

A Short Survey of Czech Literature

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CZECH LITERATURE, 1774 TO 1918

What is habitually called the modern Czech National Revival (*národní obrození*) may be said to begin in the 1770s and 1780s.

Earlier 18th-century printed book production in Czech could be described as largely a mixture of devotional writing, including religious verse, hymns and sermons - some highly cultivated and well-crafted - , also popular verses, and further popular reading matter, and it was limited in many ways, though still very much following in the path of a considerable Roman Catholic Baroque tradition. Now a new era was starting to evolve, what we may somewhat glibly call the modern era of Czech national society, culture and politics.

The end of the pre-Revival period is signalled by a number of radical Habsburg state initiatives.

These include the institution, under the Empress MARIA THERESA, of universally available primary schooling between the ages of six and twelve, under The General School Ordinance - *Allgemeine Schulordnung* - for the Bohemian and Austrian Lands, of December 1774. Textbooks were free, but parents were expected to pay fees. By 1790 a large proportion of children in the Bohemian Lands were attending primary schools (though at first boys formed the bulk of them, girls were not excluded). German was taught to all, and required for entering secondary schools and higher education (where German had now replaced Latin), but these primary schools also began to produce general literacy in Czech, as well as effecting a wider educational transformation.

JOSEPH II's radical de-feudalising and religious tolerance decrees followed in 1781: widening peasant liberties and permitting Protestant Christian worship (alongside the dominant, previously monopoly Roman Catholicism).

Of German literary culture in the eighteenth century it has been said that: "As a literature worthy of consideration alongside those of other European cultures, German literature re-emerges in the later eighteenth century... At least from the seventeenth century, Germans are acutely conscious of their lack, and develop a kind of inferiority complex which explains much of the later course of German literary history... Their position of weakness compels them to emulate and imitate foreign literatures... Then eventually, by an impulse which only appears to be of a different kind, there is an insistence on original German-ness..." (T. J. Reed, in: *Germany: A Companion to German Studies*, ed. Malcolm Pasley, 1972, 2nd edition, 1982, p.499). Substitute Czech for German and the statement still rings true, even if it took longer for major authors of imaginative writing to arrive on the scene. The late eighteenth

century in Czech is a time of scholarship and busy writerly activity rather than a source of literary masterpieces.

The two emblematic figures in the first decades of the Czech Revival are the grammarian and language historian Josef DOBROVSKÝ and the younger translator and lexicographer Josef JUNGMANN, but they are preceded and accompanied by a number of other scholars and writers.

The contemporary achievements of scholarship, conducted still in Latin or its successor German, overshadow those of imaginative writing in Czech. The status of Czech itself was threatened by compulsory German language in education and the attractions of recent German literature.

The influence of German culture was considerable. The propagation of German literature is associated from the 1760s with the figure of Karl Heinrich Seibt (1735-1806), who was appointed professor at Prague University in 1763, and was a pupil of Gellert and Gottsched at Leipzig. He lectured in German, breaking the monopoly hitherto held by Latin. Another literary figure, a follower of the poet and novelist Wieland, a fiction writer himself, was August Gottlieb Meissner (1753-1807), in 1785 the first Protestant appointed to the university for well over a hundred years. According to the contemporary historian F.M. Pelcl, "ladies who previously knew only French literature, now read Gellert, Hagedorn, Rabener, Gleim, Gessner, Kleist and others... In gardens, on walks and even on public streets one could meet (young people) with Wieland or Klopstock in their hands. Thus amongst the Czechs not only German language, but also German taste and German literature, spread more and more."

Various German "moral periodicals" and literary and intellectual journals appeared in Prague, and at the beginning of 1774 scholars set up a Private Society of Sciences (an earlier *Societas incognitorum* had been founded in 1747 by Josef Petrasch in Olomouc). In 1790 the Prague society became the *Královská česká společnost nauk* (Royal Bohemian Society of Sciences).

This period of "the ENLIGHTENMENT" or "Age of Reason" is more secular in focus than before: there is a growing rationalist reaction against the earlier devotional Roman Catholic literature, leading to an active dislike of the Baroque mentality, and rejection of its literary output, style and language. The "darkness" ("temno") of the preceding era, as it came to be called all too memorably later, has remained to this day a powerfully emotive cultural-ideological image. Enlightenment scholars now condemned uncritical Baroque historiography, and sought to acquire a more empirical view of Czech history (but themselves were affected by mythopoeic patriotism and in due course by Romantic nationalism).

A pioneer in this critical scholarly activity was Gelasius Dobner (1719-90), "father of critical historiography", who published extensive annotations on Hájek's famous *Kronika česká* (Czech Chronicle, 1541; 6 volumes, 1761-82). Václav Fortunát Durych (1735-1802) worked on Old Church Slavonic literature. Karel Rafael Ungar (1743-1807) revived literary historical research by publishing the Baroque scholar Balbin's

Bohemia docta (3 vols, 1776-80, again 1777) with its details of older writers, and Mikuláš Adaukt Voigt (1733-87) continued this work with his own biographical and literary encyclopaedic volumes. Another literary historian, František Faustín Procházka (1749-1809), also edited a number of important older Czech texts (such as the early 14th-century Dalimil chronicle).

A new Czech edition of Hájek's Chronicle was published in 1819; the stories in this work were a popular source for Revival authors. František Martin Pelcl (1734-1801) published his own Czech-language account of earlier Czech history, produced a Czech grammar, and edited Balbín's Latin defence of the Czech language (1775), as well as a famous late 16th-century travel book on Turkey, The Adventures of Václav Vratislav of Mitrovice, Příhody Václava Vratislava z Mitrovic (1599, 1777). Pelcl became professor of Czech language and literature at Prague University in 1793.

