

Beyond the World of Men



Women's Fiction at the Czech Fin de Siècle

Edited and translated from the Czech
and German by Geoffrey Chew

Beyond the World of Men

Women's Fiction at the Czech Fin de Siècle

Edited and translated from the Czech
and German by Geoffrey Chew

KAROLINUM PRESS is a publishing department
of Charles University
Ovocný trh 5/560, Prague 1, Czech Republic
www.karolinum.cz

Cover image from Felix Tèver, *Duše nezakotvené* (1908),
illustrating the beginning of 'Solitude'
Cover and graphic design by Zdeněk Ziegler
Typesetting by Karolinum Press
First English edition

Cataloging-in Publication Data is available
from the National Library of the Czech Republic

Translation © Geoffrey Chew, 2024
This selection and introduction © Geoffrey Chew, 2024

ISBN 978-80-246-5631-1 (pdf)
ISBN 978-80-246-5632-8 (epub)
ISBN 978-80-246-5617-5 (pbk)



Charles University
Karolinum Press

www.karolinum.cz
ebooks@karolinum.cz

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments and Sources /8

Introduction /12

HE KISSES YOUR HAND (1885)

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach /36

A KALEIDOSCOPE (1890)

Teréza Nováková /57

CONFIRMED BACHELORS (1891)

Božena Viková-Kunětická /66

LIFE'S SORROW (1891-5)

Růžena Svobodová /96

A VISIT TO HIS PARENTS (1894)

Tereza Svatová /107

THE PRÁŽE - A PRAGUE BASTARD (1894)

Tereza Svatová /112

TALE ABOUT NOTHING, NO. 5 (1903)

Vladimíra Jedličková /121

TALE ABOUT NOTHING, NO. 14 (1903)

Vladimíra Jedličková /124

DAILY LIFE (1904)

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach /126

A WIDOW (1905)

Anna Maria Tilschová /140

A ROSE FOR UNCLE: AN UNSERIOUS TALE

OF A VERY YOUNG COQUETTE, WITH A MORAL (1906)

Anna Maria Tilschová /181

THEORIES (1906)

Božena Benešová /187

A TALE FROM HELL (1907)

Marie Majerová /195

MARRIAGE (1907)

Marie Majerová /207

A LOYAL WIFE (1908)

Božena Benešová /210

SOLITUDE (1908)

Anna Lauermannová-Miksčová /234

THREE POINTS OF VIEW (1908)

Helena Malířová /259

. . . AND MUSIC WILL BE PLAYING OUTSIDE YOUR

WINDOWS EVERY DAY! (1908)

Růžena Svobodová /268

THE DEATH OF OPHELIA (1909)

Růžena Jesenská /299

A TRUTHFUL TALE OF A STONE STATUE (1909)

Růžena Jesenská /317

THE CHILD (1912)

Lila Bubelová /325

A THORNY QUESTION (1917)

Marie Majerová /328

A REMARKABLE INCIDENT (1924)

Anna Maria Tilschová /343

MARIE AND MARTA (1933)

