

Does Czech Science Fiction Have a (Feminine) Gender?*



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Fantastic literature is a highly popular phenomenon, accompanied not only by a massive fan movement known as “fandom” but also by very tentative literary research that, especially in Central Europe, lags behind what has been done in English-speaking countries. This is a consequence of both the publishing houses’ lack of accommodation for popular literature before 1989 and the conviction of many scholars that popular or even “trivial literature” *a priori* cannot interest any serious literary scholar or critic. Despite this rather widespread belief, essays and monographs devoted to fantastic literature have been appearing in Central European countries in increasing numbers, charting a body of work that corresponds to the common understanding of *Trivialliteratur*, but also to works that, although using patterns and motifs typical of fantastic literature, try to express universal ideas and whose literary values do not suffer in comparison to those of so-called mainstream literature.

In the following pages, we will focus primarily on science fiction (henceforth “SF”), which means that we will leave aside the numerous works described as pure fantasy (although these two genres¹

increasingly overlap, and drawing sharp distinctions among SF, fantasy, horror, and crime fiction or thrillers would obliterate rather than clarify the definitions of these genres). The main subject of our discussion will be the work of several Czech women SF authors, or rather their approach to so-called “women’s writing.”

Although in a late-20th-century interview with Stanisław Bereś, Stanisław Lem stated that “SF readers are young males who cannot cope with reality and have problems with women,”

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¹ Although there are many reservations about the use of the term “genre” when it comes to naming the various types of fantastic literature, of which fantasy and horror are commonly counted alongside SF, since works of this type are found in all literary (and cinematic) genres, the term has taken hold so strongly in the reading and research community that it can only be theoretically argued as an afterthought. Tereza Dědinová came up with a Solomonic solution, proposing to understand genre as an open system – according to Pavel Šidák: “*V tomto pojetí je žánr samotný ideálním modelem, architektem nesoucím všechny žánrové znaky – konkrétní díla však všechny znaky modelu nenaplní nikdy.*” (“In this notion, the genre itself is an ideal model, an architect featuring all the genre’s characteristics – although specific works never fully realize the model in these characteristics”) (Dědinová, 2015: 44-45). [See also Genette, 1979. Translator’s note.]

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(Bereš & Lem, 2002: 202) it cannot be overlooked that the first SF novel was – and most scholars agree on this point – Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, published in 1818, when she was twenty-one. Another indisputable fact, however, is the biased observation that for a long time, women had no presence among the genre’s prominent authors. In Anglo-American literature, where most of the works described as “fantastic” appear, female authors begin to proliferate as early as the 1940s, but it was not until the 1960s, with the advent of second-wave feminism, that the names of some women writers came to signify not only “women’s” but global science fiction. Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Anne McCaffrey. C. J. Cherryh, and later Margaret Atwood – this list of names is random and includes less than a tenth of the women writers for whom the SF genre became an opportunity to discuss current (not only) women’s issues in fiction in the guise of fantasy.

Compared to the huge wave of female SF writers in the Western world, women writers in Czech SF began to appear relatively late; this is a consequence of both the authorities’ – and thus also the publishing industry’s – distaste for the genre as such, which specifically delayed its reaching bookshelves (leaving aside fan editions), and probably also of gender stereotypes. SF – as opposed to fantasy – is a “masculine” genre that requires a fascination with technology and a dynamic narrative, not to mention an imagination that transcends the frameworks of realistic literature, to which literature written by women has traditionally been categorized.² The fact

that this is indeed gender stereotyping can be seen in the number of women authors who have debuted in the genre since the late 1980s; their voices sound no less resonant today than those of male writers. And although many of the English-language texts that are central to the “female perspective” in SF have not yet been translated into Czech, Czech women authors have found their own way to speak (or not) with a female voice.