Latin-influenced Czech style derived from Renaissance Humanism continued to affect Revival-period and 19th-century writing rather strongly, especially historiography and scholarly prose - but also the style of poetic fiction. Today's Czech readers are apt to find the elaborately crafted syntax and the artificial word-order of such writing awkward and cumbersome for their unaccustomed tastes.

Josef DOBROVSKÝ (1753-1829), like Pelcl for some time a tutor to the Nostitz family, spoke German at home, but learnt Czech from fellow-pupils at grammar school. After studying humanities and theology at Prague he became a tutor to the Nostitzes for eleven years, later administered the General Seminary in Hradisko near Olomouc for three years, and then lived privately with his noble friends and patrons from 1790 in Prague and in the country, especially with Count E. Černín, the Counts Šternberk and B. Nostic (in Chudenice). In 1792 he visited Sweden and Russia, to study Czech and Slavonic manuscripts there.

He came to the study of Slavonic linguistics through textual work on the Bible: his main works in this area are Ausführliches Lehrgebäude der böhmischen Sprache (Grammar of the Czech Language, 1809), a German-Czech dictionary (1802-21) and the Latin grammar of Old Church Slavonic Institutiones linguae Slavicae dialecti veteris (1822). In verse he rejected (1795) classical quantitative metres (which some earlier poets had attempted) and recommended improving on traditional syllabic versification by adopting the stress-based metres which became the 19th-century norm.

In his pioneering history of Czech literature Geschichte der böhmischen Sprache und Literatur of 1792 he saw the time of Veleslavín before 1620 as the high point in Czech literary culture, and he was sceptical about the future for Czech, due to the compulsory use of German in secondary and higher education. His grammar is really more descriptive than prescriptive: it describes (noting at times variant usages) the traditional literary norm, as followed in general by writers up to his own day. Dobrovský's grammar became a prescriptive model in practice through its compelling systematic clarity.

According to the Czech national bibliography of earlier printed books (Knihopis), about 20-30 Czech books were published annually in the mid-18th century. This number doubled in the 1780s.

A new publishing house for the general reader called Česká expedice was established in 1790 by the author and journalist Václav Matěj KRAMERIUS (1753-1808), a lawyer by education. In 1786 he had taken over direction of the one Czech newspaper, which originated in the early 18th century. Kramerius's Česká expedice published new popular (original and adapted) fiction and instructive writing, versions of older popular reading matter - Bruncvík, Štilfríd, Meluzína, etc. - and also various famous older Czech texts, such as Příhody Václava Vratislava z Mitrovic (The Adventures of Václav Vratislav of Mitrovice), Ezopovy bajky (Aesop's fables), Mandevillův cestopis (Mandeville's Voyage), Letopisy trojanské (The Trojan Chronicle). Other authors of Kramerius's circle included Prokop Šedivý, Jan Rulík, and Antonín Josef Zíma.

A vitalising new ingredient in Czech cultural life was the arrival of the permanent stage theatre in Prague. From 1738 there was the theatre V Kotcích and from 1783 the large Estates Theatre (Stavovské divadlo, still in use), but most performances in Prague were in German (or opera in Italian).

A Czech translation (in light verse) of a German farce Kníže Honzík (Count Hans) was performed in 1771. A more extensive series of Czech productions began in 1785 with a version of a German comedy Odběhlec od lásky synovské (Refugee from Filial Love), and in 1786 a wooden theatre called the Bouda (Hut) was erected on present-day Wenceslas Square which put on regular Czech performances for three years, until it was demolished. Most of the plays were successful pieces from Vienna by authors now long forgotten. Of familiar classics there were versions of Schiller's The Robbers, and Shakespeare's Macbeth, by Karel Hynek Thám (both were published, in 1786).

Much of the theatrical activity was organised by K. H. Thám's brother Václav THÁM (1765 - prob. 1816), originally a police official. He wrote a number of plays on national themes, of which only the titles survive. The text of another such play, however, Oldřich a Božena (Oldřich and Božena), by the author Antonín Josef Zíma was published.

Local Prague farce was produced by Prokop Šedivý (1764 - prob. 1810) e.g. Pražští sládcí (The Prague Brewers). Son of a brewer, later owner of a travelling peepshow, he is also the author of the stories České Amazonky (The Czech Amazons, 1792), as well as translator of horror stories Krásná Olivie aneb Strašidlo v Bílé věži (Lovely Olivia, or the Ghost in the White Tower) and Zazděná slečna (The Walled-Up Maiden).

Václav Thám was also editor (and part-author) of a verse anthology entitled Básně v řeči vázané (Poems in Metrical Verse, 1785), which is generally regarded as marking the beginning of modern Czech verse. As well as adaptations of the Czech Baroque poet Kadlinský, it included versions and imitations of contemporary light

Anacreontic verse (meaning little lyric poems on wine, song and friendship, modelled after the Ancient Greek poet Anacreon).

Somewhat more substantial are the anthologies edited by the priest Antonín Jaroslav PUCHMAJER (1769-1820, also author of a rhyming dictionary, a Russian and even a Romany grammar). There were five volumes of his anthology, entitled *Sebrání básní a zpěvů* (Collection of Poems and Songs, 1795, 1797), and *Nové básně* (New Poems, 1798, 1802, 1814). The authors now use stressed metres, as recommended by Dobrovský. Amongst the verse types included are the neo-classical ode, fable, and mock-heroic narrative; the writing shows some Polish influence. More attractive today than Puchmajer's 'Ode to Jan Žižka' or 'Ode to the Czech Language' are his animal fables, which follow an old Czech tradition, but also localise La Fontaine fables via Polish: e.g. 'Mlíkařka' (The Dairymaid). These are as good as anything in verse from this period, in which (the same applies to drama) the comic mode is consistently more effective than attempts at the noble and tragic - the authors' Czech was more suited to down-to-earth colloquial genres. Another contributor to the anthology was Šebestián Hněvkovský (1770-1847), remembered for his mock-heroic poem 'Děvín', on the legendary Czech "War of the Maidens" theme: later, in 1829, he tried to romanticise the poem, without success; he also wrote little comic epigrams. Further contributors were Vojtěch Nejedlý and his brother Jan Nejedlý (1776-1834), Pelcl's successor as Prague professor of Czech.

