Left, Sudeten Germans during their trek away from their heimat (homeland) in the Sudetenland Below, as the transfer progressed arrangements became more orderly although just as difficult

Right, Germans leaving the Sudetenland and far right, waiting to depart from Prague in 1945

Turmoil and odsun

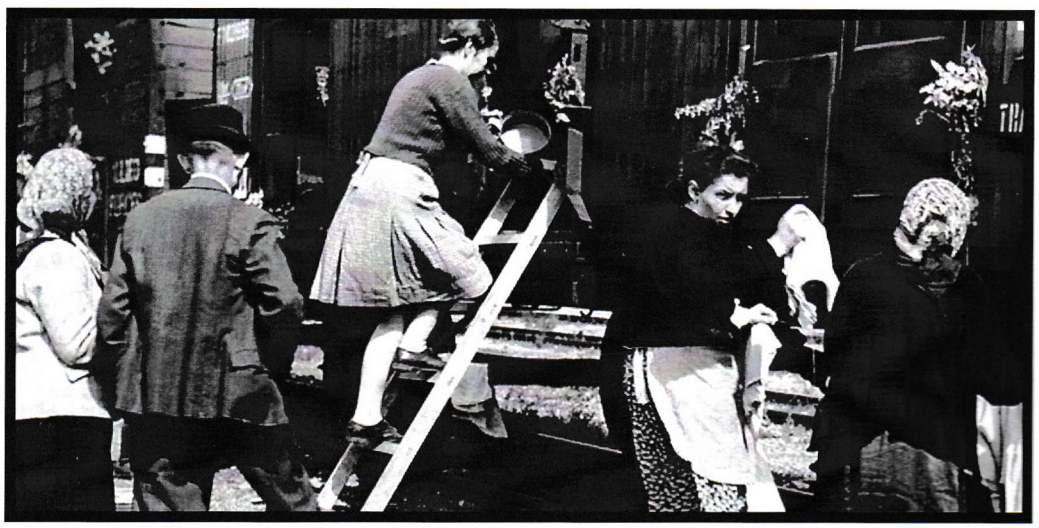
Two recent films looking at the post World War II expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia revisited painful memories. Michael Ivory reports

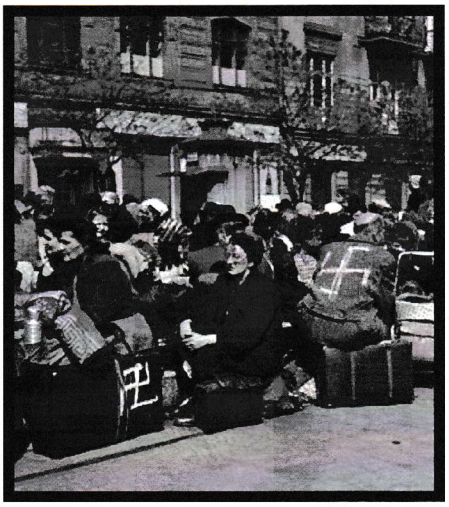
Two recent films about the forced expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia (known as the Odsun/Vertreibung) after the World War II showed just how controversial it remains after the passage of 70 years.

On May 21 the Austrian Cultural Forum in London screened Simon Wieland's documentary *Němci ven – Deutsche 'raus!*, which followed a number of elderly Austrians around their former heimat (homeland) in Brno and southern Moravia and recorded their very varied responses. Two days later, BBC2's evening programme featured *1945 – The Savage Peace*, which set out to show that the outbreak of peace at the end of World War II in no way marked the end of terrible suffering and violence, of which ethnic Germans were the principal victims. It too used the testimony of individuals, often to horrifying effect, as when a surviving *Wolfskind*, a dignified lady in her 80s, who with up to 5,000 other German orphans lived like animals in the Lithuanian forests, observed laconically that "my childhood ended early".

The forced exodus of some 12 million German-speakers from their homelands was noted in the BBC programme as the "greatest ethnic cleansing in history", while the fate of many of its participants was described as "an atrocity in plain sight" which "many saw but few were interested" and which is largely unknown outside Germany (though doubtless familiar to most readers of the *Review*).

