Beyond the World of Men

Women's Fiction at the Czech Fin de Siècle

Edited and translated from the Czech and German by Geoffrey Chew

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CONTENTS

Dedicated to the memory of Edith Birkett (1879–1946), a splendid and loving great-aunt for whom some of these stories would have had painful resonance, and in commemoration of the many successes achieved by the women of her period, despite the difficulties they had to overcome.

It is a great pleasure to thank those who have been generous with their help with this volume, especially Martin Janeček and his colleagues at Karolinum Press. Michael Tate originally suggested this translation, and I am grateful for the help and criticism I have received from readers, especially Rajendra Chitnis, Peter Zusi, Robert Vilain, John Fallas, Carleton Bulkin and Václav Mlčoch. I am also grateful to Mark Cornwall, Julia Sutton-Mattocks, Jack Coling and Carleton Bulkin for help in gaining access to some of the original texts. All remaining errors are mine.

The sources of the texts from which these translations were made, listed in the order in which the stories are presented in this volume, are as follows:

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, 'He Kisses Your Hand': 'Er laßt die Hand küssen', in her *Ein Buch, das gern Ein Volksbuch werden möchte* [A Book that Would be Glad to Become a Popular Book] (Berlin: Gebrüder Paetel (Dr. Georg Paetel), 1911), 207–33

Teréza Nováková, 'A Kaleidoscope': 'Kaleidoskop', in her *Z měst i ze samot: povídky a črty* [From Cities and Lonely Places: Short Stories and Sketches], 2nd edition (Prague: Jos. R. Vilímek, 1890), 41–9

Božena Viková-Kunětická, 'Confirmed Bachelors': 'Staří mládenci', in her *Staří mládenci a jiné povídky* [Confirmed Bachelors, and Other Stories] (Prague: F. Šimáček, 1901), 7–38 (originally published in the journal *Lumír*, 1891)

Růžena Svobodová, 'Life's Sorrow': 'Smutek života', in her *Povídky Růženy Svobodové (1891–1895)* [Short Stories by Růžena Svobodová] (Prague: Libuše, Matice zábavy a vědění, 1896), 73–82

Tereza Svatová, 'A Visit to His Parents': 'Návstěva u rodičů', in her *Selské črty* [Peasant Sketches] (Prague: Libuše, Matice zábavy a vědění, 1894), 128–31

Tereza Svatová, 'The "Práže" – A Prague Bastard': 'Práže', in her *Selské črty* [Peasant Sketches] (Prague: Libuše, Matice zábavy a vědění, 1894), 99–108

Vladimíra Jedličková, 'Tales About Nothing, nos. 5 and 14': the untitled chapters 5 and 14 of Edvard Klas, *Povídky o ničem* [Tales About Nothing] (Prague: Moderní revue, 1903), 17–19 and 40–41 respectively

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, 'Daily Life': 'Das tägliche Leben', in her *Genrebilder: Erzählungen* [Genre Pictures: Narratives] (Berlin: Gebrüder Paetel (Dr. Georg Paetel), 1910), 379–402

Anna Maria Tilschová, 'A Widow': 'Vdova', in her *Na horách – Vítr: dvě knihy povídek* [In the Mountains, and Wind: Two Books of Short Stories], Anna Maria Tilschová: Spisy, 2 (Prague: Fr. Borový, 1928), 27–69

Anna Maria Tilschová, 'A Rose for Uncle: An Unserious Tale of a Very Young Coquette, With a Moral': 'Lehounká povídka o koketním děvčátku s mravním naučením', in her *Na horách – Vítr: dvě knihy povídek* [In the Mountains, and Wind: Two Books of Short Stories], Anna Maria Tilschová: Spisy, 2 (Prague: Fr. Borový, 1928), 121–7

Božena Benešová, 'Theories': 'Teorie', in her *Myšky: povídky z let 1909–1913* [Little Mice: Short Stories from 1909 to 1913] (Prague: Edice Sever a východ, 1926), 99–106 (but in manuscript, 1906, and originally published in the journal *Národní obzor*, 1906–7)

Marie Majerová, 'A Tale from Hell': 'Povídka z pekla', in her *Povídky z pekla a jiné* [Tales from Hell, and Others] (Prague: Tiskový výbor československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické, 1907), 89–101

Marie Majerová, 'Marriage': 'Manželství', in her *Povídky z pekla a jiné* [Tales from Hell, and Others] (Prague: Tiskový výbor československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické, 1907), 123–6

Božena Benešová, 'A Loyal Wife': 'Pýří', in her *Myšky: povídky z let 1909–1913* [Little Mice: Short Stories from 1909 to 1913] (Prague: Edice Sever a východ, 1926), 73–96 (but originally published in the journal *Zlatá Praha*, 1908)

Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová, 'Solitude': 'Samota', in Felix Tèver, *Duše nezakotvené* [Souls Unanchored] (Prague: Jos. R. Vilímek, 1908), 195–224

Helena Malířová, 'Three Points of View': 'Tři kapitolky', in her *Ženy a děti: rozmarné příběhy z jejich světa* [Women and Children: Whimsical Stories from Their World] (Prague: F. Topič, 1908), 120–30

Růžena Svobodová, '. . . And Music will be Playing Outside Your Windows Every Day!': '. . . a denně bude hrávat hudba pod vašimi okny!', in her *Černí myslivci: horské romány* [The Dark Huntsmen: Mountain Stories] (Prague: Jan Laichter, 1908), 245–86

