

## Can the dissident speak? The Czech woman writer in the work of Philip Roth and Dominik Tatarka

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The dissident movements of socialist East Central Europe from the late 1970s to the revolutions of 1989 caught the attention of Western writers, but their representations of the female dissident parallel the Orientalist relationship in which the rational West is seen in contrast to the barbaric (often “feminized”) East (Said, 1979). As Domnica Radulescu has argued, women of Eastern Europe usually appear in Western writing as either “vampires” or “Amazons”; these are “two of the molds in which Western essentializing thought has cast women from these parts of the world” (2004, 28). Irvin Cemil Schick has examined the representation of “Oriental” women in erotic literature: “Sexualized images of women *and of men* were used, in Europe’s discourses of the other, as key markers of place, and hence as determinants of identity and alterity” (1999, 7). Schick’s assertion that images of both genders served as markers of place holds true in the Czech context: the self-immolation of the Prague student Jan Palach in January 1969 served as a case where the vulnerability of the male body served as a global symbol of the Czech nation (Sabatos 2009). During this time, women played a key role as both authors and distributors of dissident texts; but as Jonathan Bolton has shown, the Czech dissident subculture replicated the privileging of the male voice in the society at large:

The heroic view of dissent has tended to paint it as an individual, often lonely activity – in fact, just like writing. This view ignores the communal structures that make such writing, and protest more generally, possible [...] Indeed, many dissidents might be best thought of as “spousal units”. [...] Even those collections of prison letters were generally addressed to a spouse or lover who then played a key role in collating and distributing them. There is an unmistakable gender dynamic here. The dissident theorists and thinkers who make it into Western accounts are almost all male; the closer we come to seeing dissent as a transnational dialogue about human rights or civil society, the more women seem to be erased from the picture (2012, 42–43).

As illustrated by Jan Matonoha, the voices who held the most authority in the West, whether dissidents like Václav Havel or exile writers like Josef Škvorecký, dismissed feminism as a distraction, thus marginalizing it on the basis of their moral authority: “the dissident community permitted a certain level of overlooking and microphysics of violence with respect to another ‘marginal’ community on another level, i. e. gender, within the framework of its efforts to resist the dominant group (state political

power)” (2014, 166). Despite the essential contributions of such women as Olga Havlová and Zdena Salivarová, the female dissident voice remained overshadowed and marginalized, a situation that persisted even after the fall of the communist regimes.

The image of Central European literature in the West was strongly influenced by the American novelist Philip Roth, first through his personal contacts with Czech dissidents and exiles in the 1970s (especially Milan Kundera, whose work he helped bring to an American audience) and then through his professional support of the Penguin series “Writers from the Other Europe”, which published Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Yugoslav writers in translation. Notably, none of the authors in the series were women. Joseph Benatov has insightfully compared Roth’s work to Kundera’s through their relationship to “tamizdat” literature (i.e., East-Central European literature published in the West, as opposed to the better-known *samizdat* circulated within Eastern Europe). “If Kundera is one of the most prominent moulders of a foreign tamizdat mentality,” Benatov suggests, “Roth prefers instead to give voice to a range of domestic Czech perspectives on life under Communism” (2009, 110). This comes through most clearly in Roth’s 1985 novella *The Prague Orgy*, featuring his long-term fictional alter ego Nathan Zuckerman and published as an epilogue in the collected volume *Zuckerman Bound*. Philip Roth came across Czech dissident circles almost accidentally on his first visit to Prague, where he had gone to follow the traces of Franz Kafka and experienced a strange sense of identification through his own Jewish heritage. Roth’s Zuckerman meets a woman writer named Olga, whose pursuit of the American writer seems to owe more to erotic fantasy than to the dissident milieu Roth recreates in faithful detail. As Claudia Roth Pierpont observes in her biography, “Roth’s accounts of life in Prague are piquant – like Olga, the city has a striking cynical pathos – although they amount to hardly more than a series of vignettes.” By being published at the end of Roth’s Zuckerman trilogy, the novella “came off merely as an afterthought, earning hardly any critical attention at all” (2013, 138). While his female Czech character appears as one of the “dangerous temptresses” critiqued by Radulescu, Roth politicizes and intellectualizes this archetype by making the desiring (rather than desired) female a writer and dissident.

Another literary although non-fictional portrayal of Czech dissident circles appears in the Slovak writer Dominik Tatarka’s memoir *Navrávačky* (*Tapings*, 1988, partial trans. 2008), an episodic recounting of his experiences from his childhood in rural Slovakia to becoming a prominent figure of opposition in Slovak literature after 1968. This book was based on recorded interviews with the Czech writer Eva Štolbová, after their intellectual relationship became sexual. While Roth’s and Tatarka’s perspectives differ considerably, they share the common theme of an “outsider” entering the circle of Czech dissidents, and in both cases this encounter is mediated through a Czech woman dissident (in the gendered Czech term, *disidentka*). Roth’s Olga is a famous novelist, but an unsuccessful seductress and an obstacle to Zuckerman’s main goal: retrieving a lost manuscript and smuggling it to the West. While Štolbová is not a mere object of desire for Tatarka (her work of taping and typing enabled the text’s publication), her questions were deleted from the first samizdat/exile edition. However, she also presents her side of the story in her own memoir,

