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PRAGUE AS A CULTURAL CENTER FOR SLAVIC WOMEN WRITERS



WITH ITS HISTORICAL, geographical and demographic situation Prague has all the hallmarks of a prominent cultural center of Central Europe. Since the late Middle Ages, Prague has been a multi-national city. As a result, the cultural works created there continued the literary traditions of different nations and social environments. Incidentally, let us recall that the first female author working in Prague is thought to have been Elisabeth Jane Weston (1581–1612), a neo-Latin poet originally from England.

This study concerns a much later period. In particular, we analyse cases where Prague has attracted female writers from Slavic nations other than Czech, i.e. they find an atmosphere in Prague that favors their literary work, as well as authors whose works met with creative responses from women writers in Prague. In addition, the 19th century was a time when Slavic national ideas were formed; Prague was a distinct center for such movements. Moreover, it was a source of inspiration for writers, not all of whom were men: talented women also appeared who wanted to take part in implementing various national ideas and realizing the ideal of improving the world; they too had something to say on the subject. Both these factors inspired them to reach for their pens.

At the same time, a bond formed between them, first because they were women, and as a consequence of this, their legal and personal situations were very similar; secondly, this bond was also a result of their similar understanding of the main problems troubling societies and nations. This relationship took place across national and social divisions.

A good example of such a bond is provided by the author HONORATA ZAPOVÁ (née Wiśniowska), a Polish gentlewoman living in Prague during the mid-19th century. Although a foreigner, Zapová met with understanding in her writing and activities amongst the Czech and Czech-German female residents of Prague.

The work of Honorata Zapová (1825–1856) is one of the meeting points uniting Polish and Czech literature. The 19th century failed to bring their national ideas closer to each other, despite the presence of many common postulates inspiring the spiritual life of both nations. Examples include: the mutual proximity of the Slavs, access to education and the aspiration toward democracy. Concerning these notions – often still drawn from the Age of Enlightenment but already inspired also by Romanticism – the closest spiritual rapprochement between the Czechs and the Poles coincides with the twenty-year period after the Polish November Uprising, i.e. 1830–1849. Honorata Zapová played an active role in this rapprochement¹. Born a Polish gentlewoman, in 1841 she married a Czech burgher, with whom she settled in Prague. Complying with the duties forced upon her by society as a married woman – i.e. giving birth to children and being a housewife – she continued to translate Polish literature into Czech and was occupied with her own writing as well. In Prague she led a busy social life (running a sort of “literary salon” with her husband Karel Zap), was involved in organizational work amongst women, and took up the cause of education for girls. In 1855 she opened a boarding school for both Czech and Polish girls in Prague. However, due to Zapová’s untimely death, her school lasted for only three months. The school was supposed to take care of the patriotic and social upbringing of women in the spirit of “Slavic reciprocity”.

Considering that the feminist movement was still in its infancy and that the circles in which Honorata Zapová moved were almost entirely unfamiliar to her (a different language, culture, mentality or even different social class), and taking into account her own personal problems – repeated births

1 Z. Tarajło-Lipowska, *Polska szlachcianka Honorata z Wiśniowskich Zapová w służbie idei słowiańskiej w Pradze*, w: *Wielkie tematy kultury w literaturach słowiańskich*, red. T. Poźniak, A. Skotnicka-Maj, „Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis 2126: Slavica Wratislaviensia” 1999 (105), s. 57–63.

(over 14 years of marriage she gave birth to seven children, four of whom died), a growing aversion to her husband, the longing for her homeland and her ongoing illness (tuberculosis) – one must conclude that her writing and social activity was very intense.

Literary translations and works by Honorata Zapová herself were being published in Czech magazines at that time or remained only in manuscript form, often unfinished. Several of her translations of plays by the Polish playwright Józef Korzeniowski (1797–1863) have been preserved in the repertoire of Czech amateur and provincial theaters. In Czech history, however, Honorata Zapová will be most of all remembered as one of the forerunners of Czech feminist thought. This is for two reasons: first, because she established, together with a few Czech ladies, an organization called *Spolek Slovanek* (Association of Slavic Women, 1848–1849), also called Slavic Sisters², and second, because of the aforementioned girls' boarding school which she founded in Prague.

There is a view, expressed, amongst others, by the Czech researcher Vladimír Macura (1945–1999), that the role played by women in the ambitious project of the Czech National Revival was greater than previously thought. This is because the project was considered for a long time to be only of a political character; it was a kind of “playing at a nation”, as expressed by Macura³. *Spolek Slovanek*, the first Czech women's association, of which Honorata Zapová was one of the founders and activists, was, at first, a very practical organization set up in response to the turbulent events of 1848: the goal was to submit a petition to the Austrian authorities demanding the release of those who were arrested for participating in the Prague riots. The initiative was now far more than merely “playing” and became a real movement.

