

The emancipation of Czech female authors and the representation of the female question in their work

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Abstrakt The paper aims to acquaint with the main developmental tendencies and changes of the women's emancipation movement in the Czech environment and with the contemporary perception of the social and artistic position of the authors from the 4th stage of the national revival to the pre-war period (1930s). A representative sample of examples from the work of selected writers of the early 20th century will demonstrate how they approached the topic of women's issues in their own authorial work.

Klíčová slova Emancipation, Gynocriticism, Women's movement

1. SPECIFICS OF THE CZECH WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed two emancipatory currents, which essentially shaped the future direction of European states. It was about the emancipation of nations and the emancipation of women. Given the position of Czech citizens within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, before the history of the independent Czechoslovak state began to be written, we can perceive in our environment a specific connection of both efforts into one.

Before the fulfillment of more than a century of efforts of the revivalist generation on October 28, 1918, many partial social goals, which are described by historians, had to be achieved. But what path led to the fact that it was possible "*to place a free citizen and a free citizen next to each other without deliberation, without reservations and procrastination*" (Plamínková, 1905, p. 8) and how did publicly active women participate in it, initially especially writers, who over time penetrated more and more into the artistic field, so far reserved only for men, is a topic that is still outside the wider perspective of the attention of the professional public and targeted research.

The emancipation movement was a long-term and multi-layered process in which, for individual periods, we can observe changing tendencies, developments and ideological shifts not only at the level of nationally constituting efforts, but also regarding the status and self-awareness of women and their role in society and also in the artistic sphere. For this reason, we set out as the main purpose of the contribution to inform about these changes from their beginnings and for a more comprehensive capture of the whole process, targeting the area of the development of Czech literature written by women, which is indisputably related to the long road to national

and gender sovereignty, to mention and not omit and previous periods that led to the fulfillment of the objectives.

1.1 Developmental tendencies and transformations of the women's emancipation movement in the Czech environment from 1848 to the 1930s

In the Czech environment, which is the focus of our lecture, we can perceive the abolition of serfdom and labor duties in September 1848 as the beginning of emancipation efforts and the activities of the women's movement, which led to a gradual societal transformation. Successive steps and efforts, which in their beginnings were closely connected with the national revival movement, led to the fulfillment of the goals of the first feminist era in the Czech lands. For better clarity, the defined period can be divided into four sub-stages as follows:

- 1848 – the beginning of the 1860s
- 1860s - 1890s
- 1890s - end of the First World War
- 1918 – early 1930s

The period from the 1840s onwards is associated with the first manifestations of public women's activity - the first literary attempts of women from the circle of the Frič and Staněk families, their attempt to write a Universal Dictionary for Women under the leadership of Karel Slavoj Amerling, the founding of the Slovak Association or the activities of women in Kajetánské divadlo already in the earlier period. The repression that followed the suppression of the revolution led women in public to pragmatize efforts, especially to the level of founding philanthropic associations, organizing social events and to the search for feasible goals represented by the establishment of girls' educational institutions. These were activities that did not in any way conflict with the traditionally perceived "*social role of women, the sphere of maintaining and refining the domestic family hearth was already defined*" (Abrams, 2005, p. 49), or she was invited "*to help*" and was a "*sister*" to men in godly actions in building the homeland." (Hezcková, 2009, p. 12)

As a representative text summarizing the role of women (also from the author's point of view) in the first stage of domestic emancipation, Božena Němcová's poem *Ženám českým*¹, published

¹ Němcová, B. (1843). *Ženám českým*, Kwěty. 10, n. 27

in 1843 in the magazine Květy, can serve as a representative text. The text dominantly emphasizes the biological role of women - mothers, who make a sacrifice for their homeland in the form of active patriotic education of their offspring towards Czechness. What is interesting is the use of the adjectives *weak*, *thin* and *the motif of the heart* in connection with the noun *woman* x characteristics attached to the male subject – *sword*, *arm*, *strength*. The call to patriotic education is not addressed directly to children, as the last stanza declares, but is limited to "the education of stout rivers, strong as doves...Břetislavs...the malice of the destroyer."