The next phase in literary developments is associated above all with the name of Josef JUNGSMANN (1773-1847). Born near Beroun, he studied in Prague, then became a grammar school teacher in Litoměřice, and moved to the Old Town Gymnasium in Prague in 1815. His literary achievements are above all as a translator, exercising and expanding the expressive powers of Czech.

Apart from smaller English and German works - Pope and Gray, Goethe and Schiller, Herder, Bürger, Klopstock - also Russian - he is particularly remembered for his version of the French Chateaubriand's Romantic prose work *Atala* (1805, orig. 1801), and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1811, orig. 1667, 1674), a translation of impressive monumentality (helped by German and Polish versions); later he also translated Goethe's middle-class idyll *Herrmann und Dorothea* (1841, orig. 1797). Jungmann's original poems are few, but include two early Revival sonnets and the short narrative poem *Oldřich a Božena*.

In order to achieve the stylistic range of vocabulary he desired, for poetic effect, and in order to expand the lexical resources of Czech, Jungmann revived archaic words, borrowed from Russian and Polish, and created neologisms. Many of his words succeeded in becoming a permanent part of the language.

He also compiled a large anthology of Czech writing for school use, which provided a presentation of literary theory (*Slovesnost*, 1820), a bibliographical history of Czech literature (*Historie literatury české*, 1825), and, above all, a huge and fundamental five-volume dictionary (*Slovník česko-německý*, 1834-39), with both

Czech and German (and often also Latin) definitions, and abundant examples of usage, still consulted to this day.

Enlightenment Neo-Classicism blends with elements of Sentimentalism or (non-full-blown) Romanticism (e.g. contemplation of nature, cultivation of folklore idiom) in the works of Jungmann's circle (the term Pre-Romanticism is often used). Amongst his poetic associates was Milota Zdirad POLÁK (1788-1856), an army officer, famous in his day for his long nature poem *Vznešenost přírozenosti* (1813), revised, with Jungmann, as *Vznešenost přírody* (The Sublimeness of Nature, 1819). (Polák's love song 'Sil jsem proso na souvratí' became widely popular, as did folk-derived texts by various authors from this period.)

Other associates were Jan E. PURKYNĚ (1787-1869), a world-famous physiologist, important for the Czech language through his contributions to the magazine *Krok*; also Jan S. PRESL (1791-1849), an outstanding botanist who cultivated Czech terminology for natural history (*Flora Čechica - Květena česká*, 1819).

The leading historian, and later Czech politician, was František PALACKÝ (1798-1876). Born in Moravia, son of a Protestant teacher, he studied in Trenčín and at the Lyceum in Pressburg (Bratislava). His historical legacy is represented above all by his *Dějiny českého národu* (History of the Bohemian Nation), earlier volumes of which appeared initially in German, from 1836, switching to Czech after 1848.

Palacký's colleague Pavel Josef ŠAFARÍK (1795-1861), born in Slovakia as the son of a Protestant pastor, studied at Jena, and spent many years (from 1819) as a teacher at the Serbian gymnasium in Novi Sad. He moved to Prague in 1833, by then an established scholar, with publications which placed Czech studies within a wider Slavonic context. His main works in this area were *Geschichte der slawischen Sprache und Literatur nach allen Mundarten* (History of Slavonic Language and Literature, 1826) and *Slovanské starožitnosti* (Slavonic Antiquities, 1836-7). A writer of verse in his youth, *Tatranská múza* (Muse of the Tatras, 1814), Šafařík is remembered by literary historians for his co-authorship with Palacký of the theoretical *Počátkové českého básnictví obzvláště prozodie* (Elements of Czech Versification, especially Prosody, 1818), which advocated classical (quantitative) metres.

About the same time the current vogue for ancient non-Classical literatures (influenced by folklorism, ideas of autonomous national culture, Macpherson's rewritings of Ossianic ballads etc.) led to the production of the so-called DVŮR KRÁLOVÉ and ZELENÁ HORA Manuscripts.

The former, presenting itself as a 13th-century manuscript, contained a number of pseudo-ancient unrhymed narrative and lyrical verses with plenty of Slav and national flavour; the lyrical compositions in fact archaised current sentimental folksong. It was published by the librarian of the National Museum Václav HANKA in 1819, after its discovery in Dvůr Králové in 1817.

The second, sent to the Museum from the castle of Zelená Hora near Nepomuk, contained a legend of 'Libuše's Judgment over Chrudoš and Št'áhlav', purporting to be 10th-century.

These bogus pieces helped to bolster Czech national pride and enlarged the corpus of national myths; their themes inspired a number of authors (Zeyer), artists (Mánes) and composers (Smetana). Their bogus character was finally exposed to scholars in the 1880s, although doubts had existed much earlier (Dobrovský for example had rejected the Zelená Hora manuscript from the start).

The originators of these pseudo-medieval texts are thought to be Václav Hanka himself and his friend Josef LINDA, although direct proof is lacking. Hanka (1791-1861), as well as being respected librarian and archivist of the Museum, was one of the first imitators of folksong, while Linda (1789-1834) produced a rather Ossianic historical novel on the coming of Christianity to Bohemia, *Záře nad pohanstvem* (Light over Paganism).

