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Ambiguity of Interpretation: the Gender-Conscious Attitudes in the Dissident Works of the Czech Writer Lenka Procházková*

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This paper explores the presence of gender-conscious attitudes in the works of the Czech author Lenka Procházková (born 1951), a member of the dissident movement during the communist regime. It argues that her writings took issue with patriarchal social structures, yet sometimes camouflaged these challenges behind criticism of the totalitarian rule. These expressions, which one might be tempted to consider as feminist from a Western and 21st-century point of view, emerged within East European dissident culture and probably without exposure to Western feminist concepts. Procházková developed a model of an inner exile for dissidents that originated in a canonical work of Czech literature by Božena Němcová and from which one of her female protagonists draws strength. Thus, her works suggest that Western gender theories are limited in their potential to assess East European dissident women's writing, when they fail to include local literary traditions.

KEYWORDS: gender studies; Czechoslovakia; dissident literature; women's writing; communism; literary traditions

1. Introduction

This study discusses the gender roles outlined by the Czech dissident author Lenka Procházková (born 1951) in her works from the communist

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period, analysing them from a cultural studies' perspective. Even though existing studies often point out the central role of the female protagonists in her writings, the question of the feminist potential in her works has not yet been explored in depth. This study is an attempt to close this gap. Many of Procházková's writings address the position of women during the repressive period of normalization in the 1970s and 1980s, when the state intensified control over its inhabitants after the attempts at liberalisation in the context of the Prague Spring of 1968 had been crushed. At the centre of my analysis, there are several works Procházková published in the underground during the totalitarian period. Many of these have autobiographical elements. In addition, I include statements from her autobiography *Zvonek a pak chorál* (The Bell and Then a Chant) (Procházková, Pekárová 2010) and from an interview the author gave after the Velvet Revolution of 1989 (Procházková, Vavřín 1990). I use these latter sources to substantiate the fictionalised episodes from her prose works, thus approaching her writings from a broader cultural perspective rather than focussing mainly on literary analyses. Eva Kantůrková's (born 1930) collection of interviews with women from the dissident community, *Sešly jsme se v této knize* (We Have Gathered Together in This Book) and Jonathan Bolton's comprehensive study of the Czech dissident community, *Worlds of Dissent*, complement these sources (Bolton 2012; Kantůrková 1991)¹.

The title of this article uses the term "gender-conscious" instead of "feminist". The reason for this choice is that the term "feminist" is by no means unambiguous. Even though there might be a broad consensus that the term "feminist" designates a person that opposes discrimination of women on the basis of sex, the term has received several specifications in recent years. Elizabeth Grosz distinguishes between several types of feminism, among them "essentialism", "biologism" and "naturalism" on the one hand and "egalitarian feminism" (or feminism of equality) on the other, while observing the emergence of a "feminism of difference" in the past decades (Grosz 1994; Grosz 1995). She defines the latter as "a feminism based on the acknowledgement of women's specificities and oriented to the attainment of autonomy for women" (Grosz 1994: 91). The communist regime in Czechoslovakia adopted a type of feminism that could be labelled as

¹ I am indebted to Jonathan Bolton for drawing my attention to Kantůrková's book.

an “egalitarian feminism”, claiming that women and men have identical opportunities and duties in the public life. Procházková’s works from the communist period, which are discussed in this article, suggest that her attitude on the role of men and women comes closer to a “feminism of difference”, in particular when she narrates experiences that are specific to women, for instance childbirth. Despite the outlined reservations about its conception, I use the term “feminist” in the main body of the article, understanding it as an individual’s decision to oppose male chauvinist attitude in a broader sense and beyond the theoretical discussions that have taken place in the West in the past decades.

The liberation of women from the bondage of bourgeois social patterns was, in principle, a goal of the communist regime. Women should have a profession outside the home, nurseries should be available for their children, divorce should be possible as well as abortion, paid maternity leave should be a matter of course. These possibilities were thought to strengthen women’s self-determination over their bodies, their professions and their relationships.