Exchanging correspondence in Czech and writing literary works in Czech (including literary translations into this language), being a member of the very first Czech feminist organization and running a boarding school for girls – these were activities that allowed Honorata Zapová to establish close contact with several outstanding Czech women at that time. These included the writers Božena Němcová (1820–1862), Karolina Světlá (1830–1899) and her sister, also a writer, Sofie Podlipská (1833–1897), Antonie Reisová aka Bohuslava Rajska (1817–1852), the wife of poet František Ladislav Čelakovský, as well as Anna Hlavsová (1811–1892). Additionally, Růžena Karafiátová

2 Č. Zíbrt, „*Sestry Slovanské*“ čili „*Spolek Slovanek*“ r. 1848 v Praze, „*Květy*“ 1907, R. 29, s. 25–38, 203–215, 375–388.

3 V. Macura, *Znamení zrodu. České národní obrození jako kulturní typ*, Jinočany 1995.

(dates unknown) was a dear friend, advisor, confidante and correspondent of Honorata Zapová.

In her literary and translation work, Honorata Zapová turned to Polish examples and patterns as well as Polish literary classics, which she wanted to popularize in Bohemia. It is important to remember that this was fully in line with the intentions of the Czech national “revivalists”, such as Honorata’s husband Karel Vladislav Zap (1813–1871). Zapová’s translations of Polish literary works and the ideas to be drawn from their examples were intended to achieve three goals:

- 1) To make the reader familiar with Polish realities in general and Galicia, the country of her childhood, in particular (the western part of present-day Ukraine, strictly speaking),
- 2) To instil patriotism and an interest in public matters into readers, especially women,
- 3) To promote Polish written works as Slavic literature and as being more comprehensive and better developed than the Czech literature of that period.

Polish and Ukrainian realities are the subject of several of Zapová’s extensive fictional and ethnographic sketches which she published in Czech magazines. A very interesting example of her artistic ambitions is a fragment of over twenty pages manuscript of a drama entitled *Věštec* (The Prophet). In the part that survives one can trace echoes of the Polish Romantic drama *Dziady* (Forefathers) by Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) and elements of which prove her knowledge of the poem *Máj* by the Czech Romantic Karel Hynek Mácha (1810–1836) or at least a familiarity with some other works by this author. Thus, the drama is a blend of elements drawn from both literatures. The text is only a draft and does not appear to be a finished piece.

The only published book by Honorata Zapová is the educational treatise for girls entitled *Nezabudky, čili dar našim pannám* (Forget-me-not, Present for our Young Girls, published in 1859, and reprinted in 1863, 1866, 1870). This work, passed off as her own work, is, in fact, as recently discovered by Corinne Fournier Kiss⁴, no more than a free translation of an earlier book by Klementyna Tańska-Hoffmanowa (1798–1845) *Pamiętka po dobrej Matce, czyli ostatnie jej rady dla córki* (Keepsake of a good mother or her final advice to her daughter, 1819) – in other words, a plagiarism of a book presenting

4 C. Fournier Kiss, *Traktaty pedagogiczne Honoraty z Wiśniowskich Zapovej i Klementyny z Tańskich Hoffmanowej – inspiracja czy przeróbka?*, „Napis. Pismo poświęcone literaturze okolicznościowej i użytkowej” 2013, seria XIX, s. 385–399.

conservative views on the role and tasks of women. This discovery of plagiarism explains the contradictions presented by Zapová's activities: on the one hand, we have this 'gift' to the young Czech girls, a moralizing textbook for the boarding school Zapová established; on the other hand, we have her diary of the 1850s written in Polish, where Zapová voices a very different opinion and challenges the idea of the indissolubility of marriage, questions the inferior position of women in matrimony, perceiving it as a form of enslavement, and also calls for the mother to have the same rights over children as the father⁵.

The case of Honorata Zapová, an allegedly beautiful, noble lady and a fierce patriot was the basis of the legend of the "great love between a Pole and a Czech". This legend is referred to by the Czech columnist and Polonophile Edvard Jelínek (1855–1998)⁶. Zapová has become a model for literary characters of Polish women appearing in the various works of Czech novelists such as Karolina Světlá⁷ and Alois Jirásek (1851–1930)⁸. These are characters that renounce personal happiness in the name of love for their homeland or else find this happiness through sacrifice or devotion to the cause. However, what Zapová valued most, being a writer and activist, was her own artistic and organizational fulfilment.