Růžena Jesenská, 'The Death of Ophelia': 'Smrt Ofélie', in her *Mimo svět: prosa* [Beyond the World] (Prague: Pražská akciová tiskárna, 1909), here quoted from Tereza Nejtková, 'Růžena Jesenská: Mimo svět – ediční příprava a komentář k souboru povídek' (dissertation, Charles University, Prague, 2017), 175–87

Růžena Jesenská, 'A Truthful Tale of a Stone Statue': 'Pravdivá historie kamenné sochy', in her *Mimo svět: prosa* [Beyond the World] (Prague: Pražská akciová tiskárna, 1909), here quoted from Nejtková, 'Růžena Jesenská: Mimo svět', 113–17

Lila Bubelová, 'The Child': 'Dítě', from Lila B. Nováková, *Nad její drahou zachmuřenou . . .* [Over Her Dear Gloomy Path] (Prague: Antonín Reis, 1912), 30–33

Marie Majerová, 'A Thorny Question': 'Těžká otázka', in the journal *Lumír*, 45/1 (1917): 29–38

Anna Maria Tilschová, 'A Remarkable Incident': 'Podivuhodná příhoda', in her *Černá dáma a tři povídky* [The Black

Lady, and Three Stories] (Prague: Šolc a Šimáček, 1924), 130–40
Lída Merlínová, ‘Marie and Marta’: ‘Marie a Marta’, in the journal *Nový hlas*, 4/2 (1933): 59–61

The selection of shorter fiction by Czech women writers presented here centres on texts dating from the two decades between 1890 and 1910, with a few earlier and later outliers chosen for their interest or rarity. They are presented in chronological order of writing, so far as I have been able to establish this. I make no claim that all these stories are of equal literary merit (some are primarily of historical interest), and I have not restricted the choice to stories with a feminist ideological slant, while including many that do display such a slant. Nor have I made any attempt to provide comparative material from regions of the Habsburg empire beyond the Bohemian lands, as has been impressively done in recent years for both Cisleithania and Transleithania, particularly by the Hungarian-Canadian academic Agatha Schwartz.[1] I have, however, included two stories originally in German by the aristocrat Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach – who was born Dubská, from an ancient Bohemian noble family, at Zdislavice near Kroměříž in Moravia, was competent in Czech, and is increasingly celebrated as an important Austrian writer of her period. The stories of hers translated here are relevant to themes treated by writers in Czech, quite apart from their considerable merit as literature. In the following paragraphs, I attempt to identify some representative themes in this body of writing; the titles of stories that are included in the present collection are distinguished in **bold type**.

CZECH WOMEN'S WRITING IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY: PERMISSIBLE GENRES

To readers familiar with the European modernism of the same period, comparisons might seem best in order with

1 See the items listed under her name in the Bibliography below.

fiction reflecting themes and styles commonly associated with *fin-de-siècle* 'Jung-Wien', such as Decadence, alienation, sexual anxiety and the fragmentation of identity, and more specifically the new developments in psychology and psychiatry associated with Freud among others.[2] And such themes are not absent in the writing of the women represented in the present collection; indeed the ironizing narrative technique of Ebner-Eschenbach in **'He Kisses Your Hand'** has been directly compared with a similar technique employed by Hugo von Hofmannsthal in his dramatic writing, though she avoids Hofmannsthal's echoes of French Symbolism, and the comparison, even if justified, may mask some of her originality.[3] As for Decadence, Růžena Jesenská boldly orients it towards women, especially in her collection Beyond the World (*Mimo svět*, 1909); her **'The Death of Ophelia'**, from that collection, explores psychological breakdown. The title story of the same collection, replete with Decadent imagery, skirts around the themes of lesbian love and necrophilia, though without endorsing them.[4] (Positive accounts of lesbian relationships seem absent in women writers until some years later, as in Lída Merlínová's **'Marie and Marta'** (1933), included in this collection on account of its rarity. It tells of the breakup of the relationship between two women, with two alternative en-

2 Especially those discussed in Carl E. Schorske's influential *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980).

3 See Lore Muerdel Dormer, 'Tribunal der Ironie: Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs Erzählung "Er lasst die Hand küssen"', *Modern Austrian Literature* 9/2 (1976): 86–97.

4 This story, with its title translated 'A World Apart', is not included in the present collection but is available in translation in Kathleen Hayes, ed. and trans., *A World Apart, and Other Stories: Czech Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle* (2nd edn., Prague: Karolinum, 2022), 51–64, and Hayes's translation is reprinted in Agatha Schwartz and Helga H. Thorson, *Shaking the Empire, Shaking Patriarchy: The Growth of a Feminist Consciousness across the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2014), 198–209.

dings, of which only one is of conventional tragic despair.[5]) Vladimíra Jedličková's collection of fourteen brief prose poems published under the male pseudonym Edvard Klas as **'Tales about Nothing'** (1903; two are represented here) also develop a Decadent mood in their celebration of Nature; she was praised by the leading Czech Decadent writer and critic Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic as the 'poet of longing *par excellence*',[6] though praise may have been two-edged from as explicit a misogynist as Karásek.

