



SAPIENZA
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Recollecta Membra:
A Genetic Study of Jan Zábřana's Diaries and
Translations

A.Y. / 2024-2025

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*"I hovno začne bejt po dvaceti letech legendární. I hovno."*¹

¹ "Even shit starts to become legendary after twenty years. Even shit." Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, Torst, Praha, 2001, p. 733.

Introduction

*“Já jsem si tento způsob
tvoření vzal za motto, membra
disiecta, koláž, ale textů, o kterých si
myslím, že vytvoří celek”²*

The term “Disiecta membra”, derived from Latin and meaning “scattered limbs”, historically applies to fragments of ancient poems, sculptures, and manuscripts. This phrase originates from the Roman poet Horace, who used “disiecti membra poetae” in his *Satires* to denote the fragmented remains of a poet. Jan Zábrana appropriated this expression for his diary entries from the 1970s, likely feeling metaphorically akin to a poet in ruins, fragmented by the oppressive contemporary situation, the communist regime, the destructive impact of censorship, and his existential and personal challenges.

Zábrana was born into a family of democratic parents in Herálec and later moved to the nearby town of Humpolec, in the Vysočina region, in the central part of the Czech Republic. Following the communist coup of February 1948, which resulted in the establishment of a communist regime in Czechoslovakia, his parents were arrested. Consequently, he was barred from university studies and compelled to move to Prague and seek employment in a factory. However, Zábrana's literary talent, cultivated from a young age, enabled him to become a freelance translator in 1954, his first translations being Sergej Yesenin's poetry. Translation soon became his primary profession. Despite publishing his first poems in the 1956 anthology *Život je všude* (*Life is Everywhere*), Zábrana was largely prohibited from publishing his work throughout most of his career. His

² “I have taken this method of creation as my motto, disiecta membra, collage, but of texts that I believe will create a whole” Hrabal, Bohumil, *Sebrané spisy Bohumila Hrabala*, Praha, Pražská imaginace, 1993, p. 173. (all the translations from Czech, from this point and for the rest of the book, if not stated in the notes, will all be mine)

diaries became one of the few spaces where he could freely express himself, a practice he began in the young age. Apart from the aforementioned 1956 anthology, which included 39 poems from the collections *Anály* (*The Annals*), *Černá lyrika* (*Black Lyric Poetry*), and *Léta s Helmutem* (*Years with Helmut*), he managed to publish these poems in separate volumes during the 1960s under different titles (*Pages from a Diary*, *Fixed Black Icons*, and *Lynch*, respectively), albeit with modifications. The 1968 Warsaw Pact armies invasion into Czechoslovakia made further publication impossible for him. The worsening political climate post-1968, which saw many of his friends go into exile, deepened Zábřana's sense of isolation and led him to intensify his focus on his diaries. During this period, "Disiecta membra" emerged, comprising dozens of blue notebooks filled with political reflections, poem fragments, aphorisms, and literary criticism, spanning from 1970 until his death in 1984. For Zábřana, the act of journal-keeping transcended mere routine and assumed the character of an existential necessity. This compulsion arose not only from the oppressive political climate that defined his external reality but also from his intrinsic disposition, which left him feeling fundamentally displaced. Zábřana experienced a profound sense of alienation, one that extended beyond political and moral dimensions to encompass his individual existence. In response to this multifaceted dislocation, he sought refuge and solace in the intimate space of his diary, which became a vital sanctuary for his self-expression. His diaries reflect a dual form of isolation—both personal and political—that permeates his writings. This sense of estrangement also informed his translations, which became an additional outlet for articulating his complex inner life. His literary style, constrained from the outset to private expression or the role of a translator interpreting the words of others, developed in accordance with these limitations. As a result, his work reveals a continuous negotiation between the urge for self-expression and the external forces that sought to silence him, ultimately shaping his distinctive voice.

During the 1990s Zábřana was known primarily for his diaries (*Celý život*, 1991-1992) and translations. He devoted nearly his entire life to his work as a translator, which served, as the author often mentions in his notes, as a substitute for the literary career he never realized:

Kdybych byl někdy v životě měl ctížádost překladatele, mohl bych být – možná, možná, kdo ví – spokojen. Kdybych byl býval někdy v životě měl ctížádost překladatele... ale takhle.... Samozřejmě, že

se člověk promění v to, co dělá, samozřejmě. Ale je «náhradní život» v té nevysvětlitelné záhadě života vůbec vždycky tak velké neštěstí, za jaké je člověk považuje?³

Zábrana translated approximately 150 books, primarily from English and Russian, establishing himself as a prolific translator and cultural mediator. His translation work was enriched by a series of critical essays in which he offered in-depth analyses of the poetics of the authors he translated. In these essays, Zábrana not only explored the stylistic and thematic elements of the original texts but also examined the ways in which these stylistic features were preserved, adapted, or transformed in the process of translation. A selection of these critical reflections was later published in the volume *Potkat básníka (Meeting a Poet)*.⁴ Zábrana's translations were the primary means through which he made a significant impact on Czech literary culture of the time. His efforts were instrumental in introducing Czech readers to a wide range of works from Russian and Anglo-American literature. Without Zábrana's meticulous and nuanced translations, many of these classics would have remained inaccessible. His work played a vital role in expanding the Czech literary canon of translated works, significantly shaping the cultural landscape of the period through the careful selection of authors situated outside the mainstream literary context.

Gradually, he has gained recognition as a full-fledged author, with his works being incorporated into Czech literature study programs. This recognition is largely due to the efforts of scholars since the 1990s, who have delved into the extensive material he left behind, including unreleased poems and short stories. The contributions of Jiří Trávniček, Jan Šulc, Dušan Karpatský, Marie Zábranová, Adéla Petruželková and others have resulted in publications that introduced Zábrana's hidden literary treasures to a broader audience, accompanied by detailed critical commentary outlining his biography and poetics.⁵ The burgeoning interest in Zábrana's oeuvre has catalyzed the publication of numerous critical studies and dissertations, both within the Czech Republic and internationally.⁶ Prominent foreign scholars, such as Jonathan Bolton and Justin Quinn,

³ "If I had ever in my life had the ambition to be a translator, I might have been—perhaps, perhaps, who knows—satisfied. If I had ever in my life had the ambition to be a translator... but as it is... Of course, a person becomes what they do, of course. But is a 'substitute life' in the inexplicable mystery of life really always such a great misfortune as one considers it to be?" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, Torst, Praha, 2001, p. 418.

⁴ Zábrana, Jan, *Potkat básníka*, curated by Antonín Přidal and Vladimír Novotný, Praha, Odeon, 1989.

⁵ see for example Zábrana, Jan, *Jistota nejhoršího: výbor z básnické pozůstalosti*, curated by Jiří Trávniček, Praha, Československý spisovatel, 1991; Zábrana, Jan, *Básně a povídky*, Host, Brno 2021; Zábrana, Jan, *Sedm povídek*, curated by Jan Šulc, Brno, Atlantis, 1993.

⁶ see for example: Kavi, Samuel, *Básně a deníky Jana Zábrany: život ve znamení smrti*, Olomouc, 2012; Doležalová, Z. *Sovětská próza v překladech Jana Zábrany*. Praha, 1980. Diplomová práce. Univerzita Karlova v Praze. Fakulta filozofická; Eliáš, Petr, *Jan Zábrana – překladatel a básník. Inspirace beatnickou poezií a její překlady*. Praha, 2012. Diplomová práce. Univerzita Karlova v Praze. Fakulta filozofická.

have dedicated significant efforts to translating and analyzing Zábřana's work. Bolton is currently working on the first English translation of the diaries, while Quinn recently published *The Lesser Histories* (2022),⁷ which contains translations of Zábřana's poems from *Pages of a Diary*. A significant milestone in Zábřana studies was the 2015 conference "Jan Zábřana: Poet, Translator, Reader" organized by the Institute of Translation Studies at Charles University in Prague. This conference gathered scholars from various fields to offer diverse interpretations of Zábřana's work, resulting in a richly informative volume edited by Eva Kalivodová and Petr Eliáš.⁸ This volume offers a series of scholarly analyses that examine various facets of the poet's oeuvre, personality, and stylistic approach, establishing itself as a foundational work in the field of Zábřana studies.

Efforts are currently underway to release additional materials from Zábřana's literary estate. Notably, in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of his death, the Torst publishing house released a facsimile edition of a typescript containing excerpts from Zábřana's earlier notes, curated by Jan Šulc and titled *Excerptce* (Excerption, 2024). This paginated typescript, dating back to the early 1970s, comprises Zábřana's curated selections from his reflections on poetry, prose, and his planned diaries, drawn from the extensive collection of notebooks, loose papers, journals, and diaries he had amassed over the years. Created at the onset of the normalization period, this work reflects Zábřana's attempt to organize both his records and his thoughts. It seems that Zábřana began working on *Disiecta Membra* concurrently with compiling these excerpts, as part of a broader effort to consolidate his previous diaries and written observations into a more coherent and structured form. The selections span the years 1960 to 1971, culminating in the manuscript's completion.⁹

In a recent interview, Šulc disclosed plans for Torst to publish four additional volumes of Zábřana's work. One of these volumes will compile all of Zábřana's critical essays on translation, a portion of which was previously published in 1989 in *Potkat básníka*, representing only one-third of the material. The remaining three volumes will feature Zábřana's complete diaries, presented without cuts or omissions. One volume will encompass diary entries from 1946 to 1970, while the other two will include *Disiecta Membra* in its entirety, free from editorial intervention. The publication of these works is expected to be completed by 2030.¹⁰

⁷ Zábřana, Jan, *The Lesser Histories*, translated by Justin Quinn, Prague, Karolinum Press, 2022.

⁸ Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.), *Jan Zábřana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, Karolinum press, Praha, 2015.

⁹ Zábřana, Jan, *Excerptce*, curated by Jan Šulc, Torst, Praha, 2024.

¹⁰ The interview is accessible at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPNLakY3Uac>.

This study seeks to contribute to the ongoing scholarly discourse by critically examining the intersection of Zábřana's diaries and his translations to trace the development of his poetic style, particularly within the specific historical and existential circumstances in which it evolved. Employing various conceptual, methodological, and theoretical frameworks, this research will analyze Zábřana's growth as a writer by identifying and examining the stylistic features present in his diaries. These features will then be compared to those found in his translations to explore how his poetic style interacted with and was shaped by the styles of selected authors. This comparative analysis will provide insights into the mutual influence between Zábřana's original writings and his translation work, revealing how his poetic voice was molded by the literary voices he translated. Each section of this study will include more detailed biographical information pertinent to the corresponding phase of Zábřana's artistic evolution. The analysis will be grounded in the principles of Genetic Criticism, an approach that will be briefly outlined in the subsequent sections. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to delineate the primary material upon which this analysis will be based.

The diaries' editorial history

"In the end, it's up to the reader to accept Zábřana's challenge and seek out the meaning of this remarkable 'diary' for themselves."¹¹

The editorial history of Zábřana's diaries commenced in 1991 with the publication of a selection of his notes in the volume *Jistota nejhoršího (Certainty of the Worst)* edited by Jiří Trávníček. This volume also included unreleased poems from Zábřana's legacy. Subsequently, excerpts from the diaries began to appear sporadically in the magazine "Literární noviny," edited by Dušan Karpatský. These excerpts were referred to as "modré sešity" or "blue notebooks," named after the covers of the notebooks in which Zábřana

¹¹ Bolton, Johnathan, *Rozhazené údy Jana Zábřany*, in: Tvar, N°1, 1995.

wrote his notes during the 1970s. In 1992, two volumes titled *Celý život (All My Life)*, comprising a comprehensive selection from the diaries, were published.¹² These volumes, totalling 1103 pages, garnered significant critical and public acclaim. The initial print run of 6000 copies was reprinted the following year due to high demand. In 2001, these volumes were consolidated into a single edition, also titled *All My Life*. In 1998, the Publishing House Junák released *Náruč plná vřesu (An Arm full of Heather)*, which contains Zábrana's juvenile diaries from 1945 to 1947.

This study will focus on the most recent edition of *All My Life* (2001) as well as on *An Arm full of Heather*. The most recent edition of *Celý život* (2001), edited by Jan Šulc and Dušan Karpatský, offers the most extensive selection from Zábrana's diaries, spanning the years 1948 to 1984. This edition is divided into seven parts: the first part features Zábrana's diaries from his high school period (1948-1949). The second part includes articles published by Zábrana in the high school magazine "Výkvět" between 1947 and 1949. The third part collects notes written during the early 1950s. The fourth part is akin to the third, containing various notes from 1966, which are more fragmented and often undated. The fifth part comprises two essays published between 1968 and 1969: *Tvorba jako míra humanismu* and *O knize Stránky z deníku*. The sixth part, the most substantial, includes a selection from 127 A5 notebooks Zábrana kept between 1970 and 1984, named *Disiecta membra*. This section is further divided into two sub-sections: the first covering notebooks 1-45, and the second encompassing the remaining notebooks. The seventh and final part (May-July 1984) contains meticulously dated notes written by Zábrana from the day he was hospitalized in the Motol Hospital, concluding a few months before his death. In *A Handful of Heather*, on the other hand, we find the following material: "*Deník je napsán do předtištěného skautského zápisníku vydaného v roce 1945 ústředím Junáka. Z tohoto zápisníku také pochází většina ilustračního doprovodu knihy [...] Dopis J. Wolkerovi byl otištěn s laskavým svolením pražského nakladatelství Torst z výboru ze Zábranových deníku Celý Život I.*"¹³

¹² This release was part of a vast editorial project that aimed to publish a great selection of texts (mainly unreleased poems) that were found in Zábrana's legacy. An editorial process that was concluded in 2022 with the release of the volume *The Raven (Havran)*. An editorial project that is still the object of public debates, see: Špirit, Michael, *Pozůstalost – edice = nezvládnutá rovnice*, in "Kanon", 28 March 2024, available here: <https://i-kanon.cz/2024/03/28/pozustalost-edice-nezvladnuta-rovnice/>

¹³ "The diary written in a pre-printed scout notebook published in 1945 by the central office of the Boy Scouts' organization Junák. Most of the illustrations in the book also come from this notebook [...] The letter to J. Wolker was printed with the kind permission of the Prague publishing house Torst from the selection of Zábrana's diaries, *Celý Život I.*" Zábrana, J., *Náruč plná vřesu*, E-book ed., Praha Junák, 1998. location 670 (character size 5).

Analyzing pre-existing literary material, particularly diaries, poses a range of methodological challenges. These challenges will be addressed in the subsequent section, where I will examine how the principles of Genetic Criticism have been adapted to accommodate this specific type of material.

Concepts, Methodology, Theories

1.1. *Diaries and Endogenesis*

*“Co jsou tyhle zápisy, poznámky, náhodně zachycená slova,
připíchnutá do těchhle sešitů
jako motýli? Suspendované dílo”¹⁴*

As I mentioned, the primary objective of this study is to trace the evolution of Jan Zábrana's poetic style by integrating elements from his diaries and translations, thereby mapping the progression of his written expression over time. I argue that Zábrana's meticulously maintained diary entries, spanning his entire life, serve as crucial evidence of a writing style in continuous development. This study, therefore, delves into the trajectory of Zábrana's stylistic evolution as it emerges within his diaries. It ultimately investigates how the stylistic features identified in these personal writings intersect with his translations, which themselves constitute an integral component of Zábrana's broader literary oeuvre. To achieve this, the study is grounded in the principles of Genetic Criticism, a French linguistic approach that emerged in the 1970s, drawing from the traditions of structuralism and formalism. Genetic Criticism is dedicated to the analysis of preliminary materials—such as manuscripts, sketches, and private documents—to uncover the processes that underlie the creation of the final artistic product:

Princip textové genetiky zní: zaměřit co možná největší pozornost na tvůrčí aktivitu spisovatele, jeho gesta, emoce a nejistoty – a jejím cílem je znovu odhalit text díla ve sledu črt a úprav, z nichž se dílo zrodilo a v nichž dospělo k finální podobě. Proč to vše? Kvůli lepšímu pochopení díla: kvůli tomu, abychom zevnitř poznali jeho skladbu, viditelné i skryté úmysly autora, postup jeho invence, jeho

¹⁴ “What are these entries, notes, randomly captured words pinned into these notebooks like butterflies? A suspended work” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 754.

tvůrčí procedury, rozhodnutí, slepé uličky, pečlivě budované dílčí složky, které nakonec vyškrtne, i ty, které dále zachová a dále rozvine, kvůli pozorování chvil, kdy nemůže dál, lapsů a návratů, odhalení jeho metody a pracovních zvyklostí, zjištění, zda si napřed určí plán, nebo se do pasní vhrne rovnou, odhalení přesných stop dokumentů a knih, jichž využil, atd. Díky textové genetice pronikáme do spisovatelovy tajné laboratoře, do důvěrného prostoru psaní, které se teprve hledá.¹⁵

According to Genetic Criticism, a text must leave tangible traces to be subjected to such an analysis.¹⁶ Textual genetics involves the sorting, deciphering, and analysis of manuscripts, while genetic criticism interprets these findings, aiming to reconstruct the formation of the text in its embryonic state and elucidate the process of its conception and composition. The primary focus of this methodology is on tracing the evolution of the text: *“Genetická kritika si za téma bere tuto časovou dimenzi stávání se textem a přijímá přitom hypotézu, že i ve své konečné dokonalosti dílo zůstává výsledkem svých proměn a uchovává v sobě paměť vlastní geneze”*.¹⁷ In Genetic Criticism, the object of study is referred to as the *avant-texte* or “pre-text”. This term applies to collected material only after it has been analyzed and classified. Prior to this, the collected material is typically called a *dossier de genèse*. Genetic analysis comprises two dimensions: endogenesis and exogenesis. Endogenesis describes all internal movements of writing, including the morphological structure of sentences and themes. Exogenesis pertains to the writer's use of external texts or information, their selection, appropriation, and incorporation.

By applying the methodologies of Genetic Criticism, this study seeks to illuminate the intricate processes and influences that shaped Zábrana's literary development, offering a comprehensive understanding of his evolving poetic expression. For the purposes of this

¹⁵ “The principle of textual genetics is to focus as much attention as possible on the creative activity of the writer—their gestures, emotions, and uncertainties. Its goal is to rediscover the text of a work through the sequence of sketches and revisions from which the work was born and in which it reached its final form. Why do this? To gain a deeper understanding of the work: to understand its composition from within, the author's visible and hidden intentions, the course of their invention, their creative procedures, decisions, dead ends, carefully constructed components that are ultimately discarded, as well as those that are preserved and further developed; to observe the moments when the writer cannot move forward, the lapses and returns, to uncover their methods and working habits, to determine whether they first outline a plan or dive straight into writing; to trace the exact sources of the documents and books they used, and so on. Through textual genetics, we penetrate into the writer's secret laboratory, the intimate space of writing that is still in the process of finding itself.” Biasi, Pierre-Marc, *Textová genetika*, Praha, Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, v.v.i., p. 9.

¹⁶ “I am proposing a more general and economical definition of the diary, one that fits into three words: a diary is a series of dated traces [série de traces datées]. [...] An isolated dated trace is a memorial rather than a diary: the diary begins when traces in a series attempt to capture the movement of time rather than to freeze it around a source event.” Lejeune, Philippe, *On diary*, University of Hawaii press, Honolulu, 2009, P. 179.

¹⁷ “Genetic criticism focuses on the temporal dimension of a text's development, positing that even in its final form, a work continues to reflect the processes of its transformation and preserves within it the traces of its own genesis.” Biasi, Pierre-Marc, *Textová genetika*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

study, the concepts of endogenesis and exogenesis serve as the structural foundations for analyzing the dual dimensions of Zábřana's poetic evolution over time. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the internal and external elements and influences that shaped his poetics. This study will explore these dimensions through four genetic dossiers, containing Zábřana's diaries and selected translations, which will be structured as follows: The first genetic dossier will analyze the early phase of Zábřana's work, from 1945 to 1949, and Zábřana's translations of Sergey Yesenin's poems in the 1956 collection *Básně* (Poems). The second dossier will contain Zábřana's diaries from the first half of the 1950s, and Zábřana's translations of Yuri Zhivago's poems contained in Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago*. The third dossier will focus on the 1960s and analyze the intersection of influences created by Zábřana's translations of Allen Ginsberg's poems contained in the collection *Howl and Other Poems* (*Kvílení a jiné básně*) and his own writing. The fourth and final dossier will examine Zábřana's written expression in the diaries from the 1970s and 1980s, and the manifestation of Zábřana's own poetic voice in his translations of poems from Sylvia Plath's collection *Ariel*. Within each dossier, the collected materials are categorized into two distinct types of texts: the diary entries, which serve as "pre-texts" that document the evolution of Zábřana's writing style, and the translations, which function as "post-texts", meaning that these translations represent the space in which Zábřana applied the stylistic elements he was refining in his diaries, further enhancing them through his engagement with the works of the authors he translated. The primary criterion for selecting the translated texts was therefore their temporal proximity to the periods documented in Zábřana's diaries, ensuring alignment with the phases of his literary development as discerned in his notes.

The consideration of diaries as genetic material in literary analysis hinges on their inherent instability and their role as dynamic records of the writing process. The justification for such a study is rooted in the inherently evolutionary nature of diaries, a point underscored by diary theory:

[...] It rather means that for many authors this literariness of the diary doesn't acquire meaning in relation to themselves [...] but in relation to their works, of which the diary is a working bench [...]. The diary is no longer the confession of a man, but the elaboration of a text, a text which seems to reveal, more easily than others, its own functioning, because it's not resolute, but evolutive; it's not the finished text, but the text in its making.¹⁸

¹⁸ Didier, Beatrice, *Le journal intime*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1991, p. 46.

Diaries, by their nature, are in a state of perpetual evolution, with each entry representing a slight shift in the author's perspective and expression: "*Text je lidský artefakt, a jako takový podléhá drsnému zákonu práce, dějinnosti a touhy. Žádný text nepředchází psaní, jež mu dává formu: toto je evidentní fakt, a nutí nás nazývat vše, co mu předchází pre-textem. [...] Psaní jakožto technika i hybris, jakožto exces i hnací síla metamorfozy*".¹⁹ Diaries are often considered one of the purest forms of writing, free from external constraints, and thus provide fertile ground for aesthetic experimentation. They capture the evolving inner world of the author, reflecting the growth and changes of the self. Several recurring traits characterize diaries, allowing us to identify them as such. One key feature is the fragmentary nature of their content, consisting of discrete notes that may be written regularly or at varying intervals. Each entry typically begins with a date, a ritualistic act that anchors the diarist's life in a specific moment. At the heart of a diary is the immediate present, albeit viewed from a slight temporal distance, as diarists often record events retrospectively—either later the same day or the following day. This focus on daily life results in a form of writing that can appear monotonous and obsessive, a trait Philippe Lejeune describes in his exploration of the genre. The primary aim of diary writing is to document everyday activities, yet within this repetitive framework, a compositional code and continuity emerge:

The diary's thematic obsessions are reinforced by the regularity of its forms. By definition, writing a diary is free, totally free. But in fact, each diarist quickly settles into a small number of forms of language that become "molds" for all of his entries, and never deviates from them [...] All of these considerations go toward asking that the diary be studied some day as a rhythm. [...] The internal dimension would begin with an analysis of the diary text itself, to establish its internal morphology (themes and forms) and how the links between them are organized: precisely what one does in musical analysis when parsing a sonata or a fugue.²⁰

In essence, diaries serve as a reflective space where the author engages in self-observation and introspection. They not only chronicle daily occurrences but also provide a canvas for the diarist to experiment with narrative techniques, explore personal thoughts, and articulate evolving ideas. This dynamic nature of diary writing offers a unique vantage point for understanding the author's literary development and the intricate interplay

¹⁹ "The text is a human artifact, and as such, it is subject to the harsh law of labor, historicity, and desire. No text precedes writing, which gives it form: this is an evident fact, forcing us to call everything that precedes it pre-text. (...) Writing as a technique and hubris, as excess and the driving force of metamorphosis." Biasi, Pierre-Marc, *Textová genetika*, op. cit., p. 39.

²⁰ Lejeune, Philippe, *On diary*, op. cit., p. 189.

between lived experience and creative expression. This continuity and the act of daily recording form a cohesive narrative thread, despite the inherent fragmentariness of individual entries. I contend that it offers profound insights into the formative processes of writing, shedding light on the evolution of the author's distinctive literary voice. By examining these entries, scholars can trace the evolution of the author's style, thematic concerns, and artistic experimentation, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the text's genesis and the complex interplay of factors that shape literary creation.

As indicated by Lejeune, it is true that diaries cannot be the direct object of genetic study, but the notes they are made of inherently function as *pre-texts*, resulting from the immediate and spontaneous act of writing. Arranged in a chronological sequence, each diary entry can be viewed as a pre-text for the subsequent one, as each entry, shaped by distinct circumstances, exhibits subtle variations from its predecessor:

From this perspective, we cannot speak of any "genetic" study except by displacing the meaning of the word. Each diary entry constitutes a unique text, but because the succession of entries is controlled by a system of variations, it can be a site of learning and evolution. I can see how the entries' construction strategies (periodicity, length, internal structure) change or do not change. The same thing goes for the phrasing and the style. I cannot compare the text of August 13 to its *avant-textes* - there are none - but to the texts of August 12, or 11, yes.²¹

Each diary entry builds upon the preceding one, positioning the former as a pre-text to the latter. Given that every diary entry can be seen as a pre-text, the endogenetic analysis of Zábrana's diaries will focus on examining several key elements within them: the internal structure of the entries, recurring themes, prevalent poetic imagery, commonly used verb forms and tenses, and metaphorical language. The goal of this analysis is to try to identify specific patterns and continuities in Zábrana's writing and to explore how these aspects are shaped by his approach to managing the diaries. Additionally, this study will trace the evolution of these elements over time, trying to demonstrate that, despite the diverse and varied nature of Zábrana's work, a coherent continuity runs through his diary writings. Another criterion that this analysis will employ to distinguish traces of a poetic voice from "regular" entries is the concept of the "chronotope" as described by the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin. This approach aims to identify what I term "aesthetic conglomerations", or points where descriptions of external space converge within the entries. Considering that time in the diary serves as a constant framework, the emergence of these

²¹ Lejeune, Philippe, *On diary*, op. cit., p. 224.

“conglomerations” of spatial description may indicate the author's growing awareness of an artistic purpose, aiming to achieve a deliberate aesthetic effect. According to Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, the aesthetic value of an artistic work emerges from the interplay of spatial and temporal elements, which are meticulously controlled and arranged according to the author's will. Thus, identifying these conglomerations can reveal deeper insights into the formation and expression of Zábřana's poetic voice.²²

However, as outlined in the section discussing the material under analysis, this study draws upon private texts that were published posthumously and without the author's consent. Despite the challenges inherent in this approach, I maintain that Zábřana's published diaries offer compelling reasons to be considered suitable for such an examination. Although these diaries were published and underwent editorial alterations and reorganization, their private nature was still from the beginning tainted by Zábřana's awareness that they might be read by unintended audiences. Zábřana himself acknowledges this possibility within his entries²³. Therefore, it is likely that he composed these texts with a certain level of intentionality and self-stylization, which allows for the discernment of distinctive stylistic elements within them. I argue that this intentionality in his writing was both stimulated and intensified by the cultural context in which he maintained his diaries, specifically the Czechoslovakian communist regime.²⁴ Possible self-censorship, entangled with the literary sphere, brings forth several methodological problems, that significantly shape the way particular literature is produced and experienced:

²² “We will give the name chronotope [...] to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature [...] In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope”. Bakhtin, M. M., *Voprosy literatury i estetiki*, Chudožestvennaja literatura, Moskva, 1975, p. 234.

²³ In a diary entry from 1948, he reflects on the possibility that his diaries might one day fall into the hands of others, stating: “I cannot imagine my diary in the hands of strangers. Perhaps in the hands of friends, yes, but absolutely not in the hands of disinterested people. It is true that I am not completely honest in this diary. There is something timid within me that, except for a few unguarded moments, prevents me from writing everything with complete sincerity. Something that warns me this diary (especially in today's times) could end up in the wrong hands. [...] This diary, too, is distorted by the same dishonesty. It is full of it, and only occasionally is it written as I truly am. Not so much in my thoughts on books, but elsewhere. The entire posture from which I write this diary is false.” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 126.

²⁴ “The productive outcome of censorship activity, in general, is that its actions not only subtract meaning but always add meaning as well. This applies from the elementary level of a single sign or text to the entire literary culture. The most commonly cited example of the productive impact of censorship on literature (reflected even in contemporary literary criticism) is the cultivation of means of indirect expression and the corresponding hermeneutic mode” in: Wögerbauer, Michael; Šámal, Petr; *V obecném zájmu: cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře 1749-2014*, Svazek I, Praha, Nakladatelství Akademie, 2015, p. 26.

Tím, co podle Bourdieua (a dalších klasiků, kteří přispěli k poststrukturalistickému obratu humanitních věd, zejména Michela Foucaulta) reglementuje výpovědi, není totiž subjekt, ale předchůdné síly, které formují podmínky vypovídání, strukturují pole, kde se vypovídání děje, a udělují subjektům komunikačního procesu – institucionálním i individuálním aktérům – pozici v něm. Zatímco znamením úspěchu cenzury v úzkém pojetí je vědomý a uvědomovaný zákaz (to, že text není), znamením úspěchu cenzury v nejširším pojetí je to, že text je a že se mu v procesu semiózy nestaví do cesty žádná překážka, neboť dokonale říká vše to, co se podle pravidel daného literárního pole říkat má či musí.²⁵

One pertinent issue is the reception of the work of art. Given that these works are forbidden and often kept hidden for extended periods, compelling authors to produce them in secrecy, they reach readers with significant delay, thereby creating numerous methodological challenges in analysing their impact. Writings produced in such a communicative sphere are likely intended for a specific audience, but not one constrained by censorship. Moreover, this prospective audience could also include the authors themselves:

[...] because the diary is not only the recording of successive presents, opening onto an indeterminate future fatally closed by death. From the beginning, the diary also programs its own rereading. It might in fact never be reread, but it could be. It's like a radar signal that you project towards the future and feel strangely coming back to you. Without this presence of the future, you wouldn't write. The diary no longer leads to the contingency of an absurd ending, but toward the transcendence of one or several future rereadings. You don't imagine it finished; rather, you see it reread (by yourself) or read (by another).²⁶

The readers could be outsiders or contemporaries of the diarist, to whom he might be addressing a message should they eventually come across the diaries. However, the diarist's intended audience could also reside in the future. The future holds particular significance for the author of a diary, as he does not—and cannot—know how the diary will conclude, except perhaps with his own death, assuming he does not tire of the recording activity. Consequently “[the diarist] *cannot do more than see what the accumulated effects*

²⁵ “According to Bourdieu (and other classical scholars who contributed to the poststructuralist turn in the humanities, especially Michel Foucault), what regulates statements is not the subject, but preceding forces that shape the conditions of enunciation, structure the field where enunciation occurs, and grant positions within it to the subjects of the communicative process—both institutional and individual actors. While the mark of success for censorship in the narrow sense is a conscious and aware prohibition (i.e., the text does not exist), the mark of success for censorship in the broadest sense is that the text does exist and encounters no obstacles in the process of semiosis, as it perfectly conveys everything that the rules of the given literary field dictate it should or must say” Wögerbauer, Michael; Šámal, Petr; *V obecném zájmu: cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře 1749-2014*, Svazek I, op. cit., p. 24.

²⁶ Lejeune, Philippe, *On diary*, op. cit., p. 191.

of diary writing might mean because the diary has the future as its ultimate addressee. This future must always be a horizon, since the diarist will never reach it, but it is also a promise to that future and to whoever reads the diary then.”²⁷ In all these cases, we can assume the reader is a constant presence within the cognitive horizon of the writer, thereby instigating a degree of self-stylization in the diary. This self-stylization, along with its intended audience and corresponding rhetorical strategy, is projected towards the future.²⁸ It is worth noting that Zábrana could have chosen to destroy his diaries—an old habit among diarists to shield themselves from both past and future judgments. The fact that Zábrana did not make this choice, despite the risk of the diaries being discovered by the STB agents,²⁹ reinforces the notion that his desire to reach the future was inherent in his diaries. The diary's nature as a work projected towards the future, without a predetermined end (save for the diarist's death), further renders it “open”:

Obečná tendence k „otevřenému dílu“ – abych použila známý Ecoův výrok – v umění dvacátého století najde zvláštní uplatnění ve skutečnosti totalitního režimu, kde autor nechává dílo otevřené (ne ve smyslu interpretačním, ale konkrétním: otevřené, protože nedokončené) už jenom proto, že je nemusí dokončit, neboť je nemůže/nesmí zveřejnit.³⁰

The freedom afforded by the diary form is not only oriented towards the future, but is also concealed. This concealed space offers genetic possibilities of creation despite its hidden and dislocated nature. Cosentino underscores this aspect by stating that “*Do tohoto prostoru patří vše, co má pro básníka význam a potřebuje umístění oddělené od toho, co básníkovi nepatří; kreativní složka básnickova života nesmí existovat ve stejném prostoru, kde přebývají ti pověstní „oni“ a jejich společníci*”³¹. This dislocation offers the writer a privileged vantage point from which to observe unfolding events and allows for the expression of judgment. The desire to provide testimony is a crucial element of the diary's writing process, inherently embedded within the cognitive processes that produce it.

²⁷ Rak, Julie, *Dialogue with the future: Philippe Lejeune's method and theory of diary* in: Lejeune, Philippe, *On diary*, op. cit., p. 24.

²⁸ Lejeune, Philippe, *On diary*, op. cit., p. 190.

²⁹ The State Security (Státní Bezpečnost in Czech) functioned as the secret police force in communist Czechoslovakia.

³⁰ “The general trend toward the 'open work,' to use Eco's well-known statement – in the art of the twentieth century finds a particular application in the reality of totalitarian regimes, where the author leaves the work open (not in the interpretive sense, but concrete: open because it is unfinished) only because they do not have to finish it, or they cannot/must not publish it” Cosentino, Annalisa, *Zvláštní místa v Zábranově poetice*, in op. cit., p. 23.

³¹ “This space includes everything that holds significance for the poet and needs to be placed apart from what does not belong to him; the creative component of the poet's life must not exist in the same space where those notorious "others" and their associates reside” Ibid., *Ibid*, p. 24.

Testimony is intrinsically linked to the future, as a diary is intended to be read by future generations, serving as a warning and a prayer for those who come after. Annalisa Cosentino, for instance, observes an overabundance of diary literature in 20th-century Czech lands, attributing its prevalence to the “*potřebě podávat svědectví o dějinách, být „očitými svědky“ událostí, které z historických (respektive politických) důvodů byly nebo jsou či budou zamlčené, utajené nebo pokřivené.*”³² As Tomáš Kubíček asserts, the aspect of offering testimony is particularly relevant in Zábrana’s *Disiecta membra*. It becomes evident upon reading that the author’s need to denounce the crimes of the regime and the horrors of his time, as articulated in his diary entries, was directed beyond his own personal experience:

Za spleti jednotlivých záznamů vyrůstá obžaloba systému tvůrčí nesvobody. Povaha svědectví o potřebě svobody řadí Zábranovy deníky do široké skupiny textů s morálním imperativem. Osobní tu má až příliš blízko k nadosobnímu. V tomto smyslu nejsou Zábranovy deníky skutečným intimním deníkem každodennosti. Stávají se spíše poselstvím, dopisem v lahvi.³³

Given the preceding discussion, it seems that our analysis may acquire an additional dimension by focusing on published diaries rather than unpublished manuscripts. The editorial selection of entries itself, presumably based on aesthetic criteria as well as the preserved state of the notes, suggests that the chosen entries were deemed most suitable for publication due to their acceptability and readability. This aligns with the notion that “*it is rare to publish a journal in its written form without rewording or cuts. Most journals are so long and repetitive that they are unpublishable*”.³⁴ An intriguing observation made by one of the editors, Jan Šulc, suggests that Zábrana may have intended to revise portions of his diaries, particularly the *Disiecta Membra*, possibly with the aim of preparing them for future publication.³⁵ Marie Zábranová, the writer’s wife, disclosed that shortly before his death, the poet expressed a clear desire for his diaries to be published:

³² “[...] need to bear witness to history, to be eyewitnesses of events that, for historical or political reasons, have been, are being, or will be silenced, concealed, or distorted” Cosentino, Annalisa, *Zvláštní místa v Zábranově poetice*, in op. cit. p. 22.

³³ “Amidst the tangle of individual entries, an indictment of the system of creative unfreedom emerges. The nature of the testimony to the need for freedom places Zábrana’s diaries in the broad category of texts with a moral imperative. Here, the personal is almost too close to the impersonal. In this sense, Zábrana’s diaries are not a true intimate diary of everyday life. They become more of a message, a letter in a bottle” Kubíček, Tomáš, *Obrana paměti: čas a skutečnost v české literatuře sedmdesátých let, jejich povaha a důsledky aneb Co způsobuje narativ*, Česká literatura, Červen 2004, Vol. 52, No. 3, pp. 331-332.

³⁴ Lejeune, Philippe, *On diary*, op. cit., p. 31.

³⁵ “The notebooks were of a provisional nature, textually incomplete, and it is evident that Zábrana intended to revise them at a later stage” Šulc, Jan, *Zaknihovaný život Jana Zábrany* in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.) *Jan Zábrana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 15.

Za prvé: my jsme o nich vůbec nevěděli. Že je má a v tak upravené formě, mi řekl čtrnáct dnů před smrtí a současně vyslovil přání, aby se vydaly. Jakým způsobem, o tom se nevyjádřil, ale řekl několik jmen možných editorů: Karpatský, Justl, možná ještě dvě. Ještě za jeho života jsem se na deníky šla podívat do jeho pokoje. Ani jsem přesně nevěděla, kde jsou! Byly zabudovány v knihovně za několika řadami knih. První četba byla těžká i pro mě. Potom se o „modrých sešitech“ doslechl Josef Škvorecký, chtěl je zaslat. [...] Hlavní starost jsem měla o deníky: bylo mi jasné, že jim přikládal největší váhu z toho, co udělal, co chtěl říct. Pavel Sukdolák mi pomohl, ve dvou velkých krabicích je z Malešic odvezl a ukrýval až do roku 1989, kdy jsme se rozhodli je nacyklostylovat – celé – a začít je zpracovávat. Velkým iniciátorem knižního vydání v Torstu byl právě Jan Šulc, Dušan Karpatský vybíral ukázky do Literárních novin.³⁶

This intention underscores the idea that Zábrana wrote with a potential readership in mind. In the editorial note, Šulc emphasizes that the selection aimed to compile a representative illustration of 37 years of Zábrana's literary development: “[...]nebo se pokusit sestavit čtenářský výbor přibližující sedmatřicetiletý vývoj Zábranova psaní v celém jeho časové rozpětí”.³⁷ Šulc explains that, to make the diaries more accessible to a broader audience, the editors chose to exclude any text that could not be accurately reconstructed from the author's notes. The entries that were selected for inclusion were edited mainly with the purpose of achieving a more coherent graphic presentation:

Nakonec bylo rozhodnuto vynechat všechny texty, jejichž rekonstrukce z možných variant nebyla možná a jejichž publikování v úplnosti by čtenářský výbor neúměrně zatížilo [...] Vzhledem k tomu, že autenticita textů byla porušena již výběrem, rozhodli se pořadatelé a editoři zvolit druhou možnost a texty zredigovat. Znamenalo to zejména zásahy do psaní velkých písmen a interpunkce u básní, časté nahrazování tří teček tečkou jednou, sjednocení podobných typů textů do shodné grafické podob, u básní s variantami veršů zvolení jedné z variant apod.³⁸

³⁶ “First of all, we had no idea they existed. He told me he had them, and in such an organized form, just two weeks before his death, along with expressing the wish that they be published. He didn't specify how they should be published but mentioned a few possible editors: Karpatský, Justl, and perhaps a couple more. While he was still alive, I went to look at the diaries in his room. I didn't even know exactly where they were! They were hidden in the library, behind several rows of books. The first reading was difficult even for me. Later, Josef Škvorecký heard about the 'blue notebooks' and wanted them sent to him. [...] My main concern was the diaries: I knew he attached the greatest importance to them among everything he had done, everything he wanted to say. Pavel Sukdolák helped me; he took them in two large boxes from Malešice and kept them hidden until 1989, when we decided to mimeograph them—all of them—and begin processing them. A major proponent of their book publication by Torst was Jan Šulc, while Dušan Karpatský selected excerpts for *Literární noviny*.” Zábranová, Marie, *Infinitiv byl pro něj objev*, in Weles, 38/39, p. 153.

³⁷ “[...] to attempt to compile a reader's selection that illustrates 37 years of the development of Zábrana's writing over its entire time span. This option was chosen” Šulc, Jan, *Ediční poznámka k prvnímu a druhému vydání*, in: Zábrana, J., *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 1067.

³⁸ “In the end, it was decided to omit all texts whose reconstruction from possible variants was not feasible, and whose complete publication would excessively burden the reader's selection. [...] Given that the authenticity of the texts had already been compromised by the selection process, the organizers and editors

This suggests that the substance of the diary entries themselves remained unaltered. Similarly, in *Náruč plná vřesu*, editors Václav Břicháček and Tomáš Navrátil assert in the editorial note that the diary texts were not altered or corrected during transcription,³⁹ ensuring that what was contained in the notes that were published, pertinent to our analysis, remains in the original form and is thus amenable to interpretation.

2.1. Exogenesis and the Czech Diary

*“Přitom, že je stále víc na světě literatury lží,
literatury cenzury místo literatury pravdy.”⁴⁰*

In examining the concept of “exogenesis” in Jan Zábrana’s artistic development, this study seeks to analyze the internal dynamics of his writing within the broader historical and cultural context of Czechoslovakia. The term “exogenesis” refers to the intersection of external influences that shaped Zábrana’s writing style. This concept encompasses both the impact of his literary expression on the works he translated (referred to as post-texts) and the reciprocal influence of those translations on the stylistic features evident in his diary entries. This analysis encompasses the latter half of the twentieth century, with particular emphasis on the major literary currents that illuminate the evolution of Czech diary literature during this period. Upon the publication of Zábrana’s diaries, many critics highlighted the persistent presence of this literary form in Czech literature, particularly during the communist era, reflecting on its broader significance. For example, Michael Špirit, in an article published at the time, examined the success of this genre of “truth-literature” within the Czech context. He stated that “*V době, kdy každý slušný člověk*

opted for the second approach, which involved editing the texts. This primarily meant interventions in the use of capital letters and punctuation in poems, frequently replacing ellipses with a single period, standardizing similar types of texts into a consistent graphic format, and in poems with variant verses, choosing one of the versions, and so on.” *Ibid.*, *Ibid.*, p. 1069.

³⁹ “The text of the diary was not altered or corrected during transcription, except for punctuation, and therefore does not conform to current spelling standards.” Zábrana, J., *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit., pos. 670.

⁴⁰ “In a world increasingly filled with literature of lies, literature of censorship rather than literature of truth” Zábrana, J., *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 374.

odpoví na anketní otázku, že jeho největším čtenářským zážitkem je *Zábranův Celý život*, *Ortenovy Knihy*, *Hančovy Události*, *Kolářova Prométheova játra*, případně *Hiršalovy*, *Fučíkovy* či *Černého vzpomínky*, je nabíledni, že otázka *Co je poezie* se stává otázkou *kardinální*.⁴¹ Špirit's reference to Roman Jakobson's essay *Co je poezie?* (*What is Poetry?* 1933-1944) underscores the contemporary relevance of the question Jakobson posed in his essay.⁴² In this work, Jakobson challenges the conventional notion of poetry by analyzing the shift in the perception of what is considered poetic between the 19th and 20th centuries. Jakobson focuses particularly on the diaries of Karel Hynek Mácha, in which the illustrious poet meticulously recorded scandalous details of his private life, including his sexual encounters. Jakobson argues that, despite their content, "*Machův deník je stejně básnickým dílem jako Máj a Márinka, nemá ani příděchu utilitárního, je to čistý l'art pour l'art, je to básnictví pro básníka*".⁴³ Jakobson was not alone in considering the diary a legitimate literary genre in Czechoslovakia. In 1993, the magazine "Prostor" dedicated an entire issue to diaries, featuring contributions from several scholars who sought to explain this phenomenon. For instance, Sergej Machonin, discussing the work of Jiří Kolář, stated that Kolář's diaries represent "*stvoření české poezie druhé poloviny tohoto století. Její husí kůže z nové citlivosti světa a ohromující odvaha k odliterárnění literatury a ke kráse holé pravdy*".⁴⁴

Since the end of World War II, the Czech literary system had been fractured, first by the Nazi occupation and subsequently by the rise of communism in 1948, into three distinct categories: "official" literature, which was produced within the official public sphere and adhered to the criteria imposed by Czechoslovakian social realism; "non-official" literature, which was clandestinely published within the country (*samizdat*) through illegal channels; and literature published abroad by writers who chose exile (*tamizdat*).⁴⁵ Each category possessed its own rhetorical system and communicative sphere, a division that profoundly influenced the trajectory of 20th-century Czech literature. This schism facilitated the emergence of diverse artistic movements and poetics, which examined the lives of

⁴¹ "In a time when every decent person answers the survey question by saying that their greatest reading experiences are *Zábrana's* «All My Life», *Orten's* «Books», *Hanč's* «Events», *Kolář's* «Prometheus' Liver», or perhaps the memoirs of *Hiršal*, *Fučík*, or *Černý*, it is evident that Roman Jakobson's question «What is poetry?» becomes a cardinal one" Špirit, Michael, *Báseň a pravda*, in: *Literární noviny*, N°44, p. 5, 1992.

⁴² Jakobson, Roman, *Co je poezie?* in: "Volné směry", č. 10, 1933/1944.

⁴³ "Mácha's diary is as much a poetic work as *May* and *Marinka*; it has no utilitarian aspect, it is pure *l'art pour l'art*, it is poetry for the poet" *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, p. 223.

⁴⁴ "A unique creation of Czech poetry in the second half of this century. Its goosebumps come from a new sensitivity to the world and a staggering courage to de-literarize literature and embrace the beauty of raw truth" Machonin, Sergej, *Deníkový zápis o denících*, in *Prostor*, N° 24, 1993, p. 145.

⁴⁵ Lehár, Jan, *Česká literatura od počátků k dnešku*, NLN, Praha 2008, p. 715.

ordinary individuals. In the context of early 20th-century turmoil, these individuals encountered an intensified confrontation with reality, fostering a renewed sensitivity to their experiences. The tension between the individual and the surrounding reality was exacerbated by the rhetorical strategies of the Communist regime, which propagated a forcibly optimistic view of the “radiant future of socialism” that did not correspond with actual reality. Writers required a new kind of literature and language that could reconnect them with reality, as the “official” cultural sphere did not provide suitable expressive tools. This need for truth pertains to both the interwar Czechoslovakia and the socialist period literature, as will be examined in more detail in the individual dossiers. One particularly relevant case is that of Egon Bondy, one of the most prominent Czech writers of the 20th century. Emerging from the legacy of Surrealism, which held significant importance in the Czech lands during the 1930s, Bondy, after 1948, began to feel the need for a new tool of expression. He perceived this lack as a crisis, which he analyzed in a manifesto he wrote that same year, entitled *Notes about the Situation of Art in 1948 (Poznámky k situaci umění 1948)*. In this manifesto, Bondy articulated several aesthetic criteria, influenced by his enthusiasm for Marxism, which directly pertained to literature’s truthfulness. He advocated for art centred on its content—an art that immediately registers empirical reality and freely represents all aspects of human life without moral constraints or inhibition. To exemplify this kind of artistic creation, Bondy stated, “*Bude doba, kdy se budou uveřejňovati jen deníky a biografie, neboť nebude potřeba jiných příkladů pro poezii.*”⁴⁶

The Czech critic Jan Lopatka identifies the ability to offer a truthful representation of one’s time as the paramount literary achievement of 20th-century Czech diaries. According to Lopatka, this accomplishment was facilitated by the outsider status described earlier, which characterized different figures including Zábřana. This condition was shared by many Czech writers of the era, including Bohumil Hrabal: “*Outsidersky žil Hanč (a často to velice pronikavě reflektoval) i Hrabal své původní „Jarmilky“ a „Krásné Poldi“, [...] Jmenuji záměrně ty, kteří ve svých lepších textech přinesli něco nesmírně cenného*”.⁴⁷ Lopatka was a primary advocate of Jan Hanč’s diaries, eventually published under the title *Události (Events, 1948)*, which strongly resemble Zábřana’s *All My Life* in structure and content. In his critical analysis, largely centered on Hanč, Lopatka explores the phenomenon of Czech

⁴⁶ “There will come a time when only diaries and biographies will be published, as there will be no need for other examples of poetry” Bondy, Egon, *Poznámky k situaci umění 1948*, in: Dvorský, Stanislav et. al. (2001), *Alternativní kultura: příběh české společnosti 1945-1989*, Praha, NLN., p. 517.

⁴⁷ “Hanč lived as an outsider (and often reflected on it very perceptively), as did Hrabal with his original «Jarmilka» and «Beautiful Poldi». [...] I intentionally mention those who, in their better texts, brought something immensely valuable.” Lopatka, Jan, *Předpoklady tvorby*, Praha, Plus Triada, 2010. p. 70.

diary literature, offering evaluative criteria⁴⁸ and tracing the reasons for its emergence in the Czech context. Commenting on Hanč's work, which is a "*přesunem digresí z periferie do centra textu, kdy anekdoticky stavěný příběh není rámcem, ale objevuje se jako vedlejší motiv, kdy hierarchie se převrací tak, že prvním plánem je plán digresí*"⁴⁹, Lopatka emphasizes the diary's suitability as an ideal literary vessel of its time due to the "empirical pressure" that provoked formal heterogeneity in the author's works and a shift in the narrative focus.

In addition to Lopatka, several scholars have highlighted various aspects of these diaries rooted in truth. Vladimír Karfík, for example, categorizes diary literature into two types: intentional and non-intentional. The former, as exemplified by Karel Hynek Mácha's diaries, is seemingly aimed at preserving memory. The latter, attributed to the texts of Leon Bloy, from which the writer Jakub Deml drew inspiration for his diaries, is characterized by its lack of compositional intent or unifying stylistic effort: "*podobu mu vtiskuje život, jak šel, a to, co do něho i zvnějšku zasahovalo. Ne náhodou se u Demla objevuje slovo svědectví. Co je pro Demla příznačné, je vzácná shoda autenticity s básnickou intencí*".⁵⁰ Following Deml, Jiří Orten and Jiří Kolář centered their poetic strategies on the diary form, using their entries as a repository of empirical material to inform their compositions. These fragments of experience constitute the bedrock of their poetic endeavors. Karfík also argues that the polemical gestures of both Kolář and Orten influenced Zábřana:

Nejnovější významné deníkové dílo, Zábřanův Celý život zřetelně navazuje na tradici. Zdá se, jako by Zábřana pochopil, že mu nestačí dosavadní aktivita básnická, překladatelská a esejistická, a sahá po formě totálnější, po deníku. Je si přitom vědom výjimečnosti a neopakovatelnosti Ortenova gesta, a byl si vědom i toho, že v současné literatuře neexistuje jiná forma, která by umožnila z fragmentárních záznamů podat pravdivější obraz zraněné básnické osobnosti, jejího tragického pobytu ve světě, s nímž se nemůže smířit. Deníková forma Zábřanovi umožnila, aby v posledním období své tvůrčí dráhy

⁴⁸ "This sheds new light on his literary milieu and on the manner in which his work and this milieu must be evaluated, "measured". First and foremost, it is necessary to free oneself from judging the success or failure of individual sequences. The urgency of each record, even if it seems insignificant, resists such isolated assessment. The fundamental plan, "urgency and morality", which according to Hanč's formulation a literary creation cannot lack, also illuminates the smallest of its parts" Lopatka, Jan, *Předpoklady tvorby*, op. cit. p. 96.

⁴⁹ "[...] the shift of digression from the periphery to the center of the text, where the anecdotally constructed story is no longer the framework but appears as a secondary motif, with the hierarchy reversed so that the digressions take the primary focus." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵⁰ "[...] molded by the unfolding of life and external influences. It is no coincidence that the word 'testimony' frequently appears in Deml's work. What distinguishes Deml is the rare congruence of authenticity with poetic intention" Karfík, Vladimír, *Autentičnost a forma*, in: in *Prostor*, N° 24, 1993, p. 25.

plasticky vyslovil svou konkrétní zkušenost, své poznání a zároveň bezděky odhalil hloubku svých traumat, která určila jeho pohled na svět.⁵¹

It can thus be argued that Zábrana's diaries were created within a long and rich tradition of diary literature, a tradition of which he was fully aware and which he regarded as the most appropriate artistic form for self-expression, much like the aforementioned authors did with regard to their own works.

2.2. Translation and the “threshold poet”

A significant aspect of Zábrana's exogenesis lies in his translations, which for the purpose of this study, I consider to be “post-texts” in the development of his poetic. I argue that, through his work as a translator, Zábrana engaged deeply with the compositional codes of numerous literary masterpieces, rephrasing and expanding these texts to better align them with the Czech context. Moreover, Zábrana's choice of texts for translation often served as a form of resistance against the regime: “*Když zakázali Kafku, budou mít Platonova, novelu Hnojný vítr, která je ve své fantasmagoričnosti a stálém dobíhání a zase couvání od konkrétní analogie stejně úděsná, možná úděsnější... A dál... A pořád... I kdyby až do smrti bez reálného výsledku.*”⁵² By translating works that were ignored in Czechoslovakia, he indirectly challenged the authorities. As suggested by Jonathan Bolton, he could do that because of his marginal position, situated at the periphery of the “polluted” semiosphere of the literary context of the time.⁵³ Using Jurij Lotman's theories, Bolton investigates the role Zábrana's boundary position had in challenging the regime's rhetoric system, by “capturing” anomalies in any type of communication act that the same system produced:

⁵¹ “The most recent significant diary work, Zábrana's *Celý život*, clearly continues the tradition. It seems that Zábrana realized that his previous endeavors in poetry, translation, and essay writing were insufficient, prompting him to embrace a more comprehensive form: the diary. He was acutely aware of the uniqueness and irreproducibility of Orten's gesture, and he recognized that contemporary literature offered no other form capable of conveying a truthful depiction of a wounded poetic persona, its tragic existence in an unaccepting world, through fragmentary records. The diary format allowed Zábrana, in the final phase of his creative journey, to vividly articulate his personal experiences and insights. Simultaneously, it inadvertently exposed the depth of his traumas, which shaped his worldview” Karfík, Vladimír, *Autentičnost a forma*, op. cit., p. 26.

⁵² “When they banned Kafka, they will have Platonov, the novella *Manure Wind*, which in its phantasmagoria and constant advance and retreat from concrete analogy is just as dreadful, perhaps even more dreadful... And on... And always... Even if until death without any tangible result” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., s. 252.

⁵³ Bolton, Jonathan H., *Writing in a Polluted Semiosphere: Everyday Life in Lotman, Foucault and De Certeau*, in: Schonle, Andreas (ed.), *Lotman and Cultural Studies: Encounters and Extensions*, Madison WI, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006.

Over and against the drab grayness of socialist reality, language is a source of endless fascination for Zábrana, and he carefully monitors the way words are used in conversations, newspapers, radio broadcasts, and literature. Overall he paints a panorama of linguistic everyday life focused on informal colloquial and unofficial usage [...] Zábrana notes moments of linguistic crossover – moments where transient use of language fixes a funny, bizarre, or thought-provoking translation from one linguistic realm, or realm of experience, to another⁵⁴

The semiosphere, as theorized by Lotman, is a macro-system made of a “*group of texts and languages separated one from another*”⁵⁵, whose closeness arises from its inability to interact with texts that are semiotically different from its own, as such interactions would necessitate an act of translation to incorporate them into the code of the semiosphere. This closeness delimitates therefore a boundary, a “*bilingual space that translates the external information in the internal language of the semiosphere*”⁵⁶, a filter⁵⁷ which functions through the rejection or adaption of the information coming from different semiotic systems, and through the interaction of different linguistic elements pertaining to the different spheres the semiosphere itself is composed of; regularly, the centre of the sphere holds a dominant position, and can impose its influence over the rest of the semiosphere. However, a peripheral semiotic universe might become aware of its own specificity, leading to contrast with the dominant core of the semiosphere. The struggle, or the interaction, between the centre and its peripheries, is one of the elements that contributes to the dynamic processes inside the semiosphere, and it is how new information is created:

The structural irregularity of the semiotic space is the reservoir of dynamic processes and is one of the mechanisms for processing new information within the semiosphere. In the peripheral zones, which are organized less rigidly and equipped with “mobile” and flexible constructions, dynamic processes encounter less resistance and therefore develop more quickly.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 336.

⁵⁵ Lotman, Jurij, *Semiosfera: kul'tura i vzryv vnútri mysljaščich mirov. Stat'i, issledovanija, zametki*, translated from Russian by M.A., Iskustvo-SPB, Sankt-Peterburg, 2000, p. 251.

⁵⁶ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 252.

⁵⁷ To corroborate the connection we established, for the purpose of this study, it is also worth mentioning that the diary, in Lejeune's conception, works also as a filter: “Lejeune tracks what some of this process involves: as filters for everyday life since one really cannot tell everything to one's “dear diary,” diaries are what Lejeune calls “traces” of life where the discontinuous nature of everyday events is managed by “repetition and variation”. Rak, Julie, *Dialogue with the future: Philippe Lejeune's method and theory of diary*, in: Lejeune, Philippe, *On diary*, op. cit., p. 33.

⁵⁸ Lotman, Jurij, *Semiosfera: kul'tura i vzryv vnútri mysljaščich mirov. Stat'i, issledovanija, zametki*, op. cit., p. 251.

As I have underlined, it is an act of translation which, in Zábřana's case, encompassed every aspect of his existential situation and literary production, thus making the translational dimension a pivotal element in the exogenesis of his writing expression, reflecting his marginal position and his defiance against oppressive forces. Deprived of a normal functioning literary sphere where literary works could be produced without being "castrated in advance",⁵⁹ Zábřana was mainly influenced by the voices of the authors he could translate, representing at the time a worthy literary examples he could draw inspiration from. That ensured a certain degree of polyphony in his style.⁶⁰ Annalisa Cosentino further characterizes Zábřana's marginal position as a critical factor influencing the formation of his poetics:

Společenská a politická „dislokace“ neboli displacement intelektuála, který své povolání musel provozovat skoro stále mimo oficiálně určené struktury a místa – ať jde o studia, která nemohla probíhat na univerzitě, nebo o básnickou dráhu, která se většinou musela uchýlovat do ústraní –, koresponduje podle mého názoru se specifickou poetikou. Od samých začátků se Zábřanův zájem o literaturu a jeho literární talent musely konfrontovat s nemožností svobodného vyjádření.⁶¹

Translation can be considered the “art of borders” par excellence. As the Czech literary critic and translator Otakar Fischer aptly stated: “*Překladařství je pomezí činnost, jež vzniká ze syntézy pudu naukového a uměleckého. Originální tvorba ve vznešeném slova smyslu nemůže se rovnat, protože nepřináší prvků v podstatě nových: protože nezmáhá svět, nýbrž poezii. Protože neformuje život, nýbrž jazyk.*”⁶² Situated at the intersection of multiple spheres—political, cultural, historical, and semiotic—Zábřana exemplifies what I term a “threshold poet”, a writer whose development was influenced by his liminal position.⁶³ This position is also where the translator finds themselves during the

⁵⁹ Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 293.

⁶⁰ “To understand Zábřana the poet, we also have to understand how translation was fundamental to his poetry [...] More generally, we are reading poems that are generously open to other poems; indeed, one might say that the poet is in part made by other voices” Quinn, Justin, *Zábřana overheard*, in: LARB, April 19, 2022.

⁶¹ “The social and political ‘dislocation,’ or displacement of the intellectual, who had to practice his profession almost always outside officially designated structures and places—whether it be studies that could not take place at the university or a poetic career that mostly had to retreat into seclusion—corresponds, in my opinion, with a specific poetics. From the very beginning, Zábřana's interest in literature and his literary talent had to confront the impossibility of free expression.” Cosentino, Annalisa, *Zvláštní místa v Zábřanově poetice*, op. cit., p. 20.

⁶² “Translation is a border-kind of activity, which comes to life both on the grounds of science and art. It cannot be compared to the work of art in the noblest sense of the word, because it does not carry new elements, nor does it draw its material from the world, but rather from poetry; because it does not create life, but rather a language” Fischer, Otakar: *O překládání básnických děl*, Odeon, Praha, 1982, p. 270.

⁶³ “Zábřana realized that significant change could filter from a boundary region into the rest of the semiosphere; when he writes, in the same entry, “*you have to work on the side, from below, from the side*” he is expressing not a sense of marginalization but rather a sense of what a “marginal” figure can achieve”

act of translation, a process through which they are enriched by engaging with a work shaped by a distinct set of cultural, linguistic, and historical coordinates. This interaction broadens the translator's comprehension of the text, facilitated by the creation of what Marilyn Gaddis Rose describes as an "interliminal space," wherein the collaboration between author and translator unveils new dimensions of the original work:

Translation brings us into a literary work, in the usual sense of immersion and identification. [...] A translation challenges readers with a boundary. But in setting a provisional boundary, it also establishes an interliminal space of sound, allusion and meaning where reader must collaborate, criticize and rewrite, thereby enriching their experience of literature.⁶⁴

The extensive contact with numerous authors and years spent translating their works significantly influenced Zábřana, both artistically and ethically.⁶⁵ He identified so strongly with some of the authors he translated that he came to regard them as his alter-egos. As he reflected, "*člověk, který čte poezii, setká se, jak se čas vrší, s básníky, kteří jsou mu bližší než jiní. Takových setkání jsem zažil v životě mnoho*".⁶⁶ He frequently expressed a profound affinity with authors such as Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandelstam, and Sergei Yesenin, whose persecution under the communist regime mirrored his own experiences, often feeling a stronger connection with them than with contemporary Czech writers: "*Všichni, které kdekoli na světě komunismus zničil, zmrzačil, zlikvidoval fyzicky nebo duševně, jsou moji bratři. [...] Mně blízcí, sympatičtí lidé, s nimiž já cítím účast. Tak se rodí spřízněnost, tak se rodí blízkost*".⁶⁷ This deep sense of identification, undoubtedly intensified by his continuous immersion in the works of others, manifested in various ways depending on the particular author Zábřana was engaging with. The specific ways in which their voices resonate with Zábřana's will be explored in each dossier.

Bolton, Johnatan, *Writing in a Polluted Semiosphere: Everyday Life in Lotman, Foucault and De Certeau*, op. cit., p. 339.

⁶⁴ Gaddis Rose, Marilyn, *Translation and Literary Criticism: Translation as analysis*, St. Jerome Publishing, Manchester 1997, p. 2.

⁶⁵ "When we look at Jan Zábřana's literary work, we cannot help but ask how it was linked to his translation work [...] At the same time, however, we feel that the translator's intimate relationship with significant works of world literature cannot be matched by any reader, no matter how attentive. Translating immensely enriched Zábřana and, I dare say, without an intimate connection to modern American poetry, "The Wall of Memories" would not have been created, and without engaging with the finest prose texts, both Russian and American, Zábřana would never have developed such a unique and sharp narrative style as we encounter in the "Disiecta membra" diaries." Šulc, Jan, *Zaknihovaný život Jana Zábřany* in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.) *Jan Zábřana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁶⁶ "A person who reads poetry will, over time, encounter poets who are closer to them than others. I have experienced many such encounters in my life" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 418.

⁶⁷ "All those who have been destroyed, crippled, or physically or mentally eliminated by communism anywhere in the world are my brothers. [...] People close to me, sympathetic individuals with whom I feel a deep connection. This is how kinship is born, this is how closeness is born." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 379.

The aim of such translation studies is to examine the influence of Zábřana's evolving poetic style on his translations and to compare it with the linguistic data that were found in the diaries. From this intersection of these two elements, post-texts and pre-texts, I contend that his distinctive written expression emerged. Zábřana's approach as a translator was centered on achieving target acceptability through the incorporation of the target culture's principal linguistic elements, which correspond closely to the original elements of the source text. This aligns with what Jiří Levý terms the functional aspect of translation, involving an understanding of "*jaké sdělovací funkce mají jednotlivé jazykové prvky a které sdělovací prostředky ve vlastním jazyce mohou plnit stejnou funkci*".⁶⁸ Zábřana does not hesitate to incorporate elements of spoken Czech and alter the rhythmic structure of the poems he translates. In some instances, these modifications are justified by his desire to preserve specific sound characteristics of the original texts.