*Lamento* (1994), and the sections that she contributed to *Navrávačky* were restored in later editions. As a dissident writer and Czech-Jewish woman, she represents the urban intellectual, while her male counterpart portrays himself as the rural peasant, a reversal of the class and gender dynamic in the representation of Czech women by Prague-German writers. Following Jonathan Bolton's suggestion, it is the diversity of dissident perspectives that gives them a lasting fascination: "Dissent is a reminder that we cannot always judge art, culture, and scholarship by their supposed political or real-world effects; at some level, dissent is always a call to explore the complexities of a world that others have tried to simplify" (2012, 275). Thus it is worth adapting Gayatri Spivak's well-known question on the subaltern (1988) to the former socialist world: Can the dissident (woman, or *disidentka*) speak? And how does erotic attraction across linguistic and social boundaries, both thwarted and consummated, affect the dissident's ability to represent her own experience?

### THE HISTORIAN OF EROTICISM: ROTH IN THE OTHER EUROPE

Philip Roth's first visit to Prague in spring 1972, during a tour of "beautiful cities" with his partner Barbara Sproul, gave him a glimpse of the cultural repression under post-1968 "normalization." His books *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) and *Letting Go* (1962) had been published in Czech translation, but his later works *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) and *Our Gang* (1971) could not be published due to their erotic and political content (Roth 1976, 6). This visit awakened his curiosity, and he returned to Prague in 1972, where he was able to befriend several writers, including Ivan Klíma, Milan Kundera and Ludvík Vaculík, whom he referred to anonymously as "X, Y, and Z" in an article for the *New York Times*:

Let me just say here that with "X", who wanted to show me the confluence of two beautiful rivers, I have taken a trip by car to a countryside castle for lunch, with "Y" I have spent an evening listening to his wife sing for us some favorite Moravian folk songs, and one night I lost a post-dinner contest to "Z," who shamed me by knowing the names of more American Indian tribes than I did – alas [...] I was not raised on the books of Karl May (1976, 7).

In 1974, Roth had begun to edit the "Writers from the Other Europe" series, which published seventeen books, including four by Kundera and one by Vaculík. Barbara Sproul, who was active in Amnesty International, became its Czech coordinator and Roth arranged for American writers to send financial support to their Czech counterparts. Roth also attended a course in Czech culture taught by the émigré journalist Antonín Liehm. He returned to Prague again in 1974, when he met Václav Havel, who was then writing his open letter to the Czechoslovak leader Gustáv Husák, one of the key documents of the dissident movement (Havel 1986, 3), as well as the translator Věra Saudková, Franz Kafka's niece (Pierpont 2013, 88). After 1976, Roth's visa applications were denied, so he was unable to return for more than a decade, but he sent his character David Kepesh to Prague in *The Professor of Desire* (1977), in which the most vivid scene (a visit to an ancient woman reputed to be Kafka's whore) turns out to be a dream.

Among all of these contacts, Roth's most lasting connection was with Milan Kundera, although their communication was only possible thanks to the interpreting

of Kundera's wife Věra, as Roth later recalled of one long conversation in Prague: "By the time it was over Věra looked like she'd had sex with both of us [...] pale, her hair all over her face, and very excited from the conversation" (Pierpont 2013, 91). In 1974, Roth published an "appreciation" of Kundera, along with two of his stories in translation, in the men's magazine *Esquire*, creating a definitive image of the Czech writer for Western readers. Rather than describing Kundera as "a writer who is oppressed by a Communist regime", Roth focuses on his use of "erotic play and power", comparing the protagonist of *Žert* (1967, *The Joke* 1969) to characters by Norman Mailer and Yukio Mishima, although he is distinguished from them by "the ease with which his erotic power play is thwarted and then turned into yet another joke at *his* expense" (1974, 182). After Kundera emigrated to France, Roth was able to keep in close touch with him, unlike most of the other Czech writers. In 1979, the Czech novelist contributed the introduction to the French translation of Roth's *The Professor of Desire*, later excerpted in his essay collection *Une rencontre* (2009, *Encounter*, 2010), also focusing on sexuality as a central theme in his counterpart's work. Roth, Kundera suggests, is "a great historian of American eroticism". This connects him to a broader theme, the "acceleration of history" which has reached the point where "the continuity, the identity, or a life is in danger of cracking apart" (2010, 27). Kundera's most successful novel, *Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí* (1985, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 1984), became an international bestseller through its distinctive eroticization of politics, but its female characters are reduced to figures of male fantasy, like the protagonist's lover Sabina (although a free-thinking artist, she may be best-known for wearing her grandfather's bowler hat, as featured on millions of covers in dozens of languages). It was at the peak of Kundera's fame during this period that Roth (still unable to return to Prague in person) decided to revisit it in fiction through *The Prague Orgy*.

