FORM, GENDER AND ETHNICITY IN THE WORK OF THREE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CZECH WOMEN WRITERS

By Alfred Thomas

In his study of questions of identity in modern Czech and Slovak literatures, Robert Pynsent traces a trajectory from a collectivist sense of national belonging, based on a perceived set of essentialist characteristics, to the philosophical dissolution of the stable self in the Decadence of the 1890s. Both these models of national and philosophical identity present the self as *donnée* and thereby overlook the role of social discourses (such as feminism and human rights) in the construction of subjectivity[1]. As a consequence, questions of gender invariably get elided in discussions of identity in Czech literature and culture. Historically, gender has been subordinated to the unitary category of ethnic identity, since what unites peoples as Czechs is deemed to be of greater importance than what differentiates them as men and women. The possibility that such a hierarchization of values may have been politically constructed rather than natural has been completely ignored in discussions of Czech national identity.

In nineteenth-century literature ethnic identity was synonymous with the life of the village, which was often favourably contrasted with that of the city. If the former was virtuously and authentically Czech, the latter was tainted with foreign vice, a dichotomy that can be traced back to late medieval verse compositions written in Czech such as the fourteenth-century *Dalimil Chronicle* and *The Verse Legend of Saint Procopius*[2]. Some of the most prominent chroniclers of Czech village life in nineteenth-century Czech literature were women. Not surprisingly, these works have been seen largely in terms of their ethnic content. The most famous Czech woman writer of the nineteenth century – perhaps of all time – is Božena Němcová (1820–1862), author of *Babička* (Granny, 1855), *the* classic novel of Czech village life. Němcová's novel occupies a prominent position within the canon of Czech national literature because it represents the apotheosis of the revivalist cult of the village. Other women writers were deeply influenced by Němcová's work. Karolína Světlá (1830–1899), the founder of the Czech Women's Movement (1871), is perhaps the best-known woman writer of the next generation, one of the *májovci* or members of the *Máj* almanac, founded in 1858, which aspired to inject more cosmopolitanism into Czech literature. An important female writer of the third generation was Gabriela

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[1] See Pynsent, Robert: Questions of Identity. Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality. Budapest-London-New York 1994. See also Šmahelová, Hana: Autor a subjekt v díle Boženy Němcové [Author and Subject in the Work of Božena Němcová]. Praha 1995.

[2] See chapters three and five of my book Anne's Bohemia: Czech Literature and Society, 1310–1420. Minnesota 1998 (forthcoming).

Preissová (1862–1946), the founder of Czech naturalist drama. Her play *Její pastorkyňa* (Her Step-daughter, 1890) is better-known in the English-speaking world as the modified libretto for Leoš Janáček's Romantic opera *Jenůfa*.

In this essay I shall argue that these three writers all attempted to present traditional Czech village life in terms of their own authentic experience as women. This meant trying to reconcile an ethnic ideal of collective existence with the reality of their female experience of disenfranchisement. In the Bohemian Lands, feminism may be said to date from the time of the Prague Uprising of 1848 and its repressive aftermath. Influenced by the French novelist George Sand, Božena Němcová was the first feminist writer in Czech literature. But she was also a nationalist writer who believed deeply in the Czech and Slovak right to equal political representation within the Habsburg Empire. As we shall see, the national interests of the collective and the feminist interests of women are not – and cannot – be perfectly reconciled in her work precisely because Czech nationalists – both male and female – believed that ethnic rights were more important than women's right to emancipation. Němcová was a rare exception to this rule since she believed in emancipation for all compatriots, male and female. And yet when one surveys the critical reception of her work since the mid-nineteenth century, it is not Němcová's belief in female emancipation but her idyllic celebration of Czech village life which has attracted the attention – and adulation – of generations of critics. In this essay, I shall be arguing that this reception reflected a political need to have a Czech woman within the national canon rather than an objectively historical understanding of Němcová's complex position as a Czech woman. If Němcová's life and work constitutes a national trophy, it follows that this trophy must remain pristinely gleaming within the national canon; above all it should never be removed from its show-case and examined at close quarters.

Světlá and Preissová's position within the national canon have been eclipsed and overshadowed by Němcová, less because they are aesthetically inferior to her than because Němcová's position within the national canon represents a *token female presence*. Moreover, to link her with other women writers in any generic manner would be tantamount to admitting that her feminist beliefs are as worthy of critical examination as her espousal of the national cause. This is not to say that these other writers are ignored altogether. Světlá's work has certainly attracted the favourable attention of women scholars in particular. Preissová, however, has fared less well. Her importance as the founder of Czech naturalist drama may be said to constitute a classic example of how the interests of genre and gender do not always dovetail in an harmonious fashion. The connection between genre and gender was in part the consequence of the nineteenth-century tendency to equate realism (and its later development naturalism) with the male inclination to describe the truth as it is and idealism with the female tendency to prescribe what the truth should be. The gendering of this realism/idealism binary as male and female (respectively) is typically expressed in a passage which George Sand attributes to Balzac, where the latter identifies his own writing as realistic, and the former's as idealistic:

> You are looking at man as he should be; I take him as he is. Believe me, we are both right. Both paths lead to the same end. I also like exceptional human beings; I am one myself. I need them to make my ordinary characters stand out, and I never sacrifice them unnecessarily. But the

ordinary human beings interest me more than they do you. I make them larger than life; I idealize them in the opposite sense, in their ugliness and in their stupidity. I give them frightful deformities or grotesque proportions. You could not do that: you are clever not to want to look at people and things that would given you nightmares. Idealize what is pretty and beautiful; that is a woman's job[3].

By collapsing the arbitrary opposition between romantic idealism and naturalism, Preissová was also challenging the gender hierarchy upon which such a distinction was founded. In one review of her play *Her Step-Daughter*, she was accused by a prominent contemporary male compatriot of transgressing literary and social barriers, an accusation which perhaps accounts in part for the neglect her work has suffered in the annals of Czech literary criticism, particularly compared with the mass of scholarly writings available on Němcová's life and work. Yet in spite of Němcová's canonic status as the "first modern woman" in Czech literature, there is a kind of inverse parallel between their critical reception. For if Preissová has been almost completely excluded from the canon of nineteenth-century Czech literature, Němcová's prominence is based almost exclusively on her idealistic novel of village life, *Granny*. Critics have paid far less attention to her so-called "realistic fairy tales" written in the 1850s. The reason for this neglect, I think, is not because these shorter texts are less impressive as works of fiction than *Granny* but because they are not so easily assimilated into the national canon which equates female writing with the ideal and male writing with the real.