In reality, however, lingering traditional gender roles led to a so-called double burden for women: apart from their full-time paid work outside the house (part-time work was virtually non-existent), they were also responsible for running the household and bringing up the children (Scott 1974; Heitlinger 1979: 135–190; Hašková 2011: 390; Oates-Indruchová 2012: 364; Kantůrková 1991: 102)². Men withdrew from these responsibilities in the private sphere, and the idealisation of the private sphere during the period of normalization intensified this tendency. In her article *The Vision of Czech Women: One Eye Open (Gender Roles in Czech Society, Politics and Culture)*, the literary scholar Eva Věšínová-Kalivodová describes how the period of normalization produced a withdrawal of Czechoslovak society into the private realm, which cemented traditional gender roles (Věšínová-Kalivodová 1998: 363). After the suppression of the Prague Spring movement, vocational fulfilment was mainly confined to those faithful to the now repressive regime. The very term of *career* (kariéra) carried negative connotations and was associated with advancement inside the communist

²In Russian literature Natalia Baranskaia describes this double burden in her story *A Week like Any Other Week*, published in 1969 (cf. Clement 2012: 269–270).

party (Věšíňová-Kalivodová 1998: 362). Even though Czechoslovaks were working in the public sphere to have an income, they channelled a considerable amount of their energy into the private sphere. There, responsibilities were separated according to gender (Oates-Indruchová 2012: 362). Women were in charge of household chores and bringing up the children, whereas many men used their leisure time to build, for instance, a country cottage for their families. The family turned into an allegory for a domain that was beyond communist indoctrination; women were accorded the status of the guardian of uncorrupted morals and virtue.

This development may have glorified the image of mothers, but it did not challenge the underlying sexism in society of that time, which was rarely articulated. Ironically, these gender roles with their idealisation of women inverted the ideals of the equality between women and men, which many communists might originally have wanted to achieve. In addition, they contradicted the collectivist communist ideal (Věšíňová-Kalivodová 1998: 363)³. The withdrawal from the public sphere, which set in during the 1970s, displayed various features. Some Czechs emigrated to the West while others withdrew into an “inner exile”. This “inner exile” could entail either a strong non-political focus on private life, as outlined above, or entry into the political dissident community, whose complex gender structures will be discussed further below.

2. Overview of Procházková’s life and works

Procházková is known as a dissident author and social activist who emerged onto the public scene during the 1980s. Daughter of the author and scriptwriter Jan Procházka (1929–1971), she was born in 1951 in Olomouc and later moved to Prague with her parents. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 the authorities publically vilified

³On traditional gender structures in communist societies see also Miroiu 2007. In the same issue, in which this article appeared, several replies to Miroiu’s article were published, which partly revised her argument; see, for instance, Novikova 2007 and Daskalova 2007. Daskalova, for instance, points out that at that time patriarchal gender structures existed in the West too, and therefore she asks: “And, how does this East European «state patriarchy» relate to the Western «private patriarchy?»” (Daskalova 2007: 217).

Procházka, who fell ill and died in 1971. Procházková inherited from him her status as a dissident. She intended to do a degree in film studies, but was not allowed to do this because of her father's former political conflicts with the regime. She studied literary theory instead, but after graduation did not find a position that would have suited her qualifications. Like many other dissidents, she eventually had to accept manual work to make a living, in her case as a cleaner. An important person in her life was Ludvík Vaculík (1926–2015), the dissident author and editor of the underground publishing house Edition Padlock (Edice Petlice) and father of two of her children. The style of Procházková's works is often reminiscent of film scripts, given the number of dialogues they include. As was typical for dissident literature, her works are often written in the first person singular and included pseudonyms for people from the dissident community. In this way, Procházková's works conveyed to the reader a sense of immediacy and adopted documentary features. The literary critic Ellena Sokol observes how this interrelationship between life and literary art is typical of both Procházková's and Vaculík works; their conception of literature as a part of life thus differs from Milan Kundera's (born 1929), who dissociates himself from assumptions about similar interrelations. (Sokol 2005). Sokol further points out the "strongly gendered" nature of the topics Procházková's works address with their focus on female experiences such as childbirth, child-rearing, and everyday life as a dissident unmarried mother during socialism (Sokol 2005: 200). As Lea Zídková points out in her master's thesis on the author, contemporary male critics often expressed their unease about the fact that some of Procházková's works adopt exclusively the female perspective of the narrated events (Zídková 2011: 143–145).