A Slovak became the first widely celebrated Czech poet of the 19th century. Born in 1793, Jan KOLLÁR studied Protestant theology in Jena, where he fell in love with the daughter of a Protestant pastor, Friderike Wilhelmine Schmidt, whom he eventually married, sixteen years later. Meanwhile he became a pastor in Pest, writing a collection of sonnets, first published in 1821, in which his beloved metamorphosed into Mína, an ideal Slav maiden from once Slav, now German territory.

In an expanded edition of 1824, called *Slávy dcera* (Daughter of Slavia), Kollár poetically elevated her to daughter of the goddess Sláva, liberator of the Slavs from past wrongs and oppression. The poet goes on a pilgrimage round the historic sights of Slavdom, with the sonnets divided into three sections, each named after a partly Germanised river: the Saale, the Elbe and the Danube. The whole cycle is prefaced by a grand Prologue in classical elegiac couplets, in which Kollár compares the lamentable present state of Slavdom with its ancient glories and erects a vision of a future of Slav and universal human co-operation and liberty.

The next edition of 1832 added new sections, Lethe and Acheron, portraying Slav figures residing in heaven and hell. By now Kollár had more or less overwhelmed the often effectively sentimentalist eroticism of the earlier editions with grandiose didactic historicism. The best sonnets, if generally staid and four-square, still display some genuine versifying skill. Some strike notes of playful eroticism and pithy moral and national ardour, and display some neat, memorable diction, using antithesis, paradox and conceit. Many are unbearably stiff-jointed and dry-as-dust.

Kollár's fervently expressed (unpolitical) pan-Slav national pathos was a large part of the appeal. His ideas of Slav literary and cultural mutual cooperation are expounded in his treatise 'O literárnej vzájemnosti mezi kmeny a nářečími slávskými' (On Literary Mutuality Among the Slav Peoples and Dialects, 1836, also in German: 'Über die literarische Wechselseitigkeit'). He was also a notable collector and publisher of Slovak folksong.

Folksong gathering and imitation were widespread activities at this time. Alongside Hanka (see above), an outstanding practitioner was František Ladislav ČELAKOVSKÝ (born 1799, Strakonice - Prague 1852). He collected not only Czech, but Slav folksong and folklore generally: *Slovanské národní písně* (Slavonic Folk Songs, 1822-27), *Mudrosloví národu slovanského ve příslovích* (Wisdom of the Slav People in Proverbs). The Czech (and wider contemporary European) cult of "natural" spontaneous poetry, of "organic" and autonomous national culture, tended to idealise a certain limited view of ("uncorrupted") peasant values. The sources of such ideas are various, but include of course the French Rousseau, and Herder, whose German writings also influenced those Kollárian ideas of Slav cultural unity (whether as imaginary glorious past, present needs, or visionary future). Indeed, both the folklore and Pan-Slav cults rather precisely mirror German intellectual attitudes.

Čelakovský embodied such concerns in two volumes of skilful imitations or "echoes", his *Ohlas písní ruských* (Echo of Russian Songs, 1829), mainly narrative pieces, and *Ohlas písní českých* (Echo of Czech Songs, 1839), mainly lyrical pieces, e.g. 'Pocestný' (The Wayfarer), still sung - 'Je to chůze po tom světě...'; also the opening ballad of the collection, 'Toman a lesní panna' ('Toman and the Forest Maiden'), which powerfully anticipates the ballads of Erben.

Simultaneously intimately involved in and transcending the general provincialism around him, is the work of the Czech Romantic poet, Karel Hynek MÁCHA (1810-36). Born in Prague of unprosperous parents, he studied law and became briefly a lawyer's assistant in Litoměřice, where however he soon died, shortly after his fiancée had given birth to a short-lived baby son. His first poetic attempts were in German, while still at the Gymnasium, but he switched to Czech. He was also active as an amateur actor in Czech theatricals (at the Estates Theatre and the Kajetánské divadlo). In the spirit of historicist sentiment and love of scenery he enjoyed visiting old castles full of the pathos of the past, and he travelled widely on foot, to destinations such as the Krkonoše mountains, or across the Alps to northern Italy. His sexual passion for the daughter of a Prague bookbinder Eleonora (Lori) Šomková is poetically transformed, in that high Romantic interfusing of life and art, into an agony of awareness of the gulf between ideal and actual.

His prose writings draw on the historical novel (depicting the time of Wenceslas IV), the Gothic novel and lyrical speculative prose ('Pout' krkonošská' - 'Pilgrimage to the Krkonoše Mountains'), typically Romantic tales of outsiders, and the love tale with a contemporary setting ('Marinka'). Mácha's various rebels, outsiders, social outcasts are typical Romantic self-images of non-acceptance, but at his best, most obviously in his verse masterpiece, *Máj* (May), Mácha eludes easy literary - critical definitions and summary philosophising.

In *Máj* (May, 1836), Mácha combines grotesquely exploited Gothic-Romantic (Baroque-derived) clichés of prison, execution, gallows, skulls, robbers, dying lovers, and graveyards, with musical, ostensibly idyllic evocations of nature - in which he

ambivalently employs further lyrical clichés of the cycle of seasons: doves, roses, nightingales, and the like.

In the story (exiguously sketched out in the poem) Vilém is imprisoned and executed for killing his own father, unrecognised - his father, seducer of his own beloved. (Is this fatal destiny or classical-mythicised male psychology?) Man is envisioned as prisoner of enigmatic nature and time, subject to metaphysical agony and agnosticism; seasonal, cyclical nature, the sensory may be received as pure beauty, beautiful illusion, or harsh mockery of human ideals. The text plays with illusive and elusive sensual effect, ironic contrast of nature and man, mind and matter, speculative lyrical meditations and submerged erotic double-entendres. It expertly exploits (yet simultaneously dismantles?) the pathetic fallacy of lyrical empathy in nature. Possible sentimental or “Victorian” misapprehension of his double-edged conception of “love” is dispelled by inspection of his sexually explicit diary.