The programme focused its attention on events in the Czech lands, with a brief foray into Poland. It included previously unseen footage of examples of unspeakable mistreatment, some of which provoked viewers to complain to Ofsted and which certainly made for difficult viewing. The film of the slow death of Karl-Hermann Frank at his





public hanging may have been shown before, but amongst other horrors this writer had never seen the "home movie" of the killing of dozens of men, women and children in the Prague suburb of Hanspaulka, or of lorries being deliberately driven over their bodies. The local amateur cameraman ordered by a partisan to record these events suffered a moral and physical collapse on his return home.

The programme was at pains to document such atrocities during the time of "wild expulsions" in the immediate aftermath of the war, and did point out the contrast between this chaotic period and the more "orderly and humane" planned expulsions which followed later. However, what was lacking was an adequate appreciation of the wider historical context in which such savagery could come to seem justified.

We were reminded of the horrors of Nazi rule in general terms, but its specific effect on the Czech population of the Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia was hardly touched upon. Prague was described as having had a "quiet war", a not very adequate evocation of six years of forced and utterly humiliating collaboration, which was almost bound to end in an eruption of rage and hate, unleashed upon the innocent as well as the guilty.

Some of the elderly folk in Simon Wieland's Austrian documentary had taken part as children in the so-called Brno Death March of May/June 1945 and were able to recall its horrors vividly. In old age, most were able to "recollect emotion in tranquillity", though others seemed trapped still in the experience and attitudes of the time.

Perhaps unfairly, Wieland also featured a blustering Czech ex-policeman who loudly blamed no-one but the Germans themselves for the fate they had suffered.

He was counterbalanced by a gentle, bearded inhabitant of Ivančice, who on his own initiative had created a small museum devoted to the expulsions, and who can perhaps be taken as an example of a younger generation of Czechs concerned, like the late Václav Havel, to "live in truth", and to overcome the past by facing up to it.

● Odsun - transfer

Family tales from Czech political figure

Zuzana Slobodová takes a look at Jiří Pehe's newly translated family saga which also invokes the supernatural

Three Faces of an Angel
by Jiří Pehe
Translated by Gerald Turner
Jantar Publishing £18
***ISBN* 9780956889041**

Jiří Pehe is better known as a political analyst, an adviser to the late Czech President Václav Havel and the director of the New York University in Prague than as the writer of a tear-jerking novel in which the supernatural plays a prominent part. Yet *Three Faces of an Angel*, a family saga first published in Czech in 2009, was his second work of fiction, soon followed by a third. It is the first to appear in English, in an accomplished translation by Gerald Turner.

The plot, which is narrated by three voices from successive generations of a Czech-German-Jewish family, moves by improbable sudden appearances of long lost relatives or hidden documents. Orphaned and abandoned children pop up everywhere. True love looms high: a man kills himself over the death of his beloved in childbirth; a Holocaust survivor goes mad when her lover is killed by Communists; a gifted violinist, despairing over the loss of his fingers, finds solace in his true love; a womaniser is saved from death in the Twin Towers by returning to his.

Titillation is provided by a nymphomaniac Holocaust survivor; a femme fatale seducing her daughter's boyfriend; a Shamanic orgy in Siberia. Thrillerish action comes in the form of a Soviet agent's escape to the West.

All this is told in deadly earnest, without the slightest trace of the humour so often found in Czech literature. But Pehe can laugh at his own kind. Academics are "narcissists intoxicated with themselves" who "need constant reassurance of their exceptional qualities". Female academics prostitute themselves to get a respected publisher for their dull work. Sovietology and then postmodernism are "good business". Politology is a game, a means of acquiring fame and attracting women.

Although Pehe satirises the simplistic anti-Soviet thinking of western Sovietologists, his own anti-Communist stance is unequivocal. Russia was backward, the Bolsheviks "brutes", their women "libertines", their teaching a "plague"; the barbarism of the 20th century was a monstrous outcome of the rationalist faith in human reason and science rather than God.

But Pehe's God is not a caring father. He set up the world as a computer program and only intervenes to correct faults by means of wars and other disasters. Man's fate is predetermined. The individual, says Pehe, should concentrate solely on accepting his destiny and finding his "true love".

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