (ibid., p. 23), the subject envies a blade of grass that it may ‘merely flutter and grow’ (ibid., p. 16). The motif of trembling thus becomes the leitmotif of the collection, which may be ‘read’ as an image of fear. The predominant iambic cadence of the verse, which simulates the movement of trembling or fluttering referred to in the poem *Stéblo trávy* (Blade of Grass), supports the image of a timid and tender subject. The intimate positioning of the verses may thus be interpreted also as an aspiration to express lyrical experience within a universal validity, not merely as a representation of an experience of the events of the time. If the verses in *Hebrejské melodie* mobilise towards power and growth, and incline rather to occasional lyricism, *Kniha noci* is permeated with existential motifs. However, motifs of courage or awaiting change are not absent either from this collection. At such a moment Fischl employs a trochaic tetrameter, which through its forceful rhythmisation draws attention to the seriousness of the theme:

*Forests of nights, rocks of days  
do not set, do not fade  
wherever I return  
for the meantime, only for the meantime*

*Rock, melt like ice  
laugh your last  
mock my dizziness  
for the meantime, only for the meantime*

*Anchored in the bed of silence  
I’ll see the night and I’ll see the day  
how I’ll then repay you  
for the meantime, yours for the meantime  
(ibid., p. 36).*

Other collections by Viktor Fischl from the time of the First Czechoslovak Republic remained in manuscript form, though he published some of the poems from these collections in the press during that time. These are the collections *Sonáta z konce tisíciletí*, which he wrote in 1934, and also *Světice děti andělé* (Saints, Children, Angels), also from 1934. Both collections could be characterised as occasional lyricism with their roots in the Jewish experience, even though social engagement rather predominated in the collection *Světice děti andělé*. In *Sonáta z konce tisíciletí* the lines ‘my home



is not here', 'into where have I been born?' appear, as well as the motif of departure, referring to the Zionists' return to their roots and departure for the Promised Land. In 1936 the author wrote an extensive poetic composition with four songs entitled *Litanie k času* (Litany to Time). It presents the image of a man who is torn out of his existence and finds himself adrift in the winds of time, unable to stand up to a world that is beyond his powers. This can be seen for example in the lines 'forgive me, time / forgive me my faintness' (Fischl 1936c, unpaginated). At the end of the composition the subject turns with an appeal to truth. Fischl undertakes the task of a defence of Jewishness, or a general acceptance of the obligation to serve the work commenced by the previous generation — 'the work that has begun you may finish for your father' — (Fischl 1938, unpaginated) in the poem *Když* (When). *Variace na téma z Kiplinga* (Variations on a Theme from Kipling) is also preserved only in manuscript form.

Within the context of the poetry collections published during the time of the First Republic, Fischl's work appears as a representation of the Jewishness of the day, which was consistent with his public engagement within the field of journalism. It is evident from his articles in the Zionist newspaper *Židovské zprávy*, of which he was chief editor after 1936, that he felt a need to draw attention to the Jewish past and its culture, as well as current events relating to Jews.<sup>6</sup> In this newspaper he also took a stand against anti-Semitism, and focused on the coexistence of the Jews and Arabs within the territory of Palestine, as well as the responsibility of the British in forming the new Jewish state. He was also active in the Jewish Party, in which he was the head of the parliamentary and Prague secretariat after 1937, and was the chairman of the Theodor Herzl Association, which affiliated Zionist academics.<sup>7</sup> From the 1930s onwards it was clear that he also endeavoured to establish good relationships between Zionists and the state representation of the First Czechoslovak Republic. As ensues from the articles he wrote from that time, he greatly revered the figure of T. G. Masaryk, and in his interpretations he presented him as a statesman who respected the cultural identity of the Jews.<sup>8</sup>

However, if we read Fischl's poetry output from the period of the First Republic also within the context of his unpublished collections, it is evident that his work comes to incorporate an ever increasing number of images which refer generally to the onerous existential or marginal situation of humanity. The view of the world 'from the bottom' entered Czech literature at the very beginning of the 1930s in artistically diverse texts by authors such as František Halas (*Kohout plaší smrt* — The Cockerel Scares Death), Vladimír Holan (*Triumf smrti* — The Triumph of Death) or Jan Zahradníček (*Pokoušení smrti* — The Temptation of Death), and this theme then remained present in certain permutations throughout the entire decade. In Viktor Fischl's work it is manifested most pronouncedly in 1936 in his *Litanie k času*. From the lines: 'I hear you death, as you creep', or 'With the hand of a child, when you shield the horror' (Fischl 1936c, unpaginated) we can read an oppressive depiction of fear, the consciousness of approaching death and a feeling of being trapped in an anxious, temporary present.