Czech drama had declined after the initial spurt of the 1780s, but revived somewhat by the mid 1820s. Václav Kliment KLICPERA (1792-1859), a teacher, is the leading drama figure of the 1820s, and some of his comedies are still revived. He also attempted historical fiction in the manner of Walter Scott (e.g. the contemporary success *Točník*, 1828, featuring Wenceslas IV). In the fertile nationalist context the (often thinly) Walter-Scottian historical romance became a Czech literary obsession.

Other dramatists included Fr. Turinský (Angelína, 1821) and Karel Simeon Macháček. They were followed by Josef Kajetán TYL, whose musical comedy *Fidlovačka* (Spring Fair, 1834) contains the verses of what became the Czech national anthem. Tyl (1808-56) was one of the leading public literary figures in the 1830s and 1840s. From 1834-37 he led an amateur dramatic society, whose members included Mácha, performing at the Cajetan theatre in the Malá Strana. In 1846 he was appointed in charge of Czech productions at the Estates Theatre. After public involvement in the events of 1848-9 he was unable to continue in this post, or work as a magazine editor as he had previously also done. (He died some years later in Plzeň with his travelling theatre company, leaving seven children, the mother of whom was the actress sister of his legitimate wife.)

One of his more notable plays, still sometimes performed, is *Strakonický dudák* (The Piper of Strakonice, 1847), which treats the theme of love for home virtues ultimately overcoming the lure of travel and material ambition; it has been praised for sharp characterisation of figures, and idiomatic colloquial dialogue. Tyl's historical dramas, such as the social tragedy *Krvavý soud aneb Kutnohorští havíři* (The Miners of Kutná Hora, 1847, censored until 1848), set in the 15th century, or *Jan Hus* (1848) give contemporary patriotic and democratic resonance to their themes from the past. The premiere of *Jan Hus* caused an enormous stir and attracted crowds of people to the theatre.

Tyl was also the successful author of well-written short stories and other fiction, including *Rozervanec* (The Malcontent, 1840) with a caricature of Mácha. His *Poslední Čech* (The Last Czech, 1844), however, not one of his best examples, was

severely and famously criticised by the leading young journalist of the day, Karel Havlíček Borovský, for sentimental love scenes and facile nationalism.

Other dramatic writers include Josef Jirí Kolár (1812-96), who translated a number of Shakespeare's plays (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*) as well as Schiller, Goethe's *Egmont* and the first part of *Faust*.

Subjective Romantic agonies, and sentimentalism, are thus already beginning to be undermined. The contemporary humorist František Jaromír RUBEŠ (1814-53) likewise pokes fun at a Mácha-like figure in his vaguely Pickwickian travel story *Pan amanuensis na venku aneb Putování za novelou* (Mr. Amanuensis in the Country, or In Search of a Novella, 1842). Co-founder of the first humorous magazine *Paleček* (1841-47), he was also a writer of popular, light recitational verse (*Deklamovánky a písně*, six volumes, 1837-1847).

By the brink of that ‘Year of Revolutions’, 1848, Czech Revival literature had passed through a series of overlapping phases, all of which would continue to make themselves felt in the following decades: sentimentalism and rationalism, popular moralist narrative and Gothic horror, folklorism and national historicism, nature-lyricism and subjective Romanticism. There were also stirrings of a more sociological, or descriptive concern with contemporary life in fiction which one might, at least partly, assign to the patterns of 19th-century Realism. This type of writing, however, is more clearly represented (to varying degrees) in the fifties, sixties, and after, by the prose of Němcová, Světlá, Hálek and Neruda.

BRIEF SKETCH: 1848 TO AUSGLEICH (1867) AND 1918

The leading democratic journalist of 1848-9 was Karel HAVLÍČEK (1821-56). Residence in Russia as a tutor (1843-44) had had a sobering effect, curing him of the fashionable Pan-Slav vision of Tsarist Russia as a force for emancipation and replacing the Kollárian vision with emphasis on political self-reliance (article ‘Slovan a Čech’, ‘Slav and Czech’, 1846). For his democratic constitutionalist journalism Havlíček was interned in the Austrian Tyrol in 1851. Released in April 1855 he fell ill with tuberculosis and died soon after. In literature he is remembered for his sharp epigrams and humorous satirical verse such as *Křest sv. Vladimíra* (The Christening of St. Vladimir), which castigates absolutism and the established church.

Another radical of 1848, Karel SABINA (1813-77) had been an associate of Mácha, and was imprisoned until 1857. Later, in 1872, he was accused of being a police informer, as indeed he was. His most successful literary work was arguably the semi-autobiographical *Oživené hroby* (Graves Revived, 1870), set amongst revolutionaries in Olomouc prison, but he is best known for his adroit librettos to Smetana's opera *The Brandenburgs in Bohemia* (1862) and *The Bartered Bride* (1863).

Another liberal and admirer of the poet Máchá was Josef Václav FRIČ (1829-90), the son of a lawyer, who left home at seventeen and lived for a while in London and Paris. Like Sabina he was arrested after involvement in the events of 1848-9, amnestied in 1854, but subsequently interned again and expelled from Austria in 1859. He went to London, where he associated with the Russian liberal exile Herzen, and travelled around Europe. His most important literary writings are his memoirs, *Paměti* (1884-87).

The most significant poet of the 1840s and 1850s was Karel Jaromír ERBEN (1811-70), who was employed as archivist of the city of Prague, and was an outstanding collector of folk song and tale, seeking for survivals of ancient pagan myth and wisdom in this material in the spirit of the German brothers Grimm. He published the classic folksong collection *Písňe národní v Čechách*, 1842-5, later re-titled *Prostonárodní české písňe a říkadla*, 1864, with over 2,200 songs, and also edited the collection of Slav folktales *Sto prostonárodních pohádek a pověstí slovanských*, 1865 (from which there are some English translations). He was also an important editor of older Czech literature, including works of Hus and Štítný and the Czech humanists.