Perhaps partly under the influence of Decadence, women writers sometimes adopted an extreme Naturalism in sexual matters, which to some degree foreshadows twentieth-century psychological realism. It appeared sensationally in popular German-language novels of the period published in Berlin or Vienna, such as Grete Meisel-Hess's *Fanny Roth: Eine Jung-Frauengeschichte* (1903), with its description of marital rape, Margaret Böhme's *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (1905), a fictional diary of a prostitute, and Else Jerusalem's *Der heilige Skarabäus* (1909), set in a brothel.[7] The explicitness of such novels is echoed in the blazing rage of **'The Child'**, from Lila Bubelová's collection Over Her Dear Gloomy Path about masculine brutality (*Nad její drahou zachmuřenou . . .*, 1912).[8]

5 My thanks are due to Mark Cornwall for supplying me with a copy of this short story. It is not an excerpt from Merlínová's later 'Marie a Marta' novels, in which the women of the titles are sporty, emancipated sisters, rather than lesbian lovers.

6 Preface to Edvard Klas (Vladimíra Jedličková), *Povídky o ničem* (Prague: Moderní revue, 1903), 6.

7 An extract from Meisel-Hess's *Fanny Roth* (the notorious rape scene) is included in translation in Schwartz and Thorson, *Shaking the Empire* (n. 4 above), 166–73.

8 Bubelová wrote at this period under the pseudonym Lila B. Nováková. In the afterword to her drama The Maidservant (*Služka,* 1933) she apologizes, needlessly, for her writing of this earlier period: 'As a young girl I used to write poetry […] I am enormously glad that these books (there were five of them, but

However, most Czech women writers worked out another kind of modernism under the shadow of the celebrated and canonic *Grandmother* (*Babička*, 1855) by Božena Němcová, whose themes were arguably drawn on by many of them. (Němcová is usually regarded as the greatest nineteenth-century Czech woman writer, and a founding figure of the National Revival in Czech literature. In a comparable way, male Czech writers returned constantly to the language and imagery of the nihilistic poem *May* (*Máj*, 1836) by K. H. Mácha, another foundational text of Czech Romanticism.) And the genre choices open to Czech women writers were usually strongly limited by the expectations of their patriarchal society, and followed Němcová in being 'concentrated primarily in the realm of the domestic idyll, in didactic writing, and [. . .] autobiography'.[9] This was the case even with the novelist Karolina Světlá (1830–99), a spokeswoman in her fiction for the underdog, who, inspired by the example of George Sand, in her turn inspired some of the authors represented in this collection.[10] Women writers could accordingly adopt a kind of 'ethical realism', often ironic, 'an engagement with the problems of contemporary society, aimed at altering the reader's outlook and moral values';[11] some, such as Jedličková and Lauermannová-Mikschová in

very slim volumes!) have disappeared; I am very embarrassed when any of my old friends remind me about them.'

9 'Das weibliche Repertoire war vor allem auf den Bereich des Häuslich-Idyllischen, des Pädagogischen und […] des Autobiographischen konzentriert': Gudrun Langer, 'Babička contra Ahnfrau: Božena Němcovás "Babička" als nationalkulturelle Immatrikulation', *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie*, 57/1 (1998): 133–69 (this quotation at p. 139).

10 Karolina Světlá was the pseudonym of Johanna Mužáková née Rottová; she was a leading member of the so-called *májovci*, contributors to the *Máj* almanac founded in 1858 and so named in honour of the poem *Máj* by K. H. Mácha, whose aesthetic the almanac hoped to revive.

11 Charlotte Woodford, 'Suffering and Domesticity: The Subversion of Sentimentalism in Three Stories by Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach', *German Life and Letters* 59/1 (2006): 47–61 (this quotation at pp. 48–9).

the present collection, published their work under male pseudonyms.[12]

SOME VERSIONS OF PASTORAL: BIGOTED GRANDMOTHERS AND WELL-MEANING ARISTOCRATS

In Němcová's *Grandmother*, the notional female narrator is Barunka, granddaughter of the Czech peasant woman of the title, who is apparently now grown up as an infant teacher. Didactically and expertly, she depicts an ideal Czech landscape in which all social classes live in harmony. This society is still held together in Barunka's memory by the universal controlling wisdom of her grandmother, who had grown up in the second half of the eighteenth century, and is fondly remembered as fanatical in her traditional Catholicism, distrustful of the city ways and German language of 'Pan Prošek', her son-in-law, but very comfortable in dealing with royalty and nobility. In the traditional pastoral terms of the story, she is able, out of her simplicity as a peasant woman, to instruct the local noblewoman (and, by extension, Countess Eleonore Kaunitz, the aristocratic dedicatee of the novel) in correct behaviour. Nevertheless, she is evidently unable to handle some of the social problems endemic in her own class – she can do no more than wring her hands when Viktorka, a young peasant woman, is fatally, and supernaturally, compromised through yielding her virginity to a 'dark huntsman', and when Viktorka, driven out of her mind, drowns the infant she bears to this malignant figure and spends the rest of her sad life sleeping rough.

The motif of the controlling grandmother recurs in two of the most successful and well-known works by a Czech

12 Lauermannová-Mikschová's pseudonym, 'Felix Tèver', refers to Rome, where she lived for a time (happily beside the river Tiber or Tevere).

woman writer later in the century, the first two plays of Gabriela Preissová, not represented here, which both deal with problems of marriage and illegitimacy in rural society. The first of these, 'The Boss Peasant-Girl' (*Gazdina roba*), with a stereotypical bigoted Catholic grandmother, is a dramatic adaptation (first performed 1889) of a short story of that year with the same name.[13] The second, 'Her Foster-Daughter' (*Její pastorkyňa*, first performed 1890) adds Němcová's motif of infanticide by drowning; it provided the libretto for Janáček's opera known in English as *Jenůfa* (1904). The central conflict of the play, and of the opera, arguably lies in the impossible situation faced by the elderly and ultra-pious Kostelnička, Jenůfa's foster-mother, who is driven to the brink of insanity in feeling herself forced to risk damnation by drowning Jenůfa's illegitimate child.