3. Male chauvinism in *Oční kapky* (Eye Drops): the hospital scene

Procházková's novel *Oční kapky* (Eye Drops), which appeared in 1982, seems to blend criticism of patriarchal features of Czechoslovak society in the 1970s with accusations levelled against the totalitarian regime. The novel is about the student Pavla, who is pregnant by Jakub, a photographer and cameraman. After she has given birth to a daughter it

seems, at least for a while, that all three will be living together as a family. Pavla's relationship with Jakub is passionate yet problematic, as he is excessively jealous, yet at the same time he repeatedly and inexplicably withdraws from her: he finds reasons not to acknowledge his fatherhood and is hesitant about making plans for their marriage. The riddle of his strange behaviour is solved when at some point Pavla bitterly realises that Jakub has secretly emigrated to Germany. She and her child, it seems, have been little more than a complication to an emigration plan that had been established long ago.

Jakub's emotional withdrawal from his responsibility as a partner and a father expresses itself repeatedly, for instance after the birth of his daughter. Procházková's novel depicts Jakub's callousness in a stylistically clever way by letting two letters follow one another, both addressed to Pavla. In a previous letter she has communicated to Jakub that she had given birth to a daughter instead of a son. Both had been convinced that they were going to have a son, who would have been called Vojtěch. Now Pavla longs for a reply from Jakub. When she receives a letter, the reader assumes it to be from Jakub. The joyful tone of the first sentences seems to confirm this impression, as they give a solemn and affectionate account of the day on which Pavla's daughter was born:

Pavlinko drahá,
jednou si vzpomeneš, že to bylo tenkrát, jak byla ta strašně teplá zima. Představ si, že v parku už pučely na keřích lístečky. V ten den chvílku svítilo slunce a pak zas lilo a lidi nevěděli, co si mají oblíct (Procházková 1991: 40).

*My dearest little Pavla,
Some day you will remember that it was a terribly warm winter then. Guess what, on the shrubs in the park the little leaves were already sprouting. On that day the sun was shining for a moment and then it rained again and people didn't know what to wear⁴.*

But on continuing to read the letter we discover that a woman must have written it, which, in Czech, is indicated by the feminine ending of the past tense:

Řekli mi, že se Ti narodila holčička. Já jim nevěřila. A potom jsem se smála a plakala (Procházková 1991: 40).

⁴All translations of quotations and book titles in this article are by Ursula Stohler.

I was told that you had given birth to a daughter. I didn't believe them. Then I laughed and cried.

In English, the gender of the person who has written the letter is revealed only at the end, with the sender's name, Alena. The next letter is written in a tone that differs fundamentally from the one just mentioned. It is from Jakub and also addresses the birth of Pavla's daughter. It begins like this:

Milá holčičko,
ty teda umíš člověka překvapit! Tak jsem tůdle někde zaslech, že prej máš dceru. Vojtěšku? Co uděláme s výbavičkou? Je pěkná jako Ty? Jestli ne, tak ji vrať. (Holku, výbavička se dá obarvit.) (Procházková 1991: 43).