His poetic masterpiece was a slender collection of literary ballads *Kytice z pověstí národních* (*Bouquet of National Legends*, 1853, enlarged 1861). The core of the book is formed by twelve ballads (with a prefatory poem 'Kytice'), based on various Slav legends, but also on German literary ballads and, indirectly, even English ones. The earliest, 'Záhořovo lože', was begun in 1836 and shows influence of Máchá, especially in early draft form, in its pilgrim figure and evocation of night landscape, but polemicising with Máchá's sensibility of revolt.

Erben presents instead a sensibility of submission to the mysterious natural order and collective morality whose transgression courts disaster. He portrays a dialectic of pain inseparable from joy in human relations, fragility and conflict in bonds between mother and child, husband and wife, or lovers, fulfilment in intimacy matched by destructiveness in the urge to possess, hold on, not release, in adulthood or in death, be impossibly at one with the other. The folksong idiom, with integral elements of peasant Christianity and magic belief, is made the pregnant, terse figurative and narrative expression of psychological and moral philosophical anxiety.

Dvořák based several works on these ballads: *The Spectre's Bride: A Dramatic cantata* (Op. 69), and a series of four tone poems (1895-6): *The Water Gnome/Sprite* (*Vodník*), *The Noonday Witch* (*Polednice*), *The Wild Dove* (*Holoubek*), and *The Golden Spinning Wheel* (*Zlatý kolovrat*).

Another lasting author of the 1850s is Božena NĚMCOVÁ (1820-1862), whose prose fiction stands alongside the ballads of Erben, especially her fairy tales, several stories and above all her classic idyllic novel *Babička*.

Born in Vienna, she grew up in Ratibořice where her parents worked for the Countess Zaháňská, and during her childhood her grandmother Magdaléna Novotná left a powerful impact on her. At seventeen she was married off to an excise official

Josef Němec, fifteen years older than her. Through him she met the Czech literati of Prague in 1842-5, and subsequently lived for a time (1845-8) in southern Bohemia, where she studied local folklore. After 1848 Němec was disadvantaged for his Czech patriotism, transferred to Nymburk, Liberec, and then in 1850 to Hungary. Němcová moved with her children to Prague where she spent the remaining twelve years of her life in straitened circumstances. Her eldest son Hynek died, her husband lost his income, yet in these years of trouble Němcová produced her finest work.

Němcová's masterpiece is the delightfully written novel *Babička* (*Grandmother*, 1855), a therapeutic metamorphosis of her childhood into an idealised, selectively realistic, poetically convincing vision of children growing up in a happy rural setting, the cycle of the seasons, the lovingly and vividly enumerated minutiae of daily human life, its round of traditional observances and pious customs, in which even tragedy - disastrous flood, for example, or the seduction by an outsider, illegitimate pregnancy and madness of the village girl *Viktorka* - is accommodated by human mutual solidarity into a sense of order and harmony. The grandmother, from a poor upland district, brings her simple morality and pious wisdom to help those around her, even the elevated family of the Countess: a delicate advocacy of traditional simple existential values and moral egalitarianism, in which disharmonious urbanising social change and loss of older communal values and Christian verities are present to the reader in their eloquently poetic near-erasure.

The 1850s were a period of political reaction, of bureaucratic neo-absolutism, and of censorship, as well as the publication of Erben and Němcová's masterpieces of rural-derived, acquiescently lyrical (though also in part acquiescently tragic) Romanticism.

The 1860s mark a renewed shift in some quarters towards a more socially sceptical and radical outlook, a trend associated with some of the authors who commemorated Máchá's legacy in the *Máj* (May) miscellany of 1858 - especially Jan NERUDA (1834-91), the ironic terse melancholy of whose first poetic collection *Hřbitovní kvítí* (*Graveyard Flowers*, 1857) drew partly on the influence of Heine in German.

Later, in his *Balady a romance* (*Ballads and Romances*, 1883) Neruda skilfully adapted the folk ballad idiom and Christian (secularised) themes to social comment, the uncertainty of national aspiration, and the affirmation of plebeian values, - and in *Prosté motivy* (*Plain Motifs*, 1883) he ruefully, with humorous, ambivalent self-irony, expressed aging and unmarried eros in a tensely emotive lyrical cycle following the seasons and love for a young girl.

In his lifetime he was particularly recognised for his abundant literary journalism, sketches, short stories, criticism and essays. His most famous volume of stories, *Tales of the Lesser Quarter* (*Povídky malostranské*, 1878), set in the district of narrow streets and old houses beneath Prague Castle, combine evocative local colour, social atmosphere, and sharp, emotionally charged, ironic character portrayal with touches of wry social, and desolemnising national comment, but also ambivalently

deprecatory self-stylisation, in the gruff eccentric figure, the solitary, the bachelor, the beggar, the lover or the child.

Very popular in their day, and still read, are the sweetly composed love lyrics entitled *Večerní písně* (Evening Songs, 1859) of Neruda's fellow *Máj* anthology contributor Vítězslav HÁLEK (1835-74), who also wrote a number of skilful, mainly village stories, evocative of rural settings and with a liking for the happy resolution of conflict and moral sympathy for simple and unselfish humanity, and democratism, set against conservatism, material greed and class superiority. He also wrote the urban story 'Poldík rumař' (Poldík the Scavenger, 1873), in which Poldík cares for the son of the woman he unhappily loved.