A very different development of the same theme, in another pastoral context, is seen in the multiple layers of irony in Ebner-Eschenbach's savage story, **'He Kisses Your Hand'** (1885). Ebner-Eschenbach's fictional aristocratic narrator is, once again, a grandchild; his grandmother, a widowed noblewoman and the absolute ruler of her domain, had been as strict, and domineering, a Catholic as Němcová's grandmother, and had been raised in the same period and the same landscape. The framing narrative in Ebner-Eschenbach's story shows the aristocracy and the Czech peasantry, unlike those imagined by Němcová, essentially in continual conflict. Ebner-Eschenbach's grandmother, like Němcová's countess, intervenes paternalistically in the lives of her subjects, ostensibly with the best of intentions. But her mind is fatally occupied with other things. As an accomplished poet, she has composed and rehearsed a clichéd Renaissance pastoral in 'impeccable Alexandrines',

13 Preissová's short story 'The Boss Peasant-Girl' is available in translation as 'Eva', in Hayes, ed. and trans., *A World Apart* (n. 4 above), 119–52.

Les adieux de Chloë, for the aristocratic guests attending her birthday celebrations, in an uncomfortable parallel with Marie Antoinette before the French Revolution, and in doing so she has failed to see the real pastoral unfolding before her eyes, initiated by her own repressed sexuality, until it is too late to forestall the more catastrophic *adieu* with which the story ends.

THEORIES, THEORIES . . . : THE 'WOMAN QUESTION' AND THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The 'woman question' (*ženská otázka*, *Frauenfrage*), addressing the injustice of patriarchal society in the Habsburg empire, is unsurprisingly a constant theme in these texts.[14] Women were debarred from voting, as also from participating in the public sphere through membership in professional or political groups. With few exceptions, they were virtually confined to the private domestic sphere, when married, inescapably under the control of their husbands – although the noted feminist Božena Viková-Kunětická, represented in the present collection, was proud to be the first woman to be elected to the Bohemian Diet within Austria-Hungary in 1912. When unmarried, they had few opportunities for

14 Outside the sphere of literature, though by a prominent woman writer perhaps best known for her operatic libretti, see the political essay 'The Czech Woman Question' of 1881: Eliška Krásnohorská, *Ženská otázka česká* (Prague: Edvard Grégr, 1881), excerpted in translation in Schwartz and Thorson, *Shaking the Empire* (n. 4 above), 210–27. Krásnohorská links the call for justice for women with Czech nationalism, appealing to prehistory and medieval history, and the memory of Czech warrior princesses, though the national question and the 'woman question' were usually kept separate. Krásnohorská was also responsible for founding the Minerva school in Prague in 1890, the first Gymnasium opened there for girls: the eighteen-year-old 'daughter of a rich, decent family' in Helena Malířová's story **'Three Points of View'** is an old girl of that school. It should be added that some male writers concerned themselves sympathetically with the 'woman question', notably J. S. Machar and the future Czechoslovak President T. G. Masaryk.

independent behaviour, and women teachers were required to remain entirely celibate as a condition of employment (this was the situation of the author Růžena Jesenská, and also of the young fictional teacher in Růžena Svobodová's **'Life's Sorrow'** (1891–5).[15]

Though such restrictions on women's participation in public affairs affected bourgeois women in particular, the same constraints applied to women of all social classes.[16] Writers represented in this volume taking the 'woman question' as a main theme indeed range from the conservative aristocrat Ebner-Eschenbach to the young anarchist and later well-known communist Marie Majerová; I have chosen Ebner-Eschenbach's **'Daily Life'** (1904) and Majerová's **'A Thorny Question'** (1917) as an obvious pair, both concerned from their different points of view with seemingly inexplicable female suicides that result from intolerable and unjust pressures imposed on women, whether or not Majerová is directly using Ebner-Eschenbach's tale as a model for the plot of her story. (Majerová had foreshadowed Socialist Realism in her earlier **'A Tale from Hell'** (1907) – an admittedly tendentious story of the re-education of the resident physician at the Kladno steelworks and coalmine.)

15 Women had been entirely debarred from the teaching profession in the Habsburg lands, except in a very subordinate capacity, until an Act, passed in 1869, which allowed the establishment of institutes for training women teachers but enforced celibacy on women teachers (except teachers of handicrafts) as long as they continued in the profession. Even when qualified, women were paid only 80% of the salary of male teachers with equivalent qualifications. The enforcement of celibacy was abolished only in 1919, after the establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic.

16 Even labouring women were subject to such constraints in the workplace (for telling examples, see Rudolf Kučera, 'Marginalizing Josefina: Work, Gender, and Protest in Bohemia 1820-1844', *Journal of Social History* 46/2 (2012): 430–48), although 'by 1880 Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia accounted for approximately two-thirds of Cisleithania's industrial production' (Hugh Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 2004), 140).