In this essay I shall concentrate on Němcová's story *Divá Bára* (Wild Bára, 1856), Světlá's tale *Nebožka Barbora* (Poor Dead Barbora, 1873) and Preissová's play *Her Step-Daughter* (1890). I shall explore ways in which their realistic portrayal of idyllic Czech village life begs important political questions about the author's ethnic and generic identity as Czech women. Form, gender und ethnicity, I shall claim, are not mutually exclusive categories but are deeply and inextricably implicated in each other. If I succeed in demonstrating the truth of this assertion, my conclusion must pose questions about how Czech women writers are represented within the national canon and how that representation should be subjected to critical scrutiny in the future.

Wild Bára

Božena Němcová was born Barbora Panklová in Vienna, where her mother worked as a servant and her father as a groom. She spent most of her childhood in Ratibořice in East Bohemia, where her parents settled soon after her birth and where her father was in service with Princess Kateřina Zaháňská. Young Barbora was brought up by her maternal grandmother, Magdalena Novotná, who had a strong influence on her favourite grandchild and whose story-telling inspired young Barbora to try her hand at creative writing. At the age of seventeen Barbora made an unhappy marriage with a customs-official named Josef Němec. She had four children, whom she supported through her own writing when her marriage failed. Both Barbora and Němec supported the 1848 Uprising. When the Prague Uprising collapsed, Němec was dismissed

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[3] Quoted from The Story of My Life: The Autobiography of George Sand. A Group Translation. Ed. by Thelma Jurgrau. Albany, N.Y. 1991, 923.

from his work and moved to Hungary. Barbora stayed behind in Prague with her four children, enduring considerable poverty and hardship.

Barbora (from henceforth Němcová) wrote several books of Czech and Slovak fairy tales, several ethnographic studies, books of stories of village life, and her best-known and best-loved work, the novel *Granny*. Written at the time of her greatest bereavement, after the death of her beloved son, Hynek, and when she herself was already seriously ill, *Granny* was based on her recollection of her own happy childhood and her adored grandmother. It was first published in 1855 and has since become the most widely read classic of Czech literature. *Granny* is an idyllic study of Czech rural life where all classes live in blessed harmony, disturbed only by outsiders.

Němcová's early years coincided with the final phase of the National Revival. In the year of her birth (1820), Jan Kollár had published his epic poem *The Daughter of Sláva*, a collection of narrative and lyrical sonnets which celebrated the spirit of Pan-Slavism as the allegorical figure of a pagan goddess named Sláva. The symbiosis of nationhood and womanhood which Kollár's poem promoted goes a long way toward explaining how a nineteenth-century woman like Němcová became a national symbol for generations of Czech readers. Since Czech women's perception of the nation tended to be inseparable from their perception of themselves *qua* women, it is not surprising that the young Němcová colluded in the creation of her own myth. In an early poem entitled "To Czech Women", written under the influence of her patriotic lover Václav Nebeský in 1843, she reinforces the stereotype of the innately frail woman:

Muž, ach ten má meč svůj ostrý,
rámě, sílu – muž má všecko;
ale utlá, slabá žena
jen své srdce a – své děcko[4].

Man, oh he has his own sharp sword,/arms and strength – man has everything;/but a frail, weak woman has only her heart – and her child.

The myth of Němcová as the suffering mother of the nation (she died young) has continued to the present day in conformity with this persona and has been reinforced by the potent precedent of the Virgin Mary. Significant in this connection is the title of František Halas's verse collection *Naše paní Božena Němcová* (Our Lady Božena Němcová, 1947) and the recent volume of criticism of her work, *Božena Němcová: paní našeho času* (Božena Němcová: A Lady of Our Time[5]).

In perpetuating this myth, critics have insisted that Němcová's writing – like her image – transcends the social context of her time. In an essay published in 1930, Arne Novák claimed that Němcová's fiction has a timeless quality denied to contemporary Czech male writers:

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[4] Sebrané spisy Boženy Němcové. Ed. by Marie Gebauerová. Praha 1910, vol. 9, 3–4, here p. 3.

[5] See for example the collection of essays entitled Božena Němcová. Paní našeho času [Božena Němcová. A Lady of Our Time]. Ed. by Karol Rosenbaum et al. Praha 1986. For a life of Božena Němcová, see Václav Tille: Božena Němcová. Praha 1939.

A hle, mezi těmito přechodnými zjevy myslitelů a publicistů, učenců a básníků' ... stojí také ženská postava, první naše moderní žena vůbec, Božena Němcová, která silou básnické své osobnosti dovedla překlenouti bytostné spory oné kritické doby, a třebaže za cenu životního štěstí, vytvořiti vyšší synthesu, která ucházela mužským jejím druhům[6].

Behold, among these transitional phenomena of thinkers and publicists, teachers and poets ... stands a female figure, our first modern woman altogether, Božena Němcová, who through the strength of her poetic personality succeeded in transcending the ontological debates of that critical time, and perhaps at the cost of a happy life, in creating a higher synthesis which eluded her male associates.

By raising Němcová symbolically above the social debates of her male contemporaries, Novák denies her an autonomous voice within the polyphony of Czech literature. His position is insidious because it panders to a certain kind of idealistic feminism which emphasizes the transhistorical, transnational and transclass specifities of women's writing. But as Naomi Schor has pointed out in connection with George Sand – as we shall see, a major influence on Czech women writers of the nineteenth century – "female specificity in writing is also contextual, local, a microspecificity that shifts opportunistically in response to changing macrohistorical and literary historical circumstances."[7] Like Sand, Němcová was deeply involved in the local events happening around her. During the revolutionary year of 1848, she published several political pamphlets in the spirit of revolution – in *Národní noviny*, in *Česká včela* and in *Květy*[8]. Moreover, her fiction was capable of arousing a hostile reception. In *Květy*, May 30, 1846, one critic accused Němcová of giving her stories a bias in favour of female emancipation[9].