However, as pointed out by other scholars, there are cases where these alterations appear in Zábřana's translations entirely unjustified and could be viewed as either deliberate or unconscious attempts to rewrite the text.⁶⁹ These instances will be referred to as aesthetic excesses—fragments of Zábřana's voice embedded within the translated texts, showing the interaction between Zábřana's emerging poetics with the one of the alter-ego. In the comparative analysis of the translations and their originals, three distinct categories of aesthetic excesses will be identified. These categories reveal how Zábřana asserts his poetic voice by emphasizing certain poetic images:

- **verbal dynamism (dynamization)**, i.e., inserting into the poem certain verbs of movement that dynamize it.
- **emotional intensification**, which enhances expressiveness.
- **concretization of poetic images**, adding details that were not present in the original.

⁶⁸ "The communicative functions of individual language elements and the means of communication in the target language that can fulfill the same function" Levý, Jiří, *Umění překladu*, Panorama, Praha, 1986, p. 25.

⁶⁹ "It is necessary to distinguish linguistic form from its ideological and aesthetic value. The translator should translate ideologically aesthetic content, of which the text is just a carrier. The text itself is conditioned by the language in which the work is stylized, and therefore many values must be expressed in Czech by means of others [...] it is necessary to preserve those forms that have some semantic function, on the contrary, it is not possible to insist on the preservation of linguistic forms." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 47.

Through these categories, I aim to investigate the formation of certain translation habits, which are also an expression of Zábřana's creative personality⁷⁰.

In his book *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (2012), Gideon Toury describes cultural, temporal, and societal norms from which the translator's strategies and decisions emerge. Toury distinguishes various types of norms that in one way or another influence the creation of a translation, its reception, and essentially perceives translation as filling a cultural gap on the part of the target culture, thereby causing the translation process.⁷¹ Toury identifies three types of norms: *preliminary norms*, which pertain to the publishing policies governing the translation, and *operational norms*, which concern the structural and linguistic choices made by the translator throughout the translation process. Additionally, Toury introduces the concepts of *adequacy* and *acceptability* as two distinct trends of the *initial norm*.⁷² Adequacy refers to a translation approach where the target text retains the foreign elements of the source text and context, thus presenting itself as a “foreignizing” text. In contrast, acceptability involves modifications to the translated text to align it more closely with the target cultural context, allowing it to integrate seamlessly within that context or fill a cultural gap, rendering it closer to texts originally produced in the target culture. This approach to translation aligns with a framework recognized by Levý, albeit from a slightly different perspective. Levý identifies two primary norms that a translator is expected to adhere to when translating a text: the reproductive norm and the artistic norm. The reproductive norm emphasizes fidelity to the source text, seeking a translation as close as possible to the original. In contrast, the artistic norm guides translators to produce a target text that not only faithfully reproduces the source but also resonates aesthetically and ideologically with the target audience.⁷³ Remaining indifferent in such a process is not easy, whether it is even possible, and the translator is always tempted to add something of themselves to the text, to enhance it, to fulfill their creative expectations:

Ani ten nejpřesnější překladatel nevyhne se tomu, aby z jazykových a veršových důvodů do cizího díla něco nevložil ze svého, a právě takové nezbytné vsuvky jsou nejpádnějšími ukazateli jeho snah: stálo

⁷⁰ “It is possible to consider translation as an expression or manifestation of the translator's creative individuality and accordingly determine the share of the translator's personal style and interpretation in the final shaping of the work. We can examine his poetics as an example of differences in the literary development of two nations, differences between the poetics of two epochs. And finally, we can search for the translator's method behind the work as an expression of a certain translation norm, a certain attitude towards translation”. Levý, Jiří, *Umění překlada*, op. cit., p. 31.

⁷¹ Toury, Gideon, *Description Translation Studies and Beyond*, Benjamins, Amsterdam 2012, p. 81.

⁷² Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 69.

⁷³ Levý, Jiří, *Umění překlada*, op. cit., p. 87

by jednou za to, srovnat ve dvou nebo třech překladech jednoho téhož výtvoru, co první, druhý, třetí překladatel svému autoru přidal, co vložil, co vinterpretoval; zkoumat, zdali přímětky jsou konformní s duchem spisovatele originálního, zdali se shodují s ostatním rázem přeložené básně, zdali tedy a do jaké míry je v nich učiněno zadost onomu požadavku tlumočnického taktu.⁷⁴

As previously mentioned, Zábřana aimed to shape the Czechoslovak literary landscape through his translations. It is argued that his work frequently aligned with Gideon Toury's concept of the "acceptability norm" and, by extension, Levý's "artistic norm". This approach required his translations to be adapted in a way that allowed them to function as literary texts closely attuned to the sensibilities of the target audience, thereby maximizing their potential to exert a meaningful influence. These norms necessitate significant adaptation by the translator, rendering these translations as post-texts where Zábřana's voice is prominently featured. In this analysis, we will employ Toury's translation norms, alongside those proposed by Levý, to evaluate the specific criteria Zábřana's translations met. This approach will enable us to explore the underlying motivations and objectives of these translations, ultimately assessing how they can be considered distinct works authored by Zábřana himself.

My objective is not merely to demonstrate the coherence of one of the most compelling voices in Czech literature of the time, but also to elucidate the mechanisms of the author's distinctive poetics, which from the outset contended with constraints on free expression. It is precisely within this context that the uniqueness of Zábřana's poetics is situated—a quality that not only defines his work but, as previously discussed, also characterizes the creative output of numerous other Czech writers of the era, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century. The aim of this study is to shed light on this intermediary poetics, piecing together the fragments of Zábřana's self that he has left behind for us to examine.

⁷⁴ "Even the most precise translator cannot avoid adding something of their own to a foreign work for linguistic and metrical reasons, and precisely these necessary insertions are the most convincing indicators of their efforts: it would be worth comparing in two or three translations of the same work what the first, second, third translator added to their author, what they inserted, what they interpreted; to examine whether the epithets are in conformity with the spirit of the original writer, whether they match the overall character of the translated poem, whether and to what extent they meet the requirement of interpreter's tact" Fischer, Otokar, *O překládání básnických děl*, op. cit., p. 11.

First Dossier: The Boy Scout's diaries (1945-1947)

*"In many respects, the diarist is still in-fans, to use the Latin expression: they are at a stage of pre-language, pre-writing"*⁷⁵

The origins of Zábřana's diary writing can be traced back to the 1940s in the tranquil town of Humpolec, where the young poet spent his childhood with his parents. The starting point of this first dossier, which explores Zábřana's early creative period, includes all the diaries he kept during his youth. Central to this examination are the Scout Journals, published in 1998 in the collection *Náruč plná vřesu* (*An Arm Full of Heather*). This collection features selections from the journals that Zábřana maintained from June 4, 1945, until September 1947. These records reveal a different side of Zábřana, who, before the communist coup in 1948, had not yet developed the bitterness toward life that would later characterize his works. During this period, the author appears as a carefree boy, full of passion for scouting and an intense love for life. It is a transitional phase marked by transformations and new discoveries.⁷⁶ Zábřana commenced his diary writing in 1945, suggesting his immediate involvement in the Scout Movement following the conclusion of World War II. He notes, "*Naše družina byla založena ke konci května 1945, po slavných revolučních dnech. Je to vůbec první junácká družina, jež byla v Humpolci založena*".⁷⁷ This early engagement with the Scouts marked the beginning of his lifelong habit of journaling. Keeping a diary seemed to be a common practice in the scout world, but from a social and psychological perspective there are more possible reasons to note: as mentioned earlier, Zábřana grew up in Humpolec, in the Vysočina region. His family, consisting of the democratic teachers Jiřina Zábřanová and Emanuel Zábřana, was active and well-known in the public sphere of the small town. This environment and the fact that Zábřana grew up as an only child likely influenced his decision to become the author of diaries later on. Beatrice Didier emphasizes the importance of both the suburbs and the loneliness in the household, as factors can lead to the kind of solitude that prompts writers to keep diaries.⁷⁸ As for his interest in literature, this developed when he was still very

⁷⁵ Didier, Beatrice, *Le journal intime*, op. cit., p. 102.

⁷⁶ Navrátil, Tomáš, *Skautský život Jana Zábřany*, in *Náruč plan vřesu*, op. cit., location 24.

⁷⁷ "Our troop was founded at the end of May 1945, after the famous revolutionary days. It is the very first scout troop established in Humpolec" Ibid., *ibid.*, 1945, location 69.

⁷⁸ Didier, Beatrice, *Le journal intime*, op. cit., p. 67.

young. We know, for example, that when he was ten⁷⁹ he tried to write three novels from the “wild west”.⁸⁰ In the forthcoming dossiers, I will delve more deeply into the author's relationship with the Anglophone world. However, it is crucial to acknowledge, as noted in Jiřina Zábranová's memoir *Ohlédnutí* (*Looking Back*, 1994), that the family maintained ties with an uncle who had emigrated to the USA and married an American woman, which contributed with an “English element” to Zábrana's outlook in his youth.⁸¹

In the initial phase of his written expression displayed in his diaries, a period during which he devoted considerable free time to Boy Scout activities, Zábrana rarely commented on his favourite readings and authors or reflected on external realities beyond the scouting world. These diaries primarily serve to capture the essence of the scouts' activities, including camping, forest expeditions, training, and various tests that scouts had to undergo. The Czech Boy Scouts movement, initiated by Antonín Svojsík in 1912, experienced an interruption during the war but was revived afterward. The philosophy of the Scout movement is fundamentally rooted in the concept of freedom and it is likely to have influenced Zábrana's worldview. We can make this assumption based on the ideals of the Scouts Movement and its practices as they were understood at the time. Its aforementioned founder, Antonin Svojsík, followed the example of Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the founding father of global scouting. In 1912, with the aim of establishing the Czech Scout Movement, Svojsík wrote a handbook called *Základy Junáctví* (*The Foundations of Scouting*), in which he discussed the origins, the objectives and the methods of Scouts education.⁸² As main references for the whole idea of scouting, Svojsík mentions François Rabelais, Jan Amos Komenský and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who were among the first to promote a return of mankind to nature:

Rabelais ve svém románu o Garantuovi a Pantagruelovi stanoví základní požadavky přirození výchovy naproti scholastice a jednostrannému slovíckarství své doby. Výchova má se dít v přírodě, pro

⁷⁹ One year before he started keeping the “Boy Scout's journals”.

⁸⁰ Šulc, Jan, *Zaknihovaný život Jana Zábrany* in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.): *Jan Zábrana, básník, překladatel, čtenář*, Karolinum press, Praha 2015, p. 1.

⁸¹ Zábranová, Jiřina, *Ohlédnutí*, Praha, Torst, 1994, pp. 124-126.

⁸² “In his novel about Gargantua and Pantagruel, Rabelais establishes the basic requirements of natural education as opposed to scholasticism and the one-sided verbalism of his time. Education is supposed to happen in nature, for nature, and in harmony with nature. Whatever corresponds to nature (physis) is good; all unnaturalness (antiphysis) is the source of all misery, all evil. [...] And in the 17th century, our Comenius agrees with Rabelais. Nature is indeed the true teacher of humanity for him; schools are workshops of humanity, intended to educate for life. [...] The main proponent of naturalism in education, or educational naturalism, in the 18th century was Rousseau. His 'Emile' is the gospel of natural education, as Goethe wrote. He awakens understanding for the peculiarities of the child's soul and calls for a return to nature. [...] Away from the city into nature, cities are chasms of humanity.” Svojsík, Antonín, *Základy Junáctví*, Praha, České lidové knihkupectví a antikvariát Josef Springer, 1912.

přírodu a ve shodě s přírodou. Jen co přírodě odpovídá (physis), je dobré, veškerá protipřírozenost (antiphysis) je pramenem vší bíd, všeho zla. [...] A v století 17. s Rabelaisem souhlasí náš Komenský. Příroda jest mu pravou učitelkou lidstva, školy jsou dílnami lidskosti, mají vychovávat pro život. Hlavním pak hlasatelem přirozenosti ve výchově čili výchovného naturalismu byl v 18. století Rousseau. Jeho Emil jest evangeliem přirozené výchovy, jak Goethe napsal. On budí porozumění pro zvláštnosti duše dětské a volá po návratu k přírodě. Pryč z města do přírody, města jsou propasti lidskosti.⁸³

Svojsík underscores the advantages of nature-based education for boys, asserting its capacity to cultivate a deep appreciation for all living creatures and to sharpen observational skills. He further elaborates on Baden-Powell's perspective, clarifying that the term "scouts" is not intended in a military context, but rather refers to "boys who desire to know everything," constantly pursuing knowledge. Additionally, a crucial attribute of an exemplary scout is a strong sense of honour, which demands that the scout serve as a moral exemplar. According to Svojsík, scouts are envisioned as the heirs of medieval knights, embodying their virtues.⁸⁴ The influence of such an education is evident in his earliest writings. Notably, the collection of selected entries opens with the poem *Skautská (The Scout's Life)*, which is inscribed directly into his journal, reflecting the immediate impact of these formative experiences on his literary expression:

Dnes v noci přšelo dost hustě,
na ovhlé kůře stojí krůpěje.
Vítr, který odnášel pryč noc,
už utichl; nevěje.

A dole řeka rozsvěcuje
kouzlivý třpyt svůj prchavý,
spí se tu velmi dobře
květiny pod hlavy,
a mech je letos na jaře
zelený, že nemůže být více,
a kroky, jež zní venku,
patří přecházející hlídce.

⁸³ Ibid., *ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁸⁴ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 28.

Já hlídám až za dvě hodiny,
vyspím se ještě, to se musí umět.
Však už se těším docela,
měsíc bude svítit a řeka šumět.⁸⁵

The poem is about life in the Scouts camp, bringing a poetic description of the sounds and perceptions of nature accompanying the young boy's falling asleep. Fellow footsteps intertwine with other night sounds, creating a romantic image of the Scout-poet connection with the landscape. The author aims to convey the atmosphere of the night camp, employing imagery that evokes tranquillity and silence after the rain, while the wind has calmed, and the river murmurs. The night watch and waiting for the moon provide authenticity and concreteness to the poem. It could be perceived as an ode to the night but simultaneously serves as a poetic expression of Zábřana's personal experience. The night is perceived as a refuge, not only for physical rest, but also with a spiritual dimension. The symbolic as well as concrete images of flowers and green moss under the head creates an impression of comfort and tranquillity. The lyrical self uses the first person. A simple, everyday experience blends with natural beauty, creating a poetic diary entry, written directly inside the journal, like many of Zábřana's poetic records from that time. This fact adds an additional layer to the journal which does not become just a tool for recording events and memories: it might have been a workshop for developing his writing skills and searching for an original style. From a formal perspective, it is noteworthy that Zábřana pays meticulous attention to the musicality of the poem, establishing a solid rhythm through the use of alternating rhymes.

The diaries also contain prose entries, in which Zábřana briefly notes daily activities, typically with short sentences comments on the Scout group hierarchy, changes, departures of some of members, and so on:

Jmenujeme se Jestřábi. V původní družině byli tito hoši: Jarka Dušek, Standa Honzárek, Mirek Příborský, Miloš Čihák, Láďa Strádal, Julius Kunš, Vláďa Leštinský a já. Naším rádcem byl Zdeněk

⁸⁵ "Last night it rained heavily, / Droplets cling to the damp bark. / The wind that carried the night away/ Has now quieted;/ it no longer blows.
And down below, / the river lights up Its enchanting,/ fleeting shimmer./ It's very peaceful here,/ With flowers as pillows,/ And the moss this spring/ Is greener than it could ever be,/ And the footsteps sounding outside/ Belong to the passing guard./I'm on watch in two hours,/ I'll sleep some more; you have to know how./ Yet I'm already looking forward to it,/ The moon will shine, and the river will murmur. Zábřana, Jan, *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit., location 45, April 1947 (From this point forward, all English translations of the fragments or poems are my own. Please note that these are not official translations; their purpose is solely to convey the meaning of the texts, allowing non-Czech speakers to understand their content).

Študent. (...) Po prázdninách byly určité změny. Leštinský se odstěhoval, za rádce máme nyní Jarku Duška. Podrádcem je Miloš. Julka už není u nás v družině, je rádce družiny Káňat (vlčat), ta jsou ale u nás v oddíle, takže se stále vidíme.⁸⁶

This text uses simple language and is structured to inform clearly about the establishment of the Scout troop and the changes in its composition after the holidays. Such records are diary-like in the narrower sense; they do not include descriptions of the environment or attempt to create an exceptional image; they only register bare facts. The difference between this type of record and the following one is evident: “*Schůzka se konala v nevytopené místnosti, nazývané mírně eufemisticky lednicí. Slzy, které jsme prolévali nad jejím chladem, nám okamžitě zmrzly na tvářích a někomu dokonce ve vousech, měnily se v ‚třpytivé křišťály‘. Bylo to nádherné*”.⁸⁷ The primary distinction can be observed in the richer use of descriptive details that lend themselves to a more literary and poetic representation. For instance, the metaphorical comparison of frozen tears to “sparkling crystals” not only enhances the visual imagery but also transforms the typically negative connotation of tears into something unexpectedly beautiful and enchanting. Such figurative language contributes to the overall poetic quality of the text, imbuing it with an added emotional resonance and aesthetic depth.

Additionally, there are instances of dynamic narration, particularly in passages describing the Scouts' activities. These sections employ a rapid succession of verbs in the present tense, creating a sense of immediacy and movement that vividly captures the vitality and spontaneity of their actions:

Vyšli jsme z lesa na mýtinu, kde stál opuštěný domek. Šipka nás navedla přímo k němu. Obdržel jsem rozkaz prozkoumat dům. Zatímco ostatní hoši pátrají v přízemí, já se vyšplhávám na půdu – a objevuji vedoucího. Na jeho pokyn sestupuji dolů, hlásím „nic“ a mlčím. Pár kroků od nás objevujeme zprávu, že poklad je ukryt tam, kde dva stromy vytvářejí X. Tyto stromy nacházíme rychle – indikaci vedoucího k pěti bodům.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ “Our troop was founded at the end of May 1945, after the famous revolutionary days. It is actually the first Scout troop ever established in Humpolec. There was no Scout presence here before the war. We are called the Hawks. The original troop consisted of these boys: Jarka Dušek, Standa Honzárek, Mirek Příborský, Miloš Čihák, Láďa Strádal, Julius Kunš, Vláďa Leštinský, and myself. Our leader was Zdeněk Študent. (...) After the holidays, there were some changes. Leštinský moved away, and now Jarka Dušek is our leader. Miloš is the assistant leader. Julka is no longer with us in the troop; she is now a leader in the Cubs troop, but they are still part of our group, so we still see each other”. Ibid., *ibid.*, 1945, location 69.

⁸⁷ “The meeting took place in an unflooded room, somewhat euphemistically called a fridge. The tears we shed over its chill immediately froze on our faces and even on someone's mustache, turning into 'sparkling crystals.' It was beautiful.” Zábrana, Jan, *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit. 1946, location 80.

⁸⁸ “We emerged from the forest into a clearing where there stood an abandoned cottage. The arrow led us straight to it. I received an order to explore the house. While the other guys searched on the ground floor, I climbed up to the attic – and discovered the leader. Following his instructions, I descended and reported

However, there are also entries in which Zábřana directs his attention outward, focusing on the external physical environment and its transformations. In these records, he lingers on the shapes, forms, and spatial configurations that surround him, while simultaneously contemplating the passage of time—a central element of the diary form. These entries capture the intricate interplay between space and time, which I have previously referred to as “chronotopic agglomerations”: “*Dopoledne bylo zachmuřené a chladné. Po obědě vysvitlo slunko a trochu hřálo, ale studený vítr neustával váti.*”⁸⁹; “*Je bezvětrno, jasná obloha, nad chatou se naklánějí větve a je mi hezky. Potůček stéká po kamenech a bublá. je tři čtvrtě na sedm*”⁹⁰; “*Les je krásně zelený a mech nemůže být svěžejší. [...] Mám hroznou chuť do práce a hezkou náladu. Sluníčko už slušně hřeje*”.⁹¹ Entries that may initially appear as mere observations of weather conditions and atmospheric phenomena, accompanied by the author's reactions to them, can actually provide profound insights into the foundational existential concerns of the young Zábřana during his brief involvement with the Scouts. It is reasonable to suggest that Zábřana's preoccupation with these elements during this period reflects his nascent poetic sensibilities. Much like the themes discerned in the earlier poem under analysis, these entries exhibit a distinct focus on the sensory and visual dimensions of the natural world. They echo the core of his poetic voice as it begins to emerge in the Scout's journal—a voice that expresses a deep-seated affinity with nature and its relevance in his life. This connection is not merely observational but indicative of a broader existential engagement with the natural environment, which serves as both a source of inspiration and reflection. The continuity of this theme is further elucidated in the subsequent poem, where Zábřana's sensitivity to the natural world once again manifests:

Večerka

Zapad den.

Slunce svít

vymizel z údolí

'nothing' in silence. A few steps away, we find a message that the treasure is hidden where two trees form an X. We quickly locate these trees – a clue from the leader pointing to five points”. Ibid., *ibid.*, 2 February 1946, location 134.

⁸⁹ Ibid., *ibid.*, 2 February 1946, location 119.

⁹⁰ “The morning was overcast and cool. After lunch, the sun came out and provided a bit of warmth, but the cold wind persisted. It is windless now, clear sky, branches leaning over the cottage, and I feel good. The stream flows over the stones and murmurs. It's a quarter to seven.” Ibid., *ibid.*, 1 April 1947, location 344.

⁹¹ “The forest is beautifully green, and the moss couldn't be fresher. (...) I have a tremendous desire to work and a nice mood. The sun is already warming up nicely” Ibid., *ibid.*, 2 April 1947, location 344.

z temen hor,
odpočiň, každý kdos
Boží tvor⁹²

The visual imagery of the poem is marked by its simplicity yet remains evocative; the poet meticulously captures the movement of the sun as it descends behind the mountains, with the gradual encroachment of nightfall. A pronounced emphasis is placed on the passage of time, underscoring a natural cycle that unfolds before the reader. The poem offers an unembellished portrayal of the transition from dusk to night. The final verse emphasizes the harmony among all creatures associated with the night, suggesting that the nocturnal world is a space where all beings find rest and repose. This reaffirmation of Zábrana's positive associations with night and dreams reveals a recurring motif in his poetry, wherein the night serves as a realm of peace, introspection, and renewal. Zábrana also recounts that his group established a Scout magazine titled *Vátra*, to which he contributed with a short poetic article.⁹³ The use of the term *článek*, or “article”, is particularly noteworthy, as it traverses the boundary between the genres of poetry and journalism. This lexical choice implies a convergence of the material and the poetic realms, which seems to be crucial during this stage of his endogenetic development. It reflects Zábrana's early attempts to merge the concrete reality of his surroundings with a poetic sensibility, a synthesis that appears to inform much of his creative trajectory during this period:

Slunce rozpaluje stráně,
Zelené trávníky se rozprostírají do nekonečna,
ostře kontrastující s barvou zadumaných lesů.
Teplé větry rozpařují zemi a zahalují ji parami.
Dny se dlouží,
v sedm je ještě docela dobře vidět,
večery jsou světlé,
komáři se svíjejí nad zemi v celých hejnech,
tiché noci jsou rušeny jenom nočním koncertem
skřehotavých žab z blízkých potoků a tůní,
který se však nakonec také oposlouchá, a je možno

⁹² “Evening/ Day sets/The sun's glow/vanished from the valley/and the darkened mountains/rest, everyone who is/God's creation.” Zábrana, Jan, *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit., 1946, location 136.

⁹³ “Měl jsem tam kratičkový, poetický, nepřilíš zdařilý článek o junáckém jaru.” Ibid., *ibid.*, 1946, location 141.

při něm i spát.
Rána jsou plná rosy,
studené,
chladivé
a blyštivé,
která se pod paprsky slunce vypařuje do šumících lesů.⁹⁴

The poem presents a suggestive yet realistic depiction of the landscape, where the creatures of the natural world are vividly portrayed engaging in their habitual activities, interspersed with prosaic remarks on the lengthening days. The emphasis on colors, sounds, and sensory impressions derived from observing the natural environment enhances the poem's authenticity, grounding it in a tangible reality. In this piece, nighttime is once again depicted as a period of harmony, reflecting Zábřana's recurrent fascination with nocturnal imagery. The theme of the passage of time becomes increasingly pronounced, particularly through the detailed descriptions of transitions between days, evenings, and nights, capturing the fluidity of temporal experience. The poem's formal structure is another noteworthy aspect that contributes to its thematic development. Unlike the more traditional forms encountered in earlier notes, the rhythm here is free-flowing, devoid of rhymes. The varying lengths of the verses seem deliberately crafted to draw attention to specific details of the depicted scenes, creating moments of pause that disrupt the poem's overall cadence. In the latter part of the poem, Zábřana draws the reader's attention to the freshness of the dew using three distinct adjectives, each separated to emphasize its unique quality.

Zábřana's entries in the Scout journals frequently reveal his concerns about the internal dynamics of his scouting group, particularly the challenges surrounding the management of the newly established magazine, *Vátra*. These entries underscore the significant role that the group and its activities played in his formative years. As the management of the magazine became increasingly burdensome, the cohesion among group members began to wane, exacerbated by a lack of time and a gradual decline in interest in the Scouts' way of life. However, the group eventually found resolution when a

⁹⁴ "The sun scorches the slopes,/ Green lawns stretch into infinity,/ sharply contrasting with the color of the pensive forests./ Warm winds heat the earth and envelop it in vapors./The days grow longer,/at seven it is still quite light,/ the evenings are bright,/ mosquitoes swarm above the ground in entire hordes,/ silent nights are disturbed only by the nocturnal concert/ of croaking frogs from nearby streams and ponds,/ which, however, eventually also becomes monotonous, and one can/ even sleep through it./ Mornings are full of dew,/ cold,/ refreshing,/ and glittering,/which evaporates under the sun's rays into the murmuring forests" Zábřana, Jan, *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit., 1946, location 141.

new leader stepped in, revitalizing the members' commitment and allowing the group to resume its activities. Zábrana's own contributions to the second issue of *Vátra*, published under his Scout name, Donald, reflect his deep engagement with the group and his commitment to its cultural and literary output.⁹⁵ The poem, which Zábrana transcribed in his diary, is called *The Scout's Camp*:

Junácký tábor

v protichlé vůni lesů
strání, jež se létem staly,
se smíchem jsem běhávali
s náručí plnou vřesu.

A večer v zátočině teskné
se kolébaly naše čluny,
když řeka pod odrazem luny
do duší poklid bleskne.
V zeleném přítmi žilo mládí,
přítmi protějších břehů.
Noc vydechla svou bílou něhu
a rozpálené tváře chladí...

Při jasů ohňů táborových,
až zazní bratrův hlad,
se pohroužíme do snů nových,
do nepoznaných krás.

Kraji slunný, mládím protkaný!
Viděl jsem hasnout kopretiny
pod ploužícími se stíny,
když večer padal na stany.

Tajemný kraji! Řeko stříbrolicí!
Slyš naši píseň vděku!
Pod stany spali hoši snící

⁹⁵ Jan Šulc surmises that one of these was Zábrana's first printed poetry: "The revised last two stanzas of the poem 'Junácký tábor' were published [...] in the magazine for Czechoslovak youth *Junáci*, vpřed! on September 7, 1948. Excluding poems published in the cyclostyled magazine *Výkvět* from Humpolec gymnasium, this is probably the very first printed poem by Ján Zábrana" Šulc, Jan, *Doslov* in: Zábrana, Jan, *Havran*, Praha Torst, 2022, p. 712.

The poem constructs a romanticized vision of Scout life, depicting it as an almost dreamlike realm detached from the constraints of the real world. Within this imaginative space, the Scouts embody an ideal of eternal youth, symbolized by the color green. Within this poetic universe, the night is depicted as a benevolent force, with its “white tenderness” serving as a metaphor for the evening’s coolness, offering solace and respite to the young Scouts after a day spent under the scorching sun. This focus on freshness—embodied by recurring motifs such as dew and night—reflects the Scout’s desire for relief following their strenuous daily activities, thereby establishing a direct link between the poem’s subject matter and the Scout’s immediate needs and experiences. The river functions as a metaphor for the passage of time, its continuous flow representing both constancy and transformation. The image of daisies wilting in the evening shadows underscores a deep sense of nostalgia and the inescapable march of time. This juxtaposition of imagery creates a poignant tension between youthful idealism and the natural progression of life toward maturity and eventual decline. From a formal perspective, the poem is marked by the use of dactylic trochees, a metrical pattern that establishes a steady and rhythmic cadence, enhancing the musicality and fluidity of the verse. The rhyme scheme follows an ABBA pattern, reminiscent of the enclosed rhyme structure of the Petrarchan sonnet, further contributing to its lyrical quality.

In the next poem, we once again encounter Zábrana’s keen sensitivity to detail and his capacity to intertwine the natural world with personal emotions and experiences:

Jitra byla mramorová rosou,
která se šedivě roztahovala
po lístcích, větvích a kmenech, kamenech,
rosou, která padala na věčně šumící hladinu
řeky,
tropické vedro za poledne a v časných hodinách
odpoledních
nám nedávalo možnost k činnosti

⁹⁶ “The Scout camp/in the contrasting scent of forests/hills, which turned green in the summer,/we ran with laughter/with arms full of heather./And in the evening in the melancholy bay/our boats swayed,/as the river shimmered under the moon’s reflection/calmly into our souls./In the green twilight, youth lived,/the twilight of opposite shores./The night exhaled its white tenderness/and cooled the heated faces.../In the glow of campfires,/when the brothers’ hunger is heard,/we immerse ourselves in new dreams,/in unknown beauty./Sunlit land, interwoven with youth!/I saw daisies fade/under creeping shadows,/when evening fell on the tents./Mysterious land!/Silver-glistening river!/Hear our song of gratitude!/Under the tents, boys slept, dreaming/of heroes of new ages.” Zábrana, Jan, *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit., 2 February 1946, location 191.

a nanášelo na naše těla barvu světlé čokolády.
Nejkrásnější byly večery.
Ticho se rozlévalo,
keře a stébla trávy šuměly,
stín stromů padal na hladinu řeky,
měsíc sypal hvězdy a probleskoval korunami
stromů
a stříbřil tok řeky.⁹⁷

Zábrana's poetry places a premium on the visual, sensory, and auditory elements of the natural landscape, with the sound of rustling as a constant motif that threads through his verses. This recurring auditory image evokes an environment that is alive and perpetually in motion. Zábrana's use of precise imagery—such as “marble dew” that “spreads greyly over the leaves, branches, and trunks,” or “the shadow of trees falling on the surface of the river”—further emphasizes the significance of color and texture in his depiction of reality. The depiction of mornings as “marble” due to the dew, a recurring element in his poetic representations of reality, serves as a visual metaphor that conveys both color and the sensation of coldness. The moon, with its light filtering through the trees and reflecting on the river's surface, transforming it into silver, suggests an affinity with the marble-like mornings through their shared quality of coolness. Moreover, this imagery alludes to a deeper connection between the natural world and the cosmic realm. The river's surface is described as “eternally rustling”, a phrase that evokes the passage of time and the perpetual flow of life. By employing a careful repetition of motifs—like dew, river surfaces, and tree shadows—alongside temporal markers such as dawn, noon, afternoon, and evening, Zábrana creates a seamless flow of thoughts that mirrors the cyclical rhythm of nature. This technique not only enhances the visual continuity within the poem but also establishes a temporal framework that mirrors the natural world's recurring patterns. The tropical heat oppresses the Scouts during midday and early afternoon, painting a vivid picture of the sweltering conditions that dominate the day. This heat is so intense that it coats the Scout's body in the color of chocolate, a metaphor that not only conveys the physical effects of the sun on the skin but also evokes the tactile experience of heat and sun exposure.

⁹⁷ “The mornings were marble with dew,/which spread grayly/over leaves, branches, and trunks, stones,/dew that fell onto the perpetually murmuring surface/of the river,/tropical heat around noon and in the early hours/of the afternoon/did not give us the opportunity to act/and it applied a color of light chocolate to our bodies./The most beautiful were the evenings./Silence spread,/bushes and blades of grass rustled,/the shadow of trees fell on the surface of the river,/the moon sprinkled stars and flickered through the treetops/and silvered the flow of the river.” Zábrana, Jan, *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit., 1946, location 249.

In the subsequent entries, we observe that the group is experiencing another crisis, with some boys failing to return to the camp: “*Brosche odchází z Humpolce, odstěhovali se, a tak se střediskovým vedoucím stává Kudrna. Máme před sebou jediný úkol: zachránit skauting v Humpolci, udržet při životě tu krásnou ideu věčného mládí a věčného přátelství i mezi méně zaujatými chlapci.*”⁹⁸ Awareness of the passage of time, in contrast to the ideal of eternal youth, begins to permeate not only the poetry but also the journalistic records of the young Scout. As the crisis within the group intensifies, Zábrana’s sensitivity to the progression of time becomes increasingly evident. This heightened temporal awareness is reflected in his entries, where he not only records dates but also provides exact times. For instance, on August 4th and 9th, he notes: “*Ráno v 6 hodin jsme v klubovně, v 8 přijelo auto*” and “*Je půl třetí ráno*”⁹⁹. This focus on time aligns with one of the most detailed chronotopic agglomerations observed in his writings:

Když jsem vylézal ze stanu, byl jsem překvapen nezvyklou září. Nad nejvyššími borovicemi stál měsíc mající podobu plného písmene C a ozařoval tábořiště. Kajak se matně leskne. Plytká a nestálá jsou mračna na obloze, měsíc je jako hvězda. Ať kterákoliv hvězda, záříš a vzpomínáš v mé duši. Noc je syrová a plná rosy. Je 11 hodin večer na 10. srpna. Včera, jak je vidět z předchozího, jsem deník nedopsal, neboť má malá petrolejová lampička zaprskala a zhasla a já již neměl sirku, abych nalil nový petrolej. Musel jsem tedy deník opustit a vracím se k němu až teď, kdy uplynul celý den a je zase noc, ne sice tak pozdní jako včera. Včera už jsem nestačil napsat, že jsem od večera lovil „Tři orlí pera“.¹⁰⁰

Zábrana is deeply moved by the beauty of the nighttime scene, where the moon once again takes center stage, casting its gentle light over the campground. In this entry, he uses evocative language, such as the adjective *plytký* (shallow), to describe the clouds, highlighting the coolness of the night and its comforting effect on him. The serenity of the

⁹⁸ “Brosche is leaving Humpolec; they have moved away, and Kudrna is becoming the new center leader. We have a single task ahead of us: to save scouting in Humpolec, to keep alive the beautiful idea of eternal youth and eternal friendship, even among the less enthusiastic boys”. Zábrana, Jan, *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit., 1946, location 269.

⁹⁹ “In the morning at 6 o'clock, we were at the clubhouse, at 8 a car arrived”; “it's half past two in the morning”. Ibid., *ibid.*, 4-9 August 1947, pos. 386.

¹⁰⁰ “When I crawled out of the tent, I was surprised by the unusual glow. Above the tallest pines stood a moon shaped like the letter C, illuminating the campground. The kayak glistens dimly. Shallow and unsteady are the clouds in the sky, the moon is like a star. Like any star, you shine and dwell in my soul. The night is raw and full of dew. It's 11 o'clock in the evening on August 10th. As can be seen from the previous entry, I did not finish the diary yesterday because my small kerosene lamp sputtered and went out, and I didn't have any matches to refill it with new kerosene. So I had to leave the diary and I'm returning to it now, after the whole day has passed and it's night again, although not as late as yesterday. Yesterday, I didn't manage to write that in the evening I was hunting for the 'Three Eagle Feathers'.” Ibid., *ibid.*, 9 August 1947, location 386.

night provides a soothing contrast to his concerns. The author expresses anxiety over his lack of diary entries, specifically mentioning the “Three Eagle Feathers” trial. This suggests that Zábrana views diary writing as a daily obligation, almost as if it is a self-imposed contract.¹⁰¹ His concern seems to stem from a sense of wasted time and the realization that his time at the campsite is not infinite. This urgency to document his experiences may reflect his broader struggle with the fleeting nature of time. The tension between the ideal of eternal youth, as enshrined in the Scout code, and the inexorable passage of time, as captured in his diary, appears to contribute to Zábrana’s heightened sensitivity to time. This dichotomy likely fuels his nostalgia and deepens his reflections on the transient nature of his experiences.

A similar concern about neglecting the diary surfaces in an entry dated August 10, where Zábrana writes: “*Ani včera večer mi nebylo dopřáno dopsat deník v klidu, jak je vidět na posledních řádcích, kdy vysychlé pero už sotva píše. Dnes ráno v pět hodin jsem vstal, vzal si deník, kus suchého chleba, knížku na čtení, sekerku, zápalky a stanový dílec a odešel jsem do lesa*”.¹⁰² In this entry, Zábrana provides a meticulous account of his observations during the test, including dialogues he overheard, such as Hálak’s remark “*Ti to umějí, dají do toho rybíz, angrešt, třešně, borůvky...*” or Vineta’s “*Pojďte na to heslo*”.¹⁰³ The incorporation of dialogue into the diary entries marks a notable development. It introduces a new dimension to Zábrana’s documentation, enhancing the narrative with a more vivid and interactive quality. This shift reflects an increasing attention to the nuances of his experiences and interactions, offering a richer and more detailed portrayal of his surroundings and the events unfolding within them. The experience with the “Three Eagle Feathers” trial serves as the impetus for this poetic creation, encapsulating all the key elements that have characterized Zábrana’s previous writings:

Jak pramen odtékáš, dne,
A kdo tě za čas vzpomene.
Přejdou dny prázdné a šedivé.

¹⁰¹ “For some, the journal constitutes a kind of moral exercise. And it is here again that we see to what extent it is tributary, by its origins and by its functioning, to the examination of conscience and to an entire spiritual technique that Christianity has systematically developed.” Didier, Beatrice, *Le journal intime*, op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁰² “Even yesterday evening, I was not able to finish the diary in peace, as can be seen in the last lines, when the dried-out pen barely writes. This morning at five o’clock, I got up, took the diary, a piece of dry bread, a book to read, an axe, matches, and a tent peg, and I went into the woods.” Zábrana, Jan, *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit., 10 August 1947, location 412.

¹⁰³ “They know how to do it, they put in currants, gooseberries, cherries, blueberries...”; “Let’s focus on that motto.” Zábrana, Jan, *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit., 10 August 1947, location 425.

V soumraku hledím na kmene
 a smolná vůně pryskyřice
 je jak dech staré balady.
 Tesknosti lesa! Oč jsi více
 než uprášené zahrady
 a parky na pokrajích měst
 každý kout tu chtěl bych znát,
 všechno prozkoumat a kopce slézt
 stále vidět i a stále poznávat.
 Ranní vlhkosti! Mechu v rose!
 Jak znáš budit čelo rozespálé
 a když chlad mrazivá nohy bosé,
 chtěl být žít věčně v tomto mále.
 Však Slunce zapadá a hasne,
 není už pole, kde se orá,
 je čas zanechat psaní básně
 a navrátit se do tábora.¹⁰⁴

In addition to the rhymes, which resonate in an unordered sequence, several characteristics align with the previous poetic diary. Firstly, the poet's profound connection with nature is evident in the evocative memories that immerse him in nostalgia. This symbiosis with nature underscores a heightened sensitivity to the passage of time, as illustrated by the metaphor of flowing water. The poet's question about who will remember the spring in the future intertwines natural elements with human life, posing a poignant inquiry into what will endure in memory. This approach not only recalls but also reflects on the concept of forgetting, adding another layer of depth to the poem. Zábrana's poems emerge from direct observation and are shaped by reality. At the end of this poem, the subject announces that it is time to stop writing and return to the camp, directly capturing the real situation in which the poem was written. In this way, the real penetrates the poetic, demonstrating the young poet's strong desire to capture a genuine fragment of

¹⁰⁴ "How the spring flows, day by day,/ And who will remember you in time./ Empty and gray days will pass./ In the twilight, I gaze at the tree trunks,/ And the resin's sticky scent/ Is like the breath of an old ballad./ The longing of the forest! What are you more/ Than a dusty garden/ And parks on the outskirts of cities?/ I want to know every corner here,/ Explore everything, descend the hills,/ Always see and always learn./ Morning moisture!/ Moss in the dew!/ How well you know how to wake the sleepy forehead,/ And when the cold chills the bare feet,/ I wish to live forever in this realm./ But the sun sets and fades,/ There's no more plowed field,/ It's time to leave off writing poetry/ And return to the camp./ "During the test of the Three Eagle Feathers." Ibid., *Ibid.*, 10 August 1947, location 481.

experience. This blend of reality and fiction highlights Zábřana's skill in weaving intricate, reflective poetry that resonates on multiple levels. The author does not attempt to detach himself from the writing subject; on the contrary, he becomes both the subject and object of his own writing. A compelling argument can be made that, in literature, deictic verbs and temporal markers typically do not reference the real world but rather a fictional one, thus remaining entirely detached from the empirical context in which the author is writing.¹⁰⁵ In Zábřana's case, however, the creative process unfolds in a unique manner. Rather than distancing himself from the writing subject, he consciously inhabits both the subject and object of his narrative: *"The diarist is two: he is the one who acts and the one who watches himself act, and who writes: this second character is often endowed with a kind of superiority over the first. But whatever the hierarchy, what remains fundamental in the diary is that the diarist is perpetually both subject and object of his discourse."*¹⁰⁶ This duality, along with the direct connection to personal experience and perception of the world, is characteristic of the diary genre, underscoring the diary-like nature of Zábřana's writing.

In his Boy Scout's diaries, the young Zábřana references only two authors directly: Jaroslav Foglar and Jiří Wolker. In the entry from February 2, 1946, Zábřana mentions Jaroslav Foglar's book *Pod junáckou vlajkou* (*Under the Scout Flag*, 1940). Foglar, a prominent figure in children's and youth literature, became involved with the Scouts' movement in 1923 and kept diaries throughout his life. His works, often set in the Scouts' environment, focused on the moral upbringing of boys. The main characters in Foglar's works typically mature and grow through various adventures. *Pod junáckou vlajkou* is no exception, telling the story of a boy whose behaviour is shaped by his experiences among the Scouts. Zábřana regards the book as a "Scout manual" that teaches him everything he needs to know. In the same entry, he also mentions the magazine *Junák*, of which Foglar was the editor. The self-educational function is undoubtedly one of the main dimensions of the Scout's diary.¹⁰⁷ Another significant reference is Jiří Wolker, a Czech Scout and poet. In an entry dated April 16, 1947, the young author evokes the memory of the author, noting that he and his group are planning to set up camp near the Orlová Woods, a site where the Scout-poet himself had once camped and where a memorial now stands in his honor. Zábřana reflects on this connection to Wolker and quotes from one of his ballads:

¹⁰⁵ Culler, Jonathan, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 30.

¹⁰⁶ Didier, Beatrice, *Le journal intime*, op. cit., p. 116.

¹⁰⁷ "It's a control that the author imposes on himself. But the nature of this control varies: the author can question both his moral attitude and the progress of the work he is writing; the transition from an intimate diary to a diary of a work occurs entirely spontaneously." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 18.

Čas jako voda utíká,
čas jako moře je
do San Franciska pluje loď
do San Franciska z Bombaje
a potom ještě dál...¹⁰⁸

In the same entry, he reflects on the first two verses concerning the passage of time, offering a melancholic observation on its relentless nature: "*Ano, utíká to. Dnes je už ta paseka, kde stály vaše stany, zarostlá a už bychom na ní nic nemohli postavit, jen malý pomníček nese Tvé jméno a vzpomínku...*".¹⁰⁹

Jiří Wolker is widely regarded as the first Czech proletarian poet and one of the founders of the Devětsil: Founded in 1920 in Prague by a group of avant-garde artists, writers, and intellectuals, Devětsil sought to break away from traditional forms and aesthetics to embrace new, experimental approaches in art and literature. The group was deeply influenced by a range of contemporary European avant-garde movements, such as Futurism, Constructivism, and Dadaism, and aimed to develop a distinctly Czech form of modernism. Devětsil's members, including notable figures like Karel Teige, Vítězslav Nezval, and Jaroslav Seifert, were united by their commitment to social and political engagement through their art. They championed "Poetism", an artistic concept formulated by Karel Teige, which sought to celebrate everyday life and embrace the joy, playfulness, and spontaneity found in ordinary experiences. Wolker's poetry, characterized by its focus on the lives of the working class and its fusion of lyrical expression with a socially conscious message, closely aligned with the ideals of the Devětsil group, particularly in its commitment to making art accessible and meaningful to the broader public. Wolker was also actively involved in the Scout movement, which he joined in 1916-1917 under the guidance of A. B. Svojsík, the founder of Czech Scouting. During his time camping, Wolker maintained journals that were subsequently published in various editions of his collected works following his premature death in 1924. Discussions about Wolker's personality and work continued into the 1940s and 1950s, with perspectives diverging between admirers and critical commentators. His popularity during his lifetime and the subsequent

¹⁰⁸ "Time flows like water,/time is like the sea,/ship sails to San Francisco/from Bombay to San Francisco/and then even further..." This is a fragment from the first canto of the Ballad of the Sailor, which was found in the poet's estate. Zábrana, Jan, *Náruč plná vřesu*, op. cit., 16 April 1947, location 357.

¹⁰⁹ "Yes, it passes swiftly. Today, the clearing where your tents once stood is overgrown, and we could no longer erect anything there; only a small memorial bears your name and remembrance Ibid., *ibid.*, 16 April 1947, location 357.

mythologizing after his premature death contributed to his portrayal as a figure with mythical traits. This mythologization was partly influenced by his tragic death at a young age, leaving behind a significant cultural legacy. For our purposes, it is pertinent to focus on Wolker's poetic vision, which was oriented towards capturing everyday phenomena and imaginatively reviving reality. This vision is evident in the letter that the young Zábbrana wrote to Wolker, a letter incorporated into the published parts of Zábbrana's diaries. In this letter, it is evident that the young Scout shared with Wolker a profound awe for the surrounding world, a deep appreciation of natural phenomena, and a keen interest in poetically capturing the everyday. Considering the previously cited fragment from Wolker's oeuvre and the poetic imagery present in the poems discussed thus far, it is reasonable to suggest that the symbolic association of time with flowing water held a particular significance for Zábbrana. This metaphor aligns closely with Zábbrana's own poetic sensibilities, reflecting his deep engagement with themes of temporality and natural imagery.

Several characteristic thematic and stylistic elements can be discerned in this phase of Zábbrana's oeuvre. Central to his work is a profound relationship with nature, which he intertwines with his Scout experiences and the idyllic notion of eternal youth that Scout life embodied for him. The symbolism prevalent in his early writings and poems often revolves around natural elements: night serves as a refuge, providing both physical and spiritual solace, enabling the poet to delve into the realm of dreams. Another significant theme is time and its inexorable passage, which Zábbrana increasingly reflects upon and explores in both his prose records and poetic compositions. The practice of maintaining a diary reinforces this awareness, as the recognition of time's passage elicits a profound sense of nostalgia, which becomes particularly pronounced during periods of personal crisis. Stylistically, Zábbrana exhibits a distinct penchant for lyricism, manifesting through his evocative depictions of natural phenomena, as well as his adept use of rhyme and rhythm. Nevertheless, this lyricism retains traces of the diary form, as concrete and factual elements often punctuate the lyrically rendered natural impressions.

Diaries from the years 1948-1949

This section of the first dossier examines the diaries that Zábrana kept between 1948 and 1949, which were first published in 1992 in the two-volume work titled *Celý život* (*All of My Life*). Zábrana's life underwent a profound transformation following the Communist coup of February 1948. This shift did not occur abruptly; rather, the initial signs emerged gradually, significantly impacting his personality and life trajectory. Seventeen-year-old Zábrana, remarkably astute and perceptive for his age, began to document these changes. His records reveal an intricate blend of political upheaval with the experiences and challenges of adolescence, including secondary school studies, personal anxieties, and first loves. The brief interlude of peace that followed the end of the war and occupation was ending. In these entries, Zábrana provides insight into his life as a student, discusses the books that captivated him, and describes his daily activities, classmates, and romantic interests.

He began writing this notebook in January 1948, noting: “*Jak dlouho už se mi zdá, že píšu deník. A je to teprve od ledna!*”.¹¹⁰ The selection we are examining begins with an entry from April 29. Here, we encounter a significantly more mature Zábrana, even though only a short time has passed since his Boy Scout diaries. This maturation was primarily driven by the increasingly oppressive grip of the regime, making the situation in Czechoslovakia nearly unbearable. From a stylistic perspective, the diary retains its function as a record-keeping tool. This is evident in the detailed descriptions found in the entries, as illustrated in the following example:

Knaute dnes nebyl ve škole, má ženu už asi v nemocnici, bude dvojnásobným otcem. Chtěli mě dnes vybrat (ti páni jsou hrozně chytří), abych šel zítra večer prodávat odznaky na benátskou noc. Museli jsme jít dolů do ředitelny a po cestě po schodech jsem uvažoval, zda mám či nemám jít. [...] Tak jsem odpoledne probil, četl v novém Kritickém měsíčníku [...] Zajímala mě tam hlavně stať Jaroslava Janů o Hrubínovi, od něhož jsem před několika dny četl jeho novou sbírku Nesmírný krásný život, která mě zaujala svým pojetím i problematikou, snahou po novém věděni, ale i formou, která rozbíjí bývalou dokonalou strofu Hrubinovou..¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ “It feels like I've been keeping a diary for so long. And it's only since January” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 1 June 1948, p. 29.

¹¹¹ “Knaute wasn't at school today; his wife is probably already in the hospital, and he'll be a father of twins. They wanted to recruit me today (those gentlemen are terribly clever) to sell badges for the Venetian Night tomorrow evening. We had to go down to the principal's office, and on the way down the stairs, I contemplated whether or not to go. [...] So I spent the afternoon, reading in the new Critical Monthly [...] I

This initial entry exemplifies Zábrana's diary habits during the years 1948 and 1949. Here, he neither engages deeply with the external environment nor employs poetic language. Instead, he focuses on a straightforward account of his daily activities and interactions. He provides space for the characters he encountered and emphasizes his impressions from the books he read. Notably, this entry lacks specific chronological details, relying instead on general markers like “today” or “afternoon”. This structural approach is typical of his entries, which primarily concentrate on the events of the day. A typical diary entry is organized into three parts: a description of the day's events, his reaction to these events, and subsequent commentary. He also reflects on the political situation in Czechoslovakia at the time, as well as his own mood. These entries are structured as streams of thought, with no traces of chronotopical conglomerations, aiming primarily to display his internal reflections.

However, other entries exhibit a higher degree of elaboration, as illustrated in the following example:

Asi o půl šesté šly kolem budící kapely, vstal jsem až před osmou. Vzal jsem si sice nové šaty, ale vyrazil jsem až těsně půl devátou, abych to stihl. Po cestě se mi podařilo odvrátit nebezpečí v podobě několika prodavaček rudých karafiátů, které jsem odbyl: „Nemám s sebou peníze“ nebo „nechci“. [...] Wendlik byl rozzloben, někdo mu včera ve sborovně prohledal jeho psací stůl a on není z těch, kdož si nechají líbit všechno. Zuřil a řekl: „Zamykat stůl nebudu, ale jestli tam někoho ještě chytanu, dám mu pár facek, ať je to kdo je”.¹¹²

In this fragment, which delineates a more specific time frame, Zábrana provides insights into the conditions of the period and his personal response to them. He humorously recounts his avoidance of “danger” during the International Workers’ Day, represented by women selling red carnations—symbols associated with socialism. The context of the newly established regime and its increasing impact is further suggested in the latter part of the

was mainly interested in Jaroslav Jan's article about Hrubín, from whom I read his new collection 'Infinite Beautiful Life' a few days ago. It captivated me with its concept, issues, the quest for new knowledge, and the form that breaks Hrubín's former perfect stanza”. Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 29 April 1948, p. 7.

¹¹² “On May 1, 1948, around half past five, the waking band passed by. I didn't get up until just before eight. Although I put on new clothes, I didn't leave until just before half past eight to make it on time. On the way, I managed to fend off the danger posed by several sellers of red carnations, whom I dismissed: 'I don't have any money' or 'I don't want any.' [...] Wendlik was angry; someone had rummaged through his writing desk in the common room yesterday, and he's not the kind of person to put up with everything. He was furious and said, 'I won't lock up the desk, but if I catch anyone there again, I'll give them a few slaps, whoever it may be.’ Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, 1 May 1948, p. 9.

entry, where Zábrana notes that the desk of one of his professors was searched. This detail hints at the intensifying scrutiny and control exercised by the authorities over citizens. An interesting feature in this entry is the inclusion of dialogue, comprising both Zábrana's speech and quotations from others. This dialogical aspect becomes a recurrent element in his diaries. Typically, a diary would not include such details, as the diarist is already aware of the interactions—they were the one who spoke and heard them. There is no need to report them if the diarist merely intends to comment on them; they could simply make judgments on the situation, assuming they are the sole addressee of the note. As noted by the aforementioned Kubíček, narrating something entails selecting empirical material and subjecting the text to creative rules. What is being described is not noted as it is experienced but is recollected afterward.¹¹³ Kubíček also refers to the degree of stylization in a diary entry as the “attributes of the reader’s situation”:

Co jsou to ony atributy čtenářské situace? Jsou to momenty, které například u deníku rozhodují o míře jejich stylizovanosti, a tedy i autenticity. [...] Kontextové odkazy tohoto typu mají závazný důsledek pro intimitu sdělovaného. Ba co víc, závazným způsobem ovlivňují samu povahu textu. Čtenáři si uvědomí, že mezi ním a vypravěčem byl umístěn filtr. Sebereflexe píšícího se ocitla pod kuratelou pohledu čtenáře. [...] Důležitým kritériem pro rozhodování o attributech čtenářské situace je čas..¹¹⁴

Another aspect worth mentioning is that the author becomes a character in his own narrative, as he reports his own words within particular situations while still serving as the narrator. Comparing these entries with his earlier diaries reveals a significant shift: in the scout journals, the author never directly took on a speaking role, although he did record some dialogues. In the current entries, however, he appears to be gradually becoming a more integral part of the world he depicts in his notes.

Plurilingualism emerges as a notable feature of this phase in Zábrana's writing, evident in his diaries through expressions that showcase his proficiency in foreign languages. Alongside English, Latin appears frequently, a language he studied and seamlessly integrates into his writings. Latin phrases are either quoted directly or embedded within Czech sentences. Examples include phrases like “*jsem rád, že je to all right*”¹¹⁵, as

¹¹³ Kubíček, Tomáš, *Obrána paměti*, op. cit., p. 344.

¹¹⁴ “What are these attributes of the reader's situation? They are the elements that, for example, determine the degree of stylization and thus the authenticity of diaries. [...] Contextual references of this type have a significant impact on the intimacy of the communication. Moreover, they significantly influence the very nature of the text. The reader becomes aware that a filter has been placed between them and the narrator. The self-reflection of the writer has come under the supervision of the reader's perspective. [...] An important criterion for determining the attributes of the reader's situation is time” Ibid, *ibid.*, p. 348.

¹¹⁵ Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 30 April 1948, p. 8.

well as passages like “*Ta třída se změnila přes prázdniny. Inu, tempora mutantur... Ano, tempora mutantur.*”¹¹⁶ These linguistic amalgamations often serve an ironic function or lend weight to sentences through quotations from notable figures. Zábrana occasionally reflects on Latin, extolling it as “the true measure of a real scholar” and praising it as “an inexhaustible well of magical water.”¹¹⁷ Latin appears to have represented for him not only a language of knowledge but also a perennial source of artistic inspiration. Furthermore, Zábrana’s penchant for interweaving other languages with Czech text underscores a characteristic of his early writing: the juxtaposition of colloquial expressions with more formal sentences.

These diary entries reveal a significant use of colloquial expressions, as demonstrated by various terms for cinema, such as “bio” or “biják”, and nouns describing personal characteristics, such as “*Pokouš je starej klid’as*”,¹¹⁸ as well as student slang related to academic life, exemplified by “*Mimo jiné jsme psali hodně těžkou anglickou kónu*”.¹¹⁹ This prevalent use of informal language raises the question of whether it reflects a deliberate stylistic choice by the writer or an inherent aspect of his natural mode of expression. It seems more likely to be the latter, particularly given its prominence in documenting daily experiences. This marks a departure from his earlier style, observed in the Scout diaries, which featured fewer colloquialisms. Despite Zábrana’s academic engagement, including contributions to the school magazine and involvement with literary works, his diary-keeping may have led him to adopt a more spontaneous, informal mode of writing that diverges from his formal academic language. Philipp Lejeune highlights this characteristic of diary writing, noting that:

Bloggers are looking for fellow feeling. They operate on the principle of live and let live, take me as I am, trying to interest people by giving a faithful and detailed picture of a life, not by drawing the reader in with the charm of their conversation. The composition is looser. There is often a tendency to choose a language close to a spoken style, imitating an internal monologue or addressing a sympathetic listener. Same observation as earlier: “oral” postures like this are not exclusive to the Internet, and they are found in many a good old-fashioned notebook.¹²⁰

Regarding chronotopic phenomena, the language employed in certain instances closely mirrors the descriptive style found in the Boy Scout’s records. This reveals a

¹¹⁶ Ibid., *ibid.*, 29 August 1948 p. 45

¹¹⁷ Ibid., *ibid.*, 29 January 1949, p. 110.

¹¹⁸ Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 14 September 1948, p. 56.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., *ibid.*, 18 January 1949, p. 103.

¹²⁰ Lejeune, Philippe, *On diary*, University of Hawaii press, Honolulu 2009, p. 306.

consistent approach to time and space, which is typically manifested in the relationship between the poet and the natural landscape. This alignment is particularly apparent in the following entries from 1948:

Jsou chladné a mlživé dny. Větvemi se tře vítr a ptákům křehnou křídla. Kraj před oknem je podzimní, pole jsou vlhká (ale jenom na povrchu), vespod je to popel a zase popel. Kol Orlíku se svíjejí mraky, země se choulí do kozelců keřů. Slunce se asi odstěhovalo¹²¹

Den voleb. Prvních nedemokratických voleb v ČSR. K ránu byl příšerná bouře. Vzbudil jsem se asi o půl páté, pokoj a krajina byly ozářeny blesky, hřmělo, až se vše otřásalo, bouře byla přímo nad městem. Blesk i hromobití současně. Asi 3/4 hodiny to trvalo, nebylo možno spát. Nepamatuji na takovou noční bouři. Myslel jsem si: „Hřmi, Perune, na můj svátek“¹²²

Zábrana's entries frequently depict autumnal landscapes that, while reflecting the season in which they were written, also suggest a deeper fascination with wintry scenes. The first description is particularly striking in its realism, and its style can be characterized as both melancholic and atmospheric. Zábrana employs concrete imagery and natural motifs to evoke a poignant atmosphere, wherein cold, misty days evoke a sense of abandonment and tranquility. Elements such as the wind, the fragile wings of birds, and the autumnal landscape imbue the text with a distinctly poetic quality. Specific details, like the moisture of the fields and the movement of the branches, provide an immersive sensory experience, drawing the reader into the scene. The metaphor "the land curls into the horns of shrubs" adds a layer of complexity to the description, suggesting a sense of anxiety or a contraction of nature itself. In these entries, nature regains the vitality it had in the earlier Scout diaries, serving as a dynamic backdrop to the author's reflections. In the second entry, Zábrana offers a vivid depiction of a night storm, which coincides with the elections in Czechoslovakia, creating a metaphor for the looming sense of danger. The tumultuous weather depicted in the text reflects the tense political climate, suggesting that the storm functions not merely as a meteorological event but also as a symbolic representation of the nation's troubled times. This interpretation aligns with a tradition

¹²¹ "Cold and misty days. The wind rustles through the branches, and the wings of birds are fragile. The landscape outside the window is autumnal; the fields are damp (only on the surface), underneath it's ashes and more ashes. Clouds coil around the Orlík hills, the land curls into the horns of shrubs. The sun has probably moved out." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 19 May 1948, p. 16.

¹²² "Election day. The first undemocratic elections in Czechoslovakia. By morning, there was a terrible storm. I woke up around half-past four; the room and the landscape were illuminated by lightning, thundering until everything shook, the storm was right above the city. Both lightning and thunder simultaneously. It lasted about 3/4 of an hour, sleep was impossible. I don't remember such a nocturnal storm. I thought: 'It's thundering, Perun, on my feast day.'" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 30 May 1948, p. 25.

established in the Boy Scout diaries, wherein the natural landscape frequently serves as a mirror to the writer's emotional state. Nature thus reemerges as a pivotal element in Zábřana's worldview, albeit in an evolved form. In his earlier diaries, depictions of the natural world consistently held a positive value, both in poems and entries. However, as the author matures, natural phenomena acquire a negative dimension, reflecting his increasing internal struggles. This evolution in Zábřana's writing style persists and develops further, as evidenced in the following note:

Pondělek ještě volný. Dušičkový.

Takový podzim, jako jsou dny teď, je bezesporu krásnější než jaro. Vzduch je ad absurdum čistý a svěží. Vonný. Lesy se zviditelňují do nebývalé přesnosti. A pravidelné hranaté: obláčky jdou za sebou po nebi jako vagony nebeské lokomotivy. Tíše, přesně. V mé zemi je všechno krásné, zač lidé nemohou. Alespoň nyní. Táta byl ještě s námi. Odjížděl navečer. [...] Na dráhu jsem nešel. Rozloučili jsme se doma. Není to lehký život, ale je hrdý. Lépe nuzovat, strádat a plahočit se se vzpřímenou hlavou než sloužit na kolenou¹²³

In this entry, Zábřana contrasts the aesthetic beauty of the natural world with the perceived degradation of the human condition in his country, which likely reflects the adverse living conditions following the rise of communism, particularly for his family. His father, having lost his position as a teacher, was compelled to seek employment elsewhere, necessitating prolonged separations from his family. The passage poignantly details Zábřana's struggle with this separation, thereby elucidating the profound melancholy that permeates the text. For him, the human and natural worlds become symbolic of two polarized realms: darkness and light, corruption and purity. This contrast is particularly underscored by the author's description of the air's quality, which he accentuates with the Latin phrase "ad absurdum". This use of Latin serves not only to heighten the impact of the expression but also to illustrate the enhanced significance of such linguistic combinations, a technique evident in his earlier entries. This stylized portrayal of the autumn landscape departs from earlier descriptions by introducing the metaphor of a train, which Zábřana utilizes to illustrate the movement of clouds across the

¹²³ "Monday is still free. All Saints'. Such an autumn, like the days now, is undoubtedly more beautiful than spring. The air is pure and fresh ad absurdum. Fragrant. The forests become visible with unprecedented precision. And the regular angular clouds follow each other across the sky like cars of a celestial locomotive. Quietly, precisely. In my country, everything is beautiful, except for the people. At least for now. Dad was still with us. He left in the evening. [...] I didn't go to the station. We said goodbye at home. It's not an easy life, but it is a proud one. It is better to live in hardship, to suffer, and to struggle with an upright head than to serve on one's knees" Ibid., *ibid.*, 1 November 1948, p. 73.

sky. This metaphor conveys a sense of calmness and order inherent in the natural world, a stark contrast to the disorder and unrest present in the human realm.¹²⁴ Another exemplary case of how the landscape becomes the focus of Zábřana's poetic gaze can be found in an entry dated February 20, 1949:

Včera a dnes mašřují dny vřkutku jarní. Sněhy, o řech se pomalu dá řici s Villonem: Ou sont...? A řa jarní země, vydělená v cípy mezi řestičkami a mezičkami pod Orlíkem, země jeřtě nepokřytá řůstem. Vřechno, řelá krajina v modřavém oparu, řterý slunce vřluzuje z vřlké hlíny. A řráva, řráva je jako řpáčovy po probužení, zřálená a zaelumaná od řpánku, jaro z řoho řičí, hvíždá. Řřůzřačné dny, řřůzřačná obloha, řřůzřačné háje. Obhlížel jsem řromy na zahrádce, dýchal jako divý řen vřdunch. Jak by řo bylo řvěží, jak by řo vřechno řozřřasňovalo, kdyby nebylo břemená, řteré nese má. Kdyby byl řlověk řto řet na řéto zemi, nemohlo by řu jaro zevředněř [...]. A vysoký jalovec vedle řestičky ke vřchodu do řomu probodává oblohu jako injekce řřěstí. Nebe je jeřtě řřidce, řezbarvě jasně, ale řo už je cítit, ře bude modřat, bude modřat.¹²⁵

Zábřana's Romantic engagement with nature is, once again, permeated with a sense of melancholy. This fragment may be read as an ode to nature; however, it also serves as a meditation on the inevitable transition from winter to spring. The passage further reflects the writer's personal struggles, which cast a shadow over the natural beauty he depicts. Zábřana's descriptions are not merely observational; they are laden with a sense of impending change. The diarist subtly hints at the transformation of the landscape, emphasizing the freshness of the air and the vivid colors that spring will soon introduce. Moreover, the text employs specific stylistic devices to reinforce this sense of change and anticipation. The repetition of certain adjectives, such as "řřůzřačný" (transparent), and verbs, notably the recurring "bude modřat, bude modřat" (it will turn blue, it will turn blue), serves a dual purpose. On one hand, it mirrors the cyclical nature of the seasons, capturing the gradual and inevitable shift from one state of being to another. On the other hand, this repetition underscores a sense of longing or yearning within the

¹²⁴ According to Jiří Trávničěk, trains are a thematic obsession in Zábřana's work. Trávničěk, Jiří, *Slovo řvřřané řějřinami*, in: Zábřana, Jan, *Havřan*, op. cit, p. 642.