As for the political and sexological theories spawned during this period about the essence of those strange beings called Woman and Man, ironically deflated by Božena Benešová in her brief story **'Theories'** (1906), it will suffice merely to quote a couple. In his first aphorism on the subject, expressed in 1878, Nietzsche advanced one such theory:

> Perfect Woman is a higher type of human being than perfect Man, but also much rarer. The natural history of animals offers a means of demonstrating the probability of this proposition.[17]

In December of that year, perhaps provoked by this, Ebner-Eschenbach wrote, in a pointed letter to a male friend who was personally in correspondence with Nietzsche:[18]

> A newly invented natural history among us has made the discovery that Woman is nothing in and for herself, that she can become something only through Man – to whom she belongs in love – to whom she submits in humility – in whose life her own life is absorbed. A being as perfect as that self-evidently does not possess a perfect talent. Her efforts to develop one have something gratuitous

17 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches, allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister* (Chemnitz: Ernst Schmeltzner, 1878), aphorism 377 (my translation). On Nietzsche reception in the Habsburg empire more generally, see Alice Freifeld and others, eds., *East Europe Reads Nietzsche*, East European Monographs 514 (Boulder, CO, and New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

18 Her correspondent was the Hungarian nobleman Emmerich von Du Mont, and he was interested enough in the subject to write a book, *Das Weib: Philosophische Briefe über dessen Wesen und Verhältnis zum Manne* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1879). The extract from the letter (here in my translation) is quoted from Anton Bettelheim, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs Wirken und Vermächtnis* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1920), 277ff, in B. J. Kenworthy, 'Ethical Realism: Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's *Unsühnbar*', *German Life and Letters* 41/4 (July 1988): 479.

and mistaken about them: at best they arouse pity, and at worst disgust.

But how would it be if Woman were first and foremost a human being and only secondly female? if she were to possess just as much individual life as Man, and were to need complementation through him no more than he through her?

Her own marriage was one in which her husband had disapproved of her literary activity and her leading role in a Viennese women's literary association, the Verein der Schriftstellerinnen und Künstlerinnen in Wien, and had tried to restrict them. Her **'Daily Life'**, published only after her husband's death, fictionalizes the situation of her marriage, though it is hardly autobiographical in its detail.

More notorious as a theory of Woman was Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* (*Geschlecht und Charakter*, 1903).[19] This deeply misogynistic and anti-Semitic work invokes Woman and the Jew as symbols in a 'grandiose attempt to explain the modern world on the basis of the putative opposition between male and female principles, and the struggle between the Aryan and the Jewish mind'.[20] It gave rise to considerable discussion at the time, and may have resonated with some of the anti-Semitism evident in Czech women writers of the time, further discussed below, though it scarcely represents a defining influence on them.

19 Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter: Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung* (Vienna and Leipzig: Braumüller, 1903); English translation as *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

20 Christine Achinger, 'Allegories of Destruction: "Woman" and "the Jew" in Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*', *The Germanic Review* 88/2 (2013): 121–49, this quotation at p. 122.

'WE'RE NOT SATISFIED WITH YOU EITHER!': THE LITTLE MICE OF CZECH SOCIETY

'Czech men! We're not satisfied with you either!' was the title of a pamphlet published in 1897 by the feminist Jaroslava Procházková,[21] and the constructions of inadequate masculinity (and femininity) in women's writing of the period, reflected in this collection, are varied and sometimes comic. Two stories in the present collection are taken from the 1916 collection *Myšky* by Božena Benešová, whose title means 'little mice' – their heroines are middle-aged petit-bourgeois women, more or less frustrated, who experience epiphanies that enable them to transcend their tedious lives, while their men remain in blissful ignorance of what has happened. (There is a further twist in her story **'A Loyal Wife'**, not its original title, first published in 1908, which stops well short of the unhappy end that must inevitably be awaiting its heroine.)[22] A variant of the 'little mouse' is Ebner-Eschenbach's Myška (in the German, 'Mischka'), a peasant boy of guileless Czech simplicity, in **'He Kisses Your Hand'**. Another is the Johann Myška, a ne'er-do-well who falls in with itinerant strolling players, in the story 'Myška, Man of the World', not included in this collection, from Anna Maria Tilschová's *In the Mountains* (1905).

A more consistently comic variant of male inadequacy is found in Božena Viková-Kunětická's splendid mock-fairytale, **'Confirmed Bachelors'** (1891). Though her three ridiculous, aging bachelors have apparently foresworn sex in their enchanted castle, a magical princess intervenes, at

21 Jaroslava Procházková, *Českým mužům: 'Ani my nejsme spokojeny s vámi!'* (Prague: J. Baštář, 1897).

22 Another story by Benešová is translated as 'Friends' in Hayes, *A World Apart* (n. 4 above), 30–50, and two more were published in translation in Geoffrey Chew, *And My Head Exploded: Tales of Desire, Delirium and Decadence from Fin-de-Siècle Prague* (London: Jantar Publishing, 2018). For further details of the dating of the original stories, see Dobrava Moldanová, 'Rané povídky Boženy Benešové', *Česká literatura* 20/2 (1972): 115–30.

last setting their libido free and allowing them to indulge in extreme erotic – but ultimately sterile – fetishism. In this story Viková-Kunětická, unlike other women writers, limits her feminism – but reinforces her position as a politician – by suggesting implicitly that the ideal relationship between the sexes is to be found in marriage.[23]