The following reflections will be centered around three subtopics: the existence of a Czech feminist SF wave, then the question of so-called *écriture féminine* (“women’s writing”), and finally the view that the gender of the author does not have to determine the manner of writing, the subject matter, or the opinions expressed. While these questions concern literature in general, when thinking about SF we must consider the fact that it is a literature based on an initial idea, *i.e.*, on the construction of a fictional world within which there is a certain fantastic element that is not negligible but essential for the functioning of that world. This has been noted by scholars and critics of fantasy, for example, “*James Gunn nazývá science fiction literaturou změny a fantasy literaturou rozdílu a odlišuje je s ohledem na to, zda vybízejí čtenáře k pokládání takzvaných realistických otázek*” (“James Gunn calls science fiction the literature of change and fantasy the literature of difference, and distinguishes them in terms of whether they invite readers to ask so-called realistic questions”) (Dědinová, 2015: 97) and Samuel R. Delany writes that “we must think about literature and science fiction not as two

² Ewa Kraskowska writes in more detail about the fact that “women’s writing” has been

more realistic for many decades (2000: 200-210).



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different sets of marked texts, but as two different sets of values, two different ways of responding, two different ways of making sense of the text, two different ways of reading – or what one academic tradition would call two distinct discourses” (2005: 65). But although in SF we treat the construction of the fictional world differently from texts set in the “real” world, it is nevertheless conceivable that we can use methods typical of SF research to investigate “non-fiction” works (let my fragmentary reflections here serve to confirm this thesis).

Before 1989, in the countries of the former socialist bloc, SF often became a disguise for the expression of dissent against the regime. Since the political changes, apart from being a stream of pure entertainment, SF has still served as a useful tool for conveying various distinct ideas such as feminist ones. This is most evident at the thematic level, where (mostly) female authors so oriented choose as themes of their texts the issues of patriarchy – or matriarchy, the unfair distribution of life’s tasks, the presentation of women as mere sex objects or even less valuable beings.

In this respect, Eva Hauserová is rightly considered a purely feminist author who in her first texts, which she describes as “biopunk,”³ focused mainly on ecological problems of the future caused by contemporary human beings.

³ Dating from 1988, Hauserová’s usage of “biopunk” is distinct from the later American one. Hers depicts distorted social relations under late communism through biological metaphor. U.S. “biopunk” is a science-fiction subgenre that draws upon modern genetics and related disciplines. [Translator’s note, with thanks to Cyril Simsa for the observation.]

However, she speaks with a most distinctly feminine voice in her collection of short stories *Když se sudičky spleto* (When the Fates Get It Wrong, 2000), where she focuses on issues typical of the so-called second wave of feminism, such as the patriarchal organization of society, the suppression of women’s role in society, and the search for one’s own feminine identity. The protagonist of the short story that gives the collection its title is a beautiful young woman suffering from depression, outwardly resembling a Hollywood celebrity, who is prescribed so-called visionary drops by her therapist, the effect of which is to relax and induce pleasant fantasies. This is meant to lead the women patients to make these ideas come true. Although the drops do have an effect on Karolína, they fail at first to improve reality in any way – she still feels underestimated by her husband, and she is the object of her former co-workers’ envy, although all she wants is love and understanding, which still do not come. So the protagonist starts experimenting with the drops, until finally, during her husband’s “business” dinner with a foreign guest, she takes a whole bottle instead of a few drops – and finds herself in a man’s skin:

Nesmírně živě jsem cítila svoji plochou, volně a svobodně dýchající širokou hrud' bez ňader [...], ale hlavně varlata – v těch byl ten pravý zdroj energie! Vysílala mi do těla přívaly testosteronu, snažila se mě zvednout ze židle a pohnout k nějaké akci, pohybu, velkému činu [...]

I felt extremely vividly my flat, free-breathing, broad chest without breasts [...] but especially my testicles – they were the real source of my energy! They would send surges of testosterone into my body, trying



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to lift me out of my chair and rouse me to some action, movement, some great deed [...] (Hauserová, 2000: 25).

The consequences of this event go much further – during a therapy session that this time includes both Karolína and her husband, the protagonist responds to the doctor’s call to tell her husband that she loves him by saying:

Víte, mně se strašně líbil ten pocit, když jsem měla koule. Pochopila jsem, co je v životě zábavné. Bojovat. Likvidovat. Ničit a vítězit. Díky, opravdu jste mi pomohl!

You know, I really liked the feeling of having balls. I got what was fun in life. Fighting. Getting things out of the way. Destroying and winning. Thank you, that was a great help!” (23).