Changes in the way of thinking about women, their social role, public and private activities did not occur until the beginning of the 1890s, at the end of the second emancipation wave. At its beginning are cultural, linguistic and political changes enabling women to gain new perspectives. From the founding of women's associations (e.g.: American Ladies' Club, Women's Manufacturing Association, Brno Association Vesna) aimed not only at charity and philanthropy, but at the practical or professionally oriented education of women, still available according to social class, the path leads to to establish the first private Minerva high school in Central Europe for girls. The demographic crisis and the growing number of women who, as a result, could not get married and had to look for a way to dignified economic independence, also played an auxiliary role in the development of accessible education for girls.

While until the 1860s, women could only leaf through German or French fashion magazines, a change in the Press Act in 1863 simplified print production, and the first magazines aimed exclusively at women in the Czech language began to appear. The prerequisite for their expansion was the sufficient education of female subscribers and, on the part of the magazine, capable editors with literary experience and knowledge of the Czech language (E. Krásnohorská, P. Moudrá). In the second stage of women's emancipation efforts, the perception of women as independent artists begins to change due to the indicated circumstances – "*a process of literary self-reflection and active modeling of one's own image takes place*" (Hezcková, 2009, p. 13)

From the texts of female writers belonging to the second phase of the emancipation process - Světlá, Krásnohorská, Podlipská, etc., after much hesitation and selection, I have included as a representative text the poem by Irma Geisslová - *Cesta ke spáse*) published in 1879 in the poetry collection of *Immortelly* by Höschl and Grégr. My choice fell on Irma Geisslová because her life story and artistic direction best demonstrate the position of a contemporary woman/writer - after the contradictory reception of *Immortelly*, which Neruda and Krásnohorská criticized in particular for its pessimism, Machovian disunity and despair, the author resigned from publishing her original work, but not for writing and thus remained forgotten for a whole century, despite the indisputable artistic value of the work. The poem *Cesta ke spáse* is part of the 3rd section of *Immortelly* (out of a total of six) called *Fatherland*. The title of the section is the same as the initial apostrophe in the 1st verse of the text. The transformation of the well-established metaphor "rodná vlast" = mother, so often used in revivalist circles, is here replaced by the noun "otčina/fatherland", which can be interpreted as an allusion to the dominant patriarchal structure of Czech society. The overall tuning of the text radiates sadness and disillusionment over thwarted revivalist ideals, national inactivity, loss of faith and determination for social change, uncertainty about the future, yet it does not give up hope and calls for a solution in the final stanza... "*When I despair - I will stop hoping, and we will acknowledge, reap salvation only in work, in a hereditary role, only in science, only in art!*" (Geisslová, 1879, p. 129). If we were to leave the plane of the nouns *sacrifice* (in Němcová) - *salvation* (in Geisslová), we can say that Geisslová is looking for a way that is

already outside the suffering conception of women of the Marian archetype. From the last verses we can perceive the exclamation of acceptance and awareness of the female role, which goes beyond the established framework and calls for one's own active attitude, not passive "*hope, despair*", but for intellectual and mental activity even within the framework of socially established mantles.

"*The third stage of emancipatory efforts, which we have defined from the 1890s to 1918, is accompanied by dramatic and dynamic processes of modernization and crisis, in which the social, political, legal and cultural situation of women will be transformed, however temporarily regressive the changes may be.*" (Bahenská et al., 2011. s. 27) The shift in the perception of the role and mission of not only female writers and the partial result of previous emancipatory efforts are best described by the words of Eliška Krásnohorská on the occasion of the 10th World Exhibition held in Paris in 1889. the text of her speech not only demonstrates proud self-confidence and recognition of women's professional and creative qualities, but on their basis sets another goal that arises before women - from the marginalized acceptance of women's professional efforts to men achieving real independence and independence on an equal level.