Like her contemporary and friend, the satirist and journalist, Karel Havlíček-Borovský (1821–1856), the political insights Němcová acquired during and after the crucial events of 1848 forced her to re-think and reject the political romanticism of her youthful poem "To Czech Women". Němcová's mature work may be said to mark a transition from an idealistic-essentialist vision of Czech womanhood – as enshrined in "To Czech Women" – to a more radical belief that identity is culturally constructed, an insight born of her acute social awareness of the plight of disenfranchised social groups (workers, women and Slovaks). During the time of Austrian oppression known as the "Bach Reaction" (named after Baron Alexander von Bach, the repressive head of the Austrian government from 1852 to 1859), the political rights of minority groups had to be explored in the carefully encoded form of belles-lettres, since a free press was proscribed. Only in 1858, toward the close of the Bach Reaction, were Adolf Heyduk, Vítězslav Hálek, Josef Václav Sládek, and Karolína Světlá able to

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[6] Novák, Arne: Česká literatura a národní tradice [Czech Literature and National Tradition]. Praha 1995, 30–37. For a similar use of the word synthesis, see Krejčí, Karel: Božena Němcová a světová literatura [Božena Němcová and World Literature]. In: Božena Němcová. Paní našeho času 79–116, here 81.

[7] See the introduction to Sebrané spisy Boženy Němcové [The Collected Works of Božena Němcová]. Praha 1919, vol. 11, vi.

[8] Schor, Naomi: George Sand and Idealism. New York 1993, 48.

[9] Pech, Stanley Z.: The Czech Revolution of 1848. Chapel Hill 1969, 326.

found a literary almanac named *Máj* in honour of the great Romantic poem by Karel Hynek Mácha. This new generation, known as the *májovci* after their almanac, conceived of poetry as a vehicle of political commentary and protest against social injustice. Heyduk and Hálek embraced the cause of the Slovaks and gypsies, addressing them as "brothers"[10]. Sládek spent two years in America as a teacher and returned to Bohemia to eulogize in verse the fate of the persecuted native American Indians. By exploring political issues in traditional verse form, this generation of Czech writers aspired to graft a new awareness of political rights onto traditional nationalism. In this way, the essentialist belief in an unchanging national typology as reflected in literature was coming into conflict with a new political awareness that identity was a product of cultural difference.

This tension within Czech literature of the 1850s has its social and intellectual origins in the Enlightenment ideals of the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. The belief that all men were born equal quickly gave rise to debates about the social position of women[11]. Were women innately inferior to men, as western thought had consistently maintained since ancient times, or were they on a par with men? In England of the 1790s, the radical writer Mary Wollstonecraft claimed that women were rational thinking beings, a belief that ran counter to the ancient Aristotelian equation of women with emotion and men with intellect. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) spawned a conservative reaction in the form of many tracts and writings which appealed to the "natural" difference between the sexes[12]. The most prominent of these anti-Wollstonecraftian writers was Hannah More, author of *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799). In this book More makes a rousing appeal to English women to support the national cause at a time of war with Napoleonic France: "I would call on [women] to come forward, and contribute their full and fair proportion towards the saving of their country. But I would call on them to come forward, without departing from the refinement of their character, without derogating from the dignity of their rank, without blemishing the delicacy of their sex."[13]

Němcová's access to the new radical and socialist ideas of the time was mediated through the influence of František Matouš Klácel (1808–82), a priest and a brilliant professor of philosophy in the Episcopal Institute of Brno. Klácel was the author of *Listy přítele k přítelkyni o původu socialismu a komunismu* (Letters to a Female Friend about the Origins of Socialism and Communism, 1848), which he wrote for

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[10] For the relation of the *májovci* to Slovakia, see Jeřábek, Dušan: Tradice a osobnosti. K problematice české literatury 19. století [Tradition and Personalities. Toward the Problem of Czech Literature of the 19th Century]. Brno 1988, 91–110.

[11] See Taylor, Barbara: Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century. Cambridge Mass., 1983. For feminism in central Europe in the nineteenth century, see Rudinsky, Norma L.: Incipient Feminists: Women Writers in the Slovak National Revival. Columbus, Ohio 1991.

[12] Wollstonecraft, Mary: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Ed. by Miriam Brody. Harmondsworth 1992.

[13] Quoted from Vivien Jones's introduction to Austen, Jane: Pride and Prejudice. Harmondsworth 1996, xvi.

Němcová. After appearing as a series of articles in the newspaper *Moravské noviny*, they were later published in book form[14]. Němcová had met Klácel probably in 1844, while he was in Prague after his first break with the Church. His *Letters* were a compilation, and in many places a free translation, of Lorenz von Stein's *Der Sozialismus und Kommunismus des heutigen Frankreichs* (Socialism and Communism in Contemporary France), published in Leipzig in 1848. His delineation of socialism from the radical Czech sect of the Adamites in the fifteenth century to the events of 1848 interested Němcová, but she was especially fascinated by the brief account in letter eighteen of the Saint-Simonian advocacy of equal rights for women[15].

The immediate product of Němcová's socialist and feminist education was a short pamphlet entitled "Hospodyně, na slovíčko!" (A Word to Housewives!), which was published under Klácel's editorship in *Moravské noviny* on November 29, 1848[16]. "A Word to Housewives!" marks a shift away from "To Czech Women." In this early poem the author had defined women as weaker than men and therefore implicitly inferior to them. There is no trace of any such hierarchization of the sexes in "A Word to Housewives!" which advocates the emancipation of women in the revolutionary spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity. The tension between Němcová's earlier belief in the "natural" difference between the sexes and her new-found insights into female subordination as a culturally-derived condition came to characterize many European women writers of the early nineteenth century. An important European woman writer of the first half of the nineteenth century who combines these antipodal models of femininity is the novelist George Sand. As Naomi Schor has pointed out in her illuminating introduction to Sand's first independent novel, *Indiana* (1832), the narrative consists of a male voice which expresses essentialist ideas about the natural difference between the sexes and a sexually unmarked humanist voice which deems female identity and that of other oppressed groups such as black slaves to be culturally determined[17].

As her correspondence reveals[18], Němcová was an avid admirer of George Sand, herself deeply involved in the politics of the 1848 Revolution which abolished the authoritarian July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe (1830–1848) and inaugurated the short-lived Second Republic (1848–51). For Sand, art, politics and morality were intimately linked, which explains why in the nineteenth century her popularity exceeded

[14] Klácel, František Matouš: Listy přítele k přítelkyni o původu socialismu a komunismu [Letters from a Friend to a Female Friend about the Origin of Socialism and Communism]. Praha 1848.

[15] Ibid. 84.

[16] Němcová, Božena: Hospodyně, na slovíčko! [A Word to Housewives!]. In: Sebrané spisy. Praha 1919, vol. 11, 1–6.