The inspiration for this tale can be found not only in Aristotle, who referred to woman as a damaged man, but especially in Sigmund Freud, who – probably also inspired by Aristotle – proclaimed that woman is a *de facto* castrated man, and that she bears the trauma of the discovery of this fact her whole life long. Freud’s ideas, although greatly misogynistic, became fertile ground for feminist views, since despite all the objections of his followers, the father of psychoanalysis left a visible mark on mainstream thinking not only about the roles of women and men in life, but also about the reasons why women represent the “weaker sex.” Hauserová’s story focuses on the biological difference between women and men, which affects not only the functioning of the body but also the character traits of the person who, in possessing testicles, feels

empowered and enabled to decide the fates of others.

Another short story, “Tajemství dělohy” (The Mystery of the Womb),⁴ elaborates on the ideas of Freud’s predecessor Otto Weininger, who argued in his study *Geschlecht und Charakter* (Sex and Character, 1903) that all humans are bisexual, in fact a mixture of male and female substance, although according to Weininger, men are active and productive, while women are passive and unconscious (Chadak, 2000). The initial idea of the story was that there are women on Earth who, after their first sexual intercourse – regardless of the contraceptives used – become pregnant and also “absorb” the father of the child during the development of the fetus. He becomes a part of them, creating a new, female-male being, which, even before this fact is discovered, the female protagonist describes in the following way:

Často se mi v mysli vynořovaly vzpomínky nebo vize nebo co to vlastně mohlo být – na to, jak mám mužské tělo, jak jsem převtělená do té mužské podoby a dokonce jak i prožívám sex jako muž. Byla to docela normální část mého světa. Ale přesto se mi zdálo, že jiný holky nic takového neznají a zase naopak že je vzrušují věci, který na mě nemají činek.

In my mind, memories or visions, or whatever they might have been, would often emerge – of having a male body, of being reincarnated in a male form and even of experiencing sex as a man. It was a

⁴ In English as “Between Us Girls,” transl. Cyril Simsa, in *Allskin and Other Tales*, ed. Alexandra Buchler. Seattle: Women in Translation, 1998. Translator’s note.



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completely normal part of my world. But I still sensed that other girls had no experience of any such thing, and that on the contrary, they were turned on by things that had no effect on me. (Hauserová, 2000: 28).

In Hauserová's short story, she brings Weininger's ideas up to date, although in the sense of the second feminist wave, which emphasizes the exceptionalism of women, who are more powerful in her text, while the man becomes part of the future mother after impregnation (which is actually his only role). At the same time, the author stresses women's sense of community – also typical of the second feminist wave – and self-sufficiency, as expressed in the words:

A současně mě napadlo, že jejich schůzky – tušila jsem, že nejde jen o povídání při kafičku, ale spíš o nějaký podivný, přízračný orgie – by mi mohly konečně přinést tu ostrou a intenzivní rozkoš, kterou jsem s muži vlastně nikdy nemohla zažít. Pochopila jsem, že ten muž, který je ve mně – a v mé matce a v mé dceři – mi přinese ještě mnoho radosti.

And at the same time, it occurred to me that their meetings – I suspected that it was not all just talking over coffee but rather some strange, phantasmic orgy – might finally bring me the sharp and intense pleasure that I could never actually experience with men. I understood that this man inside me – and in my mother and in my daughter – would bring me much more pleasure. (33)

In the short story “Milé maminky!” (Dear Mothers!) we find several themes typical of the body of women's work: motherhood, the role of mother and wife preferred and prescribed by the male part

of society, and women's disapproval of these cultural stereotypes. The axis of the story is an Internet chat among the four heroines: A (Adele), B (Bára), C (Cecilia) and D (Dora), who exchange opinions on their roles as women, which they question. However, Cecilia is different in some ways, since from the start, she suggests that she is in a kind of dungeon, under the care of a nurse. As the plot develops, the reader learns that Cecilia is constantly giving birth and believes she is the mother of children serving as donors of human organs or tissues for medical experiments. At the end of the story, the reader discovers that as it turns out, Cecilia's comments, which have given the impression that their author is afflicted with some mental illness, are justified, since strange men appear outside Adele's house and evidently take her to the baby farm, something that the chat participants have already been warned against by Dora (in fact, a computer technician whose female identity is merely a ruse).