Honorata was certainly one of those responsible for the wind of polonophilia that blew over the Czech emancipation movement in the second half of the nineteenth century in Prague. Two Polish women writers especially caught the attention of the Czechs in general and of Czech women in particular, namely ELIZA ORZESZKOWA (1841–1910) and MARIA KONOPNICKA (1842–1910).

Orzeszkowa and Konopnicka were good friends. In their youth, they had attended the same boarding school in Warsaw. Afterwards they kept in touch all their lives, as testified by their correspondence. Their personal lives have many points in common: both were married to much older men, but

5 H. Zapová, *Zápisník z let 1851–1854*, manuscript (Literární archiv českého písemnictví v Praze, fond Honoraty z Wiśniowských Zapové).

6 E. Jelínek, *Honorata z Wiśniowských Zapová, Dodatek ke spisu Dámy starších salonů polskich*, Praha 1894.

7 Corinne Fournier Kiss, for example, in her article *Polonofilizm i polskość wśród cze-skich emancypantek w drugiej połowie XIX wieku: przykład Karoliny Světlej* (w: *Polonistyka wobec wyzwań współczesności*, t. 1, Opole 2014, s. 263–272) has carefully analysed the significant role played by the Polish women (who bear Honorata's features) in Světlá's literary work.

8 K. Kardyni-Pelikánová, *Kontakty polsko-czeskie w dobie powstania styczniowego*, Wrocław 1975.

both proved to be sufficiently independent of public opinion to decide after a few years of marriage not to live any longer with a man they didn't love. Orzeszkowa did not follow her husband when he was sent to Siberia after the insurrection of 1863, and when he came back, she divorced him; Konopnicka, who was living with her family in the countryside, left her husband in 1878 and went to Warsaw with her six children to start a literary career.

If this emancipated aspect of the two women was not openly spoken of, it is clear that it played a role in the popularity of Orzeszkowa and Konopnicka among Czech women fighting for women's rights. But what was openly considered worthy of attention in these two writers was their commitment to greater justice and humanity in general, and to better education for women in particular. In any case, their works were translated into Czech as soon as they were published in Polish.

For their part, both writers came several times to Prague – though not at the same time (we know that Orzeszkowa visited Prague in July 1881 and in January 1893, Konopnicka in 1884 and 1902) and their visits gave them the opportunity to meet Czech intellectuals, such as Edvard Jelínek and Jaroslav Vrchlický, as well as to get to know Czech women writers like Eliška Krásnohorská, chief editor from 1875 to 1911 of “Ženské Listy” (“Women's Journal”), the first feminist journal of Bohemia, and Pavla Maternová, chief editor from 1908 to 1912 of another feminist journal that began in 1896, “Ženský Svět” (“Women's world”). These journals regularly devoted articles to Orzeszkowa and Konopnicka, published translations of their works and some of their letters.

As far as Orzeszkowa's relationship to Czech intellectuals is concerned, it was already the subject of an article⁹. In our present context, is it worth recalling her meeting with Krásnohorská in 1881 as well as her correspondence with her, where she showed her esteem for the spirit of cooperation that prevailed among Czech women at that time and where she expressed her hopes for a collaboration between the two nations – and especially between the women of the two nations. Similarly of interest are two letters from Pavla Maternová addressed to her, letters that are not published but can be read in the “Archives of Eliza Orzeszkowa” in the Institute of Literary Research in Warsaw (Instytut Badań Literackich PAN). These letters are dated 1907–1908 and contain, in the first, a request for permission to translate into Czech

9 C. Fournier Kiss, *Polish and Czech „literary reciprocity” in the second half of the 19th century: Eliza Orzeszkowa's reception by the Czechs and Karolina Světlá's reception by the Poles*, „Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne” 2012, s. 355–371.

Ad astra by Orzeszkowa, and in the second one, an invitation addressed to the Polish writer to a women's meeting in Prague. We do not have any letters from Orzeszkowa to Maternová (they are probably lost), but we do know from a letter of Orzeszkowa to Kredba that she was unable to go to Prague at this time, probably for health reasons¹⁰.

If we know from these letters that Pavla Maternová (1858–1926) never met Orzeszkowa personally, we do know that she knew Konopnicka very well; moreover, she refers to her in her letters to Orzeszkowa. Maternová was even the main popularizer of Konopnicka in Prague and the Czech lands. She was also her main translator: she translated for example her short stories and, since she was herself an author of children's literature, many of Konopnicka's tales for children.