¹²⁵ "Yesterday and today the days march forward with a truly spring-like character. As for the snow, one could slowly say with Villon: Ou sont...? And that spring earth, divided into patches between paths and small roads under Orlík, earth still uncovered by growth. Everything, the entire landscape, is in a bluish haze that the sun draws out from the moist soil. And the grass, the grass is like a sleeper upon waking, tousled and rumpled from sleep, with spring shouting and whistling from it. Transparent days, transparent sky, transparent groves. I examined the trees in the garden, breathing in the air like a madman. How refreshing it would be, how it would all be uplifting, if it weren't for the burden I carry. Even if one lived a hundred years on this earth, spring could never become mundane. [...] And the tall juniper next to the path to the house pierces the sky like an injection of happiness. The sky is still sparsely, colorlessly clear, but you can already feel that it will turn blue, it will turn blue" Zábřana, Jan, *Řelý řivot*, op. cit, 20 February 1949, p. 127.

author, as if he is both anticipating and willing the arrival of spring as a form of emotional and psychological renewal.

These diaries also serve as a medium through which the young author articulates his moral values and political thoughts, providing a lens into his evolving understanding of morality and politics, revealing how these concerns influence his perspectives on contemporary issues and his responses to the changing landscape of his society:

Člověk musí žít nadšeně a vytrvale pro něco, co v něm hoří sžíravým plamenem, dává mu zapomenout na bene, odstraňuje z něho sobectví, a pro co je ochoten přinášet obětí. Život bez obětí, život chlebařský, je život, který musí sám degradovat člověka na úroveň zvířete.¹²⁶

To navigate the oppressive political climate, Zábřana entrusts his diaries with his silence, viewing it as a necessary sacrifice. This act of self-sacrifice, living for the flame burning within him, enables him to preserve his integrity and survive. This moral stance foreshadows aspects of his emerging artistic expression. Even in this early phase, Zábřana's ideals are distinctly articulated. He possesses a mature clarity regarding his moral values and his unwavering opposition to the regime. A particularly significant influence is a quote from Winston Churchill, "The soul of freedom is immortal; it cannot and will not be destroyed," which Zábřana records in his diary and elaborates on in another entry:

Je také velmi důležité pro správné poznání přečíst si některé válečné reportáže. Těch já jsem četl dost. A mám ze všeho svůj vlastní, pevný a vytrvalý uzávěr. Jenom to, co jsem si zapsal jako motto zápisu z 10. ledna, je neměnná pravda, ve kterou věřím. Jinak jsou různé okolnosti proměnlivé, nevyzpytatelné a klamné. Nechat ostatním jejich slova! Ale ve svém mlčení vědět a vidět více než oni!¹²⁷

Firstly, Zábřana's poetic imagination is populated not only by the minutiae of everyday life but also by the grand sweep of "great history", reminiscent of Tolstoy's juxtaposition of individual lives against the backdrop of historical events. Secondly, he felt

¹²⁶ "A person must live with enthusiasm and persistently for something that burns in him with a corrosive flame, makes him forget about 'bene,' removes selfishness from him, and for which he is willing to make sacrifices. Life without sacrifices, a bread-and-butter life, is a life that must degrade a person to the level of an animal" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 29 May 1948, p. 24.

¹²⁷ "It is also very important for a proper understanding to read some war reports. I've read enough of those. And from all of them, I have my own, firm and enduring closure. Only what I wrote down as the motto of the entry on January 10th is an unchanging truth that I believe in. Otherwise, various circumstances are variable, unpredictable, and deceptive. Let others have their words! But in my silence, to know and see more than they do" Ibid., *ibid.*, 13 January 1949, p. 101.

a profound moral obligation to bear witness to these unfolding events and to record them faithfully, even if this required a temporary silence. For Zábřana, truth was an absolute imperative—a means to endure the pervasive falsehoods surrounding him. His assertion that one must read war reports to grasp the essence of events and form one's own judgment is particularly intriguing. While it is challenging to ascertain whether the style of such reports influenced his writing, this claim underscores a critical necessity: the preservation of a tangible connection to reality.

One entry of significant stylistic interest is from September 7-8, 1948, where Zábřana vividly describes the funeral of President Beneš. Zábřana, along with his classmates, sought permission to travel to Prague to witness the funeral procession. With remarkable detail, Zábřana narrates their navigation through the massive crowds and the pervasive atmosphere of mourning and discontent in the capital. This excerpt showcases familiar elements such as the inclusion of dialogue from the marching crowd. Particularly noteworthy is the thematic structure of the entry, which straddles the line between a report and a stream of consciousness. Zábřana meticulously and journalistically depicts the entire scene: the physical movement of people, the presence of the SNB in both personnel and vehicles, crowd control measures, the prolonged wait, the progression of the procession, and the complaints and swearing of the spectators:

Čas ubíhal, davy byly tiché, pokorné, lidé stojící vedle sebe se seznamovali a šepem vyprávěli, občas se postoupilo o pět deset krůčků. [...] ubíhalo to pomalu, mezi osmou a devátou se rychle setmělo a posunování se dopředu bylo měřeno od lampy k lampě. Dav příliš nehučel, lidé jedli, muži kouřili, všichni jaksi ponořeni, zamyšleni strnuli. [...] „Nedejte ho!“ a zazní hymna. SNB stojí v pozoru. Jeden z nich, jenž nezdraví hymnu, je odměněn políčkem od muže z davu. Hymna končí a znovu burácí skandování: „Proč nám ho neukážete! Beneše nám nevezmete!“ [...] „Lumpi, chcete nás podvést!“ [...] „Drž hubo, fízle!“¹²⁸

Zábřana meticulously chronicles the crowd's movement, the snippets of conversation, and the ambient street noises. Each phase of the funeral procession is captured in his description. He employs short, almost stenographic sentences to convey the unfolding events. The narrative style in the latter part of the entry shifts to Zábřana's

¹²⁸ “As time passed, the crowds were quiet, obedient; people standing next to each other introduced themselves and whispered, occasionally advancing five or ten steps. [...] it progressed slowly, between eight and nine it quickly got dark, and the forward movement was measured from lamp to lamp. The crowd didn't make much noise; people ate, men smoked, everyone, somehow immersed, thoughtful, stood still. [...] 'Don't give it up!' and the anthem sounds. SNB (Security Police) stands at attention. One of them who doesn't salute the anthem is rewarded with a slap from a man in the crowd.” “The anthem ends and the chanting roars again: “Why won't you show him to us! You won't take Beneš from us!“ [...] 'Scoundrels, you want to deceive us!' [...] “Shut up, cop!” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 7-8 September 1948, p. 51.

personal perception of the procession, leading him to contemplate the stark contrast between the motion of the living and the stillness of death:

Vůz s Paní Hanou, a konečně krokem jede skleněný pohřební vůz, ve skleněné rakvi, zasypan až k prsům květy, leží drahý prezident. Jeho tvář je strnulá, protáhlá smrtí, balzamováním vosková, neživotná. Teprve tu, vprostřed kvílejícího davu a světel padá na duši hrůza a pravé uvědomění toho, co si nebylo pod deštěm frází lze představit. Tu leží Beneš, pan prezident, mrtvý, bez moci, cizí lidé jej vezou bez jeho souhlasu mezi davy, které zbožně hledí vpálit s do srdcí podobu jeho tváře, ulicí, kudy chodíval, hrozně nepřírozně působí, že on, ještě před nedávnem v činnosti, hovořící, starající se, gestikulující, tu leží v autě, bezmocně, bez pohybu mezi živými davy [...] Snad by bylo důstojnější, aby nehybnost smrti nebyl rušena [...] takto vezou Beneše, o němž si už neuvědomujeme stále, že už nepromluví, nic neudělá, [...] Byli jsme zvyklí slyšet, co Beneš učinil, rozhodl – a on nyní učinil to, že zemřel, a působí trapně a tragicky, zoufale nás to rozbolestňuje, že on, který rozhodoval o nás, leží tu před námi v jediné slabosti, bezmocný, nehybný před námi živými, nerozhoduje on, ale jiní o něm, on, jehož dnes lidé vidí prvně jaksí v bezmoci, ubohosti, jen v majestátu smrti.¹²⁹

The sight of President Beneš's corpse triggers a series of associations in Zábrana's mind, which systematically repeat, creating a thematic coherence that connects with the earlier description of the marching crowds. Zábrana immediately discerns the contradiction between the moving coffin and the corpse within. Notably, the rhythm of this fragment stands out. Terms and syntactic constructions related to the concepts of powerlessness (*bezmocně*, *bez moci*, *bezmocný*) and stillness (*nehybnost*, *bez pohybu*) recur frequently. The forced motion of death by external forces highlights the immobility of the deceased president, who once held power over the masses. Zábrana is struck by the irony of such a powerful and active figure being reduced to complete motionlessness. This immobility, symbolizing being at the mercy of others' decisions, terrifies him, underscoring a profound reflection on power and helplessness. This sense of impotence is intricately linked to Zábrana's personal experience of powerlessness and entrapment. His diary entries

¹²⁹ "A carriage with Mrs. Hana, and finally, step by step, a glass hearse moves, in a glass coffin, buried up to the chest in flowers, lies the dear president. His face is stiff, elongated by death, waxen from embalming, lifeless. Only here, in the midst of the wailing crowd and lights, horror falls on the soul, and a true awareness of what was unimaginable under the deluge of phrases comes to mind. Here lies Beneš, Mr. President, dead, powerless, strangers are carrying him without his consent among the crowds, who devoutly gaze at the fiery image of his face, the street he used to walk through; it looks terribly unnatural that he, not long ago active, speaking, caring, gesturing, now lies in the car, powerless, motionless among the living crowds. [...] It might have been more dignified if the immobility of death had not been disturbed. [...] This is how they carry Beneš, about whom we no longer realize constantly that he will no longer speak, do anything. [...] We were used to hearing what Beneš did, decided—and now he did that he died, and it is awkward and tragic, painfully distressing to us that he, who used to decide for us, lies here before us in a single weakness, powerless, motionless among the living, no longer deciding about himself, but others deciding about him, he, whom people today see for the first time in helplessness, wretchedness, only in the majesty of death" Ibid., *ibid.*, 7-8 September 1948, p. 51.

frequently reflect his anxiety and feelings of confinement within the political climate of his time. The heightened awareness of movement and stillness might indeed be a product of the act of diary writing itself. Indecision and resultant stillness are often central features of the diaristic mode, suggesting that these elements may be accentuated through the process of recording one's thoughts and observations.¹³⁰ The sensation of being enclosed, trapped, and powerless to respond emerges as a recurring theme in the diary entries from this period. This sentiment likely heightened the author's sensitivity to this particular scene, which deeply resonated with his own experiences.¹³¹ This fragment primarily illustrates how Zábrana engages with empirical material and adapts it to meet his recording objectives.

Another potentially relevant phenomenon in Zábrana's writing development is the first entry of 1949, where Zábrana recounts the New Year's celebrations. The entry is quite extensive and demonstrates Zábrana's attempt to depict an event he himself remembers little about:

... Nový rok. Víím jen, že jsme se s Jirkou, Pídou, Julekem objímali, přáli si, aby byl lepší, Julek řval přípitky na adresy drahých v dál docela bezostyšně. Potom se tancovalo a pil grog, vřelý a silný. A pak už se nepamatuji téměř na nic, jenom nějaké šílené tancování, potom jsem dlouhou dobu (ale to už jsem skoro nevěděl, co dělám), seděl vedle Lídy, držel ji za ruce a stále jí něco říkal a vykládal: víím z toho jen to, že jsem jí stále opakoval, že ji miluju a nějaké hlouposti, ale to už je všechno spletené a zapadá do tmy¹³²

Through a rapid sequence of images and actions, Zábrana endeavors to reconstruct the events, piecing together the fragments of his memory. Glimpses of conversations, actions, and characters intermingle, creating a tapestry of recollections:

Potom jsem chodil po černé chodbě ještě s některými kluky, byl jsem si vědom, že jsem ožralý jako slíva, ale nepomáhalo to. Běžel jsem dolu a chtěl jsem dát venku hlavu do sněhu, ale školník měl už všude zavřeno, a tak jsem si jenom na temeno točil z kohoutků vodopády vody, nepomáhalo to však ani málo. [...] vedl jsem tam nějaké řeči s Jarkou a Růžou a nakonec už jsem jenom seděl za stolem, uvědomoval jsem si, že jsem opilý, všechno kolem bylo jako za sklem, věděl jsem o sobě, ale nemohl

¹³⁰ "The act of writing about this indecision prolongs it, transforming it into a state that is ultimately quite stable and vaguely comfortable." Didier, Beatrice, *Le journal intime*, op. cit., p. 99.

¹³¹ The idea of being surrounded is marked by the frequent use of the verb "obklopovat" (surrounded, encircled): "Je to moře nenávisť, kterým nás, psance ve své zemi, obklopují" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 4 October 1948, p. 64.

¹³² "... New Year. I only know that Jirka, Píďa, and Julek hugged each other, wished for it to be better; Julek boldly shouted to the dear ones far away. Then there was dancing and drinking grog, warm and strong. And then, I hardly remember almost anything, just some crazy dancing. Later on (but I barely knew what I was doing by then), I sat next to Lída for a long time, holding her hands and kept telling her something: all I know is that I kept repeating to her that I love her and some nonsense, but it's all tangled and fades into darkness" Ibid., *ibid.*, 1 January 1949, P. 93.

jsem si poroučet, byl jsem slabý a chtělo se mi spát. [...] Na jednom stole a pod stole byl celý zalitý ubrus – Kasal tam rozbil láhev vína, střepy – všude to teklo, v praménkách jako krev – bylo to téměř jako v putyce a začalo se mi dělat špatně z výstřihů všech dívek, z toho rafinovaného poodhalování, na chodbě Julek líbal Lídu Metalovou, všude bylo plno kouře – tančila vždy jen jedna nebo dvě dvojice, rádio, anebo to byl gramofon, burcoval jazzovou hudbu moc hlučně. Mluvili na mne, chodil jsem s nimi, ale vše bylo jako za sklem a viděl jsem, že oni jsou opilí také.¹³³

Zábrana pays meticulous attention to his physical sensations under the influence of alcohol, vividly depicting the disorder of the party. He captures the confusion caused by the noise of the music, the room filled with smoke, the atmosphere, and his sensation of sickness. Beyond the rapid succession of sensations that highlight Zábrana's descriptive prowess in capturing a chaotic whirlwind of events, certain details warrant particular attention: the image of the broken bottle of wine flowing like blood, with its fragments creating a tangible, vivid portrayal. This detail stands out amidst a narrative primarily characterized by brief, fragmented actions. Following this, Zábrana describes his aversion to the necklines of the girls at the party. This term is revisited in another entry from January 21, 1949, where he explains that in his writing, he sought to convey in one of his poems how a woman's body exerts an alluring influence on a young man while simultaneously posing a threat of destruction, and how the sophisticated display of the female body evokes a profound sense of disgust:

[...] Ale napadla mě básnička, a tak jsem se tím zabýval. Napsána byla celá ve dvou minutách, dnes to šlo rychle, ale seděl jsem nad ní a zatesknul si. Chtěl jsem v ní říci, jak působí přitažlivě žena svým tělem na mladého člověka, ale jak se zase hrozí záhuby, a nechutnost nad rafinovaným odhalováním ženského těla¹³⁴

The experience of the New Year party was transmuted into a poem, signalling a new thematic core in Zábrana's poetry: the magnetic allure of women's charm and the fear

¹³³ "Then I walked down the black corridor with some guys; I was aware that I was drunk as a plum, but it didn't help. I ran down and wanted to put my head out in the snow, but the janitor had everything closed everywhere, so I just turned the taps and waterfalls of water on my head, but it didn't help at all. [...] I had some conversations there with Jarka and Růža, and in the end, I just sat at the table, realizing that I was drunk, everything around was like behind glass, I knew about myself, but I couldn't command myself, I was weak, and I wanted to sleep. [...] On one table and under the table, the entire cloth was soaked - Kasal broke a bottle of wine there, shards - it flowed everywhere, in streams like blood - it was almost like in prison, and I started to feel sick from the cleavages of all the girls, from that sophisticated exposure; in the corridor, Julek was kissing Lída Metalová, there was smoke everywhere - only one or two couples were dancing, the radio, or it was a gramophone, blared jazz music too loudly. They talked to me, I walked with them, but everything was like behind glass, and I saw that they were drunk too" Ibid., *ibid.*, 1 January 1949, P. 93.

¹³⁴ Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 21 January 1949 p. 104.

of the ruin it could bring. This thematic core, as evidenced, emerged directly from the diarist's personal experience.

Zábrana's sense of isolation, as mentioned before, is another prominent element in this set of diary entries. This isolation was not only a result of the prevailing political circumstances but also stemmed from the diarist's own outlook. As the political situation began to deteriorate, so too did the circumstances of Zábrana's family, which intensified his feelings of isolation and despair, especially in the entries from 1949. This growing sense of alienation led him to express a profound aversion to the era in which he lived, as he articulates in the following entry:

Kolem jdou neustále zprávy, verbovárný, reformy a nárazy politické! Podivuji se sám sobě, že mi to sem do deníků ani moc neproniká; já to vstřebám jen tak jedním uchem, pokud mě to nebije přes hlavu, ale to si ani já neuvědomuji, co mě to vlastně stojí za námahy. Ale potom se divím, že když přijdu večer domů, že se potom ve mně něco zadrhne, mám najednou vždy takový nervový úhoz, jako celý zničený. A je to čas tak hnusný, ve kterém žijeme, že se ani povídat nedá! Mimo jiné jsem psali hodně těžkou anglickou kónu¹³⁵

In this passage, Zábrana reflects on the impact of political events on his emotional state, intertwining the broader context with his personal struggles. The fragment captures the tension between the external world, marked by political turmoil and societal changes, and the internal world of Zábrana's emotions and reflections. The diary serves as a space where he grapples with the challenges of his time, expressing both his resistance to the political climate and his coping mechanisms, such as finding moments of beauty in the midst of turmoil. The entry provides insights into how Zábrana uses his diary as a tool for self-reflection and a means of navigating the complexities of his life. Zábrana asserts that the political context does not affect his diary too much, even if, as we have observed, he frequently comments on the world at large. According to Philippe Lejeune, diaries are a filter that the diarist uses to erase negative elements of life, in order to convey only the positive into his writing and, in so doing, shield himself. However, in Zábrana's case, the influence of these events is so strong, that they inevitably become part of his reflections. Ruminations on the political situation are, however, always interspersed with accounts of his everyday

¹³⁵ "News, recruitments, reforms, and political shocks are constantly going on around. I'm amazed at myself that it doesn't penetrate too much into my diaries; I absorb it only with one ear unless it hits me over the head, but I don't even realize what it actually costs me. But then I wonder that when I come home in the evening, something suddenly grinds in me, I always have such a nervous twitch, like completely destroyed. And it's such a horrible time we live in, that it's not even worth talking about! Among other things, we wrote a very difficult English essay." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 18 January 1949, p. 56.

activities, as we can see in this fragment: after complaining about the horror of the time, the author ends the note with a remark about an English test he had. The juxtaposition between the Great History and the triviality of his individual reality is always present.

When analyzing the endogenesis of Zábřana's writing, it is essential to consider how the author reflects upon and describes his creative process in these diaries:

Odpoledne jsem trochu přemýšlel a přišla mi myšlenka, jak jsem se vlastně já dostal k poezii, zájmu a chápání nejkrásnějších z múz: někdy koncem roku 44-45 pod silnými city a pohnutími (přímo lze napsat, že to byla Sona, která to způsobila) jsem se pokoušel vypsát své dojmy. Jak mě napadlo, že do veršů, to bohužel nevím a asi se už nedopřemýšlím. [...] Do té doby jsem četl rodokapsy a detektivky, ani román ne, natož verše. Snad jsem trochu autokritiky měl, napsané se mi nelíbilo, sáhl jsem po nějaké knize básní, abych viděl, jak se to dělá, začal jsem se hlouběji, našel jsem pramen a zdroje netušených krás.¹³⁶

His sensitivity and emotions, particularly his relationship with a girl named Soňa, played a crucial role in his creative process. Zábřana admits that, until then, he had not read poetry and had only written popular novels while reading detective stories. However, for him, poetry served not only as a form of testimony but also as a vehicle for reminiscence. In an entry dated November 30, 1948, he reflects on a poem he composed while remembering Soňa, noting that it was she who inspired him to begin writing. In this extensive entry, he provides a thorough account of the motivations and circumstances that led him to write poetry during this period. He notes, "*jediný pramen, který ve mně stále hrčí svěžími barvami, jsou ty vzpomínky. Schematizovaly, prošel je čas, ale stále žhnou.*"¹³⁷ Memories and the constant return to them are the primary sources of joy for Zábřana, a joy he associates not only with vivid colors but also with the element of fire, underscoring the vitality of those lost moments. In contrast, the present is consistently portrayed in his diary entries in terms of pale and cool tones, set against a wintry landscape that, while offering a degree of solace from life's turmoil, is invariably tinged with melancholy and stillness. In this context, he declares that "*vzpomínka je znovuprožití. Mnohdy intenzivnější a takové, jaké současnost nedovoluje*", affirming the stark contrast, in his view, between the present and the past.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Ibid., *ibid.*, 27 August 1948, p. 44.

¹³⁷ "The only source still bubbling in me with fresh colors is those memories. They have been de-schematized, time has passed, but they still burn" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit, 30 November 1948, p. 82.

¹³⁸ "Memory is a re-experience. Often more intense and authentic than the present allows" Ibid., *ibid.*, 30 November 1948, p. 83.

He then distinguishes between two types of poems: those emerging from the immediacy of experience and those rooted in memories, the features observed earlier during his scouting period that continue to reappear. Zábřana describes his artistic process in a noteworthy manner: "*Člověk potřebuje víc a víc zážitků, aby to v něm mokvalo a hnisalo, a pak už se básně valí ven jako hnis z protrženého vředu*".¹³⁹ For Zábřana, creation was a way of filtering past experiences, assimilating them into the poet's inner self until they created some infection that could be cured by writing. Zábřana feels he is drying up because he no longer has such experiences, as he is "*navlečen do kůže vydědence. Sám jsem ji oblékl*".¹⁴⁰ The solitude into which he has withdrawn is caused by both his personal need and the political situation, leading to a sense of helplessness. Inner pain, uncertainty, and the heaviness of personal and external situations strip him of all strength and essentially his will. Incapacity and frustration lead to a state of nervousness, isolating him from others, thus forcing him to wear a mask of arrogant detachment. His poems serve as a remedy against the drying up of memory, and as a way to return to a better past.

Thus, in this phase of Zábřana's development, writing seems to primarily serve as a remedy against oblivion. The notion of the past as a safe place, evoked through writing, is corroborated by another entry, also related to Soňa:

Ale obávám se, že se Soňa ve mně už stává jen vzpomínkou. Vím, co mě čeká, odejde-li paměť a vzpomínání – schopnosti věčného obrozování krásy přešlé, vím to, neboť se znám, znám všechny ty stagnace, krize, neschopnosti, jichž jsem pln. Stál jsem dnes na hřbitově polorozsvíceném světýlky vzpomínání blízkých a snažil se promyslet se hlínou ke zbytkům mrtvých tam dole. Nemohl odejít všechen život z toho, co kdysi žilo. A tak věky odcházejí lidé, odcházejí, mění se v hlínu jejich těla; každého to čeká, a přece se nikdo nedovede zbavit strachu a hrůzy ze smrti. Je to nenávratnost a věčnost smrti, zmlknutí nekonečné, co děsí.¹⁴¹

The consequences of memory loss manifest as stagnation, personal crises, and a pervasive sense of helplessness that frequently torments the author. For Zábřana, the

¹³⁹ "A person needs more and more experience for it to soak and fester in him, and then the poems roll out like pus from a burst boil" Ibid., *Ibid.*, 30 November 1948, p. 83.

¹⁴⁰ "Dressed in the skin of an outcast. I dressed it myself" Ibid., *ibid.*, 30 November 1948, p. 82.

¹⁴¹ "But I'm afraid that Soňa is becoming just a memory to me now. I know what awaits me if memory and recollection fade away – the ability to perpetually renew the beauty of the past. I know it, for I know myself, I know all those stagnations, crises, incapacities with which I am full. Today I stood in the cemetery, dimly lit by the lights of memories of the departed and tried to contemplate with the earth towards the remnants of the dead down there. All the life that once lived couldn't vanish entirely. And so people departed for ages, leaving, transforming into the soil of their bodies; everyone faces it, yet no one can rid themselves of the fear and horror of death. It's the irreversibility and eternity of death, the infinite silence, that frightens" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 1 November 1948, p. 74.

erosion of memory is not merely a passive forgetting but a profound threat to his very sense of self and continuity. These feelings of disorientation and paralysis emerge repeatedly throughout his diary entries, suggesting that for him, memory serves as a vital anchor against the encroaching void of the present. During this period, in addition to his affection for Soňa, Zábrana also harboured a passionate love for another classmate, Lída:

Hodně se v těchto dnech pokouším psát verše: podněty, které přicházejí a téměř nutí psát, jsou časté a neobyčejně živé. Je v tom ještě něco z tragické krásy té bolesti (nebylo to víc) k Lídě. Ale márně se pokouším uchopit výraz. Jindy mě poslouchá., nemám-li co říci. Nyní je s ním třeba svádět zápas, aby neučesal všechno pudové, nečesané a horké.¹⁴²

Zábrana yearns for an authenticity of emotion that he endeavors to capture in his poetry. This aspiration for genuine expression arises from the profound despair he experiences due to the unattainability of his beloved, Lída. The love that Zábrana is unable to openly declare compels him to craft verses imbued with a newfound intensity and vividness. Notably, he describes his creative process in terms of a struggle, referring to it as “fighting with” his poetic material. He emphasizes the importance of resisting the impulse to embellish his writing, highlighting the imperative to convey his emotions with the utmost clarity and simplicity. During this period, we can argue that love and the contemplation of his beloved became a fundamental driving force behind his poetic creativity, particularly in relation to Lída. This is evident in another entry from October 4:

Bože, z té Lídy se stává den ze dne hezčí děvče; je vidět, že umím dobře odhadovat, má nádherně modré oči v úžasně souměrném obličejí (...) Ale už je to jen objektivní pozorování krásy, jako zežloutlé listí, jasné dny atd. Nic víc pro mě. Já vždycky zabiji a ukřičím v sobě svou lásku a touhu a vzdám se jí. A snad jedině proto může zůstat tak krásná¹⁴³

¹⁴² “In these days, I am trying a lot to write verses: the impulses that come and almost compel writing are frequent and extraordinarily lively. There is still something of the tragic beauty of that pain (wasn't there more) towards Lída. But I vainly attempt to grasp the expression. At other times, it listens to me, when I have nothing to say. Now it is necessary to wrestle with it, so it doesn't smooth out all the instinctual, uncombed, and hot” Ibid., *ibid.*, 17 September 1948, p. 57.

¹⁴³ “God, Lída becomes a more beautiful girl day by day; you can see that I can estimate well, she has wonderfully blue eyes in an amazingly symmetrical face (...) But it's just objective observation of beauty, like yellowed leaves, bright days, etc. Nothing more for me. I always kill and scream my love and desire within me and give up on it. And maybe only because of that, she can remain so beautiful” Ibid., *ibid.*, 4 October 1948, p. 65.

The impossibility of attaining his desired love compels Zábrana to renounce these feelings, relegating them to the realm of objective facts that can be documented in reality, deprived of any emotional charged. For Zábrana, the suppression of emotion and the withdrawal from personal engagement appear to be the only means of preserving the beauty of the beloved. It is as though external reality inevitably corrupts all that is beautiful in human existence; thus, only by maintaining a distance and observing from afar can the purity of the poetic image be safeguarded. The poet channels his emotions into both his verses and his diary entries, which together create an idealized space for contemplating these phenomena while establishing the necessary separation from the contaminating effects of reality. Zábrana elaborates on the significance and value of such distance in another entry, suggesting that it is this detachment that enables the preservation of poetic purity and aesthetic integrity:

21. září 1948 Chladný den. Svíravý šedivý vítr v krajině a dojem podzimní opuštěnosti. [...] Díváme-li se třeba na podzim z léta, vidíme jenom větrné dny, jeřabiny na stromech, zoraná pole a lesy v mlhách, kouzlo těsnějšího života v domově, které vrcholí v zimě. Tento pohled z jiné roční doby je ale schematizující. Když zrovna je podzim, nelze dost výrazně vidět všechny ty jevy, poněvadž jsou příliš samozřejmé. A cítit krásu a zabývat se jí lze lépe tehdy, když je vzdálená a nedosažitelná. Je jaksi ideální, zbavena všech objektivních vad, které jsou patrný tváří v tvář, pohled z dálí vidí jen to, co chce, co mu bylo příjemné, odtud už zásadní subjektivnost.¹⁴⁴

Viewing from a distance permits Zábrana to perceive the object of his contemplation unburdened by the limitations imposed by objective reality. This distance enables a subjective reinterpretation of memories, wherein the recollection is reshaped according to the poet's inner experience rather than the constraints of external facts. The act of maintaining a diary plays a crucial role in fostering this sense of detachment, offering a refuge where the author can momentarily withdraw from the pressures and demands of the external world. In the diary, Zábrana is able to craft a space for introspection and creative reflection, allowing him to engage with his experiences on his own terms.

¹⁴⁴ "September 21, 1948. A chilly day. The air is tense, gray, with a sense of autumnal desolation. [...] When we look at autumn from the perspective of summer, we see only windy days, rowanberries on the trees, plowed fields, and forests in mists, the enchantment of a closer home life, which culminates in winter. However, this view from a different season is schematic. When it is actually autumn, one cannot distinctly perceive all those phenomena because they are too obvious. And to feel the beauty and engage with it better when it is distant and unattainable. It is somewhat ideal, devoid of all the objective flaws that are apparent face to face. The view from a distance sees only what it wants, what was pleasant to it, thus emphasizing a fundamental subjectivity" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 21 September 1948, p. 59.

In another next entry, dated 24th October 1948, Zábrana tries to explain why he started a diary in the first place:

Po obědě jsem nad deníkem trochu přemýšlel, jak já, člověk od přírody nestálý, nevytrvalý, proměnlivý a vrtkavý, jsem přišel vůbec na myšlenku psát deník. Tož: už dřív jsem se o to pokoušel, nebo alespoň zaznamenávat některé události. Ve svých papírech mám některé zlomky. Ale začalo to loňské zimy tím, že jsem četl (hned nějak o Novém roce) Montgomeryho životopis, kde píše, jak si vedl své deníky a jak mu bývaly užitečné. Rozhodl jsem se tehdy psát deník každý den, i když není zajímavý. Tehdy jsem byl také hrozně zaťat do Jarky, všechno volalo po nějakém vyslovení: snad i to byl úmysl, z něhož se deník zrodil. A pak: nejednou si uvědomoval, že mi minulost splývá, že nedovedu oddělovat jednotlivé věci; i měl deník sloužit k čistému a přesnému zapsání toho všeho, co kdy bylo. Vydržel jsem to až dodnes, dělat to rád. ¹⁴⁵

A primary impetus for Zábrana's decision to keep a diary appears to be his desire for self-improvement. Influenced by his reading of Captain Montgomery's biography, Zábrana came to view diary-keeping as a potentially advantageous practice for individuals who struggle with qualities such as "inconstancy, impermanence, variability, and fickleness." He recognized that these traits posed challenges in maintaining a coherent and stable sense of self. Moreover, Zábrana acknowledges his own difficulties in distinguishing and accurately recalling individual events from the past. This struggle with memory and the fragmentation of his experiences further motivated him to document his thoughts and experiences systematically. By keeping a diary, Zábrana sought to counteract these tendencies and achieve a greater degree of clarity and self-understanding.

His nostalgia extends beyond personal relationships with past romantic interests to encompass a broader sense of loss regarding the world that existed prior to the Communist regime—a world depicted in his scout diaries that preceded the end of World War II. Following his reading of Christopher Buckley *Road to Rome*,¹⁴⁶ Zábrana reflects with nostalgia on the liberation from Nazism, recalling the fervent enthusiasm that greeted each

¹⁴⁵ "After lunch, I pondered a bit about the diary, how I, a person by nature fickle, unsteady, changeable, and capricious, ever came up with the idea of writing a diary. Well, I had tried it before, or at least jotting down some events. I have some fragments in my papers. But it all started last winter when I read (right around New Year's) Montgomery's biography, where he writes about keeping his diaries and how useful they used to be to him. I decided then to write a diary every day, even if it's not interesting. At that time, I was also deeply into Jarka, everything called for some expression: perhaps that was also the intention from which the diary was born. And then: more than once I realized that my past was merging, that I couldn't separate individual things; the diary was supposed to serve to record all that ever was purely and accurately. I have kept it up until today, enjoying doing it." Ibid., *ibid.*, 24 October 1948, p. 70.

¹⁴⁶ Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 28 October 1948, p. 72.

advance of the troops, which “warmed their souls” and inspired a sense of renewal and freedom. He laments the contrast between this sense of liberation and the current state of oppression, remarking, “It is bitter to realize again what freedom has turned into in our hands.” The culmination of this yearning for lost freedom is poignantly captured in two verses: “*Je korunou vší bídy/dní šťastnějších vzpomínat*”,¹⁴⁷ encapsulating the deep sorrow elicited by reminiscing about more prosperous times.

The period from 1948 to 1949 stands out as particularly significant for the burgeoning writer Zábřana. During this time, his enthusiasm for literature intensifies, leading him to devour a wide array of literary works. This phase of his diaries is notably rich in references to novels, poems, essays, and reports, each accompanied by Zábřana’s commentaries. This indicates that his engagement extended beyond passive reading; he was actively developing his skills as a literary critic. Zábřana’s involvement in the literary community of his hometown was profound. He participated in his school’s literary circle,¹⁴⁸ where he was frequently tasked with presenting papers on various authors. Additionally, he contributed to the editorial board of the high school magazine *Výkvět*, providing reviews and critical assessments of contemporary books.¹⁴⁹ Although the task was forced upon him, these activities prompted him to reflect critically on literature and literary style. Given the vast amount of material available, we will concentrate on the works and authors Zábřana mentions most frequently or comments on with particular specificity, highlighting their significant impact on him.

During this period, the sheer quantity and diversity of Zábřana’s readings is truly remarkable. Providing a comprehensive account of all his literary encounters would be challenging; therefore, I will offer a brief overview before focusing on the texts and authors that, in my view, exerted a particularly significant exogenetic influence on his development.

Zábřana was an avid reader not only of Czech literature, where he demonstrated a deep and nuanced understanding, but also of international literary traditions. His interests extended to various national literatures. Among the Anglo-American writers he mentions are Edgar Allan Poe, Graham Greene (whom he would later translate), Alexander Pope, and John Steinbeck. In terms of Czech literature, he cites several classic and contemporary authors, including Josef Hora, František Halas, Petr Bezruč, Vladimír Holan, Karel Čapek, and Jakub Arbes, among others. Zábřana also engaged deeply with literary criticism of his

¹⁴⁷ “Is the crown of all misery/ to remember happier days” Ibid., *ibid.*, 28 October 1948, p. 73.

¹⁴⁸ “Po obědě jsem dočetl Černého a byl ve městě vybírat příspěvky na Kruh přátel českého jazyka” Ibid., *ibid.*, 28 December 1948, p. 90.

¹⁴⁹ “Včera na oné idiotské schůzi jsem byl s mnoha jinými jmenován na redaktoření do Výkvětu” Ibid., *ibid.*, 15 September 1948, p. 56.

time, frequently referencing studies by figures such as František X. Šalda, Jan Mukařovský, and Václav Černý. French literature also features prominently in his diaries, with mentions of François Villon, Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Pierre de Ronsard, and Jean-Paul Sartre. His readings further extended to ancient literature, including figures such as Socrates and Virgil, which were likely connected to his classical studies in high school. Russian literature, however, seems to occupy a less central role in his notes, with the notable exception of Sergei Yesenin, whose influence will be explored in the final section of this dossier. Although Zábrana briefly references Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and his experience reading Nikolai Gogol's *Taras Bulba*, he does not dwell on these authors to the same extent. This selective engagement reflects Zábrana's eclectic but discerning approach to literature during this formative phase of his intellectual development. He also remarks on the behaviour of contemporary Czech authors who were affiliated with or sympathizers of the Party, condemning their choices and portraying them as "traitors". In a subsequent entry, he critiques František Halas, whose collection of poems had been sent to him by Soňa a few days earlier, provoking a strong reaction of disgust. Reflecting on one of Halas's verses from the poem *Padlým* ("Nad život nad smrt nechť je svoboda na věky nám"), he asserts:

Což už Halas zapomněl, co říkal? Nebo mu snad dnešní „svoboda“, která smrtí ty, kdož s ní paralelně nesmýšlejí, stačí? Či má básník ústa jen proto, aby jimi slova procházela a aby nic z nich nezůstalo uvnitř? Je to možno pro jeho svědomí smířit se s pádem toho, oč jiné vyzýval, aby jim bylo nad život, nad smrt? [...] Básníkovi se to rétoruje, když netuší, že za čásek přijde osvědčit jeho slova skutek. Zamýšlím se nad tím: nesmím být takový! Ať jsem jinak slaboch bez vůle, nesmím zrazovat své! Uznávám Halase a obdivuji se mu jako velkému básníkovi, ale... Možná že má jiná sudidla.¹⁵⁰

This entry illustrates that, for the young author, the moral stance of a writer was paramount, regardless of the literary merit of their work.

Regarding the authors upon whom Zábrana reflects most deeply during this period, Jan Zahradníček's (1905-1960) collection *Korouhve* (*Banners*, 1944) stands out as a significant artistic touchstone. Zábrana meticulously documents the impressions the collection made on him, especially from a technical standpoint. He expresses admiration for

¹⁵⁰ "Has Halas already forgotten what he once said? Or is he content with today's 'freedom,' which condemns to death those who do not think in parallel with it? Or does a poet have a mouth only for words to pass through, without leaving anything behind within? Is it possible for his conscience to reconcile itself with the downfall of that which he once urged others to hold above life, above death? [...] It is easy for the poet to speak rhetorically when he does not know that soon his words will have to be proven by actions. I reflect on this: I must not be like that! Even if I am otherwise a weakling without will, I must not betray my own! I recognize and admire Halas as a great poet, but... Perhaps he has different standards" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 30 December 1948, p. 92.

the plasticity of Zahradníček's verses and attributes the beauty of his work to his Christian faith and moral outlook. Zábrana is captivated by the religious belief in a cosmic harmony, a vision in which one can perceive the presence of the Almighty. This fascination may be rooted in a sense of the lost stability and certainties of the modern world. Zábrana's quest for a lost harmony mirrors his perception of the past, especially the idyllic paradise of his youth. Notably, in his scout diaries, he invoked God as a central figure in this harmonious world, which encompassed both the natural landscape and the experience of scout camps.¹⁵¹ This suggests a deep-rooted connection between his early experiences and the spiritual and moral frameworks he later explored in his literary works.

The longing for the joy of past times also manifests in Zábrana's attraction to Ladislav Fikar's (1920-1975) poetry.¹⁵² For instance, in an entry from October 1948, he commends the tenderness of Fikar's verses in the collection *Samotín* (1945). The thematic core of Fikar's collection lies in a return to childhood memories, underpinned by an enduring belief in lyricism. Zábrana reflects on the nostalgia evoked by Fikar's verses again in his entry on October 5 of the same year: "*Byl dnes nádherný podzimní den. Četl jsem ve Fikarově Byl dnes nádherný podzimní den. Četl jsem ve Fikarově Samotínu. To na mně padne vždy taková něžná tesknota, bolest and překrásným, co se mohlo splnit, ale nesplnilo, nějaké vyhladovění citů, jako po koupeli*"¹⁵³. Zábrana feels a tender "tesknota" (nostalgia), a key word in his writing of these years, and feels pain because of what he has lost.

Zábrana's literary interests extend even to works from the Far East, as evidenced by his enthusiasm for the poems in the collection *Zpěvy staré Číny* (*Songs of Ancient China*, 1939). In these poems, he discovers a tenderness and reverence for the beauty of nature that closely mirrors his own sensibilities:

Myslím si, že Zpěvy staré Číny a jejich druhý díl byly lepší. [...] Je to především ten bohorovný, v přírodě v nepatrných radostech zakotvený životný klid. Klid, v němž se lze těšit z východu slunce, ze vznešenosti skupiny borovic, něžnosti rozkvetlých stromů a čerstvého sněhu. S tím souvisí samota [...] Ale představa přírodní, izolované a dlouhé samoty ve mně vyvolává touhu. Z takového ústraní, vyjmut ze všeho běhu životního, bych mohl porozumět smyslu všeho dění, jeho příčinám atd.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ See the poem *Večerka* at page 6.

¹⁵² "Četl jsem Fikarův Samotín. Je to snad, po mém soudu, náš nejlepší mladý lyrik. Při čtení jeho veršů se mne zmocňuje to podivné zjhnutí a zněžnění, které je průvodním znakem pravé poezie." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 2 October 1948, p. 64.

¹⁵³ "Today was a beautiful autumn day. I read Fikar's Samotín. It always brings such tender melancholy to me, a pain over the beautiful that could have been fulfilled but was not, a starvation of feelings, like after a bath." Ibid., *ibid.*, 5 October 1948, p. 65.

¹⁵⁴ "I believe that *Songs of Ancient China* and its second volume were better. [...] It is primarily the divine tranquility, anchored in the subtle joys of nature. This tranquility allows one to take pleasure in the sunrise, the grandeur of a group of pines, the tenderness of blossoming trees, and the freshness of new snow. This is

This entry reinforces what has been evident in Zábrana's relationship with nature since 1945: his quest for solace and tranquility amidst the chaos of the external world, coupled with his tendency to withdraw from reality to attain a deeper understanding of events. This approach is closely linked to the earlier observed sense of distance regarding the subjectivity inherent in his poetic perspective.

Another significant figure in Zábrana's reflections is the French poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), whose influence he cannot seem to escape:

Těmito slovy (Je ne pouvais pas continuer, c'était mal) se jeden z největších básníků světa všech dob, Rimbaud, rozloučil se svou básnickou činností. [...] Vždy se snažil téměř se vyhnout publikování a o jedinou knížku, která vyšla mimo jeho vlast, se vůbec nestaral. Zabývám se už Rimbaudem delší čas: je to fascinující osobnost [...] je to okouzlující. Chlad k ženám. Pohrdání světem. Silácké gesto a naopak nejvroucnější slova [...] ta úžasné propastná distance od celého lidského hemžení, ode všechno zbytečného, nízkého, co tvoří život a čím já pohrdám¹⁵⁵

Zábrana expresses a deep appreciation for Rimbaud's poetry, particularly for its “mysterious and wild strings that are either reflected in the poems or surprisingly absent from them.” He is captivated by Rimbaud's unconventional attitude, his rejection of both societal norms and even his own literary work. Thematically, Zábrana identifies with several elements of Rimbaud's poetic persona: his “coldness towards women, contempt for the world, a strong gesture, and, conversely, the warmest words”. These attributes resonate profoundly with Zábrana, reflecting a shared sensibility marked by a disdain for superficiality and a preference for authenticity. A significant exogenetic influence on Zábrana is the rejection of all that he deems unnecessary in life. He reflects on this sentiment, emphasizing the distance it creates between him and the “human swarm”—a metaphor for the masses whose values and preoccupations he finds trivial and repugnant. In this light, Zábrana admires Rimbaud's audacity to articulate the unspeakable. In the same diary entry, Zábrana draws on insights from Václav Černý's *First Issue on Existentialism* (*První sešit o existencialismu*, 1947-1948), particularly Rimbaud's concept of the impossibility of salvation through art. Existentialism, which began to influence Czechoslovak intellectual circles in the early 1930s, resonates with Zábrana's own engagement with these ideas. He further references another work by Černý, (*Personality, Work, and Struggle*, in which Černý

closely related to solitude [...] But the idea of a natural, isolated, and extended solitude evokes a deep longing in me. From such seclusion, removed from the rush of everyday life, I could understand the meaning of all events, their causes, and so on” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 1 February 1949, p. 113.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., *ibid.*, 3 January 1949, p. 95.

contemplates whether the greatest poets might be those who abandon their craft prematurely.¹⁵⁶ This notion deeply impacts Zábrana, as evidenced by his inclusion of Černý's full quote in his diary. Černý argues that the greatness of such poets lies in their uncompromising honesty and purity—a concept that Zábrana finds particularly compelling.¹⁵⁷

Another author briefly mentioned by Zábrana, but worthy of attention, is Jiří Kolář (1914-2002). Although Kolář does not appear to play a significant role in this period of Zábrana's life — being referenced only once in the available selections — he holds considerable importance as an innovator in Czech diaristic literature and as a leading figure of Group 42. Understanding the young Zábrana's stance towards the new literary tendencies that emerged after World War II is crucial, as it reveals contrasting facets of his evolving ideas about literature during this phase of his development.

Influenced by the wartime crisis and the perceived moral degradation of the world, a new generation of writers increasingly lost trust in external reality, turning instead towards the inner world. These writers sought refuge in the everyday dimensions of human life, embracing simplicity and the elemental aspects of existence.

Zprvu veřejně málo viditelné projevy tradičních skupin surrealistů, Skupiny 42 nebo mladších autorů formujících své poetiky v době po Únoru, sjednocuje touha po autenticitě, protože autenticita obecně prezentovaného příběhu postupně slábne a stále více se rozchází s viděním a vnímáním světa jednotlivců i skupin. Zároveň se od konce 40. let projevuje vliv evropských myšlenkových proudů, zejména francouzského existencialismu – Sartrovy Cesty k svobodě vycházejí ještě před Únorem 1948 a jeho hra S vyloučením veřejnosti měla premiéru v roce 1947.¹⁵⁸

The writer Kamil Bednář, for example, attempted to analyze the characteristic features of this new poetics in his article *Slovo k mládím* (*A Word to the Young*, 1940), in which he theorized about the image of the naked human, i.e., a person devoid of all social conceptions. Parallel to this, Jiří Chaloupecký's second program, titled *Svět, v němž žijeme* (*The World We Live In*, 1940), placed the individual in the world of objects and the exterior.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., *ibid.*, 16 January 1949, p. 101.

¹⁵⁷ Refer to page 23, where Zábrana elucidates the necessity of maintaining the straightforwardness of his verses.

¹⁵⁸ "Initially, the less publicly visible manifestations of traditional surrealist groups, such as Group 42, did not include younger authors shaping their poetics in the post-February period. These groups were united by a desire for authenticity, as the authenticity of the generally presented story gradually weakened and increasingly diverged from the vision and perception of the world held by individuals and groups. Simultaneously, from the late 1940s, the influence of European intellectual currents, particularly French existentialism, grew. Sartre's *Roads to Freedom* was published before February 1948, and his play *No Exit* premiered in 1947" Papoušek, Vladimír, *Monumenty a existence*, in: Papoušek, V. a kol., *Chór a disonance. Česká literatura 1947-1963*, Akropolis/Filozofická fakulta JČU, Praha 2022, p. 82.

This fundamental contrast between the interior and the exterior became a key element for the subsequent poetic era. In a similar spirit, with Chalupecký as their main theorist, the artistic association “Group 42” focused on depicting the harshness and simplicity of reality. Kolář, with his commitment to diaristic realism and attention to the minutiae of daily life, exemplifies this trend. However, Zábrana’s engagement with these new tendencies appears ambivalent, suggesting a deeper tension in his literary outlook, one that often favors a more traditional, lyrical approach over the stark realism favoured by some of his contemporaries.

Zábrana's reference to Kolář during this period appears in the context of a review he was assigned to write on Kolář's collection of poems, *Dny v roce* (*Days in a Year*, 1948). While acknowledging the collection as “interesting, but not remarkable,” Zábrana critiques it, stating, “this is not the right path to a new kind of poetry.” This evaluation suggests Zábrana’s awareness of, and engagement with, contemporary poetic trends, as well as his developing critical stance toward the innovations of his literary predecessors. Kolář’s work, known for its experimental approach and focus on urban themes, perhaps did not resonate with Zábrana’s own poetic aspirations or his understanding of what constituted “new” poetry.¹⁵⁹ Zábrana's limited commentary on Kolář suggests a fundamental misalignment between Kolář’s diaristic “total realism” and his own literary ideals. To further elucidate Zábrana’s perspective, one can turn to the review he wrote of Kolář’s work for *Výkvět*. In this review, Zábrana begins by challenging the common notion that poetry is something inherently elusive and difficult to comprehend. He contends that contemporary poetry has a different task than it did in the past, implying that Kolář's method represents a departure from traditional poetic forms. Zábrana specifically critiques Kolář for presenting poems that lack conventional rhyme and rhythm, suggesting that they resemble rhythmic prose more than true poetry.¹⁶⁰ While he acknowledges Kolář’s acute sensitivity to the overlooked details of everyday life, Zábrana is less appreciative of Kolář’s overt declaration of intent to engage with reality, as seen in the collection's epigraph. Zábrana implies that by explicitly directing the reader's interpretation, Kolář detracts from the very sense of reality he aims to evoke. It is evident, however, that Zábrana found greater resonance with poets who embraced a more traditional approach—those whose lyrical and comprehensive style aimed at capturing absolute truths, evoking images of peace and harmony through the potency of their language. For Zábrana, this type of poetry served not only as a means of artistic expression

¹⁵⁹ “Kolářovy Dny v roce jsou zajímavé, ale málo poetické. To nebude pravá cesta k nové poezii” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 18 August 1948, p. 40.

¹⁶⁰ “Poezie má dnes jiné úkoly než kdy jindy. Kolář se rozchází s tradiční básnickou formou, opouští rytmičné verše, vzdává se rýmu.” Zábrana, Jan, *Dělník Jiří Kolář – tvůrce nové poezie*, in: *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 140.

but also as a source of solace for the poet's wounded soul, offering a refuge from the disquiet of reality and a pathway to deeper emotional and spiritual restoration.

Zábrana and Yesenin

Despite the wide range of Zábrana's literary influences, the Russian poet Sergei Yesenin emerges as the most significant and enduring. Zábrana makes frequent references to Yesenin throughout his diaries from this period and beyond, demonstrating his profound

engagement with the poet's work. According to Stanislav Rubáš, Zábřana first encountered Yesenin's poetry in 1947, when he began translating some of his poems from the collection *Modravá Rus'* (*Azure Rus'*, 1947). This suggests that Yesenin had a long-lasting impact on Zábřana, particularly during the formative years covered in this initial genetic dossier (1947–1949).¹⁶¹ In 1948, Zábřana frequently reflects on the melancholy and sorrow evoked by Yesenin's verses. He often associates the poet with colder seasons, such as winter and autumn: “*A večer (stydím se to skoro psát) slzy a teskný zármutek nad Jeseninem, básníkem, s nímž a jeho melancholií jsem žil letošní (vlastně loňskou) zimu a k jehož steskům mě dnes přivedla tichá jeseň. Je to můj nejmilejší básník.*”¹⁶²

Sergei Yesenin (1895-1925) is widely recognized as a quintessential voice of traditional Russian culture, celebrated for his evocative depictions of the rural landscape, nature, and folklore. His poetry delves into the complex interplay between humanity and the natural world, embodying a sensitivity and emotional depth that resonated profoundly with Zábřana. This connection was not merely academic or aesthetic; Zábřana felt a personal affinity with Yesenin's ability to articulate emotions and experiences that mirrored his own inner world. In his 1948 writings, Zábřana reveals his profound admiration for Yesenin, noting that the Russian poet “expresses things as he himself would”, suggesting a deep identification with Yesenin's poetic voice: “*Každý den čtu, dnes a denně, v Jeseninovi. Ten básník mi udělal. Říká naprosto vše, co cítím, co bych chtěl říci, a to svým osobitým výrazem.*”¹⁶³ This admiration influenced not only Zábřana's literary tastes but also his own creative process, as he sought to capture similar nuances of human experience and natural beauty in his work. However, Yesenin was not merely a poet of natural beauty; he also represented the profound schism between Old Russia and Revolutionary Russia, a divide that deeply influenced his life and work in the wake of the 1917 Revolution. This tension between the past and the present, tradition and change, is a recurring theme in Yesenin's poetry, imbuing it with a complexity that transcends simple pastoral imagery. Zábřana, acutely aware of this duality, emphasizes the significance of this rupture in his preface to the Czech edition of Yesenin's poems—a preface later included in his collection *Potkat básníka* (*Meeting a Poet*, 1989):

¹⁶¹ Rubáš, Stanislav, *Zábranův Jesenin*, in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.): *Jan Zábřana, básník, překladatel, čtenář*, Karolinum press, Praha, 2015, p. 132.

¹⁶² “And in the evening (I am almost ashamed to write this), tears and wistful sorrow over Yesenin, the poet with whom and whose melancholy I lived through this past winter (actually last year's), and whose laments were brought to me today by the quiet autumn” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 18 September 1948 p. 58.

¹⁶³ “Every day I read Yesenin, day in and day out. That poet made me. He says absolutely everything I feel, everything I want to say, and he does so with his unique expression.” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 24 September 1948, s. 61.

U nás byl vztah k Jeseninovi méně proměnlivý. V polovině dvacátých let byl přijímán jako představitel nové sovětské kultury, a to bez ohledu na výhrady, které k němu měla sovětská kritika. (...) Pro českého intelektuála z 20. a 30. let měla Jeseninova poezie (...) i tu přitažlivost, že ne přinášela výsledek ukončeného konfliktu, ale že se přímo v ní odehrával konflikt, jemuž stranil a jehož chtěl být svědkem: zápasu Staré Rusy s revolučním Ruskem Sovětským. Jeseninovy verše tak u nás sehrály pokrokovou roli politickou: byly nejen láskou, ale i zbrojí naší tehdejší kulturní levice. Teprve v padesátých letech je u nás tento vžitý Jesenin nahrazen úpadkovým Jeseninem zcela podle směrnic sovětské kritiky.¹⁶⁴

According to Zábrana, Yesenin's appeal to Czech society in the 1920s and 1930s stemmed from his complex duality—a characteristic that has been repeatedly reinterpreted and instrumentalized to serve various ideological purposes over time. This duality allowed different factions to project their own values and concerns onto his work, often in ways that suited their political or cultural agendas. Stanislav Rubáš has meticulously chronicled the history of Yesenin's translations, shedding light on the various interpretative processes and ideological manipulations that his work underwent during its reception in both Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union:

Zatímco ve druhé polovině dvacátých let konvenoval Horovi Jesenin prorok, v souboru Horových překladů z Jesenina a Pasternaka, vydaném v roce 1947, tedy už po Horově smrti, je protináboženská póza autora „Inonie“ nápadně zmírněna. [...] Horova překladatelská řešení z roku 1927 jsou namnoze přesným zachycením toho, co Jesenin skutečně říká – na rozdíl od řešení pozdějších, jež se uchylují buď ke zjevnému lyrizování a patosu. [...] Dnes už stěží zjistíme, co Horu přimělo provést všechny citované změny, které tlumí Jeseninovy protináboženské výpady.¹⁶⁵

Rubáš's research reveals how Yesenin's poetic legacy was shaped by these shifting interpretations, particularly in the context of Czech translations. The first translations of

¹⁶⁴ "With us, the attitude towards Yesenin was less variable. In the mid-1920s, he was accepted as a representative of the new Soviet culture, regardless of the reservations that Soviet criticism had towards him. (...) For a Czech intellectual of the 1920s and 30s, Yesenin's poetry (...) had the allure that it did not bring the result of a resolved conflict but that the conflict itself played out directly in it, a conflict he sided with and wanted to witness: the struggle of Old Russia against Soviet Revolutionary Russia. Yesenin's verses thus played a progressive political role in our country: they were not only a symbol of love but also a weapon for our cultural left at the time. It was only in the 1950s that this established image of Yesenin was replaced by a decadent Yesenin, entirely in line with the directives of Soviet criticism" Zábrana, Jan, *Potkat básníka*, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁶⁵ "While in the second half of the 1920s, Yesenin the prophet suited Hora's taste, in the collection of Hora's translations of Yesenin and Pasternak, published in 1947 after Hora's death, the author's anti-religious pose in "Inonia" is conspicuously softened. [...] Hora's translation solutions from 1927 often accurately capture what Yesenin actually says – unlike the later solutions, which tend to resort to overt lyricism and pathos. [...] Today, it is difficult to determine what prompted Hora to make all the quoted changes, which tone down Yesenin's anti-religious outbursts." Rubáš, Stanislav, *České překlady Jesenina a sovětská ideologie*, in: *Acta universitatis carolinae*, Philologica 1, Translatologica pragensia, 2019, p. 39.

Yesenin's works appeared in 1926, undertaken by Josef Hora, a prominent Czech poet and translator. Hora's translation presented a selective reading of Yesenin, emphasizing elements that aligned with the prevailing pro-Soviet sentiments of the time. This approach largely disregarded the poet's inherent ambivalence towards the Russian Revolution, instead casting him in a light that conformed to the ideological expectations of Soviet sympathizers. Zábřana frequently engages with the complex reception of Sergei Yesenin, critically analyzing how the Soviet authorities deliberately propagated a distorted image of the poet:

Za čtyřicet let od Jeseninovy smrti změnil se několikrát vztah k jeho dílu i v Sovětském svazu. Po básníkově sebevraždě se houfně začalo psát o nebezpečí jeseninštiny (pod tímto termínem se rozumělo opilství, chuligánské výtržnosti, erotická promiskuita, ideologická netečnost, přežitky minulosti, prostě to, čemu se kdysi říkalo bohéma). Před vlivem jesenštiny měla být údajně chráněná mládež, a protože žalobci Sokratů jsou si málokdy jistí tím, co je dobré a co je špatné umění, postarali se pro jistotu, aby při kampani proti jesenštině upadlo do odsluní i básníkově dílo.¹⁶⁶

Our primary focus is on Zábřana's translations of Yesenin's poems for the collection *Básně* (Poems, 1955), which serve as post-texts to the dossier we have previously examined, given the chronological proximity of these translations to his notes from the late 1940s. These translations are particularly significant for understanding the phase of Zábřana's literary development that we have analyzed thus far. Additionally, it is worth noting that, according to another entry, these were the first translations ever published by Zábřana.¹⁶⁷ As outlined in the introduction, this study aims to identify aesthetic excesses in the translations of the poems within this collection—excesses that reveal the polyphonic nature of Zábřana's evolving poetics. To understand the relationship between Zábřana and the poet he translated, as well as the motivations behind his specific translation choices, I will draw on Gideon Toury's norms. Regarding the preliminary coordinates of Zábřana's translations, it is crucial to comprehend the stance of Czech society in the 1950s towards Yesenin. In addition to Zábřana's contributions, the collection *Básně* included translations by

¹⁶⁶ "Over the forty years since Yesenin's death, attitudes toward his work have changed several times even within the Soviet Union. Following the poet's suicide, there was a surge of writing about the dangers of "Yeseninism" (a term that encompassed alcoholism, hooliganism, erotic promiscuity, ideological indifference, remnants of the past, essentially what used to be called bohemianism). The youth were supposedly to be protected from the influence of Yeseninism, and because the accusers of Socrates are seldom certain about what constitutes good and bad art, they ensured that during the campaign against Yeseninism, the poet's work also fell out of favor" Zábřana, Jan, *Potkat básníka*, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁶⁷ "Just a year after the publication of that treachery, the first selection of Yesenin's works since 1948 began to be prepared (thanks to Fikar and under his patronage), which was then published after 1955 and included my very first book-printed translations." Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., March/April 1980, p. 742.

several other Czech translators, notably Ladislav Fikar, whom we have identified as a significant exogenetic reference point. Zábrana himself remarked that this volume was published at a time when the prevailing image of Yesenin had already been overshadowed by a more decadent portrayal, one marginalized by the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, he contended that *Básně* was, at the time, the most comprehensive collection of Yesenin's poetry, even though it excluded some of his more controversial works.¹⁶⁸ Apparently, Yesenin's position in the Czech context of the period was so precarious that the book had to be "shielded" by a postface written by the literary historian Josef Rumler.¹⁶⁹ In this postface, Rumler stated:

[...] nás Čechy upoutávalo v Jeseninově poesii především to, co v ní bylo sovětského, ale naprosto ne dekadentní nálady, kterými Jesenin vzbuzoval zájem například u některých francouzských literátů. A mluvili se o vlivu „jeseninštiny“, neměla na nás Čechy opravdu žádný vliv a není náhodou, že jsme si u nás tenkrát nepřeložili téměř ani řádku z veršů poplatných chuligánství.¹⁷⁰

By adopting such measures to distance itself from Yesenin's "decadent tendencies", the book was able to be published. This strategy mirrors a practice that Zábrana himself employed during his career as a translator to facilitate the publication of the works he translated.¹⁷¹

One of Zábrana's main objectives with his translation of Yesenin, as he commented many years later, was to offer a more truthful interpretation of the poets who had to publish during the Soviet era and whose works were instrumentalized by the regime's propaganda:

Samozřejmě že jsem celý život pracoval s cenzurou v zádech a že jsem mohl dělat jen to, co tak či onak šlo [...] ale při tom všem jsem se snažil aspoň o něco: zdánlivě jen zkorigovat, ale de facto rozmetat zavedenou představu o ruské literatuře – přeložit autory, jimž oni ve své zaslepenosti a oblbenosti

¹⁶⁸ "Teprve v padesátých letech je u nás tento vžitý Jesenin nahrazen úpadkovým Jeseninem zcela podle směrnic sovětské kritiky. (...) Už koncem roku 1955 vycházejí však české překlady znova, a přestože do knihy nemohly být ještě zařazeny některé sporné básně (například Černý muž) přece je to nejúplnější Jeseninovský soubor u nás." Zábrana, Jan, *Potkat básníka*, op. cit., p. 25-26.

¹⁶⁹ "The volume includes an ideologically biased but information-rich afterword by the literary historian Josef Rumler. This afterword was presumably intended to ideologically endorse the entire book, as suggested by the publishing practices of the time." Rubáš, Stanislav, *České překlady Jesenina a sovětská ideologie*, op. cit., p. 44.

¹⁷⁰ "[...] we Czechs were primarily captivated by the Soviet elements in Yesenin's poetry, rather than the decadent moods that interested some French literary figures. And when discussing the influence of 'Yeseninism,' it truly had no impact on us Czechs, and it is no coincidence that we hardly translated a single line of verses that conformed to hooliganism." Rumler, Josef, *K novému českému výboru*, in Sergej Jesenin, *Básně*, Československý spisovatel, Praha, p. 339.

¹⁷¹ "In typesetting at Odeon was another volume of his Selected Works [...] to which, last autumn, I wrote a preface as part of my editorial duties, intended solely to 'endorse' the book and ensure that the text reached the reader." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., February/March 1974, p. 276.

sovětskou oficiální propagandou upřeli svou pozornost a «vypudili je z obrazu», autory, které obešli a zatajili – Babela, Platonova, Cvetajevou, Mandelštama, Bunina [...] ale I ukázat ve zcela jiném světě ty, které k nám uváděli ve zparchantělé podobě, ze «sověteského» zorného úhlu, jako třeba Jesenina a Paternaka.¹⁷²

Although the author made this comment many years after the publication, if we consider his interpretation of Yesenin in the 1940s, we can infer that the perception of Yesenin as an author “ruined” by Soviet propaganda was already present in his mind:

Jesenina mám stále raději, čím víc jej znám. Myslím, že kdybych uměl všechny básně z paměti, byl bych jimi úplně uřknut. Už několikrát jsem si všiml protimluvu v jeho díle. [...] ve své autobiografii na konci knihy říká, že stál cele na straně Října, se sedláckou úchylkou. Šla tehdy tato slova Jeseninovi od srdce? Nebo je napsal do svého vyznání jenom proto, aby sovětská vláda nesetřela jeho dílo z povrchu světa? Zdá se mi to pravděpodobné. Jesenin jako typický sedlák, milovník tklivého, starozákonného a začazeného žití ruského venkova, se musel dostat do rozporu s revolucí, která vlastně bořila, co on miloval. Je to slyšet z jeho básní. Sovětská revoluce vzala Jeseninovi předmět jeho básní, vzala mu jeho život a chtěla, aby žil nově, komunisticky. [...] Lze žít, ztratili-li jsme svůj život? „Nelze,“ zní Jeseninova odpověď v leningradském hotelu Angleterre v noci z 27. na 28. prosince 1925.¹⁷³

In addition to conveying his admiration for Yesenin, Zábrana's interpretation of the poet clearly underscores his perception of Yesenin as a figure marked by profound contradictions—a poet stripped of his primary source of inspiration and consequently fated to self-destruction. Zábrana rejects the notion that Yesenin could have genuinely embraced the ideals of the Soviet revolution, viewing it as a force that ultimately destroyed all that Yesenin cherished.