A ROSE FOR UNCLE: OLDER MEN AND YOUNGER WOMEN, AND THE MARRIAGE MARKET

Another recurrent topos in women's writing is the mismatch between young, nubile women and girls and the older men, often predatory, but in any case with an advantage of power owing to their gender, who show an interest in them. This situation is hinted at in Teréza Nováková's curious semi-comic **'A Kaleidoscope'** (1890), a conversation at a society ball between an evidently middle-aged gentleman and a very young débutante, in which he gives her eye-opening gossip about a number of the dancers present and, implicitly, explains the society she is entering, without revealing what his own interest might be in her, and without allowing her to speak a single word. It is more obviously central to Anna Maria Tilschová's **'A Rose for Uncle'** (1906; not its original title), in which a paedophile 'uncle', a family friend, seduces a girl about ten years of age. This story is cast as a kind of Aesopian fable, with a moral apparently directed entirely at young girls rather than at the men who pose a danger to them. And Helena Malířová offers a light-hearted account of the sexual politics of marriage as viewed by the young daughter of an affluent family and by the two men attracted to her in her **'Three Points of View'** (1908).

23 On this story, see in particular Robert B. Pynsent, 'Neplodní "Staří mládenci" jako výplod feministické ideologie Boženy Vikové Kunětické', *Slovo a smysl / Word & Sense* 1/1 (2004): 66–87. Pynsent foregrounds Viková-Kunětická's political commitment to marriage as an instrument of nation-building.

CLASS CONFLICT AND THE REMARRIAGE OF WIDOWS

Class conflict had not been a traditional topic in women's writing, but emerges in those stories in this collection that take as their subject-matter the social problems of the peasantry. (Ethnography was an acceptable occupation for some women, such as Teréza Nováková, who published her findings in scholarly journals after her marriage and her move to Litomyšl.[24]) Some of these stories are, in effect, fictionalized ethnography, and include not merely conflicts between aristocracy and peasantry, but also conflicts within peasant village communities between wealthy tenant peasant farmers (those who held title to their house and land) and poorer 'inmate' peasants (those who resided in titleholders' households). It is largely these conflicts that underlie the griefs and complaints of the characters in Růžena Svobodová's **'Life's Sorrow'**, though the story suggests fatalistically that the griefs are a universal aspect of humanity – an inescapable part of a Nature beyond human control.

The uneasy relationship between wealth and poverty among the peasantry, without reference to the aristocracy on whose lands they lived, is developed more comprehensively in Tilschová's **'A Widow'**. This is the most substantial of the very varied stories in her remarkable collection, In the Mountains (*Na horách*, 1905), which she wrote at Kameničky in the Českomoravská vrchovina, the hilly region between Bohemia and Moravia, when she and her husband were on holiday there in 1904 with the historian Jaroslav Goll and the painter Antonín Slavíček.[25] There were dai-

24 See Libuše Heczková, *Píšící Minervy: vybrané kapitoly z dějin české literární kritiky*, Mnemosyne 1 (Prague: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2009), 167–8.

25 Another of the stories from Tilschová's In the Mountains is available in English translation as 'A Sad Time' in Hayes, *A World Apart* (n. 4 above), 209–16.

ly discussions about Goll's theories of the persistence of archaic religion and archaic customs among the local peasantry,[26] and she weaves these into her psychological study of the unforgettable Adna, a strong-willed, rich widow of a tenant peasant farmer, her passively hostile relationships with the local inmate peasants, with her ineffectual and illegitimate son Francek, with her teenage orphan servant Lojza, and with her three very imperfect men: Drahoš, her abusive husband; Kaplan Humperský, with whom she has a brief sexual relationship; and the symbolically named Svoboda ('liberty'). In nineteenth-century rural Bohemia, some rich widows of tenant peasant farmers (like Tilschová's Adna, but unlike most other women) were potentially able to enjoy a remarkable degree of freedom and independence.[27]

Admittedly, Tilschová's story may disappoint a modern readership in suggesting finally that an elderly widow, even one as independently minded as Adna, is unlikely to survive in the Czech countryside without a male partner, even one with as lurid a history of criminal violence as Svoboda. This story bears comparison with Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová's **'Solitude'** (1908): its central character is another widow, Teza Uvarová, also living in the countryside. Like Tilschová's Adna, Teza is rich, but unlike Adna, she is mid-

26 See Miroslav Heřman, *Národní umělkyně Anna Maria Tilschová*, Knižnice Národních umělců československých (Prague: Ministerstvo informací, 1949). One of the obscure nineteenth-century survivals of folk myth among heterodox Protestants that is referred to in the text is footnoted in the translation.

27 See, in particular, Alice Velková, 'Women between a New Marriage and an Independent Position: Rural Widows in Bohemia in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', *The History of the Family* 15/3 (2010): 255–70. Němcová's fictional grandmother supplies no precedent for the widows of these stories, and cannot be placed in the context of real history at all. In the mountain village from which she moves, she is clearly rich enough to be independent, but even if she is a widowed tenant, it is inconceivable that she should be able to leave her 'modest cottage' permanently, at a moment's notice, merely at her daughter's request.

dle-class; she feels herself on the verge of old age at 35, as the menopause approaches. She has reluctantly taken up 'philanthropy' as her only realistic future prospect, and knits for charity, but she receives a proposal of marriage from a longstanding friend, an aristocratic parliamentarian with the ominous name Peklín ('peklo' meaning hell), and he thus offers her an opportunity to escape from her 'philanthropy'. She is fond of Peklín, but puts him to the test by visiting a remote estate of his, a property in the inhospitable mountains. There she sees the fate of the females, human and canine, who, once of use to him, are now cast aside, and particularly that of Fanynka, an orphan girl whom he had fancied as a young man, had provided with an education for his own amusement, to the consternation of his mother, but had later forced into marriage with his boorish farm manager. We do not find out explicitly whether Teza finally rejects marriage with Peklín in favour of her 'philanthropy', nor what the authorial attitude is to the remarriage of widows more generally, but the story ends with her retreating into 'Solitude', her house, and slamming the door.