Konopnicka, like Orzeszkowa, never missed an opportunity to express her interest in Czech issues. Orzeszkowa's and Konopnicka's feelings of friendship and sympathy towards the Czech people found expression on the occasion of a sad event that happened in Prague. Since in 19th-century Prague, there was only a German theater, the Czechs had decided to build a national theater. The first stone was laid in 1868, and in the meantime, they had a provisional National Theater. As a matter of fact, the National Theater in Prague was meant to be a monument in honor of the friendship of all Slavs, a kind of symbol of Slav solidarity. In concrete terms, it was a place where not only Czech plays should be staged, but also plays from other Slavic literatures. In the provisional National Theater, the Polish theater was mainly represented by the comedies of Aleksander Fredro (1793–1876).

In the same year as the National Theater was completed, in 1881, the building burnt down, just a few months after Orzeszkowa's visit to Prague. The Polish intellectuals strongly supported the Czechs, and Orzeszkowa and Konopnicka were especially active. Whereas Orzeszkowa organized fundraising for a new building and herself gave 25 rubles (we can still see the receipt in the library of the national Museum in Prague), Konopnicka wrote a moving poem of condolence for the Czechs entitled *Gore! (Fire!)*. It was a poem of condolence but also of encouragement not to lose heart: "O, famous Prague, set to work! Stand up! Half of the action consists in audacity!

10 Cf. Orzeszkowa's *Letters to Václav Kredba*, 4th and 6th June 1908, in the Literary Archives of Strahov (Památník národního písemnictví, abbreviated from now on LA PNP) in Prague. These letters are mentioned by Iwona Wiśniewska in her impressive work on Orzeszkowa, *Kalendarium życia i twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej* (unpublished).

Gather together the ruins and the building will stand again! Get down to collective work. Life is a constant resurrection from the ashes”¹¹.

Konopnicka then wrote other poems in honor of the Czechs. In *Braciom Czechom* (*To the Czech brothers*, 1882), for example, she emphasizes the brotherly links between Czechs and Poles. She explains that Poles have to be grateful to the Czechs, because Christianity came to the Poles through the Czechs. Czechs and Poles have a common faith and common hopes, they are like links of the same chain – they should therefore conclude an alliance and walk hand in hand along the same road, a road which would lead to greater justice. She also wrote a poem entitled *Jan Hus – Przed obrazem Brożika* (*Jan Hus – Before the painting of Brožík*, 1883)¹². The Czech painter Václav Brožík produced a painting in 1883 representing Jan Hus at the Council of Constance. Konopnicka admired this picture in the Old Town Hall of Prague and let herself be inspired by it. In her poem, she makes of the Czech lands, through their hero Jan Hus, a kind of “Christ of nations”, to use Mickiewicz’s formula in *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* (*The Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish Pilgrimage*, 1833). Like Christ, Jan Hus stands and keeps silent (the sentence “stoję i milczę”, “I stand and keep silent” keeps recurring in the poem), but like Christ’s, his death has a redemptive effect. “Mój stos płonie... ja duch ja żyję” (“My stake is burning... I am a spirit, I live”). Martyrdom is understood here as a sign of election necessary for the salvation of the nation, as pleaded for in the poem, but may also be necessary for the salvation of the whole world. The main thing is that he does not betray his faith and convictions, whatever they may be¹³.

The aim of all these poems is of course to bring out the common points in the experience of Czechs and Poles and therefore, to stimulate the collaboration between Czechs and Poles for the same ends: liberty, independence and justice.

Besides these poems and others, where Konopnicka overtly addressed the Czechs, it has been noticed by critics that probably some of Konopnicka’s works would not have been written as they were if Konopnicka had not been familiar with Czech literature. This is the case with *Pan Balcer w Bra-*

11 See: M. Konopnicka, *Gore*, „Kłosy” 1881, nr 847, s. 170. Thank you to Iwona Wiśniewska for her kind help in finding this text.

12 Jan Hus was a Czech Church reformer from the beginning of the 15th century, and is now considered to be a forerunner of the Reformation. In 1415 he was condemned to death for heresy by the Catholic Church and burned in Constance.