Another contributor to the *Máj* miscellany, Karolína SVĚTLÁ develops portrayal of the social inequalities of rural life, in fictional works with strongly portrayed, independent-minded female characters, most notably perhaps her psychologically well-handled and convincing *Vesnický román* (A Village Novel, 1867), where conflicts of matrimony and desire, incompatible character, age and social disparity collide with material need, religious belief and moral duty.

AUSGLEICH TO WORLD WAR

The Ausgleich, an agreement which split the Empire administratively into the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, left Czech nationalism disappointed, still prone to indulge in nostalgic, or propagandistic historicism, but the remaining decades of the century in fact produced a series of rapid and substantial national advances.

The grandiose National Theatre, whose foundation stone was solemnly laid in 1868, opened in 1881 (and again, after a fire, 1883). The university divided into separate Czech and German institutions in 1882. The Czech Academy of Sciences arose in 1890. Large Czech encyclopaedias were published: the eleven-volume work (1860-74) edited by the politician František Ladislav Rieger, and the publisher Otto's twenty-eight-volume monumental work (1885-1909). The new National Museum building was opened in 1891, and various large exhibitions took place.

A degree of division arises between more national-based, Slav-orientated authors, traditionally called the Ruch school after the miscellany *Ruch* (1868, 1870), and the more "cosmopolitan" Lumír school, grouped especially from 1873 around the magazine *Lumír*, keen to absorb Western European trends, in poetry especially French and Italian influences.

The most eminent of the national-based school was Svatopluk ČECH (1846-1908), a strongly social poet, remembered for works such as his *Písně otroka* (Songs of a Slave, 1895), castigating Czech submission to bourgeois Vienna, and the colourful satirical social allegory *Hanuman* (Hanuman, 1884) about a civil war between clothed cosmopolitan and naked nationalist "natural" apes. His satirical fictions based on a Prague rentier figure Mr Brouček, transported into unlikely

milieux, which also contain anti-Art-for-Art's sake caricatures of poets, have been drawn on for Janáček's two-part opera *The Excursions of Mr Brouček* (The Excursion of Mr Brouček to the Moon, and The Excursion of Mr Brouček to the Fifteenth Century) (1908-17, premiere 1920).

Somewhere between schools was the poet Josef Václav SLÁDEK (1845-1912), who spent two years in the United States from 1868. He wrote intimate and folksong-based lyrics, but also translated English authors, including Longfellow, Bret Hart, and Robert Burns. Above all, he produced versions of almost all of Shakespeare's plays.

An obviously foreign-influenced author of fiction and verse was Julius ZEYER (1841-1901), of mixed Prague French-German and Jewish birth, who learnt Czech from his nanny, and wrote a sensual, Romance-style prose, alternating and blending exotic legends and foreign settings with contemporary national themes and historic atmosphere, focussing on pathos of individual aspirations, national, artistic, erotic, mystical, passionate, spiritual or ascetic. His prose fictions includes the novels *Jan Maria Plojhar* and *Dům "U tonoucí hvězdy"* (The House "At the Sinking Star"), and *Tři legendy o křížifixu* (Three Legends of the Crucifix), two of which have been translated as 'Inlulus', tr. Paul Selver, *Review-43*, 2, 1943, and 'Samko the bird', tr. W.E.Harkins, *Czech Prose*, pp.243-63.

The leading Lumír poet was the hugely prolific Jaroslav VRCHLICKÝ (1853-1912). Highly influenced by Romance culture, he spent time in Italy in 1875-6 as a tutor, and translated abundantly from French and Italian. His numerous lyric collections contain a multitude of intimate, meditative and love verses, in a large variety of metres and stanza forms, In the spirit of Victor Hugo he attempted a vast cycle of "epic fragments" to encompass a poetic vision of ennobling human spiritual evolution (e.g. *Duch a svět*, 1878; *Zlomky epejeje*, 1886; *Bar Kochba*, 1897). He translated from Victor Hugo, Dante, Leopardi, Tasso, Goethe, Baudelaire, Petrarch, Shelley, Whitman (etc. etc.). He composed cascades, volume after volume, of unevenly inspired verses, much of which expresses celebratory delight in life's bounty, nature's sensory beauties, the responsive creativity of the human spirit embodied in art (from *Z hlubin*, 1875, to *Meč Damoklův*, 1913, including *Rok na jihu*, 1878; *Eklogy a písně*, 1880; *Okna v bouři*, 1894; *Strom života*, 1909).

Against all this (and ambitious drama too: the trilogy from Greek mythology *Hippodamie*, 1890- 91, the historical comedy *Noc na Karlštejně*, 1884, and Shakespearian *Soud lásky*, 1887, - critical writing too), there came, much held at bay, the perennial corrosives of the artist's grandiose euphoria: conflict between vision and contemporary existence, imagination and experience, loss of intimacy and love, emotional pain, illness, age, vanitas rerum, knowledge of transience. Where these enter Vrchlický's lyrical sensibility, infusing the musical craftsmanship of forms and sensual evocations, the poetic pulse remains most alive.

After the 1860s there came a renewal of popular interest in national historical fiction, connected with the historic state rights campaigns of the nationalist leaders, disappointed over the dualist settlement between Austria and Hungary in 1867.

The main historical novelists were the popular Václav BENEŠ TŘEBÍZSKÝ (1849-84), Alois JIRÁSEK (1851- 1930) - the most famous of these - and Zikmund WINTER (1846-1912), with a more critical historical and psychological insight, for example in his novel *Mistr Kampanus* (1909) set around 1620.

Rural fiction was practised by authors such as Karel Václav Rais (1859-1926), the conservative ruralist Josef Holeček (1853- 1929), Antal Stašek (1843- 1931), who wrote on the Czech textile workers of northern Bohemia, the socialist-inclined Teréza Nováková (1853-1912), and the brothers Alois and Vilém MRŠTÍK (1861-1925, 1863-1912), well-known for their drama *Maryša* (1894), while Vilém also produced the notable Prague novel *Santa Lucia*.