[17] See Sand, George: Indiana. Tr. by Sylvia Raphael. Oxford-New York 1994, xv–xvi. Not all critics of Indiana agree on this issue. For a reading of the novel which highlights its performative and exclusively constructionist vision of gender, see Petrey, Sandey: George and Georgina Sand: Realist Gender in Indiana. In: Textuality and Sexuality. Reading Theories and Practice. Ed. by Judith Still and Michael Worton. Manchester-New York 1991, 33–47.

[18] Věřím Ti, že se Ti Sandová líbí, i mým ideálem je ta žena [I believe you that you like Sand; that woman is also my ideal]. In: Sebrané spisy. Praha 1914, vol. 13, 69 (Letter to Žofie Rottová, dated October 3, 1852).

that of any other French writer in central and eastern Europe. Sand's advocacy of human rights appealed to post-1848 Czech writers like Němcová, who saw themselves as enslaved subjects of an autocratic, foreign regime. Poised between the ideals of revivalist ideology with its emphasis on natural differences between ethnic groups and a new feminist-socialist insight into identity as a cultural construct, Němcová's fiction may be said to have inherited and reproduced the discursive tension between a humanist-inspired and a male-inspired essentialist narrative voice, which Schor has discerned in Sand's early fiction. In the story *Baruška* (1852)[19], for example, based on the German story *Die Frau Professorin* (The Teacher's Wife) by Bertold Auerbach, a village girl's unhappy marriage to a painter is transformed into a successful relationship thanks to the heroine's "natural" goodness. In a clear polemic with Auerbach, Němcová makes Baruška's love for her husband and forgiveness of his failures the means of his salvation, a motif which recalls the narrative conventions of many early-nineteenth century female novels, for example Jane Eyre's selfless love for her unhappy employer Mr. Rochester in the famous English novel by Charlotte Brontë.

Němcová's rewriting of Auerbach's narrative reveals the specific influence of George Sand's socialist ideas of equality between the sexes but also her Rousseauesque emphasis on the natural goodness of rural life. In Sand's novels natural gender roles are challenged and, in some cases, reversed; her female characters are allowed to have happy, rather than tragic, fates; they are assertive and passionate, while the male protagonists are effeminate and passive[20]. Němcová's plots after 1848 betray a similar desire to portray strong female characters with traditional masculine attributes. This preference is particularly apparent in Sand's pastoral novel set in the Berry region of France, *La petite Fadette* (Little Fadette, 1849), with its forceful, yet natural peasant heroine Fadette. Němcová read *La petite Fadette* (in German translation) with great enthusiasm. She was also familiar with it in a dramatic adaption entitled *Die Grille* by Ch. Birch-Pfeifferová. Němcová translated this German play into Czech, which received its première at the Estates Theatre in Prague on February 18, 1858, two years after the publication of *Wild Bára*[21].

Although Czech scholars have pointed out the important influence of *La petite Fadette*[22] on the story *Wild Bára* (1856), they have omitted to explore it in a detailed fashion. The same is true of the intertextual relationship between Němcová's story and the folk ballads of her contemporary and compatriot Karel J. Erben, *Kytice*, published three years earlier than *Wild Bára*[23]. Just as Němcová assimilates and adapts Sand's

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[19] The story is anthologized in Patero dívek [Five Girls]. Ed. by Miloslav Novotný. Praha 1941, 202–250.

[20] See Courtrivon, Isabelle de: Weak Men and Fatal Women: The Sand Image. In: Homosexualities and French Literature. Cultural Contexts/Critical Texts. Ed by George Stambolian and Elaine Marks. Ithaca-London 1979, 210–227.

[21] See Každa, Jaromír: Božená Němcová a dramatické umění [Božena Němcová and Dramatic Art]. In: Božena Němcová. Paní našeho času, 117–174, here p. 131f.

[22] For Sand's influence on Němcová, see Kopal, Josef: George Sandová a Božena Němcová [George Sand and Božena Němcová]. Praha 1927.

[23] For the Czech text of the story, see Patero dívek 116–57. For an English translation of Wild Bára, Czech Prose. An Anthology. Ed. and tr. by William E. Harkins. Ann Arbor 1978, 113–155.

proto-feminist and socialist ideas to fit her ethnic tale of Czech country life, so, conversely, does she rewrite the plots (unconsciously or not) of Erben's conservative national folk ballads to make them fit her progressive, proto-feminist point of view. This assimilation of two generic modes – one romantic and idealistic, the other realistic – involved the attempt to reconcile two discourses of gender identity, one "cultural," derived from Sand and western feminism, the other "natural" and part of a larger patriarchal and nationalist ideology.

Before exploring the story in detail, it may be useful to delineate the plots of three of Erben's ballads which are reproduced in *Wild Bára*. In *Polednice* (The Noon Witch), a distraught, overworked mother threatens her naughty child with the witch who is said to stalk recalcitrant children at the noon-hour. When the child continues to be unruly, she invokes the supernatural hag who comes to take the recalcitrant infant away. The terrified mother and child huddle in the corner of the room, the former accidentally smothering her offspring in her protective embrace. What appears to be divine punishment turns out to be nothing more than patriarchal control camouflaged as a supernatural old woman.

In the ballad *Štědrý večer* (Christmas Eve), two maidens dig a hole in the surface of a frozen pond and peer into the watery darkness to divine their fates. One girl, Hannah, sees the image of her beloved Václav to whom, within a year, she is married. But the other girl, Marie, sees red lights in a sacristy and a coffin; and within the same period of time she has died, punished for the sin of seeking to usurp destiny. The story's rigid dichotomy of marriage/death exemplifies nineteenth-century women's social plight, presenting a stark alternative between adherence to the social convention of marriage and social exclusion symbolized by death. In Erben's ballads, woman as wife and mother paradoxically personifies the moral-social order and perpetually seeks to undermine it. Hence her deviation from the moral Law must be severely punished in order to restore the harmony between man and his world.

In *Svatební košile* (Wedding Shirts), a young virgin transgresses against nature by praying to the Virgin Mary to bring back her lover from his travels, ignorant of the fact that he has died. When the wish is granted, it is not the familiar lover but a predatory vampire who comes to claim his bride. The unsuspecting maiden agrees to accompany the vampire to his "orchard" (a cemetery), and they ride on horseback to their destination. On the way, the vampire is perturbed by various religious accoutrements which belong to the girl such as a rosary, missal and crucifix; and in an extraordinary rapistic fantasy, he discards each offending and protective item.