13 The poems *Braciom Czechom* and *Jan Hus* can be found in: M. Konopnicka, *Poezje*, Warszawa 1951, t. 1 (s. 222–224), t. 2 (s. 118–120).

zylii (*Mr Balcer in Brazil*, 1910), which, according to the critic Karel Krejčí, appears as a very strange phenomenon in Polish literature – though not from the point of view of the content: it deals with a hot topic at that time, namely the problem of the migration of Polish peasants to Brazil, where they were given the very tough role of clearing the forests. But this work is also unusual from the point of view of the form: Pan Balcer is in fact an epic poem, a literary genre very much used in Romantic literature, but which was dying out in European literature of that later time – except in Czech literature, where it was still alive, as attested for example by the poems of Svatopluk Čech, like *Lešetínský kovář* (*The Blacksmith from Lešetín*, 1883). The critic's hypothesis is as follows: if it is well known that during the national revival at the beginning of the 19th century, the Czechs were looking for literary models in Polish literature (e.g. Mickiewicz) – then in the particular case of Konopnicka writing *Pan Balcer*, it seems to be, on the contrary, the Polish writer who looks towards the Czechs in order to write her epic poem. In other words, according to this critic, the formal features of Konopnicka's work *Pan Balcer* are very unusual and even anachronistic in Polish literature, but they would not appear as strange in a work of contemporary Czech literature, where they clearly can find correspondences in other epic poems¹⁴.

Therefore, the city of Prague, the contact with Czech intellectuals and the familiarity with Czech literature seem to have had a certain importance for the literary careers of Orzeszkowa and Konopnicka (in the sense that the Czechs inspired them and maybe even played a role in the literary genres chosen by them). On the other hand, these two Polish women writers were nearly considered by the Czechs of that time as their own national writers. The critic Josef Karásek, who wrote a little book in order to pay homage to Konopnicka just after her death in 1910, did not hesitate to state that if the almost simultaneous disappearance of Orzeszkowa and Konopnicka's was a huge loss for Poland, it was a huge loss for Prague and Bohemia too¹⁵.

At the beginning of 20th Century, Prague was one of the liveliest cultural cities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. György M. Varga wrote that although there was never a cultural, literal and historical entity or a compact community in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, there remained thousands

14 K. Krejčí, „*Pan Balcer w Brazylii*” na tle rozwoju poematu realistycznego w literaturze czeskiej i polskiej”, w: *Konopnicka wśród jej współczesnych. Szkice historycznoliterackie*, red. T. Achmatowicz, Warszawa 1976, s. 139–153.

15 J. Karásek, *Maria Konopnicka*, Brno 1910, s. 3.

and thousands of complicated interrelationships, cultural exchanges, spreadings of ideas, connections and similarities within these differences¹⁶.

Prague was the center of Czech modernism, the place where the Czech and German communities were, despite political conflicts, in a cultural space that communicated with each other. Prague during that period was also one of the centers of European modernism, as Bernard Michel has emphasized in his book: it was a city of the European avant-garde¹⁷, where at the beginning of the 20th century the Czech symbolist and decadent movement was successfully (and literally) incorporated into Czech life. Even so, the movements had already reached their peak. In Prague literary society, the national idea and also Panslavism were no longer so important as they had been at the beginning of the national revival movement in the 19th century. Patriotism in Czech literature was simply no longer considered modern.

The Slovenian writer ZOFKA KVEDER (1878–1926) was a Central European intellectual, balancing between different cultures¹⁸. She was part of the “Habsburg myth”. She moved in her twenties to Prague and lived there from 1900–1906, and then moved to Zagreb. Her work was successfully published in Czech and well known to Czech culture till the outbreak of the First World War. She was known for her cultural hybridity: she changed identities and switched language codes very often, and was bilingual from her childhood: she knew the Slovene and German languages, later she learned Czech; half of her literary work is in Croatian and she also translated from other languages into Slovene and German. Regarding this, Moritz Csáky, a literary historian, is convinced that all Slavic writers living in the Habsburg Empire were bilingual or multilingual and multicultural, a fact that encouraged their artistic power and creativity¹⁹. Zofka Kveder mostly wrote autobiographical short stories about women from different sections of soci-

16 G.M. Vajda, *Wien und die Literatur in der Donaumonarchie zur Kulturgeschichte Mitteleuropas (1740–1918)*, Wien 1994, s. 12: „[Es] sind doch tausende und abertausende von Querverbindungen, Wechselbeziehungen, Ähnlichkeiten inmitten der Unterschiede vorhanden [...]“.