Roth's perception of the Czechs was also shaped, of course, by the influence of Kafka, who frequently mentions the tensions between national groups in the Prague of his lifetime. Czech women played a distinct role for Prague-German writers of Kafka's generation, as Tim Beasley-Murray explains:

For German-language writers of the Habsburg Empire, Slav culture occupies an unusual position by being both alien and familiar [...] [Hermann] Broch and others use the relationship between the German and the Slav to project personal and social anxieties and desires. The images that result, however, are the projections of dominant, privileged, and especially, male subjects (2006, 134–144).

Writers such as Kafka, Max Brod, and Franz Werfel viewed these "alien and familiar" women with a mixture of adoration, fascination and fear. Roth's female dissident Olga must be seen as a conscious, if ironic, continuation of this tradition, in which his autobiographical protagonist Nathan Zuckerman projects his own anxieties as a Jewish-American. Searching for the past of Prague-Jewish literature, what Zuckerman discovers in its place is the life of the Czech dissident underground, with its mix of political repression and erotic freedom.

As Josef Jeřáb has pointed out, Philip Roth's portrayal of female characters is more nuanced than some critics have suggested:

Roth has been criticized for literary pornography, for misogyny, for reducing women to sexual objects. It is hard to deny that in his prose, such signs can be sensed and directly read, but as soon as we judge them in isolation, outside the context of which they are an integral part, including their symbolic meaning, I think we are committing a “political” reading which all of Roth’s work warns us against (2015, 50).

While neither of the main female characters in *The Prague Orgy*, the writer Olga and her husband’s lover Eva, become sexual objects for Zuckerman, one might argue that they are represented as caricatures. However, when comparing *The Prague Orgy* with Roth’s lesser-known television adaptation of the novella (which was never produced), the Czech dissident woman is subtly given more agency within her social context.

At the beginning of *The Prague Orgy*, Nathan Zuckerman encounters the exiled novelist Zdenek Sisovsky [Šišovský] and the actress Eva Kalinova [Kalinová] (Roth does not use Czech diacritics in any of his characters’ names). Both characters serve to illustrate Roth’s most widely quoted statement on Eastern Europe, from a 1984 interview with Hermione Lee: “I work in a society where, for writers, everything goes and nothing matters, while for the Czech writers I met nothing goes and everything matters” (Searles 1992, 184). Sisovsky explains the paradox of his exile situation: “In Czechoslovakia [...] I can at least be a Czech – but I cannot be a writer. While in the West, I can be a writer, but not a Czech. Here, where as a writer I am totally negligible, I am *only* a writer” (Roth 1985, 13). Kalinova, however, refuses to draw on Central European literary archetypes to romanticize her situation: “I do not care to be an ironical Czech character in an ironical Czech story. Everything that happens in Czechoslovakia, they shrug their shoulders and say, ‘Pure Schweik, pure Kafka.’ I am sick of them both” (16). While this meeting may reflect some aspects of Roth’s conversations with Věra Kunderová and Milan Kundera, the complex processes of translation have disappeared, since both Sisovsky and Kalinova speak fluent English, making the female character a distraction from the conversation, rather than its enabler.

After Kalinova’s departure, Sisovsky explains that his father had written stories in Yiddish that were never published, asking Zuckerman to save the manuscripts since he cannot return to Prague himself (25). To do so, he must see Sisovsky’s estranged wife Olga, and this quest is presented as a seduction: “She does anything for love” (27). In Prague, Zuckerman’s friend Rudolf Bolotka describes Olga as a famous novelist: “Olga wrote our love stories [...] She went to bed with a woman and the whole country read the story and was guessing who it was. She was seventeen, she already wrote a bestseller, *Touha*. Longing” (28). In the story, however, her identity as a writer is overshadowed by her longing for love, or more precisely sex; Zuckerman refers ironically to her *touha* as he feels “the best legs in Prague” pressing against him (29).

Zuckerman’s quest to retrieve a literary work from oblivion is a literal reenactment of Roth’s activity in editing the “Writers from the Other Europe” series. Bolotka (based on Ivan Klíma, the only one of Roth’s dissident friends who was actually fluent in English) gives Zuckerman the deceptive promise: “You like orgies, you come with me. Since the Russians, the best orgies are in Czechoslovakia [...] Come to the orgy, Zuckerman – you will see the final stage of the revolution” (29). When he visits Bolot-

ka's "dank room", the Czech writer tells him "that I shouldn't feel too bad about his standard of living [...] For a man of his predilections it really is the best place to live. 'It excites young girls,' Bolotka informs me, 'to be fucked in squalor'" (43). The secret police had come to offer him papers to emigrate, but he had refused, even though in the West he would be able to resume his theatrical career: "I have sixteen girl friends in Prague [...] How can I leave?" (45). More than thirty years after his first visit to Prague, in his remarks to the PEN Club, Roth revealed that Ivan Klíma had used a similar excuse when he was taken under police interrogation for his association with the American writer.

As Ivan later told me in a letter, he had only one answer – one – to give them throughout their dogged nightlong inquisition about why I was hanging around the city every spring. "Don't you read his books?" Ivan asked the police.