JEWS, GERMANS, CZECHS, ORIENTALS, AND OTHERS

Society in the nineteenth-century Bohemian lands was not merely patriarchal but also classically colonial, with a dominant group seeking to legitimize its control over other groups defined both racially and linguistically. For those Czechs seeking independence, this was a particular concern as a result of the *Ausgleich* (the so-called Austro-Hungarian Compromise) of 1867, under which a dual monarchy had been established, with a considerable degree of independence for the Hungarians but not for the Czechs. Unsurprisingly, with tension between Germans and Czechs increasing markedly towards the end of the century, much

literature by writers of both sexes in all linguistic and racial groups draws on images of the Other, often stereotypical, sometimes Orientalist, and sometimes hostile, in depicting members of other groups.[28] Some Bohemian-German writers, even those like Ebner-Eschenbach who were not essentially hostile to the Czechs, draw on stereotypes that masculinize Germans and feminize Czechs;[29] some Czech writers make a similar construction to distinguish Czechs from Jews.

Anti-Semitism in fiction by Czech women writers has been discussed in recent years by Robert Pynsent and Jitka Malečková;[30] as for the present collection, the Jewish characters in tales by non-Jewish writers may be mentioned in particular. These sometimes draw on stereotypes without ideological implications, as in the incidental Jewish characters (the merchant, and the chancer Kaplan) in Tilschová's **'A Widow'**. The young anonymous Viennese-Jewish woman in Tilschová's later science-fiction tale **'A Remarkable Incident'** (1924) bears closer scrutiny, however: her stereotypical amorality and love of luxurious excess are essential parallels to the 'nothingness' of the Ohnes men in the story. She is very comparable to the Viennese-Jewish capitalist

28 For a particularly thoughtful introduction to this topic, see Ritchie Robertson, 'National Stereotypes in Prague German Fiction', *Colloquia Germanica* 22/2 (1989): 116–36.

29 It does not yet seem possible to judge whether male writers were more liable to do this than female. For an example of a novel where the stereotypes prove damaging, see Robertson, 'National Stereotypes in Prague German Fiction' (n. 28), 118 ('in [his] *Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen* [Max] Brod inadvertently confuses his pro-Czech message by uncritically adopting stereotypes which by 1909 had been current for so long as to pass for knowledge').

30 Robert B. Pynsent, 'Czech Feminist Anti-Semitism: The Case of Božena Benešová', in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, 4 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010), 344–66, and Jitka Malečková, 'Czech Women Writers and Racial Others: (Un)Timely Reflections on the History of Czech Nationalism', *Central Europe* 13/1-2 (2015): 4–18.

Jindřich Frank in Svobodová's unusual tale of late-awakening female sexuality, **' . . . And Music will be Playing Outside Your Windows Every Day'**. Anča, the heroine of Svobodová's story, is a version of Němcová's Viktorka who, attracted by the dangerous violence of a Czech 'dark huntsman', marries him and tries her best to settle down with him, only to find that the danger was overestimated, and he is frigidly uninterested in sex or romance. She herself has become a Sleeping Beauty, and is awakened to sensuality by her Jewish prince, who is joyfully oversexed and exotically Oriental – and, far from receiving the punishment for this which a reader might expect, she is happy to leave her Czech husband and live in sin with him for ever.[31]

SOME REMARKS IN CONCLUSION

I hope that this selection illustrates some of the great variety of approaches that Czech women's writing displays in the *fin de siècle*, in a period when Czech literature, written by authors of both sexes, was particularly lively. The survival of serious literature in Czech was no longer in question at this period, as it arguably had been earlier in the Czech National Revival, with a substantial reading public now supported by a solid base of publishing houses, and with literary journals prepared to publish challenging material.[32] (Some such journals catered specifically for women.) Fur-

31 The story is one of Svobodová's *The Dark Huntsmen* [*Černí myslivci*], stories loosely linked together in what the author calls a 'mountain novel' [*horský román*]. Svobodová's narrator glosses the 'dark', 'black', of the title by having the huntsmen dressed in black. Another of the stories from this collection, variations on a theme, is translated as 'A Great Passion' in Hayes, ed. and trans., *A World Apart* (n. 4 above), 182–208.

32 'However ferociously the nationalities conflict [sic] in Austria was raging [by the 1890s], writers no longer feared for the future of the literary language': Robert B. Pynsent, 'Czech Women Writers, 1890s–1948', in Celia Hawkesworth, ed., *A History of Central European Women's Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 126.

thermore, some women hosted salons in which literature was discussed by both men and women; the principal such salon in Bohemia, and one of the longest-lasting, was hosted by Lauermannová-Mikschová.