The analysis will employ specific segments of both the translation and the original text because, according to Toury, additions or omissions in the translation become clearer only through paired comparisons (coupled pairs). The first category of aesthetic excesses we will examine are “poetic concretizations”, which reveal several differences between how a poetic image is constructed in the translation and in the original text. Yesenin's poetics often rely on images to evoke a certain effect, drawing the reader into the rural world he

¹⁷² “Of course, I have worked my whole life with censorship breathing down my neck, and thus I could only do what, in one way or another, I managed to do. [...] But throughout all this, I have always tried to do at least one thing: ostensibly just correcting, but de facto dismantling the then prevalent image of Russian literature – translating authors on whom they, blinded and stupefied by official Soviet propaganda, had fixed their attention, ‘making them disappear from the face of the earth’ – authors who were rejected and concealed – Babel, Platonov, Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam, Bunin (...), and to completely reframe in a different light those authors introduced by us in a form degenerated from the “Soviet” point of view, such as Pasternak and Esenin.” *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, March 1982, p. 874.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, 19 December 1948, p. 89.

seeks to praise and depict. Zábřana will remain obsessed with the secret of Yesenin's works throughout his entire life, often wondering where lies the strength of his poems: "*Několik dobře vystižených, dobře nalezených (trefených) a dobře osvojených frází, které dojmají za všech okolností, zkombinovaných s malebnými přírodními obrázky... je tohle opravdu celé tajemství Jeseninovy poezie?*"¹⁷⁴

Spirituality is also a key element in Yesenin's poetry, closely tied to folklore and mythology. Many of his earlier poems exhibit a degree of immateriality that suggests the transcendence of his work. In Zábřana's adaptations, this aspect appears somewhat altered. The following example illustrates a higher degree of materiality and specificity in the imagery of the translated version:

Там, где капустные грядки
Красной водой поливает восход
Клененочек маленький матке
Зеленое вымя сосет.

Tam, kde **plá východ**, zelné řádky
rudou vodou zalévaje,
zelené vemeno své matky
malý javoreček ssaje¹⁷⁵ (Tam, kde plá východ, zelné řádky; 1° stanza)

Солдаты, солдаты, солдаты —
Сверкающий бич над смерчем.
Кто хочет свободы и братства,
Тому умирать нипочем.

Vojáci, vojáci řadoví —
Nad smrští **září bič jak louč.**
Ten, kdo chce volnost a bratrství
Umírat věru nemá proč (Nebeský tambor, 8° stanza)¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ "A few well-crafted, well-chosen, and well-mastered phrases that touch the heart in any situation, combined with picturesque natural imagery... is this really the entire secret of Yesenin's poetry?" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 327.

¹⁷⁵ Jesenin, S., *Básně*, ČS spisovatel, Praha, 1955, p. 12.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 70.

Скучно слушать под **небесным древом**
Взмах незримых крыл:
Не разбудишь ты своим напевом
Дедовских могил!

Křídla nebes snad pod **kříže dřevem**
slyšíš, zazní-li.
Neprobudíš nikdy však svým zpěvem
dědů mohyly.¹⁷⁷ (Dotančil déšť jarní po krajině, 2° stanza)

In the initial verses of the poem *Там, где капустные грядки* (*Tam, kde plá východ, zelné řádky*), Yesenin mentions “*There, where the cabbage beds are watered by the Red Water at sunrise.*” However, Zábrana translates this as “*There, where the **sunrise flames**, watering green rows with red water,*” specifying that the horizon is illuminated by the light of the sunset, thereby conveying a more concrete scenery.¹⁷⁸ This pattern continues in the other examples: in the second instance, drawn from the poem *Небесный барабанищик* (*Nebeský tambor*), Zábrana's version has the whip on the storm “glow like a torch,” adding an element absent in the original and offering a more specific image. Similarly, in the last quatrain, which comes from the poem *Проплясал, проплакал дождь весенний...* (*Dotančil déšť jarní po krajině*) the translator renders the image of the wooden cross more concrete, stating the material it is made of and removing the reference to its heavenly nature. These choices not only illustrate Zábrana's commitment to preserving the rhymes of Yesenin's text but also reveal a tendency toward emphasizing the materiality of the depicted scenery. This contrasts with the metaphysical character inherent in Yesenin's poetry. Another discernible category of excesses in these poems is characterized by instances of “verbal dynamism”:

Проплясал, проплакал дождь весенний,
Замерла гроза.
Скучно мне с тобой, Сергей Есенин,
Подымать глаза...

Dotančil dešť jarní po krajině,
Bouře šla už spat
Teskno mi, Sergeji Jesenine,

¹⁷⁷ Jesenin, S., *Básně*, op. cit p. 54.

¹⁷⁸ To underscore the consonance between the two authors, is particularly significant to highlight the verse referencing the “little juniper.” This image evokes Zábrana's earlier note, where he likewise employs the juniper as a symbolic motif (see p. 17).

S tebou poklekat¹⁷⁹ (Dotančil déšť jarní po krajině, 1° stanza)

Клубит и пляшет дым болотный...

Но и в кошме певучей тьмы

Неизреченностью животной

Напоены твои холмы.

Mlžný kouř tančí z blat jak divý...

Ze zpěvu tmy se dere ven

Hlas nevyřčený, ale živý,

každý les je jím napojen.¹⁸⁰ (Kraji, tvým deštěm konce není; 4° stanza)

Static images, like the “dying” or “frozen” storm in the first stanza presented (both translations being valid), are rendered dynamic by Zábřana, who transforms them through a more active portrayal, suggesting a state akin to falling asleep. Similarly, instead of remaining in the “singing robe of darkness”, the smoke emerging from the swamp “breaks out from the song of darkness”, implying a more violent and tumultuous nature. This transformation introduces a heightened sense of unease into the verses. Furthermore, as we will examine in the translations of other poetic alter-egos, Zábřana’s distinctive voice is most evident through his use of emotional intensifications. These instances highlight elements with particular pathos that, in the original poems, might have been perceived as neutral. Given that this pattern recurs throughout Zábřana's translations, and as noted by scholars, we will explore this phenomenon in greater detail:

В тучах дом мой **завертел**/Můj dům v mračnech **utápěl**¹⁸¹ (Kde je, kde můj rodný dům; 4° stanza)

Скромнен в песнях **дощатый** мост/jak lávka **rozvrzaná** jsem¹⁸² (Poslední básník ruské vesnice, 2° stanza)

По-смешному я сердцем влип /Hřej se mým srdcem, jen se hřej¹⁸³ (Jsi prostá jako všechny jsou, 2° stanza)

С отягченными веками, Я смотрю и смотрю на луну/Těžká víčka řezou mě a pálí¹⁸⁴ (Listí padá, listí vítr žene, 2° stanza)

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁸¹ Jesenin, S., *Básně*, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁸² Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁸³ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 102.

Лить зов над озерами сил/ Do boje na svět **prohnilý**¹⁸⁵ (Nebeský tambor, 11° stanza)

In this particular instance, Zábřana's re-elaboration is markedly evident, resulting in a profound alteration of the poetic impact. The modifications introduce a more intense and sober tone to the original verses. For example, the house no longer “whirls in the clouds”, but rather “drowns” in them. Similarly, the “modest wooden bridge” is transformed into a “trembling” bridge, presenting an image of anxiety and fragility; the heart is no longer merely “stuck” but becomes a source of heat; and the “burdened eyelids” are depicted as “cut and burn”. The concluding verse from the poem *Nebeský tambor* describes the world as “prohnilý”, or rotten, indicating a significant departure from the original text. This alteration, I contend, reflects a harsher and more critical perspective on the world, together with a more feverish and unstable tone that gives the impression that the one who speaks is a different Lyrical I.

These changes exemplify how Zábřana's translation not only shifts the imagery but also amplifies the emotional weight of the original text:

На тропу голубого поля
Скоро выйдет железный гость.
Злак овсяный, зарею пролитый,
Соберет его черная горсть.

Na cesty našich modrých polí
stroj vpadne silou železnou.
Ovesné klasy, plné slunce,
Vysbírá černou tlapou svou.¹⁸⁶ (Poslední básník ruské vesnice, 3° stanza)

Милый, милый, смешной дуралей, Ну куда он,
куда он гонится?
Неужель он не знает, что живых коней
Победила стальная конница?
Неужель он не знает, что в полях **бессиянных**
Той поры не вернет его бег,
Когда пару красивых степных россиянок
Отдавал за коня печенег?

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 96.

Milý, milý směšný hlupáček.
 Kampak, kampak? Letí, jen to hvízdá
 Neví snad, že živých koní trysk a **vzte**k
 Předhonila ocelová jízda?
 Cožpak neví, že dnes v našich polích **skomíravých**
 Nedohoní už ten **vě**k
 v kterém párem stepních Rusek plavých
 platíval za koně Pečeněg?¹⁸⁷ (Sorokoust, 9° stanza)

As Jonathan Culler notes, “*the fact that the rhyme unites two words together establishes a mutual relationship between their meanings.*”¹⁸⁸. In these two examples, several notable changes can be observed between the original poems and their translations, primarily due to the translator's efforts to preserve the rhyme scheme, which in turn creates a harsher perspective of the described scenes. In the first stanza, the original Russian text refers to a “steel guest” entering the blue trail, whereas Zábrana’s adaptation reimagines this image as a “machine that bursts into the trail with a strength of steel.” This alteration introduces a more violent depiction of the original scene, symbolizing the incursion of the modern world into an idyllic countryside. This could also be seen as a case of “concretization”, since Zábrana's reference to the train is more explicit than in the Russian poet's description. In the second stanza, derived from the poem *Сорокоу*с (Sorokoust), the translator not only heightens the tragic tone of the scene—the young horse unable to outrun the train—but also adds an additional rhyme that introduces a new layer of meaning. In the original, a literal translation might read, “does he not know that the living horses were defeated by the steel carriage?” Zábrana’s translation, however, introduces two new elements: “maybe he does not know that the living horses’ rage and gallop were defeated by the steel cavalry?” The use of the word “vztek” (“rage”), an addition by Zábrana, conveys more of a desire for vengeance than resignation and rhymes in the sixth verse with the word “věk” (“century”), prompting the reader to associate this sense of rage with a lost era. Furthermore, Zábrana's substitution of the adjective “бессиянный” (a Yesenin neologism that could be translated as “without light”) with the more concrete “skomíravý” (“dying”) adds to the portrayal's severity. This choice not only conveys a sense of finality and impending death but also emphasizes the harsher representation of a world in decline.

Bruno Carnevali, a noted scholar of Yesenin’s poetry, asserts that “*the image is the center of gravity, the authentic focal point of Yesenin's poetry. Everything else is a*

¹⁸⁷ Jesenin, Sergej, *Básně*, op. cit., p. 78.

¹⁸⁸ Culler, Jonathan, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 38.

deteriorating legend”,¹⁸⁹ underlying the importance of images in his poetry. Thus, it can be argued that Zábrana's decision to prioritize rhyme represents a strategic choice that reflects his personal tendencies, both as a translator and as a writer. The final two examples discussed illustrate the previously mentioned interpretation of Yesenin by Zábrana. In this view, Yesenin is depicted as a poet devastated by the loss of his former world, a poet who mourns and perceives the new world as a threatening and destructive force, which aligns it, in the way it is conveyed, with the translator's view. These tendencies in Zábrana's adaptations of Yesenin were also detected by Sergej Skorvid:

Totéž se dá říci o zachycení ambivalentního postoje Sergeje Jesenina – či jeho lyrického subjektu – ke změnám, jimiž procházel patriarchální venkov na úsvitu sovětské éry. „Poslední básník ruské vesnice“, za jakého bývá Jesenin ve shodě se Zábranovým překladem počátečního verše stejnojmenné básně označován, se v originále této básně jeví zároveň sebejistější i rezignovanější¹⁹⁰

A more emphasised idea of lost youth in Zábrana's translation of Yesenin is more evident in the following stanza from the poem *Листья падают, листья падают...* (*Listí padá, listí vítr žene*):

Чтоб под этою белою лунностью,
Принимая счастливый **удел**,
Я над песней не таял, не млея
И с чужою веселою юностью
О своей никогда не **жалел**.

Abych se zas v záři luny bílé
Jako kdysi v náhlém štěstí **chvěl**,
ve svých písních nelkal, neslzel
a pro svěží mládí svojí milé
na to své už víckrát **nevzpomněl**.¹⁹¹

In this stanza, several elements emerge that are more indicative of Zábrana's stylistic preferences than those of Yesenin. The dynamism of the second verse is particularly evident

¹⁸⁹ Carnevali, Bruno, *Esenin: poesie e poemetti*, Roma, Avanzini e Torraca, 1968, p. 9.

¹⁹⁰ “The same can be said about the depiction of Sergei Yesenin's— or his lyrical subject's— ambivalent stance towards the changes occurring in the patriarchal countryside at the dawn of the Soviet era. Referred to as the “last poet of the Russian village,” as reflected in Zábrana's translation of the opening verse of the eponymous poem, Yesenin in the original version of this poem appears both more self-assured and resigned.” Skorvid, Sergej, „*Nám byl jen kámen dán...*“: *K Zábranovým překladům z ruské literatury*, in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.) *Jan Zábrana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 152.

¹⁹¹ Jesenin, Sergej, *Básně*, op. cit., p. 280.

in Zábřana's choice to substitute the term “удел” (“fate”) with the verb “chvět” (“trembling”), reflecting a mode of expression more characteristic of Zábřana's distinctive style.¹⁹² This trembling quality in the early manifestations of Zábřana's lyrical “I” has also been observed by Jiří Trávníček:

I Zábřanova poezie při veškerém svém uzavření se do sebe občas propustí do svého území střípek agresivní reality, čímž se zákonitě vychyluje a tím se i donucuje hledat rovnováhu na nové, proklamativnější, více rozbourané rovině.[...] Ve všech těchto momentech se znatelně mění i tónina, ve které je promluva pronášena, a to směrem od harmonizujícího a mimočasového mélosu k pohnutí, zaujetí, ba i patosu. Stav se proměňuje v dění. [...] Zábřanovo lyrično, jakkoli čisté a kultivované, se chvěje katastrofickými předtuchami.¹⁹³

Furthermore, the final verse exhibits a striking similarity to themes present in one of Zábřana's poems from his Scout period, particularly in the depiction of night as an ostensibly positive entity. Zábřana's interpretation reinforces the concept of remembrance by employing the verb “vzpomenout” (“to recall”) in place of “жалеть” (“to feel sorry”), thereby intensifying the theme, especially when linked through rhyme with “chvět” (“to tremble”) and “slzet” (“to weep”).

The shifts observed between the two translations reveal several aspects of Zábřana's writing style, aligning with themes noted in the diaries from this initial dossier. As evidenced by entries from 1948 and 1949, the element of fire is symbolically connected to memory—the burning recollections of a past that the poet yearns for. In an entry dated September 23, 1948, Zábřana employs a similar imagery while contemplating Yesenin's life, underscoring the poet's preoccupation with these themes:

Je to má láska, Jeseninovy verše. Když o nich přemýšlíš a stopuješ život, o němž v nich mluví ten, kdo je napsal, vidíš, že vlastně Jesenin musel svůj život skoncovat, aby zůstal tím, čím je. Když člověk mnoho prožil, mládí když je pryč, není lépe nečekat na šediny a skončit život, který už by jen doutnal vzpomínkami po minulých požárech.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² “[...] Ale přestože jsem se *chvěl* stále jako zvon po úderu, přinutil jsem se, že jsem četl [...] Nejvíc mě *pálí*, že vím, kdo byl původcem té rány” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 31 January 1949, p. 112.

¹⁹³ “Zábřana's poetry, despite its tendency to lock itself inward, occasionally allows fragments of aggressive reality to penetrate its domain, inevitably causing a shift and forcing it to seek balance on a new, more declarative, and turbulent plane. [...] In all these instances, there is a noticeable change in the tone of the utterance, moving from a harmonizing and timeless melos to one marked by agitation, engagement, and even pathos. A state transforms into an event. [...] Zábřana's lyricism, however pure and cultivated, trembles with catastrophic premonitions.” Trávníček, Jiří, *Poezie poslední možnosti*, op. cit., p. 641-642.

¹⁹⁴ “It is my love, Yesenin's verses. When you think about them and trace the life spoken of by the one who wrote them, you see that Yesenin had to end his life in order to remain who he is. When a person has lived through a lot and youth is gone, isn't it better not to wait for gray hair and to end a life that would only smolder with memories of past fires?” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit. 24 September 1948, p. 61.

In this entry, Zábřana emphasizes the profound sense of loss experienced by Yesenin as a result of the Revolution. He contends that Yesenin could not continue living after losing everything, asserting that the poet was left merely striving for the past, symbolized by the “fires” he once knew. In a later note from the 1970s, he mentions that he never encountered such strong sense of resignation then in Yesenin poem *Отговорила роща золотая* (*The golden birch-tree grove has fallen silent*), where a fire burn without being able to warm anyone.¹⁹⁵ The sense of loss and yearning for the past is further amplified in Zábřana's translation of the subsequent stanza from the poem *Мне осталась одна забава....* In the original, the poet claims to have caused scandal in order to shine brighter, whereas in Zábřana's rendering, the emphasis shifts to a desire to “shine once again”. This subtle change reflects Zábřana's nuanced interpretation and deepens the thematic resonance of the poem:

Золотые, далекие дали!
Все сжигает житейская мрень.
И похабничал я и скандалил
Для того, чтобы ярче гореть.

Zlatý, rodný kraji v minulosti
Všechno sžihá každodenní svět.
Sprostačil jsem, dělal výtržnosti,
Abych se moh znovu rozhořet.¹⁹⁶

I propose that this nostalgia for the past is accentuated in Zábřana's interpretation of Yesenin's poetry due to his own sense of deprivation from his world. It is plausible that the resonance between Zábřana and Yesenin lies in their shared relationship with the past, particularly its divergence from their present realities. The unifying factor is, once again, nostalgia. Yesenin's affection for pre-Revolutionary Russia was obliterated by the upheaval, and although he initially embraced the Soviet changes as a vision of a new future, he eventually felt alienated from this new world. This dissonance led him to adopt the persona of the “chuligan”, the bandit of the streets and taverns, reflecting the contradictions between his old and new worlds. This mask of the bandit Yesenin wore in public to hide away from the rest of the world might have reminded Zábřana of his own stance towards the world,

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., *Ibid.*, September/October 1975, p. 406.

¹⁹⁶ Jesenin, Sergej, *Básně*, op. cit., p. 95.

since he states in his diaries that he has the habit of wearing a mask in public to hide his true self.¹⁹⁷ This sense of an era's end and a deep nostalgia for a vanished world strongly echoes Zábřana's own experiences. Reflecting on this years later, in an entry dated December 11, 1976, Zábřana articulates what Yesenin symbolized for him during his youth: "*Toho Jesenina jsem loni nepřekládal. Bral jsem ho jako lék proti blížící se smrti. Lék známý z mládí. Lék v opuštěnosti, mlčícím zoufalství, zbavenosti přátel, v chřadnutí, lék ze začátků, braný na konci*".¹⁹⁸ In his diaries from 1948 to 1949, Zábřana laments the world he lost following the Victorious February. The parallels between Zábřana's experiences and those of Yesenin become more pronounced when considering Zábřana's scout period. Nature played a pivotal role not only in Zábřana's personal development but also in scout education, which emphasized an appreciation for nature as fundamental to personal growth. The subsequent severance from nature, imposed by the relentless forces of history, left both Zábřana and Yesenin in a new and alien environment. It can be argued that both poets' works evolved along similar trajectories: beginning with a lyrical engagement and harmonious connection with nature and later shifting to another world deprived of nature's protection, prompting nostalgia. In the afterword of another collection of Yesenin's translated poems, *Slaměný měsíc* (*Straw moon*, 1981), Zábřana argues that this loss that Yesenin experienced was what led him to become a poet:

Žádný ruský básník první poloviny dvacátého století nebyl tak spontánně čten a milován jako Jesenin. [...] Je možné souhlasit s názorem, že tomuto bytostnému vesničanovi zasela bouřlivá revoluční léta do duše zmatek a nepřinesla mu nic než rozpory. Ale kdo ví, zda právě rozbití celého myšlenkového světa, rozkolísání všech hodnot a nenaplněná touha po vnitřní jednotě a harmonii nebyla právě tím, co chlapec od Rjazaně potřeboval, aby se stal básníkem?¹⁹⁹

I contend that Zábřana's characterization of the emergence of Yesenin's poetics—*"[...] But who knows whether it was precisely the shattering of his entire intellectual world, the destabilization of all values, and the unfulfilled longing for inner unity and harmony that*

¹⁹⁷ "Jsem odpoután a odlomen, nejistý, nespokojený [...] poután ve své masce arogantní odloučenosti" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 30 November 1948, p. 83.

¹⁹⁸ "I didn't translate Yesenin last year. I took him as a remedy against the approaching death. A remedy known from my youth. A remedy in loneliness, in silent despair, in the absence of friends, in decline—a remedy from the beginning, taken at the end." Ibid., *Ibid.*, p. 418.

¹⁹⁹ "No Russian poet of the first half of the twentieth century was read and loved as spontaneously as Yesenin. [...] It is possible to agree with the opinion that the tumultuous revolutionary years sowed confusion in the soul of this quintessential villager and brought him nothing but contradictions. But who knows whether it was precisely the shattering of his entire intellectual world, the destabilization of all values, and the unfulfilled longing for inner unity and harmony that the boy from Ryazan needed to become a poet." Zábřana, Jan, *Doslov* in: Jesenin, Sergej, *Slaměný měsíc*, Praha, Lidové nakladatelství, 1981, p. 431–432.

the boy from Ryazan needed to become a poet.”—aptly mirrors the formation of Zábrana’s own poetic development.

Yesenin’s distinctive writing style, which encompasses not only musicality and rhyme but also the rich imagery and iconography of his poetry, posed a significant challenge for the translator. The choice confronted by Zábrana was whether to preserve the original imagery at the expense of rhyme or to prioritize rhyme, potentially altering the imagery. Zábrana opted for the latter approach, choosing to emphasize rhyme even if it meant substantial modifications to the imagery of the texts. This choice underscores one of Zábrana’s recurring tendencies, as evident from his notes: a particular focus on the formal aspects of poetry. Thus, applying Gideon Toury’s framework, it can be argued that Zábrana’s translation of Yesenin aligns more closely with the acceptancy norm, as evidenced by the numerous modifications observed in the poems analyzed thus far. Moreover, it is apparent that the translations were reworked according to Zábrana’s personal criteria, ultimately rendering a more resigned and tortured portrayal of the lyrical subject. This reimagining of Yesenin’s verse reflects and resonates with Zábrana’s own sensibilities, revealing a deep interplay between the translator’s inner world and the original text.

Finally, based on our analysis, it can be inferred that the development of Zábrana’s writing during this early period, spanning the latter half of the 1940s, progressed through a series of distinct phases. Initially, his work was characterized by natural lyricism, deeply rooted in the ideals of eternal youth and a strong connection with nature. These themes were heavily influenced by the principles of scouting, which emphasized a strict moral code and a sense of duty. The concept of eternity, coupled with his meticulous diary-keeping, heightened Zábrana’s sensitivity to the passage of time. During his youth, these aspects were further enhanced by his readings of Wolker, Yesenin, and Fikar, all of whom placed significant emphasis on nature in their poetry. The language used in Zábrana’s early entries is more polished and marked by a higher use of literary expression, including the insertion of entire poems. However, as the political situation worsened in 1948, more serious matters began to dominate Zábrana’s reflections. His mode of expression became more colloquial, focusing on the everyday events of a high school student. Despite this shift, his entries remained interwoven with intertextual references to the works of other writers and literary critics. His studies led him to experiment with language, often mixing multiple languages within a single sentence.

The deteriorating political landscape also prompted Zábrana to thematize core issues such as anxiety and a sense of encirclement, which fueled his longing to return to

the past. This desire to recover the past became a primary impetus for his poetry, with his works serving as a means to reclaim lost time. The natural landscape continued to be a central theme in his poetry, but its character evolved, becoming sadder and more distant—a symbol of the world he lost after the rise of Communism in Czechoslovakia. In conclusion, Zábřana's writing journey illustrates a profound transformation from the idealistic and nature-centric perspectives of his early years to the more somber and reflective tones of his later work. His initial inspiration from nature and scouting ideals gave way to a more complex interplay of personal and political themes, as he grappled with the loss of his former world and sought solace in the lyrical expressions of memory and nostalgia.

Second dossier: Notes from the first half of the 50s

“Žije se matně, jako v prezervativu, opravdu.

A také duše je větší v záhybech, opravdu.”²⁰⁰

The second dossier aims to analyze one of the smallest selections included in the published volume of Zábrana’s diaries: the *Notes from the first half of the 50s*. This section

²⁰⁰ “Life feels dim, as if in a condom, truly. And the soul is larger in its folds, truly” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., 162.

comprises a series of scattered entries that Zábřana recorded during the 1950s, a period marked by significant upheavals in his life. Foremost among these was the imprisonment of both his parents under false charges. Zábřana's mother was arrested in 1949 and, in May 1950, was sentenced to 18 years in prison. In that same year, the young Zábřana graduated from Humpolec High School and subsequently sought admission to the program in Classical Philology at Prague's Faculty of Arts. However, his application was rejected due to "completely inadequate political prerequisites for study".²⁰¹ As an alternative, Zábřana enrolled at the Roman Catholic Cyril and Methodius Theological Faculty, from which he was expelled in 1952 after only four semesters. In 1951, his father was arrested and, in 1952, sentenced to 10 years in prison. Left alone and deprived of his family's property, Zábřana moved to Prague that same year to sustain himself financially. After a series of unstable jobs, he began working at the Tatra enamel factory in Smíchov. Between 1952 and 1953, he trained as a locksmith at the Tatra Smíchov wagon factory and subsequently worked as a grinder at the Smalt cooperative in Holešovice and Radotín. During this period, Zábřana also established contact with several intellectuals who operated outside the official cultural spheres. Among them were some of the most significant Czech artistic and political figures of the 20th century: the aforementioned Jiří Kolář, Josef Škvorecký, Josef Jedlička, Václav Havel, Vladimír Holan, and Bohumil Hrabal.

The early 1950s also marked one of the harshest periods of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia. Any deviation from the official party line was labelled "anti-revolutionary" or "bourgeois" and was subjected to severe persecution. Evidence for such persecution was often fabricated to suit each case, leading to the condemnation of numerous intellectuals and writers through fraudulent trials. Cultural expression was under stringent censorship; the only permitted literary orientation was Socialist Realism, which mandated that literature serve the purpose of educating the masses to build the radiant future of socialism. This approach dictated that acceptable genres included the didactic novel, agitprop poetry, and works that celebrated the virtues of the working class. Conversely, any literature that explored the inner world of the individual—an aspect critical to post-war literary sensibilities—was deemed unworthy and reactionary. This ban encompassed psychological novels, Catholic literature, and surrealism. Consequently, many writers chose exile, while others remained in the country, joining the early efforts to create an underground community of unofficial literature—the nascent stages of the

²⁰¹ Quinn, Justin, *Poezie ve dvojím ohni: transnacionalismus a studená válka*, Praha, Univerzita Karlova, nakladatelství Karolinum, 2018., p. 77.

Czechoslovak samizdat, with which Zábrana had apparently nothing to do with, despite being in contact with some of his exponents. Despite being marked by profound loneliness, this period in Zábrana's life proved to be highly productive in terms of his literary output, as he continued both writing and translating. It was during this time that he composed and conceived his three (and only) poetry collections. Furthermore, it was in this period that he established himself as a translator, a role that would become his primary occupation. In 1955, he joined the Translators' Circle with his translations of Sergei Yesenin's poems. Based on his literary estate, Zábrana worked on several poetry collections up until 1954, continuously revising and refining them:

Pořádání autorovy básnické pozůstalosti dokládá, že už hluboko v padesátých letech Zábrana své texty (bez sebemenší naděje na publikování) také komponoval do celků, které opakovaně přepracovával a cizeloval, takže jak znění jednotlivých básní, tak složení souborů zůstávalo otevřené. Do roku 1954 víme kromě Černé lyriky, Análů a Let s Helmuthem ještě o souborech a s názvy Motonónní básně, Únor 1954, a Pásmo.²⁰²

During this period, Zábrana was consciously engaged in developing a distinct literary style. From an artistic perspective, this era marks a significant evolution in his poetics, characterized by a notable shift toward a more raw and unembellished form of expression. This stylistic transformation appears to have been influenced by the artistic ethos of Group 42, a Czech avant-garde collective known for its commitment to realism, urban themes, and a stark, often unsettling portrayal of modern life:

Již ve čtyřicátých letech byl ovšem Zábrana hluboce zasažen věcným civilismem Skupiny 42, zejména ranými sbírkami Kolářovými a Kainarovými, a hledal cestu, jak tento básnický, ale i myšlenkový a etický impulz propojit s vlastním básnickým talentem. Je pozoruhodné, jak v letech 1953–54 do jeho veršů krok za krokem proniká syrová věcnost, nelibivá scenerie města a epičnost.²⁰³

²⁰² Petruželková, Adéla, *Ediční poznámka* in: Zábrana, Jan, *Básně a povídky*, Brno, Host, 2021, p. 592.

²⁰³ "Already in the 1940s, Zábrana was deeply influenced by the factual civilism of Group 42, especially by the early collections of Kolář and Kainar, and he sought a way to connect this poetic, as well as intellectual and ethical impulse, with his own poetic talent. It is remarkable how, in the years 1953-54, a raw objectivity, unappealing urban scenery, and epic quality step by step began to permeate his verses" Šulc, Jan, *Zaknihovaný život Jana Zábrany*, in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.) *Jan Zábrana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit, p. 13.

Between October 1954 and May 1957, he also composed thirteen short stories (at least those that have been discovered), all of which were published posthumously. Seven of these stories appeared in 1993 in a collection titled *Sedm povídek (Seven Stories)*, while in 2012, six additional stories were discovered and subsequently added to the previously published works in a new edition simply called *Povídky (Stories)*. These narratives are often set in the milieu of the factory, a setting Zábřana was familiar with from the early 1950s. They exhibit several characteristics indicative of the influence of Group 42, including the extreme realism of the plots, which center on the lives of ordinary workers. These characters express themselves in colloquial Czech, with the narrative conveyed through their perspectives, devoid of the intervention of an omniscient authorial voice.²⁰⁴ Zábřana's close association with Jiří Kolář and his literary circle, which he used to meet and hang out with, was instrumental in fostering not only this new poetic view, but also his engagement with Anglo-American literature. Kolář, a leading figure in Czech avant-garde circles, was deeply involved in translating key American authors such as Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg. Through this collaboration and intellectual exchange, Zábřana was introduced to the innovative stylistic and thematic elements characteristic of these authors.²⁰⁵ The year 1954 also marks a pivotal moment in Zábřana's literary development, as it was when he met the renowned writer and literary critic Josef Škvorecký. This encounter sparked a long-lasting friendship that would significantly influence Zábřana, particularly from an artistic standpoint. Škvorecký, a profound connoisseur of Anglo-American literature, channeled his deep appreciation for this literary tradition into his novels, which are characterized by their dynamic use of dialogue to propel narrative action and a distinct incorporation of jazz music—a hallmark of his writing style. Škvorecký's engagement with American literature, especially with its nuanced dialogue and rhythmic qualities, provided Zábřana with new perspectives on narrative techniques and thematic exploration.

In 1956, as discussed in the introduction, Zábřana's poetry gained wider recognition when he contributed several poems to the anthology *Life is Everywhere (Život je všude)*, where he emerged as one of the most prominently featured poets. This anthology also featured the works of Zábřana's close literary contemporaries—Bohumil Hrabal, Josef Škvorecký, and Václav Havel—all of whom were integral to his intellectual circle. Edited by

²⁰⁴ Klímová, Kamila, *Postava jako zrcadlo každodennosti*, in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.) *Jan Zábřana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 39.

²⁰⁵ Kalivodová, Eva, *Objevování Ezry Pounda* in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.) *Jan Zábřana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 227.

Jiří Kolář and Josef Hiršal, the anthology was a samizdat project conceived as a form of protest against the prevailing literary constraints of the period. It was reportedly preceded by two events organized by Václav Havel in 1955 under the same title, *Life is Everywhere*, which aimed to showcase the emerging generation of Czech poets. These poets regarded Group 42 as the last authentic source of poetic inspiration within the literary landscape of the time.²⁰⁶

Literary scholar Michal Špirit notes that these authors, including Zábrana, were profoundly influenced not only by American literature, which provided them with fresh approaches to narrative form and style but also by the work of the Czech poet Vladimír Holan.²⁰⁷ The selection available to us, *Zápisky z první poloviny 50. let (Notes from the First Half of the 1950s)*, opens with a visit Zábrana made to Vladimír Holan's residence, followed by his recollections of the conversation that ensued. According to the diarist, this encounter occurred on March 7, 1951. Zábrana's account is rendered with a strikingly vivid, almost cinematic quality, presenting the scene of the meeting much like a script. The author begins by providing a succinct yet evocative description of the interiors of Holan's house: "*Dobrovského dům na Kampě. Vchod vraty, kde stojí nádoby s popelem. Na dveřích je vizitka. Vychází nějaká starší žena. Zve dál "Nesvlékejte si kabát, tady to protahuje." Celkem nepořádek. Vlevo velké police na knihy, plné. Stůl se sodovkou. Krabice cigaret. Místnost rozdělená na tři poloddělené pokoje*".²⁰⁸ With minimal yet evocative details, the authors succeed in imbuing the surrounding space with a sense of presence, exemplifying a case of chronotopic agglomeration. This careful construction of the setting serves as a precursor to the recounting of several discussions that Zábrana held with Holan. Notably, only Holan's dialogues are directly transcribed in the text, though the level of accuracy in capturing his exact words remains uncertain. In contrast, Zábrana's contributions to the conversation are presented through indirect speech and rendered in the first person, as illustrated in the following example: "*«Jak jste ke mně přišel?» Říkám, že jsem se dověděl od spolužáka, kde bydlí. Potom mu říkám, že jsem v 48. četl v Lidovkách Fikarovo ocenění jeho Lyriky*".²⁰⁹ The two writers engage in a discussion

²⁰⁶ Catalano, Alessandro, *Rudá záře nad literaturou*, Brno, Host, 2010, p. 240.

²⁰⁷ Špirit, Michael, *Padesát let: letopočet krásy a „neskutečný umělci“*, in: *Život je všude. Almanach z roku 1956*, Praha, Paseka, 2005, p. 283.

²⁰⁸ "Dobrovský's house in Kampa. The entrance is through a gate, where containers of ash are standing. There's a nameplate on the door. An older woman comes out. She invites us in, saying, "Don't take off your coat, there's a draft here." It's fairly untidy. On the left, large shelves full of books. A table with soda water. A box of cigarettes. The room is divided into three semi-separated spaces" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 145.

²⁰⁹ "How did you find me?' I said I found out from a classmate where he lives. Then I told him that in '48, I read Fikar's review of his *Lyrics* in *Lidovky*" Ibid., *ibid*.

about the prevailing political climate, particularly focusing on Holan's prohibition from publishing and how other prominent authors of the time were navigating the transformed landscape of the cultural sphere. They comment, for instance, on the actions of Vítězslav Nezval, a surrealist writer who, following the events of February, began aligning himself with the Party. This conversation with Holan reveals that Zábrana's approach to documenting encounters has remained largely consistent since the 1940s. He continues to meticulously record dialogues, not merely summarizing them, but striving to faithfully reproduce them as he heard them, with a focus on capturing the nuances and immediacy of the spoken word.

The notes in this selection are notably more extensive than those observed in earlier entries. Unlike the more straightforward “regular” entries previously encountered, which typically detailed the author's daily life, these notes predominantly reflect the author's contemplations on various subjects, particularly his existential situation, contemporary political issues and his perspectives on literature. It appears that, at least from this selection, the diary has evolved no longer serve as record of daily activities, but it is crystalizing in a platform for displaying and develop ideas. Zábrana's expression in this period is markedly more refined and contemplative. The fragments often resemble personal confessions or philosophical inquiries, with the author frequently posing rhetorical questions as though engaging in a dialogue with an unseen interlocutor. Judging from what he notes down, it is not hard to believe that in that period the writer was crafting the main lines of a writing style, and that he was working on his poems. The entries are characterized by a sense of gravity and solemnity, as Zábrana articulates not only literary approaches, but also his moral principles with an elevated tone, reflecting a profound engagement with the intellectual and emotional currents of his time:

To není doba klidu a spočinutí. Toto je doba velké přípravy. Sebezachování a přežití, to je hlavní, ovšem. Ale je možno pracovat na sobě, aby jednou, až přejde doba přežívání, byl člověk plnější [...] Přijde-li světlejší čas, bude to výborné a dobré. [...] Nepřijde-li? Tak to bude prostředek, jak se prokousat touto polovírou a polonevírou do jasného rozhodnutí. [...] Aspoň teď ještě není chvíle k malověrnosti. Jesenin žil ještě 8 let, Pasternak žije dosud. Je to heroické, člověk, kterému se vzalo vše, co tvořilo jeho život, ale člověk který dosud žije. Asi ne už básník, ale jak neobdivovat oázu uprostřed pouště, i když je to jen pár stromů, které by jinde ničím nepoutaly?²¹⁰

²¹⁰ “This is not a time for peace and rest. This is a time of great preparation. Self-preservation and survival are the main concerns, of course. But one can work on oneself so that, one day, when the time of mere survival has passed, one becomes more complete. [...] If a brighter time comes, that will be excellent and good. [...] And if it does not come? Then it will be a means to get through this state of half-faith and half-doubt toward a clear resolution. [...] At least now is not a time for faint-heartedness. Yesenin lived for another

In this note, Zábřana emerges as a slightly less skeptical figure. He speaks of survival and self-improvement, drawing inspiration from two of his literary idols, Yesenin and Pasternak. Both figures, having endured the rise of Communism, exemplify the fracture Zábřana himself experienced—a fracture that Yesenin also confronted. The fact that Pasternak remained alive provided Zábřana with considerable motivation, likely serving as a model for navigating his own challenging circumstances. Same as him, also Pasternak was deprived of everything, and yet he was still living at the time. Zábřana's renewed determination is evident in a note dated October 27, 1951, where he states, "*Já nechci už dál opevňovat trosky. Já chci stavět nový dům.*" This expresses his desire to move beyond living in ruins and to build anew. In another entry without date, he describes his situation with deep melancholy, wondering if he might be ever able to improve himself: "*Samoto, osamělosti! Těžká za jarních večerů. Smrtící! Jak je třeba si někdy promluvit s někým! Jak je třeba rozumět si aspoň s jedním člověkem nefalešně. [...] Může člověk být jiný než je? Může na sobě něco změnit? Ze své vůle a ze svého rozhodnutí? Nebo je v podstatných rysech určen?*".²¹¹

The sense of loneliness that permeated his diaries in 1948 is still present with him, deepened by a need for truth that he does not apparently recognize in the world which surrounds him. As we seen in the first entry presented, Zábřana is seeking renewal. Despite this aspiration, he remains acutely aware of the constraints that have shaped his life, reflecting on the inescapable sense of fate that has accompanied him since his youth. He engages deeply with the concept of fate, contemplating its implications with a focus on its passive nature. Zábřana grapples with the trajectory of his life, endeavouring to make sense of it and find meaning amidst the struggle. His reflections reveal an ongoing internal conflict, as he seeks to reconcile his experiences with his aspirations, striving to forge a path forward despite the remnants of his past hardships: "*Je nutno řešit svůj osud? Není lépe čekat, až bude řešen? Ale je můj osud, můj úděl, sudba, los, všechna ta čtyři slova jsou pasivní. Což se nelze vzepřít dříve, dokud se na vše nedíváme z odstupu?*"²¹² In a

8 years, Pasternak is still alive. It is heroic — a person from whom everything that made up his life has been taken away, but who still lives. Perhaps no longer a poet, but how can one not admire an oasis in the middle of the desert, even if it is just a few trees that would not attract attention elsewhere?" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 151.

²¹¹ "Solitude, loneliness! Heavy on spring evenings. Deadly! How necessary it is sometimes to talk to someone! How necessary it is to truly understand at least one person, without pretense. [...] Can a person be different from what they are? Can they change something about themselves? By their own will and decision? Or are they fundamentally predetermined in their essential traits?" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 151.

²¹² "Is it necessary to resolve one's fate? Would it not be better to wait until it resolves itself? But my fate, my destiny, fortune, lot—all four of these words are passive. Is it not possible to resist earlier, before viewing everything from a distance?" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 153.

note from 19th December 1951 he writes that: “*Můj život! Nic z něho nežít jinak, nic neupravovat, takový je, takový ať zůstane*”,²¹³ which enhances the idea of the impossibility to change the past. However, this is not necessarily a negative aspect. In that same note, the diarist starts connecting the unavoidable of fate not only with his existential stance towards outer reality, but also with the way he produces his writing:

Od svých let v obecné škole jsem nepoužíval při psaní gumu. Je to odporná věc. Pálil jsem, škrtal, přepisoval. Všechny věci mají své místo. I špatné. [...] Ať říká Gide, že na životě je nekrásnější to, že se píše z jedné vody načisto, že na něm nelze nic korigovat; má pravdu. V tomhle mu rozumím. Je nemožné tvořit svůj život, jako se píše román, tady se fantazii cosi vzpírá a nejlepší pravděpodobnost je nespolehlivá. Já mám ten dojem, že je směšné říkat si, že píšu svůj život, vyplňuji stále jenom jeho dotazníky. Jsem-li unaven, je to slabé, někdy dělám kaňky, tímhle perem si nejsem nikdy jist. A pak se nedá než obrátit stránku a mít radost (nebo úzkost), že další je dosud čistá. Z téhle knihy se nedají trhat listy. [...] Pero lze odložit jen jedenkrát, víte kdy, až pak nadobro.²¹⁴

According to this entry, Zábrana hated to erase what he had wrote, because even bad things could be of some use. He connects this concept to a way of writing without any form of correction, hinting to the activity of keeping his journals. By stating that it is not possible to create a life in the way a novel is written, he alludes to the fact that his creative stance is based on the immediate registration of reality, which cannot be erased afterward. This does not bring clarity to him, but he can be reassured by the fact that he will find another page of his diary which will be empty. Reassured or anxious, as this duality is always present in him. But one cannot tear away the pages of the diary: everything stays there, with the heaviness and the weakness of each word for the diarist to see. We can therefore argue that everything could potentially become part of the creative process of the author, every experience that came from his life could be re-written and reused. Zábrana further develops this concept of art through life, when in another note he outlines his idea of what art should be:

²¹³ “My life! Not to live anything in it differently, not to adjust anything—let it be as it is, and let it remain so” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 155.

²¹⁴ “Since my years in elementary school, I have not used an eraser while writing. It is a repulsive thing. I would burn, cross out, and rewrite. Everything has its place, even the bad things. [...] Let Gide say that the most beautiful thing about life is that it is written in one go, that nothing can be corrected; he is right. In this, I understand him. It is impossible to create one's life as if writing a novel; here, something resists imagination, and the best probability is unreliable. I have the impression that it is ridiculous to say I am writing my life; I am constantly just filling out its questionnaires. If I am tired, it is weak; sometimes I make blots; I am never sure with this pen. And then, there is nothing to do but turn the page and feel joy (or anxiety) that the next one is still blank. You cannot tear pages out of this book. [...] The pen can only be put down once, you know when, only then for good” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 155.

Psát verše, psát mínění, psát dopisy, knihy. Nic z toho nedělám a měl bych to dělat všechno. (...) Někdo dovede zkušenost ze života a zkušenost života využít pro literaturu. A u mne to bylo právě opačné. Čím silnější jsem prožíval svůj osobní život, byl dospělejší, vidoucnejší, tím těžší bylo vytrhnout se z něho a psát o něm, ne v něm. Což k umění se roste jenom z umění, to jest z destilovaného života. Vede život jen k životu? Jaký je odstup mezi životní zkušeností a tvorbou? Život musí být základem. Ale cokoli z něho může být východiskem. Třeba sen. Sen je také část života. Z praktického hlediska je život první a činnost celých našich dnů a celých nocí, to je existence v čase. Žijeme i tehdy, když spíme. Život není podmíněn vědomím života. Je umělecké dílo výsek života? Je to jeho vybraná a upravená část?²¹⁵

The influence of Group 42 becomes increasingly apparent in Zábrana's reflections, particularly in his emphasis on the connection between literature and real life. He asserts that a work of art must be grounded in actual experience, marking a significant shift from his earlier views on poetic creation in the 1940s. This period also highlights Zábrana's struggle with incorporating his own experiences into his writing. He observes that the more intimately he is connected to an experience, the more challenging it becomes to effectively convey it through his art. This observation aligns with our earlier findings, which suggest that Zábrana's creative process required a degree of detachment to produce the desired artistic effect, as we have seen in the previous set of diaries, where distance in the author's words represented for him one of the sources of his writing. Furthermore, Zábrana's reflections extend to the role of dreams in an individual's life. He considers dreams to be an integral part of lived experience, despite their unconscious nature, arguing that they are part of the continuous flow of time. This perspective suggests that for Zábrana, life is defined by its temporal unfolding, regardless of whether it occurs in conscious or unconscious states. Then the author poses a crucial question: is art a piece of life? A piece taken from it and corrected, improved? He provides an answer in the following notes, but we should dwell upon another intriguing aspect of these reflections: the intended audience of Zábrana's musings. Are these questions directed at himself, or are they meant for an external interlocutor? This ambiguity invites further exploration into

²¹⁵ "Writing verses, writing opinions, writing letters, books. I do none of these things, yet I should be doing them all. (...) Some people are able to use life experience and the experience of life for literature. But for me, it was quite the opposite. The more intensely I experienced my personal life, the more mature and perceptive I became, the harder it was to tear myself away from it and write about it, rather than within it. Does one grow into art only through art itself, that is, through distilled life? Does life only lead to life? What is the distance between life experience and creation? Life must be the foundation. But anything from it can be a starting point, even a dream. A dream is also a part of life. From a practical perspective, life comes first, and the activity of all our days and nights is existence in time. We live even when we sleep. Life is not conditioned by the awareness of life. Is a work of art a segment of life? Is it a selected and arranged part of it?" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 153.

the nature of his self-dialogue and the broader implications of his philosophical inquiries. In a subsequent entry, Zábřana continues to grapple with the definition of life:

Zkuste říci, co je život. Nepovede se vám to. Je nedefinovatelný. A slepíte-li definici, bude to schema bezobsažné jako smrt sama, a ne podstata života. A s poezií to nemůže být jinak. Verše nemusí být poezií. A často nám některá místa v románech rvou srdce víc než dest sbírek veršů. A dnes je vůbec složité psát básně. (...) Všechno na světě se dá vidět nově a stále jinak. S každou chvílí se naše nazírání se mění. Co bylo významné, je vedlejší, a co jsme přecházeli, je náhle otázkou života a smrti. Je těžko mluvit po svém, necítíme-li po svém a nevidíme-li svýma očima. Poezie by měla být něco jako restaurování starých obrazů. Nebo jako letní dest, který obnovuje zaprašenou krajinu, její barvy a tvary, které jsme si navykli přijímat s prachem.²¹⁶

In Zábřana's view, life possesses no fixed substance, as it continuously shifts according to the perspective of the one experiencing it. Life, therefore, manifests in numerous forms, each contingent upon the observer's stance. The role of poetry, he asserts, is to provide a singular and unique perspective on life. He likens poetry to the "restoration of old images", as it revitalizes life by offering a fresh vantage point, unveiling aspects that previously lay concealed. In the same passage, Zábřana elaborates on his conceptualization of poetry through a series of vivid metaphors: *"Without harmony, there is nothing. You may violate it a hundred times, but you will only succeed if you never forget that it exists. [...] You must not lose the ground beneath your feet, but if your wings are burned, it is equally tragic. And that music inside, that sea, which is always in motion, must never dry up."* Here, poetic inspiration is metaphorically rendered as an endless music, a perpetual wave that continuously returns, signifying a dynamic, inexhaustible creative force. Yet, amidst these ceaseless impulses, Zábřana underscores the necessity of maintaining a delicate equilibrium—a balance that must be achieved between extremes, such as vulgarity and kitsch, or between helplessness and creative incapacity. In this context, Zábřana appears to be reflecting on his own position as a diarist; he does not write from the standpoint of a professional writer but rather from a marginal, almost

²¹⁶ "Try to say what life is. You won't succeed. It's indefinable. And if you manage to piece together a definition, it will be a lifeless scheme, as empty as death itself, and not the essence of life. And with poetry, it can't be any different. Verses don't necessarily make poetry. And often certain passages in novels tear at our hearts more than ten collections of verse. Today, writing poetry is particularly difficult. (...) Everything in the world can be seen in new and constantly changing ways. With each moment, our perception shifts. What was once significant becomes secondary, and what we once overlooked suddenly becomes a matter of life and death. It's hard to speak in your own voice if you don't feel for yourself or see with your own eyes. Poetry should be like restoring old paintings. Or like a summer rain, refreshing the dusty landscape, bringing out its colors and shapes, which we had grown accustomed to seeing only through the veil of dust." Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 154.

clandestine corner, capturing fleeting glimpses of reality. Simultaneously, he is acutely aware of his powerlessness, constrained by the socio-political realities of his time and relegated to the margins of his own notes. Thus, Zábrana's conception of poetry is deeply tied to the notion of harmony. It is a harmony that must be found in all things, even amidst discord and contradiction.

In a later entry dated February 26, 1953, Zábrana emphasizes that this balance in poetry is maintained by a particular tension, without which poems would merely be aggregations of words, devoid of a true essence or inner life. What is particularly compelling, however, is that Zábrana also refers to this tension as an "irritation": "*Mnoho lidí může psát verše, ale bez schopnosti ucítit v sobě a fixovat v básni zvonem řeči, rozmístěním slov či jiným z nespočetných prostředků tohoto napětí, nebo možno též a snad lépe říci zjitření, nemohou se z nich stát básníci. Báseň nemusí působit přímo na rozum, na jednání přímo*".²¹⁷ This characterization is intriguing, as it recalls his earlier metaphor from the last dossier, where he likened poetry to an infected wound that could only be healed through the act of writing. It suggests that, even in the 1950s, this conception of poetry as a form of emotional and psychological disturbance remained a central tenet of his poetics. For Zábrana, a poem must unsettle or provoke, engaging the reader's emotions on a deeper level. He illustrates this by referring to the hypnotic effect that a single line from Ivan Blatný's poem *Tento večer* ("That Night", 1945) had on him: a mere six words that, in isolation, seemed to lack any clear meaning, but whose internal tension was so potent that it captivated and held him in thrall: "*Tím docházím k tomu, co jsem řekl: básen nemusí navazovat přesný, vyhraněný (a tím ovšem i ohraničený). Stačí, když působí jako klíč, který odmyká jisté zámky. [...] Stačí, když odhazuje písek nad pramenem, který hrká zasutý dole. Rozechvívá nás, činí nás pozornými a vnímavými*".²¹⁸ The poem evokes a profound sense of unease and sharpens our perception, making us more attentive. This aligns with Zábrana's assertion that poetry should have the capacity to reveal new dimensions of reality. It is something that should not rely on logic, but on feelings, create a mystic attraction. This engagement also sheds light on his 1948 critique of Jiří Kolář's *Dny v roce*, where Zábrana contends that merely documenting reality is

²¹⁷ "Many people can write verses, but without the ability to feel within themselves and capture in the poem, through the resonance of language, the arrangement of words, or one of the countless means of this tension—or perhaps it would be better to say this exacerbation—they cannot become poets. A poem does not need to directly affect reason or action." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 158.

²¹⁸ "Thus, I arrive at what I have said: a poem does not need to establish a precise, defined (and thereby, of course, limited) boundary. It is sufficient if it acts as a key that unlocks certain locks. [...] It is enough if it scatters the sand above a spring that gurgles buried below. It awakens us, makes us attentive and perceptive." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 159.

insufficient; instead, reality must be rendered through the dynamic tension of words: the content must be supported by the rigor of the form, by the harmony that he mentioned in the previous notes. The author even creates a list of rules he must follow to compose a poem. He first speaks of the fact that a poem can stand just stand two pronouns; that one must discard many poems and from those many create one, and that poet should not be afraid of letting reality enter into his verses. Another rule is that the poet should as objective as possible and he should not talk about himself, also by remembering the scales and the proportions of the real world. The most interesting and suggestive “commandment” dictates as follows: “7) *zacházet opatrně s časem i prostorem, nemíchat je zmateně, jedině v případě jasného úmysl, srv. chirurg zapomene v operovaném nůžky, hníjí v živém těle.*”²¹⁹ He therefore suggests that time and space should be treated carefully, dosed to create the right effect.

The most significant aspect of these entries is Zábřana's apparent move away from a state of intense agitation, because in the notes from of the 40s the catastrophe is still coming. Here, he is already in the world in ruin he perceived in youth. He seems to be gradually coming to terms with his circumstances, embracing the notion of fate as a means of coping. This period marks a maturation in his outlook, where he appears more resigned and contemplative. His primary source of solace seems to be his writing, as evidenced by an entry dated July 13, 1953, where he reflects on the role of writing in his life:

Kdysi před lety, když jsem byl ještě mladý, celý život se všemi možnostmi stál přede mnou, psal jsem tehdy verse jen tak, protože se mi chtělo, neměly pro mě větší cenu než různé jiné věci. – Nyní, kdy obzor je zatažen, možnosti vzaty, rozhodování omezeno, využití schopností minimalizováno, život už nestojí přede mnou v celé své šíři, nenabízí se, musí být dobýván, nyní jsou moje verše jediným, co mám, jsou mi dražší ze všech věcí. Tak se změnami našich osudů nabývají nedůležité věci váhy a jedinečnosti, jiné jsou ztráceny a opouštěny. V životě člověk stále nalézá a ztrácí, mohl by vůbec nalézat, kdyby neztrácel? Jen poměr a hodnota ztraceného a nalézaného se nesmí příliš úzkostlivě počítat, to by někdy příliš zamrazilo u srdce²²⁰

²¹⁹ “Handle time and space carefully, don't mix them up chaotically, except in cases of clear intent, compare to a surgeon forgetting scissors inside an operated body, festering in the living tissue”. Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 163.

²²⁰ “Years ago, when I was still young, with my whole life ahead of me and all possibilities open, I wrote verses just because I wanted to, and they didn't hold any more value for me than other things. – Now, with the horizon clouded over, possibilities taken away, choices limited, the use of my abilities minimized, life no longer lies before me in its full breadth, it no longer offers itself; it must be fought for. Now, my verses are the only thing I truly have; they are dearer to me than anything else. Thus, with the changes in our fate, things that were once unimportant gain weight and uniqueness, while others are lost and abandoned. In life, one constantly finds and loses, but could one find if they didn't lose? Only the balance and value of what is lost and found must not be calculated too anxiously, as it would sometimes chill the heart too much.” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 161.

Every way out seems to have shut completely. But this powerlessness, as we have seen, is one forces that prompt his writings. The concept here is that losing is also finding, and that everything shifts in weight according to the different phases of a person's life.

Besides this essayistic and philosophical entries that we have so far described, which display the development of his thought and the capacity he possesses to express himself metaphorically, there are only a few chronotopical agglomerations in this selection where we might discern some of Zábřana's writing style of that period: "*Stůl je pokryt květovaným papírem. Napravo svíčka, nalevo vysoký egyptský popelník. Nůž. Zápalky. Vzpouza andělů. Taková je letošního léta dobírka za loňské? Nejtěžší: přestat snít. Jaká by byla?*".²²¹

The passage evokes a subtle recollection of Zábřana's earlier description of Holan's house, as noted at the beginning of this dossier. With sparse, economical details, the poet sketches a scene, likely one that he saw directly before him at that moment. This is followed by an unexpected comment about a "revolt of the angel," two rhetorical questions, and a statement on the necessity of ceasing to dream. A sense of abandonment permeates this brief description, its emotional intensity underscored by the brevity and fragmentation of each sentence. The fragment appears to reflect the author's own situation, wherein his persistent struggles have yielded minimal reward. This may explain the injunction to "stop dreaming." The phrase "revolt of the angel" could metaphorically reference the knife and matches on the table, suggesting they are the only "weapons" available to the poet in a battle where all seems lost. Here, we observe a convergence of several elements that we have align with the description of what poetry should be like that Zábřana has so far provided: a stark and direct description of the physical environment, common objects pertaining to the ordinary world, alongside metaphorical and evocative language, coupled with rhetorical questions that align with a more essayistic style. The prose is simultaneously concrete and abstract, compressing profound ideas into the restricted space of a few lines. This approach appears to align closely with Zábřana's expressed views on art, where he seeks to deliver something that strikes the reader—a work that is intentionally vague, relying not on logic but on evoked sensations. However, these sensations must be deeply rooted in real-life experiences, capturing the authenticity of lived moments while transcending mere description. Reading these more poetic entries

²²¹ "The table is covered with floral paper. To the right, a candle; to the left, a tall Egyptian ashtray. A knife. Matches. The Revolt of the Angels. Is that this summer's payment for last year's? The hardest thing: to stop dreaming. What would it be like?" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 162.

hints at the existential value writing acquired for the diarist in that period, as we can see from the following note:

Až letos, v září '53, na mně padá únava a schopnost odporu uvnitř řídne. Jsme tak bezmocní. Vzpomínám s nostalgií na Jesenina, Pasternaka, Gumiljova, Šklovského. Žije se matně, jako v prezervativu, opravdu. A také duše je větší v záhybech, opravdu. Nejsem gigant. Neuздvihnu sám sebe. Nedovedu se nadlouho zapírat. Kapky vody vysychají na slunci. Všechno je osud. Ve chvíli, kdy se ve vysoké trávě červená brusinka, ze stromu odlétá tetřev – tehdy je pohnutější než když se zed' jen vydroluje. Srdce se scvrkává a napíná celý život, ale nyní se otfřásá ještě druhým pulzem, jako vysazeno do větrné pláně. Naše srdce je ořech v louskáčku, ještě klade odpor. Brzo praskne. Dosud neustaly všechny vášničky, kdo nejde za sladkostí života? Kéž hořkost přijde nepozorovaně, ať potom hned tady, ať nepřichází. Také lonksé noci byly noci zašité v pytlovině. Ale tehdy jsem tě ve tmě aspoň tušil. O, kdybychom mohli pohlížet svrchu na přešlý čas. Loni jsi byla touha nesplněná, dnes nesplnitelná.²²²

We have here the chance to see what the author has so far only theorized: the application of the poetics he has been refining. He mentioned that powerlessness is one of the core of artistic creation. Here one can observe how, during a moment of weakness, the author starts to transform his doubts into a poetic fragment. He starts with a simple statement about his mental condition, remembering with nostalgia some authors, speaking in the first singular person. Life in those conditions is compared to a condom, using a blunt metaphor to convey the idea that the life he is living is uncomplete, blunt, referring to the state of impotence of the writer, which is giving up. Then, he starts using a series of evocative images that mostly pertains his emotional state. Another reference to fate, which is what troubles the lyrical I. The image of the heart is used to portray an increasing condition of tension, representing a metaphor of a life on the brink of destruction. The fragment ends with the second singular person, as the diarist his referring to someone, a female entity, which is not longer with him. Besides the evocative strength of some images (the heart in the nut-cracker, the nights stitched into burlap), elements that display a high degree of

²²² "Only this year, in September '53, fatigue begins to settle over me, and my capacity for inner resistance wanes. We are so helpless. I recall with nostalgia Yesenin, Pasternak, Gumilyov, Shklovsky. Life is dim, as if lived in a condom, truly. And the soul, too, is larger in its folds, truly. I am not a giant. I cannot lift myself. I cannot deny myself for long. Drops of water dry in the sun. Everything is fate. In the moment when a lingonberry turns red in the tall grass, a capercaillie flies from a tree—it is then more stirring than when a wall simply crumbles. The heart contracts and strains for a lifetime, but now it shakes with a second pulse, as if thrust into a windy plain. Our heart is a nut in a nutcracker, still resisting. It will soon crack. Not all the lures have ceased; who does not chase after the sweetness of life? May bitterness come unnoticed, and then leave immediately, may it not come at all. Last year's nights were also nights stitched into burlap. But at least then I could sense you in the dark. Oh, if only we could look down on past time from above. Last year you were an unfulfilled desire, today you are unattainable" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 162.

materiality, even if they should not possess it; that use of the images reminds of the Russian acmeism, to whom Zábrana might be referencing, having mentioned Nikolaj Gumilev at the beginning of the fragment. We can observe this aesthetic approach in another undated entry, where a similarly concrete image is paired with a poignant reflection on the absence of a person. The scene reads:

Druhý den:

Zválená pšenice pod okny leží jak vousy v mastném potu, který vyrazil na kůži, že tu nejsi. ²²³

In this entry, Zábrana uses a vivid, tactile image—“the trampled wheat beneath the windows”—to create a powerful sense of absence and longing. The wheat, personified to resemble a “beard in greasy sweat,” suggests a visceral reaction to the physical surroundings, yet it is the emotional weight of absence that drives the image. The line’s brevity, akin to the earlier fragment, reflects Zábrana’s stylistic inclination toward conciseness, where every word and image is charged with meaning. Another entry without date presents the same introduction of the later, with the statement of “day three”, making in therefore some sort of continuation to the previous entry, which started with “second day”:

Den třetí:

Což není způsobů, jak se Ti přiblížit? Naše léta jsou horší rok od roku a nejmeně na rok jsi opět ztrácena. Vzpomínám na ten zastup zaolejovaných dní v přešlém roce. Jak jsi byla stále v mé mysli, jak jsem se domníval, že všechno s Tebou skončí dobře. Anyní jsi oddálena nejméně o rok, o rok v letech, která jsou horší rok od roku. Úplňkový měsíc je neschopen naplnit zející prostranství po odešlém. Jsou noci jako tato, kdy keř se vrhá po keři. Po noci poznáváme, že sen není bratrem skutečnosti. Sen je osmahlým mužem z jiných životů. Snad už nikdy nebude cestovat. ²²⁴

²²³ “The second day/The trampled wheat lies beneath the windows like a beard in the greasy sweat that broke out on the skin because you’re not here” *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, p. 162.

²²⁴ Third day/Are there no ways to get closer to you? Our years get worse with each passing one, and for at least a year, you are lost again. I remember those oil-stained days of the past year. How you were always on my mind, how I thought that everything with you would end well. And now you are distanced by at least a year, a year in years that are worse with each passing one. The full moon is incapable of filling the gaping emptiness left by your departure. There are nights like this when one bush hurls itself against another. After the night, we realize that the dream is not the brother of reality. The dream is a sunburnt man from other lives. Perhaps he will never travel again. Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 164.

This entry invites a deeper analysis, particularly due to its multiple layers of meaning and stylistic complexity. Firstly, there are several reasons to consider it as a continuation of the previous entry. The central theme, once again, revolves around loss and is addressed to someone who is absent, much like the earlier fragment. However, this is not explicitly stated, as the author uses a generic feminine reference, indicated by the use of feminine pronouns. Notably, the Czech word “minulost” (meaning “past”) is feminine, suggesting that this piece could represent a lament for lost time rather than for a specific person. Stylistically, the entry opens with a rhetorical question, a recurring feature in Zábřana's writings during this period. The passage is replete with poetic imagery that grapples with themes of distance, past illusions, and a longing for what has been lost. The repetition of the word “rok” (year) serves as a leitmotif, emphasizing the sense of distance and the passage of time. As night descends, it offers no solace to the lyrical subject; instead, it reinforces the realization that dreams are fundamentally separate from reality—mere fragments of lives that are not one's own.