As might be expected, they were stymied by the question, but Ivan quickly enlightened them. "He comes for the girls," Ivan said (Roth 2013).

As Brian Goodman suggests, "This is the larger function of sex, or its absence, in the novella: to signal how Prague has transformed Zuckerman as a writer and a narrator. Instead of the novelist's relentless self-expression and obsessive desires driving the action, the voices of the writers of the Other Europe are given free play" (2015, 733). However, Roth's fictional voices are not fully free of traditional roles: while Bolotka uses sex as a metaphor for politics, Olga uses politics as a metaphor for sex, dividing even these liberated dissidents along gendered forms of expression.

Bolotka takes Zuckerman to a party where he introduces him to Olga. She immediately ridicules the supposed reason for Zuckerman's visit: "Why are you in Prague? Are you looking for Kafka? The intellectuals all come here looking for Kafka. Kafka is dead. They should be looking for Olga" (Roth 1985, 33). As with the other characters, Olga's English is almost flawless, but her use of sexualized slang keeps the American writer at a distance rather than stimulating his desire:

"So why do you come to Prague? You are not looking for Kafka, none of our heroes in New York sent you, and you don't want to fuck. I love this word fuck. Why don't we have this word, Rudolf?" To me again: "Teach me how to say fuck. This is a good fucking party. I was really fucked. Wonderful word. Teach me."

"Shut the fuck up."

"Beautiful word. Shut the fuck up. More."

"Fuck it all. Fuck everything."

"Yes, fuck it all... Why do you write this book about fucking that makes you so famous if you are afraid to fuck somebody?" (35)

In place of the promised orgy, the seduction remains purely verbal (and unsuccessful). In fact, the only sexual encounter Zuckerman observes (albeit indirectly) is between the middle-aged writer Vodicka and a young hustler who is implicitly described as Roma (gypsy): "Plump, smooth, dark, and cruel: a very creamy caramel dessert" (36). Olga encourages the young man (at Vodicka's request) to show his penis. Martin C. Putna has suggested that this "easily deciphered – and extremely ridiculous – literary character" is a thinly disguised portrayal of Ladislav Fuks, whose homosexuality was known, although he never treated it in his work (2001, 144). He

was, however, one of the first non-Jewish writers to portray the Nazi persecution of Czech Jews in his fiction, metaphorically representing his sexual oppression through the more socially acceptable theme of political oppression. Thus Roth extends the eroticization of politics by bringing in gay sexuality and the marginalization of the Roma, both of which were largely taboo topics in 1980s Czech literature (including among exile writers such as Kundera.)

While Olga refers directly to Kafka, as a character she seems like an allusion to (if not a good-natured parody of) Kundera's recurrent theme of thwarted eroticism. What is unexpected is that Roth's usually sex-obsessed protagonist is the one who thwarts the encounter, making it laughable. Zuckerman's final meeting with Olga in her small apartment is narrated in the style of a dramatic script, in which he again demands that she give him Sisovsky's stories:

Z. He left them with you – you must know. His mother came to you and tried to get them, and you showed her photographs of his mistress. That's what he told me.  
O. Don't be sentimental. They were pictures of their cunts. Do you think they were so different from mine? You think theirs were prettier? Here. (*Opens her robe*) Look. Theirs were exactly the same (Roth 1985, 73).

Eventually Olga gives Zuckerman the stories and starts to cry:

You don't even have to fuck me, if I am such an unattractive woman. To fuck and be fucked is all we have that they cannot stop, but you do not have to fuck me [...] I want nothing. Only that when he asks you how much did you have to give her, how much money and how many fucks... tell him you had to give me nothing. Tell *her* (77).

As in some of Kundera's novels, sexuality becomes the only form of personal expression that "they" (the communist system) are unable to suppress. In Roth's case, however, the Western protagonist refuses to be manipulated by the Czech dissident writer's erotic blackmail, persisting in his "brotherly" quest for his fellow male writer (while refraining from sexual contact with the woman Sisovsky has left behind). However, the final "joke" takes place at Zuckerman's hotel, where the unread manuscripts are confiscated by the police (and presumably lost for good). Zuckerman is immediately driven to the airport and deported, wondering to himself: "Either Olga had a change of heart and called the cops, or else they called on her" (80). The novella, limited to Zuckerman's point of view, leaves her motives unclear. Her final words in the story are an expression of jealousy towards her fellow female dissident Eva, whose successful seduction of Sisovsky contrasts with Olga's unsuccessful approaches toward Zuckerman.

A more nuanced view of Olga's actions emerges when comparing *The Prague Orgy* with Roth's television adaptation, written in 1985–86 but unpublished until 2007. It closely resembles the novella, but there are small differences: for example, all of the male characters (Sisovsky, Bolotka and Zuckerman) use the word "petchya", apparently a transcription of the Czech *piča*, in place of "cunt" (thus the only Czech word specified in the script, presumably due to broadcast restrictions on profanity, is a vulgar term for female genitalia). The most important change is a greater role for Eva, whom Roth planned as a role for his long-term partner, the actress Claire Bloom. The confrontation in Olga's apartment is given an additional interpretation lacking in the book:

What takes place over the next few hours... is a series of scenes between an interrogator – ZUCKERMAN –and the suspected criminal – OLGA [...] We see ZUCKERMAN’s force and single-mindedness here, and OLGA’s powers of endurance, even though she is clearly near the end of her strength” (Roth 2007, 571–72).