17 M. Bernard, *Praha, město evropské avantgardy 1895–1928*, tr. J. Vymazalová, Praha 2010.

18 See also several studies and books about Zofka Kveder: M. Govekar, M. Nadlišek Bartol, *Zofka Kveder, „Ženski svet“ 1927, nr 5*; K. Mihurko Poniž, *Drzno drugačna. Zofka Kveder in podobe ženskosti*, Ljubljana 2003; *Zofka Kveder (1878–1926)*, ed. A. Jensterle-Doležal, J. Honzak Jahič, Praha 2008.

19 M. Csáky, *Europa im Kleinen: Multiethnizität und Multikulturalität im alten Österreich*, w: *Die eine Welt und Europa – Salzburger Hochschulwochen*, hrsg. H. Schmiedinger, Graz 1995, s. 215.

ety. In her critical observations of the place of women in patriarchal society she depicts different cultural roles. During her residence in Prague, she explored the lively and rich atmosphere of the city and played a role in its cultural life in cafes (Union, Slavia) and student clubs (Slavia). She was the first modern Slovenian female professional writer, journalist, editor, translator and one of the first Slovenian feminists and a great mediator between different cultures. It was typical that her first article published in Czech was a report about the Slovenian women's movement²⁰. She associated herself with the Czech women writers and feminists²¹. At the beginning of the 20th century in Prague, the third generation of Czech women writers surfaced: they were also the first self-proclaimed feminists. To use the words of Libuše Heczková – in Czech society it was the time of the birth of gender equality and the New Woman writer and critic as well²².

Kveder's cultural hybridity is part of the Habsburg myth. Her personal charisma was filled with enthusiasm, power and life energy. She became passionately involved in Czech cultural life also because of the tradition of Slovenian-Czech connections inherited from the 19th century. Her willingness to accept Czech models proved that the literary work of the Czech writers was known to Slovene culture at the end of the 19th century: the main Slovene newspaper, *Ljubljanski zvon*, published modern Czech literature, as well as articles about Czech modernism (*Česká moderna*). Czech literary life – especially women's writing, was much more developed than in Slovenia, so she was also influenced by Czech models of writing.

In Prague, Zofka Kveder absorbed the productive atmosphere of Czech culture, greatly influenced by such leading figures as Tomáš Masaryk, and published articles, translations, essays and travelogues in Czech newspapers. The Prague period was her most productive period: she constructed a network of literary connections with different national literary circles present in Prague: she had contacts with the Croatian "moderna"²³ through her husband Vladimir Jelovšek; she was in touch with Josef Svatopluk Machar – the

20 Z. Kveder, *Ženské hnutí slovinské*, „Slovanský přehled” 1899–1900 (Praha), t. 2 (10), s. 462–465.

21 See the following articles and studies about her life in Prague: J. Chlapec Djordjević, *Iz praških dana Zofke Kvedrove*, w: J. Chlapec Djordjević, *Studije i eseji o feminizmu*, Beograd 1935, s. 176–185; B. Orožen, *Zofka Kveder v Pragi. Ob stoletnici rojstva*, „Dilogi” 1978, nr 4, s. 220–232.

22 L. Heczková, *Píšíci Minervy. Vybrané kapitoly z dějin české literární kritiky*, Praha 2009, s. 263.

23 “Moderna” is a literary movement specific to the literatures of Central Europe.

central figure in Czech “moderna”, the man who introduced Czech “moderna” to Austrian culture; and above all she translated Ivan Cankar – the great Slovene author of modernism – from Slovene into German. She also had connections with the famous, recognised group of German-Jewish authors including Oskar Wiener (a member of the literary circle of Paul Lepin and Franz Werfel). She also published her German translations from Slovene in Prague’s German newspapers *Politik* (Prague) and *Agramer Tagblatt* (Zagreb).

We wish to underline specific literary relationships between Zofka Kveder and Czech women writers and intellectuals. Each and every one of these women was part of her “communication web”, and these connections were crucial to the constructing of her professional writer’s self-consciousness and gender identity. Kveder published most of her stories and essays in women’s newspapers and was especially connected to the Czech editors of these newspapers: to Anna Ziegloserová (1883–1942), writer and – together with her husband – editor of “Ženský obzor” (“Women’s horizon”), Teréza Nováková (1853–1912), editor of “Ženský svět” (“Women’s world”), and later to a friend, Miloslava Síssová (1883–1941), editor of “Vydrovy besedy” (“Vydra talks”) and, from 1915 to 1930, also editor of “Ženský svět”. Kveder also developed a close literary friendship with Ziegloserová and Síssová. Each of them published her translations in the newspapers. They praised Kveder’s work, especially in “Ženský svět”, as the work of a distinguished, modern writer. For example, the renowned critic and literary historian, Arne Novák, wrote very positive critical notes on her short stories in 1906²⁴.