What is particularly striking about this fragment is its rhythm. The repetition of the phrase “*Naše léta jsou horší rok od roku a nejméně na rok jsi opět ztrácena*” (Our years are worse year by year, and for at least another year you are lost again), though reversed in order, imbues this prose entry with a musicality akin to that of poetry. Additionally, the text employs several alliterations, such as “*Jsou noci jako tato, kdy keř se vrhá po keři*” (There are nights like this, when one bush throws itself upon another), which contribute to a rhythmic cadence that enhances its lyrical quality:

A bud' požehnaná každá chvíle, která zabrání pohlížet do prázdných sudů od minulosti. Ztroskotaná plavidla, nebudete nahrazena jinými. Jsme ze řádu lidí, toužíme po sobě, odpuzujeme se. Stříbrné lodi odpluly, ty lodi ohňů ve tmách mladého žalu, ty lodi, které se nikdy neztroskotají. Černé vagony lesů stojí staletí. Země se nedá do vzrušených pohybů pro naše umírání. Jsme obnaženi na nerv, ztrácíme dobré, takzvaně dobré návyky, usilujeme o jediný směr, voda ve studni tvrdohlavosti je nedočerpatelná. Jde o naše sblížení s naší vytčeností. Není v nás za nehet mnišskosti. Život není k žití, ale je lhůtou, tak jej vidíme. Smutní rytíři, sešikovaní táhneme v hejnu k jiným mlýnům. Nic nedopadá dobře. Na místě, kde jsem tě posledně viděl, padá prach a cesta je uzavřená. Bílé stromy, domy na druhé straně jsou ničivost sama. I čas je lhůtou, ale jaké hrozivosti nabývá v tom, že nedopřává oddechu. Stárnutí se vplíží do všeho. Chápeme život nejvíc v zhoubnosti.²²⁵

²²⁵ “And let every moment be blessed that prevents us from gazing into the empty barrels of the past. Shipwrecked vessels, you will not be replaced by others. We belong to the order of humans, we long for one another, yet we repel each other. The silver ships have sailed, those ships of fire in the darkness of youthful sorrow, those ships that will never be shipwrecked. The black wagons of the forests have stood for centuries. The earth won't stir into excited motion for our dying. We are stripped down to the nerve, losing our good, so-

The second part of the text deepens its exploration of existential anguish and the complexities of the human condition, employing a series of evocative poetic images that articulate pain and melancholy. The past is metaphorically presented as “empty barrels,” symbolizing emptiness and desolation. Similarly, the “shipwrecked vessels” convey a sense of loss and stagnation, vessels that have sailed away forever. Initially described as “silver” and later as “of fire,” these vessels remain illuminated against the darkness of past grief. This contrast of silver and fire renders them enduring symbols, suggesting that the passions and emotions of the past continue to burn as long as the individual remains alive. In a paradoxical twist, these vessels “will never wreck,” as the fire of past emotions and memories persistently glows, refusing to be extinguished. This imagery is sharply contrasted with that of the “black wagons of the forest,” which stand still for centuries, embodying a sense of immobility and permanence. Here, a distinct opposition emerges between stillness and movement, suggesting a deeper tension between the unchanging nature of certain elements and the fleeting nature of human experiences. The lyrical subject (the “Lyrical I”) reflects on the individual’s plight, living in the present with a profound sense of nostalgia. This individual struggle, attempting to move resolutely in a single direction, even as the earth itself remains indifferent to the fate of a single person. Life and time, both defined as finite or “termed,” are depicted as relentless forces, bound together in a cycle that leaves little room for human agency or hope. There is an underlying suggestion that life becomes fully comprehensible only when viewed through the lens of its ruin or decay—a theme Zábřana has articulated previously. The passage concludes with a meditation on the inevitable encroachment of aging, which “creeps into everything,” further emphasizing the themes of decay and inevitability that permeate this work. The relentless passage of time strips away illusions, leaving the individual to confront the stark reality of existence, where life is understood primarily through its transience and fragility. Ultimately, Zábřana’s use of imagery and metaphor in this section captures the tension between the persistence of memory and emotion and the unyielding

called good habits, striving in only one direction, the water in the well of stubbornness is inexhaustible. It’s about our reconciliation with our marked path. There isn’t a trace of monkishness in us. Life is not for living, but is a deadline, that’s how we see it. Sad knights, we march in ranks toward different mills. Nothing ends well. At the place where I last saw you, dust falls and the road is closed. White trees, houses on the other side are destruction itself. Even time is a deadline, but how terrifying it becomes when it offers no respite. Aging creeps into everything. We understand life best in its destructiveness” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 164.

forces of time and fate, drawing a poignant portrait of the human struggle to find meaning in the face of inevitable decline.

For what concerns the exogenetic influences of this phase of development, besides the aforementioned authors, in this selection is present an entry where Zábana makes a list of the books he was able to read in 1951. The range of readings is, as always vast. We find there Czech, Russian, French, English and Spanish authors, demonstrating the extent and the variety of his interest. However, we will focus on the readings he seemed more interested in, at least according to the clues we have: next to two books he writes in brackets "*po třetí*", for the third time, manifesting a particular attraction to them. These books are Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* and Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway is an author I deem particularly suitable to have been a source of exogenetic influence for Zábana's. Especially for what concerns the use of dialogues, particularly evident in the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, set in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. In the novel, the characters speak an English which is often a direct translation of some Spanish word, in order to increase the degree of realism of how protagonists of the story move and react. Also, Hemingway worked as a reporter and the novel was based on his real life experience during the Civil War in Spain, making it akin to the artistic tendencies of Zábana I have detected in both the dossiers so far: the interest for the registration of reality. For what concerns Greene's, Zábana read the novel *The Power and the Glory* already in 1948: Greene's book revolves around the figure of a catholic priest in Mexico, struggling with his sins and the remorse he feels because of them. Zábana's fascination to the novel of the English writer might have been due to the moral and ethical issues it deals with, thematizing themes like sacrifice and martyrs in order to atone for one's sins.

I have mentioned the poet Vladimír Holan at the beginning of the dossier as a source of exogenetic influence for Zábana. Vladimír Holan (1905–1980) was a prominent Czech poet known for his dense and introspective verse, which combines existential themes with a profound sense of history and metaphysical inquiry. Often regarded as one of the most significant voices in 20th-century Czech literature, Holan's work reflects the complexities of his time, marked by war, political upheaval, and personal introspection. In his complex poems, the Czech poet investigates the relation between man and the world which surrounds him, reflecting on the caducity of humanity. His poetic language presents a high degree of experimentation, with a significant employment of quotations from other

authors and sentences in foreign languages, similarly to what we have said to be an habit of Zábřana in the previous dossier.

Zábřana and Pasternak

Boris Pasternak (1890–1960) initially pursued a career in music before turning to literature. His early poetry, marked by its lyrical intensity and philosophical depth, established him as one of the foremost poets of the Russian Silver Age. However, his literary career was marked by tension with Soviet authorities, particularly after *Doctor Zhivago* was published abroad in 1957, leading to his forced rejection of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1958. It is clear that, in the period we are taking into consideration, Pasternak's figure was ostracized because the political pressure.

Pasternak's *Doktor Zhivago* publishing and translation history is widely known to have been troubled; the novel got into the hands of readers only after several postpones and refusals. Pasternak started working on his oeuvre right after World War II. In 1947 he made a deal to publish the novel with a publishing house, however this agreement was later cancelled. The first draft of the novel was submitted by the author to the editorial board of the publishing house *Novyj Mir* in 1955. After being asked by the publishing house to severely edit the novel, Pasternak decided to accept the offer made to him by the Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, who eventually received the manuscript from the author and published the novel in 1957 for the first time and in the Italian translation. Given its complex editorial history, and the difficulty in obtaining the Russian original manuscript, Czech readers could read something from *Doktor Zhivago* only through ten poems published in 1954 on the fourth issue of the magazine "Znamja" in the Russian original version. These poems are part of a larger fictional cycle made of 25 poems which are placed at the end of *Doktor Zhivago*, representing meta-narratively the poetic heritage of its main character, Jurij Zhivago. Six of these poems will be translated by the Czech poet Ladislav Fikar (which we have previously indicated as a source of exogenetic influence for Zábřana) *Spring Mud, Farewell, Reunion, March, Girl Summer, and Wind*, that will be

published in 1957 on the magazine “Světová literatura”.²²⁶ On that same year, Zábřana translated another poem from the Zhivago cycle called *Dawn* (*Svítání*), published on “Kultura 1”. The entire translated in cycle Czech will be published for the first time in 1959 by the exile published house Svědectví, in the translation of Jiří Kovtun, with the title *Básně Doktora Živaga* (The Poems of Doktor Zhivago). However, as noted by Lukáš Klimeš, the public that this latter volume could reach was probably limited. Jan Zábřana will obtain the full novel only in 1965, after his wife Marie Zábřanová took a study trip to Italy, where she was able to get one copy of the manuscript and to transport it back with her to Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, that does not explain how before that Zábřana was able to translate the already mentioned poem *Dawn*; we can assume that the source text was the original Russian one published on “Znamja”. Thus, it would be possible to argue that Zábřana could have been working on the Zhivago poems since 1954. After obtaining the manuscript, Zábřana started immediately to translate it, while Mrs. Zábřanová was looking for a publishing house. In the end, Zábřana signed a contract in 1968 with the publishing house *Československý spisovatel*.²²⁷ However, even this deal will have no results, since in 1971 the publishing house will retrieve the proposal and cancel the project because of the changes in the political climate of the time. In 1988 Doktor Zhivago was finally released in the Soviet Union on Novyj Mir, allowing therefore the Czech edition to be published by the Lidové nakladatelství in 1990, based on Zábřana’s manuscript and redacted by Jaroslava Dienstbierová. In the 1990 edition, Zábřana is identified as the sole translator, whereas in later editions (2003, 2005, 2011) he is credited with the translation of the prose, while the poems are attributed to his joint work with Jiří Kovtun.²²⁸ Kovtun had already translated and published all of Zhivago’s poems under the title *Básně Doktora Živaga* with the exile publisher Svědectví in 1959.²²⁹ From the analysis of the poems contained in this first edition resulted that 20 poems of the entire cyclus corresponded to the one translated by Jiří Kovtun for the “Poems of Doktor Zhivago” in 1959, meaning therefore that only five poems are Zábřana’s original translation: *Hamlet* (Hamlet) *Confession* (Vyznání), *Wedding* (Svatba), *Winter Night* (Zimní noc), and the abovementioned *Dawn* (Svítání). As Lukáš Klimeš argues, the reason why Kovtun’s translations were collocated together with Zábřana’s was that the latter never finished/was

²²⁶ Klimeš, Lukáš, *K otázce autorství českého překladu Pasternakova Doktora Živaga*, in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.): *Jan Zábřana, básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 102.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²²⁸ Klimeš, Lukáš, *Zábřanův Doktor Živago: Okolnosti vzniku a analýza vybraných překladatelských řešení*, diploma thesis defended 14.09.2016, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, 2016, p. 35.

²²⁹ Pasternak, Boris, *Básně Doktora Živaga*, translated by Jiří Kovtun. New York, Svědectví, volume 7. 1959.

never satisfied with some of his translation; that may have brought him to decision to utilise Kovtun's already existing translation, so that the novel could still be released:

Je velmi pravděpodobné, že byl-li na konci šedesátých let přesvědčen, že jeho převody nedosahují uspokojivé úrovně, rozhodl se svůj rukopis doplnit již vydanými překlady Kovtunovými, patrně s vědomím, že až bude vydání básní aktuální, použije buď své převody, nebo odhalí skutečného autora.²³⁰

These poems will be the focus of our analysis, as we will attempt to trace in their translation aesthetic excesses which testify the presence of Zábřana's unique writing style. Before venturing into the texts of the poem, it is necessary to dwell upon the circumstances that shaped Zábřana's choices while translating the abovementioned poems, since they are pivotal to our understanding of the strategies the author deployed. After having reconstructed the editorial history of *Doktor Zhivago* and its poems, it is clear that the novel held a significant value for Zábřana. Not only because of the affinity that he felt towards him and the author; but also because of the value ascribed to Pasternak's oeuvre. Zábřana considered translating Pasternak pivotal mainly for two reasons: the sense of kinship he felt towards the poet and the literary quality he assigned to Pasternak's work. He was one of the authors that were "ruined" by the Soviet propaganda and that he strived to represent in a new and more faithful light. The poems of the Russian author were also one of the source of relief he could find in those years, along with other writers we have already mentioned: "*Pasternak, Jesenin, Hora, Halas, Orten, Fikar. Poezie utěšitelka? Snad také. Jistě je namnoze tím, co nám pomáhá nest břímě života. Vím, co říkám, a opakuji: břímě života*".²³¹ It could also be argued that Zábřana and Pasternak lived in many regards similar experiences, although located in two different countries: they were both persecuted by the communist regime, both of them were prevented from

²³⁰ "It is very likely that if, by the end of the 1960s, he was convinced that his translations did not reach a satisfactory level, he decided to supplement his manuscript with already published translations by Kovtunov, probably with the awareness that when the publication of poems becomes current, he will either use his translations or reveal the real author" Klimeš, Lukáš, *K otázce autorství českého překladu Pasternakova Doktora Živaga*, in: Kalivodová, Eva; Eliáš, Petr; *Jan Zábřana, básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., 109.

²³¹ "Pasternak, Yesenin, Hora, Halas, Orten, Fikar. Poetry as a comforter? Perhaps that too. It is certainly, in many cases, something that helps us bear the burden of life. I know what I'm saying, and I repeat: the burden of life" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 159.

publishing and took consequently shelter in the translation activity.²³² This is probably one of the reasons why Zábřana felt him so close:

Jako literát se stal pro režim nepohodlný. Uvědomíme-li si, že Zábřana (především ve svých počátcích) přistupoval k překládání jako k nucenému řemeslu a ke zdroji obživy, nemůžeme neopomenout, že podobný osud sdílel i Boris Pasternak, jehož po druhé světové válce prakticky až do konce života překlady „živil“. ²³³

In his notes, Jan Zábřana mentions Pasternak very often, sharing his thoughts not only about the extraordinary quality of his poetry, but also about the treatment the Russian writer received, raging against the unjust way Pasternak's work were received after the release of Doktor Zhivago. At the same time, this ostracization was at the heart of the connection he felt not only with Pasternak, but also with all the persecuted writers, as we have seen in the introduction. If Yesenin represented an alter-ego of himself while struggling with the loss of the old world, Pasternak represented the maturity of that same man in the aftermath of the new world, trying to live in it by staying true to himself. That is the reason why Pasternak in those years represented for Zábřana a beacon of hope in an appalling world, an oasis in the desert, since he was a survivor even if he had told the truth the regime. ²³⁴ As Zábřana will later reflect on in the 1970s, the strength and the importance of these writers lied in the fact that, despite the peril they might face, they stayed true to themselves:

Spisovatelé, kteří v tomhle režimu lži a lži a zas jen lži neuměli rezignovat na statut spisovatele (...) ti všichni skončili nejen jako nespisovatelé, jako trosky zaživa zapomenutý, ale i v lidsém debaklu. [...] Svou duši – „světlo, které je v tobě“ - zachránili jen ti, kteří dokázali říct ne, kteří jim plivli do ksichtu Pasternak, kterého štváli, podezříváli, usměrňovali, přehlíželi a bagatelizovali čtvrt století - ale který jim

²³² While taking a break from the writing of Doktor Zhivago, Pasternak dedicated himself to the translation of literary works such as *Faust*, *King Lear* and Sándor Petőfi's *John the Valiant*.

²³³ "As a writer, he became inconvenient for the regime. When we realize that Zábřana (especially in his early years) approached translation as a forced craft and a means of livelihood, we cannot overlook the fact that Boris Pasternak shared a similar fate, as after World War II, translations were practically his only source of sustenance until the end of his life." Klimeš, Lukáš, *Zábřanův Doktor Živago: Okolnosti vzniku a analýza vybraných překladatelských řešení*, op. cit., p. 41.

²³⁴ Zábřana frequently associates Pasternak with the concept of hope: "The hope that Pasternak wrote about at the end of *Zhivago* — that even if it is not fulfilled, even if it proves to be an illusion, it can still create and represent the true meaning and the sole substance of long periods in a human life". Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 666.

v románu řekl, co jsou zač, a řekl jim do očí, že zničili generaci... [...] Ale Pasternakův román je summa života.²³⁵

Zábrana admired and respected Pasternak for his moral integrity, which was apparently, as we have seen in this last note, one had to possess, in his view, to be considered a writer. Pasternak shared the same idea about the duty of an artist who, in his opinion, should not be constrained in any way, so that he can act as a witness of his age.²³⁶ The strength of Pasternak's work did not come, according to Zábrana, only from the ethical value of his oeuvre; it was also due to his unique writing style. In his notes, Zábrana often wonders about the uniqueness of Pasternak's work, his ability to merge prose with poetry:

Duševní stav objektu, "skrže" který je vyprávěno, digrese, působení krajiny vyvolávající jen jisté – a ne jiné – metafory, a asociace – skoro všechno, co je v konvenční próze vedlejší, je zde hlavní nebo alespoň hypertrofované – vyklene se (v Pasternakově rané próze) v jakýsi zvláštní prostor... Novinkou v době napsání Appelovy čáry například bylo "mluvení do telefonu jen z jedné strany", tedy jen částečné odhalení smyslu, tj. využití formulací pro prózu nedostatečných (ale dostatečných pro aktéry děje)²³⁷

The fascination of Pasternak's verses springs from the suspension they are permeated by, thanks to the use of metaphors that create an ambiguous ensemble that offers itself to different interpretations. This uncertainty of Pasternak verses almost reminds Zábrana's thoughts on poetry and on the mysterious power it should possess to act on the feelings of the readers. This affinity was also suggested by Zuzana Šťastná, who talking about Pasternak's poetic affirms that "*Pasternakova síla je, podobně jako Buninova, v lyrickém detailu a ve schopnosti „vykřísnout z některých okamžiků vidění“*,"

²³⁵ "Writers who, in this regime of lies upon lies, were unable to resign from the status of a writer (...) all of them ended up not only as non-writers, as wrecks forgotten while still alive, but also in personal ruin. [...] They saved their soul – 'the light that is within you' – only those who were able to say no, who spat in their faces. Pasternak, who was hunted, suspected, controlled, ignored, and belittled for a quarter of a century – but in his novel, he told them what they really were, and told them to their faces that they had destroyed a generation... [...] But Pasternak's novel is the summa of life" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 293.

²³⁶ Hughes, Olga, *The Poetic World of Boris Pasternak*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015, p. 128.

²³⁷ "The mental state of the subject 'through' whom the story is narrated, the digressions, the influence of the landscape that evokes only certain—and not other—metaphors and associations—almost everything that is considered secondary in conventional prose becomes central or at least hypertrophied here. It expands (in Pasternak's early prose) into a peculiar space... For example, a novelty at the time of writing *Appel's Line* was 'speaking on the phone from only one side,' that is, only partially revealing the meaning, employing expressions that are insufficient for prose (but sufficient for the participants of the narrative)" Ibid., *ibid.*, 727.

dát všedním věcem jednou provždy nezapomenutelnou tvář, a myslím, že právě to na něm muselo Zábranu přitahovat neméně než epická (a etická) výpověď jeho Živaga.”²³⁸ I agree on that, it was exactly that capacity that Pasternak oeuvre had to shed a new light to the what is ordinary was what attracted Zábrana to him and, I argue, it is exactly the kind of poetics he was seeking, as we have seen in the note from the 50s about the idea of the poetic depiction of reality as a “restoration” of old images. Pasternak shared that same vision of art as a way to create everything anew through the unique point of view of the poet: “Art, according to Pasternak, results from the poet’s attempt to name the new aspect of reality revealed to him [...] Giving names to the new that the poet experiences becomes the aim of his work”.²³⁹ Naming again reality in order to give it a new form is connected to the pureness of childhood, the period of life when the individual becomes gradually aware of the world which surrounds him. Finding a new way to define reality it’s a way to reshape the world and to go back to the purity of one’s childhood. This need of pureness also likely resonated with Zábrana. In the first dossier we have seen that he sees and seeks this innocence in his memories of the past and, although with a new attitude towards the situation, even in this 1950s that idea is still with him: “Vím mé srdce není takové, jaké by mělo být, je příliš zfašnělé, je zakaleno zly, vášněmi tohoto světa. Ale zůstává ve mně předobraz, snad projekt, jaký by měl člověk být: jasný, dětský, neokoralý. Pak by to ovšem nebyl život. Částečně tento obraz nacházám u Jirky”.²⁴⁰

As we will see, there are not many aesthetic excesses in these translation; the reason might be that maybe that Pasternak’s poetic, in this phase of Zábrana’s writing style development, closely aligned with that of the Russian poet.

The first stanza presented comes from the poem *Объяснение* (Explanation), translated by Zábrana as *Vyznání* (Confession)—an interesting shift in itself. Focusing on the stanzas, several deviations are evident: in the first verse, the Lyrical I’s presence is made explicit with the verb “vidět” já vidím (I see), representing a concretization compared to the Russian original’s more abstract “Vot ona” (There she is). The most striking alteration is in the second line, describing the woman seen by the Lyrical I:

²³⁸ Šťastná, Zuzana, *Zábranovy deníky jako cesta k ruské literatuře* in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.): *Jan Zábrana, básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 96.

²³⁹ Hughes, Olga, *The Poetic World of Boris Pasternak*, op. cit., p. 47.

²⁴⁰ “I know my heart is not as it should be; it is too corrupted, clouded by the evils and passions of this world. But within me remains an image, perhaps a vision, of what a person should be: clear, childlike, unspoiled. However, that would not be life. I find this image, in part, in Jirka” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 158.

Вот одна походкою усталой

Медленно выходит на порог

Vidím jednu, bledou jako stěnu

rozpačitě přestoupila práh. (Vyznání, 4° stanza)²⁴¹

In the Russian original, the woman moves with a slow gait, as if she is tired, and with that same slowness, crosses the threshold of the door. In Zábřana's translation, the emotionality of this passage is not only intensified; it also acquires a different character. The expression "bledou jako stěnu," meaning "blank as a wall," is an idiomatic expression in Czech usually associated with fear. Additionally, the substitution of the adverb "медленно" (slowly) with "rozpačitě" (embarrassed) changes the emotional tone of the passage.

The most intriguing aspect, however, is the expression "bledou jako stěnu" (pale as a wall), an idiom Zábřana also employed in his translations of Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*, on which he began working in the 1960s. This repetition may support Gideon Toury's assertion that certain expressions can become ingrained in a translator's long-term memory, ultimately becoming integral to their writing style.

There are other cases of emotional intensification:

Если только можно, Авва Отче,

Чашу эту мимо пронеси

Abba, otče, tento **hořký** kalich

aspoň dnes odejmi ode mě. (Hamlet, 2° stanza)²⁴²

И все **терялось** в снежной мгле

Седой и белой.

Свеча горела на столе,

Свеча горела.

Sněhová, šedá mlha vše

pohlcovala.

²⁴¹ From this point forward, all references to the original poems by Boris Pasternak will be drawn from the following edition: Pasternak, Boris. *Doktor Zhivago*. Vremja, Moscow, 2018. The translations by Jan Zábřana, on the other hand, are sourced from: Pasternak, Boris. *Doktor Živago*. Lidové nakladatelství, Prague, 1990.

²⁴² Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 584.

Planula svíce na stole,
svíce tam plála. (Zimní noc, 6° stanza)²⁴³

Не плачь, не морщь опухших губ,
Не собирай их в складки.
Разбередишь присохший струп
Весенней лихорадки.
Сними ладонь с моей груди,
Неплач а nešpul zpuchlý ret,
utiš se, ovládni se přece!
Ten přischlý strup si strhneš hned,
ten, co ti zůstal po horečce.
A dlaň z mé hrudi, tu dej pryč, (Vyznání, 6° stanza)²⁴⁴

In the first example, drawn from the poem Hamlet, the chalice is described as “bitter”, while in the Russian original there is not mentioned to it. In the second stanza presented, everything does not get lost in the snow but swallowed by it. The following examples are drawn from the poem Hamlet, and we can observe a case of concretization. In Zábřana's translation, the text includes more concrete images and details that were absent in the original:

Я один, все тонет в фарисействе.
Жизнь прожить — не поле перейти.

Jsem sám, vše tone v **bahně** farizejství.
Život – to není přejít přes pole. (Hamlet, 4° stanza)²⁴⁵

Но как ни сковывает ночь
Меня кольцом тоскливым,

²⁴³ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 585.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 583.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 579.

Ať uhrane mě do svých pout
noc teskná **jako oko hadí** – (Vyznání, 9° stanza)²⁴⁶

Пройдут года, ты вступишь в брак,
Забудешь неустройства.
Быть женщиной — великий шаг,
Сводить с ума — геройство.

Roky jdou. Vdáš se nakonec,
šílení, zmatky čas pak skryje.
Být ženou – to je velká věc,
plést mužům hlavu hrdinství je. (Vyznání, 7° stanza)²⁴⁷

In this instance, we observe the addition of “bahno”, which means “mud”, to convey the image of everything drowning in hypocrisy. This addition provides a more vivid and specific image within the verse. The second stanza, drawn from the aforementioned poem *Confession*, see the addition of a comparison between the night and an snake’s eye, an image absent in the original verse. The same goes for the verse about women’s behaviour towards men, which in Zábrana’s translation is more evident.

Regarding dynamization, no notable examples have emerged so far, except for the instance of “vidím” (I see), which could be considered a form of dynamization, as it renders the Lyrical I an active participant in the scene. All other verbs and actions correspond with their Russian originals. The absence of further dynamization may be attributed to Pasternak’s poetics, which, as noted by scholars, is inherently dynamic and replete with movement.²⁴⁸ Consequently, Zábrana may not have felt the need to further dynamize the text, as it already resonated with his own poetic sensibility.

Zábrana’s approach to translation, as demonstrated in this case, remains largely consistent with his previous work. He prioritizes the preservation of rhyme at all costs,

²⁴⁶ Pasternak, Boris, *Doktor Živago*, op. cit., p. 583.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 583.

²⁴⁸ Paola Ferretti for example states, talking about Pasternak’s poetry: “Movement [in Pasternak] is sovereign: it unites space and time, abstract entities and physical presences, atmospheric phenomena and inanimate objects; it generates visions, clarifies their ultimate meaning, and connects everything. Whether it is the sudden and disruptive movement of a tear—with its idea of something that tears and writhes, a rupture that occurs and releases what was previously blocked.” Ferretti, Paola, *Ineluttabili miracoli minori*, in: Pasternak, Boris, *Temi e variazioni*, Passigli, Firenze, 2018 p. 11.

even if doing so requires altering the original imagery of the poem. This strategy often leads to a transformation in the representation of scenes, making them more concrete and tangible. This occurs despite the fact that the original poetry, as in the case of Pasternak, is characterized by an atmosphere of suspension, ambiguity, and subtlety. In this sense, Zábrana's translations align with the concept of "acceptability" within the target culture, as they are adapted to recreate the musicality and formal qualities of the source text.

However, as evidenced by the examples discussed earlier, these translations are marked by a discernible presence of "aesthetic excesses", which signal Zábrana's own poetic voice asserting itself within the translation. His tone, noticeably harsher than Pasternak's, suggests a divergence not merely in style but in sensibility. This divergence can be interpreted as a reflection of Zábrana's own personal and artistic struggles during this period. Caught between different cultural and historical forces, Zábrana was grappling with how to find coherence in a fragmented world, attempting to impose a sense of harmony on elements that resisted reconciliation.

At the same time, this harsher tone and personal imprint in the translations can be seen as a testament to Zábrana's commitment to his outsider status, which he maintained as a badge of honour. His approach in translation thus becomes not only a technical exercise but also a mode of self-expression, reflecting his complex relationship with his time, his peers, and his own artistic identity. In sum, these translations should not be viewed simply as faithful renderings of Pasternak's poetry, but rather as hybrid works where Zábrana's own voice emerges, navigating the tension between fidelity to the source text and the pressures of the target culture, while also bearing witness to the translator's own internal conflicts.

Notes from the Year 1966

“vědět, že jde o to, zešílet tím správným způsobem jako Allen,
jinak to není k ničemu.”²⁴⁹

The 1960s were years during which, with the exception of the ominous 1968, literature could slowly start breathing again. After Khrushchev's denounce of Stalin's crimes in 1956 at the XX Congress of the Soviet, in the Soviet Union the political climate started to ease up. This phenomenon came to be known as “thaw” and saw in the Soviet Union the rehabilitation of different political prisoners, among which writers. Zábrana's parents were also released in 1960. The consequences of this loosening eventually reached communist Czechoslovakia, where writers and students start to rise up and to protest, asking for a newly free literature scene. Eventually, these demands were repressed by the cultural authorities of the regime, but this “opening” allowed the publication of the works of author until then could not publish. One example was the aforementioned anthology *Life is Everywhere*, but also the release of Škvorecký's *Zbabělci* (The Cowards) in 1958. Books translated from other languages slowly started to penetrate the wall of dogmatism erected by the Regime. A growing economical crisis made impossible for the Communist Czechoslovakia to continue to isolate itself from the Western world and, consequently, many Czechoslovakian citizens were eventually able to travel abroad. It is sufficient to mention that apparently Zábrana's translation of Allen Ginsberg's poems were published on the pages of the magazine “Světová literatura” already in 1959.²⁵⁰ In that same year, as mentioned by Justin Quinn,²⁵¹ Zábrana also started working on the anthology *Pátá roční doba: Antologie americké radikální poezie*. A prominent role, in this renewal of the cultural scene, was held by the culture newspapers, where even forbidden authors could at time publish. The same can be said about Zábrana, who had started from the second half of the 1950s to publish not only translations, but also original poems on magazines such as “Host do domu”, “Květen”, “Tvář” and others. Zábrana will publish during the half of the 1960s for the first time ever three original collections of poems: *Fixed Black Icons* in 1965, *Lynch* and *Pages of a diary* in 1968.

²⁴⁹ “To know that the point is to go mad in the right way, like Allen; otherwise, it's pointless” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 167.

²⁵⁰ Lehar, Jan, *Česká literatura od počátku k dnešku*, op. cit., p. 772.

²⁵¹ Quinn, Justin, *Jan Zábrana a překládání za studené války* in: *Svět literatury*, 51, 2015, p. 7.

Along with them, in those years the author also wrote together with Josef Škvorecký a trilogy of detective stories and a book for children: *Vražda pro štěstí* (*Murder for Happiness*, 1962), *Vražda se zárukou* (*Murder with a Guarantee*, 1964), *Vražda v zastoupení* (*Murder by Proxy*, 1967) and *Táňa a dva pistolníci* (*Tanya and Two Gunmen*, 1965).

The selection which will be at the center of this dossier contains notes written in one specific year, 1966. This particular year is situated right between what I have so far described, a period of relative successes for Zábrana, and the catastrophic year 1968, which marked the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Despite the accomplishments he was able to achieve, Zábrana was never convinced with the liberalization period of the Prague Spring and remained sceptical until the end, as we can see in this note from 1966:

Nikdo nikdy nepochopí tu hořkost podzimu a zimy 65 pro mne. Té chvíle, kdy mě ti, kdo v padesátých letech seděli na katedrách marxismu-leninismu a studovali na filozofických fakultách (odkud mě vykopali), když tihle lidé mě, který jsem v padesátých letech objezdil Rakovník, Oslavany, Jáchymov, Pardubice, Příbram, protřel Tatrovu, Radotín, když mě tihle lidé začali strkat do pytle s těmi, kdo měli v padesátých letech moc. [...] Vážení, v téhle zemi se před necelými 15 lety spisovatelé popravovali, popravovaly se tu ženské. Pamatovat si to nemusíte, ale z hlediska tohoto faktu odmítám přistoupit na každou hru, která je laciná. To nejdůležitější, co nevíte: kalkulujete s tím statem quo, ve kterém jste daleko víc doma než někteří z těch, které jste osočili. Je to nečistá hra – tvářit se svobodně, kdy jsem jen pes na řetězu, který štěká na jiného psa na řetězu. Pustit se s nimi do diskuse [...] znamená je uznat.²⁵²

This entry expresses immediately what was the author's stance towards the society of the time. He perceived them as hypocrites, who were able to move on and act as they were free only by forgetting all the victims that the regime had made until that point. Just speaking with them, as Zábrana puts it means recognizing them to be at the same level. That is why he prefers to remain in his isolation, to not interact with them at any cost, with his silence as a proof of refusal of everything which concerns the regime: "*Jediné*

²⁵² "No one will ever understand the bitterness of autumn and winter of '65 for me. That moment when those who, in the 1950s, sat in chairs of Marxism-Leninism and studied in philosophy departments (from which I was expelled)—when those people, I, who had traveled to Rakovník, Oslavany, Jáchymov, Pardubice, Příbram, who had been through Tatrov, Radotín in the 1950s, when these people started lumping me in with those who held power in the 1950s. [...] Ladies and gentlemen, not even 15 years ago in this country, writers were being executed, women were being executed. You don't have to remember that, but in light of this fact, I refuse to accept any cheap game. The most important thing you don't know is this: you calculate on a status quo in which you feel far more at home than some of those you accuse. It's a dirty game—to act freely when I'm just a dog on a chain, barking at another dog on a chain. To engage in debate with them [...] would be to acknowledge them." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 171.

východisko svobodného: neodpovídat na otázky, na jejich otázky, jediná možnost existence: neexistovat proti moci, ale vedle ní, paralelně s ní. To jste nepochopili".²⁵³ To fully grasp the scale of his adversity to *their* world, another entry is quite enlightening:

Jak je to zvláštní, že mě dnes nejmíň přitahují z Pasternakových veršů ty, které byly (mohly být) za války a hned po ní publikovány. Dne mě přitahují nejmíň (jako by byly nějak zvlášť šedivé, jako by byly nutně inferiorní proto, že tehdy mohly být publikovány, že tehdy prošly. To je jedno z nebezpečí publikování v totálním státě: ta část díla, která projde, se zavádí do vědomí čtenáře (který víceméně ví, jak vypadají poměry) jako jaksi defektní. Defektní proto, že cenzuře nevadila. To znamená, že prosazení něčeho k publikaci nemusí být vždy výhra, z tohoto hlediska to může být prohra. Verše, které prošly ted', na to doplatí v budoucnu.²⁵⁴

This remark sheds light on Zábrana's perception of the "polluted" semiosphere I mentioned in the introduction. The space occupied by the regime did not morally affect the people acting in it but also influences the quality of the literary works that are published inside of it. Using the example of his beloved Pasternak, he argues that he has the impression that everything that passed the control of censorship is inferior. His choice of living on the side acquires even more sense.

Besides the abovementioned fragments, the notes contained in this section are often made of only one line, a phrase started with the infinitive form of a verb and the depiction of the action that unfolds through that verb. This style of artistic creation was already used by Zábrana in 1956, even though in the diary notes of the last dossier we did not find any of them. Therefore, I could argue that in the 1950s, the infinitive had not become yet a literary tool that he employed consciously. We find these types of sentences in the entries of this period for one main reason: in those years he was working on one of his important poetic composition, *Havran* (The Raven). According to Jan Šulc, the poem n. 90 contained in *Fixed Black Icons* was (conceived in the 1950s) already an attempt to

²⁵³ "The only way out for a free person: to refuse to answer questions—their questions. The only viable form of existence is not to exist in opposition to power, but alongside it, parallel to it. This you did not understand" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 171.

²⁵⁴ "Isn't it strange that today I am the least drawn to Pasternak's verses that were (or could have been) published during and immediately after the war. Today, they appeal to me the least—as if they carry a certain grayness, as if they are inherently inferior simply because they could be published at that time, because they made it through. This is one of the dangers of publishing under a totalitarian state: the portion of work that passes through censorship enters the reader's consciousness (who is more or less aware of the prevailing conditions) as somehow defective. Defective precisely because it didn't disturb the censors. This means that getting something published isn't always a victory; from this perspective, it can be a defeat. The verses that make it through today will pay for it in the future." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 170.

create this poem.²⁵⁵ Zábrana kept working on it and eventually handed over the manuscript in 1969 to the publishing house Dialog, but it will never be published.

We can then assume, that the 1966 was a year of profound investment in the realization of this project, which elaborated throughout his notes. These brief sentences, because of their structure, remind of diary notes, although the action described in them do not feel like captured life moments but, rather, established laws which will never change, events unendingly repeating themselves. This sensation is marked by the lapidary gravity which the infinitive verb gives to these statements:

vzrušovat už se právě jen svou nepřítomností v jejím životě.

spát s ženou po popraveném muži

souložit bez touhy při zlučnickovém záchvatu, aby rozkoš přemohla bolest

smilovávat se nad smrtelností těch sedřených, širokorozchodných vagín

sdělovat si poznatky o tom, že kvalita soulože je jiná podle toho, zda se před tím vymočíš nebo ne²⁵⁶

These phrases present a fragmented portrayal of human experience, centering on controversial or uncomfortable aspects of the Lyric I's life, often expressed in a cryptic and contextless manner. The lack of narrative continuity suggests that these are not merely casual reflections but deliberate, experimental fragments. The use of infinitive verbs, which mirror a "to-do" list format, initially gives the impression of triviality. However, the content of these lines reveals a more profound conceptual engagement, indicating that they are not simply random thoughts but part of a broader artistic or philosophical experiment. Actually, it is as if the use of the infinitive verb is suggesting that these actions are being repeated, in a sequence of never-ending daily activities, even that they sound odd and bizarre. As if they were supposed to have a universal meaning which could be applied to everyone.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Šulc, Jan, *Zaknihovaný život Jana Zábrany*, in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.), *Jan Zábrana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 14.

²⁵⁶ "To be aroused precisely by one's absence in her life./To sleep with a woman after her man has been executed/To make love without desire during a gallbladder attack, so that pleasure overpowers pain/To take pity on the mortality of those worn-out, broad-gauge vaginas/To share observations on how the quality of sex differs depending on whether you urinate beforehand or not" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., pp. 165-168.

²⁵⁷ "Havran měl být jakési bezbřehé všechno, spojení osobní zkušenosti, možností básnictví, zafixovaná paměť generace [...] Proto všechny ty záblesky situací a konkrétních příběhů a současně infinitiv – tvar, který je mimo gramatickou osobu, způsob i čas" Trávníček, Jiří, *Stránky z celého života* in: *Jan Zábrana: 4. 6. 1931–3. 9.*, edited by Jan Šulc, Humpolec, 1996, p. 34.

Sexuality emerges as a recurrent theme within these passages, often set against peculiar and disconcerting contexts. The imagery employed is raw, vivid, and unflinchingly corporeal, as though the author aims to foreground the materiality and transient nature of the human body. This focus on the body's decay and the mechanical aspects of human existence suggests an underlying existential or nihilistic framework. The explicit details, while unsettling, seem intended to highlight the fragility of the body, not only in its physical limitations but also in its detachment from deeper emotional or spiritual meaning. The overall tone of these fragments evokes a sense of confessional intimacy, as if they could belong to a personal diary. Yet, they are stripped of introspective depth and reduced to mere actions. This reductionist approach positions these entries as stark, almost clinical observations about the human condition, devoid of sentimental embellishment. In the first example, the Lyric I finds arousal not in the act of intimacy, but in his absence from the life of the desired woman. This inversion of the typical romantic trope of presence and longing introduces a complex psychological layer. The absence of context leaves the reader in a state of ambiguity, unsure whether the narrator is critiquing this emotional detachment or merely observing it. Similarly, in the second example, the narrator recounts a sexual encounter with a woman whose husband has been executed yet refrains from moral judgment or emotional commentary. This ambiguity raises questions about the ethical dimensions of such actions, though the narrative remains purposefully aloof, resisting any prescriptive conclusions. The focus shifts in subsequent lines to the mechanical and repetitive nature of sexual acts. Here, sex is portrayed not as an intimate or emotional exchange, but as a routine, almost banal, aspect of daily life. The juxtaposition of sex with physical decay further reinforces a nihilistic worldview, where bodily pleasure is transient and ultimately insignificant in the face of human mortality. The author's pragmatic approach to these themes suggests a deeper philosophical reflection on the futility of human desires and the inevitability of death. This bleak perspective aligns with the tone of Zábrana's later works, where existential questioning and disillusionment with life's superficial pleasures become more pronounced. The text's irony, particularly in its treatment of socially taboo subjects, reinforces a resigned acceptance of life's darker realities. This ironic detachment, coupled with the stark and provocative portrayal of human experiences, paints a complex picture of Zábrana's worldview during this phase of his literary development. Finally, a nostalgic tone emerges in the second example, where

the loss of first love is subtly mourned: “*smířit se s tím, že už podruhé neprožiješ první lásku, nezakusíš první žárlivost*”.²⁵⁸

Another recurring theme in these fragments of actions is death. Death is often addressed by Zábrana, directly or with indirect references to other people who died: “*vytáčet telefonní čísla dávno zaniklá v seznamech i ve skutečnosti*”.²⁵⁹ Death is also mentioned in ironic comments: “*brát si do nemocnice růžový župan, abys byl i ve smrti přitažlivý*”,²⁶⁰ exhibit the same tone detected in the other fragments: death is treated with irony, as if the author wanted to mitigate its impact, normalizing it by reducing it to real life situation. There are also instances in which these comments relate to aging:

nutit starce naplít na jejich mládí

vědět, že dospělost je to, když ti přestane záležet na tom, zda si děláš nepřátele

zestárnout (stejně jako otec) do podoby sobě podobného starce²⁶¹

The changes provoked by aging are a common theme in a diary, which thematically makes these chains akin to diary writing. Resignation spires from comment like this, a sensation of time lost that surely the author felt. We can understand more about their nature if we take into consideration another entry Zábrana’s apparently wrote in the same period. In this entry, the diarist notes down a brief explanation of the creative process behind these infinitive chains:

Poslední dva články řetězu do básně č. 90 „přišly“ ve Zlíně o Velikonocích. [...] Vrátil-li se zpět: je to pokyn vědomí, že „maximální“ délka řetězu byla dosáhnuta? Jestliže jsem o básni č. 90 uvažoval jako o svém Havranu, počítal jsem asi se sto deseti verši. Tolik jich ještě není. Bude-li se po 4. červnu pokračovat, je třeba začít v Praze na „zapsaném“ materiálu pracovat: 1) vyloučit opakování 2) nejdůležitější: vřazení dalších jader – nespolehat na logiku. Asi chybné – sdružovat verše se detaily

²⁵⁸ “To come to terms with the fact that you will never experience your first love again, nor feel the sting of jealousy for the first time” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 166.

²⁵⁹ “Dialing phone numbers long vanished from directories and reality” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 166.

²⁶⁰ “Bringing a pink robe to the hospital so that even in death, you remain attractive” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 165.

²⁶¹ “To force old men to spit on their youth/to know that adulthood is when you stop caring whether you make enemies/to grow old (just like one’s father) into the likeness of an old man who resembles oneself” Ibid., *ibid.*, pp. 165-168.

fyzického pocitu a verše generalizující. Logika zabíjí báseň, která ještě může růst. Pracovat s absolutním spolehnutím na polopodvědomý instinkt jako dosud. Co vědomí vyplaví.²⁶²

Reflecting on the poem n° 90, Zábřana comments on the length of this “chain”, as he calls it, comparing it to the already mentioned *The Raven*. We could therefore argue that these fragments, to which is clearly referring, are not to be considered singularly, but as part of a longer chain of actions. He then mentions the need of continuing working material he already has, suggesting that this creative process also relies on the re-use of what he had already written. Apparently, the logic behind these chains is that there must not be any logics. This approach almost reminds that of the Surrealist automatic writing, since the author subsequently affirms that text must come out almost as an error (“unite verses with details about physical sensations and general comments), given that “logic kills a poem that can still grow”. The “half-unconscious instinct” mentioned at the end might hold the key to interpret this approach with writing, which perfectly aligns with what we have seen in the last dossier. Writing conceived as something that must be carried out following one’s impulse, on the moment, without dwelling too much time upon it because that would prevent it for “growing”. This verb Zábřana’s utilizes to describe the act of writing might be very significative, as indicates an idea of writing as something that poured out of him and that needs to grow. And yet, despite this need of immediacy, there are still some “rules” he is set to follow. He mentions that he wants to avoid any kind of repetitions (which already means exercising a form of control over this spontaneity) and that he needs to add more cores (thematic cores, I presume). The outcome is a method of creation which is on the edge between freedom and strict control, which could be considered a more concrete description of what Zábřana has been crafting in his diaries for all these years. Not only because the approach described reminds of diary writing, which is also immediate and instinctive (Zábřana connected this concept of spontaneous writing in his note from the 1950s where he spoke of the fact that he hates the eraser); but, I argue, can be considered the concretization of that method that he had outlined in the 1950s, discussing

²⁶² “The last two links in the chain for Poem No. 90 ‘came’ to me in Zlín over Easter. [...] If I go back: is this a signal from the mind that the ‘maximum’ length of the chain has been reached? When I thought of Poem No. 90 as my *Raven*, I envisioned about one hundred and ten verses. It’s not there yet. If it continues after June 4, it will be necessary to begin working with the ‘recorded’ material in Prague: 1) eliminate repetitions; 2) most importantly: integrate new cores—without relying on logic. Perhaps it’s a mistake to group lines with details of physical sensation alongside generalizing lines. Logic kills the poem, which could still grow. Work with absolute trust in the semi-conscious instinct as I have done so far. Let the mind surface what it will” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 174.

the harmony the verse should achieve between the form and the content. The reason behind the need of this kind of tension is further elaborated by the author:

Ve všech ostatních případech:

Nejuvolnější básně byly nejvyprahlejší

Nejstriktnější práce = nejvyšší míra fantazie

Ani jeden z básníků těchto let nepřišel na to, že popření formy je možné jen při jejím zachování.

Koncepce „14 řádků“ mě osvobodila v řádu formy, *nikoli mimo ni*. Právě ty verše, které ve svých básních cítím jako barbarské (mluvím pořád o formě) nebo „školské“ – na jistém stupni je „školské“ totéž co „klasické“ – , mají největší náboj skrytých možností, jsou nejméně propadlé inerci. Při práci na jejich zlepšení vždycky docházelo k vysokovoltovým výbojům (krátkým spojením), které rozkolísaly „hotové“ verše a proměnily kvalitu básně. Definitivní pak byl právě ten „otřesený“, „v pochybnost uvedený“ tvar – nikoli předcházející, hladký.²⁶³

Zábrana claims that only possible way to reject and overcome the form is by maintaining it, which would seem a contradictory statement. However, if we think about what we have learned so far about his poetics, we can make several hypotheses. He argues that the method of the “14 lines”, which refers to the sonnet form, gave him freedom while, on the contrary an excess of freedom led him to the creation of empty poems. Apparently, he has achieved good result only while working on already written poems (scholastic, as he defines them), since they possess “secret possibilities”, and that while improving them he felt an “high-voltage charge”, mainly in the shortest connection. The author might be referring to the fact that a delimited space, such as that of a strict poetic form, enhances the potential of expression. The chains of actions we have seen so far might be considered the concretization of such a method: they achieve a balance through the regularity of their form (the always begins with an infinite verb), but at the same time maintain a high degree of unpredictability, due to the instability of their content, which can drastically change from one another. The cohesion among the chain/poem is also granted by some recurring cores, as we have noted in the examples provided: death,

²⁶³ In all other cases:/The most unrestrained poems were the driest. The strictest work = the highest level of imagination. Not a single poet of these years realized that the rejection of form is only possible through its preservation. The concept of ‘14 lines’ liberated me within the order of form, not outside of it. Those very lines in my poems that I feel are barbaric (I am speaking only about form here) or ‘academic’—at a certain level, ‘academic’ is the same as ‘classical’—carry the greatest potential for hidden possibilities and are the least subject to inertia. Working to improve them always led to high-voltage discharges (short circuits) that destabilized the ‘finished’ lines and transformed the quality of the poem. It was precisely this ‘shaken’ or ‘called into question’ form that proved to be definitive—not the preceding, polished one.” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 8.

body decay, aging, sex. The apparently random associations contained in them are actually a specific literary device: as Zábrana mentioned in his entries from the 1950s, a poem should not only exert influence upon the reader's feeling through an uncommon disposition of the words; Right that element which is introduced unexpectedly, as mentioned by Zábrana, that was preceded by nothing, becomes crucial in the creation of a poem, which aligns with what we have learned about the spontaneity the poetic chains possess. These chains show other perspectives on several, intimate aspects of human life. This is possible only by surpassing the limits of one's poetics, which remains a poetics without being one, as Zábrana coherently puts it:

Překročit meze racionální poetiky je schopen jedině ten básník, který je schopen kritiky „slabých míst“ prvního zápisu básně. Ta jsou klíčová. Nejde o to (a není to možné), opravit je v intencích poetiky. Lze je „opravit“ pouze kvalitativní změnou básně – pak poetika přesáhne mez, po kterou si uvědomuje (vnímá) samu sebe. Směr síly toho kterého básníka je udán jeho slabostí. Je to jasné.²⁶⁴

This is the second time he mentions weakness as a key feature for his poetic creation. In his notes from the 1950s, as we have seen, he defined powerlessness as the mark of a true poet.²⁶⁵ Interesting is, that he seems to perceive as a sign of weakness the habit he has of returning to his own poems and being able to criticize what is weak in them, demonstrating humility. We could also relate this habit to what we have said before about the poet's intent to conciliate spontaneity and strictness to the form in his artistic process, since this habit of working on what was already written aligns with this kind of procedure: what was noted down on the moment, instinctively, is re-adjusted in a second moment. As Jiří Trávniček has pointed out that, for Zábrana, "*text byl spíše generátorem dalších možností, které je v něm možno – stále a stále – vytvářet a objevovat*".²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ "Only a poet capable of critiquing the 'weak points' of a poem's first draft can transcend the limits of rational poetics. These weak points are crucial. It's not about (nor is it possible) correcting them within the framework of poetics. They can be 'corrected' only through a qualitative change in the poem—only then can poetics surpass the limit at which it becomes aware of (or perceives) itself. The direction of a poet's strength is determined by their weakness. This is clear" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 175.

²⁶⁵ See p. 70.

²⁶⁶ "The text was [for Zábrana] more of a generator of further possibilities, which could be continuously created and discovered within it" Trávniček, Jiří, *Ediční poznámka* in: Zábrana, Jan, *Básně*, Torst, Praha, 1993, p. 264.

Regarding the “closeness” of Zábrana’s writing style, also Cosentino noted that the need of an enclosed space played a key role in his formation, both from an existential and an artistic point of views:

Hledání jiného (možného) prostoru pro tvorbu hluboce souzní s bytostným básnickým Zábranovým založením, má v Zábranově senzibilitě a poetice autentickou korespondenci [...] V tomto ohledu uzavřený útvar, který se od začátku vyskytuje v Zábranově poezii, můžeme považovat nejen za důkaz básníkovy virtuózního stylistického talentu, ale také za schránku, za uzavřený prostor, kde „dislokované“ prvky znovu najdou své umístění a tedy svůj smysl: v již zmíněné sbírce *Stránky z deníku* se nikoliv náhodou jako hlavní slohový útvar objevuje sonet – nebo raději báseň o čtrnácti verších.²⁶⁷

I concord on the fact that Zábrana’s tendency towards smaller spaces coincided with the existential need to find an enclosed place where everything might find its order in the midst of the turmoil of his life, and that is connected to his diary keeping practice. One guess might be that, being used to write in the small space of a diary entry, the writer got use to condense many elements inside a specific number of lines; I am keen to believe that this need of a delimited space had other genetic precedents in the dossiers we have reviewed so far, like the tendency to the sonnet might have his roots in Zábrana’s interest in ancient poetry.

In another note, the author speaks further about his stance towards the poetics of Jiří Kolář, which he had briefly mentioned in the diaries from 1948, and which might represent a clear explanation of what he meant back then, when he criticized his *Dny v roce*:

Snaha o formu ztrácí smysl ve chvíli, kdy přestane být pociťována. Víc než Šklovskij mě o tom předsvědčil Kolářův omyl v období, kdy psal „limb“. Vnějšíšková aplikace, v jeho případě číselná – měla

²⁶⁷ “The search for another (possible) space for creation deeply resonates with Zábrana’s essential poetic nature, having an authentic correspondence with Zábrana’s sensibility and poetics. In this regard, the enclosed form that appears from the beginning in Zábrana’s poetry can be considered not only as proof of the poet’s virtuoso stylistic talent, but also as a vessel, an enclosed space where “dislocated” elements can once again find their place and therefore their meaning. In the aforementioned collection *Pages from a Diary*, it is no coincidence that the main stylistic form is the sonnet—or rather, a fourteen-line poem” Cosentino, Annalisa, *Zvláštní místa v Zábranově poetice* in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.), *Jan Zábrana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 25.

smysl jenom pro něho, nikoli pro čtenáře – udržela jej (básníka) v iluzi, že je ještě v mezích formy, když už se dostal mimo ni. Jenom tato iluze mu umožnila kontinuitu s dalšími básněmi.²⁶⁸

Zábrana argues that, for the form of a poem to have an actual impact, it must be perceived. Referring to Kolář's collection of poems *Limb*, he mentions that the form the poet chose had a meaning just for him, but not for the reader. In this way, apparently, in Zábrana's view, he was no longer relying on the form, but he had just the illusion of it. This remark adds to the author's reflections another layer of interpretation: the presence and the collaboration of the reader in his creative process. He seems to be implying that a poem, in order to be considered accomplished, has to be understandable for the reader, and not only for the writer himself. The centrality of the subject, in his poetic view, is addressed again by Zábrana in another entry: "*Duveauova definice, že „forma je extenzí obsahu“ zapomíná na subjekt. Nikoli „jakákoli“. Ledaže jej automaticky předpokládá.*"²⁶⁹

To understand this statement, it might be useful to take into consideration what the author said about his creative process. As we have seen, Zábrana stated that his poetry relies on a balance between instinct and strictness of the form, a balance which ensures the spontaneous flourishing of a poem in the framework of an established form. Despite that, he did not explain the reason why the form held such a significant role in "freeing" his poetry. This might have something to do with the reader, that must perceive the form, he must recognize it. I am implying that the active role of the perceiver, in this case the reader, is an integral component of the functioning of this poetics. Zábrana chooses a specific form, for example the sonnet, and fills it with a material that should not belong to that kind of poetic form, such as vulgar images, daily life scenes etc. The reader recognizes the poetic form of the sonnet but is struck by its unusual content, which goes against the tradition of that poetic form. This contrast produces a sense of estrangement which contributes to that the effect we said Zábrana mentioned and wanted to achieve with his poetry: create a particular tension in the reader, a combination of words that could affect his feelings.

The contrast between the content and the form which is typical of Zábrana's poetics was noted by other scholars. Heftrich, for example, sees in this kind of creation similarities

²⁶⁸ "The effort toward form loses its meaning the moment it ceases to be felt. More than Shklovsky, I was convinced of this by Kolář's mistake during the period when he was writing *limb*. The external application—in his case, numerical—made sense only to him, not to the reader. It kept him (the poet) under the illusion that he was still within the bounds of form, even though he had already moved beyond it. Only this illusion allowed him to maintain continuity with his other poems." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 175.

²⁶⁹ "Duveau's definition that 'form is an extension of content' overlooks the subject. Not just 'any' subject—unless it assumes it automatically Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 175.

kinship with the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, an exponent of the Acmeist movement, with whom the author felt a deep affinity:

Zvažme např. témata, která mladého Mandelštama tak fascinovala, že je zpracoval v básních svého prvního svazku lyriky *Kámen* (Камень, 1913): tenis, fotbal, služebnictvo, kočí, vrátní, kino, americký bar, turistika a zmrzlina. A vedle toho si vybavme, která témata použil ne už tak mladý Jan Zábrana v cyklu básní *Stránky z deníku* (1968): dostihy, fotbal, plavčík, páskové, kadešníci, vesnický cirkus, taneční parket, rekreační chaty a gabardén. Takovéto zdánlivě triviální předměty Zábrana neustále spojuje s klasickými jmény a látkami [...].²⁷⁰

Heftrich also points out to the fact that the strictness of Zábrana to the formal structure of the poems might be more akin to the Acmeist movement than to the poetic of the Group 42, which artistic program was the exact opposite, relying on the total refusal of the form. Heftrich also notes that the choice of the sonnet might have, in Zábrana's case, an ironic function, and that the contrast between the content and the form remind that of the parody. He also attributes that to a stance Zábrana took willingly towards the regime: using a classic form like that of the sonnet to mark his distance from everything that was produced in context without freedom.²⁷¹

In the selection that we have at our disposal there are also single stanzas, that might be considered attempts to write poems which were discarded; or maybe that were intended to be isolated instances where Zábrana could experiment with a more restricted space. Noteworthy is the fact that all these fragments or note are addressed to someone:

Cholagol, barbur, ventracid,
ale tím nemládneš,
to působí i na cit...²⁷²

Neboť jsme zaměnitelní
na tomto světě.

²⁷⁰ "Consider, for example, the themes that so fascinated the young Mandelstam that he incorporated them into the poems of his first lyric collection, *Stone* (Камень, 1913): tennis, football, servants, coachmen, doormen, cinema, American bars, tourism, and ice cream. Alongside this, let us recall the themes used by a no longer young Jan Zábrana in his poem cycle *Pages from a Diary* (1968): horse races, football, lifeguards, hooligans, barbers, village circuses, dance floors, recreational cabins, and gabardine. Zábrana persistently connects such seemingly trivial subjects with classical names and themes". Heftrich, Urs, *Jan Zábrana and Osip Mandelstam*, in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.), *Jan Zábrana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 123.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, p. 124.

²⁷² "Cholagol, barbur, ventracid,/but that doesn't make you any younger,/it affects even your emotions..." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 170.

Nedělejte si iluze, že ne.²⁷³

Co ti dnes ta první říká,
kam až jsi dohléd skrze ní?
Noc plná filmařského vkusu
a televizních tvrzení.²⁷⁴

Nemysli, že budu napravovat chyby,
které jsi nadělala před mýma očima.
Nikdy jsem se o ničem
neradil ani se Svořitelem. Nikdy jsem
nikomu neradil v ničem.²⁷⁵

Kdy všeho už je příliš, příliš.
Kdy svět je kabaretem soch.
Tak příliš, že snad nezešlíš,
však zbláznit se, to už bys mohl²⁷⁶

In these small stanzas, the lyric I corresponds without a doubt with the author. He addresses either himself, either an interlocutor (by using the second person). In the second example proposed, it seems that he is speaking to a larger audience. They remind the diary entries where we have seen Zábrana developing his thoughts on a certain topic and then started posing many rhetorical questions, as if he was speaking with someone. There is, in the writings of this period, an increasing tendency towards dialogism. Often times, it seems like he speaking with himself. These stanzas are in rhyme and they seem to be part of Zábrana long-term work on the form of the sonnet, even if it is unclear if they can be considered stand-alone poems or work in progress stanzas that were supposed to become part of larger poems. As we have discussed so far, the content of some these small stanzas is simple and related to the daily life of the author, reflecting what was present in the chains and what we have said about the author's intention to create a contrast between the formal structure of the poem and its content. On the other hand, some of them seems to encompass more universal themes, to speak to a broader

²⁷³ "For we are replaceable/in this world./Don't delude yourselves otherwise" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 171.

²⁷⁴ "What does the first one tell you today, /how far did you see through it?/A night full of cinematic flair and television assertions." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 169.

²⁷⁵ "Don't think I'll be fixing the mistakes/you made right in front of me. /I've never consulted/even with the Creator on anything./I've never given advice to anyone on anything". Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 169.

²⁷⁶ When everything is just too much, too much, /When the world becomes a cabaret of statues./So much that perhaps you won't go mad,/But losing your mind—well, that you just might" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 168.

audience, as if they were meant to be some kind of testimony. We often said, in the previous dossiers, that the ability to speak truly was considered by Zábřana one of the main characteristics of a writer. Besides aging, which is a recurring theme in the notes of this period, these stanzas present a general sense of surrender and pessimism. They deal with the sense of abandonment which the lyric I/author feels, with his resentment towards outer reality and its falsity.

One poem from the content of these entries is, in my opinion, particularly interesting to sum up the development of Zábřana's poetics, both from a thematic and stylistic point of view, that we have so far discussed:

Tvoje osmnáctiletá krása je nehotové dílo.
Ale to ti tvoji mladí milenci neřeknou.
A pětatřicetiletému muži (pochopitelně) neuvěříš ani slovo.

Jenže jak má čas dohotovit to,
co může jen zničit?

Další cesta je už jen cesta dolů
k nedokončení.

Jako nedokonalé dílo,
k němuž se den ze dne vrací,

aby na něm provedl úpravy.
Až jednou se všechno zborší...

Krása je nepoužitelná (v tomto světě)
a její dokonalost nikdy není teď.

Ano, smrt... dokončenost
i dokonalost
je zároveň.

Takže je, až když není.
Až když není,
pokud zasažené vědomí
dosud trvá.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ Your eighteen-year-old beauty is an unfinished work./But that's something your young lovers won't tell you./And, of course, you won't believe a single word from a thirty-five-year-old man./But how is time

Thematically, this poem explores death and aging through the metaphor of an unfinished work of art that is continuously revised and refined in an attempt to reach completion. This metaphor suggests that the pursuit of perfection, whether in life or art, is an ongoing process that, paradoxically, also entails degradation. The notion that perfection can only be achieved at the point of finality—that is, in death—highlights the tension between creation and destruction. As the poem suggests, a “perfect” work is only realized at the end of the path, when life itself reaches its inevitable conclusion.

The poem can be interpreted on multiple levels. On one hand, it reflects the poet’s fascination with death and his existential predicament. The speaker implies that true life, or perhaps true meaning, lies beyond the present, waiting somewhere beyond the reach of the living. This notion conveys a sense of alienation from life as it is lived, suggesting that the reality the poet inhabits is not entirely fulfilling or authentic. On the other hand, the poem could also serve as a metaphor for the creative process itself, particularly the poet’s own writing practice. As previously discussed, Zábřana often returned to his earlier poems, revising and “unmaking” them in order to craft something better. This practice of continuous revision mirrors the process of aging, in which one moves closer to an endpoint but in doing so must endure a certain decay or loss along the way. It is particularly intriguing that Zábřana, in this poem, seems to equate his method of working with the process of aging, a connection that can also be seen in his meticulous practice of diary-keeping. The diary, like his poems, was a place where he constantly revisited past moments, seeking to rework and refine his experience through reflection and memory. This parallel between the creative process and the passage of time underscores a fundamental theme in the poem: the interplay between impermanence and the desire for completion, a desire that can only be fully realized at the moment of death. On a formal level, the poem shares notable similarities with other fragments of Zábřana’s work that we have previously encountered. The tone is introspective and reflective, imbued with a sense of melancholy and philosophical inquiry. The poem is structured as an address to an eighteen-year-old girl, with the speaker offering her a reflection on youth, beauty, and the inevitable passage of time. This direct address creates a dialogue that heightens the poem’s emotional intensity, as the speaker’s insights are cast into sharp relief against the naivety and

supposed to complete/what it can only destroy?/The next path is only a downward path/toward incompletion./Like an imperfect work,/to which one returns day after day/to make adjustments—/until, one day, it all collapses.../Beauty is unusable (in this world)/and its perfection is never now./Yes, death... completion/and perfection/are one and the same./So it exists only when it doesn’t./Only when it doesn’t,/if the consciousness touched/still endures. Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, p. 172.

idealism of youth. The use of rhetorical questions further emphasizes the speaker's contemplative stance, inviting the reader to ponder the complexities of existence, aging, and the pursuit of meaning. In summary, this poem encapsulates Zábřana's preoccupation with the fleeting nature of life and the quest for artistic and existential completion. It operates both as a meditation on mortality and as a commentary on the creative process, illustrating the poet's deeply personal struggle to reconcile the forces of creation and destruction, of life and death. The notion that beauty and perfection are only realized in their absence—that is, in death—imbues the poem with a profound sense of existential resignation yet also highlights the persistent human drive to strive for meaning in the face of inevitable decay.

In the available selection of Zábřana's diaries, only two writers are explicitly referenced as potential sources of influence: Allen Ginsberg and Michael McClure, both prominent figures of the Beat Generation. The Beat Generation, as is widely known, refers to a movement of American poetry that emerged in the 1950s and gained international recognition for its radical break from the literary traditions and cultural norms of the preceding generation. The term was first coined by John Clellon Holmes in his 1952 article, "This Is the Beat Generation", in which he described a group of young poets who, whether directly or indirectly, had been marked by the experiences of World War II. These poets were profoundly disillusioned with the prevailing moral and social conditions of post-war America.²⁷⁸ The Beat Generation poets sought to challenge the rigid moral codes and conformist ideologies of their time. They aimed to liberate themselves from the constraints of societal norms and carve out a space for individual expression. Central to their ethos was a rejection of conventional values and an embrace of personal authenticity. This is reflected in their experimentation with form, language, and subject matter, as well as their openness to inspiration from non-literary sources such as jazz music. Jazz, with its emphasis on improvisation and spontaneity, became a key influence for the Beats, not only because it embodied a rebellious stance against the strictures of musical conventions, but also because it mirrored their own aspirations for artistic freedom. The improvisational nature of jazz provided a model for literary experimentation, exemplified by Jack Kerouac's "spontaneous prose", which sought to capture the unfiltered flow of thoughts and emotions in writing. Zábřana's interest in the Beats is particularly significant given his own context as a Czech writer living under a repressive political regime, where personal expression was

²⁷⁸ Zita, Antonín, *How We Understand the Beats: The Reception of the Beat Generation in the United States and the Czech Lands*, Masarykova Univerzita, Filozofická Fakulta, Brno, 2018, p. 9.

constrained by ideological control. The Beats' emphasis on personal freedom and resistance to conformity would have resonated deeply with Zábřana, who himself struggled against the limitations imposed by the Communist regime. In one diary entry, Zábřana expresses a keen interest in the poetics of Michael McClure, whose work embodies the core values of the Beat movement. McClure, like Ginsberg, was deeply invested in exploring the boundaries of consciousness, individuality, and social norms through poetry that was often radical in both content and form:

Víc než Ginsbergova poetika mě zajímá poetika McClura. Pozdější Kolář, pokud ještě nepřechází celé do výtvarnictví, mě zajímá ještě tam, kde zůstává „slovo“ – sémantická jednotka; při další „destrukci“ ztrácím jakýkoli zájem to sledovat. U McClura jde v podstatě o zúžení, „odpočítaný“, „vymezený“ obsah slov, který nesmí být rozšířen. S tím by se dalo pracovat. Ovšem za předpokladu, že si ponechám slovesa.²⁷⁹

In the first part of this note, Zábřana reiterates his aversion to Jiří Kolář's practice of "destruction of the word," a process which, in Zábřana's view, moved Kolář's works closer to the realm of graphic arts rather than literature. While this stance had already been evident in his earlier reflections, this specific mention further underscores Zábřana's commitment to preserving the sanctity of the written word, which he viewed as the most fundamental element of his literary craft. For Zábřana, the word was not merely a tool of expression but the very essence of artistic creation. However, what is perhaps more significant in this note is the way Zábřana speaks of his interest in the American poet Michael McClure. This mention marks a notable shift from his criticism of Kolář's experimental approach to an expression of admiration for McClure, whose work is rooted in the rebellious spirit of the Beat Generation. McClure, an essential figure in the Beat movement, gained prominence through his participation in Allen Ginsberg's now-legendary public reading of *Howl* in 1955 at the Six Gallery in San Francisco—an event that is widely regarded as a defining moment in the cultural and literary affirmation of the Beats. This public reading, which also featured other poets such as Jack Kerouac and Philip Lamantia, symbolized the emergence of a new poetic voice that rejected the conventions of mainstream literature and embraced a more spontaneous, unfiltered expression of the self.