The stage directions also add a motivation for Olga’s final surrender: “In the presence of what she suddenly accepts as his pure motive, she weeps for the loss of her own simplicity. It is the desire to commit a transcendent act of her own that moves her to act as she now does” (578). While this version attributes nobler motives to Olga than female jealousy, it is the American novelist’s idealism that inspires her “transcendent” sacrifice. The script includes an additional final scene after Zuckerman’s return to New York, in which he calls Sisovsky but finds Eva, whom he has abandoned. When Zuckerman tells her he is back from Prague, she replies sarcastically, “Oh, you’re full of Prague. You’re full of dissidents. You’re full of the suffering. You’re full of compassion” (591). In this version it is a Czech woman who literally has the last word: “I’m glad everything worked out so well in Prague for *your* art. Good luck with your marvelous story” (593). Ultimately, her irony overshadows Zuckerman’s idealism and even disparages the “story” of which she is a part.

#### THE SLOVAKO-CZECH DIALOGUE OF ŠTOLBOVÁ AND TATARKA

Unlike the sexual frustration in Roth’s dissident Prague, Dominik Tatarka’s *Navrávačky* is the result of erotic consummation. As a Slovak, Tatarka was of course not a “foreign” writer as Roth was, yet he was perceived by the Prague dissidents as “both alien and familiar”, much as Beasley-Murray describes the Austrian or Prague-German view of the Czechs. Tatarka’s literary career was typical of his generation: raised in a Slovak village, he studied in Prague and Paris, and his early novels were anti-fascist, then strongly influenced by socialist realism. He was among the earliest writers to satirize the Stalin-era cult of personality, in his novella *Démon súhlasu* (1956, *The Demon of Consent*, 1987). After expressing disapproval of the 1968 Soviet invasion and joining the Charter 77 movement, Tatarka was banned from publication, and his later works were printed only by exile publishers and circulated in samizdat, making him the best-known Slovak writer associated with the Czech dissidents. Xavier Galmiche has pointed out “the strange discrepancy existing, notably, even within Czechoslovakia during ‘normalization,’ between the profusion of anti-establishment culture (above all, samizdat) in the Czech lands and the calm apparently prevailing in Slovakia. Consequently, Tatarka was a double dissident” (2007, 7). The major work of Tatarka’s “dissident” period is *Písačky* (Jottings, 1986) whose eroticism led to varying critical reactions. Robert Pynsent describes it rather dismissively as “repetitive, lush, sometimes mawkish, sometimes coarse and usually sensualist, descriptions of the *Ich*’s erotic play and copulation” (1991, 13). Peter Petro calls it Tatarka’s “necessary, though excessively – even pathologically – erotic appendix to ‘official’ prose, which was recovering from the shell-shock it had suffered after the forceful suppression of freedom perpetuated in 1968” (1996, 146). *Písačky* inspired the creation of Tatarka’s subsequent and final work: after reading it, Eva Štolbová wrote to Tatarka in admiration, which



led to a relationship between them, and their later conversations became the text of *Navrávačky*.

The creation of *Navrávačky* was complex due to linguistic as well as political factors. Between autumn 1985 and spring 1986, Štolbová recorded her conversations with Tatarka, then the cassettes were transcribed and edited by the dissidents Martin Šimečka and Ján Langoš, and printed in 1987 by the samizdat publisher Edice Petlice (run by Ludvík Vaculík) in Prague. This version, however, omitted Štolbová's side of the discussion and turned their Czecho-Slovak dialogue into a Slovak monologue. In 1988, it was published in book form by the exile publishing house Index in Germany, and excerpts began to appear in 1989, even before the Velvet Revolution, in the Slovak journal *Slovenské pohľady*. Shortly after Tatarka's death in the same year, the émigré journal *Proměny* published an issue featuring reflections by a number of Czech writers, as well as an excerpt from *Navrávačky*. Calling Tatarka "the first new Czechoslovak," Vaculík explains: "Everyone could see in Dominik that true Slovak begins where it cannot be translated into Czech; that Czech simply must broaden itself there" (1989, 14). In the case of this text, the language was "broadened" through Tatarka's erotic connection with his co-author. The original, complete transcripts of *Navrávačky* were published in 2001 (second edition 2013), in a form differing so substantially that this version was called *Navrávačky with Dominik Tatarka* and listed Eva Štolbová as author. In an interview for the publication of the "full" version, Štolbová described it almost like an illegitimate child (using the verb *splodiť*, which means "conceive" in both an artistic and biological sense): "When we conceived the text, the whole dissident community didn't know what to think of it. They may have been suspicious of me" (Pálková 2001). Reaction in the Slovak press emphasized the "Czecho-Slovak" nature of Tatarka's language, such as one review stating that "this work will reach the public in an authentic form, which reinforces the fact that both [participants] speak a mixture of Slovak and Czech, as if to symbolize the unity of two kindred souls" (Bžoch 2001). At a broader level, the "unity" between Tatarka and Štolbová represents that of the two nations and the power dynamic between their "kindred" yet separate languages.