In addition to the demand for equal recognition of the public activity of women, there is another new phenomenon that women writers will have to cope with in connection with the artistic and philosophical direction of Europe, especially the influence of the decadent decomposition of sexual identities and Weininger's and Nietzsche's philosophical conception of male and female roles, and the so-called "*a dispute over the body and a dispute over the mind*" (Hezcková, 2009, p. 130). The entire 19th century judged a woman primarily "*on the basis of her role and behavior at home*" (Abrams, 2005, p. 47), and her concept was purely maternal. New questions regarding physicality, sexuality and the erotic perception of women (whether adoring or condemning) began to appear precisely from the 1890s and, together with the social discussion regarding women's mental abilities, which were often physiologically conditioned, really complicated further successes in the direction of the emancipation movement in meaning of society-wide acceptance of the idea of equality. Paradoxically, the outbreak of the First World War contributed to the temporary end of the discussion about the social role and gender predestination of women.

In 1905, F. X. Šalda commented on the issue of women's literary work and the status of female artists in the article *Woman in Poetry and Art* and formulated the goals that female writers should achieve as follows: "*And the most recent history itself already proves the correctness of this opinion: erotic life has acquired only truth and depth since the woman, until now mute, spoke. A woman who speaks is more enchanting than a woman who is silent, and erotic culture acquired, in addition to new shades and tones, a sanctification and confirmation of its old core and its own foundations.*" Despite the fact that the lecture attributes full importance to women poets, it does not avoid stereotypical assessments in some parts. Again, the image of a woman is brought up as an inspirer of men who admire her beauty and fall in love with her. Gradually through individual artistic periods from Dante to Turgenev, Šalda evaluates the contribution and contribution of women mostly from an inspirational point of view. Only from the second half is the lecture focused on the critic's insights into the mission of new female writers, their possible goals. At the end of the lecture, recommendations are included that female authors should not distinguish themselves against male writers, in which Šalda agrees with Krásnohorská, that they reject the excessive tendency and one-sidedness of the so-called feminist novel and that, based on their own self-knowledge, they should get rid of conventionality and give more to the representation of personal experience, which is what art is all about.

Four years later, in 1909, Pavla Buzková writes in her work *Pokrokový názor na ženskou*, following Šalda's idea: "The life of society to be purposefully reformed. However, empty forms of laws cannot give a woman true equality, if she does not give it to herself. A woman will not be made a man if she does not make him of herself." The demand for individual self-awareness and self-acceptance of a woman freed from experienced ideas and required roles and the subsequent transformation of the result of this process into an artistic artifact (or the free choice of one's own human direction) as the main measure of the quality and value of the creation is accentuated also because artistic creation as a means Women's self-expression was relatively new to the activity of writers in the Czech environment. With this demand, as well as recommendations on how to achieve it, Šalda went beyond the marginalization of women's literature as "writing by women for women" and defined himself against tendentious writing for the needs of achieving the goals of the emancipation movement. According to this established standard, we can continue to divide the increasingly rich work of female writers into initiative and initiation in terms of the starting points it offers. We call an initiative work that describes the contemporary state, situations and pitfalls in which women find themselves (in the period under review it is mainly represented by prose), but does not in any way go beyond social conventions and the traditional perception of the role of women, does not offer readers a way out, or one where the women's question and its direction are described (it includes mainly essays, journalism and expert contributions). We refer to texts as initiatory which, with their originality, go beyond the established discourse of the time, define situations in which literary heroines appear regardless of the norms or opinions of the time, or even go beyond them, and whose authors bring readers new possibilities in terms of the realization, status and acceptance of women, whether either by themselves or the public.