There are too many undeveloped ideas and plotlines in the short story for it to be considered successful from a literary point of view, but of course from a feminist point of view, it raises several topics of discourse. The basic one represents motherhood – which is understood by the protagonists as a necessity, culturally imposed and demanded, but for the subject herself (who is considered an object by the outside world, *i.e.*, mostly by her husband and relatives) – as a fate that deprives a woman of her own life. That includes both her intellectual and her purely human life, as one of the protagonists states explicitly: “*Já musím říct, že úplně ze všeho nejvíc toužím po klidu a pořádným spánku*” (“I've got to say that the thing I



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really want most of all is peace and a good night's sleep") (82). This idea is developed fully in Cecilia's fate, which symbolizes the humiliation and enslavement of women as mothers, since they are denied any human rights except the right – and duty – of giving birth.

Another broad theme that appears in the story is cyberfeminism, a movement that emerged in the late 1990s and predicted that the Internet and computers would become weapons and tools of rebellion in the hands of women. According to the movement's founder, Sadie Plant, cyberfeminism represents the apparent "far-reaching connection between the development of computer technology and women's liberation,"⁵ and its activists have made it their mission, among other things, to improve women's use of the Internet both for the exchange of information and for the publication of their own artistic works.

Patricia Waugh, in her book *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*, notes that the authors of literary texts from the second feminist wave have chosen two paths (Waugh, 1989), which Jan Matonoha summarizes in the following words:

První řečiště spočívalo v uchovávaní a pouhém převrácení konvenčních mužských a ženských rol [...] Druhou realizovanou možností byla oslava a upřednostňování tradičně pojímaných femininních kvalit a senzitivity, jimž se nedostává v novověké kultuře dostatek prostoru a které se tak ve snaze o kritiku převládajících vzorců paradoxně navracejí k velmi esencialistickým konceptům genderových vztahů.

The first current consisted in preserving and merely reversing conventional male

and female roles [...] the second in the celebration and privileging of traditionally conceived feminine qualities and sensibilities, which are given short shrift in New Age culture and which thus paradoxically revert to very essentialist concepts of gender relations in an attempt to criticize prevailing patterns. (Matonoha, 2009: 65)

The contents of Eva Hauserová's short story collection as a whole speak to both of the currents marked out by Patricia Waugh; what we really have is a literary elaboration of multiple feminist ideals or misogynist ones – which are of course refuted from a feminist point of view. To some extent, the stories are a literary illustration of Hauserová's feminist essays printed in *Na koštěti se dá i lítat* (Broomsticks Are Good for Flying Too, 1995).

Carola Biedermannová was an author who was very active in the feminist movement, although not all her texts bear traces of these views. Her story "Oni" (They),⁶ printed in the March 1991 issue of the journal *Ikarie* on the occasion of International Women's Day, received the greatest acclaim. Its nameless female protagonist, referred to as The Little Girl, The Girl, and The Woman depending on her age, has a constant and well-founded sense of injustice, and she feels that she does not belong in a world where people behave so callously and pettily towards each other and suppress her uniqueness at every turn. No, it's not just a man who is harassing the heroine but also other women such as The Mother, who responds to her daughter's complaints about being

⁶ In English as "They," transl. Cyril Simsa, in *Yazzyk*, 3 (1994) pp. 55-62. Translator's note.

⁵ [cit. 20.4.2015] URL: <http://www.lyxnet.au/>



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stalked by The Boy in a manner typical of the “male” perspective:

Je slyšet Matčin hlas.

“Já jako myslela, že je do ní tak nějak blbě zamilovanej, a že to jako neumí jinak dát najevo, a co já vím, třeba ho vona něk blbě provokovala...”

The Mother’s voice is heard.

“I thought he was in love with her and just didn’t know how to show it. What do I know, maybe she was leading him on in some dumb way...” (Biedermannová, 1991: 37)

In the story, Biedermannová expresses her resentment against a world where the patriarchal order influences the callousness not only in the behavior of men but also in that of the women who have submitted to this order, to the detriment of their freedom and individuality. However, the protagonist has her own weapon – she can sublimate the people who harass her, *i.e.* make them disappear with just her mind, and ultimately even transport herself in this way to another world:

Kdyby zmizeli Oni, všichni Oni, třeba by se objevili jiní. Z toho světa, kam patří. Nebo – nemohla by tam přesublimovat?