Unburdened by these repressive objects of religious devotion, the lovers pass over flint-stone cliffs, and the maiden cuts her feet on the sharp edges, leaving trails of virginal blood symbolic of sexual penetration. When the girl eventually discovers that her lover is really a vampire, she flees to a mortuary and bolts the door against him. The lover calls upon a corpse lying in the mortuary to rise up and open the door. In despair, and about to become the victim of the vampire, the girl appeals once more for forgiveness from the supernatural power invoked to bring back the lover. Miraculously, her wish is granted: the ghost vanishes, the corpse returns to its stone slab and the girl emerges to see her wedding shirts torn to shreds and scattered across the grave stones. The concluding stanza of the poem, addressed to the female reader, admonishes her

to avoid the fate of the wedding shirts. A male fantasy of rape thus achieves closure as a respectable moral stricture on female waywardness.

Let us now turn to *Wild Bára* in order to explore how the author mediates between Sand's and Erben's plots to fit her agenda as a Czech woman writer. Bára is the daughter of Jakub and his wife, also called Bára, whose house lies symbolically between the familiar social milieu of the village and the mythic, fairy-tale world of the forest. The strange circumstances of Bára's birth lead to a conflict of interpretation in the village: the midwife claims that she is an ordinary baby, while other old women suspect that she is a supernatural changeling planted by the Noon Witch. Following the plot of *La petite Fadette*, in which a virtuous, strong-minded little girl is shunned as a sorceress by the villagers, Němcová contrasts the enlightened vision of the midwife with the superstitious bigotry of the old women. At the same time, the detail of the Noon Witch can be seen as a subtle critique of Erben's ballad of the same name.

Bára grows up to be an independent, good-natured girl but remains the victim of prejudice because of her tomboyish individuality. She forms an intense homosocial relationship with the priest's niece, Elška – the embodiment of cultural femininity – in the course of which the latter leaves for Prague to receive the kind of superficial education deemed appropriate to a young lady of the day. Devoted to Elška, Bára patiently awaits her friend's return. After an absence of three years, Elška returns to the village as the fiancée of a Prague burgher. On St John's Eve, the two girls perform the traditional virginal practice of casting home-made wreaths from the river-bank in order to divine their future, a scene clearly reminiscent of Erben's *Christmas Eve*. Bára's wreath gets stuck on the branch of a willow while Elška is carried away by the current of the river, symbolizing their divergent fates: Elška will leave the village for married life in Prague while Bára will remain in the countryside.

In a humorous subplot, Bára tries to foil the bailiff's attempt to woo her friend by disguising herself as a ghost in order to frighten him away. When her ruse is uncovered by the villagers, the local priest – in consultation with the elder, alderman and schoolteacher – decides to submit Bára to a public humiliation by locking her in the cemetery charnel-house for one whole night. But the story ends happily when the mysterious forester, whom Bára knew only by sight, arrives, discovers what has happened, and breaks down the door of the charnel-house. Having liberated the girl, he asks for her hand in marriage. She accepts and the couple disappears to the forester's ancestral home in the woods.

If Bára and Elška recall Sand's male twins Landry and Sylvinet in *La petite Fadette*[24], they are equally reminiscent of Hannah and Marie in Erben's ballad, *Christmas Eve*, the main difference being that Němcová's heroines ordain their own fate by making the wreaths follow their personal desires, the former wishing to remain in the countryside, the latter intent on moving to Prague. In Erben's ballad, by contrast, it is not the girl's subjective desire but fate which determines happiness for one and tragedy for the other. By incorporating the folk motif of the wreaths, Němcová again contrasts essentialist, conservative beliefs about women with a proto-feminist alternative, thereby critiquing Erben's fatalistic and tragic plot about doomed heroines.

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[24] Sand, George: La petite Fadette. Paris 1967.

Another example of Němcová's rewriting of a scene from an Erben ballad is Bára's incarceration in the charnel-house, which parallels the final scene in *Wedding Shirts*, where the maiden locks herself in the mortuary to escape her predatory vampire-lover. Němcová transforms this gothic scene of horror and male sadism into a social allegory of the harsh, unfair treatment of women. Whereas Erben's vampire-lover's aggression is a male rape fantasy, the forester's equivalent act of breaking down the door of the charnel-house is a feminist fantasy of social justice triumphant. Whereas Erben's poem ends with a grim admonition to young women to be obedient and demure and not to succumb to their innately uncontrollable natures. Němcová's story concludes with the opposite message, since Bára is not chastened but vindicated. The flipside of the sexually rapacious vampire-lover of *Wedding Shirts*, the forester is a platonic messiah-figure who – like the idealized Sir Ralph in Sand's *Indiana*-spirits the heroine away to a distant idyll.

In spite of Němcová's skill in integrating Sandian feminism a traditional folk plot, we can still detect a tension in the story's dénouement. If Bára's unfair punishment is the consequence of her inferior cultural status as a woman and a peasant, her identity as a culturally constructed individual contradicts the essentialist picture of her as a "wild" and spontaneous child of nature. By attempting to fuse folk-tale motifs with social realism in the manner of one of Sand's rural novels, the author comes up against complications which are at once genre and gender-related. The idealist mode inherent in the ethnic folk tale cannot be perfectly reconciled with the realistic mode of the social novel. By analogy, the ideological interests of femininity (associated with idealism) are ultimately incompatible with those of masculinity (associated with realism). It is perhaps to circumvent these generic tensions that Němcová has her heroine transported from the realistic social milieu of the village to the unambiguously idealistic fairy-tale world of the forest. The same problem faced Sand in her novel *Indiana*, in the epilogue of which Sir Ralph saves his Créole cousin Indiana from a tragic fate in France by taking her back to the idyllic Bourbon Island where she was born and where they devote their lives to freeing poor and infirm slaves. If Bára's fate is forged in the real world of the village, it is in the idealistic locus of the forest that it finds fulfilment. Ironically enough, Němcová's sudden switch from the realistic setting of the village to the happy, fairy-tale setting of the forest replicates the bifurcative conclusion of Erben's *Christmas Eve* with its drastically polarized choice for women between acceptance of social conformity – represented by Hannah's marriage to her village sweetheart – and the exclusion symbolized by Marie's death. Seen in this light, Marie's death in Erben's ballad and Bára's departure for the forest are inversely parallel. If, then, the forest is a space of idyllic egalitarianism – like the Valley of Bernica in *Indiana* – it is equally a death-like "other" place of absolute exclusion confronting nineteenth-century women unwilling or unable to conform to a prescribed social role. No-one understood this better than early nineteenth-century women writers like Sand and Němcová. When Sand makes Sir Ralph and Indiana resolve to jump to their deaths into the ravine below as a prelude to their idyllic life in the valley of Bernica, she seems to be suggesting that there is a fine and ambiguous line between death and salvation[25]. The tragic fate ordained by so

[25] Sand, George: Indiana. Paris 1983, 312–313.

many male writers for their transgressive heroines and the paradisal alternative envisioned by their female detractors like Sand and Němcová are, in this respect, merely opposite ways of representing in an imaginary form the restricted options available to nineteenth-century women.