*My dear girl,
Now know how to surprise a fellow! So, I heard somewhere around here that apparently you have a daughter. Vojtěška? What are we going to do with the layette? Is she as pretty as you? If not, return her (the daughter; the layette can be redyed).*

Jakub's tone is reserved and reveals male chauvinism, his joke about the daughter's looks is inappropriate. It is difficult to convey this joke in the English translation: in Czech, "layette" has female gender, so the reader could at first assume that Jakub is talking about the layette instead of the daughter, and the shock that he is actually talking about the daughter, as is clear from the following sentence in brackets, is even deeper and his comment even more out of place. Pavla's life was in danger during childbirth, but she and her daughter were saved at the very last moment. Jakub's way of writing is therefore far from what Pavla would have expected from the father of her daughter. The contrast to the previous letter from Pavla's friend Alena is crucial: the first one is precisely the tone that Pavla would have expected from Jakub; his, on the other hand, seems even more inappropriate when compared to Alena's.

One might argue that Jakub's emotional distance to Pavla and to his daughter originates in his knowledge that sooner or later he would secretly emigrate to the West, and that therefore he did not want to become too emotionally attached. With this in mind it is possible to interpret this sequence in *Oční kapky* (Eye Drops) as criticism of the totalitarian regime, which left many intellectuals with no choice but to emigrate, sometimes leaving behind their families. The novel could therefore be read as an

implicit accusation of the communist state. There is a moment later in the novel that seems to support this view: there, Pavla is wondering if life in communist Czechoslovakia might indeed have been unbearable for Jakub, so that he had to emigrate. Then, however, she forbids herself to think like this, as his daughter and his relationship with Pavla should have more than made up for these difficulties (Procházková 1991: 218). In her autobiographical work *The Bell and Then a Chant*, she declares that the novel's main topic was the betrayal of love, and that criticism of the communist regime was not at its centre (Procházková, Pekárová 2010: 44). I would argue that *Eye Drops* furthermore contained an implied criticism of male chauvinist attitudes, which existed in Czechoslovak society at that time, as a subtext. Procházková was living in the dissident community, and to express herself as a feminist openly criticising patriarchal social structures would have presented her in an unfavourable light, especially given that she depended on dissident solidarity for protection against the harassments of the totalitarian state. She might therefore have camouflaged her criticism of male chauvinism by blending it with some criticism of the regime, which made her works acceptable to dissident readers.

4. Implicit criticism of patriarchal social structures: the breakfast scene

Oční kapky (Eye Drops) includes several scenes that seem to be implicitly criticising patriarchal social structures. In the following, this criticism is not linked to the topic of emigration or the totalitarian state. Pavla and a male friend are spending a weekend in a country cottage together after she has overcome the shock of Jakub's unexpected emigration. The evening before the two have had an argument, and in the morning Pavla is reluctant to get up. Her partner is lying on the couch and reading:

“Už jsi asi jedl, vid” vnucuju mu své přání.

“Ne, nikoliv. Čekám, že mi uděláš snídání. Dal bych si kakao a chleby s paštikou. Koupil jsem včera játrovou, je ve spíži.”

Představím si ledovou špižku a rychle vylézám z postele, abych to měla co nejdřív za sebou. Když už je někdo ten typ, co potřebuje hned ráno jíst, má si něco uklohnit sám a neotravovat normální lidi! (Procházková 1991: 267)

"I guess you have already eaten", I am pressing my wishes on him.

"No, not at all. I was waiting for you to make breakfast for me. I'll have cocoa and bread with paté. I bought some with liver yesterday; it's in the pantry."

I am picturing the icy pantry and am quickly crawling out of bed to get it over with as soon as possible. If somebody is the type of human being that needs to eat first thing in the morning he should at least prepare it himself and not pester normal people with it!