Obejme děti a zavře oči.

Svět se rozvlní, rozpadne do pruhů.

If They, all of Them, disappeared, perhaps others would appear. From the world where they belong. Or – could she sublimate [herself] there?

She gives the children a hug and closes her eyes.

The world ripples and disintegrates in parallel stripes. (40)

Just how great a stir was caused

among fans by this story, one perhaps not even extremely feminist but very raw and direct, is evidenced by the fact that one of them, Josef Vašák, sent his reaction to the editors of *Interkom* in the form of a poem, where among other things we read:

*I takový může být výplod děv
mám z toho zánět básnických střev.
Tato vlna v světě trvá
honem piš – u nás budeš prvá
co když by se další nebály
psát podobné kanály
a tak dej do toho kusu
co nejvíce hnusu
žádná štíhlá dívčí nožka
probere se důkladně použitá vložka*

Fair maids of course may write such
stuff but
what turmoil doth this bring to my gut.
This wave is here to stay
so hurry up and have your say
lest someone less conservative
sooner pen such purgatives,
a surfeit of filth
the fruit of their tilth.
No comely leg to shine your lamp on
alive, the discarded tampon [...]⁷

(Vašák, 1991: 10)

In their stories, both Hauserová and Biedermannová ply the feminism of “struggle,” *i.e.*, one that expresses disagreement with the existing world order, and they call attention to the inferior position of women in society, not to mention the feeling of powerlessness resulting particularly from attempts to change male thinking.

The Slovak writer Sanča Fülle (who

⁷ Vašák’s title uses the feminine form of “they” (*ony*) in contrast to Biedermannová’s mixed or exclusively masculine form (*oni*). Translator’s note.



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also writes in Czech) brought a similarly “feminine” view of the world to her novel *Strážce noci* (The Guardian of the Night). This post-apocalyptic novel is set in Central Europe, which is threatened by an expanding Tibet that has already conquered Ukraine. After the nuclear wars, the world lies in ruins – materially and socially, as well as morally. The novel’s protagonist is Lisa, a girl born into a family living on the margins of a society from which she flees, whereupon her encounter with a monk brings her into the care of the Světloňoš Order, *i.e.*, a Church organization, which has taken over for most institutions in the post-war chaos. Although the main storyline is about Lisa and the monk Adrián’s efforts to rebel against the Order and expose its totalitarian nature, the love story is equally important. The first part of the novel, written in the first person and from the point of view of a child who, while accepting the cruelty of the world around her as her destiny, cannot imagine any other reality.

Mne bylo devět a Elvisovi sedm. Když to tenkrát začlo. Byla bych ji zabila. Kurva, dyť jsem ji zabila. I otce, toho uřvanýho saďoura, co byl denně klidnej asi tři minuty, potom, co ho vytáhl z některýho z nás.

I was nine and Elvis was seven. Back when it all started. I could have killed her. I fucking did kill her. My dad too, that loudmouth little shit, who was quiet for about three minutes every day after he pulled it out of one or the other of us. (Fůlle, 2007: 21)

In the book, the key issues for the author are the sexual abuse and sale of children, who, given the infertility of many

women (caused by radiation), are *nedostatkové zboží* (“a scarce commodity”) and the psychological effects of traumatic childhoods, destroying women’s lives in their maturity. Fůlle, in sensitively and delicately written passages (as opposed to the above), illustrates the difficulty of overcoming disgust toward men and sex in a girl who has been repeatedly raped over several years. In so doing, the author not only plugs into discourse on rape, which, thanks to feminists, has ceased to be a taboo subject since the 1970s, but deploys a literary presentation to communicate to many readers that the rape of a woman – let alone a child – is not the result of any provocation but always “*formou násilí a dominance [...] Násilník znásilňuje, aby demonstroval svou moc*” (“a form of violence and domination [...] The rapist rapes to demonstrate his power”) (Graff & Sutonowski, 2001: 236).