6 For further details see Vydra (2007), Kaďůrková (2002).

7 For further details see Halamová (2010, p. 10).

8 For further details see Fischl (1991).



Immediately after the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939 Viktor Fischl left for England, where he founded the organisation Selfaid Association of Jews from Czechoslovakia, whose aim was to help Czech Jews emigrate. Up to the beginning of the Second World War in September 1939 they rescued at least 100 Jews from the territory of the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.<sup>9</sup> From November 1940 Fischl worked in the information department of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry in exile in London, which was engaged in propagating the ‘Czech cause’.<sup>10</sup> During the period of his wartime emigration, the emphasis on a collective Jewish intentionality subsided in his work, and in both his artistic and non-artistic texts Fischl helped accentuate the importance of the culture of the Czechoslovak First Republic, thereby supporting Beneš’s conception of a continuous national cultural identity, the aim of which was to invalidate the Munich Agreement.

During this period his poetry shifted towards themes of emigration (*Anglické sonety* — English Sonnets, *Lyrický zápisník* — Lyrical Notebook). Images of suffering took on more general contours, relating not only to Jews or Czechs but the suffering of all (*Evropské žalmy* — European Psalms), as documented by his lines: ‘Herod heaps up the heads of the innocents, / as their eyes accuse from your walls, / Europe, you shawl damp with mothers’ lamentations’ (Fischl 1941a, p. 49). This transformation was evidently part of the author’s recent life experience; in the environment of exile and in the post of head of the department of film and cultural propaganda within the acute historical conflict, Fischl identified with the interests of the Czechs and the Czechoslovak government, and his artistic texts from the wartime period also represent these interests.<sup>11</sup> As is typical in our artistic tradition, dating from the time of the national revival, whenever the nation finds itself in a moment of distress, the proportion of the appellative function in art is increased, and art thus supplements or complements politics. This is referred to also by Fischl’s Kiplingesque ‘Know and serve’ from his *Anglické sonety* (Fischl 1946a, p. 12), in which the artist stands side by side with the combatants and places his art in the services of the nation: ‘O what is more, my dears, than to be a man?’ (ibid.). At the same time it is necessary to note the fact that Fischl’s poetry of that period is not merely occasional poetry. Its formative

9 In the typescript of a short essay (*Každý z nás má své osobní vzpomínky... — We all have our personal recollections...*) Fischl describes how immediately after the occupation on 15 March 1939 he set out for London in order to rescue 70 leading Czech Jews: ‘Two weeks later in London, based on assurances from the Jewish Agency with regard to giving priority when granting immigration certificates [...], the British authorities issued visas by telegraph to all seventy applicants from my list. Only four of them arrived. Later, together with Leo Herrmann, who had come from Jerusalem to London upon my request, and with Štěpán Barber, who was working at the time in the London office of the World Congress, we established the Selfaid Association of Jews from Czechoslovakia, and before the war broke out we succeeded in providing visas and residence permits in England to approximately a hundred Jews from Czechoslovakia’ (Fischl 1954, p. 9). In her book *Dva životy: Hovory s Viktorem Fischlem* (Two lives: Talks with Viktor Fischl), Dana Emingerová lists 200 rescued Jews (Emingerová 2002, p. 45). The same number is stated by Viktor Fischl also in other interviews or memoirs.

10 For further details see Fischl (1941b; 1942). See also Halamová (2012).

11 On the sociology of intellectuals see Dahrendorf (2008).



function is suppressed by the relating of the subject to the concrete, through reflection and recollection, which became a central principle of his post-war production, when he began to focus on prose writing.