Clearly, the present selection invites comparison with the outstanding, and pioneering, anthology of English translations of shorter fiction by Czech women writers edited by Kathleen Hayes and published by Karolinum Press almost a generation ago, and now fortunately available in a second edition.[33] In some respects the two selections are complementary, since there are still a good many texts – and authors – that are unfamiliar but deserve to be unearthed. But in including a couple of German-language stories, I have attempted also to point towards the reassessment of Czech literature that may be imminent in the present climate – in which, one may hope, Czech literature may come also to be imagined in territorial terms as the common inheritance of all the writers who lived and worked in Bohemia and Moravia, rather than merely those who wrote in the Czech language or who were patriotically Czech. Moreover, there has been interest in recent years in exploring 'indifference to nation', the rejection of patriotism or narrow identity politics, as a response to modernism rather than as a symptom of backwardness or insularity, and some texts by both women and men may merit analysis along these lines in the future.[34]

Moreover, the women of this period, whether writing in Czech or in German, seem to share styles and approaches

33 Kathleen Hayes, ed. and trans., *A World Apart* (n. 4 above).

34 A symposium at Edmonton, Alberta, in 2008, examined 'Sites of Indifference to Nation in Habsburg Central Europe', and volume 43 of the *Austrian History Yearbook* contained articles based on material presented there. For an overview see Pieter M. Judson and Tara Zahra, 'Introduction', *Austrian History Yearbook* 43 (2012): 21–7.

that divide them from contemporary male writers.[35] Not only does their social comment often seem more trenchant than that of the men, but they also seem able to spice their writing with both comic and sentimental elements with a degree of humanity, and of subtlety, that escapes their male colleagues. Even as harrowing a story as Ebner-Eschenbach's **'He Kisses Your Hand'** is made more palatable by its comic touches. And the preference for social comment may to some degree explain why some of these women – notably Tilschová and Majerová, of those represented here – later came to be regarded as better models for a literature fit for a socialist society than their Decadent male colleagues.

So I hope that readers may be pleasantly surprised by the wide variety in the body of writing represented by the present collection: these authors had interests that included, but that also went well beyond, themes reflecting the oppression suffered by their gender. But I also hope that readers should not be surprised to know that it has been a great pleasure to seek out these stories – some of them extremely rare survivals – and to translate them.

Geoffrey Chew
Egham, April 2023

35 Admittedly, even the most prominent of the male authors of the period, such as Jiří Karásek, Julius Zeyer, and more generally those writing for the influential modernist Czech periodical *Moderní revue*, will probably not be familiar to an English-speaking readership; a selection of fiction written by such authors is offered in Geoffrey Chew, trans., *And My Head Exploded* (n. 22 above).

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'So, in the name of God,' said the countess, 'have your say! I shall listen to you, but I shall not believe a single word.'

The count leant back comfortably in his large armchair. 'And why not?' he asked.

She shrugged briefly. 'Probably you are not inventive enough to be convincing.'

'I am not inventing at all – I am remembering! Memory is my leisure activity.'

'What a one-sided, servile leisure that is! You remember only the things that suit you. And yet there are many interesting, beautiful things on earth besides – nihilism.' She had lifted her crochet hook, and fired off the final word like a rifle shot at her old admirer.

He took it without flinching, stroked his white beard easily, and regarded the countess from his shrewd eyes almost with gratitude. 'I wanted to tell you something about my grandmother,' he said. 'It occurred to me in the middle of the forest while I was on my way here.'

The countess bent down over her work and murmured, 'It will be a story about robbers.'

'Oh, nothing less! And as peaceable as the creature that stirred the memory in me when I saw him – namely, Myška IV, a great-grandson of the Myška I who gave my grandmother cause for a little hastiness that she seems later to have regretted,' said the count with slightly affected carelessness, and he then quickly continued, 'A careful gamekeeper, my Myška – one must grant him that! But he was not a little frightened when I stepped unexpectedly into his path – and I had already been watching him for a while. He was crawling around like a beetle collector, his eyes fixed on the ground, and what do you think he had stuck in the barrel of his rifle? Imagine! It was a bunch of strawberries!'

‘Very sweet!’ replied the countess. ‘Get yourself ready – soon you will be meandering over the steppes to me, because you’ll have been deprived of the forest.’

‘At least Myška isn’t preventing that.’

‘And you’re making sure of that?’

‘And I’m making sure of that. Oh yes, it’s terrible. That weakness is in my blood – inherited from my ancestors.’ He sighed ironically and cast a sidelong glance at the countess, with a degree of malice.

She suppressed her impatience, forced herself to smile, and attempted to give her voice as indifferent a tone as possible, saying, ‘How about having another cup of tea and leaving the shades of your ancestors unsworn for once? There is something else I should be discussing with you before I leave.’

‘Your lawsuit with the municipality? – You are going to win that.’

‘Because I am in the right.’

‘Because you are completely in the right.’

‘Make the peasants understand that. Advise them to withdraw the lawsuit.’

‘They won’t do that.’

‘They would rather bleed to death and give the lawyer their last penny. And, good God, what a lawyer he is . . . a ruthless sophist. They believe him and not me, and I think they don’t believe you either, in spite of all your seeking after popularity.’

The countess drew herself up and took a deep breath. ‘Confess that it would be better for these people, who are so stupid both in trusting and in mistrusting, if they were prevented from choosing their own advisers freely.’

‘Naturally it would be better! They should have an appointed counsellor, and their trust in him should also be appointed.’