From the point of view of a Western reader of the 21st century this scene is highly interesting. As in the scene described further above, there is no explicit criticism of patriarchal social structures here. Rather, Pavla's bad mood at her friend's demand – to make breakfast for him – seems to originate in the argument between the two, which had happened the evening before, and not from a possible discontent from Pavla about this distribution of gender roles. However, a closer analysis of this dialogue reveals how strange it sounds when transposed into a 21st century Western context. Nowadays, a sentence such as "I was waiting for you to make breakfast for me" would, in most circumstances, only be acceptable in an ironic and affectionate manner. Here, on the other hand, it seems to be meant seriously and so reflects the gender roles of the society of that time (and it was probably no different in the capitalist West than in the communist East)⁵. Was Procházková here again implicitly criticising patriarchal social structures, camouflaging Pavla's reason for her bad mood with the quarrel she and her partner had the evening before? Or were these patriarchal gender structures so deeply engrained that they were accepted without question? Was the presentation of such structures, as depicted in this scene, perhaps another implicit way of actually criticising them? Western 21st-century feminists might here struggle to provide answers, as their point of view is incompatible with both the reality of Eastern Europe during the communist regime, and with that of the 1970s.

The question of whether the presentation of traditional gender roles in Procházková's works was a subliminal way of criticising them reappears when we look at other of her works. In her novel *Růžová dáma* (The Pink Lady), for instance, the female main protagonist, Kytka, is responsible for cooking, baking, doing the washing up, and housekeeping. In the course of

⁵ On the problem of how to translate patriarchal expressions from past times for contemporary readers, see Flotow 1997.

the novel, Kytka has several consecutive relationships, yet the gender pattern remains the same each time. Just once does she meet a younger man, who wants to disrupt these traditional gender roles, yet Kytka struggles to accept this possible new order (Procházková 1982a: 92, 95, 150). In the story *Fešáková žena* (The Beau's Wife) from the collection *Hlídač holubů* (The Guardian of the Pigeons), the male protagonist as a matter of course orders his girlfriend to run him a bath and make coffee for him – and she executes these assignments, as if this were part of her role as a woman (Procházková 1984b: 41). The 21st-century reader might again wonder if such depictions of traditional gender roles might have been a hint of discontent at patriarchal social structures, or if such an interpretation might rather be the result of turning the Western feminist gaze on an East European, communist reality of the past.

When we abandon the realm of fiction and look at accounts of life in the dissident community, a similarly complex picture of traditional gender roles emerges. On the one hand, the dissident community presented opportunities to women, for instance in allowing them to be authors, as the examples of Procházková or Kantůrková suggest. It should also be noted that the speaker of *Charta 77* was a woman, Zdena Tominová (Kantůrková 1991b: 45). On the other hand, traditional gender structures persisted in the dissident community. Women were, for instance, responsible for the typing of manuscripts for the underground publishing houses; in the Czechoslovak dissident community, this task usually fell to Zdena Ertelová (Bolton 2012: 99). A further complexity of gender structures in the dissident community is revealed when we consider the fact that women there had the opportunity to participate in political activities, for instance in the shaping, reviewing, or signing of *Charta 77*. As these topics were mostly discussed at the dissidents' homes or in their country cottages, women could take part in these debates. However, sometimes they could follow these discussions only marginally, as they were busy with preparing food for the participants (Bolton 2012: 170)⁶.

⁶In Kantůrková's collection *Sešly jsme se v této knize* (We Have Gathered Together in This Book), Elžbieta Lederová relates this episode as a *funny story* (směšná historka), yet this designation does not change the patriarchal gender structures prevalent at that time (Kantůrková 1991a: 37).

It should further be noted that Procházková's work was viewed more positively during communism than afterwards: in the post-communist period it was sometimes dismissed as

These examples suggest that Western feminist theories about gender equality have to be reconceptualised when we look at the reality of Eastern European dissident women.

5. The inner exile of the dissident community

The complexities of its partly patriarchal structure notwithstanding, the dissident community offered a woman author, such as Procházková, an island of intellectual freedom and emotional support (Bolton 2012: 97). It enabled Procházková to execute an activity that was essential for her: writing. Her day job as a cleaner might have been socially humiliating and physically exhausting, yet it still left her enough time to work as a writer, and the dissident community provided her intellectual stimulation as well as the possibility to publish her thoughts. In an interview that she gave after the fall of the Communist regime in the 1990s, she was asked if the time that she had spent working as a cleaner had not been lost years. She answers in the negative:

Když už mě společnost postavila ke kýblu s hadrem, neměla jsem co ztratit a stala jsem se opravdu svobodným člověkem. Mohla jsem dělat, co jsem chtěla. Azylem mi bylo psaní, po nocích (Procházková, Vavřín 1990: 4).