²⁷⁹ "I am more interested in McClure's poetics than Ginsberg's. Later Kolář, as long as he hasn't completely shifted into the visual arts, still interests me where he remains within the 'word'—the semantic unit; with further 'destruction,' I lose any desire to follow his work. With McClure, the focus is essentially on a narrowed, 'counted,' 'defined' content of words, which must not be expanded. This approach could be worth working with, provided I retain verbs" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 175.

McClure's early poetic style, particularly in his initial works, appeared to adhere closely to traditional forms:

The poems (which he'd written earlier and took to the class) were metrical, rhymed sonnets, sestinas, and villanelles. He remembers Duncan being somewhat alarmed by the fact of his apparently working in traditional forms. The mark of this formal interest is evident especially in McClure's early works such as *Dark Brown* and *Odes*, and is also evident in his countermanding given forms, as if in the same instant (of being formed) he's speaking to his own speaking: "There is no form but shape! No logic but sequence!/. . . synaptic/stars/FORM IS AN EVASION!" ("Rant Block")²⁸⁰

During this period, Zábřana collaborated with Stanislav Mareš on an anthology of Beat poets titled *Obeznámení s nocí* (Acquainted with the Night), which was published in 1967 and featured translations of McClure's poems, alongside works by Ginsberg, Corso, Ferlinghetti, and others. This project not only reflects Zábřana's engagement with the Beat movement but also provides insight into the influence of these poets on his own creative process. In particular, Zábřana's discussion of McClure's method of creation bears striking similarities to his own need for a delimited artistic space, within which creative expression is constrained and controlled. McClure, as described by Zábřana, worked with a limited set of words in a restricted space, a technique that resonates with Zábřana's own artistic approach. However, Zábřana adds an interesting nuance to this observation, stating that while McClure may have restricted his language, he personally would prefer to retain the verbs. This remark is significant when considered in the context of Zábřana's broader poetic concerns. In earlier analyses, I outlined how movement plays a crucial role in his translations and how this tendency to emphasize action is reflected in the texts we have examined. The preservation of verbs aligns with this emphasis on movement, as verbs inherently drive the progression of thought and action within a poem. By retaining the verbs, Zábřana ensures that the poetic sequence remains dynamic and fluid, continually in motion. Moreover, this focus on verbs and movement also connects to the improvisational techniques of the Beat poets, a hallmark of their literary style. Improvisation, as we have noted, was a central component of the Beat generation's rejection of traditional forms and structures. Zábřana's approach to constructing poetic "chains of action" embodies this improvisational ethos. The "infinite verbs" that begin each sentence not only maintain a

²⁸⁰ Scalapino, Leslie, *Introduction* in: McClure, Michael, *Of Indigo and Saffron: New and Selected Poems*, University of California Press, 2011, p. 6.

sense of ongoing motion but also function as a recurring motif that provides continuity throughout the text. This strategy reflects a form of controlled improvisation, where spontaneity is allowed to flourish within the boundaries of a carefully constructed structure. In this way, the poets of the Beat generation—particularly figures like McClure and Ginsberg—offered Zábřana valuable models for experimenting with his own poetic style. While Zábřana may downplay his interest in Beat poetics, the influence of their improvisational techniques and emphasis on linguistic freedom is evident in his work. Allen Ginsberg, for instance, despite Zábřana's claims of ambivalence, emerges as a key influence in the development of Zábřana's own literary voice. The use of improvisation, coupled with the focus on verbs and movement, highlights how Zábřana absorbed elements of Beat poetry and adapted them to fit his unique artistic vision.

Zábřana and Ginsberg

As previously mentioned, Zábřana had been engaged with the works of Allen Ginsberg since the 1950s. Ginsberg's *Howl* was first published in 1957, marking a significant milestone in American poetry and the Beat Generation movement. As was already noted, Zábřana came into contact for the first time with the Beat Generation in 1959, with the publication of Ginsberg's poems on the pages of *Světová Literatura*. On that same magazine he also published in 1961 six translations of the poems by Gregory Corso,²⁸¹ while two volumes containing his translations of the poems of Lawrence Ferlinghetti were released in 1962 (*Lunapark v hlavě*) and in 1964 (*Startuj ze San Francisca*).²⁸² He was therefore already well acquainted with their poetry. We have already mentioned that what draws Zábřana to the poetry of the Beat poets was the degree of freedom and experimentation he found in them. Another element that probably resonated with his poetics was a long tradition of colloquialism in literary texts, which the Czech literary tradition in that moment lacked. While commenting the problems he had encountered while translating the works of Warren Miller, he mentions that:

Jako překladatel stál jsem před svízelným problémem. Millerův originál je psán nadmíru obhroublým slangem dětí harlemské ulice, jazykem bez sentimentality, ale zato je ve své prostotě přímo nabitým

²⁸¹ Zábřana, Jan, *Potkát básníka*, op. cit., p. 181.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, 326.

zvláštní poezii. Problém byl tím těžší, že otázka použití slangu a nářečí v literatuře je u nás stále živá a stále nedořešená. Nemáme tradici knih psaných důsledně [...] jazykem, jakým lidé skutečně mluví [...] Američané, v jejichž literatuře [...] je tradice víceméně uplatňování hovorového jazyka, slangu a nářečí mnohem bohatší než u nás, jsou na tom líp.²⁸³

Zábrana's writings display a consistent attentiveness to colloquial language, a sensitivity that appears even in his early notes. In his diaries from 1948, he frequently noted his admiration for John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, which played a central role in shaping his literary preferences. He recounted his search for Czech representations of spoken and colloquial language in literature, ultimately finding what he sought in Vladimír Procházka's translation of *The Grapes of Wrath*, which sparked his lasting interest in American literature. Zábrana wrote, "*Akademik Procházka [...] jehož pionýrská práce v problematice překládání dialektu mi byla velkým povzbuzením a jehož nezapomenutelný překlad Hroznů hněvu ve mně ještě za středoškolských studií probudil zájem o americkou literaturu.*"²⁸⁴ Thus, it could be argued that Zábrana's initial attraction to American literature was motivated by the raw, spoken quality of the language—a linguistic aspect that was largely absent from Czech literature at the time. In his reflections on Gregory Corso, Zábrana expands upon his admiration for Beat Generation poetics and articulates insights that align closely with his own creative evolution. Zábrana's writing reveals how the Beat Generation's works, especially Corso's, informed his unique approach to capturing the mundane in a provocative light. He observed that Corso's poetry "aims to present the reader with shocking associations," associations that initially appear jarring but ultimately emerge as reflections of everyday reality. These realities, although familiar, are seen "from an unconventional angle," as Zábrana explains: "[...] *to, co nám připadalo kuriózní, je vlastně pouhá realita, jenom jakoby abnormálně zvětšená mikroskopem či viděná z nekonvenčního úhlu. To, co se může zdát podivínstvím nebo extravagancí [...], je ve skutečnosti osobitým způsobem vidění světa.*"²⁸⁵ This perspective

²⁸³ "As a translator, I faced a challenging problem. Miller's original is written in the exceptionally rough slang of Harlem street kids—a language devoid of sentimentality but charged, in its simplicity, with a unique poetry. The difficulty was heightened by the fact that the question of using slang and dialect in literature remains an open, unresolved issue here. We lack a tradition of books written consistently [...] in the language people actually speak [...] Americans, whose literature [...] has a much richer tradition of incorporating colloquial language, slang, and dialect, are better off in this regard" Ibid., *ibid.*, pp. 175-177.

²⁸⁴ "Academician Procházka, whose pioneering work in translating dialect was a great inspiration to me, and whose unforgettable translation of *The Grapes of Wrath* sparked my interest in American literature even during my high school years" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 178.

²⁸⁵ "What seemed curious to us is, in fact, simply reality—only magnified as if under a microscope or viewed from an unconventional angle. What may appear as eccentricity or extravagance [...] is, in reality, a distinctive way of perceiving the world" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 185.

parallels Zábrana's own stylistic trajectory from the 1950s to the 1960s, during which he sought to present readers with strikingly altered aspects of reality to stimulate a reaction and provoke thought. Zábrana also comments on Corso's conviction in his role as a poet, observing that Corso demands from his readers exactly what religions require of their congregants: "A věří především absolutně v sebe, věří o sobě, že je básník. [...] Také od svých čtenářů žádá přesně to, co od svých oveček požadují církve: víru".²⁸⁶ For Zábrana, the interaction between the poet and the audience is vital, highlighting his own reliance on readers' active engagement with his work. Additionally, he draws a parallel between the Beat poets and the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, whose works had fascinated him. Zábrana observed that both the Beats and Rimbaud shared a similarly polemical stance against societal norms, a rebellious spirit that resonated deeply with his own resistance to established conventions.

The connection between Zábrana and Allen Ginsberg was already profound by 1965, a bond that intensified during Ginsberg's visit to Czechoslovakia that year, when the two met in person—just one year before the period addressed in Zábrana's notes. Eva Masnerová, the editor overseeing Zábrana's translations of *Howl* and other Ginsberg poems, provided detailed insights into the translation's publication process. According to Masnerová, the initial plan was to release a collection of Ginsberg's poetry, including *Howl*, in 1965, likely comprising the poems that Zábrana had previously published in periodicals. However, due to Ginsberg's prolific output and Zábrana's interest in including additional material, publication was delayed until 1971. The book, intended to be titled *Kvílení a jiné básně* (*Howl and Other Poems*), was ultimately blocked by the authorities, largely due to the controversial content and Ginsberg's association with countercultural movements. It was not until 1990, following the Velvet Revolution and the fall of the communist regime, that the work was finally published.²⁸⁷

As noted by Petr Onufer, the Czech translation of *Howl*, the poem that serves as the titular work in Ginsberg's collection, appeared in publication at least three times prior to its release in the aforementioned volume. Its initial appearance was in 1959, in issue 6 of the magazine *Světová literatura*. This was followed by its inclusion in *Jazzová inspirace* (*Jazz Inspiration*, 1966), curated by Lubomír Dorůžka and Josef Škvorecký, and later in *Jak se dělá báseň* (*How to Make a Poem*, 1970), edited by Zábrana himself.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ "And above all, he has absolute faith in himself; he believes he is a poet. [...] He also asks of his readers exactly what churches ask of their congregants: faith." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 184.

²⁸⁷ Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.), *Jan Zábrana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 243.

²⁸⁸ Onufer, Petr, *Ediční poznámka* in: Ginsberg, Allen, *Kvílení a jiné básně*, Praha, Argo, 2015, p. 64.

Within the poems contained in the collection *Kvílení a jiné básně*, we encounter numerous instances of stylistic and aesthetic intensity.²⁸⁹ Emotional amplification is particularly prominent, with notable occurrences throughout the text:

who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard

wondering where to go, and went, leaving no broken hearts,

Kteří se toulali o půlnoci sem a tam po nákladovém nádraží, **lámali si hlavu** kam jít a odešli a nezanechali žádná zlomená srdce. (Kvílení)²⁹⁰

who lit cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars racketing through snow toward **lonesome** farms in grandfather night,

kteří si zapalovali cigarety v dobytčácích, dobytčácích, dobytčácích, rachotících sněhem k **zapadlým** farmám v pradědečkovské noci (Kvílení)²⁹¹

we thought the same thoughts of the soul, bleak and blue and **sad-eyed**,

mysleli jsme stejnými myšlenkami duše, ponuře, smutně a s **tesklivýma** očima, (Slunečnicová sůtra)²⁹²

My mind is **made up** there's going to be trouble. **You should** have seen me **reading** Marx.

Už jsem **se rozhod**: z toho bude malér. **Mělas** mě vidět, **jak jsem čet** Marxe. (Slunečnicová sůtra)²⁹³

In the first two examples, Zábřana's translation choices intensify the expressivity of the original text, adding a layer of emphasis not present in Ginsberg's version. For instance, the English verb "wonder" is rendered by Zábřana as *lámat si hlavu*, which means "to rack one's brain," thereby amplifying the psychological intensity of the line. Similarly, in his translation of the adjective "lonesome" from *Howl*, Zábřana opts for

²⁸⁹ From now on, all the examples in Czech will come from Ginsberg, Allen, *Kvílení a jiné básně*, op. cit.; The english versions of the poem are drawn from Ginsberg, Allen, *Howl and Other Poems*, San Francisco, City Lights Books, 1996.

²⁹⁰ Ginsberg, Allen, *Kvílení a jiné básně*, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁹¹ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁹² Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁹³ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 42.

zapadlý, a Czech term meaning “forgotten” or “lost.” This substitution shifts the tone of the original image, imparting a darker and more isolated quality to the verse. This tonal shift is also evident in Zábřana's treatment of the colloquial language found in Ginsberg's *Sunflower Sutra*. Here, Zábřana adopts conversational Czech phrases like *rozhod se* (he decided), *mělas* (you had), and *jak jsem čet* (as I read), which lower the linguistic register of the translation. By choosing colloquial forms, Zábřana creates a more natural flow in Czech, allowing the lines to resonate with a sense of familiarity for the reader. However, this approach subtly alters the perception of the original work, presenting Ginsberg's voice with a tone more grounded in the Czech vernacular. Zábřana's translation not only makes Ginsberg's poetry accessible but also intensifies the emotional impact. The naturalistic choices add a layer of emphasis that, while staying true to the spirit of Ginsberg's language, modify the cultural and tonal underpinnings of the original. In effect, Zábřana does not merely translate but actively interprets, adapting Ginsberg's rhythm and expressivity into Czech forms that capture both the energy and the underlying emotionality of the source material. This intensification can be seen in further examples, where Zábřana's careful selections amplify the emotional resonance of Ginsberg's poetry, preserving its intensity while adding unique textures that reflect his interpretation:

Its cover **stares** at me

Jeho obálka na mě **vejrá** (Slunečnicová sůtra)²⁹⁴

America how can I write a holy litany in your **silly** mood?

Ameriko, jak můžu psát zbožnou litanii v tvém **bláznivém** ovzduší? (Slunečnicová sůtra)²⁹⁵

Her make us all work sixteen hours a day. Help. America this is **quite** serious.

Ha. Vono chtít, aby my pracovat šestnáct hodin denně. Pomóóc. Ameriko, tohle je **zatraceně** vážné.
(Slunečnicová sůtra)²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ Ginsberg, Allen, *Kvílení a jiné básně*, op. cit., p. 43.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 43.

Besides the use of colloquialism, Zábřana's interpretation tends to be harsher and even more dramatic. Given the high degree of materiality present in the poems, there are as well cases of what we have called poetic concretization:

who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love,

kterí kouřili ocasy a nechali si je kouřit od těch lidských Serafinů, námořníků, něžnosti atlantické a karibské lásky (Kvílení)²⁹⁷

bed, and continued along the floor and down the hall and ended fainting on the wall with **a vision of ultimate cunt and come eluding the last gyzyrn of consciousness**

a pokračovaly na podlaze a na chodbě a skončily omdlelé na zdi s vizí vrcholné kundy a **spermatu vyhýbajícího se poslední ejakulaci vědomí**. (Kvílení)²⁹⁸

In the first example, Zábřana's choice of Czech equivalent, while retaining the colloquial tone of Ginsberg's reference to performing oral sex, is noticeably more specific and direct than its English counterpart. This approach highlights Zábřana's distinct interpretive choices, emphasizing the differences between languages while still preserving the raw immediacy of Ginsberg's tone. Many of Ginsberg's stylistic and thematic elements align with Zábřana's own poetic preoccupations and artistic imagery. Ginsberg's frequent references to sex, his colloquial style, and his use of stark, often jarring imagery find a close match in Zábřana's work. However, it is essential to note that, unlike Zábřana's translation choices for Pasternak, where he introduced verbal dynamism and free-flowing syntax, Zábřana's translation of Ginsberg maintains the original's structural coherence without significant alterations to the dynamic flow of the text. This adherence to the original's rhythm and form suggests a conscious decision to preserve Ginsberg's poetic energy in translation without over-adaptation. Furthermore, Ginsberg's poetics may have influenced Zábřana's own development as a writer, particularly in his adoption of a messianic tone aimed at reaching broader audiences. Much like Ginsberg, who expressed the disillusionment and ideals of his generation, Zábřana aimed to document the individual's experience against the oppressive backdrop of socialist society. Providing this

²⁹⁷ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 16.

testimony of personal struggle within an authoritarian context became one of Zábřana's primary objectives, reflecting his desire to articulate the collective disquiet of those, like himself, who felt compelled to remain hidden to avoid persecution. For Zábřana, this responsibility to speak out against repression echoed Ginsberg's critique of capitalist society's perils, revealing in each writer a commitment to confronting the dominant ideology of their respective worlds. Thus, Zábřana's distaste for the oppressive mechanisms of socialism is mirrored in Ginsberg's aversion to capitalist society, forming a bridge between their parallel but distinct critiques. While talking about the value of Ginsberg's poetry, he affirms that he "[...] říká, že celá ta země skvělé techniky, racionálně řízeného průmyslu a zmechanizovaného pohodlí neuspokojuje lidi, kteří se nevzdali nároků na samostatní myšlení, protože mrzačí lidskou individualitu, vychovává roboty s uniformními myšlenkami".²⁹⁹ Formally, Zábřana was particularly drawn to the autobiographical depth and heterogeneous content that characterize Ginsberg's poetry. The structure of Ginsberg's work—composed of a dense array of memories, political commentary, and various personal reflections—creates a layered, almost chaotic amalgamation of material. In Zábřana's view, Ginsberg achieves a remarkable feat by weaving these disparate elements together in a way that remains decidedly poetic, resisting the slide into prose:

Zdá se, že nejobjektivnější bylo právě Ginsbergovo první období, báseň Kvílení, kde psal o současnicích, o své generaci, protože v dalším vývoji vtahuje do veršů stále intimnější fakta své autobiografie. (...) Vše je zavaleno excitující třídí vzpomínek, vedlejších poznámek, rodinných štrapácí, pomluv, letmých impresí a detailů; navíc je to vše sděleno veršem, který se právě v Kadiši dostal nejdál v útržkovitosti a zpřerývanosti, do jakési stále vzrůstající tenze neklidu a nervozity. A přece se báseň nerozpadá a podle některých je největší elegií americké poezie vůbec: Ginsbergova poetika právě zde prodělala zkoušku ohněm, nová forma vydržela i nové věci a velká enumerační poema (vypočítává celé rozsáhlé situace a výseky skutečnosti) se neproměnila v prózu.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Zábřana, Jan, *Potkat básníka*, op. cit., p. 214.

³⁰⁰ "It seems that Ginsberg's first period, especially in *Howl*, was his most objective, where he wrote about his contemporaries and his generation. In his later development, he increasingly draws intensely personal facts from his own life into his verses. (...) Everything is filled with a tumultuous clash of memories, side notes, family struggles, gossip, fleeting impressions, and details; furthermore, it is all conveyed in verse that, in *Kaddish*, reaches an extreme fragmentation and irregularity, creating a growing tension of restlessness and anxiety. And yet, the poem does not fall apart and, according to some, stands as the greatest elegy in American poetry. Here, Ginsberg's poetics underwent a trial by fire: the new form held up to the new material, and the extensive enumerative poem (cataloging vast situations and fragments of reality) did not turn into prose" Zábřana, Jan, *Potkat básníka*, p. 213.

Considering how Zábřana articulated his own poetic vision, we can better understand the profound influence of Ginsberg's work on his craft. Zábřana saw in Ginsberg's verses a source of inspiration, particularly regarding the transformation of ordinary or even mundane details into powerful poetry. This transformation was achieved, in Zábřana's view, through a unique kind of poetic tension—a tension he himself sought to cultivate. Zábřana described this poetic tension as a mechanism for reimagining the trivial elements of everyday life, converting them into charged symbols or images that transcend their ordinary significance. This process relied heavily on his use of free association, a technique that allowed disparate elements to be woven together in a seemingly spontaneous yet deeply intentional way. Through this approach, Zábřana could infuse even the most banal aspects of experience with a lyrical quality, expanding the boundaries of what poetry could include and how it could resonate. As Petr Eliáš also noted:

Since Jan Zábřana wrote many essays and studies on the authors he translated we have quite a lot of information to answer the question why he chose the Beat poetry. It was not only their defiance of the society and establishment but also their concept of poetry as something that should be read aloud. What Jan Zábřana and beat poets had in common was that for them a poem was an organic structure not finalised by writing down. Although there is a difference – changes in beat poetry were often caused by the fact that it was read aloud and included a certain amount of improvisation, whereas Zábřana rewrote his verses intentionally, as a result of his developing poetic vision.³⁰¹

As other scholars have pointed out,³⁰² Zábřana's technique of the chains of infinitive verbs might have been inspired from Ginsberg's stylistic trait of starting each new verse of his poem with the same grammar element. In *Howl*'s case, for example, it's the pronoun "who" which is repeated each new sentences, ensuring a continuity between all the elements of the poem. What comes after the pronoun is totally up to the writer, the same thing that happens with Zábřana's chains. The difference is that the Czech poet utilises verbs since, as he mentioned earlier while speaking of McClure poetics, he cannot renounce to the verbs. Judging from what we have said so far, we might affirm the never-

³⁰¹ Eliáš, Petr, *Individual style in translation*, in: *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Philologica*, 3, 2015, pp. 55-60.

³⁰² "Regarding *Havran*, which was gradually expanded over time, it has been suggested that the work might serve as 'a kind of Zábřana's dialogue with Poe and Ginsberg, as well as a record of both personal and social life experience.' For the account of the 'Horrors' published in *Život je všude (Life is Everywhere)*, Zábřana employed an impersonal infinitive form, which could perhaps be seen as an analogy to Ginsberg's litany-like verbal references in *Howl*, directed toward 'those who (suffered, raged, dissented...)' v Kvílení" Kalivodová, Eva, *Objevování Ezra Pounda* in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.), *Jan Zábřana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 227.

released poem *The Raven* was supposed to be Zábrana's *Howl*. In sum, Zábrana's translation not only captures Ginsberg's original style but also invites reflection on the resonances between their works, highlighting Zábrana's alignment with Ginsberg's spirit of rebellion, critique, and truth-telling.

Fourth Dossier: Disiecta Membra and Notes from the Hospital (1970-1984)

“Spisovatel, o kterém po smrti budou moci říct:
popsal za svého života les
- les dost velký, aby v něm zbloudilo dítě.”³⁰³

The final dossier encompasses Zábřana's diaries from 1971 to 1984. This period marks the deepening of the author's isolation, largely due to the deteriorating political climate. The year 1968 saw the abrupt end of the brief liberalization movement known as the Prague Spring, which was quashed by the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces. This invasion ushered in the so-called “normalization period”, during which a new communist government, backed by the Soviet Union, reinstated strict control over society. This regime systematically repressed any form of dissent, initiating widespread purges across public institutions, similar to those following the 1948 communist coup. Writers and magazines were censored, and many intellectuals chose to go into exile—such as Josef Škvorecký, who left for Canada. Zábřana, however, decided to remain in the country, even though Škvorecký had secured a teaching position for him in Slavic studies at the University of Toronto. Deemed an undesirable writer by the state, Zábřana refocused his efforts exclusively on translation work, a task that increasingly became his refuge. In early 1971, during his stay at the writer's residence in the Slovak town of Horní Smokovec, Zábřana began composing a new poem in free verse. This work, characterized by a stark and bitter perspective on reality, once again bore the hallmarks of diary entries, blending personal reflection with poetic expression. The poem, which can be seen as an evolution of the earlier *Havran* mentioned previously, was posthumously published under the title *Zed' vzpomínek* (*Wall of Memories*) in 1992.³⁰⁴ The poem's editor, Jiří Trávníček, described it as a collection of improvised notes and automatic writing, left in an unfinished state.³⁰⁵ This observation underscores the critical role of improvisation and spontaneity in Zábřana's creative process, which often blurred the boundaries between structured literary form and raw, unmediated expression. The fragmented and improvisational nature of *Wall of Memories* highlights Zábřana's distinctive approach to poetry, where the act of writing

³⁰³ “A writer about whom, after his death, they will be able to say: he described a forest during his lifetime— a forest large enough for a child to lose their way” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 211.

³⁰⁴ Šulc, Jan, *Zaknihovaný život Jana Zábřany* in: Kalivodová, E., Eliáš, P. (eds.) *Jan Zábřana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., p. 15.

³⁰⁵ Zábřana, Jan, *Zed' vzpomínek*, curated by Jiří Trávníček. Brno, Atlantis, 1992, p. 121.

becomes a direct extension of lived experience, capturing fleeting moments of thought and emotion with minimal mediation or artifice.

The deep sense of loss, depression, and isolation that defined his life during this period drove Zábrana further into his diaries, which he used as a sanctuary to express his innermost thoughts. It was during this time that Zábrana coined the term *Disiecta Membra*, a Latin phrase meaning “scattered fragments”, which he used to describe the fragmentary, disjointed nature of his existence. This term is particularly significant, as it encapsulates not only his personal experience of isolation and loss, but also the broken, disrupted nature of his cultural and intellectual life. In contrast to earlier diaries, in which Zábrana would detail daily activities and personal experiences, the entries from this period are markedly different. There is a stark absence of routine, mundane details; instead, these diaries are filled with memories, political reflections, commentary on translation work, reflections on books, and the formulation of new concepts and ideas for potential future projects. Of particular note is the inclusion of new poems, which emerge as an essential component of his creative output during this time. Zábrana's *Disiecta Membra* thus becomes not only a repository for intellectual and political musings but also a vital space for artistic experimentation and expression. What is especially striking about these diaries is the remarkable variety that Zábrana displays in his reflections. The fragmented entries illustrate the wide-ranging scope of his intellectual and creative pursuits, even in the face of political oppression and personal hardship. The texts blend different genres and forms, oscillating between autobiographical reflection, philosophical inquiry, political commentary, and poetic creation. Zábrana's multifaceted writing process reveals a deep engagement with his surroundings, despite his isolation, as well as a relentless drive to make sense of the world through literature:

Zahlédnout ještě jednou toho šťastného hráče
jak odchází
z místa triumfu obklopen
houfem hlučících
farizejů
uličkou kde odpařená stará moč
po sobě nechala poprašek stříbrné soli
kde hvězdy s nimiž domluvil
obestřel flór osobních vášní
kde na konci uličky blýská dýka
kde na konci uličky padne

This poem, written in free verse, present several interesting traits that align with the style of Zábřana we have seen so far. The scene depicted is very simple: a player of some sort is leaving accompanied by the shouts of an enthusiastic crowd. The crowds are made of pharisees, underlying their hypocrisy with a biblical reference. We can see the presence of strong images, such as that of the old urine that evaporates. That same player, at the end of the poem, gets “murdered by the velvet blade of words”. The poem might be hinting to the corruption of the society of the time, blinded by power, surrounded by traitors and slave to its pulsion that eventually might be killed by the power of word, by literature, which is poetically described as made of velvet, since its effect are shown gradually, slowly. Other poems featured in this set of the diaries are way more explicit in what they thematize:

Je to krásné... je to
jak když vprostřed věty
vzpomene si na verš
nedopsaný před dvaceti lety

Za tu dobu se děti narodily, vyrostly
a zkurvily,
umřelo půl generace,
malé město zbořili.
Zapomněl jsem já na tebe
a na mě ty,
jen ten verš, ten nedopsaný,
zůstal trčet kdesi v paměti.

Zpátky? Zpátky?
Cestou poznačenou,
stezkou ještě tak plachou,
ještě mladou cenzurou
a líbeznými, mladickými zvrátky?
Dali to sežrat horké tvému mládí

³⁰⁶ To catch one last glimpse of that joyful player/as he departs/from the site of his triumph, surrounded/by a throng of clamoring/Pharisees,/down an alley where evaporated old urine/has left a dusting of silver salt,/where the stars he bargained with/are shrouded in a veil of personal passions,/where at the end of the alley a dagger glints,/where at the end of the alley he falls,/murdered by the velvet blade of words Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 194

The poem explores the profound sense of a life lost and wasted, a theme that has consistently characterized Zábrana's work since the late 1940s. This recurring feeling of futility is articulated through the voice of the lyrical "I," who reflects on a life left in suspension, frozen in time, and accessible only through the fleeting and often painful lens of memory. This suspended state suggests a life shaped and limited by external forces, evoking a sense of regret and powerlessness. The poem's nostalgic tone, however, is undercut by a sharp critique of those individuals who initially supported communism but later denied their complicity or sought to erase their involvement. This critique underscores the moral and ethical dimensions of Zábrana's work, as he grapples with questions of accountability and historical amnesia. Formally, the poem adheres to a structured format, containing rhymes and precise stanzas reminiscent of a sonnet. This adherence to formality contrasts with the raw emotional content, creating a tension between structure and substance that amplifies the poem's impact. As with much of Zábrana's poetry, the narrator—or lyrical "I"—adopts a dialogical attitude, addressing either an absent figure or the reader directly. This dialogic approach reinforces the poem's reflective nature. A notable feature of the poem is its use of rhetorical questions, which underscore its philosophical undertones. These questions challenge both the narrator and the reader to confront uncomfortable truths about personal and collective responsibility, the passage of time, and the impossibility of reclaiming lost opportunities. Despite its reflective and nostalgic tone, the imagery within the poem is strikingly harsh and unflinching, demonstrating Zábrana's commitment to depicting reality without embellishment or sentimentality. Additionally, the inclusion of foreign expressions within the text adds another layer of complexity. These linguistic shifts may symbolize the fractured identity of the narrator, suggesting an inner conflict or a sense of estrangement from both self and society. This multilingual element could also be interpreted as a way of universalizing the poem's themes, linking Zábrana's personal and cultural experience to broader human concerns.

³⁰⁷ It is beautiful... it is/like in the middle of a sentence/you suddenly recall a verse/left unfinished twenty years ago./In that time, children were born, grew up,/and turned rotten./Half a generation died,/a small town was demolished./I forgot about you,/and you about me,/but that verse, the unfinished one,/remained lodged somewhere in memory./Back? Back?/Along a path now marked,/a trail still so timid./still young with censorship/and sweet, youthful vomit?/They made your youth swallow it scalding./Don't forget that. Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 204.

As previously mentioned, the diaries function as a unique space for the author to experiment freely with ideas and concepts. They serve as a kind of creative laboratory, allowing the writer to test out themes, structures, and stylistic approaches that could later be developed into fully realized works. This experimental nature of the diaries underscores their importance not merely as a personal record but as a dynamic and generative space for literary innovation. Within these pages, one can observe the preliminary sketches of ideas, narrative fragments, that reflect the author's evolving creative process:

Hospodský, který měl psa místo koše na odpadky – bylo mu to líto vyhodit, pes byl jak líný žok – dokud žral a trávil, bylo dobře, když přestal žrát, utratil ho – živý odpadkový koš PES ZBYTKAŘ. O kastelánovi, co má tak rád zvířata, že je chová na dožití, například prase tak dlouho, až umře, slepice, krůty, husy, ovce, když jde nakoupit, zvířata jdou do vsi za ním. Jsou pojmenovaná - Pepík, Slávek. Na hradě má ještě ochočeného lyšáka, kterého vždycky pošle na chvíli do lesa, když má přijít exkurze, pak ho zas povolá - cvičí se s ním na nádvoří, pomlouvači dokonce tvrdí, že ho učí jiu-jitsu, protože je lyšák bezbranný, jak je ochočený. Historka s husou, kterou seshora furt cpali šíškami a zezdola ji v posadě žraly krysy, pořád kejhala, tak ji pořád a pořád cpali.³⁰⁸

The narratives presented by the author are characterized by a unique blend of humor and tragedy. Featuring various animals as central figures, these stories can be interpreted as allegories of life under a totalitarian regime. Each narrative functions as a metaphor for different aspects of a dictatorship, subtly critiquing the mechanisms that sustain such a regime through the use of seemingly whimsical and fantastical elements. For instance, the character of the “dog-trashcan” serves as a powerful metaphor for the way a totalitarian state manipulates and controls information. The dog, which consumes the garbage its owner wishes to dispose of, can be seen as a representation of the masses being force-fed propaganda by the regime. This interpretation aligns with the broader critique of how a dictatorship shapes and distorts reality for its own purposes,

³⁰⁸ “The innkeeper who used a dog as a trash can—he just couldn't bring himself to throw things away. The dog was like a lazy sack—so long as it ate and digested, all was well. When it stopped eating, he put it down. A living trash can, the DOG OF LEFTOVERS.

Then there's the castle custodian, who loves animals so much he keeps them until they die of old age—a pig, for example, until it finally passes away; chickens, turkeys, geese, sheep. When he goes shopping, the animals follow him into the village. They even have names—Pepík, Slávek. At the castle, he keeps a tame fox. Whenever a tour group is about to arrive, he sends the fox off to the forest for a bit, then calls it back afterward. He trains with it in the courtyard, and some gossips even claim he's teaching the fox jiu-jitsu, as it's defenseless due to being so tame.

Then there's the story of the goose. They kept stuffing it from above with pinecones, while below, rats gnawed at it as it sat in its pen. The goose kept honking, so they kept stuffing it and stuffing it.” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 194.

feeding people only what it deems acceptable or useful while discarding inconvenient truths.

Similarly, the other stories, such as *The Castle Keeper* and the tale about the goat, feature animals that are “tamed” or “constrained” by human masters, symbolizing the oppression of individuals who are forced to adapt to the needs of the regime. The animals in these stories, much like the citizens under totalitarian rule, lose their autonomy and are compelled to serve the interests of their rulers. The castle keeper, for instance, could be seen as a figure representing those tasked with enforcing the state's will, maintaining order and control through fear or coercion.

The story of the goose, in particular, provides a striking and poignant metaphor for the suffering endured under oppressive regimes. In this narrative, the goose is being tortured and cries out for help, yet those who hear its cries mistakenly interpret them as pleas for more food. This powerful image underscores the idea that perceptions of suffering and need can be manipulated or misunderstood, depending on the perspective of the observer. The goat's plight symbolizes the misinterpretation of suffering within a repressive society, where genuine cries for help can be twisted into something else entirely by those in power or by those who are indifferent to the suffering of others.

The author's use of animal characters in these stories reflects a broader literary tradition of using fables and allegories to critique authoritarian systems.³⁰⁹ The fairy-tale atmosphere of the narratives creates a sense of distance from the harsh realities they depict, allowing the reader to engage with the underlying political messages in a more accessible, yet still profound, way. This technique is reminiscent of classic works of political satire, such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where animals are used to expose the absurdity and cruelty of totalitarian rule. The idea of the mechanized and corrupted society of the communist regime as made of animals without free will is suggested in another short stories, which perfectly exemplifies Zábřana's view on his contemporaries:

Obnovovaný pes. Dvě rodiny u nás ve věžáku mají stále stejného psa – šestnáct let, co tu bydlíme. Jedni úhlově černého malého kníračce, drží irského setra. Dlouho mi nedocházelo, že to není pořád týž pes. Až loni, když setr paní V. skonak na psí infarkt, zaregistroval jsem, že si do týdne, snad ještě dříve, opatřila absolutně stejně zbarvené štěně, které je dnes, za pár měsíců, od mrtvého psa k nerozeznání. Štěně se jmenuje Alana, ale říká se mu jak tomu nejdřívějšímu – Bondy. Dověděl jsem se, že je to už čtvrtý, absolutně stejný pes, kterého má a kterému pořád stejně říká, zatímco L. už mají

³⁰⁹ “What are we? Animals harming themselves... A stage of the development of consciousness (of the brain) in constant conflict with a stage of biology (presumably lower), unable to manage it, unable to overcome it...” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 225.

dokonce pátého, absolutně stejného antracitového knírače a pořád mu taky říkají Brix. Takhle pořád *obnovovaný pes je de facto nesmrtelný pes* a co nevidět tomu tak bude i s lidmi, které si režimy chovají ve svých státech pro svou potřebu jako lidé v domácnostech ty permanentní psy.³¹⁰

In further entries, we find similar fairy-tale-like narratives that continue this allegorical exploration of life under dictatorship. One such example is the story of two dwarves, a tale that, like the others, utilizes fantastical elements to convey deeper political and philosophical meanings. Through these seemingly simple stories, the author is able to offer a layered critique of the totalitarian state, using humor and tragedy to explore the complexities of power, control, and resistance:

Bajka

Byli dva trpaslíci, bratříčci. Jeden se jmenoval Leva, druhý se jsemoval Kynikrok.

Leva si dobře uvedl, stále toužil poznávat něco nového, vysedával nad knihou. Maminka Repka o něm tvrdila, že to někam dotáhne, že půjde stále kupředu a dál.

Zato Kynikrok byl lajdák, hlupák a nemotora. Stále bez cíle pobíhal po kuchyni, něco si vymyslel, na něco se vyptával a zlobil. I když se sedl k učení, nedobře si vedl, usínal nad knihou, hlava mu bimbala, valného užitku z jeho učení nebylo.

Když se blížil večer, Maminka Repka oba skřítky pozorovala. Seděli nad knihami a učili se. Když viděla, jak se Levova tvář chápavě projasňuje novým poznáním, povzbuzovala synka slovy:

“Kupředu - Leva!”

Zato když viděla ospalý, tupý výraz na tváři Kynikrokově, jeho bimbající hlavu, rozhodla se vždy energicky ukončit ta zbytečná muka a posílala nevyvedeného syna do postele se slovy “Spát - Kynikrok”

Od těch dob na památku obou povahově tak rozdílných bratříčků skřítků vysílá rozhlas vždy večer před zprávami písničku, končící maminčinými slovy:

Kupředu - Leva!

Spát - Kynikrok!³¹¹

³¹⁰ “The perpetually renewed dog. Two families in our apartment building have had the same dog—or so it seems—for the sixteen years we’ve lived here. One has a coal-black miniature schnauzer, the other a brazen Irish setter. For a long time, I didn’t realize that it wasn’t always the same dog. It only dawned on me last year when Mrs. V’s setter died of a heart attack. Within a week—perhaps even sooner—she had acquired a puppy with exactly the same coloring. Today, just a few months later, the new dog is indistinguishable from the one that died. The puppy is named Alana, but they call it by the same name as the first dog—Bondy. I learned that this is already her fourth identical dog, each one given the same name. Meanwhile, the L. family is now on their fifth identical charcoal schnauzer, which they still call Brix. This perpetually renewed dog is, in essence, an immortal dog. Before long, the same will be true for people—individuals cultivated by regimes for their needs, just as households keep their permanent, interchangeable dogs.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 868.

³¹¹ Fairy tale /There were two dwarf brothers. One was named Leva, and the other Kynikrok. Leva was ambitious and always eager to learn something new. He would sit with a book for hours. Their mother, Repka, used to say that Leva would go far in life, always striving forward and beyond. Kynikrok, on the other hand, was lazy, foolish, and clumsy. He aimlessly ran around the kitchen, coming up with silly ideas, asking

The author entitles this entry “bajka” (fairy tale), adhering to the conventional structure of the genre. However, beyond its simple form, the text can be interpreted as a commentary on the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes and the mechanisms through which they are created and disseminated. The two brothers, Leva (whose name shares the root with “levý,” meaning “left” in Czech) and Kynikrok, represent two archetypes: the diligent and disciplined student, deemed promising and supported by adults for his future success, and the lazy, hopeless child who is easily dismissed. This juxtaposition aligns with familiar societal norms and expectations.

The name Leva, which can be linked to “left” in a political sense, might suggest a symbolic representation of the ideal citizen in a socialist state. Leva embodies the model worker, the productive and obedient member of society, who is encouraged to move “forward” and contribute to the state’s goals. In contrast, Kynikrok represents the unproductive, aimless individual who fails to meet societal expectations, symbolizing those who are left behind or actively dismissed by the state as unworthy. The mother’s stark encouragement—“Kupředu - Leva!” (Go forward, Leva!)—and her dismissal of Kynikrok—“Spát - Kynikrok!” (Go to sleep, Kynikrok!)—reflect the clear division between those who are seen as valuable contributors to society and those who are not. At the conclusion of the fairy tale, we learn that a song, broadcast on the radio before the news, repeats these two phrases from the mother. The broadcast of these private interactions into the public domain reflects a more sinister undertone: the regime’s control over private life. The fact that the radio, a symbol of state communication and propaganda, is privy to the intimate exchanges between mother and child suggests the intrusion of the state into the most personal aspects of individual lives. In a socialist state where the collective is prioritized over the individual, privacy is eroded, and personal identities are subsumed by public expectations. The transformation of the mother’s words into a repetitive song also hints at the way societal roles and expectations are reinforced through state apparatuses. The refrains, “Kupředu - Leva!” and “Spát - Kynikrok!,” serve as ideological mantras, subtly indoctrinating society into accepting a binary perception of citizens: those who contribute

endless questions, and causing trouble. Even when he tried to study, he struggled. He would fall asleep over his books, his head bobbing, and his studying yielded little benefit. As evening approached, Mother Repka would observe her two sons. They would sit together with their books, trying to learn. When she saw Leva’s face light up with understanding and new knowledge, she would encourage him with the words, “Go forward, Leva!” But when she noticed the sleepy, dull expression on Kynikrok’s face and his bobbing head, she would promptly decide to end his futile efforts. She would send her less successful son to bed with the words, “Go to sleep, Kynikrok!” Since then, in memory of the two dwarf brothers, so different in character, the radio has played a song every evening before the news, ending with their mother’s words: “Go forward, Leva! Go to sleep, Kynikrok! Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 207.

to the state's vision of progress and those who do not. This mechanized repetition of roles functions like a form of hypnosis, a process by which the state's values are transmitted, normalized, and internalized by the populace. Zábřana's ideas regarding future possible works of his also encompass the sci-fi genre:

Dva náměty: 1) sci-fi o lékaři, který při výzkumu objevil možnost oživit v lidech stopy prožitých, zaniklých vývojových stadií. Tak u lidí období řije jako u jelenů, srnců. Rezultuje z toho co? 2) Gestapák, který nedokázal za války včas zlikvidovat odbojového pracanta, pomstí se mu do budoucna tím, že před útekem zařadí odbojářovo jméno do kartotéky gestapa (ačkoli ten nikdy agentem nebyl). Pomstu dokoná po válce, po 10 nebo 25 letech jiná rozvědka.³¹²

In the first example, Zábřana once again demonstrates his inclination to employ the animal world as a lens through which to critique aspects of human society—a strategy reminiscent of George Orwell's approach in works such as *Animal Farm*. Zábřana speculates on what might occur if human beings adopted a mating season similar to that observed in the animal kingdom. This satirical premise underscores his ability to use hypothetical or exaggerated scenarios to expose the absurdities or inconsistencies in human behavior. The comparison to Orwell is apt, as both authors leverage allegory to interrogate societal norms and critique human tendencies from an external perspective. The second subject, while less speculative, ventures into stark realism. It focuses on a member of the resistance unjustly accused of collaborating with the Gestapo, a narrative thread rooted in historical reality rather than science fiction. This premise could easily have served as the foundation for one of Zábřana's detective novels, given that all three of his contributions to the genre were set during the German occupation. However, it also reflects a broader thematic preoccupation in Zábřana's work: the mystification of truth and the manipulation of historical narratives. This concern reveals his anxiety about the potential for a person's legacy to be distorted or entirely falsified, with such distortions perpetuated across generations. In the *Disiecta membra*, this theme is further elaborated through recurring stylistic devices, such as the "chains of infinitive verbs," which were analyzed in the previous dossier. These linguistic constructions serve as a formal experiment but also mirror the thematic content of Zábřana's reflections: the overwhelming

³¹² "1) A sci-fi story about a doctor who, during his research, discovers the possibility of reactivating traces of past, extinct developmental stages in humans. For instance, triggering a mating season in humans like that seen in deer or elk. What results from this? 2) A Gestapo officer who, during the war, fails to eliminate a resistance worker in time and seeks revenge by secretly adding the resistance member's name to the Gestapo files (despite the person never having been an agent). The revenge is completed after the war, 10 or 25 years later, by another intelligence agency." Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit, p. 211.

accumulation of actions, events, and possibilities that ultimately dissolve into ambiguity or uncertainty:

vracet se do města, kde na rohu každé ulice se na mne ušklíbá vzpomínka³¹³

slyšet její nářky, že jí chybí půl centimetru prstu k tomu, aby mohla holou rukou vymývat jogurtové skleničky³¹⁴

vidět, že izraelští básníci odmítají označit oddíly svých básní arabskými číslicemi³¹⁵

zjistit jednoho dne při psaní u stolu, že si ti vlastní břicho sedlo na kolena jako teplá a těžká angorská kočka a začalo je hřát.³¹⁶

The themes presented in these poetic chains show a marked consistency with those previously discussed, as they revisit the familiar motifs of aging, nostalgia, and women's behavior. These motifs are central to the poet's exploration of human experience, providing a lens through which the complexities of life are examined. The imagery employed in these chains similarly echoes the patterns established in the 1960s, blending depictions of quotidian events with a distinctive perspective that elevates the ordinary to the poetic. This stylistic approach aligns with the author's evolving artistic objectives during that earlier period, highlighting the continuity in their creative vision. Moreover, this interplay between the mundane and the extraordinary reflects the author's sustained commitment to capturing the essence of lived experiences through an unconventional poetic lens. The chains do not merely recount events; they reinterpret them, imbuing everyday moments with deeper significance. This technique serves as a hallmark of the author's poetics, showcasing their ability to merge reality with a personal, often introspective, narrative style.

An additional manifestation of this poetic device can be observed in the following excerpt:

DIALEKTIKA

Pochvalovati si Činany, prokínat Činany,

³¹³ "returning to the city, where on the corner of every street a memory sneers at me," Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 195.

³¹⁴ "hearing her lament that she's half a centimeter short of being able to clean yogurt jars with her bare hands" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 197.

³¹⁵ "seeing that Israeli poets refuse to label sections of their poems with Arabic numerals" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 198.

³¹⁶ "realizing one day, while writing at the table, that your own belly has settled onto your knees like a warm, heavy Angora cat, and has begun to warm them." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 199.

velebit Tita, proklínat Tita, podlízat Titovi,
 stavět pomník, odhalovat pomník, rozplývat se nad pomníkem,
 bořit pomník,
 slavit Stalina, hanět Stalina,
 zavřít Gomulku, pustit Gomulku, nastolit Gomulku, kopnout do prdele Gomulku,
 říkat, že vyhasíná třídní boj, že se zostřuje třídní boj, že vyhasíná třídní boj,
 zavřít Husáka, pustit Husáka, zvolit Husáka, chválit Husáka,
 zřídit Stazku, zrušit Stazku, zřídit Sazku,
 popravit, mlčet, popravit, nerehabilitovat, popravit, rehabilitovat,
 zakázat žvýkáci gumu, trpět žvýkáci gumu
 a pořad spět k socialismu³¹⁷

The author enlists a series of action that, as it becomes clear at the end of the fragment, describes the chain of action performed by the Communist regime. Each line has a series of verbs at the infinitive, which are repeated or replaced by other verbs in each line. These actions contradict between each other, demonstrating the regime falseness and change of behaviour according to its needs. This is also the reason why the fragment is called “DIALECTICS”, because this is the way a totalitarian regime express itself. Everything is reduced to actions that repeat themselves endlessly, despite the object or the situation. This is what life has become according to the author, a fake a mechanized existence built on reiteration and false mite. If this is how Zábrana perceives the reality of the regime, the present times, the chain of actions he used to craft his poems were, on the other hand, the opposite of such a scheme of action and consequences. Even tough the founding principle was the same (the infinitive verb), in the author’s chains, as we have seen many times, the follow up of each act had always unexpected outcomes, since they were supposed to capture the hidden facets of reality. The kind of poetry that shows the peculiarity of each individual breaks the chain of repetitive actions that constitute the totalitarian world.

During this period, Zábrana’s life and work were deeply permeated by a sense of loss—both the enduring losses from his past and the new ones that continued to shape his present. This preoccupation with loss is vividly reflected in his writing and notes, where

³¹⁷ “To praise the Chinese, to curse the Chinese,/to extol Tito, to curse Tito, to ingratiate oneself with Tito,/to build a monument, to unveil a monument,/to marvel at the monument, to demolish a monument,/to celebrate Stalin, to condemn Stalin,/to imprison Gomulka, to release Gomulka, to establish Gomulka, to kick Gomulka in the ass,/to say that class struggle is dying out, that class struggle is intensifying, that class struggle is dying out,/to imprison Husák, to release Husák, to elect Husák, to praise Husák,/to establish the Stazka, to abolish the Stazka, to establish the Sazka,/to execute, to stay silent, to execute, not to rehabilitate, to execute, to rehabilitate,/to ban chewing gum, to tolerate chewing gum,/and always to advance towards socialism.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 254.

themes of grief, mortality, and existential despair are recurrent. A particularly striking entry from this period stands out for its stylistic and structural innovation: a poignant reflection on the suicide of the poet Jiří Pištora, with whom Zábrana appears to have had a close friendship. This fragment, which is dedicated to Pištora's tragic end, is constructed as a narrative in five distinct acts, each offering a glimpse into the poet's final days. The structure is both compelling and harrowing: each act is framed by a symbolic countdown, marking the passage of time as the inevitable moment of Pištora's suicide approaches. The acts represent the last eight days of the poet's life, with the progression of time emphasizing the inexorable approach of his final decision:

I. 8 dní, 19 hodin předtím, než spáchal sebevraždu, pochutnával si na zadělávaných žampionech. Náramně si pochutnával na zadělávaných žampionech a tak zálibně krájel přírodní řízek z telecího masíčka. Osm dní předtím, než spáchal sebevraždu, mu náramně chutnalo.³¹⁸

The motif of suicide emerges as a central theme in this entry and functions as a refrain, underscoring its profound significance within the narrative. This recurring motif contrasts sharply with the vivid and affectionate memories of the poet Jiří Pištora that Zábrana presents throughout the text. By juxtaposing the inevitability and finality of Pištora's death with scenes from his life, Zábrana emphasizes the unpredictability of death and its dissonance with the vibrancy of the poet's existence. This contrast becomes a poignant commentary on the fragility of human life and the complex interplay between memory and mortality. The remaining sections of the entry adhere to a consistent pattern, depicting Pištora in humorous and light-hearted moments from his daily life. These anecdotes serve as a counterpoint to the somber theme of suicide, offering a fuller, more human portrayal of the late poet. Through these reminiscences, Zábrana paints a nuanced picture of Pištora, highlighting his wit, personality, and vitality in ways that seem to resist the tragic shadow of his end. The tonal shifts between the melancholic reflection on his death and the humorous recollections of his life imbue the entry with emotional depth and complexity:

³¹⁸ "I. Eight days and nineteen hours before he committed suicide, he thoroughly enjoyed a dish of creamed mushrooms. He savored the creamed mushrooms with great delight, slicing into a natural veal cutlet with such relish. Eight days before he took his own life, he found the meal immensely satisfying" Zábrana Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 202.

To myslel - 4 dny, 10-9 hodin předtím, než spáchal sebevraždu. A ty 4 dny, 10-9 hodin předtím, než spáchal sebevraždu, mi zavola. Zavola a chtěl se sejít, ale já mu řekl: "Hele, nesor furt, mám fotr. Je to tak důležitý, nemůže to počkat do příštího týdne?"³¹⁹

The attempt to closely mirror reality in Zábrana's writing is particularly evident in the dialogues, where the use of colloquial expressions vividly captures the way people actually spoke. Phrases such as "mám fotr" exemplify this approach, grounding the narrative in the authentic vernacular of the time. This stylistic choice enhances the immediacy and realism of the text, allowing the reader to engage more intimately with the depicted events and characters. Such use of naturalistic speech serves not only to portray the voices of the characters but also to reflect the author's intention to blur the line between literature and lived experience.

In these entries, direct speech functions as a multifaceted expressive tool. It operates both as a means of character development—revealing personalities, relationships, and social contexts—and as a medium for Zábrana to communicate his own emotional and intellectual engagement with the subject matter. This dual functionality underscores the layered complexity of the text, where the dialogues enrich the narrative with depth and texture, while simultaneously serving as a reflection of Zábrana's literary craft. The tragedy of Jiří Pištora's death is underscored by a recurring structural device that Zábrana employs at the beginning of each act within the entry. A repeated formula announces the decreasing number of hours leading to the poet's suicide, creating a haunting countdown that intensifies the reader's sense of tension and inevitability. This meticulous structuring mirrors the inexorable progression toward the tragic event, enhancing the dramatic impact of the narrative. The stark juxtaposition between the countdown—a cold, mechanical marker of time—and the poignant, human moments depicted within each act accentuates the emotional gravity of the entry.

Another category of entries in Zábrana's diaries presents itself as a series of philosophical inquiries into various aspects of human life. However, their unusual content and the themes they address reveal a complexity that transcends mere reflection, offering deeper insights into Zábrana's writing style and worldview. One striking example illustrates his capacity to intertwine the ordinary with profound philosophical musings: "*Starší lidé souloží většinou po ránu. Přicházejí k tomu z rosné země snu, z mlhy spánku, která*

³¹⁹ "He thought that—four days and 10–9 hours before he committed suicide. And those four days and 10–9 hours before he took his own life, he called me. He called and wanted to meet, but I said to him: "Look, stop being such a pain. I'm swamped. Is it really that important? Can't it wait until next week?" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 202.

smazává, v níž se ztrácí všechno, co bylo předtím (prožito, zakončeno, zlomeno, znetvořeno, zpotvořeno), přicházejí k tomu jako z dětství".³²⁰ In this fragment, Zábrana offers a delicate meditation on the sexuality of older individuals, interweaving it with motifs central to his work, such as memory and childhood. Here, he juxtaposes seemingly incongruous elements, blending the intimacy of a morning sexual encounter with the innocence and freshness of childhood. By comparing the act to a return to childhood, Zábrana evokes a sense of renewal, as if the participants are learning everything anew, unburdened by the weight of past experiences. This purity is achieved, in Zábrana's view, through the erasure of prior memories and emotional scars, creating a moment untainted by the past—a recurring theme in his oeuvre. This reflection also illustrates Zábrana's broader engagement with themes of the body and sexuality, particularly as they relate to his own experiences. He frequently comments on his physical state and the challenges of aging, addressing these changes with both humor and poignancy. For instance, he observes: "*Začne si muž po čtyřice schraňovat sperma, neboť už konečně pochopí, že je to jediný argument a příspěvek do diskuze o zítřku světa?*"³²¹. This provocative statement underscores Zábrana's preoccupation with the decline of physical vitality and its implications for identity and purpose. The tone, oscillating between irony and existential questioning, reflects his broader concerns about the body's role in shaping human agency and legacy. The preservation of sperm, framed as a metaphorical contribution to the future of humanity, becomes a reflection on the fragility of existence and the desire for continuity.

Another recurring theme in this set of diary entries is fate, which Zábrana approaches with a characteristic sense of unease. Fate, for him, is often linked to the mercilessness of God, a force that operates beyond human comprehension or control. This theological dimension introduces a sense of existential dread, as Zábrana grapples with the tension between individual agency and the inevitability of destiny:

Koupit si pár složek papíru a něco pěkného na ně napsat. To je první popud. První motiv. Vnější. Ale ten pravý důvod, ten byl dán dřív, ještě dřív, od počátku. Vzpomínám si, že tíhnutí k papíru se projevovalo brzo, ve dvanácti - třinácti letech, ještě dřív, než jsem o té katastrofě vědomě věděl. Touha psát tedy nepřišla až dodatečně, jako reakce na uvědomění si úrazu, jako spása před ním, zápas s ním. A tak nakonec připouštím to, o čem jsem nikdy nechtěl ani uvažovat; obskurita toho mimo nás, co ví dřív, než my víme, co rozhodlo dřív než my, dřív než jsme vyručkovali po té nesnadné hrazdě

³²⁰ "Older people tend to make love mostly in the morning. They come to it from the dewy ground of dreams, from the mist of sleep that erases, where everything that came before—lived, concluded, broken, deformed, distorted—fades away. They approach it as if emerging from childhood" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 204.

³²¹ "Does a man begin to save his sperm after forty because he finally understands that it is his only argument and contribution to the discussion about the world's future" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 205.

uvědomění si sebe sama, své situace ve světě. A tak: jsme marionety? Co je to, co ví, co vědělo předem? Bůh?³²²

The theme of being controlled by a higher power recurs frequently in Zábřana's reflections, forming a critical component of his worldview. This sensation, evident as early as his diaries from the 1940s, encapsulates a deep-seated feeling of powerlessness, which he vividly conveys through the metaphor of a marionette—a puppet manipulated by an unseen and often inscrutable force. Zábřana's struggle to identify this controlling entity, questioning whether it is God or some other indefinable power, underscores his existential dilemma. This exploration of predestination becomes particularly prominent when Zábřana reflects on his choice to become a writer. In one revealing entry, he states that the true impetus for this decision did not stem from conscious deliberation but rather from an almost primordial inevitability. He describes it as having existed before, at the beginning, suggesting that his vocation was not a matter of personal choice but rather a predetermined path that he was compelled to follow. This phrasing encapsulates his perception of a profound lack of agency, not only in his life's work but in his broader existence. The image of the marionette serves as a powerful symbol of this existential captivity, one that reverberates across Zábřana's writings. It encapsulates his view of life as a theater in which individuals are bound by strings they cannot control, enacting roles dictated by external forces. This metaphor, rich in its implications, highlights Zábřana's recurring preoccupation with questions of fate, agency, and the nature of human autonomy. Zábřana's contemplation of these themes is not confined to isolated moments; rather, it emerges as a persistent thread woven throughout his diaries. His reflections often revisit the interplay between individual will and the constraints imposed by external powers. In another diary entry, he revisits these ideas, though from a slightly different perspective:

Noc. Mlha, mraky, tma z pláň od Jarova. Zima, ač je půl září. Sedím ve světru, zima. Ticho v bytě. Sedím sám. Všichni přátelé jsou daleko, pryč. Pepík J., Errol, Standa M. Pilnakovi by letos bylo teprve 78 let. Babelovi také teprv 78 let.

³²² "To buy a few folders of paper and write something nice on them—that's the first impulse. The first motive. External. But the real reason, that was given earlier, much earlier, from the beginning. I remember that the attraction to paper manifested itself early, around twelve or thirteen years old, even before I consciously knew about that disaster. The desire to write didn't come later, as a reaction to realizing the injury, as a salvation from it, a struggle with it. And so, in the end, I admit something I never even wanted to consider: the obscurity of something beyond us that knows before we know, that decides before we do, before we have climbed up that difficult bar of self-awareness, of realizing our place in the world. So: are we marionettes? What is it that knows, that knew beforehand? God?" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 207.

Jeseninovi 77, Mandelštamovi 81. Ale oni by už nežili. Zdá se, že jsou mrtví celý můj život. Noc se přikrádá. Nemám už autentický pocit života. Ale vím proč. Bůh si to nepřál. Bůh mě chtěl mít mrzákem. To vysvětluje všechno, co na mně bylo kdykoli komukoli nepochopitelné. Ale nesvěřil jsem se s tím v životě nikomu.³²³

The author's reflection on his present is imbued with melancholy and resignation, as he catalogs the individuals who have left him, including those he never met personally, such as the poets Yesenin and Babel. Their absence feels so profound that he remarks, "they have been dead for my entire life." This statement suggests that their works and spirits, though impactful, have been overshadowed by their absence, creating a sense of perpetual mourning. The diary entry opens with a vivid description of the scene, likely the setting in which the diarist composed his thoughts: a nighttime landscape shrouded in fog and clouds. These environmental details are presented with stark brevity, as if to establish not only the physical surroundings but also the emotional tenor of the reflection that follows. The descriptions unfold in short, clipped sentences, creating a lapidary rhythm that mirrors the fragmented and somber mood of the entry: "Night. Fog, clouds, darkness from the plain near Jarov. It's cold, even if we are in the middle of September." This cinematic approach to framing the scene echoes the style of a film script, where the setting functions as both a backdrop and a prelude to the thematic concerns of the narrative. Within this evocative setting, Zábřana delves into a deeply personal confession: his lack of what he terms "an authentic feeling of life." He attributes this existential void to the will of God, whom he accuses of condemning him to a state of metaphorical infirmity by making him a "cripple." The choice of this imagery resonates powerfully with the overarching theme of fragmentation inherent in the *Disiecta membra*—a metaphorical depiction of his scattered thoughts and limbs, symbolizing both physical and psychological disintegration:

Chyba byla z řádu tajemství, které nás obklopuje. Proč o ní mluvit s kýmkoli z lidí? Strašná, strašná zima. A je teprv září. Teploměr na okně ukazuje 7 nad nulou. Jsem nasmrť unavený. [...] Jeden z nejkurióznějších zážitků posledních měsíců: kniha memoárů Naděždy Mandelštamové (anglicky jsem ji četl už v létě 71, ale teprv letos v červnu jsem dostal ruský originál a od té chvíle jej čtu pořád znova a znova, obklopen stovkami jiných, nečtených knih) mě zavádí do jakéhosi světa personálního snu, přes všechnu hrůznost je mi s ní chtě nechtě útulno jako ve vlastní kůži a vlastním životě, ano, takové byly

³²³ "Night. Fog, clouds, darkness from the plain near Jarov. It's cold, even if we are in the middle of September. I sit in a sweater, chilled. Silence fills the apartment. I sit alone. All my friends are far away, gone. Pepík J., Errol, Standa M. Pilňák would only be 78 this year. Babel too, only 78. Yesenin would be 77, Mandelstam 81. But they wouldn't be alive anymore. It feels as if they've been dead my entire life. The night creeps closer. I no longer have an authentic sense of life. But I know why. God didn't want it. God wanted me to be a cripple. That explains everything about me that anyone has ever found incomprehensible. But I've never confided this to anyone in my life" Ibid., *ibid.*, 17 September 1972, p. 216.

premisy života mých mladých let, to vše je mi blízké, pochopitelné, moje, to byli lidé ve stejné situaci a myslící stejně jako já. Moji reální současníci, spoluprožívači mého života jsou daleko, jsou pryč. O těch o deset let mladší radši nemluví - jak jsou mi cizí. Ti deset dvacet let starší jsou chodící trosky, chodící mohyly. První generace živých socialistických hrobů.³²⁴

The author appears to be preoccupied with the pervasive “mystery” that surrounds him—a concept he previously referred to as “obskurita” or “darkness.” This recurring notion of obscurity, ambiguity, and the unknown may explain his association of the nighttime with his broader sense of loss and disconnection. His reflection is interspersed with repetitions, notably the lament, “Terrible, terrible cold. And it’s only September.” This refrain not only reinforces the somber tone of the entry but also serves as a thematic echo, reconnecting to the phrase that introduces the note. The repetition gives a cyclical rhythm to his thoughts, mirroring the unrelenting nature of his despair. Zábrana’s meditation deepens as he brings into focus Nadezhda Mandelstam’s memoirs, which provide a heartfelt exploration of the life and tragic fate of her husband, the poet Osip Mandelstam. Zábrana frequently cites Osip Mandelstam as one of the figures with whom he feels the greatest affinity, finding in the poet a kindred spirit who shared his struggle against oppression and his creative resilience in the face of adversity. This connection underscores Zábrana’s broader identification with individuals who have suffered persecution under totalitarian regimes. He considers such persecuted figures to be his “true contemporaries,” a powerful declaration that highlights his sense of alienation from his fellow countrymen. This detachment is not merely personal but deeply existential, rooted in his perception of a collective moral and cultural failure within his immediate surroundings.