The last author who deserves our close attention is the “first lady of Czech SF” Vilma Kadlečková. An example of a prose work with a strongly feminist note is her novella *O snovačce a přemyslovi* (The Thread Spinner and the Thinker), originally published in the anthology *Imperium Bohemorum* (2006). This work is the author’s response to the novella *Pole a palisáda* (Field and Palisade), in which Miloš Urban reinterprets the legend of Libuše in the Myths book series, presenting the princess as a young and immature girl who reaches for power but soon realizes her limited abilities; she then gladly seeks out a suitable man and puts the rule of the country in his hands.

Whatever the motives behind the genesis of Urban’s text, Vilma Kadlečková’s reaction was fierce – first on her personal blog, where she criticized Urban as follows: “*Tohle je z příběhu cítit zdaleka nejvíc: snaha vytvořit etalon,*



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kodifikovanou verzi, která je lepší než nemoderní Kosmas nebo zaprášený Jirásek nebo nějaká obrozenecká opera (“By far the strongest impression the story makes is that it is an effort to create a [new] standard, to codify a version that improves on obsolete old Cosmas or musty old Jirásek or some National Revival-era opera”). And furthermore,

Mytická Libuše by měla být jakousi emisarkou ženství v mužském světě. Snaží se uspět, ale její ženskost jí brání používat čisté mužské prostředky tam, kde by byly na místě. Protože je vědma, nahlédne nepatřičnost takové snahy, přenechá mužskou práci mužům, a sama se stáhne do pozadí a dodává jim jenom inspiraci a vizi – zkrátka dlouhodobé plány, které jí umožňují vidět její ženská jasnozřivost. Z tohoto pohledu Libušin ústup nemusí být vnímán jako její selhání a bezvýhradné vítězství mužského principu tam, kde na tom záleželo, nýbrž zkrátka návrat k rovnováze.

The mythical Libuše is supposed to be a kind of emissary of womanhood in a man’s world. She tries to succeed, but as a woman she is prevented from using purely masculine means when appropriate. Because she is a seeress, she discerns the ill augured by such an attempt, leaves the masculine work to the men, and withdraws into the background, supplying only inspiration and vision – in short, the long-term plans that her feminine clairvoyance allows her to see. From this perspective, Libuše’s retreat need not be taken as both a failure on her part and the unqualified triumph of the male principle at a critical point, but simply a return to equilibrium.⁸

⁸ Kadlečková, Vilma. *Dvoji selhání kněžny Libuše*. [cit. 4.4.2015] www.argenite.org/page-povidani-o-vsem-moznem, private correspondence with the author dated 4

After a short time, however, Kadlečková withdrew this comment from her blog and instead created her own literary polemic.

In this pun-rich novella, the author satirically describes an attempt to create a kind of second National Revival as a defense against ever-expanding Islam. Its ideas are to be inculcated into the Czechs using virtual reality, employing old Slavic roots (reworked for the needs of a mythology project) and deploying the abilities of the so-called thread spinners and the thinker, who are able to control virtual reality. However, the project organizers are unaware that the spinners are the still-living sisters Libuše, Kazi, and Tetka, and the thinker is Přemysl the Plowman, who have been fighting each other for centuries in a fierce struggle for dominance. Kadlečková has thus returned both to the idea of matriarchy, which is implied by Libuše herself in Cosmas’ twelfth-century chronicle to have been the former system in the Slavic lands; and to the attempt to restore to women their magical power, suppressed in Urban’s novella.

In contrast to the thematic level, which is clearly definable, the term *écriture féminine* (“women’s writing”), as also used in feminist critique, is relatively diffuse. In the texts of feminist scholars Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, who postulated how women should write, I can find several common denominators of a “feminine” style. These include sensibility and corporeality, as well as polysemy and polyphony. “The language is highly emotive, sensual, rich in erotic metaphor, the body is not an object but becomes the very form of speaking, the materiality of sound merges with fluid and open

April 2015 (author’s personal archive).



