



editorial |



*photograph by Milan Jankovič*

## Dear readers,

the special issue of *Bohemica litteraria* is dedicated to Jan Patočka's thinking on aesthetics, more specifically to his reflections on literature. Indeed, even if Patočka did not write a systematic treaty on aesthetics and literature he was publishing articles on the topic throughout his life. Until now there has been but few systematic efforts to evaluate these texts in their totality. The present volume desires to be one of the first steps in English in that direction. Czech readers have already at their disposal first volumes on the topic, such as *Patočka's Interpretations of Literature* authored by Blahutková and Ševčík (Patočkovy interpretace literatury, Pavel Mervart 2014), *Ševčík's Art as Expression of Meaning. Jan Patočka's Philosophy of Art* (Umění jako vyjádření smyslu. Filozofie umění Jana Patočky, Pavel Mervart 2014) and *Jan Josl's Art and Caring for the Soul in Jan Patočka* (Umění a péče o duši u Jana Patočky, Karolinum 2018). Three issues of the magazine *Philosophica et Historica. Studia Aesthetica* (Karolinum 2011, 2013, 2014) were dedicated to Patočka's relation to art; two of them were published in Czech (vol. IV, VI), one in English (vol. VII – *Myth, Philosophy, Art, and Science in Jan Patočka's Thought*, 2014).

The studies presented in *Bohemica Litteraria* convincingly demonstrate Patočka's lifelong interest in literature and aesthetics. Indeed, during his lifetime, Patočka authored a considerable amount of texts that could be qualified as artistic and literary criticism. At the same time Patočka's thinking significantly influenced Czech literary criticism, namely Květoslav Chvatík, Zdeněk Kožmín, Přemysl Blažíček or Milan Jankovič. However, due to political circumstances in Czechoslovakia after 1968 some of these scholars could not take part in academic activities. Their work, apart from samizdat production, could be published only in a limited way and thus could not enter into dialogue with international literary theory. That is why the present issue also introduces translations of two texts, by Milan Jankovič and Zdeněk Kožmín. It is a way of highlighting the legacy of Patočka's thinking and his contribution to Czech literary criticism.

Jonathan Bolton's text offers a reflection on the relation between Patočka's "cultural criticism" and his commitment to Charter 77. Bolton suggests that careful reading of texts dedicated to art and literature disclose Patočka's clear evolution of the understanding of civic commitment and responsibility. Petra James studies Patočka's interpretations of literature and arrives at a conclusion

that numerous of his interpretations deal with more general philosophical categories but also with civic theme of responsibility, which is one of the key topics of Patočka's thinking and leads to his political commitment with Charter 77 as a logical continuation of his thinking. The texts on Vyskočil and the topic of Faust offers a political reading that demonstrate the point. The article of Rajendra Chitnis studies Patočka's foreword to his 1975 translation of Jaroslav Durych's novel *God's Rainbow*. It focuses on the complex relationship of a literary text and a text of interpretation. According to Chitnis, while having undoubtedly contributed to the promotion of the novel, Patočka's interpretation also played a role in the reduction of the literary text to its historical context of Czech-German, which diminished the universal resonance of Durych's novel.

The article of Erin Plunkett analyses Patočka's thinking on literature against the backdrop of phenomenology. She focuses mainly on the study "The Writer's Concern" to demonstrate Patočka's understanding of specificities of literary writing. Literature is seen as a specific way of phenomenological "disclosure" of the world, a counterpart to the techno-scientific framework of Western life. She puts forward Patočka's definition of literature as "an *individual* capturing of *life's meaning*". The article of Jan Tlustý draws on Patočka's major studies on art. Following similar argumentation as Erin Plunkett, he stresses Patočka's idea that art has the ability to reveal the meaning of existence and remind us of the phenomenological nature of our life-world. He shows the parallels with the thinking of other philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur and in the second part he traces the influence of Patočka's thinking in the works of Czech literary scholars, Zdeněk Kožmín and Milan Jankovič.

Ondřej Sládek focuses on the dialogue between structuralism and Patočka's phenomenology. It introduces Patočka's view of structuralism and Patočka's relationship to Czech representatives of structuralism, in particular to Jan Mukařovský. Finally, it outlines the differences between structuralist approach and Patočka's phenomenology. Jan Josl closely traces the influences on Patočka's concept of art, especially those of Hegel and Heidegger, and he shows how his critical dialogue with the thinking of Roman Ingarden contributed to Patočka's refining of his own history of art in the 1970s.

We hope that the present English studies will help readers not fluent in Czech and interested in the works of Jan Patočka to dive deeper into his aesthetic thinking. This publication will be followed by English translation of several of Patočka's key texts on art, literature and culture. We are also happy to announce the English translations of selected writings by Jan Patočka. The volume

under the working title *Jan Patočka: Selected Edition* is being edited by Erin Plunkett and Ivan Chvatík and is set to be published in 2022 by Bloomsbury in the translation of Alex Zucker. The large volume of almost 400 pages will contain Patočka's studies on phenomenology, philosophy of history but also a large section dedicated to texts on art and literature. Two thirds of the texts will be translated into English for the first time. The rich selection of texts and the quality of the translations might, as we desire, attract new readers and provide an opportunity for Patočka's ideas to have a greater impact on the English-speaking world.

Petra James, Jan Tlustý