During the communist period, most citizens of Czechoslovakia were passively fluent in both Czech and Slovak due to frequent exposure on television, etc.; yet while Slovaks comfortably read both languages, this was less true for Czechs (Slovak literature was regularly published in Czech translation, while the reverse was almost never the case). As Zdeněk Eis has explained, this linguistic difference also had a profound impact on Tatarka: as a student in Prague, "he *contemplated* for the first time the culture he had brought from his homeland, [in comparison] with the Czech cultural tradition" (40). The difference between the two languages is perhaps best reflected in the title *Navrávačky* itself, for which an exact equivalent does not exist in Czech: Štolbová uses it in quotation marks in her introduction to the 1988 edition. While taken from the Slovak verb *navravieť*, which can mean either persuading someone to do something or just idly chattering, it can also be perceived as a play on the similar-sounding noun *nahrávka* (tape recording). Tatarka's editor Martin Šimečka, who is fully bilingual, has described his experience of feeling at home in both languages, but for different purposes

I felt an astonishment that these two very similar languages were in fact fatally different and that despite their almost identical grammar I was unable to translate myself. The difference was in the character of the language detected only by one who used them both as one's own [...] If Slovak is merely an instrument for expression of understood reality, then Czech is the opposite: it models the reality by dint of elegantly expressing that what does not yet exist and thereby creates this reality (1999, 183).

Šimečka's comparison is implicitly gendered, as can be seen in the contrast between Slovak passively "expressing" reality, while Czech actively "models" it. This recalls Vladimír Macura's description of gendered national images: "There is something perceptibly female in the Czechs' image of Slovakia [...] it's as if Czechia, that traditional female allegory of Czechness, has suddenly become masculinized through her contact with her neighbor Slovakia" (1993, 40–41). In *Navrávačky*, the Slovako-Czech literary partnership reverses this male/female dynamic.

While he pushes beyond taboos in his descriptions of his physical desires, Tatarka's views of women fall along the traditional binary of maternally pure and sexually desirable. In her brief review of *Navrávačky* for *World Literature Today*, Wilma Iggers highlights the connection between "Eva, the Czech-Jewish woman he loves," and his "widowed peasant mother" for whom "he felt an almost mystical closeness"; she also suggests Tatarka's closeness to Czech literature: "There are a number of Czech but few Slovak writers who, although very vulnerable, speak out as frankly as Tatarka" (1989, 508). *Navrávačky* begins with the passionate lines taken from one of Tatarka's first letters to Štolbová [the following translations are my own]:

My dear sweet Eva, my soul, my heart. I was lucky, I was lucky, that I met you, for they have sent me to a strange prison [...] I cannot teach at school, although I am a professor; I cannot write, although I am a writer [...] But I wrote a literary metaphor which was read by a professor of Czech in Prague. And she wrote to me in the hospital that she was really pleased, excited, inspired [...] I forgot about the letter for several months, until I read it again, and now I'll write Eva a thankful, enthusiastic letter (1988, 7).

Half-ironically evoking his peasant upbringing, he reflects, "You are a Jewish woman and I am a Carpathian village shepherd. What we have in common, God knows. But perhaps it is that we both wander; somehow we came to be here, we go through the deserts, we walk among random masses, in big cities" (8). Reminiscing about his fatherless childhood, Tatarka concludes that his close relationship with Eva can be attributed to the very differences between them: "It is something like a feminine element and a masculine element, which complement each other, which can create a harmonious, flourishing home. Our home lacked this [in my childhood] and I feel that lack even today" (13). By contrast, the "feminine" element is lacking in the 1988 edition: although it includes Štolbová's brief introduction, there is almost nothing of her original questions left in the text.

The transcripts of the interviews, as published in Štolbová's edition of *Navrávačky*, more clearly highlight the relationship of language and gender. Tatarka's Slovak seems more receptive to influence from the other language than Štolbová's Czech. While Štolbová generally poses a question and Tatarka answers it, he goes back and forth frequently between Slovak and Czech, often actively trying to speak in the lat-

ter, while she only uses Slovak words for emphasis when repeating things Tatarka has said. At the beginning of the first tape, for example, she asks him in Czech if he remembers his father. He responds “*ne, ne*” (no in Czech) and continues in Slovak, saying that his father left no photograph or “*list*” (letter) behind. “Ani list” (“Not even a letter”), Štolbová replies, repeating the Slovak word *list*, rather than the Czech *dopis*, and Tatarka echoes, “*Ani list*” (Štolbová 2001, 15). Although this follows Šimečka’s example of Czech “modeling” reality and Slovak “expressing” it, the reversed gender dynamic makes the dominance of Czech more ambiguous.