Once society had put me next to a bucket and a cleaning rag, I had nothing left to lose and became a truly free human being. I could do whatever I wanted. My asylum was my writing, at night.

For Procházková, freedom does not depend on the political regime, in which one is living, and does not necessarily require emigration. Her works seem to subtly link this concept with questions of gender and the

just women's writing. See, for instance, the appendix in the re-edition of Jiří Pechar's *Nad knihami a rukopisy* (On Books and Manuscripts) or Jan Čulík's *Knihy za ohradou. Česká literatura v exilových nakladatelstvích, 1971–1989* (Books behind an Enclosure. Czech Literature in Exile Publishing Houses, 1971–1989 (Pechar 1996: 215; Čulík 1991: 141). Čulík's partly dismissive comments were reprinted in a literature textbook for secondary schools that appeared after 1989, which might have contributed to Procházková's works being considered as women's writing and of secondary importance in the Czech post-communist literary culture (Martinková, et al. 1994: 331–333).

role of women in the Czechoslovak society of the communist 1970s, as the following example suggests. In her story *Přijed' ochutnat* (Come Have a Taste) from the collection of the same title, the protagonist's former boyfriend calls her at her home in Czechoslovakia. He has emigrated to the West and is now trying to convince her to do the same. One thing he does not know is that she is pregnant. The story does not reveal who the father of the child is. Her round belly and the movements of the child in it symbolise the possibility of having a fulfilled life even within Czechoslovak society during the period of normalisation. The following dialogue between her and her former boyfriend reveals this attitude:

“Přece nemůžeš nic kloudného stvořit někde, kde je absolutní nesvoboda!”

Zaráželo ji, s jakou nonšalanci ji koledoval o kriminál.

“Svoboda je stav duše,“ poučila ho i ostatní tiché přislouchávače.

Zadrmolil něco v angličtině.

“Četl jsi Solženicynovu harvardskou přednášku? Tam to všechno je.”

“Dobře, no dobře. Ale zkus to zařídít, jo?” (Procházkova 1982c: 98)

“After all, you can't create anything useful in a place where absolute bondage reigns.”

It surprised her with what nonchalance he was turning her into a criminal.

“Freedom is a state of the soul,” she taught him and the other silent listeners.

He began to murmur something in English.

“Have you read Solzhenitsyn's Harvard speech? It's all in there.”

“Yes, fine, but try to arrange it, ok?”

For her emigrated former boyfriend, freedom is only possible in the capitalist West; for the female protagonist, on the other hand, it is also there in the islands offered by the dissident community⁷. To remain in Communist Czechoslovakia during the period of normalization seems even more logical to her as she is expecting a baby. This quotation addresses the topic of pregnancy, a life-changing state for the female protagonist, a period when she is preparing herself to assume responsibility for a new human being. Procházková here, and in many other of her works, chose a topic that might concern women more immediately than men. She was one of

⁷Kantůrková expressed a similar view when saying that life was everywhere, in freedom as well as under totalitarianism (“život je všude. Ve svobodě jako v totalitě”: “Life is everywhere. In freedom as well as in totalitarianism”). She thus hints at the title of a work by Milan Kundera, *Život je jinde* (Life is Elsewhere). For her, inner independence is essential for authors (Sůva 1991: 177).

the women authors who introduced this topic most explicitly into the community of the dissident readers. We might interpret this choice of topic as a feminist one on its own terms.