As examples of initiative work, I would mention, among others, the actions of women writers based on mutuality, leading to the support of the continuum of women's work and the preservation of its value. These are editorial works, when female authors advocated for the publication of the collected works of their predecessors or wrote monographs and literary-critical articles about them, in which they reviewed the writing achievements of their colleagues. As the first area, we can name Sofia Podlipská's editorial work on the publication of the 9th volume *Sebrných spisů* of Božena Němcová from 1891 or Teréza Nováková's monograph on Karolína Světlá – *Karolína Světlá její život* a from 1890. From many literary critical articles, I present texts for illustration, whose authors did not enter high school literature textbooks - Pavla Maternová on Božena Kunětická Víková - *Macecha a jiné črty*, *Ženský svět* 1902, on Růžena Jesenská - *Nina a další prózy*, *ibid.*, Teréza Turnerová Božena Němcová, *Ženský obzor* 1910, Podhorecká Žofie about *Růžena Svobodová's prose*, Marie Lehnertová Štechová on Teréza Nováková *Život a dílo Terézy Novákové*, *Ženský svět* 1916. An interesting feat from the professional field is the writing of the phrase "female emancipation" by Albína Honzáková and Františka Plamínková in the 27th volume of Otto's educational dictionary published in 1908.

From the field of journalistic activity, I have selected an excerpt from a collection of 33 magazine articles by Teréza Nováková on the women's question entitled *Ze ženského hnutí* from 1912, as one representative example of initiative work. In the Women in Politics section, in the article *Volební právo žen u nás* (1903), discussing the current issue of voting rights after the 1895 Act on the Fifth Curia, Nováková writes: "And so it happened that, for example, a young journeyman went to the first choice, while the widow after the master, herself now a master, stayed pretty at home, that the

matron, who gave birth, raised and still supported the twenty-four-year-old young man, a student or unpaid clerk, saw her son go to his fate in with the full awareness of civic maturity, that the not-young, decades-serving teacher was in trouble to bat her eyes in front of a youthful colleague, not long ago the test of maturity was more difficult. And this unheard-of grievance did not even stir up a storm among our women, they endured it calmly, without protest, pursuing work in other fields of women's issues, for educational, humanitarian, artistic, economic work, as long as they did not fold their hands in their laps or get distracted by external trifles." (Nováková, 1903, p. 309)

From fiction, I would cite Božena Benešová's early short story collections *Nedobytá vítězství* – 1910, *Myšky* – 1914 and *Kruté mládí* – 1916 as an example of initiative work. In them, Benešová already builds original heroine types, very often with autobiographical features, but the result of their life journey is usually resignation in various forms. Each of the female characters is distinct and unique, yet they share most of the basic traits, which are the inability to love, the desire for something more than they can have (even though they don't have little), the excess of reason that binds them, and the lack of courage to fight back. All these characters are either unable to be happy or scared of happiness, they would like to defy their fate, but they don't have enough courage or strength to do so. Therefore, without exception, they end tragically, although each one in a slightly different way. The character of Katy Tomanová from the short story *Z mladosti dvou smutných sester* from 1910 resigns and, under the pressure of family, society and external events, marries without love and without hope for further happiness. Even after her husband's death, Anežka Pasovská from the short story *Vdova* – 1910 cannot escape from his influence, from eternal boredom, sadness and hopelessness. Only after finding out that her husband did not die in an accident, but committed suicide (and thereby actually voluntarily resigned before her), does she feel free, ready for happiness. However, she cannot bear this knowledge, goes crazy and returns to her green sofa, the symbol of all marital hopelessness, boredom, sadness and alienation. Dagmar Halová from the short story *Hladina* – 1917, on the other hand, is unable to cope with the infidelity of her future husband, she betrays herself and the idea of her virtue, which she had clung to in her life so far, and out of defiance she becomes sexually intimate with a man to whom she has strong moral reservations and dislike. Due to these circumstances, he then chooses suicide as the only way out of unhappy love and disappointment in his person.

The opposite approach is offered by Benešová's friend, Růžena Svobodová in the novel *Písčítá půda* from 1918, which is why I present her as an example of initiative fiction. The protagonist of the novel, after discovering her husband's infidelity, a confrontation with his lover and a general disillusionment with the man's character, also considers ending her life. The realization that her immediate family, both her own and married, knew about her situation and watched her hypocritically, leads the heroine to defy her grief and all those who silently watched the situation, which saves her life.