The final section of *Navrávačky* highlights Tatarka’s relationship with the Czech dissidents, which is brought about through Štolbová’s intervention: “There we were, Eva, your little car took us off to Prague, we found the conspirator Ludvík Vaculík and entered the atmosphere of a little Czech literary community. They welcomed us, extended their hospitality, and we had the feeling: this is a holy community” (Tatarka 1988, 104). Tatarka compares the intellectual satisfaction of the dissidents to sexual satisfaction: “a dissident or national community which knows everything about itself [...] does not have a feeling of emptiness, emptiness which I spoke of in other contexts. Why does a woman have a feeling of emptiness with a man? Perhaps she cares too little” (106). According to Vladimír Petřík, during his period of literary isolation after 1968, Tatarka’s intimacy with a number of lovers served as “inspiration” for his works: “The women whom Tatarka writes about inspired the gradual uncovering of the author’s inner self. Through them he revealed himself to the reader.” Yet he had an “ambivalent relationship” to them, because he was suspicious that they had been sent by the secret police to report on his private life, a real possibility in the political situation of the time (Štolbová 2013, 9).

Tatarka’s description of one discussion is focused on the relationship between German, Austrian, and Prague-German writers and the women who inspired them:

I remember that a conversation began about authors who wrote in German [...] it began with the women who went through their lives. Lou, who had Rainer Maria Rilke and Nietzsche, Milena Jesenská, then we added Alma Mahler, who had Croupier [sic] and after him Franz Werfel. You know, Werfel wrote *Piety*. *Piety*, that was one of the Czech maids in the Werfel family [the title of Werfel’s 1929 novel *Barbara oder die Frömmigkeit* is confused here with the name of his nursemaid]. It’s shown that the families of these Prague intellectuals had Czech servants [...] Werfel, Kafka, they achieved world recognition, but there is a nation here, which is amazing, which creates something, endures (Tatarka 1988, 104).

When comparing this passage to the full transcripts, however, it appears that this passage attributed to Tatarka actually comes from Štolbová’s part of the conversation (in Czech rather than Slovak):

There were several interesting themes [...] and you [Tatarka] started [talking] about Czechs living in [...] about Prague German... Actually it wasn’t just about their personalities, but about the women who broke into their lives. You spoke of that Lou, that you read her manuscript and that she was the lover of Rainer Maria Rilke, is that right? (D. T.: Yes.) And of Nietzsche and maybe someone else. And that she was the kind of woman of whom they say that she has it written in her eyes. We also spoke of Milena Jesenská. (D. T.: Yes, that’s right.) Then we also spoke about Alma Mahler and I couldn’t remember, they said

she had [Walter] Gropius, the architect, and I couldn't remember who else – and it was Franz Werfel. Before that, even before Gropius she was the wife of Franz Werfel. Who was also one of those Germans, Prague Germans, feeling Prague and living there (Štolbová 2013, 141).

This example shows that, apart from minor errors in transcription (“Croupier” for Gropius, for example), the editors of the 1988 *Navrávačky* not only abridged the original recordings, but added their own broad interpretations (including the reference to Kafka, who does not appear in the transcripts) and not only excise Štolbová's words but ascribe sections of them to Tatarka.

Štolbová's memoir *Lamento* (1994) displays the multilingualism that was edited out of the earlier version of *Navrávačky*, by reproducing Štolbová's and Tatarka's Czech-Slovak conversations, and takes the intertextual step of incorporating Tatarka's letters into the narrative. In her focus on their sexual relationship, Štolbová “dissents” from the acceptable limits of women's expression by voicing her desires as explicitly as Roth's fictional Olga. *Lamento* begins with Štolbová's discovery of Tatarka, when she reads excerpts of his work in the exile journal *Listy*: “What did these words suggest to me? What struck me so much?” Her reaction to his text is passionate, even before meeting him: “I read, I don't breathe, I am excited, I long for him, I want something.” She obtains a samizdat copy of *Písačky*, and her fascination with Tatarka grows into near-obsession: “I carried it everywhere with me. If I read it to others, it spoke to them in a foreign language” (1994, 7–8). Following Ludvík Vaculík's advice, Štolbová writes to Tatarka directly, and when he responds, she shares the letter with her daughter and with her friends: “Dominik was with us all Saturday and Sunday. He was constantly an invisible presence, he was ours, intimate” (12). At her first visit to Bratislava, this literary intimacy became an erotic one, which Štolbová describes with the frankness that is often credited to Tatarka: “It seemed to me that I had never seen such a beautiful male body. I kept looking at his groin. He had a big and thick member that was not erect. It was as soft and smooth as a baby” (28). Despite her strong attraction to Tatarka, Štolbová describes herself as being unable to feel pleasure as they consummate their relationship, even as he demands that she open her legs for him: “The chimerical image of an inimitable writer, a national martyr, was replaced by the concrete presence of an ardent man who longed for me, devoured my body, did not want me to let me out of his arms even for a second, choked me with kisses and completely absorbed me into himself” (30). The “invisible” intimacy between author and reader has led to a “concrete” intimacy between lovers, which is then textually reproduced through Štolbová's incorporation of Tatarka's words.