In *Píseň o lítosti* (Song of Pity), his first prose text written in 1947, the author deals with the theme of the Holocaust through the medium of the character Daniel, returning to his home town after several years. Daniel is the only Jew from that community who has survived the Holocaust, and it appears that there is nobody here who could recognise him. He seems somehow familiar to the guard at the railway station, but because Daniel himself has undergone such a dramatic physical transformation the guard does not recognise him: 'On first glance it was impossible to say whether he was an old man with a young face, or a young man beaten down by a long, arduous journey' (Fischl 1982b, p. 7). For the local populace he thus remains a foreigner, which he also feels himself to be in his home town. With the exception of the servant girl Kačka, whom he meets at the end of the story, there is nobody in the town who could confirm his existence. Daniel is lost even to himself. And because he attributes great significance to this journey, it appears that it is precisely this journey that must return to him his lost identity. He therefore recalls from his memories the Jewish world from before the transport, and thereby returns to his childhood. In addition to the stories of Daniel's youth during that time, we find ourselves in a world built on the mutual sense of belonging of the people from the Jewish community, in a world of traditional values bound together with the Jewish faith, religious festivals and regular visits to the synagogue. The return to the Jewish world is also confirmed to the reader by the use of the Jewish ethnolect.<sup>12</sup> It appears that the necessity of preserving the Jewish world despite the Holocaust and the murder of millions of Jews may be highlighted also by the glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish words provided by the author, which explains the meaning of the words and the context within which they are used. The community formed over generations disappeared in a single moment, in a single transport. Fischl attempted to illustrate the loss of specific human fates and thus the loss of Jewish culture and identity precisely through the use of a greater number of expressions from the Jewish ethnolect, which do not appear to such a degree in his later texts. If the First Republic image of Jewishness in Viktor Fischl's poetic texts was motivated by an endeavour to make the Jews and their culture visible, and also to give voice to their fears of potential repressions, the representation of Jewishness in *Píseň o lítosti* is intended to point to the existential experience of emptiness and obliterated Jewish identity that the Jews suffered during and after the Second World War. Other of the author's post-war representations also relate the representation of Jewishness to the Holocaust and their suffering, though the narratives now refer rather to the need to learn from this tragic historical experience.

It is in this first novel that the author's fundamental motifs in connection with the Holocaust appear, namely motifs of guilt, pity and forgiveness, as well as the motif of uncertainty of faith in God:

*'None of us will ever know what is chance, and what is divine punishment.' And then uncle Jakub also suddenly appeared here [...] and my grandfather said to him: 'God?*

12 On the Jewish ethnolect in 20<sup>th</sup> century Czech literature see Balík (2022).

*I believe that he exists, and that he is just and full of mercy. I believe, but I'll never know for certain whether or not he exists. That's what we need most of all. To know that none of us will ever know for sure. We are wretched, all of us are wretched, all of us are like children in a dark forest. Perhaps this is the reason why we must be good, to lead each other by the hand through the darkness, to be full of pity for the others.' [...] But the others were murderers. And they killed my grandfather, and uncle Jakub, and all of them, all the rest. And grandfather Filip felt pity for them, but still they killed him. So even pity did not help. And yet he heard his grandfather repeat that word again and again: 'Pity, pity, pity. There is nothing in our life that is stronger, nothing more beautiful, nothing better.' 'Pity for murderers?' he asked, unable to reconcile himself to it. But his grandfather replied: 'Even for them. They too are children in the dark. They too are wretched. Perhaps even more wretched than the rest of us' (Fischl 1982b, pp. 161–162).*



It is clear from Fischl's later work that he regarded the Holocaust as a catastrophe that hurtled humanity towards dehumanising chaos. He referred to this also in his most celebrated novel *Dvorní šašci* (The Court Jesters), written in the 1970s and 80s. In addition to the fear, misery and humiliation of the four prisoners in the concentration camp, the novel is permeated also by the theme of one's own guilt and responsibility for the death of another person, even though this guilt should unequivocally be borne by the camp guards or the other presented aggressors. The moral code born out of Judaism and Christianity comes into conflict with the morality that forms in a desperate life situation. The narrator, one of the four 'court jesters', thus feels guilty for surviving when all around him have been killed. In addition to this motif, which is typical of texts on the theme of the Holocaust, in the book Fischl also contemplates the guilt of another of the protagonists for his failure to prevent the death of his wife in the concentration camp. However, Adam Wahn could have saved her only by sacrificing his own life. Had he dropped his juggling balls during a performance for the Nazis from the camp, it is possible that they might not have killed his wife, but it is entirely certain that they would have killed him.