Social conflicts of the countryside also figured in a number of plays of the period, especially Ladislav Stroupežnický's (1850-92) *Naši furianti* (Our Swaggerers, 1887), Jirásek's *Vojnarka* (Mrs Vojnarová), and Gabriela Preissová's (1862-1946) *Její pastorkyňa* (Her Shepherdess, 1890), known abroad in the form of Janáček's opera *Jenůfa*.

Working-class urban and industrial society was treated by a series of authors, including the pioneering Gustav Pflieger Moravský and Jakub ARBES (1840-1914), best known today for the mystery tales of his *Romanetta* (Romanettos), such as *Sv. Xaverius* (St. Francis Xavier). Another social author was Matěj Anastazia Šimáček (1860-1913), e.g. *Duše továrny* (Soul of the Factory, 1894). Urban mores are also treated by Ignát Herrmann (1854-1935, and in a psychological manner related to naturalism, with elements of grotesquerie and stylistic exuberance, mingling formal, intellectual and plebeian language, by perhaps the most remarkable of them, Karel Matěj ČAPEK-CHOD (1860-1927), e.g. his novel *Turbina* (The Turbine, 1916) and Antonín Vondřejc (1917-18).

These years are also characterised by the changing scholarly climate, symptomatic of which were the various public interventions of the University professor and future President T. G. MASARYK (1850-1937), one of those instrumental in overturning faith in the forged *Dvůr Králové* and *Zelená Hora* manuscripts along with the Old Czech scholar Jan Gebauer (1838-1907).

Masaryk and his associates were known as the "Realists". His view of literature was primarily ethical and social, and he propagated a very Protestant-style view of Czech culture which stressed, somewhat distortingly, the legacy of the Reformation (including in this the Hussites) as the main precursor of modern humanitarian democratic beliefs. He saw the Czech national programme as being essentially democratic, and anti-imperialist, insofar as it remained true to its roots.

The social-critical view of art was adhered to by the "Realist" poet Josef Svatoopluk MACHAR (1864-1942), who analysed the moral decay of Viennese-dominated society (*Confiteor*, 1887; *Tristium Vindobona*, 1893), portrayed the disadvantaged status of women in *Zde by měly kvést růže* (Here Should Roses Bloom, 1894), depicted the life of a prostitute (*Magdalena*, 1894), and saw

Christianity negatively as having caused the fall of ancient Greek civilisation and morality, in his cycle *Svědómím věků* (Through the Conscience of the Ages).

Another social-critical poet was Petr BEZRUC (1867-1958), who styled himself as a rough prophet or coal miner condemning the oppression of 70,000 Czechs in his native Silesia germanised and polonised by mine owners, aristocrats and government authorities, and neglected by Czech politicians. The most powerful poems in his collection *Slezské písně* (Silesian Songs, 1909) have an effectively emotive symbolism, a dark gusto of rough-hewn, despairing, disillusioned rhetoric.

Beside the impressionist subjectivist Antonín SOVA (1864-1928), the most honoured of the symbolists is Otokar BŘEZINA (1868-1929), who in his five collections of poetry and in his essays presents a vision expressed in grandly metaphorical melodious verses of mystic spiritual uplift from despair to cosmic brotherhood with all creation: *Tajemné dálky* (Mysterious Distances, 1895), *Svítání na západě* (Dawning in the West, 1896), *Větry od pólů* (Winds from the Poles, 1897), *Stavitelé chrámu* (The Builders of the Cathedral, 1899), *Ruce* (Hands, 1901), and the essays of *Hudba pramenů* (Music of the Springs, 1903).

The Decadent fin-de-siecle is perhaps most notably represented amongst poets associated with the literary periodical *Moderní revue* by Karel HLAVÁČEK (1874-1898), of working-class origin, who died of tuberculosis. A graphic artist and author of two main collections *Pozdě k ránu* (Late Towards Morning, 1896) and *Mstivá kantiléna* (Vengeful Cantilena, 1898), he turns the typical aristocratism, aestheticism and obsession with art, and often perverse eroticism, alongside delicate evocation of crepuscular and soft-toned atmosphere, into musically alluring expressions of isolation, impotence, vengefulness, sickness, resignation and foredoomed resistance. Decadent ennui becomes famine of ambience.

More typically Decadent is the work of Jiří KARÁSEK ze Lvovic, for example his first two collections *Sexus necans* (1897) and *Sodoma* (1895), with its homosexuality, sadomasochism and erotic pseudonecrophilia. The first edition of *Sodoma* was confiscated; it was reissued after poems were read out in the Reichsrat by the Social Democrat J. Hybeš in 1903, putting it beyond the grasp of the censor.

Social non-conformity and rebellion amongst younger writers before 1914 often took the ideological form of anarchism. Various influences of Nietzsche are also detectable. Stanislav Kostka NEUMANN (1875-1947) passed on to Communist rhetoric from anarchist utopianism and a nature vitalism shared somewhat by the poetry of Fráňa ŠRÁMEK (1877-1952) or the gentler intimate lyricism of Karel TOMAN (1877- 1946).

A more shocking non-conformist anti-lyrical antibourgeois colloquial style characterises the verse of František GELLNER (1881-?1914).

Viktor DYK (1877-1931) espoused an anti-bourgeois right-wing nationalism, and created an atmospheric, but ironically barbed social-critical neo-romanticism in works such as the poem *Milá sedmi loupežníků* (The Beloved of Seven Bandits, 1906), the

novella *Krysař* (The Ratcatcher, 1915), and the play *Zmoudření dona Quijota* (The Coming to Wisdom of Don Quixote, 1913).

The obvious watershed years of the 1914-18 War bring this increasingly very summary section of our survey to an end.

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