"The separate spheres which had been the basic principle of the relations between the sexes since the French Revolution had come under immense strain during the war, but although the governments concerned and many men tried hard to defend the boundaries against female incursions into the male world, they were unable to prevent women from creating self-awareness that required recognition of their rightful place in the state." (Abrams, 2005, p. 314)

It would seem that the required equality guaranteed by the new constitution of the republic in 1920 has been achieved. Above all, the efforts of Františka Plamínková and her colleagues in women's

organizations contributed to the fact that the constitutional document of the Czechoslovak Republic from February 1920 in § 106 contained the formula: "Privileges of gender, sex and employment are not recognized." But practice still did not indicate the ideal, despite advocacy and promotion women's issues with important personalities of the time. In T. G. Masaryk we can read: "*I agree with Mrs. Plamínková and all reasonable supporters of women that women's efforts for equality with men are correct, and I therefore wish him every success.*" (Masaryk, 1927, p. 17) We consider the abolition of celibacy for female teachers by an amendment to the Education Act from 1919 to be another partial success.

"After the First World War, a new generation of young, educated and self-confident women enters the life of society, who want to realize themselves professionally, but at the same time do not want to give up on their family. This new reality soon reveals the concept of the double burden of women and the right to one's own body." (Bahenská et al., 2011, s. 172) The question of equality is moving from the pen of professional literary women to publicly active women outside the artistic sphere, who, thanks to the acquired education, are beginning to represent new functions. The most visible example is precisely Františka Plamínková, who understood that cultural and educational action would not be enough to promote other goals of the women's issue, but that negotiations would now take place on a political level. The question of the double burden of women, which the writer and philosopher Anna Pammrová talks about she spoke of as "rag service" and "pot service", by which every woman is enslaved and diverted from her spiritual work, crystallized in the framework of the economic crisis in a public and political discussion, about the ban on the work of married women. Plamínková in her journalistic study *O právu vdaných žen na výdělečnou činnost* from 1934 describes the fundamental cracks in the hard-fought equality for women. It states that although in Czechoslovakia women have gained equal civil rights, a possible ban on married women from performing gainful work, the insufficient application of women in political life, the weak interest of leading politicians and the press in looking at women from the perspective of democracy and the new tasks resulting from it, a conservative view of the family life with the passive role of the wife and, last but not least, the effort of society and women themselves to solve contemporary problems with old means, seriously threatens the future development of the women's issue. In her opinion, the supporters of the ban on women's gainful employment in no country decided to present its positives, except allegedly for one: "Return the woman to the family!" She considered the quoted argument to be short-sighted. Family life is also related to the second pressing contemporary issue – a woman's right to her own body, which was reflected in the public debate by the demand to legalize abortion. The law on legal termination of pregnancy was only adopted in 1957, 13 years after the execution of Františka Plamínková by the Nazis.

Just as the initiative of Františka Plamínková was irreplaceable for the fourth wave of Czech emancipation, the feminine initiatory perspective of the excellent thinker, philosopher and writer Anna Pammrová, whose work has so far escaped the attention of the general public, is indispensable for it. In a reflective essay text named *Cestou k zářnému* from 1925 she wrote: "*I want no share in what the Man, burdened with greatness, sowed in our fallow land. He declared Suffering to be an ennoblement tool...Extinction as a condition of knowledge...Struggle as a symptom of the Enlightenment movement. The Bereaved Woman accepted the statement without reservation. She must have suspected that Suffering is a warning phenomenon... Extinction is a curse phenomenon. Relegation flag match. And yet she agreed to men's statements - Bewildered Woman.*" (Pammrová, 1925, p. 116) With her conception of a woman's task, Pammrová demonstrates that all

the events we have mentioned here so far took place within the framework of the patriarchal organization of society. In it, she sees the cause of why it is difficult for a woman to find her place within society and to go through the initiation path to understanding her own femininity, as Pavla Buzková and F. X. Šalda talked about.

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