When addressing questions of guilt, the protagonists turn to God even after many years, since within the context of the moral code of European society formed over the centuries, they wish to consider him the stable point of their existence:

*There was a time when I revolted. At that time I likened God to the jester Wahn, who was concerned with only one thing. Only with his own survival, and there was nothing in the world that could have diverted him from his pursuit of this one goal. Not even the fact that they killed his wife before his very eyes. If that was what was necessary for him to survive, then his coloured balls could not cease to spin in their prescribed circles like planets in the universe, controlled by another, greater jester, planets that did not halt in their orbits because millions of innocent children had been murdered on one of them. Today, now that I no longer revolt, I would not know who to apologise to, who to beg for forgiveness for this comparison. God or Adam Wahn. In Wahn's case I at least know what drove him to act the way he did. About God I know nothing more than I knew before. Wahn wanted first to survive, and later to take revenge. But God? Why does God do all the terrible things he does? (Fischl 1990, pp. 142–143).*





The issue of questioning God's intentions appears also in the works that follow on from *Dvorní šašci — Ulice zvaná Mamila* (A Street Called Mamila) and *Loučení s Jeruzalémem* (Farewell to Jerusalem), which together form the *Jeruzalémský triptych* (Jerusalem Triptych). In the second part, the narrator personally puts God on trial. He does not ask God why he allowed the Holocaust to happen, but only asks him about the fate of one particular man, because 'our fantasy, our human ability to feel compassion cannot embrace [...] even one ordinary man' (Fischl 2006, p. 140). During the indictment of God, the wind blows, opening up the Bible, specifically the Book of Job, and the narrator notices a number of important sentences which could provide him with an answer:

*Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? [...] Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? [...] Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? [...] Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth? [...] Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? Canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth? [...] And who may say to him: Thou hast committed injustice. [...] But where is wisdom to be found? [...] God alone knows the path to it, and knows its place. For he looks to all the ends of the earth and sees everywhere all that is beneath heaven. [...] And he said to man: Yes, it is so. Fear of God, wisdom, and the spurning of evil is the foundation of reason (ibid., pp. 140–141).*

However, the judge shows that the Holocaust cannot be erased from the memory of the survivors or from the memory of humanity. It is nevertheless necessary to heal this wound:

*I sometimes also go on a short outing in the middle of the week [...] and then I always think of those cruel years I spent in the concentration camp at the court of the all-powerful governor Kohl. But more than anything else I think of forgetting, how the most terrible things I went through are finally covered over with a veil. [...] Everything remained buried within us like those villages that were flooded by water after the construction of the dam. They're known to be down there somewhere on the bed of that lake that was created, but we no longer see the tips of the church spires, and it is only rarely that someone remembers them when looking out over those immense waters that flooded them. Only Menachem does not change. He still stands behind the counter of his little kiosk-stall [...], and he still watches the people walking along the street and knows about everything that's happening around him, and instead of layers of forgetting he thinks of how to help someone or other. For Menachem is undoubtedly the wisest of us all (ibid., pp. 116–117).*

Fischl's post-war artistic output, like his cultural-political analyses, points towards the conviction that there is no other way than to stand up to the dehumanising chaos by clinging to the need to learn from history, by an insistence on re-establishing order in the world and embracing empathy for our fellow human beings. In his work he thus frequently recalled a world in which it was still possible to find a natural order. He thus increasingly often returned thematically to the period of the First Re-

public and to his childhood. In the texts *Hrací hodiny* (Musical Clock), *Rodný dům* (Native Home), *Všichni moji strýčkové* (All My Uncles) and *Zátiší s houpacím koněm* (Still Life with a Rocking Horse), the affiliation of kinship is presented as the first natural order of the world that humans encounter, and keep within themselves. In his later novel *Proměny* (Metamorphoses), which has been preserved only in typescript form, as well as in the novel *Vy, soudci athénští*, the theme of faith in the possibility of finding harmony and order via the antique (mythical) world appears. However, this suprapersonal concept is soon abandoned, since the harmony that is found is always only fleeting, and it is necessary to embark on a journey of a personal approach to the world. According to Fischl, it is only through one's own personal experience that it is possible to arrive at order. Wisdom, the desire for truth and conscience are attributes which accompany this journey. In these last novels, God also returns to Fischl's world by means of the author's personal approach to order, and doubts are no longer cast upon his existence as in previous texts.

