



Jiří Weil  
Lamentation  
for 77,297 Victims

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Translated from the Czech by David Lightfoot

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This is a highly dense index page with a large number of entries. The text is organized into columns and rows, with many entries starting with red-colored words. The entries appear to be a mix of names, titles, and possibly dates or locations, though the text is too small to read clearly. The overall layout is that of a traditional printed index.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jiří Weil** (1900–1959) was a Jewish Czech writer, translator, and essayist.

Born into an upper-middle class family in the small Central Bohemian village of Praskolesy, Jiří Weil moved to Prague to study Slavic philology and comparative literature at Charles University; in 1928 he earned his doctorate. A committed leftist at the time, he translated for the press department of the Soviet trade representation in Prague when he was still a student.

In 1933 the Czechoslovak Communist Party sent Weil to Moscow to work as a translator for the Comintern. His harrowing experiences in the Soviet Union inspired him to write *From Moscow to the Border* (1937) upon his return; fiercely critical of Stalinism, the novel resulted in his expulsion from the Communist Party.

Having narrowly escaped Stalin's purges, Weil's life was again in jeopardy when Nazi Germany invaded Czechoslovakia the following year. During the occupation, Weil was assigned to work in Prague's Jewish Museum, where confiscated Jewish property was processed. To avoid being transported to the concentration camps, Weil faked his own suicide.

After the war, Weil would return to Prague's Jewish Museum to work as its senior librarian. Although Weil had mentioned Judaism only once in his writings before World War II, it now became the focus of his writing. His most famous novel, 1949's *Life with a Star*, was criticized both by the ruling Communists and by members of the Jewish community. This novel, as well as Weil's anti-Stalinist stances, led him to be expelled out of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union in 1951. *Life with a Star* is now considered a classic, championed by writers like Philip Roth.

Weil's oeuvre is notable for its range of styles, from the documentary fiction of *Memories of Julius Fučík* to the experimental prose poem *Lamentation for 77, 297 Victims*. A common thread in his work, however, is a brave stance against the horrors of totalitarianism.



Smoke from nearby factories shrouds a countryside as flat as a table, a countryside stretching off to infinity. It is covered by the ashes of millions of dead. Scattered throughout are fine pieces of bone that ovens were not able to burn. When the wind comes, ashes rise up to the sky the fragments of bone remain on the earth. And rain falls on the ashes, and rain turns them to good fertile soil, as befits the ashes of martyrs. And who can find the ashes of those from my native land; there were 77, 297 of them? I gather some ashes with my hand, for only a hand can touch them, and I pour them into a linen sack, just as those who once left for a foreign country would gather their native soil so as never to forget, to return to it always.

Paper boxes sit on a shelf of soft wood painted brown. In the boxes names are arranged in alphabetical order. There are 77,297. These are the names of victims from Bohemia and Moravia. Each name has a transport number, year of birth, last place of residence, and date and place of death. Sometimes the date and place of death are not given. No one knows when and where they died. The names are inscribed on the walls of the Pinkas Synagogue, which stands next to the Old Cemetery. Thus will their memory be preserved.

MOREOVER ALL THESE CURSES SHALL COME  
UPON THEE, AND SHALL PURSUE THEE,  
AND OVERTAKE THEE, TILL THOU BE DESTROYED

-- Moses 28:45

That day snow fell, though spring had already come, snow that immediately melted and turned into mud, that day people stood helpless, raising their fists in the air or crying, that day wheels cut into wet earth, and the rattle of military trucks drowned out the shouts of despair.

Josef Friedman, forty-four, immigrant from Vienna, jumped from the fourth floor of his apartment building. He died slowly in the street. The ambulance couldn't get to him because the military had closed off the street. When the ambulance finally reached him, Friedman was already dead. That was 15 March at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

SO I RETURNED, AND CONSIDERED ALL THE  
OPPRESSIONS THAT ARE DONE UNDER THE SUN:  
AND BEHOLD THE TEARS OF SUCH AS WERE  
OPPRESSED, AND THEY HAD NO COMFORTER;  
AND ON THE SIDE OF THEIR OPPRESSORS THERE  
WAS POWER, BUT THEY HAD NO COMFORTER.  
-- Ecclesiastes (Keholet) 4:1

Death entered the city that day, accompanied by fifers, bearers of horsetails, death's-heads and the rattle of drums. People tried to flee from her, but Death's legs were faster, she caught them in their flight, in trains and at the gates of border-crossings.

People were standing in a long line outside the police headquarters on Perštýn. They had been there since the early hours, they had arrived when it was still dark. At 9 o'clock the gate opened. An SS-man in black uniform stepped out. He said: Jews—out of the line. He said it in German, as he stood on the sidewalk with his legs splayed wide, and a Czech guard translated.

THEREFORE WILL I CAST YOU OUT OF THIS LAND  
INTO A LAND THAT YE KNOW NOT, NEITHER  
YE NOR YOUR FATHERS; AND THERE SHALL YE  
SERVE OTHER GODS DAY AND NIGHT

-- Jeremiah 16:13



They issued laws meant to bind, hound, wear-down, pulverize, crush and destroy the spirit—spiteful and senseless laws. And because they only thought about how to enrich themselves— for they loved things and were willing to steal, to murder and to plunder,— they first issued laws that made it possible for them to seize property.

Rudolf Jakerle of Kobylisy had saved money his whole life so he would have something to live on in his old age. He kept it in the bank. On 28 March he wanted to withdraw a certain amount, but they told him at the bank that they could not release any money without proof of Aryan status. Rudolf Jakerle went home agitated. An hour later he suffered a stroke and died.

IN WHOSE HANDS IS MISCHIEF,  
AND THEIR RIGHT HAND IS FULL OF BRIBES.

-- Psalms 26:10

Then they passed countless other devious laws, of which no one could keep track: they forbade the use of streets, some only during business hours, and others on Sundays and holidays, some that were paved with cobbles, some that were asphalted, and some that were actually highways. One forbidden street was Ermine, and no one knew where that could possibly be. They also forbade certain foods, fruits, onions, garlic and spinach. They forbade parks, woods, waterfronts, libraries and galleries. Some of these laws were passed in secret, including an order that Jews not leave their homes after 8 pm.

On December 15, 1939 an SS commando stormed the Aschermann café on Dlouhá Street, the Ascherman was a café Jews were allowed to patronize, mostly emigrants and people who had no place to live and nothing to live on went there. It was exactly 20:05. The SS pulled leather gloves on their hands and began beating Jews. Chairs fell and tables were overturned, thickening blood dripped onto the broken cups as they lay strewn on the floor. The patrons were dragged out of the café, packed into wagons and were taken to a villa in Střešovice that housed the anti-Jewish unit. There in a courtyard next to the garage they were again beaten long