Poor Dead Barbora

Karolína Světlá (1830–1899) is the pen-name of Johanna Rottová, the daughter of a Prague tradesman. She married Petr Mužák in 1852, who helped her to strengthen her already awakened sense of Czech patriotism. She grew very fond of her husband's birthplace in north-eastern Bohemia, the village of Světlá (whence she derived her pen-name) at the foot of the Ještěd Mountains, and spent several months there every year. The locale, people and their dialect were to serve as material for her writing. In 1862 she had an affair with Jan Neruda, but she broke off the relationship because of the ensuing gossip and scandal. The Rott family was acquainted with Božena Němcová, whose literary career and writings had a great influence on Světlá's own life and work. She resembles Němcová in her ethnographic interests and the use of fairy-tale motifs in her fiction. Světlá's heroines are strong and devoted, but they invariably sacrifice their own happiness from a sense of duty. Such is the moral of her novel *Vesnický román* (A Village Novel, 1867). Both here and in *Kříž u potoka* (The Cross by the Brook, 1868), the heroine gives up her own love but accepts her husband's extra-marital relationship. Ultimately her true love redeems her husband.

What we find in these works is an attempt to reconcile the fairy-tale idealism of the happy-ever-after ending with a feminist desire to portray relations between the sexes in a socially realistic light. A good example of this attempted synthesis is the story *Poor Dead Barbora* from the collection of tales entitled *Kresby z Ještědí* (Sketches from the Ještěd Country, 1873)[26]. It tells of a life-long love affair between Barbora, a strong and lively girl in the mould of Sand's and Němcová's heroines, and the shy and retiring boy Matýsek. In the course of the story, the girl and boy defy popular opinion which tries to drive them apart as an unsuitable and unconventional couple. They marry, whereupon Barbora comes into an unexpected inheritance of a house and some land. She sets up Matýsek as the master of the household, who proceeds to lord himself over the female housekeeper and her four children. One day, Barbora develops a mysterious disease which rots her bones. Knowing now that she will soon die and anxious to spare her devoted husband unnecessary grief, she persuades him to go to another district to gather cranberries which are said to have a miraculously curative effect. When Matýsek leaves, Barbora dies and is quickly buried. When the husband returns, he refuses to accept the truth of his wife's death and pretends that she has merely gone away on a pilgrimage to her mother's home of Bezděz in northern Bohemia. Only during private prayer at Mass does he show his grief at his wife's death. So deep is this grief that he dies from it. The story concludes as he is found dead at the end of a church service, anxious to join his poor dead Barbora.

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[26] Sebrané spisy Karolíny Světlé [The Collected Works of Karolína Světlá]. Praha 1900, vol. VIII, 151–181. For an English translation, see H a r k i n s (ed.): Czech Prose. An Anthology, 157–182. – See also Ř e p k o v á, Marie: Vypravěčské umění Karolíny Světlé [The Narrative Art of K. S.]. Ústí nad Labem 1977.

This story may be said to represent an amalgam of idealistic and realistic elements. At the heart of the tale is the traditional village setting into which Světlá introduces realistic features. For example she reverses the gender relations between the protagonists so that Barbora possesses strong male characteristics while Matýsek is presented in passive, feminine terms. Even when he assumes the mastership of the household, it is at Barbora's instigation and with her financial backing. Světlá also mentions that a woman in the village was beaten to death by her husband. She is also quite unsentimental about the bullying way Matýsek treats the children in his charge. At the same time, however, the writer adheres to one of the most fundamental features of nineteenth-century romantic idealism: the sacrificial death of the heroine (usually of some mysterious disease). Barbora's premature and unexplained demise can be seen as a narrative device to bring necessary closure and resolution to a story which mediates uncertainly between folk idealism and social realism. Just as Bára is whisked away to the forest by her messiah-like saviour at the end of Němcová's story so that her social predicament as a free female agent can be reconciled with the preservation of the village as a social idyll, so may Barbora's death be seen as a way of side-stepping the problematic status of a woman whose dominant role and independence clearly deviate from the passive and subordinate social role assigned to women in representations of Czech rural life. It is as if both writers explored so far were (unconsciously at least) repressing their feminist desire to create a totally realistic account of women's lives within the village by resorting to the kind of traditional narrative devices employed within folk literature in general. In this sense, the interests of ethnicity and gender are not always in harmony with each other.

Her Step-Daughter

Gabriela Preissová (nee Sekerová) was born in Bohemia, but she visited Moravia as a child and at the age of eighteen settled there when she married Jan Preiss, a German-speaking official at a sugar factory who worked in the small town of Hodonín in south-eastern Moravia. Hodonín is the center of a border area between Moravia and Slovakia known as Slovácko. Preissová spent nine years in Hodonín (1880–1889), getting to know the local people, their way of life, and collecting folk embroidery. While Hodonín itself, like most Moravian towns of that time, had a predominantly German-speaking population, Preissová was able to travel through the Czech-speaking villages of the region on her husband's business trips. She wrote of her experiences in a series of short stories which she began to publish in journals from 1884 onwards, later assembling a three-volume collection entitled *Pictures from Moravian Slovakia* (1886–1889). One of these stories – *Gazdina roba* (The Farmer's Woman) – attracted the attention of the director of the National Theatre in Prague, František A. Šubert (1849–1915), who encouraged Preissová to turn it into a play[27]. It was performed in 1889 with such great success that Preissová was immediately encouraged to write another. This was *Her Step-Daughter*, also set in Moravian Slovakia. This time, the reviews of the première in Prague (November 9, 1890) were mixed, but mainly negative. The

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[27] Preissová, Gabriela: Gazdina roba [The Farmer's Woman]. Praha 1956.

leading Czech poet Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853–1912) found the drama's rebellious spirit unsuitable for the pen of a woman:

The theme of the play, which reeks of the criminal courts, is elaborated in complete accordance with the recipe already provided by Tolstoy, Strindberg and Hauptmann, and its basic idea, the murder of a baby, is particularly reminiscent of Tolstoy's *The Power of Darkness*. The good points of the play are weighed down by the unsympathetic and embarrassing atmosphere of the whole, which suggests the pen of a young literary rebel rather than that of a woman[28].