Lída Merlínová /357

Biographical Notes on Authors /361

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND SOURCES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Tereza Svatová, ‘The “Práče” – A Prague Bastard’: ‘Práče’, in her *Selské črty* [Peasant Sketches] (Prague: Libuše, Matice zábavy a vědění, 1894), 99–108
- Vladimíra Jedličková, ‘Tales About Nothing, nos. 5 and 14’: the untitled chapters 5 and 14 of Edvard Klas, *Povídky o ničem* [Tales About Nothing] (Prague: Moderní revue, 1903), 17–19 and 40–41 respectively
- Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, ‘Daily Life’: ‘Das tägliche Leben’, in her *Genrebilder: Erzählungen* [Genre Pictures: Narratives] (Berlin: Gebrüder Paetel (Dr. Georg Paetel), 1910), 379–402
- Anna Maria Tilschová, ‘A Widow’: ‘Vdova’, in her *Na horách – Vítr: dvě knihy povídek* [In the Mountains, and Wind: Two Books of Short Stories], Anna Maria Tilschová: Spisy, 2 (Prague: Fr. Borový, 1928), 27–69
- Anna Maria Tilschová, ‘A Rose for Uncle: An Unserious Tale of a Very Young Coquette, With a Moral’: ‘Lehounká povídka o koketním děvčátku s mravním naučením’, in her *Na horách – Vítr: dvě knihy povídek* [In the Mountains, and Wind: Two Books of Short Stories], Anna Maria Tilschová: Spisy, 2 (Prague: Fr. Borový, 1928), 121–7
- Božena Benešová, ‘Theories’: ‘Teorie’, in her *Myšky: povídky z let 1909–1913* [Little Mice: Short Stories from 1909 to 1913] (Prague: Edice Sever a východ, 1926), 99–106 (but in manuscript, 1906, and originally published in the journal *Národní obzor*, 1906–7)
- Marie Majerová, ‘A Tale from Hell’: ‘Povídka z pekla’, in her *Povídky z pekla a jiné* [Tales from Hell, and Others] (Prague: Tiskový výbor československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické, 1907), 89–101
- Marie Majerová, ‘Marriage’: ‘Manželství’, in her *Povídky z pekla a jiné* [Tales from Hell, and Others] (Prague: Tiskový výbor československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické, 1907), 123–6

- Božena Benešová, 'A Loyal Wife': 'Pýří', in her *Myšky: povídky z let 1909–1913* [Little Mice: Short Stories from 1909 to 1913] (Prague: Edice Sever a východ, 1926), 73–96 (but originally published in the journal *Zlatá Praha*, 1908)
- Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová, 'Solitude': 'Samota', in Felix Tèver, *Duše nezakotvené* [Souls Unanchored] (Prague: Jos. R. Vilímek, 1908), 195–224
- Helena Malířová, 'Three Points of View': 'Tři kapitolky', in her *Ženy a děti: rozmarné příběhy z jejich světa* [Women and Children: Whimsical Stories from Their World] (Prague: F. Topič, 1908), 120–30
- Růžena Svobodová, '. . . And Music will be Playing Outside Your Windows Every Day!': '. . . a denně bude hrávat hudba pod vašimi okny!', in her *Černí myslivci: horské romány* [The Dark Huntsmen: Mountain Stories] (Prague: Jan Laichter, 1908), 245–86
- Růžena Jesenská, 'The Death of Ophelia': 'Smrt Ofélie', in her *Mimo svět: prosa* [Beyond the World] (Prague: Pražská akciová tiskárna, 1909), here quoted from Tereza Nejtková, 'Růžena Jesenská: Mimo svět – ediční příprava a komentář k souboru povídek' (dissertation, Charles University, Prague, 2017), 175–87
- Růžena Jesenská, 'A Truthful Tale of a Stone Statue': 'Pravdivá historie kamenné sochy', in her *Mimo svět: prosa* [Beyond the World] (Prague: Pražská akciová tiskárna, 1909), here quoted from Nejtková, 'Růžena Jesenská: Mimo svět', 113–17
- Lila Bubelová, 'The Child': 'Dítě', from Lila B. Nováková, *Nad její drahou zachmuřenou . . .* [Over Her Dear Gloomy Path] (Prague: Antonín Reis, 1912), 30–33
- Marie Majerová, 'A Thorny Question': 'Těžká otázka', in the journal *Lumír*, 45/1 (1917): 29–38
- Anna Maria Tilschová, 'A Remarkable Incident': 'Podivuhodná příhoda', in her *Černá dáma a tři povídky* [The Black

Lady, and Three Stories] (Prague: Šolc a Šimáček, 1924),
130–40

Lída Merlínová, 'Marie and Marta': 'Marie a Marta', in the
journal *Nový hlas*, 4/2 (1933): 59–61

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOME VERSIONS OF PASTORAL:

BIGOTED GRANDMOTHERS AND WELL-MEANING
ARISTOCRATS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THEORIES, THEORIES . . . :

THE 'WOMAN QUESTION' AND THE PROMOTION
OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'WE'RE NOT SATISFIED WITH YOU EITHER!':

THE LITTLE MICE OF CZECH SOCIETY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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