The author's post-war texts, whether artistic or non-artistic, are acts of speech by which Fischl wished to warn and guide the world towards a restoration of democratic principles. However, this intention did not originate in his work during the post-war period, but rather grew out of his social conscience and engaged observations in the 1930s and 40s, and was then manifested more distinctively in the 1950s. Like many not only European intellectuals,<sup>13</sup> for whom fears about the post-war world led them to reflect upon the guilt and dehumanisation of European society, Viktor Fischl too was conscious of the necessity to confront the legacy of the past. In his prose works he accomplished this through a reflection on the past of the Holocaust and its 'incorporation' into the present. The narration of his *Dvorní šašci* thus differentiates the narrating time from the narrated time, and the reader can regard himself as an actor in the communication, who is thus addressed by such a narrative in the present. Through the 'adoption' of the narrating time, the reader 'adopts' the story and views it within the patterned regularities of his present world.<sup>14</sup>

In his cultural-political analyses from the 1950s, especially in his article *The Poet and the Cage* from 1951, Viktor Fischl highlighted the parallels of Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism, and its immense danger not only for the satellite states of the Soviet Union. In his newspaper articles and artistic texts written in Israel, to where he emigrated in 1949, he reflected upon the post-war events in Europe, and on new manifestations of anti-Semitism. In 1950 he thus wrote short stories, later included in the collection *Obžalovací spis* (The List of Charges), describing the practices of socialist power. It is no coincidence that the victims in the short stories include a Jewish married couple. In the typescript text *The Poet and the Cage* he presented his vision that in order to sustain democracy it was necessary for states to create visions of cultural life, and for art not to be the exclusive preserve of a narrow circle of intellectuals, but to reach the largest possible number of readers with its humanising values. His artistic texts themselves fulfil this function. Fischl was not an experimental writer, but an author of cultivated, lyrically imbued texts. It is precisely the lyrical and philosophical 'attunement' of his narratives that augments

13 See Arendt (2013), Friedrich — Brzezinski (1962), see also Brenner (2008).

14 For further details see Halamová (2010, p. 106).



the aesthetic value of the texts and guides the reader to reflect upon the world and its values.

The representation of Jewishness in Fischl's artistic texts from the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic is viewed via the prism of the suprapersonal role of the subject, since in his poems he referred to the past of the Jews and their cultural tradition. In the second half of the 1930s his work then manifests a heightened sense of fear concerning the future existence of the Jews, which in certain texts is permeated with existential anxiety (in particular *Litanie k času*). The search for an obliterated Jewish identity is striking in his post-war prose work *Píseň o lítosti*. In his subsequent prose texts Fischl inclined more towards a presentation of the Holocaust as a memento of the Jews, which nonetheless at the same time became a symbolic warning relating to us all, not only Jews. This theme fits well into his post-war conception of the humanisation of the world, in which literature and culture in general are to play a significant role in restoring order in the post-war world.<sup>15</sup>

As stated above, during the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic Viktor Fischl advocated Zionism in the newspaper *Židovské zprávy*. It is therefore possible to ask whether his work directly reflects his Zionist outlook. In his poetry output from the First Republic we can find only a minimum of motifs that relate to living in a diaspora, or motifs which would incite a return to the Promised Land. They appear in his composition *Sonáta z konce tisíciletí*. I also do not regard his post-war production as referring to Zionism, although it is true that the characters of the *Jeruzalémský triptych* return to Jerusalem as their natural environment. In these books Jerusalem is presented as a city referring generally to Jewish identity, but at the same time it is also a city which represents the whole world, since after the war it is a magnet for Jews from throughout the entire world, seeking space and peace for a future life after the experience of the war or the Holocaust. However, war again encroaches also upon this space, once again a war provoked by a cultural and religious conflict. This is the Israeli-Arab war of 1967. It thus appears that there is no 'homeland' in which religious conflicts do not exist. Even in this city of all cities, the narrator of the *Jeruzalémský triptych* cannot locate the sense of history and the sense of the wounds inflicted on the world, as mentioned in *Ulice zvaná Mamila* (Fischl 2006, pp. 148–149). I 'read' the Holocaust as depicted by Fischl as a synecdoche that represents any kind of ethnic, religious and consequently also political conflicts, and I regard the prose works of the *Jeruzalémský triptych* as an expression of the author's thinking of the time, referring to the need to embrace humanity, and the Christian-Jewish moral order as the essence of the thought of all of us, which should prevent further hate-fuelled conflicts.

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15 See Adler (1998), Adorno (2009), Adorno — Horkheimer (2009).



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