The *furore* created by the play's first performance clearly exposes a correlation between form and feminism: how dare a *woman* present the village in such low-life terms? As we have seen with respect to Balzac in the introduction to this essay, in European nineteenth-century culture women writers were expected to be idealists rather than realists. It was one thing for a man like Ibsen of Tolstoy to address the pressing social issues of the day in a realistic vein in the public forum of the theatre; it was quite another for a woman to do so.

From the late eighties onwards several Czech dramatists had attempted to portray Czech life as truthfully as possible. Following the Russians Belinsky and Dobrolyubov rather than the western theoreticians of Realism, they had taken their subject-matter from the village, convinced that only there was typical Czech life to be found. Where Ibsen portrayed the small-town Norwegian *bourgeoisie*, the Czechs looked to the peasantry with its rich folk traditions beloved of folklorists, musicians (such as Janáček) and ethnographers alike. According to Karel Brušák, these dramatists, even when dealing with the darker side of village life – greed, brutality and alcoholism – avoided naturalism and rarely portrayed peasant characters as being influenced by social conditions[29].

Preissová's *The Farmer's Woman* and *Her Step-Daughter* went further than previous Czech drama in exploring the relationship between individuals and their social environment. What sets Preissová apart from previous Czech Realism was her authentic exploration of the relationship between peasant men and women. Where earlier dramatists continued to see Czech or Slovak village life in terms of conventionalized social relations, Preissová's drama explores the complexities of the relationship between men and women. In her first play, *The Farmer's Woman*, Mánek, the son of a rich farmer, loves the poor and head-strong Eva, who refuses him because she has been slighted by his mother. When her subsequent marriage fails, she and Mánek, now also married, become lovers again. They leave as seasonal harvesters for Austria where they live as man and wife. But when they are prevented from being divorced from their spouses, Eva, driven by despair and guilt, drowns herself in the Danube. In this play Preissová introduces Romantic-idealistic themes but her treatment-including the use of authentic dialect and folklore elements – is wholly naturalistic. On the one hand, Mánek and Eva's unhappy fate reflects the difficult social conditions of the time, such as the extremely strict divorce laws and the opprobrium attached to adultery. On the other

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[28] Jaroslav Vrchlický, review of *Her Step-Daughter*, in Hlas národa [Voice of the Nation]. November 11, 1890. Quoted from Brušák, Karel: Drama into Libretto. In: Janáček. Jenůfa and Katya Kabanová. London-New York 1985, 13–20, here p. 13.

[29] Brušák: Drama into Libretto 13f.

hand, Eva's suicide seems to exemplify the Romantic-idealistic convention that woman must suffer for a mistake or crime already committed. In Eva's case, this was the initial rejection of Mánek because she was slighted by his mother.

Preissová's second and better-known play – *Her Step-Daughter* – is a more successful fusion of Romantic-idealistic convention and realistic-naturalistic innovation. The key to this highly accomplished drama is its Romantic folk ballad-like theme and setting: the tale of a seduced girl set in a secluded mill and a lonely cottage. Preissová uses the conventions of Romanticism as a dramatic foil to throw her real-life drama into stark relief. Romanticism is apparent in the parallelism between the mood and nature – the sunset in the first act, the windy moonlit night in the second, the frosty winter day in the third. But Preissová derived her plot from two real-life incidents she heard about during a stay in Moravian Slovakia. One was the crime of a jealous peasant who deliberately slashed the face of his brother's fiancée with whom he was in love. The second crime was that of a woman who helped her step-daughter to kill her illegitimate baby. Preissová used the first story unchanged but altered the second to provide a contrast between the gentle Jenůfa, incapable of hurting a living creature, and her step-mother, the Kostelnička, who becomes the sole murderess.

As the village sacristian (hence her Czech nickname Kostelnička), she leads religious processions, takes care of burials and knows how to cure the sick. She is the widow of a man whom she married for love who became a drunkard, squandered her money and beat her. When he dies, she is left destitute with Jenůfa, his daughter from his first marriage. Resilient in the midst of adversity, she peddles victuals from the village to the town, making enough money to support both herself and Jenůfa who becomes the centre of her life, the child she never had. After Laca, the step-brother of Jenůfa's lover Števa, slashes Jenůfa's face out of jealousy, and after Števa ceases to love Jenůfa who is already pregnant by him, the Kostelnička conceals the birth of the child. When she is unable to marry Jenůfa to either Števa or Laca, she tells the latter that the child has died to convince him to take her disfigured step-daugther. Once she has said this, she must get rid of the baby one way or another.

Here Preissová found it difficult to reconcile the requirements of naturalism with her feminist beliefs. It is certainly not a feature of the Kostelnička's character to commit murder, and the necessity for doing so introduces a determinist element into the plot which is foreign to the feminist spirit of the play as a whole. Up to this point everything about Preissová's naturalist drama presupposes a constructionist vision of gender: the female characters' lives reflect the real social conditions of the time; they work for their living and are physically abused by men; and the unmarried Jenůfa becomes pregnant, after which she must either marry or get rid of the child. But since she was disfigured, neither Števa nor Laca will marry her. In a monologue, the Kostelnička rejects the idea of giving the child away because Jenůfa would not agree to it; so she rationalizes her decision to kill the child to spare it from possible diphtheria and to give the hapless mother a second chance in life.