Zábrana’s reference to Nadezhda Mandelstam’s work is particularly significant because her memoirs represent not only a tribute to Osip Mandelstam but also an act of resistance against the erasure of memory by authoritarian powers. By drawing on this example, Zábrana situates his own reflections within a broader lineage of writers who

³²⁴ “The mistake belonged to the realm of the mystery that surrounds us. Why talk about it with anyone? Terrible, terrible cold. And it’s only September. The thermometer on the window shows 7 degrees above zero. I’m deathly tired. [...] One of the most curious experiences of recent months: the memoirs of Nadezhda Mandelstam (I read it in English back in the summer of 1971, but it wasn’t until June of this year that I received the Russian original, and since then, I’ve been reading it over and over again, surrounded by hundreds of other unread books) transport me into a kind of personal dream world. Despite all its horror, I find it, willy-nilly, as cozy as my own skin and my own life. Yes, these were the premises of my youth, all of it familiar, understandable, mine. These were people in the same situation, thinking the same way I do. My real contemporaries, the co-experiencers of my life, are far away, gone. I’d rather not even talk about those ten years younger—how alien they are to me. Those ten or twenty years older are walking wrecks, walking tombs. The first generation of living socialist graves.” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 216.

grapple with loss, memory, and the oppressive weight of history. His alignment with persecuted poets and intellectuals reveals his desire to transcend national and temporal boundaries, seeking solidarity in shared experiences of resistance and suffering. The motif of coldness, repeated throughout the entry, operates on multiple levels: it symbolizes the physical discomfort of the moment, the emotional chill of loss, and the existential isolation that defines Zábrana's worldview. The nocturnal setting further amplifies these themes, as the darkness enveloping him mirrors the inner obscurity and uncertainty he grapples with. The interconnectedness of these elements—the personal, the historical, and the universal—demonstrates Zábrana's ability to weave his immediate experiences into a tapestry of broader significance:

A proto v Mandelštamové nacházím svět, kterému rozumím, úděsnost historie bez šťastného konce mi připomíná klima mého života. A historická situovanost (prostředek 30. let) knihu a její osudy přibližuje mému mládí. Ostatně - 30, léta jsme v Československu prožívali v letech 1948-1956.

To je můj svět, víc, mnohem víc než ten, ve kterém teď žiju. Ticho. Noc. Zima. Život pokračuje. Můj život? Černý Petr, o kterého jsem nestál.³²⁵

Zábrana articulates a profound sense of identification with a world defined by persecution, oppression, and existential stasis. This alignment is not merely thematic but also reflected in the formal and structural characteristics of his writing. In this particular entry, Zábrana employs the repeated use of thematic keywords—Silence, Night, and Cold—as a deliberate formal device. These recurring elements serve to anchor the narrative, creating a cohesive framework that encapsulates the emotional and intellectual tenor of his reflections. The repetition emphasizes the pervasive sense of inertia, isolation, and existential heaviness that pervades the text. Additionally, the rhythmic recurrence of these motifs imbues the prose with an almost incantatory quality, heightening its psychological resonance and suggesting the enduring impact of the oppressive realities Zábrana seeks to convey. This stylistic approach aligns with Zábrana's broader tendencies, observed across his oeuvre, to dynamically link fragmented prose through the deliberate recurrence of specific motifs and lexical elements. This repetition transcends its rhetorical function to become a structural principle, transforming what might otherwise appear as disjointed musings into a unified and textured textual landscape. This technique

³²⁵ "And so, in Mandelstam's memoir, I find a world I understand; the dreadfulness of history without a happy ending reminds me of the climate of my own life. Its historical context (the mid-1930s) brings the book and its fates closer to my youth. After all—the 1930s were, in Czechoslovakia, experienced during the years 1948–1956. That is my world, much more so than the one I live in now. Silence. Night. Cold. Life goes on. My life? A losing card, one I never wanted." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 216.

also serves to underscore the thematic gravity of his reflections, drawing the reader into the cyclic nature of his thoughts and experiences. One of the key leitmotifs in Zábrana's writing is the image of the poet as a cripple, a recurring metaphor that encapsulates his sense of creative and existential limitation under a repressive regime. This motif, reprised multiple times in his diaries, reflects Zábrana's perception of his own fractured existence—an incomplete life that renders the spectre of death an intrinsic part of daily reality. He poignantly remarks on this condition, writing, "*Totální režimy nás obklopují první smrtí už zaživa: prolhaným zpravodajstvím, komentáři, cenzurou všeho a stále. Smrt v podobě dechovkových pořadů, polských krví, častušek, písní centrální skupiny vojsk.*"³²⁶ This passage vividly conveys his view that totalitarian regimes impose a metaphorical "first death" upon their subjects—an existence suffocated by propaganda, censorship, and the omnipresence of ideologically charged cultural products. Zábrana's reflections further reveal his inability to sever ties with the past, which looms as an oppressive force, refusing to relinquish its hold over him. This haunting by history becomes a central theme of his work, as the weight of unresolved memories and injustices prevents him from moving forward. In this context, the use of repetitive imagery—whether it be the silence of oppression, the cold of emotional detachment, or the night as a metaphor for existential darkness—serves to emphasize the cyclical nature of his struggle, where past and present are inextricably intertwined:

Věrnost stínům, věrnost stínům... Třetina lidí, s nimiž jsem před čtyřidvaceti lety chodil pražskými ulicemi, je po smrti - pohřbena, spálena... Ale svěžest, jítřně skelná křišťalovost tehdejších vjemů, pocitů, dojmů je stejně svěží, stejně čerstvá jako tehdy - i ve stárnoucích smyslech, i v rychle stárnoucím těle... stejná, stejná - celý se roztřesu, když mi někdy pamet' vybaví některý z tehdejších intenzivních prožitků - je to, jako když se ve mně bortí zed', ten pocit "propadnutí" v krajině žaludku... Trnu, když si uvědomím, že některé z těch kluků, co za mnou chodí, nosí mi básničky a ptají se mne, co si myslím o Zappových textech a nahrávkách, vozily mámy v kočárcích kolem mne, když jsem chodíval za větrných dopolední s E. po vyšehradských hradbách... Ten temný, stále houstnoucí les, do něhož zacházíme pořád hloub ve středních letech, není ze stromů, ale z mrtvých...³²⁷

³²⁶ "Totalitarian regimes envelop us in a kind of first death while still alive: through deceitful news reports, commentary, and relentless censorship of everything, always. Death takes the form of brass band programs, Polish krakowiaks, chastushkas, and songs from the Central Group of Forces" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 229.

³²⁷ "Loyalty to shadows, loyalty to shadows... A third of the people I walked the streets of Prague with twenty-four years ago are now dead—buried, cremated. Yet the freshness, the morning-glass crystalline clarity of those perceptions, feelings, and impressions is as vivid, as fresh as it was back then—even in aging senses, even in a rapidly aging body. The same, the same—I tremble all over when memory sometimes conjures up one of those intense experiences from that time. It's as if a wall inside me is collapsing, that feeling of "falling" in the pit of my stomach. I shudder when I realize that some of the boys who visit me now, bringing

In this entry, *Zábrana* conveys a profound sense of temporal dislocation, expressing that he experiences the past with greater immediacy and vividness than the present. This heightened perception of the past arises from the reality that many of the individuals who once populated his life are now deceased. The sharp contrast between these fresh, enduring memories and his own aging body generates a feeling of estrangement, as the vitality of his recollections stands in stark opposition to his physical reality. This disjunction points to a deeper tension within *Zábrana*'s experience of time: while his memories situate him firmly within a past era, his current life in the present feels distant and disconnected. He occupies a psychological space where his chronological age does not align with the period in which he mentally resides.³²⁸ This creates a dissonance between the self and the surrounding world, leading to an alienated sense of existence:

Pořád se mi vrací ta věta z Dante (verš?), kterou Graham Greene zvolil za moto k Vyhaslému případu: *Io non mori, e non rimasi vivo.* (I did not die, yet nothing of life remained.) (Neumřel jsem, ale ze života nic nezůstalo.) Nic jiného nevystihuje přesněji můj životní pocit těchto posledních let.³²⁹

The juxtaposition between the enduring presence of those who have passed away in his memory and the continual progression of time underscores a feeling of being out of sync with the present moment. *Zábrana*'s narrative reveals how memory can act as both a refuge and a trap, anchoring him in a temporal space that no longer exists, and thereby intensifying his sense of isolation in a world that has moved on without him. This temporal and existential disconnect captures the complexity of aging, loss, and the persistence of memory as defining elements of his reflective and literary practice:

Už tolik, tolik lidí, které jsem měl rád nebo kteří mi byli bližší než kdokoli z živých, je po smrti nebo jsou sedmý rok v Kanadě, v západním Německu, v Austrálii. Hlasy mrtvých a hlasy těch v dálce...

their poems and asking what I think about Zappa's lyrics and recordings, were once pushed in strollers by their mothers past me as I strolled along the Vyšehrad walls with E. on windy mornings. That dark, ever-thickening forest we wander deeper into in middle age is not made of trees but of the dead." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 320.

³²⁸ "Back then! In childhood, when time didn't rush by, or flowed differently! Back then..." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 654.

³²⁹ "That line from Dante (a verse?) that Graham Greene chose as the epigraph for *A Burnt-Out Case* keeps coming back to me: *Io non mori, e non rimasi vivo.* (I did not die, yet nothing of life remained.) (Neumřel jsem, ale ze života nic nezůstalo.) Nothing else captures the essence of my feeling about life in these past few years more precisely" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 460.

dennodenně je slyším v uších a mluvím s nimi, hlasy bližší, hlasy mnohem dražší těch, s nimiž se dennodenně setkávám, denně stýkám...³³⁰

Zábrana engages in a persistent and introspective dialogue with death, which permeates his reflections and writings. The deceased individuals he contemplates include not only those he personally encountered but also figures he came to know through their literary works. This ongoing connection with the dead reflects his sense of alienation from his contemporaries, who, in his view, failed to share the profound and harrowing experiences that defined his life and that of others like him. Zábrana explicitly articulates this disconnection, stating, "*Proto mě tak málo zajímali a zajímají moji současníci, ať ti mladší nebo ti starší, pro které tahle zkušenost nebyla tak základní, tak palčivá, tak absolutně rozhodující jako pro mne. Jejich problem mě osobně málokdy dokážou vzrušit; mluvím s nimi, ale v duchu s nimi nejsem*".³³¹ This passage reveals his deep-seated detachment and inability to fully relate to those who lacked the defining, searing experiences of totalitarian oppression that shaped his worldview:

Ten muž, ta ulice, ten krátký okamžik, zalehnutý sluncem před 20 lety, žije už jen v mé hlavě. Tolik skutečností žije už jen v mé hlavě. Ještě pár let. Pak nic, nic, nic. Nikdo o tom všem nebude vědět. To je smrt smrti, ta druhá -když už není jediné vědomí, v němž jsi autenticky byl!³³²

Given this sense of estrangement, it is unsurprising that death emerges as a dominant motif in Zábrana's entries from this period. For Zábrana, death is not solely a matter of aging or physical decline; it also symbolizes the metaphysical realm he inhabits even while alive—a world of the dead, populated by the memory and influence of those who have passed. His reflections demonstrate that he sees himself as living on the boundary between two worlds, a state that amplifies his feelings of isolation and existential inquiry. Zábrana's self-perception as a member of the world of the dead—a realm he regarded as comprising his true community—renders the theme of death not only omnipresent in his work but also multifaceted in its treatment. For Zábrana, death is not an

³³⁰ "So many, so many people I loved or who were closer to me than anyone alive are either dead or have been in Canada, West Germany, or Australia for seven years now. The voices of the dead and the voices of those far away... I hear them in my ears every day, and I speak with them—voices closer, voices far dearer than those of the people I meet and interact with daily" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 368.

³³¹ "That is why I have so little interest in my contemporaries, whether younger or older, for whom this experience was not as fundamental, as searing, as absolutely decisive as it was for me. Their problems rarely manage to stir me personally; I speak with them, but in spirit, I am not with them." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 474.

³³² "That man, that street, that brief moment bathed in sunlight twenty years ago, now lives only in my mind. So many realities now exist only in my mind. Just a few more years. Then nothing, nothing, nothing. No one will know about any of it. That is the death of death, the second one—when there is no longer a single consciousness in which you authentically existed!" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 231.

aberration or a distant, abstract concept; rather, it is a natural and inescapable aspect of human existence. This perspective permeates his writing, where death is explored with unflinching honesty and is woven into the fabric of life itself. One of the defining features of Zábřana's approach to death is his use of bitter irony, a literary device that underscores its inevitability. This irony often serves to highlight the futility of resisting or denying mortality, emphasizing instead the absurdity of human attempts to outmanoeuvre or ignore it. Death, in Zábřana's worldview, is not an extraordinary event but a mundane certainty—an experience as integral to the human condition as birth or love. Through this lens, Zábřana invites readers to confront death not as a source of fear but as an intrinsic and unremarkable element of life:

Lidský život je pořád jen a jen: děláme, co můžeme, a když nemůžeme, umřeme³³³

Dialog: "Umírám... já umřu..." - "Tak až umřeš, tak mi zavolej." - "Budeš ještě vzhůru?"³³⁴

Moreover, Zábřana's ironic portrayal of death often reveals a deep engagement with the absurdity of human life itself. By juxtaposing the banality of daily existence with the inexorability of death, he exposes the fragile and transient nature of human aspirations and achievements. This perspective serves to remind readers of the limitations of individual agency and the ultimate futility of resistance against the forces of fate.

In addition to the entry on Mandelstam, Zábřana's diaries include other fragments of poetic prose that illuminate his literary style and thematic preoccupations. These entries blend personal reflection with a broader commentary on human existence, often using lyrical and metaphorical language to explore themes such as memory, loss, and the passage of time. The fragmented structure of these pieces reflects Zábřana's tendency to juxtapose disjointed thoughts and images, creating a tapestry of reflections that mirrors the fractured nature of his inner world:

Sirka v průvanu - zhasne. Co jiného? Hmyz pomře do konce léta. Co jiného? Štěstí lidského masa je nemožné bez tohoto masa. Co jiného? Ne jako oni, ale až do konce se muset tvářit jako oni. Co jiného? Náhražky předpisované k náhradě. Co jiného? Nač slzy, když i ty jsou jiné než jejich? Ale co jiného? Co jim nabídnout? Zlatou protézu? Co jiného? Stahovat šťastné do svého neštěstí? A co

³³³ "Human life is always just this: we do what we can, and when we can't, we die." Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 300.

³³⁴ "Dialogue: 'I'm dying... I'm going to die...' 'Well, when you die, give me a call. 'Will you still be awake?' 'Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 300.

jiného? Viník příčiny je i viník řetězu příčin. Co jiného? To poslední na tomto světě není k pochopení. A na čem jiném záleží? Když není naděje, je vpředu už jen smrt. Co jiného?³³⁵

The central theme of this entry is lost hope, with the lyric speaker repeatedly questioning what remains in the world after hope—symbolized by the extinguished match—has vanished. The phrase “*Co jiného?*” is a recurring motif, serving as a refrain that provides the structural framework for the text. This repetition not only reinforces the speaker’s resignation and sense of entrapment but also functions as a rhetorical device akin to anaphora in poetry. Through this refrain, the lyric voice conveys a profound inability to envision alternatives or solutions, encapsulating a life emptied of meaning and a pervasive sense that it is no longer worth living. The rhetorical tone of the passage combines polemics with resignation, reflecting the messianic undertones that began to characterize Zábřana’s writings from the 1960s onward. This duality—a confrontation with despair paired with an almost prophetic lamentation—imbues the text with an emotional intensity that is both personal and universal, inviting the reader to grapple with the existential implications of the speaker’s reflections.

Distinct from the thematic entries analyzed thus far is a particular category of brief prose fragments, which appear to capture scenes born of sudden inspiration:

přesadit olivu a cedr na Špilberk... vypouštět kolibříka ve Strahovské zahradě... “Ptáky, které jsem lákala, plameny zaháním zpět” ...z oken trčely pruhy světla... sama od sebe sunula se údolím stěna mlhy³³⁶

Černý pták slétl do jejího klína, tetelivě se tam usazoval, zamával vzepřenými křídly a explodoval v rozkoši, roztekl se v kaluž nejvzácnějšího stříbra na světě, v kaluž kalného stříbra života...³³⁷

The motif of the bird recurs frequently throughout this note, highlighting its symbolic significance within the author's poetic universe. The bird, as a recurring image, appears to

³³⁵ “A match in a draft – goes out. What else? Insects will die off by the end of summer. What else? The happiness of human flesh is impossible without this flesh. What else? Not like them, yet having to pretend to the very end to be like them. What else? Substitutes prescribed for substitution. What else? What use are tears, when even they are different from theirs? But what else? What to offer them? A golden prosthesis? What else? Dragging the happy down into one’s misfortune? And what else? The culprit of a cause is also the culprit of the chain of causes. What else? The last thing in this world cannot be understood. And what else matters? When there is no hope, ahead there is only death. What else?”, *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, 7 July 1973, p. 236.

³³⁶ “Transplant an olive and a cedar to Špilberk... release a hummingbird in the Strahov Garden... “The birds I lured, I now chase away with flames.” ...strips of light jutt out from the windows... the wall of mist slid through the valley on its own”. Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 327.

³³⁷ “A black bird descended into her lap, trembling as it settled there, its outstretched wings quivering. It exploded in ecstasy, melting into a pool of the rarest silver in the world, a pool of the murky silver of life.” *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, p. 328.

be intricately linked to the idea of freedom, a notion often juxtaposed with its antithesis—imprisonment, represented by the cage. This dichotomy between liberty and confinement resonates profoundly in the author's reflections, particularly in his characterization of marriage. He frequently portrays marriage as a state of captivity, a theme vividly illustrated in the following passage: “*vzít se... a ve voliére manželství do smrti navzájem pozorovat svá stárnoucí těla*”.³³⁸ In this context, the aviary emerges as a poignant metaphor for the constraints inherent in the marital bond and the inexorable passage of time. It transforms a space traditionally associated with care and nurturing into one evocative of confinement and restriction. Furthermore, the metaphor extends beyond the concept of marriage itself to encompass the physical body, which is also depicted as a cage—an emblem of the aging process and the limitations it imposes on human existence. This layered symbolism underscores the tension between freedom and constraint, a recurring theme in the author's reflections. This metaphorical alignment of women with birds extends beyond his prose and finds expression in his poetry as well:

Z prstů ti teče krev, řízla ses o teploměr.
A ty vyčteš mi i smrt. A že jsem
s ní měl poměr.
Tak křičí v kleci pták. Slyším
to z kuchyně.
Tu bledou rtěnku sis
Půjčila u tchyně.³³⁹

The imagery of the bird, frequently recurring in Zábřana's work, often operates within a dual framework of freedom and captivity. The metaphor of the totalitarian regime as a cage trapping a multitude of birds gains further resonance in another entry: “*Bůh pouští na svět smrt jak kočku do voliéry*”.³⁴⁰ Here, the world is envisioned as an aviary, but one subject to the indifference of a distant God, casting existence itself as both confined and imperiled. The bird also emerges as a symbol of death in Zábřana's reflections: “*Dnes, ve tři čtvrtě na jedenáct, když jsem větral, vletěl mi do pokoje nějaký malý ptáček. Podle*

³³⁸ “To marry... and in the aviary of marriage, observe each other's aging bodies until death” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 286.

³³⁹ “Blood flows from your fingers; you cut yourself on the thermometer. /And you accuse me, even of death,/and of having an affair with her./The bird screams in its cage; I hear it/from the kitchen./That pale lipstick/you borrowed it from your mother-in-law.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 624.

³⁴⁰ “God releases death into the world like a cat into an aviary.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 689.

ruské pověry to znamená smrt (9. listopadu 1978)".³⁴¹ This motif resonates with Zábrana's engagement with Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*, where the bird embodies death and foreboding.

In addition to its associations with death and oppression, the bird also encapsulates Zábrana's reflections on poetic expression. In one fragment, he writes: "*Svoboda je večeře a snídaně a oběd... Žádná sexuální tabu... Jinak nás zabijíte, zabijíte, jen a jen zabijíte... Pták v kleci nezpívá přeci... Ale jaký zpěv – co dneska básník se zpěvem... to přenechá ptákům... (poznámky k poetice)*".³⁴² This passage suggests that the bird in a cage metaphorically represents his approach to poetry, particularly from the 1960s onward. Within the confines of a rigid poetic structure—analogue to the cage—Zábrana sought a new kind of freedom. His deliberate choice to work within strict forms, such as limited verses and stanzas, paradoxically afforded him greater creative liberty. The bird, refraining from song, might thus symbolize Zábrana's rejection of traditional poetic modes in favour of an innovative style better suited to articulating the complexities of his time. In this sense, the silent bird becomes an emblem of his restrained yet profound poetic voice, one that sought to break away from convention while still operating within its boundaries. This nuanced approach reflects Zábrana's broader struggle for authenticity and freedom, both as a poet and as an individual living under an oppressive regime.

Zábrana's diaries frequently function as a space for introspection on his *ars poetica*, providing insights into his evolving approach to writing and his artistic influences. In the previous dossier, we examined how Zábrana drew inspiration from the poets of the Beat Generation, whose innovative styles and thematic focus on everyday reality significantly shaped his own poetic vision. Zábrana's adaptation of these influences resulted in a distinctive poetics characterized by thematic engagement with quotidian life and a formal structure unified by recurring elements. In his shorter poems, coherence was achieved through rhyme schemes; in his poetic prose fragments, through the repetition of key images; and in his broader works, by the recurrence of infinitive verbs. These devices not only provided a rhythmic and structural cohesion but also reflected Zábrana's persistent efforts to balance innovation with formal discipline.

During this period, Zábrana appears to have been particularly invested in formal experimentation, seeking new strategies to expand the expressive range of his poetry. His

³⁴¹ "Today, at a quarter to eleven, while I was airing out the room, a small bird flew in. According to Russian superstition, that means death. (November 9, 1978)" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 618.

³⁴² "Freedom is dinner and breakfast and lunch... No sexual taboos... Otherwise, you're killing us, killing, only killing... A bird in a cage doesn't sing... But what kind of singing – what does a poet have to do with singing today... that's left to the birds... (notes on poetics)" Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 801.

diary entries reveal a deliberate and reflective process of artistic evolution, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

Báseň zvukových náhrad - tak aby vznikly dva významově rozdílné texty, např. slovo měsíc nahradit slovem mestic, - stál - sál a podobně (...) Z toho by mohl vyjít pokus číslo 2 - významově rozdílné texty se stejnými rýmovými slovy. Identické opory uvnitř textu by bylo možno ještě rozšířit. Praktický význam = znázornění relativity pevné jazykové struktury, nahá sémantika; dvojspřeží význam - zvuk.³⁴³

Zábrana's concept of the “poem of sound substitutions” demonstrates his experimental approach to language and meaning, offering insight into his desire to push the boundaries of poetic form. In this framework, he proposes creating two semantically distinct texts by substituting words with phonetic equivalents, such as replacing *měsíc* (moon) with *mestic* or *stál* (stood) with *sál* (hall). These substitutions not only create textual variations but also open new interpretive possibilities. Zábrana emphasizes the interplay between sound and meaning, exploring how identical phonetic structures can support divergent semantic interpretations. This technique reveals his interest in linguistic relativity, where the apparent stability of language is exposed as a fluid and dynamic construct. By stripping away fixed semantic associations, he seeks to lay bare the underlying mechanisms of language—what he calls “*naked semantics*”. The result is a dual harnessing of sound and meaning, which not only challenges conventional expectations of coherence but also deepens the reader’s engagement with the text. Zábrana's own diary provides a practical application of this theory, illustrating how the substitution of sound can lead to varied interpretations while maintaining a coherent aesthetic structure:

Hořel student.

Hořel studem.³⁴⁴

číst Analogon,

brát Alnagon,

pracovat pro Armabeton,

čeká jej Armageddon³⁴⁵

³⁴³ “A poem of sound substitutions—so that two semantically different texts emerge, for example, replacing the word *měsíc* with *mestic*, *stál* with *sál*, and so on. (...) From this could come Experiment No. 2—semantically different texts with the same rhyming words. Identical anchors within the text could be further expanded. Practical significance = illustrating the relativity of fixed linguistic structures, bare semantics; a dual harness of meaning and sound.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 229.

³⁴⁴ “A student burned/He burned with shame.” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život* op. cit p. 383.

³⁴⁵ “Reading *Analogon*,/Taking *Alnagon*,/Working for *Armabeton*,/Armageddon awaits him” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 289.

The author's fascination with linguistic phenomena of this kind may stem from what Bolton described as the "polluted semiosphere," a concept introduced in the introduction to this work. In his view, as he poignantly expressed in a short poem he noted in a diary entry, the language was so filled with lies, that it seemed like something coming from another world:

Smrt se do nás do všech vklížila
Žijeme tu jak na vesnici
v osmnáctém století
Čeština z rádia
zvodnatěla lží jak nohy s elefantiázou
A zní neznamě
jak řeč z jiné galaxie³⁴⁶

Zábrana showed a persistent interest in documenting the errors and ambiguities present in the state's official and public communications—subtle shifts in phrasing that could alter the meaning of a statement. From his perspective, these errors represented cracks in the façade of the regime's ideological discourse, exposing its inherent contradictions and vulnerabilities. For instance, he wryly notes: "[...] *Místo 'Pořad o Leninovi' (recenze jakéhosi televizního pásma) vyšel titulek 'Pořad o Leninovi'. A letěli.*"³⁴⁷ This misstep, trivial on the surface, held deeper symbolic significance for Zábrana as an indication of the regime's inability to maintain a perfectly controlled narrative. These linguistic anomalies often served as a source of inspiration for Zábrana, embodying the unintentional creativity of a controlled system inadvertently undermining its own authority.³⁴⁸ They symbolized, for him, the inherent flexibility and unpredictability of language—qualities he sought to explore in his own literary work. In some cases, fragments of official discourse or distorted phrases became the seed of a poetic idea. One particularly striking example comes from an entry in which Zábrana transcribes the headline "ZÍTRA K URNÁM". This phrase, likely intended as a call to participate in elections, also evokes the imagery of funerary urns containing human ashes. Zábrana,

³⁴⁶ "Death has crept into all of us./We live here like in a village/in the eighteenth century./Czech on the radio/has swollen with lies like legs with elephantiasis,/And it sounds unfamiliar,/like a language from another galaxy. Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 205.

³⁴⁷ "Instead of "Program About Lenin" (a review of some television segment), the headline came out as "Always About Lenin." And they were fired." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 619.

³⁴⁸ "On the other hand, the choice of non-standard forms becomes a tool for parodying official propaganda slogans, which are thus inverted from a lofty plane to a lower one" Mareš, Petr, *Revolt against standard language: requirements for language of literature and Jan Zábrana's stories*, Jazykovedný časopis, 2023-12, Vol.74 (2). P. 554.

ever attuned to the duality of language, transforms this seemingly banal announcement into a darkly poetic meditation. The same phrase reappears in one of his poems:

Konec vší krásy je na dohled.
Do půllitrů je odtroubeno.
Venuši spláchli pivní pěnou
A zítra k urnám!... Zítra? Hned!
Když med je jed a jed je med,
je konec krásy na dohled³⁴⁹

The author's linguistic play, particularly the juxtaposition of words with similar phonetic qualities but opposing meanings, such as "med" (honey) and "jed" (poison), reveals his deep engagement with the malleability of language. This overlapping not only highlights the potential for misunderstanding and ambiguity but also demonstrates Zábrana's ability to harness these qualities as a deliberate poetic device. By embracing linguistic dualities and ambiguities, he underscores both the fragility and the potency of language. His work reveals that language can serve as a medium of beauty and poetic expression, but it is equally capable of distortion and depersonalization. Through these deliberate choices, Zábrana emphasizes that anything has the potential to be rendered poetic or stripped of its poetic quality, depending on the context and intention behind its use. The use of variations is not limited to the sounds, but also to the words. We mentioned that the author has a tendency to go back to old poems and keep working on them, given that he was never really satisfied with the result. It happens often that the same poem was rearranged, by maintaining the same structure and the same key words, but presenting some differences that slightly shifted the meaning:

Mladý básník
napíše štěstím křičící verš
v březnovém dopolední s třesknutým
větrem a sluncem,
vyjde na ulici a za rohem
ho čeká mladá dívka.

Starý básník
napíše steskem prosáklý verš

³⁴⁹ "The end of all beauty is in sight. /The last call has sounded for the pints./Venus drowned in beer foam's flight,/And tomorrow to the polls!... Tomorrow? Tonight! /When honey is poison and poison is sweet,/The end of beauty is in sight." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život* op. cit, p. 625.

v březnovém dopoledni s protivným
větre a sluncem,
vyjde na ulici a za rohem
ho čeká stará smrt.³⁵⁰

Furthermore, Zábřana frequently engages with the *visuality* of language, utilizing the graphic aspects of the text to emphasize meaning and create additional layers of interpretation. A notable example is his strategic use of capitalization to underscore certain concepts, lending them a heightened sense of urgency and universality. This technique is evident in the following excerpts:

Když jsem je slyšel říkat: "Život jde dál," měl jsem vždycky chuť se jich zeptat: "A smrt ne? Ta ne? Smrt nejde dál?" Ale většinou jsem si tu chuť nechal zajít; lidí tohohle druhu jsem se v životě nikdy na nic moc nevyptával. Ovšem, smrt jde dál, SMRT JDE DÁL. Ta především.³⁵¹

Dva systematizovaní
chcankobardi
Jevtušenskij a Voznešenko
(jedna prdel o dvou půlkách)
rozeslaní do USA
vytírat zrak
VERŠE NA KMÍNĚ
VERŠE SYROVÉ
Což tak právě hovi
Žaklíně
Kenneydové³⁵²

The use of such stylistic devices, evident not only in Zábřana's prose but also in his poetry, appears to serve the dual purpose of rendering poetic language more realistic and imbuing it with a conversational, dialogue-like quality. This is achieved through strategic pauses, emphasized expressions, and frequent use of ellipses, which enhance the

³⁵⁰ "A young poet/writes a verse shouting with joy/on a March morning with biting/wind and sun,/steps out onto the street, and around the corner/a young girl awaits him./An old poet/writes a verse soaked in longing/on a March morning with spiteful/wind and sun,/steps out onto the street, and around the corner/old death awaits him." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 655.

³⁵¹ "When I heard them say, "Life goes on," I always felt like asking, "And death? Doesn't it? Doesn't death go on?" But most of the time, I let the urge pass; I never really asked people of that sort much in my life. Of course, death goes on, DEATH GOES ON. Above all, death." Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život* op. cit, p. 228.

³⁵² "Two institutionalized/piss-bards,/Yevtushenko and Voznesensky/(two halves of the same ass),/dispatched to the USA/to dazzle with/VERSE ON CARAWAY SEEDS/RAW VERSE./Perhaps they're currently wooing/Jacqueline/Kennedy." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 213.

dialogicity of the text. Ellipses, in particular, serve as markers of unspoken thoughts or emotional hesitation, reinforcing the fragmented and fluid nature of human interaction and thought processes:

Kouká jak žába z prachu...
Opuštěný jak plaňka...
Kůl v plotě...
Osamělý jako palec...
Zmoklá slepice...
Holedbavý páv...
Jako Jeremiáš nad Jeruzalém...
Směje se jak motocykl s uraženým výfukem...³⁵³

Another notable aspect of Zábřana's formal experimentation is his deliberate manipulation of the graphic placement of text, a technique that contributes to the overall interpretative depth of his work. Consider the following entry:

Je to jako když jdeš
po přeplněném chodníku
velkoměstské ulice
zdaleka vidíš přicházet ty, kteří přicházejí proti tobě, módní modely, módní frizúry, módní klobouky,
nedbalá pánská elegance kožených kazajek a k pomilování pohřbených trubek, přicházejí proti tobě,
rozlišuješ je, některé ženy se ti líbí, z některých haurů máš srandu, ty řasy, ty oči, ty knírky, ta gesta, to
vše zcela konkrétní, to vše zcela jedinečné - a najednou stačí, když uděláš dva kroky vlevo z chodníku
do trafiky, zdržíš se tam 120 vteřin, vrátíš se na chodník a po nikom z nich už ani stopy.
svět je bez nich
kam se poděli
nikdy nebyli³⁵⁴

This fragment of poetic prose is striking in its structural composition. It comprises two distinct textual units—an introductory and a concluding section, both visually offset

³⁵³ "He looks like a frog in the dust.../Abandoned like a stray fence slat.../A post in a fence.../Lonely as a thumb.../A soaked chicken.../A boastful peacock.../Like Jeremiah over Jerusalem.../Laughing like a motorcycle with a broken exhaust..." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 215.

³⁵⁴ "It's like walking/on a crowded sidewalk/of a big city street./From afar, you see them coming toward you—/fashionable outfits, trendy hairstyles, chic hats,/casual male elegance in leather jackets,/and irresistibly buried brass instruments./They come toward you; you distinguish them./Some women catch your eye,/some show-offs make you laugh—/those lashes, those eyes, those mustaches, those gestures,/all so concrete, all so unique—/and suddenly, all it takes/is two steps to the left,/into a newsstand,/a delay of 120 seconds,/and when you return to the sidewalk,/there's no trace of them./The world is without them./Where did they go?/They never existed" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 222.

and aligned slightly towards the center, and a central body that functions as an explanatory interlude. The graphic division is more than an aesthetic choice; it conveys a profound thematic significance. The opening and concluding sections could easily function as a standalone poem, encapsulating the central idea of impermanence. However, the central body offers a detailed and dynamic narrative, elaborating upon the fleeting nature of human presence and interaction. The structural arrangement of these components serves a dual function. On the one hand, the graphic separation mirrors the richness and transient quality of a fleeting moment, symbolizing how life's myriad details unfold rapidly, only to vanish without a trace. This layout aligns with Zábřana's poetic vision, which often grapples with the tension between permanence and ephemerality. On the other hand, the central section provides a more explicit reflection on the fragility of human uniqueness, emphasizing how even the most vivid and concrete details of individual existence can disappear within seconds, leaving no discernible mark on the world. The concluding lines—“*svět je bez nich / kam se poděli / nikdy nebyli*”—strip the reflection to its core, declaring the world's indifference to those who have vanished. These laconic verses, stark and unembellished, underscore the inevitability of loss and the relentless erasure brought by time. Beneath their apparent simplicity lies a deeper, implicit resonance: the sense of irrevocable grief connected to someone's departure, whether literal or metaphorical. The author transforms the mundane observation of people disappearing into the crowd into a meditation on existential absence, a theme that resonates with the broader motifs of his work. This interplay of form and content exemplifies Zábřana's ability to balance explicit narrative clarity with layers of implicit meaning. By using the visual placement of text as a symbolic tool, he invites readers to not only engage with the words but also to consider their spatial relationships and the ways in which form can amplify meaning.

Another well-documented stylistic hallmark of Zábřana's writing is his plurilingualism, a feature that is particularly prominent in the poems and fragments from this period. This linguistic layering is not merely ornamental; it serves multiple purposes, enriching the text's thematic and stylistic dimensions. Previously, we observed how Zábřana employed foreign languages, such as French, to create deliberate *linguistic misunderstandings*. These instances functioned as tools for characterization—adding depth and individuality to his figures—and satire, exposing the absurdities or contradictions inherent in particular social or ideological constructs.

In this period, Zábřana's plurilingualism continues to operate with an array of additional functions. Take, for example, the following fragments:

I'm your opus, your octopus, teče mi do bot, já jsem tvůj chobot (toto dvojjazyčné blábolení dnes ráno po probuzení v hlavě - 8. října 1974)

La belle dame sans mercy

A s vředy na bérce³⁵⁵

Dolce vita s horkým koncem³⁵⁶

Ta wife má tuhý life³⁵⁷

Badatelé v cyklistické moči,
zkoumatelé pozadí básnických očí.

My dear

a tím to končí,

tím to všechno končí³⁵⁸

The interplay of English and Czech creates a surreal linguistic rhythm that mirrors the dream-like and absurd nature of the fragment. The wordplay ("opus"/"octopus" and "chobot") highlights Zábrana's fascination with the malleability of language and its ability to stretch meaning across cultural and linguistic boundaries. This bilingual "babbling," as the author describes it, functions as a self-reflective commentary on his creative process. It captures the fluidity of thoughts and the uncontrollable ways in which language interacts within the mind. Moreover, the use of English, interspersed with Czech idiomatic expressions ("teče mi do bot"), reveals a playful juxtaposition of registers, mixing the mundane with the poetic. The fragment about "la belle dame sans mercy" demonstrates how Zábrana uses French to evoke cultural and literary resonance, referencing Keats's poem *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, only to subvert its romantic and melancholic imagery by pairing it with the starkly unpoetic and grotesque Czech phrase "s vředy na bérce" (with ulcers on her shins). This juxtaposition destabilizes the high-cultural aura of the French expression, grounding it in an unflattering corporeality that is both humorous and disconcerting. The effect is a deliberate undermining of romantic idealism, emphasizing Zábrana's tendency to challenge and deconstruct literary traditions. Another striking

³⁵⁵ Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 224.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 831.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 661.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 212.

example is the use of Italian in the third example. The phrase combines the Italian expression “*dolce vita*”—symbolizing a carefree, hedonistic lifestyle—with the ominous Czech phrase “*s horkým koncem*” (with a bitter or fiery end). The bilingual nature of this phrase creates an ironic tension, where the idyllic implications of the Italian are undercut by the foreboding Czech addition. This suggests a critique of superficial pleasures or fleeting beauty, themes that align with the disillusionment pervasive in Zábřana’s writing.

Regarding the thematic content of Zábřana’s poetry, it is evident that his focus remained consistent over time. The quotidian aspects of life continue to occupy a central position in his creative vision, alongside his enduring intent to challenge the limits of language and transcend them. This ambition is explicitly articulated in the following excerpt:

Zapsání holého faktu do básně může

- 1) ubránit fakt před upadnutím do zapomenutí
- 2) destruovat báseň
- 3) uvést do poezie oblast dosud považovanou za nepoetickou (tj. způsobit, aby byl fakt vnímán jakožto poezie). Tato třetí možnost má mnoho variant v rámci mnoha poetik a efekt je zřídka trvalejší než lhůta, v níž ta či ona poetika dominuje³⁵⁹

Through this concise yet profound list, Zábřana outlines the foundational principles of his poetic practice. He emphasizes the transformative power of integrating raw, unembellished facts into poetry. This process achieves several objectives: it safeguards factual elements from the inevitable erosion of memory, challenges and deconstructs traditional poetic forms, and brings into poetry domains previously dismissed as unpoetic. In doing so, Zábřana not only broadens the scope of what poetry can encompass but also challenges its conventional boundaries. The first point in Zábřana’s framework underscores poetry’s ability to preserve ephemeral moments. By embedding bare facts into his verses, Zábřana seeks to rescue them from the impermanence of time. This approach resonates with his broader poetic aim, discussed earlier, of arresting the flow of time. Poetry becomes a medium through which fleeting elements of daily existence are immortalized, granting them a permanence otherwise unattainable in ordinary

³⁵⁹ “Recording a bare fact in a poem can: Protect the fact from slipping into oblivion. Destroy the poem. Introduce into poetry a domain previously considered unpoetic (i.e., cause the fact to be perceived as poetry. This third possibility has many variations within various poetries, and the effect is rarely more lasting than the period during which a particular poetics prevails.)” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 283.

discourse.³⁶⁰ Zábrana's claim that the inclusion of raw facts may "destroy the poem" is paradoxical. This destruction, rather than diminishing the poem, elevates its integrity by stripping it of artifice. It foregrounds the essential nature of the fact itself, transforming what might otherwise be overlooked into something remarkable. This act of deliberate deconstruction reveals Zábrana's commitment to authenticity and his willingness to destabilize traditional poetic aesthetics in pursuit of a greater truth.³⁶¹ The third possibility articulated by Zábrana—bringing into poetry elements traditionally considered unpoetic—reveals his experimental ethos. By challenging preconceived notions of what constitutes poetic material, he renders the ordinary extraordinary. This approach aligns with his use of everyday language and imagery, infusing them with poetic significance through their integration into a structured artistic form. The transformation of the mundane into the poetic underscores Zábrana's belief in the elasticity of language and its ability to imbue meaning into even the most prosaic elements. These three elements—the preservation of memory, the poeticization of the unpoetic, and the deliberate provocation of the reader—can be seen as closely interconnected within Zábrana's poetic framework. The author's insistence on ensuring that memories do not dissolve into the obscurity of history is achieved, in part, through the elevation of unpoetic elements into the poetic realm. This process serves not only to commemorate these elements but also to imbue them with a sense of permanence and significance. Zábrana achieves this transformation by adhering to two distinct but interrelated strategies. First, as the poet himself asserts, the act of thematizing and presenting elements traditionally excluded from poetry inherently grants them a new poetic dimension. By doing so, he elevates the mundane or vulgar to the level of the epic, creating a stark contrast that compels the reader's attention. This transformation, in turn, allows such elements to resist the natural erosion of time, as they become enshrined within the literary text. Second, Zábrana deliberately destroys traditional poetic expectations by introducing jarring or vulgar content into his work. This act of destruction paradoxically renders the poem more memorable. The shock produced by such disruptions imprints the poem in the reader's memory, ensuring its endurance beyond the fleeting moment of reading. Here, Zábrana's aesthetic intention is clear: to provoke and challenge the reader, thereby catalyzing a deeper engagement with the text. This approach reflects the critical role of form, content, and reader interaction in Zábrana's

³⁶⁰ "In a situation where there is no future, the significance of the past doubles for a person." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 291.

³⁶¹ While commenting on his experimentations with the form of diary writing, he remarks: "To expand this form to encompass an experience that was previously unknown to it—that was it, nothing more, nothing less—what I was attempting when I wrote *Pages from a Diary*" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 448.

poetics. As noted in the second dossier, Zábřana believed that the reader must be actively stimulated for the poem to achieve its aesthetic potential. The deliberate interplay between the poem's formal structure and its provocative content is instrumental in achieving this goal. By unsettling the reader's expectations, Zábřana creates a dynamic space where the act of reading becomes a participatory experience, rather than a passive one:

Všechny začínají infinitivem. Šlo o princip, ke kterému definitivně dospěl. Infinitiv byl pro něj objev, který mu umožňoval dostat do básně konkrétnost, skutečnou pachut' i jas života. Honza Šulc říká, že to byla rukavice hozená sobě samému. Zkoušel, kolik takový postup unese a kam až dojde. Byla to nedokončená, otevřená stavba, jeho babylonská věž...³⁶²

The intertextual dimension, a hallmark of Zábřana's creative process, continues to play a crucial role in his work during this period, enriching both its depth and complexity. The dialogue with other authors, often seamlessly interwoven with his own reflections and experiences, becomes an integral aspect of his literary production. This intertextual engagement is not merely a matter of citation or homage; rather, it reflects Zábřana's deep-seated belief in the interconnectedness of literary voices and the collective nature of creative expression:

Pole jsou obdělávána, továrny září, nepřátelé jsou popravováni, my dekorováni... (Automatické rozvíjení první řádky, která je z básně Paula Eluarda *Smrt láska život*, napsané v roce 1951.)³⁶³

A compelling example of this can be observed in a fragment where Zábřana juxtaposes his personal memories with lines from a poem by Ladislav Fikar. This act of binding his individual recollections to the verses of another poet serves several critical functions. First, it creates a layered textual landscape, where his subjective experiences resonate with the universal themes articulated in Fikar's poetry. This interplay blurs the boundaries between personal and shared memory, underscoring Zábřana's commitment to capturing the collective dimensions of human existence:

³⁶² "They all begin with an infinitive. This was a principle he ultimately arrived at. For him, the infinitive was a discovery that allowed him to bring concreteness, the real tangibility, and clarity of life into his poetry. Honza Šulc notes that it was a challenge he posed to himself, testing how far such an approach could be pushed and where it might lead. It was an unfinished, open structure—his Tower of Babel" Zábřanová, Marie, *Infinitiv byl pro něj objev*, op. cit., p. 145.

³⁶³ "Fields are cultivated, factories glow, enemies are executed, we are decorated... (An automatic elaboration of the opening line from Paul Éluar's poem *Death Love Life*, written in 1951)" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 516.

Strojím vánoční stromek a myslím na matku, která letos zemřela... Beru do rukou stříbné saxofonky, světélkující koule s duhovými kružnicemi... Někde, kdy vypadly háčky, jsou ozdoby navázány barevnými nitkami... U jedné záchytky, pletené ze zelené bavlnky, jsem si dokonce vzpomněl, jak ji dělala háčkem ve velkém pokoji v Humpolci v zimě 46 nebo 47, za okny sníh, v zahradě stromy obalené slámou, do dálky běžící zasněžená pole a pláň venkovských Vánoc na kraji nového města, táhnoucí se tichem až k lesům pod Orlíkem... Už to bude skoro třicet let. Ty křehké ozdoby ji přežily... Ty křehké ozdoby... Vzpomínám si, jak mě rok co rok napomínala, abych je ze samé horlivosti nerozbil... Ty křehké stříbné, tenounké, nepravděpodobné ozdoby ji přežily... Letošní Vánoce? Eman Frynta umírá... Kolikrát mě ještě venku, doma, okouzlovaly jako kluka Fikarovy verše:

Městečko v zimě. Sivé, studené.
 Bez konce padal bezútěšný sníh.
 Pili jsme tenkrát ještě z pramene...
 Z ryzáků. Vzpomeň. Z píšťal vánočních.
 Vánoce, říkám si na sadě pohřbeném.³⁶⁴

The memory is portrayed with striking vividness and is, as is frequently observed in Zábrana's diary entries, prompted by a seemingly simple action performed in the present. This form of involuntary recollection, reminiscent of Proustian moments, serves as a recurring narrative mechanism in Zábrana's work, where past experiences resurface through sensory or situational triggers. In this specific passage, the melancholic tone is amplified by the imagery of a wintry landscape, which, within Zábrana's poetic framework, functions as a symbol of nostalgia—a bridge connecting him to a time irretrievably lost. The winter motif not only evokes a somber, reflective mood but also underscores a deeper theme in his writing: the persistence of memory amid transience. Central to this fragment is the leitmotif of materiality, particularly the Christmas decorations, which, despite their deteriorated state, have outlasted Zábrana's mother. These fragile objects, described with a palpable sense of decay, gain significance precisely because of their delicate nature. Their fragility mirrors the vulnerability of human memory, yet paradoxically, it is this very fragility that imbues them with permanence. The decorations serve as physical relics,

³⁶⁴ I'm decorating the Christmas tree and thinking of my mother, who passed away this year... I take the silver saxophone ornaments into my hands, the glowing balls with iridescent rings... In some places, where the hooks have fallen off, the ornaments are tied with colorful threads... On one hook, crocheted from green cotton, I even remembered how she made it with a crochet hook in the large room in Humpolec during the winter of 1946 or 1947, snow outside the windows, trees in the garden wrapped in straw, snowy fields and plains of countryside Christmases stretching into the silence all the way to the forests below Orlík... It's been almost thirty years now. Those delicate ornaments have outlived her... Those delicate ornaments... I remember how, year after year, she would caution me not to break them in my eagerness... Those delicate silver, thin, improbable ornaments have outlived her... This Christmas? Eman Frynta is dying... How many times, outside or at home, was I enchanted as a boy by Fikar's verses:/The little town in winter. Gray, cold./The unrelenting snow fell endlessly./Back then, we still drank from the spring.../From the roans. Remember. *From Christmas flutes.*/Christmas, I think to myself, in the orchard buried in grief. Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 331.

anchoring memories of more joyful times and thus becoming vessels of emotional continuity in a life marked by loss and disintegration. This interplay between the physical and the ephemeral, between objects and memories, reveals Zábřana's ongoing struggle with the passage of time. His reflections on material remnants suggest a profound meditation on the capacity of fragile objects to withstand the erosion of memory and time, thereby offering glimpses of stability and coherence in an otherwise fragmented existence. This idea of time and erosion is also linked to the decay of the physical body. As we have seen several times, Zábřana's interest and fear in the decaying of the physical body (not only his, but also of other) is one of the main themes he addresses. It is of course something linked to his conception of time, the division between the old world of his memories which is pure and untainted, and the present he despises so much. But it is also one thing triggered by diary writing. The theme is declined by Zábřana in several ways. It is a reflection not only of his mortality, but also of his existential condition of a cripple in pieces: "*vědět, že nikdo už tě nebude milovat kvůli tobě; vidět, jak věk nás rychle mění v trosky a nakonec je jenom logické, že zemřeme...*"³⁶⁵.

Zábřana's engagement with the concept of time is multidimensional, encompassing its fleeting nature, its presence in the here and now, and its implications for the future. His awareness of time as a succession of transient moments is a recurring theme in his diaries, where the act of recording becomes a way of grappling with and preserving these ephemeral fragments. The present, as captured in the diary, emerges as a site of reflection and meaning-making. This temporal awareness is thematized in various ways, including the notable use of repetitive chains featuring the infinitive verb, which serve to emphasize the immediacy and persistence of time's passage. For instance, in the entry from January 4, 1975, written in the early hours of the morning, Zábřana implores himself to grasp the essence of time:

Pochop čas. Pochop ho.
Prožívej kalendář.
Ze všech sil. A třeba jako křeč.
(4. ledna 1975, 0,3 hod. ráno)³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ "To know that no one will ever love you for who you are again; to see how age quickly turns us into wrecks, and in the end, it's only logical that we die..." Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 209.

³⁶⁶ Understand time. Understand it./Live the calendar./With all your might. Even as a convulsion./(January 4, 1975, 12:30 a.m.) Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 331.

The imperative tone underscores the urgency of understanding and fully inhabiting the present moment, even if doing so feels as strained and desperate as a cramp. The emphasis on experiencing time intensely reflects Zábřana's preoccupation with its inexorable progression and his desire to capture its elusive essence. Similarly, his poetry often reflects on the cyclical nature of time, weaving together motifs of beginnings and endings. In another entry, the layers of temporal continuity and recurrence are poetically encapsulated:

Čas
konců i počátků,
cheopsů, eposů
přečtených pozpátku³⁶⁷

Here, time is presented as a continuum that encompasses both the monumental (the pyramids of Cheops) and the literary (epics read backward), suggesting a view of history and personal experience as interconnected and cyclical. This reflective stance highlights Zábřana's awareness of the vast temporal scales in which human life is situated, juxtaposing individual moments with the weight of historical and cultural legacies.

Beyond the present and past, Zábřana's work reveals a pronounced tension towards the future, which becomes particularly acute in the *Disiecta Membra*. This orientation towards what lies ahead manifests both personally and morally. On a personal level, Zábřana grapples with the uncertainty of what the future holds, a theme amplified by his experiences living under an oppressive regime. His reflections often oscillate between hope for personal and collective freedom and a sense of foreboding rooted in the constraints of his socio-political context:

Jenom jedno ještě zůstává v naší moci: postarat se, aby tentokrát dějiny, svědectví o této době nepsali vítězové. Toto někdejší privilegium je v naší moci jim vyrvat. V starověké Číně odcházeli literáti na venkov a do horských klášterů. Tady to chce pořídit si psa a psací stůl.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁷ "Time/of endings and beginnings,/of Cheops, of epics/read in reverse". Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit. p. 608.

³⁶⁸ "Only one thing remains within our power: to ensure that this time, history, the testimony of this era, is not written by the winners. This former privilege is within our grasp to wrest from them. In ancient China, men of letters retreated to the countryside and mountain monasteries. Here, it calls for getting a dog and a writing desk." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 380.

The imperative to offer testimony, which emerges as one of the primary functions of Zábřana's diaries, finds explicit articulation in his reflections and is deeply intertwined with his growing polemical tone, particularly from the 1960s onward. This shift in his writing style aligns with his broader ambition to address a larger audience, warning them about the dangers and atrocities perpetrated by the communist regime. Throughout his works, Zábřana repeatedly underscores the fundamental responsibility of a writer to convey the truth. For him, this duty was not merely a professional commitment but a moral imperative, as he articulates in a passage that exemplifies his convictions:

Nastanou-li takové okolnosti, že stát, v němž žije, znemožní spisovateli publikovat pravdu, má spisovatel psát a nepublikovat. Nemůže-li se uživit, aniž publikuje, má se živit něčím jiným. A jestliže vůbec někdy napíše něco, o čem ve svém nejvnitřnější svědomí ví, že to není pravda, pak je vyřizen. Lidé o něm nebudou chtít ani slyšet, protože on, jehož povinností je říkat jim pravdu, jim lhal. A on sám nikdy nedomyslí vnitřního klidu, protože zradil svou jedinou zásadní povinnost³⁶⁹

This passage is a quote from Hemingway's *Men at War*, a source that Zábřana strategically integrates into his work to reflect and reinforce his own views on the writer's role in society. The invocation of Hemingway adds an intertextual depth to Zábřana's argument, situating his struggle within a broader literary tradition of truth-telling as a form of resistance. Zábřana's reliance on Hemingway underscores his alignment with the belief that writing should serve as a moral compass, a beacon of honesty in the face of political and social corruption. Zábřana's forward-looking perspective is not confined solely to his denunciation of the regime's crimes but also reflects a deeply personal need for enduring remembrance. This preoccupation is evident in his reflections on the limitations of publication under oppressive conditions and the existential consequences of silencing a writer's voice: "*Ještě jednou se vrátím k tomu Publish or perish. Ale co když publikovat absolutně nelze a zahynout se nechce? Co pak? Pokusit se hodit do proudu času udici, návnadu, tenkou šňůru, za kterou tě jednou z hloubky - je-li vůbec taková šance - budou moct vytáhnout*".³⁷⁰ Here, Zábřana encapsulates the dual nature of his tension with the

³⁶⁹ "If circumstances arise where the state in which a writer lives prevents them from publishing the truth, the writer must write without publishing. If they cannot make a living without publishing, they should earn a living through other means. And if they ever write something they know in their innermost conscience is not true, they are finished. People will not want to hear from them, because they, whose duty it is to tell the truth, have lied. And they themselves will never find inner peace, having betrayed their one essential obligation" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 288.

³⁷⁰ "Once again, I return to *publish or perish*. But what if publishing is absolutely impossible, and one does not wish to perish? Then what? Try to cast a line into the stream of time—a bait, a thin thread—something by which, one day, someone might be able to pull you up from the depths, if such a chance exists at all." Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit. p. 611.

future. On one hand, the metaphor of casting a fishing line into the stream of time reflects his hope that his works might one day reach a receptive audience, even if only posthumously. On the other hand, it underscores the precariousness of such an endeavor, where the chances of retrieval are slim but nevertheless crucial to his legacy. This tension also encapsulates the broader existential struggle he faces—the simultaneous yearning to preserve his voice for posterity and the looming threat of physical decline and mortality. The ambivalence in Zábrana's approach to the future is thus richly layered. It conveys his dual aspirations: the urgency of documenting and denouncing the injustices of the present to ensure they are not erased from historical memory, and the deeply human desire to transcend his temporal limitations through literary permanence. However, this forward orientation is shadowed by the inevitability of death and decay, which he perceives as both a personal end and an existential horizon that informs his creative urgency. In this way, Zábrana's diaries and poetry serve not only as acts of resistance against tyranny but also as profound meditations on the nature of time, truth, and the writer's role in bridging the ephemeral and the eternal.

Several entries in Zábrana's diaries reveal how his recollections are infused with chronotopical elements, offering rich, layered descriptions that demonstrate his skill in creating evocative prose fragments. Consider the following passage:

Byl jsem tehdy ještě mladý, řídké podvečerní světlo březnového dne mě doprovázelo po sení cestě, ještě v něm byl rozpuštěný nažloutlý svit, šel jsem nad ozdravovkami lesem, ne po silnici, na pasekách a na kraji lesa bylo světlo ještě tak intenzivní, že tam, kde dopadalo na kůru borovic, byly stromy narudlé, do červena... V lese ve stínu ležely šedé, d'obkaté koláče posledního sněhu, jehličí bylo lesklé a mokré, svlažené, po zimě bez vůně, les prostupovala jen jakási předjarně svěží a zároveň smutná vlhkost³⁷¹

This passage highlights Zábrana's nuanced use of light as a literary device to evoke a particular mood and sensation. The woods are bathed in the dimming light of dusk, a blend of residual snow and emerging spring transforming the landscape into a liminal space between seasons. This interplay of light and shadow creates an atmosphere that is both melancholic and reflective, suffused with a quiet anticipation of renewal. For Zábrana,

³⁷¹ "I was still young then, walking along the hay-scented path in the sparse evening light of a March day. The light still held a faint yellowish glow, accompanying me as I walked through the forest above the sanatoriums, avoiding the main road. On the clearings and at the edge of the forest, the light was so intense that where it fell on the bark of the pine trees, the trees glowed reddish, almost crimson. In the shaded parts of the forest, there were speckled gray patches of the last snow. The pine needles were glossy and wet, dampened, devoid of scent after the winter. The forest was permeated by a fresh, pre-spring moisture—both invigorating and quietly melancholic." *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, p. 547.

such landscapes often held personal significance, evoking memories of his childhood and the “old world” that he repeatedly revisited in his writing.³⁷² The thematic recurrence of certain colors, especially shades of yellow, further amplifies the emotive resonance of his descriptions. These hues appear frequently in his diary entries from this period, such as the one from August 25:

25. srpna. Dnes ráno – po týdnech dešťů – první podzimní den. V ranním světle je všechno jak vykrojené skleněným nože. Tráva dýchá ledovou rosou, jako by už v ní byl nadrobno nasekaný led. Ranní slunce už není žluté, je do okrová a průsvitné zároveň. Můj dávný ilusivní pocit: sklo. Všechno kolem za sklem. Za skleněnou stěnou. [...] Ani jsem letos nevěděl, že bylo léto. Přišpendlený k papíru jak exponátní motýl. Se svěžími smysly, ostrými vjemy minulosti už mě spojuje jenom ten pocit čerstvého, studeného předzimního rána. Smrtelnost...³⁷³

[...] Šel jsem od paní P., které jsem celé odpoledne diktoval první verzi překladu dalších Buninových povídek (těch, které dělám pro Odeon) a čekal jsem u metra na autobus 155 do Malešic. Bylo už skoro sedm hodin, to je ta chvíle, kdy odpadne nervozita a spěch, od Vltavy, od Karláku svítilo po několika rozpršených dnech do táhle stoupající ulice průsvitem slunce a mázlo ji bronzovým medem podvečerní idylky, jaká bývala v Praze za járných večerů před čtvrt stoletím, když jsem sem přišel.³⁷⁴

The recurring motif of colors like yellow and ochre serves as a symbolic thread in Zábrana's diary, representing not only the remnants of a vanished world but also the enduring connection to it. These colors are closely tied to the morning and evening hours, moments that hold an inherent liminality: *“nechtěl bych příliš generalizovat, ale čím dál víc si uvědomuju, že literatura, kterou mým opravdu rád a která je mi nejbliž, je literatura z let 1920-1940. Samozřejmě – plus minus. Je to proto, že to je svět, který jsem vnímal nejsvěžejšíma očima dítěte? Že to je svět, v jakém jsem si jako dítě představoval, že budu*

³⁷² “Eva brought water for the flower vase three times, and the sunlight refracted and sparkled in the glass of water like dew in the grass during those long-ago summer mornings in the garden in Humpolec” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 372.

³⁷³ “August 25th. This morning—after weeks of rain—the first autumn day. In the morning light, everything looks as if it has been cut with a glass knife. The grass breathes icy dew, as if tiny shards of ice were already scattered within it. The morning sun is no longer yellow; it is ochre and translucent at the same time. My long-standing illusory feeling: glass. Everything around is behind glass. Behind a glass wall. [...] I didn't even realize summer had come this year. Pinned to paper like a specimen butterfly. The only thing that still connects me to the fresh, sharp sensations of the past is this feeling of a crisp, cold, pre-winter morning. Mortality...” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit. p. 554.

³⁷⁴ “I was walking back from Mrs. P., to whom I had spent the entire afternoon dictating the first draft of my translation of more of Bunin's stories (the ones I'm working on for Odeon). I was waiting by the metro for bus 155 to Malešice. It was nearly seven o'clock, that moment when the nervous rush fades. From the Vltava, from Karlák, the sun shone after several days of rain, casting its translucent light up the long, rising street and painting it with the bronze honey of an early evening idyll, the kind Prague used to have on spring evenings a quarter-century ago, when I first arrived here.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 289.

žít?"³⁷⁵ Here, Zábřana explicitly links his affinity for the interwar literary era to the freshness of childhood perception—a time when the world appeared most vivid and full of potential.

The poet's fixation on the period of his youth, particularly through the act of remembrance, is poignantly illustrated in the metaphor of the butterfly pinned to a sheet of paper. This image serves a dual function: on the one hand, it symbolizes a long-lost memory that has been preserved in his diary as a means of holding onto it; on the other, it acts as a representation of the poet himself, immobilized in time by the weight of his past. The motif of the butterfly, however, is not confined to his prose; it migrates into his poetry, as exemplified in the following verses:

Tenkrát!
Tloukli jsme se v parku deštníky a hustilkami po hlavách.
Milovali jsem se.
Smrt byla na cestě.
Sousedé mávali,
hodinky na vestě.
Skřínkohra v ložnici.
Zalepilas mi srdce do obálky.
"Víš to ještě?" Oh, sûr que oui.
Sladký prach se sypal z podrážek.
Ukrajovaný tvým pláčem.
Nikdy jsem neodepjal řemen.
Jak?
"Rychle, než se vyvaříš."
Rychle.
Dvě cizí dcery z mezipatra
odešly do hudební školy.
Připíchlas motýla na samet' velké sbírky.
Nadechla ses a vykřičela.
Milovali jsme se.
Tenkrát!³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ "I don't want to generalize too much, but I'm becoming increasingly aware that the literature I truly love and feel closest to is the literature from the years 1920–1940. Of course—give or take. Is it because this is the world I perceived with the freshest eyes of childhood? Because it's the world in which, as a child, I imagined I would one day live?" *Ibid.*, *ibid.* p. 417.

³⁷⁶ "Back then!/We hit each other in the park with umbrellas and bike pumps on the head./We loved each other./Death was on its way./Neighbors waved,/watches on their vests./The wardrobe chimed in the bedroom./You sealed my heart in an envelope./"Do you still remember?" Oh, sûr que oui./Sweet dust spilled from the soles of our shoes,/shaken loose by your tears./I never unbuckled the strap./How?/"Quickly, before you boil over."/Quickly./Two strange daughters from the floor above/left for music school./You pinned a

In this poem, the butterfly is explicitly linked to stillness, embodied in the image of the insect pinned to velvet as part of a collection. This act of pinning also serves as a metaphor for memory: fixed, unchanging, and forever tied to the past. The refrain “Tenkrát!” (“Back then!”) underscores the poet’s longing for and attachment to a bygone era. It reflects Zábrana’s recurring theme of the past as a realm more vivid and alive than his present, a concept explored in depth in earlier analyses. This association between the past and an almost consuming vitality resurfaces in another motif—fire. In Zábrana’s writing, fire frequently symbolizes the vibrant, albeit fleeting, intensity of memories. For instance, the following lines evoke a poignant interplay between the fragility of memory and its enduring warmth:

Na lásku vzpomeň
Jak byla krotká
Jak sfoukla oheň
Ta tichá loutka.³⁷⁷

In the later phase of Zábrana’s writing, fire takes on an expanded significance, becoming a central motif in his poetic landscape. While it continues to symbolize the vitality of the past, it also acquires darker associations, particularly with death and the atrocities committed by oppressive regimes. This duality is evident in *Disiecta Membra*, where fire often invokes the imagery of crematoria, as seen in the recurring references to urns that encapsulate the remnants of human lives obliterated by totalitarian violence:

V krematoriu jsem byl v posledních letech a hlavně letos tolikrát, že už tam jsem jako doma³⁷⁸

I popel z těch nejžhavějších kremací jednou vychladne³⁷⁹

Informace z krematoria: Urnu možno vyzvednout v úterý - pátek od 8 do 15 hodin (i přes poledne)³⁸⁰

butterfly to the velvet of your grand collection./You took a breath and screamed./We loved each other./Back then! Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit. p. 277.

³⁷⁷ “Remember love/How gentle it was/How it blew out the fire/That quiet puppet” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 811.

³⁷⁸ “In recent years, and especially this year, I’ve been to the crematorium so many times that it already feels like home” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 301.

³⁷⁹ “Even the ashes from the hottest cremations will one day cool.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 314.

³⁸⁰ “Information from the crematorium: Urns can be collected Tuesday–Friday from 8 AM to 3 PM (including during lunch hours).” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit. p. 319.