6. The inner exile of the Czech idyll

The idea that freedom and inner peace are possible even within Czechoslovak society during normalization appears frequently in Procházková's works, especially in scenes where she depicts an idyllic life in the countryside. This happens, for instance, in *Smolná kniha* (The Book of Misfortune), a kind of sequel to *Eye Drops*. This novel includes some so-called *intermezzi*. In these, Pavla is travelling with her new partner Josef to the east of Czechoslovakia, first to Olomouc (where Procházková spent the early years of her childhood), then on to Slovakia. The moments she spends there with Josef are fond depictions of the local landscape; the two lovers enjoy nature and the frugal, healthy food (Procházková 1989: 180). In another intermezzo they drive to the west, to Karlovy Vary, and spend some relaxing time there, going for walks in the picturesque little town (Procházková 1989: 275).

Another such idyll appears in *Eye Drops*. Pavla and Jakub (the boyfriend, who would later on emigrate to the West without telling her) are travelling through Czechoslovakia, first to the North, then to the South, where they visit Pavla's sick grandmother. Pavla and her grandmother exchange memories of Pavla's childhood, when she used to spend a lot of time at her grandmother's place. The two remember the colourful flowerbeds, the entertaining antics of the geese, the smell of the hay, the river, and how unbelievably delicious were the freshly caught fish, which the grandmother used to fry with fresh onions and serve with crispy bread. After that, Pavla says to her grandmother:

“Musíš se rychle uzdravit a přijet na hodně dlouho k nám do Prahy, abychom si spolu takhle mohly povídat! Až bude Magdalénka trochu větší, tak bude šťastná, že má prababičku a ta že z vesnice a umí hezky vyprávět (...)” (Procházková 1991: 117).

“*You have to get well again soon and come to us to Prague for a long time, so we can chat like this together! And when Magdalena [Pavla and Jakub's daughter] is a bit*

older she will be happy to have a great-grandmother who comes from the countryside and who tells such beautiful stories (...)."

The theme of the grandmother, which Procházková hints at here, has a long tradition in Czech literature. It recalls the classical novel *Babička* (*The Granny*), written by one of the best-known Czech authors, Božena Němcová (1820–1862), in the 1850s and which is known to every Czech child. In Němcová's novel the grandmother is the centre of all events, which are narrated in Biedermeier-like pictures. The book is full of idylls that celebrate life in the countryside; a feature that we find repeatedly in Procházková's works.

Procházková's allusion to this central work of Czech literary history attempts to demonstrate to the readers that Czech identity was independent of political regimes. The novel thus criticizes Jakub, Pavla's boyfriend, who, in the remainder of the story, abandons Pavla and his daughter to emigrate to the West: despite having a child and memories of idyllic moments of life in the Czech countryside, he has failed to appreciate the value of Czech culture and of family responsibilities. Procházková links her criticism of male chauvinist behaviour with one of the best-known works of Czech literature, which was written by a woman. She creates a line of female ancestors by referring to the protagonist's grandmother and her great-grandchild, and embeds this lineage into Czech cultural memory.

7. Conclusion

This contribution set out with the goal of exploring gender-conscious attitudes in Procházková's works. My analysis suggests that the author frequently addresses the situation of women in the Communist Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s, and that there are many instances where a 21st-century reader might feel tempted to call Procházková a feminist. On the other hand, however, her criticism of a patriarchal system is often clad in literary contexts that allow for different interpretations, shifting the weight of the feminist argument to topics such as life under totalitarian rule. Sometimes her criticism of male chauvinism is neutralized when she allows the reader to locate the reasons for her female protagonist's dissatisfaction in relationship problems seemingly beyond feminist considerations. At other times,

she provides simple descriptions of gendered responsibilities without hinting at rebellion against the presented inequality. This procedure might leave 21st-century readers unsure of the extent, to which her works can be interpreted as feminist. Western interpretations, no matter how gender-conscious, need to take into consideration allusions to the local literary traditions that Procházková's works include, and use these as a ground in order to assess the extent, to which she addresses topics that especially concern women.

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