Nonetheless, Štolbová is tormented by jealousy, and from her perspective the “holy community” of Czech dissidents seems more like a Rothian orgy:

Dominik sat between Eda and Lenka; he was constantly stroking their legs from the knees up. I had never known him to do that before. He showed signs of being in love with Lenka. But Eda paid him more attention. I was insanely jealous. So that's what our life as a couple would look like. I saw that I didn't exist for him. When he looked at me by chance, there was simply a cold gaze (55).

Later, however, she asserts her dominance over Tatarka, through both emotional and linguistic control: “In Czech surroundings, Dominik started to speak Czech. I often had to correct him and ask him to speak in Slovak. But internally this pleased me. Both of us were exchanging our languages out of love” (71). Beginning with a literary contact and progressing to an emotional and sexual relationship, their recorded conversations have come full circle to producing a new literary work. By “conceiving” their shared literary offspring, Tatarka and Štolbová turn the Czecho-Slovak cultural bond into a gendered one, in which the Slovak writer overcomes his creative “impotence” through the Czech dissident’s “loving exchange” of languages.

As a Slovak, Tatarka cannot essentialize Czech women in the same way as German writers like Kafka, or for that matter Western visitors like Philip Roth. His relationship with Eva Štolbová empowers her as a writer, allowing her “authentic female voice”, in Barbara Einhorn’s (1993) terms, to “[articulate] itself in new literary forms,” in this case the fragmented form of tape-recorded conversations (although their full publication was delayed for over a decade). While her voice was virtually erased from the dissident and exile version of Tatarka’s final text, her contribution and authorship were restored in the “official” post-socialist edition (published in two editions by the state-funded Literary Information Centre). To reverse Vladimír Petřík’s claim of Tatarka’s lovers as enabling him to “reveal himself,” the relationship between these two writers also “inspired the gradual uncovering of [Štolbová’s] inner self” in her own work, *Lamento*.

In both *The Prague Orgy* and *Navrávačky*, the first published versions give precedence to the male voice in first-person narration, while the second versions (Roth’s television script and the full transcripts between Tatarka and Štolbová) reveal a more balanced perspective between its male and female protagonists. Interestingly, in both of the latter versions, a Czech *disidentka* named Eva asserts greater control over the narrative: both Roth’s Kalinova and Tatarka’s co-creator Štolbová. While Roth’s own adaptation of *The Prague Orgy* was never produced, a new version was recently announced, to be filmed in 2018 – with a Czech director, Irena Pavlásková (Kudlác 2017). If this project comes to fruition, the American novelist’s fictional model of reality will be appropriated by a Czech woman artist, which represents a sort of “dissident” viewpoint in the globalized media landscape of the twenty-first century. While these Cold War-era texts may seem to belong to an increasingly distant past, the ability of the dissident to speak and to be heard remains in question, particularly in regards to feminist or gender issues. As Jan Matonoha rather pessimistically concludes: “the silence on the issue of gender [...] became the index (symptom) of a broader deficient understanding of democracy [...] in the discourses of the dissent prior to the revolution of 1989 and in Czech post-revolutionary society in general” (2014, 180). With the resurgence of populist and/or authoritarian governments in Hungary, Poland, and most recently the Czech Republic, as well as elsewhere in Europe, the need for dissenting voices – especially those of women – is as crucial as ever.

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## Can the dissident speak? The Czech woman writer in the work of Philip Roth and Dominik Tatarka

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Dissidence in Czechoslovakia. Philip Roth. Dominik Tatarka. Eva Štolbová. Gender in Slovak literature.

The Czech dissident movement that began in the late 1970s was a network in which women played a key role, but the Czech writers who gained fame in the West were invariably men. In Philip Roth's 1985 novella *The Prague Orgy*, his alter ego Nathan Zuckerman meets a woman writer named Olga, whose pursuit of the American writer owes more to erotic fantasy than to the milieu Roth recreates in otherwise faithful detail. This portrayal of the Czech female as both sexualized and "other" can be traced back to twentieth century Prague-German writers, but Roth both politicizes and intellectualizes this archetype by making the desiring (rather than desired) woman a writer and dissident. A real-life perspective on the Czech *dissentka* (female dissident) appears in the work of Dominik Tatarka, one of the few Slovak writers to be closely associated with the dissident movement. The last work Tatarka published in his lifetime was a memoir based on tape-recorded interviews with Eva Štolbová, who became Tatarka's connection to Prague dissident circles. In 1988, these *Navrávačky* (*Tapings*) were published in edited book form in Germany, and it was not until more than a decade later that the full transcripts were published in Slovakia. While the female Czech dissident is eroticized in this text as well, Štolbová is not a mere object of desire; she portrays her side of the story in her own memoir, *Lamento* (1994). The gender dynamic between Štolbová and Tatarka subverts the cultural assumption in which the Czech language was constructed as "masculine" and Slovak as "feminine." Thus both Roth and Tatarka illustrate the interplay between "otherness" and gender in the production of dissident culture, and its reception by domestic (both Czech and Slovak) as well as international readers.

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