A čeho se teď lidé chytají, čeho se drží? Polovina se jich drží volantu, který je v iluzi vede vpřed – ale ten je kruh, nikde nezačíná, nikdy nekončí [...] A ti druzí, včetně mne? Drží se, ano, právě drží cigarety, která se každým okamžikem se proměňuje v popel.³⁸¹

In Zábrana's work, fire emerges as a multifaceted motif deeply intertwined with his reflections on the past, present, and future. The symbolic weight of fire extends beyond its literal representation, encompassing themes of memory, vitality, and destruction. Fire is particularly tied to the past, a period the author often depicts as vivid and alive in stark contrast to his perception of the present and future. This thematic connection is exemplified in the poet's tendency to characterize his current existence as engulfed by an all-consuming darkness, devoid of light or hope:

V noci jsem slyšel z rádia šest Mozartových landlerů – venku po dešti, vítr, vítr, temná pláň, v dálce namodralá světla letiště, kruh světla z lampy, samota nad papírem... Mrtví mě obstoupili, stesk, všechno, co byl život, bylo už dávno. Slzy v očích a přede mnou jen noc, noc, noc až do konce.³⁸²

Nezapomínat: přišel jsi na svět umírat... Zřejmě je to všecko normální, organické: všechno je den ze dne cizejší, vzdálenější, míň barevné. Slyším je: kroky konce, kroky konce.³⁸³

This passage reveals the stark contrast between the vibrancy of the past and the pervasive desolation of the present and future. The imagery of “endless night” suggests a life overshadowed by an absence of light—metaphorically, the extinguished fire. The dead are ever-present, surrounding him in solitude, while the living moments of his past, which once brimmed with vitality, now exist only as a distant echo. This distance is usually expressed by the author through the image of the glass:

Za průhlednou clonkou skla
se čas přeshoupal
jak plynoměr

³⁸¹ “And what do people cling to now, what do they hold onto? Half of them grip the steering wheel, which gives them the illusion of moving forward—but it's a circle, with no beginning and no end. [...] And the others, including me? We hold onto, yes, we cling to cigarettes, which with every passing moment are turning into ash” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 274.

³⁸² “At night, I heard six of Mozart's Ländler on the radio—outside, after the rain, wind, wind, a dark plain, in the distance the bluish lights of the airport, the circle of light from the lamp, solitude over paper... The dead surrounded me, longing, everything that had been life was already long gone. Tears in my eyes, and ahead of me only night, night, night until the end.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 655.

³⁸³ “Don't forget: you came into this world to die... Apparently, it's all normal, organic: everything grows stranger, more distant, less colorful day by day. I can hear them: the steps of the end, the steps of the end.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 312.

Celá ta džungle v tobě
Přestala věřit
v příští jaro.
Bohyní všech tvých dnů
se stala noc.

Házené maso života
dopadá mimo klec.
Ne, život od tebe neodpad,
ale ty, ta řasa na víčku,
stal ses v něm řasou v oku.

Zítra, pozítří, teď –
Teď, pozítří, zítra
umřeš. A co?
Nebude to poprvé.
Ty, který jsi prožil
Tolik mrtvého života.

Třicet let smrti zaživa
v režimu lží, vražd
a sviní v lidské podobě

Smrt je jen plná míra
mrtvého života.³⁸⁴

The darkness, the goddess of night, reflects an existential void, a future stripped of hope or meaning. The motif of fire, therefore, becomes thematically linked to the author's efforts to preserve the past through the act of writing. As a diarist and poet, Zábrana's creative process can be seen as an attempt to rekindle the flames of memory, countering the encroaching darkness. The symbolic interplay between fire and darkness not only highlights the fragility of memory but also underscores Zábrana's belief in the power of literature to defy temporal decay. By recording the ephemeral and breathing life into the inert, he reclaims fragments of the past, granting them a semblance of permanence. Light

³⁸⁴ "Behind a transparent veil of glass,/time shifted/like a gas meter./The whole jungle within you/stopped believing/in the next spring./The goddess of all your days/became the night./The tossed meat of life/lands outside the cage./No, life hasn't abandoned you,/but you, that lash on the eyelid,/have become the mote in its eye./Tomorrow, the day after, now—/Now, the day after, tomorrow/you will die. So what?/It won't be the first time./You, who have lived/so much dead life./Thirty years of death while alive/in a regime of lies, murders,/and swine in human form./Death is only the full measure/of dead life." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit. p. 641.

and darkness as respectively the beginning of and the end of the poet's life are also underlined in the following verses:

Koleje, koleje,
na jednom vašem konci už světlo,
na druhém vašem konci už tma...³⁸⁵

This short poem once again brings into focus the motif of tracks, specifically the railway tracks that signify a train bound to follow its predetermined route. This imagery resonates deeply with Zábřana's recurrent use of the train as a metaphor, an element we have previously examined in earlier analyses. The train, with its unalterable path, serves as a powerful symbol of predestination, a theme that preoccupied Zábřana throughout his work. This metaphor extends beyond the scope of individual experience, encapsulating Zábřana's perception of historical and collective human destiny: "*Ujel jim autobus, vypadli z vlaku dějin, vylili s vaničkou i dítě a na jejich ulici už nebude nikdy svátek...*"³⁸⁶

One poem that serves as an exemplary illustration of the key elements in Zábřana's poetry, as discussed so far, is the following piece, noted down in 1973. This work encapsulates the imagery, themes, and stylistic nuances characteristic of this phase of Zábřana's writing:

Ptáci
zatavení
v křišťálu podzimního vzduchu.
Kdo ji měl trestat,
tenkrát, před třinácti lety,
za hysterii, již propadla,
když ho uviděla v blízkosti
mladé ženy?

Když si uvědomila,
že jí sváteční vánočka štěstí
nevykynula pod rukama?

To všechno ze strachu
před osamělými podzimy

³⁸⁵ "Tracks, tracks,/at one end of you, there's already light,/at the other end of you, there's already darkness..." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 315.

³⁸⁶ "They missed the bus, fell out of the train of history,/threw out the baby with the bathwater,/and on their street, there will never be a holiday again..." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 215.

s ptáky zatavenými do kříšťálu vzduchu.

“Kam jsem rozum dala,
že jsem se za něho neprovdala?”

I smrt, i smrt mi jednou
mohla říkat: “Paní...”
Tak blázen trestá jiné
za své vlastní chyby.

Na milovaných jsou nám
nesnesitelné i ty chyby,
s nimiž se u sebe smiřujeme.
Jsme neradi, když se před námi
shazují ti, které máme radi.
A láska změřená tímhle
je láska zabitá sekerou.
Láska zmýlená s megerou.
Podzim ticha.
Ticho v hlučném světě.
O jedny plíce mín vtahují
z toho vzduchu.
Jsme zataveni v nehybnosti letu.
Jsme zataveni v kříšťálu.

A bývala to slza.
A ze slzy zažloutlá kaluž
jak prostěradlo pomočené dítětem.
Zataveni do vzduchu
tohoto podzimu a světa
i se svým výletem.

Pravověrní ke smrti -
chtivost, dychtivost života
zdá se nám přirostlá
jak lačný host,
jenž neví, kdy má dost.

Nás z někdejška,
otíštěné do vosku,
už rozestavil čas

u zbagranových cest.
Slyšíš pořád ty včely
v lipových alejích,
jejichž dřevo shořelo před deseti lety?

Vidíš pořád to ranní slunce,
v okrovém prachu ulice,
kterou zbořili před deseti lety?
Pak svět ujíždí pod nohama jako led.
A pak už jsme víc v tom,
který není,
než v tom, který je.
Svět v moři našich hlav.
Je dál ten zlatý páv.

Ten ted a kolem nás
je temný jako Sibiř.
Jako hrob, k němuž jdeš,
kam míšiš.³⁸⁷

This poem encapsulates many of the thematic and symbolic elements that are central to Zábřana's poetic vision. Chief among these is the recurring image of birds, here depicted as frozen in the crystal of autumn air." This imagery evokes a profound sense of entrapment and stillness, a motif that appears frequently in Zábřana's work as a metaphor for captivity—whether physical, emotional, or existential. The poem also prominently features the color yellow, or ochre, a hue that Zábřana often associated with loss and nostalgia. The yellow here is tied to memories of the past, evoking both the beauty and

³⁸⁷ "Birds/Frozen/in the crystal of autumn air./Who was to punish her,/thirteen years ago,/for the hysteria that seized her/when she saw him/near a young woman?/When she realized/that the festive Christmas loaf of happiness/had not risen under her hands?/All of it driven by fear—/fear of lonely autumns/with birds frozen in the crystal of the air./"Where was my mind/when I didn't marry him?"/Even death, even death itself,/might have once called me "Madam..."/So a fool punishes others/for her own mistakes./In those we love,/even the faults we tolerate in ourselves/become unbearable./We dislike it when those we hold dear/humble themselves before us./And love measured by such things/is love slain by an axe,/love mistaken for malice./The autumn of silence./Silence in a noisy world./One less breath pulls/from this air./We are frozen in the stillness of flight./We are frozen in crystal./Once, it was a tear./And from that tear, a yellowed puddle/like the sheet wet by a child./Frozen into the air/of this autumn and this world,/even with our journey./Faithful unto death—/the craving, the yearning for life/clings to us like a greedy guest/who doesn't know when to leave./We, from that former time,/pressed into wax,/have already been placed by time/along the bulldozed roads./Do you still hear the bees/in the linden alleys,/whose wood burned to ash ten years ago?/Do you still see that morning sun,/in the ochre dust of a street/that was demolished ten years ago?/Then the world slips beneath your feet like ice./And then we are more in what isn't than in what is./The world within the sea of our minds./The golden peacock is still there./But the world here, around us now,/is as dark as Siberia./Like the grave to which you walk,/toward which you head." Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 244.

fragility of what has been irretrievably lost. This association may stem from the seasonal setting of autumn, a period Zábřana revered for its transient beauty and melancholic overtones. As noted in the first dossier, autumn for Zábřana carried personal and literary significance, serving as a bridge to the poetic worlds of Sergei Yesenin. The tension between the present and the past is another key element in this poem. Zábřana juxtaposes the impermanence of memory with the persistence of sensory impressions: “*Slyšíš pořád ty včely v lipových alejích, jejichž dřevo shořelo před deseti lety?*” (“Do you still hear the bees in the lime-tree avenues, whose wood burned down ten years ago?”). The dissonance between memory and the irrevocable passage of time mirrors the poet’s broader struggle to reconcile personal and historical losses. The theme of mortality permeates the text, particularly in its exploration of the fragility of love and the inevitability of death. Lines such as “*Pak svět ujíždí pod nohama jako led*” (“Then the world slides away underfoot like ice”) reflect Zábřana’s existential concerns, emphasizing the precariousness of life and the inexorable pull toward the void. This meditation on the fleeting nature of existence finds its culmination in the stark imagery of the poem’s final lines, where the world becomes “dark as Siberia,” a metaphorical grave to which all are ultimately drawn. Another element which is noteworthy, for this phase of Zábřana’s poetic development, is the image of the bees and the hive, which become recurring in the diaries of this period. At times, the dead bees symbolize the poet deprived of his literary career: “*vědět, že v nesvobodě i slova básníků páchnou jak mrtvé včely v zabedněném úle*”.³⁸⁸ In another entry, the author offer a more precise interpretation of this kind of imagery. He compares the countries subjugated by a totalitarian regime to an hive: “*Do konce století chtějí vlády všude na světě udělat z lidstva úly. Jejich ideálem, ideálem všech vládnoucích zločinců jsou úly včel, které makají a na nic se neptají - farmy norků a nutrií*”.³⁸⁹ Deprived of their individuality, the citizens of a totalitarian country are like bees, whose purpose is only that to work and produce, and to follow blindly the orders they are given. This might be the reason why the dead bees could symbolize not only the unpublished works of banished authors, but also writers themselves, persecuted and stripped of their role as intellectuals, forced to perform menial jobs. This idea also corroborates what we have said about how Zábřana utilizes animals to portray the Czechoslovakian society of his time.

³⁸⁸ “To know that, without freedom, even the words of poets reek like dead bees in a sealed hive.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 208. Or “And the bees settled and drifted along the sweet streams of diabetic urine”. Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 326.

³⁸⁹ “By the end of the century, governments everywhere aim to turn humanity into hives. Their ideal—the ideal of all ruling criminals—is bee hives: bees that toil without question, like mink and nutria farms.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 236.

The “Notes from the Hospital” represent a unique segment of Zábřana’s diaries, penned during his hospitalization at Motol Hospital in Prague in 1984. These entries provide an intimate, unflinching look into the poet’s physical and mental condition, as well as his observations of the hospital environment, its routines, and its inhabitants. Written amidst his illness, these fragments are characterized by a stark blend of cynicism, meticulous detail, and poetic resonance, reflecting both his acute self-awareness and his broader existential reflections. In these notes, Zábřana carefully documents his symptoms with clinical precision, conveying both the relentlessness of his physical suffering and his intellectual engagement with his deteriorating condition:

Drápky andulky, které se ti zatínaly do ruky, tvrdá žihadla jiskřících injekcí, které se ti slétaly na ruce, to byl tvůj civil, civil tvé vlekle usouzené každodennosti, tvoje hřebíky Kristovy.³⁹⁰

Here, he transforms the ordinary pain of medical treatment into a vivid metaphor. The image of a budgerigar’s claws digging into his hand and the sting of injections evoke not only the physical invasiveness of his condition but also its deeper existential toll. The phrase “your nails of Christ” ties this pain to a broader spiritual and philosophical reflection, elevating his suffering to a universal dimension while maintaining the specificity of his personal struggle. Zábřana’s notes also include stark and concise records of his physical state and medical procedures, rendered with an almost detached objectivity that contrasts with the emotional depth of his metaphors:

53. narozeniny. Ve špitále. V noci mě bolela játra, k ránu jsem se znova potil (po inzulinu?)³⁹¹

Opět špatná, stavy úzkosti, pocení, běhání na záchod. Odpoledne Eva na návštěvě.³⁹²

Čtvrtek 21. června, dusné, zamžené červnové ráno. V poledne mi mají dělat laparoskopii. Přes noc už injekce, prášky, dvakrát klystýr, ale spal jsem jakž takž³⁹³

³⁹⁰ “The claws of the budgie digging into your hand, the sharp stingers of sparking injections landing on your arms—this was your civilian life, the civilian reality of your drawn-out, tormented everyday existence, your nails of Christ.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 1018.

³⁹¹ “Fifty-three years old. In the hospital. At night, my liver hurt; by morning, I was sweating again (from the insulin?)” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 1018.

³⁹² “Once again, bad. States of anxiety, sweating, constant trips to the bathroom. In the afternoon, Eva came to visit.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 1021.

³⁹³ “Thursday, June 21st. A stifling, hazy June morning. At noon, they’re supposed to perform a laparoscopy. Overnight, it’s already been injections, pills, two enemas—but I slept, more or less.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 1030.

These entries provide a glimpse into the mundane realities of hospital life—pain, medical interventions, and exhaustion. Yet, even in their brevity, they hint at the poet's endurance and the quiet despair of confronting his mortality within the sterile confines of a hospital. In addition to chronicling his physical condition, Zábřana's diary portrays the broader environment of the hospital. His descriptions of other patients and their routines bring the setting to life, often with a wry, critical tone:

Klidná, klidná... Pacienti mají puštěný tranzistor. Od šesti ráno předčítá líbezný, šťavnatý, sytě modulovaný hlad jednu lež za druhou – jako každý den.³⁹⁴

This observation juxtaposes the superficial calmness of the patients with the unrelenting intrusion of propaganda from a transistor radio, symbolizing the larger sociopolitical constraints Zábřana experienced even in the hospital. The "sweet, juicy, richly modulated voice" delivering "one lie after another" encapsulates his disillusionment with the regime and its pervasive control over public discourse.

Beyond clinical observations, the *Notes from the Hospital* are replete with personal memories and poetic fragments, demonstrating a continuation of the reflective practice seen in *Disiecta Membra*. These entries reveal an author deeply engaged in assessing the trajectory of his life, balancing his reflections on the past with considerations for the future. At this stage in his life, Zábřana revisits his personal and professional struggles, particularly those rooted in the systemic injustices he endured due to his social and class origins. His enduring resentment against those who oppressed him is palpable, as is his commitment to preserve an unvarnished account of his life for posterity:

CO BYCH MĚL UDĚLAT, DOSTANU-LI SE JEŠTĚ K TOMU: napsat si pro sebe (a pro kohokoli v budoucnu) krátký, několikastránkový, ale ve faktech exaktně přesný životopis, kde budou uvedeny naprosto konkrétní údaje (že například svazáckými přísedícími komise v modrých košilích, která mi napsala, že jsem nebyl přijat ke studiu na FF pro „naprosto nevyhovující ideologické předpoklady k studiu“, byli ti a ti...). Životopis, který by rušil všechny zámky a polopravdy, jež jsem z donucení musel psát jinde. Pak psali můj životopis jiní.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ "Calm, calm... The patients have the transistor radio on. Since six in the morning, a sweet, juicy, richly modulated voice has been reading one lie after another—just like every day." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 1027.

³⁹⁵ "WHAT I SHOULD DO, IF I EVER GET THE CHANCE: write a short, several-page biography for myself (and for anyone in the future), one that is factually precise and accurate. It would include entirely specific details (for example, naming the youth league members of the commission in blue shirts who wrote that I was not admitted to study at the Faculty of Arts due to "completely unsuitable ideological qualifications for study"). A biography that would break through all the locks and half-truths I was forced to write elsewhere. Later, others wrote my biography for me." Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 1024.

Here, Zábřana expresses a determination to create an autobiographical account that is factually precise and immune to manipulation. This life narrative would serve as both a corrective to official histories and a means of denouncing those complicit in his marginalization. His desire to “rušit všechny zámky a polopravdy” (break down all locks and half-truths) underscores his lifelong commitment to truth-telling, even in the face of oppressive forces that sought to silence him. Despite the physical toll of his illness, Zábřana’s entries also hint at his enduring creative aspirations. These include plans for new poems and translations, as exemplified in the following fragment:

Had formy
si tebe podal
z platformy
kdy básnické je
spíš než lidské
a lidské jen to
nebásnické³⁹⁶

Described by Zábřana as a poem inspired by a visit to a prison, this work reflects his characteristic interplay between personal and collective experience. Formally, the poem exhibits features familiar in his oeuvre: a rhythmic use of rhyme and the engagement of a lyrical “I” addressing an interlocutor. This interaction suggests a shared emotional or existential space, reinforcing the central tension in Zábřana’s work between individual subjectivity and universal themes. As his health deteriorated and the wait for medical results dragged on, the specter of death loomed large in Zábřana’s reflections. His diaries from this period are permeated with a haunting awareness of mortality, which surfaces not only in his prose but also in the fragments of poetry he continued to compose. The inevitability of death—manifested through both physical suffering and existential contemplation—becomes a dominant theme, underscoring the fragility of life and the urgency of Zábřana’s creative and testimonial endeavours. In this context, the Notes from the Hospital serve as a testament to Zábřana’s resilience as both an individual and a writer. Even as his body failed him, his commitment to capturing the truth—whether in prose, verse, or personal recollection—remained unwavering, ensuring that his voice would endure beyond the confines of his own mortality

³⁹⁶ The serpent of form/took hold of you/from the platform,/where the poetic/is more than the human,/and the human/is only that/which is unpoetic. *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, p. 1025.

For what concerns sources of exogenetic influences, in this final phase of his writing, we find several of them. One is for example the friend and writer Josef Škvorecký, with whom Zábrana had been in constant touch since the 50s: “*Styskali jsme se tenkrát skoro denně a pořád mluvili spolu o práci, takže ty výpůjčky jednoho od druhého byly běžné. Já jsem si od něho vypůjčil do jedné básně ze Stránek z deníku jeho parafrázi německé válečné písničky (Sterbe wohl, Erika) a jindy jiné věci.*” We have already mentioned of the contact with the writer was key in Zábrana’s formation as an expert and translator of angloamerican literature. He mentions different authors throughout the diaries of this period, and I will try to focus on the ones that in my opinion influenced him the most, besides the alter-ego we will speak of in the latest section of this dossier.

Among Russian writers, the ones he was most fond of were Osip Mandelstam, Ivan Bunin, and Andrei Platonov. While Mandelstam’s work resonated deeply with him for reasons previously discussed, his connection to Bunin and Platonov reveals a similarly profound and personal engagement. Zábrana’s attraction to Ivan Bunin appears to have been driven by a kind of mystical force, as he himself described:

Čím dál víc si uvědomuji, že v mém vztahu k Buninově próze je cosi “soukromě mystického”, pocit sblížení, částečné identity osobnosti (nikoli ke jeho veršům, které mi přes několikeré opakované čtení pořád zůstávají cizí). Buninova próza jako by mi potvrzovala, že v životě a v umění má cenu přesně to, o čem jsem si vždy myslel, že to cenu má. (...) jsem tou prózou stále posedlejší - odejdu od překladu, a místo abych se rozptýlil něčím jiným, čtu si jiné jeho povídky.³⁹⁷

Tenhle svět, jehož cípek jsem na světě ještě zahlédl a který mě v Buninovi očaroval kouzlem ztraceného ráje.³⁹⁸

Překládat Bunina je tak těžká práce jako orat pole. A to říkám v roce 1974, kdy pracuju jako překladatel z profese dvacátý let³⁹⁹

Zábrana’s fascination with Bunin was rooted in the writer’s ability to evoke a poignant and sentimental atmosphere, imbuing his works with a magnetic charm. He found

³⁹⁷ “I increasingly realize that my relationship with Bunin’s prose has something “privately mystical” about it—a feeling of closeness, a partial identification of personality (though not with his poetry, which, despite multiple readings, still feels foreign to me). Bunin’s prose seems to affirm that in life and art, what has value is precisely what I have always believed to be meaningful. (...) I am becoming more and more obsessed with his prose—I step away from translating, and instead of distracting myself with something else, I find myself reading his other stories.” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 324.

³⁹⁸ “This world, a glimpse of which I still caught in my lifetime, enchants me in Bunin’s work with the charm of a lost paradise.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 282.

³⁹⁹ “Translating Bunin is as arduous a task as plowing a field. And I say this in 1974, after twenty years of working professionally as a translator.” Ibid., *ibid.*, 274.

Bunin's capacity to evoke tears in his readers, while still maintaining a degree of sentimentality, particularly compelling. He wrote: "*Slzotvorné pasáže v Buninovi. Jsou to nejejenálnější místa v jeho próze. Někdy sentimentální*".⁴⁰⁰ Zábrana felt an extraordinary closeness to Bunin, to the extent that the Russian writer can be considered one of Zábrana's literary alter egos⁴⁰¹—figures from the past with whom he maintained a symbolic dialogue across time. This profound sense of connection is articulated in a note Zábrana wrote in 1980, where he reflects on his unfinished translations of Bunin's works. He remarks: "*ten Bunin se pro mne stal symbolem, životním setkáním, prózou – snem o něčem, co jsem znal v mládí, co mi bylo nekonečně blízké a drahé, bez čeho bych nechtěl odcházet*".⁴⁰² Zábrana's sense of affinity with Bunin was further intensified by what he perceived as a series of symbolic coincidences, which he interpreted as evidence of a fateful connection between them. He describes one such moment during Christmas Eve, when he was translating Bunin's novella *Chistyj ponedel'nik* (*A Clean Monday*). The story is set on the night before Christmas, and Zábrana, struck by this parallel, remarks: "*Další z těch "shod okolností", které ke mně mluvily, které mě oslovovaly od dětství. Mluví s námi mrtví prostřednictvím těchto skrytých, jen našemu vědomí zjevovaných znamení? Bunin měl tuhle povídku nejraději ze všeho, co kdy napsal [...]*"⁴⁰³. This sense of fate and connection also extended to Zábrana's engagement with other writers, such as Osip Mandelstam. Zábrana noted with amazement that Mandelstam's poem *Polnoč v Moskvě. Roskošno budijskoje leto...* ("Midnight in Moscow. A Luxurious Buddhist Summer...") was written on June 4, 1931—the day of Zábrana's birth: "*Mandelštamova báseň 'Polnoč v Moskvě. Roskošno budijskoje leto....' Je napsána v den, kdy jsem se narodil- 4 června 1931*".⁴⁰⁴ Such moments reinforced his belief in the existence of symbolic links between himself and these figures from the literary past. These connections, real or perceived, provided Zábrana with a sense of continuity and dialogue with the dead, which he regarded as a profound source of artistic inspiration.

⁴⁰⁰ "Tear-inducing passages in Bunin. These are the most brilliant moments in his prose. Sometimes sentimental" Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 315.

⁴⁰¹ "Before I die, I still want to visit a the few ones that are truly dear to me — among those I've translated: Bunin, Yesenin..." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 366.

⁴⁰² "Bunin has become for me a symbol, a life-defining encounter, prose—a dream of something I knew in my youth, something infinitely close and dear to me, something without which I would not want to depart." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 751.

⁴⁰³ "Another of those "coincidences" that have spoken to me, reaching out to me since childhood. Do the dead speak to us through these hidden signs, revealed only to our consciousness? Bunin considered this story his favorite of everything he ever wrote." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 263.

⁴⁰⁴ "Mandelstam's poem "Midnight in Moscow. Luxurious Buddhist summer..." was written on the day I was born—June 4, 1931." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 516.

Another significant literary alter ego for Zábřana during this period was the Chilean poet Nicanor Parra. Zábřana found a striking resonance between himself and Parra, describing the connection as if he had discovered his own double: “*žádný cizí básník mě v posledních deseti letech «neoslovil» tak přímo a naléhavě jako Nicanor Parra [...] Od chvíle, kdy jsem ho prvně četl [...] měl jsem pocit, že jsem snad nikdy u nikoho nenašel vyjádřenou nauzeu ze skutečnosti v takové analogii ke své vlastní*”.⁴⁰⁵ This profound sense of identification with Parra’s poetic sensibility astonished Zábřana, leading him to reflect on their shared worldview and artistic expression.

In a journal entry, Zábřana elaborates on the extraordinary nature of this connection:

Člověk, který čte poezii, setká se, jak se čas vrší, s básníky, kteří jsou mu blíží než jiní. Takových setkání jsem zažil v životě mnoho. Moje setkání s Nicanorem Parrou bylo ale úplně jiné, mimořádné od prvního pohledu. Se stejnou intenzitou uhranutí, jakou jsem znal z mládí, když jsem v davu těl a tváří zahlédl na plovárně jedno tělo a jednu tvář [...] Jako kdybych žil já — JÁ SÁM — ještě jednou, zároveň na jiném místě na světě — jako by každý Parrův verš byl pro mne veršem ze sna, mým verše, mým vlastním, který jsem už kdysi napsal, o kterém se mi zdálo, že už jsem jej někdy napsal [...] dokážu promluvit česky za svého dvojníka?⁴⁰⁶

Zábřana recognized in Parra a mirror of himself, a counterpart born in another country. In the author’s words, they shared a similar nausea towards reality, which we said, at least in Zábřana’s case, was triggered by the appalling present he was living in. This profound kinship with Parra, while deeply enriching on a personal level, would make him an unlikely subject for inclusion in one of Zábřana’s so-called “genetic dossiers.” The rationale is clear: Parra was so aligned with Zábřana’s own poetic ethos that their relationship would not offer much insight into Zábřana’s literary evolution through external influences. However, Zábřana’s connection with Parra provides a unique lens for understanding his poetics during this phase. For instance, in a 1976 journal entry, Zábřana notes that Parra was one of several writers who employed a compositional principle similar

⁴⁰⁵ “No foreign poet in the last ten years has ‘spoken’ to me as directly and urgently as Nicanor Parra [...] From the moment I first read him [...] I felt as though I had never encountered anyone who expressed a nausea toward reality so analogous to my own.” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 396.

⁴⁰⁶ “A person who reads poetry will, as time accumulates, encounter poets who feel closer to them than others. I have experienced many such encounters in my life. But my meeting with Nicanor Parra was entirely different, extraordinary from the very first moment. It struck me with the same intensity of enchantment I had known in my youth, like seeing a single face and body in a crowd at the swimming pool that held my gaze above all others. It was as though I—I myself—were living once more, simultaneously in another place in the world. As if every one of Parra’s verses was a verse from a dream, a verse of mine, my very own, one I had already written, or dreamt that I had written before. Can I find the words in Czech to speak on behalf of my doppelgänger” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 418.

to that of his own *Havran*. He writes: “V Nicanoru Parrovi nalezen další z textu, vznikajících jakoby z analogické koncepce jako můj *Havran*. (*Emergency Poems, báseň Pastime*.) Připojit k připraveným a excerpovaným textům z Eliota a Stevense (+1 verš z Ferlinghettiho: ‘To fuck is to love again’.”⁴⁰⁷ This note highlights Zábrana’s systematic effort to identify authors who utilized a compositional principle based on the chain of infinitive verbs, as he observed not only in Parra but also in poets like Ferlinghetti and Mercerau: “Infinitivní slovesa – pozor, věc zájmu! – také v básni Mercerau v Čapkově Francouzské poezii. (nepříliš výrazně)”.⁴⁰⁸ Wallace Stevens also figures prominently in Zábrana’s literary reflections, as the two poets shared a preoccupation with the fragility of human existence and the illusory nature of the past. In a 1982 entry, Zábrana remarks: “Jenom vzduch, který dýcháme v mládí, v kterém vidíme všechno kolem sebe v mládí, je vzduch věčnosti. Po čtyřicítce už vdechujeme jen vzduch nicoty, vidíme všechno obklopené vzduchem nicoty. Přesně to, jak je to v té Stevensově básni, kterou jsem před lety překládal: To je jen iluze, že jsme kdy byli naživu”.⁴⁰⁹ This reflection underscores Zábrana’s philosophical affinity with Stevens and his deep engagement with the themes of transience and existential void.

Zábrana held Andrei Platonov’s work in high regard, viewing it as possessing a literary potency comparable to that of Franz Kafka. In one journal entry, he reveals his decision to translate a short novel by Platonov as a substitute for Kafka, whose works were banned at the time.⁴¹⁰ What captivated Zábrana most about Platonov was his distinctive writing style, which he described with great admiration:

Platonovova věta je nesena jeho dechem a okamžitým stavem myšlenky: Zdánlivě „nedotažené“, polo banální formulacem, někdy stále opakování jednoho slova, klouzání po okraji fráze – to vše tvoří jeho styl, který někdy naopak dokáže zachytiti a uvést do hry leccos jinak nezachytitelného, postihnout

⁴⁰⁷ “In Nicanor Parra, I found yet another example of texts arising from an analogous conception to my *Havran*. (See *Emergency Poems*, the poem *Pastime*.) Add this to the prepared excerpts from Eliot and Stevens (+1 verse from Ferlinghetti: ‘To fuck is to love again.’)” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 425.

⁴⁰⁸ “Only the air we breathe in youth, the air in which we see everything around us during youth, is the air of eternity. After forty, we inhale only the air of nothingness, seeing everything surrounded by the atmosphere of nothingness. Exactly as it is in that Stevens poem I translated years ago: ‘It is only an illusion that we were ever alive.’” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 643.

⁴⁰⁹ “Only the air we breathe in our youth, the air through which we see everything around us in our youth, is the air of eternity. After forty, we breathe only the air of nothingness; we see everything surrounded by the air of nothingness. It’s exactly as it is in that poem by Stevens that I translated years ago: it is merely an illusion that we were ever truly alive.” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit. p. 865.

⁴¹⁰ “When they banned Kafka, they will have Platonov—his novella *The Dung Wind*, which, in its phantasmagoria and constant oscillation between approaching and retreating from concrete analogies, is just as horrifying, perhaps even more so... And beyond that... And always... Even if it continues until death without any tangible result” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 252.

nepostižitelné. Nejlépe to, myslím, zatím formuloval kritik, který napsal, že v prózách Andreje Platonova je jazyk v předanalytickém stavu⁴¹¹

This description highlights the unique texture of Platonov's prose, which Zábřana found simultaneously raw and profound. The apparent simplicity of Platonov's sentences belied their ability to encapsulate deep philosophical and emotional truths, resonating with Zábřana's own aesthetic sensibilities. Zábřana recognized in Platonov a kindred spirit, a writer who, like himself, sought to explore the ineffable dimensions of human experience through language.

Zábřana's engagement with Platonov also sheds light on his broader literary strategy. By choosing to translate Platonov, Zábřana not only circumvented the restrictions imposed on Kafka's work but also enriched his own literary practice. Translating Platonov allowed him to immerse himself in a style that mirrored his own tendencies toward repetition and the use of deceptively simple expressions to convey complex ideas.

Despite his connections to these various writers, it is Sylvia Plath who stands out as the most compelling of Zábřana's literary alter egos. Plath encapsulates the characteristics Zábřana most valued and struggled with in his own work: a relentless interrogation of existence, a haunting engagement with the self, and an acute awareness of life's inherent fragility. As we explore in the final section of this dossier, Plath's influence offers a key to understanding the culmination of Zábřana's poetic vision.

Sylvia Plath requires little introduction; she is one of the most significant poets of the twentieth century. The feelings of tension and anxiety that she experienced throughout her life are thematized in her poetry, especially in the posthumously published collection *Ariel* (1965), which is the focus of our discussion here. This is deeply personal poetic work that reflects and explores various aspects of the poet's personality. This type of work is commonly referred to as "confessional poetry," a style that emerged in the 1950s with figures like Robert Lowell.⁴¹² Plath's poetry addresses her relationship with her father, her family, her inclination toward death, and the death of love.

⁴¹¹ "Platonov's sentences are carried by his breath and the immediate state of his thought: seemingly "unfinished," semi-banal formulations, sometimes the constant repetition of a single word, skimming the edge of a phrase—all of this constitutes his style. This style, in turn, is capable of capturing and bringing into play elements that would otherwise remain elusive, grasping the ungraspable. I believe this was best articulated by a critic who wrote that in the prose of Andrei Platonov, language exists in a pre-analytical state." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 253.

⁴¹² Molesworth, Charles, „With Your Own Face On“: *The Origins and Consequences of Confessional Poetry*, in: "Twentieth Century Literature", May, 1976, Vol. 22, N° 2, pp. 163-178.

Zábrana worked on translating Sylvia Plath's poetry from 1967 until the end of his life in 1984. Plath's poetic voice resonated with him, which was a rare occurrence for Zábrana, even among the many authors whose works he translated into Czech. As a translator, Zábrana achieved an extraordinary level of understanding of the texts: to render them faithfully, he needed to immerse himself in their structure and uncover the intricacies of their composition and poetics:

nikdy knihu nepoznáte tak dobře, jako když ji – slovo od slova – přeložíte, poněvadž při té práci ji de facto rozpitváte, prokouknete do detailů, jak jsou stavěné věty, jak dělané odstavce, jakou má autor slovní zásobu, jak promyšlené a hluboké jsou dějové a psychologické spoje zajišťující textu věrohodnost, originalitu, dlouhověkost.⁴¹³

Although Zábrana claims not to identify with the authors he translates, he was drawn to the strength of certain personalities. Sylvia Plath was one such figure; one might even say she was his poetic alter ego. Through her poetically rendered experiences, Plath becomes “*a singular poet of the tragedy of her fate—a fate that is not merely the result of a momentary crisis but a fundamental characteristic of her life.*”⁴¹⁴

In an essay dedicated to Plath's work, Zábrana highlights the main features of her poetics, rooted in her personal experiences, observing that her poetry is “predominantly confessional, where she does not attempt to ‘process themes’ but instead writes herself, expressing her destiny in the world that surrounded her.”⁴¹⁵ Despite this, Zábrana insists he did not fully identify with Plath as he did with other alter egos he has mentioned. Yet, it seems that Plath's world became in some way a part of his personality. He remarks: “*Zapomněl jsem možná na Sylvii Plathovou, ale její sbírku Ariel jsem víc prožil a pochopil, dokázal ji do sebe vstřebat - tam pocit sebeidentifikace s výpovědí chyběl.*”⁴¹⁶ In this case, it appears that the extent to which Zábrana recognized himself in the words of his alter ego was less significant than the sheer poetic force of Plath's work, which was so powerful and compelling

⁴¹³ “You never truly understand a book as deeply as when you translate it—word by word—because in doing so, you essentially dissect it. You uncover the details of how the sentences are constructed, how the paragraphs are crafted, the breadth of the author's vocabulary, and the depth and thoughtfulness of the narrative and psychological connections that ensure the text's credibility, originality, and longevity” Zábrana, Jan, *Potkat básníka úvahy a eseje*, op. cit., p. 408.

⁴¹⁴ Zdeněk, Beran, *Básnická podstata Zábranových překladů z angloamerické literatury*, in: Jan Zábrana, *básník, překladatel, čtenář*, op. cit., s. 178.

⁴¹⁵ Zábrana, Jan. *Potkat básníka: úvahy a eseje*, op. cit., p. 342.

⁴¹⁶ “I may have forgotten Sylvia Plath, but her collection *Ariel* was something I experienced more deeply and understood; I was able to absorb it. However, the sense of self-identification with her expression was absent.” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 630.

that it fostered a certain form of identification.⁴¹⁷ It is worth noting that this degree of resonance may also have stemmed from shared existential and artistic traits between the two writers. Tragedy, for example, was a fundamental aspect of both Plath's and Zábrana's existence. Both may have felt the impossibility of escape, striving to articulate this in their poetry—a necessity and urgency that can be perceived in their work. This affinity between the two authors has been examined, for instance, by scholar Markéta Jansová, who focused on gender identity in Plath's poetry. Jansová argues that the gender ambiguity in Plath's poetry—partly due to the morphological characteristics of the English language—could offer the translator a degree of choice in selecting gender during the process of translation:

Básně Sylvie Plathové jsou často psány tak, že není jisté, „kdo ke komu mluví“, „kdo komu co dělá“. Mluvčí („the speaker“), identita autorského promlouvajícího subjektu, se v jejích básních formuje od sloky ke sloce, někdy od verše k verši. Tato nejednoznačnost se netýká jen rodu, jde i o číslo, hru s dvojitým významem slov či o dvojznačné syntaktické struktury.⁴¹⁸

The author continues the analysis by presenting two examples of Zábrana's translations in which he chooses to use the masculine form, thereby disrupting the ambiguity inherent in English morphology. What is more surprising, as Jansová argues, is Zábrana's decision to translate the title of the poem *The Munich Mannequins* with the masculine *Mnichovští manekýni* (Munich Male Mannequins):

V originálu sice není jejich mužská nebo ženská identita explicitně vyjádřena, avšak domnívám se, že řada obsahových indikátorů odkazuje v tomto případě na ženy. Báseň začíná jedním z nejcitovanějších úvodních veršů Sylvie Plathové: Dokonalost je strašná, nemůže mít děti. Tento verš se vztahuje k ženám, ženskému tělu.⁴¹⁹

But what do these alter egos created by Zábrana have in common with Plath, given that she came from an entirely different cultural context? We have seen that Zábrana's

⁴¹⁷ Eva Zábranová na příklad tvrdí, v své knize věnované památce otce, že Sylvia Plathová byla mezi všemi ženami, které za svého života miloval, jeho „bezkonkurenční favoritkou“ a že měl „její malou rozmlíženou fotku nalepenou na knihovničce nad stolem“ Zábranová, Eva, *Flashky*, Torst, Praha 2014, p. 63.

⁴¹⁸ “The poems of Sylvia Plath are often written in a way that leaves it uncertain “who is speaking to whom” or “who is doing what to whom.” The speaker, the identity of the authorial voice, takes shape stanza by stanza, sometimes even line by line. This ambiguity extends beyond gender to include number, plays on double meanings of words, and ambiguous syntactic structures.” Jansová, Markéta, *Genderová identita v poezii americké básnířky Sylvie Plathové a v českých překladech*, in: Heczková, Libuše a kol. (eds.), *Vztahy-jazyky-těla.*, FHS, Praha 2007, p. 1.

⁴¹⁹ “In the original, their masculine or feminine identity is not explicitly expressed; however, I believe that numerous contextual indicators in this case point to women. The poem begins with one of Sylvia Plath's most quoted opening lines: *Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children*. This line relates to women and the female body.” Jansová, Markéta, *Genderová identita v poezii americké básnířky Sylvie Plathové a v českých překladech*, op. cit., p. 2.

affinity with the various authors he translated stemmed from different aspects: shared life circumstances (Pasternak, Mandelstam), mystical attraction (Bunin), or self-identification through the words of the poet (Yesenin, Parra). The themes addressed in the poem *The Munich Mannequins* seemingly have nothing to do with Zábrana, as Jansová claims, because they pertain to the condition of women. However, is it possible that Zábrana felt similarly—like a puppet manipulated by external hostile forces? This proposed identification would indicate how closely Zábrana related to Plath's sensibilities, despite the gender and life differences between them. The painful absurdity they both carried within them was the same. Considering how Zábrana describes his existential situation in his diaries, we can identify the basis of this kinship. The image of the puppet appears repeatedly in Zábrana's journal entries. For example, in a 1948 entry, he writes: "*Nějak to skončí, všechno musí nějak skončit. Někdo se mnou zahraje a dohraje můj život. Jako se hraje s loutkou*".⁴²⁰ The motif of the marionette, linked to the theme of the unfree individual, appeared several other times throughout the diaries, as we have previously seen:

Manekýny nosí na holém těle řetízek (pevně obepjatý). Jakmile se jim začne zařezávat, přestanou jíst, a naopak, jakmile je volný, přestanou se o dietu starat.⁴²¹

V místnosti byla zhuštěná atmosféra tupé blbosti, jako když se pět manekýnek sejde...⁴²²

To přináší velká pocit rozkoše – korumpovat lidi. Jsou jak loutky na jednoduchých drátkách své ziskuchtivosti, lačnosti, neřestnosti.⁴²³

Připadali mi jako figuríny loutkového divadla, za něž jiný hovoří a jedná, hněvivě bez hněvu, radostně bez radosti.⁴²⁴

hrát loutkové divadlo se sáčkem čaje na nitce⁴²⁵

This inexplicable predestination, which strips individuals of the ability to choose their fate and appears absurd to the author, evokes in Zábrana a profound sense of anxiety. This

⁴²⁰ "Somehow it will end; everything must end somehow. Someone will play out my life with me, and finish it, just as one plays with a puppet." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op.cit., p. 84.

⁴²¹ "Mannequins wear a chain (tightly fitted) on their bare skin. As soon as it starts to break, they stop eating; conversely, as soon as it becomes loose, they stop caring about their diet." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 297.

⁴²² "The room had a dense atmosphere of dull stupidity, like when five mannequins gather together..." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 239.

⁴²³ "There's a great sense of pleasure in corrupting people. They are like puppets on simple strings of their greed, gluttony, and vice." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 868.

⁴²⁴ "They seemed to me like figurines in a puppet theater, speaking and acting through someone else—angrily without anger, joyfully without joy." Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 873.

⁴²⁵ "Playing puppet theater with a tea bag on a string." Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op.cit., p. 386.

feeling, I believe, draws him closer to Sylvia Plath. While in Zábrana's case, this sense of entrapment relates to God—the supreme being who decides on behalf of all—for Sylvia Plath, this anxiety can be attributed to the position of women in the society of her time. Scholars of her work suggest that her sense of isolation might also have been caused by the premature loss of her father:

Most critics attribute this sense of alienation and depression in Plath to her troubled childhood, particularly the premature death of her father in 1940, which left her with a deep sense of abandonment and fear of losing people. It is evident that her young life was plagued by an acute sense of anxiety and suffering. Feelings of anger, betrayal, and hatred, as well as the fear of loss, never left Plath's mind.⁴²⁶

Similarly, Zábrana experienced the loss of his parents early in life, which instilled in him anger and distrust toward the world around him. Broadly speaking, while Sylvia Plath was not persecuted by a political regime, she suffered because of her societal role as a woman and mother, a role to which she felt predestined.

⁴²⁶ Ghasemi, Parvin; *Violence, rage and self-hurt in Sylvia Plath's poetry*, in: CLA Journal, MARCH 2008, Vol. 51, No. 3 (MARCH 2008), p. 285.

Zábrana and Plath

“Den ze dne chce spáchat sebevraždu a pořád si kupuje nové šaty.

(Esther v románu Sylvie Plathové *The Bell Jar*)”⁴²⁷

The collection *Ariel* was published posthumously in 1965. Zábrana's Czech translation of the collection appeared in 1984. However, as his diaries reveal—and as previously mentioned—he had actually been working on these translations for nearly twenty years, beginning in 1967.⁴²⁸ The title of the collection could refer to a variety of elements, but it is, in fact, a testament to the author's first encounter with death: „pro ni Ariel bylo jméno koně, na kterém chodívala jezdit a který ji jednou shodil a zranil, přiblížil k smrti, jak o tom píše ve stejnojmenné básni, po níž dostala sbírka název“.⁴²⁹ Death can, therefore, be considered one of the central themes of the collection. The helplessness of life, as well as the process of aging and physical decay heralding imminent death, are frequently thematized in Zábrana's diaries.⁴³⁰ The atmosphere of *Ariel* likely held deep personal significance for him, resonating with his own experiences and emotions.

We know that Zábrana translated certain authors with the intent of introducing something innovative to Czech literary culture, with the hope of positively transforming it.⁴³¹ Moreover, as Petr Onufer's editorial note to the third edition of *Ariel* (2017) confirms, Zábrana had access to the 1966 American edition of the collection, which included three additional poems compared to the first British edition (*Lesbos*, *Mary's Song*, and *The Swarm*).⁴³² What

⁴²⁷ “Day by day, she wants to commit suicide, and yet she keeps buying new dresses. (Esther in Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*)” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op.cit., p. 631.

⁴²⁸ “April 21, 1983. I completed the translation of Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*—10:05 in the morning. A task I thought I might never conquer, a task I began in 1967!” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 933.

⁴²⁹ Zábrana, Jan. *Potkat básníka: úvahy a eseje*, op. cit., p. 346.

⁴³⁰ “potkávat starce s výstavními hlavami, tvářící se, jako by nebyl čas, nebyla smrt” Ibid., *ibid.*, 213.

⁴³¹ “The translator can preserve the national peculiarities of a work to a greater or lesser extent depending on the level of familiarity with the foreign culture they can assume in their reader. At the same time, however, the translator has the opportunity to educate the reader towards a better understanding of foreign literature. (...) The translator can even, depending on the needs of the historical situation, deliberately influence the rapprochement or distancing of two cultures.” Levý, Jiří, *Umění překladu*, op. cit., p. 97-98.

⁴³² Onufer, Petr, *Ediční poznámka* in: Plathová, Sylvia, *Ariel*, přeložil Jan Zábrana, Argo, Praha 2017, p. 121.

translation opportunities did Zábřana have under the conditions of a totalitarian regime? By the 1980s, he was able to use his name as a “cover” to support the publication of translations by other politically undesirable translators.⁴³³ This suggests that Zábřana held an officially recognized status as a translator during that period, allowing him to influence publishers in their selection of texts for translation.⁴³⁴ His influence may explain why Plath’s collection was accepted for publication. Zábřana’s translations needed to achieve a high level of artistic quality, adhering to the standard of artistry defined by Jiří Levý—that is, they had to be sufficiently reworked to exert a positive influence on the core of Czechoslovak cultural semiosphere.⁴³⁵

The analysis will use specific segments of the translation and the original text, as additions or omissions in translation become more apparent through paired comparison (*coupled pairs*).⁴³⁶

In the opening poem of the collection, *Morning Song (Jitřní píseň)*, we immediately encounter instances of aesthetic excesses in the first stanza:

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements.

Láska tě natáhla, jak tlusté zlaté hodinky
porodní bába popleskala po patách a tvůj lysý křik
si uzurpoval místo mezi živly.⁴³⁷

We can observe here that, compared to the original, where the integration among the elements is relatively neutral, this image in Zábřana’s interpretation transforms: it becomes harsher and more brutal than what is expressed by Plath. He adds a nuance that could be described as political, as the verb *usurp* is semantically linked to seizing a throne—almost

⁴³³ Wögerbauer, Michael; Šámal, Petr, *V obecném zájmu*, II. svazek, Nakladatelství Akademie, Praha 2015, s. 1110.

⁴³⁴ “V sazbě byl v Odeonu další svazek jeho Vybraných spisů [...] k němuž jsem loni na podzim v rámci editorských povinností psal doslov určený jen k tomu, aby knihu «zaštil», aby se text dostal k čtenáři.” Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 276.

⁴³⁵ “In times of oppression, it is more valuable and significant to translate the works of writers who lived in freedom, who were able to write and publish freely, than to create original works. [...] Literature that is preemptively resigned to censorship and calculates its presence in advance is dead, forever condemned to death before it has even written its first sentence. Indeed, if one cannot write freely, it is better (if one wishes to publish) to translate and release the works of those who had the privilege of writing in freedom.” Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 458.

⁴³⁶ Toury, Gideon, *Description Translation Studies and Beyond*, op. cit., p. 124.

⁴³⁷ The Czech translations of the poems by Zábřana are drawn from the following volume: Plathová, Sylvia, *Ariel*, Argo, Praha 2017. The English original version of the poems is taken from: Plath, Sylvia, *Ariel*, Faber and Faber, London, 1968.

as if the child were violently taking the mother's life. The image of the newborn, which becomes a significant part of the parents' lives, is depicted by Zábřana in a more pronounced way. Why might he have chosen such an approach? It seems that this choice of verb is not motivated by phonetic considerations. One of Zábřana's most frequently employed translation strategies is his effort to reconstruct as faithfully as possible the charm of the original text in Czech so that it resonates naturally with Czech readers. Yet here, the solution does not align with the original; rather, it diverges. Such a political reading of *Morning Song* is amplified by the second stanza, where the original verse acquires a similar tone in translation:

*Shadows our safety. We stand round **blankly as walls**/ špehuje naši obezřetnost. Stojíme kolem **bledí jako stěny**.* (Jitřní píseň, 2° stanza)

Additionally, the phrase *pale as walls*, unlike in the original, takes on an emotional undertone and becomes more intense, as in Czech it is commonly associated with fear. Furthermore, the expression draws attention to itself acoustically due to the rhyme, which is absent in the original. In both cases, this reflects a phenomenon of aesthetic excess, which we previously referred to as emotional intensification. By this term, we aim to capture the aesthetic excesses in Zábřana's translations, where poetic images become more concrete compared to those found in Sylvia Plath's original poems. Other examples can also be cited in which Zábřana opts to replace certain abstract images with more specific ones, thereby giving the poem a new and more tangible visual quality:

Is it the sea you hear in me, its dissatisfactions?/ je to moře, co slyšíš ve mně, jeho **podrážděné reptání** (Jilm mluví, 2° stanza)

Grey birds **obsess** my heart/ Šedí ptáci **jsou Fúrie** mého srdce (Mariina píseň, 5° stanza)

It is the **noise** that appals me most of all/ nejvíc mě děsí to **reptání** (Přivezli úl, 4° stanza)

Or shall i bring you the **sound** of poisons?/ nebo ti mám přinést **šumění** jedů? (Jilm mluví, 5° stanza)

Stasis in the darkness/ **Zatrnout. Strnout** ve tmě. (Ariel, 1° stanza)

Why am I given/ proč **mně** byly dány (Noční tance, 11° stanza)

The noteworthy aspect here is the fact that Zábřana is compelled to re-translate and thus internalize the texts, which gives them his unique imprint. The sense of dissatisfaction and anxiety is more pronounced in Zábřana's work than in Plath's, where her pessimistic stance towards the world manifests in a different way. While Zábřana's expression of this element carries an impatient, almost irritated tone that fills his poetic-prose images with anger, Plath's approach often leans toward passivity and resignation. The most striking example is the phrase "*zatrnout, strnout*" (to shudder, to freeze), which in Zábřana's translation adds an additional layer of meaning compared to the original. This is very similar to the chains of infinitive verbs that Zábřana frequently employs in both his poetry and his diaries.⁴³⁸ This phenomenon recurs in other instances, such as in the line "*why am I given*," where Zábřana emphasizes the personal pronoun "*mně*" (to me) with italics, which is absent in the original. Although this choice aligns with English conventions of emphasizing by repositioning the pronoun "I" before the verb "to be" (am), Zábřana's use of italics is also a recurring feature in his original poetry.⁴³⁹ Thus, it could be seen as evidence of his stylistic influence permeating Plath's poetry. On the morphological level, static imagery in Plath's work often transforms into dynamic scenes in Zábřana's interpretations. This is evident in multiple poems:

And I a smiling woman/a já **se změní**m v tu ženu, která se směje (Lady Lazarus, 7° stanza)

Whose side are they on?/ **za koho se jdou bít**? (Říznutí, 6° stanza)

There is a green in the air/ Nějakou zeleň **cítím** vzduchem vát (Listopadový dopis, 2° stanza)

I am learning peacefulness/**učím se vnímat** klid a mír (Tulipány, 1° stanza)

And I am aware of my heart/a **pojednou** vím, že mám srdce (Tulipány, 9° stanza)

Then that red plush /**vyhrknul** rudý pleš (Říznutí, 2° stanza)

⁴³⁸ "trnout, zalykat se v reji kmotrů, šakalů, motýlků, francouzských milenek, půlnočních kovbojů, klosetklosů, efelvěků, šafaříků". Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 299.

⁴³⁹ "Vidí, co toho *navážily* [...] *spálily* jenom vařečky" Zábřana, Jan, *Stránky z deníku*, Československý spisovatel, Praha 1968, p. 34.

However, it is essential to note the morphological differences between Czech and English. English, as a nominal language, tends to describe external reality through nominal constructions, whereas Czech, as a verbal language, frequently employs verbal expressions.⁴⁴⁰ Even if this transformation is partially attributable to the specific traits of Czech, Zábřana's interpretation nonetheless alters the essence of Plath's poetic images. The stillness of her poetic world acquires a different character and begins to tremble, as though it belonged to another author:

Centered on insatiable private needs, such a life is "stalled," "stilled," "stunned" - words used often in the poetry - in chronic repetition. Existence seems to have meaning for Plath only when it either confirms her vision of deadliness and death, or offers a momentary release from it, as with the thrill of a cut finger; a child's cry at dawn; the sight of poppies in October or a rook in rainy weather. Immobilized by her own psychic paralysis, she resists the spontaneous impulse towards action or perception that could allow her a larger and more objective view of the outer world.⁴⁴¹

The static world of Sylvia Plath, in Zábřana's translations, becomes more dynamic; her voice often grows harsher as it names phenomena and emotions. These phenomena are linked to what we have described as verbal dynamization.

Another phenomenon of aesthetic surplus is the concretization of poetic images. In his translations, Zábřana conveys a greater semantic intensity that was not present in the original poems. These changes are frequently tied to specific semantic spheres that resonate closely with Zábřana's own poetics:

Of your small breath/ tvého **křehkého** dechu (Noční tance, 5° sloka)

Bit my pretty red heart in two/ kdo mi rozkřáp **křehké** rudé srdce jako **střep** (Tato, 12° sloka)

It is the noise that appals me most of all/ nejvíc mě děsí to **reptání** (Přivezli úl, 4° sloka)

I do it so it feels like hell/ to umím tak, že to **pálí**, že je to jak **peklo vřelé** (Lady Lazarus, 15° sloka)

I turn and burn/ **pálí** to jako **plamen**. (Lady Lazarus, 23° sloka)

⁴⁴⁰ Dušková, Libuše – Kalenská, Eva: *Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny*, Academia, Praha 1994, s. 542. Nebo: Nováková, Eva: *Nominální tendence v angličtině a jejich české ekvivalenty*, [online]. Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Palackého v Olomouci, Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky, Olomouc 2012, p. 12.

⁴⁴¹ McClave, Heather, *Sylvia Plath: Troubled Bones. New England Review (1978-1982)*, 1980, č. 3, p. 447-465.

Snags and eddies round a sunken rust-red engine/ když se ve vírech tříští o motor na dně,
sežraný rudou rzí (Tulipany, 8° sloka)

If you only knew how the veils were killing my days/Kdybys tušil, jak mi ty závoje **znehucovaly**
den za dnem (Dárek k narozeninám, 19° sloka)

The ovens glowed like heavens, incandescent/sálaly pece jak nebesa **rozpálená doběla**. (Mariina
píseň, 6° sloka)

It becomes evident that such concretizations are often associated with specific notions: fragility,⁴⁴² bitterness,⁴⁴³ and physical and psychological degradation.⁴⁴⁴ We also observe the element of fire, which is often intensified or concretized and serves as a recurring symbolic obsession in Zábrana's diaries.⁴⁴⁵ As has been mentioned, these tendencies have been observed by other scholars as well. In addition to Jansová, Vanda Obdržálková, in her study on Zábrana's translations in the anthology *Modern English Poetry* (1964), also noted the tendency toward "appropriation" in Zábrana's translational approach:

Pokud bych měla na základě analyzovaného materiálu definovat obecnější rysy Zábranovy překladatelské práce, je třeba v první řadě říci, že se vždy snažil, pokud možno, přesně interpretovat význam básně jako celku. Tento přístup na jednu stranu umožňuje dosáhnout výsledku, který je pro čtenáře srozumitelný a přirozený, ale zároveň s sebou nese některá úskalí [...] Druhé úskalí pak představuje fakt, že Zábrana má v některých případech tendenci vykládat si překládané texty „po svém“ a snad do nich i vkládat vlastní myšlenky a postoje, ačkoli přesnou hranici mezi „neporozuměním“ a vědomým zdůrazněním jednoho z možných významů není vždy snadné určit.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² „ty **křehké**, jemné, štíhlé, krásné staré americké dámy“. Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 233.

⁴⁴³ “[...] Jenže pro mě to je **horké**, pro mě to je pořád tak **horké** jako ten den, kdy *hořelí*. A nikdy to pro mne ani o chlup míň **horké** nebude[...]”. Ibid., *ibid.*, p. 297.

⁴⁴⁴ “[...] Srdce **se scvrkává** a napíná celý život, ale nyní **se otřásá** ještě druhým pulzem, jako vysazeno do větrné pláně. Naše srdce je ořech v louskáčku, ještě klade odpor. Brzo **praskne**. [...]”, p. 162.

⁴⁴⁵ References to the element of fire are virtually everywhere in Zábrana's versions of poems found in his diaries: “[...] Příkladáš mě do svých kamen./ A čekáš **plamen. Amen. Amen. Amen.** [...]” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 223.

⁴⁴⁶ “If I were to define the broader characteristics of Zábrana's translation work based on the analyzed material, it must first be said that he always strove, as much as possible, to accurately interpret the meaning of the poem as a whole. On the one hand, this approach enables a result that is understandable and natural for the reader, but on the other hand, it carries certain challenges. [...] A second challenge lies in the fact that Zábrana, in some cases, tends to interpret the translated texts 'in his own way' and perhaps even to insert his own thoughts and attitudes into them. However, determining the precise boundary between 'misunderstanding' and a deliberate emphasis on one of the possible meanings is not always easy” Obdržálková, Vanda. *Překlady v antologii Moderní anglická poezie*, in: Jan Zábrana, básník, překladatel, čtenář, op. cit., p. 181-183.

Similarly, Petr Eliáš observed this stylistic crossing of boundaries between translator and author. In Zábřana's translations "*se setkáváme s dílčími posuny v expresivitě. Jedná se většinou o případy, kdy Zábřana poměrně bezpříznakový výraz nahrazuje expresivnějším. Velmi často přitom volí nejrůznější sousloví či frazémy (jsou v tahu, poslat k čertu apod.). Zesílení expresivity tedy není cílem, ale spíše vedlejším efektem snahy o idiomatičnost*".⁴⁴⁷

If we were to evaluate the position occupied by all of Zábřana's translations analyzed across the various dossiers, we could assert that his work demonstrates a nuanced interplay between two poles defined by Toury's distinction: acceptability (i.e., the adaptation of the source text to align with the norms of the target culture) and adequacy (i.e., the preservation of the source text's integrity without incorporating elements from the target culture). Zábřana's approach is characterized by a deliberate effort to mediate between these poles, reflecting both an intent to adapt the text to the expectations of the Czech cultural context and a commitment to infuse it with his own aesthetic sensibilities.⁴⁴⁸ This duality is particularly evident in instances where Zábřana introduces elements of aesthetic amplification that exceed the source text's original intent. Such embellishments often align closely with his personal poetics and emotional sensibilities. For example, recurring motifs like heat, fire, and other related imagery, which we have identified in several of his translations, reveal not only his interpretive choices but also his inclination to render the text in a way that resonates with his subjective creative vision. These interventions underscore a tension between fidelity to the source and an active re-creation of the text that reflects Zábřana's individual artistic criteria, suggesting that his translations serve as a site where his personal poetics and the source material converge.

⁴⁴⁷ "We encounter partial shifts in expressivity. These are typically cases where Zábřana replaces relatively neutral expressions with more expressive ones. Often, he chooses various idiomatic phrases or colloquialisms (e.g., '*jsou v tahu*' [they are done for], '*poslat k čertu*' [to hell with it], etc.). The intensification of expressivity, then, is not a goal in itself but rather a byproduct of his effort to achieve idiomatity." Eliáš, Petr. *Jan Zábřana – překladatel a básník: inspirace beatnickou poezií a její překlady* [online]. Diplomová práce. Filozofická fakulta Karlovy univerzity, Ústav translatologie, Praha 2022, p. 73.

⁴⁴⁸ "In the various things I worked on, I always 'wove in' something: something personal, a memory of a friend, and so on" Zábřana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit., p. 458.

Conclusion

*“Žijeme v době, kdy je člověk celá desetiletí nucen
předstírat, že není básník, že ani ve snu nepomýšlí na
to, aby se jím stal, nebo že už na to aspoň dávno
přestal pomýšlet – kdy musí všechno tohle předstírat,
aby jím mohl být”⁴⁴⁹*

After analyzing the evolution of Jan Zábrana's writing style across four distinct periods as documented in his diaries, several conclusions emerge. The poetics and literary style of this Czech poet stand out as profoundly intertwined with the cultural and historical circumstances in which he lived. Zábrana's work reflects the profound impact of the Communist regime on his personal and artistic life, tracing a trajectory from the romantic idealism of his early years to a stark and uncompromising realism shaped by trauma and persecution. His early love for nature and the idyllic visions of his youth were irrevocably altered by the political realities of the era, transforming his poetic paradise into a grim depiction of an unyielding and oppressive world.

One of Zábrana's defining characteristics as a writer was his extraordinary erudition, cultivated from an early age. His extensive engagement with a wide range of literary traditions provided him with the tools to master diverse formal devices and to approach poetry with a meticulous attention to form. This passion for literature and its structures informed his poetics, even as his thematic concerns shifted toward the harsh realities of life under a totalitarian regime. Despite the increasing realism in his content during the 1950s and 1960s, the formal architecture of his works remained a cornerstone of his artistry.

The diary form, central to Zábrana's personal and creative life, shaped not only his perception of time but also his poetic structures. His poetics, as influenced by the diary format, operated on multiple temporal layers. First, there is a focus on the present—a

⁴⁴⁹ “We live in a time when a person is forced for decades to pretend that they are not a poet, that they do not even dream of becoming one, or that they have long since abandoned such thoughts—all this pretense, just so they can actually be a poet” Zábrana, Jan, *Celý život*, op. cit, p. 866.

present that Zábrana sought to capture in all its transience. This is evident in his use of formal devices such as chains of infinitive verbs, which reflect his intent to distil fleeting moments into poetic form. These moments, however, were often imbued with a poignant sense of loss, as they represented fragments of a life stripped of meaning and vibrancy by the Communist regime. In this desolate present, Zábrana found solace only in his imagined dialogue with the dead—writers and individuals who shared a fate similar to his own.

Zábrana's work is also deeply oriented toward the past, particularly the past of his youth, which he viewed as a lost paradise. Nostalgia for this irretrievable time pervades his writing, often symbolized by the image of fire, a recurring motif representing both the warmth of memory and the pain of its absence. One of Zábrana's central aims as a writer was to preserve these memories, to shield them from the erasure imposed by the regime and to maintain their vitality as a source of personal and cultural identity.

Equally significant is Zábrana's orientation toward the future. His evocation of the past is not solely an act of personal preservation but also a deliberate attempt to bear witness to the atrocities of his time. He viewed writing as a moral act, a means of ensuring that the crimes of the regime would not be forgotten. By preserving these truths, Zábrana sought to create a bridge to future generations, offering them a testimony of resilience and warning against the repetition of such horrors. This forward-looking dimension is evident in the rhetorical questions that often punctuate his work, suggesting an implicit dialogue with a broader, imagined audience. For Zábrana, the role of the writer was fundamentally ethical: to state the truth with clarity and conviction.

Zábrana's poetics thus emerge as a product of captivity—both physical and intellectual—that encompasses all dimensions of time. His work is an alternative history, a monument to the individual, and an intricate intertextual network that underscores the permeability of literary traditions. As a translator, Zábrana absorbed and reinterpreted the voices of other writers, incorporating their influences into his own poetic framework. This interplay between translation and original work further enriched his poetics, situating him at the threshold of multiple dimensions: private and public, past and future, individual and collective.

In conclusion, Zábrana was a poet of liminality, operating at the intersections of various spheres and temporalities. His work reflects a profound engagement with the complexities of human experience, shaped by the historical forces of his time and the literary traditions he so deeply admired. This unique position renders him a poet of

exceptional depth and significance, whose voice resonates far beyond the confines of his immediate historical and cultural context. His writing stands as a testament to the enduring power of art to resist oppression and to illuminate the human condition.

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