Her real success came after 1906 – after her move to Zagreb. Her work was extensively published in Czech literary sources till the First World War, which was also partly the result of the existence of a common book market across the Austria-Hungarian Empire. She was so popular in Czech culture that after the translation of her short stories *Vesnické povídky* (*Village stories*), fifteen critiques were published. The “Ženský svět” critic, Pavla Maternová (already previously mentioned as a friend of Konopnicka), praised her work in 1907 as a “literal concert of full-blooded modernism”²⁵. From 1903 to 1939, they published 183 of her literary works in Czech newspapers. Some of them were published only in Czech. Paradoxically, especially during the first period, reactions to her work were much more positive than in Slovenia.

24 A. Novák, *Review of Zofka Kveder, Povídky (1906)*, „Ženský svět” 1906, nr 10, s. 261.

25 P. Maternová, *Vesnické povídky Ottové laciné knihovny*, „Ženský svět” 1907, nr 11, s. 239.

Kveder's relations with Zdenka Hásková (1878–1946) were very fruitful. This poet, writer, her translator and critic, had a special intellectual taste for modern literature and remained Kveder's best friend throughout her life²⁶. The beginning of the friendship between Hásková and Kveder was inspired by their work. Their vast lifelong correspondence is a great source of information about their personal and professional life and also – in Kveder's case – an ambitious literary work²⁷: in her letters she tried to write in her distinguished impressionist literary style. She also wrote to her friend about the autobiographical motifs in her writing and explained her narrative strategies²⁸. On the other hand, Hásková expressed herself as a distinguished critic of her friend's work. Hásková was the primary translator of Kveder's books and articles and we might imagine they not only translated, but formulated texts together (Kveder's texts in Czech were mostly published as originals, not translations). We might even speculate about a collective authorship especially in the beginning when Kveder was learning Czech.

Hásková established herself within Czech culture as a prominent critic of women writers and yet, in the case of Kveder, remained her main critic all her life. She attempted to form Kveder's style and expression. In their later correspondence, before the First World War, we find Hásková's critical reflections on Kveder's tendency toward producing ideological works. She criticized her narrative strategies and especially the lack of psychology in her characters²⁹.

Hásková also introduced Kveder to the literary students' club Slavia and initiated relationships with her friends – other Czech women writers such as Růžena Svobodová (1868–1920), Helena Malířová (1877–1940) and Marie Majerová (1882–1967). All these women shared a similar confidence in their

26 See the analysis of her letters in the following articles: A. Jensterle-Doležal, *Pisma Zdenki Háskovi – prostor intíme Zofke Kveder*, w: *Zofka Kvedrová (1878–1926). Receptce její tvorby ve 21. století*, s. 241–245.

27 We can find their correspondence in the LA PNP literary archives in Prague, Ljubljana Rokopisni oddelek NUK (Slovenia), and in Zagreb (Arhiv HAZU). All the letters are written in Czech. We can imagine that many letters were also lost because of the difficult historical situation during and after the First World War.

28 A. Jensterle-Doležal, *Podoba iz sanj. Roman Hanka v luči korespondence med Zofko Kveder in Zdenko Háskovo*, w: *Vzájemným pohledem, V očíh drugega: Česko-slovinšké a slovinsko-české styky ve 20. století*, ed. A. Jensterle-Doležal, Praha 2011, s. 125–143.

29 See the *Letter of Zdenka Hásková to Zofka Kveder*, 14 V 1813, *Literarna zapuščina Zofke Kveder (Literary inheritance of Zofka Kveder)*, fond Ms 1113, D 81, št. 14, Rokopisni oddelek NUK-a, Ljubljana, Slovenia, and the *Letter of Zdenka Hásková to Zofka Kveder*, 7 XII 1914.

authorship, already searching out their gender and professional identities, even sharing similar political opinions. In solidarity, they read each other's work and criticized it. They also wrote articles, appreciating each other as both writers and different personalities.

Růžena Svobodová had a literary salon at the time, which was visited by important Czech intellectuals and cultural figures. Svobodová was older than the others and acted and behaved as a mentor to other younger women writers³⁰. At the beginning of the 20th century she was already a respected literary personality, writing in the impressionist and symbolist style. With her personal and professional charisma, she strongly influenced the others, especially inspiring Kveder with her prose collection *Pěšinkami srdce* (*The Paths of the Heart*, 1902). From a letter³¹ Hásková wrote to Svobodová (in 1902), we know that Kveder read this work twice and was deeply impressed by it. Like *The Paths of the Heart*³², Zofka Kveder's first short stories also dealt with unhappy marriages and the problems of independent women while, as a feminist writer, she particularly emphasized the problems of women within bourgeois society.