Preissová was clearly dissatisfied with this draconian solution to her plot since it perpetuated the essentialist belief that the female character is morally flawed and, in so doing, undermined her feminist project to present women in a true-to-life fashion. Like Němcová in *Wild Bára*, Preissová does not really resolve this predicament as

side-step it. In order to redeem the Kostelnička's character, she makes her succumb to a temporary bout of insanity when she kills the child. In some ways, Preissová is here the victim of her own feminist project. Having modified the real-life story by making the Kostelnička and not the child's mother the murderess, she is able to maintain Jenůfa's innocence only at the cost of transferring all the blame onto the Kostelnička. By reproducing the convention of woman erring against nature, Preissová falls back upon an old Romantic formula. The tension between the constructionist underpinnings of the feminist plot and its essentialist dénouement parallels the interpenetration of Romantic and naturalist elements in the Kostelnička's role as village matriarch. On the one hand, she is an ordinary woman who performs menial work and was beaten by her husband; on the other, she is invested with the supernatural power to determine life and death. As a totemic figure in the village hierarchy, her fall (once it comes) is all the more tragic. She is held up to an ideal she cannot fulfil precisely because the role of matriarch is imaginary rather than real.

In his adaption of the play as a libretto (1904), Leoš Janáček recognized and tried to simplify Preissová's ambivalent plot. He played down the Kostelnička's attempt to rationalize the murder and placed more emphasis on her deranged state of mind as the following aria shows:

Co chvíla ... co chvíla ...
a já si mám zatím přejít celou věčnost,
celé spasení?
Což kdybych raději dítě někam zevezla?
Ne ... ne ...
Jen ono je na překážku,
a hanbu pro celý život!
Já bych tím jí život vykoupila ...
a Pánbůh, on to nejlépe ví, jak to všecko stojí,

a Pánbůh, on to nejlépe ví, jak to všecko stojí,

jak to všecko stojí,
jak to všecko stojí
(sebere se závěšky vlňák
a zaobalí se do něho)
Já Pánbohu chlapce zanesu ...
Bude to kratší a lehčí!
Do jara, než ledy odejdou,
památky nebude.
K Pánubohu dojde,
dokud to ničeho neví.
(v nejvyšším rozčílení pomíjejíc se smysly)
To by se na mne, na Jenůfu nesypali!
To by se na mne, na Jenůfu nesypali!
(krčíc se ukazuje pronásledována prstem)
Vidíte ji, vidíte ji,
vidíte ji, Kostelničku![30]

"In a moment ... in a moment."
and I have to wait here a whole eternity,
a soul's eternity?
What if I took the child off somewhere?
No ... no ...
The baby's the only obstacle,
a lifelong disgrace!
That would be a way of redeeming her life ...
and it's God who knows best how everything stands,

it's God who knows best how everything stands,

how everything stands.
(takes woollen shawl off a peg
and wraps it round herself)
I'll deliver the little boy to his Maker ...
that will be quicker, easier!
By springtime, when the ice melts,
there'll be no trace.

[30] See the libretto in the London label recording of Jenůfa, conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras, 136–138.

He will come to God
before he knows anything.
(in the highest excitement)
They would all be down on me, and on Jenůfa,
They would all be down on me, and on Jenůfa!
(pointing at herself as the victim of persecuation)
"Look at her! Look at her!
Look at her! Kostelnička!"

In the play, the Kostelnička first of all considers giving the child away rather than killing it ("Což kdybych raději dítě někam zavezla na chování?") But then she changes her mind since Jenůfa would not agree to the plan: "Ne ... Jenůfa by nedopustila a lhát ona také nedokáže"[31] ("No ... Jenůfa would not allow it and, besides, she will not permit lying.") She now presents the murder as a mercy killing since the child will probably die of childish convulsions or diphtheria anyway: "Já Pánubohu chlapce zanesu ... Bude to kratší, lehčí těžkost, nežli mají děti, které dlouho se trápí, než je psotník či zaškrt uničí." ("I will deliver the little boy to the Lord ... It will be a shorter and lighter burden than suffered by those children who die of convulsions or diphtheria.") Finally she persuades herself that murder is the best solution since she will be able to spare her own and Jenůfa's honour: "Dorostlý život tím vykoupím. Jenůfinu a svoji čest ..." ("In this manner I shall redeem an adult's life. My own and Jenůfa's honour ...") In this fashion, Preissová shows the psychological skill by making the Kostelnička rationalize her drastic solution to the problem and convincing herself that the child's death will be to the advantage of the baby, Jenůfa and herself. (In the opera, it is only Jenůfa's honour that is invoked). For the dramatic purposes of opera, Janáček simplifies the Kostelnička's complex soliloquy by excising all the remarks which might be construed as rational, thus endowing the character with greater dramatic consistency while deviating from Preissová's intention to reconcile her feminist principles with a prescripted male narrative[32]. In short, Janáček appropriates a feminist play as a tragic opera whose dénouement entails the inevitable madness or death of the heroine[33].

Conclusion

Wild Bára, Poor Dead Barbora and *Her Step-Daughter* define a trajectory in Czech nineteenth-century literature from a purely idyllic revivalist representation of village life to a more naturalistic revision of this idyll in the 1890s. That this development is attributable to three *women* writers seems to me to be more than a coincidence. So too is the fact that all three sample works examined in this essay combine elements of idealism and realism. We have seen that this attempt at a formal synthesis is inseparable from the politics of gender since realism was perceived as *the* masculine literary mode

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[31] Preissová, Gabriela: Její pastorkyňa [Her Step-Daughter]. Praha 1945, 47. This edition places in italic the dialogue cut by Janáček in his operatic version of the play.

[32] For Janáček's changes to the play, see Brušák: Drama into Libretto 18–20.

[33] For the representation of women in opera, see Clément, Catherine: Opera, or the Undoing of Women. Tr. by Betsy Wing. Minneapolis 1989.

of the late nineteenth century[34], while idealism was gendered as *the* feminine mode. In the selected work of Preissová, Němcová and Světlá, idealist and realist modes intermingle but are not fully integrated and involve an implicit tension between essentialist and cultural visions of identity. By exploring this tension I have not sought to denigrate these writer's artistic achievement but rather have highlighted the difficulties they faced as progressive, feminist writers in a small-nation culture. The disjuncture between ethnicity and idealism, on the one hand, and feminism and realism, on the other, is the inevitable consequence of women writers aspiring – and inevitably failing – to unite perfectly the ethnic and generic aspects of their identity, to reconcile the ideal of the village as the essentialist nucleus of national identity with a more realistically cultural account of women's less-than-ideal experience of it.

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[34] Conversely, idealism was regarded as the feminine mode. Schor, Naomi: Idealism. In: A New History of French Literature. Ed. by Dennis Hollier et al. Cambridge, Mass. and London 1989, 769–774, here p. 771.