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meanings. Cixous terms this the identity of *signifiant* and *signifié*, and Irigaray speaks of words that do not deny corporeality but speak corporeally” (Burzyńska & Markowski, 2006: 412). These ideas are complemented and refined by Jan Matonoha, who applies the notion of women’s writing to such literary texts as are based on “*paradigmatu jazyka (ve smyslu jeho nezastupitelné artikulační a strukturující role při uchopování a zpracovávání individuální a kolektivní zkušenosti)*” (“the paradigm of language (in the sense of its irreplaceable articulative and structuralizing role in grasping and processing individual and collective experience)”) (Matonoha, 2009: 62). Matonoha, with whose views one can certainly agree, further states that

podstatným rysem psaní autorek [...] je právě pozornost k roli jazykových a narativních struktur prostředkujících nám materiál naší zkušenosti ve vždy již určitým způsobem zformovaném tvaru. V tomto ohledu lze říct, že ‘ženské psaní’ se neobírá a nemůže obírat expresí nějaké původní, nezczitelné ‘ženské’ zkušenosti, nýbrž textovými a diskurzivními postupy a rámci, jež činí zkušenost v první řadě možnou, dostupnou a uchopitelnou.

an essential feature of women authors’ writing [...] is precisely the attention to the role of linguistic and narrative structures mediating the material of our experience in a form that has always already been shaped in a certain way. In this respect, it can be said that “women’s writing” does not and cannot be preoccupied with the expression of an original, inalienable “female” experience, but with the textual and discursive practices and frameworks that make experience possible, accessible, and graspable in the first place. (63)

Traces of “women’s writing” in this

sense can be found in the work of all the aforementioned authors, who translate women’s experiences into textual form; literature becomes for them a means of expressing their very selves. However, in Vilma Kadlečková’s most recent work (her pentalogy *Mycelium*), we can find still other features characteristic of “women’s writing” that can be identified in the expressive characterization of individual characters through personal narratives. Most of the protagonists in this work are women (or alien beings female in gender). By constructing the personal narrative in the third person and from the point of view of multiple characters, the author, narratively speaking, is on par with Virginia Woolf and her masterpieces, where not only the views of the individual characters (something that fully corresponds to Bakhtin’s requirement for polyphony), but their individual traits are likewise hinted at in the opening passages – to illustrate this point, just one short quote from Vilma Kadlečková’s text:

Chvíli se na ni díval. Pinky přešlápla. Proboha, uvědomila si, muselo mu to dojt, teď, okamžitě: nepotřebuju Lucasovi vracet knihu tady, když se s ním vídám třikrát týdně na tréninku! Právě se chtěla dát na ústup, ale vtom jí vyrazil dech znovu. Ustoupil stranou a otevřel jí dveře.

“No dobrá, slečno Pinkertino. Pojďte dál.” [...]

Pinky blesklo hlavou všechno možné, mimo jiné take to, že ji Giles Hildebrandt znásilní v obýváku na pohovce, uškrtí a zakope na zahradě. Byl mnohem vyšší než ona, kostnatý, ale silný.

He looked at her for a while. Pinky stepped over. *For God’s sake*, she realized, *it must have gotten through to him right away, straight off: I don’t need to return Lucas’s book right here when I see him three times*



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a week at training! She was about to retreat, but then the wind was knocked out of her all over again. He stepped aside and opened the door for her.

“All right then, Miss Pinkertina. Come on in.” [...]

All sorts of things flashed through Pinky’s mind, including the possibility that Giles Hildebrandt would rape her on the living room sofa, strangle her, and bury her in the garden. He was much taller than she; bony, but strong. (2013: 24)

Not only because of the many heroines, but above all because the pentalogy’s main character Lucas Hildebrandt is portrayed as a cynical and egotistical figure, the work takes on a feminist character from a “female point of view...”

The authors whose work we have discussed here make no secret of their gender and try to bring their own views and ideas into feminist discourse, although we could certainly find others in the SF field who show no traces of such an attitude. Although, for example, in the work of Ludmila Freiová, the recently deceased doyenne of Czech SF, we can easily detect elements of a “feminine” style, contemporary female authors such as Edita Dufková or the rising star Julie Nováková stick to a “masculine,” *i.e.*, rational style in their texts, and their female protagonists are not feminist or gendered in any way. The only trace of “feminine thinking” in these texts may therefore be the fact that the social roles of both sexes are equal.

The question posed in the title of this chapter – does Czech science fiction have a (feminine) gender? – can be answered relatively simply: yes, if the women writing it want it to.

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⁹ Author's correct surname is Vašát.
Translator's note.