As is evident, female authors from the Slavic countries were connected to each other by personal sympathies as well as gender solidarity. That phenomenon was part of the intellectual feminism at the beginning of the 20th century in Prague and the Czech lands. They also shared the collective phantasmas about the past: from somewhere behind their other thoughts and ideas, there also emerged the idea of Slavic solidarity, the belief in Slav connections.

Female writers originating from Slavic nations other than the Czech – but writing in Prague or having close ties with Czech female writers – contributed considerably to the cultural achievements of both their own nations and those of Bohemia. They played an important part in the history and culture of Bohemia and Europe as a whole, but this fact is often underrated – not only because of their gender, but also because of their position “on the

30 Her biographer stressed that Svobodová helped young Czech women writers such as Helena Malířová, Růžena Nosková-Násková, Zdenka Hásková. Marie Majerová, Eva Vrchlická and Marie Hennerová-Pujmanová to become a part of Czech literary life. See: J. Mourková, *Odkazy, Růžena Svobodová*, Praha 1975, s. 164.

31 Zofka Kveder wrote some sentences about this on the second page of the letter which Zdenka Hásková wrote to Růžena Svobodová, letter without date (1902?), see *Pozůstalost Růženy Svobodové (Literary inheritance of Růžena Svobodová)*, fond 496–562, št. 39/66, LA PNP, Strahov, Prague.

32 R. Svobodová. *Pěšinkami srdce, povídky*, Praha 1918.

border between nations”. The works of such writers are often passed over by national centers. We should add that this last statement refers above all to Honorata Zapová and Zofka Kveder; it does not refer to Maria Konopnicka and Eliza Orzeszkowa, whose place in the pantheon of Polish literature is indisputable, although their close contacts with Czech female writers is often forgotten.

One of the reasons behind the formation of the special women writers’ literary community was the relatively open-minded atmosphere of Prague at that time which, similarly to Vienna, was a crossroads of different nationalities and varied cultural exchanges. This was the atmosphere that stimulated challenges to standard or conventional divisions between the genders and their roles in society, along with an active women’s literary community within the Czech cultural system³³.

The purposes and motivations of Slavic women writers based in, or linked in some way, to Prague related to each other and constructed creative literary networks, changing over time: in the 20th century, women writers’ solidarity was not so much the result of Slavic ideas and national movements as it had been in the second half of the 19th century. They related to each other more because of feminist beliefs and ideas, as well as gender solidarity. These fruitful connections occurred within the new context of European modernism.



ABSTRACT

PRAGUE AS A CULTURAL CENTER FOR SLAVIC WOMEN WRITERS

This paper focuses on several Slavic women writers whose literary careers took a new turn in one way or another because of their encounters with the city of Prague: the Polish writer Honorata Zapová née Wiśniowska (1825–1856), who moved to Prague in 1845 and showed great concern about building bridges between Polish and Czech literatures; the Polish writers Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841–1910) and Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910), who came to Prague several times during

33 Czech woman writers, the generation most active at that time, wrote autobiographical novels about this inspired period – about their living at the beginning of the 20th century in Prague: Z. Hásková, *Mládí*, sv. 5, Praha 1900; R. Násková, *Jak šel život: Paměti a zápisky*, Praha 1953; H. Malířová, *Deset životů*, Praha 1937; R. Svobodová, *Barvy Jugoslávie: obrázky z cest 1911*, Praha 1920. In this autobiographical prose they did not write about the role of Zofka Kveder in Czech culture, even though they praised her and abilities as a writer in their correspondence. See also: A. Car, *Czeszki. Trajektorie tożsamości w prozie czeskich modernistek*, Kraków 2012.

their lifetimes, developed a strong interest in Czech culture and established close contacts with several outstanding Czech women (as testified by their correspondence); and the Slovenian writer Zofka Kveder (1879–1926), who lived in Prague from 1900–1906 and began very quickly to write articles and novels in Czech that were favorably received, especially by Czech feminist women writers and critics.

KEYWORDS

beginnings of Czech, Polish and Slovene feminist thought,
Czech, Polish and Slovene women writers in the 19th and 20th centuries,
Slavic reciprocity, Maria Konopnicka, Zofka Kveder, Eliza Orzeszkowa,
Honorata Zapová